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Culture From Camelot: The Origins and Goals of Arts Policy in the Kennedy Administration

DONNA M. BINKIEWICZ

BABBITTRY IS BEHIND US. We live in an era of impressive artistic achievement. Our painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers and dramatists are the envy of the world."¹ Such was John F. Kennedy's assessment of the arts in America as he responded to a *Musical America* questionnaire sent to him and to Vice President Richard Nixon during the 1960 presidential campaign. His reference to Babbitt proved pointed in more ways than one. It immediately drew attention to the United States' artistic success during the post-World War II era. Kennedy's admiration for excellence made him proud of what he considered some of the highest achievements in American culture and pleased at the worldwide attention they generated.²

Yet much more than idle praise for the arts resounds in Kennedy's remarks to *Musical America*. Besides the overt cultural commendation lay a subtle challenge for American culture. Essentially, the Babbitt reference was rife with meaning. It evoked images of early twentieth-century nouveaux riches Americans who believed that they had achieved a certain level of prominence. However, those familiar with Sinclair Lewis's characters would also realize that these arrivistes were more interested in wealth and social climbing than in genuine cultural progress. On this level Kennedy's reference may be taken as criticism of perceived growth in American materialism and complacency during the 1950s. In his campaign Kennedy promised to reinvigorate America, selecting the arts as one means to raise the level of American civilization. His remarks to the magazine went on to explain the purposes art could serve in both domestic and foreign arenas to elevate American image and culture, particularly in the Cold War context.

Kennedy's letter to *Musical America* reveals his desire to improve the quality

of life in the United States through increased intellectual and cultural achievement, which he believed a federal art policy could encourage. He pointed out historic eras in which great advances were made in politics and culture and expressed hope that his tenure as president would inspire similar results. Mus-ing on the interconnections between success in public life and artistic progress, Kennedy pointed out that the age of Elizabeth was also the age of Shakespeare. He then maintained that:

The New Frontier for which I campaign in public life, can also be a New Frontier for American art. For what I descry is a lift for our country: a surge of economic growth, a burst of activity in rebuilding and cleansing our cities. . . an age of Discovery in science and space; and an openness toward what is new that will banish the suspicion and misgiving that have tarnished our prestige abroad. . . For we stand, I believe, on the verge of a period of sustained cultural brilliance.³

Kennedy recognized that to achieve long-lasting international recognition as a great culture, America would first have to raise its own level of achievement. He believed that the arts could play a part in programs designed to reengage American ingenuity in combatting domestic problems. By their very nature, they could instill a higher sense of purpose to American endeavors and inspire superior achievements. This would ultimately produce an American culture worthy of world acclaim.

Not only were the arts important for domestic welfare, Kennedy also considered them a foreign policy measure to showcase American leadership and freedom. He believed in 1960 that the American government should support the arts, "for art. . . speaks a language without words, and is thus a chief means for proclaiming America's message to the world over the heads of dictators."⁴ He reiterated these sentiments in a *Saturday Review* article advocating expanded international exchange programs and State Department cultural programs, arguing: "[If] every student of the USSR and the satellites could tour the United States and compare what they see with what they have been told, I would have little fear of future wars."⁵ Clearly, Kennedy acknowledged the importance of arts and culture in promoting his drive to make the U.S. the leader of advanced civilization. He vowed that he wanted to become the President who "not only held back the Communist tide but who also advanced the cause of freedom and rebuilt American prestige."⁶ Kennedy's competitive attitude was well known in the Cold War world and spanned many aspects of his campaign and administration. Eventually, he would elevate the arts to a level of national importance

closely tied to military and political measures. Indeed, these domestic and foreign policy applications of the arts would become a vital selling point for the formulation of the National Endowment for the Arts.

This article examines the unprecedented attention brought to the arts under the administration of John F. Kennedy. The President and Jacqueline Kennedy transformed the White House into a theater and museum that focused a spotlight on the arts brighter than at any previous time. More importantly, during the Kennedy and subsequent Johnson administrations a drive for an institutionalized arts policy was clearly developed and maneuvered through both the executive offices and Congress. This article explores the origins and goals of the arts policy struggle during the Kennedy administration that ultimately would set the tone for federal arts policy administration to date. While there had been some governmental forays into arts policy prior to the 1960s, the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities created by Kennedy and Johnson achieved permanence as a federal cultural agency previously unknown in the United States.⁷ Its genesis in the early 1960s resulted from greater public interest in the arts and enlarging federal programs. But more significantly, it developed out of an intellectual tradition informing Kennedy's and Johnson's liberalism and their desires to elevate national goals and win the Cold War. These important aspects of art policy development, which continued to influence NEA operations through the 1980s, have been overlooked in scholarly assessments of the agency.⁸

American intellectuals during the 1950s had in large part coalesced around two ideological frameworks that became central to the Kennedy vision: one of Cold War consensus and one which urged an uplifting of the quality of American life in an age of abundance. Consensus developed in American liberal thought during the postwar era as intellectuals, who had once espoused Marxist or socialist utopian ideals, became horrified by Stalinist totalitarianism and turned to a defense of American-style capitalist democracy in light of its survival during the Depression and its economic successes during and after World War II. Their turn away from socialist politics was also exaggerated by Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade, which demanded support of American democracy and capitalism.⁹

Yet, amidst the affluence of the 1950s, something seemed amiss. American intellectuals began to express a belief that undesirable undercurrents permeated American society. Many of them suggested ways to handle these problems which would impact Kennedy's and, later, Johnson's developing political programs, including arts policy. The trouble, intellectuals pointed out, centered on increasing conformity as a result of a loss of individual freedom both in the work

place and new suburban housing as well as the American public's misuse of its expanding leisure time.¹⁰ In *The Lonely Crowd* David Riesman expressed these fears when he lamented that Americans were becoming "soft" as the economy shifted from production toward consumption and the populace diverted their focus from the rewards of work to the pursuit of image. Riesman argued that to achieve autonomy outside of the workplace, leisure would have to be more than undirected play or conspicuous but hollow consumption. Rather, it must create a meaningful style of life and sound character by "uplifting the mind."¹¹ Accordingly, Americans needed to focus less on technological and personal skill enhancement and more on pure intellectual activity that would expand their minds. Humanities and culture were being unduly neglected.

The disturbing trends exposed by Riesman continued to be the focus of other intellectuals' writings throughout the 1950s. In 1952 economist and future Kennedy advisor John Kenneth Galbraith had defended the stability of the American economy and argued that it was virtually self-regulating. At that time, the gross national product (GNP) was growing at an unprecedented rate of 3.9% each year and the masses were prosperous.¹² However, after contemplating the excesses of McCarthyism and increasing criticism of American materialism, Galbraith also found postwar prosperity paradoxical. In his 1958 publication *The Affluent Society*, he argued that it created not only economic abundance but also a low quality of life among Americans which in essence left "the bland leading the bland."¹³ Galbraith traced the problem to the false assumption that continued economic growth and cultural health were required ever-expanding production and purchase of commodities rather than necessities. He argued that the encouragement of consumer spending by business created imbalances in American culture—that the idea that private spending on desirable consumer goods was positive, but that public expenditures on services was unsound was actually counterproductive. It allowed for families with beautiful, "air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobiles" to take drives through cities that [were] "badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted by buildings, billboards, and posts for wire that should long since have been put underground."¹⁴ Such a scenario revealed a society lacking in thoughtful goals, long-range cultural health, and even economic prosperity.

