

**PRESENTED BY  
THE WESTERN STATES ARTS FEDERATION**

**WESTAF**

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# SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS



**SUPPORTED BY THE  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS**





## **SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS**

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## WESTAF (WESTERN STATES ARTS FEDERATION)

The Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) is a regional arts organization that serves the arts-development needs of the arts community and the general public in the 12 Western states. The 27-year-old organization is an active partnership of the state arts agencies of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Working with these states, the NEA, and public- and private-sector funders, WESTAF's primary goals are to strengthen the arts infrastructure in the West and to expand the audience for all forms of the arts.

Throughout its history, WESTAF has adapted and transformed its programs and initiatives to reflect the current needs of the arts community and to respond to major structural changes in the field. The recent dramatic changes in arts funding in both the public and private sectors have prompted WESTAF once again to transform itself to ensure that it is properly positioned to best benefit the arts.

WESTAF remains committed to programmatic work in the areas of multicultural arts, literature, folk arts, visual arts, and performing-arts presenting. Programs in these areas include convening leaders from an arts discipline; the development of model programs; and the sponsorship of long-term, region-wide programs that fill a gap in the arts infrastructure of the West. WESTAF also has launched an ambitious program in the area of technology and the arts. The presence of the Internet has provided WESTAF with a much-sought-after means of serving artists and arts organizations across the vast reaches of the West. In addition, WESTAF remains committed to increasing the impact and effectiveness of the state arts agencies in the region. The maintenance of these agencies as a progressive force that benefits the arts interests of the public is WESTAF's preeminent goal.



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The symposium featured ten presenters and eight respondents. Each presenter was allocated 15 minutes to deliver a prepared statement, after which the symposium facilitators directed a discussion that included all participants. At the discretion of the facilitators, audience members were invited to participate in the discussion.



FOREWARD  
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO CULTURAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT:  
SUMMARY, OBSERVATIONS, AND PROVOCATIONS

E R I N M . T R A P P

The twentieth century in the U.S. ended far differently than it began. The silicon chip replaced the dynamo as the killer app of the future. Expansionism gave way to tighter borders and stringent immigration quotas. Homesteads were carved into ever-smaller parcels in sprawling suburbs. New immigrants who once were too shamed to speak their native tongue in public were succeeded by second and third generations who became vocal proponents of preserving and observing their native languages and traditions in their adopted home. The Cold War ended, and a philosopher declared the end of history. Perhaps the most significant shift of the late 20th century was that the notion of a unified national identity was supplanted by a panoply of increasingly strong voices for identities and practices. It is in this

tion of regional cultural policy in the  
In October, 2000, the Western States convened a symposium at the As- that affect cultural policy in the is only one small part of a much an attempt to acknowledge the most large was made in selecting topics

**“The cultural community has failed to embrace shifts in the environmental context that defines U.S. culture at the beginning of the 21st century..”**

preservation of multicultural context that WESTAF’s examina- West commenced.

Arts Federation (WESTAF) pen Institute around four topics West. Because the culture sector larger socio-political environment, important factors in the world at for the symposium rather than

adopting an insular framework of culture. Experts in the fields of technology, youth culture, demographics, and politics were invited to share their perspectives on important trends and discuss the relationship of these areas to the culture sector that does or does not exist. The purpose of the gathering was to expand on the previous year’s forum on the same topic and to draw upon and highlight the intellectual resources of the region that can and do contribute to broader discussion of cultural policy. From these discussions emerged a picture of the West that both mirrors and belies that of the nation as a whole.

