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Fortresses of Culture: Cold War Mobilization, Urban Renewal, and Institutional Identity in the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and Center Theatre Group

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Fortresses of Culture: Cold War Mobilization, Urban Renewal, and Institutional Identity in the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and Center Theatre Group

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ABSTRACT

Fortresses of Culture: Cold War Mobilization, Urban Renewal, and Institutional Identity in the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and Center Theatre Group

by

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The Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and Center Theatre Group were just two of dozens of regional theaters that emerged across the United States in the mid-twentieth century, but for many reasons they stand apart from most others. Because of their position as constituents of institutions directly tied to economic and political imperatives of New York and Los Angeles, they were linked more explicitly to their respective cities' identities than most other theaters in the United States. New York and Los Angeles looked, respectively, to Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center as sources of civic pride, while theater makers, audiences, and critics looked to the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and Center Theatre Group as focal points in the quest for alternatives to Broadway and the development of an institutionalized national theater.

This dissertation examines the ways in which each of the organizations studied herein established their authority to represent their cities and the nation as civic institutions and explores how they legitimated their identities as such in the context of Cold War culture. Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center, despite their purported cultural aspirations, grew out of pragmatic desires among urban elites to replace one vision of urbanity with another and to raise the national and international stature of their respective

cities. Lincoln Center had no officially sanctioned designation as a national cultural center, but nonetheless was said to stand as a symbol of American cultural might by virtue of its location in New York, whose global profile was on the rise following World War II. Los Angeles, meanwhile, worked to reconcile its booming population with a decidedly un-metropolitan national image, while the city's business elite sought to wrest control of the Los Angeles's built environment from the political forces of the left, and the Music Center figured prominently into these circumstances.

The centers' theater constituents, meanwhile, were not directly linked to the urban renewal efforts but were nonetheless strongly influenced by the conditions shaping Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center, particularly in relation to establishing the theaters' legitimacy as civic institutions. In tracing the genesis of these theaters and their parent organizations, this dissertation seeks to make visible the plethora of forces, both internal and external, that converged to shape their emerging identities. Moreover, this dissertation posits that the rise of the institutionalized theater in the United States, a relatively overlooked area of study, offers a valuable site of interrogation for theater historians. To be sure, the individual works of playwrights, actors, and directors offer valuable insight into the ways in which artists respond to prevailing social, political, and economic conditions in any given historical moment. However, the rise of institutionalized theater caused a profound shift in how theatrical works are legitimated in the United States by adding a new level of legitimation: the institutional identity of a theatrical organization. Such institutions, therefore, figure as prominently into theatrical history as any playwright, actor, director, or producer in that their identities are as reflective of social, political, economic, and artistic circumstances as the works created within them.

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INTRODUCTION

Preamble: A Tale of Two Cities, Two Cultural Centers, and Two Theaters

When Lincoln Center was first conceived in the mid-1950s, New York was in the midst of a major transformation of its landscape as Robert Moses, chairman of the city's Slum Clearance Committee, pursued an ambitious program of urban renewal projects designed to align the city with his own vision of progress by eradicating buildings and neighborhoods he deemed derelict and obsolete with clusters of apartment towers and public buildings including university facilities, hospitals, convention centers and, of course, the behemoth cultural center that now stands proudly a few blocks north of Columbus Circle. Nearly sixty years after its 1959 groundbreaking, Lincoln Center remains a dominant presence on Manhattan's West Side while the people—mostly people of color with low incomes—who inhabited San Juan Hill, the neighborhood bulldozed to make way for the Center, are all but forgotten, as is their valiant fight to save their neighborhood from Moses's brand of progress that valued order and efficiency over all else.

One of the last of Moses's major urban renewal projects, Lincoln Center was pitched to the public as an important symbol of America's cultural maturity during the Cold War and, its backers argued, Lincoln Center would put the world on notice that the United States would be second to none not only in matters of economic and military might but also in the arena of high art and culture. Like the displaced population of San Juan Hill, the Cold War rhetoric that underscored the founding of Lincoln Center has faded into memory, but the Center and its constituent organizations like the Metropolitan Opera and the New York

Philharmonic have solidified their preeminence as important and influential cultural institutions.

The same cannot be said for the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center. When Lincoln Center announced that its plans would include not just homes for the Met and the Philharmonic but also a permanent repertory theater, the prospect of a permanent theater company, free from the commercial constraints of Broadway, was heralded as "undoubtedly the most exciting news to develop in a long time for the American theatre."[1] Already home to dozens of theater buildings, New York had been the center of theatrical production in the United States for nearly a century, as the "combination system" had led to the demise of locally produced theater across the country only to be replaced by touring productions emanating from New York. That centrality formed the basis for a constant refrain among artists and critics alike that the dominance of commercial theater in the United States "tolerated only plays that would appeal to the common denominator in a large and divergent group of people spread out over the country, and the control of that system by businessmen furthered the emphasis on broad popular appeal."[2]

The Repertory Theatre would, it was hoped, offer a venue where, free from the financial hit-flop model of Broadway, artists could produce works deemed by most Broadway producers to be too financially risky, such as classics and bold experimental work. Even more importantly, the Repertory Theatre, housed within this national symbol of cultural gravitas, could help fulfill what had been for many years an "obsessive purpose: the creation

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[1] Lewis Funke. "Lincoln Center Prepares for Repertory." *New York Times,* May 18, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[2] Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 101.

of a single American National Theatre to rival any in the world."[3] To meet this goal, John D. Rockefeller 3rd, president of Lincoln Center, turned to producer Robert Whitehead and director Elia Kazan, two of the most influential figures working on Broadway in the mid-twentieth century, to lead the enterprise. Whitehead and Kazan promised to create a theater that would at last endow the United States with an institution to rival England's Old Vic and the Soviet Union's Moscow Art Theatre. However, from the moment of its inception, the Repertory Theatre faced sharp criticism from the public, and a series of missteps by Kazan and Whitehead would eventually turn the theater's own board of directors against them, leading to the ousting of the two men before they could complete their second season. After eight more tumultuous seasons under different management, the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center finally collapsed under the weight of its symbolic importance and has since faded into obscurity.

Meanwhile, three thousand miles away, while the Repertory Theatre was floundering, the foundation was being laid for the Los Angeles Music Center which would give rise to Center Theatre Group, where the Mark Taper Forum would emerge after its inaugural season as one of the most viable and influential theater companies in the nation. Much like Lincoln Center, the Los Angeles Music Center exerts dominance over its environment with a sprawling footprint. The neoclassical design of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and the colonnade linking the Ahmanson Theatre with the Mark Taper Forum conspire to demonstrate the civic importance of this "20th Century Parthenon on our downtown Acropolis."[4] The Center sits upon an elevated plaza above Grand Avenue, a broad roadway

[3] Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* (New York: Da Capo, 1977), 5.

[4] Thomas M. Self. "The Music Center Story," in *The Music Center Story: A Decade of Achievement, 1964-1974*, ed. James W. Toland (Los Angeles: Music Center Foundation, 1974), 4.

that descends into the canyon created by corporate skyscrapers lining the boulevard. Walking on the sidewalk through this enormous canyon, the pedestrian cannot help but feel that he is somehow trapped in a simulacrum of a city, a stage set that lacks any trace of history. As urban historians Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury have argued, the contemporary environment of Bunker Hill is "an acontextual landscape." The architecture, defined by monolithic skyscrapers, plazas, and malls, is unsettlingly like most urban downtown cores. This generic quality, Loukaitou-Sideris and Sansbury argue, is heightened by "the absence of 'urban clues'—older buildings and urban artifacts that relay the history of the site," preventing the pedestrian "from being oriented in space and time."[5] Even more than Robert Moses's urban renewal projects in New York City, Bunker Hill reflects an intervention, an "episodic act"[6] of total erasure for the sake of civic progress.

When the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion opened its doors in 1964, it looked down not on the skyscrapers that currently dominate Bunker Hill but on a virtual tabula rasa after the entire neighborhood had been razed to make way for the new downtown business district. Built on vacant land already owned by Los Angeles County, the Music Center avoided becoming embroiled in any contestation over eminent domain and the concomitant eviction and displacement of residents and business owners that defined the Lincoln Center project in New York. But although the Music Center and the redevelopment of Bunker Hill were discrete projects, both grew out of a long struggle by the city's business elite to reclaim control over the built environment of the city from what they viewed as the grip of a socialistic vision that threatened to stymie economic growth and prevent Los Angeles from

[5] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury. "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill." *California History,* 74.4 (Winter 1995/1996), 406.

[6] Ibid.

assuming the stature a city of its size should have on the national and global stage. The "new" Bunker Hill would serve as a powerful symbolic representation of Los Angeles's economic might, while the Music Center served as "the vehicle through which the city announced, upon its opening in 1964, that Los Angeles had undeniably become a great city, a city of culture and taste and refinement as well as a city of wealth and growth."[7] Separate though the projects may have been, their emergence in a single historical moment reflected the desires of individuals in government, culture, and business to establish Los Angeles's preeminence as a world class city complete with all of the architectural, economic, and cultural amenities of cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The Music Center played an important role in reshaping downtown Los Angeles and, in the words University of California Regents President William Carter, it would help "offset the image that [Los Angeles] is populated largely by kooks."[8] The Center, the founding of which redefined in many ways the distribution and exercise of power and social status in the city, also would play an important role in reshaping the image of the city.

In its conception, the Music Center was intended to consist of only one building whose primary purpose was to house the Los Angeles Philharmonic and provide a host venue for the prestigious music and opera companies, but the Center's scope was expanded after Dorothy Chandler, the driving force behind the fundraising efforts to build the Center, visited London and, inspired by her theatergoing there, expanded the vision of the Center to include the two additional buildings that would become the Ahmanson Theatre and the Mark Taper Forum. The expanded vision would, Chandler told the Board of Supervisors in March 1961,

[7] William Fulton. *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Point Arena: Solano Press Books, 1997), 64.

[8] "Brightness in the Air." *Time.* December 18, 1964.

"give the people of Southern California a complete Center to serve all the performing arts."[9] While the Music Center would, by providing homes for the Philharmonic and the Light Opera, open "avenues of opportunity," Chandler believed that the "foremost opportunity" lay in "the development of a native Los Angeles theater entity."[10] *Los Angeles Times* theater critic Cecil Smith argued that Los Angeles was poised to take its place as a theatrical producing center, arguing that there "would seem to be audiences here waiting like a patient cat for the best in theater to emerge,"[11] and he pointed to the success of the Theatre Group, a company operating under the auspices of UCLA Extension and led by John Houseman, as evidence of an audience hungry for serious theater in Los Angeles. In 1966, the Theatre Group was named as the resident theater constituent of the Music Center and it would eventually evolve into the Center Theatre Group, consisting of two "arms," one producing large-scale productions targeting a mainstream audience in the Ahmanson Theatre and the other presenting smaller works, with an emphasis on experimentation, in the Mark Taper Forum. The Taper, led by Gordon Davidson, quickly established itself as an artistically adventurous company, and by the end of its second season it had become, according to theater critic Jules Novick, "one of the most stable and viable regional theatres in the country,"[12] a status it maintains to the present day. Unlike the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, CTG did not boast of becoming the *de facto* "National Theatre" of the United States,

[9] Henry Sutherland. "The Spirit That Built the Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[10] Cecil Smith. "The Greatest Gift of All: The Soul of the Music Center Is Not What It Is but What It Does." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964: ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[11] Ibid.

[12] "A Report from the Press Department." Center Theatre Group Records, 316-M, University of California, Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

but in the space of two seasons it established itself as an important player on the national stage.

The Argument: Cold War Culture, City Making, and Institution Building

The Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and Center Theatre Group were just two of dozens of regional theaters that emerged across the United States in the mid-twentieth century, but for many reasons they stand apart from most of the others. Because of their position as constituents of institutions directly tied to economic and political imperatives of New York and Los Angeles, they were linked more explicitly to their respective cities' identities than most other theaters in the United States. New York and Los Angeles looked, respectively, to Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center as sources of civic pride, while theater makers, audiences, and critics looked to the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center and Center Theater Group as focal points in the quest for alternatives to Broadway and the development of a national theater.

This dissertation examines the genesis of these organizations and argues that the respective success and failure of Center Theatre Group and the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center rested squarely on their ability to forge a distinctive identity while navigating the complexities of the relationships among their parent institutions, their cities, and the landscape of American theater at large in the context of Cold War culture. The organizations were defined in different ways and to varying degrees by a growing anxiety over the expression of national, civic, and cultural identity, as the United States assumed a dominant position on the global political stage. By the time ground was broken at Lincoln Center and the LA Music Center in 1959 and 1962, respectively, the United States was deeply entrenched in its Cold War with the Soviet Union. Both cultural centers grew out of

fundamentally pragmatic desires to strengthen the economic fortunes of their respective cities, but winning the necessary support for the projects meant establishing a critical need for the centers in the public imagination, and the Cold War provided the necessary rationale in both New York and Los Angeles, albeit in different ways.

In the case of New York, Lincoln Center was not only to be one of Robert Moses's biggest urban renewal projects, but it would also bring about the strongest resistance he had ever faced as thousands of residents mounted a campaign to save their neighborhood from the wrecking ball. For the first time, the human cost of urban renewal, which had for years forced the relocation of tens of thousands of New Yorkers from their neighborhoods, was brought to light when two grass roots organizations, the Lincoln Square Residents' Committee and the Lincoln Square Businessmen's Committee, mobilized against the Lincoln Square project. Although they were ultimately unsuccessful in stopping the project, Lincoln Square's residents and business owners "brought a citywide audience face to face with the outcomes that the muffled liberal reports and studies had already predicted: renewal scattered a diverse working-and-middle-class community and pushed the growing Puerto Rican population into a shrinking pool of housing."[13] Lincoln Center's backers, while they acknowledged the plight of those displaced by the project, incorporated Lincoln Center into the Cold War, arguing that it was a necessary weapon in the fight to establish the cultural supremacy of the United States. Although it was unfortunate that residents of Lincoln Square would be displaced, they argued, the cost that had to be borne if the United States was not to be seen as trailing the rest of the world in cultural matters.

[13] Samuel Zipp. *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 216.

The Los Angeles Music Center, on the other hand, made more subtle use of Cold War rhetoric during its development, although the path for its creation was paved by fever-pitched anti-Communist hysteria. Whereas Lincoln Center's backers emphasized New York's position as the city most representative of the United States on the global stage, the Music Center represented a growing concern among city leaders with the stature of the city within the United States. The failure of Los Angeles to establish a visible cultural infrastructure had by the 1950s become a source of embarrassment to the city, most clearly demonstrated when the Hollywood Bowl, one of the only venues for high culture in the city, suddenly closed in the summer of 1951. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, that moment in many ways sparked the Music Center project by rallying public support around saving the Bowl and securing substantial city and county financial support, marking the local government's entrée into subsidizing cultural institutions.

However, the Music Center was also an important part of the business elite's strategy to re-centralize their power in Downtown LA, which had waned during the Depression and the war years when the liberal left reigned in Los Angeles and instituted a large program of public housing projects in the city. The elite's reclamation was made possible not by invoking the need to demonstrate the cultural supremacy of the United States on the global stage but by discrediting the liberal left coalition by painting public housing, which in 1950 seemed well on its way to becoming the centerpiece of urban planning in Los Angeles, as a dangerous socialistic enterprise and replacing it with a culture-and-commerce driven vision of civic progress. Lincoln Center had used the Cold War rhetoric as a largely defensive maneuver, designed to provide the justification for the toll taken on those displaced, but in Los Angeles, city leaders in both government and business harnessed Cold War paranoia to

advance their growth agenda by launching an extraordinarily vicious red-baiting campaign that effectively convinced the electorate that the public housing program in Los Angeles was nothing short of a Communist plot to undermine free enterprise in the city. The Music Center itself was not part of this campaign, but it almost certainly would not have come into being had public housing not been supplanted in Los Angeles, opening the door for what historian Don Parson calls the "corporate modernist" vision that has defined downtown Los Angeles's landscape since the early 1960s, and it was the triumph of that vision that essentially set the stage for the Music Center's creation. So effective was the campaign to defeat public housing in reshaping Los Angeles, Parson's assertion that "modern Los Angeles...might be described as nothing short of the spatial expression of the Red Scare"[14] is virtually indisputable.

The rhetoric surrounding the Music Center would not rely on explicit Cold War rhetoric in the same way that Lincoln Center did, but instead evoked the Cold War atmosphere in more subtle ways, most significantly in the emphasis on philanthropic fundraising in the narrative of the project's evolution. Dorothy Chandler, the wife of *Times* publisher Norman Chandler, influenced every facet of the Music Center's development, but her most important contribution was leading the fundraising efforts which resulted in the vast majority of the funds for the project coming from private sources. Philanthropy became an important means of entrée into the upper echelons of Los Angeles society for those long excluded, most notably the wealthy Jewish elite from the west side of Los Angeles like Mark Taper and Howard Ahmanson, for whom the Center's two theaters were named. Moreover,

[14] Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 198.

by soliciting smaller contributions from the general populace, the Center's backers portrayed financial support as an act of civic participation. Although the Center received significant support from the county in the form of the free land upon which to build and subsidies for some overhead costs like maintenance, the emphasis on contributions from private individuals allowed the Center to be portrayed as a demonstration of the power of private enterprise in support of a project deemed important by the citizenry who accepts that the Center might demonstrate the city's cultural gravitas to the rest of the country.

For Center Theatre Group, the rhetoric of cultural maturity was particularly important in establishing the company's legitimacy for the public of Los Angeles. Establishing cultural maturity was much less a symbolic imperative in Los Angeles than it was in New York. Despite the fact that Lincoln Center would mark the first time that high culture had been officially afforded a prominent swath of land within the city grid, the city was already recognized as a center of cultural production in the United States. The same could not be said of Los Angeles, which was often the target of national ridicule for having "produced nothing of cultural value since the orange."[15] Although Los Angeles had once been home to several "Little Theaters" of varying levels of professionalism, the city had failed to generate a stable local theater scene and instead functioned primarily as a road stop for tours of recycled Broadway shows. The 1959 founding of the Theatre Group at UCLA under the direction of John Houseman quickly changed that. From its inception, the Theatre Group experienced exceptional box office success, typically playing to houses at over ninety percent capacity and establishing itself as an artistically adventurous company, drawing on classics and

[15] Cecil Smith. "Center Theatre Group's Goal: Image of its Own." *Los Angeles Times,* February 5, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

introducing Los Angeles audiences to works by European playwrights like Ionesco and Brecht. The press lauded the Group's work, but it also repeatedly valorized the organization's audience as evidence that Los Angeles was home to a long-neglected sophisticated audience comprised of what Houseman believed to the "true" theatergoing audience: the middle-class intelligentsia. The Theatre Group became an important means through which Los Angeles audiences could demonstrate their intellectual and cultural gravitas, which became an important means of establishing a relationship with audiences that would carry over to the Music Center when the Group was named as the Center's resident theater constituent.

The Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, on the other hand, did not look to a particular audience as a source of legitimation but rather attempted to establish its legitimacy on the professional reputations of Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead. The Repertory Theatre would ostensibly represent the United States on the global stage during the Cold War, but its legitimation as the presumptive national theater grew not from any official appellation as such or from federal or municipal underwriting, but rather out of its relationship with Lincoln Center. However, it would soon become clear that the pressures of creating a "national" repertory theater out of thin air would be fraught with difficulties, most importantly in the establishment of an identity for an organization conceived in a boardroom with no artistic mandate. From the earliest stages of its development, the Repertory Theater was plagued by conflicts over how to best reflect American theatrical ideals within an institutional structure. Every aspect of the theater's artistic work, from the acting to play selection to the physical plant, was hotly contested both within the organization and publicly in the press. At the root of the conflict lay a failure to establish a clear sense of identity that could withstand the

onslaught of criticism foisted on the theater from the press and its own board of directors. Rather than collaborating to develop the theater's identity, the individual players involved in this story fought to protect their own legacies.

The founding of Lincoln Center, the Los Angeles Music Center, and their respective theater constituent organizations reflects a relatively neglected area of study in theater history: the rise of the institutional theater in the United States in the postwar years, a movement in which debates about the future direction of American drama centered not only on dramaturgy and aesthetics, but also—and perhaps to a greater degree—on the need for an institutional structure equipped to support alternatives to the Broadway "showshop" and to facilitate the development of a representative national theater. While many contemporary critics and scholars in the 1960s and 1970s wrote extensively on the rise of the resident theater movement and the push for a national theater in United States during the postwar years, few studies since have fully explored the intersection of theatrical institutions and civic and national imperatives, let alone the impact of economic forces on cultural production.

That said, this dissertation is not ultimately concerned with the more obvious effects of economics on theatrical production; it goes without saying that the enormous expense inherent in theatrical production plays a significant role in determining which plays make it onto the boards, how long they run, how many people see them, and so forth. Rather, I argue that the rise of institutional theaters in the United States, embodied in the regional theaters and cultural centers that emerged in the postwar era, demonstrates an important shift in how theatrical works are legitimated. Whereas in the purely commercial theater, productions were essentially legitimated at the box office and by critics, the institutional theater has created another level of legitimation: the institutional identity of a given theater. Just as "direct from

Broadway" signals to audiences in far-flung places a certain level of commercial success (and thereby legitimates a production as a commodity), "Live from Lincoln Center" suggests to the PBS viewer a production of cultural import, while many regional theaters, particularly the Mark Taper Forum, have attained such a level of prestige that their imprimatur has become an important means of legitimating the professional and artistic stature of playwrights, actors, and directors. These are just a couple of examples of how the rise of the notion of a theater institution as an entity—as opposed to the more ephemeral play-by-play model of the commercial theater—has affected the landscape of theatrical production, but the point I make here is that institutions, be they cultural centers or small regional theaters, figure as importantly into theatrical history as any playwright, actor, director, or producer in that their identities are as reflective of social, political, economic, and artistic circumstances as the works created within them.

If we accept the premise that institutional prestige plays a role in establishing the cultural legitimacy of artistic work, then it logically follows that the roots of that prestige warrant interrogation. The institutions examined in this dissertation lend themselves particularly well to such an interrogation, because they offer the opportunity to explore the expression of identity—which was inextricably linked the pursuit of prestige—on several levels ranging from the national to the organizational. Taking it a step further, it could be said that the question being asked in each chapter of this dissertation is how these organizations attempted to acquire the authority to stand as representatives of national and civic identity at the time of their emergence.

Critical Concerns: Identity and Legitimation

As a theater historian, I am more interested in examining the ways that material conditions shape theatrical art than in looking to the art itself—be it the work of playwrights, actors, or directors—as a site of interrogation. Of course, the close study of theatrical texts and practices offers the historian fertile soil for contemplation of the myriad ways that artists have responded to their contemporary moments both in terms of the social and political realities in which they worked and the aesthetic movements in which they participated or against which they resisted, and even the most materialist approach to the historical study of an institution must consider to at least some degree the works generated by that institution. However, as Marvin Carlson has argued, the practices championed by "new criticism," which advocated for a "pure" analysis of the printed text unencumbered by contemplation of the socio-political factors surrounding its creation have long been viewed as inadequate to a meaningful understanding of how theater generates meaning for a society. "No longer do we necessarily approach theatre primarily as the physical enactment of a written text with our historical concern anchored in the interplay between that text and its physical realization," Carlson observes. Rather, we now must look at theater in a more comprehensive light, "as a sociocultural event whose meanings and interpretations are not to be sought exclusively in the text being performed but in the experience of the audience assembled to share in the creation of the total event."[16] Carlson's study of theatrical architecture and building, one of the earliest to consider the significance of a theater's physical location on the city grid, makes a compelling case for incorporating urban analysis into an understanding of the theatrical

[16] Marvin Carlson. *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatrical Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2.

experience. Carlson is now just one of many scholars who have closely examined the ways in which theater spaces make meaning. Carlson is also just one of many scholars before me who have considered the importance of economic factors and who have made the case that sites of performance can serve as an indicator of the status that theater or other forms of artistic production hold within a society, but the body of literature examining the impact of economic forces remains limited.

Much of the literature on the impact of economic forces has focused primarily on how the commercial nature of theatrical production in the United States has stymied dramaturgical maturity and progress. For example, Walter Meserve in *Heralds of Promise,* an account of American drama during the Jacksonian era, catalogs a number of factors, many of them economic, to explain the failure of American drama to thrive. The list ranges from the anti-intellectualism of the era to the primacy of actors and "star vehicles" and the lack of copyright protections in the 1800s, each of which discouraged the development of playwriting as a viable profession, hence slowing down the development of a uniquely "American" drama.

Others have argued persuasively that such development was further exacerbated by the dominance of the Syndicate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a phenomenon explicated most thoroughly by Alfred Bernheim. Bernheim argued that the collapse of the resident stock theaters and the rise of the touring "combination" system destroyed the local isolation and independence of theaters in the United States and brought about the separation of function in theater ownership and the production of plays, culminating in the establishment of New York as the center of production and the

development of the booking system that ultimately evolved into the Syndicate's monopoly of theatrical real estate across the country.

As Bernheim noted, the rise of the Syndicate clearly indicated that "the era of the business man had arrived" and that it was "he who has appeared to reap the fruits of the new organization of the theatre, to guide and to direct the theatre's destiny."[17] Bernheim's argument that the theatrical production in the United States was shaped more by business concerns than anything else was echoed by Jack Poggi, who wrote that the combination system "tolerated only plays that would appeal to the common denominator in a large and divergent group of people spread out over the country, and the control of that system by businessmen furthered the emphasis on broad popular appeal."[18] Both Poggi and Bernheim offer insightful analyses of the ways in which the economic conditions of the United States through the 1930s (Bernheim) and the 1960s (Poggi) influenced both organizational structure and dramaturgy. Adding to the body of work about the economic challenges facing theater and the other performing arts in the United States were Thomas Moore's *The Economics of the American Theatre* and William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen's *The Performing Arts—the Economic Dilemma,* both of which focused their arguments on the need for subsidy to sustain non-commercial theater in the United States and were influential in their time in the justification of foundational and governmental support for the arts. Each of these is a valuable historical resource, and although Poggi does touch on some particular institutions, including the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, the necessarily cursory treatment cannot

[17] Alfred Bernheim. *The Business of the Theatre* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1932), 31.

[18] Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 101.

account for all of the factors in the shaping of the company's identity, nor can he fully analyze the relationship among the Repertory Theatre, Lincoln Center, and New York City.

Since the publication of these books, little has been published about economic factors related to theatrical production, but a significant body of work examining theater from a materialist perspective has developed since the 1990s. As noted above, Carlson's *Places of Performance* surveys the architecture and semiotics of western theaters from the ancient Greeks to the late twentieth century. Carlson does not venture into an analysis of the ways in which the performance sites influence the promulgation of particular types of work, but rather emphasizes how the physical structure of performance spaces as well as their location within the city landscape reflect the social position of theater within a given society. He notes, for example, the development of the "theatre as public monument in the twentieth century," which "demonstrate[s] in a highly visible fashion the public dedication to the arts now expected of a world class city."[19] He cites Lincoln Center as one such "monument," but focuses primarily on the meaning of the structure within the urban landscape without venturing into consideration of the work produced behind the marble façade or the circumstances that led to its erection in the first place.

Mary C. Henderson also considers the relationship between theater buildings and their surroundings in the context of the city. Like Carlson, Henderson does not venture into analysis of the work happening within the walls of the theaters, but rather on how the social, political, and economic climate of the city influenced theater construction and architecture. Henderson also emphasizes the effect of changes in urban life, particularly the rise of public transportation, on the theater business. The rise of transit, she argues, meant that "Urban

[19] Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance,* 92.

existence became divided into spheres of activity, each bearing little relationship to the others except that all were tied together by public transportation."[20] Public transit within the city facilitated the centralization of the theater business at Union Square (and later further uptown at Times Square), and this centralization aided in establishing New York as a major exporter of theater to the rest of the country.

The work of Carlson and Henderson, which focused primarily on the geographical situation of theaters within cities, represents just one aspect of the trend toward materialist and spatial analysis that has become prevalent in theater scholarship. Gay McAuley, in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre,* examined the ways in which the spatial arrangement of theaters influenced every aspect of theater production. Her analysis built on Carlson's by moving beyond the architecture to offer a theorization of the implications of spatial politics in the running of rehearsals and the arrangement of backstage areas. Unlike Carlson and Henderson, hers is not a historical analysis, but rather, a kind of ethnographical study in which she places herself in the position of observer within the rehearsal room, auditorium, and backstage areas.

Ric Knowles, in Read*ing the Material Theater*, offers a thorough articulation of the materialist analysis of theatrical productions. His analysis focuses primarily on audience reception and addresses the ways in which the meaning generated by a performance is bound to the social and cultural context in which it is situated. He writes, "*Reading the Material Theatre*, then, and the 'materialist semiotics' that it articulates and puts into practice, is concerned with the meanings—the social and cultural work—produced and performed by theatrical productions in negotiation with their local audiences in particular cultural and

[20] Henderson, Mary C. *The City and the Theatre.*

theatrical settings and contexts in the English-speaking theatrical world."[21] Both Knowles and McAuley argue for an analysis of theatrical production focusing heavily on the phenomenological experience of meaning making and audience reception, and indeed much of the existing scholarship and theory relating to the cityscape has approached the understanding of the city from a phenomenological perspective.

Perhaps the most well-known theorization of the city grid is DeCerteau's essay "Walking in the City" in *The Practice of Every Day Life.* At the heart of DeCerteau's analysis is the contemplation of the built environment as a manifestation of a system of power and the ways in which the individual at street level—the pedestrian—either affirms or subverts that power structure through his own decisions as to whether or not to adhere to the patterns implicitly imposed on the pedestrian through the arrangement of the streets, avenues, etc. DeCerteau further articulates this concept through the paradigm of the strategy versus the tactic, the city street representing the strategy and the pedestrian representing the tactic. The city is built, DeCerteau argues, from a strategic perspective, designed to impose order and structure and also to create the conditions that support and perpetuate the dominant social structure. The grid requires that vehicular traffic follow certain patterns; the subway system requires that passengers embark from pre-designated points; and sidewalks are designed to ensure the pedestrian is kept safe from (and does not interfere with) vehicular traffic. To put it another way, the design of the city grid is intended to shape at least to a certain degree the social practices and interactions at street level. The pedestrian has the ability to either comply with the existing structure or to resist it by pursuing a path differing from the one seemingly prescribed. Such resistance is what DeCerteau would classify as a tactic; it is through the use

[21] Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theater* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 22.

of tactics that the pedestrian shapes his experience. Through the choices he makes, he contributes to the writing of the "text" that is the city, all the while being unable to read that text or see the way in which he fits into it.

DeCerteau's analysis centers on the lived experience of walking through the city. Although he addresses the way in which the existing built environment reflects the exertion of power, he considers the city as it exists when the pedestrian encounters it. This phenomenological understanding of the city is, to a large extent, the way that cities tend to acquire their identity in the public imagination. Descriptors like "the city that never sleeps" or "the big easy," are provoked by visceral experiences and express what it feels like to walk through a city. But this understanding of the city fails to address the reality that the "energy" a resident or visitor encounters in a particular urban environment evolves out of an ongoing process driven by an array of political, economic, and social forces. In other words, the this-ness of a city, far from being a naturally occurring phenomenon, arises from concrete decisions made by individuals and institutions over a long period of time. Even the changes that seem to happen overnight, particularly those related to the urban renewal projects to be discussed in this dissertation, require processes of legitimation relying on the crafting of a narrative drawing on a long history.

Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey have each examined the city from a Marxist perspective, arguing that urbanization is an ongoing process that enables and responds to the development of capitalism. Lefebvre asserts that urbanization is an ongoing process that transcends the boundaries of any given city, and he uses the term "urban society" to refer to

"the society that results from industrialization, which is a process of domination that absorbs agricultural production."[22]

Lefebvre traces the progression from agrarian to urban society, noting the changing nature of the city over the course of that progression. He places the "political city" at the point of origin on his timeline. According to Lefebvre, this initial iteration of the city was essentially the seat of power and a kind of administrative center for vast territories. In these early political cities, functions related to commerce were excluded from the city limits and relegated to fairgrounds and suburbs. The process of integrating markets into the city can take centuries, and, he argues, "it is only in the European West, at the end of the Middle Ages, that merchandise, the market, and merchants were able to successfully penetrate the city."[23] Eventually, the incursion of the market into city limits led to the establishment of the mercantile city, wherein commercial exchange became the primary function of the city, resulting in significant moment of change in the progression from agrarian to urban society. With the establishment of the mercantile city came an understanding of the concept of the central marketplace. As a result of this understanding of the centrality of the marketplace, the city emerged as the primary mediator between the home and the world at large, and ultimately the mercantile city gave way to the industrial city with the advent of industrial capital.

The theories of philosophers like Harvey, DeCerteau, and Lefebvre offer useful points of reference for understanding the complexities of how cities evolve over time and are affected by a multitude of conditioning forces. Indeed, these complexities are central to the

[22] Henri Lefebvre. *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 2.

[23] Ibid., 9.

stories at the center of this dissertation. However, while an understanding of the city in relation to capitalism and the concomitant issues of production, consumption, surplus capital and so forth from a broad perspective are important, and valuable as their approaches are to "reading" a city, I find such theories far more useful as a means of generating questions than as a method of articulating answers. To put it another way, my interest as a historian lies primarily in unearthing the ways in which individual people and organizations exert their will on the cityscape and in the shaping of institutions and how those actions and the underlying desires intersect with larger historical forces.

My concern in this dissertation, then, has less to do with theorizing, from a phenomenological perspective, the spatial meaning of performance vis-à-vis the city than it does with understanding the processes through which sites of performance—which ultimately become the subject of phenomenological analysis—acquire their place on the city grid in the first place and how those processes interact to generate the identities of the institutions housed therein. To further refine my line of inquiry, it is important to note that I do not aim to *define* the identities of the cities and institutions considered in this dissertation, but rather to examine their processes of *becoming.* To put it another way, it is not my goal to look at these cultural centers—these purported monuments to high art and culture—and say, "this is what defines them," but rather to deconstruct them to examine how and why they came to be conceived as monuments deserving of such a prominent position on the urban landscape and how they legitimated themselves as entities representative of civic and national identity.

Indeed, legitimation lies at the heart of my inquiry. The concept of identity, particularly when considering entities as large as nations and cities, is complex and slippery

and could enmesh the historian in a theoretical quagmire were he to attempt to examine the concept from every possible angle, which is an important reason that I have resisted engaging in a phenomenological analysis, working instead to find a more manageable and pragmatic approach to a topic so rife with complexity. Looking to processes of legitimation serves not only to narrow the scope of analysis, but also provides firm terrain upon which to build a coherent narrative by highlighting the contestation that undergirds the development and expression of the identity of an entity, whether a nation, a city, or a cultural institution, which ultimately relies upon the ability to create and control a narrative, a process that frequently entails a tug-of-war among individuals and organizations with competing objectives. Ultimately, this project does not seek to define the identities of the entities discussed herein as something fixed in time, but rather to use the lens of a particular historical period to demonstrate the ways in which external forces ranging from material factors like dollars and cents to less tangible socio-political factors coalesce to determine whose vision of the city shapes the landscape and which cultural institutions and works win the stamp of "official" approval.

The Cold War Zeitgeist and the Gathering Historical Forces of "Progress"

Each chapter of this dissertation closely examines the development of the institutions discussed herein. Chapter One considers the genesis of Lincoln Center and argues that its public-facing identity was shaped long before anyone performed on its stages by Cold War rhetoric and its imbrication in the battle to redefine New York's urban identity in the postwar era. The second chapter examines the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and argues that the symbolic weight of its presumptive status as a "national theater," coupled with an unclear artistic vision, hampered the theater's ability to forge an identity for itself, ultimately leading

to the ousting of its artistic leadership. Chapter Three examines the genesis of the Los Angeles Music Center and argues that the Center was not only an important symbol of Los Angeles's cultural maturity, but was an important nexus for the accumulation and exercising of power as Los Angeles looked to take its place as a cosmopolitan city that could rival cities like New York. Chapter Four explores the founding of Center Theatre Group and argues that the company's success hinged on its successful cultivation of a local audience determined to demonstrate its cultural maturity and the successful balancing of idealism and pragmatism.

While much of the narrative contained in each chapter emphasizes the role individuals played in shaping each organization, larger forces were at work, most importantly the zeitgeist of the Cold War, characterized by an anti-communist fervor that seemed to rule the public imagination for nearly twenty years after World War II. Preventing communism from infiltrating the United States—the strategy of containment—not only dominated United States foreign policy after World War II but also extended to virtually every facet of American life in the years leading up to the founding of Lincoln Center, the Los Angeles Music Center, and the theater companies examined in this dissertation. While a full explication of the ways in which containment strategy was reflected politically, culturally, and economically is far beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to consider how it affected three particular aspects, namely cities' built environments, the rise of resident theaters, and financial government support of the arts, each of which played an important role in laying the groundwork through which the organizations emerged and reflected the historical moment of their emergence.

An important effect of the onset of the Cold War was the repudiation of the New Deal and the valorization of affluence and prosperity as proof positive of the supremacy of the

"American Way." The Second World War forced the United States to face the reality that national security could not be maintained while pursuing an isolationist foreign policy. After nearly two centuries of believing that they were immune from attack by foreign enemies, largely because of geography, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, in the words of Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis, "shattered the illusion that distance ensured safety: that it did not matter who ran the other side of the ocean."[24] The surprise attack on that U.S. naval base demonstrated with resounding clarity that advances in aviation and military weaponry had rendered geographical distance from enemies irrelevant and that an attack on American soil had become a distinct possibility. As a result, it became necessary, says Gaddis, "for the United States to assume global responsibilities. Those required winning the war against Japan and Germany . . . but they also meant planning a postwar world in which democracy and capitalism would be secure."[25] Gaddis's phrasing here is important to note because it reflects what became an important touchstone in the emerging postwar identity of the United States: an explicit connection between democracy and capitalism. As the United States dug in its heels against communism in the 1950s, affluence and the perceived need to protect it against the threat of communism became major touchstones of American hegemonic identity. As historian Stephen Whitfield has argued, the FBI and Department of Justice, through their relentless hunting of Communists and fellow travelers, sought to protect "a lifestyle intimately associated with the blessings of prosperity. Above all, the American experiment meant—at home and abroad—abundance, which was the firmest proof of manifest destiny."[26] It must be noted that not everyone in the United States reaped the benefits of post-

[24] John Lewis Gaddis. *The Cold War: A New History*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 92.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 69.

war affluence, but the Cold War provided the rationale for the relentless pursuit of profits, order, and efficiency at all costs, and that imperative dominated most aspects of public and private life in the United States in the postwar years. As Bruce McConachie has argued in his study of American theater during the Cold War, Cold War culture served to "justify the depredations of big business" and to "legitimate the struggle of the United States against international communism everywhere in the world—to separate a virtuous 'us' from an evil 'them' without ambiguity."[27] In that context, consumption of the modern conveniences pedaled by Madison Avenue became as important an expression of American identity as anti-communism hysteria, as did other visible symbols of personal economic wellbeing.

The Cold War ethos of conspicuous consumption and visible prosperity had significant implications in shaping the physical landscape of cities and their surroundings. Nothing symbolized American prosperity more vividly than the single family suburban home. Postwar affluence meant that Americans had far more spending power than they had ever known before and, in the words of historian Samuel Zipp, the "crowning domestic glory" of postwar economic growth was the spread of suburban developments outside of cities that "seemed to represent freedom, abundance, and happiness to a generation of Americans seeking respite from two decades of depression and war."[28] But while the suburbs flourished, cities across the country were faced with economic and physical decline caused by the mass suburban exodus. "Despite the democratic rhetoric of equal benefits that accompanied the politics of economic growth," argues Zipp, "the affluence the United States

[27] Bruce McConachie. *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-1962* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 9.

[28] Samuel Zipp. *Manhattan Projects,* 23.

enjoyed in the postwar years was a product of urban decline."[29] The decline of the urban core was further exacerbated by the decamping of much industrial production to outlying areas after the war, while cities rezoned their cores to accommodate an expanding white collar economy. While the suburban ideal provided a clear demonstration of the virtues of American capitalism and abundance, the deterioration of the nation's cities threatened to cast a pall over that idyllic vision of suburban bliss. The federal government had been in the business of subsidizing slum clearance and public housing since the passage of the 1937 Housing Act, but federal and local policies governing urban redevelopment shifted in the postwar years away from the progressive vision of New Deal liberalism toward a more commercially driven approach to city building in an effort to not only protect the economic infrastructure of the nations' cities but to help remake their images as they endured the effects of industrial decentralization.

It was in 1948 that Robert Moses assumed leadership of the newly formed Slum Clearance Committee, which was created in anticipation of passage of the 1949 Housing Act. As chairman of that committee, Moses would oversee the redevelopment projects administered under Title I of the new law. Originally born out of the Progressive movement to remedy the squalor that defined the lives of tenement dwellers, the 1937 Housing Act provided federal subsidies to local housing agencies to improve living conditions for low-income residents, and it aligned with the New Deal's imperative to combat the poverty sweeping the nation so clearly evident in the city's tenements. Despite resistance from conservatives and private real estate interests, public housing gained significant popular support during the late 1930s and throughout the war years, particularly in Los Angeles,

[29] Ibid.

which faced an unprecedented housing shortage, but that support faded quickly in the postwar era as the United States began to experience economic growth.

The Housing Act of 1949, while still intended to alleviate sub-standard housing conditions, marked an important turning point in urban redevelopment policy in that it extended the power of eminent domain from being limited solely to government-built housing to private real estate developers. Under Title I of the law, government agencies, like New York's new Slum Clearance Committee, could now sell sharply discounted city land to private developers as long as they agreed to provide a significant amount of housing on the development site. However, even though the law dictated that Title I projects be limited to "slums and blighted areas" that were "predominantly residential," the language was "not specific enough to guarantee that rundown areas would be rebuilt with housing alone, much less low-income housing,"[30] thereby allowing New York and other cities to use the law to underwrite the building of complexes for universities, libraries, cultural centers, and the like.

Another change to urban renewal law came with the passage of the 1954 Housing Act, which removed housing as a required component of slum clearance and redevelopment projects. The 1954 act changed the calculous of urban renewal by changing housing from the *raison d'être* for renewal projects and making it instead a tool for the strengthening of urban centers. In other words, the 1954 act, signed into law by President Eisenhower, privileged private enterprise and commercial redevelopment as the driving force behind urban renewal. More importantly, while the 1949 Housing Act had effectively stretched the limits of what constituted a "public purpose" that could justify exercising eminent domain, the 1954 act

[30] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 163.

stretched that meaning even further by essentially defining any threat to the economic well-being of a city neighborhood as a threat to the general welfare.

These changes to housing and urban renewal policy were particularly important in the context of the Cold War, when clearing cities of blighted areas and slums took on an importance as symbolic as it was practical. Just as residential communities in central cities began clearing out after the war years, so too did many cities see a significant decline in industrial production within the urban core. In the eyes of many city leaders, the survival of the central city meant remaking the urban landscape so that it could better accommodate the ascendant service-and-knowledge-based economy, which was quickly supplanting industrial production. As city leaders worked to shore up the economic and physical infrastructure of the city center, "the operative term for city housing, street layouts, and land use," argue urbanists Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, "was *obsolete."*[31] From a practical standpoint, remaking the "obsolete" and cluttered city along modern lines would mean tearing down what already existed with little attention paid to preserving the traditional character of existing neighborhoods. Factories and warehouses would have to give way to banks, government agencies, and cultural centers while the superblocks and megastructures created under the auspices of urban renewal would, it was believed, bring a sense of order to the urban landscape, clearing away signs of decay and poverty and strengthening not just the economic health but also providing a powerful visual representation of American prosperity.

Providing such a visual display was particularly important as the United States became more entrenched in the Cold War. The presence of slums and any appearance of

[31] Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn. *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 15.

blight not only had economic consequences but also reflected poorly on the country in the eyes of the rest of the world, jeopardizing the image of the United States as a nation prospering under capitalism. As Zipp argues, "Urban renewal would represent . . . an effort to contain the infelicities of American life for Cold War onlookers abroad. By alleviating inequalities, urban renewal would promote the idea that cities were entering a new era of abundance and rational modernity for all."[32]

Much like the nation's foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and other communist regimes, urban renewal could not promise to eliminate poverty and other "infelicities" of American life any more than the United States could promise to eliminate communism, but could promise only to contain them. Indeed, so closely aligned to Cold War containment logic was urban renewal policy in the eyes of some that one historian has referred to the 1949 Housing Act as "a kind of Marshall Plan for cities."[33] In practice, containment through urban renewal meant tearing down entire neighborhoods and relocating the residents—who were almost always low-income people of color—to housing projects far removed from their condemned homes in the only neighborhoods many of them had ever known. Moreover, urban renewal represented a vision of the city that saw little value in the day-to-day interactions on sidewalks, stoops, and in the shops and bodegas that characterized life in the neighborhoods bulldozed in the name of progress. Under the vision espoused by urban renewal proponents, the city streets were to be remade to express a monolithic identity anchored by rational order, a vision that failed to recognize the importance of what journalist, activist, and urban renewal opponent Jane Jacobs called "the mix and jumble of older

[32] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 25.

[33] Anthony Flint. *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City* (New York: Random House, 2011), 63.

neighborhoods."[34] A staunch opponent of urban renewal, Jacobs argued against the uniformity and deadness that urban renewal projects left in their wake, advocating instead for the preservation of the mix of residential and commercial buildings and the concomitant social activity and networking among residents and proprietors that characterized city streets.

Jacobs argued that because city streets had to be equipped to handle a constant flow of strangers, they organically developed their own identity based on the interactions among neighbors and passersby. Successful neighborhoods made the presence of strangers a "safety asset," rather than a liability, but doing so required the existence of spaces that were socially functional. To that end, according to Jacobs, streets of the successful city neighborhood must have three main qualities: (1) "[T]here must be a clear demarcation between what is public space and what is private space;" (2) "[T]here must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street. The buildings on a street equipped to handle strangers and to insure the safety of both residents and strangers, must be oriented to the street;" and (3) The sidewalk needs "users on it fairly continuously, both to add to the number of effective eyes on the street and to induce the people in buildings along the street to watch the sidewalks in sufficient numbers."[35] Urban renewal, by erasing the small blocks that fostered community, cooperation, and vitality, according to Jacobs, led to isolation and deadness on the city street. The housing projects that replaced the tenement neighborhoods deemed slums by the proponents of urban renewal ultimately became "worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace," while the housing projects' physical structure were "truly marvels of dullness

[34] Anthony Flint. *Wrestling with Moses*, 25.

[35] Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 44-5.

and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life."[36] But the same activity that Jacobs saw as key to maintaining order and safety on city streets and so desperately lacking in the new modern city landscape, others saw as chaos that needed to be tamed and contained in order to ensure that abundance was kept on full display.

As important as such visible displays of abundance were in demonstrating the supremacy of capitalism, however, the emphasis on material wealth was a double-edged sword that could potentially undermine the United States' efforts to prove its supremacy. While Americans were being encouraged to spend and consume more than ever before, many contemporary intellectuals were, by the end of the 1950s and heading into the 1960s, sounding the alarm that the country had been lulled into a sense of complacency and conformity, and there was growing concern that the United States was coming to be viewed abroad as an increasingly consumerist society focused on little other than accumulating wealth and living in luxury with little desire for cultural or spiritual enrichment.
This perception was not simply disheartening. In the context of the Cold War, it was dangerous, and it was on this basis that a preoccupation with a demonstrable affinity for high art came to be viewed as an important weapon in the ideological struggle with the Soviet Union. Although the founding of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities would not happen until 1965 under the Johnson administration, which was finishing the work started under Kennedy, the groundwork for the founding of the two endowments could be said to have begun nearly two decades before their establishment, and they would almost certainly never have received the necessary Congressional support were it not for a growing

[36] Ibid., 6.

consensus that the arts were an important weapon to be wielded in the fighting of the Cold War.

As early as 1946, the United States government responded to the Cold War threat with what historian Michael Kammen has called "an unprecedented yet uncoordinated array of initiatives by the federal government to export American culture as exemplary illustrations of what the free world had to offer Europe as well as developing nations."[37] In 1948, the Educational Exchange Act, for example, established three offices within the State Department devoted to cultural exchange and to educating nations abroad about American culture: the Office of Educational Exchange, the Office of International Education, and the United States Information Service.[38] The United States Information Agency, created in 1953, built on the earlier educational exchange programs and relied heavily on the performing arts as a diplomatic tool, and in the words of Kammen it soon "had jazz bands such as Dizzy Gillespie's making international tours. Such exports achieved undeniable popularity wherever they went, and they were perceived as the music of individualism, freedom, pluralism, and dissent—fundamental qualities obliterated by Communism."[39] The USIA and other cultural exchange initiatives were clearly more concerned with rebutting communist propaganda that argued that Americans were "propagators of a money-mad civilization, atom bomb barbarians who have forfeited the right to use the word 'culture'"[40] than they were with establishing a clear cultural policy on the domestic front. However, by enlisting the arts in

[37] Michael Kammen. "Culture and the State in America," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (1996), 797.

[38] H.F. Peters, "American Culture and the State Department," *The American Scholar* 21, no. 3 (1952), 269.

[39] Michael Kammen, "Culture and the State," 797.

[40] H.F. Peters, "Culture and the State Department," 266.

the Cold War even for the most pragmatic of reasons, these initiatives opened the door for increased support for the arts in the United States.

As theater historian Margaret Knapp notes, "the economics of the arts received its most widespread and thorough scrutiny in the 1960s, a decade when the Kennedy administration made high culture fashionable" and when economic prosperity led to interest in supporting the arts.[41] Joseph Zeigler echoes Knapp's nod to Kennedy as an important influencer in winning widespread support for the notion of arts subsidy. "The advent of the Kennedy administration in 1961," Zeigler writes, "introduced a new tone to American cultural life. After the apple-pie nonintellectualism of the Eisenhower years, there was at last a new young awareness in Washington."[42] Zeigler is right to point to the Kennedy administration as an important turning point in the cultural life of the United States; even before he took office, Kennedy repeatedly revealed on the campaign trail "his desire to improve the quality of life in the United States through increased intellectual and cultural achievement, which he believed a federal arts policy could encourage."[43] Although it would ultimately be Lyndon Johnson who signed into law the bill creating the NEA and NEH in September 1965, it was Kennedy who initiated the effort. The Cold War rhetoric of demonstrating the cultural maturity of the United States remained central to making the case for government support for the arts, but he also argued emphatically for the importance of the arts in providing uplift for citizens at home. While Kennedy certainly recognized the problem of the world's view of America's cultural immaturity as a significant problem with far-

[41] Margaret Knapp. "Narrative Strategies in Selected Studies of Theatre Economics." *The American Stage: Social and Economic Issues from the Colonial Period to the Present.* Ed. Ron Engle and Tice L. Miller

[42] Joseph Zeigler. *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* (New York: Da Capo, 1977), 62.

[43] Donna Binkiewicz. *Federalizing the Muse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 34.

reaching consequences in foreign policy, he also understood that effectively deploying the arts as diplomatic tools required nurturing them at home; international recognition could only be achieved if America "raise[d] its own level of sophistication."[44] The arts could indeed act as a powerful psychological weapon in the Cold War, as evidenced in the practices of the USIA and the other tactics used by the previous administration, but Kennedy believed in and argued repeatedly for the intrinsic value of the arts. In a 1963 speech in honor of poet Robert Frost at Amherst College, Kennedy proclaimed the importance of raising the stature of art and culture in the United States:

> Our national strength matters, but the spirit which informs and controls our strength matters just as much. . . . I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft. 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.[45]

Kennedy was assassinated less than a month after giving this speech, but the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson picked up the mantle and gave form to the initiative by establishing the National Endowment for the Arts. Despite Kennedy's repeated assertions of the intrinsic value of the arts, proponents of the NEA focused their arguments on the importance of bolstering America's image abroad. Nonetheless, when the 1960s dawned, there was a growing sense in the country that the United States was undergoing a major cultural

[44] Ibid., 35.

[45] Speech at Amherst College, cited on NEA website

explosion, and the rise of the regional theater movement seemed to provide further evidence of that boom.

Looking Beyond Broadway: The Resident Theatre Movement

The resident theater movement grew out a long-standing desire among theater artists to find alternatives to the dominance of the commercial theater epitomized by Broadway. That desire was certainly nothing new in the postwar United States. The first two decades of the twentieth century, for example, saw the proliferation of "little theaters" across the United States and even in New York that sought to foster the work of new playwrights experimenting with forms more adventurous than the standard fare offered on Broadway. The Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Playhouse, founded in 1914 and 1916, respectively, were the two most prominent examples, but dozens of cities took part in this movement. However, it was not until the years following World War II that the resident theater movement created a seismic shift in the theatrical landscape.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, dozens of theaters opened in cities throughout the country, and by1966 there were more actors working in resident theaters than in New York City.[46] Although it was the desire to create alternatives to the Broadway producing model that drove the resident theater revolution, the very concept of the resident theater depended on what Joseph Zeigler, one of the few historians to document the movement, called "the concept of the theater as an institution," with each theater "structured as an entity unto itself, with an identity and standing of its own, like a business corporation."[47] The earliest resident theaters revolved, according to Zeigler, around "the essential need in each situation for a

[46] Joseph Zeigler, *Regional Theatre,* 1.

[47] Joseph Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 2.

single, messianic leader to give it character, spirit, direction, and inspiration,"[48] starting out either as an amateur organization or on a very modest professional scale and founded only to provide their leaders with forums for their own work, and these early theaters had "few ties to the community at large and none to the nation as a whole. . . . There were no theories of institutionalism or decentralization, let alone dreams of a national theatre."[49] Some of these early theaters, like the Alley in Houston, founded in 1947 by Nina Vance, expanded and forged close ties with their communities over time while others collapsed once their founders departed. However, what they all had in common was that for their founders, as critic Martin Gottfried said, "the theater was hardly more than a dream held together by a shoestring."[50] However, two major events changed the nature of resident theater and played a significant role in moving the resident theater companies toward institutionalism: the advent of major foundation support, most notably from the Ford Foundation, and the founding of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

Both Poggi and Zeigler point to 1957 as the turning point in the regional theater movement. It was in this year that W. McNeil Lowry, who headed the arts and humanities program at the Ford Foundation, became interested in the burgeoning regional theaters. Throughout 1957 and 1958, Lowry traveled through the country, visiting several regional, community, and university theaters, seeing their work and meeting with their leaders. In 1959 the Ford Foundation awarded three-year support to the Alley Theatre, the Actor's Workshop, and Arena Stage. These grants, which would be the first of many, were for the express

[48] Ibid., 3.

[49] Ibid., 24-25.

[50] Martin Gottfried. *A Theater Divided: The Postwar American Stage* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 95.

purpose of building a permanent acting company. The grants required that the funds be used solely for payments to actors hired on a seasonal basis and allocated $100 per week for ten actors while the theater would be required to pay each actor an additional $100 per week out of their own funds.[51] The involvement of the Ford Foundation was a major turning point for a few reasons. Obviously, the influx of cash provided much-needed financial support. But such a significant support from a major foundation provided, in the words of Joseph Zeigler, "the first hint of legitimacy and the primary building blocks of institutionalism."[52] The Foundation was also instrumental in creating a sense of shared purpose among the leaders of the theaters that were cropping up from coast to coast. Shortly after the grants were announced, the Ford Foundation convened a conference among two dozen leaders of community, university, and professional theaters. This meeting, according to Zeigler, helped to break down the isolation of the theaters operating in disparate locations and "helped to turn the early regional theatre strivings into a *movement* in America."[53]

Also important to the evolution of the regional theater movement was the growing belief that a cultural boom was sweeping the country. Many contemporary observers pointed to higher than ever ticket sales to performances and a sharp increase in the sale of books as evidence of what was widely called a "cultural explosion," thought to demonstrate an extraordinary and unprecedented interest in the performing arts. Although William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen's *The Performing Arts—the Economic Dilemma* would, when it was published in 1966, debunk the myth of the cultural explosion by demonstrating that the statistics, when adjusted for postwar population growth, actually indicated that the

[51] Jack Poggi, *Theater in America,* 212.

[52] Joseph Zeigler, *Regional Theatre,* 64.

[53] Ibid. (emphasis in text)

percentages of those attending cultural events had remained flat, the rhetoric of the cultural explosion loomed large throughout the mid-1950s and into the 1960s, and there was an undeniable obsession with culture in public discourse that only grew once the Kennedys came onto the scene. Lowry of the Ford Foundation dated the cultural fixation to the mid-1950s "when community leaders argued that the arts were good for society by promoting a strong national image, showcasing American artistry to the world. . . . More importantly, perhaps, art ensconced in physical institutions . . . gave communities a source of civic pride."[54] Although he doesn't mention the Cold War rhetoric, his observation demonstrates that the concern with the nation's image as it related to the arts was very much present in the public imagination.

The legitimation of the regional theater movement took another significant step forward in 1963 when the Guthrie Theatre opened in Minneapolis. Planning for the Guthrie had begun in 1959 when Tyrone Guthrie, Broadway producer Oliver Rea, and Broadway stage manager Peter Zeisler met to discuss the idea of creating "a classic repertory company with the highest professional standards, in a city removed from the commercial pressures of New York."[55] Unlike the other regional theaters that had emerged organically over the preceding years and built up slowly, the Guthrie took an entirely different approach. Shortly after the meeting of Guthrie, Rea, and Zeisler, Brooks Atkinson ran a column in the *New York Times* inviting cities across the country to apply for the honor of being home to—and raising the funds to build a theater for—the fledgling company to be led by one of the leading directors in contemporary theater. After visiting seven cities, the trio settled on Minneapolis

[54] Martha LoMonaco. "Regional/Resident Theatre" in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume III,* ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 235.

[55] Poggi, *Theater in America,* 219.

which "had the right combination of civic-minded young businessmen and their wives who were anxious to make their marks in the public sector and could raise funds quickly to build the theater structure, its company, and its audience."[56] In addition to a successful statewide fundraising campaign in Minnesota, the company received a grant in excess of $300,000 from the Ford Foundation to guarantee against loss for the first three seasons.[57] When the company opened in May 1963, it boasted an acting company of forty, led by Hume Cronyn, Jessica Tandy, and George Grizzard, the starriest cast yet assembled for a regional theater company.

The Guthrie was inarguably a "game changer" in the regional theater landscape for several reasons. First, the sheer scale and success of the enterprise—and the national attention it received in large part because of the stature of Guthrie and the leading players he assembled—lent further legitimacy to the regional theater movement. Secondly, it increased pressure on communities throughout the country to "keep up with the Joneses" by creating the feeling among many cities that "they really ought to have a theatre."[58] Third, and most importantly, argues Zeigler, the Guthrie stoked the notion that "from the regional theatre might come a National Theatre for America. Before the Guthrie, there had been scant justification for such an idea. The Guthrie was the first regional theatre that looked as if it could conceivably develop into the realization of this long-cherished dream."[59] Although the Guthrie Theatre would not ultimately attain or even aspire to such a designation, Zeigler's assertion that it revived hope for the creation of a national theater seems to rest primarily on

[56] Martha LoMonaco, "Regional/Resident Theatre," 238.

[57] Jack Poggi, *Theater in America,* 219.

[58] Martha LoMonaco, "Regional/Resident Theatre," 239.

[59] Joseph Zeigler, *Regional Theatre,* 76.

the notion that the Guthrie raised the bar in terms of quality, scale, and community support and launched what he calls "the struggle for national supremacy" among the regional theaters.[60] If nothing else, the Guthrie raised the bar on the level of professionalism that could be expected from a non-profit theater outside New York and it showed that such a theater could receive national attention and assume a prominent position, not to mention that it showed how having such a theater could benefit a city. In the years following the Guthrie's successful opening, a number of large-scale theaters, spurred into being by their cities' power structures, emerged in cities across the country with varying degrees of success. That same year saw the opening of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, and then in 1966 the Repertory Theatre of New Orleans was created through an NEA grant designed to "produce classics for high school students in prescribed areas."[61] That theater lasted just a few seasons until, unable to find an audience to sustain it, it closed in 1972. Despite the varying degrees of success and failure of the regional theaters that sprouted up across the country, the change brought to bear by the Guthrie was an important one in that it demonstrated the national prominence such an institution could bestow on a city as far removed from New York as Minneapolis and would help add grist to the mill for city leaders who sought to bolster their image through the use of the arts. However, as would become clear in many cases, particularly at Lincoln Center, the institutionalism of theater was not without peril. Success could no longer be determined simply on the artistic merits of the work produced by an organization. As institutional prestige became more important in establishing a theater's legitimacy, control of the shaping of a theater' identity would rest not just in the hands of its

[60] Ibid.

[61] Zeigler, *Regional Theatre,* 80.

artistic leadership but rather would be influenced by countless factors both internal and external.

The following chapters work to identify some of those factors and to explicate the ways in which they shaped the emergent identities of two nascent institutions, but it is my hope that these stories will demonstrate the value of narrative historiography, particularly in examining the role institutions play in shaping the cultural landscape and defining civic and national identity. As will be seen in the chapters ahead, a multitude of forces shaped each of these institutions on levels ranging from the relationships among individual personalities to the overwhelming political force of the Red Scare. By looking closely at the concrete forces shaping these institutions and the landscapes of the cities in which they emerged, the sources of power in the shaping of an entity's identity begin to become visible. In addition to chronicling the histories of historically important sites of performance, institutional analysis of cultural organizations provides a valuable means of making visible the forces that shape the spaces where cultural works are legitimated and vividly demonstrates how intersecting personal, municipal, institutional, and national imperatives conspire to shape cultural production.

CHAPTER 1

"A Mighty Influence for Peace:" Lincoln Center, Urban Renewal, and Cold War Mobilization

Ground-Breaking

On May 14, 1959, twelve thousand people looked on as President Dwight D. Eisenhower turned the first shovel of earth at the site of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. The president praised Lincoln Center, calling it a "cooperative venture in which Federal and local governments, artistic groups, large foundations and private citizens are joining forces." The Center, according to Eisenhower, symbolized "an increasing interest in America in cultural matters as well as a stimulating approach to one of the nation's pressing problems—urban blight" and it would be a place from which would develop "a mighty influence for peace and understanding throughout the world."[62] As Eisenhower dug into the ground with the chrome shovel, the Philharmonic Orchestra "swung into the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's Messiah, and a few moments later Anthony Capasso, a 44-year old power-shovel operator, dug the bucket of his giant machine into the ground to begin construction of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts."[63] For Robert Moses, chairman of the city's Slum Clearance Committee, the comingling of Handel's score with the sounds of Capasso's power-shovel was surely music to his ears.

From the podium, Moses, the *de facto* master builder of New York City during the first half of the twentieth century, echoed Eisenhower's touting of the symbolic importance

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[62] "Addresses by Eisenhower and Moses." *New York Times.* May 15, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The New York Times.

[63] "Lincoln Center Work Begun as Eisenhower Swings Chrome Shovel." *Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 1959, p. 14

of Lincoln Center, declaring in his own remarks that with Lincoln Center the city was "stak[ing] its claim that New York will become the Center of the performing arts as it has already become the world political capital." But in his very next breath, Moses abruptly changed his tone. "You cannot rebuild a city without moving people any more than you can make an omelet without breaking eggs," he bluntly stated. Responding to criticism that urban renewal projects like the one out of which Lincoln Center was born favored wealthy real estate developers while displacing thousands of low-income residents, he reminded the crowd that someone— "the speculative builder who charges higher rentals and pays full taxes"—had to foot the bill. "It is easy for demagogues to insinuate that only the small-income man should be considered in such projects, to sneer about windfalls and handouts for private builders and play up and exaggerate individual tenant hardship,"[64] he said. That hardship, played up or not, was simply the cost, Moses repeatedly argued, of progress. As far as Moses was concerned, progress meant eradicating a city grid characterized by congestion and chaos and imposing order on the urban landscape.