Galbraith proposed that the state should step in to halt the potentially destructive downward spiral of American culture, as it had done to regulate the economy in modern times. By expanding investment in research beyond military development and encouraging civilian goals, the government could create a healthier society. Specifically, improved education could redress the moral and

economic loss seen in declining work hours and could enable Americans to learn the skills necessary to make the best use of leisure time and improve the overall quality of American life.¹⁵ The ultimate aim of such a policy would be "less the effectiveness of our material investment than the effectiveness of our investment in men" who would be called upon to apply their intelligence and creativity to solving American problems, thus advancing American civilization in the future.¹⁶ John F. Kennedy found many of Galbraith's arguments convincing and frequently consulted with him for economic advice while planning his political endeavors.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* was also of fundamental importance in expounding the postwar intellectual thinking that became an integral part of President Kennedy's political culture. In this important work Schlesinger proposed that, rather than dream of utopias, intellectuals should strive to improve society within the American political system. Furthermore, he urged support for American policies of containment and aid to progressive regimes to ensure the continued strength of anti-communist forces.¹⁷ According to historian Christopher Lasch, Schlesinger's views represented a new brand of liberal pragmatism that combined realism with calls for political action.¹⁸ Schlesinger hoped to elevate political issues to a level of philosophical debate and he would later encourage Kennedy's adoption of such a style.¹⁹

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. went a step further than Galbraith by transforming warnings about the perils of prosperity into objectives for an active government to achieve a viable welfare state. He believed government should use its powers to extend the virtues and rewards of American life to all its citizens. Expressing commitment to the public interest in "The Challenge of Abundance," Schlesinger called for "qualitative liberalism" "to improve schools, hospitals, cities . . . the public domain," which included cultural activities.²⁰ He specifically advocated a greater role for the federal government in arts policy, since he believed the arts lent value and thoughtfulness to true civilization.²¹ Also a close advisor to Kennedy, Schlesinger was able to funnel a wide body of intellectual criticism calling for the promotion of higher cultural standard into the White House and to lobby for the implementation of arts policy.

Schlesinger's arguments drew upon the works of such notable cultural critics as Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald who claimed that American leisure was increasingly dominated by a mass media which promoted mediocre products and deplorable aesthetics. Greenberg railed against "kitsch" in his essays while defending the achievements of artistic modernism and the avant-garde. Macdonald noted that, on the one hand, the rise of mass culture was

"desirable politically" because it was democratic and closed the gap between the wealthy and the common man. On the other hand, however, it caused "unfortunate results culturally" by destroying men's sense of community and encouraging their production and consumption of "junk." Nevertheless, Macdonald seemed to believe such cultural decline could be isolated, if not reversed, by a conscious cultivation of higher cultural achievement—as long as "midcult" would not be allowed to swallow up the distinctions between "masscult" (or kitsch) and "High Culture."²² Paul Goodman also argued in *Growing Up Absurd* that something must be done to promote higher cultural standards in the U.S. He criticized the American leadership in the late 1950s for reneging on its responsibility to stimulate artistic excellence. He lamented:

Our present President (Mr. Eisenhower) is an unusually uncultivated man. It is said that he has invited no real writer, no artist, no philosopher to the White House. Presumably he has no intellectual friends; that is his privilege. But recently he invited the chief of the Russian government [Chairman Khrushchev] to a banquet and musicale. And the formal music of that musicale was provided by a Fred Waring band playing 'Oh, What a Beautiful Morning' and such other numbers. This is disgraceful.²³

Goodman stressed the potential international prestige America could gain with a display of high cultural achievement, an idea that Kennedy and his advisors embraced.

The chorus of challenges by American intellectuals nearly coincided with a series of disconcerting events for the United States. The first surrounded the 1957 launch of the Soviet satellite, *Sputnik*. Rocket scientist Wernher von Braun had warned prophetically that it "would be a blow to U.S. prestige if we did not do it first."²⁴ As a second Soviet satellite orbited the earth, Khrushchev boasted that the USSR would surpass the U.S. in economic output within fifteen years. *LIFE* magazine printed "Arguing the Case for Being Panicky," Arthur Trace published *What Ivan knows and Johnny Doesn't*, and Americans from all walks of society feared that the U.S. was losing the race with the Russians. Lyndon Johnson, then Senate Majority Leader, blamed the problems of American affluence and complacency for the failure to match the Soviets and quipped, with a reference to Detroit auto manufacturers, "It is not very reassuring to be told that next year we will put a better satellite in the air. Perhaps it will even have chrome trim and automatic windshield wipers."²⁵ Such cumulative reproach helped to shock Americans out of their self-satisfaction and to renew their interest in achievement—not only in military terms but also intellectual and cul-

tural endeavors. No one was more attentive than the Democratic nominee in 1960.

John Kennedy's campaign pledge to "get the country moving again" was dedicated not only to closing the perceived missile gap and restating American commitment to containing communism, but it was also a vow to promote intellectual values and renew American commitment to cultural excellence. Kennedy embraced the ideals of consensus liberalism, courted academics, sought their advice, and brought many directly into his new administration. Galbraith served as the American Ambassador to India, while Schlesinger became an important White House speech writer, presidential aid, and link to the intellectual community as he continued to shape Kennedy's rhetoric and programs.

The Kennedy administration's efforts to recharge the tone of American politics and to invigorate American culture began as soon as he took office. In January 1961, Robert Frost stood at the podium in an unusually cold capital city and read the poem he wrote for the occasion of John F. Kennedy's inauguration. He pronounced:

Summoning artists to participate
In the august occasions of the state
Seems something for us all to celebrate. . .
It makes the prophet in us all presage
The glory of a next Augustan age. . .
Firm in our free beliefs without dismay,
In any game the nations want to play.
A golden age of poetry and power
Of which this noonday's the beginning hour.²⁶

After Frost's recitation, the new President took his oath of office and stood to speak. Kennedy delivered his now-famous oration vowing American military strength in the face of a worldwide communist threat and calling upon Americans to join together in a struggle to redefine the U.S. as the world leader not only in military force but also in scientific progress and aesthetic excellence. Kennedy invited the Soviet Union to cooperate with the U.S. to "invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors . . . explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease . . . and encourage the arts."²⁷ Yet he also left no doubt that he believed Americans could triumph in any contest and thereby provide the world with the best example of freedom and democratic success.

Kennedy's inaugural address expressed themes that would characterize his

presidency. First, it stated his concern for foreign policy and his dedication to the preservation of American democracy and world freedom in a continuing Cold War struggle. At the same time, his speech professed a belief in change and announced a new approach to world conflict—that of joining social and cultural advancement to the single-minded militarism of the Cold War. His call to work with the Soviets towards scientific and artistic advancement suggested a calmer approach to the Cold War that later would be reflected by his support for bilateral test ban treaties and his efforts to ease domestic Cold War McCarthyism. Kennedy's faith in American potential for energetic progress would also auger well for the arts.