After decades of only infrequent mention of the term in the United States, *cultural policy* has become a major theme in today’s discussions concerning culture and its development. We suggest that the current attention to and emphasis on cultural policy is driven primarily by a crisis of leadership in the cultural community. The cultural community has failed to embrace shifts in the environmental context that defines U.S. culture at the beginning of the 21st century, leading to the loss of forward momentum in the funding and perceived significance of public sector culture agencies, particularly the national cultural agencies. This stagnation finally has forced individuals involved in and advantaged by the expansion of funding for and the influence of these agencies to examine the underlying causes. A second factor is the maturing of the field of cultural administration. This, we propose, has resulted in a demand for practitioners who understand policy theory as a foundation upon which to build action rather than for practitioners who take actions because they are, without any evidence whatsoever, perceived to be good. Finally, for the first time,

private funders are supporting significant inquiry into the dynamics of public sector cultural policy, which they have not done previously, creating a third impetus for a focus on cultural policy.

The symposium and these proceedings, while not attempting to develop a Western cultural policy establishment exclusively derived from and committed to the West, are presented to provide an opportunity to reflect on the cultural policy issues particular to this region, to introduce cultural policy practitioners in the region to one another, and to expand the acquaintance of national and international discussions of cultural policy with thinking and thinkers in the West.

Participants in the symposium provided thoughtful and insightful analyses of various dimensions of cultural policy in the United States and the West. At the same time, their discussions suggested problems with the current conception of cultural policy and, in the aggregate, were focused on the obstacles within the current cultural policy system and on challenges facing the development of effective cultural policy in the United States and the West. The positing of bold alternatives to the current state of affairs generally was not to be found in the discussions. The following themes, gleaned from the two days of the symposium, illustrate how the group, perhaps appropriately, instead struggled to explicate the current state of the field with the hope that such an understanding might generate a future-focused dialogue.

**Retrospective Focus.** The climate for innovative cultural policy currently is impeded by the largely retrospective focus of many cultural policy discussions that catalog the foundations and history of cultural policy. Certainly, an understanding of the foundations and strands of cultural policy is essential to establishing the cultural sector's place in the larger socio-political context; however, too much emphasis in this area has starved the field of forward-looking cultural policy options. To a large extent, these proceedings and the symposium they document extend the retrospective line of inquiry, exploring historical precedent as a means for better understanding the current state of the cultural sector. Cultural policymakers, however, need to eschew their retrospective posture at some point if significant advancement in cultural policy is to be made.

The prominence and prevalence of the Western myth serves to reinforce the historical focus of cultural policy development; the continued inability of the Western myth to accurately portray a complex, multicultural regional identity was explored at this symposium. For some, the West conjures up nostalgic images of hardy pioneers farming fertile soil. For others, it speaks of imperialism, genocide, exploitation, and abuse. Despite efforts to debunk the Western myth, it remains firmly entrenched in the psyche of the public and woven into the fabric of our public lives. A successful cultural policy in the West must be inoculated against the suffocating effect of the Western myth on cultural activities that do not conform to the master narrative of the region.

Among the defining characteristics of the Western myth are a resistance among Westerners to federal involvement in culture and a distaste for centralization. Perhaps the most divisive contemporary legacy of the myth is found in resentment of federal land ownership and land-use policies. The myth also is manifest in a desire for independence from government interference and market controls. Accordingly, many pro-

mote a pure market approach to cultural development. As Lance Izumi points out, however, neither a complete market approach to the arts nor a return to censorship would eliminate many of the products that conservatives find objectionable. Arguably, while the very lack of a homogenizing national cultural policy in the past allowed dissent to flourish in a manner that generated both the richness and difficulty of issues now expressed in discussions of race, regionalism, immigration, public safety, religion, environmentalism, and ultimately of cultural identity, it would be appropriate to consider the complex ways in which federal involvement in cultural policy may be productive.