The groundbreaking marked the beginning of physical construction, but plans for the Center had been underway since 1953 when Moses first approached the Metropolitan Opera and offered them the opportunity to sponsor a portion of the urban renewal project. A few months after the groundbreaking, John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc., issued a progress report on the development of the Center. In the progress report, Rockefeller wrote, "The story of Lincoln Center is the story of gradual development of an idea, of complex relationships between old and proud institutions, of pioneering in the development of new organizations, of cooperation between private and

[64] Ibid.

governmental agencies. It is a story in the American tradition of voluntary private initiative and of what it means in service to the public." According to Rockefeller, the Center would also serve to "meet a paramount need of our time: the need for modern man for creative fulfillment—his striving for self-expression and the emotional and aesthetic satisfactions that set him above the animal."[65] Rockefeller promised the Center would endow the city with a valuable cultural asset while bolstering the image of the city and nation as cultural capitals on the global stage.

At the height of the Cold War and at the apex of the era of urban renewal in New York City, the Center seemed poised to respond to several needs. It would provide new homes for "old and proud institutions" like the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic. It would serve as the Centerpiece for an urban renewal project that would drastically alter the landscape of Manhattan's Upper West Side. And it would demonstrate to the world the cultural maturity of the United States, which was experiencing unprecedented growth in economic and global political power in the aftermath of the Second World War. Throughout its development, the Center's leadership and the press framed the project as an enterprise designed to ennoble the citizenry of New York and the United States while enshrining America's commitment to something other than materialism and the bottom line. But despite the symbolic importance placed upon the Center and reflected in the aforementioned words of Eisenhower, Moses, and Rockefeller, "even the loftiest dreams of culture were rooted in pragmatism." [66]

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[65] Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Progress Report, New York Philharmonic Archives.

[66] Robert Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman. *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial.* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 677.

The impetus for the Center's creation grew from the practical needs of three institutions: the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic Society, and New York City's Slum Clearance Committee. The backers of the Lincoln Center project portrayed the coming together of these organizations as a serendipitous phenomenon that made the Center's birth virtually inevitable, spinning a tale of "three coincidences" that led to the creation of Lincoln Center. As luck would have it, so the story went, Robert Moses had selected the Lincoln Square neighborhood for slum clearance while at the same time the Metropolitan Opera was in the midst of an ongoing search for a new home. Meanwhile, the New York Philharmonic faced eviction from Carnegie Hall, which had just been sold to a private developer who planned to tear it down to make way for commercial development. In short order, the Met and the Philharmonic would team up to sponsor the redevelopment of a portion of Moses's project site, naturally resulting in a world class cultural institution that would in turn serve to clear a deteriorating neighborhood and bring the order of modernity to yet another swath of Manhattan.

It obviously took more than happenstance to bring this cultural center into being, despite the inevitability of the "three coincidences" narrative. The long road from concept to institution intersected at many points with New York's own journey out of its industrial past and into the new vision of modernity brought about in the aftermath of World War II and with the onset of the Cold War. The changes occurring within New York and the United States in the two decades following the war set the stage for the creation of Lincoln Center and provided a basis for the rhetoric that would be deployed to garner support for the project and shape the institution's public-facing identity as an institution authorized to represent the cultural maturity of the United States on the international stage. Although the United States

President had declared Lincoln Center to be "a mighty influence for peace and understanding throughout the world," the Center did not derive its legitimacy through any official national or even municipal designation. Rather, it was through its imbrication in a struggle for control of the expression of urban identity in the postwar era that Lincoln Center emerged as a monument to civic and national progress even before anyone ever took to its stages.

Out the Most Barren Wasteland

The Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project was by far the biggest Title I project undertaken in New York City. As originally conceived, the project site spanned 53 acres, more than four times larger than the average 12.5 acre size of Title I sites up until that point.[67] Robert Moses and the project's sponsors viewed the scale as a laudable element of an ambitious vision, but that same scale also ensured massive displacement of residents and business owners. At an October 1956 luncheon, reporters asked Moses to respond to criticism of the anticipated evictions in Lincoln Square. His response was as brief as it was vivid. "The scythe of progress must move north,"[68] he declared, evoking an image of building after building being violently whacked from its foundation by the scythe's blade on a relentless march up the island of Manhattan. Not only did the image conjured by his metaphor suggest a willful disregard for the existing cityscape, but it also chillingly reflected the virtual defenselessness of those in the path of the scythe-wielding representative of progress who exercised near absolute control over the built environment of New York City.

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[67] Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 279.

[68] Charles Grutzner. "Stevens Expands Lincoln Sq. Plans." *New York Times*, October 27, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

By the time the Lincoln Square project was officially announced in 1955, Moses was four decades into a career in which he had transformed the landscape of the outer boroughs of New York with a vast array of public works projects including a sprawling network of roadways, bridges, and tunnels leading to his network of parks and recreational facilities. After World War II, he oversaw two projects in Manhattan, the Stuyvesant Town housing project and the United Nations headquarters, each of which was privately sponsored and established the practices that would become the signature of the "New York approach" to urban renewal. Despite the success of these projects and although he had amassed extraordinary power by the end of the war, control over Manhattan's landscape—at least to the degree that Moses desired—remained elusive.

That changed swiftly and decisively in December 1948 when Moses convinced Mayor William O'Dwyer to appoint him as chairman of the Slum Clearance Committee, which would oversee implantation of urban renewal projects under Title I of the 1949 Housing Act. The appointment received scant attention in the press, which had yet to understand the impact that Title I clearance would have on the city. However, "on the landscape of New York's history," writes Moses's biographer Robert Caro, "that appointment stands out like a mountain."[69] Title I not only made unprecedented amounts of money available for purposes of slum clearance, but it also "extended the power of eminent domain, traditionally used in America only for government-built projects, so drastically that governments could now condemn land and turn it over to [private] individuals."[70] Between the passage of the 1949 Housing Act and the Lincoln Square project, Moses used these newly

[69] Robert Caro. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), 777.

[70] Ibid.

expanded powers of eminent domain to bulldoze entire neighborhoods to make way for superblocks on which he built apartment complexes, hospitals, university buildings, and of course, cultural centers. When Lincoln Center was first conceived in 1953, Moses's urban renewal projects had encountered some political resistance from those who argued that slum clearance and urban renewal projects led not to the improvement of living conditions for those inhabiting what Moses and the Slum Clearance Committee described as derelict and obsolete buildings but rather to the tearing apart of tightly knit communities forced to endure relocation to housing projects far removed from the neighborhoods that had evolved over decades. However, before the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project, such arguments had never gained much political traction, largely because of Moses's masterful depiction of substandard living conditions and his insistence that remaking the physical landscape of the city was a necessary means to the end of an orderly city worthy of its increasingly prominent place on the world political stage.

Nothing symbolized that newfound prominence as vividly as the United Nations Headquarters, which marked an important moment in the shaping of New York's postwar identity. "I felt that this was the one great thing," Mayor O'Dwyer later recalled of the city's efforts to lure the UN to New York, "that would make New York the center of the world."[71] The United Nations represented New York's centrality on the global political stage and served as a shining example of the order that modernist architecture, embodied in the sleek glass tower of the Secretariat Building, could impose on the unruly city streets, embodied by the conglomeration of slaughter houses in the largely industrial neighborhood, known as

[71] Ibid., 771.

Turtle Bay, upon which the UN headquarters arose. More importantly for purposes of the story of Lincoln Center, there was virtually no controversy over the clearing of the Turtle Bay neighborhood because of its predominantly industrial character and the political significance and prestige of the UN project. This combination made the project, to use common parlance, a no brainer. "In truth," writes Samuel Zipp, "no justification was needed, only a story that laid out a clear and meaningful progression from one kind of a neighborhood to another." The Turtle Bay neighborhood, essentially a slaughterhouse district, was viewed as "unsightly distasteful, and noxious" in comparison to its more refined bordering neighborhoods. More important, however, was that the significance of the United Nations headquarters meant that the existing neighborhood was seen as "ultimately unimportant in light of the world historic splendors planned to replace it."[72] Turtle Bay, therefore, had to go not only to eradicate the "unsightly, distasteful, and noxious" environment of the slaughterhouse district but also to establish in the public imagination the need for New York to self-consciously craft its image as a world class city by making room on the city grid for important institutions like the United Nations and eventually Lincoln Center.

Moses's total control over the selection of urban renewal sites, unfettered by effective resistance, was typical of most major cities in the period spanning the late 1940s until 1965, according to urban historians Norman and Susan Fainstein. They argue that during this period, which they term the "directive period" of urban politics in the United

[72] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 56.

States,[73] control over the landscape of the city rested in the hands of a tightly controlled sphere of influence and power. "Development politics in the city was pluralistic," they write, "only in that it had many powerful players, certainly not in the sense that ordinary communities or working class and minority groups influenced the process."[74] The prevailing wisdom of the day dictated that in the neighborhoods targeted for renewal and slum clearance the deterioration was so severe that only a clean slate could bring about rehabilitation and that clean slate could only be brought to bear by the swift unilateral action of city government. The core tenet of urban renewal—a belief in the idea of benevolent intervention in the shaping of the cityscape for the greater good—helped to stave off those who would object to slum clearance projects by depicting targeted areas in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for an outside observer to view such sites—and they were almost referred to as sites or areas, not neighborhoods—as having any intrinsic value.

Moses was a masterful spin-doctor when it came to making the case for deeming a neighborhood a slum in need of clearance**.** A major factor of his effectiveness was the matter-of-fact way in which he presented the case for any given urban renewal project. For every project, Moses prepared a highly detailed brochure in which he laid out the redevelopment plans and demonstrated the prevalence of slum conditions. The brochures emphasized empirical data and "demonstrated Moses's commitment to professional expertise" and the nuts and bolts of the redevelopment plan were "cast in terms of square-foot and dollar calculations rather than social vision." To demonstrate blight, Moses relied on both concrete

[73] Norman I. Fainstein and Susan S. Fainstein. "Governing Regimes and the Political Economy of Development in New York City, 1946-1984" in *Power, Culture, and Place: Essays on New York City.* John Hull Mollenkopf, ed. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), 164.

[74] Ibid., 169.

facts and figures and photos that depicted the area as being run down. And although the brochures included information to demonstrate that steps had been taken to assist with tenant relocation, they rendered the existing residents virtually invisible.[75]

In the case of Lincoln Center, the *New York Times* consistently carried Moses's blight removal banner, lauding the eradication of "the barren urban waste" of the Lincoln Square neighborhood, "full of filth and vermin." Surely the public couldn't be expected to mourn the loss of such a neighborhood, especially when it would give way to "a cultural fairyland."[76] As work got underway to bring Lincoln Center into being, it seemed that Moses's vision of the city had won. However, by the time the Lincoln Center project was announced, about six years after the passage of the 1949 Housing Act, it had become increasingly difficult to mask the social costs of urban renewal projects as it was becoming clear that there was inadequate housing to absorb the refugees from Moses's Title I projects.

When plans for Lincoln Center were announced in 1955, protests arose immediately. Harris Present, who had been approached by two committees—one representing residents and one representing business owners—became the leading voice in resistance to Lincoln Square and ultimately to urban renewal itself. Although the resistance to the project focused primarily on the displacement of the neighborhood's inhabitants, Present and his allies realized that they were fighting not just for the homes and businesses of those already in the neighborhood but for the legitimacy of "an alternative urbanism based in the informal

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[75] Hillary Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal: The Title I Program," in *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York,* ed. Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 99-100.

[76] Harold C. Schonberg, "Progress Report on the New Arts Center," *New York Times,* May 25, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

connections of neighborhood culture."[77] Although they failed to stop the project, their opposition "revealed the fault lines at the heart of urban renewal,"[78] bringing the growing discontent with Moses's brand of "all-or-nothing bulldozer clearance" to a wider audience than ever before. "Perhaps the most important achievement" of the resistance was that it "revealed a vision of urban culture that was diametrically opposed to that on offer at Lincoln Center; instead of a new modern cityscape for a world city delivered from on high, the residents and businesspeople of Lincoln Square defended the complex social world of their old neighborhood."[79] Although Lincoln Center's backers successfully warded off the protesters to ensure the project could succeed, the protests had effectively called into question the wisdom of a "top down" approach to urban development. The "alternative urbanism" advocated by the protesters finally found its voice when Jane Jacobs published *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1962, a landmark publication that led to a major shift in urban renewal practices. By the mid-1960s, developers found that simply bulldozing over existing neighborhoods was no longer a politically tenable approach to urban redevelopment and by the 1970s "for the first time in New York's history, many preservation and renewal programs were aimed at preventing the complete disappearance of buildings associated with the city's identity."[80] Such a major change represented an ideological if not practical victory for those who had protested so fiercely against the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project and also highlights Lincoln Center's unique position as a sort of linchpin in the trajectory of urban planning politics in postwar New York City. It also helps to explain

[77] Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 216.

[78] Ibid., 20.

[79] Ibid., 21.

[80] Francois Weil. *A History of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 274.

why the Center's backers would double down on the notion of weaponizing high culture in the fight for supremacy during the Cold War. In the face of such fierce resistance, such a narrative was crucial in making the argument that Lincoln Center served an important public purpose.

From the Golden Horseshoe to Lincoln Square

For the cultural institutions to be housed there, Lincoln Center's scale and its status as the anchor of a city-sponsored urban renewal program proffered the hope of liberation from the whims of the speculative real estate market, to which most performing arts venues, particularly theaters, had been relegated up until that point. While Moses looked to the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic for the stamp of cultural legitimation necessary to lend the necessary aura of a higher purpose to the project, the Met and Philharmonic, each facing their own real estate challenges, eventually embraced the opportunity offered by the Lincoln Square project to resolve those challenges. Partnering with Moses on the project would not only solve practical problems, however. It would but also help to affirm their civic importance in a highly visible way by claiming an enormous swath of public land on the city grid.

For the Metropolitan Opera, the journey from their original home to Lincoln Center was particularly tumultuous. When it accepted Robert Moses's invitation to sponsor a portion of the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project in October of 1955, the Metropolitan Opera set in motion the creation of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and ended an ongoing search for a new venue that dated as far back as 1908 when Otto Kahn, the new president of the Metropolitan Opera Company, first floated the idea of abandoning the opera house located at Broadway and 39th Street. When prospective general manager Giulio Gatti-

Casazza suggested the many shortcomings of the existing auditorium might dissuade him from accepting the position, Kahn assured him that he need not be concerned. "Don't worry about it and have patience," Kahn told him. "In two or three years a new Metropolitan Opera House will be built."[81] However, as Kahn was soon to learn, convincing the opera's boxholders to abandon their beloved "golden horseshoe" would be a virtually impossible feat no matter how severe the theater's practical shortcomings. The journey to a new home lasted not the two or three years Kahn promised but instead nearly six decades as competing factions within the company fought over a series of proposals to abandon the Met's home at 39th Street and Broadway, a conflict driven by the tension between Otto Khan's desire to democratize the Opera and the old guard's desire to maintain the opera house as an important expression of their social status.

In late 1925, Kahn proposed building a new opera house on a plot of land he had acquired, bounded by 56th and 57th Streets and Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Kahn argued a new venue was needed to address two pressing concerns. First, there was the practical matter of the condition of the auditorium, which lacked adequate backstage storage and whose mechanical equipment could be generously described as outmoded. Secondly, in the years following World War I, the Opera began to attract an audience outside the ranks of high society and Kahn felt passionately that the Opera should be working to broaden its reach to this "substantial group of well-educated music lovers who cared nothing about social standing." [82] To achieve this, Kahn proposed that the new opera house have an additional one

[81] Howard Taubman, "Brave New World: The Future of New York's Musical Life May Be Shaped by Relocation Plans." *New York Times*, October 23, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[82] Johanna Fiedler, *Molto Agitato: The Mayhem Behind the Music at the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 25.

thousand moderately priced seats and that the number of parterre boxes be reduced from thirty-five to thirty. Further, while the current boxholders would continue to be shareholders in the opera house, the boxes themselves would no longer be owned but would be distributed under a leasing system.

It is important to note that from the time of its inception until 1940, the Metropolitan Opera actually consisted of two distinct corporate entities. The Metropolitan Opera Company, which was the producing unit, bore responsibility for artistic direction and production. The Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, on the other hand, was the real estate holding company that owned the building itself with the boxholders sharing the ownership among themselves. Any plans for relocation would require the approval of the boards of both the producing company and the Real Estate Company. While the producing company unanimously accepted Kahn's proposal, the Real Estate Company's board was sharply divided, with some of the older directors expressing opposition to Kahn's idea. Nonetheless, Kahn knew that some members of the board favored the idea, and said so in a letter to R. Fulton Cutting, chairman of the Real Estate Company's board.[83] Cutting countered that although some members of the Real Estate Company's board had expressed support for the proposal, there was certainly no consensus among them that replacing the existing building was desirable. However, he stipulated that if Khan could demonstrate adequate public support for the proposal, the Real Estate Company would not stand in the way.[84]

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[83] "Kahn Awaits Voice of Public on Opera." *New York Times.* January 16, 1926. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[84] "Ask Music Lovers to Decide on Home for Metropolitan." *New York Times.* January 15, 1926. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

Khan took to the press to make his case, and flatly accused the Real Estate Company's board of rampant classism, which he argued was the real motive behind the resistance to doing away with the beloved "golden horseshoe." "A considerable number of the lower priced seats are so bad," he said, "that it is really an act of unfairness to take money for them especially from people of small means."[85] That so many of the more affordable seats had obstructed views was a direct result of the theater's design, which had been selected based on "the single fact of [architect Josiah Cleveland Cady] having provided more boxes than any of the other entries [in the competition for the opera house commission]."[86]

Khan's publicity campaign garnered enough public support to pressure the board to approve the plan to replace the old opera house, which they did in a unanimous vote in February 1927. But despite the board's acquiescence to the public pressure, Khan, in launching his public campaign against the opera house and the exclusivity it represented, had "unintentionally awakened the sleeping giant of [the Real Estate Company]," setting off a power struggle in which he "faced an effort to discredit and defeat him at every turn."[87] Even as architects Joseph Urban and Benjamin Morris began to develop the plans for the new house, a faction of the Real Estate Company's board worked to undermine Kahn's proposal. When it was discovered that the actual costs of building on Kahn's site far exceeded the allotted budget for the new house, a faction of the old guard, led by Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt and her nephew seized the projected overrun as an opportunity to put the kibosh

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[85] Charles Afron and Mirella Jona Affron. *Grand Opera: the Story of the Met.* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 113.

[86] Victoria Newhouse. *Wallace K. Harrison: Architect.* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989), 198.

[87] Theresa M. Collins. *Otto Kahn: Art, Money, & Modern Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 217.

on using Kahn's site and succeeded in reversing the board's decision.[88] Kahn, realizing he had been defeated, put his parcel on the market.

Khan's failed attempt to replace the grand auditorium with a less ostentatious venue demonstrated just how invested the Real Estate Company was in protecting the venue, which had become such an important expression of their social standing. Although some on the board might have conceded that the time had come to make the Met's performances more accessible, the opera house continued to be an important locus for New York's elite. As the *Times* noted, the Metropolitan Opera House was "recognized as the only centralizing factor in New York society, which has been broken up into small groups and scattered by many influences in the last generation or two. . . . The Golden Horseshoe represents New York society's last stand as a unit."[89] By the time the proposal was defeated, the Real Estate Company, despite the fierce opposition Kahn's proposal had evoked, had in fact reached consensus that a new and better-equipped opera house was desirable, and in 1928 turned their attention to a new site and a new patron.

The site was several blocks in midtown Manhattan owned by Columbia University: a three-block area bounded by 48th and 51st Streets and Fifth and Sixth Avenues that would eventually become Rockefeller Center. Benjamin Morris, who had designed a modest opera house for Khan's site, adapted his design for the new location, which he conceived as a "monumental arcade" that would "open onto a large square fronting the opera house. The arcade would make the opera house visible from—and give it an address on—Fifth Avenue."

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[88] Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera 1883-1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 21.

[89] "Ask Music Lovers to Decide on Home for Metropolitan." *New York Times.* January 15, 1926. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

Commercial office towers would line the square on which the opera house was to sit, generating a steady stream of revenue.[90] Whereas Kahn's plan for the new opera house rejected ostentation, Morris's vision promised to provide the monumental setting that Kahn eschewed, and the promise of such a setting would prove to be essential in winning to the approval of the Real Estate Company's board of directors.

Cutting, who had shown so little enthusiasm for the 57th Street site, embraced Morris's proposal and began working to find a way to finance the project and to garner support among his fellow board members, and in the spring of 1928 he succeeded in convincing John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to underwrite the cost of the land. The cost of building the opera house, however, was to the responsibility of the Metropolitan Opera Real Estate Company. The Rockefeller Center project seemed likely to finally put to rest the conflict-laden search for a new venue for the Met by offering both the adequate facilities the old house so desperately lacked and a setting that would demonstrate the organization's artistic and social supremacy, while at the same time providing the city with a grand civic plaza.

The center's layout would counter the increasing dominance of the skyscraper and rampant overbuilding that had, according to the *New York Times*, "allowed New York to choke itself to death."[91] The design of Rockefeller Center "made provision for public space on a scale which had no precedent in New York," allowing for "the maximum amount of light into the entrance [of the plaza], and ensur[ed] there was no sense of an out-of-scale canyon effect."[92] Moreover, the plan "[offered] to put in a distinguished position an

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[90] Daniel Okrent. *Great Fortune: The Epic of Rockefeller Center* (New York: Viking, 2003), 28.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Eric Homberger. *The Historical Atlas of New York City* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 142.

institution which, in spite of its eminent artistic and social standing, has seemed condemned to be relegated to the side lines to which our theatres for the most part have already retired."[93] Situated in the majestic setting of Rockefeller Center, the Met would be rescued from the crass commercial character of it once-fashionable present location, which had come to be enveloped by the garment district to the south and the theater district to the north, and the affiliation with the Rockefeller name could only enhance the prestige of the organization.

But despite the seemingly perfect marriage between the Met and the Rockefeller Center project, the Metropolitan Opera was forced out of the project by the bottom line Realizing just how much the building project would cost—a cost exacerbated by the fact that the Met would have to remain dark for a year during the transition[94]—the Met began to hesitate, and Rockefeller and his associates sensed that they might be deliberately stalling. After months of obvious delaying tactics, Rockefeller and his team pressed the Met's board to make a firm commitment to building the opera house on the site, but the board argued that the only way they could move forward with the project would be if Rockefeller agreed to pay half the cost of the new building. Rockefeller, affronted by what he considered "genteel blackmail," dropped the opera from the project.[95] By now, twenty years had already passed since Otto Kahn's 1908 promise to Giulio Gatti-Casazza that the Metropolitan would find a new home. As the Depression took hold, construction all but stopped in cities across the

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[93] H.I. Brock. "A Place de L'Opera for New York City: Rockefeller Realty Gives Hope to a Cherished Civic Dream." *New York Times*, February 10, 1929. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[94] According to Rockefeller biographers Harr and Johnson, the opera company had initially planned to sell the old house and use the funds from that sale to pay for the new building and the land upon which it was to be built. In addition to the cost of the building, which would cost $8 million, and the land, which would cost $3.6 million, financing the construction of the new house with proceeds from the old one meant the Met would have to be dark for a year.

[95] Ibid.

country and the Metropolitan Opera entered into a period during which its very survival was threatened by a major financial crisis. It would be nearly twenty years more until another opportunity arose.

That opportunity came from Robert Moses. On May 9, 1951, the *New York Times* announced that Moses had invited the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic to construct "a modern music Center" in Columbus Circle, which was next up on Moses's roster of Title I projects. Moses offered the Met and Philharmonic 80,000 square feet on which to build the Center. The Metropolitan would be required to pay approximately one million dollars, which represented a considerable savings, for the land. However, Moses "warned that 'if the Metropolitan Opera enters the picture, with or without the Philharmonic' it would be on its own in financing construction of the music Center."[96]

The Opera expressed interest in the proposal and successfully solicited a $500,000 pledge from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Then, on July 24, 1951, George Sloan and Lowell Wadmond—chairman and president, respectively, of the board of directors—formally agreed to bid on the land according to Moses's terms. As the opera understood the matter, recalled general manager Rudolf Bing, this letter should have reserved the land on the project site for the Met. But eight months later, "without warning," Moses "dumped the opera house project in a letter sent simultaneously to Wadmond and to the press."[97] As Bing tells the story, the Met's board of directors was enthusiastically pursuing the Columbus Circle opportunity only to be completely blindsided by Moses who unceremoniously pulled the rug out from under

[96] "City Offers Land for Music Center: Moses Invites the Metropolitan Opera and Philharmonic to Build at Columbus Circle." *New York Times*, May 9, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[97] Rudolf Bing. *5000 Nights at the Opera*. (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 289.

them at the last minute. However, a close look at the words of George Sloan and the words of Moses himself suggests otherwise.

While it is true that Moses's withdrawal of the offer to the Met was abrupt, it seems clear that it was caused, much like the Rockefeller Center project, by internal conflict within the Met and a continued sentimental attachment to the old house. Less than a year after Moses's initial announcement, the Met had raised $900,000 toward the $1.2 million required to purchase the land, and it appeared that the prospects for raising the remaining $300,000 were good.[98] But Moses dropped the Met two months later citing both financial concerns and housing requirements imposed by Title I as reasons. These were valid concerns, but there is little doubt that Moses's impatience with the machinations of the Met's deliberations played a significant role in his decision. At one point, Moses candidly stated that the Opera remained "divided in its own counsels and some of its officials prefer to rebuild on the present site,"[99] an observation that appears to have been well founded.

Lowell Wadmond, president of the Metropolitan Opera Association, told the *Times*, "We are unhappy because this site was the finest in New York for a new opera house" and added that the "news will be a disappointment to the people who pledged money toward the purchase of the site."[100] Sloan, on the other hand, had consistently been lukewarm in his comments about the Met's inclusion in the Coliseum project. In May 1951, when news first broke of Moses's invitation, Sloan stated that the Met's directors were "deeply appreciative"

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[98] Howard Taubman. "$900,000 Is Pledged for New Opera Site." *New York Times*, January 15, 1952. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[99] "Exclusion of Opera Defended by Moses." *New York Times,* April 1, 1952. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[100] "Plan Is Abandoned for 'Uptown' Opera." *New York Times,* March 29, 1952. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

of the offer and that "while there had been discussions with Mr. Moses, the announcement of a possible land subsidy was a new and welcome development, but there was a long way to go before the association could make a firm commitment."[101] Several months later, when the *Times* announced that fifty percent of the necessary funds had been raised by the opera to purchase the land at Columbus Circle, Sloan again equivocated, insisting, "while the opera group was deeply grateful to Mr. Moses and appreciated his cooperation, plans for relocating the opera house were in little more than the 'dream stage.'"[102] Every time things seemed to be moving forward, Sloan was quick to lower expectations and plant seeds of doubt.

Sloan publicly explained his tepid endorsement of the project by focusing on the financial aspects of the relocation, but it seems more likely that he was opposed to the move because of a sentimental attachment to the prestige and glamour of the old house and a discomfort with the notion of the Metropolitan's association with a public urban redevelopment project. The Columbus Circle project, although supported by most of Sloan's colleagues, presented a difficult conundrum. On the one hand, the project offered the Opera a site that, while perhaps not quite as glamorous as Rockefeller Center, would ensure "an opportunity to create [an] imposing civic [monument]. . . . But at the same time Moses's invitation raised questions about the Metropolitan Opera's willingness to modify its traditional stance as a quasi-aristocratic group that was too 'white glove' to cooperate directly with municipal government."[103] While neither Sloan nor any other Met director ever

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[101] "City Offers Land for Music Center." *New York Times*, May 9, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[102] "50% of the Cost for the Met Opera Site in Columbus Circle Pledged Now." *New York Times*, July 27, 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[103] Robert Stern, et al. *New York: 1960*, 677.

made any such statement publicly, it is a reasonable conclusion. As Howard Taubman wrote in the *Times,* Sloan "made no secret of his fondness for the old opera house, built in 1883 and reminiscent of a gracious era."[104] And what could be less gracious than being associated with a slum clearance and public housing project? Sloan's colleagues recognized that among many reasons that Moses sought to include the Metropolitan Opera in one of his Title I project was his realization of the "inability of the Metropolitan Opera and the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra to cope with the real estate challenges of New York City."[105] If the Met were ever to escape the clutches of the garment district and take its rightful place on an appropriate pedestal, it would require a patron. It was one thing when that patron was to be John D. Rockefeller, Jr., but the idea of the city as patron was too much to bear for Sloan. While it was widely understood within the organization that a major change was needed in regards to the Metropolitan's home, the organization seemed, in 1952, to be at an impasse. As long as the makeup of the board of directors and executive management remained the same, little was likely to change.

Meanwhile, the New York Philharmonic, which Moses had also reportedly invited into the Columbus Circle project, was soon to face its own real estate troubles, which would provide an important impetus in the development of the Lincoln Center project. As noted above, the original announcement of Moses's Columbus Circle project stated that both the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic had been invited to participate in the project. But the ensuing press coverage scarcely mentioned the Philharmonic, focusing instead almost entirely on the Met. Five days after Moses's announcement of his proposed

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[104] Howard Taubman, "West Sixties Site Sought by Opera," *New York Times,* April 15, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[105] Hillary Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal," 107.

music Center at Columbus Circle, Floyd Blair, president of the Philharmonic Symphony Society, told the *New York Times* that while he thought the idea of a music Center in collaboration with the opera would be a "splendid thing for the city," he had written Moses to say that he was "at a loss as to how to discuss the orchestra's role." According to Blair and the *Times*, no one had approached him and the first he heard about the project was when he read about it in the papers.[106]

A few weeks later, Blair reported to the board of directors about the proposed music center in Columbus Circle, "and after discussion the Board unanimously agreed that the President and the Management should do their utmost for the best interests of the Society which is interested in any development for a permanent concert hall."[107] For the next eight months, the board remained silent on the matter until a February 1952 meeting when they affirmed their interest in joining the Metropolitan Opera at Columbus Circle "if the plan could readily be expanded into a larger project." However, the following month, Moses pulled the plug on the Columbus Circle music center project and the matter was laid to rest for the time being.[108]

Three years later, some significant changes rekindled discussions of a joint venture between the Met and Philharmonic. Robert Moses began eyeing the area northwest of Columbus Circle for slum clearance and redevelopment in 1953. The project he envisioned "would provide for housing, a hotel or hotels, and other improvements, including perhaps,

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[106] "Reaction." *New York Times*, 20 May 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[107] Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, June 11, 1951. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

[108] Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, February 7, 1952. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

such quasi-public institutions as the Engineering Societies, Metropolitan Opera, Philharmonic, etc." However, he was unsure whether the Metropolitan and Philharmonic could be counted on to "come to an agreement among themselves."[109] In March 1954 he wrote to Col. Joseph M. Harfield, an executive committee member at the Met, to gauge the interest of the organization in joining the project, asking Harfield to tell him "briefly and categorically whether the Metropolitan Opera would have enough money to buy, let us say, three acres at a written-down cost and enough funds left to be sure of completing a building within a period of about four years?"[110]

Having dealt with the Met's lack of resolve in the past, he made plain in asking for a "brief and categorical" response that he was unwilling to be waylaid again the way he had with Columbus Circle and the way that Rockefeller had been similarly waylaid twenty years before. Harfield replied promptly that the Metropolitan Opera was indeed interested, but again he faced stiff opposition from Sloan. After five months passed without a commitment from the Met, Moses informed members of the Slum Clearance Committee that he was dropping the Met from the project because of Sloan's opposition.[111] Harfield pleaded with Moses for more time to get the Metropolitan to commit and although Moses hoped there might still be a path by which to bring the opera on board, he looked elsewhere for sponsors for the redevelopment project.

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[109] Robert Moses. *Public Works: A Dangerous Trade* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970), 516.

[110] Ibid., 517.

[111] Ibid.

A few months later, Sloan, the last significant hurdle to relocating the Met, resigned as the chairman of the Metropolitan Opera's board of directors. [112] With Sloan removed as chairman, fellow director Charles Spofford, who had long advocated finding a new auditorium for the opera company "took charge of the Opera Association and seized the opportunity" to get the Board to affirmatively state its intention to secure a site within the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project.[113] The Metropolitan Board wasted no time in doing so. On April 15, 1955, they resolved unanimously to advise Moses of the Met's "continued interest" in the project and to develop a plan to finance the purchase of the land on the project site and the construction of the opera house.[114] Having officially resolved to move forward with the plan, four representatives from the New House Committee sat down with Moses about a week later. At the meeting, Moses presented his official offer: 120,000 square feet was available to the Met at a cost of $8 per square foot. The offer was contingent on acceptance by the Met no later than July 1, 1955.[115] During this same meeting, the idea of a joint venture with the Philharmonic was floated but Moses rejected the idea, saying that the Met "should not attempt to associate with any other group, or try to build a temple of music in which other organizations could participate, or any other joint venture." Three days later, however, Moses, for reasons that do not appear ever to have been explained, changed his

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[112] "Sloan Resigning Post with Opera." *New York Times*, March 14, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. (Sloan submitted his letter in March, but it could not be acted upon until early April when Opera president Lowell Wadmond returned from a trip abroad.)

[113] Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007), 283.

[114] Edgar Young, *Lincoln Center: The Building of an Institution* (New York: New York University Press,1980), 12-3.

[115] Ibid., 14 and Robert Moses, *Public Works*, 518.

mind and agreed to make land available within the site for the Philharmonic as well should they be interested.[116]

While the Metropolitan's New House Committee was negotiating with Moses in the spring of 1955, the New York Philharmonic was dealing with its own real estate troubles. In May 1955, Floyd Blair told the Philharmonic's board that he had received notice from Carnegie Hall's management that they intended to cancel the Philharmonic's lease because of their plans to sell the building. Blair reported that a representative of Carnegie Hall had indicated that he "was desirous of preserving the Hall" rather than seeing it demolished to make way for more profitable land use "and would sell it to the Philharmonic at possibly less than the offer" the owners of the hall had received.[117]

The Philharmonic had been housed at Carnegie Hall since the hall was built in 1891 and although they had expressed interest in the previous Columbus Circle proposal, there was little real enthusiasm for the move. Carnegie Hall had been an ideal home. Now, faced with the possibility of losing that home, the leadership began weighing its options, which included accepting the offer to purchase Carnegie Hall or "the building of a new hall, either in cooperation with the opera or alone."[118] It is not clear exactly when the Philharmonic was first approached by representatives from the Metropolitan Opera, but such an approach likely happened prior to the May 11th meeting at which Blair announced the impending sale of Carnegie Hall to the board and the executive management committee. The aforementioned meeting among Moses and the Met's New House Committee had taken place on April 26,

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[116] Young, *Lincoln Center,* 14.

[117] Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee of Auxiliary Board, May 11, 1956. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

[118] Ibid.

and the idea of a joint venture was floated during that meeting and the news of the sale of Carnegie Hall was delivered to the Philharmonic early in April.

In stark contrast to the Met, the Philharmonic approached the issue of its permanent home with remarkable pragmatism. The committee tasked with exploring housing options ultimately identified four options. Among them were the purchase of Carnegie Hall, the purchase of an existing hall (other than Carnegie), the construction of a new hall, or a joint venture with another institution. Houghton, the chairman of the committee, intimated the desirability of this last option, but also noted that moving forward with such a joint venture was for the moment out of the Philharmonic's control because "[t]he initial action—the acquisition of the property—is in the hands of the Opera, and the Society must await its decision which is expected by the end of summer."[119] Although the prospect of the joint move with the Met offered many advantages, Houghton reminded the board that the orchestra was guaranteed three years of tenancy at Carnegie Hall even if the building were to be sold. The Philharmonic therefore had "adequate time to explore all of the four outlined possibilities," so he recommended moving forward on all four options without committing to any, which would ensure that the Philharmonic could maintain a strong bargaining position in negotiations for whichever option they chose.[120] However attached the organization was to their home at Carnegie Hall, the board easily arrived at a consensus that such an attachment needed to be set aside in order to ensure the advancement of the Philharmonic as an organization.

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 30 June, 1955. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

By the summer of 1955, the Philharmonic had all but decided not to purchase Carnegie Hall. A committee unaffiliated with the Philharmonic had launched a campaign in June 1955 to save the hall, [121] but the Philharmonic, although they were grateful for those running that campaign, said they were unable to take an active part because they were, as they said in their annual report, occupied with the annual fundraising drive to meet their annual deficit."[122] Clearly they realized that remaining at Carnegie Hall was becoming a less attainable goal, and their distancing themselves from the efforts to save the hall suggests they were attempting to detach the Philharmonic from the venue both internally and in the public mind. Although the Met was still about a month away from officially committing to the Lincoln Square project, it had by this time raised almost all the money necessary to do so. With this knowledge in hand, the Philharmonic could—and did—state that it believed "that if a civic music Center is to be established, the Orchestra should join with the Metropolitan Opera and become part of such a Center."[123] All that was needed was the green light from the Met.

On October 17, 1955, Metropolitan Opera president Lowell Wadmond wrote to Moses and officially offered to sponsor development of a 120,000 square foot plot within the Lincoln Square area.[124] Later that month, the Philharmonic's board unanimously voted to commit the Philharmonic to paying $250,000 for the purchase of one acre on the Lincoln

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[121] "Drive Set to Bar Sale of Carnegie." *New York Times*, June 2, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[122] New York Philharmonic Annual Report, 1954-1955. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Robert Moses, *Public Works*, 520-1.

Square Urban Renewal Project site.[125] After the Slum Clearance Committee rejected the $250,000 bid, the Philharmonic's board authorized an increased bid of $350,000 in order to meet Moses's demand for no less than $8 per square foot.[126] On December 9, 1955, Houghton informed Moses of the decision and the bid was accepted.[127]

Much work remained to develop the institutional framework within which the Philharmonic and the Metropolitan would operate, but both organizations, having been marshaled into Moses's march toward modernity, had secured a permanent home on the cityscape that was sure to be defined by grand vistas and monumental structures. With the participation of the Metropolitan and the Philharmonic confirmed, work could now begin on establishing how these two institutions would relate to each in the context of their new home while Moses could begin the work of gaining the necessary approvals to start condemning and razing the neighborhood to make way for his next superblock project.

Enter Rockefeller

When the Met and Philharmonic's joint participation in the Lincoln Square project was publicly announced in October 1955, it was understood publicly as little more than a real estate transaction involving two distinct organizations, and in reality, that is essentially what it was. A joint committee comprised of leaders from both organizations had been formed to address the question of their interrelationship. John W. Dyre, representing the Met, said that he "was pleased by the Philharmonic's decision [to join the project], but said it was too soon

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[125] Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 27 October 1955. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

[126] Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 8 December 1955. New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives.

[127] Robert Moses, *Public Works*, 520.

to predict just how the two committees would cooperate," emphasizing that the two organizations would "exist in the new development as two distinct units."[128] However, despite Dyre's insistence on maintaining the autonomy of each organization, many of his colleagues on the committee had begun to think of the move to Lincoln Square as an opportunity to develop a project that was more than a simple real estate transaction. Although it would take a considerable amount of time to firmly establish all the intricacies of what would eventually become a mammoth institution, the vision for Lincoln Center as it finally emerged was established in relatively short order and, like the decision of the organizations to move to Lincoln Square, had its roots grounded firmly in pragmatism.

Despite the steeply discounted cost of the land upon which they would build their new venues, the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic Society needed to raise many millions of dollars. Raising the funds would be difficult under the best circumstances, but the added difficulty stemming from the inevitable competition that would arise from simultaneous appeals to many of the same prospective donors required the committee to think beyond brick and mortar. "There was tentative talk of some kind of a joint campaign," recalled Edgar Young, "and agreement that in whatever way their plans might evolve they needed the judgment, interest, and support of civic leaders outside their immediate groups."[129] The group, according to Young, hoped to bring a Rockefeller on board to assist with the fundraising and in developing the organizational structure of a joint venture. Nelson Rockefeller, located in Washington at the time (he was yet to be elected Governor of New

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[128] Ross Parmenter. "Symphony Plans Move to Center: Philharmonic Follows Opera in Decision to Relocate in Lincoln Square Project." *New York Times*, October 28, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[129] Edgar Young, *Lincoln Center,* 16.

York), was clearly not a possibility, so architect Wallace Harrison suggested John D. Rockefeller 3rd, a suggestion echoed by Dean Rusk, president of the Rockefeller Foundation.[130]

In early September 1955, Charles Spofford attended a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations, a panel on which he served alongside John D. Rockefeller 3rd. During a break from the meeting, Spofford told the Rockefeller the story of the "three coincidences" and shared that the committee members had begun to think about an expansive cultural center. Rockefeller later recalled that after hearing Spofford spin the three coincidences story, "new horizons began to open" for him. "Since the war," he said, "my work had been concentrated in the international area and I had begun to think more seriously of my responsibilities as a citizen of New York."[131] Although Rockefeller had no previous experience in music, theater, or dance, Lincoln Center was not his first flirtation with the performing arts. Just two years before, three leaders from the City Center for Music and Drama—president Newbold Morris, treasurer Morton Baum, and managing director Lincoln Kirstein—reached out to Rockefeller with an invitation to join their board to head a new fundraising effort. Rockefeller's involvement with City Center ultimately did not pan out, as Rockefeller came to realize after many months of negotiation that the City Center leadership wanted him "for the prestige of his name and his ability as a fund-raiser, not to yield any power or allow him to have any real say in the governing policies of the Center."[132]

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[130] John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson. *The Rockefeller Conscience: An American Family in Public and in Private* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), 122.

[131] John D. Rockefeller 3rd. "The Evolution: Birth of a Great Center." *New York Times,* September 23, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[132] Harr and Johnson, Rock*efeller Conscience*, 127.

Uninterested in a position offering no meaningful policy role to play, Rockefeller dropped negotiations with City Center in early 1955. Although Rockefeller walked away from City Center, the negotiations had led him to the determination that "any new activity [for me in New York City] should be in the field of culture."[133] It was a logical determination, largely because it would allow Rockefeller to stake out his own philanthropic "territory" among the Rockefeller family, as the Rockefeller Foundation had not showered the arts and humanities with its beneficence to anywhere near the degree it had endowed medicine, education, and science, an aversion dating back to its 1913 founding. With John D. Rockefeller, Sr. and Standard Oil still embroiled in an antitrust lawsuit brought by the federal government, the Foundation was viewed with great suspicion, and many assumed that it was vehicle for money laundering and other such improprieties. As a result, "the Rockefeller Foundation refrained from anything that smacked of controversy" and for a long time "shunned the humanities, social sciences, and the arts as areas too subjective or fraught with political peril."[134] The Foundation heavily favored, as a matter of political survival, science and medicine, which shielded it and Rockefeller Senior from charges of favoritism. Obviously, by the time Senior's grandson was approached about joining the Lincoln Center effort, the Standard Oil chapter had long been closed and Lincoln Center would offer a highly visible entrée into culture for the Rockefeller Foundation. After consulting with several people, including Foundation president Dean Rusk, Wallace Harrison, Edgar Young, and Lincoln

[133] Ibid., 126.

[134] Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 568.

Kirstein, head of the New York City Ballet, Rockefeller committed to attending a meeting of the committee, the first of which took place on October 25, 1955.[135]

At this first meeting, the group turned their attention to the primary question at hand: was it feasible or desirable to build anything other than an opera house and concert hall within the Lincoln Square project? Edgar Young recalled they considered many questions to determine the feasibility of expanding the vision: "What might foster the arts of serious music? What might bring those arts to a wider public? Are facilities needed for other arts? What would be constructive and important in the life of New York City and of the nation?"[136] Naturally the committee did not arrive at any immediate answers to these questions, but they were clearly beginning to think along the lines of national stature and prestige. Two weeks later, Rockefeller officially assumed the chairmanship of the committee, which officially named itself "The Exploratory Committee for a Musical Arts center" in December 1955. The committee established a preliminary budget of $50,000 to cover their costs over the next five months and applied to the Rockefeller Foundation for a grant in that amount. Writing the formal request on behalf of the committee, Spofford articulated the mission of the group:

> [T]o determine the feasibility of a musical arts Center in the City not only for the opera and symphony but also for such activities as chamber music, ballet, light opera, and spoken drama, and possible educational programs related thereto. Other questions

[135] Representing the Metropolitan Opera were Spofford, chairman of the Met's executive committee, and president Anthony Bliss. Floyd Blair and Arthur Houghton, chairman and president respectively, represented the Philharmonic. Rounding out the committee at this initial meeting were Rockefeller and Wallace Harrison. At Rockefeller's recommendation, the group was expanded to include Lincoln Kirstein, Robert E. Blum of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, and Devereaux C. Josephs, a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation and the chairman of New York Life. See Young, *Lincoln Center,* 19-20 and Harr and Johnson, *Rockefeller Conscience,* 123.

[136] Young, *Lincoln Center*, 20.

to be considered by the Committee, should it reach an affirmative decision regarding the Center, will touch upon the proper organizational relationships of the various participating groups, the facilities that would be required, and the best methods of financing such a project.[137]

The first key question the committee had to address was what arts other than opera and symphonic music would be included. They swiftly decided that the Center would be devoted exclusively to the performing arts and would therefore exclude visual arts because they "were well accommodated in New York, and we were concerned with how much a single Center could wisely include."[138] They also quickly reached consensus that in addition to the symphony and opera, spoken drama and ballet ought to be considered for inclusion in the Center, but no commitments were made nor were any actions yet taken.

Although the expanding vision had a long way to go before being clearly defined, the exploratory committee began to make its existence known to the public in the final weeks of 1955. On December 1, 1955, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story announcing Rockefeller's leadership of the committee and revealing that the committee was exploring "the feasibility of an artistic set-up that would take in ballet, concerts, light opera and perhaps educational programs" as well as opera and symphony already represented by the Met and Philharmonic. In addition to exploring an expanded cultural center, The *Times* reported, the committee would also study possible means of financing the project, noting that Rockefeller's familial pedigree coupled with "his long interest in social and cultural matters,"

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[137] Harr and Johnson. *The Rockefeller Conscience,* 123.

[138] John D. Rockefeller 3rd, "The Evolution: Birth of a Great Center. *New York Times Magazine*. September 23, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

had led to "speculation that funds from the Rockefeller Foundation might be put into the proposed Lincoln Square enterprise."[139]

As things stood both among the committee members and in the public imagination, the relocation of the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic was moving forward, the pragmatic answer to a practical problem for each organization, facilitated by Moses's vision for a modern metropolis. No clear sense of identity or "higher purpose" had yet been discussed publicly or even privately. But by highlighting Rockefeller in announcing the widening scope of the project of a bigger cultural center in Lincoln Square, the *Times* foreshadowed the important role Rockefeller would take in shaping the image of Lincoln Center in the months and years that lay ahead.

Not for the Privileged Few, but for the Many

A year after his involvement with the Lincoln Center project was announced, Rockefeller told the *Times,* "In the past the Metropolitan Opera has been for the few . . . and one wants to think of the Center as for the many." [140] This one sentence demonstrates the key challenge facing Rockefeller and his committee in establishing the Center's civic and national value. There was no escaping the fact that the Metropolitan Opera had been built on a foundation of exclusivity and classism and that it was easy to view Lincoln Center as little more than a lavish venue—built on the rubble of a working-class neighborhood—for elite institutions. The committee would need to develop a narrative that made plain that accessibility for the citizenry was to be a core tenet of the Center's philosophy, a narrative

[139] Harold C. Schonberg. "Rockefeller 3d Will Direct Study of a Lincoln Sq. Center for the Arts." *New York Times*, December 1, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[140] Seymour Peck. "A Rockefeller Enters 'Show Biz,'" *New York Times,* November 18, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

that would need to be expressed through both rhetoric and the very structure of the organization. In terms of rhetoric, the Center's leadership and the press, particularly the *Times,* consistently focused not on how the Center might reflect the cultural tastes of the broader populace of the city, but rather how that broader populace might be uplifted by exposure to opera, ballet, and symphonic music. As things stood a year into planning for Lincoln Center, more populist forms of entertainment would have to continue to fend for themselves on the real estate market, but Lincoln Center would whisk highbrow culture from the crass clutches of the city grid and mount their institutions on a dais overlooking the Upper West Side. The rhetoric of cultural maturity, discussed later in this chapter, would be an important strategic approach to justifying the privileging the highbrow through monumentalization, but in the course of planning the logistical setup of the institution, Lincoln Center's leaders would need to strike the balance between maintaining the autonomy of the constituent organizations and portraying the overall cultural center as an institution meant to serve the many.

When Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. was officially incorporated on June 22, 1956, only the Metropolitan Opera and Philharmonic were firmly committed as constituents; although the committee had decided to expand the Center to include drama, dance, and an educational component, no decisions had been made in terms of what existing entities might be brought in. Work in that regard would span the next several years, but in the meantime, the committee worked toward articulating the function of the Center as an entity in its own right. The guiding principle that shaped the development of what came to be known as the "Lincoln Center Concept" was one of a "loose federation" in which each constituent organization would maintain "absolute artistic and financial autonomy." The

newly established board of directors decided early on that Lincoln Center would not provide financial subsidy to cover the operating needs of the constituent organizations, which would, they felt, run counter to the pivotal principle of autonomy and be fiscally unsound.

Instead, Lincoln Center would function as a beneficent landlord and would "assist but not control the development of the performing arts through the constituents."[141] The Center articulated its core principles in a document prepared in October 1957 and entitled "Standards for Constituents," which articulated the "emerging principles" resulting from the "explorations with potential institutional sponsors in drama and the dance [which had] been in process for many months." According to these principles, Lincoln Center's role would be to "serve as a stimulus to artistic achievement and public service on the part of its constituents, and to be helpful in the developing relationships among constituents and their respective arts and functions." Secondly, each constituent member would be assigned responsibility "for its own program and its own financial support," which was "essential not only for the benefit of the constituents, but also for the Center itself and for the success of the joint effort." The third principle that emerged was that, although each constituent organization was responsible for its own management and financing, inclusion in Lincoln Center offered several benefits. Among these were prestige; a home (Lincoln Center would "give its constituent performing companies assurance of their respective halls for such seasons as they require, together with year-round rehearsal halls, office space, storage rooms, and workshops"); operating benefits (Constituents would rent their halls, owned by Lincoln Center, on a break-even basis and in turn "Lincoln Center will pass on to its constituents tax exemptions, freedom from charges for debt service, and economies based on large-scale,

[141] Edgar Young, *Lincoln Center,* 53.

year-round operation"); and policy participation (under the by-laws of Lincoln Center, each constituent would have at least one representative on the Board of Directors of Lincoln Center).[142]

The document went on to spell out the standards expected of any constituent organization: (1) ability to provide a needed service in or to the performing arts; (2) establishment and maintenance of artistic standards of the highest quality; (3) professional leadership capable of gaining and holding the respect of experts and of the public; and (4) institutional framework designed to assure continuity and financial stability, a commitment to public service, and a dedication to artistic advancement.[143] With this general framework and these standards in mind, Lincoln Center continued its search for the remaining constituents.

The New York City Ballet seemed to everyone on the committee to be the obvious choice to be brought in as the dance constituent at Lincoln Center. However, the Ballet did not have its own institutional existence, as it was a part of City Center, which was also home to the City Opera and was a frequent producer of musicals and operettas. The Ballet's director, Lincoln Kirstein, a member of the Exploratory Committee, had recently resigned from City Center, leading "everyone to assume that the New York City Ballet could be detached to become the third constituent of Lincoln Center. . . . At first [Kirstein] seemed to be amenable to the idea and then his institutional loyalty to City Center reemerged."[144] The negotiations between Lincoln Center and City Center dragged on for months and ultimately resulted in a stalemate. However, a budget crisis in 1959 led to renewed negotiations with

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[142] Standards for Constituents. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, Box 262, Folder 10.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Harr and Johnson, *Rockefeller Conscience*, 129.

City Center and led to a tussle among the directors of Lincoln Center in which the Lincoln Center Concept would be put to the test.

In 1959, Lincoln Center faced a major fiscal crisis when updated budget analyses revealed a $37 million gap between original estimates and the actual financial need.[145] Knowing that filling such an enormous gap from gifts from the private sector was unrealistic, Rockefeller advocated pursuing direct financial support from the city, leading Lincoln Center to consider a new approach to bringing the New York City Ballet on board as a constituent organization. By this time, the board had long abandoned pursuing the Ballet as a stand-alone entity; if Lincoln Center wanted the New York City Ballet, it would have to bring in City Center in its entirety, which is precisely what Rockefeller decided to do It is impossible to know if Rockefeller would have moved forward with the idea had he not been faced with substantial budget overruns, but bringing in City Center solved two important problems. The first was practical; including City Center could help address an enormous budgetary problem. The other was symbolic; City Center, which had catered to working class audiences since its inception, would help Lincoln Center affirm its commitment to serving a wide audience and help better legitimize itself as a civic institution.

By 1960, Lincoln Center had decided to seek $35.2 million from New York State and City government sources to fill the projected budget gap, $17.5 million of which would fund construction of the theater meant to accommodate the dance constituent.[146] Rockefeller hoped to convince the city to underwrite the cost of the dance theater. Bringing in City Center, with its connection to the working class and reputation as a high-quality populist

[145] Ibid., 140.

[146] Harr and Johnson, *Rockefeller Conscience*, 141.

venue, could make such a request more politically viable. As Rudolf Bing recalled, "direct tax-supported contribution to Lincoln Center was most easily justified by support for a low-priced, popular house."[147]

City funding of the building turned out to be a complicated legal problem as New York's state constitution prohibited the city or state from funding the construction of buildings it did not own. So if the city were to build the dance theater, it would have to retain ownership of the building and Lincoln Center would in turn lease the building from the city and the constituent housed therein would sub-lease the dance theater from Lincoln Center. Further, the city would not be able to provide the entire cost of the building, and so state funds would be required as well. But finding a framework for the state to make a substantial direct contribution posed a challenge as well. The 1964 World's Fair provided the solution. John Lockwood, legal counsel for the Rockefeller family, discussed the matter with Robert Moses, who was to head the World's Fair. The two came to an agreement whereby Lincoln Center would house the performing arts unit for the fair (thereby saving the cost of erecting a venue at the fair's site in Flushing Meadows, Queens). Under this arrangement, the dance theater, which would be named the New York State Theatre, would be the city and state's contribution to the 1964 World's Fair and not a direct endowment to Lincoln Center. It took two years of protracted negotiations and legislative maneuvering to finalize the arrangement, but by August 1962, Lincoln Center had secured the funds it needed to build the New York State Theatre, with the expectation that City Center would be, as a constituent of Lincoln Center, its primary tenant.

[147] Rudolf Bing, *5000 Nights at the Opera*, 298.

Even after Lincoln Center secured state and city funding for the State Theatre, negotiations with City Center would not be finalized for two more years, with the lease arrangement being one of the key sticking points. City Center objected to the notion of leasing from Lincoln Center and argued for an arrangement wherein they would lease directly from the city. However, Rockefeller and the Lincoln Center board refused to consider such a leasing arrangement as it would run counter to the entire Lincoln Center Concept, which held that Lincoln Center would act as landlord to all the constituent organizations. Further, the Lincoln Center Concept also specified that in order to facilitate Lincoln Center's role as a facilitator of advancement in the performing arts, Lincoln Center would assume control of the buildings during the constituents' off season during which it would book programming under the auspices of the Center itself. City Center objected to this proviso as well, demanding year-round control of the building. Finally, City Center agreed to sublease the State Theater building from Lincoln Center and to yield the venue to Lincoln Center for five to ten weeks per year. It was an agreement a long time in the making but one that shed light on the nature of the emerging institution.

The decision to bring in City Center proved to be controversial within Lincoln Center. While Rockefeller believed that it was important to have a constituent organization with ties to the working class and with a low-price ticket policy to demonstrate that "Lincoln Center exist[ed] for the benefit of people at large and not for any limited social or economic group,"[148] others, particularly the leadership of the Met, feared having such a populist organization in the Center would diminish its prestige. While the Met and the Philharmonic had historically catered to and to a large degree derived their cultural legitimacy from that

[148] Ibid., 119.

affiliation, City Center's history was one defined by a strong connection to City Hall and the working classes of New York. Despite a solid reputation for its artistic achievements, it stood apart from the elite organizations that had spawned Lincoln Center

City Center opened on December 11, 1943, when it produced its first opera, a "ragged-but-right" *Carmen*. The opening date was also significant in that it was scheduled to coincide with Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's sixty-first birthday. City Center was almost entirely an initiative conceived and birthed by LaGuardia himself, who "harbored the conviction, then highly unorthodox in the United States (though not in continental Europe or Britain), that 'high art' was intrinsically a proper concern of government, not only because it was a mark of civic achievement but also because it represented a means of happiness and fulfillment of which working class people were being unjustly deprived."[149] LaGuardia was not as interested in City Center serving as a symbol of any kind, but thought of it instead as a place where the working class citizens of New York, excluded from Broadway theaters and the Met by prohibitively expensive ticket prices, could enjoy the best in theater, opera, and music for an affordable price. Further, his belief in making culture available to the masses stemmed not from a desire to cultivate gentility but to provide uplift. "The industrial worker," he declared, "has a monotonous job. He sews on buttons, say, all day long, stitch after stitch after stitch after stitch. But when the worker's day is over, he can find his spirit refreshed and uplifted through—yes—through music, through art."[150]

City Center emerged out of the WPA program and "came as a result of a demonstrated popular demand." In 1938, LaGuardia asked City Council president Newbold

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[149] Mason B. Williams, *City of Ambition: FDR, LaGuardia, and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 202.

[150] Ibid.

Morris if he would manage they city operation of the WPA music project. Newbold at first resisted, arguing that he was not a musician. "That's just why I want you to take this on," LaGuardia replied. "You're 'box office;' you know what kind of programs the average music lover wants to hear."[151] As he began the work of taking over administration of the city's WPA music program, Newbold discovered that the program already in place was surprisingly robust. After attending a concert in a high school auditorium given by what he considered to be the best out of three WPA orchestras operating in the city, he arranged for a series of concerts to be performed in the auditorium at the new Rockefeller Center. To advertise the event, "Morris filled the subway with advertisements that read: 'Mayor LaGuardia presents the New York City Symphony,' with the identification 'WPA Project' in small script at the bottom,"[152] a significant decision that immediately linked the program to LaGuardia himself, which became of the utmost important as City Center evolved.

The concert series that Morris spearheaded continued until the WPA was terminated shortly before the United States entered World War II. However, when the city took possession of the Mecca Temple on 56th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues after the Shriners failed to pay taxes on the building, Morris convinced LaGuardia to convert the building into a performance venue, and then the two men "organized a non-profit corporation to run the enterprise and enlisted a group of subscribers consisting mostly of labor unions and philanthropists to meet the initial costs." After making repairs to the building and equipping it to function as a performance venue, the city leased it to the non-profit corporation "on the

[151] Newbold Morris. *Let the Chips Fall: My Battles Against Corruption* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), 156-7.

[152] Williams, *City of Ambition*, 202-3.

condition that the maximum ticket price be set at $2 (about a third the price of an orchestra seat at the Metropolitan Opera)."[153]

LaGuardia remained closely associated with the Center from the moment of its inception and throughout his mayoralty, and he ensured that this close association remained highly visible to the public, which went a long way toward ensuring City Center's survival during its early years when it faced low box office receipts. City Center received little support in the way of municipal subsidies; although LaGuardia believed in making the arts available to the public, he was not a proponent of direct subsidy. But although City Center received very little direct financial support from the city, Mayor LaGuardia's connection to the institution endowed it with the legitimacy of a municipal entity in the public mind. The perception that City Center was operated by the city was not uncommon, and LaGuardia "did not seek to dispel that impression," writes historian Murielle Vautrin. What made it a public institution in the minds of so many New Yorkers, including the Mayor himself, was "the fact that it had been organized under the auspices of City Hall, and that it reflected the Mayor's philosophy, according to which the benefits of democracy, including culture should be distributed more equally. In other words, the identification of the Center with City Hall and the control that the City exercised on its quality standards, not its (rather insignificant) municipal subsidies, made the City Center a municipal theater."[154]

LaGuardia's close association did, however, have its financial benefits. Because the Center was so closely associated with the Mayor and enjoyed great prestige deriving from that affiliation, LaGuardia and Morris were able to persuade top performers to work for a

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[153] Ibid., 203.

[154] Murielle Vautrin. "Government and Culture: Government and Culture: New York City and Its Cultural Institutions, 1870-1965" (PhD diss., Brandies University, 1997*)*, 163.

fraction of the fees they would command in the commercial sector, thereby "effectively replacing the federal subsidy of Morris's WPA concerts with subsidization by the performers, who were willing to donate their talent out of enthusiasm for the project."[155] City Center was in some ways similar to Lincoln Center in that it housed a variety of art forms, was viewed as a public institution, and relied on institutional support from the private sector. And, like Lincoln Center, the makeup of the group that moved City Center from a vision to reality reflected the demographic with which City Center would come to be associated.

When Newbold Morris began the work of creating City Center, he "took [his] proposal to a cross section of New York's leading citizens and organizations." In addition to some wealthy opera-loving New Yorkers, he talked to "Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, David Dubinsky of the International Ladies' Garment Workers, Adolf Held of the Workmen's Circle."[156] Herein lies one of the main differences between Lincoln Center and City Center. Whereas Lincoln Center turned primarily to bankers and other titans of business to serve on its board of directors, Morris's understanding of "leading citizens and organizations" was clearly different from that of Rockefeller, Spofford, et. al. In Morris's and LaGuardia's minds, the leaders best equipped to assist with City Center were those who understood the work of the artists who would perform in the Center and represented the audiences for whom the Center was founded. With City Center, Morris and LaGuardia succeeded in creating a quasi-municipal institution that made the culture available to the masses, not only at a more affordable cost but also in a "familial atmosphere far different

[155] Williams, *City of Ambition*, 203.

[156] Newbold Morris, *Let the Chips Fall*, 164.

from the stiff formality of traditional high-art ventures."[157] It was to be the embodiment "of the working-class that made its existence possible."[158]

The prospect of bringing City Center—specifically its opera constituent, City Opera—onboard at Lincoln Center rankled the Metropolitan Opera. Rockefeller and many of the others on the committee believed that there would be no real problem presented by having two distinct opera companies, playing two distinct schedules, and appealing to different audiences coexisting at Lincoln Center. Bing and most of the leaders did not see it that way, and "were affronted by the very idea of this plebeian institution with its low-priced wares standing next door to the aristocratic Met."[159] A certain degree of elitism is undeniable in Bing's protests over City Center, and specifically City Opera, joining Lincoln Center. However, he also voiced legitimate concerns over the primacy of the Met as the opera constituent as well as what he viewed as a violation of the Lincoln Center Concept.