Indeed, among the thousands gathered to hear Kennedy's inaugural address in the seats set aside for his friends and political advocates were a number of prominent artists, including abstract painters Mark Rothko and Franz Kline, and museum directors Alfred Barr and René d'Harnoncourt of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA).²⁸ Never before had so many artists and intellectuals been included in the usual crowd of dignitaries. The President elect and Mrs. Kennedy wished to honor individuals representing the quality and excellence of American culture, especially in art and music, and to recognize representatives of leading Washington cultural institutions. This gesture began what Kennedy had only hinted at during his campaign, that "the New Frontier . . . [could] be a New Frontier for American art."²⁹

A Kennedy friend who lived in Georgetown, Kay Halle, in consultation with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., drew up the list of inaugural invites. She arranged for artists and cultural institution heads to participate and planned that they would also inscribe their sentiments in a book to be presented to the President and First Lady.³⁰ The expressions recorded on that morning were overwhelmingly laudatory and supportive of the new administration, as were the numerous telegrams and letters received from the art world. Declaring his pride and pleasure in Kennedy's recognition of artists and the optimistic tone of the inauguration, Archibald MacLeish wrote that the address "left me proud and hopeful to be an American—something I have not felt for almost twenty years. I owe you and send you my deepest gratitude." An even more enthusiastic message came from John Steinbeck. Recalling that artists had been attacked in the past for their leftist politics, he wrote to Kennedy: "[W]hat a joy that literacy is no longer *prima facie* evidence of treason."³¹ The reintegration of artists into the good favor of the federal government was indeed a significant move by Kennedy to alter what had become burdensome social and cultural constraints imposed by the Cold War. Defying a McCarthyite mentality which had blacklisted artists

suspected of communist sympathies, Kennedy deliberately invited them to collaborate fully with the government to raise American culture to new heights.³² Even more than in his public speeches, Kennedy's actions expressed his desire to diffuse the accusational tendencies in government's dealings with those who criticized U.S. social and economic policies and to infuse politics and culture with a higher purpose.

Initially, however, Kennedy's gesture of inviting prominent artists to his inauguration was conceived to be more symbolic than substantive. August Heckscher, the President's Special Consultant on the Arts, later recalled that when the artists attended, "I don't think [Kennedy] had any idea of the stir it would cause."³³ Indeed, public recognition of artists raised expectations in the artistic community that Kennedy would truly support the arts on a national level—a hope shared by key Kennedy staff members, such as Schlesinger, Stuart Udall, and Pi  re Salinger. Salinger moved a step further after the inauguration and solicited ideas on arts policy that he later gave to special art consultant, Heckscher. Once embarked upon the path toward an official arts policy, Heckscher surmised that "it was the inauguration which really had begun everything."³⁴

Kennedy advisors agree that the President worked in a series of small trial steps: he would test the waters with a small gesture, gauge the response, and if positive, proceed in a somewhat bolder fashion. Such was the case with the arts during the Kennedy administration. The President and First Lady were extremely pleased with the admiration and support showered upon them by the art world after the inauguration. They were also genuinely pleased with the book of messages compiled by Kay Halle and responded with a personal letter of thanks to each artist. As in most presidential letters, the President began in perfunctory prose, "Mrs. Kennedy and I have had extraordinary pleasure in going through these volumes. . . I am hopeful that this collaboration between government and scholarship will continue and prosper." He continued with a plea for concrete ideas, however, stating "I would be particularly interested in any suggestions you may have in the future about the possible contributions the national government might make to the arts and scholarship in America."³⁵ Kennedy was testing the waters and finding them warm.

As an arts patron himself and a man groomed to higher culture and education, Kennedy needed little convincing that the arts were worthy of his attention. His education at Choate and Harvard as well as his European tours instilled in the future president a familiarity with the fine arts and an appreciation for their place in any sophisticated individual lifestyle or national culture. In

terms of his own artistic preferences, Kennedy most enjoyed reading history and classical novels or viewing eye-catching Broadway musicals, ancient Greek or Roman sculpture, and seascape paintings.³⁶ While some of his private tastes reflected those of mainstream American arts audiences, Kennedy also appreciated more avant-garde modern art styles in an intellectual sense if less a personal one. Kennedy believed that exposure to excellence in arts and culture were important means to elevate one's own cultural level as well as that of American society as a whole, and he was willing to go out of his way to support highbrow culture.³⁷ He was certainly encouraged in this regard by his wife.

Surprisingly little notice has been given to the important role of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy when, in fact, she was responsible for suggesting the invitation of artists to the inauguration. More so than the President, Mrs. Kennedy set a tone of style and grace for the new administration and encouraged the development of arts events and policy. She channelled many of her ideas through Pierre Salinger who, as a formally trained classical pianist, shared her tastes and ambitions, and later through August Heckscher.³⁸

Without a doubt, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy exerted a great deal of pressure on her husband to patronize the fine arts and by so doing set an example of American cultural maturity. Education at Vassar and the Sorbonne as well as with her stepfather Hugh Auchincloss's experience as an art collector imbued Mrs. Kennedy with a wide familiarity with and affinity for ballet, symphony and chamber music, and modern art. She was particularly fond of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiques and of impressionism, post-impressionism, and abstraction in the visual arts.³⁹ Thus, the First Couple shared a certain cultural breeding and were both long-standing patrons of the arts.

Among their private dinner guests at the White House were artists and arts patrons. One important influence was their friend and frequent visitor painter Bill Walton, whose own aesthetic style had evolved from representational to abstract by 1960. The first people invited to the mansion were poet Robert Frost and New York City ballet director Georges Balanchine—of whom Mrs. Kennedy asked what she as First Lady could do for the ballet. Mrs. Kennedy also conferred with Isaac Stern, who would later serve on the National Council on the Arts, about arts policy development. Indeed, it was her initiative that transformed the White House into a showcase for art and artists during the Kennedy administration. Mrs. Kennedy encouraged President Kennedy to replace stodgy state receptions with elegant cultural soirées in the executive mansion. During the Kennedys' tenure at the White House a stage was built that could be stored and erected on short notice. Pages of handwritten memos attest

to her detailed planning of White House events and cultivation of the President's and America's public image.⁴⁰ Both she and President Kennedy understood the importance of image as well as example, liberally patronizing high culture.⁴¹

Following the positive public reaction to the participation of artists in the inauguration, the Kennedys began to showcase the arts in a series of dinners and performances and in Jacqueline Kennedy's televised tour of the newly re-decorated White House. One of the most famous occasions was a November 1961 evening honoring Puerto Rican Governor Muñoz Marín that included a performance by Pablo Casals, who had previously refused to play his cello publicly in the United States to protest American recognition of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. Introducing Casals, Kennedy announced that "[we] believe that an artist, in order to be true to himself and his work, must be a free man."⁴² Thus, the President acknowledged Casals's freedom to criticize U.S. policy towards Spain and admired his stance in favor of freedom. Then, stressing freedom in the relationship between the arts and politics, he continued, "I think it is most important not that we regard artistic achievement and action as a part of our armor in these difficult days, but rather as an integral part of our free society."⁴³ Thus, Kennedy's frequent references to freedom and democracy directly connected the arts to position of the United States in the Cold War. In his view, the arts were meant not only for beauty and entertainment, but for political purposes as well. Casals' recital drew very positive responses from a national audience. The *New York Times* announced that in the area of culture "The White House is rising to its responsibilities and—in one respect at least—coming of age." Such praise encouraged Kennedy's growing endorsement of artistic excellence.

Another result of the Casals concert was that it almost instantly gave the President the reputation of being a serious lover of classical music. This perception proves the success of the Kennedys' orchestration of their refined image, yet the irony was not lost on the First Lady, who was the true classical music devotee. In one incident, Jacqueline Kennedy apparently tired of the somewhat misplaced admiration, quipped to a friend about her husband that "the only music he likes is 'Hail to the Chief.'"⁴⁴ Nevertheless, her remarks remained private at the time and much of her work to orchestrate the event went quietly unknown. In fact, Mrs. Kennedy played a prominent role in conceiving and arranging the Casals concert and other events—from large-scale program planning and publicity down to details of flower and seating arrangements. Mrs. Kennedy chose to remain behind the scenes because she believed that her husband, as president, should claim the spotlight. In fact she feared being seen as

seeking public acclaim for herself and distracting attention from her husband's public work. Previously, she had stated her priorities when she professed in a campaign interview that if John Kennedy were elected "I'd be a wife and a mother first, then First Lady."⁴⁵ Jacqueline Kennedy understood the widespread norms about the proper place of women in public as secondary to that of men. As Elaine Tyler May suggested in *Homeward Bound*, an intense desire for security during the Cold War era translated into an idealized vision of home and family that subordinated women and contained them within the domestic sphere.⁴⁶ Unwilling to publicly challenge this perceived status quo and draw criticism upon the White House, Mrs. Kennedy eschewed a more public role in arts policy development while encouraging the arts from her position as First Lady and enlarging her stewardship of the White House.