**Moribund Leadership in Cultural Agencies.** A second obstacle to the development of a robust cultural policy is the limited leadership provided by participants representing the nonprofit cultural sector. In the absence of a policy-strong nonprofit cultural sector, the commercial entertainment sector has assumed the *de facto* leadership role in shaping global cultural policy; the dominance of the private sector over the worldwide perception of American culture is virtually unchallenged. Symposium keynote speaker Vjerran Katunarić explains how Hollywood’s portrayal of the Old West still commands the international psyche and plays a much larger role in our conception of culture in the West than anything produced by the nonprofit sector: “Today, we know that spectacular narratives about the West, managed by Hollywood filmmakers, were addressed to the vast public, both American and a good part of the rest of the world. . . . In these places, people still believed in the ultimate triumph of America as the leader of the Free World, in the White Man, and in their mission to bring justice to the rest of the world.” By ceding the territory of creation and maintenance of culture and cultural policy to the commercial entertainment sector and presiding as arts education programs in schools nationwide are eroded to the point of virtual extinction, the nonprofit sector now is left to watch as generations of Americans willingly accept the limited cultural forms and options that are developed solely based on profitability.

Furthermore, the isolation and insulation of many leaders of cultural policy efforts ultimately is injurious to the development of effective cultural policy. The nonprofit cultural sector largely is controlled by individuals running small government agencies that disappear in state bureaucracy or nonprofit organizations that are immune from forces in the community. Accordingly, leaders of these groups can hold a job for decades by appealing only to a small group of carefully selected trustees or by disappearing inside a small agency that usually is not important enough to elicit disapproval from legislators based on constituent complaints. Furthermore, many of these positions are political appointments and granted with negligible regard for the communities these leaders are meant to serve. Thus, there is scant means for the public to topple cultural leadership that has become outmoded through ignorance, arrogance, or resource starvation.

The response among the general public is largely to ignore the nonprofit cultural sector and to participate in culture elsewhere—often the commercial arena. Cultural expressions are ubiquitous in America, but the cultural community continually fails to acknowledge how particular activities can contribute to the cultural fabric of the community. Every day, Americans sing in church choirs, decorate piñatas, tattoo their bodies with elaborate designs, attend tractor pulls, and participate in Taiko drumming, their efforts unheralded by cultural leaders clinging to programming developed decades earlier on a Euro centric model. Culture leaders must adopt an inclusive definition of cultural participation that mirrors what the public uses when

defining the activities that color their lives. The alternative is the continued dominance of profit-driven activities.

**Refusal to Embrace Technology as Central to Culture.** Technological advancements are causing a regular and dizzying reconceptualization of every facet of life, including the community, the workplace, education, privacy, and entertainment. The staggering speed at which our core structures and belief systems are reframed also is contributing to uncertainty in the cultural policy environment and obscuring rather than clarifying the future. Although the general public has become adept at adapting to major conceptual changes in this framework, the cultural community—in its refusal to accept technological applications as a central tenet of every aspect of its work—has failed to lead what is at its core a creative process and continues to retrofit its systems to catch up with last year’s trends. The public’s expectation for technological resources continues to expand, and cultural organizations must devote adequate resources to technological programs, which largely have been allowed to wither in favor of “safe” established programs that are largely irrelevant to all but a few individuals.

In many ways, the issue of technology is more urgent to cultural policymakers in the West than in any other region because the development of the West mirrors the development of the Internet. Both were conceived as a federal project, both were built on a decentralized model, and both impact the national consciousness with a force that belies their youth. With parallel origins, the West and the Internet are increasingly co-dependent; the need for connectivity often is most acute in the vast open spaces of the region and, as a result, the West often has been the first to adopt or be affected by new technologies. One Western cultural organization that has managed to develop a cutting-edge advocacy program using technological applications—Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley—is located in the geographical heart of the commercial technological world. John Kriedler describes how that organization built a cultural policy simulator that demonstrates how wise investments in culture can create strong communities. In using technology to demonstrate the dependent relationship among culture, economic success, and ultimately, healthy cities, this one cultural organization raised the bar for commercial development while promoting an integrated approach to culture.

