

TRANSCRIPT

United States
Government

National Endowment
for the Arts
(NEA)

Narrator

Listen to part of a discussion in a United States government class.

Professor

OK, last time we were talking about government support for the arts. Who can sum up some of the main points? Frank?

Male student

Well, I guess there wasn't *really* any, you know, *official* government support for the arts until the twentieth century. But the first attempt the United States government made to, you know, to support the arts was the Federal Art Project.

Professor

Right. So, what can you say about the project?

Male student

Um, it was started during the Depression, um, in the 1930s, to employ out-of-work artists.

Professor

So was it successful? Janet? What do you say?

Female student

Yeah, sure, it was successful—I mean, for one thing, the project established a lot of, like, community art centers and, uh, galleries in places like rural areas where people hadn't really had access to the arts.

Professor

Right.

Male student

Yeah, but didn't the government end up wasting a lot of money for art that wasn't even very good?

Professor

Uh, some people might say that, but wasn't the primary objective of the Federal Art Project to provide jobs?

Male student

That's true. I mean, it did provide jobs for thousands of unemployed artists.

Professor

Right, but then, when the United States became involved in the Second World War, unemployment was down, and it seemed that these programs weren't really necessary any longer.

So, moving on . . . we don't actually see any govern—er, well, any *real* government involvement in the arts *again* until the early 1960s, when President Kennedy and other politicians started to push for major funding to support and promote the arts. It was felt by a number of politicians that, well, that the government had a *responsibility* to . . . uh, support the arts as sort of, oh what can we say, the soul, or *spirit* of the country. The idea was that there'd be a federal *subsidy*, uh, financial *assistance* to artists and artistic or cultural institutions. And for just those reasons, in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts was created.

So, it was through the NEA, the National Endowment for the Arts, um, that the arts would develop, would be *promoted* throughout the nation. And then, individual states throughout the country started to establish their *own* state arts councils to help support the arts. There was kind of a cultural explosion—and by the mid-1970s, by 1974, I think, all 50 states had their own arts agencies, their own state arts councils that worked with the federal government, with corporations, artists, performers, you name it.

Male student

Did you just say corporations? How were they involved?

Professor

Well, you see, corporations aren't always altruistic, they might not support the arts unless . . . well, unless the government made it attractive for them to do so, by offering corporations tax incentives to support the arts—that is by letting corporations pay less in taxes if they were patrons of the arts. Uh, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., you may, maybe you've been there, or Lincoln Center in New York. Both of these were built with substantial financial support from corporations. And the Kennedy and Lincoln Centers aren't the only examples—many of your cultural establishments in the United States will have a plaque somewhere acknowledging the support, the money, they've received from whatever corporation. Yes, Janet?

Female student

But aren't there a lot of people who don't think it's the government's role to support the arts?

Professor

Well, as a matter of fact, a lot of politicians who did not believe in government support for the arts, they wanted to do away with the agency entirely for that very reason—to get rid of governmental support—but they only succeeded in taking away about half the annual budget. And as far as the public goes . . . well, there are about as many individuals who disagree with government support as there are those who agree—in fact, with artists in particular, you have lots of artists who support—and who have benefitted from—this agency, although it seems that just as many artists oppose a government agency being involved in the arts for many different reasons—reasons like they don't want the government to control what they create. In other words . . . the arguments both for and against government funding of the arts are as many and, and as varied as the individual styles of the artists who hold them.