The most time consuming of Jacqueline Kennedy's aesthetic endeavors proved to be the restoration of the White House. Mrs. Kennedy formed a Committee of Fine Arts to officially oversee the project and devoted untold hours to researching and reacquiring, or copying, historic furnishings and art work for the mansion. In this respect, Mrs. Kennedy resembled certain early twentieth-century women whom historians of culture have identified as playing a prominent role in cultural institution building.⁴⁷ Like Abby Rockefeller, the founder of the Museum of Modern Art, Jacqueline Kennedy appointed prominent men to head the cultural projects while she played a less visible, though nonetheless significant, role. She corresponded personally by handwritten memos to commission members and staff, further diminishing the record of her White House projects.

The First Lady did gain national attention in a televised tour of the White House which was broadcast in prime time by all three television networks in February 1962. The one-hour program includes a narrated history of the White House and a room-by-room tour. Dressed in her trademark two-piece wool suit with a three-strand pearl necklace, the First Lady described each piece of furniture, painting, and art work. Speaking in her soft, breathy voice, she explained who originally purchased each piece, in what style and when it was made, and how it was copied, reacquired, and restored. It was evident that she was very aware of and rather uncomfortable about having a camera following her around the mansion, yet her excitement about the art and her pride in her achievement were clear. In one particularly revealing moment of the tour, the CBS commentator noted the special place the arts had achieved in the Kennedy administration and inquired as to whether she felt that there should be a particular connection between the arts and the national government. Mrs. Kennedy

smiled and replied, "Oh that's so complicated. I don't know. I just think everything in the White House should be the best."⁴⁸ Then she casually moved on to describe the East Room candelabra. By deliberately shunning an opportunity to remark on political matters, the First Lady relegated herself to the private arena and presented an image of herself as apolitical, leaving the public and political realm to her husband. President Kennedy arrived at the end of the television program to bestow his blessing on his wife's project and to remark on the importance of reclaiming history and American culture. He ended the program by encouraging children to visit the White House so that they would be excited by history and perhaps even inspired to live there themselves one day. "Even the girls," he said with a grin. In this closing scene the President essentially stole the show and presented himself as firmly in charge and looking to the future. He held the tools for molding policy and shaping the American cultural sensibilities while his wife preserved tradition and the first home.

Another prominent occasion that enhanced the cultural aura of the White House and the agenda of the Kennedy administration was a reception for French Minister of Culture, André Malraux in May 1962. The Kennedys specifically emphasized culture for this event rather than the traditional diplomatic focus of state dinners for foreign dignitaries. Jacqueline Kennedy had toured French art galleries with Malraux on the Kennedy's state visit to France in 1961. Thus, the Kennedys wished to impress the Minister of Culture with an American show of talent on his visit to the White House the following Spring. Guests for the evening included painter Andre Wyeth, poet Robert Lowell, playwrights Arthur Miller, S. N. Behrman and Tennessee Williams, actress Geraldine Page, ballet director Georges Balanchine, Metropolitan Museum of Art curator James Rorimer, White House arts consultant August Heckscher, and business and culture magnates John Loeb and David Rockefeller. Guests were treated to a French dinner and to a classical recital of Shubert's Trio in B-flat major, opus 99, by Eugene Istomin, piano, Isaac Stern, violin, and Leonard Rose, cello. In his remarks to the White House guests that evening, John Kennedy scoffed at the idea that the life of an artist is "soft," borrowing a word from Riesman's critique of American organization employees in the fifties. "Actually," the President asserted, "creativity is the hardest life there is."⁴⁹ His statements once again proved his admiration for artists as hardworking individuals who devoted hours of difficult and often lonely and unrewarded practice to perfect their talents. Kennedy believed such dedication was an important component of individual accomplishment and a quality society should value.

Following this glamorous dinner, an unprecedented cultural exchange took

place between France and the United States. In 1963 Jacqueline Kennedy personally arranged with Malraux a tour of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre to the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Met in New York. The painting was designated a "guest" of the President and travelled under his personal protection. At a reception for the President and Mrs. Kennedy held at the French Embassy prior to the exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* in Washington, Kennedy expressed his gratitude to France as the "leading artistic country" for its loan of the priceless portrait. Moreover, he used this occasion to argue that the United States would "continue to press ahead to develop an independent, artistic force of its own."⁵⁰ Not coincidentally, the Kennedy administration was orchestrating U.S. State Department support for the American painting exhibition at the 1964 Venice Biennale whose prizes historically had been France's domain. Kennedy hoped that American success there would announce the United States' cultural presence on the European continent.⁵¹ Kennedy's calculated encounters with the arts were amounting to more than image-making opportunities, and the President soon took the lead in creating a new federal policy concerning the arts.

With the encouragement of his advisors, Kennedy had already begun taking determined steps toward devising a federal arts policy. In July 1961, Pierre Salinger, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Max Isenberg, and Phillip Coombs met for a lunch to discuss art policy. The meeting focused on Isenberg's policy paper, "A Strategy for Cultural Advancement."⁵² A State Department official interested in American cultural expansion, Isenberg proposed that Kennedy evaluate the realm of government and the arts and examine the possible improvement of existing government art programs and expansion of federal efforts into new areas both at home and abroad. Reminding the President of his inaugural commitment to cultural advancement, Isenberg called for fulfilling this commitment for two reasons. First, he believed it would improve the quality of American life in the United States. He argued that the "pursuit of happiness" should be restored to its proper place in American thought—Americans should be reminded through aesthetic endeavors that striving for peace and material well being were not ends in themselves but means to a higher quality of life. Remembering these ideas would "do no less than transform the national character and open, for the whole world to see, an exhilarating new chapter in the American Revolution for the nineteen sixties."⁵³

Underlying Isenberg's ideas on American life were equally salient concerns about how American life would be perceived abroad. His second reason for promoting arts policy explicitly stated that:

[It] would make the less developed nations think better of us as a model; and to the nations of the Soviet bloc, it would show devotion on our part to a humanism transcending political differences, a demonstration which holds more promise than any other approach tried thus far of bringing forth affirmative, even conciliatory, response from their side.⁵⁴

The potential for arts as a foreign policy tool were duly noted by Kennedy staff. Moreover, the timing of this proposal was significant, for it came on the heels of tense international incidents at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba and in Berlin.⁵⁵

The Bay of Pigs invasion resulted in a great deal of public criticism of the Kennedy administration. Among those denouncing the President's repression of a small, independent country were a number of American artists, who carried protest signs against repression at a demonstration in Washington. One young poet directed her outcry to the First Lady with a placard reading, "Jacqueline: vous avez perdu vos artistes!" (You have lost your artists), appealing to her cultured persona and signalling these artists' rejection of strong arm tactics.⁵⁶ The whole experience painfully taught Kennedy to back away from hard-line military means to secure U.S. power and to carefully consider how U.S. actions would be perceived around the world, especially by small Third World countries caught between United States and Soviet struggles.

An important element of military policy was analyzed by Henry Kissinger during the Berlin crisis. He advised President Kennedy that firmness should not be proven by shying away from diplomacy that would leave only military options.⁵⁷ Kennedy agreed that more flexibility was necessary in Cold War confrontations to avoid total warfare; therefore, he increased his options by abandoning Eisenhower's policy of massive retaliation in favor of flexible response military tactics.⁵⁸ His approach to world crisis came to include not only nuclear threats, but Special Forces recruits and Peace Corps volunteers enlisted to outperform the Soviets around the world. With the President's concern for total mobilization militarily and socially, it took him only a short time to incorporate cultural endeavors.