Through its success, Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley demonstrates the feasibility of a nonprofit-developed application with reach far beyond its meager resources, but examples such as this are few due to lack of leadership in the area of technology and culture. Ultimately, the cultural community never will impact the commercial sector with a tiny fraction of the resources available to commercial concerns unless its leadership takes an innovative approach to resource and leadership development and places technological programming at the center of its work. Cultural policymakers must create a long-term vision founded on historical projections and current trends that clearly articulates the role of culture in a changing society dominated by technological forces.

**Failure to Acknowledge Complex Environmental Contexts.** Cultural policy participants need to be more aware of the complex contexts in which their reflections, deliberations, and efforts will be received and implemented. A keen example is the manner in which cultural policy discussions typically occur without

consideration of key political and economic factors. Michael Dorf astutely points out that the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities are bargaining chips in a larger political game, noting that although “some of the opposition to the arts reflected philosophical concerns over the role of federal funding of culture as well as antipathy to particularly controversial grants made to individual artists, much of the West’s resistance to the NEA and the NEH in the Senate was a tactical response to actions of a powerful Chicago Congressional representative who was able to protect the arts by trading them against the [land and water policy] interests of the Western states. . . . Western antipathy to the arts was primarily a tactical maneuver.” To the degree that cultural policymakers are ignorant of factors other than specifically cultural ones that affect policy development and implementation, they cannot successfully navigate these arenas.

The failure of the cultural community to address the changing demographic context of the region in a meaningful way represents a crisis both of resources and leadership. Although anticipating the demographic changes that regularly re-

the region is sometimes difficult, cultural interests, and aesthetic the delivery of cultural products. It cultural community that no ethnic majority in California; this demo-

than a decade prior, and it repre- elsewhere in the region as well. many organizations use with respect reliable and consistent support to

**“The failure of the cultural community to address the changing demographic context of the region in a meaningful way represents a crisis both of resources and leadership.”**

shape the face and character of these shifts bring new art forms, tastes that must be considered in should come as no surprise to the community now counts as a graphic was predicted for more

sents the crisis that is coming Still, the *ad hoc* approach that to programming fails to provide those communities, further

perpetuating their status as under-served or “other” audiences. Arts organizations in the West ignore and subordinate the interests of diverse audiences at their own peril. If this attitude does not change, these organizations will collapse under the weight of apathy of their “underserved” audiences who will represent a majority of citizens.

**Ambivalence Toward Multiculturalism.** The ambivalence in the United States toward multiculturalism poses significant problems for the development of effective cultural policy. As William Ray points out, “the paradox of culture [is that] the same word denotes both the inherited social reflexes that elude awareness precisely because they set the parameters of awareness, and a practice of self-conscious individuation that stakes its claim on an understanding of those reflexes.”<sup>1</sup> The tension inherent in the word *culture*, as Ray describes it, underlies the hesitance of the nonprofit cultural community to embrace multiculturalism. Culture, a concept that binds individuals through shared social experiences and traditions, has been used to exclude and exalt a class of citizens based on a heritage in Euro centric art forms deemed worthy endeavors. The failure of cultural organizations to embrace the universality of culture in favor of particularism that exalts a single artistic and cultural tradition *de facto* invalidates cultural expressions that diverge from the norm. There is no small irony in the fact that America, the country that purports to reject monolithic cultural practices in favor of telling the multiple stories of its citizens, is the world’s primary exporter of a monolithic commercial culture—through popular music, clothing, soft drinks, fast food and the like. In

other countries' cries of cultural colonization, then, we hear echoes of our own Native and ethnic populations, who fear losing their language and culture to the greater mass culture. The paradox and discomfort of culture, then, prevents forward movement in terms of cultural policy that truly works because the ultimate effect of the nonprofit communities' refusal to accept an inclusive definition of culture is the obsolescence of their efforts.