The chief concern was that the New York City Opera, housed within City Center, would, if it moved to Lincoln Center be mere steps away from the Metropolitan Opera. Not only would this create unfair competition at the box office, but it would also, in Bing's view, threaten to sully the reputation of the Metropolitan Opera. After learning of the proposal to bring in City Center—and the New York City Opera—Bing wrote to Metropolitan president Anthony Bliss. Bing told Bliss that his immediate reaction to the news was "one of dismay." He had been under the impression, he said, that "Lincoln Center aimed at the highest cultural achievements" and that the constituents chosen "had belonged to the highest class in their

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[157] Joshua Freeman. *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 67.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Johnson and Harr, *Rockefeller Conscience*, 130.

field." City Center, he said, had "no place in that group." Reminding Bliss that "the eyes of the world" were now on Lincoln Center, he argued that the "rest of the world and indeed the less knowledgeable parts of the United States will find it difficult to distinguish between the two opera companies" and that it would be detrimental to the Center "if the unique position of the Metropolitan [were] suddenly confused with a very much lesser organization." [160] Bing clearly viewed City Center as a threat, but because of its importance in securing necessary city and state financial support, he had no alternative but to compromise, but it would take difficult negotiation to bring Bing around. The contention among the Met, City Center, and Lincoln Center comes through with resounding clarity in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Met and Lincoln Center. In addition to recording the basic terms of the overall constituency agreement between the Met and Lincoln Center, the MOU included a summary of the *modus vivendi*—an agreement allowing conflicting parties to coexist peacefully—between City Center and the Metropolitan Opera. All the constituent organizations would, in their agreements with Lincoln Center, undertake an agreement to respect the area of primacy of the other constituents. But because of the potential for direct conflict represented by City Opera, the primacy agreement was to be "amplified" by the *modus vivendi (MV)*. Lincoln Center agreed that, except for City Center, no other organization in the field of opera or classical operetta would be permitted to join Lincoln Center without the express consent of the Metropolitan. The MV emphasized the primacy of each organization, stating that City Center agreed that opera would not be its principal function while the Metropolitan agreed the same in regards to ballet. The actual terms of the MV do not go much beyond spelling out that simple principal and stipulating that in the

[160] Rudolf Bing, *5000 Nights at the Opera*, 297-8.

event of a dispute, Lincoln Center could act as arbiter. Its longest passage is not even really the articulation of a particular policy, but reads rather like a legally memorialized attempt to soothe Bing in the face of his fierce opposition to City Opera's inclusion at Lincoln Center:

> The Metropolitan and City Center have heretofore coexisted in the City of New York without undue prejudice to either by reason of differences in artistic objectives, nature of productions, artistic personnel, and in the audiences to which they have primary appeal, which have resulted in the activities of the Metropolitan and City Center being complimentary rather than conflicting in nature. In addition, City Center's operatic performances have been so scheduled as to minimize conflict with the Metropolitan's New York Season. It is anticipated that this presently existing complementary relationship of the Metropolitan and City Center with respect to artistic objectives, nature of productions, artistic personnel, audiences and scheduling will be preserved to the greatest extent practicable.[161]

Bing did not feel particularly mollified by this attempt at conciliation. Most troublesome to him was the procedure for resolving differences between the Met and City Center in regards to their area of primacy. The outlined procedure indicated that in the event of a dispute, a committee consisting of "two directors of each of the disputants, and the chairman of such committee to be selected by the members thereof." The majority opinion of this committee would be the binding decision should any such dispute arise. Should the committee be unable to arrive at a conclusion, the matter would "at the request of either party, be referred for recommended resolution to the Board of Directors of Lincoln

[161] Memorandum of Understanding Between Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. and Metropolitan Opera Association, Inc. (*Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records*, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, Box 19, Folder 4), p. 4

Center."[162] Bing considered this an intrusion by Lincoln Center and recalled that the leadership of City Center felt the same way. Nonetheless, the Met and City Center agreed to the terms of the MV. In retrospect, Bing came to find having City Opera as a neighbor to be a mutually beneficial arrangement and said that "it now seems clear to me that I was wrong in fighting the entry of City Opera to Lincoln Center. There have been no particular difficulties. They have helped us and we have helped them by lending singers, and many of our most valuable artists . . . have been 'graduates' of the City Opera." He went on to say, "Productions there have considerably improved" although he said he hoped he would "be allowed my continuing opinion that they are simply not in the same league as Metropolitan productions."[163]

The complexity of negotiations surrounding City Center's journey to Lincoln Center could easily fill a chapter or even an entire dissertation. However, the overview provided here demonstrates the complexity of the relationships among the constituent organizations, the Lincoln Center leadership, and city and state government officials. These relationships informed decisions affecting every aspect of the Center from architecture to the selection of constituents to programming. Despite the primacy given the Metropolitan and the Philharmonic in the early days of the development of Lincoln Center, Rockefeller's persistence in pursuing City Center was just one of the ways he assumed control of shaping the identity of Lincoln Center that would emerge over the course of its development. City Center was to be an important means by which Lincoln Center could fulfill its mandate to make culture available to the masses. Negotiations between City Center and Lincoln Center

[162] Ibid., 28.

[163] Rudolf Bing, *5000 Nights at the Opera*, 300.

spanned the course of several years (approximately 1957 through 1965) and that process played a significant role in shaping the institution.

Cultural Maturity

While all this wrangling was happening behind closed doors, Rockefeller was also hard at work acting as the public face of Lincoln Center and developing an effective narrative to win support for the project among a broad range of audiences from potential donors to the government officials whose approvals would be necessary to bring the Center to fruition. What had begun as a project to protect the longevity of two organizations would evolve into an important symbol of America's "cultural maturity." Using the rhetoric of cultural maturity to emphasize its national importance, Rockefeller drafted Lincoln Center, already deployed in Robert Moses's northward march of progress, into the Cold War. Framing the Center as a battleground in the Cold War allowed Rockefeller and Lincoln Center's leadership to legitimate the project by suggesting that it was just as essential to the stature and security of the city and nation as the United Nations had been.

Many had thought Rockefeller to be an odd choice to lead the Lincoln Center project, but he maintained that his involvement grew naturally from his prior philanthropic work, which had focused on international issues in the years following World War II. In addition to his work to bring attention to the problems arising from an increase in the global population, Rockefeller had become closely involved with the Japan Society, which eventually led to the founding of the Asia Society, of which Rockefeller would serve as president. Rockefeller frequently pointed to his Far Eastern travels as the source for his concern with what he saw as a troubling view of Americans' relationship to the arts. "In travel abroad," he recalled, "I have often observed the interest of ordinary peoples in artistic and cultural achievement.

Even the poorest homes in Japan, for example, always have some artistic feature . . . that emphasizes their aspiration to cultural progress." He went on to say, "They respect nations that encourage such progress. The disturbing thing is that many foreigners mistakenly believe Americans are concerned only with material achievement." Rockefeller believed this to be a "handicap" in American relations with other peoples and, because of that, he hoped that "Lincoln Center may become a symbol before the world of America's cultural development."[164] Such rhetoric eventually became prevalent in the discourse surrounding Lincoln Center, but when planning for the Center first began, talk of the Center's importance as weapon in the Cold War took a back seat to the more pragmatic issues of providing adequate facilities for the cities' elite cultural institutions. While some of the early remarks of Lincoln Center's backers and the press pointed to the Cold War ideology that would come to underscore the project, such rhetoric became explicit only after the committee had established the organizational framework and Lincoln Center had to begin explaining its value to the public, especially once a large segment of that public began questioning the project.

A few days after Robert Moses officially announced plans for the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal project, Howard Taubman extolled the promise of the proposed cultural Center in a lengthy article in the *New York Times*. With plans for the cultural Center well underway, New York stood "on the threshold of a brave, new era in the performing arts." If successfully brought into being, the Center would "give a tremendous lift to the cultural tone of the city. At the same time it will transform physically the area for which it is planned."

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[164] Joe Alex Morris, "Colossus on Broadway," *Saturday Evening Post,* July 19, 1958. Academic Search Complete, EBSCO host.

Despite having "an abundance of activities in the performing arts," the city, Taubman argued, needed such a Center if it was to be truly deserving of its position as a capital of the performing arts. Having spent many column inches on the potential benefits to the city's cultural scene, Taubman concluded his article with a nod to the national importance of the Center. In addition to "open[ing] up new intellectual and emotional vistas for the good of the city and the country," it could also demonstrate that "democracy has the determination and power to devote itself to the things of the mind and heart as well as to creature comforts."[165] Taubman quickly emerged as a leading cheerleader for the Lincoln Center project and argued incessantly of the Center's importance to the city's cultural life and advocated strongly for governmental support for the Center. "In any other country such a project could not be contemplated without almost complete government financing. . . . But what does New York do for a project which will keep it in a position as a leading metropolis?" After acknowledging that the city was in fact making the Center possible through its contributions toward land acquisition costs, he asserted that the city needed to do more. The city, he argued, "should be dealing with [Lincoln Center] as the cultural enterprise it is and not as though it were another slum clearance and housing development."[166] In essence, Taubman's argument that the city should throw its support behind the Center for its intrinsic cultural value rather than limiting its intervention to the financial participation required under Title I called for "official" legitimation of the Center as a civic institution. However, with such

[165] Howard Taubman. "New Cultural Vista for the City." *New York Times*, April 22, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[166] Howard Taubman, "Civic Pride: City Officials Should Work for Lincoln Center as a Municipal Necessity," *New York Times,* June 2, 1957. ProQuest Historical newspapers: The New York Times.

official appellation not forthcoming, it fell to Rockefeller and the Center's backers to develop the narrative establishing Lincoln Center as a truly civic and national enterprise.

Throughout the summer of 1956, more information about the Center became public. In July, *New York Times* reporter Ross Parmenter wrote a lengthy article in which detailed plans for the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts were delineated for the first time. In addition to detailing the general plans in terms of the arts to be represented by constituent organizations with the Center, the article touched upon the aims of the Center as well as the events that conspired to spur the idea for the Center. "One of the leading aims of the Center is that its units should stimulate and cross-fertilize each other," Parmenter wrote. This principle of cross-fertilization, Parmenter suggested, had played a role in the decision to include a venue for legitimate theater "even though New York does not have the equivalent of London's Old Vic to run it. One of the hopes of the Center is that its facilities will lead to the establishment of a strong dramatic organization," something New York clearly lacked. Parmenter made no mention of how the Center would play in terms of expressing the cultural maturity of the United States, but focused instead on the voids in the cultural landscape the Center would fill in relatively practical terms. The article also highlighted Rockefeller's conviction in the "importance of culture in the life of any nation. He wanted to 'do something in the New York City picture.' And he had already given considerable thought to a cultural Center here in New York." After dutifully repeating the story of the three coincidences, Parmenter explicated all the details that had been ironed out up until that point and concluded the article with a call for public support of the project. "The men behind the project are all deeply excited by its potentialities," he wrote. "They hope the public will catch some of the

fire of their enthusiasm so that the Center will receive the necessary support."[167] However, it would soon become clear that in the eyes of many New York City residents and government officials, accommodating cultural institutions and enriching the cultural life of a local municipality did not quite rise to the level of significance necessary to justify the massive displacement of residents and businesses that the project would cause.

With an approval vote scheduled for a September 1956 Board of Estimate meeting, protestors stepped up their efforts in the summer months, culminating in a postcard campaign in which neighborhood residents and business owners reminded Mayor Wagner, "You will need our votes in November." Harris Present recalled that in the last statewide election, Governor Harriman had won by a remarkably small margin and suggested that were the election to be close in the fall of 1956, "Mayor Wagner's action on Lincoln Square may be the determining factor as to whether he will or will not be elected."[168] This particular tactic was essentially a concrete expression of the overall message that undergirded all of the resistance to the Lincoln Square project: David had just as much right to influence the shape and identity of the city as Goliath did. Winning the battle, Rockefeller realized, would require that Goliath come up with as consistent a message as David. Moreover, it would be particularly important that Goliath's message could claim the moral high ground equal to or surpassing that of David.

While the first laudatory articles began to appear in the press, Rockefeller began to develop messaging that went beyond extolling the importance of culture for culture's sake

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[167] Ross Parmenter. "Lincoln Square Plan Develops Toward World Cultural Center," *New York Times,* July 23, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[168] Charles Grutzner. "Foes Threaten a Political Fight Against Lincoln Square Project," *New York Times,* September 8, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

and instead sought to establish the Center's national importance. Rockefeller turned to Harold Seymour, an experienced fund raiser. Seymour advised all his clients that "the case should be bigger than the cause" and he urged Rockefeller to focus his rhetoric on "the possibilities of bringing into being something truly big, exciting, and of international significance, rather than to stop at something that merely satisfies an urgent, minimum, and local need." So while the origin story focusing on the coincidences and the need for new homes for the Met and Philharmonic made for a good story, they "should not be major themes in a campaign because they were 'not challenging enough.'"[169] Further complicating the challenge of creating a compelling message was the fact that Lincoln Center, despite its primacy as the Centerpiece of the project, was one of several different elements of a redevelopment project that would cover fifty acres sprawling over the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Also to be included were apartment buildings, a campus for Fordham University, and a row of commercial theaters sponsored by theater impresario Roger Stevens. As historian Joel Schwartz has noted, "the jerry-rigged assemblage left individual sponsors uncertain about their relationship to the overall plan." Lincoln Center's exploratory committee "had little contact with Fordham, looked askance at Stevens's theatrical row and ignored [the] housing component, which was needed for the write-down." Rockefeller's committee tried to find a way to relate the arts Center to the district planning, "but members could not disguise the haphazard way the project was sited onto the West Side."[170] In other words, the Title I project lacked any cohesive sense of purpose. Yes, Lincoln Center was

[169] Milton Goldin. "'Why the Square?': John D. Rockefeller 3rd and the Creation of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts." *Journal of Popular Culture*, 21.3 (3), 22.

[170] Joel Schwartz. *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 278.

unquestionably the biggest element of the project, but everyone knew that Lincoln Center was not the true impetus for the Title I project. In reality, Moses's goal was slum clearance. As Robert Stern has argued, even if the Metropolitan and Philharmonic had not been interested in participating in the project, "Moses still would have cleared the site and rebuilt it, with Fordham University as its principal institutional tenant and much of the land given over to housing."[171] Moses had in fact never really bothered to articulate any kind of "higher purpose" for the project. In his mind, the project was of "vital importance to the city and to the entire West Side of Manhattan" because most of the buildings in the area targeted for redevelopment "were Old Law tenements in various stages of obsolescence."[172] As far as Moses was concerned, the state of the neighborhood—which he considered to be in a state of dilapidation beyond repair—was all the justification he needed to flatten it. Throughout the project—and indeed throughout his career—Moses assiduously focused his messaging on the pragmatic needs associated with urban redevelopment, specifically ridding the city of slums and rebuilding along stark modern lines. Even when attempting to wax poetical about the city, he was unable to tamp down his pragmatism.

In May of 1956 Moses, at the request of the editor, penned a piece for the *Times* entitled "Significance: What the City Means." In the piece, Moses characterized himself as one who "has tried to make a few superficial improvements in our town in the effort to keep it abreast of the times and has come to realize its unique character, its natural and man-made beauty, its fast tempo, its traditions—valid and woozy—and its irritating, stubborn resistance to change." The piece is perhaps one of the most telling Moses ever wrote in terms of

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[171] Robert Stern et al, *New York: 1960*, 678.

[172] Charles Grutzner. "Moses Outlines City Within City for Lincoln Sq." *New York Times*, May28 , 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

shedding light on what he loved and hated about the city and what drove him in his efforts to reshape the landscape. Moses's love of the city comes through with resounding clarity in the piece, but at the same time, that love is defined not by an idle admiration of the city as it existed but rather for its potential to be remade to reflect physically the excellence of all that made New York notable. "Those of us who see New York in all its aspects, who get about, who know its light and shade, who are fascinated by its varied peoples, find it the most stimulating workshop in the world," he wrote. For Moses, the city was "a town of superlatives" and the Lincoln Square project, the latest in a long line of redevelopment efforts, would work to bring New York's landscape in line with its aspirations of excellence.[173]

So convinced was Moses that his vision of the city—his "workshop"—was the right one, he left it to the individual sponsors of the institutions to be housed on his project sites to extol their importance to the city. The challenge for Rockefeller and his colleagues was to ensure that Lincoln Center was at the center of the campaign to win approval for the urban renewal project and in turn to develop a compelling message that would convince the public that the Center was not simply a superfluous ornament for the city, but was rather indisputably necessary. To do this, Lincoln Center would need to bring an aura of national and global significance to the project. The Cold War provided the basis Rockefeller needed to achieve this goal.

In December 1956, Rockefeller addressed a luncheon meeting of the Women's City Club at their Park Avenue headquarters, where he told the assembled crowd, "So much of

[173] Robert Moses. "Significance: What the City Means." *New York Times*, April 29, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

America's prestige abroad is based on accomplishments in industry and sciences, but our cultural side is often less well understood than we might wish." During his speech he focused on the Center's need for financial support as well as his own commitment and that of his colleagues to ensuring that those displaced by the project would receive as much assistance in the relocation process as possible. He assured his audience that although it was "always most unfortunate, when an area undergoes change, that there is a displacement of people," all those associated with the project were "very much aware of our responsibility to find new housing for these families and are confident of our ability to do so" and assured the audience that a "continuing supply of new housing" would help ease the burden on those forced out of the neighborhood by the Center. Having given those assurances, he discussed the high cost of the Center, then estimated at $75 million, and insisted that despite some government and foundation support, the majority of the funds would have to come from the private sector. "While we realize that a substantial proportion of the needed money must come from relatively few givers, we must have broad general support. Lincoln Center is for the many and it is only sound and right that all should join in its support." Rockefeller justified this tacit demand for financial support from the public by emphasizing the national and international significance of Lincoln Center, which would, he said assure the city's position of leadership, a respectable goal in its own right, but more importantly, the Center would have international significance, standing as "a symbol of American cultural maturity, affirming for people everywhere our faith in the life of the spirit."[174] In this address, Rockefeller launched his campaign to portray Lincoln Center as a "response to the great

[174] "Center is Viewed as Arts Capital. *New York Times*, December 14, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

questions of the age." Doing so meant explaining the project's "importance of culture for national life during a time of affluence, for the country's international reputation in an era of Cold War, and for urban resurgence."[175]

While the centrality of the Metropolitan Opera and New York Philharmonic exposed Lincoln Center to charges of elitism, the prevalent mood of the Cold War offered Rockefeller a powerful defense against such charges. As Stephen Whitfield has argued, political discourse during the Cold War in the United States rejected the articulation of overt political ideologies. Whitfield cites a 1953 book by contemporary historian Daniel J. Boorstin entitled *The Genius of American Politics*. Boorstin identifies the titular genius as "antimetaphysical, a blank state that was devoid of susceptibility to the 'philosophies' of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism. American politicians were supposed to arrange deals, not articulate ideals."[176] Instead of working to articulate a uniquely American identity, the Cold War was best fought by defining national identity through contrast with the threatening "other." In addition to the specter of the ever-looming atomic attack, falling behind the Soviet Union in terms of progress threatened the primacy of the United States. Rockefeller and his colleagues in Lincoln Center capitalized on this attitude to advance their cause.

There was certainly no denying that Lincoln Center, however benevolent its intentions, would appeal most strongly to the well-heeled. And although Rockefeller sought to broaden Lincoln Center's appeal by including City Center, the climate of the Cold War relieved him of the burden of developing a truly populist institution. "Faith was strengthened in the institutions of authority as the best preservatives of national values," argues Whitfield.

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[175] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 175.

[176] Stephen Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 54.

Lincoln Center was repeatedly framed as an antidote to the perception that America was a crass culture driven by little more than the bottom line. For example, a fundraising appeal letter asserted that Lincoln Center could respond to the charge that "Americans are only interested in making money" and "could stand as a symbol of the nation's coming of age, of its readiness to stand with Europe at the head of civilization."[177] But the cultural means by which Americans would do so was clearly to be bestowed from above, as Zipp persuasively argues:

> Of course, the Center's sponsors found American mass culture to be distasteful. Their efforts to democratize the arts amounted to a kind of controlled release, an attempt to guide, supervise, and guarantee its munificent effects from on high, not an attempt to inject high culture into the mass marketplace. Lincoln Center's great gift to a newly affluent American society was to be a curious and novel blend of elitism and democratization, far more open to the public than earlier models of cultural hierarchy rooted in nineteenth century class antagonism, but still controlled from above.[178]

Although Lincoln Center was to be more open to the public than "earlier models of cultural hierarchy rooted in nineteenth century class antagonism," the concerns Lincoln Center was said to address were strikingly similar to those expressed in the 19th century. Lincoln Center's public statements made repeated reference to the importance of cultural institutions as antidotes to the increased amounts of leisure time available to working class Americans in the age of affluence. One of Rockefeller's colleagues warned, "We will have to learn how to fill the time we have literally manufactured in our factories." Failing to do so

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[177] Zipp. *Manhattan Projects*, 178.

[178] Ibid., 177.

could result in psychological and societal crises."[179] Although he didn't say so explicitly, he clearly implied that the average worker, when left with unstructured time, posed a potential danger to the social order.

This was hardly a new line of argument. In 1886, trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art were embroiled in heated debates over whether to open the museum on Sundays. Ultimately the trustees decided to do so, apparently having been convinced that visiting the museum to be edified would provide an alternative to frequenting immoral places. One concerned citizen challenged opponents of Sunday museum hours by asking, "Will you refuse with such noble powers in your hands to be the ally of this community in the struggles against gigantic vices?"[180] Such direct rhetoric, rooted in class antagonism, would naturally not fly in the public statements of Lincoln Center, and it is not my intent to suggest that class prejudice lay at the root of the emphasis on filling leisure time. However, the Cold War culture valorized homogeneity, and the provision of culture through an institution endowed with a certain degree of authority could be seen as a way of facilitating such homogeneity.

By the time Lincoln Center faced its last hurdle for city approval, the rhetoric of cultural maturity and containment had been well rehearsed and played a central role in the statement of John D. Rockefeller 3rd at the City Planning Commission's heated public hearings. The statement reiterated all the virtues of the Center as a performing arts venue in its own right but also emphasized the international importance and the value it would bring to the spiritual edification of New York's people. Rockefeller declared, "To New York, Lincoln

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[179] Ibid.

[180] Calvin Tomkins. *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), 76.

Center will add another capital as important to the performing arts as the United Nations is to world affairs, Wall Street to finance and Fifth Avenue to fashion. . . . To the world, [it] will announce America's cultural maturity. Lincoln Center will prove that the arts in America have come of age." He also argued emphatically that the Center reflected "the growing recognition that enjoyment of the arts is important if not essential to the human spirit."[181]

Rockefeller and the leaders of Lincoln Center would continue to double down on this rhetoric throughout the development of Lincoln Center, but by framing the project as one of national importance, they had succeeded in establishing Lincoln Center as a bulwark in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. By seizing upon the Zeitgeist and aligning their rhetoric accordingly, they ensured that that the buildings would rise. Budget crises and conflicts among the constituent organizations would abound, but the project was underway and the institutional framework of the Center was, by 1957, taking shape.

[181] "Text of Statement by Lincoln Center for the Arts." *New York Times*, September 12, 1957. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

CHAPTER 2

Travertine and Turmoil: Contestation and Identity in the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center

Introduction: The Happiest Play

On October 24, 1963, the acting ensemble of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center gathered in a Second Avenue studio for the first rehearsal of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*. The play, Miller's first in nearly a decade and the inaugural production of the Repertory Theater, was, Miller told the assembled actors, "a happy play, the happiest work I've ever written." As Christopher Bigsby has observed, that must certainly have seemed like an odd statement for a play "in which the cruelties of the House Un-American Activities Committee led to the suicide of one of its victims and in which friends prove false and marriages collapse." Any sense of happiness in the play must surely have come, Bigsby argued, "from the reconciliation with private and public history towards which [the play] moves."[182] The reconciliation of which Bigsby writes relates to the play's protagonist, Quentin, and his attempt to reconcile his own conception of his identity with the reality of the life he has lived. As the opening production of the Repertory Theater, the play was a particularly appropriate choice. Not only was it the first play in nine years from one of the country's most prominent playwrights, but the action of the play also reflected the turmoil that would unfold within the Repertory Theater over the course of its existence. Just as Quentin found himself locked in a confrontation with his own sense of identity, the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center was forced into a moment of reckoning in which the ideals and practices of its artistic leadership collided with the institutional apparatus of Lincoln Center.

[182] Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 232.

Having laid claim to its stake on Manhattan's landscape, Lincoln Center now offered director Elia Kazan and producer Robert Whitehead the opportunity to stake their claim on the landscape of American theater history. Both men had firmly established themselves as leaders in the commercial theater world, Kazan as the most influential theatrical director of his time, and Whitehead as a producer with a track record of successful productions of "quality plays" on Broadway. The Repertory Theater could bestow upon Kazan and Whitehead the ideal capstones to already illustrious careers, for it was not intended to be just another New York theater, but was in the words of one of its harshest critics, Martin Gottfried, "designed to be the American National Theater from the moment it opened its doors."[183]

By the time the acting company assembled for their first rehearsal in October 1963, Lincoln Center had firmly established itself as a necessary demonstration of American cultural maturity, a designation that had been used to justify the erasure of a vibrant neighborhood for the sake of progress. Now the leaders of the Center, having elevated the Met and Philharmonic to monumental status, offered the city and the nation the promise of a theatrical institution that would, as part of Lincoln Center, represent the United States on the global stage during the Cold War. Unlike the other institutions housed at Lincoln Center, however, the Repertory Theatre had no institutional existence prior to its conception as part of the Center. Instead, Rockefeller and the founders of the Center hoped to create a theatrical institution as venerable as the other constituents from the ground up, but as everyone would

[183] Martin Gottfried, *A Theater Divided: The Postwar American Stage* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 148.

soon learn, the pressures of creating a "national" repertory theater out of thin air complicated a development process already fraught with difficulties.

Chief among these difficulties was establishing the identity of an organization conceived in a boardroom with no clear artistic mandate but rather with the mandate to establish a theater worthy of the prestige that Lincoln Center banked on to establish its preeminence. From the earliest stages of its development, The Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center suffered from the collision between a vague mission and a board of directors unnerved by public criticism and the fiscal realities of running a permanent repertory theater. Further complicating matters was Kazan's ambivalence about the project and his uncertainty about both his willingness and ability to meet its demands. In the years between the incorporation of the theater and the opening of *After The Fall,* Kazan struggled to define the meaning of the theater for the public, but in so doing he was forced into a confrontation with his own beliefs about his talent, taste, and convictions about the theater, and Whitehead discovered that his extensive career in the Broadway theater had not prepared him to confront the political machinations of the corporate board room. From the earliest stages of its development, the Repertory Theater was plagued by conflict over how to best reflect American theatrical ideals within an institutional structure. Every aspect of the theater's artistic work from the acting to play selection to the physical plant was hotly contested both within the organization and publicly in the press. At the root of the conflict lay a failure to establish a clear sense of identity that could withstand the onslaught of criticism foisted on the theater from the press and its own board of directors. Rather than collaborating to develop the theater's identity, the artistic leaders sought to protect and enshrine their artistic legacies, while the Board of Directors resisted them at every turn.

The Vivacious Philanthropist

The first salvo in the fight to define the Repertory Theater in the public mind was fired on May 5, 1958, when the *New York Times* announced that department store heiress and "vivacious philanthropist" Vivian Beaumont Allen had pledged three million dollars toward the construction of the building that would eventually become home to the Repertory Theater.[184] In its press releases, Lincoln Center had consistently mentioned its plans to include a repertory theater, but "Until Mrs. Allen's munificent gift," wrote Lewis Funke in the *New York Times,* "no one had more than a right to hope that the Center's aims would be fulfilled. Her gift not only makes possible the construction of the physical theatre," Funke said, "but it also opens up horizons hitherto only dreams in the minds of many dedicated theatre-lovers."[185] Policy statements regarding the future work of the theater would remain vague for some time, but the public announcement of Allen's three million dollar gift, followed in quick succession by the announcement of Broadway producer Robert Whitehead's appointment as the chief consultant, cemented from the beginning the theater's affiliation with the wealthy elite and the Broadway establishment in the public imagination.

Rockefeller, who had engaged in closed-door meetings with consultants for over two years, used the occasion of Allen's gift to launch the development of the theater's organizational structure in a more public forum. Securing the gift had taken over a year, and it had significant importance, both materially and symbolically. Materially, the three-million contribution represented the first donation of that size from a private individual, and would,

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[184] "Vivacious Philanthropist: Mrs. Vivian Beaumont Allen." *New York Times,* May 05, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[185] Lewis Funke, "Lincoln Center Prepares for Repertory." *New York Times,* May 18, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

Rockefeller hoped, go a long way toward attracting similarly large contributions. Symbolically, major gifts like this one tethered the Center—and specifically the theater—to the aspirations of the citizenry. The importance of Allen's gift lay not just in its facilitation of the laying of brick and mortar, but also—and more importantly—it attested to the what the *Times* called the thoughts and hopes of the individual citizen. Of course, Allen represented a particular demographic of New York's citizenry and Lincoln Center's leadership surely expected that most of their financial support would come from that same demographic, which meant that Rockefeller and Lincoln Center's backers would need to establish that the theater would not take a back seat to the other constituent organizations at Lincoln Center, a concern that Allen herself had raised with Rockefeller and which Rockefeller worked to assuage when courting Allen's multi-million dollar contribution, assuring her that "the drama theater should not have to take a secondary place in the center concept, in building or location, or in timing of construction" and that "'her theater' would be as important as the one for dance."[186] Considering the absence of an already-established organization that could match the stature of the other organizations, her concerns were well founded, and Rockefeller did his best to reassure her in that regard.

Writing to Allen in January 1958, Rockefeller asserted the importance of the theater within the Center, promising that "the repertory theater is an important and integral part of the overall development" of Lincoln Center. He assured her that plans were in place to develop a sound organization for the theater, and that he had retained Robert Whitehead as a consultant "with the expectation, as plans develop and become more concrete, that he would become the permanent leader of the whole (drama) undertaking." Whitehead's credentials

[186] Edgar Young, *Lincoln Center,* 72.

undoubtedly helped reassure Allen of the potential prestige of the theater at Lincoln Center. Since his 1947 debut as a Broadway producer with a production of *Medea,* Whitehead had enjoyed a career defined by box office successes and had become known for what many contemporary writers called "quality plays." Among the works he had produced were *Bus Stop, Major Barbara, Orpheus Descending*, and *A Touch of the Poet*. The works, although not the most unconventional, lent Whitehead's record an air of gravitas, while his box office successes afforded Rockefeller the further legitimation he needed in the absence of the long-standing institutional framework of an organization like the Metropolitan Opera. Four months after Rockefeller's letter, on April 26, 1958, Allen made the pledge.[187]

By the time Allen confirmed her pledge in April 1958, Rockefeller had officially appointed Whitehead as the primary consultant for the repertory theater and charged him with leading an advisory council and with heading the development of the theater's programming. In the letter documenting Whitehead's appointment, dated February 6, 1958, Rockefeller memorialized the shared belief among himself, Whitehead, and Lincoln Center's Vice President George Stoddard in the "desirability and importance of developing a repertory drama performing group here in New York City," adding that having the group be a part of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts would "not only contribute materially to the group's effectiveness but also would give it an added prestige and stability."[188] It is important to note Rockefeller's phrasing here. Although this letter essentially served to engage Whitehead to act as a consultant to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Rockefeller speaks of the establishment of a repertory theater in New York City as being desirable in its

[187] Ibid., 73

[188] Rockefeller to Whitehead, February 6, 1958. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, Box 262. Folder 1.

own right, noting that such an organization, once formed, would benefit by joining Lincoln Center as a constituent organization. In other words, the creation of the theater company was to be, technically, an event discrete from, and preceding, the theater's becoming a constituent of Lincoln Center. In so phrasing the understanding between Whitehead and Lincoln Center, Rockefeller simultaneously commissioned the creation of a new theater company from scratch and adhered to the Lincoln Center concept, which stipulated that all constituent organizations were to be autonomous and responsible for their own financing, management, and programming.

In tasking Whitehead with leading the formation of the new theater, Rockefeller made an important decision in shaping the direction the repertory theater would take. For starters, Whitehead, although highly regarded as a producer of "quality" plays on the more refined end of the Broadway spectrum, was still part of the Broadway "establishment." Secondly, the Actors Studio had been vigorously campaigning to be named Lincoln Center's theater constituent, and Whitehead's official appointment marked the end of its candidacy. Although it is unclear exactly when Rockefeller began talks with Whitehead, there can be no doubt that those talks coincided with Rockefeller's talks with the Actors Studio. And there is little doubt that Whitehead, given his deeply held belief that Strasberg's teaching of the Method had been a destructive force in the American theater, influenced Rockefeller in his decision to reject the Studio as the theater constituent. "We didn't want Strasberg," Whitehead stated plainly in 1963. "Through Strasberg the psycho-sexual interpretation of the subtext has become a major force now. At Lincoln Center we will be anti-psychoanalytic." In rejecting the Studio, the Repertory Theater had made a clear choice. "We want to establish,"

Whitehead said, "a new character for our performers, as well as the theatre."[189] By shunning the Actors Studio, the theater-to-be distanced itself from the Method and rejected the idea of Strasberg as a defining force at the Repertory Theater, despite his influence as an acting teacher.

The day after formally engaging Whitehead as the primary drama consultant for Lincoln Center, Rockefeller broke the news to Elia Kazan, who had been on the advisory council and who had led the campaign for the Actors Studio's selection as the theater constituent. Rockefeller assured Kazan that Whitehead "hopes as strongly as I do that you will continue to work with us in the development of these plans which we all feel are so important not only to the Center but for the development of the art of the theatre in America,"[190] but clearly the doors of Lincoln Center had been slammed shut in the face of the Actors Studio, which had been in talks with Rockefeller and his colleagues for at least two years. The conciliatory tone in Rockefeller's letter, in which he informed Kazan, "Mr. Whitehead knows of our previous conferences with you and your associates," suggests that Rockefeller likely concealed his negotiations with Whitehead from Kazan, waiting until he had a firm commitment from Whitehead before cutting the Actors Studio loose, a rejection that clearly left Kazan feeling stung and humiliated.

The rejection of the Actors Studio left Kazan feeling conflicted. Looking back on the experience, he insisted that he didn't work as hard as he might have to secure the constituency of the Actors Studio, with himself, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg as co-managers and directors, because he "didn't believe in him [Lee Strasberg] as an equal partner

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[189] Paul Gray, "From Russia to America: A Critical Chronology" in *Stanislavski and America: an Anthology from the Tulane Drama Review,* ed. Erika Munk (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 170.

[190] Rockefeller to Kazan, February 7, 1958. Actor's Workshop and Lincoln Center Records, box 262, folder 1.

or as a producer, or want him as a standby advisor or as an overlord, however benign." [191] But at the time, in his correspondence with Rockefeller and, later, with Whitehead, Kazan adamantly insisted that the Actors Studio was the ideal organization to represent the spoken drama at Lincoln Center, and his advocacy for the Actors Studio suggests a belief in the Studio—and its leadership, including Strasberg—as the standard-bearers of cutting-edge theater in the United States.

In proposing the Actors Studio as the theater constituent for Lincoln Center, Kazan attempted to capitalize on the Studio's reputation as a breeding ground for the most compelling actors in American film and theater and asserted the importance of the Method as an arbiter of American theatrical identity. In June1956, Kazan informed Rockefeller that the Actors Studio was prepared to take over a six-month season at Lincoln Center and that "the effort of the Actors Studio there would be administered by Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, and myself." The "fundamental intention," according to Kazan, would be to "make our people aware and proud of the work and importance of the American Theatre—its plays, its craftsmen, their techniques and their talents," and the organization would maintain a training program alongside its theater-producing arm.[192] In this brief letter, Kazan made only passing reference to repertoire, focusing instead on the importance of showcasing the craftsmanship of the American theater. And perhaps nowhere was the craftsmanship of American theater better displayed, in Kazan's view, than in the work of the actors connected to the Actors Studio.

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[191] Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997), 609.

[192] Elia Kazan, *The Selected Letters of Elia Kazan*, ed. Albert J. Devlin and Marlene J. Devlin (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 336-7.

Six months after this initial letter to Rockefeller, Kazan sent a more detailed proposal laying out in detail the reasons that the Actors Studio was, in his view, best equipped to operate the theater at Lincoln Center. Kazan proclaimed the importance of the theater at Lincoln Center as an "American" enterprise, insisting that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, there existed an extensive repertoire of American drama classics, but that the absence of a repertory system wherein those classics could be kept in rotation and in the public consciousness had resulted in the disappearance of those plays once their initial runs had ended. As Kazan saw it, the lack of permanent companies had led to the perception that the United States lacked a strong theatrical tradition, but what it lacked in a dramatic "canon" it made up for in the quality of the acting that had emerged out of the Studio.

Rockefeller, however, found Kazan's argument insufficiently persuasive, looking instead toward more trustworthy indicators—box office receipts and critics' notices—as the legitimation he knew would be necessary to win the support of prospective donors. Perhaps it is cynical to suggest that the decision to enlist Whitehead rather than the Actors Studio regime was directly influenced by Rockefeller's efforts to secure the funding for the construction of the theater, but it is clear that Whitehead's involvement in the project was a significant selling point in Rockefeller's pitch to Vivian Beaumont Allen. Fundraising, however, was not the only consideration that played into Rockefeller's choice to go with Whitehead instead of the Actors Studio.

Kazan had arranged a meeting among Strasberg, Rockefeller, and some other leaders from Lincoln center, a meeting Kazan learned did not go well. Kazan recalled that reports of the meeting indicated that "Lee was in the glory of his pride, instructing Rockefeller that if he hoped to have a theatre in his Center, the first person he should have consulted was Lee

Strasberg, because Lee and no one else grasped the artistic problems and their solutions."[193] Although Rockefeller was too polite to say so in the meeting, Kazan knew that after this encounter there was little hope of Strasberg being brought aboard the project in any meaningful capacity. Kazan, who did not attend the meeting, suspected that Strasberg's authoritarian tendencies alienated Rockefeller, and that there might be other motives at work in the decision to reject the Actors Studio's candidacy.

After learning of the rejection, Kazan complained bitterly to Clifford Odets, suggesting that the decision of "Rockefeller and his committee of Presbyterians" to choose Whitehead as the principal advisor, despite the considerable effort put forth by Kazan on behalf of the Actors Studio, was pre-ordained. "I had already done a lot of advising," he told Odets, "attending many meetings with him and his group and writing several prospecti. But in the end consanguinity told."[194] It is unclear exactly what Kazan was suggesting by his choice of the word consanguinity, but it is reasonable to infer that he suspected ethnic or political prejudice to be at the heart of the decision. It is impossible to know whether that is true, but Rockefeller must certainly have found Strasberg's authoritarian tendencies not only viscerally off-putting but also concerning as an indication that Strasberg lacked the malleability necessary to ensure successful cooperation with the institutional apparatus of Lincoln Center, while Whitehead was just as comfortable in a boardroom as he was in a theater.

Whatever Rockefeller's reasoning, the announcement of Whitehead's appointment, which coincided with the securing of Allen's gift, marked the first milestone in the

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[193] Kazan, *A Life*, 608.

[194] Kazan, *Selected Letters*, 366.

development of the public identity of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center years before an actor ever set foot on its stage. In the decision to cast aside Strasberg and the Actors Studio in favor of Robert Whitehead, Rockefeller rejected the legacy of the Group Theater in favor of a successful Broadway track record. Now, with the funds for the building assured and Whitehead's leadership established, Rockefeller began to publicly unveil the results of his work up until this point.

Going Public

In May 1958, Rockefeller revealed that Lincoln Center had established an advisory council on drama and had appointed Whitehead as the primary consultant for the developing repertory theater. Serving alongside Whitehead on the advisory council were Vivian Beaumont Allen, Cheryl Crawford, producer Robert Dowling, critic Walter Kerr, actress Eva Le Gallienne, Sanford Meisner, Jo Mielziner, Rogers Stevens, George D. Stoddard of NYU, and Juilliard president William Schuman. Kazan was also on the council where he would, for the time being, serve in an advisory capacity. Notably missing from the list was Lee Strasberg. The advisory council was tasked with "assur[ing] for drama at Lincoln Center the highest in artistic standards, continuity, and financial stability" by establishing general policy and eventually forming a nonprofit organization.[195] Whitehead had little to say about the specifics of the theater's programming , stating only that the new theater "should devote itself to producing the best of American plays, old and new, and should be prepared to present the best in the world, including Shakespeare and other classics" and that he "envisioned an organization consisting of a managing director and two production directors

[195] Lewis Funke, "Repertory Adviser and Council Named for Lincoln Sq. Drama." *New York Times*, May 16, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

entrusted with the training and development of the acting company," which would have "twenty top actors. . . . There would also be a studio where selected young players would receive free training."[196]

Lewis Funke, in the *Times*, heralded the beginning of the Repertory Theatre's development as "undoubtedly the most exciting news to develop in a long time for the American theatre."[197] The creation of a permanent company, in Funke's view, marked a tremendous step forward for raising the stature of the American theater both at home and abroad. "Little imagination . . . is required," he wrote, "to realize that were we in possession of such a theatre, and its essential concomitant, a permanent acting company, we would not have floundered as we have in quest of a representative group to send to the Brussels World's Fair—or to any of the international drama festivals now in existence." A repertory theater could also function, Funke suggested, as a "library of plays—a fountainhead for the preservation of a nation's dramatic classics, a constant source of stimulation and reinvigoration for the nation's playwrights." Funke emphasized the importance of the theater as a public institution that could represent the United States on the world stage. He expressed his confidence that "auguries are good for the birth and durability" of a permanent company, assuring readers, "It is a credible assumption that like the Metropolitan and the Philharmonic, the repertory theatre will be in the hands of civic and culturally minded citizens of substance who will see to it that the theatre has an uninterrupted life." Funke articulated the repertory theater's potential to fulfill a great need in the American theater. With the regional theater movement still in its infancy and so many previous attempts at the establishment of a

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[196] Ibid.

[197] Lewis Funke, "Lincoln Center Prepares for Repertory." *New York Times,* May 18, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

permanent repertory company having failed, the promise of a sound institutional framework capable of supporting such an undertaking was tantalizing. Adding urgency to the need for a nationally recognized institutional theater was the ever-mounting pressure for the United States to demonstrate its cultural superiority to the Soviet Union.

While even the American theatrical press was highly critical of the commercial nature of Broadway, the Great White Way came under increasing criticism in the late 1940s and into the 1950s from behind the Iron Curtain. In June 1949, Soviet critic I. Kulikova published an article in which she declared Broadway dead. In many ways, her critique of Broadway echoed American critics, who felt that Broadway's reliance on the box office as the sole barometer of success had stifled artistic innovation, and she identified many of the same causes, including the star system and the fact that despite there being nearly forty Broadway theaters in the theater district, "not a genuine theatre company (*truppa)* was to be found, nor a single theatre collective with a constant repertoire—merely tenant companies specifically chosen for a particular production."[198] Kulikova's critique differed from American critics in that she framed the creative vacuity of Broadway not merely as the result of producers' greed but rather as a result of the crushing force of capitalism itself, arguing that "the character of Broadway productions was not determined by public taste, but 'in accord with tasks set by Wall Street."[199] The "stale atmosphere" of Broadway, wrote Kulikova (as reported in the *Times),* was created by "Broadway imperialists," and it "stifl[ed] all creative initiative of theatrical groups and turn[ed] actors and producers into robots, obedient to the will of Wall

[198] David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 58.

[199] Harrison E. Salisbury, "Broadway Dead, Says Soviet Critic." *New York Times,* June 21, 1949. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

Street bosses."[200] By casting the Wall Street bosses as oppressive heavies manipulating Broadway producers and artists, Kulikova implied that America's capitalistic system robbed the people of their voice in the theater, preventing the theater from occupying a meaningful place in their lives. Another Soviet critic, M. Morozov, had argued, prior to Kulikova's article, that Americans envied the Soviets because the United States lacked a theater that spoke directly to them. According to Morozov, Americans, "with a pained longing . . . read about Soviet theatre, which not only talks about the people, and serves the people, but belongs to the people."[201] Soviet theater was, Morozov argued, an integral part of Soviet life to a degree that Americans could only dream about.

Although Morozov and Kulikova penned these articles ten years before the founding of the Repertory Theatre at Lincoln Center, Funke's article announcing the establishment of the advisory board—with its assertion that a permanent company could have prevented the embarrassment of "floundering" at the Brussels World Fair—clearly demonstrates that the nerve struck by the Soviet critics remained raw. The establishment of the advisory board and the assurance of the theater's construction offered hope not only that an institutional framework to support a national theater could at last be developed, but also that the Repertory Theater, situated within the fortress-like campus of Lincoln Center, would serve as a visual display of American theatrical might to counter criticisms like those leveled by Soviet critics. It now fell to Whitehead and Kazan to make the case for how their new theater would fill the cultural void left by the absence of a national theater.

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[200] Ibid.

[201] David Caute, *Dancer Defects,* 57-58.

One of Whitehead's first undertakings was a tour of European repertory theaters during which he visited several repertory companies. Upon his return in June 1959, he said he had been impressed by what he saw during his travels, which had "changed [his] entire thinking about repertory theatre here." He had been most impressed by the German repertory theaters he visited, particularly the Berliner Ensemble. "They have achieved amazing range and style and they have standards of production we would do well to emulate," he reported, noting that it was amazing what could be accomplished by "talented actors and directors working together over a period of time."[202] Shortly after his return from Europe, Whitehead announced that he had accepted an invitation from Soviet officials to spend several weeks touring Russian theaters. According to the *Times,* the officials wanted Whitehead's "suggestions on which of their native productions to export to the United States and they have extended the unusual invitation through this country's State Department." Whitehead accepted the invitation and felt it would serve a "double purpose, in that it not only would further the cause of good cultural relations between the two countries but also would give him an opportunity to report to the Lincoln Center people on Russian repertory techniques."[203] It also allowed him to tie the work of the Repertory Theater to the Cold War mobilization narrative so important to the development of Lincoln Center.

When he returned in December 1959, Whitehead reported that his visit to the Soviet Union affirmed his main takeaway from his tour of European theaters: the importance of a well-trained company and permanent repertory. "You cannot achieve great theatre after three

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[202] Lewis Funke. "Gossip of the Rialto." *New York Times.* June 28, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[203] Arthur Gelb. "News and Gossip of the Rialto." *New York Times,* August 16, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

weeks in rehearsal and an opening in New Haven," he told the *Times.* He argued, "Playwrights must exist within an organization—they must live with the day-by-day turmoil, with the whole mess." He was also quick to point out, however, that Americans should be careful not to fetishize the Soviet theater too much. "There are no third-act problems in the new Soviet plays—the solution is Marxist doctrine . . . You cannot put on plays by committee, here or elsewhere. They can be done by dedicated individuals and groups thriving in a free theatre atmosphere and society."[204] In other words, Whitehead suggested that while the Soviets might have a stable institutional structure for their theater, they did not enjoy the same freedom of expression in the theater or in society at large. The theater at Lincoln Center could learn much from the Soviets about the value of permanent ensembles and repertoire, but it would also benefit from the free and open discourse absent in the Soviet Union.

Like Rockefeller, Whitehead managed to invoke the Cold War ethos, defined by the supremacy of American democracy, while avoiding any hint of fanaticism. Instead, he worked to emphasize what he believed was a cultural shift in the United States that made the theater possible and necessary. Whitehead faithfully towed the party line throughout his association with the theater, repeatedly asserting that although Rockefeller and his fellow "enlightened business leaders" played an important role in making the theater possible, "it could not have come about without the atmosphere that currently exists in the nation. We have reached a point in our history—possibly it is a maturity; certainly it is a psychology, a need that exists."[205] The theater reflected, according to Whitehead, not just a mobilization

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[204] Herbert Mitgang, "Robert Whitehead's Mission to Moscow." *New York Times,* December 27, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[205] Barry Hyams, "A Theatre: Heart and Mind" in *Theatre: The Annual of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Volume One* (New York: Playbill, 1964), 52.

against the Soviet Union in the fight for supremacy, but also the culmination of a process of evolution that had been underway for some time. Refrains of cultural maturity had echoed throughout Lincoln Center's development and would continue to be sung as the theater evolved from concept to producing organization. But, as Whitehead and Kazan would soon learn, those refrains would not be enough to define the theater's identity or to convince critics of the theater's worth.

Incorporation

Sometime in the summer of 1959, Whitehead proposed to Kazan a fifty-fifty partnership in the artistic leadership of the Repertory Theater. Kazan accepted the position on September 2, 1959, but his acceptance came with a caveat. He told Whitehead that he would be willing to compromise on any number of things to be dealt with as they came up, but that there was "only one piece of understanding that I have to have with you before I start. . . . So now I'll spell out the one thing that is of great concern to me. And I'll do so by making a suggestion."[206] He suggested that the Repertory Theater remain unaffiliated with the drama department of the Juilliard School, which was to be led by Michel St. Denis, and that the Actors Studio be "attached" to the Repertory Theater as the official actor-training arm of the company. Under this proposed arrangement, Strasberg would run the training studio but would have no leadership or executive role within the Repertory Theater.

Allowing Strasberg to head the Studio under the auspices of the Repertory Theater would mitigate the risk that St. Denis would exert undue influence on the acting company of the Repertory Theater, a concern that had nearly ended Kazan's relationship with the

[206] Kazan, *Selected Letters,* 410.

Repertory Theater five months earlier, when he had resigned his position on the advisory board after learning of St. Denis's likely appointment as the head of the drama department at Juilliard. Kazan believed that St. Michel's approach to acting, which placed tremendous emphasis on external style, was anathema to the idea of an American repertory theater and feared that his leadership of the Juilliard School would taint the acting company of the Repertory Theater.

If the Repertory Theater was to be a distinctly American theater, Kazan insisted, it must resist the temptation to turn over the training of its actors to a European teacher, a decision that seemed to him "not only deplorable but even tragic."[207] The Method, according to Kazan, defined American theater and "[sprang] from our national temperament—the nature of our people."[208] As far as Kazan was concerned, the Repertory Theater, if he was to lead it, should be free of the influence of St. Denis, who would, he feared, drain the company of a distinctly American character. Whitehead did not appear to support Kazan's proposal to attach the Actors Studio to the Repertory Theater, but Kazan, despite his misgivings about St. Denis's leadership of drama at Juilliard, accepted the offer to join Whitehead as the co-director of the theater, which was officially incorporated in February 1960.

When Lincoln Center announced the incorporation of the Repertory Theatre Association in February 1960, the *New York Times* proclaimed its confidence that this new theater company, despite the obstacles that surely lay ahead, would ultimately find success. "With the same patience and dedication as has been manifested by the other constituents in

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[207] Elia Kazan to John D. Rockefeller 3rd, April 28, 1959. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center records, Box 262, Folder 1.

[208] Ibid.

Lincoln Center," the *Times* predicted, "success seems bound to be its reward."[209] The announcement in the *Times* only vaguely alluded to the theater's programming plans, mentioning only Whitehead's assertion that "the life of the theatre is in its new work. We must do new plays along with American revivals and classical works."[210] A great deal of work lay ahead in the establishment of a clear artistic policy and organizational structure for the theater, but the most senior leadership of the company had now been installed. Serving as president of the corporation would be George Woods, a banking executive and chairman of the First Boston Corporation. Whitehead, as had been expected, assumed leadership as the producer and Elia Kazan joined him as co-producer and artistic director.

Shortly after the announcement of its incorporation, the theater's public relations director, Barry Hyams, wrote to Robert Whitehead to "express the importance of press representation for the Repertory Theatre from this time forward," urging Whitehead to take control of the narrative of the theater's evolution. "The need arises," he wrote, "to shape this identity in the public mind and to create a positive and sustained attitude toward the Repertory Theatre."[211] Hyams understood that the theater's association with Lincoln Center exposed it to greater scrutiny than a stand-alone repertory theater would ever receive. More importantly, he understood that if Whitehead and Kazan did not make a concerted effort to establish the theater's identity in the public imagination, there were plenty of other people who would do it for them. Perhaps Hyams had recalled that two years earlier Vivian

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[209] "Repertory Theatre." *New York Times,* February 17, 1960. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Memo from Barry Hyams to Robert Whitehead, April 2, 1960. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 261, folder 7.

Beaumont Allen had expressed her "cherished hope that our country might one day have a national theatre comparable in distinction and achievement to the Comedie Francaise."[212] From a public relations standpoint, such comparisons risked shaping a particular identity in the public mind before the theater's leadership could establish its direction themselves. Now was the time for the theater's leaders to begin to give the public an idea of what they had in mind.

Whitehead and Kazan, heeding the advice of their public relations director, made their first extensive public remarks about their vision for the theater on April 17, 1960 in an interview with Maurice Zolotow of the *New York Times*. Zolotow called their decision to leave the commercial theater behind for Lincoln Center "the first seismic tremor in what may prove to be a great earthquake in the American theatre, comparable to the effect of the Theater Guild during the Nineteen Twenties or the Group Theatre during the Nineteen Thirties."[213] Kazan and Whitehead, although careful never to explicitly evoke these other companies, described their own organization as an endeavor sharing similar aims. In terms of repertoire, each season would, according to Whitehead, include two new American plays, two classical European revivals, and one "revival of an American classic, or an O'Neill play or Thornton Wilder, perhaps."[214] Kazan emphasized that the theater, despite its intent to mount productions of classics, would do so only for works that seemed relevant in contemporary terms and that such productions would be mounted in an "exciting way."

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[212] Ira Henry Freeman. "Woman Gives Lincoln Sq. Center 3 Million for Repertory Theatre." *New York Times (1923-Current File),* May 05, 1958.

[213] Maurice Zolotow. "Whitehead and Kazan Strategy." *New York Times,* April 17, 1960. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[214] Ibid.

Liberation of the artist from the frenetic pace of the Broadway production process would, Kazan and Whitehead proclaimed, facilitate the lofty programming goals of the new theater company. Rehearsal periods would last not two and a half weeks but, insisted Kazan, "as long as a play needs it—three months, six, months, yes, even eight months," much like the Group Theater had done with its famously long periods of exploration and rehearsal.

In articulating the theater's strategy, Whitehead adopted a cool, even-keeled tone, limiting his commentary primarily to questions of repertoire and the physical theater space, so it fell to Kazan to articulate the theater's purpose. Kazan spoke emphatically about the vitality he hoped the new theater would bring about, "excitedly describ[ing] a theatre of color and spectacle, of mobility in the use of stage dynamics, of a utilization of the arts of the painter, the singer, the choreographer, the pantomimist."[215] The Repertory Theater, Kazan implied, would not only present works unlikely to receive production on Broadway, but would push the very boundaries of production techniques. Kazan intended, he said, to "make a theatre that is interesting, exciting, vital to us in contemporary terms. . . . There is a dearth of ideas about life, about morality and there is a dearth of theatricality, of emotionalism, if you like. We want to be more theatrical—not less—than the commercial theatre."[216] Exactly how it would be more theatrical than the commercial theater remained to be clearly explained. Kazan somehow managed to be simultaneously evocative and vague in his descriptions, evoking a theater unlike anything ever seen before on the one hand, but on the other failing to offer any specific details about how he would accomplish this. This tension between impassioned rhetoric and meagre substance characterized many of his public and

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

private statements during the early part of his tenure at Lincoln Center, and the impression that emerges is of a man trying to convince himself as much as anyone else, an impression confirmed by the events of the coming years and Kazan's own reflections on those events.

Meanwhile, the policy announcement swiftly drew fire from critics who felt that the appointment of a management team who had built their careers in the commercial theater was an outright betrayal of the very idea of a repertory theater, which was meant to be an alternative to the hit-flop commercial producing model. Robert Brustein was particularly hostile toward the Kazan and Whitehead administration and scoffed at the statements they made in the *Times*. "One may wonder—when it is commercialism that is debasing our theatre—why the Lincoln Center project was handed over to two men who up till now have shown no great interest in any other system."[217] Kazan and Whitehead's proposed emphasis on new plays from leading American writers was, in Brustein's view, a mistake in terms of emphasis. He argued that the "repertory fever" sweeping the country grew out of the realization that "America will never develop a satisfactory dramatic tradition until it can develop a unified company with plenty of rehearsal time and a vigorous, intelligent, and continuous artistic policy."[218] Kazan's longstanding association with the Actors Studio suggested to Brustein that one of the main problems facing the American theater, the lack of "histrionic range" of American Method-trained actors, would only be exacerbated under the leadership of Kazan who would likely draw his actors from the ranks of the Actors Studio.

Tyrone Guthrie also argued that a national repertory theater "should not indulge in the highly speculative business of producing new work." He argued that instead the commercial

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[217] Robert Brustein. *Seasons of Discontent: Dramatic Opinions 1959-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 218.

[218] Ibid., 210.

theater "could still reward success in this field so richly that the responsibility can still be left to private enterprise. Moreover, private enterprise affords to new authors a more catholic taste and more competitive terms than does an institution," which should instead work to keep "a selection of Great Masterpieces constantly in view."[219] Although Guthrie had made these remarks two years earlier when the news of the repertory theater first broke, his and Brustein's arguments represent the views of many contemporary proponents of repertory. While there might be room in a repertory theater for the new works by "leading playwrights," critics seemed to fall into one of two camps. In one camp were the intellectual theatrical press who believed that a repertory theater should take advantage of its subsidy not only to present works unsuitable for Broadway, but that those works should adventurously explore the limits of theatrical practice. Brustein even went so far as to suggest that an organization like the Living Theater would be a more appropriate choice to assume the theater constituency at Lincoln Center.[220] Others, like Guthrie, saw a repertory theater not as an outlet for experimentation but as a repository of sorts for great works. Whichever camp critics fell into, one thing was relatively clear. Kazan did not align with either of these visions, and he knew it.

Looking back years later, Kazan admitted that he had misgivings about taking the position in the first place. "Although I'd often proclaimed that repertory was the only kind of theatre I believed in," he wrote, "I doubt very much if I was enthusiastic about fathering the day-to-day life of a company of actors. The job would require a total devotion, near

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[219] Tyrone Guthrie. "Ten Best for a Repertory Theatre." *New York Times,* November 9, 1958. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[220] Robert Brustein, *Seasons of Discontent,* 251.

fanaticism. I didn't have that."[221] Feeling honor-bound to stay with the project, he determined that he would do his best to make it work, but he felt trepidation every step of the way. In September 1960, he wrote a lengthy letter to Whitehead laying out many of his convictions about the direction in which he felt the theater should move. On the surface, the letter seems like an impassioned rallying cry shared with a collaborator. However, a close look at the letter in the context of the surrounding circumstances suggests a certain amount of duplicity at work and that the letter was motivated less by conviction than by hesitation.

After listing all the reasons why a repertory theater was likely doomed to failure in New York, Kazan wrote, "There's no reason to do this whole bloody thing. Is there? . . . Unless," he wrote, ". . . it's exhilarating! Unless it's an adventure, unless it fills us with the sense that we're making the impossible come to be . . . and unless the result, in a word, is Art."[222] In addition to insisting that it must be an ART THEATRE—a phrase that appears in all capital letters twice in close succession—Kazan argued for a socially relevant theatre:

> I think we should be a social Theatre. I don't mean this in the narrow sense of the Thirties (although I'd prefer that to our own theatre). To put it another way, it should be a thematic Theatre. It should be a Theatre of Themes. Each play, each production should say something. I want us to do comedies, musicals, fantasies, pantomimes, childrens [sic] plays, as well as tragedies and dramas—but I don't want to do anything unless something in the core of the play or the production-to-be is STIRRING to me. I want to become the centre [sic] of a Group of Contemporary

[221] Elia Kazan, *A Life*, 586

[222] Kazan, *Selected Letters,* 428.

American Artists: playwrights, directors, designers, actors technicians all of whom think of the Theatre as a cause.[223]

This same fervent tone runs through most of this letter and one cannot help but feel that the passion is somewhat forced; at times the letter feels more as though it is meant for publication than as a communiqué between colleagues.

Kazan also reopened the subject of the Actors Studio, making another pitch to formally attach the Studio to the Repertory Theater. He proposed putting Strasberg in charge of the Repertory Theater's actor-training program issued an ultimatum to Whitehead: If Whitehead would not agree to attach the Actors Studio to the Repertory Theater and if the two organizations were to remain separate, Kazan would stay on at the Actors Studio—rather than accepting Whitehead's offer to lead the Repertory Theater—and only direct the occasional play at Lincoln Center. Closing the letter, Kazan said, "I think we must see if we do agree on these concrete, specific fundamental points of departure." If they discovered that they were not in accord, he said, Kazan would "resign as co-whatever-I am and I will be open to invitations to direct a show for you your first season."[224]

By the time he wrote this letter in 1960, Kazan had already admitted to himself that he wished that he had never agreed to join the Lincoln Center project, but he realized he had to see it through, recalling later, "if I could have found an honorable way out, I would have taken it."[225] Kazan's ultimatum was almost certainly an attempt to create such an "honorable" escape from the project. Considering that Kazan knew of Whitehead's hostility toward Strasberg and the Actors Studio, he seems to be inviting Whitehead to ask for his

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[223] Ibid., 429.

[224] Ibid., 433.

[225] Kazan, *A Life,* 596.

resignation. No such request was forthcoming, however, and it does not appear that Whitehead ever responded, at least in writing, to Kazan's ultimatum.

Honestly, Baby, Isn't It Time?

Now locked into the Lincoln Center project with no escape in sight, Kazan worked at lining up playwrights to contribute work to the theater. In June 1961, he wrote an impassioned letter to Tennessee Williams, urging him to give Lincoln Center a play. Kazan conceded that writing for the Repertory Theater would not offer Williams anywhere near the remuneration he could expect from a Broadway hit, but the Repertory Theater could "make of you a living playwright in the sense that Brecht is a living playwright in East Berlin."[226] He urged Williams to turn his back on the commercial theater and write for an institution where he could be more daring. "Honestly, baby, isn't it time," he chided Williams. "Most everyone experiments when they're young, but the real good ones, Picasso, Michelangelo, Chaplin and Goya experiment when they have their full gift."[227] Kazan tried to seduce Williams with the promise of that the Lincoln Center theater would avoid the traps of previous repertory groups that had died from "asphyxiation in the dust of worthiness" and that the theater's physical plant would be equipped to realize Williams' wildest imagery. He implored Williams to give the theater "a difficult [play], an impossible one, a truthful one, a painful, honest, uncompromising one, all personal statement, all inconvenience, all untraditional, all uncommercial. We can put wonder back in the corpse of our Theatre."[228] If Kazan was to be believed, he was presenting Williams with a theater that he could call his

[226] Kazan, *Selected Letters,* 444.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid., 445.

own where his plays "will be kept alive and revered."[229] Although Williams expressed some initial interest, he ultimately turned down the offer from Kazan.

Despite his assertion that he planned to push the boundaries of theatrical production at Lincoln Center, Kazan trod familiar territory in his search for contributing playwrights, approaching former collaborators like Clifford Odets and William Inge. The first play he secured for the theater's inaugural season was a play by Broadway veteran S.N. Behrman, *But for Whom Charlie,* which had originally been optioned for a Broadway production by Whitehead, who had asked Kazan to direct it. According to Behrman, the Broadway production of the play had been sidelined by Kazan's film commitments, but once planning for Lincoln Center was underway, Kazan suggested to Behrman that the play might be appropriate for the Repertory Theater. Behrman, although impressed by Whitehead's ambitious plans for the Repertory Theater, hesitated to commit to a non-commercial production, but Kazan persisted, finally cornering Behrman at a state dinner at the White House on May 11, 1962.[230] "I don't know whether it was the general excitement of the evening, the anticipation of presently meeting the President and First Lady, or Mr. Kazan's ignescent personality that made me suddenly feel that this was the only destiny for me and my play," Behrman recalled. "I said 'yes.' It was probably the first theatrical deal ever

[229] Ibid., 444.

[230] "Lindberghs Attend Gala Dinner at White House." *Los Angeles Times,* May 12, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

consummated in the White House."[231] Within a few weeks, Behrman and the Repertory Theater finalized the deal, which the *Times* reported on May 29, 1962.[232]

The press seems to have had little to say about Behrman's selection at the time, although many critics would come down hard on the play once it premiered, lambasting it as frivolous and more suited to Broadway than a prestigious repertory theater. Behrman himself made no bones about the fact that he was not a "proletarian writer" but rather he "[wrote] plays about people who are fairly intelligent" and was "interested in what problems afflict mature and intelligent people. I think they have problems, too. I think they suffer, too."[233] No doubt Vivian Beaumont Allen, the vivacious philanthropist herself, would have been first on line to buy a ticket had she lived to see its opening.