By the fall of 1961, the unofficial Isenberg paper became the basis for the next step towards developing an official arts policy as Kennedy's advisors recommended the appointment of a special White House consultant. Arthur Schlesinger suggested August Heckscher, who had written a paper for Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals titled "The Quality of American Culture" advocating federal arts policy. Heckscher was then working on a book proposing involvement in the arts as an antidote to the alienation of modern

life—a philosophy akin to both Schlesinger's and Kennedy's beliefs.⁵⁹ Assured by Schlesinger in November that “no editorial writer has used the Casals dinner to accuse you of fiddling while Berlin burns,” Kennedy was ready to act.⁶⁰ He wrote to Heckscher in December 1961 that the time had come for “a more systematic approach” and asked him to come to Washington to conduct a survey and recommend presidential actions on matters of culture.⁶¹ Heckscher, recruited to work on a part time basis for six months, soon found his place among the busy and ambitious full-time White House staff.

A great deal of importance fell upon this first official “Special Consultant on the Arts to the President.” His responsibilities included more than simply maintaining the first cultural office in the White House, and Heckscher understood the significance of his position. The very appointment of a Special Consultant on the Arts indicated a new interest on the part of the federal government. Heckscher believed “all [Kennedy] had to do was ask me down there and then that set in motion waves which carried quite far.”⁶² Indeed, Heckscher's arrival made the front page of the *New York Times* and received nationwide attention. Soon, letters from across the country kept the office busy responding to Americans' cultural concerns, as did Heckscher's agenda of writing articles and delivering speeches promoting a closer relationship between government and the arts.

Upon assuming his position in March 1962, Heckscher's main goal was to assess the relationship of government and the arts and report to the President on means to improve federal policy. After more than a year of conducting work and research in an unprecedented capacity, he submitted his report, “The Arts and the National Government,” to the President in May 1963. Heckscher's introduction reiterated 1950s ideas on Cold War culture. He argued that the 1960s would be a decade in which Americans needed to address the issue of increasing leisure time. He also acknowledged the growing importance of the cities and recognized that there was far more to American life than the acquisition of material goods. His opening lines asserted, “The United States will be judged and its place in history ultimately assessed—not alone by its military and economic power—but by the quality of its civilization.” Evoking the foreign policy applications underlying his work, Heckscher also noted “the evident desirability of sending the best examples of America's artistic endeavors abroad.” Significantly, he recognized that this aim had forced American leaders to reexamine U.S. achievements in the field of aesthetic creativity and to realize that more needed to be done at home to cultivate excellence both within American culture and in its representation abroad. It seemed that the time was ripe for

domestic arts policy to preserve American cultural assets and promote "an environment within which cultural values can be realized."⁶³

Prior to his official report, Heckscher's statements on the arts often revealed his commitment to elevating the best of American culture. In a speech before the Conference on Aesthetic Responsibility in 1962, for example, Heckscher commended the widespread interest in the arts developing in the United States at that time. Still, he warned that Americans must beware of blurring the distinction between "the excellent and the second-rate, between the genuine and the spurious, between the artist and the amateur." Only by striving for excellence in the arts could the U.S. hope to attain outward beauty and fulfillment akin to that of Athens in the classical age. With ancient Greece as his model of civic and aesthetic achievement, Heckscher advised American officials to "make sure, as we build for ourselves, that men and their cities prove of equal worth. It is not, after all only beauty itself, but the striving for beauty that lifts up men and makes a civilization."⁶⁴ These words resurfaced often in Congressional debates over arts policy and became a mantra among those advocating aesthetics as a responsible means to uplift society.

Addressed in the report to the President was a complicated question: how should this cultural goal be achieved? The report and Heckscher's cover letter pointed out inadequate support by the government for the arts and the existence of policies impinging upon their development, such as certain tax and tariff laws. The report emphasized the importance of government research and interagency cooperation in matters of culture and recommended a number of wide-ranging actions be taken up by the federal government. Heckscher's research, in large part corroborated by the Bureau of the Budget, first indicated that there was already varied and extensive government involvement in the arts through the uncoordinated efforts of numerous agencies. He counselled a categorical assessment of agencies' use of art and a streamlining of separate efforts under a defined federal policy. His recommendation included the following: increased acquisition of art, including more visual arts for the Smithsonian Museums, the National Gallery, and the Library of Congress; commissioning of more art for public buildings under the General Services Administration; exhibition of art in American Embassies; the elevation of design standards for government posters, bulletins and stamps; historic preservation; increased urban renewal efforts under Public Housing Administration; the development of a National Cultural Center (for which Congress had passed legislation in 1958: Kennedy had appointed Roger Stevens Chairman of the Board in September 1962); increased funds for international exhibitions; beautification of Washing-

ton D.C. (for which Kennedy established the Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Council in May 1962); greater funding for arts and humanities education; the recognition of artists with national merit awards; and the rewriting of tax laws to lighten the burden on artists.

More fundamental than these overall concerns were Heckscher's three most direct recommendations. First, he advised the appointment of a full-time, permanent Special Consultant on the Arts, who should be available to advise the President on all matters pertaining to the arts, in addition to performing the policy, planning and review functions which formed the major part of the original assignment. Second, he favored the establishment of an Advisory Council on the Arts reporting directly to the President. He argued that its function would be to expand the duties of the Special Consultant. As part of the federal government apparatus, the Council would be responsible for gathering information about the arts, reviewing federal policies and making recommendation for improving design and long-range programs, and encouraging the active participation of the artistic community in the government effort.⁶⁵ Third, Heckscher called for the establishment of a National Arts Foundation. This agency would administer grants to states, generally on a matching basis, and for projects proposed by artists or cultural organizations. It would thus be able to support "experiments designed to increase attendance, to foster creativity and introduce contemporary works to new audiences, or to offer services on an experimental basis."⁶⁶ The arts foundation would be commissioned to encourage the innovation and excellence that both Heckscher and the President so esteemed. Upon submission of the report, Heckscher resigned his post as the Special Consultant to the President so that he could resume his duties at the Twentieth-Century Fund. He agreed to remain until a successor was named and to serve on the Advisory Council once that body was established.⁶⁷

Kennedy considered the report "a milestone" that would open up "a new and fruitful relationship between the government and the arts."⁶⁸ He embraced the federal government's leadership in aesthetic achievement to promote the pursuit of happiness, but the Kennedy circle envisioned the arts as something more than entertainment.⁶⁹ Economic growth was a major factor enabling any arts policy implementation. Heckscher's report reinforced Kennedy's fears about the decadence that accompanied increased leisure time in what Galbraith had termed an "affluent society".⁷⁰ Kennedy's remarks at a dinner promoting the National Cultural Center and an article he wrote for *Look* magazine pointed out that with economic abundance and "with peace, too often comes an exclusive preoccupation with material progress and private pleasures." Kennedy extolled the

artist—who worked amid deprivation and loneliness to hone his skills and realize his vision—as a virtuous individual and the alternative to decadent materialists. He admired the discipline, willingness to take risks, and pursuit of excellence that artists displayed and believed his government should encourage such qualities. Kennedy believed those values would enrich the lives of American audiences as well as the artists. He wrote:

[the] suburban housewife harassed by numerous children, the husband weary after the day's work, young people bent on having a good time —these might not appear to enjoy a very high level of intellectual pursuit. Yet . . . the appreciation of cultural and intellectual values has a place. To further this appreciation of the arts among all the people, to increase respect for the creative individual and to stimulate participation by those of even modest gifts, is one of the great and fascinating challenges of these days.⁷¹

Always willing to accept a challenge, Kennedy prepared to implement the Heckscher report recommendations.