This issue is further complicated by the fact that culture is not limited to ethnic heritage, although in its common usage in the field, *multicultural* generally is used as a catchall term relating to indigenous and non-European immigrant peoples. Each individual defines his or her own culture in different terms, however, based on ethnicity, age, regional identity, political affiliation, affinity, sexuality, or a fluid combination of these and other factors, as Eric Hayashi and Fred Nawooksy explore. The exclusive stance that restricts the effective development of cultural policy extends to the failure of the cultural community to work meaningfully with other important voices in the West that do not adhere to a particular dominant modality. As Adelma Roach highlights, the moribund nature of the relationship between cultural entities and young people mirrors the resistance of many cultural policymakers to contrapuntal entities that emerge from these multi-ethnic communities. Likewise, the refusal by cultural organizations to engage conservative policymakers, as Lance Izumi explores, further illustrates the ambivalence toward multiculturalism in its broadest sense. The notion that a tiny cadre of "experts" who feel differently about art and assess art differently from the general public is increasingly seen as elitist and dysfunctional, as Tomás Ybarra-Frausto suggests. Francis Fukuyama sparked a firestorm of debate in 1989 with an essay titled "The End of History," in which he declared that society entered a new and lasting phase with the triumph of liberal democracy over Communism. In an essay in defense of his position, Fukuyama asserts that "the vacuum that constitutes our freedom can be filled with anything: sloth and self-indulgence as well as moderation and courage, desire for wealth and preoccupation with commercial gain as well as love of reflection and pursuit of beauty, banality alongside spirituality."<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama acknowledges that freedom is what citizens make of it, and the simple failure of individuals to favor feudalistic notions of high culture over banal commercial pursuits does not justify the creation of vast infrastructures devoted to preserving select incarnations of cultural expression. The appropriate role for cultural leaders, then, is not to impose monolithic ideas on citizens or direct their creative activities so much as to equip them with the necessary tools and resources from which true creativity will emerge.

All of these obstacles to the development of effective cultural policy suggest that cultural leaders need to address in a more realistic fashion the social and environmental factors that influence culture today. It is no longer sufficient to approach cultural development from a supply-side perspective, which makes the false assumption that constituents value the programs and processes that were developed during the past 30 years. The need to manage expectations and foster both preservative and formative processes currently exceeds the need to support the discipline-specific structure that still is supported at many levels. Furthermore, resources must be diverted from archaic programs to activities relevant to diverse cultural communities and educational programs that foster creativity and equip citizens to make informed cultural choices. Culture is not a liberal pursuit of European immigrants over the age of 50. Culture reflects everyone in society, and meaningful discussions with people across the spectrums of age, politics, ethnicity, and class

are the only hope for the creation of meaningful cultural policies. Such a dialogue represents a paradigm shift for many cultural entities accustomed to operating in a sponsorship model. This new model that acknowledges that culture may not exist outside the marketplace no doubt will be very threatening to some in the cultural establishment because it will highlight the need for some of them to go out of business. Cultural policymakers must learn to enable and engage individuals and communities rather than attempting to reinforce hopelessly outdated notions of elite culture or risk a continued erosion of influence and public support for their work.

These proceedings suggest ideas that move the cultural sector and cultural policymakers into a progressive approach toward cultural policy. The notion that cultural entities can operate outside the central forces that shape our world is rampant in the cultural community; indeed, it is a central operating principle for many organizations that argue the marketplace fails to support worthy works of culture that must be buttressed by their efforts. This logic is based on a value judgment that favors traditional European art forms and that is not sustainable in this era of sweeping technological and demographic change. The time is coming when many cultural organizations will be forced to close their doors for lack of support. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto points out that “it may be that culture—just like water and land—is a non-renewable resource. Culture also dies if it is not taken care of.” The pertinent question is whether cultural policymakers are preparing to cultivate the next generation of culture makers in meaningful and relevant ways or planning for a future of increasing obsolescence.

<sup>1</sup> William Ray. “The Ideology of ‘Culture.’” *Oregon Humanities*, Fall, 2000. p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama. “The End of Hysteria?” *The Guardian*, December 15, 1989.