While Kazan worked to woo Behrman, Whitehead was dispatched to meet with Arthur Miller in his room at the Chelsea Hotel, where he asked Miller if he would write a play to open the Repertory Theater. Whitehead naturally had concerns about whether Miller would be able to work with Kazan after their public break over the HUAC proceedings. Miller had not changed his opinion that Kazan's testimony "had disserved both himself and the cause of freedom," but the moral question confronting Miller was "whether his political stance and even moral defection, if one liked, should permanently bar him from working in the theatre, especially this particular kind of publicly supported theatre."[234] Miller believed

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[231] S. N. Behrman, "Introduction" in *Theatre: The Annual of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Volume One* (New York: Playbill, 1964), *ix.*

[232] "Repertory Group to Perform in '63." *New York Times,* May 29, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[233] John Simon. "John Simon: S.N. Behrman—A Dialogue" in *Theatre: The Annual of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Volume One* (New York: Playbill, 1964), 36.

[234] Arthur Miller, *Timebends* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 529.

that refusing to work with Kazan would put him on the same moral footing as those who had promulgated the blacklisting and persecution during the McCarthy era. From a professional and artistic point of view, "to reject [Kazan]," Miller recalled, "was to reject the hope for a national theatre in this time."[235] Miller agreed to give the play on which he was working—*After the Fall*—to the theater and he began to accelerate the pace so that he could finish it in time for opening about a year hence. It is unclear exactly when Whitehead approached Miller, but the initial meeting most likely happened sometime in the late summer or early fall of 1962. The *Times* reported Miller's commitment on October 26, 1962. Whitehead expressed his and Kazan's "immense enthusiasm" and said, "Arthur Miller has taken an important step in helping establish the purpose of the Lincoln repertory company."[236] Having secured a new play from a leading American playwright, the Repertory Theater had taken an important step in establishing its prestige. Meanwhile, Kazan and Whitehead had begun the work of building the acting company.

A King or a Brooklyn Cab Driver

In September 1962, almost exactly a year after Kazan's "final offer" to Strasberg, thirty-five actors—twenty-one men and fourteen women—all under the age of twenty-five, convened for the first time in the Carnegie Hall studio that would house the Repertory Theater's training program.[237] According to a press release from the Repertory Theater, the training program aimed "to establish and teach an approach to style for the American actor

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[235] Ibid., 530.

[236] Milton Esterow, "Miller Is Writing Play for Center." *New York Times,* October 26, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[237] Lewis Funke, "Training Plans for Actors Begun: Lincoln Repertory Company to Start Sessions Monday." *New York Times,* September 29, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

faced with the varied requirements of a repertory consisting of classics, revivals and contemporary plays." Whitehead called the gathering the "first step toward actual performance." The actors would undergo an intensive eight-month training program, after which fifteen of the twenty-five trainees would be invited to join the repertory company alongside more senior and established actors. As the Repertory Theater began to occupy more and more column inches in the press, the selection of the more senior actors came under scrutiny, and many critics suggested that Kazan's history with the Actors Studio would likely result in a company drawn from its ranks, thereby severely limiting the range of the company. Although the inner turmoil surrounding the involvement of the Actors Studio had been settled, Kazan and Whitehead would continue to be on the defensive as they rolled out their plans regarding the acting company.

In the months leading up to the start of actor training, Whitehead kept mum about the actors who might fill the ranks of the repertory company at Lincoln Center. Lewis Funke ribbed Whitehead in the *Times* for the apparent laryngitis that seemed to kick in when Whitehead was asked to confirm meetings with notable actors under consideration. Funke reported in January 1962, "it has been clear to patrols and intelligence agents that intense activity has been in progress looking toward the formation of the company for the Vivian Beaumont Theatre to be erected in the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts."[238] Among the actors sighted entering and leaving Whitehead's West Forty-Sixth Street offices were Christopher Plummer, Geraldine Page, Anne Bancroft, Mildred Dunnock, Pat Hinkle, Jason Robards, Eli Wallach, Karl Malden, Hume Cronyn, among others. Many of the actors with

[238] Lewis Funke, "News of the Rialto: Lincoln Repertory." *New York Times,* January 28, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

whom Whitehead reportedly met were affiliated with the Actors Studio, alarming many critics.

Whitney Bolton of the *New York Morning Telegraph,* for example, wrote that the revelation that so many Studio actors were under consideration diminished what limited hope he might have had for the repertory theater's ability to live up to its promise. Like Brustein, who had argued two years earlier that the Method was "the worst possible training grounds for a repertory actor,"[239] Bolton believed that relying on Studio actors would impede the range of works that could be adequately presented by the company, and went so far as to argue that Kazan seemed "so narrow a director that he [felt] secure only with Studio people." Bolton, who characterized himself as "one critic who often enough has been dismayed by Studio techniques," saw something even more pernicious than Kazan's potential artistic limitations at play, and suggested that Whitehead and Kazan were "deliberately creating a closed corporation cozily assembled around their mostly Studio favorites." Bolton, clearly not a devotee of the Studio, would likely have scoffed at Kazan's assertions to Rockefeller and Whitehead that the Method was a defining characteristic of what made American theater unique, as he believed that limiting the roster to Studio alumni would essentially disenfranchise the vast majority of American actors while preventing the Repertory Theater from achieving the artistic stature worthy of a national theater. As he saw it, the Studio and the Method represented a narcissistic sect of the American theater more concerned with self-indulgence than with serving the needs and desires of American audiences. "Make way for the mumblers, the actors with small regard for traditional obligation to audiences," he wrote. "Make way for a cult that already has done much damage to the American theatre. At

[239] Robert Brustein, *Seasons of Discontent,* 213.

Lincoln Center, apparently, the cult has found its temple and the professional theatre has found a locked door."[240] Bolton was one of many critics who expressed concern that the influence of the Method could work against the aspirations of a repertory theater, and so the Repertory Theater would have to work to ensure that not only were they working to train their actors to meet the demands of repertory but also that they communicated those efforts clearly to the public.

At Kazan's urging, Whitehead had agreed to engage Robert Lewis, a Group Theater alumnus, to lead the training program. Knowing that Whitehead viewed the Method skeptically and admired Michel St. Denis's approach to teaching style, Kazan and Lewis worked to convince Whitehead that Lewis could deliver the training that the young actors needed. In late 1960, Lewis wrote to Whitehead and attempted to assuage Whitehead's misgivings. Lewis echoed Kazan's objections to Michel St. Denis's emphasis on the "outside in" approach to acting. However, he was careful to assure Whitehead that he understood the necessity of technical training in conjunction with the emotional truth that the Method's training techniques fostered. "Certainly, it is to be hoped," he argued to Whitehead, "that this time more than lip service will be paid to the desperate need for daily intensive study in all the means of the actors' expressivity. . . . However, the training and development of the actors' true inner feelings to fill up this sense of form with life is fundamental."[241] Lewis promised Whitehead that he would develop a training program to equip actors with the

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[240] Whitney Bolton, "Why 'Studio Group at Lincoln Center? Other Professional Talent Available." *New York Morning Telegraph,* January 31, 1962. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Clippings file.

[241] Robert Lewis to Robert Whitehead, November 28, 1960. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 265, Folder 11.

technical capabilities necessary to tackle the demands of rotating repertory while ensuring that the vitality and truth derived from the Method would not be sacrificed.

Kazan and Lewis, in the public rolling out of the training program, carefully downplayed the influence of the Method and emphasized the intensive technical training the actors would undergo. Addressing the actors in the training program on that first day, Lewis told the assembled students, "We believe in true feeling, but if we are to have a genuine repertory company we must extend the range of the actors."[242] Whitehead, Kazan, and Lewis worked carefully to conjure in the public mind the image of an actor defined by poise, flair, and technique as opposed to the image of the stereotypical Method actor too self-involved to worry himself about something so trivial as being heard or understood by an audience. Lewis insisted to the assembled actors—and to the public via the press release recounting this first day—that his training program would "provide the actor with the best of both schools—the 'all inside,' and the 'all outside' –so that he will be able to play a king, as well as a Brooklyn cab driver.'"[243] In other words, the emotional truth of the Method would occupy a central position, but the repertory trainees would be well prepared to tackle the elevated works expected of a national repertory theater.

Kazan used the training program's kick off as the occasion to publish his first extensive public statements about his vision for the theater since the April 1960 joint interview with Whitehead. In an article entitled "Theater: New Stages, New Plays, New Actors," Kazan emphasized the importance of the actors to the theater's vision, writing, "It is perfectly obvious that the program of a repertory theater is something that is not sympathetic

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[242] Robert Lewis. "A Director's Credo." New York Times, December 9, 1962, p. 53

[243] "Lincoln Repertory Company – Training Program Opens Sessions in Preparation for 1963 Season" (Press Release). Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center Records, Clippings File.

to all actors nor even to most actors. It is equally obvious that most actors are not technically prepared and trained to play repertory." He went on to say, "It is shocking and dismaying how untrained many of our stage stars are, how narrow their vocal range, how provincial their speech, how inept their bodies." The training at Lincoln Center would address these deficiencies and would work to move beyond the kind of work generated at the Actors Studio. Kazan explicitly mentioned the Studio in the article, noting that his "greatest disappointment" with the Studio's work was that it never transcended the "preoccupation with the purely psychological side of acting."[244] Despite his acknowledgement of the importance of the Studio's contributions to the theater, Kazan clearly made an intentional and explicit public break with the Studio with the publication of this article in the *Times.* Not only did he have to hit back against criticisms that his Studio and Method background was antithetical to repertory, but he also had to make it clear in the public mind that he was no longer affiliated with the Actors Studio.[245]

After eight months of training, Kazan and Whitehead invited fourteen of the thirty actors in the program to join the repertory company. Kazan met with members of the training program on April 29, 1963 either to offer them a position in the company or to send them on their way. Kazan offered most of the chosen actors two-and-a-half year contracts, and told most that they were not guaranteed roles. In many cases, he also made a point of compelling the actors to declare their commitment to stay with the company and not abandon ship should commercial theater or movie offers come in. In his notes, he recounted his meeting with

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[244] Elia Kazan, "Theater: New Stages, New Plays, New Actors." *New York Times*, September 23, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[245] Kazan retired from the Actors Studio board of directors when, in May 1962, the Studio announced its intention to create its own producing unit.

Faye Dunaway, in which he told her that she would almost certainly be getting movie offers and "we weren't interested in having her unless she wanted nothing but this." Dunaway replied that a position in the repertory company was "all in the world she wanted."[246] Of those actors not chosen for the company—including a young Frank Langella, whose rejection was "the hardest one" for Kazan—most seemed, according to Kazan, to take the news relatively well despite some tears from a few.

However, one cannot help but notice a hint of sexism running through Kazan's commentary. Kazan described many of the rejected men as taking it hard or being disappointed, but he described the women's reactions in stark emotional terms. Of actress Gail Fisher, he wrote, "Came in hostile. Said that it was a corrupt world and, therefore, our class was corrupt. . . . I had no respect for her reaction." A young actress named Gretchen Walther complained that Robert Lewis expressed hostility because he "[didn't] like girl girls and, therefore, she had great difficulty working in this atmosphere of antagonism and scorn or whatever. Then she burst into tears. . . . The meeting confirmed the impression that I had that she has a very slight talent if any."[247] It is impossible to know whether Kazan's assessment regarding the "slight talent" of Walther or the hostility of Fisher were valid, but it seems worth noting that he recounted his meetings with women in a much more visceral way than the meetings with the men of the company. While this could be chalked up to a clear trend of misogyny that characterized much of Kazan's personal life, it also seems likely that the harshness visited upon these women in the notes on his meeting at least subconsciously served to bolster his attempts to appear objective when recounting the meeting with the

[246] Actor Training Program Meeting Notes, April 29, 1963. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 265, Folder 11.

[247] Ibid.

actress whom he claimed to have criticized most harshly—Barbara Loden, who was accepted into the company and would become the breakout star after playing the leading role in *After the Fall.*

By the time of these meetings in April 1963, Kazan and Loden had been romantically involved for five years, and she had given birth to Kazan's son Leo. Recounting his meeting with Loden, Kazan reported that he had been "very rough with her on her voice. Told her she hadn't made nearly enough progress. Whitehead and Kazan agreed to talk to her each separately about this again. Kazan feels Whitehead especially would have influence over her in this regard."[248] His account of this meeting with Loden was the only one in which he spoke of himself in the third person, and the only one in which he leveled such a specific and harsh criticism at an actor. One can almost imagine him winking at Loden while berating her in front of Whitehead and Lewis. But what is particularly interesting about his attempt to demonstrate impartiality toward Loden—despite the fact that by now their romantic entanglement was all but common knowledge—is that she had already surfaced as the leading contender for the role of Maggie in *After the Fall.* In late December 1961, ten months before the training program even began, Loden, days away from giving birth to Leo, met with Miller and read for the role of Maggie, and it was clear to both men that they had found their leading lady. Nonetheless, Loden went through the training program like everyone else and was given a two year contract at a weekly salary of $350, making her one of the most highly compensated among the company.[249]

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[248] Ibid.

[249] The majority of the repertory company earned less than $200 a week, while the top salary of $800 a week went to Jason Robards and David Wayne. Hal Holbrook and Ralph Meeker earned the second highest salary of $700 a week. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, Box 254, Folder 3.

The month before the announcement of the selection of the ensemble, the *Times* announced that Jason Robards had joined the company. Robards agreed to appear in four plays over the course of two years. Among his assignments were the leading roles in *After the Fall* and *But for Whom, Charlie.* A bona fide Broadway star, Robards would help lend the Repertory Theater star power, while reinforcing the importance of the venture to the health of American theater. "I feel I have to do it," he said; "it's not for the money I assure you."[250] Just like Miller, Behrman, Kazan, and Whitehead, Robards could earn substantially more money on the commercial stage, but by joining the repertory company, he sent a clear signal that the Repertory Theater would help counter the "disintegrating state of the theater."[251] And so now, three years after its incorporation, the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center had secured two original plays, put together an ensemble and landed a prominent leading man to head up the repertory company. When rehearsals began in October 1963, there was, it seemed, much to be excited about.

The Great American Company

Expectations were naturally high as rehearsals began. A permanent company comprised of veteran performers and promising newcomers was to be directed by the most influential contemporary director in a new play by Arthur Miller. Miller was optimistic that the freedom from the financial pressures of Broadway would allow the company to "work a change in the theater; it's the spirit of the play again instead of the motive for personal success," he said. "I feel we can build a permanent voice with the repertory company. The

[250] Louis Calta, "Robards to Join Repertory Group. *New York Times,* April 27, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[251] Ibid.

only value involved will be the play itself and the expansion of the actors' techniques."[252] Everyone from Kazan to the unknown young ensemble actors echoed Miller's refrain of freedom from the commercial excesses of Broadway, and embraced the opportunity to enjoy the stability and continuity of working in a permanent company.

By all accounts, the atmosphere in those early days of rehearsal was one of exuberance and anticipation. William Goyen, a writer-in-residence on a Ford Foundation grant, spent several months observing rehearsals and published his reflections in *Show* magazine. He recalled that in those early days, actors spoke "with the tone of relief and reinvigoration of people who have been saved from something. . . . Here it was at last, they were saying, the Great American Company. Now they would live together and work together and make a community."[253] Many of the actors expressed their gratitude and excitement over being able to devote themselves to their work without worry about what would happen if the production folded due to poor ticket sales. Ensemble member James Greene told a reporter, "Here for the first time, an actor gives his complete attention to what he is doing. He's not thinking about TV or about anything else. Each actor feels, 'Now I have two years to apply myself.'"[254] But the euphoria in which so many of the actors reveled was to be short-lived.

As Goyen tells it, the mood in the rehearsal shifted rather quickly as tensions mounted within the company. Goyen suggested that the weight of the plays, *After the Fall* and O'Neill's *Marco Millions,* which was to be the second play in the repertory lineup,

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[252] Louis Calta, "Arthur Miller Conducts Reading for His Lincoln Repertory Play." *New York Times,* October 25, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[253] Goyen, William. "After the Fall of a Dream: A Behind-the-Curtain Report on What Went Wrong with Lincoln Center Repertory." *Show* 4,8 (Sept. 1964), 44-47, 86-89, 45.

[254] Sandra Hochman, "Twenty-Five Ways of Looking at a Company" in *Theatre: The Annual of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center* (New York: Playbill, Inc., 1964), 90.

overtook the cast. Miller's play, said Goyen, seemed to be a "portrait of self-pity, maudlin self-concern, immense self-aggrandizement. But the people caught in the deepening relationships and realities of the characters in this world of Miller's were shadowed by it. Barbara Loden was three times trying to leave the play."[255] To make matters worse, Robards disappeared for a days-long bender in November, buckling under the pressure of the enormous role of Quentin and likely reacting negatively to the realization that he was likely to be overshadowed by Loden's performance.[256] When Robards returned, nobody said a word about his disappearance, according to Goyen. Any relief the company felt over his return was quickly overshadowed, for Robards had returned to rehearsals on November 22, 1963. Rehearsals broke for the day upon receiving word of President Kennedy's assassination, but the company was back at work at the next day. Kazan recalled the company being utterly devastated by the news. Their grief was only compounded when, three weeks later, Kazan's wife Molly suffered an aneurism and died. Rehearsals were suspended for a few days until Kazan returned to the rehearsal studio, obviously weakened by the experience. The company pulled together and continued to work toward the January opening of *After the Fall,* which as we will see received a relatively favorable critical response. But the time the play opened, a cloud seemed to hang over the company. Adding to the sense of gloom was the danger that Whitehead and Kazan had begun to sense lurked in the boardroom.

Oaths of Vengence

By the time rehearsals began in October 1963, Kazan and Whitehead had already lost the faith of some members of the theater's board of directors, who believed Kazan and

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[255] Goyen, "After the Fall of a Dream," 46.

[256] Richard Schickel, *Elia Kazan: A Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 408.

Whitehead had demonstrated questionable artistic and administrative judgment. Whitehead in particular had raised the ire of some of the board members—and that of George Woods, the president of the Repertory Theater—through his solution to a major logistical challenge facing the company. Although his downfall was still a year off, it was this decision that can fairly be viewed as his tragic mistake. In early 1962, Whitehead and Kazan learned that the Vivian Beaumont Theater, because of construction delays, would not be ready until late 1964, a full year later than the originally scheduled opening. Waiting for the Beaumont's completion could cause the company to lose the plays they had commissioned from Behrman and Miller.[257] In addition, the Beaumont's delayed opening date would coincide with the 1964 World's Fair, and Whitehead felt it important that the Repertory's opening not be overshadowed by such a high-profile event.[258] It seemed clear to Whitehead that the company would need to find an alternative venue to present their first season. Whitehead presented this idea for the first time in May 1962, when "after a week of intensive discussions with the center's executive board, the repertory theatre's producing directors—Robert Whitehead and Elia Kazan—were given the approval and necessary financial support to take the step."[259] Whitehead claimed that the plan for an alternative venue "had been endorsed enthusiastically by George D. Woods,"[260] but even if Woods did support the plan initially, which seems unlikely, he clearly changed his mind soon enough.

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[257] Louis Calta, "Lincoln Troupe to Get Its Tent: Company and ANTA Settle Rent for Temporary Home." *New York Times*, April 23, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[258] Arthur Gelb. "Repertory Group to Perform in '63: Lincoln Center Unit Seeks a Stage While Awaiting Beaumont Theatre." *New York Times*, May 29, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid.

At first, Whitehead intended to rent an existing theater that could be adapted to give the stage some of the characteristics of the Beaumont's thrust stage, but he and Kazan could not find a venue suitable to their needs. They instead devised a plan to construct a temporary structure, essentially a steel-framed tent, which would replicate the stage and seating arrangement of the Beaumont. Whitehead and Kazan had hoped initially that such a structure might be erected on the grounds of Lincoln Center on the site of the Juilliard School—construction of that building had not yet begun—but that proposal was rejected by Lincoln Center for largely aesthetic reasons, so the Repertory Theater would need to find another site. Woods bristled at the idea of erecting a new structure, saying he "found these ambitious plans financially disturbing and reported his concern to the Lincoln Center Executive Committee on January 30, 1963. Lincoln Center took a firm position that it could not help in financing such a building; the Repertory Theater would have to take full responsibility."[261] Woods so vociferously opposed the plan that he went so far as to tell the Lincoln Center Executive Committee in February 1963 that he had lost confidence in Whitehead.[262]

Things only got worse when Whitehead maneuvered around Lincoln Center's refusal to finance the theater's construction by successfully negotiating an arrangement with ANTA, which offered to invest $400,000 to build the temporary theater. George Stoddard, chancellor of New York University and a board member of Lincoln Center and the Repertory Theater, offered Whitehead a site on Washington Square.[263] Having secured the funding from an

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[261] Edgar Young. *Lincoln Center*, 243.

[262] Edgar Young, *Lincoln Center*, 243.

[263] Arthur Gelb, "Repertory Group Will Act in Tent." *New York Times*, April 3, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

outside investor, Whitehead convinced the board to approve construction of the theater. He had clearly—and publicly—defied Woods. "There was a gleam of triumph in Bob Whitehead's eye" recalled Kazan, "and George saw it. People don't take oaths of vengeance anymore, but if they did, George would have."[264]

Although no action was taken against Whitehead for the time being and although the Repertory Theater moved forward with its plans to erect the temporary theater downtown, the situation brought to the surface the tensions between the artistic direction and the administration. In Kazan's view, the acrimony grew directly from the issue of authority within the organization: "From the incident of the ANTA Washington Square Theatre, the issue became Who's boss? Who has the authority, the men with the money or the men with the theatre savvy to do the job?"[265] And so even before the curtain rose on the first production, it was clear that the artistic leadership was not likely to enjoy the unfettered freedom promised by the repertory ideal.

While Woods was incensed over Whitehead's administrative decisions, board member Eugene Black worried about the artistic direction the theater was taking. In an August 1963 letter, he voiced some of his concerns over the management of the theater to George Woods. Black was particularly concerned with play selection as well as the question of what limits should be placed on their artistic freedom. He questioned the wisdom of emphasizing new plays rather than more established works. While he supported the idea of Lincoln Center "eventually" fostering new writing, it was "not clear in [his] mind whether Lincoln Center should, at the beginning, emphasize new plays as opposed to a broad range of

[264] Elia Kazan, *A Life*, 689.

[265] Ibid.

good classical plays—classical in the sense of good modern writers as well." He also objected to the inclusion of *Marco Millions,* which he considered "O'Neill at his worst. . . . I, personally, would like to have seen them do one new play (the Miller play), one semi-modern (say, a Strindberg), and one old play (say, Elizabethan or Restoration)." Finally, he expressed his concern that both Kazan and Whitehead "might be stretching their right of 'artistic management' a little too far."[266] Black's letter to Woods did not convey any sense of hostility. Instead, he seems to have been making a genuine effort to arrive at an understanding of what the relationship between the artistic leadership and the board of directors should be. His biggest concern—and one that he would raise repeatedly—was the emphasis on new works. Far more important to him, and to many of his fellow board members, than artistic innovation was establishing the Repertory Theatre on equal footing in terms of prestige with the other organizations in Lincoln Center. He clearly had little tolerance for experimentation and uncertainty, valuing instead work that the theater could hold up as beacons of excellence. Whether Kazan and Whitehead's efforts would yield such work would become apparent once the Repertory Theater's season opened in January 1964.

Rejoice That a New Company Has Been Born

"Which to celebrate first?" asked Howard Taubman upon the opening of *After the Fall* on January 23, 1964. "The return of Arthur Miller to the theater with a new play after too long an absence? Or the arrival of the new Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center with its high promise for a consecration to drama of aspiration and significance?"[267] Taubman, ever

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[266] Eugene Black to George Woods, August 28, 1963. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

[267] Howard Taubman. "Theater: '*After the Fall'*: Arthur Miller's Play Opens Repertory." New York Times, January 24, 1964, 18.

the faithful cheerleader of the fledgling company, lauded what he saw as the promise of the acting ensemble, which seemed poised to grow into a true ensemble. The play was an artistic success in and of itself, according to Taubman, and it marked the birth of the Repertory Theater, also a cause for celebration. "Rejoice," he told his readers, "that Arthur Miller is back with a play worthy of his mettle. Rejoice also that a new company has been born committed to theater of consequence, not only the new but the old that New York so scandalously neglects."[268] John Chapman of the *Chicago Tribune* felt that the play got the Repertory Theater "off to an impressive start," and he hailed the performances of leading actors Jason Robards and Barbara Loden as "monumental." [269] The *Wall Street Journal* was not as enthusiastic, writing that the play was "an ambitious work, occasionally flashing with the talent we have come to expect of Mr. Miller. But its impact is far less than that of Mr. Miller at his best."[270] The overall reaction from the daily theatrical press was mixed but generally positive.

The more intellectual critics writing for the weeklies, however, savagely attacked the play. Richard Gilman saw in the play "everything inadequate, pretentious and self-serving in the life of our theatre." He went on to write, "A play, heralded with trumpets, which is not even the simulacrum of a drama, a troupe of professionals whose work would shame even the rawest of amateur spirits, an audience mesmerized and confirmed in its devotion to the lowest mystique of 'the theatre' to raw material in place of art and to personality instead of imaginative creation—such is Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* and its production by the

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[268] Ibid.

[90] John Chapman. "Miller's 'After the Fall' a Quest for Truth. *Chicago Tribune,* January 24, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune

[270]Richard P. Cooke. "Miller's Testament." *Wall Street Journal*. January 27, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

company that was to effect the redemption of our stage."[271] Robert Brustein called the play "a shameless piece of tabloid gossip, an act of exhibitionism which makes us all voyeurs."[272] Brustein found the play to be both in poor taste as well as poorly constructed, and he ridiculed the Repertory Theater for "institutionaliz[ing] the bankrupt Broadway vision in the fashionable culture emporium of Lincoln Center."[273] Even with mixed reviews, the play was successful at the box office, but the critical response was not what the board had hoped for.

The remainder of the season brought a generally lackluster critical response. A month after *After the Fall'*s opening, Eugene O'Neill's *Marco Millions* opened. Directed by Jose Quintero, the Repertory Theater's production marked the first revival of the play since a 1930 revival produced by the Theatre Guild. Although the critics were not especially harsh on the production, little enthusiasm could be detected in their response. Most critics made a respectful nod to the choice to revive a neglected play by the country's most revered playwright, but most also pointed out that the play was hardly one of O'Neill's best. The *Wall Street Journal* suggested a certain pretentiousness in the selection of the play, saying that it "emerge[d] as a sort of 'cultural event' rather than as a drama to stimulate or arouse."[274] Taubman praised the selection of the play and said that Quintero had "presided over a production full of theatrical flair."[275] The *Chicago Tribune's* John Chapman saw not

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[271] Richard Gilman. "Still Falling" in Common Masks and Uncommon Masks: Writings on Theatre—1961-1970. (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 152.

[272] Robert Brustein, "Arthur Miller's Mea Culpa" in *Seasons of Discontent* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 244

[273] Ibid., 247.

[274] Richard P. Cooke, "The Ugly Venetian." *Wall Street Journal,* February 24, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

[275] Howard Taubman, "O'Neill Revival: 'Marco Millions' Given by Repertory Troupe." *New York Times,* February 21, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

flair but rather "quite desperately stylized" direction, saying that Hal Holbrook "play[ed] Marco as if he were Douglas Fairbanks the Elder doing 'Robin Hood.'"[276] *Variety* also suggested that the play, in addition to being "overlong and progressively tiresome," exposed some weaknesses in the theater's acting troupe. The casting was "uneven" and some of the individual performances were "uncontrollable in several instances. The merits and faults of repertory casting are becoming more evident with added shows."[277] While the cast of *After the Fall* had been widely praised for their performances, it soon became clear that Kazan had made the mistake of selecting the company almost solely on its suitability for *After the Fall,* a problem that became even more apparent in the next production.

The third and final production to enter the first season's rotating repertory, Behrman's *But for Whom, Charlie,* opened on March 12, 1964 to a critical response that, although not hostile, was certainly not rapturous. Most reviewers offered some praise for Behrman's characteristically witty dialogue, but the play was perceived by most to be inconsequential at best. Taubman opened his review by praising the "good talk, amusing and rueful," as well as "some moments of glinting character." However, according to Taubman, "the spine of the play [was] soft. It [was] almost as if S.N. Behrman has spent all his energy and wisdom on certain thoughts pressing on his mind and has neglected not only the skeleton of his play but also a good deal of its flesh and blood." Critics were harsher on the production than on the play, many echoing Taubman's observation that the play, a conventional drawing room comedy, seemed much more suited to an intimate proscenium stage than the sprawling thrust

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[276] John Chapman, "Play, 'Marco Millions,' Is Still Heavy." *Chicago Tribune,* February 22, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune.

[277] Hobe. "Legitimate: Repertory Review – Marco Millions. *Variety,* February 26, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Variety.

of the ANTA Theater. *Variety* had kind words for the play itself but argued that it "suffer[ed] from the inadequacies of presentation. The trouble appears basic—the Lincoln Center group seems to lack the feeling for the play and the personnel to cast, stage or perform it to maximum effect." Although Kazan's "dynamic staging" had been crucial to the impact of *After the Fall,* his direction of the Behrman play '[gave] the impression of not having the proper deftness of touch for Behrman's suave and incisive writing. And since he is the artistic head of the organization, with authority in not only casting, but the selection of the company itself, he must take the major rap."[278] Kazan did not disagree, recalling later that he considered *Charlie* to be the first "fatal" mistake he made, as it "revealed [his] limitations as a director, who was clearly working outside of his range, and as the artistic leader of a theater."[279] With each of the plays having opened within weeks of each other, the increasingly negative reviews must have begun to feel like a pile-on. The Board of Directors, spooked by the press, summoned Whitehead and Kazan to a board meeting held on March 13, 1964, the day after the opening of *Charlie.*

Although the board expressed "complete confidence . . . in Messrs. Whitehead and Kazan's management of the affairs, both artistic and business of the Company," they sent a clear message that they were tightening the leash on both of them. Whitehead and Kazan agreed in the meeting that they would "review the past activities of the company, consider the areas in which mistakes were made and those in which successes were achieved, prepare

[278] Hobe. "Legitimate: Repertory Review – But for Whom Charlie." *Variety,* March 18, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[279] Kazan, *A Life,* 690.

plans for the future, and reduce their thoughts to writing for the benefit of the Board."[280] Clearly one place where mistakes had been made was in the programming. It seemed obvious that the intellectual press, which had been so critical of the first season's programming, heavily influenced the board's evaluation of the company's work.

A few weeks later, Kazan and Whitehead presented the written survey of their plans. They proposed a four-play line-up for the 1964-65 season, rather than three, as they felt they could more evenly distribute the talent of the company among four productions. Most of the plays they were considering would be "classics or contemporary European plays with classic qualities. All of them are costume pieces and the casting requirements are large. Thus it will probably be necessary for us to bring new members into the company, creating higher overhead on company costs." This approach to the programming marked an enormous departure from the first season and was almost certainly not the approach the two would have taken if left to their own devices. In reading the memo, one cannot help but detect a certain amount of passive aggression. "Okay, we'll present programming that might appease the critics," they seemed to be saying, "but you have to understand that it's going to cost more money." In the memo's summation, Kazan and Whitehead stressed their commitment to being mindful of the financial burdens of running the theater, but they reminded the board that no other repertory theater in the world had ever been self-supporting. Although most of the proposal had the tone of the genteel businessman that so characterized Whitehead, the last sentence, which calls for everyone to put their cards on the table, smacks of Kazan. "We have high hopes," they said. "We feel we have just made a start. We would like your ideas on

[280] Minutes, Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center Board of Directors Meeting, March 13, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 260, Folder 9.

all the above points. We are in the act now of planning our next two seasons. So this is the time for all of you, together or separately, officially or personally to say to us what you have to say."[281] The defiance of this last sentence seems to reflect the defensive posture in which Kazan and Whitehead found themselves in relation to the board.

By this time, Kazan doubted whether he could continue in his administrative role, and he had already begun to explore the possibility of stepping aside as co-producer and instead focusing solely on directing plays. No matter how noble a venture the Repertory Theater may have been, Kazan simply was not built to answer to executives and struggled to learn how to navigate those relationships. The week before he and Whitehead shared their proposal with the board, Kazan had a lunch meeting with Lincoln Center President Bill Schuman to discuss the problems facing the Repertory Theater. As Schuman saw the situation, a significant problem facing the company was the relationship of the artistic management of the Repertory Theater to its own board, a relationship Kazan and Whitehead needed to improve. "To my mind, many of the present problems that you have with the Repertory Theater in regard to management will be resolved if you will truly take advantage of the willingness of your Board of Directors to help you." Schuman felt that some of the problems facing the company stemmed from a lack of communication between management and directors. "Here I firmly believe," he said, "it is the responsibility of management to lead the organization in terms of the broad policies adopted by the Board. . . . I can think of no other form of checks and balances which could be devised to better this system."[282] The letter from Schuman to Kazan

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[281] *Survey of Plans for Next Season – Memo from Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead to the Members of the Board of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Inc.* April 4, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 260, Folder 8.

[282] William Schuman to Elia Kazan, April 6, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records.

summarizing their meeting does not capture anything Kazan might have said during the meeting, but it clearly indicates that Kazan was struggling with managing the institutional apparatus of Lincoln Center.

Already on the defensive internally, Kazan and Whitehead now had to turn their attention to defending the theater to the public. Although Taubman had shown quite a bit of forbearance in his reviews of the company's productions, he published a column the week after *Charlie* opened in which he said the theater must take a moment to reflect and think about what it wanted to accomplish. "The first season, despite its accomplishments, has left doubts," he wrote, "and the future is full of questions."[283] Taubman praised the theater for the simple fact that they had launched a repertory season in the face of challenging circumstances. However, he said that it was now necessary for the company to declare its mission and develop a clear policy. Clearly, Whitehead and Kazan needed to develop a strategy to address the criticisms being leveled at the theater. Barry Hyams shared Kazan and Whitehead's frustration over the barrage of criticisms being leveled against the Repertory Theater. "We have made no promises before we opened except that we would strive to establish a beachhead," he said to them in his proposed public relations plan. "We are being clobbered for not winning the war. Nevertheless, we exist. That is our achievement, and our victory." Hyams advocated a public relations approach that would emphasize the achievement of having established the Repertory Theater and remind the public that developing such an institution was an ongoing process. Therefore, "at the risk of sounding

[283] Howard Taubman, "Looking Ahead: After First Season, Center Company Must Reflect on Its Mission." *New York Times,* March 22, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

fatuous," he told Kazan, "dedication is our keynote."[284] He laid out an extensive public relations and publicity plan and admonished Kazan and Whitehead that it was imperative that they participate in interviews and publish by-line articles to defend the theater.

Kazan picked up the process mantle, and in an August editorial in the *New York Times* entitled "On Process," wrote the following:

> We know we're not there yet. We even know we'll never get 'there' because there is no 'there.' Success for us is not the broad public and critical acceptance of a single production. It is the creation of an institution and of its continuous program. We started as a process and our goal is a process. The ups and downs, the 'successes' and the 'failures' are equally part of it.[285]

Kazan acknowledged that the theater had made several missteps along the way, but he also alluded to the hypocrisy of those who criticized the Theater's apparent alignment with Broadway ideals by suggesting that his critics' condemnation was premature and more in line with the hit-flop mentality of Broadway than with the organic growth of a repertory theater, which must be allowed to grow over time. "But in the arts," he wrote, "we think in terms of the overnight sensation and the sudden genius." Rather than giving the theater time to find its identity, a process requiring experimentation and inevitable failure from time to time, Kazan felt that his critics were demanding perfection right out of the gate. It was a valid point. Moreover, those critics Kazan rebuked had greatly influenced the men in the boardroom, who by the autumn of 1964 had lost patience with the Kazan/Whitehead administration and had all but made up their minds that the two had to go.

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[284] Public Relations Report and Plan, April 2, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, Box 264, Folder 4.

[285] Elia Kazan, "On Process." *New York Times*, August 9, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

In September 1964, Robert Houget became president of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center when George Woods stepped down after taking an executive position with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which required that he reside in Washington, D.C.[286] Woods agreed to continue to serve as a member of the Lincoln Center board and to serve as chairman of the Repertory Theater's board of directors. Houget, executive vice president of the First National City Bank of New York, faced several challenges as he assumed his position as president. For starters, there were the material realities of the deficit and falling attendance. As the *New York Times* reported in October 1964, the first season had ended with a deficit of $500,000 and attendance had dropped to 55% of capacity, a significant drop from the previous season's 81%.[287] Secondly, Houget was faced with a tenuous political environment as tensions mounted within the organization. A general sense of upheaval pervaded the organization as Kazan and Whitehead found themselves facing renewed pressure.

Eugene Black, who had previously expressed concerns about Kazan and Whitehead's choices, had, by October 1964, lost all patience with the two. Particularly galling to Black was the fact that even at this late stage, with the season set to open in a matter of weeks, Kazan and Whitehead had still not announced the fourth production of the season to follow the previously announced productions of *The Changeling*, Miller's new play *Incident at Vichy*, and *Tartuffe*. He found their "hesitancy" to be a "little over-refined to [his] taste." Black was also disappointed once again with their play selection, calling their choice of plays

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[286] Sam Zolotow, "Lincoln Troupe Gets New Head." *New York Times*, September 28, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[287] Sam Zolotow, "Repertory Board to Discuss Funds: Lincoln Center Troupe Faces New Season With Deficit." *New York Times*, October 27, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

"exquisite," and saying that it seemed they were "trying to be somewhat over-arty and progressive." Black believed Kazan and Whitehead had failed in just about every way conceivable, and he finally conceded that he had come around to Woods' long-held opinion "that if we had to do this again I'm not sure I would have chosen the Kazan-Whitehead combination, and I am not even sure I would have chosen either one individually."[288] Black, who would continue to advocate for a more conservative approach to managing the Repertory Theater, was undoubtedly not alone in his views, but much of the animosity directed toward Whitehead and Kazan was voiced behind closed doors rather than openly and directly to their faces. Still, Kazan, surely aware that he was a target, decided to do what he could to get out of the line of fire.

Although Kazan had no written contract with Lincoln Center, he had made a verbal agreement to stay with the Repertory Theater at least until the opening of the Beaumont Theater in 1965. On October 23, 1964, Kazan wrote to Charles Spofford and Bill Schuman and informed them that he planned to resign his co-producing position immediately upon reaching that milestone. Kazan's agreement also stipulated that while he would confine his theater activities to Lincoln Center, there would be no such constraints on his film projects, and he invoked this point in his letter to Shuman and Spofford. "It is obvious now," he wrote, "that if I continue in the Repertory Theater in my present capacity . . . I would have to give up my motion picture work. I am not in the least prepared to do this."[289] Kazan also argued that despite having worked in harmony with Whitehead, "a two man equal-power leadership arrangement is NOT a correct one for the Repertory Theatre." Finally, he concluded the letter

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[288] Eugene Black to George Woods, October 20, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 269, Folder 11.

[289] Elia Kazan, *Selected Letters,* 522-3.

by stating that although he wished to be free of his administrative responsibilities after the opening of the Beaumont, he would be amenable to staying connected to the theater in an informal capacity, but "recognize[d] that it is possible that you may want to make entirely different plans."[290] Members of the board, it turned out, did have other plans.

Kazan's letter to Spofford and Schuman was dated six days prior to the opening of the 1964-65 season. The opening production of *The Changeling* was, by all accounts, an unmitigated disaster. Howard Taubman, who had been supportive of the Repertory Theater up to this point, opened his review by acknowledging the appropriateness of the selection of the play. "It is a play that deserves to be done," he wrote, "and a permanent repertory theater that means to serve the drama as an art with a proud history is the place to do it. On this point there can be no doubt however great one's reservations may be about the production itself." Taubman went on to harshly criticize Kazan's direction, noting the "glaring deficiencies" in the direction and the inability of the acting company to meet its demands."[291] Martin Gottfried echoed Taubman's sentiments, but was more blunt in his assessment. "Ironically, the play was the most properly chosen of all," he said. "Almost never performed, although academically respected, it had become a dead classic. If it had not already been dead, this production would have done the trick."[292] Most of the reviews zeroed in on the production's poor acting, once again exposing Kazan's limitations as a director and verifying concerns among critics that the Method-influenced company, while perfectly suited to a play like Miller's *After the Fall,* was ill-equipped for period drama; this disparity was perhaps best

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[290] Ibid., 523.

[291] Howard Taubman. "Theater: 'The Changeling' Is Revived: Lincoln Center Troupe Opens 2nd Season." *New York Times*, October 30, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[292] Martin Gottfried, *A Theater Divided,* 153.

illustrated by Barbara Loden, who drew as much critical damnation for *The Changeling* as she had drawn adulation for her "monumental" performance in *After the Fall.* John Chapman of the *Chicago* Tribune, who found the acting "almost invariably awful," expressed his disappointment with Loden, "who was so exciting last season" in *After the Fall,* but who now was "remarkably unexciting as the leading lady of 'The Changeling.'"[293] While the reviews for the previous productions had been somewhat mixed, condemnation of *The Changeling* was universal and brutal.

A week after the opening of *The Changeling*, Eugene Black urged Robert Houget, despite his initial feeling that no immediate action should be taken, to take up Kazan on his offer to step down as co-director. Both Black and fellow board member Samuel Rosenman felt that it was a step that should be taken immediately, rather than waiting, although they also argued that the decision would have to be kept out of the press at least until after the opening of the second season. Black enumerated his reasons for urging acceptance of Kazan's offer: the "joint" decisions made by Kazan and Whitehead had been universally wrong; joint management was not a viable managerial model; Black believed that Kazan was responsible for some of the more "wild eyed" ideas pursued. Black also said that Kazan was not temperamentally suited for the job, nor did he possess the skill or experience necessary to work on classical works, a fact that had just indisputably been demonstrated.

However, he also recognized the risks involved in taking immediate action against Kazan. "The arguments against doing something now are obvious, and include, of course, Kazan's reputation in the theater and the possibility he may get out and eventually take

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[293] John Chapman, "Dull Melodrama Opens Lincoln Center Season. *Chicago Tribune,* October 31, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune.

Arthur Miller with him. Also, I am not, frankly, quite crazy about Bob Whitehead—but I don't think we have had a chance to really judge this gentleman because his joint work with Kazan is not illustrative."[294] Houget clearly had his work cut out for him. Even if he himself had no immediate wish to dispose of Kazan or Whitehead or both, it must have been obvious that the board would likely be unable to continue to coexist with the two. New to Lincoln Center, he sought out advice from insiders, and the result was the public airing of the theater's backstage drama and the occasion for the fall of both Whitehead and Kazan.

On December 5, 1964, news broke of a crisis at Lincoln Center of such proportions that Rudolf Bing, general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, declared Lincoln Center to be "deteriorating to a free-for-all jungle where constituents can raid each other at will."[295] The raid of which Bing spoke involved the Metropolitan's assistant manager Herman Krawitz, Lincoln Center president William Schuman, and newly appointed Repertory Theater president Robert Houget. A few weeks prior to the breaking of the story in the *New York Times*, Houget had spoken to Schuman about the troubles facing the Repertory Theater and the board's growing loss of confidence in Whitehead's management. Schuman recommended Krawitz as a possible replacement, and Houget, followed up on that suggestion, approaching Krawitz and floating the possibility of his becoming the Repertory Theatre's managing director. Upon hearing of Houget and Schumann's overtures to Krawitz, Bing was incensed, calling the attempted poaching an affront to the very concept of Lincoln Center, which stipulated that the constituent organizations, while autonomous in their operations, should

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[294] Black to Houget, November 9, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 269, Folder 1.

[295] Milton Esterow, "Bing Attack Airs Dispute on Theater of Lincoln Center." New York Times, December 5, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

"work toward a cooperative and friendly working relationship."[296] Bing threatened to resign from the Lincoln Center Council, a body tasked with discussing and resolving joint problems of Lincoln Center constituents, over the incident, stating he had "no confidence in this setup if this is allowed to happen."[297]

Despite Bing's public condemnation of Houget's attempt to poach an employee of a sister organization, Houget refused to back down, declaring that he still planned to pursue Krawitz.[298] Anthony Bliss, president of the Metropolitan Opera, responded by declaring that he would work to ensure that Krawitz not be released from his contract, adding that Krawitz had not asked for such a release.[299] Perhaps, as *Variety* suggested, Krawitz "was just indulging a human nature interest in knowing how much somebody else considered his services worth."[300] Whatever his reasons for entertaining the overtures of Houget, Krawitz stayed put in his post at the Met.

The leadership of the Metropolitan Opera quickly put the matter to rest. At a board meeting held the following week, "there was no discussion of the Krawitz affair except that Mr. Bliss announced the issue was closed and everyone was trying to treat any wounds that had been opened." G.S. Moore, a board member of the Metropolitan Opera told Houget, "It is everyone's desire to be helpful to you in filling your staff problem. The suggestion was

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[296] Edgar Young, *Lincoln Center*, 125.

[297] "Bing Attack Airs Dispute on Theater of Lincoln Center." New York Times, December 5, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times

[298] Milton Esterow, "Lincoln Center Will Continue Seeking Director From Met." *New York Times*, December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[299] Milton Esterow. "Lincoln Center Defied by Bliss: Met President Says He Will Fight Release of Krawitz." *New York Times*, December 7, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[300] "Family In-Fighting at Lincoln Center; Talent Raid, Angry 'Power Grab' Talk." *Variety,* December 9, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Variety.

made that Roger Stevens who is on the Opera board knows the entertainment world very well and should be able to help."[301] In the grand scheme of things, the affair was little more than a black eye on the public face of the Met and Lincoln Center. But the impact was much more deeply felt at the Repertory Theatre where, for the Whitehead/Kazan administration, it was a fatal blow.

The Krawitz affair brought the troubles that had been simmering for over a year at the Repertory Theater to a head, and within days the Repertory Theater was left devoid of artistic leadership. It was no secret that Whitehead and Kazan had been facing opposition from a board of directors concerned about financial deficits and stung by the persistent negative critical response to the first several productions. But the public revelation that Krawitz had been offered "undisputed control of the repertory theater"[302] was the first that Whitehead or Kazan had heard that their positions might be in jeopardy. As far as Whitehead was concerned, the act of clandestinely approaching someone to replace him amounted to "a wrongful discharge" and Whitehead "accept[ed] it as such, effective immediately."[303]

The day after Whitehead declared his immediate resignation, Houget announced that the Repertory Theater planned "further discussions" with Whitehead and that the Repertory Theater was no longer pursuing Krawitz to replace Whitehead.[304] Over the course of the next week, Repertory Theater board member Michael Burke led negotiations between Whitehead

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[301] Moore to Houget, Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, box 269, folder 11.

[302] Milton Esterow, "Lincoln Center Will Continue Seeking Director From Met." *New York Times*, December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[303] Milton Esterow, "Lincoln Center Loses Whitehead: Theater Director Says He Considers Himself Ousted." *New York Times*, December 8, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[304] Milton Esterow, "Lincoln Theater Board Planning Talk with Whitehead in Dispute." *New York Times*, December 9, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

and the theater in an attempt to work out a solution. "I can't imagine what they talked about for a week," Kazan later said, "because the proposal Mike conveyed from Schuman was simple—and insulting. . . . They were asking Bob to continue for the rest of the season, knowing that he'd then be replaced."[305] Finally, on December 15, Whitehead announced that talks had not been successful and that he would not continue. Houget issued a statement on behalf of the Repertory Theatre's board expressing their regret that they had "been unable to deter Mr. Robert Whitehead from leaving the company immediately." Although Burke had attempted to "persuade Mr. Whitehead to continue to guide the company for the present season," Whitehead refused. On hearing of Whitehead's decision, Elia Kazan, having declared, "If he's not there, I'm not there," made good on his promise to resign if Whitehead departed, and Arthur Miller said he would cease to write for the theater.[306]

Whitehead's departure set off a major crisis inside the Repertory Theater, and in the weeks following, it seemed questionable whether it would be able to continue its operations. In addition to Kazan and Miller, the Repertory Theater suffered two other losses. On December 14, Joseph Verner Reed, the executive producer of the American Shakespeare Festival and a member of the Repertory Theater's board of directors, resigned his position on the board, calling his resignation "a protest against the shocking, disgraceful treatment that Lincoln Center has accorded to Robert Whitehead."[307] The company suffered another, potentially bigger, problem when Maureen Stapleton, who had been cast to play the lead in

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[305] Kazan, *A Life,* 698.

[306] Richard F. Shepard, "Lincoln Theater Talks Collapse; Whitehead Won't Return to Post." *New York Times,* December 16, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[307] Joseph Verner Reed to Robert Houget. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 41, Folder 6.

the upcoming production of *Madwoman of Chaillot,* resigned upon the announcement of Whitehead's ousting, even though Whitehead urged her to stay with the production, which was to start rehearsal the following week with a February 18 opening. "Mr. Whitehead told me not to do it," Stapleton told the *Times,* "but I told him that since he no longer was my boss he could not stop me. It's a shame they did that to Mr. Whitehead."[308] Stapleton was not the only member of the acting company dismayed over the ousting of Whitehead. Several other members of the acting company voiced their ire over the situation, demanding in a telegram to Houget that he inform them about plans to move forward:

> Inasmuch as communications to you from the acting company of the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center have not been acknowledged and in view of the fact that many of us hold long term contracts with you until 1966 for the purpose of building an American repertory company may we inquire into your plans for our future? If we are to be deprived of the leaders who attracted us to this organization does it follow that this city may be deprived of the repertory program which also brought us into this company and for which many of us abandoned substantial professional activities? Signed Frederic de Wilde, Robert Downing, Hal Holbrook, Michael Strong, David J. Stewart, David Wayne, Joseph Wiseman.[309]

Houget replied to the actors a few days later. In his telegram, he acknowledged that the theater faced daunting problems but assured the actors he believed the problems could be solved. "We think the repertory theater idea is a sound one and that it has a place in the

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[308] Milton Esterow, "Lincoln Theater Board Planning Talk With Whitehead in Dispute." *New York Times,* December 9, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[309] Telegram to Robert Houget, Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Box 41, Folder 6.

theater in New York. We have many advantages. We will soon have our fine playhouse to work in, we have a loyal subscription list, our performing company is in being and gains experience and stature every day." He regretted that the board could not prevent Whitehead's departure, he said, but urged the company to rally. "Now the business management, the artistic direction, and most important of all the performing company should turn their attention to their jobs," he wrote. "We must all stand solidly together and work with Mr. Stanley Gilkey as acting administrator."[310] But despite Houget's assurances to the company that all would be well, the survival of the theater was already in question.

Although the Repertory Theater announced on December 19 that a search for a new director was underway, led by board member Judge Samuel Rosenman, Houget was unsure the theater could survive considering the events following Whitehead's departure. The resignation of Maureen Stapleton led to cancellation of *Madwoman of Chaillot* because a suitable replacement for her could not be found. Arthur Miller announced on December 31 that when the season concluded in June 1965 he would withdraw both *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* in protest of Whitehead's dismissal. The cancellation of *Madwoman of Chaillot* required the refunding of $118,000 to subscribers, compounding the financial blow the company took when *The Changeling* was withdrawn from the repertory, resulting in an $18,000 refund.[311]

On January 6, Houget met with board member Michael Burke and acting administrator Stanley Gilkey. At the meeting, the group discussed the potential financial consequences of closing the theater and entering receivership. They determined that if the

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[310] Ibid.

[311] Sam Zolotow, "Lincoln Center Troupe to Drop Three Dramas From Repertory." *New York Times,* January 1, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

theater were to close immediately, they would have to refund an additional $118,000 for *Tartuffe* subscriptions. Additionally, the ANTA Theater presented a significant financial burden. Because the Beaumont was not scheduled to open until late 1965, the lease on the ANTA Theater ran until January 1966. Were the company to fold, it would still be obligated to pay $2,000 per week "dark rent" at the ANTA Theater for an entire year in addition to about $50,000 in payables Gilkey reported. In short, closing the theater would result in a total cost of nearly four hundred thousand dollars. Houget, Burke, and Gilkey concluded that folding at that moment could potentially be more costly than continuing operations. If *Tartuffe* performed well at the box office, there was a good chance that the company could break even.[312] It is unclear how seriously the management of the Repertory Theater contemplated the possibility of shutting the theater down or if the discussion even moved beyond this exploratory meeting, but the board decided to keep the theater running.

While everyone offstage at Lincoln Center was still reeling from the upheaval caused by the fracas, preparations for the next production continued and on January 15, *Tartuffe* opened to some of the more enthusiastic reviews the company had received to date. Chapman of the *Daily News* declared that with *Tartuffe* "Everything look[ed] much brighter" for the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, calling the production "the happiest event yet in the two-season history of the company."[313] Although many critics had some reservations about the production, there was clear consensus that the production was the strongest yet presented by the Repertory Theatre. The *New York Post,* for example, said that the production revealed

[312] Untitled memo signed by Robert Houget and dated January 6, 1965. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, 269, Folder 1.

[313] John Chapman. "'Tartuffe' a Rollicking Big Romp; Best yet for Lincoln Center Co." *Daily News,* January 15, 1965. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Clippings File.

"what is by far the highest degree of imagination, style and taste it has yet displayed."[314] And Howard Taubman of *The New York Times,* although expressing some reservations about the tendency of director William Ball toward exaggeration and the resulting unevenness in the production, argued that the production, the last arranged under the leadership of Whitehead and Kazan, "capture[d] enough of the spirit of the play to do honor not only to Mr. Whitehead but also to Moliere."[315] In addition to their commentary on the quality of the production, most critics also made mention of the play's prologue in which Hal Holbrook reminded the audience of the strict no-smoking policy in the theater and then announced that the evening's performance was dedicated to Robert Whitehead, prompting the audience to respond "with a loud but useless vote of confidence for Whitehead."[316] And while *Tartuffe* settled into the repertory of the company, the search for a new director for the company was underway.

The duration of the search was remarkably short—successors were named by the end of January—but throughout those few weeks, the board was forced to do some serious soul searching about the direction the theater should take. The ouster of Whitehead and Kazan posed an existential threat to the Repertory Theater. Organizations like the Metropolitan Opera or the New York Philharmonic could easily survive a sudden change of management. With a long history and established practices and policies, their sound institutional frameworks allowed for continuity that could transcend the loss of an individual leader. No

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[314] Richard Watts, Jr. "Notable Production of 'Tartuffe.'" *New York Post,* January 15, 1965. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Clippings File.

[315] Howard Taubman. "The Theater: 'Tartuffe.'" *New York Times,* January 15, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[316] John Chapman. "'Tartuffe' a Rollicking Big Romp; Best yet for Lincoln Center Co." *Daily News,* January 15, 1965. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Clippings File.

such continuity had yet been established in the Repertory Theater. Whitehead's and Kazan's departures nullified any sense of identity that had begun to emerge. Survival of the Repertory Theater would therefore hinge on finding not only the right "fit" for the Center but also an individual or team that could establish a theater on a solid institutional basis.

Eugene Black urged other board members to think carefully about how to proceed in choosing new directors, advocating a staunchly conservative approach focused on "proven plays" with new plays presented only "one every one or two seasons, and then only after careful review of the author and play by a number of competent people." He suggested that experimentation and the development of new works be limited strictly to the smaller Forum Theater and emphasized the importance of the company not getting ahead of its own capabilities, limiting classical repertoire to foreign—but English language—plays that were "not dramatically difficult to put on."[317] Black's approach, he believed, aligned well with the profile of Tyrone Guthrie's theater in Minneapolis, which had defined itself in large part by its devotion to classic repertoire. Black's comments reflected the battle scars of the Kazan/Whitehead administration. Clearly, Black was working to ensure that the Repertory Theater would have as little exposure to harsh criticism as possible; limiting the repertoire to "proven" plays was one line of defense, and ensuring that every new play went through a thorough vetting by "a number of competent people" was another, ensuring that the wild-eyed whims of any future directors might be contained. Perhaps more than anything, Black and his colleagues were determined to ward off the vicious attacks of the Brusteins and

[317] "A Concept for Lincoln Center." Memo from Euguene Black dated December 21, 1964. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records.

Gilmans of the world, and what better way to do that than to turn to those very critics for advice?

Richard Gilman recalled that in December of 1964, he was invited to lunch by an executive of Lincoln Center "who first wanted plaintively to know why my published comments on the Repertory Theater had been so harsh and then, moving from a condition of injured feeling to one of abject inquiry, whom I might recommend to take over its troubled destiny."[318] After a moment's hesitation, Gilman mentioned Herbert Blau and Jules Irving, co-directors of the Actor's Workshop, widely regarded as one of the best and most adventurous resident theaters in the country. Gilman admitted that he accepted this valuation primarily on faith, having seen only one of their productions. "But Blau's and Irving's ideas had impressed me, and so had the fact that their repertoire over the years had been built around the truest notions of what was best in contemporary drama."[319] To what degree Gilman's recommendation influenced the Lincoln Center executive (whom Gilman does not name) and his colleagues is anyone's guess. But the following month the Repertory Theater announced the appointment of Irving and Blau as the new co-directors of the theater, effective March 1, 1965.

Four months after it was announced that Irving and Blau would assume leadership of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Theodore Hoffman predicted in *Show* magazine that Irving and Blau, whose theater (the Actor's Workshop) "wasn't exactly the toast of San Francisco" would "flutter the dovecotes all right, attract plenty of partisans, make lots of provocative copy for the Sunday drama sections and probably drive the board of directors to

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[318] Richard Gilman. "The Sorrows of Lincoln Center" in *Common and Uncommon Masks: Writings on Theatre—1961-1970.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 264.

[319] Ibid.

as many secret discussions as the last regime."[320] Hoffman turned out to be right on all counts. The Blau/Irving regime would represent an almost entirely different institution and one that would prove just as controversial as the Kazan/Whitehead regime.

Conclusion

After five years of planning, the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center as conceived by Robert Whitehead and Elia Kazan unraveled just weeks into its second season. Several factors conspired to ensure its failure, perhaps none as easily identifiable as the failure to establish a clear vision for the theater. Looking back on the company's failure, Kazan named the lack of a clear sense of identity as a root cause of the demise of his and Whitehead's administration. "We had no face," he recalled. "We hadn't made up our minds who we were going to be, rather tried to be everything for everybody. Nor did our production program grow out of our personalities. The result was that we wobbled from side to side, and nobody knew who we were."[321] For Kazan and Whitehead, leading a national repertory theater offered them an opportunity to create a lasting institution that would not only transcend the commercial demands of Broadway but would also offer an alternative vision of American theatrical identity from that being presented on the Great White Way. The institutional structure of a repertory theater, subsidized by foundation grants and private donations secured by a dedicated board of directors, should have endowed the artistic leadership with the freedom to experiment and create a solid institutional foundation upon which to build an artistically progressive program. However, the economic, artistic, and political complexities of the non-profit model, which vex virtually every cultural institution, were amplified by the

[320] Theodore Hoffman. "Who the Hell is Herbert Blau?" *Show* Magazine. April 1965, 39. Actor's Workshop and Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records, Clippings file.

[321] Elia Kazan, *A Life*, 609.

unique culture of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, brought into being by titans of culture and politics and populated by some of the biggest egos in the performing arts.

Rockefeller had selected Kazan and Whitehead on the basis of their Broadway successes, a decision made largely because, despite the burgeoning regional theater movement, the board members "were not about to hand their multimillion-dollar building, and its vague but ambitious hopes, over to academics or to provincials untried in New York."[322] To put it in its simplest terms, Kazan and Whitehead, with their successful record on the commercial stage, represented the closest Lincoln Center could come to a management team as accomplished in the field of theater as the Metropolitan was in the field of opera. In exchange for the legitimation they could bestow on Lincoln Center's Repertory Theater, Kazan and Whitehead would reign over an institution that would ostensibly allow them to pursue the kind of work Broadway would not abide. However, when critics attacked the theater's artistic work, the board refused to stand by Kazan and Whitehead, demonstrating the reality that not-for-profit theater is not as free from commercial pressure as one would like to think. Despite the fact that a subsidized repertory theater operates on a non-profit basis, it still relies on box office and critical successes to underwrite the failures.

Kazan and Whitehead were clearly not blameless in the failure of the theater. Their egos, particularly in the case of Kazan, contributed to the collapse of their administration. While it is true that *Marco Millions* might not have been likely to be revived on Broadway, the programming they chose never transcended a middle of the road Broadway ethos, nor did they seem to be attempting to reach an audience beyond the typical upper middle class, middlebrow audiences that populated Broadway theaters. Instead, they seemed to view

[322] Richard Schickel, *Elia Kazan: A Biography*, 385.

Lincoln Center as a place where they could secure their legacies as dominant figures in the American theater, but in so doing, they failed to adapt to the administrative structure of the Repertory Theater and to respond to shifting currents in the theatrical landscape.

The criticisms of Brustein, Gilman, and the like stemmed from a resentment that an opportunity to push the boundaries of American theater beyond the psychological realism that had come to dominate Broadway and the American canon had been squandered on an administration led by Broadway professionals whose moment had passed. This was not an unfounded criticism. For all his misgivings about taking on the Lincoln Center project, Kazan clearly felt it important to defend the primacy of the Method despite his vow to push the acting company beyond realism, which he was never able to do successfully, and he certainly did not have a modest view of his importance in the development of American theatrical identity. For all his and Whitehead's talk of producing new works, they seemed to be uninterested in new playwrights, soliciting works almost exclusively from those who had proven track records on Broadway, and they showed no interest in engaging with artists emerging from the avant-garde movement. Instead, the Repertory Theater seemed more invested in creating a fortress in which the works of the few anointed "greats" like Miller and O'Neill could be enshrined.

CHAPTER 3

Modern Marvel: The Los Angeles Music Center and the Narrative of Civic Progress

Introduction: Ushering in a New Era

On December 4, 1964, 3,250 people filled the auditorium of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Los Angeles Music Center. After conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Richard Strauss's "Fanfare," conductor Zubin Mehta declared to the audience, "This is the most unique city in the 20th Century. I do not think it is too late, now, in mid-century, to begin a new cultural life. This evening we are going to usher in a new era."[323] With the opening of the Pavilion, the first of three buildings to open at the Music Center, Los Angeles staked its "claim to cultural supremacy in the west."[324] Perched atop Bunker Hill, the Music Center anchored the revitalization of that storied neighborhood, which had been cleared to make way for the corporate skyscrapers that would begin to rise by the end of the decade while just a few miles away, Dodger Stadium would soon celebrate its second anniversary. Meanwhile, on the west side of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art would soon open its doors on Wilshire Boulevard while UCLA was undergoing a massive campus expansion. Los Angeles seemed to be experiencing a massive facelift and what *Time* magazine called a cultural explosion, and the Music Center was ground zero.

After declaring the dawn of a "new era" for Los Angeles, Mehta asked the audience to join him in paying homage to Dorothy Chandler, "the one person who most of all is

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[323] Henry Sutherland, "Music Center Opening Hailed." *Los Angeles Times,* December 7, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[324] Peter Bart, "Cultural Center on Coast Opened." *New York Times*, December 7, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

responsible for the creation of this edifice. . . . She it is who gathered together the volunteers and the phone numbers of the millionaires."[325] Married to *Times* publisher Norman Chandler, Dorothy Chandler led the campaign to build the Los Angeles Music Center, raising the majority of funds through private contributions. The opening of the Music Center marked the culmination of more than a decade of work on the part of Chandler, who had risen to prominence after she led the effort to save the Hollywood Bowl after its sudden closure in 1951. Chandler used her experience as a fundraiser to move the Music Center project forward, becoming the driving force and the public face of the Los Angeles Music Center.

But the Music Center was more than the pet project of a socialite. Rather, it was an important symbol of Los Angeles's new modern urban image in the postwar period, and it played a key role in shaping the physical landscape of Downtown and in forming powerful coalitions of individuals from government and the private sector. To an even greater degree than New York's Lincoln Center, the Los Angeles Music Center was an important arbiter of power in Los Angeles as the old guard business elites, led by the *Times* and the Chamber of Commerce, fought to maintain power and "new money" elites from the West Side and Hollywood jockeyed for social status.