Still, there was a long-standing debate between Kennedy and his advisors over exactly how to act on art policy. Essentially, the dilemma was whether the President should wait for congressional legislation or exert executive action. After he was sure there was no promise of action on Capitol Hill, Kennedy resolved the issue by signing Executive Order 11112 in June 1963. This order established the President's Advisory Council on the Arts, giving the United States for the first time a formal government body to survey the arts in America and to recommend to the President ways to encourage them.⁷²

In a statement accompanying the release of the executive order, Kennedy expressed his value of excellence in art and culture. Kennedy began by announcing his discontent that many American children were growing up without ever having seen a professionally acted play, which he felt deprived them of important cultural opportunities. Then, echoing Heckscher's public statements, he emphasized the importance of the professional artist because "[w]ithout the professional performer and the creative artist, the amateur spirit declines and the vast audience is only partially served . . . The concept of the public welfare should reflect cultural as well as physical values."⁷³ Kennedy's call for professional excellence in his promotion of American culture exhibited elitist predilections, yet it also expressed an interest in promoting the arts for all Americans as part of the "public welfare." This reference was a deliberate way to legitimize federal arts policy and make it more palatable for congressional opponents who

did not see its relevance for their constituents.

Although he had acted in an unprecedented manner, promoting the arts by organizing an Advisory Council on the Arts, Kennedy ultimately resisted establishing an arts foundation without congressional approval. Presidential historians have long noted Kennedy's reluctance to press his adversaries on domestic issues. Kennedy's narrow electoral victory had not given him the political clout he had hoped for and this kept him from risking his prestige on bills that were uncertain of passage.⁷⁴ In addition, his hands-off style and aristocratic airs at times clashed with the manners of career congressmen, making it difficult to negotiate legislative measures. One down-to-earth representative from Tennessee who found the President distant pronounced, "[All] that Mozart string music and ballet dancing down there [at the White House] and all that fox hunting and London clothes. He's too elegant for me. I can't talk to him."⁷⁵ Thus to avoid the impression of imposing his will, Kennedy insisted that Congress give the Arts Council a statutory basis to assure a broad base of support and strengthen federal encouragement of the arts. He told Congress that "If we are to be among the leaders of the world in every sense of the word this sector of our national life cannot be neglected or treated with indifference . . . A bill (H.R. 4172) already reported out of the House would make this possible."⁷⁶

Kennedy's initiative toward arts policy gave new life to arts advocates' struggles in Congress. Senator Jacob Javits and Representative Frank Thompson had been leading a struggle to obtain federal aid for the arts throughout the 1950s. With support from the White House they joined forces with Senators Claiborne Pell and Hubert Humphrey on the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare to propose arts measure designed to accomplish three goals: 1) the establishment of a federal advisory council on the arts, 2) financial aid to state arts projects, and 3) the funding of a national arts foundation. Kennedy's call for Congress to pass arts legislation directly endorsed their arts bill.

Congressional leaders also fought for arts policy with Cold War rhetoric and pleas for advancing the quality of American civilization. Thompson took his arguments to the public in articles published in various journals, such as one entitled "Are the Communists Right in Calling Us Cultural Barbarians?" In language even more direct than Kennedy's, Thompson asserted that making Washington the "cultural center of the world would be one of the best and most effective ways to answer Russian lies and defeat their heavily financed effort to have communism take over the world."⁷⁷ Senator Pell also stressed that the United States must keep up with the Soviets, but warned that art should not be used as propaganda. Rather, America should keep hold of the cultural realm

"which has been the domain of free societies." He went on to contest assertions that government support of the arts might be a waste of funds, arguing that it should be viewed as a measure akin to appropriations for space program funding.

Our Scientific research, for which we spend billions annually . . . to maintain the posture of strength . . . will mean very little, if the culture of our people . . . is allowed to erode . . . we must contribute to the world something better than [materialism], something more lofty, something that is in tune with free men.⁷⁸

With the blessing of the White House, these congressional arts advocates were able to secure a bill in Congress during the fall of 1963 that authorized a United States arts foundation, complete with provisions for aid to the states, and implemented of Advisory Council on the Arts established by Kennedy's executive order.

In a speech dedicating a memorial to the late poet Robert Frost, Kennedy made what would be his last call for arts legislation. He asserted:

The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state . . . I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens. And I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world not only for its strength but for its civilization as well.⁷⁹

Kennedy wanted this speech to be his manifesto on federal arts policy. He had clearly concluded that in the Cold War era the freedom of artists represented a fundamental American value posing an alternative to totalitarianism. Kennedy intended to say this directly in this speech. His original draft read, "In Soviet Russia, Chairman Khrushchev had informed us, 'It is the highest duty of the Soviet writer, artist and composer, of every creative worker, to be in the ranks of the builders of communism . . . to fight for the triumph of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism.'" Kennedy deleted this on the plane to Massachusetts, Schlesinger recalled, because he did not wish to appear too antagonistic just before impending arms talks with the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, his point was made. Americans recalling *New York Times* articles on recent Soviet denunciations of abstract art exhibits in Moscow would further draw the conclusion that, by contrast, American modern artists were to be praised for their style and Americans

were to be congratulated for their tolerance and vision (however constricted that vision also might be).⁸¹

The President's efforts and cold warrior determination created an atmosphere of acceptance for the arts unparalleled by any other executive. But Kennedy would not see the passage of arts legislation. A month after his assassination, the Senate passed an arts bill for which Javits, Humphrey, Pell, and Thompson had pressed. Yet the House would not consider the measure until the following spring. Appointments of Arts Council members would also be postponed. Ironically, though, Kennedy's death became a contributing factor in Lyndon Johnson's achievement of a federal arts agency as supporters invoked the image and wishes of the late President.

Although not yet incorporated as a full-fledged federal program, the Kennedy administration gave the arts unprecedented recognition. Prominent displays in the Kennedy White House validated the arts as indicators of American civilization worthy of national support. Kennedy's art policies grew through a series of successful trial steps into an administrative program intended to institutionalize arts support at the federal level. Underscoring the value of artistic achievement in American culture, these policies reflected a desire to celebrate American artistic excellence and superiority in the cultural Cold War. In accordance with the prevailing liberal ideology, Kennedy officials believed government should act to improve the quality of American life. Domestically the arts would be an effective tool to raise aesthetic standards and stimulate intellectual activity which would counterbalance popular acceptance of more mundane and material commodities. Internationally, this achievement would demonstrate the success and desirability of American democracy. At the height of the Cold War and prior to burgeoning conflicts over American foreign policy in Vietnam, intellectuals, politicians, and artists could rally together around an ideology of American liberty and international leadership. The high cultural ideals and achievements of Kennedy's New Frontier were instrumental in setting the stage for the ideological and administrative development of the National Endowment for the Arts as manifested in the mission statement and goals of the agency. The goals of art policy and the ideological consensus behind them that emerged during Kennedy's administration, thus, outlasted his tenure in the White House. It remains significant that both the Cold War and a bipartisan agreement on the active use of government to enrich the quality of American life enabled the institutionalization and expansion of federal arts policy under the auspices of the NEA. Nonetheless, because the original rationale for federal arts support was built upon a compromise between advocacy of the arts for their own sake and their value as a cultural weapon, it is not surprising that in our current post-

Cold War and anti-welfare state era that the consensus for federal arts policy has collapsed.

NOTES

1. John F. Kennedy letter to Theodate Johnson, publisher of *Musical America*, Sept. 13, 1960, in *Musical America*, October, 1960, 11.
2. For the visual arts this included the abstract painting and sculpture that were then champions of the New York and international art scene. Kennedy respected the discipline and free expression of the modernist genre, although his own stylistic preference remained on representational painting and classical art works.
Art historians generally agree that American modernism, particularly abstract expressionist painting, had achieved prominence in the world art market after the Second World War. Serge Guilbaut argued further that this genre became the darling not only of art critics (of whom Clement Greenberg is the best example) but also of political figures interested in exporting the ideals of American cultural freedom. Modern abstraction could be seen as the perfect vehicle for this because of its free forms and lack of potentially controversial subject portrayals. The showcasing of American abstraction in U.S. State Department sponsored exhibitions abroad has been well documented by Eva Cockcroft. See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), and Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, 1974, 39–41. Kennedy himself was schooled in cultural appreciation and encouraged in the area of modern art by his wife, Jacqueline, and close friend and painter Bill Walton.
3. Kennedy, *Musical America*, October, 1960, 11.
4. Ibid.
5. Kennedy letter to Irving Kolodin, Associate Editor, *Saturday Review*, October 29, 1960, 44.
6. Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 54.
7. Arts patronage has always been a minor role of the U.S. government. The most significant attempt to develop a formal arts policy, however, came under the auspices of the New Deal Works Progress Administration. Nevertheless, these were not meant to be long-lasting programs. Rather, they were designed to provide temporary relief for out of work artists and were quickly dismantled at the end of the 1930s.
8. No critical historical analysis has been done on the NEA. The best discussion of art policy development in the Kennedy years, albeit a brief one, is Milton Cummings' essay "To Change a Nation's Cultural Policy: The Kennedy Administration and the Arts in the United States, 1961–1993," in *America's Commitment to Culture: Government and the Arts*, editors Kevin V. Mulcahy and Margaret Jane Wyszomirski, which provides an overview of the NEA as a federal agency from a political science perspective.
Art historical or art managerial studies have assessed certain aspects of the agency's activities. For arts managements perspectives see: Fanny Taylor & Anthony Barresi, *The Arts at a New Frontier: The National Endowment for the Arts*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1984); and Dick Netzer, *The Subsidized Muse: Public Support for the Arts in the United States*, (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978). Art historical studies of various NEA art programs include: Amy Galligan, *The National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities: An Experiment in Cultural Democracy*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Teachers College, 1989); Robert Jonasse, *The National Endowment for the Arts and the Public Sphere*, (Master of Arts, University of Oregon, 1992); Elaine King, *Pluralism in the Visual Arts in the United States, 1965–1978: The National Endowment for the Arts, an Influential Force*, (Northwestern Univ.: Univ. Microfilms Interna-

tional Dissertation Service, 1986); Mary McCombie, *Art and Policy: The National Endowment for the Arts's Art in Public Places program, 1967–1980*, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1992); and John Wetenhall, *The Ascendancy of Modern Public Sculpture in America*, (Stanford Univ.: Univ. Microfilms International Dissertation Service, 1988).

Some historical assessment of art policy development may be found in Gary O. Larson, *The Reluctant Patron: The United States Government and the Arts, 1943–1965*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); and Charles Mark, *Reluctant Bureaucrats: The Struggle to Establish the National Endowment for the Arts*, (Debuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1990). Other works which provide historical background on the NEA include memoirs by former agency officials, such as Livingston Biddle, *Our Government and the Arts: A Perspective from the Inside*, (New York: ACA Books, 1988). The most recent publication on the NEA is more of a polemic than a serious historical study, see Alice Golfarb Marquis, *Art Lessons: Learning From the Rise and Fall of Public Arts Funding*. New York: Basic Books, 1995).

9. Dwight Macdonald was one prominent thinker who renounced his Marxism and lashed out against Soviet dictatorship and argued that the American system allowed greater freedom. In "Why I Chose the West," for example, he argued that the American political and economic system allowed freedom and growth for intellectuals and ordinary citizens. Dwight Macdonald, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist: Essays in Political Criticism*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), 236. He also stated that artists and intellectuals in the United States had the potential to ignore the commercial market and produce decent work; whereas in the USSR "there are no loopholes—the artist cannot create independently of the Central Committee's directives." Macdonald, "USA v. USSR" *Memoirs of a Revolutionist: Essays in Political Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), 312. The essay originally appeared in *Partisan Review*.
10. David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950). Intellectual assessments of work and leisure also appear in William Whyte, *The Organization Man*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956). For anti-suburban themes, see John Keats, *A Crack in the Picture Window* (n.p.: Riverside Press, 1956).
11. David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 21, 161; and William Whyte, *The Organization Man*.
12. John Kenneth Galbraith, *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952).
13. John Kenneth Galbraith. *The Affluent Society*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 4.
14. *Ibid.*, 192.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 273.
17. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).
18. Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889–1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 308–311.
19. Interestingly, both Dwight Macdonald and Schlesinger had attended the inaugural conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin in 1950, where they and other prominent thinkers expressed the values of American intellectual life and culture in hopes of wooing Europeans into full agreement that the American system was preferable to the Soviets'. Although Macdonald and Schlesinger were not aware of it at the time, the CIA had funded the Congress with laundered money. Schlesinger was only involved in the initial conference at a time when it had a great deal of support among American intellectuals. The Congress continued to meet well into the nineteen sixties; however, it lost the support of artists and intellectuals as U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated and became less accepted and once the CIA funding source became known. Schlesinger noted that the Ford Foundation later picked up funding for the Congress. Author's interview with Schlesinger, September 19, 1995; and

- Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals during the 1940s & nineteen-fifties*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 128–129.
20. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “The Challenge of Abundance” *Reporter* (May 1956). Also see discussions of Schlesinger in Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, 131–146; and Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the nineteen-sixties*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1984), Chapter 1.
 21. Author’s interview with Schlesinger, September 19, 1995, New York.
 22. Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” *Partisan Review*, VI (Fall 1939); “Work and Leisure Under Industrialism” *Commentary*, XVI (July 1953); and “The Plight of Our Culture” *Commentary*, XV (June 1953). Dwight Macdonald, “Masscult and Midcult” in *Against the American Grain*, (New York: Random House, 1952), 34.
 23. Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, (New York: Random House, 1956), 109.
 24. Italics in original. Wernher von Braun as quoted in Walter A. McDougall, *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985), 119.
 25. Lyndon Johnson is quoted in David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 625. The reference to *LIFE* appears on 626. Also integral to this discussion of American know-how are Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read—And What You Can Do About It*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1955); Arthur S. Trace, Jr., *What Ivan Knows that Johnny Doesn’t*, (New York: Random House, 1961). These texts gained notoriety for their comparisons of American students’ academic laziness to the prowess of their Russian counterparts in literature, history, and foreign languages. They also enlivened cultural policy debates over the benefits of Ivan’s exposure to opera, theater, and art versus Johnny’s intake of American television. Rep. Kearns quotes from the Trace book in a debate on national cultural policy, *The Congressional Record: House*, 1962, 5201.
 26. Robert Frost, “The Next Augustan Age” *The New Enlarged Anthology of Robert Frost’s Poems*, Louis Untermeyer, editor, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1971), 276–278. See notes on Frost’s inaugural participation in Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 671.
 27. Emphasis mine. John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address” *Public Papers of the President of the United States: John F. Kennedy*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), 15.
 28. August Heckscher, Oral history interview conducted by Wolf von Eckhardt, December 10, 1965, for the John F. Kennedy Library, 3. Also see listings of the invites in Folder 8, Box 40, August Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
 29. Kennedy letter to Theodate Johnson, Publisher of Musical America, Sept. 13, 1960, in *Musical America*, October, 1960, 11.
 30. File memo dated January 1961, Folder 8, Box 40, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library. For a discussion of those involved in drafting the list of invites, see Heckscher, Oral History, 6. Pierre Salinger later solicited comments and suggestions from these artists on arts policy which were delivered to art consultant Heckscher.
 31. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., papers for *A Thousand Days*, Box w-3, Schlesinger Papers, JFK Library.
 32. There are other important instances in which Kennedy deliberately disregarded the social tabu on fraternizing with those deemed enemies of the United States for their communist sympathies or general criticisms of the government. For instance, the President-elect and his brother Robert, crossed an American Legion picket line in 1960 to see *Spartacus*—the film based on a novel by former communist Howard Fast (who had won the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954) and screenplay by ex-Hollywood Ten convict, Dalton Trumbo. Kennedy also intended