For nearly two decades after the onset of the Depression, the downtown business elite fought an uphill battle to regain their power as New Deal liberalism reigned in state and local government. The fight culminated in a fierce battle over public housing in which the liberal-left popular front that had gained so much political power during the late thirties and forties was roundly defeated in the early 1950s when the business elite, led by the *Times,* launched a

[325] Henry Sutherland, "Music Center Opening Hailed." *Los Angeles Times,* December 7, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

vitriolic redbaiting campaign that brought a swift end to public housing in Los Angeles, ousted the sitting mayor, and installed an elite-friendly administration (handpicked by the *Times* and the business elite) in City Hall. It was in this historical moment, when a progressive vision of what historian Don Parson called "community modernism," espoused by the left-liberal popular front and that viewed public housing as the foundation for the modern city, was cast aside for what Parson calls corporate modernism, "the monumental glorification of the commercial urban economy," that the vision of downtown Los Angeles as it exists today began to emerge.[326] The resounding defeat of the liberal-left coalition laid the groundwork for a new pro-growth alliance in which organized labor, entrepreneurs, and liberals cooperated to shape a new identity for Los Angeles, an identity that would be expressed in large part through the monumentalization of corporate power and cultural gravitas.

Although the Los Angeles Music Center was not explicitly involved in the battle over public housing, its long journey to realization was deeply connected to the struggle for control over the landscape of Downtown. The earliest iteration of the idea for the Music Center dates back to 1945 when a group of "motivated citizens" formed Greater Los Angeles Plans, Inc. (GLAPI) to "build a civic auditorium and an 'opera house.'"[327] Made up almost entirely of representatives from the Downtown business elite, GLAPI proposed to revitalize Downtown Los Angeles with a massive project comprised of an opera house and convention center, but for several years was unsuccessful in garnering the necessary voter approval for

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[326] Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 2.

[327] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 4.

the project. It was not until the early 1950s that gathering forces brought together leaders from government, culture, and the private sector in a concerted effort to monumentalize Los Angeles's economic might and reshape the national image of a city that had long been derided as "an uncouth poor relation of San Francisco."[328] The defeat of public housing led to the embracing of a new vision of the modern city and opened the door for the business elite to reclaim control over the city's physical, symbolic, and economic landscape. The Music Center's creation was not simply enabled by this reclamation, but rather played an important role in facilitating it as well, acting as a kind of nexus around which the developments reshaping Los Angeles coalesced to create the modern metropolis that began to emerge with the dawning of the 1960s.

The Creeping Cancer of Socialism

Upon his election in a 1938 recall vote against Mayor Frank Shaw, Fletcher Bowron promised his supporters—and warned *Times* publisher Harry Chandler—that he would not cozy up to the *Times* or the Downtown business establishment. "Harry will never call me Fletch," he declared. "Just because Chandler has sixty million dollars on the newspaper is no sign he can run this town."[329] Having been endorsed by every major newspaper except the *Times*, Bowron rode into City Hall with the support of a reform coalition comprised of an "alliance of the Left, including CIO unions and members of the Communist Party, the economic and moral-reform oriented Right, and the liberals and moderates convinced of massive corruption."[330] Bowron, a self-described "New Deal Republican," successfully

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[328] "Brightness in the Air." *Time,* December 18, 1964.

[329] Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt. *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California.* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 225.

[330] Tom Sitton. *Los Angeles Transformed: Fletcher Bowron's Urban Reform Revival* (Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 32.

maintained the recall coalition in order to win reelection in 1941, defeating a conservative councilman backed by the *Times.* However, between his 1941 reelection and his next bid in 1945, Bowron shifted steadily to the right, alienating many of his previous allies and strengthening ties with the city's business interests, and when he ran for reelection again in 1945, he did so with the backing of the *Times.* This newfound accommodation between the New Deal Republican, the *Times,* and the old guard business elite did not last long.

Despite his rightward political drift during the war, Bowron remained committed to expanding public housing in Los Angeles even after the Depression had lifted and the war ended, putting him at odds with the business establishment and the *Times.* As the nation and the city emerged from the war, the business elite and private real estate interests, who had opposed public housing all along, wished to return to normalcy and to put housing construction back in the hands of private enterprise with minimal government interference. However, by the time the war ended, public housing, in the words of Don Parson, "seemed on its way to becoming an entrenched and established welfare-state institution in Los Angeles."[331] Between 1939 and 1941, ten public housing projects won the approval of the City Council, albeit many of them with slim margins. Public housing would remain a divisive issue among the City Council, but a coalition of "organized labor, civic organizations, religious groups, and mobilized groups within the city's racial and ethnic communities"[332] put their full support behind the projects and helped public housing, which owed its popular support to the emergency conditions of the Depression, win legitimacy in the public mind. Not only did public housing enjoy widespread public acceptance for over a decade, but it was

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[331] Don Parson, *Making a Better World,* 103.

[332] Don Parson, *Making a Better World,* 33.

also the driving force for urban development in Los Angeles, reflecting a vision for urban growth driven by utopian aspirations. Private real estate interests could do little to stop the deepening entrenchment of public housing, and the return to prosperity as the Depression lifted and the country entered World War II only made things worse. World War II brought to Los Angeles what Mike Davis has called "its real industrial revolution."[333] Los Angeles quickly became a major center for defense manufacturing, and over the course of just six years its population grew by twenty percent as workers lured by the booming manufacturing economy flooded the city. The mass migration created an extraordinary housing crisis in the city, leading to an even further entrenchment of public housing, which came to be viewed as an integral part of the war effort.[334] Despite the return to prosperity ushered in by the war, the casting of public housing as a key element of national defense strategy ensured that popular support for public housing remained strong, while within the projects communal living thrived.

When Congress passed the 1949 Housing Act, Bowron sprang into action to make the case for Los Angeles's participation in the program, appearing before the City Council in August 1949 to request approval to apply for 10,000 units of public housing under the new federal program. The City Council unanimously approved the plan, and a month later Bunker Hill was named as the first site for redevelopment under the city's federal contract.[335] The *Times* attacked the proposal, arguing that it amounted to nothing more than taxpayer charity,

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[333] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990), 120.

[334] Housing policy was adjusted to reflect this shift. A 1940 amendment to the 1937 Housing Act allocated 700,00 units of public housing allocated to Defense workers, for whom low income requirements to qualify for public housing were waived. See Parson, *Making a Better World,* 46.

[335] Parson, *Making a Better World*, 202.

drawing the battle lines between the liberal left and the city's business interests for control over the defining vision of the city.[336]

By the end of 1950, plans for executing the federal redevelopment contract were well underway, while opposition to public housing began to mount among the electorate after the *Times* embarked on a campaign to discredit public housing by painting it as socialistic and arguing that the politicians pushing these projects through the legislative process were ignoring the will of the people. In November 1950, the City Council voted 12-1 to approve the project sites selected by the CHA despite complaints from businesses and homeowners facing eviction under eminent domain. The *Times* attacked the Council vote, arguing that the City Council had, with their near unanimous vote, "brushed aside" pleas from citizens facing eviction,[337] an assertion not without merit. By this time, public support for the housing program had clearly begun to wane. Just two weeks before the Council's vote, an anti-housing proposition had won at the polls with the backing of several pro-business organizations including, of course, the *Times.* Proposition 10 required that all future public housing proposals in California be approved by public referendum in the city and county affected.[338] The vote demonstrated a growing antagonism to public housing in Los Angeles, aided no doubt by the *Times'* vitriolic campaign against the program.

Emboldened by the results of Proposition 10, the *Times* intensified its repudiation of the public housing program, and opinions among the Council, who were starting to feel the

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[336] "The Mayor's Housing Economics." *Los Angeles Times,* August 10, 1949. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[337] "Council Votes 12-1 for Public Housing." *Los Angeles Times,* November 23, 1950. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[338] The proposition did not impact projects already approved prior to going into effect, so the projects approved in the November 1953 Council vote were exempted from the new law.

pressure, began to shift. The November 1950 vote approving the public housing project sites had passed by an overwhelming 12-1 majority, but over the course of the next year, several councilmen withdrew their support. In December 1951, Councilman Harold Harby announced his defection, saying that upon further reflection, he had come to see that the public housing program represented little more than Socialism.[339] Harby's defection flipped the majority in the City Council from support to opposition of public housing and three weeks later, on December 26, 1951, the City Council voted to nullify the federal housing contract.

The Housing Authority responded by filing a writ of mandate with the California Supreme Court to force the Council to honor the contract. Meanwhile, Bowron argued that the Council did not have the authority to cancel the contract with the federal government. He offered to renegotiate the contract and reduce the number of housing units, but refused to cancel the contract outright. The Council reacted with the "immediate approval of a municipal referendum on the issue," which would be held on June 3, the date of the state primary election.[340] Proposition B, if passed by voters, would uphold the 1949 contract, while its defeat would ostensibly kill the project.

A coalition of business leaders drawn mainly from the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants and Manufacturers Association formed the Committee Against Socialist Housing (CASH) to lead the campaign against Proposition B. The campaign unleashed an endless torrent of red baiting rhetoric, painting public housing as a Trojan horse concealing a

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[339] "Council About-Face Halts Housing Push: Harby Alters Position to Nullify Approval Given Federal Project." *Los Angeles Times,* December 4, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[340] Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed,* 169.

Communist army ready to seize the city.[341] In June 1952, voters went to the polls where anti-housing forces carried the vote, with 379,050 voting not to reinstate the contract and 258,777 voting to reinstate it.[342] However, the vote was legally meaningless. In April, the California Supreme Court had ruled that the Council did not have the authority to abrogate a federal contract, rendering Proposition B moot. Nonetheless, the outcome of the vote, despite having no legal value, had tremendous political value, having clearly demonstrated a major loss of public support for the housing program. Housing opponents seized on this opposition and intensified their assaults on the Housing Authority, launching an investigation into the agency that would have made Joseph McCarthy proud.

On August 27, 1952, Frank Wilkinson began testifying at a routine eminent domain hearing related to the Chavez Ravine housing project. Two days into his testimony, on August 29, 1952, the hearing took an ominous turn when in the middle of his testimony the opposing attorney stopped his cross examination to ask, "Now Mr. Wilkinson, what organizations, political or otherwise, have you belonged to since 1929?"[343] Wilkinson refused to answer the question, the hearing was halted, and Wilkinson was promptly suspended by Housing Authority executive director Howard Holtzendorff. Wilkinson's refusal to testify marked an important turning point in the public housing fight and sealed not only his own fate, but also that of the public housing program and the mayoralty of Fletcher Bowron.

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[341] Don Parson, *Making a Better World,* 114.

[342] Ibid.

[343] Frank Wilkinson. "The Fight Against HUAC" in *Red Scare: Memories of the American Inquisition, an Oral History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 530-1.

Although the *Times* and anti-housing forces had long ago started branding the program as "socialistic," Wilkinson, by invoking the Fifth Amendment, put a face on the Communistic threat, allowing the opposition the opportunity to argue that public housing was not just ideologically incompatible with private enterprise-led growth, but an outright threat to the nation's security. That same day, the City Council, upon learning of the events that transpired at the eminent domain hearing, unanimously adopted a motion to ask HUAC to investigate Wilkinson and the Housing Authority. In making the motion, Councilman Ed Davenport called Wilkinson's testimony earlier in the day "a very significant occurrence" that was inevitable. The issue, he said, "overrides public housing and has to do with the safety of this country."[344] Suddenly, public housing was no longer the focus of an abstract ideological difference over how to shape the built environment of the city. It was now a clear and present danger to American democracy and anyone who remained aligned with the program should be viewed as an enemy of the people.

HUAC hearings focusing on the CHA were held on September 26 and October 28, 1952. The committee identified five alleged Communists, including Wilkinson, all of whom were purged from the Housing Authority after refusing to answer questions about their political affiliations. Although none of the accused affirmed membership in the Communist party, the *Times* reported that the hearings had "revealed startling evidence of Communist plots to infiltrate the City Housing Authority and other governmental and school teacher

[344] Carlton E. Williams. "Housing Lid Blows: City Expert Throws Court Into Uproar When He Refuses to Reveal Past Group Memberships." *Los Angeles Times,* August 30, 1952. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

organizations."[345] Bowron refused to back down from his support of public housing, making it clear to the entrepreneurial elite that the only way to bring a definitive end to the public housing program in Los Angeles was to unseat him and replace him with a more business-friendly candidate.

In December 1952, *Times* publisher Norman Chandler convened a meeting in his office at the *Times.* Present at the meeting was an assemblage of Los Angeles power brokers including Chandler, Pacific Mutual Insurance president Asa Call, business leaders Neill Petree and Carey Hill, among others. The sole item on the agenda was the selection of a candidate to "carry out their mission at City Hall." They discussed a rumored thirty-four candidates, finally settling on "bland but dependable" Congressman Norris Poulson, who had a "long history of service to the regional business establishment," having "compiled a consistently anti-labor record, while opposing rent controls and public housing."[346] On December 26, 1952, Chandler wrote Poulson to inform him that he and his allies wanted Poulson to run for mayor with their backing.[347] Poulson accepted the offer and began a campaign, whose committee was organized by *Times* reporter Carlton Williams and managed by Councilman George Cronk, with substantial financial backing from real estate developer Fritz Burns.[348]

Public housing remained in the forefront throughout the mayoral campaign. By refusing the yield on the issue even in light of the HUAC hearings, Bowron had given

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[345] Carlton E. Williams, "City Officials Aroused by Senate Hearing." *Los Angeles Times,* October 30, 1952. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[346] Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed,* 178.

[347] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big*, 262-3.

[348] Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed,* 178.

Poulson and his backers all the ammunition they needed. The *Times* relentlessly dogged Bowron and painted him if not as an outright Communist then at the very least as a Communist sympathizer, while Bowron argued that the election was an attempt "by a small, immensely wealthy, incredibly powerful group" to elect a man that would do their bidding and not the bidding of the people.[349] It was a weak argument given how easy it was for Poulson and the *Times* to turn it around on Bowron, who was clearly, they would argue, defying the will of the people by pursuing a program that voters had twice rejected at the polls. Bowron's characterization of Poulson as a puppet of the business elite was no match for the elites' characterization of Bowron as being sympathetic to the Communist party. In an editorial two days before the election, the *Times* took one last punch at Bowron when they reminded readers that "[t]he public housing program brought him to bed with some characters who were dubious indeed. And he did not detach himself from them even when he was given the evidence of Red connections. If there was Communist infiltration in the Housing Authority, he apparently didn't care much, for he didn't do anything effective to stop it."[350] Despite a hard-fought campaign, Bowron was defeated by Pouslon on May 26, 1952. Upon taking office in July, Poulson would faithfully carry out the bidding of the business elite and pursue an aggressive agenda to remake the city's landscape. With public housing and its ethos of "community modernism" having been resoundingly rejected, the city would now begin the work of transforming its built environment to reflect the order of corporate modernism. The "demise of the Left in the 1950s and the delegation of its corresponding vision of community modernism to the dustbin of history," says Don Parson,

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[349] Don Parson, *Making a Better World,* 127.

[350] "Strange Case of Mayor Bowron." *Los Angeles Times,* May 24, 1953. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

gave way to a singular and definitive modern Los Angeles.[351] Just as small tightly-knit neighborhoods were bulldozed in New York to make way for Robert Moses's urban renewal projects, so too would the entrepreneurial elite exert their city-making will on the landscape of Los Angeles. The new vision of the city, forged by the defeat of public housing, paved the way for the Music Center, and the Music Center itself would play a major role in expressing the new vision of modern Los Angeles.

From Hick Town to Modern Marvel

Over the next decade, Los Angeles would receive an extraordinary makeover both physically and culturally. The Music Center was just one of many projects that would reshape power and the expression of urban identity in Downtown Los Angeles. By 1960, Bunker Hill was being cleared for one of the biggest urban renewal projects in United States history that would transform Bunker Hill into "the premier office district" of Southern California[352] and plans were well underway to construct Dodger Stadium on Chavez Ravine. Meanwhile, on the West Side of Los Angeles, plans were moving forward to create the Los Angeles County Art Museum, which would break ground in 1962, the same year that construction on the Music Center would begin.

Both the Bunker Hill urban renewal project and the construction of Dodger Stadium in Chavez Ravine grew directly out of the defeat of public housing, which had rendered the Left "voiceless" and unable to muster the political power to resist the corporate modernist vision espoused by Poulson and the downtown business establishment.[353] Having turned

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[351] Parson, *Making a Better World,* 11.

[352] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury. "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill." *California History,* 74.4 (Winter 1995/1996), 395.

[353] Parson, *Making a Better World*, 186.

popular opinion against public housing as the driving force behind the development of the built environment, the rhetoric of "civic progress" emerged as the defining principle that would shape modern Los Angeles. This emerging vision was both facilitated and legitimated to a large degree by the 1954 Housing Act, which, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, opened the door for massive redevelopment projects not contingent on housing. Most importantly for Los Angeles, the 1954 Housing Act "transcended the acrimonious divide between liberals and conservatives, forging a new consensus that emphasized commercial redevelopment instead of public housing as the answer to central-city decline."[354]

Freed from the public housing imperative, the business elite, in cooperation with Poulson and the Community Redevelopment Agency, could finally pursue a downtown redevelopment vision based on commerce and culture, a goal they had pursued unsuccessfully since the mid-1940s, when GLAPI had begun its efforts to reclaim downtown. By making federal subsidies available for the underwriting of private urban development, the 1954 Housing Act helped to shift the standard for defining the notion of "public purpose" in such a way that protecting the general economic health of a city neighborhood could now be said to be in the interest of the general welfare. Los Angeles, led by Poulson and the downtown business elite, seized on this notion in advancing the redevelopment of Downtown, insisting that corporate-and-culture-driven urban renewal was a necessary tool to ensure Los Angeles's growth and protect the city's economic health.

[354] Richard M. Flanagan, "The Housing Act of 1954: The Sea Change in National Urban Policy." *Urban Affairs Review* 33, no. 2 (November 1997), 265.

Bunker Hill had long been a target for redevelopment. Once comprised of "prosperous residential streets"[355] and characterized by ornate mansions "that did not follow any particular style but rather conformed to with their owners' imagination and aspiration,"[356] Bunker Hill had been one of the most fashionable neighborhoods in Los Angeles in the 1880s. Wealthy and upper middle class Angelenos had settled on the hill, which afforded a respite from the bustle of the developing downtown. However, the neighborhood quickly fell into disrepute when those same wealthy residents, in the 1920s and 1930s, fled the neighborhood for more fashionable areas as Los Angeles expanded westward. The mansions stayed but were converted in rooming houses, while the once-fashionable hotels started catering to low-income residents, and tenement housing was built in the 1920s and 30s.[357] Bunker Hill quickly came to be seen as a hotbed of every conceivable social ill from drug use to petty theft to murder, a vision most aptly described—and largely promulgated by—noir novelist Raymond Chandler, whose description of the neighborhood as "old town, lost town, shabby town, crook town" can be found on the pages of virtually any book or article touching on Bunker Hill's history.

Indeed, the literary and cinematic representations of Bunker Hill as a sinister landscape populated by marginalized and nefarious deviants played an important role in shaping the public's perception of a deteriorating downtown core and provided a firm foundation for those who would argue that the city needed to be "reclaimed." As Eric Avila has argued, "Hollywood's rendition of the postwar urban crisis implicated distinct social

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[355] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury. "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill." *California History,* 74.4 (Winter 1995/1996), 394.

[356] Ibid., 396.

[357] Don Parson, *Making a Better World*, 147.

actors, each of whom attained greater recognition in urban public life during the 1930s and 1940s. Blacks, women, homosexuals, and Communists ran rampant in the noir city." These same groups, Avila argues, "secured some accommodations in the political culture of New Deal liberalism, but their figurative doubles in film noir and the urban science fiction film dramatized their threat to the dawning social order of Cold War America."[358] The representation of the urban landscape in noir helped put a specific face—derelict, poor, subversive, and non-white—on the threat that lurked on the city streets in Bunker Hill and lent credence to the argument that intervention was needed to wrest control of the city from these dangerous others.

The CRA announced its intention to redevelop Bunker Hill in 1949 and issued a proposal in 1951. The centerpiece of the proposal was thirty-seven thirteen-story apartment buildings, which would help make Bunker Hill "a colony of worker bees—a hive for downtown office employees" while the existing low-income tenants would be accommodated by the public housing units to be built under the city's Title I contract with the federal government.[359] Proposition C on the April 1951 ballot asked voters to approve the issuance of five million dollars to go toward the costs of acquiring the land on Bunker Hill and then turning it over to private developers. The *Times* and the downtown business establishment supported the proposal, which would help clear the city of what was widely viewed as a slum while ensuring that the redevelopment was driven by private enterprise. The proposition

[358] Eric Avila. *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 104.

[359] Don Parson, *Making a Better World,* 150.

received a majority vote, but fell short of the required two-thirds and so the housing-based proposal was shelved.[360]

Debates over the future of Bunker Hill lasted for several years after the defeat of Proposition C. Much like Lincoln Square, the residents of Bunker Hill fought to save their neighborhood, arguing that despite the number of dwellings in poor repair, the Hill comprised a tight-knit community. Property owners submitted an alternative redevelopment plan that would not eradicate the neighborhood but rather would rehabilitate existing structures and preserve the neighborhood's general character. The City Council briefly considered the alternative plan, ultimately rejecting it on the basis that rehabilitation of the existing buildings would not adequately address the blight that plagued the neighborhood.

The final redevelopment plan was approved in March 1959. No longer anchored by housing, the proposed design for Bunker Hill would include "a total of approximately 3,750 dwelling units, 3,000 hotel units, 12 million square feet of office and over one-half million square feet of retail space."[361] Although it would take well over ten years from the start of demolition in 1960 for the new Bunker Hill to begin to take physical shape, the plan's promise to give Los Angeles the skyline it had been sorely lacking secured the ascendancy of corporate modernism as the defining ethos of the downtown landscape.

Not far from Bunker Hill, Chavez Ravine was about to undergo a transformation of its own. Upon taking office, one of Mayor Poulson's first acts was to renegotiate the housing contract with the federal government. Although he was not able to cancel the contract entirely, he significantly reduced it and eliminated several of the individual housing projects,

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[360] Ibid., 150-151.

[361] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury. "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill." *California History,* 74.4 (Winter 1995/1996), 394.

including the largest, which was to be built in Chavez Ravine. The cancellation agreement stipulated that any of the already-condemned land must be put to public use. Because of that stipulation, the City Housing Authority was now sitting on hundreds of acres that had been condemned but that could not be developed. Meanwhile, Brooklyn Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley was looking to leave New York after failing to convince Robert Moses to provide an adequate site to build a much-needed replacement for Ebbets Field. Poulson, aware that O'Malley had expressed in interest in moving the Dodgers west, pursued an agreement to bring the team to Los Angeles. Like Bunker Hill, the redevelopment of Chavez Ravine represented, as Eric Avila said, "another episode in the history of the postwar American city, in which the destruction of familiar urban spaces begot a new cultural order."[362] The transformation of Chavez Ravine into Dodger Stadium was the result of a fierce political struggle that pitted the *Times* and its allies against the politically weakened left. The fight over Chavez Ravine centered to a large degree on what constituted a "public purpose" in modern Los Angeles, and shows how important the symbolic demonstration of civic progress had become in reshaping the landscape and image of Los Angeles.

Named for Julian Chavez, one of the first Los Angeles Councilmen, Chavez Ravine was situated just north of Downtown and comprised of three neighborhoods: Palo Verde, La Loma, and Bishop. Although located close to Downtown, the neighborhoods were "semi-rural villages with poultry, live-stock, and subsistence gardening" and populated by "an extremely close-knit but impoverished community lacking basic urban services."[363]

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[362] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 146.

[363] Don Parson, *Making a Better World*, 164.

Because of its extreme poverty and substandard housing conditions, Chavez Ravine was an obvious target for redevelopment and had been designated a project site under the city's contract under the 1949 Housing Act. Declared the worst slum area in the city by the Department of Health in 1948, hundreds of the dwellings—which ranged in type from houses to chicken coops—lacked toilets, baths, and running water.[364] When it was designated as a redevelopment site in 1949, the City Planning Commission saw Chavez Ravine "as the cornerstone for a human and democratic citywide redevelopment program."[365] Residents in Chavez Ravine received eviction notices in July 1950 and the Housing Authority began purchasing the property that December.[366] Homeowners and residents of Chavez Ravine were promised first choice of units in the new housing project that would rise on the land once, but as noted earlier, that project never rose thanks the termination of the public housing project.

In October 1957, the City Council approved an agreement between the City of Los Angeles and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Under the agreement, the city offered to give O'Malley the original Chavez Ravine site and an additional 115 acres of land, two million dollars for land clearance, and $2.7 million for access roads. In exchange, O'Malley would give the city Wrigley Field, which the Dodgers owned and where the Angels played) as well as a community recreation center on the stadium site at Chavez Ravine, the latter of which was never built.[367] The deal was attacked by many who believed that it amounted to a giveaway. But Poulson, who "underestimated the strength of his own [bargaining] position," was

[364] Ibid., 165.

[365] Ibid.

[366] Ibid., 167.

[367] Don Parson, *Making a Better World*, 172.

convinced that "O'Malley needed us much less than we needed him, [so] he obviously held the trump cards,"[368] and so O'Malley had gotten what many believed could only be described as a sweetheart deal.

But it wasn't just that Poulson was thought to be giving away the store that angered so many in the city. Homeowners and residents of Chavez Ravine had been evicted to make way for a public housing project. While many of them still bore anger over being evicted for that purpose, the fact that the land would now be used for a baseball stadium rather than returned to its owners infuriated those who had been cleared from the neighborhood. The anger spread nationwide when, in May 1959, six months after voters narrowly approved the city's contract with the Dodgers, the Arechiga family, who had refused to sell their home for the price the Housing Authority offered, were forcefully evicted. Television cameras captured the moments when "Mrs. Avrana Arechiga, the sixty-eight-year old matriarch, threw rocks at [deputies enforcing their eviction], while her daughter, Mrs. Aurora Vargas, a war widow, was carried kicking and screaming from the premises"[369] and the moment, as soon as the house was vacant, when bulldozers knocked the house down while the family looked on. The event received national television coverage and created an enormous public backlash against Poulson and the Dodgers. Poulson stood his ground, arguing that the Arechigas, who had pitched a tent on the site of their demolished home and refused to leave, were simply hamming it up for the cameras in effort to get a better financial offer on their

[368] Neil J. Sullivan. *The Dodgers Move West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 99.

[369] Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West,* 179.

home. Sleeping in tents was just one more sensationalistic tactic according to Poulson and his supporters. "No doubt," said Poulson, "they enjoyed every indignant minute of it."[370]

The forcible eviction of the Arechigas put in sharp relief the conflict over Chavez Ravine as it related to the modern vision of the city versus the community-driven vision that the Left had espoused before being squashed by the redbaiting campaign. Supporters of public housing had determined that Chavez Ravine, in their view the worst slum in the city, required intervention to provide more adequate housing, with adequate being defined along modern urban lines. This was despite being "a happy community where everyone knew and helped one another." It was, according to one visitor, reminiscent "of a village in Mexico, nonetheless this was old Los Angeles with a charm all its own, a Los Angeles we will never see again."[371] Even had the public housing program not been defeated, it was clear that as modernism ascended in Los Angeles there was no longer a place for Chavez Ravine as it existed before the city's intervention. Remembered by many as enchanted and "an idyllic situation, in spite of its squalor,"[372] Chavez Ravine was for public housing proponents a site for rehabilitation through community modernism and for Poulson and Dodger proponents, it was little more than an obstacle standing in the way of progress. Poulson recalled that he had spent nearly three years trying to interest public groups in developing the land but to no avail. "Meanwhile," he said, "the place was inhabited by squatters and by a handful of small home owners whose goats, cows, and chickens roamed about."[373] One supporter of the Dodger

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[370] Ibid., 180.

[371] Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 274.

[372] Don Parson, *Making a Better World*, 165.

[373] Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West,* 87.

agreement declared in a letter to Councilman Edward Roybal, who had voted against the deal, "Anyone who is against the Dodger agreement belongs to some hick town and not this modern marvel, Los Angeles."[374]

Poulson, the *Times*, and other Dodger supporters worked to convince the public of the importance of Dodger Stadium not just as a source of revenue for the city, but as the city's entrée in the major leagues of American cities. Poulson went so far as to describe Dodger Stadium as another great public "work" and the *Times* eagerly picked up that banner, declaring that the Dodgers would "restore to the city the sense of common enterprise it once had when all the citizens would join up to tap a water supply far away in the mountains."[375] Making this comparison, the *Times* was situating Dodger Stadium among the major milestones in the infrastructural development of Los Angeles. While the aqueduct and railroads had each built the physical foundation upon which the city could rise, cultural and popular attractions like Dodger Stadium represented a new kind of infrastructure, more symbolic but no less crucial to the city's growth.

The stories of public housing, Bunker Hill, and Chavez Ravine demonstrate the way in which the elite finally reclaimed control over the vision of the city by taking advantage of the Red Scare and changes in urban redevelopment law. Although the Music Center was not directly implicated in any of these, it is difficult to imagine the project gaining traction had it not been for these events. Indeed, the Downtown business establishment had tried for nearly a decade to create a major civic cultural center. Even before the public housing war got fully underway in the 1950s, GLAPI was fighting to strengthen the elite's hold on Downtown, but

[374] Don Parson, *Making a Better World*, 181.

[375] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight,* 165.

met with defeat at every turn. Although they failed to win the necessary support, the history of GLAPI is an important chapter in the story of the Music Center and of Los Angeles.

An Urgent Need

Greater Los Angeles Plans, Inc. (GLAPI) was incorporated in 1945 for the express purpose of addressing "the urgent need for civic auditorium and music center facilities consistent with the size and importance of this metropolitan area."[376] Following GLAPI's January 1945 incorporation, the executive committee of the Downtown Businessmen's Association gave their unanimous endorsement of the project. Neil Petree, president of the Association—and a founding member of GLAPI—told the *Times*—whose publisher Norman Chandler sat on GLAPI's board—that the group hoped that "this much-needed facility may become a completed reality, making possible cultural and recreational events beyond anything Los Angeles has heretofore enjoyed, attracting thousands of tourists and bringing greater prosperity and prestige to all of us."[377] Upon its incorporation, GLAPI had not committed to a particular "location, plan or any other detail," said its president Albert B. Ruddock, who added, "We are, however, committed wholeheartedly to fostering these improvements for the city."[378] In other words, GLAPI had no clear mandate in terms of programming or cultural production, but rather saw the idea of a civic auditorium as a means to help strengthen the downtown business district, the prominence of which declined during World War II as Los Angeles, like so many other American cities experienced "an

[376] Historical Background Document, Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[377] "Cultural Group's Goals Praised." *Los Angeles Times,* February 5, 1945. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[378] "New Group Will Strive for Auditorium Here." *Los Angeles Times,* January 30, 1945. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

accelerated pattern of residential and industrial decentralization."[379] GLAPI's ostensible commitment to "fostering these improvements for the city" would also help to protect the downtown real estate and business investments of its membership. GLAPI's leadership envisioned Downtown growth through the development of a cultural infrastructure that had failed to materialize because of their own fanatical focus on real estate development which only exacerbated the suburbanization that led to downtown's decline. Although GLAPI's initial plans are rightly recognized as an important moment in the development of the Music Center, their rhetoric failed to motivate the people of Los Angeles and to win the broad-based support needed to bolster such a massive undertaking.

GLAPI's leadership was comprised of a cross section of individuals heavily invested in downtown real estate. Among them were Pacific Mutual Insurance president Asa Call, Neill Petree, Norman Chanlder, and P.J. Winant of Bullock's Department Store to name a few; many of the same individuals would later sit on the "committee of twenty-five" that handpicked Norris Poulson to run for mayor in the 1953 election. In the first few months of its existence, GLAPI employed two strategies to garner public support for their plans to redevelop downtown. A few months after its incorporation, GLAPI attempted to capitalize on postwar patriotism by declaring their proposed civic auditorium to be a "war memorial." In May 1945, GLAPI announced that two veterans' groups had endorsed their proposal for a "War Memorial center program."[380] Having already announced the unanimous endorsement of the business interests, the endorsements of the veterans' organizations would, GLAPI hoped, imbue the project with a greater sense of civic legitimacy.

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[379] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight,* 55.

[380] "Veteran Groups Favor War Memorial Plan." *Los Angeles Times,* May 20, 1945. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

To establish the cultural legitimacy of the project, they turned to New York's Metropolitan Opera, announcing that in April 1948, the Met would hold annual seasons in Los Angeles. The performances would first be given in the Shrine Auditorium "pending the construction of War Memorial Opera House and a War Memorial Auditorium."[381] The partnership between GLAPI and the Met was "hailed as the cultural milestone of the century."[382] Although the San Francisco Opera had been performing in the Shrine Auditorium for years, the establishment of a permanent arrangement with the Metropolitan Opera was heralded as a reflection of the cultural aspirations of Los Angeles's citizenry. Responding to the announcement of the GLAPI-Met partnership, County Supervisor W.A. Smith said, "The advent of Metropolitan Opera in Los Angeles will mean that the area has attained a cultural growth commensurate with the terrific advances in population and in economic and industrial development."[383] Ultimately, the relationship with the Met fizzled after a year. In 1949, it was announced that the Met would not return for another season, and it was suggested in the press that the San Francisco Opera had exerted pressure on city leaders out of fear that the Met's presence in the city would create undue competition. Whatever the reason for the end of the GLAPI-Met relationship, the organization pressed forward with its plans.

By the end of the 1940s, GLAPI had purchased two parcels of land in Downtown Los Angeles: a square at Lafayette Park for the opera house and a site bounded by Figueroa,

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[381] "Metropolitan Plans Opera in Los Angeles." *Los Angeles Times,* November 22, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[382] "'Met' Opera Will Have Home Here: Annual Presentations Scheduled to Get Under Way in April, 1948." *Los Angeles Times,* November 22, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[383] "'Met' Opera Plan Acclaimed Here." *Los Angeles Times,* November 26, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

Fremont, Third, and Fifth Streets for the civic auditorium.[384] The purchases had been made "in anticipation of favorable action by the City of Los Angeles to finance the project through the issuance of general obligation bonds,"[385] the first of which went to the polls in April 1951 as Propositions A and B, which sought a combined thirty-five million dollars for the construction of two separate facilities. Proposition A proposed a public auditorium with "19,000 seats for conventions or championship fights, or 15,000 seats for events requiring floor space" as well as a large exhibition center. Proposition B, meanwhile, proposed a "public music and dramatic center with two principal auditoriums seating 3500 and 1500" as well as rehearsal halls, practice rooms, and office and studio space.[386]

The *Times* vigorously promoted the proposal. In the months leading up to the primary election in which voters would decide the fate of the propositions, it ran numerous articles declaring the need for such facilities to bring not only economic growth to the city but also the prestige the city lacked when compared to others of comparable size. GLAPI's leadership took up countless column inches in the paper, extolling the benefits the project would bestow on the city's national and international reputation. Leland Atherton Irish, speaking on behalf of GLAPI's board of directors, promised voters that the auditorium and music center would "not only add prestige to Los Angeles as the cultural center of the world, but will contribute a wealth of advantages to each and every citizen in every walk of life."[387] Meanwhile, other

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[384] Toland, *Music Center Story*, 4.

[385] Historical Background Document, Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[386] "Music Center Details Given: Propositions A, B Seek $35,000,000 in Bonds for Buildings." *Los Angeles Times,* April 1, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[387] "Greater L.A. Prestige in Culture Seen: Auditorium, Music Center Praised as Boon to Everyone." *Los Angeles Times,* February 25, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

representatives of GLAPI worked to assure the public that the project would also deliver great material benefits to the city.

Despite the full throttle support of GLAPI's leadership and the *Times*, the proposals failed to win voter approval. Returning to the drawing board, GLAPI sold the Lafayette Park site, focused their attention solely on the property in Bunker Hill, and then put forward another ballot initiative in the 1953 election. This new iteration of the project combined the civic auditorium, convention center, and opera house onto one site. The *Times* once again threw its weight behind the project, arguing in a February 1953 editorial that the city had "long suffered because it does not have an adequate auditorium, where conventions exhibits, sporting events and other affairs can be held." Building the auditorium and opera house was "a matter of civic pride," as many cities smaller and "less important" than Los Angeles already had such facilities.[388] When voters went to the polls in May 1953, the proposition again failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority approval, although it did fare better than the first attempt.[389] GLAPI made one final attempt the following year when they created a revised proposal and partnered with a newly formed organization, Forward Los Angeles, a loosely formed "civic organization of 800 leading citizens."[390] The new proposal, Proposition F, eliminated the opera house and called for "a 15,000-seat auditorium, doubling as a sports arena, an exhibition hall for trade shows and a smaller hall for music."[391] In their public

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[388] "We Much Need a Civic Auditorium." *Los Angeles Times,* February 19, 1953. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[389] Historical Background Document, Dorothy Chandler Papers. The 1951 ballot initiative had won 52.6% of the vote, while the 1953 initiative won 61.8%.

[390] "Civic Auditorium Bond Issue Urged." *Los Angeles Times,* February 20, 1954. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[391] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 6.

statements, Forward Los Angeles emphasized that their membership comprised not just elite businessmen from downtown, but also representatives from "every walk of life and every section of Los Angeles."[392] When the voters went to the polls in June 1954, Proposition F garnered greater support than its two predecessors, with 65.6% of voters casting affirmative votes, but just shy of the required two-thirds majority.[393]

Although the vote reflected growing support for the idea, it had become clear that winning popular support for the convention hall and Music Center from the city's electorate would be more challenging than GLAPI had anticipated. Several factors could be attributed to the electorate's hesitation. For one thing, no matter how much GLAPI and its supporters lauded the benefits the downtown project would bring to everyone in the city, there was no escaping the fact that voters were being asked to fund a project that was clearly intended to benefit the downtown business establishment. While that same establishment had, with growing success, portrayed public housing as a Socialist scheme in which the taxpayer was being asked to "pay someone else's rent," they were now asking voters to foot the bill for a project meant to shore up the value of their own investment in downtown real estate. GLAPI and the *Times* had worked hard to convince the public that the opera house and convention center would benefit everyone in the city, but it was difficult to convey any sense of public ownership in the project in a meaningful way.

The geographical nature of the city further exacerbated this problem. It is important to remember that city elections reflected the votes not just of citizens of downtown Los Angeles, but also in many outlying communities where residents were not enthusiastic about

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[392] "800 Volunteers Kick Off Drive for Civic Auditorium." *Los Angeles Times,* March 24, 1954. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[393] Historical Background Document, Dorothy Chandler Papers.

supporting a project from which they did not see themselves benefiting. This became particularly obvious during the campaign for Proposition F, when several City Council members attempted to add to the proposal three "community auditoriums" in outlying areas of the city, substantially increasing the dollar figure of the proposition.[394] When the issue went before the City Council, Harry Volk, chairman of Forward Los Angeles, warned that if the "branch auditoriums" were added to the proposition, the organization would withdraw its support. Despite its desire to bring "millions of dollars in convention revenue, uphold our employment and prosperity, and bring us untold cultural and recreational opportunities," Volk said, Forward Los Angeles could not endorse a bond issue that added to the scope of the project. Of course, the added cost of the additional auditoriums was not the only consideration; the "branch auditoriums" proposal directly undermined GLAPI's *raison d'être*: recentralizing the downtown business district. So with the defeat of the third proposal in 1954, it was now clear to GLAPI and its allies that they would likely never gain the endorsement from city voters and that they would need to look to build a broader base of support.

Enter Dorothy Chandler and the Board of Supervisors

Conspicuously missing from GLAPI's original proposal was any clear affiliation with a specific cultural institution, except for the short-lived partnership with the Metropolitan Opera. As a result, there was no sense among the public that the construction of the civic auditorium represented anything more than an investment in real estate. Meanwhile, a number of cultural organizations were working to bolster their profile, and establish their

[394] Carlton E. Williams. "Branch Auditoriums Move Opposed in Council Debate: Civic Leaders Ask That Issue Be Kept Clear." *Los Angeles Times,* March 4, 1954. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

companies on a more sound institutional and permanent basis, among them the Hollywood Bowl and the Southern California Symphony Association (SCSA), both of which had grown out of attempts in the early twentieth century by Los Angeles "to develop its own regional version of American high culture—symphony, opera, oratorio, as well as noncommercial theater and the fine arts—transplanted to, created for, and participated in by a broad-based local arts community with a widespread audience."[395] Much like the city's geography, the cultural landscape of Los Angeles remained diffuse even while GLAPI was working on developing its proposals for a centralized music center and civic auditorium.

One of the most curious aspects of GLAPI's history and its relationship to the cultural landscape of Los Angeles is the fact that many of the leaders of GLAPI, the Southern California Symphony Association (SCSA), and the Hollywood Bowl belonged to the same organizations but did not align their respective objectives of economic power and cultural legitimacy. For about four years, between 1950 and 1954, the three organizations orbited separately around a similar desire to institutionalize and monumentalize culture on the city's landscape. Although nobody realized it in the moment, each was in its own way laying a piece of the foundation for what would become the Los Angeles Music Center. A confluence of events starting with the near closure of the Hollywood Bowl in 1951 brought the individual players together with the County Board of Supervisors who helped to reposition the project as a county rather than municipal project.

Most retellings of the history of the Music Center point to 1951 as the key moment in the beginning of the journey that led to its 1964 opening. It was in that year that the

[395] Catherine Parsons Smith, "Founding the Hollywood Bowl. *American Music* 11, No. 2 (Summer 1993), 206-242. J-STOR, 207.

Hollywood Bowl suddenly shut down and the city and county were forced to confront the very real possibility of losing one of the most important—and one of the only—cultural landmarks in Los Angeles. As the 1951 summer season got underway at the Hollywood Bowl, all seemed to be moving along as usual. A "comfortable informality" had marked the opening of the annual "Symphonies Under the Stars" series on July 11 when "real music lovers," including "dowagers and shopgirls, music students and music connoisseurs, civic leaders, and financial tycoons" gathered to hear the Los Angeles Philharmonic play.[396] The night before, the Bowl had opened its season with a performance of the Strauss opera *Die Fledermaus.* In his review of the production, critic Albert Goldberg complained that Strauss's light opera had been heavily burdened by a production that "suggest[ed] grand rather than light opera."[397] While the production was handsome, he said, the performance was marred by the weightiness of its scale. But the impact on the artistic interpretation was nothing compared to the financial impact *Die Fledermaus* had on the Bowl. Despite having cash on hand of just over twelve thousand dollars and disappointing advance sales, the Bowl, with *Die Fledermaus,* racked up production expenses exceeding $121,000.[398] The massive financial loss made the closing of the Bowl inevitable, and on July 15, 1951, all remaining performances for the season were cancelled. Jean Hersholt, the president of the Bowl, assured the public that the closure was only a temporary measure and that performances would resume shortly and appointed an emergency committee to develop a strategy to

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[396] Cordell Hicks, "Comfortable Informality Mark Audience at Opening Performance." *Los Angeles Times,* July 11, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[397] Albert Goldberg. "'Die Fledermaus' Given Spectacular Production in Opening Bowl Season." *Los Angeles Times,* July 11, 1951: ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[398] Grace G. Koopal, *Miracle of Music.* (Los Angeles: Anderson, Ritchie & Simon, 1972), 192.

reorganize the Bowl and secure its future sustainability. Heading the committee was Dorothy Chandler. An executive vice president of the SCSA, Chandler had been appointed to the Bowl's board of directors just over a week before its closure.[399] The coincidence of Dorothy Chandler's appointment to the Hollywood Bowl Association's board of directors and the near collapse of the Bowl turned out to be a critically important moment in Los Angeles's cultural history, as it "started her extraordinary career in the world of cultural politics."[400]

Born Dorothy Buffum and known among her friends and close associates as Buff, she met Norman Chandler, son of *Times* publisher Harry Chandler, while the two were enrolled at Stanford University. They were married in August 1922. Buff "possessed the spirit, energy, and ambition of a self-confident, savvy power player"[401] and in the early years of her marriage to Norman Chandler, she struggled to reconcile that ambition with the expectations Norman's conservative family.

Chandler's drive far exceeded that of her husband Norman. As Mike Davis has argued, by the time Norman Chandler took over the reins of the *Times,* "'tired blood' or 'spoiled rich boy' syndrome, which seemingly affects all dynasties after the second generation" had set in, making the male heirs to the throne "dependent upon their fathers' henchmen or their wives."[402] Norman Chandler was "a third-generation aristocrat," argue Gottlieb and Wolt, "and his few ambitions reflected that fact."[403] His wife more than made

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[399] "Hollywood Bowl Adds Three Directors to Board." *Los Angeles Times,* July 6, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[400] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big*, 245.

[401] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Culture Broker: Franklin D. Murphy and the Transformation of Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 31.

[402] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 121.

[403] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big*, 245.

up for that lack of drive. By the 1940s she had become "a power at the *Times* and was taking an active interest in the cultural affairs of the city, as well as keeping on top of internal corporate matters."[404] She had also taken on responsibility for managing the corporate image of the *Times,* and was deeply concerned with bolstering the national reputation of Los Angeles.

Chandler worked tirelessly to bolster the city's image by demonstrating the legitimacy of Los Angeles's cultural institutions. She was elected to the board of directors of the Southern California Symphony Association in 1943,[405] so by the time the Hollywood Bowl imploded in July 1951, she had been a long-time presence on the cultural scene in Los Angeles. But it was the Bowl crisis and her role in saving the institution that brought her greater attention and gave her an outlet that could fulfill her drive. More importantly, it would lead to the creation of a "new cultural order"[406] headed by Chandler herself and made up of a coalition bridging traditional social divides while bringing the need for an enhanced cultural infrastructure to the fore of the public consciousness.

Throughout the Hollywood Bowl campaign and the later drive to build the Music Center, Chandler carefully balanced her public persona as a society matriarch with the more private reality, in which she was a shrewd political operative and cunning power broker in her own right. After taking center stage during the Hollywood Bowl drive, and later, the Music Center project, Chandler would come to be known by insiders as the "Iron Lady"[407]

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[404] Ibid.

[405] Ibid.

[406] John Orlando Northcutt, *The Hollywood Bowl Story* (Hollywood: Hollywood Bowl Association, 1962), 22.

[407] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Culture Broker,* 31.

and was accused by many of being "dictatorial."[408] When asked about these labels, Chandler replied, "Talk like that makes me cry. Inside of me I am very loving and warm, but the position in which I've been placed, the responsibilities I have, make it necessary for me to be very strong and firm. Often I've had to be the catalyst simply because nobody else would make a decision."[409]

Surely, there is some truth in Chandler's claim that the charges of being "dictatorial" were painful to her, but when considered in light of the political skill she demonstrated throughout the Bowl campaign and would further refine during the drive to build the Music Center, it seems clear that she also understood the danger—in the late 1950s and early 1960s—of pushing back too hard against these charges that almost certainly would never have been leveled at a man occupying her position. Even though it was well known that "Dorothy, rather than Norman, had become the most important power at the *Times,"* Chandler was careful not to publicly embrace feminism. "I've earned my achievements by what I as a woman have done," she said. "But to say I'm a women's libber and I want equal this and equal that is wrong. Sure I've had to work hard at being accepted, but to talk about this competition with males all the time—I can't understand it."[410] Whatever her personally held beliefs about being a "women's libber," Chandler was astute enough to recognize that it was dangerous territory for someone seeking contributions from wealthy elites and the general public. Chandler instead chose to capitalize publicly on her role as a society matriarch to bring an aura of elegance and glitz to the fundraising drive, while behind the

[408] "Brightness in the Air." *Time,* December 18, 1964.

[409] Ibid.

[410] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big*, 246-7.

scenes she wielded her Chandlerian muscle when necessary, both of which would prove tremendously valuable in her effort to save the Hollywood Bowl and as her vision for the Music Center came into sharper focus in the mid-1950s.

One of Chandler's first acts upon the start of the Hollywood Bowl crisis was to appoint an operations committee to quickly put together a program for a series of emergency fundraising concerts at the Bowl. She appointed Edwin Lester, the director of the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera, as chairman and he was joined on the committee by Los Angeles Philharmonic Music Director Alfred Wallenstein and Los Angeles Public Schools Superintendent of Music Education William Hartshorn.[411] Over the course of two weeks, this newly formed committee put together a lineup of noted conductors and musicians to headline a series of fundraising concerts at the Bowl. Meanwhile, Chandler turned to Neill Petree to head the fundraising committee. After drafting Petree into the Bowl campaign, she instructed him to contact his friend, noted film actress Irene Dunn, and enlist her support. "She's lovely and charming," she told Petree, "and I think the motion picture connection will be very helpful."[412] Chandler also recruited Neil Smith, executive vice president of GLAPI to take over the managerial responsibilities of the Bowl after managing director Karl Wecker resigned.[413] Chandler understood that success in rescuing the Bowl would require both the support of the public and the cooperation of city and county officials. Petree and Smith ensured a solid connection to the traditional sources of financial and political support offered by the downtown business elites, and the "motion picture" connection offered access not only

[411] Koopal, *Miracle of Music*, 197.

[412] Ibid., 199.

[413] Ibid., 198.

to the deep pockets of Hollywood celebrities but also to the star power that could help ensure public interest in the Bowl.

While the financial support of individual heavy hitters would be critical to the success of the Bowl and ultimately to the Music Center as well, Chandler worked relentlessly to convince the public of the Bowl's importance to the community and to encourage broad participation in the fundraising campaign. To do this, she employed two strategies. First, she continually reminded the public that the closure of the Hollywood Bowl had attracted nationwide news coverage, all of which reflected poorly on Southern California. She frequently warned the public that the closure of the Bowl threatened the "cultural integrity and eminence of Southern California," and said that what Southern Californians wanted was "cultural stability, unity, and quality on a high plane."[414] She lamented the perception that Los Angeles was thought to be culturally inferior to cities like New York because Angelenos lacked the "civic pride" of East Coast residents and she "wish[ed] this feeling were more dominant in the West Coast. We must 'sell' what we have here—the people and our assets," she declared. "We must let everyone know that we have a great Hollywood Bowl. It is not necessary to go to faraway shores for great music. Among the best is right here."[415] The *Times* echoed Chandler's argument in an editorial, pointing out that this "great cultural asset" helped give the city prestige. "It is a case where must pay attention 'to what the neighbors say,'" the editorial argued. "The property is here, the physical installations, the tradition, the

[414] "Bruno Walter Conducts Symphony Under the Stars Tonight: Bowl Drive Goal Set at $100,000." *Los Angeles Times,* July 28, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[415] Grace Koopal, *Miracle of Music*, 215.

genius, the talent, the management ability. Solely lacking is community drive."[416] Chandler and the *Times* worked in concert to convince the public that because the Bowl was owned by the county, all Southern Californians "should consider the Bowl a civic responsibility for financial reasons if for no other."[417] And what better way for the public to fulfill its responsibility than with their financial support?

Chandler's second strategy to engage the public as active participants was in the fundraising campaign chaired by Petree and movie star Irene Dunne. Petree and Dunne were tasked with assembling a committee of one hundred members who would work toward raising $100,000. Speaking at a meeting of the fund-raising committee at the California Club, Petree explained to the assembled crowd that the fundraising plan they were developing was aimed at "affording the public an opportunity to back to the Bowl financially and artistically." Although he acknowledged that the Bowl would need to attract large donations, "it would be far better for the Bowl if 100,000 people contributed $1 than if 1000 people contributed $100."[418] The *Times* aided in the effort "to enlist financial support of the community to maintain and insure the future of fine music in the Southland" by accepting contributions to the fund and including a remittance coupon in the paper as well as "begin[ning] the fund with a contribution of $500."[419] The publicity surrounding the Bowl campaign consistently focused on the importance of the public's participation. County Supervisor John Anson Ford, in a letter published in the *Times,* lauded the modest

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[416] "Rescue Hollywood Bowl!" *Los Angeles Times,* July 17, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[417] Ibid.

[418] "Bruno Walter Conducts Symphonies Under the Stars Tonight"

[419] "Bowl Fund Drive Gets Under Way." *Los Angeles Times,* July 31, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

contributions of the citizenry as "eloquent testimony" to the great "regard for this community enterprise." He was particularly impressed, he said, by "the teacher and wife whose family obligations are large and whose pay is modest, who sent in two $1 bills. For them it meant more than $100 checks from many."[420] By October 1951, the financial situation of the Bowl had been reversed. From "box office receipts of only $38,069.81 and an operating loss of $80,096.26 during the disastrous week of 'Fledermaus,' the remainder of the season showed paid admissions of 149,339 totaling $171,320.39, with 'other income' in the amount of $15,355.06," reducing the operating loss to $33,645.82.[421] By October 1951, the goal of $100,000 had been surpassed.

With the Bowl now on firmer financial footing, Chandler turned her attention to ensuring its long-term stability and began by orchestrating a reorganization of the Hollywood Bowl Association. In January 1952, Petree was named president of the Hollywood Bowl Association and Chandler was elected executive vice president. In addition, several longstanding board members were pushed aside and replaced by a mix of individuals from business, entertainment, and municipal and county government. In reorganizing the board she had created a new alliance made up of powerhouses from the downtown establishment as well as from Hollywood, new money elites, and higher education. Chandler clearly understood that the continued success of the Bowl rested on the ability of its leadership to wield influence in a variety of sectors ranging from government to culture. Having raised the profile of the Bowl through her fundraising campaign, she now worked to establish its

[420] John Anson Ford, "Bowl Crisis Reveals Devotion." *Los Angeles Times,* August 16, 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[421] Grace Koopal, *Miracle of Music*, 204.

legitimacy not only as a musical venue but also as a vital public asset. Ensuring the longevity of the Bowl and increasing its legitimacy would require subsidy from the city and county.

Having established the importance of the Bowl to the city and county of Los Angeles, Chandler and Petree led the effort to renegotiate the Bowl's lease with the county to finance improvements to the Bowl. In a letter to the Chief Administrative Officer of Los Angeles County, Petree said it appeared "conclusively that there is no way to successfully continue the Hollywood Bowl operation unless improvements (as outlined by the architects and engineers) can be accomplished in the shortest possible time." He proposed, on behalf of the board of directors, that "the present ninety-nine year lease be cancelled and a new lease made with the County of Los Angeles, providing for a period not to exceed twenty-five years." The Bowl Association "would be relinquishing forty-five years of a lease on a very valuable piece of property in consideration of the County making the improvements that are so vitally necessary."[422] Chandler's success in the fundraising campaign, which relied so heavily on drawing the public's attention to the reputational harm the Bowl's collapse had brought to Los Angeles, made it difficult for the Board of Supervisors to decline the request.

The supervisors agreed to renegotiate the lease and assumed the financial burden of making much-needed improvements to the facility to the tune of $569,000 in the first two years alone.[423] The planned improvements for the first year included a new electrical system, new light and sound towers, new sound equipment, remodeling of the box areas and the construction of new dressing rooms. The second year's construction program would include new parking areas, ramp lighting, seating capacity expansion, and several cosmetic

[422] Grace Koopal, *Miracle of Music*, 222.

[423] Grace Koopal, *Miracle of Music,* 222; "Hollywood Bowl Rehabilitation Plans Approved." *Los Angeles Times,* October 7, 1953. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

improvements to the Bowl.[424] Millions more were spent on the physical infrastructure of the Bowl over the next few years as Chandler and the board of directors worked to ensure that the physical plant reflected the Bowl's permanence as part of the cultural and civic landscape of Los Angeles.

The Bowl's near closure, Chandler later recalled, brought about "the whole change in the cultural picture of Los Angeles. . . . That was a real shock to Los Angeles."[425] As dark as that moment may have been, Chandler recognized the opportunity not only to rally public support to save this venue and organization, but also to capitalize on the national embarrassment brought upon the city by the near loss of one of its only prominent cultural institutions. Chandler had effectively used her influence—most notably her relationship with the *Times*—to ensure that the reputational damage caused by the Bowl crisis remained front and center in the public's mind, thereby providing valuable leverage when attempting to persuade the County Supervisors to lend financial support to the Bowl. When confronted with her proposal that the county assume significant financial responsibility for the Bowl and its needed capital improvements, the Board of Supervisors was hardly in a position to say no. As one observer later recalled, Chandler had "buttonholed county supervisors and city councilmen into subsidizing culture."[426] But more important than cornering the Supervisors into lending increased financial support, Chandler had begun the process of bringing powerful players together to work toward a singular goal of revitalizing Los Angeles. When the third bond proposal put forth by GLAPI failed to win public support—falling short of the

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[424] "Hollywood Bowl Rehabilitation Plans Approved." *Los Angeles Times,* October 7, 1953. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[425] John Orlando Northcutt, *The Hollywood Bowl Story,* 22.

[426] *Los Angeles Newsletter,* April 22, 1961. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

required two-thirds majority by less than one percent—in 1954, Chandler was "really relieved" and said that although she had been supportive of all of the GLAPI proposals, she "could never see the convention center and the opera house together. The time seemed ripe to try a new tack, to see if we couldn't raise the money ourselves."[427]

Both a Challenge and an Opportunity of Major Importance

Once again, Chandler deployed Hollywood glitz to attract money and public interest. On March 17, 1955, more than six hundred guests gathered at the Ambassador Hotel for the Eldorado Party, a "golden kaleidoscope of beautiful gowns, fragrant flowers, entertainment, and music" that "made the event a memorable one in the social annals" of Los Angeles.[428] Chandler enlisted MGM Studios executive John Green to produce the event, which he titled "An Evening of Improbabilities." The evening featured a high-end fashion show and entertainment from such luminaries as Jack Benny, Dinah Shore, Danny Kaye, and David Rose. Further adding to the opulence of the event, the entire Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra performed. The main event of the evening was the raffling of an Eldorado Cadillac donated by General Motors; hence, the fundraiser's name, "The Eldorado Party." The party netted $400,000 toward building a reserve fund for the Southern California Symphony Association and would "eventually go to provide a permanent home for fine music in our City of the Angels."[429] The *Times* lavished countless column inches on the fundraiser, which was the subject of over a dozen features in the paper over the course of just a few days. In

[427] Toland, *Music Center Story*, 6.

[428] "Eldorado Party Radiant Event." *Los Angeles Times,* March 18, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[429] Ibid.

addition to raising an impressive sum, the party had provided evidence, Chandler later said, "that Southern Californians wanted a music center badly enough to build it themselves."[430]

While Chandler had been at work putting together plans to raise the funds to provide a permanent home for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Board of Supervisors had become interested in taking over the GLAPI proposal for a public auditorium as a county, rather than city, project. After losing their bid to host the 1956 Republican Convention to San Francisco because of a lack of adequate facilities, the Supervisors ordered a study of the legal framework necessary to allow the county to purchase land for and to construct venues for the purposes of presenting music and other kinds of performance.[431] In 1954 and 1955, GLAPI and the Board of Supervisors collaborated on developing such legislation, which ultimately passed in May 1955. Because GLAPI's support had been instrumental in successfully passing the enabling legislation, their leadership expected that they would retain control of the project. However, The Board of Supervisors had already moved in a different direction, causing much resentment among some of GLAPI's leaders.[432]

A few weeks after the Eldorado Party, the Board of Supervisors announced the formation of a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) to be headed by Dorothy Chandler. This committee would be tasked with "work[ing] out details of locating and financing without cost to taxpayers a downtown music center and convention hall."[433] The CAC would

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[430] Henry Sutherland, "The Spirit That Built the Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[431] Ibid.

[432] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County: Five Decades of Music, Theater, and Dance* (Los Angeles: Huntington Library, 2015), 9.

[433] "Mrs. Chandler Heads Planning for Auditorium." *Los Angeles Times,* April 20, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

be comprised of about forty members. Each of the five supervisors would appoint three committee members from their respective districts and twenty-five "at large" members would be appointed by the Supervisors as a body. Chandler worked with the Supervisors to ensure a broad representation of business, culture, and civic interests. The committee members, appointed to the CAC in June 1955, included representatives from labor, education, publishing, aviation, and motion pictures (notably represented by Cecil B. De Mille).[434] The following month, Chandler appointed her executive committee, made up of "topflight civic leaders selected for key roles." Chandler assured the Board of Supervisors that this group was "without political or other bias in its dedication to the aim of the auditorium's completion."[435] At the close of the Supervisors meeting, Charles S. Jones, the newly appointed chairman of the CAC, called a meeting for the following day as the first "work session" of the newly formed executive committee of the CAC, and Chandler closed her remarks to the supervisors by declaring the project to be "both a challenge and an opportunity of major importance not only to Los Angeles County but to the whole of Southern California."[436]

The first significant step taken by the CAC was to commission a study by the consulting firm Arthur D. Little, Inc., to make specific recommendations for the project. Engaged by the CAC in September 1955, Little worked to determine the potential markets for a civic auditorium and music center as well as the appropriate locations and

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[434] "Names of Committeemen for Auditorium Chosen." *Los Angeles Times,* June 22, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[435] "Civic Auditorium Plans Take Shape: Mrs. Chandler Names Executive Group to Work With Supervisors." *Los Angeles Times,* July 20, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[436] Ibid.

organizational and financial structures for the venues. Little recommended that the county build two separate buildings: "a convention and exposition building and a music center."[437] In its discussion of the potential market for a music center, the Little report evaluated the need for facilities to accommodate two distinct types of events: those requiring seating for fewer than 2000 audience members (such as small recitals, choral groups, modern dance, and minor ballet companies) and those requiring seating for audiences of 2000 or more (such as light opera, symphony, grand opera, major solo artists, etc.). After conducting "many detailed personal interviews with people well informed in the music field in both Los Angeles and the rest of the country" and who "were connected with almost all kinds of musical entertainment and represented virtually every aspect of the production of major musical events," Little concluded that the major deficiency facing Los Angeles was in venues able to accommodate audiences of 2000 or more. After considering several solutions to solve the lack of adequate venues for audiences of more than 2000 members, Little recommended the construction of a music center with a "flexible-capacity hall of 4000 seats."[438]

In addition to highlighting the failure of the existing musical venues to meet the needs of particular organizations like the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco Opera, which was in residence in the Shrine Auditorium during the summers, the report validated the Supervisors' concerns that the lack of adequate civic facilities was damaging not only to the county's bottom line but also to its reputation. Many of the report's recommendations were based on interviews with the managers of civic auditoriums and cultural centers in other major cities, plainly demonstrating that Los Angeles was falling behind most major

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[437] Arthur D. Little, Inc. *Report to the County of Los Angeles on a New Music Auditorium and Music Center* (Cambridge: Arthur D. Little, Inc., 1956), 1.

[438] Ibid., 38-9.

metropolises in terms of cultural growth, particularly New York, where plans for Lincoln Center were beginning to take shape.

On June 18, 1956, the CAC appeared before the Board of Supervisors to make their recommendations based on the Little report. They recommended two buildings—a convention center and music center—be built on the site bordered by Eighth Street, Hill Street, Olympic Boulevard, and Flower Street. The music center would hold a flexible capacity auditorium with maximum seating for 4000, reducible to 2100, while the convention center would have 315,000 square feet of exhibition space. "Such a building," said the CAC, "should be able to handle all major conventions, including national political conventions and vast trade shows, such as the National Automobile Show."[439] Also included in the mammoth project site would be garage facilities capable of accommodating 5500 cars. Financing the project would be accomplished through "the creation of a nonprofit corporation" managed by "public-spirited citizens."[440] Under this arrangement, the corporation would buy the land and issue bonds to finance construction of the buildings; the county would lease the properties from the corporation, and those proceeds would be used to retire the bonds. The projected cost of the land and buildings was approximately fifty-one million dollars, and the annual leasing cost to the county was estimated to be $500,000.[441] After hearing the CAC's recounting of the recommendations, the Supervisors voted unanimously in favor of moving forward with the project. Later that month, The Civic Auditorium and Music Center

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[439] "Text of Project Recommendation." *Los Angeles Times,* June 20, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[440] Little Report, 2.