- to resurrect the reputation of J. Robert Oppenheimer by bestowing upon him the Fermi Prize for his achievements in nuclear energy. Johnson presented this is December of 1963, removing the pall cast over the celebrated physicist when the Eisenhower administration revoked his security clearance in 1953 and the Atomic Energy Commission declared him a security risk because of his opposition to the development of the hydrogen bomb. See Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 181, 211, and 219.
33. Heckscher, Oral History, 3.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Kennedy letter to Prof. Jacques Barzun, Sept. 13, 1961, Folder 12, Box 40, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
 36. For comments on John Kennedy's artistic tastes see for example: Jacqueline Kennedy, Oral history interview conducted by Joseph B. Frantz, January 11, 1974, JFK Library; Paul B. Fey, Jr., *The Pleasure of His Company*, (NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 181.
 37. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, "Culture Makes a Hit At the White House," *New York Times Magazine*, January 28, 1962, p. 64-66.
 38. Author's interview with Pi  re Salinger, Nov. 1, 1995, Los Angeles. Numerous memos in the Heckscher papers at the JFK Library also point to a prominent role by the First Lady in cultural policy.
 39. See Gelb, "Culture Makes a Hit At the White House," 66; Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer, *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967); and Thayer, *Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961).
 40. Thayer, *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years*, and G. L. Hall & A. Pinchot, *Jacqueline Kennedy: A Biography*, (New York: Frederick Fell Inc., 1964). According to Doris Kearns Goodwin, it was Jacqueline Kennedy's idea to invite Frost to read at the inauguration. See Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and The Kennedys*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 813.
 41. It has been widely quoted that John Kennedy's father, Joseph Kennedy, had frequently stated to his son that "image is everything" in public life. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and The Kennedys*.
 42. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 672.
 43. Anne H. Lincoln, *The Kennedy White House Parties*, (New York: Viking Press, 1967), 57.
 44. Jacqueline Kennedy as quoted in Pi  re Salinger, *P.S.: A Memoir*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 104.
 45. G. L. Hall and Ann Pinchot, *Jacqueline Kennedy: A Biography*, 151, and Thayer, *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years*, 31.
 46. Jacqueline Kennedy accepted the generally held belief that women's place was in the home rather than the public sphere. For conventional depictions of women in the nineteen-fifties to which she conforms, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
 47. Kathleen McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1991); and Karen Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).
 48. "A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy," Feb 14, 1962, Produced by Perry Wolfe, CBS. Available in the Film and Television Archive, UCLA.
 49. Lincoln, *The Kennedy White House Parties*, 112-125; and Thayer, *Jacqueline Kennedy*, 183-184.
 50. See Thayer, p 196. Kennedy remarks at French embassy.
 51. The American activity in the Venice Biennale and French opposition to American "cultural imperialism" are documented by Laurie J. Monahan, "Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*, Serge Guilbaut, editor, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 369-416.
 52. "A Strategy for Cultural Advancement," Folder 10, Box 35, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.

53. Ibid., 1.
54. Ibid.
55. For an account of the Berlin Crisis, see Reeves, *Profile of Power*, 185–208 and Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 353–370.
56. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 286. For a detailed discussion of the Bay of Pigs see 219–249 and Reeves, *Profile of Power*, 88–106.
57. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 362.
58. The policies of massive retaliation and flexible response are detailed by John Gaddis in *Strategies of Containment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
59. See August Heckscher, “The Quality of American Culture” in *Goals for Americans: The Report of the President’s Commission on National Goals*, (New York: Columbia University, The American Assembly, 1960); and Heckscher, *The Public Happiness*, (New York: Atheneum, 1962).
60. Schlesinger memo to Kennedy, “Moving Ahead on the Cultural Front,” November 22, 1961, Folder 3, Box 16, Schlesinger Papers, JFK Library.
61. Kennedy letter to August Heckscher, December 5, 1961, “Role and Assignment” Folder 15, Box 6, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
62. Heckscher, Oral History, 48.
63. August Heckscher, “The Arts and the National Government,” Report to President Kennedy, May 28, 1963, Folder 2, Box 40, 1–9, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
64. August Heckscher, “The Challenge of Ugliness,” Address at the Conference on Aesthetic Responsibility, at New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, April 3, 1962. Reprinted in the *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 87th Congress*, January, 1962, to October, 1962, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 8910–8912.
65. Heckscher Report, 27–28.
66. Ibid., 28.
67. Schlesinger believes that Kennedy intended to appoint Richard Goodwin to the post, *A Thousand Days*, 675.
68. Kennedy letter to Heckscher, June 10, 1963, Box 40, folder 2, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
69. Kennedy’s references to the American pursuit of happiness and a discussion of Jeffersonian ideals in which the arts would combat accumulation of wealth that might encourage “course and vicious habits” can be found in Kennedy’s “Remarks at the National Cultural Center Dinner,” Nov. 29, 1962, Box 40, Folder 4, 3, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
70. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.
71. Kennedy, “The Arts in America,” *Look*, draft, Box 40, Folder 4, 8, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
72. John F. Kennedy, *Executive Order 11112*, June 12, 1963, Box 122, Folder 4, White House Central Subject Files, JFK Library.
73. Kennedy, “Statement by the President Establishing the President’s Advisory Council on the Arts,” June 12, 1963, Box 122, Folder 4, WHCF, JFK Library.
74. Kennedy biographers, such as Reeves and Schlesinger, concur that JFK was unwilling to jeopardize promoting his primary foreign policy objectives by antagonizing conservative legislators on domestic issues such as civil rights or the arts, which he deemed less imperative. Nevertheless, it is also recognized that he did promote the arts in new ways. See John Wetenhall, “Camelot’s Legacy to Public Art: Aesthetic Ideology in the New Frontier,” *Art Journal*, (Winter 1989), 303–308.
75. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 710.
76. John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to the Congress on Education,” February 6, 1962, Box 35, Folder 1, Heckscher Papers, JFK Library.
77. Rep. Frank Thompson, “Are the Communists Right in Calling Us Cultural Barbarians?” *Music*

Journal, July/August, 1955, 5.

78. Senator Claiborne Pell, quoted in *The Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 88th Congress, January 6, 1963 to December 20, 1963: Senate*, (Washington, D.C.: United States government Printing Office, 1963), 25265-25266.
79. Kennedy, "Remarks at Amherst College upon Receiving an Honorary Degree," October 26, 1963, *The Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy*, 815.
80. Wetenhall, 306.
81. See John Canaday, "Art in the Soviet: Review of a Paradox" in his series on "Socialist Realism" *The New York Times*, beginning Sept. 30, 1963. Also "Khrushchev Scolds Abstract Painters," Dec. 2, 1962, and "Soviet Orders Disciplining for Cultural Avant-Garde," *The New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1962.