[441] "Text of Project Recommendation." *Los Angeles Times,* June 20, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

Association of Los Angeles County (CAMCALA) filed articles of incorporation, with Dorothy Chandler as chairman of the board of directors and Charles Jones as president. All of the CAC members were retained as part of CAMCALA. This corporation would be responsible for land acquisition and the construction of the facilities.[442]

Naturally, the *Times* lauded the decision to move forward with the project, which represented "at once a fulfillment and a challenge."[443] In an editorial the day before the Supervisors cast their unanimous vote in support of the project, the *Times* reiterated the "fact that "Los Angeles County in its role as the fastest-growing and most forward-looking of all metropolitan areas in the United States must keep reminding itself continually that it is woefully behind the times in some respects."[444] However, despite the unanimous approval of the Board of Supervisors and the praise heaped on the project by the *Times,* the project was not immune to criticism.

CAMCALA's insistence that "the benefits of these facilities will extend far beyond the boundaries of any one city; in fact, throughout the entire County"[445] did not persuade officials and journalists in some outlying municipalities, particularly Long Beach and Pasadena, who objected to a project they felt privileged downtown at the expense of their localities. The publisher of the Long Beach *Independent Press-Democrat,* F. Herman Ridder, who wanted to build a concert hall in Long Beach, denounced the project, arguing

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[442] "Auditorium Corporation Organized: Nonprofit Group's Directors headed by Mrs. Chandler." *Los Angeles Times,* June 30, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[443] "Auditorium Decision Due Today." *Los Angeles Times,* June 19, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[444] Ibid.

[445] Undated "Question and Answer" Document, Dorothy Chandler Papers. Although this document does not have a specific title or date, it is clearly intended to rebut arguments made that the project served only downtown at the expense of other cities in Los Angeles County, particularly Long Beach.

that the Little Report overstated the potential of the proposed auditorium to be self-supporting.[446] Others argued that the Supervisors' support of the project amounted to the circumvention of the voters will by pushing ahead without seeking approval at the ballot box.[447]

Pressure continued to mount over the course of the next year, during which the project ran into increased resistance as well as legal and fiscal challenges related to land acquisition. Even the most ardent supporters of the project conceded that the growing cost of land acquisition, a result of the 1957 recession and rising interest rates, represented a significant problem, adding to the project's financial risk. Additionally, a June 1957 Board of Supervisors meeting at which Supervisor Burton Chace proposed subjecting the project to voter approval, clearly signaled to Chandler and the rest of CAMCA that the project could be in jeopardy.[448]

By the end of July 1957, CAMCA was faced with a difficult decision. On July 29, Chandler and CAMCA president Charles Jones called a meeting of the organization at the Biltmore Hotel, where Chandler and Jones presented their plan to postpone the project. Chandler emphasized that they were not abandoning the plan, but rather "putting it on the shelf," adding, "we didn't want another failure."[449] A July meeting of the Board of Supervisors had revealed faltering support for the project, and Chandler understood that an additional failure—this would be the fourth—could sink the project once and for all. Chandler affirmed her belief in the project to the CACMA membership, assuring them, "This

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[446] "L.A.C. Says: L.A. White Elephant." *Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram,* July 1, 1956.

[447] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County,* 10.

[448] Board of Supervisors Meeting Transcript, July 9, 1957. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[449] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 7.

action today represents only a period of waiting. These facilities will be built with the kind of unity and dedication we have in the people of this county."[450] The next day, the Board of Supervisors accepted CACMA's request to postpone the project.

Supervisor John Anson Ford, who had been a strong proponent of the project and a leading advocate for county support of cultural institutions like the Hollywood Bowl expressed his "deep personal regret" over having to postpone "one of the most important improvements the county has sought in many years." He added, "It doesn't lessen the great need for this civicly operated facility wanted by the great majority of our citizens."[451] A few weeks later, Ford also privately expressed to Chandler his belief in the project, praising her "pioneering effort" and noting that although the project must be postponed, CACMA, under Chandler's leadership had "clearly demonstrated" the "need and the material benefits of such a civic improvement. It is inconceivable that this need will not be filled in the foreseeable future."[452]

Although the project would languish on the shelf for well over a year, Chandler learned the lessons of failure well. Despite the initial support of the Board of Supervisors for the project, its size and location had produced a price tag too exorbitant for even the most civic-minded citizens. After accepting CACMA's request to postpone the project, the Board of Supervisors had requested that the committee "stay alive and active" and suggested that in the future, the civic auditorium could be separated from the music center "to produce a less

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[450] "Auditorium Postponing Requested: Recommendation Goes to Board of Supervisors Today." *Los Angeles Times,* July 30, 1957. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[451] "Auditorium Committee Given Praise: Supervisors Laud Unselfish Zeal in Working for Project." *Los Angeles Times,* July 31, 1957. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[452] Ford to Chandler, August 25, 2957. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

costly over-all approach."[453] This was the approach Chandler preferred all along, as it would ensure her greater control over the project, and after being elected president of the Southern California Symphony Association in January 1958, Chandler resolved to use that position to aggressively pursue the music center project independently of the civic auditorium.

Upon assuming the office of SCSA President, Chandler made two commitments to the Association: to find a permanent director and to build a permanent home for the orchestra, both of which she viewed as essential to achieving her goal of bolstering the orchestra's stature and that of Los Angeles itself. Getting the music center project underway consumed her attention during the first year of her presidency. After the most recent failure to launch the music center project, Chandler realized that she would need to demonstrate that enough private money could be raised to ensure that the financial burden to the county would be minimized as much as possible. The $400,000 from the Eldorado Party was still sitting in the SCSA's reserve fund, and Chandler believed that if she could get to $500,000 she might be able to convince the Supervisors to cooperate. She made her first major move in December 1958, when "following a hunch . . . she decided to take a Sunday drive to Orange County to talk to Myford Irvine."[454] Chandler recalled that her decision to visit Irvine, who she did not know personally, was "impulsive," but it turned out to be successful. After hearing her vision of the music center, Irvine signed a pledge for $100,000, and a month later she secured another $100,000 contribution from the Michael J. Connell Charities, a foundation that had "always given generously to the Symphony."[455] With $600,000 now in

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[453] "Auditorium Committee Given Praise: Supervisors Laud Unselfish Zeal in Working for Project." *Los Angeles Times,* July 31, 1957. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[454] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big*, 309.

[455] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 7; Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 10.

reserve, Chandler felt confident she could convince the Supervisors to support another attempt to finally build the music center.

In March 1959, Chandler's proposal was presented to the County Board of Supervisors by Pacific Mutual Insurance Executive and establishment power broker Asa Call, chairman of a small committee that had been working to develop a new strategy for erecting a cultural center in downtown Los Angeles.[456] It was this proposal that finally put the Los Angeles Music Center on the path to fruition. The proposal had two key elements: First, Chandler and Call's committee agreed to raise four million dollars toward the ten-million-dollar construction costs through private subscriptions, and asked that the county pay the remaining six million dollars and to appoint and pay the fee of the Welton Becket Architectural firm. In addition to these monetary contributions, the County would set aside a piece of county-owned land near the Civic Center.[457]

The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously in favor of the proposal and expressed their astonishment over the novel approach Chandler and her committee had developed. Supervisor Frank G. Bonelli declared after Call's presentation, "In my 15 years in public office, this offer of donations of private funds to build public buildings is the most unusual I ever heard," a sentiment echoed by others on the Board of Supervisors.[458] Supervisor Kenneth Hahn said that the proposal was "more than" unusual, adding, "It was unheard of up

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[456] Call had been appointed chairman of a small committee to "oversee the Music Center question." Chandler was the vice-chairman of the committee. Also on the committee were Charles Jones, Bob Hastings from the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera (which would soon become a constituent of the Music Center), Lin Beebe, and *Examiner* publisher Franklin Payne. See Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big,* 310 and Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County,* 11.

[457] "The Music Center: A Living Memorial to Piece" (undated document generated by Los Angeles County Supervisors providing an overview of the plan adopted by the Board of Supervisors). Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[458] "County Given $4 Million Offer for Cultural Center." *Los Angeles Times,* March 18, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

to now." Supervisor Warren Dorn "lauded the 'faith and public spirit' of 'these private individuals who would contribute to such a facility.'"[459] Over the ensuing months and years, the significance of private contributions would become an important factor in the development of the Music Center's identity. Also important, however, was its new location, which not only solved financial and political problems, but also placed the Music Center in the middle of a rapidly transforming landscape. Located adjacent to the Civic Center, atop the Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project, and within an easy drive of Chavez Ravine, where Dodger Stadium would soon rise, the Music Center would provide "a much-needed centerpiece to the city—and a bold modern identity."[460]

Somewhere Near the Center of the Greatest City in the County

The selection of the new site, bounded by Grand Avenue, Hope Street, Temple Street, and First Street, was particularly important for several reasons. From a practical standpoint, the county's ownership of the land would allow the project's supporters to avoid the financially and politically costly process of acquiring land through eminent domain proceedings which had contributed to the shelving of the project in 1957. As Toland notes in the official history of the Music Center, the idea to locate the Music Center in the Civic Center had been supported by John Anson Ford.[461] Ford had first suggested the Civic Center site in a June 1957 meeting of the Board of Supervisors just before the previous proposal was shelved. During that meeting, Ford affirmed his belief that "a great metropolitan area like ours deserves and needs a center for . . . cultural activities, such as music and opera" and that

[459] Ibid.

[460] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Culture Broker,* 76.

[461] Toland, *Music Center Story*, 7.

the "logical" place for such facilities was "somewhere near the center of the greatest city in the County in the metropolitan area." Although he believed that spending public money on a cultural center was entirely justified, he recognized that the residents in the outlying areas "bitterly opposed" the project because they were "being called upon to help pay for a deficit on a downtown project." Of course, there was no question that a cultural center, if built, would be built in the downtown area, so garnering adequate support for the project rested on the ability to reduce the projected cost. By lowering the cost of the initial real estate investment, he argued, they could demonstrate that the deficits could be substantially reduced, thereby giving the supervisors the political cover to vote in favor of the project.[462] Also important was the fact that the use of land already owned by the county ensured that the project was protected from becoming bogged down in the political quagmire of eminent domain proceedings, thereby reducing the likelihood of the significant political resistance that had plagued Lincoln Center. This is not to say that urban renewal in Los Angeles was any less contentious than in New York City. The redevelopment of Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine each faced significant opposition from residents and business owners who faced displacement because of the projects. However, by the time the Board of Supervisors voted to move forward with the Music Center project in 1959, both the Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine urban renewal projects had been approved by the City Council and upheld by the courts, thereby allowing the Music Center's proponents to avoid explicit association with evictions, displacement, and erasure, while simultaneously capitalizing on the new vision of

[462] Board of Supervisors Meeting Transcript, July 9, 1957, p. 18-9. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

the city that was emerging under Mayor Poulson and the newly emboldened business elite who had finally been able to seize control of the downtown landscape.

Several Million Dollars and Lots of Civic Pride

With the future of the project finally secure, Chandler set about the work of raising the funds to build the Center. The fundraising campaign was important in creating the same sense of public investment in the project that had saved the Hollywood Bowl almost ten years before, and it reinforced the narrative of the Music Center as a demonstration of "co-operation between free enterprise and free government without parallel in history"[463] and of the public's will to build the Music Center themselves. Phrases like "motivated citizens," "public-spirited," and "civic minded" peppered almost all of Chandler's public comments about the Center and its supporters, and Chandler consistently portrayed monetary contributions as an explicit act of civic participation. A fundraising brochure inviting individuals to become "founders" the Music Center with a contribution of $25,000 or greater told prospective donors, "In a free society, giving is a privilege and an honor. It can also be a joyous and thrilling experience when it provides the chance to share in a project of urgent need and shining promise, to participate directly in countless other lives that will be in some way enhanced by one's gift."[464] Such rhetoric allowed potential donors to feel as though they were participating in a project that would benefit the community at large by bequeathing much needed cultural facilities, but the implicit paternalism also reassured prospective patrons that the Music Center would stand not only as a monument to the cultural maturity of

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[463] Henry Sutherland, "The Spirit that Built The Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964: ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[464] "An Invitation to Become a Founder of the Music Center, A Living Memorial to Peace." Dorothy Chandler Papers.

Los Angeles but would also forever attest to the social and financial power of those who were able to facilitate its construction.

Chandler sought financial support from virtually every imaginable source, most notably looking beyond the traditional downtown funding sources and turning instead to Hollywood and the "new money" of the predominantly Jewish Westside. As Chandler later recalled, "The city was fragmented. . . . There was Hollywood, and there was downtown, and they didn't know who the others were." She eschewed the traditional big meetings in elite social clubs—most of which, at least in downtown Los Angeles, were off limits to Jews—and instead favored fundraising "on an individual basis . . . in my house or somebody else's house, or in little private dining rooms, everyone accepted on the same basis."[465] Chandler's inclusion of the new money Jewish elite rankled some members of the old guard elite who felt that Chandler would compromise the prestige of the elite by opening the door to anyone with the price of admission. Columnist Hedda Hopper criticized Chandler, saying "Los Angeles society is much like the frog that wanted to inflate himself bigger than the bull. Outside our city's limit, its 'society' doesn't mean much primarily because our standard isn't 'Who are you? but 'How much have you got?'"[466] Nonetheless, Chandler, having long since come to terms with the scorn from the old guard who resented her clout within the *Times* and in political and cultural affairs, pressed forward with her campaign.

Perhaps no anecdote better illustrates Chandler's shrewdness as a fundraiser than that of a chance encounter that led to on-the-spot contributions from two men totaling $250,000. Chandler had scheduled a meeting with the Music Center's Building Fund Committee and

[465] Gottleib and Wolt*, Thinking Big,* 311.

[466] Ibid.

hoped to be able to announce at the meeting that they had reached their goal. Instead, it looked as though she would have to inform the committee that they were still $250,000 short. As she walked into the upscale Perino's Restaurant, she spotted Edward Pauley with whom she served on the University of California Board of Regents. When Chandler told Pauley of the shortfall, he offered to contribute half of the needed amount if Chandler could match it. When Sam Mosher, Chairman of Signal Oil, walked into the bar, Chandler "excused herself and went to speak to Mosher, glancing occasionally at Pauley."[467] Mosher wrote Chandler a check on the spot for the $125,000. Chandler knew the two men to be rivals and, when she found herself in the same room with the both, she seized upon the opportunity to use that rivalry as leverage. She would use a similar tactic the following year when she set her sights on savings and loan magnates Mark Taper and Howard Ahmanson.

By December 1961, the plan for the Music Center had expanded to include not just the pavilion, but also two additional theaters. The first of the new buildings would be called the "Forum" and would be "a small building of approximately 800 seats that will be for musical purposes, for dramatic purposes, for civic education, for educational forums for getting groups to come from all over the country." The second building, would be the "Center Theater" and would have approximately 1,825 seats and "would house anything within the area of the performing arts which needs a theater of that size."[468] To meet the additional cost of the two new buildings, the fund-raising committee had raised its goal to twelve million dollars. Around Christmas of 1961, Chandler approached S. Mark Taper, who had, by the late 1950s, made a fortune financing suburban housing.

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[467] Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 12.

[468] Dorothy Chandler, Report to the Board of Supervisors (transcript), January 16, 1962. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

Taper had moved to Long Beach from England in 1960 "with every intention of retiring in the sun on a modest income." Taper did not stay in retirement for long. Instead, he invested heavily in real estate and built thirty-five thousand homes in Northern and Southern California, "acquired a handful of savings and loan associations and formed the First Charter Financial Corporation."[469] Like many of his "new money" counterparts, Taper wished to carve out a place for himself in Los Angeles society, a desire that Chandler tapped into during their negotiations for Taper's gift, which took place over the course of about one year. Under the terms reached, Taper agreed to contribute one million dollars to build the forum if three provisions were met. First, the building would be named in his honor. Second, he would have a permanent box seat adjacent to the Chandlers' box. Third, he would have veto power over the naming of the other two buildings in the Music Center. [470] Taper's contribution was a major boon to the Music Center fundraising drive, moving it past ninety percent of its twelve-million-dollar goal, but it also served as an important sign of Chandler's commitment to reaching her goals by opening the doors of Los Angeles society to those who had been unable to gain entrée into the elite social circles of the old guard. In exchange for a few million dollars, Chandler offered previously marginalized individuals legitimation in a literally concrete way.

After securing Taper's gift, Chandler set her sights on Howard J. Ahmanson, another savings and loan magnate and "new rich upstart."[471] Ahmanson had moved to California when he was about twenty years old and began working for his family's fire and casualty

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[469] "$1 Million Donation for Forum Puts Music Center Beyond 90% of Goal." *Los Angeles Times,* November 11, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[470] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big,* 312.

[471] Ibid., 313.

insurance company. In 1947, he bought Home Savings and Loan and "grew the thrift side of the business into an empire that made him one of the richest people in the United States."[472] In addition to his success in finance, Ahmanson was an active philanthropist, having donated two million dollars toward construction of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1961 followed by a one million dollar gift to the University of Southern California the following year.[473] Ahmanson and Taper were by all accounts fierce rivals in the savings and loan industry, and Chandler capitalized on their mutual competitiveness to secure a gift from Ahmanson. "You've got to play one against the other," she said. "You've got to know when to push and when to shove. It took a lot of talking, a lot of understanding, a lot of listening to their personal lives. One wanted to give as much as the other." Although it took nearly two years to secure the gift, Ahmanson, "not wanting to be outdone" by Taper, donated over a million dollars toward the construction of the Center Theater in 1965, and Chandler agreed to his stipulation that the building be named after him. Finally, on December 28, 1965, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the official naming of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the Mark Taper Forum, and Ahmanson Theater. As the Board of Supervisors prepared to vote on the naming of the buildings, Supervisor Ken Hahn declared it "proper to give tribute to whom tribute is due and it is certainly the consensus of the opinion of the citizens of the great County, through their elected Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles, to give this public honor to the donors of these, of the benefactors of good things for the people."[474]

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[472] Davis, *Music Center of Los Angeles County,* 17.

[473] Ibid., 17-18.

[474] Transcript of Meeting of the Board of Supervisors, December 28, 1965. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

As important as these major gifts were to the funding of the Music Center, these remarks by Supervisor Hahn reflected a challenge facing Chandler. The fundraising campaign was not just a means to generate revenue to build the Center. Rather, it was also important to developing its public image. Indeed, no aspect of the Music Center's creation was more loudly touted than the significance of private contributions. Over and over again the public was reminded that the Music Center, while enjoying some financial support from the county, was being funded not through the levying of taxes or expensive municipal bonds, but rather through the kind of voluntary giving encouraged by the free enterprise system. However, too much emphasis on the major donations like those of Irvine, Taper, and Ahmanson could not only alienate prospective small donors but could also undermine public good will toward the project if it appeared to be solely paternalistic enterprise.

Appearing before the Board of Supervisors in January 1962, Chandler boasted that her fund-raising team had raised millions of dollars at a cost of only $48,000, noting that there was "no record in the United States" of such a sum being raised with so little expense. Chandler attributed the low fundraising costs to the volunteer nature of the endeavor; the only paid person on staff, Chandler said, was a part-time secretary. Also important to the fundraising effort was the policy "to spread the base of giving because we felt that then everyone would feel that it was their Center, no matter whether they gave a dollar or a hundred thousand dollars, it was their Center from then on." Out of 1,342 gifts, nearly half were in the $1 to $1,000 range, while only two percent of the gifts exceeded fifty thousand dollars.[475]

[475] Ibid.

Nonetheless, because major gifts attracted the most news coverage and were in fact so large that they comprised a disproportionate percentage of the bottom line, Chandler had difficulty downplaying the degree to which the Center was financed by the city's elite. A few weeks after Taper's gift was announced to the public, Chandler received a letter from a Los Angeles resident named Lillian Madsen. After thanking Chandler for her work in creating the Music Center, Madsen suggested that "a beautiful fountain or container of some sort be built where coins could be put in a slot." Such an approach, Madsen suggested, would allow "those who are not blessed with lots of money feel that they too can have a part in the culture of the city." Expensive fundraising dinners and galas were "fine," Madsen said, but they made many in the city feel shut out both "financially and psychologically." Soliciting contributions as small as a few pennies could, Madsen suggested, yield "several million [dollars] and lots of civic pride."[476]

Chandler had effectively courted wealthy donors on the premise of civic participation through giving—and by offering many of them entrée into the upper echelons of Los Angeles society—but she had not been nearly as effective in soliciting support from the general public, many of whom clearly felt alienated from the project, as Madsen's letter poignantly demonstrates. Chandler was surely aware of this disconnect, but finding an effective way to generate wider participation in the fundraising for the Music Center remained elusive until September 1964 when she spoke at the dedication of the Pavilion.

After thanking all who had given of their time and money, Chandler, acknowledging her reputation as a tenacious fundraiser, said to the assembled 3,500 onlookers and countless others listening over radio and television, "So as not to disappoint anyone, let me make one

[476] Lillian Madsen to Chandler, November 30, 1962. Dorothy Chandler Papers, Box 11.

little pitch—We need more money! The Center Theater is not yet funded. We need approximately $1 million. If one million people would put $1 in an envelope . . . The Music Center would be complete!"[477] After her remarks, Chandler was besieged by people crowding around her to place dollar bills in her hands. Many of these individuals echoed Lillian Madsen's belief that their small donations were not needed or desired. One woman told Chandler, "Until you said that, I'd have been a little ashamed to offer so small a contribution. But now I'm not. Thank you." Another woman and her husband each contributed a dollar and told Chandler, "Now it's our Music Center too."[478]

The response to her "little pitch" demonstrated to Chandler that a small gifts campaign would not only tap a potentially vast revenue stream but would also help to better establish the Center as a civic enterprise. Chandler turned once again to Hollywood and enlisted Walt Disney to help raise one million dollars from one-dollar donations. On November 1, 1964, they launched the "Buck Bag" campaign in which fifty thousand blue bags designed by Disney were "placed in the hands of a host of volunteer collectors representing the entire spectrum of Southern Californians." Chandler said of the campaign, "We want people everywhere to have an opportunity to participate personally in The Music Center. When [the Buck Bag drive] is complete, I hope a million Southern Californians will be able to say with pride, 'I helped build it.'"[479] By the time the month-long campaign was over, more than two million dollars had been raised, including $500,000 in matching funds

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[477] Henry Sutherland, "Many Small Offerings for Center Seen: Mrs. Chandler Elated at Reaction to 'Little Pitch.'" *Los Angeles Times,* October 4, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times. At the time of the dedication in September 1964, Howard Ahmanson's gift of one million toward the Center Theater had not yet been secured.

[478] Ibid.

[479] "Disney Announces Fund Drive for Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* November 1, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

from Mark Taper, and when the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion opened on December 6, 1964 all the buildings were fully funded.[480]

When all was said and done, it cost approximately $34.5 million to build the Music Center, $19 million of which was raised by Chandler and her committee. The remaining balance was paid by about one million dollars from county funds and a nongovernmental bond issue of $14.5 million. The buildings, legally owned by non-profit "lease companies," were rented to the County, and the County's rental payments went toward retiring the bonds.[481] The Buck Bag drive helped to add another strain to the narrative of civic engagement that had defined the fundraising campaign, which in turn had served as the primary means through which the public became familiar with the Music Center. By harnessing financial resources from every conceivable source, Chandler "transform[ed] her city's image and the relations of power by redefining the nature of the establishment."[482] By offering men like Taper and Ahmanson entrée into the downtown scene, Chandler demonstrated a clear understanding that maintaining Chandlerian power in Downtown Los Angeles could no longer be viewed as a zero-sum game if Los Angeles was to achieve prominence on the national and international stage. Perhaps more than any of the other Chandlers, Dorothy Chandler's desire to remake downtown Los Angeles transcended the purely financial concerns of those in the establishment who had made the first attempt under the auspices of GLAPI. For Dorothy Chandler, bolstering the political and financial status of

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[480] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 123.

[481] Martin Mayer. *Bricks, Mortar and the Performing Arts: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Performing Arts Centers.* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1970), 48.

[482] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big,* 317.

Los Angeles was inextricable from establishing its cultural legitimacy. Just as she had worked to assemble the funds to build the Music Center, she would keep her hands in every pot to ensure that the Center maintained high standards, always with an eye beyond the borders of the city.

Like a Meeting with Mr. Khrushchev

By the time Chandler was elected president of the Southern California Symphony Association in January 1958, her political power in Los Angeles had grown considerably since the campaign to save the Hollywood Bowl. The Bowl campaign had established her as a major force on the cultural scene of Los Angeles, resulting in increased influence within the SCSA and catapulting her into the public limelight. In 1954, she had been appointed by the governor to the University of California Board of Regents, where she oversaw the physical expansion of the campus. The presidency of the SCSA gave her the added political clout she needed to take control of the Music Center project and to better establish the cultural legitimacy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Although the orchestra had engaged a succession of notable conductors, it "was without [permanent] leadership and was losing quality," said Chandler.[483] Finding a permanent conductor was just as important to Chandler as building a new home for the orchestra, and she spent the better part of 1959 conducting a search for a musical director who would bring not only stable leadership but also musical excellence and star power to secure the Orchestra's place among the nation's best. In the end, the Orchestra found and signed a conductor with exactly the musical prowess, star power, and the unexpected bonus of sex appeal, but only after a contractual crisis brought the

[483] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 7.

orchestra unwanted national attention, launched a war between the *Times* and the Hearst papers, and put Chandler on the defensive against accusations of totalitarianism.

In 1960, the Southern California Symphony Association announced that it had signed Hungarian conductor Gorg Solti as Los Angeles Philharmonic Music Director. Solti seemed to have all the qualities that Chandler wanted in a musical director. He was well known as a topflight conductor in Europe and had also achieved celebrity in the United States in 1958 when his recording of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* reached the top 40.[484] "The appointment of Mr. Solti as music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra," said SCSA Chairman Henry O. Duque, "marks another step forward for this outstanding orchestra." Having a conductor of Solti's stature, said Duque, meant that the orchestra would "continue to contribute immeasurably to the cultural life of Southern California. In his recent period of conducting, he has won a deep regard from the music-going public."[485] According to Solti's agreement with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, he would be a guest conductor until 1962, when he would become music director. A slate of additional guest conductors was assembled to cover the 1961-62 season.

Among these was Zubin Mehta, a young conductor from Bombay.[486] At just twenty-five years old, Mehta had already established himself on the international music scene as a prodigy with extraordinary potential. Responding to a recent performance, one Los Angeles critic wrote, "The disturbingly talented young conductor from Bombay performed feats of

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[484] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 28.

[485] "Solti Named Music Director of Philharmonic Orchestra." *Los Angeles Times,* April 21, 1960. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[486] "Philharmonic Lists Guest Stars." *Los Angeles Times,* February 26, 1961. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

musicianly virtuosity." In addition to his musical gifts, Mehta also brought with him an unusual asset for a potential Philharmonic leader: sex appeal. According to *Time* magazine, "his tousled sable locks, his honey-colored aquiline features and voracious energy gave him the appeal of a matinee idol" and made him "a kind of culture hero."[487] While Solti ensured gravitas, Mehta promised to bring to the Philharmonic the kind of charisma and star power that would attract national attention and set it apart from its counterparts. After a series of successful concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Mehta was offered the position of "conductor in association" with Solti. Under his agreement, he would be in residence for at least eight weeks each year for a term of three years to "give [the contract] and him a sense of permanency."[488] Mehta's engagement was announced to the public in February 1961 and Soti, who was out of town until April, was notified via telegram.

Solti had not been consulted about the offer to Mehta and his title of associate conductor, and he did not receive the news well. When Chandler returned from the weekend on the Monday following the Mehta announcement, she found an angry telegram from Solti waiting for her. Solti was furious that such an important decision had been made without his explicit consent. In a meeting with Chandler, Solti's manager and legal counsel issued an ultimatum: cancel the Mehta contract or Solti would not show up for his next scheduled appearance in April. Chandler found this tactic to be "startling" and refused to act favorably in response to an overt threat. She asked instead that Solti "hold the 'status quo'" until April when they could meet in person to hash out the matter.[489] Ultimately, Solti was unyielding in

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[487] "Conductors: Gypsy Boy." *Time.*

[488] Chandler Statement to SCSA Board of Directors. Dorothy Chandler Papers. This document is undated, but was likely prepared sometime in April 1961.

[489] Ibid.

demanding that Chandler cancel Mehta's contract as Associate Conductor, and Chandler was equally unyielding in her refusal to do so. As far as Solti was concerned, Chandler's decision to elevate Mehta to near equal status without even consulting him represented a usurpation of his artistic authority over the orchestra. Solti resigned in March 1961, citing the Philharmonic's "decisions contrary to my rights which constitute a serious breach of contract," which left him "no alternative but to withdraw from my engagement."[490]

Even the most restrained journalist could hardly have resisted covering the power struggle between maestro and matriarch, and the story received significant local and national coverage in the press. After years of favorable coverage, Chandler suddenly found herself facing relentless sniping from a variety of sources, particularly the Hearst papers, which gleefully leveled accusations of despotism at her. An April 3, 1961 headline in the *Los Angeles Examiner*—one of the *Times'*s fiercest rivals—declared, "Dictatorship Shocks Public." *Time* magazine reported that many of Chandler's colleagues resented her forceful style of leadership. One of her fellow board members (although the article does not make it clear on which board this source served) said, "A meeting with Mrs. Chandler is like a meeting with Mr. Khrushchev; you sit around a table and she makes the decisions."[491] The article in *Time* also quoted *Los Angeles Examiner* critic Patterson Greene, who lamented, "Once more Los Angeles has been tumbled from possible artistic eminence to obvious artistic disgrace."[492] Greene repeatedly insinuated that Chandler's management—

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[490] "Solti Resigns as Director of Orchestra." *Los Angeles Times,* March 29, 1961. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[491] "Buffie and the Baton." *Time.*

[492] "Buffie and the Baton." *Time.*

characterized by her usurpation of her own musical director's authority—made a mockery of the maturity and gravitas to which the Music Center ostensibly aspired.

At the height of the Solti crisis, *Times* editor Nick Williams came to Chandler's defense, arguing in an April 1961 editorial that the attacks emanating from the *Examiner* had little to do with the management of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, but rather represented an opportunity "to vent the frustrations of a losing corporate battle upon thousands of dedicated workers in the public's service."[493] In the editorial, Williams ridiculed the *Examiner's* declining circulation rates and painted their attacks on the Philharmonic and Chandler in particular as a desperate attempt to increase their own circulation by "wildly defam[ing] one person connected with The Times." However, apart from this one allusion to Chandler, Williams downplayed her centrality in the story. Instead, to further vilify Greene and the *Examiner*, Williams painted their attacks as being directed not at the single most powerful woman in Los Angeles, but rather at the "thousands upon thousands of volunteer women, working from Santa Barbara to San Diego and in all the cities of our Southern California" to support the Los Angeles Philharmonic and create the Music Center.

Chandler herself seems to have maintained a relatively low public profile during the episode, but behind the scenes of the SCSA, she worked to balance justifying her actions to the board with asserting her executive authority. Although the Solti episode led to some unfortunate publicity, Chandler believed that accepting his resignation and terminating the contract were in the best interest of the long-term stability of the Philharmonic. The situation had, Chandler argued to the board, created a sense of unrest, which had negatively impacted

[493] Nick B. Williams, "The Destructive Rage of Envy." *Los Angeles Times,* April 16, 1961. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

everything from ticket sales to the "sense of volunteer and Board harmony." Additionally, it created the public perception that there was "a lack of confidence" in Chandler's presidency of the SCSA.[494] Furthermore, despite the fallout, Chandler insisted that the Orchestra had acted well within the bounds of its authority in hiring Mehta, which was done, Chandler reminded the board, to more firmly establish the institutional soundness and permanence of the orchestra. At the time of Mehta's hiring, Solti was only available for thirteen weeks of a twenty-three-week season, so having an associate conductor would, Chandler believed, ensure stability and continuity within the organization, which was particularly important as the opening of the Music Center approached.[495]

Although the Solti affair was all-consuming for much of the spring of 1961, the matter soon passed into memory as plans for the Music Center progressed. The board of directors stood by Chandler, reelecting her to the presidency in May 1961. She had come "out of the affair injured but not mortally wounded."[496] With the Solti affair settled, Chandler "called for a committee of five to seek out a new conductor," and soon thereafter, that committee recommended that Mehta be appointed conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.[497] Mehta would serve as the conductor of the orchestra for over a decade and brought just the kind of star power that Chandler had hoped he would. Although the preceding controversy had given the Orchestra and the Music Center a bit of a black eye, Chandler had succeeded in establishing the continuity and legitimacy that would be

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[494] Chandler Statement to SCSA Board of Directors (undated), Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[495] Ibid.

[496] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big,* 316.

[497] Ibid.

necessary to establish the Philharmonic as an organization on the cutting edge of orchestral music in the United States.

From Glittering Architectural Monument to Living Gallery of Fine Arts

Although it was her promise to find a new home for the Philharmonic that finally set the Music Center on the path to realization, Chandler knew from the beginning that the Philharmonic alone, with a season of only twenty-three weeks, would be unable to sustain the Center artistically or financially on a year-round basis. The original germ for the Music Center idea dating back to GLAPI in 1945 had been driven by a desire to monumentalize culture on the cityscape with little thought given to what would inhabit whatever monument might rise. Now that plans were moving forward, Chandler would need to work to "turn the Music Center from a glittering architectural monument into a living gallery of the fine arts."[498] To fill the remainder of weeks at the Pavilion, Chandler approached the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Association (LACLOA), which would play an important role in shaping the Music Center. Founded in 1938 by former concert pianist-turned-talent-agent Edwin Lester, the LACLOA began as a producer of operettas and light opera, but by the 1950s had become the premiere presenter and producer of musical comedy on the West Coast, presenting the West Coast premieres of Broadway musicals and producing new productions that transferred to Broadway, the most successful of which was *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin in 1954. With a solid national reputation and a healthy bottom line, the Civic Light Opera Association offered a valuable counterpart to the Philharmonic.

In addition to its success as a producer and presenter locally, the LACLOA had effectively raised the profile of Los Angeles as a fertile market for operetta and musical

[498] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 134.

theater. "When the Civic Light Opera Association was being formed here," said Lester, "the theatrical world usually referred to Los Angeles as 'the worst show town in America.'"[499] While many Broadway tours stopped in San Francisco, almost all of them bypassed Los Angeles. When the first season of the LACLOA—which Lester, then working as a talent agent, formed primarily for the purpose of putting his clients to work—was announced, there was "colossal disinterest" in the idea of an annual light opera season. But Lester managed to sign opera star John Charles Thomas for their first production, *Blossom Time*, which generated significant interest, not to mention revenue. That first season closed out with *Roberta*, starring an up and coming comedian named Bob Hope. The production was an enormous success, grossing over $41,000 in a single week, contrasting starkly with a touring production of *Blossom Time* mounted a few weeks earlier that earned a weekly gross of only $6,000.[500]

By the time Chandler approached Lester about joining the Music Center, the LACLOA had developed into a hugely successful operation with a track record of successful local productions and Broadway transfers. The company also enjoyed the kind of fiscal security most non-profit producing organizations would envy. The consistently growing national reputation of the organization had attracted a substantial number of patrons to the point that Lester declared, "being a guarantor had become a sought-after obligation."[501] Lester had also built "one of the most sophisticated and successful subscription lists in the

[499] Edwin Lester, "Civic Light Opera in a New Setting." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[500] Ibid.

[501] Ibid.

history of American theater. Ninety-five percent of all Civic Light Opera seats were sold in advance to subscribers."[502]

Chandler approached Lester in 1959 to see whether he might be interested in making the LACLOA a resident of the Music Center. The company had been performing in the Philharmonic Auditorium and when Chandler approached Lester, he was in the middle of negotiations to purchase the Pantages Theater. In July 1959, the Light Opera's board of directors, recognizing the "urgent need for the Music Center," resolved to "give its wholehearted support in bringing it into being," and to make the Music Center its home.[503] In addition to agreeing to become a resident company, the Light Opera contributed $250,000 to the Music Center building fund.[504] When it moved into the Music Center, the company brought with it over a thousand guarantors, ninety-six percent of whom had renewed their pledges from previous seasons. This base of support was "believed to be the largest theatrical support crowd in the world and those guarantors helped solidify the Music Center's base as it opened and then began to expand."[505]

Although the Philharmonic was the impetus for the Music Center, the Civic Light Opera would become the dominant economic force at the Music Center. Lester prided himself on his ability "to operate and not go out begging for money"[506] and noted that in the

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[502] Burt A. Folkart, "L.A. Civic Light Opera Founder Edwin Lester" (Obituary). *Los Angeles Times,* December 15, 1990. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[503] LACLOA Policy Memorandum, July 15, 1959. Dorothy Chandler Papers, Box 11 (Music Center Background Folder).

[504] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County,* 34.

[505] Burt A. Folkart, "L.A. Civic Light Opera Founder Edwin Lester" (Obituary). *Los Angeles Times,* December 15, 1990. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[506] "Encore! Celebrating 25 Years of the Music Center Yesterday." *Los Angeles Times,* September 10, 1989. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

beginning, the Music Center depended upon the LACLOA for its survival, pointing out that in the first two years, "our rental really kept them alive. We often advanced our six months' rental to help them out of various spots,"[507] and the Light Opera never hesitated to use its financial clout as a negotiating tool. For example, when faced with a lease modification that would increase their rental rate, they requested several concessions in exchange for the increase in rent, including an increase in the lease's duration and in the number of weeks during which the Pavilion would be available for their use. "In any consideration of rental adjustment," wrote their legal counsel to County Administrative Officer L.S. Hollinger, "we would assume that serious consideration will be given to the fact that LACLOA is the major source of income for the Pavilion."[508] As "the only Los Angeles group that could guarantee to fill a hall many weeks,"[509] the LACLOA worked not only to exploit their economic clout, but also to use that clout to ensure their autonomy and primacy among the constituents within the Music Center.

Like the New York Met's Rudolf Bing, Lester jealously guarded the Civic Light Opera's status as the premier producer of light opera and musical theater. When he learned that the D'Oyly Cart Opera Company, a renowned touring operetta company dedicated to the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, which Lester dismissively called "a trouping repertoire company,"[510] he voiced his objections to Music Center General Manager William Severns. Particularly troubling to Lester was the fact that the February 1965 booking would precede the Light Opera's first production in the Pavilion, which would open in December 1964.

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[507] Ibid.

[508] James E. Ludlam to L.S. Hollinger, May 23, 1963. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[509] Martin Mayer, *Bricks Mortar, and the Performing Arts*, 50.

[510] Edwin Lester to William Severns, January 28, 1964. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

Lester argued that it was imperative for the first presentation of Light Opera in the Pavilion to be of the highest caliber possible and that D'Oyly Carte "[did] not present a quality of production nor a standard of performance that is any way representative of the best in the light opera and musical comedy theater of today."[511] The booking, argued Lester, violated the LACLOA's agreement with the Music Center Operating Company stipulating that the presentation of light opera would be the function of the LACLOA. More important to him, however, was protecting the Light Opera and the Music Center from being associated in the public mind with what he viewed was a mediocre company. "The first presentation of light opera or musical comedy in the Music Center should," he argued, "be the essence of glamor. . . . At least the first presentations in each of the fields which the Music Center will serve, should be as near as possible to the ideal." In making his argument, Lester once again invoked the stature of the LACLOA. "Just as the symphony can leave no stone unturned to attain the highest degree of perfection in its first presentations at the Music Center," he told Severns, "the Civic Light Opera has an even greater responsibility because of the number of performances for which we are obligated and the larger public which we have to serve."[512]

Severns pushed back on this point, arguing that the while the LACLOA's "large public" eagerly anticipated the organization's first season in the Music Center, "there is a smaller public who should also be served if the Music Center is to keep faith with the total ticket-buying pubic of the area. The dedicated Savoyard deserves the opportunity to see and hear his favorites under the most advantageous circumstances offered by the Music

[511] Ibid.

[512] Ibid.

Center."[513] Severns assured Lester that the public was unlikely to associate in any way D'Oyly Carte with the LACLOA. More importantly, however, Severns refused to back down from asserting the Music Center's right to present outside attractions, so long as they met certain standards of performance,[514] when the resident companies were not occupying the Music Center's building. Moreover, the Music Center was obligated, under the terms of its sublease with the County, "to furnish the maximum educational and cultural benefits to the community without tax burden to the County,"[515] and booking outside attractions was an important means of doing so. Refusing to honor the booking with D'Oyly Carte would lead, Severns argued, to the rightful accusation that the Music Center was "refusing an appealing attraction and the rental income from such an engagement." It was also important to Severns, as the General Manager of the Music Center Operating Company, to assert the authority of the Center and keep the Light Opera in check. Chandler herself, despite recognizing the importance of the Light Opera to the success of the Music Center, worked to ensure that the SCSA would not be overshadowed by the Light Opera. She undoubtedly resented Lester's repeated reminders of the Light Opera's financial might and had taken steps in setting up the management of contributions to the Center to ensure that the SCSA would remain on even footing with the LACLOA within the Center.

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[513] William Severns to Edwin Lester, February 18, 1964. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[514] A February 1965 memo from Music Center General Manager William Severns detailed certain standards to be met by any performances booked into the Music Center. Among these requirements were the following: The performance must be by professional performers; Performances must be of a quality "consistent with that which is usual in facilities of similar stature and repute in other metropolitan areas in the United States; Performances must be fully mounted (as opposed, for example, to a concert version of an opera) unless otherwise explicitly stated in all advertising. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[515] Severns to Lester, February 18, 1964.

An Unsettled Situation

Although the D'Oyly Carte conflict quickly faded from memory after the troupe made its appearance as scheduled in 1965, the episode was one of the earliest tests of the organizational structure of the Music Center. When the Center opened in 1964, its constituents consisted only of the Philharmonic and the Civic Light Opera.[516] Like Lincoln Center, the Music Center acted as landlord to its resident companies while also sponsoring performances by outside organizations during the resident companies' off seasons. In 1961, the Music Center Operating Company (MCOC) was formed to manage the operations of the Music Center. A nonprofit organization headed by "nine volunteer civic leaders and businessmen,"[517] the MCOC's primary responsibility was the administrative management of the Music Center, which included dealing with the county, contracting with performing arts companies, and establishing procedures for the operation of the complex,[518] which turned out to be more complicated than expected.

A 1965 study by management consulting firm McKinsey & Company determined that the Music Center was suffering from an organization that "reflect[ed] an unsettled situation"[519] stemming from the fact that rather than establishing a clearly defined central management system, the Music Center Operating Company had been "superimposed" on the existing organizational practices of the Southern California Symphony Association and the

[516] Three additional constituents—Center Theater Group (the subject of the next chapter), the Music Center Opera Association, and the Southern California Choral Music Association—were not incorporated until 1966, over a year after the Pavilion's opening.

[517] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 36.

[518] Ibid.

[519] "Organizing for Effective Operations: Music Center Operating Company, December 1965, 5-1. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

Hollywood Bowl Association (HBA).[520] McKinsey said the employees of the Symphony and HBA were operating under what they called a "business-as-usual under the old organization attitude," carrying on "as one large informal organization."[521] While the informal structure was working well enough for the time being, it was clear that it would not be sustainable in the long term, especially as the Music Center brought aboard new resident companies. McKinsey recommended that routine administrative functions be centralized under the direction of the MCOC and that functions critical to the success of, or entirely unique to, specific companies be handled directly by those companies.[522] Seven specific functions were to be centralized under the new organizational structure: national publicity, local advertising, direct mail, office services, ticket sales, and personnel administration.[523] The MCOC would bear responsibility for overseeing these functions, which would be paid for by the constituent organizations, with the exception of the Civic Light Opera, which had opted not to participate in the sharing of centralized services so as not to disrupt their well-established business practices.

What the McKinsey report could not address, however, was the artistic decision-making authority of the resident organizations and the MCOC. The MCOC's function was strictly administrative and operational; it had no authority to exercise artistic control. Chandler had long been considering the "idea of a group that would provide not only direction for the artistic development of the Music Center but also educational and

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[520] The Bowl Association was not officially a resident of the Music Center, but rather had an indirect relationship to the Center because of its relationship with the Philharmonic, which presented its summer season at the Bowl.

[521] "Organizing for Effective Operations," 5-1.

[522] "Organizing for Effective Operations," 6-1.

[523] Ibid.

professional development."[524] In August 1965, she announced the creation of the Performing Arts Council, the concept for which had first been announced in December 1964 upon the opening of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.[525] The Performing Arts Council would "coordinate the activities of the resident companies of the Music Center, establish long-range policies, and raise funds as necessary."[526] The Council would also bear the responsibility of selecting additional resident companies to complement the Philharmonic and Civic Light Opera. Announcing the creation of the Performing Arts Council, which would consist of two representatives from each of the resident groups and ten "at large" members, Chandler expressed her excitement over this important challenge, "to help forge the resident companies that will infuse these majestic structures with vitality and meaning, and to encourage the development of important new talent, to make Southern California truly a crucible of the performing arts."[527] The Performing Arts Council would "not only direct the producing activities of the center but would also solicit funds for these projects and dispense monies to the field with the most urgent need."[528] According to Chandler, the creation of the Performing Arts Council marked the transition of the Music Center from a labor of love among civic volunteers to a cultural institution governed by "highly professional representatives of the theater, the ballet, the opera, the symphony, the musical theater."[529]

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[524] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 38.

[525] Cecil Smith, "The Greatest Gift of All: The Soul of the Music Center Is Not What It Is but What It Does." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[526] Ibid.

[527] Henry Sutherland, "Performing Arts Council to Develop Talent for Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* August 1, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[528] Cecil Smith, "The Greatest Gift of All: The Soul of the Music Center Is Not What It Is but What It Does." *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[529] Ibid.

Chandler hoped the Council would help to define a distinct identity for the Music Center that would transcend its function as landlord and further enhance the legitimacy of the institution, but it was also intended to help mitigate any one constituent—particularly the Civic Light Opera—from gaining too much power. As noted above, one of the functions of the Council was to solicit funds for its programming and determine how those funds were disbursed. The use of the Council as conduit grew out of what Chandler saw as "the jockeying for cultural/political domination of the Music Center project that had peaked by the early 1960s." The Light Opera's dominance at the Music Center grew not only out of its box office success and sizable subscription base, but it was also a bastion of the "old guard" elite, many of whom were guarantors of the organization. "Other Chandler-led cultural organizations, such as the Southern California Symphony," say Wolt and Gottlieb, "were poor cousins when it came to financial backing." The Performing Arts Council was created "to challenge the preeminence of the old Light Opera group."[530] The tensions that surfaced between the LACLOA and the Music Center Operating Company and Chandler's efforts to maintain a balance of power within the Music Center reflect the way in which cultural institutions in Los Angeles became a space wherein competing factions of the city's elite fought for control of Downtown. Keeping the Civic Light Opera in check was not just a matter of maintaining operational order. Rather, it was an important part of asserting the power of the new money elites who had finally gained entrée into Los Angeles society through the Music Center and other cultural institutions like the LACMA.

[530] Gottlieb and Wolt, *Thinking Big,* 312.

Conclusion

To an even greater degree than Lincoln Center, the Los Angeles Music Center was a powerful weapon used to acquire and wield political power in postwar Los Angeles. For the business elite, the Music Center was key to attracting real estate development to Bunker Hill and shoring up the value of their investment in Downtown. For the Board of Supervisors and the city government, the Music Center provided a powerful symbol of Los Angeles's newfound identity as a modern metropolis that could finally take a leading role on the national and international stage. It provided new money elites like Ahmanson and Taper the social legitimation they desired and allowed them to put their stamp on Downtown Los Angeles. The history of Los Angeles in the postwar period is ultimately a story of competing visions for the future of Los Angeles. The triumph of what Parson calls corporate modernism obliterated the vision of community embraced by the Left and in so doing erased several vibrant communities for the sake of progress. In the absence of a Robert Moses who wielded virtually unchecked power, the Downtown Business elites instead worked together to form a coalition to ensure their success in shaping the Downtown landscape as a means of securing their power. The Music Center played a critical role in bringing this coalition together, while providing the cultural institutions housed within with a highly visible stamp of legitimation.

When the Center opened in 1964, Bunker Hill was a virtual tabula rasa, with most of the boarding houses and motels having been demolished and with the land on which they once stood awaiting development. Today, Bunker Hill is a fully realized corporate district lined with skyscrapers and all the trappings of a modern city. Even now, the Music Center, proudly perched above Bunker Hill, dominates its surroundings, looking down on the progress it played such a role in ushering in. But one cannot help but think that hovering

over the Center is Benjamin's Angel of Progress, watching as the organic neighborhoods that once stood in Downtown Los Angeles were erased by the vision of progress that enabled the forces that gathered in postwar Los Angeles to finally create the Modern Acropolis crowned with the "Twentieth Century Parthenon."

CHAPTER 4

"The True Theatre Audience:" Center Theatre Group and Cultural Maturity in Los Angeles

With the opening of the Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles declared to the world that it was taking its rightful place as a modern metropolis that could compete with cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. In addition to providing lavish surroundings for symphony and opera, the Music Center would function as an important nexus of political and financial power in the city of Los Angeles. Having built a coalition of business elites that transcended traditional social barriers, Dorothy Chandler and the Music Center played a critical role in reshaping the physical, social, and political landscape of Los Angeles. The organizations housed within the Center, such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Civic Light Opera Company, would continue to enjoy artistic success in their new surroundings, but as Lew Wasserman, president of the Center Theatre Group Board of Directors, would proclaim ten years after its opening, "Center Theatre Group has been the most successful and the most deeply influential of the new ventures at the Music Center."[531]

From its inception, Center Theatre Group enjoyed consistent critical and popular success as well as broad support from the community and its board of directors, and as early as its first season it established itself as an organization known for producing high caliber productions ranging from classics to world premieres. Many of its premiere productions, like *Angels in America*, *Zoot Suit,* and *Children of a Lesser God,* have gone on to become staples in the American canon. As the *Los Angeles Times* wrote upon hearing of the impending

[531] Toland, *The Music Center Story,* 51.

retirement of the Mark Taper Forum's founding artistic director, Gordon Davidson, Davidson "won the West Coast a seat at the New York tables where serious theatrical conversations are held."[532] When Center Theatre Group raised its curtain for the first time in April 1967, the resident theater movement was well underway, but many in Los Angeles felt that the city might forever be relegated to being little more than a stop for touring productions of established Broadway hits. Even one of the most successful theaters in town, the Huntington-Hartford, survived only by booking national tours, and the little theaters that produced their own shows offered up a steady diet of conventional commercial fare.[533]

With the national profile of Los Angeles rising as it transformed its image into a modern metropolis, the city's dearth of a serious theater (i.e., theater that did more than function like "a delayed echo of the New York seasons"[534]) had become a focus of major concern among theatrical professionals in the city. In October 1966, the Hollywood Press Club hosted a panel discussion entitled "How Legit is L.A.?" The panel consisted of leaders from the Pasadena Playhouse, the Huntington-Hartford, the Carousel Theatre-in-the-Round, all of which were suffering from major financial crises. According to *Los Angeles Times* reporter Charles Champlin, the views of the panelists "tended to run from sharp concern all the way to dark pessimism."[535] While organizations like the Civic Light Opera continued to thrive, most on the panel felt that the city had failed to develop an audience conditioned to go to the theater. "Theatregoing is in part habit," wrote Champlin. "It ought to be an option any

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[532] Christopher Reynolds and Don Shirley. "Davidson: A Hard Act to Follow." *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2002: ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[533] Charles Champlin. "Theater: Where Is the Life That Once It Led?" *Los Angeles Times,* October 30, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[534] Ibid.

[535] Ibid.

night. In recent Los Angeles history, theater hasn't been."[536] However, Champlin expressed hope that with the opening of the two theaters—the Ahmanson and the Mark Taper Forum—at the Music Center and the fact that they would benefit from at least a partial subsidy, things might start to look up for the city.

Los Angeles Times theater critic Cecil Smith did not share the pessimism of Champlin and the panelists. Smith argued that the city was in the midst of a theatrical boom. Despite Doolittle's cries of poverty at the Huntington-Hartford, their productions had been well attended, Smith said. The Civic Light Opera had generated a $3.8 million gross, and the APA Repertory Theatre, in residence for the summer in Los Angeles, had yielded "the best weeks the APA Repertory has known."[537] Los Angeles had proven, Smith said, that it had an audience hungry for good theater even if it was in relatively short supply. Smith argued that the regional theater movement was "the most hopeful, dynamic and explosive area of the arts" and "nowhere [was the movement] happening with more force and purpose and promise than in Los Angeles."[538]

Nowhere was that force and purpose more clear, Smith argued, than in the establishment of Center Theatre Group, which would help to flip the script and turn Los Angeles into a major theatrical center and not simply a road town. Although it would face challenges as its operations got underway, Center Theatre Group would in fact achieve its goal of attaining local support and national legitimacy within its first year. While in some ways its situation within the Music Center mirrored that of the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln

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[536] Ibid.

[537] Cecil Smith. "Theatre Has the Most Hopeful Outlook of All the Arts." *Los Angeles Times,* December 11, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[538] Ibid.

Center's relationship to its own parent organization, Center Theatre Group enjoyed many advantages that the Repertory Theatre did not. First, it grew to a certain degree out of an existing enterprise, which had established its own legitimacy through an affiliation with UCLA. Secondly, the lack of serious theater in Los Angeles meant that the company would fill a widely recognized void in the cultural landscape and provide a means to rally audiences and supporters around the narrative of a city on the cultural rise. Third, the company received support from the same two arenas that had so undermined the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center—the press and its board of directors, each of which was deeply invested in bolstering Los Angeles's image as a major metropolitan center, seeing Center Theatre Group as a vital part of that objective. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Mark Taper Forum, which would become the artistic heart of the company, was led by a director who not only was deeply committed to generating new work but who was extraordinarily adept at finding the balance between aspiration and pragmatism and recognizing the importance of building a sense of community between theater, audience, city, and nation.

A Troupe of Actors in Search of a Theater

Although Center Theatre Group was not incorporated until 1966, it has its origins in a 1958 conference at UCLA's Lake Arrowhead Conference Center where Abbott Kaplan, dean of UCLA Extension, and William Melnitz, the dean of the UCLA School of Fine Arts, convened a meeting of over eighty theatrical professionals from across the country. Among the attendees were Lee Strasberg, Paul Newman, Anthony Quinn, Eva Marie Saint, Shelly Winters, Joanne Woodward, and Robert Ryan. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a plan "to fill the void in serious theater [in Los Angeles] with professional productions on the UCLA campus, not with a resident company but utilizing the enormous pool of talents [sic]

working in movies and television here."[539] At the time of the meeting, "the professional theater in Los Angeles was a seldom thing, rarely noted and seldom discussed." Los Angeles was, Cecil Smith recalled, rightly "known as the worst theater town in the country."[540] That would begin to change less than a year after the 1958 meeting when the Theatre Group presented a series of three staged readings on the campus of UCLA in the summer of 1959.[541]

Within just a few years, the Theatre Group would firmly establish itself as a major theatrical force in Los Angeles and would develop a national reputation as one of "the most brilliant permanent professional theaters in the country."[542] Already heralded by local critics and audiences, the Group by its fourth season had begun to attract the attention of critics from across the country. Howard Taubman, drama critic for the *New York Times,* praised the Group in June 1962 for having "become an asset to the college community and to Los Angeles at large." The Group had, he said, "found an audience and improved the state of theatrical culture in Southern California."[543] Taubman had been impressed by the Group's world premiere production of *The Child Buyer* that season and said that the production clearly demonstrated that Southern California boasted an eager theater audience "willing to make up its own mind and ready to respond to plays that [had] not yet won the imprimatur of New York." As for the production itself, Taubman argued that the performance "observ[ed]

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[539] Cecil Smith. "At UCLA Theater Group, the Ordinary Was a Rarity." *Los Angeles Times,* May 14, 1981. ProQuest Histoircal Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[540] Cecil Smith. "The Theater Group—a Hopeful End and a New Beginning." *Los Angeles Times,* May 29, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[541] Philip K. Scheuer. "First Plays Named by Theatre Group." *Los Angeles Times,* July 15, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[542] "Protecting a Cultural Resource." *Los Angeles Times,* October 15, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[543] Howard Taubman, "Campus and Stage: Company at U.C.L.A. Reflects New Trend." *New York Times,* June 3, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

high theatrical standards" and benefited from a pool of available talent that could not be matched by most metropolitan centers.[544]

Shortly after Taubman published his article on the Group, the company was awarded a $500,000 Ford Foundation grant. The Group was one of nine theaters in the United States awarded the grant, which was designed to help companies that had demonstrated enough success and developed enough community support to ensure that the grants would aid them in "reach[ing] significant new levels in their development."[545] Standing on the UCLA campus shortly after the announcement of the Ford Foundation grant, John Houseman declared, "Here is the future of the theater."[546] Although the Theatre Group was "in certain respects," according to Houseman, a "typical example of the new theatrical wave that is sweeping away the crumbling remains of the centralized commercial theatre in America,"[547] he also observed that there were three specific characteristics that set the Theatre Group aside from the other regional theaters: the "alliance of professional theatre people and university personnel that is unique in this country;" its location within "a community with an exploding population and passionate concern with establishing its own cultural identity;" and "the fact that it was situated "in the center of a great conglomeration of performing and producing talent."[548] The Theatre Group depended on each of these factors in establishing its cultural legitimacy. The affiliation with the university lent the Group an air of gravitas and

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[544] Ibid.

[545] Arthur Gelb. "9 Nonprofit Theaters Granted 6.1 Million by Ford Foundation." *New York Times,* October 10, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

[546] "Protecting a Cultural Resource." *Los Angeles Times,* October 15, 1962. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[547] John Houseman, *Final Dress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 197.

[548] Ibid., 198.

institutional legitimacy from its beginning, while also allowing UCLA Extension to broaden its reach into the community by aligning itself with notable theater and film personalities. More importantly, however, the legitimacy bestowed on the Theatre Group by its affiliation with UCLA allowed Houseman to attract the intellectual upper middle class audience he desired. In his view, the "true theatre audience [had] virtually disappeared." By partnering with UCLA, Theatre Group could "now reach the middle-class intelligentsia that has simply ceased going to the theatre because it is too much of a nuisance or because it is too expensive."[549] Despite his assertion that aligning with the university would "offer the theatre the broad base it needs,"[550] that base consisted almost entirely of well-educated and well-to-do Angelenos. While a distinct undercurrent of elitism is clearly evident in his naming of the middle-class intelligentsia as the "true" theatergoing audience, Houseman's assessment of Los Angeles as a city passionately concerned with establishing its own distinct cultural identity shows a he had a keen understanding of the changes that were sweeping the city. By the time the Group opened its doors in 1959, the business elite had long since won control over the city's landscape and the construction of its new modern identity was well underway. It was in this new cultural landscape that Houseman's "true" audience looked to the Group to affirm their aspirations of cultural gravitas and maturity, which had become such an important thread in the ascendant narrative of Los Angeles's metropolitanism.

The first of the three readings presented in the summer of 1959, *Under Milkwood* by Dylan Thomas, "came off the bookshelf onto the stage of Schoenberg Hall" on August 6, 1959. *LA Times* critic Philip Scheuer called the play a "literary-dramatic curiosity," praised

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[549] Murray Schumach, "New Group Takes Root in L.A." *New York Times,* December 18, 1960. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[550] Ibid.

the professionalism of the actors, but admitted that he had difficulty understanding the work. "I caught what I could; it was not much," he said, but added that the actors, who "seemed not only to understand it, but to love it," gave the dialogue "an absolutely superlative enunciation as well as emotional expression." Closing out the review, he wrote, "Well done, pros. But 'Under Milkwood' is strictly for the longhairs—and only certain longhairs at that."[551] Scheuer's assertion that the play was only for "longhairs" may have been an overstatement, but his difficultly in grasping the work as a critic suggests just how unfamiliar unconventional European work was to Los Angeles audiences. The Group had clearly announced with this opening production that it aimed to produce work that was both unfamiliar and intellectually challenging. The reading of *Under Milkwood* was followed by staged readings of *Mother Courage* and Nikos Kazantzakis's *Sodom and Gomorrah.* As unfamiliar to local audiences as such works might be, however, the readings were tremendously successful at the box office, attracting nearly nine thousand people and playing to 94% capacity.[552]

John Houseman joined the Group as artistic director the following January. With this first season, Houseman established the principles that would guide his work during his tenure at the Group. He followed his first full-scale production, T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral,* with Chekhov's *The Three Sisters,* which he recalled could still be announced as a west coast premiere "in view of Southern California's benighted theatrical record."[553] Determined to brighten that "benighted" theatrical record, he would look not to Broadway

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[551] Philip K. Scheuer. "'Milkwood' a Literary Curiosity, Well Acted." *Los Angeles Times,* August 6, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[552] Statistical History of Theatre Group. Theatre Group Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[553] John Houseman, *Final Dress,* 201.

but to Europe, classics, and the avant-garde for the Group's repertoire. He rounded out his first season with *The Prodigal* by Jack Richardson and an evening of four plays entitled "Comedies of Despair," featuring Albee's *The Sandbox,* Tennessee Williams's *This Property Is Condemned,* Ionesco's *The Lesson,* and Beckett's *Act Without Words*. Each performance of this evening of "mostly absurdist plays"[554] was followed by "a debate in which our actors matched their bewilderment with that of panels of local intelligentsia that included Charles Brockett, Steve Allen, Christopher Isherwood, and Clifford Odets."[555] *New York Times* theater critic Murray Schumach wrote that these debates stimulated the "fraternization between the worlds of Hollywood and the universities," and he noted how the affiliations of each of the panelists influenced the ways in which they responded to the work. The debates served not only as a forum to grapple with the merits of the works presented, but to foster a sense of cross-fertilization among disciplines from the more "highbrow" academic departments to Hollywood and to further valorize the intellectual curiosity of the Group's audiences. By the end of its first season, the Group had, according to the *New York Times,* challenged not only the "theatre taboo" that Los Angeles residents could "not be drawn into a legitimate theatre that features serious drama unless a swimming pool and barbeque pit are included in the price of admission," but that "the legitimate theatre and a university are about as compatible as Greek drama and popcorn."[556]

As important as the Group's affiliation with UCLA was in establishing its cultural legitimacy, the alliance also yielded many important practical benefits as well. Chief among

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[554] Ibid.

[555] Ibid., 202.

[556] Murray Schumach. "New Group Takes Root in L.A." *New York Times,* December 18, 1960. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

these was UCLA Extension's commitment to covering the Group's overhead administrative costs and to providing them access to performance facilities at no cost. It was estimated that if the Theatre Group were charged for the administrative services provided by UCLA Extension staff at the same rate as other organizations using those same services, it would incur overhead charges of approximately $26,000.[557] The financial and institutional support the Group received from UCLA was indispensable in setting up the company, but that support began to founder as early as 1961 when tensions between the Group and UCLA Extension began to surface.

In October 1961, Dean Kaplan announced to the Theatre Group's board that because of cutbacks to their budget, UCLA Extension would need to reconsider whether they could continue to cover Theatre Group's overhead costs. Kaplan revealed that he was under increasing scrutiny from colleagues and staff members who "question[ed] the wisdom of continuing support of Theater Group, at this time when Extension [was] having serious difficulties." Houseman bristled at Kaplan's suggestion that the Group be charged retroactively for their overhead costs that fiscal year, but he recognized the validity of Kaplan's position and reluctantly agreed that it would be reasonable to charge the Group for its own overhead costs moving forward.[558]

Although the Group would remain on campus for several more seasons, it was clear as early as this 1961 meeting that no matter how highly audiences and critics esteemed the company and believed it to be an asset to the campus, it was not without its detractors. In a

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[557] Theatre Group. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, The Theatre Group, October 7, 1961*. Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[558] Ibid.

Los Angeles Times retrospective, Cecil Smith recalled, "The enthusiasm of the audience did not necessarily extend to campus" and he noted that there was "considerable resentment in the academic community at the invasion of these professional workers in such mundane fields as movies and TV."[559] Critic Jules Novick characterized the Group as "somewhat of a stepchild at UCLA,"[560] an assessment vividly illustrated by the Group's continued challenges in securing a dedicated performance space on campus. Despite its artistic preeminence, the Theatre Group remained throughout its existence "what it was at the very start: a troupe of actors in search of a theater."[561] No matter how much prestige the Group had won for itself and had brought to the UCLA campus, it was necessarily relegated to second-class status when it came to the use of performance facilities, priority for which was given to university programming. The Theatre Group's quest for a theater facility of its own became a top priority for Houseman and the board and the efforts to reach that goal began sometime late in 1961. The quest would drag on for several years and force the Group into a moment of reckoning with its identity as it related to UCLA and the city of Los Angeles.

In February 1962, Kaplan told the board he had met with McNeil Lowry at the Ford Foundation and inquired about the possibility of obtaining a grant for the construction of a theater. Lowry seemed reluctant to give the company money earmarked for theater construction and instead offered a grant to be used for hiring actors and directors,[562] an offer

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[559] Cecil Smith. "At the UCLA Theater Group, the Ordinary Was a Rarity." *Los Angeles Times,* May 14, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[560] Jules Novick, *Beyond Broadway: The Quest for Permanent Theatres* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 99.

[561] Anton Calleia. "UCLA Theatre Group Successful, but Still Searching for a Home." *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[562] Although the Foundation had been providing project-specific support to individual theater artists affiliated with resident theaters since 1957, it did not begin giving bulk grants to theaters themselves until 1959, and those were intended primarily to help with the building of companies, specifically to hire professional actors and directors; it was not until the 1962 round of grants that the Foundation began loosening the parameters of their

Kaplan rejected because "Theatre Group is able to get these people, due to its location in Los Angeles."[563] Without support from the Ford Foundation, Kaplan thought it ill-advised to launch a fund-raising campaign at that juncture, as it was unclear whether the Group would be able to rally the necessary support. The board agreed that before they moved forward with planning a fundraising drive, they would need to work toward securing verbal commitments from at least a few potential donors to demonstrate support for a building project before approaching the Regents, whose approval was required before any actual fundraising could begin.[564]

Over the next few months, Kaplan began pursuing approval from the Regents to begin raising funds. Everything seemed to be moving along smoothly, and in July 1962, Kaplan announced that the Board of Regents had designated a site for the construction of a theater on the UCLA campus.[565] Two months later, in October, came the announcement of the aforementioned Ford Foundation grant. As exciting as news of the site selection and the grant was, Houseman became disturbed as he noticed in the ensuing months "a strange silence" starting to "surround the Theatre Group's future."[566] Returning from abroad in the late fall, Houseman met with Kaplan and some of the Group's board members, who, Houseman recalled, "proved incapable of giving me any definite information about the

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grants. See Gottfried, *A Theater Divided*, 98-99; Zeigler, *Regional Theatre,* 180-185; Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces,* 211-213.

[563] Theatre Group. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, The Theatre Group, February 1, 1962*. Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[564] Theatre Group. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, The Theatre Group, February 1, 1962*. Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[565] Charles Hinch. "UCLA Theater Site Selected by Regents." *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1962.

[566] John Houseman, *Final Dress,* 242.

construction or even preliminary designs for our theatre."[567] Houseman suspected that the project might have run into resistance "in an upstairs boardroom."[568]

His fears were confirmed at the February 1962 board meeting, when Kaplan informed the board that the Regents had withdrawn their support for the fundraising drive for a new theater. Houseman learned from Kaplan that Dorothy Chandler, a UCLA Regent, had "declared that she would countenance no university theatre plans until her own major downtown fund-raising drive was completed. And she virtually ordered Chancellor Murphy to abandon the idea of a theatre on campus until further notice."[569] Houseman was incensed not only by Chandler's scuttling of the project but also by Kaplan's acquiescence and refusal to fight the decision. He accused Kaplan and Murphy of selling out to Chandler and voiced his sense of betrayal after having devoted so much time and energy to creating "a permanent organization with its own artistic identity and its own base on campus," a hope that was now "shattered."[570]

The next month, Houseman resigned as artistic director. Informing the board of Houseman's resignation, Kaplan said that Theatre Group, "as an activity of University Extension," had benefited from the use of many university facilities and services, but the Group had, "because of the complexities of the university and the absence of its own staff . . .

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[567] Ibid., 240. Houseman gives no date for this meeting, but it seems most likely that this would have been some time between November 1961 and January 1962.

[568] Ibid., 242.

[569] Ibid., 243. Houseman's is the only account I have been able to locate. Curiously, the February meeting minutes are not included in the Group's records. I have also been unable to determine how, if Chandler was so strongly opposed to the building project, the Regents approved the designation of land in the first place. I can only presume that Chandler was outvoted by her colleagues on the Board of Regents and then turned to Chancellor Murphy, with whom she was strongly allied, to have him cancel the project.

[570] Ibid. In reading Houseman's account, it is not entirely clear if these words were said at a board meeting or in private.

encountered difficulties. Many of these problems will be mitigated when the Theater Group is in its own theater," but it would be, he said, at least three years before a new theater would become a reality. Houseman had decided, Kaplan told the board, that it was impossible for him to continue as artistic director under those circumstances.[571] Although he was present at the meeting, the minutes do not record Houseman making any remarks of his own to the board. However, in his memoir, Houseman affirms Kaplan's statement regarding the reasons for his departure, but in more explicit terms.

The halting of the building project had pushed Houseman over the edge after months of increasing frustration, and Houseman realized that there was little chance that the status-quo would change any time soon, a reality he could no longer abide: "If the best we could hope for was to continue to function indefinitely as 'migrant mummers,' dependent for acting space on the whims of the Music and Humanities Departments, then I for one, was no longer interested!"[572] Houseman's frustration in his final months as artistic director contrasted sharply with his initial hope for the Group's future. The alliance with the university, which had at first seemed the key to establishing a serious professional theater in Los Angeles, turned out, in Houseman's view, to be an insurmountable hindrance to institutional progress. Even with the reduction of the overhead subsidy after the first season, the Group had enjoyed considerable administrative support from UCLA Extension and was therefore able to operate with little more than a skeletal staff, but the building project crisis revealed just how problematic that limited structure was in terms of achieving autonomy.

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[571] Theatre Group. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, The Theatre Group, March 28, 1962*. Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[572] John Houseman, *Final Dress,* 243.

When the board first began to pursue the Regents' approval for a fundraising campaign a year earlier, Kaplan pointed out that a challenge the Group faced was a lack of administrative "machinery" to manage a major fundraising campaign and suggested that the Group would need to develop a more robust and clearly defined organizational structure. However, doing so was easier said than done. Because the Group was technically an "activity" of University Extension and Extension was the "responsible agent," many of the administrative and financial responsibilities could not be separated from Extension. As a result, even if the Group had developed a fully-fledged organization chart complete with administrative officers, "the officers' functions would be less than in another type of organization."[573] In other words, because of the Group's relationship to Extension, its own executive officers, if such positions were created, would remain subordinate to Extension. The Group now found itself in what seemed like a conundrum. On the one hand, UCLA Extension's support was steadily dwindling and the Group faced increasing difficulty in securing performance venues on the campus. On the other hand, they now found that their reliance on the university had held them back from venturing out on their own.

After Houseman's resignation, the company continued to thrive artistically. Houseman even returned as a guest director a year after his resignation for a production of *King Lear* starring Morris Carnovsky.[574] The production was a massive hit, sold out before performances began,[575] and received stellar reviews. The production turned out to be an

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[573] Theatre Group. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, The Theatre Group, March 19, 1962*. Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[574] "'Lear' to Begin Theater Group's 6th Year." *Los Angeles Times,* May 31, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angles Times.

[575] Margaret Harford. "Stirring 'King Lear' Presented at UCLA." *Los Angeles Times,* June 9, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

important moment for the Group thanks to Houseman's decision to bring along an assistant director named Gordon Davidson, who had worked as Houseman's assistant at the American Shakespeare Festival in Connecticut in 1958 and had worked extensively as a stage manager in New York.[576] Davidson had not planned to stay in Los Angeles after his engagement with *Lear*, but when Lyle Dye, who had been acting as the Group's executive coordinator, was tapped to lead the Performing Arts Council at the Music Center, Davidson was offered Dye's position.[577] Davidson would continue the tradition of presenting intellectually challenging works, as Houseman had done, but would also work to move the company in a more adventurous direction, seeking out material that was artistically exciting, decidedly contemporary, and controversial. The most notable of these was Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*, a massive verse drama in which Hochhuth excoriates the Catholic Church for its refusal to intervene in the Nazi's extermination of the Jews during World War II.

Despite the promise of continued artistic success under Davidson's leadership, a "sense of disenchantment" had set in within the Group. It seemed, according to Cecil Smith, to have remained "a theater of promise rather than actuality," still operating "at UCLA's sufferance in halls available when not used for classrooms; it still has no facility in which to work between productions, no center to operate in, no shop of its own."[578] Indeed, by 1965, the Theatre Group found its existence threatened when UCLA announced that its academic calendar would transition from the semester system to the quarter system, and opened its

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[576] John C. Mahoney. "Gordon Davidson: A Trifle Too Good to Be True?" *Los Angeles Times,* September 20, 1970. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[577] Ibid.

[578] Cecil Smith. "'Deputy' a Hot Item for L.A. Theater." *Los Angeles Times,* May 2, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

1965-66 season, in the words of *New York Times* reporter Peter Bart, "amid woes." With the transition to the quarter system, there would be far fewer weeks and nights when the facilities used by the Group were not needed to support academic programming, so the Group expected to be pushed off campus and grew frustrated with Extension for taking no steps to help find them a home.[579] Increasingly, those associated with Group began to argue that the time had come for them to sever ties with UCLA. Actor, director, and board member Lamont Johnson told the *New York Times* that he believed that the Group had gone as far as they could go under the existing setup.[580] Breaking with UCLA Extension increasingly seemed to be the most likely resolution to the challenges posed by the impending loss of performance space on campus, but that reality was more problematic than promising, and it forced the Group toward a moment of reckoning about how it would manage to sustain itself away from UCLA.

The comments made publicly by Lamont Johnson and another unnamed board member, who had argued that the affiliation with UCLA had become more of a liability than an asset,[581] stemmed from an April 1965 meeting at which Kaplan told the board he did not see a way for the Group to continue operating unless it could secure its own venue off campus and find independent means of funding such facilities. Because Regents' approval of a fundraising campaign remained unlikely, the board agreed that it was time to consider whether it made sense for the Group to remain under the auspices of the university or to cut ties and "become an independent community project." Doing so, Gordon Davidson argued,

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[579] Peter Bart. "Coast Stage Unit Opens Amid Woes: 6th Season May be Last for Homeless Theater Group." *New York Times,* June 4, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times.

[580] Ibid.

[581] Ibid.

would exponentially increase the Group's expenses and would require "some form of subsidization."[582] Although the Group had a large and supportive audience, he said, it had "no active group committed to or affiliated with it." Obtaining the subsidization necessary to sustain the Group as an independent organization would require that it "proceed on several levels in order to integrate the community in [the Group's] activities" in order to develop a "sponsoring group."[583] Some of the board members agreed and proposed that were the Group to become an independent organization, the board should take on more active roles as community liaisons in order to generate the support the Group would need. Such outreach and fundraising were standard functions of most boards of directors, but the Theatre Group's board had largely been relieved of that responsibility because of the Group's affiliation with UCLA, and not everyone on the board agreed that they should expand their responsibilities into the realm of community liaising and raising money.

Actor Jeffrey Hayden, a founding board member of the Group, plainly stated that he had no interest in participating in any such activity and threatened to resign from the board. He pointedly reminded everyone that the Group had been created not to address any needs of the community at large, but rather "out of the need of theatrical people" to develop a place to pursue meaningful stage work in a city dominated by film and television. Davidson shot back, stating that he "felt that actually there was no real sense of commitment from professionals, as witnessed by the many cast crises we have had in the past productions."[584]

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[582] Ibid.

[583] Theatre Group. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, The Theatre Group, April 12, 1965*. Publicity Records (University Archives Record Series 253). UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives.

[584] Ibid.

Even if it were true, Davidson suggested, that the Group's main purpose had been to fulfill the needs of artists over those of the community, those same artists showed little regard for their art when Hollywood came calling. This argument between Davidson and Hayden highlighted the core problem that the Theatre Group now had to face: the administrative support provided by UCLA Extension had relieved the Group not only of fiscal responsibility but also organizational responsibility as well, allowing them to devote their attention almost exclusively to production. Given that reality, one can understand Hayden's objection to expanding the scope of the board's responsibility to engage the community and fundraise; that was clearly not what they had signed up for seven years earlier. But it had become clear that once the company was pushed off campus, it would no longer be able to maintain the status quo.

After the debate between Davidson and Hayden subsided, Lyle Dye, who had retained his position on the board after resigning as executive coordinator to join the Music Center, expressed his belief that "the time had come for a complete re-evaluation of the role and duties of the Board" and suggested that "each member should tender his resignation voluntarily to allow such an evaluation." Kaplan echoed Dye's suggestion, noting that before the Group could make any informed choices about what the role of its board should be, it would first need to determine "what kind of organization The Theatre Group should become." Hayden moved to dissolve the board, and the motion carried unanimously with the board agreeing not to publicize its dissolution.[585]

[585] Ibid. This April 1965 board meeting is the last for which minutes are found in the Theatre Group's files. It appears that a new board was not formed prior to the Group's move to the Music Center.

Two months after this meeting, the Group launched its sixth season, which turned out to be the penultimate rather than the final season as the *New York Times* prophesized it might be. Instead, the season was the Group's most successful to date, with average attendance of 92%. Davidson's production of *The Deputy* alone drew more than 25,000 audience members. Even with all this success, the Group seemed certain to fold once its time on the UCLA campus ended. Following the dissolution of the board of directors, Davidson continued to look for off campus alternatives, and went so far as to draw up plans to convert a Ralph's Supermarket, which the company had used as a rehearsal space, into a theater. But without funding, the plan was a nonstarter. [586]

The Group's success in continuing to draw near-capacity audiences did not go unnoticed by the Music Center's management, who announced in March 1966 that the Group had been selected as the Center's resident theater company. As Cecil Smith observed, the Theatre Group's affiliation with the Music Center would "not only [fill] a major void in the plans for that complex but also [would give] the producing organization its long needed permanent home."[587] Chandler and her colleagues among the Music Center's leadership were undoubtedly impressed by the Group's artistic success, but were likely even more impressed by the subscription audience the Group had in place; by the time it launched its final season, it had attained a subscription base of over eleven thousand,[588] a sizable ready-made audience for the Music Center's new resident company.

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[586] John C. Mahoney. "Gordon Davidson: A Trifle Too Good to Be True?" *Los Angeles Times,* September 20, 1970. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

[587] Cecil Smith. "Theater Group Named Resident of Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* March 20, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[588] Cecil Smith. "Theater Group Era Ends with Anouilh's 'Poor Bitos.'" *Los Angeles Times,* September 4, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

The invitation to join the Music Center clearly marked a triumph for the Group in that it assured its continuation, but it remained unclear at the time of the announcement exactly how the Group would need to evolve once it joined the Center. In fact, the announcement did not even suggest that Davidson might be brought aboard in an official capacity to lead the Group once it moved to the Music Center. Abbott Kaplan had agreed to helm the board once the Group moved, but no other staffing decisions were announced. Davidson found the omission of his name puzzling. "People had argued," he recalled, "that the one thing Theatre Group could provide was audience continuity and reputation, in which I'd played a part. I guess they shopped for some heavier names."[589] Indeed, when the invitation to the Group was announced, Kaplan told the press that the company would look for an artistic director of "international stature."[590] And although the Theatre Group had been designated as the theater constituent of the Music Center, most likely for the very reasons Davidson named, when the newly formed board met shortly after the Group's acceptance into the Music Center, there was virtually no mention of the Theatre Group. Rather, the discussion proceeded as though the board were creating a theater company from scratch.

In April 1966, about two weeks after the Music Center announced the Theatre Group as its resident theater company, Dorothy Chandler convened a meeting of the newly formed Center Theatre Group's board of directors. Also in attendance at the meeting was actor Hume Cronyn, who had been invited to advise the board largely because of his association with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis where he and Jessica Tandy led the acting company in its inaugural season. The meeting focused on several key practical questions, with an emphasis

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[589] John C. Mahoney, "Gordon Davidson: A Trifle Too Good to Be True?" *Los Angeles Times,* September 20, 1970.

[590] Cecil Smith, "Theater Group Named Resident of Music Center," *Los Angeles Times.*

on whether to operate the theater on a true rotating repertory basis, the problems associated with assembling a permanent acting company, and whether the company should sponsor engagements by outside organizations. Acutely aware of the importance of the company having an initial success, Cronyn warned the board, "If this theater fails or doesn't do well it is going to be a black eye of such dimension to the whole American theater. . . If this one should turn out a calamity, we are right back where we started—at the Broadway and road company." Failing to develop a strong company would result in the theater buildings becoming little more than road houses.[591]

Although Cronyn believed that it would serve the theater well to occasionally bring in other prestigious theater companies to limit dark time in the theaters, he held firm in his belief that a permanent acting ensemble was the backbone of a theater company, and said, "I think with two theaters you will have less risk if you have a company of 45 to 55 actors in the first year. Then you could play both theaters. If you cannot do that, then I do not think you have a theater,"[592] even while acknowledging that keeping actors year-round represented a significant challenge. When some board members expressed resistance to launching with such a large company, Cronyn suggested the board might consider mitigating risk by concentrating on just one of the theaters for the time being, while working toward the ultimate goal of concurrent operation of the two theater buildings and a sizable permanent company. There would be "no disgrace," he said, in starting with the Taper, the smaller of the two theaters. What was important, he argued, was that Center Theatre Group "start with a pinch of public acceptance and a sufficient degree of success." Opening with the Taper could

[591] Center Theater Group Meeting Held April 5, 1966. Dorothy Chandler Papers.

[592] Ibid.

allow the company to open with an artistic triumph. "With the best productions of Chekhov—the best ones I have seen were on a thrust stage, because it brings the theater to the people. They seem to be in the room." He recalled that the two best productions thus far at the Guthrie had been *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard.* "Those productions," he said, "did not rely on extraneous showmanship—there was a real emotional life and presence."[593] This suggestion was one of only a few times Cronyn touched upon the potential repertoire Center Theatre Group might consider, but he was clearly pushing the board toward a theater much more staid than adventurous, starkly different from what the Theatre Group had evolved into over the preceding eight years at UCLA.

Although Cronyn and the board extensively discussed several concrete challenges such as budgeting and attracting directors, the meeting ultimately amounted to little more than existential hand wringing. Cronyn repeatedly reminded the board that no meaningful decisions could be made until the board determined "what sort of theater it wants." Chandler admitted that the board had not had any meaningful discussions about that key question, and Lamont Johnson lamented, "We are kidding ourselves as a board until we make more decisions of what we are. We are beguiled by the beauty and frightened by the reality."[594]

This outburst by Johnson, a long-time member of the Theatre Group, highlights the key challenge that faced the board as it worked to determine how best to chart the course of the company. The physical plant and the institutional support the Music Center would finally provide were beyond anything the Group had ever thought they could achieve, but those same advantages represented frightening realities that meant the Group could hardly expect

[593] Ibid.

[594] Ibid.

to simply "relocate" from UCLA to Downtown Los Angeles. As Cecil Smith wrote when covering the launch of the Group's last season at UCLA, the Group was "moving into a broader arena than it [had] ever known, subject to a wider audience than it [had] ever sought." When it moved to the Ahmanson and the Taper, it would need to "develop a new identity, a new personality, geared to that massive cultural complex."[595] Much of the Group's success had hinged on the niche audience of "middle class intellectuals" cultivated by Houseman and later Davidson, an audience eager to be challenged and willing to accept the occasional artistic failure for the sake of "a university experiment in professional theater,"[596] but at the Music Center, they would face not only the realities of a broader audience but also a physical scale and civic prominence that would significantly raise the stakes.

Nobody on the board was more attuned to the scrutiny the company would face in its move to the Center than Dorothy Chandler herself. When Chandler kicked off the meeting, she told the board that "start[ing] with the right people" would be "the most important thing" and that she "hope[d] this theater group [could] come to some decisions quietly and not have to go back and re-do,"[597] an admonition stemming from a recent experience with the Center's opera constituent, the Los Angeles Opera Company, which had operated as a quasi-professional company since 1948. One of its board members, attorney Bernard Greenberg, recalled that the board had "decided that we should try to elevate the performances, become a real professional company. We thought that if we became associated with the Music Center

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[595] Cecil Smith. "Theater Group Era Ends with Anouilh's 'Poor Bitos.'" *Los Angeles Times,* September 4, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[596] Ibid.

[597] Center Theater Group Meeting Held April 5, 1966."Dorothy Chandler Papers.

we would be able to do that."[598] The company produced three operas at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion as the resident opera company, but despite fairly positive critical response, Chandler felt that the quality of the productions did not rise to the level required by the Music Center and the company was forced to reorganize into a sponsoring organization.[599] The loose organizational structure of the Theatre Group likely gave Chandler and others on the board reason to worry that the Group could suffer a fate like that of the Opera, which had sought to use the Music Center as a means to attain greater professionalism rather than coming on board as a fully established professional producing organization. When the meeting with Cronyn concluded, they were no closer to arriving at a clear sense of purpose or direction than when they had started.

Re-enter Robert Whitehead

On Tuesday, May 10, 1966, a week after the board's meeting with Hume Cronyn, a train carrying Robert Whitehead pulled into Los Angeles at one o'clock in the morning. A few hours later, Whitehead, donning a hardhat, toured the Ahmanson and Taper, both still under construction. Project architect John Knight and Lyle Dye, executive director of the Council of the Performing Arts, the central oversight body for the Music Center, led Whitehead through the construction site as he "moved everywhere, saw everything," keeping up a "steady barrage of questions to Knight, the woods to be used, the fabrics, the colors, where and how the trucks could deliver scenery, where it would be stored, what the facilities for dressing rooms and rehearsal halls are."[600] With the pragmatic eye of a successful

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[598] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County, 49-50*.

[599] Ibid.

[600] Cecil Smith. "Theater Seeking Spotlight in America's Cultural Life." *Los Angeles Times,* May 12, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

Broadway producer, Whitehead inspected the buildings carefully, assessing the potential challenges each posed. A few hours later, he sat with the board to advise them on launching the organization's operations. Whitehead and the board discussed many of the same topics as those covered during the Cronyn meeting, but the discussion was more candid and brought to the surface many of the board's major concerns. Moreover, during this meeting the vision for the overall structure of Center Theatre Group, particularly the respective purpose and function of each of the two theater buildings, began to crystallize, opening the door for Davidson to ensure that the Theatre Group could hold on to its artistically adventurous identity even after its move to the Music Center.

Whitehead echoed Cronyn's argument that the prominence of the Music Center and Los Angeles meant that the theater would face much higher expectations than most others and insisted that in such a metropolitan area there could be no compromise.[601] Recalling Cronyn's argument that the development of a large acting ensemble was the most important element of developing a true theater company, Melnitz asked if the board should consider creating an ensemble large enough to operate in both theaters. Whitehead said that while he believed it was possible to operate both theaters at the same time, the prospect of launching true repertory in the Ahmanson, which seemed to him to be rather big and impersonal, worried him. He reminded the board of the importance of aligning their aspirations with the financial realities of operating a company on such a large scale, encouraging them to start out with a series of individual productions. Starting with a series of individual productions, then building toward developing a permanent repertory company, would offer a more manageable

[601] Discussion between Mr. Robert Whitehead and the Theatre Board, May 10, 1966. Dorothy Chandler Papers (Collection 1421). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

alternative to attempting to launch with a full-blown repertory company out of the gate, which he argued would "present immediate problems that might take the heart out of everyone," placing an undue burden on the company that could potentially undermine the longevity of the operation, a hard-learned lesson from his experience at Lincoln Center two years earlier. Whitehead's point about starting small was well taken by the board. However, with the construction of the theaters set to be complete in early 1967, they felt pressured to ensure that the theaters not sit dark upon completion, a concern Whitehead understood and for which he suggested a solution that sparked intense debate among the board.

Holding firm to his belief that the company must not rush into launching an operation too big to manage, he proposed an alternative arrangement wherein Center Theatre Group would engage individual producers, "the best producers in America," for a series of productions in the Ahmanson. Under this arrangement, the productions would be financed through Center Theatre Group, which would maintain sixty percent ownership, leaving forty percent for the producer, who would then be free to tour the production if it was a success. Such an arrangement would be attractive to producers, Whitehead argued, because it would give them the opportunity to present productions, such as classics, that they might not be willing to risk presenting on Broadway. Furthermore, inviting in a series of independent producers might eventually lead, Whitehead suggested, to "find[ing] a producer who might take over on a more long-time basis, who would eventually build a repertory."[602] Lyle Dye viewed Whitehead's suggestion as one which, if viewed as part of a long-term strategy, would buy the organization time to take the necessary steps toward developing "the finest

[602] Ibid.

kind of repertory company." While most of their thinking had been "going toward opening a full-blown repertory company in 1967," Whitehead had offered a viable alternative.

Some on the board, however, viewed this proposition as one fraught with danger. Board member William Fadiman argued that while he understood that starting out as a booking organization could ultimately lead to the development of a repertory company, much of the theater's funding would come from community members, not to mention the fact that the Center was built on county land, and that under Whitehead's proposal, Center Theatre Group would be asking the citizenry of Los Angeles to support a road house without roots in the community. Rather than supporting a Los Angeles company, the citizens would be paying, Fadiman argued, "to see us rent four walls."[603] Fadiman also felt that outside producers would only be interested in coming to Los Angeles to reap the benefits of having Center Theatre Group financially sponsor their own productions, further distancing the theater from any sense of growing out of the community. Henry Dreyfuss seconded Fadiman's concerns, arguing that because Los Angeles was a community "imbued with civic pride," Center Theatre Group must be "a community endeavor otherwise we are all merely going to be theatrical angels. We could go to New York and be angels."[604]

Despite Dreyfuss and Fadiman's resistance to Whitehead's proposal, there was consensus among the board that it was a sound idea so long as it was understood to be an interim solution as the organization worked toward building a locally managed company. George Seaton, asked Whitehead if he thought it possible that the company might hire an artistic director who would "then commission a New York producer-director to come out and

[603] Ibid.

[604] Ibid.

do a production so that it would be our production." Whitehead tried to allay the board's concerns, saying, "I meant to make that clear. There should be an artistic director. He and two or three people must plan the season." This, Seaton argued to the board, would help to generate civic interest, and Dreyfuss seemed to find some reassurance in this notion. Lyle Dye argued that even if the company launched with the presentation of outside productions, Center Theatre Group and Los Angeles itself could reap important reputational benefits, but only if it was understood that any productions presented would originate at Center Theatre Group as opposed to touring companies using the Ahmanson as a tour stop. "Then, if a production has a future beyond here," he said, "we would participate. These would be productions from the Center Theatre Group of Los Angeles," helping the company begin to build a national reputation.[605]

Throughout the debate, Whitehead and some on the board repeatedly returned to the discussion of the size of the theater, many of them implying or stating explicitly that the Ahmanson was simply too large. When Dorothy Chandler objected to the criticisms being leveled against the Ahmanson, George Seaton assured her that he did not mean to criticize the buildings, but argued, as had Whitehead earlier in the meeting, that "the size of the theatre dictates what you are going to do in that theatre." The Ahmanson dictated, he argued, a certain scale of production, echoing Whitehead who believed that the Ahmanson was more suited to conventional drama on a large scale while the Taper seemed to him more of a "playwrights' theatre" and one that would lend itself well to experimentation.

Chandler didn't reply to Seaton, but instead turned to Gordon Davidson. "Gordon," she said, "so that there is something going on which carries on a tradition from the

[605] Ibid.

University, we could take the little theatre and use the challenges there in doing some interesting things, maybe with writers." She prodded him further, "Don't you think that could be done in the kind of way it has been done at the University?"[606] Davidson seized on Chandler's prompt. "I think that the small theatre really cries out to be used that way," he said, but cautioned that "creating this umbrella under which you are operating a major producing company plus another organism that is somehow stimulating new playwriting as well as producing" represented a major undertaking. To set that in motion by 1967 posed significant challenges. Melnitz, excited by the prospect of "taking what [had] been done at UCLA and moving it into a better suited and better equipped theatre," assuaged Davidson's concerns, noting that the Taper and the Ahmanson need not necessarily open simultaneously. Having an "umbrella" over the Ahmanson and Taper while the Taper was carrying on the tradition of what had been done at the Group, Melnitz said, would not only be possible but also an advantage. Dreyfuss concurred, proclaiming that some of the best theater that had been produced on the West Coast had been at UCLA and that the Taper was perfectly suited to carry on that same kind of work. Furthermore, he suggested, if the board could agree to carrying on the work of the Theatre Group in the Taper, he could get on board with the idea of bringing in outside producers, an idea about which he had expressed deep reservations only a short while ago.

Chandler's proposal offered solutions to several of the problems, both practical and less tangible, that had been identified at the start of the meeting. Opening at the Taper, a suggestion first floated by Hume Cronyn two weeks earlier, would buy the company time in that it seemed more feasible, Chandler said, to prepare something on a smaller scale in the

[606] Ibid.

Taper than it would be in the Ahmanson and suggested that the company could conceivably prepare three plays in the Taper in the spring and summer of 1967 while preparing for two productions in the Ahmanson in the fall. Whitehead concurred, telling Chandler and the board that the small theater "requires more imagination than back-breaking effort." Chandler also suggested that opening on a small scale in the Taper would not only solve financial and logistical challenges, but would also help to garner community support. "It seems," Chandler said, "that the support of the community could be carried on through the challenge and stimulation if we started with something in the small theatre and got them excited about that. Then, by the time the fall comes there is a new staff that is ours that has the little theatre under its wing and is the one that makes the arrangements for the other productions." Dreyfus, unable to contain his excitement, leaped in, "Then before the opening of the Taper Theatre, an announcement would be made of what would be done in the big theatre. I think almost anything done out at the University could be done in the Taper Theatre." [607]

Although Center Theatre Group would ultimately not operate as a true rotating repertory company or even engage a permanent resident acting company, this meeting was a watershed moment in the development of the company. By the time the board adjourned, the skeleton of the organization had come clearly into view. Center Theatre Group would operate the two venues simultaneously. The Taper would focus on experimentation, developing new works, and would carry on the Theatre Group's adventurous work while the Ahmanson would be home for large scale productions geared toward a broader audience and would actively seek high profile producers and directors to mount new productions with an eye toward moving those productions beyond Los Angeles. Through this structure, the company

[607] Ibid.

could build on the local support and national profile of the Theatre Group while expanding its reach into the national theater scene.

Assembling the Creative Team

Following the May 1966 board meeting, Davidson, although gratified that the Group's work would be carried on in the Forum, remained unsure of his role in the endeavor. His attention was focused on finishing out the Theatre Group's final season on the UCLA campus and in the summer of 1966 he began rehearsals for the Los Angeles premiere of Leonard Bernstein and Lilian Hellman's *Candide,* which would not only be one of the Theatre Group's most successful productions but would also give Chandler the assurance she needed that Davidson could handle the job of overseeing the Mark Taper Forum. When *Candide* opened in July 1966, Cecil Smith called it "the most ambitious and elaborate work the Theatre Group has attempted in its eight years on the UCLA campus" and considered it "one of the most impressive," hailing it as "an immensely gratifying experience, pulsating with life, visually exciting, charged with ribald wit, a swirling ragtag world pinned to the stage."[608] Music critic Martin Bernheimer lauded Davidson's "stress on bitter satire—as opposed to shiny 'show-biz cheer,'" which imbued the music with a "degree of theatrical irony it lacked before."[609] Leonard Bernstein himself called the production "staggeringly wonderful," adding, "Gordie has a genius for digging into a play and locating those hidden truths that perhaps even the playwright overlooked."[610] By all accounts, the production

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[608] Cecil Smith. "Staging Hailed as Exciting: 'Candide' Review: The Stage Angle." *Los Angeles Times,* July 14, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[609] Martin Bernheimer. "Bernstein's 'Candide' Given New Life." *Los Angeles Times,* July 14, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Los Angeles Times.

[610] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 45-46.

breathed new life into the piece, "help[ing] to reestablish [its] prestige after an over-blown and heavy-handed original Broadway production staged by Tyrone Guthrie," which folded after only a couple of months.[611]

Dorothy Chandler attended one of the eleven performances of *Candide,* and after the performance, she went backstage to ask Davidson if she could come back to his house to talk. A few days later, Davidson was asked to meet with Chandler at the Music Center, where he was offered the leadership of the Taper.[612] The Center Theatre Group archives hold no record of any deliberations among Chandler and the board regarding Davidson's appointment as artistic director of the Taper. Historian Margaret Leslie Davis, in her account, based largely on an interview with Davidson, suggests that it was seeing *Candide* that led Chandler to hire Davidson. While it seems unlikely that Chandler would have made such a decision based on one performance, it is not implausible that *Candide* was the tipping point that led to Davidson being handed the job. Surely, Chandler must have had Davidson in mind when the Theatre Group was named the theater constituent of the Center, but she likely had reservations about putting someone who lacked the national stature that others on the board had argued was necessary for whoever would lead the organization, which had been initially conceived as an operation vastly larger than that of the Theatre Group at UCLA. However, now that it had become clear that the Taper would operate as its own organism within Center Theatre Group and would need its own artistic director, Davidson certainly seemed likely.

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[611] Joseph Zeigler, *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage*, 82-83.

[612] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County,* 46. It is unclear who attended this meeting other than Davidson and Chandler. The source of Davis's account is Gordon Davidson's own recollection as told to her. There is no record of this meeting in the Center Theatre Group archives and Davidson did not mention anyone other than Chandler in relation to this meeting, which took place some time in late July or early August 1966.

Furthermore, the scale of *Candide* likely gave Chandler further assurance she needed that Davidson could handle the job of overseeing the Taper.

After finally offering Davidson the leadership of the Taper, Chandler approached Lew Wasserman, president of MCA, Inc., to see if he might be interested in serving as president of Center Theatre Group's board of directors. Unsure at first, Wasserman sat with Dorothy Chandler in a meeting where he said he spent "two hours saying no" to her. Nevertheless, she persisted, telling Wasserman that with the opening of the theaters only months away and with an urgent need to raise money, things were getting "chaotic" and she needed his influence on the board.[613] Wasserman finally agreed, and his engagement was announced in September 1966.

Wasserman, according to the *Times*, was particularly well equipped for his post. He was, wrote Cecil Smith, "a president intimately conversant with the theater world and one who has been closely involved with local and national civic projects."[614] Although this was surely an important part of Chandler and the board's calculus in selecting Wasserman, his connections to Hollywood and Westside money played no small role in his appointment. Recalling Wasserman's appointment, Davidson praised Chandler's fundraising acumen. "Mrs. Chandler knew that if this Music Center complex was to survive," the money could not all come from Pasadena and Orange County. "It had to include the Westside, the Jewish community, the movie people. How do you get them? Get their leader."[615] And if anyone could be rightfully called the leader of the Hollywood elite, it was Wasserman, who after

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[613] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 46.

[614] Ibid.

[615] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County,* 46.

working as a theater usher and talent agent, "emerged as the most powerful mogul in post-World War II Hollywood."[616] Upon Wasserman's death in 2002, Stephen Spielberg called Wasserman "the chief justice of the film industry—fair, tough minded, and innovative," adding that many in Hollywood felt that with Wasserman's passing, they had "lost their benevolent godfather."[617] But benevolence was not what drew Chandler to Wasserman. By 1966, Wasserman had already built a reputation as "Hollywood's most skillful executive at raising campaign funds and at forging ties to top politicians in Washington, Sacramento, and at Los Angeles City Hall," having "correctly sensed that money and access to stars spoke volumes to politicians,"[618] knowledge upon which Chandler herself capitalized during the Music Center campaign. Wasserman, Chandler knew, could play the same fundraising role for Center Theatre Group that she had played for the Music Center. And in addition to his fundraising prowess, Wasserman's national stature as the most powerful figure in Hollywood demonstrated that Center Theatre Group aspired to claim a place for itself on the national stage, which was further demonstrated by the appointment of Robert Whitehead as general advisor, announced simultaneously with the Wasserman announcement.

Reporting on Wasserman and Whitehead's engagement, Cecil Smith proclaimed, "The formation of the Center Theatre Group is unquestionably the most significant development in the history of drama in Los Angeles—one of the most important in the burgeoning growth of the American theater." Smith outlined the scope of the organization, which would do everything from producing "plays of cultural and artistic value" and

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[616] James Bates. "Lew R. Wasserman: 1913-2002: The Hollywood Mogul and Kingmaker Dies at 89." *Los Angeles Times,* June 4, 2002. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[617] Ibid.

[618] Ibid.

developing promising playwrights to presenting "visiting theatrical productions of "exceptional merit" and sponsoring major independent productions originating in the city. Center Theatre Group, would be, he said, "not just another transient voice in the theatrical world but a permanent cultural force in Los Angeles."[619] Smith and Wasserman's comments demonstrate how Center Theatre Group aligned with the imperatives of the Music Center to bolster Los Angeles's national image. By emphasizing Center Theatre Group as a "permanent cultural force" in Los Angeles, Smith helped to position the company within the paradigm of the transformation of Los Angeles as a modern marvel, embodied in the monumentalization of corporate, cultural, and recreational spaces like Dodger Stadium on the cityscape. Smith and Wasserman also implied that becoming such a permanent force could only be achieved by ensuring that the company's reach extended beyond the city of Los Angeles, which would help to establish Los Angeles as an important center of production. Although much of the rhetoric of Center Theatre Group's leadership in the coming months would herald the artistic freedom that could only be offered away from the financial constraints of the commercial theater, tethering the company to Broadway and Hollywood was an important part of the organization's strategy in achieving national prominence.

In his own comments, Wasserman carefully worked to drive home the message that Center Theatre Group would position itself as a leader on the national stage while building upon what had been generated locally on the UCLA campus. He was careful not to make any proclamations about artistic programming, saying he was "too new a voice" to discuss specific plans. His basic thinking, he said, was that "at UCLA certain people have done such

[619] Cecil Smith. "Wasserman Will Head Center Theatre Group." *Los Angeles Times,* September 18, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

an incredibly fine job that our best contribution is to provide them all the help we can," stressing his commitment to supporting the work of the Theatre Group, which had "set a standard that has influenced the theater throughout this area and is greatly responsible for the growing theatrical interest here."[620] He then picked up the cultural maturity mantle, declaring that there was no question in his mind "that we are maturing as a nation, that our interest in cultural and artistic and intellectual work has grown enormously. . . . Even that monster that comes into our home—TV—has done much to whet the appetite for art, literature, theater and many worthwhile things."[621] He was confident, he said, that Center Theatre Group could "accomplish something quite extraordinary here. . . . We have a strong board and we will have a first rate staff. I'm very impressed with Gordon Davidson—I think he's done a fantastic job at UCLA. Our job is to give the creative people the tools to work with—and tell them: go!"[622] Despite his emphasis on the commitment to continue the work developed locally at UCLA, Wasserman's statements carefully wove the local importance of the locally produced work of the Theatre Group with national concerns. Meanwhile, Whitehead emphasized that while his association with the theater would be "as a working member—not simply a casual adviser," he would continue his independent work as a producer," and Smith noted that Whitehead had three productions in the works, one of which might be launched at Center Theatre Group.[623] Chandler further clarified Whitehead's role, saying that he would be a "key figure" within the organization, noting that his primary responsibility would be to

[620] Ibid.

[621] Ibid.

[622] Ibid.

[623] Ibid.

guide the productions in the Ahmanson, which she emphasized "would be original productions, not merely road companies of Broadway plays."[624]

Just a few weeks later, Center Theatre Group announced it would produce the world premiere of a new play by novelist Romulus Linney. *The Sorrows of Frederick*, based on the life of Frederick the Great, would be Linney's first full-length play and was to be directed by Albert Marre. After Marre secured the play, he approached Robert Whitehead to act as producer for a Broadway production. Whitehead, interested in producing the play commercially, thought it would also "be ideal for launching . . . the Taper Forum."[625] At the time of the announcement, negotiations among Center Theatre Group, Marre, and Whitehead were still in the early stages, but the early announcement allowed Center Theatre Group to demonstrate its commitment to extending its reach beyond Los Angeles, a point emphasized by the *Los Angeles Times* when it reported the story. The arrangement with Whitehead to produce on Broadway a production originating in Los Angeles marked, the *Times* told its readers, "another significant departure from the usual theatrical procedure which brings new plays to the West Coast only after lengthy New York runs."[626] At last, the *Times* suggested, Los Angeles would no longer be relegated to importing goods created in New York and legitimated by the Broadway box office, but would finally be in a position to be an arbiter of artistic merit and to become an exporter in the national theatrical economy for the first time.

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[624] Peter Bart. "Whitehead Adds Los Angeles Job." *New York Times*. September 17, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[625] Lewis Funke. "A Prussian Love Life About a Prussian Love Live." *New York Times,* October 9, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[626] "Forum Bow to Include New Play." *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

Obviously, striking this balance would need to be carefully executed through programming and operational management, but in this early stage when the company was just beginning to go public with its plans, messaging was particularly important. The company held its first press conference on December 22, 1966.[627] The press conference marked the announcement that Broadway producer Elliot Martin had been named artistic director of Center Theatre Group. Elliot had turned to producing after having worked as an actor, stage manager, and production manager on Broadway and in London's West End. As a producer, he was represented on Broadway by *Never Too Late* and *Dinner at Eight.*[628] Martin was joined at the press conference by Lew Wasserman and Gordon Davidson. The men discussed the organizational structure of the theater, noting that Davidson would helm the Mark Taper Forum, which they said "promised bold, provocative drama." In keeping with this imperative, Davidson revealed that the Taper had commissioned a piece from playwright William Murray. *Witnesses,* in the style of what Davidson called "theater of fact," dealt with the recent killing of Kitty Genovese, and used as its primary textual sources "the words of actual testimony, police and court records." Davidson offered no other specifics about the lineup in the Taper, but assured those at the press conference that the Taper would be committed to "contemporary plays relevant to the issues of our time."[629]

No Center Theatre Group programming for the Ahmanson Theatre had been decided upon as of this December 1966 press conference. However, Martin said that while the Taper,

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[627] Cecil Smith. "Center Theatre Group—Hope for Drama." *Los Angeles Times,* December 23, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[628] Cecil Smith. "Firm Hands on the Drama Tiller." *Los Angeles Times,* January 5, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[629] Cecil Smith, "Hope for Drama." *Los Angeles Times,* December 23, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

with its semi-circular auditorium and thrust stage, was best suited for "free form experimental work," the Ahmanson would produce "more conventional drama." Furthermore, Martin said, while it was understood that the Taper would be a deficit operation, the Ahmanson would be expected to at least break even, although he doubted it would turn a significant profit, saying "in my experience, nonprofit ventures usually remain nonprofit." He was careful, however, to temper the expectation that the Ahmanson would remain in the black by emphasizing that programming decisions would be driven as much as possible by providing the community with "the finest drama possible." Much like Whitehead and Kazan before him at Lincoln Center, he told reporters he embraced "the opportunity to approach a script not from the standpoint of economics and Broadway tastes but on the basis of fine writing, depth of characterization and the important statement it makes." Here was a theater, he said, "not designed for the longest possible run and the highest return to its backers but on the excellence of the work itself."

Most importantly, he and Davidson promised that the theater would be defined by its "dedication to new works of depth, imagination and substance, cast out of the immense pool of theatrical talent here and mounted and staged in production equal to any on earth,"[630] a promise that reflected how important the theater would be in establishing Los Angeles as a leading purveyor of culture that might eventually rival New York. Wasserman meanwhile was quick to emphasize that CTG was a producing theater "designed to create the finest dramatic productions in and for Los Angeles. It is not a 'booking' organization to house traveling companies in old Broadway shows and in no sense is either theater a 'road show'

[630] Cecil Smith. "Center Theatre Group—Hope for Drama." *Los Angeles Times,* December 23, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

house."[631] This emphatic insistence on Wasserman's part was necessitated not only because of the longstanding history of Los Angeles being an importer of New York hits, but also because the Ahmanson was slated to open not with an original CTG production, but rather with a Civic Light Opera presentation of *Man of La Mancha,* a decision that put Center Theatre Group on the defensive in the press.

The *Times* announced in early November 1966 that the Ahmanson Theatre would open in April 1967, six months ahead of schedule, with "that most brilliant of modern musical dramas, 'Man of La Mancha,'" which would be presented by the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Association.[632] The decision to host the Civic Light Opera Association rather than open with an original production was in keeping with the plan that had emerged from the meeting with Whitehead wherein CTG would launch a series of plays in the Taper Forum in the spring, while preparing through spring and summer for a fall opening of the Ahmanson Theatre, construction of which was not expected to be complete until October. With construction so far ahead of schedule as to coincide with the April opening of the Taper, the board felt it was important not to let the theaters sit dark. However, generating an original production to meet that deadline "would have meant," Cecil Smith argued, "a desperate, last minute assembling of a season, which would have done the CTG and the theater a disservice."[633] Opening with CLO's *La* Mancha would at least allow the Music Center to capitalize on the simultaneous opening of the two buildings. Smith devoted several column

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[631] Ibid.

[632] Cecil Smith. "'Man of La Mancha' First for Ahmanson." *Los Angeles Times,* November 2, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[633] Cecil Smith. "Center Theatre Group's Goal—an Image of Its Own." *Los Angeles Times*. February 5, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

inches in his coverage of the *La Mancha* announcement to a laudatory description of the building, which he called "one of the most elaborate and flexible playhouses in the nation, a five-level structure in glistening white concrete panels linked to the Forum by a towering colonnade which surrounds both buildings."[634] Anticipating possible backlash from the choice to open the Ahmanson with a Broadway musical, he was quick to add that *Man of La Mancha* was "in no sense a conventional Broadway musical. Dale Wasserman wrote his play with serious, philosophical overtones, finding in the life of Cervantes a passionate plea for idealism and illusion."[635]

Despite Smith's preemptive efforts to shield Center Theatre Group from criticism, the company received what Smith called "some rather abrasive criticism in the eastern press concerning the Center Theatre Group and its plans for drama in the new theaters of The Music Center."[636] Most of the criticism, he said, grew out of misconceptions and misinformation, but he also faulted CTG for shrouding itself in a "cone of silence" after announcing that the Ahmanson would open with *La Mancha.* "During the silence," he wrote, "it was duck soup for any critic worth his opening night pass to rip out a searing thousand words castigating the city for building a multi-million dollar citadel of art and opening it with a roadshow production of an established Broadway hit."[637] Elliot Martin sat down with Smith for an interview to set the record straight and offer a better explanation of his intentions for the Ahmanson. He confessed that he himself was disappointed that the Ahmanson would

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[634] Cecil Smith. "'Man of La Mancha' First for Ahmanson." *Los Angeles Times,* November 2, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[635] Ibid.

[636] Cecil Smith. "Center Theatre Group's Goal—an Image of Its Own." *Los Angeles Times.* February 5, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[637] Ibid.

open with a Broadway remount because it created "the false image of a roadshow house rather than a producing theater," adding that he would be on a plane out of Los Angeles if he thought the job would be nothing more than booking productions created elsewhere.[638] He identified establishing its own image as one of the most important goals for Center Theatre Group as its operations got underway and said he hated "the image that we will function on borrowings from the East or abroad, that we have no profile of our own." Dispelling that image was proving to be easier said than done, as evidenced from the meetings he had had with playwrights and directors when approaching them about working with CTG. "I have to spend the first hour telling them that we're not a roadshow house, that we will create the productions we have, that we want to do new works that grow out of this western soil."[639] Martin's assertion that he wanted works growing out of "western soil," however, seems to have had more to do with establishing the company as a producing organization as opposed to providing a platform for a specifically Californian or "western" point of view. There is little evidence to suggest a real commitment from either Martin or Davidson to the idea of placing meaningful emphasis on nurturing local playwriting talent. Instead, most of the plays selected for the first few seasons were from playwrights from Europe and those based in New York. However, as playwright Oliver Hailey, whose play *Who's Happy Now* would be presented in the Taper's first season, pointed out, CTG could hardly be faulted for that.

Hailey argued that despite the burgeoning regional theater movement, New York's centrality remained tenacious, and even the most successful original play produced at a regional theatre still required the "New York stamp of approval" if it were to "rise above the

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[638] Ibid.

[639] Ibid.

region." Nonetheless, he viewed the Taper as a source of hope that perhaps the day might come when a play "could succeed in Los Angeles first and finally. And move from here directly into the American repertoire."[640] As matters stood at the moment of the CTG's founding, however, entrée into the "American repertoire" still required the legitimation of a successful New York run, a reality that was fast becoming the conventional wisdom among many regional theaters throughout the country, particularly after the phenomenal success of *The Great White Hope*, which had originated at Arena Stage in the same year as the Taper's inaugural season and then went on to take Broadway by storm.

The success of *The Great White Hope* was a major turning point in the regional theater movement for two reasons. First, it "swung the dominance for the production of new plays," said Arena Stage artistic director Zelda Fichlander, "away from Broadway to the resident theatres outside New York."[641] Bolstered by foundation support, subscription audiences, and lower production costs than those plaguing Broadway, regional companies were proving able and willing to mount productions that seemed too risky to commercial producers. The successful reception of such a production at a regional theater could convince a commercial producer to take a risk they might not otherwise take. Secondly, *The Great White Hope* clearly demonstrated that the key to raising a regional theater's stature was through the production of new works that could achieve the national recognition that could only be bestowed by a successful New York run. By the mid-1960s, many regional theaters had shifted their emphasis from classical repertoire to producing new plays. This trend came from, argues Zeigler, the "desire to move the theatre *itself* into a context of national and

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[640] Oliver Hailey. "L.A.—New Birthplace for Playwrights, Original Plays?" *Los Angeles Times,* April 14, 1968. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[641] Quoted in Zeigler, *Regional Theatre,* 194.

historical influence." In other words, there was a growing desire among resident theaters to claim a prominent place on the national stage by establishing their institutions as the progenitors of new drama. The success of *The Great White Hope* had clearly demonstrated to regional theater leaders that new plays were "one key to unlock a place in history for them."[642] Securing such a position of national importance was particularly important to CTG, which had a clear imperative to bolster Los Angeles's profile.

The growing trend of resident theaters transferring productions to Broadway naturally exposed them to criticism for making programming decisions based on the potential for Broadway success, an accusation to which the Ahmanson was particularly vulnerable, given the fact that its programming was necessarily more commercially oriented than the Taper's. Martin Gottfried decried Martin's appointment, calling Martin a "right-wing Broadway producer" who was given overall control of Center Theatre Group "because such right-wing enterprises [like the Music Center] conceive of *big-time* theater as Broadway's."[643] Martin pushed back against such criticisms by arguing that the Ahmanson's mandate to break even meant that it "must try to be the best of both theater worlds." It could not, he said "be set completely apart from the commercial theater and yet its responsibility to the community is to work at the highest cultural level attainable. It should not do 'Getting Gertie's Garter,' but it must be able to reach and entertain a wide audience."[644] While purists like Gottfried would continue to liken associating with commercial producers to trafficking with the devil, Martin's assertion that Center Theatre Group's unique structure meant that the company

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[642] Ibid., 198.

[643] Martin Gottfried, *A Theater Divided,* 166.

[644] Ibid.

could not reject outright the commercial theater reflected the pragmatism that underscored the initial planning meetings among the CTG board and Whitehead and Cronyn. But even more important than that pragmatism based on the financial realities was Martin and Davidson's desire to secure a place for CTG—and the city of Los Angeles—on the national stage.

As plans moved forward for the Taper, meanwhile, Davidson would have to find a balance between pursuing the adventurous work promised for the Taper, while navigating the complexities of operating in a County-owned facility and serving a broader audience than he had ever known. After having said little in public about the Taper's upcoming season in the months that passed since the December press conference, Davidson laid out his guiding philosophy in a lengthy editorial that appeared in the *Times* in April 1967. The editorial reflected the combination of pragmatism and aspiration that would define Davidson's leadership of the Taper. He began by refuting critics like Walter Kerr who argued that expensive theater buildings and cultural centers were "the curse of the creative man" and Robert Brustein who had railed against the proliferation of cultural centers, arguing that it was "high time we stopped building culture centers before we have built a culture." Davidson responded by dismissing the constant invocation of the "edifice complex," saying instead that all he could say was "thank God for the citizens of this community for contributing to the development of a million dollar edifice (in this case a $43-million complex), for without them I would not be writing and thinking and planning about making a theatre today."[645]

[645] Gordon Davidson. "The Forum: Focus for the New Leisure." *Los Angeles Times,* April 9, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

Taking a pragmatic view of the importance of buildings such as those that comprised the Music Center, he argued that theaters, to compete with cinema, needed to up the ante in the physical comfort and luxury they provided to audiences who had become accustomed to "being entertained in huge, comfortable movie palaces that abound in every major metropolis." The nation's relatively new affluence, he argued, "[made] its people more susceptible to live theater when it is performed in a beautiful modern facility." Buildings like those at the Music Center provided a "desperately needed focus," he insisted, in "the battle for the individual's leisure time and entertainment dollar," a battle which was, he said, "a deadly serious one."[646] Davidson's defense of the Music Center buildings cast them as crucial weapons in an existential fight for survival of live theater in Los Angeles, a fight that would be lost if the seats remained empty. But as important as the buildings' extravagance was in attracting audiences, the physical attributes of the Taper would serve a purpose higher than luring patrons by appealing to their desire for lush surroundings.

Davidson told readers he believed "that physical structures (environment) help shape the personality, in this case, of the theater, and have great influence on both participants—actor and audience." The Taper's physically intimate environment offered unique possibilities for close interaction between artist and audience, fostering "the excitement of mutual expression." Such mutual expression was at the heart of his vision for making the Taper not just a place to put on plays, he said, but to make it a creative theatrical community. He closed out the editorial with an appeal to readers. "We reach out to you to help us make that community, here in Southern California, a reality. . . .With your vigorous assistance, the dreams of Center Theater [*sic*] Group will be capable of tangible measurement, in *our*

[646] Ibid.

lifetime, by the hours of enjoyment experienced at evenings in our theaters."[647] What had started out as a pragmatic defense of the "edifice complex" turned out to be a call to action to Angelenos not only to fill the seats in the auditoriums at the Music Center but to think of themselves as participants in the community Davidson hoped to foster.

More than a statement of his philosophy, this editorial by Davidson was also an important tactical maneuver in a fight with County supervisors and conservative leaders that began brewing just a month after CTG announced the lineup for the first season, in January 1967, when the specter of censorship began to loom over the Taper and threatened to undercut the theater's ambitions. Pushing back against the threat, Davidson, Chandler, the press, and other supporters of the theater would not only object to the scurrilous moral and political implications of censorship, but would also invoke the cultural maturity narrative that had been so important in garnering support for the Music Center and would be equally important in sustaining Center Theatre Group.

In January 1967, Center Theatre Group announced that the Mark Taper Forum would open on April 9 of that year with a production of John Whiting's *The Devils,* the first of four productions in the Taper's inaugural season. Rounding out the lineup would be Romulus Linney's *The Sorrows of Frederick,* the previously announced *Witnesses* by William Murray, and Durrenmatt's *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi.* In many ways, *The Devils* was an ideal production with which to launch the Taper. A sprawling intellectual drama with what *New York Times* critic Howard Taubman called "an Elizabethan sweep and richness of texture," the play tells the story of a libertine priest in seventeenth-century France, Father Grandier, who impregnates a seventeen-year-old girl, is accused of diabolism by a scorned nun, and is

[647] Ibid.

ultimately forced to trial and execution by the Catholic Church in retaliation for his opposition to Cardinal Richelieu. Episodic in structure, the play deals with questions of institutional power, faith, and the capacity of individuals and institutions to destroy others in furtherance of personal and political agendas.

Having originally appeared in London in 1961, the play had a brief run from November 1965 to January 1966 on Broadway, before closing abruptly after only seventy-five performances, despite a positive critical response.[648] Howard Taubman called the play "one of the finest of our age" and marveled that it had taken so long—nearly five years—to reach New York from London when "our stage" was "in such desperate need of nourishment."[649] The play fit neatly in the tradition established by the Theatre Group of presenting challenging work appealing to the intellectual audience cultivated by Houseman and Davidson. It was also sure to provoke the "spirited dialogue between audience and artists" that Davidson had said would define the Forum.

Davidson defined the premiere season's theme in the program for *The Devils* as "affirmation and denial—a quest for values."[650] He confined his program note to discussing how the season's plays reflected that overall theme, but affirmation, denial, and the quest for values could just as easily be said to define the unfolding story of the launching of the Mark Taper Forum. Its first seasons would be defined not just by the work on its stage but by the

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[648] "'The Devils' Felled by 2 Misfortunes." *New York Times,* January 6, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. Producer Alexander Cohen decided to close the production after Anne Bancroft, who headlined the production along with Jason Robards, suffered a back injury that would sideline her for several weeks. Coinciding with Bancroft's absence was a transit strike leading to "the cancellation of a major percentage of the considerable advance that had accumulated at the Broadway Theater."

[649] Howard Taubman. "Theater: Jason Robards in 'The Devils': Anne Bancroft Co-Stars in Play by Whiting." *New York Times,* November 17, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[650] Gordon Davidson. "The Lie That Tells the Truth." *Devils* program. Center Theatre Group Records.

development of its relationships with its audiences, the community at large, the County Board of Supervisors, and other theaters across the country. Although Davidson had two advantages Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead did not enjoy at Lincoln Center—a supportive board of directors and a friendly press—he would not mount his first seasons without resistance from a variety of corners. He would soon discover, he recalled while looking back at the Taper's first season, that the "reality, pressures, and responsibilities of living and working in a publicly owned facility (Los Angeles County) are enormous. Political sensitivity to the righteous wrath of taxpayer pressure is immediate and disconcerting."[651] It was the controversy that arose from the selection of *The Devils* that would bring the Taper's first exposure to the wrath of taxpayer pressure, and would prove to be a defining moment for the theater.

A Dastardly Opening

The night of Sunday, April 9, 1967 marked the beginning of a week-long celebration of the opening of the Mark Taper Forum and the Ahmanson Theatre. That evening, the Taper was dedicated with a sneak preview performance of *The Devils.* With the dedication of the Taper, wrote *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Philip Fradkin, "Experimental theater in the United States was given a thrust forward." Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, presided over the dedication ceremony preceding the performance and called the theater a "beautiful temple of our profession and art."[652] Also on hand were Dorothy Chandler, Mark Taper, and a host of other high profile figures including Mayor Sam Yorty, County

[651] Joseph Wesley Zeigler. *Regional Theatre*, 83.

[652] Philip Fradkin. "Mark Taper Forum Dedicated in Program at Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* April 10, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

Supervisor Ernest Debs, and of course CTG's leadership team, Davidson, Martin, and Whitehead.

Despite the glamour of the dedication week festivities, a cloud had been hanging over the Taper and the Music Center since February, when County Supervisor L.S. Hollinger recommended that the Music Center's Production Standards Committee "be expanded to include qualified members to review and make recommendations on dramas the new theater group plans to produce." Hollinger's recommendation stemmed from "numerous communications" about the "controversial nature" of *The Devils,* communications which "protest[ed] the use of a public owned facility for such productions."[653] Although the Standards Committee mentioned by Hollinger existed not to review content of productions at the Music Center but rather to ensure that any entities seeking to use the Music Center facilities met certain standards of professionalism and quality, he wanted its purview expanded to ensure that future productions of CTG would be reviewed for content. Lew Wasserman responded by dismissing the idea that any censorship board would hamper CTG's efforts to produce important works in the new facilities at the Music Center.[654] Looking back years later, Wasserman called the controversy "a dangerous situation," and he said that had CTG not been able to open with *The Devils* as they had planned, "it could well have compromised the vitality of the CTG for a long while, perhaps permanently."[655] Despite Wasserman's resolve to ensure the creative freedom of CTG and to protect it from political

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[653] Cecil Smith. "Censorship Issue Raised on Plays at Music Center." *Los Angeles Times,* February 17, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[654] Ibid.

[655] Toland, *The Music Center Story*, 131.

interference, he realized that the situation would need to be handled delicately because of the stakes involved not just for the theater but also for the reputation of Los Angeles.

On February 22, 1967, the Board of Supervisors followed Hollinger's suggestion and voted to "expand the present Music Center Standards Committee to include experts on drama." Hollinger recommended that the authority of the expanded Standards Committee be written into the long-term operating lease which was due to be signed in June. The Supervisors "unanimously denied that censorship was intended but insisted that some form of standards must be maintained as long as the theaters are partially supported by public funds."[656] Just as the political complexities of the relationship between the theater and the County constituted new terrain for the Taper, so too was it new and treacherous ground for the county supervisors, who struggled to find the balance between pushing back against programming they found objectionable and not appearing to be engaging in explicit censorship.

In early March 1967, William Severns, the head of the Music Center Operating Company, circulated a recent edition of the "Los Angeles Newsletter," which he described as "a little scandal sheet that is circulated among public offices," and which provided, he said, valuable insight into how the Supervisors' minds worked.[657] According to the newsletter, the supervisors, "who got publicly burned in the public flap" over an exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, were trying to handle the situation with *The Devils* with a bit more

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[656] Tom Goff. "Music Center Tax Proposal Deferred." *Los Angeles Times,* February 22, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[657] "Los Angeles Newsletter." February 18, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, 316-M, University of California, Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

aplomb and "considerably more sophistication"[658] Just a year earlier, the supervisors had been embroiled in a battle with the museum over an exhibit by local artist Edward Kienholz. The exhibit consisted of two tableaus, one depicting a house of prostitution and the other showing a couple embracing in the backseat of a car. In a unanimous vote, the Board of Supervisors had demanded that the museum remove the works. Supervisor Warren Dorn, whose vote against the museum coincided with the announcement of his candidacy for governor, said the works by Kienholz "were not art in the ordinary sense. My wife knows art. I know pornography."[659] Another supervisor declared the works were "not only in bad taste, but inconsistent with the repeatedly expressed views of this board in its efforts to halt the moral decline of the community."[660] The Museum's trustees refused to acquiesce to the supervisors, arguing that doing so would establish a dangerous precedent. Eventually, the Museum and the supervisors arrived at a compromise allowing the works to remain in place, albeit behind a closed door, but the incident was embarrassing to the city on the national stage. *New York Times* art critic Philip Leider mocked the supervisors, noting that the events were remarkable "even for a city that has as great an appetite for disgracing itself culturally as Los Angeles."[661] By demanding the Museum shut down the exhibit under penalty of defunding, the supervisors had exposed themselves to accusations of abusing their authority and had portrayed Los Angeles in an unflattering light. Moreover, the Supervisors had

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[658] Ibid.

[659] Peter Bart. "Tableaus Revive Museum's Woes: Los Angeles Supervisors Assail Kienholz Work." *New York Times,* March 24, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[660] Philip Leider. "Los Angeles and the Kienholz Affair." *New York Times,* April 3, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[661] Ibid.

learned that banning an exhibit or production outright was a politically dangerous move, so they would need to find a more artful solution.

However, even though they realized they could not press CTG to cancel the production, they could not escape the fact that the production would offend a large segment of the population, many of whom viewed the play as anti-Catholic, not to mention those who would be offended by the overt sexual content of the play. Further complicating matters was the fact that the supervisors had allocated a $35,000 subsidy for the Dedication Week festivities, which would prominently feature *The Devils.* Meanwhile, many of them had been working overtime acting as fervent defenders of decency on their constituents' behalf. Frank Bonelli had just "made a swinging attack against 'Filth' in the UCLA Daily Bruin, only to find some of the same words to be uttered by actors in a county-owned theater." Meanwhile, Kenneth Hahn "had to cope with constituents from the Southern Bible belt who were already raising hell about the painting of a nude woman in the City Hall Rotunda," and "Supervisor Warren M. Dorn had to protect his image as the champion of the Decency Amendment."[662] Given these efforts, the Supervisors "realized they could not openly subsidize 'The Devils' as a 'historical' pageant without a major flap."[663]

Sometime in February, a high-level meeting among the supervisors, Dorothy Chandler, and other leaders of the Music Center took place. The meeting resulted in a compromise in which the parties agreed as follows: the supervisors agreed not to interfere with the production, which would go on as scheduled; the Music Center and supervisors agreed to find some other way to spend the $35,000 earmarked for the dedication "without

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[662] "Los Angeles Newsletter." February 18, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records.

[663] Ibid.

directly subsidizing the play"; the Music Center would expand the Standards Committee to screen drama in addition to its current limitation to reviewing musical events in the Pavilion. Although there would likely be a "few cries of 'censorship,'" the long term effect of the agreement, said the "Los Angeles Newsletter," would be "to remove the Music Center productions from direct political control by supervisors who are probably better at making speeches than telling actors what they can say."[664]

Between the February meeting and the opening of *The Devils,* little was said in the press about the controversy. However, the play's opening provoked renewed debate over whether it was appropriate to present, in a publicly-owned facility, a production considered by many to be licentious, an attack on religion, or both. A few weeks after the opening of the play, the Anchorettes, Catholic Women in Government Service decried *The Devils,* calling it "lewd, sordid, obscene and pornographic," adding that it "derides and defames religion."[665] An organization called Operation Moral Upgrade issued a radio advertisement calling upon theatergoers to boycott the production. "This is not UCLA," they said, "where all costs are picked up by the captive taxpayers. A buying audience goes because they wish to—taxes for our state institutions [like UCLA] are paid because we have to." Arguing that many "life time supporters of Los Angeles theater are not buying season tickets" at the Forum because of the play selections, they urged Angelenos, "Make your wishes felt, state your preference for [the] type of entertainment desired—for it is the public that has the final word."[666] The *Times*

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[664] Ibid.

[665] "Women Ask Censorship on Center Plays." *Los Angeles Times,* May 1, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[666] "Operation Moral Upgrade Radio Announcement." April 1967. Center Theatre Group Records. Emphasis in original.

published several letters to the editor both protesting and supporting the production of the play, and Gordon Davidson received a deluge of letters from subscribers and other Angelenos.

Davidson said little in public about the matter, but responded to many of those who wrote him either in support of or opposition to his choice to mount *The Devils*. One such letter arrived in February 1967 from a UCLA Theatre Group subscriber named Adele Erenberg. After learning that the supervisors had voted to require the expansion of the Standards Committee, Erenberg was angered by Davidson's lack of a public response, and wrote to Davidson to ask that her name be removed from CTG's mailing list. "I do not wish to patronize any cultural endeavor that so meekly agrees to censorship,"[667] she told Davidson, who replied a few days after receiving her letter. Davidson acknowledged receipt of Erenberg's request to have her name deleted from the mailing list but said, "I'm afraid I can't comply with your request because I think you're too valuable a member of our audience. If people like you feel strongly about this issue and don't support us, then indeed we will be in trouble." He then went on to tell her that he was enclosing an order blank so that she could subscribe, closing out the letter by telling her, "I do mean it when I say I think you should be part of our first season."[668] Davidson had turned her protest around on her, seizing upon her sense of righteousness over the apparent acquiescence to censorship and her belief that such acquiescence represented a shirking of responsibility on Davidson and the Taper's part. By choosing not to patronize the theater, Davidson pointed out, Erenberg

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[667] Adele Erenberg to Gordon Davidson, February 22, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 1. Folder: "Subscribers – 1967 Season, Correspondence."

[668] Gordon Davidson to Adele Erenberg, February 27, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 1. Folder: "Subscribers – 1967 Season, Correspondence."

herself would be guilty of shirking her own responsibility, as a member of the community concerned with the freedom of expression, to support the theater. In other words, the responsibility to resist censorship did not rest solely with the theater, but was a shared responsibility.

In June 1967, shortly after *The Devils closed,* Davidson received a letter from a Dr. A. Giesbret, who chastised him for mounting a play in which the "artistic value of the acting and the plot is far outweighed by the destructive Christian attitudes." The choice of the play was particularly "remarkable," Giesbret wrote, "in these days when Christianity is being eliminated overseas and when internal insurrection is heavily weighed with anti-christian [*sic*] dogma." Closing out the letter, he inquired, "May I have your opinion whether this is the nature of your personal policy, or the future character of plays?"[669] Giesbret did not come out and ask Davidson to name any political parties he belonged to either currently or in the past, but by linking "internal insurrection" with what he perceived as the anti-Christian content of the play, he seems rather clearly to have been invoking anti-Communist sentiment in his closing inquiry to Davidson. Davidson, however, did not take the bait. Instead, he plainly said, "The play does not reflect my personal policy, other than my concern with issues of our time, and it is my hope to be able to find playwrights who will discuss all sides of all important questions." Davidson also assured Giesbret that the play was not anti-Christian, but in fact the opposite. The main concern of the play, Davidson said, was "man's search for God and his attempt to find meaning in a world in which faith is often denied or destroyed." In the end, Davidson said, the priest did in fact find God and was redeemed in

[669] A. Giesbret, M.D. to Gordon Davidson, June 5, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 1. Folder: "Subscribers – 1967 Season, Correspondence."

death. “His revelation,” wrote Davidson, “is not unlike Saint Joan’s and I am convinced that this play is a religious, Christian story of temptation, fall and redemption.” More important than the theme of the play, however, was the fact that the play “couldn’t help but stimulate talk and discussion. The very fact of your letter corroborates this.” Davidson closed the letter by entreating Giesbret to return to the Taper and said he hoped that Giesbret would “be moved to write when you are both disturbed and pleased by what you see and hear.”[670]

These were just two of dozens of letters Davidson received, but they demonstrate perhaps better than anything else Davidson’s vision of how a “civic” theater should operate. His final gesture in his letter to Adele Erenberg in which he implicitly demands that she buy a subscription was not the effort of a producer to get more bottoms in the seats, but rather a demonstration of his belief that just as playwrights, actors, and directors had a responsibility to produce compelling work in the Forum, audiences had an equal responsibility to show up and engage with the work. Meanwhile, his response to Giesbret demonstrated his commitment to using the work of the theater to foster discussion within the community. Moreover, the volume of correspondence and his silence in the press while the censorship controversy played out suggests an astute decision to avoid publicly antagonizing the Board of Supervisors and to allow Chandler and Wasserman to handle much of the delicate negotiation while he worked “on the ground” to cultivate the Taper’s audience.

The controversy reached its boiling point and ultimately its resolution in June 1967. At a May 31 meeting, the Board of Supervisors refused to approve an operating lease for the Ahmanson and the Taper because the “proposal did not give them enough control over the

[670] Gordon Davidson to A. Giesbret, M.D., June 8, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 1. Folder: “Subscribers – 1967 Season, Correspondence.”

quality of productions." Supervisor Frank G. Bonelli defended the Board's stance, saying, "We don't want to be complete censors, but we need safeguards to see that something as dastardly as 'The Devils' does not come back again."[671] The lease already contained a paragraph detailing certain requirements that must be met by productions presented in the two theaters, saying that the companies operating therein would present "a season of productions and events which shall be dignified and thoroughly high class in caliber and cast no reflection upon the County of Los Angeles . . . or mar the reputation of The Music Center." Further, nothing could be presented that "contain[ed] songs, speeches, or other dialogue . . . which are considered vulgar, obscene, licentious, indecent, immoral, illegal, scandalous or objectionable to a substantial segment of the public."[672] The Board of Supervisors, however, protested that the lease did not include any mention of the Standards Committee to be put in place to review spoken drama in the two theaters.[673] Supervisor Bonelli declared he was "not at all happy with the lack of restrictions," and said he would not ever try to interfere with what was presented in "private theaters," but because of the County's financial interest in the Center, "it should have control over the type of productions presented."[674]

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[671] Tom Goff. "Supervisors Ask Safeguard, Balk at Music Center Lease." *Los Angeles Times,* June 1, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[672] Ibid.

[673] As stated earlier in this chapter, Music Center leaders had met with Supervisors in February and had agreed, according to the Los Angeles Newsletter, to put such a committee in place. It is unclear what transpired between February and May that led to the committee not being included in the lease turned over to the Supervisors for approval. Although the Supervisors voted in February to require the expansion of the Standards Committee, it is possible that the Newsletter was mistaken in its reporting that all parties had agreed to the provision and that the Supervisors voted to require it without having obtained agreement on the part of the Music Center.

[674] Tom Goff. "Supervisors Ask Safeguard, Balk at Music Center Lease." *Los Angeles Times.*

The supervisors felt pressure to take a stance after having received complaints from constituents and the Catholic Church. However, in the wake of the May 31 meeting, the public and the press voiced opposition to what they viewed as another attempt at censorship. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Art Seidenbaum mocked Bonelli's characterization of *The Devils* as "dastardly," saying the lease already promised productions would not be "'vulgar, obscene, licentious, indecent, immoral, illegal. . . .' See: not a single prohibition against a dastardly act. Maybe if the Theatre Group would throw in that one added adjective, a compromise lease will be signed this week." Seidenbaum also suggested that supervisors were motivated by their desire to sell a parcel of land in the Civic Center adjacent to the Music Center and that Bonelli did not "want to see this territory applied to any potential dastards." Bonelli, according to Seidenbaum said he was worried that there would be an attempt to get the land for more cultural facilities. "God forbid," Bonelli said, "the day we put more money into cultural activities than we have now." Seidenbaum shot back, "that's what happens when you water the desert; greedy culturists expect more."[675]

Most major radio stations also issued editorials condemning the Board's stance. In a statement read on the air on June 5, Robert P. Sutton, vice president of CBS Radio and general manager of local affiliate KNX, called the supervisors' plan to require a review board un-American and a sham, arguing, "The marketplace—the box-office—that is the censorship in a democracy. What the people don't want, they don't buy. In Russia and Red China, the government tells the people what they can see and hear. Not in America."[676] Radio station

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[675] Art Seidenbaum. "The Censors, Sellers in Cultureland." *Los Angeles Times,* June 6, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[676] Transcript of Radio Address entitled "Double-Think Comes to Los Angeles Theater," June 5, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 1. Folder: "Censorship."

KABC argued that the restrictions demanded by the Supervisors threatened the integrity and vitality of the Music Center and would cast Los Angeles in a negative light, just as the Museum scandal had. "What kind of drama would we have," the editorial asked, "if every presentation had to be so innocuous that no one would be scandalized?" Not only would that result in the Music Center becoming "a dead, uninspiring museum for period pieces," they argued, but it would also stop in its tracks Los Angeles's "effort to be a world-wide focal point for the arts. We've made a fine start. Let's not destroy it all with foolish attempts at censorship."[677]

A week after the May 31 Board of Supervisors meeting, the supervisors finally approved the lease after receiving "assurances from the Performing Arts Council of The Music Center that its Standards Committee would review future productions in both theaters as well as the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion." Moving to approve the lease, Bonelli reiterated his belief that "as long as taxpayer money is used in support of that complex of buildings . . . we must have a committee that can and will assure us proper standards will be maintained." Ernest Debs, meanwhile, was quick to add that with the expansion of the Standards Committee, "We'll have nothing to say," as the Committee would have "sole determination" over what was deemed suitable or not. "I am hopeful," Debs said, "that it will be absolutely clear that we are not acting in any way as censors."[678]

The supervisors had gotten what they wanted. By strong-arming the Music Center into expanding the Standards Committee they were able to demonstrate to some of their

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[677] Transcript, "KABC Editorial. Transcript of Radio Address entitled "Double-Think Comes to Los Angeles Theater," June 5, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 1. Folder: "Censorship."

[678] Tom Goff. "Lease Approved for Two Music Center Theaters." *Los Angeles Times,* June 7, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

constituents that they would not stand for "indecency," while also disavowing themselves as censors. Center Theatre Group, meanwhile, emerged relatively unscathed. Although Chandler had agreed to expand the purview of the committee, she assured Davidson that he had her absolute support and that she would not interfere with his artistic decision-making. Davidson later recalled, "I felt I had complete freedom, and along with freedom comes responsibility." Chandler, Davidson said, "mainly just wanted to be informed. Neither she nor Lew Wasserman wanted to be blindsided." Chandler also told Davidson to let her know if he felt there were any productions she should avoid seeing. "Then," she told Davidson, "I won't have to have an opinion about it."[679]

As for the committee, Chandler asked UCLA Chancellor Franklin Murphy to chair it. When he expressed his objection to what he considered to be a "censorship board," Chandler "shook her head. 'Franklin, we've been told to form it,' she said. 'That doesn't mean it ever has to meet.'"[680] According to Davidson, the committee met only once. After calling the meeting to order, Murphy announced, "this is the first meeting of the standards committee. And it is the last meeting of the standards committee."[681] Chandler also knew that Murphy would be as committed as she was to protecting the integrity of Center Theatre Group. While Davidson's concern was primarily the sanctity of artistic autonomy in the Taper, Chandler and Murphy viewed the stakes as being much higher. Both were intensely intent on elevating the national stature of Los Angeles and erasing the perception of the city as a cultural backwater. Murphy and Chandler had formed a close alliance in their work at UCLA—

[679] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Music Center of Los Angeles County*, 52.

[680] Ibid., 53.

[681] Ibid.

Murphy as Chancellor and Chandler as a Regent—motivated by their commitment to putting UCLA on the same level as Berkeley. Murphy's commitment to this goal was aptly demonstrated early in his tenure at UCLA when he heard an administrative assistant answer the phone, announcing, "University of California, Los Angeles Branch." Murphy responded by issuing an edict to all staff that they were henceforth to refer to the institution as UCLA, proclaiming, "We'll make those four letters just as visible and indelible as MIT."[682] Chandler, meanwhile, in addition to her efforts to bring the Music Center to fruition had been working since the early 1960s to shake things up at the *Times* and transform it from the "information bible" of the far right into a "modern paper" fit for a "contemporary city."[683] Obsessed with the image of Los Angeles, Chandler was not about to allow the moralizing Supervisors to diminish the prestige of Center Theatre Group, which was gearing up in June 1967 to present its first world premiere play.

An Ambitious and Perilous Policy

While the censorship controversy over *The Devils* was playing out, rehearsals were already underway for the second offering of the Taper's first season, *The Sorrows of Frederick* by Romulus Linney. The play, scheduled to open on June 23, 1967, was the first by the renowned novelist, and with it, wrote Cecil Smith in a typical puff piece, Center Theatre Group "embark[ed] on the ambitious and perilous policy it set for itself in its formation—the production of new plays."[684] Smith lauded Center Theatre Group for

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[682] Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Culture Broker* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 46.

[683] Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt. *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California.* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 322.

[684] Cecil Smith. "'Frederick' to Open at Forum Tonight." *Los Angeles Times,* June 23, 1967: ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

breaking with the tradition of most institutional theaters, like the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and the Guthrie, which dealt "almost exclusively in classics or established modern plays, proven works" and noted that in addition to the world premiere about to open at the Taper, the Ahmanson would soon launch its production of *More Stately Mansions*, marking the first American performance of that play.[685] Both productions were expected to be exported to New York following their CTG productions, and promised to establish the company's national prominence. With its world and American premiere productions, said Elliott Martin, Los Angeles, once a tributary to Broadway, was "now helping to erase the historic boundaries and [was] taking up a position of independence and equality."[686]

Although *Frederick* would ultimately not have a Broadway run, the Taper production marked an important moment in the early life of the Taper. In addition to demonstrating the company's commitment to generating new work, it also made clear Davidson's desire to establish its legitimacy not through a self-righteous rejection of Broadway carried out in an insular provincial theater, but rather through the cultivation of a mutually beneficial relationship with the commercial theater world. As passionately as Davidson believed in developing an adventurous local audience in Los Angeles, he also understood how important the city's growing national prestige was to Los Angeles's civic pride, which had been so important to Chandler and the backers of the Music Center. With *The Sorrows of Frederick,* Davidson made the first attempt to move the Taper toward national prominence when he entered into an agreement with Robert Whitehead and playwright Albert Marre to present the

[685] Ibid.

[686] Elliott Martin. "Our Theatre: Faces of the Future." *More Stately Mansions* Program. Center Theatre Group Records, 13.

play with Marre and Whitehead as producers, an undertaking that turned out to be, as Cecil Smith, had written, both "ambitious and perilous."

In February 1967, negotiations were finalized in an agreement among Center Theatre Group, Robert Whitehead, and Albert Marre for *The Sorrows of Frederick.* Whitehead and Marre would "present the play as a presentation at the Mark Taper Forum,"[687] and the two would have joint authority with CTG on artistic decisions. They would negotiate all production-related contracts with actors, designers, and so forth. CTG would provide the theater facilities at no cost to the producers but would retain all box office receipts, and, if the play were to move on to a "first class stage production," the organization would be given the right of first refusal to invest "all or part of the financing required for such production." Further, the agreement specified that while CTG would contribute to the production financially in accordance with the "customary" costs of a CTG production, Whitehead and Marre would be responsible for any overages, which were expected to amount to approximately $75,000. Although Whitehead and Marre would not participate in box office receipts at the Taper, presenting the play at the Forum afforded them the benefit of a rent-free venue as well as CTG's obligation to pay its "customary" production costs, which amounted to $125,572,[688] thereby mitigating a significant part of the financial risk they would undertake were they to launch the production on Broadway or on a commercial tour rather than at the Taper. The Taper, meanwhile, benefited from the supplemental financing

[687] Agreement for *Sorrows of Frederick,* February 28, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records.

[688] An appendix to the agreement specified the limitations of CTG's financial contribution to the physical production, listing the costs for a "customary Group production," the expected cost of the "Marre-Whitehead production" and the overage. For example, the "customary" cost for the scenery, props, and costumes for CTG was listed as $25,000, while the anticipated cost for *Frederick* was estimated at $45,000, leaving an overage of $20,000.

provided by Whitehead and Marre, which allowed them to present a production more lavish than they otherwise could. Furthermore, the arrangement offered the possibility of significant financial rewards for CTG, as it stipulated that CTG would be entitled to participate in the proceeds from the sale of subsidiary rights obtained after the Taper production.

While the scale of the production and the partnership with Whitehead and Marre demonstrated the ambition of the Taper's policy of generating new work, the drama that unfolded behind the scenes demonstrated the perils of such a policy, perils stemming from the delicate balance that had to be struck between the interests of each of the parties involved in creating the production. In one corner was Center Theatre Group, which was working to lay the foundation for a company that not only generated compelling artistic work but that could also achieve longevity and institutional soundness. In another corner were Whitehead and Marre, commercial producers facing enormous financial risks. And in yet another corner sat the playwright, Romulus Linney, who looked to the Taper to provide him with a creative environment free from the constraints that had kept him away from writing for the theater up until that point. Davidson firmly believed, he would later say, "that the thrust and force" of the Taper lay in the generation of new work, "not just because it happens to excite and stimulate our audiences, but because I have a tremendous sense of obligation to the writing talent in the country to provide them with a responsible and highly professional environment in which they can create."[689] Davidson's phrasing here is worth noting in that it demonstrates that his commitment to fostering creativity was strongly undergirded by a sense of responsibility to ensuring that the environment he hoped to provide could be sustained.

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[689] Cecil Smith. "Theater's First Year at the Forum." *Los Angeles Times,* December 10, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

Davidson was happy to give playwrights, directors, and actors as much autonomy as possible, but he would intervene when he thought it necessary to protect the organization.

A week before *Frederick's* opening, Romulus Linney sat down with Cecil Smith for a lengthy interview for the *Times.* Much of the interview focused on the play itself, but it was clear from the interview that the censorship cloud still hung over the Music Center complex. Linney's main interest, he said, had always been the theater, but he had "worked in novels for the freedom of intellectual inquiry and the full exploration of serious themes in an era when there is little opportunity in the commercial theater for serious plays." Linney believed that "the great opportunity for American drama" lay in institutional theaters like CTG, "if they [could] function freely."[690] Linney found the Taper to be an ideal venue for his play, he said, and noted that the Forum's "broad, outthrust stage [was] ideal for the complex, experimental structure of the drama," and he expressed his respect for Gordon Davidson and the artistic management of the Taper, where the work had "been conducted," he felt, "in an atmosphere of sympathy and understanding."

Despite this praise for the company, however, an undercurrent of frustration emerged in the interview. Linney argued that a writer in the theater had to be "part artist and part streetfighter—part thug! You've got to battle every inch of the way against those who'd sabotage your work."[691] Linney said he "deplored" the general attitude of bureaucrats toward artists, saying, "There seems to be absolutely no attempt to understand the position of the artist, the author—his responsibility to his work. I've worked five years on this damned thing

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[690] Cecil Smith. "The Sorrows of Linney Over Joy That is 'Frederick.'" *Los Angeles Times,* June 18, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[691] Ibid.

and I wouldn't let anybody destroy it."[692] He seemed to be speaking in general terms, rather than saying that CTG specifically had in any way interfered with his work. At least that's how Smith painted it in his write up of the interview. But Linney was clearly suggesting that he had at least to a certain degree felt pressured to compromise his artistic work at the Taper. Although the interview did not explicitly say so, Linney had in fact been pressured by CTG to make changes to the play as the organization was still navigating its way through the censorship crisis spawned by *The Devils.* While Linney swore that he was not about to let anyone destroy the play he had worked on for five years, the management of CTG felt similarly strongly about protecting the viability of their own enterprise, causing a behind-the-scenes row between Linney and CTG's management that led Linney, several months later, to declare that the production had severely undermined his original vision. In the weeks preceding Linney's interview with Smith, concern had grown within Center Theatre Group that *Frederick* presented potential problems that might require the intervention of the organization's management, specifically the length of the play, which threatened, if not significantly trimmed, to run nearly four hours, and, more importantly, explicit language. When Linney resisted making changes in either regard, Davidson was left with no alternative but to intervene to protect the fledgling company.

Davidson expressed his concern over the length of the play to Whitehead, Marre, and Linney early during the rehearsal period. He assured the creative team of his feeling that the Taper's audiences were "mature enough to participate in a long evening."[693] However, he also believed that there always came "the point of diminishing returns" and said he "hope[d]

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[692] Ibid.

[693] Memo from Davidson to Marre, Whitehead, and Linney, June 5, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 3, Folder: Correspondence, General, Sorrows of Frederick.

that during the course of the previews, we can honestly evaluate the flow of the play in relation to the dramatic effect so that the time factor becomes less important."[694] Emphasizing that his main concern was the overall effectiveness of the play, he still said that he hoped the play could be kept to a total running time of three hours. With a curtain time of 8:40,[695] even a three-hour running time would mean the evening would not end until twenty minutes before midnight. Pushing it any further than that could, Davidson thought, anger many patrons. Whitehead suggested that the curtain time be moved up to 8:00. After consulting with the Music Center Operating Company, the CTG Board of Directors, and administrative staff, however, Davidson informed Whitehead, Linney, and Marre, that it was not possible to change the curtain time,[696] thereby putting pressure on the creative team to reduce the play's length.

The more urgent matter for Davidson and CTG was the play's use of explicit language, which Davidson urged, on behalf of the CTG's board of directors and the Music Center Operating Company, be toned down significantly, and asked the three men to "consider the deletion of a number of words from the script."[697] Davidson affirmed his commitment to "the creative atmosphere that must exist here and the need for the theatre to be bold and daring and, most of all, supportive of artistic integrity." He believed, he said, that the choice of plays for the season bore out that commitment. However, the memo in which

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[694] Ibid.

[695] "Music Center Curtain Time Staggered." *Los Angeles Times,* April 7, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times. The unusual curtain time was due to the Music Center's practice of staggering curtain times to relieve traffic congestion. Performances in the Pavilion would begin at 8:00, those in the Ahmanson at 8:30, and those in the Taper at 8:40.

[696] Memo from Davidson to Marre, Whitehead, and Linney, June 5, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 3, Folder: Correspondence, General, Sorrows of Frederick.

[697] Ibid.

Davidson expressed these concerns was issued on June 5, two days before the Board of Supervisors finally approved the leases for the Taper and the Ahmanson, and less than a week after the *Devils* controversy had reached its climax with the threat that the lease would not be renewed. Davidson warned the men that the "ability of this theatre to continue forging a unique place for itself is in serious jeopardy," and he pleaded with them to "help in the matter by giving this request your serious consideration."[698]

Marre and Whitehead were sympathetic to the situation, which they explained to Linney before asking him to make cuts to what was thought to be problematic language. Linney had not agreed to the cuts, prompting Davidson's June 5 memo, which went unanswered. Ten days after Davidson's memo, Elliot Martin intervened. He began by reminding Linney of the shaky ground on which the young organization stood. Although they had survived the Supervisors' assault on CTG over *The Devils*, it was still "important that the creative momentum of this kind of theatre operation gather steam and confidence with each new play. . . . This kind of theatre complex," he said, "must gain the confidence of theatre-goers, over a period of time."[699] After expressing his confidence that the play's production, which Center Theatre Group was "very proud" to be presenting as its first original work, he told Linney that it was now "absolutely imperative that certain lines in the play be deleted." Linney would of course be free, Martin said, to reinstate those lines for his New York engagement, but he assured Linney that he, Whitehead, Marre, and Davidson believed that deleting the lines would make "no difference between success and failure in Los Angeles, or that the deletion of these lines [would] in any way impede the story line or the dramatic

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[698] Ibid.

[699] Elliot Martin to Romulus Linney, June 15, 1967. Center Theatre Group Records, Box 3, Folder: Correspondence, General, Sorrows of Frederick.

impact of the work."[700] Martin made it clear to Linney that his communiqué with him was not an entreaty but a mandate, infuriating Linney.

Previews of *Frederick* were already underway when Martin issued his directive to Linney—with the backing of Davidson, Whitehead, and Marre—to delete several specific lines. Linney refused to make the changes, but was overruled by Marre, a co-owner of the play. Marre was left to make the adjustments on his own after Linney walked off, "adamantly refus[ing] to touch a word, rewrite a scene or fully co-operate on the production."[701] After witnessing the changes that had been forced upon his play, Linney accused Marre and CTG of "violating" his play and argued that "the various cuts and deletions [had] turned his study of the founder of Prussian militarism and the lineal ancestor of Hitler into the portrait of a charming old king."[702] Over the course of several weeks once the production opened, he inundated Cecil Smith with letters and phone calls in which he "loudly voiced his complaints." In the earlier and aforementioned interview with Smith, Linney had tempered his language about the frustrations he was experiencing in the creative process at the Taper, but after walking off the production, he now sought to publicly accuse CTG of sabotaging his work by trying to get Smith to publish his side of the story.

Knowing that he could not ignore Linney's letters and calls, Smith reported Linney's objections, but staunchly defended CTG and dismissed Linney's complaints. "My sympathies are usually with the writer," Smith told his readers, ". . . but in Linney's case, I think his objections are hogwash." Smith said he had reread the original script paying close

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[700] Ibid.

[701] Cecil Smith. "Linney Sorrowful Over 'Frederick.'" *The Los Angeles Times,* August 1, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[702] Ibid.

attention to each of the cuts that Linney was demanding be reinstated, and said that he did "not believe they would make one whit of difference in the ultimate impact of the play."[703] Smith had given the play a glowing review upon its opening, praising the "language, rich with wit, that floods the theater; the scenes that sear the mind; the gallery of 18th-century nobles, not uniforms stuck onto sticks, but fully realized and rounded humans!"[704] He reiterated his praise of the play when reporting on Linney's objections and also repeated his opinion that the play's major shortcoming was its ending. More importantly, however, Smith argued that even with the play's flaws, one "would feel that director Albert Marre working with Linney . . . by reshaping and reforging certain elements during the run here would end up with a really, important, cohesive drama."[705] Smith added that although Marre believed the play would likely be on Broadway in the fall, it should be remembered that preparing plays for commercial runs was "not the function of the CTG nor the purpose of the Forum." What mattered, regardless of whether a show actually had a subsequent commercial production, was the "launching of a valid new drama." *Frederick* was "the sort of play that art theater companies from Atlanta to Seattle are in search of," Smith said, adding that it was "the function and purpose of this organization to do its utmost to make a new play of stature into a viable drama that is a valuable addition to American dramatic literature."[706]

Smith essentially turned Linney's argument around on him. Linney had besieged Smith with protestations over the treatment of his play by CTG, ostensibly with the purpose of getting

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[703] Ibid.

[704] Cecil Smith. "'Sorrows of Frederick' Premieres at the Forum." *Los Angeles Times,* June 26, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[705] Cecil Smith. "Linney Sorrowful Over 'Frederick.'" *The Los Angeles Times,* August 1, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

[706] Ibid.

Smith to report sympathetically on his plight as a writer whose work was being undermined by the bureaucratic machinations of CTG. Smith, however, turned the tables on Linney and essentially accused him of undermining his own play by refusing to collaborate and of impeding the Forum's ability to carry out its primary purpose of expanding the American theatrical canon.

Because of Linney's dissatisfaction with the Taper production, *The Sorrows of Frederick* did not move on to a Broadway production. Nearly a year after its Taper production, Robert Whitehead told the *New York Times* he was still very much interested in mounting the play on Broadway, but there were "some present complications." Just a few days before Whitehead spoke to the *Times,* Linney himself had told the paper that he "had not gotten along with Albert Marre while working on the Taper production. If there were to be a Broadway production, it would not be until after September 1968, when Marre's option on the play ended. Linney said he might be willing to proceed with the play with Whitehead producing but refused to work with Marre on the production.[707] Nonetheless, *Frederick* was an important milestone for the Taper, which had delivered on its promise to deliver a compelling world premiere drama. The episode also demonstrated Davidson's pragmatism in finding the balance between producing bold and thematically controversial work while balancing that aspiration with his need to ensure the institutional survival of the theater. Furthermore, Smith's intervention in the press provided Davidson and CTG cover by painting Linney's reaction to the imposed changes as unreasonable because the production did not suffer from those changes and that the company had fulfilled an important part of its

[707] Lewis Funke. "News of the Rialto: A Sound of Now." *New York Times,* March 24, 1968. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

mission by producing such an innovative original work in the first place. Meanwhile, by putting his foot down with Linney over some of the language in *Frederick* after having refused to back down in the face of the disgruntled supervisors during the *Devils* controversy, Davidson demonstrated to his board that they could trust that he would make minor compromises when necessary to protect the greater artistic freedom to tackle challenging work that might rankle some audience members.

Moving into the second season, Davidson would continue to challenge the Taper's audiences and critics with challenging and controversial work. Although he started the season with a canonical comedy, Moliere's *The Miser*, starring Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, the remainder of the season featured a revised version of Tennessee Williams's *Camino Real,* the American premiere of the controversial *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer,* and an evening comprised of two one-act plays, *The Golden Fleece* by A.R. Gurney and *Muzeeka* by John Guare, that had been born out of the Taper's original play workshop series "New Theatre for Now," which had begun at the end of the first season under the leadership of director Ed Parone. The season was a huge critical success. At the end of the program note for the season's final offering, Davidson commended his audience for "attempt[ing] four different and adventurous journeys with us."[708] With his choice of plays that season, Davidson affirmed his commitment to presenting work that was relevant, that pushed stylistic boundaries, and that challenged audiences.

But perhaps even more important in the establishment of the Mark Taper Forum's identity, the second season finally secured for Los Angeles its place on the national theatrical stage when Davidson directed a production of *Oppenheimer* at the Repertory Theatre of

[708] Ibid.

Lincoln Center after Robert Whitehead passed on the production. The Taper had also attracted national press coverage for its own productions at an unprecedented level for any regional theater. By the end of the second season, the CTG Press Department could rightly report to the board of directors that "no theatre in Los Angeles can match [the Taper's] record for national coverage and review, and all of it happening within a period of less than two years."[709]

With the success of the Taper's first two seasons, Center Theatre Group finally fulfilled the aspirations of Dorothy Chandler and the Music Center's backers to transform Los Angeles from a theatrical wasteland feeding on scraps from New York to a major arbiter of theatrical taste. Its earlier incarnation at UCLA had clearly demonstrated that Los Angeles was home to a sophisticated theater-going audience, while using the intellectual and cultural legitimacy of UCLA to affirm their audience's desire to demonstrate their own sophistication and cultural prowess. Moving to the bigger arena of Downtown Los Angeles, Gordon Davidson effectively maintained the identity he had worked to develop for the company at UCLA, while working to broaden the company's reach by enlisting his audience in the mission to make the Taper a space wherein Angelenos could build community by engaging with challenging works presented in bold productions. *The Devils* proved to be an ideal choice for the opening of the company, not just because it fulfilled the company's mission of presenting important and intellectually stimulating work, but because the threat posed by the Supervisors rallied artists, administrators, and the press to the defense of an institution that, more than any other of the Music Center's constituents, could place Los Angeles at the forefront of the resident theater movement. Whereas the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center

[709] "A Report From the Press Department." Center Theatre Group Records.

never seemed able to make it clear why it even existed in the first place, Center Theatre Group established itself as a critical expression of the national and international aspirations of a city that was in the midst of a rise to global preeminence.

CONCLUSION

It has been my aim in this dissertation to examine the ways in which the organizations studied herein established their authority to represent their cities and the nation as civic institutions and to explore how they legitimated their identities as such. Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center were linked to differing degrees to urban renewal efforts in their respective cities, but both institutions relied on their founders' ability to make the case that a pressing need existed to create new cultural venues on an unprecedented scale. Despite their purported cultural aspirations, both centers grew out of pragmatic desires to replace one vision of urbanity with another and to raise the national and international stature of their respective cities. Lincoln Center had no official designation as a national cultural center, but nonetheless was said to stand as a symbol of American cultural might by virtue of its location in New York, whose global profile was on the rise after World War II. Los Angeles, meanwhile, worked to reconcile its booming population with a decidedly un-metropolitan national image, while the business elite sought to wrest control of the city's built environment from the political forces of the left, and the Music Center figured prominently into these efforts.

The centers' theater constituents, meanwhile, were not directly linked to urban renewal efforts but were nonetheless strongly influenced by the conditions shaping Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center, particularly in relation to establishing the theaters' legitimacy as civic institutions. In the case of Center Theatre Group, the organization effectively tapped Angelenos' growing desire to demonstrate their cultural sophistication and the desire to establish Los Angeles as a city able to compete with New York and other cities as a center of theatrical production. The Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, on the other

hand, failed to establish a clear vision for an organization that was to be the presumptive national theater of the United States. Although the ousting of Kazan and Whitehead was largely the result of personal conflict between them and the theater's board of directors, much of that conflict grew out of the pressure caused by the symbolic weight placed on the organization and its failure to respond to changing theatrical trends.

The Permanent Capital of the World

When New York was negotiating with the United Nations Organization (UNO) to locate its headquarters in Manhattan, the press wasted no time in arguing that securing the UNO Headquarters would make New York "the permanent capital of the world,"[710] and securing the United Nations inarguably bestowed an increased global preeminence on postwar New York. More importantly, though, the United Nations was, in the words of Samuel Zipp, "an opening episode in a decades-long attack on industry and blue-collar life in Manhattan on the part of urban redevelopment policies."[711] Making the case for the United Nations had been easy. Turtle Bay had long ago ceased to be a residential neighborhood and was occupied almost entirely with industry, mainly in the form of slaughterhouses. It would be difficult to argue against trading in slaughterhouses for the United Nations, particularly in the absence of large residential populations facing eviction. In the case of the UN, Robert Moses's slum clearance ideal could be, to again borrow Zipp's words, "reduced to its purest logic."[712] If ever there was a good case for the ethos of benevolent intervention in the urban landscape, this was it.

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[710] Robert Caro, *The Power Broker,* 774.

[711] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 58-59.

[712] Ibid., 59.

Robert Moses established the legitimacy of his urban vision by demonstrating to the public that the neighborhoods razed to make way for his slum clearance projects not only had little intrinsic value but also threatened the general health and welfare of the city. It fell to the leaders of the institutions to be housed on the rubble to establish their civic importance. A few months before New York's Board of Estimate gave final approval to the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project, Howard Taubman argued in the *Times* that the city should not only give its approval to the project but that they should also assume much if not most of the financial burden for the Center's construction as a matter of civic pride.

But while Taubman suggested that the city's failure to fully back the Center financially might rob the institution of its rightful civic stature, the Lincoln Center Board of Directors used their reliance on private donors and foundations as a means of establishing the institution's legitimacy as a symbol not just of America's cultural maturity but as a symbol of the virtues of capitalism. "As a symbol before the world," they said, "Lincoln Center will be all the better because it will be built and supported by the freely given gifts of private individuals, foundations, and corporations."[713] While Lincoln Center would from the moment of its inception—and indeed to the present day—face sharp criticism for elitism, the logic of the Cold War, with its valorization of unabashed capitalism, allowed the Center to frame private support from the wealthy elite—and even institutional control by a board of directors drawn from those same circles—as being demonstrative of the civic values of the Center, even while they argued that the Center would offset the belief that Americans cared only about material wealth and placed little value on cultural enlightenment.

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[713] William J. Buxton. *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy's Transformation of Culture, Communication, and the Humanities* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 32.

While the rhetoric of cultural maturity and spiritual aspiration was plentiful, so too was language that explicitly cast the Center as a weapon against dangerous others, foreign and domestic. Promoting Lincoln Center in a speech to the University Club, board member C.D. Jackson declared, "Culture is no longer a sissy word. Today, it is a word of immense worldwide political significance." It was "absolutely fantastic," he said, "that, from out of the seething postwar world, it is culture that should have emerged as a dynamic concept, an aspiration of whole nations, a force capable of swaying the masses, an element of decisions in the minds of the uncommitted." Jackson went on to say that the "cultural offensive" against Cold War threats was no less important than the arms race or the race to achieve a high living standard.[714] Such rhetoric effectively lent the Center the air of urgency it needed to claim its status as a symbol of national and civic importance.

The architecture of the Center, with its austere travertine facades and the blunt edges and stark modern lines that characterized its buildings further demonstrated the force with which the nation was ready to deploy its cultural resources in the fight against communism. Moreover, the physical transformation of the cityscape helped to "boast new urban places equal to those of classical Europe," and would serve, according to Samuel Zipp, to "preserve the influence in the United States of a threatened European culture." Although the Center's backers and leaders never publicly said as much, internal documents cited by Zipp show that an early draft of a public statement regarding the Center asserted that the arts "help to keep alive and meaningful our cultural and blood ties to Great Britain and the Continent." As Zipp observes, such rhetoric shows the urban elite's growing discomfort with the changing demographics of the city. In the face of postwar suburbanization, deindustrialization, and a

[714] Quoted in Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 179.

massive influx from the black South and Puerto Rico, argues Zipp, "the traditional markers of elite stewardship, influence and power were slowly eroding. Lincoln Center promised some symbolic support for this endangered social infrastructure."[715] The Center, then, derived its legitimacy not just through the artistic stature of the organizations to be housed within, but also through its function as a fortress protecting the western heritage of high art and culture. More important to the Center's leadership than expressing a distinctly American identity through the works on its stages was the unequivocal demonstration of the cultural and economic might of the United States, a demonstration executed through the very process of clearing the landscape to make way for the Center, constructing a citadel equal to those found across the Atlantic, and ensuring the institution's sustainability over the long term.

With the eyes of the world on Lincoln Center, the Repertory Theatre was subject to intense scrutiny from the moment of its inception. Howard Taubman predicted in 1961 that the Repertory Theatre would be "the Center's most searching test and most challenging opportunity." Unlike Lincoln Center's other constituents like the Met and the Philharmonic, which were "going concerns," the theatre represented a "new beginning."[716] It was not, Taubman suggested, merely to be the new beginning of just one organization, but rather a new beginning for the American theatre itself, which would at last have a permanent repertory company in its theatrical capital city that would help to raise theatrical standards to theretofore unknown heights. Kazan and Whitehead, he said, were "assuming an enormous burden," with the obligation "to create a theatre that has coherence, continuity, and a commitment to the fine, gay, and ennobling achievements of the past and to the spirited,

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[715] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 183.

[716] Howard Taubman. "A New Beginning: Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre Can Raise National Standards." *New York Times,* November 26, 1961. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

adventurous, provocative work of our own day."[717] As it turned out, it was a burden too heavy for the Repertory Theatre to bear, and the weight of that burden came largely from the expectations placed on the theater by a sense of expectancy that it would rise to be the long sought-after answer to the quest for a permanent national theater to rival such European institutions as the Old Vic and Comedie Francais.

With no existing institution ready to take up residency as the theatrical constituent of Lincoln Center, Rockefeller turned to Broadway icons Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead, hoping that their track record of artistic and box office success would be a solid foundation on which to build a sustainable theater that could match the preeminence of its neighbors at the Center. However, as Kazan and Whitehead would soon learn, creating a venerable theatrical institution, particularly one that could live up to its *de facto* national theater status, was far more challenging than either of them, particularly Kazan, could have imagined. Certainly, the personal conflicts among the artistic leadership and the theater's board of directors chronicled in Chapter Two of this dissertation played an important role in the unraveling of the Kazan/Whitehead administration. That conflict grew, however, not from simple personal animosity, but rather from a confluence of factors, each of which was unique to the theater's location within Lincoln Center.

Chief among these factors was the simultaneous bestowment of unofficial "national" theatre status and a failure to define exactly what the expectations of such an institution should be. The one factor that everyone seemed to agree on from the outset was that any theatrical institution at Lincoln Center should operate on a repertory basis, which seems to have been almost universally viewed as a panacea against the commercial hit-flop model that

[717] Ibid.

had for so long stunted the artistic progress of American theatrical art. Robert Brustein, for example, had argued that "America will never develop a satisfactory dramatic tradition until it can develop a unified company with plenty of rehearsal time and a vigorous, intelligent, and continuous artistic policy."[718] Tyrone Guthrie argued that repertory was particularly important for young actors who needed the training and grounding that can only come from "a quick succession of well contrasted parts" on a regular basis.[719]

But perhaps more important than any reason for Lincoln Center to use the repertory model was the simple fact that the United States lacked a permanent repertory theater, while such institutions were commonplace in Europe, a fact emphasized by Repertory Theatre board member Eugene Black, who argued after Kazan and Whitehead's ousting that it was critical that the Repertory Theatre continue to operate. "[T]his country does not have a national quality repertory company, such as the National Theater in England and the Comedie Francaise," he said, "and it is important that we have such an instrument in this country to perform the great plays of history in an imaginative, qualitative, and worthwhile manner."[720] Black wrote these comments in a memo he called "A Concept for Lincoln Center," which he drafted days after the departure of Kazan and Whitehead and which was intended to propose a guiding artistic policy for the continued operation of the theater. Chief among his proposals was a strict limitation on the number of new plays produced by the theater (a maximum of one every one to two seasons) and an almost exclusive focus on

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[718] Robert Brustein, *Seasons of Discontent,* 210.

[719] Tyrone Guthrie. "Repertory Theatre—Ideal or Deception?" *New York Times.* April 26, 1959. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[720] Eugene Black. "A Concept for Lincoln Center," December 21, 1964. Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center Records.

"proven" plays.[721] In Black's mind, what would establish the national importance of the theater was not innovation, risk taking, or the fostering of new playwriting talent, but rather only "the greatest excellence in both the constant quality of plays and acting and directing."[722] To put it another way, the function of this "national" theater in Cold War America was not to give voice to new emerging American voices but to ensconce works from "proven" playwrights.

Although Black did not make any pronouncements about what might constitute appropriate thematic content for the repertoire moving forward, he laid bare what had been one of his deepest concerns about Kazan and Whitehead—that their selection of plays revealed the same "left-wing" thinking that had defined the Group Theatre, with which Kazan had such a long history. As evidence he pointed to *Marco Millions,* "one of the most anti-business or Establishment plays written this century," and *The Mad Woman of Chaillot,* which he noted Arthur Miller had once called "the most reactionary play of our time."[723] Although there is little other evidence to suggest the board tried in any way to censor play selection based on content, this memo demonstrates how much of the conflict that emerged within the Repertory Theatre stemmed from its location on what was clearly the Establishment's turf.

While the Board of Directors might have viewed some of Kazan and Whitehead's programming as being too left-leaning or anti-Establishment, much of the criticism leveled at the Repertory Theatre by the press and theater insiders came from those who felt that the

[721] Ibid.

[722] Ibid.

[723] Ibid.

Repertory Theatre had, by cozying up to an Establishment represented not just by its board but by Kazan and Whitehead themselves, squandered an important opportunity to revitalize a stagnant American theater, and it was an argument not without merit. For all of Kazan's early talk about striving to develop a theater of "themes" and his wish to push theatrical boundaries, little of that was borne out in his work onstage or in his deliberations reflected in the surviving records. Instead, it appears he was more concerned with preserving the legacy of the postwar tradition of theatricalized realism and psychological truth embodied in his collaborations with Williams, Miller, and designer Jo Mielziner, who in addition his work as set designer on several of Kazan's productions, also designed the auditorium of the Beaumont. Just as the founders of Lincoln Center sought to protect their rule over the urban and cultural landscape, the Repertory Theatre could provide Kazan, Whitehead, and playwrights like Miller the opportunity to monumentalize their legacies as progenitors of American theatrical identity while the forces of the avant-garde, Off-Broadway, and Off-off Broadway threatened to exert their influence and challenged the primacy of these men who had established themselves at the forefront of American theatrical art during the postwar period.

By the time the Repertory Theatre was incorporated in 1960, Broadway was not only experiencing a sharp economic decline, but had also ceased to be an incubator for work grappling with important socio-political issues. Christopher Bigsby has argued that it was not just economic factors that impacted the economic and artistic decline of Broadway, but that "more crucially, it was a matter of attitudes and a basic cultural parochialism,"[724] an

[724] Christopher Bigsby. *Beyond Broadway,* vol. 3 of *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 20.

argument echoed by many other theater historians and critics. Arnold Aronson, for example, argues that the emergent Cold War culture in the 1950s undermined both the entertainment and discussion-forum function of mainstream theatre by delivering a double whammy of sorts, noting that by the 1950s, "much of the entertainment function had been ceded to television, and the political atmosphere stifled the more open and visible forms of public debate."[725] Bruce McConachie, meanwhile, argues that by the 1950s, "whole areas of working-class life vanished from the [Broadway] theater," a result of the "triumph of capital over labor in the years after World War II," which "underwrote and legitimated the business-class orientation of Broadway theater."[726]

When the political consensus of the 1950s finally began to crack toward the end of the decade, Broadway had long since lost its authority as the primary venue for the expression of American theatrical identity. "Consensus politics had collapsed," argues Bigsby, adding that if indeed there had ever been a singular audience to be addressed, that was no longer the case. "There were now many audiences," Bigsby says, "some defined racially, some politically, some aesthetically, and Off-Broadway, Off-off Broadway (which also began to emerge in 1959), a newly constituted regional theatre were ready to address them."[727] The rise of theaters like La Mama and the Living Theatre sent a clear message that postwar psychological realism could no longer contain the aesthetic direction in which the theater was heading, and the voices of this incipient generation of playwrights were no longer

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[725] Arnold Aronson. "American Theatre in Context" in *Post-World War II to the 1990s,* vol.3 of *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, eds. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93.

[726] Bruce McConachie. *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-1962* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 5.

[727] Christopher Bigsby, *Beyond Broadway,* 21.

looking to the theater of Broadway, which had come to represent the Establishment from which they sought to break, an Establishment to which Kazan undeniably now belonged.

When it came to developing the programming for what was to be ostensibly to be a representation of American theatrical identity, Kazan and Whitehead seem to have paid little attention to the emergent voices of the Off-Broadway movement and the avant-garde. Rather, Kazan's view of the American theatre as an institution seems forever rooted in the tradition of the Group Theatre, the Actors Studio, and his Broadway career defined by his stature as "the man responsible for the 'cult of directors' as it existed in the Broadway theatre of his day."[728] As unhappy as Kazan was during his tenure with the Repertory Theatre, there is little question he had some hope of shielding the legacy of the theater he helped create within the citadel that was Lincoln Center just as the founders of Lincoln Center worked to hold on to their power by erecting the great travertine monument.

Neither he nor Whitehead could see beyond the recent theatrical past for inspiration, and they were thus unable to meet the expectations thrust upon them from every conceivable direction. By the time the theater opened in 1964, American theatrical identity had become too large to be contained in the walls of one institution on Manhattan's Upper West Side. As the regional theater movement gained momentum, theatrical identity would have to be negotiated and legitimated on a more local scale. While Lincoln Center might have been equipped to stand as a national symbol of American cultural maturity, the Repertory Theatre proved unable to convince the public that it could stand as a nationally representative institution.

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[728] Joseph Ziegler, *Regional Theatre,* 143.

The Twentieth Century Parthenon

It is difficult to imagine an urban transformation more drastic than that which happened in Los Angeles in the two decades following World War II. Having defeated public housing and politically crippling the left, the city's pro-growth coalition, led by the *Times* and its allies in business, culture, and government, unleashed their vision of the modern metropolis on downtown Los Angeles. Although it would take decades for skyscrapers now dominating Bunker Hill to rise, the die had been cast and the corporate modernist vision of the city had clearly triumphed over the utopian aspirations of the now defeated New Deal coalition. In the space of just a few years, urban renewal proponents in Los Angeles forged a new identity for the city intended to supplant the image of Los Angeles as hick town with that of modern marvel.

Cold War paranoia had given the business elite the weapon they needed to ensure their control over the vision for Los Angeles and to portray their culture-and-commerce-driven vision as a more "American" alternative to public housing. Culture and leisure spaces like the Music Center, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Dodger Stadium would, city leaders argued, demonstrate to the nation that Los Angeles was ready to assume its place on the national stage and to rival New York as a leading metropolis. Moreover, the urban spaces that emerged through these projects would function as a spatial expression of containment by essentially turning their backs to the street and creating plazas that could function not to promote organic social interaction but rather to provide an oasis from the city streets and to "exclude the social liabilities of modern downtown—the poor, the denizens of

skid row, the homeless."[729] This approach to urban planning was a defining feature of downtown renewal in cities across the country, but it was particularly important in Los Angeles, where the suburban ethos of, to borrow a phrase from Eric Avila, "social and spatial isolation," reigned supreme. Dodger Stadium, Avila argues, is just one example of how the institutions that defined the "new" downtown reinforced white suburban identity even as city leaders sought to counter suburban sprawl by recentralizing downtown. He argues that Dodger Stadium "shared the spatial culture that defined the suburban periphery" of Los Angeles. Unlike Ebbets field, "which epitomized the heterogeneous and rambunctious public life of the streetcar metropolis," the new Dodger Stadium "ensconced baseball fans within a corporate arena tailored to the privatized, sanitized, and disciplined nature of public life after World War I."[730]

The Music Center similarly ensconced its audiences on a plaza that was not simply tucked away from the street, but elevated above it, its refined environment standing in the sharpest imaginable contrast to the purported dangerous and sleazy streets of the now-razed Bunker Hill. Upon the opening of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in December 1964, *Time* magazine described it as a "masterful combination of warmth and tasteful luxury," noting that those attending the opening performance "mounted an elegant, cantilevered marble staircase that crossed a pool filled with white azaleas set in the lobby's floor" and "saw themselves multiplied into infinity in tall wall-sized mirrors." The feature in *Time* also noted how the interior of the Pavilion contrasted "the sharp-edged angularities and cool-toned décor" of Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall and instead "was all curves and warm shades

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[729] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tridib Banerjee. *Urban Design Downtown: Poetics and Politics of Form* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 65.

[730] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*," 146.

of gold, coral and beige."[731] Such rhetoric about the building's elegance was common, and differed significantly from the rhetoric surrounding Lincoln Center's architecture which tended to emphasize not elegance and refinement but power and masculinity.

This distinction highlights one of the key differences in the legitimation strategies of the two institutions. While Lincoln Center was sold almost explicitly as a kind of citadel where cultural treasures of the United States would be protected and displayed as an important part of America's cultural arsenal, the Music Center, with its affectionate moniker of "our twentieth century Parthenon on our downtown Acropolis,"[732] would provide for a newly expanded social elite a space where they could demonstrate their cultural sophistication safe atop a hill protected by an "acropolis" fortified by corporate capital. In creating the Music Center, Chandler and her associates had achieved their goal of "creating the social conditions for upper-class recognition around the country" and ensuring that by creating "an expanded elite," the *Times* and its allies would maintain their power, at least for the time being.[733]

While expanding entrée into the social elite of the city had been an important strategy in gaining support for the project from many influential individuals, garnering public support also required creating an urgent need for the Center in the public imagination. One of the key strategies deployed in this regard, dating all the way back to the initial GLAPI proposals and coming to a head with the Hollywood Bowl's closure and rescue, was the promulgation of the idea of Los Angeles as a "have-not" city when it came to cultural institutions. Although

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[731] "Brightness in the Air." *Time,* December 18, 1964.

[732] Thomas M. Self. "The Music Center Story" in *The Music Center Story: A Decade of Achievement 1964-1974*, 4.

[733] Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big,* 317.

the GLAPI proposals failed to convince the electorate of the need for a civic auditorium, it certainly was not for lack of trying. The *Times* had put the full force of its editorial power behind the initiative and argued tirelessly that erecting such a facility was essential to progress for the city, especially as it had grown to be one of the largest in the nation.

Although they failed to convince the public of the "urgent need" for GLAPI's proposed auditorium, the near loss of the Hollywood Bowl helped to give the notion of the reputational importance of culture to the city's stature more credibility. Whereas the auditorium proposed by GLAPI was little more than an abstraction to the general public, the potential loss of the Hollywood Bowl and the national embarrassment it would cause was all too palpable and helped ignite widespread support for saving the Bowl, which Chandler would transform in later years into support for the Music Center project. As embarrassing as the potential loss of the Bowl was, it also proved to be important in that the national attention it brought to the city demonstrated unequivocally that the rest of the country was indeed watching what was happening in Los Angeles with a sharply critical eye, a fact that played an important role in the development of Center Theatre Group.

Tapping into the growing desire to bestow national stature on the city was critically important in establishing the civic importance and cultural legitimacy of CTG. By the time the Music Center announced that the Theatre Group would become the Center's theater constituent, the Group had already established local and national prestige through its work at UCLA, which was widely praised by critics and which had earned the company significant financial support from the Ford Foundation. Foundation support, critical praise, and the affiliation with UCLA were important factors in demonstrating the company's legitimacy, but also important was the emphasis that the theater and the press placed on the

sophistication of its audiences, who were frequently lauded as ideal theatergoers, as intellectually curious as they were adventurous. The Group demonstrated, said John Houseman and the press alike, that Los Angeles was a town teeming with audiences hungry for serious theater and not the confections that passed through Los Angeles on second-rate Broadway tours.

The press played a hugely important role in establishing not only artistic legitimacy through their reviews of the Group's work, but also by constantly reinforcing the notion that the Group's success at the box office disproved the widely-held view that Angelenos were vapid sunbathers uninterested in cultural matters. Of the scores of newspaper articles written about the Group, particularly in the *Los Angeles Times,* virtually none of them failed to mention the organization's devoted audience or to remind readers that the Group was the only game in town when it came to serious, challenging theater. In a retrospective on the Group's tenure at UCLA published upon the opening of their final production, Cecil Smith called the Group's effect on "the arid theatrical atmosphere" of Los Angeles "immeasurable." The Group was, Smith wrote, "the single factor most responsible for the astonishing growth of interest in serious theater here and the deepening awareness of drama that probes and explores the human condition, not as a casual diversion but in a critical attempt to define the measure of man."[734] Such rhetoric, simultaneously lauding the "interest in serious theater" and lamenting the theretofore "arid theatrical atmosphere," went a long way in establishing CTG as an institution urgently needed by Los Angeles to put it on equal

[734] Cecil Smith. "Theater Group Era Ends With Anouilh's 'Poor Bitos.'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The Los Angeles Times.

footing with other cities across the country and to help affirm Angelenos' growing sense of cultural sophistication.

The established need for the theater and the way in which audiences looked to it to demonstrate their gravitas was also an important factor in the Taper's survival of the censorship controversy that arose with its opening production of *The Devils.* Despite mixed opinions of the artistic merits of the play itself, the press and the community overwhelmingly came out to defend the Taper against interference from the county supervisors, motivated not simply by a moral objection to censorship but also by the reputational damage sure to befall Los Angeles if the supervisors successfully intervened in determining the Taper's programming. The episode was a defining moment in the Taper's history that helped to delineate the boundaries between the theater and Board of the Supervisors who had argued that because the theater enjoyed the financial benefit of being housed on county-owned land, the county should have some say in the company's programming. That the supervisors failed in exercising such control can of course be attributed to the outcry from the public and the press, but Dorothy Chandler's unqualified support of Davidson's artistic autonomy was also an important factor in the Taper's victory. While the press and other media outlets were most deeply concerned with the slippery slope presented by such censorship, Chandler understood, perhaps even more so than Davidson, that caving in to the supervisors would only serve to demonstrate the very kind of cultural parochialism for which the city had long been ridiculed and which she had fought to counter with her efforts to create the Music Center. The success of the Taper, Chandler understood, would rely on its ability to generate new work and to challenge audiences. While the Music Center and its more traditional constituents like the Philharmonic and the Civic Light Opera would put Los Angeles on equal footing with other

metropolises, it was the Taper's commitment to bold experimentation that could potentially put Los Angeles on the cutting edge and move it to the front of the pack nationally, and it was this potentiality that audiences were continually reminded of not only through the theater's programming but also through the rhetoric that ran through virtually everything written about the theater by the organization itself and in the press.

Of course, the Taper was only one part of the CTG operation. The Ahmanson Theatre, with an audience capacity three times that of the Taper's, was initially committed to producing primarily new works, American premieres, and to hosting prestigious companies like the Royal Shakespeare Company. Although Elliot Martin maintained the new works policy for the first several seasons, he continually faced criticism from critics that the Ahmanson seemed to be more concerned with the potential financial returns of a Broadway run following a successful run at the Ahmanson. Critic Dan Sullivan suggested that Martin's contract, which allowed him to personally produce and take a slice of the financial pie of subsequent commercial productions, was problematic because the potential for box office returns in the commercial arena might influence his decisions when programming a season at the Ahmanson. In other words, Sullivan argued, it was reasonable to question whether Martin's programming's decisions were truly "indifferent" to commercial potential.[735] Martin took umbrage to Sullivan's innuendo that he was motivated by personal profit in his programming decisions for the Ahmanson and rebutted Sullivan in a *Los Angeles Times* editorial. He argued that while it was true that he had the contractual right to participate personally in the proceeds from commercial productions of works originated at the

[735] Dan Sullivan. "Martin and CTG: Thoughts About Their Partnership." *Los Angeles Times,* January 17, 1971. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

Ahmanson, it was not the potential of personal profit that motivated his programming decisions, but rather the fact the Ahmanson received no subsidy whatsoever, a reality that "dictate[d] a programming policy of quasi commercially oriented theater." Moreover, he argued, he had an obligation not only to mount programming that could ensure that the Ahmanson could meet its financial obligations but also to reach an audience broader than that of the Taper. "We must vary our bill of fare," he argued, in order to "keep [audiences] coming and establish the theatergoing habit."[736] While the Taper fulfilled an important need for bold and daring original works appealing to the intellectually adventurous audience like that cultivated by the Group at UCLA, the Ahmanson, Martin argued, had an obligation to fill the void on the more commercially-oriented end of the theater spectrum, although he would still work to ensure that productions were chosen by their artistic merit over all else, financial realities notwithstanding.

Despite the criticisms leveled at Martin and the Ahmanson, the organizational structure of CTG was an important factor in ensuring the organization's success for a few reasons. The first of these reasons is financial as discussed above; the break-even policy at the Ahmanson helped to subsidize the Taper. More importantly, however, the Ahmanson provided a broader audience, not quite as adventurous as the Taper's audience, the opportunity to don their fine feathers and attend high profile theatrical events like the American premiere of O'Neill's *More Stately Mansions.* Moreover, when the Taper instituted its "New Plays for Now" series, which provided playwrights an opportunity to

[736] Elliot Martin. "Let's Get on With Our Work." *Los Angeles Times,* January 24, 1971. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times.

workshop experimental work in an environment off limits to reviewers, it expanded CTG's audience even further.

When Joseph Ziegler spent a weekend taking in performances at CTG during its inaugural season, he noted the variety among audiences of the Ahmanson, Taper mainstage, and the New Plays for Now lineup. Attending *More Stately Mansions* at the Ahmanson on a Saturday night, he encountered an audience decked out in "rats-nest hairdos, beaded gowns, and sling-back shoes." The next night, attending Durrenmatt's *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi* at the Taper, he found himself "among a healthy smattering of pageboy hairdos, madras dresses, and sensible shoes." Then on Monday, attending three short plays in the New Theatre for Now program, he was seated "in the midst of a grab bag of straight hair, pants, and sandals." There was "not much overlapping of audiences," he noted, "but there was clearly an extensive spread."[737] Ziegler's description of these audiences helps illustrate just how important the organizational structure of CTG—which remained remarkably unchanged from that which was first proposed at that 1966 meeting with Whitehead and the board of directors—was in allowing a wide range of upper and middle class Angelenos to turn to the theater to affirm their cultural gravitas and their alignment with Los Angeles's purported deepening interest in culture. However, it is also glaringly obvious, if only by omission in virtually all the contemporary coverage of the organization, that little effort was made to expand the reach of the Music Center or Center Theatre Group beyond mostly white upper and middle class Angelenos at least in those first few seasons. In subsequent years, the Taper would work to more adequately reach a more diverse audience, but for the time being, there was no escaping that the Music Center had successfully claimed downtown Los Angeles as

[737] Joseph Ziegler, *Regional Theatre,* 84.

the domain of the elite and that, the theatrical boldness of the Taper notwithstanding, the definition of culture as reflected in its programming was skewed toward the middle and highbrow.

Final Thoughts

A significant body of literature has emerged over the last three decades, most of it in the social sciences, that examines the intersection of cultural production and the cityscape. Much of that scholarship grapples with the ways in which cultural amenities like theaters function to make gentrification more politically palatable by allowing developers and city leaders to point to the civic value of the arts and culture and the economic benefits that a vibrant cultural scene can bestow on a city, even while large parts of the population are forced out of their neighborhoods. Such scholarship effectively explicates the ways in which cultural institutions shape the built environment of the city, and it has been my aim with this dissertation to turn the gaze inward to better understand how the identities of cultural institutions are in turn shaped by their imbrication in the local and national political, social, and economic imperatives that drive the shaping of cities.

As I argued in the introduction to this dissertation, theatrical institutions play as important a role on the stage of theater history as do playwrights, directors, actors, and individual texts and performances. Examining these institutions in relation to the cities in which they emerge makes visible influences on the work generated therein that might not be otherwise apparent. Such analysis provides valuable fodder for the theater historian seeking to identify points of intersection among a wide range of the social, artistic, and economic factors that influence cultural production. To be sure, a body of theatrical texts offers the historian important insight to the ways in which artists responded to social and cultural

conditions within a given historical period. However, the explicit study of the material conditions that shape the places and institutions where such works are created and legitimated illuminates the mutually constitutive relationship between cultural production and larger social, political, and economic realities.

Buildings like those at Lincoln Center and the Los Angeles Music Center stand as monuments to a society's commitment to providing its citizenry with cultural and spiritual uplift. However, the very act of monumentalization is a function of the power to create and control a narrative, which becomes an important means of bestowing cultural legitimacy on the ephemeral performances presented in buildings defined by their permanence and monumentality. Only by peeling back the marble curtain and looking within the institutions housed in these edifices can we begin to unearth the histories that reveal how power was acquired and wielded and how the wielding of that power has amplified some voices while silencing others. The stories told in the preceding chapters demonstrate just how inextricably linked artistic legitimation is to a seemingly infinite number of forces both concrete and intangible. A close study of the material conditions shaping the intersection of those forces is crucial to the study of theater history if we are to arrive at an understanding of the ways in which institutionalized power works to determine whose vision of national, civic, and aesthetic progress attains the authority to stand as representative of the culture at large.