



President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities



2009–2016 Report to the President

A Legacy of Action



“We must recommit to advocating for the role of the arts and humanities in civic life and in education so that all our Nation’s students are inspired to create and succeed.”

—First Lady Michelle Obama

Letter from the First Lady

September 1, 2016

As First Lady and Honorary Chair, I take great pride in recognizing the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities for their outstanding work throughout this Administration.

Since my family moved to Washington, I’ve made it one of my top priorities to celebrate the fine arts at the White House. I firmly believe that every young person deserves opportunities to learn, grow, and reach their fullest potential, and I know that the arts play such an important role in that development.

Too many youths across our country did not have the support or the resources they needed to access centers for culture and the arts. However, with the efforts of this committee—as well as those of hundreds of artists, mentors, and teachers—more young people are now using their creative talents to explore the world around them. The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities worked tirelessly to make the arts more attainable, increasing programming in schools and furthering community engagement for those students who need it most. Today, as we celebrate these successes, we must also recommit to advocating for the role of the arts and humanities in civic life and in education so that all our Nation’s students are inspired to create and succeed.

Again, thank you to the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, and I wish you the very best.

Michelle Obama



In 2009, President Barack Obama already had a comprehensive platform on the arts and the humanities. The President and his Administration see the arts and humanities as critical to competitiveness in a global economy and artists, performers, and thinkers as a valuable resource for conveying American values and ideals. The Administration supports greater arts and humanities resources, increased cultural diplomacy, and policies putting the arts and humanities into our education system. This comprehensive platform served as the guiding principal for the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities throughout the Obama Administration.

Introduction: Chairs

We set out in the early days of the Obama administration to ensure that the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities would play a leadership role in the cultural life of our country. The President invigorated our effort by appointing an unprecedented number of important American artists to the Committee, including Chuck Close, Jhumpa Lahiri, Yo Yo Ma, Kerry James Marshall, Thom Mayne, Kalpen Modi, Edward Norton, Sara Jessica Parker, Kerry Washington, Forest Whitaker, Damian Woetzel, George C. Wolfe, Alfre Woodard, and John Lloyd Young.

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities has always been a respected advisor to the White House and federal cultural agencies. The Committee and its predecessors share a belief that the arts and humanities are the engines of this nation's creativity, diversity, and its collective imagination. Our members took their lead from our Honorary Chair, First Lady Michelle Obama, and President Obama, whose commitment to the arts and humanities is part of the bedrock of

their legacy. As the President wrote in his 2010 proclamation, "Our strength as a nation has always come from our ability to recognize ourselves in each other, and American artists, historians, and philosophers have helped enable us to find our common humanity."

Though the priorities for each Administration vary, each President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities has a shared commitment to educating our youth for the future; stimulating philanthropy from the private sector for the Committee's programs; creating international understanding through cultural diplomacy; and honoring this nation's greatest artists, scholars, and writers. The members of this Committee sought to protect this legacy and to build on it—becoming an important resource for the White House and our partners and a catalyst for change at the national level. We have continued to support the National Arts and Humanities Youth Programs Awards begun in the Clinton Administration and sustained a significant presence in cultural diplomacy, launching important projects in Haiti and Cuba.

We have also initiated two highly successful new education programs—Turnaround Arts and the National Student Poets Program that both stressed the critical need for equity and access to the arts for young people across the country. These projects were made possible through the individual and collective creativity and energy of our members and staff. This was particularly true of Turnaround Arts, the largest and most successful program created by this President's Committee. The seed for this new program was firmly planted in the soil of the arts education field, but the program became a catalyst in the much larger school reform movement. Turnaround Arts has significantly improved student performance, attendance, and discipline. This program has unquestionably transformed the culture of our schools for our principals, teachers, students, and their families.

We are honored to have been invited to serve a President and First Lady whose leadership endorses the arts and humanities as a necessity, not a luxury, for every American.

George Stevens, Jr.
Co-Chair

Margo Lion
Co-Chair

Mary Schmidt Campbell
Vice Chair

“It’s not enough to make the argument once or to make it twice or to make it even three or four times. It is the kind—if we believe in this, it is a kind of ongoing advocacy over time where we have to be prepared to continually compile the research, make the argument, and reach the necessary constituency.

—Mary Schmidt Campbell on the release *Reinvesting Arts Education*

2015 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards Ceremony; the First Lady with attending Committee Members



President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities Members

George Stevens, Jr., *Co-Chair*

Margo Lion, *Co-Chair*

Mary Schmidt Campbell, *Vice Chair*

Megan Beyer, *Executive Director*

Private Members

J. Ricky Arriola

Paula Boggs

Chuck Close

Richard J. Cohen

Paula Crown

Stephanie Cutter

Christine Forester

Fred Goldring

Howard L. Gottlieb

Teresa Heinz Kerry

Pamela Joyner

Janet Keller

Victoria S. Kennedy

Jhumpa Lahiri

Anne Luzzatto

Yo-Yo Ma

Liz Manne

Kerry James Marshall

Thom Mayne

Kalpen Suresh Modi

Olivia Morgan

Edward Norton

Eric Ortner

Sarah Jessica Parker

Ken Solomon

Andy Spahn

Caroline “Kim” Taylor

Jill Cooper Udall

Kerry Washington

Andrew Weinstein

Forest Whitaker

Damian Woetzel

George C. Wolfe

Alfre Woodard

John Lloyd Young

Public Members

William “Bro” Adams, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities*

Jane Chu, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts*

Carla Hayden, *Librarian of Congress*

Sally Jewell, *Secretary of the Interior*

John Kerry, *Secretary of State*

John King, *Secretary of Education*

Jacob J. Lew, *Secretary of the Treasury*

Kathryn Matthew, *Director, Institute of Museum and Library Services*

Earl A. Powell, III, *Director, National Gallery of Art*

Deborah Rutter, *President, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts*

David J. Skorton, *Secretary, Smithsonian Institution*

Dan Tangherlini, *Administrator, General Services Administration*



“An Unambiguous Place in the Curriculum” —Reinvesting in Arts Education

One of the first meetings of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities was a briefing at the White House with President Obama about his arts and humanities priorities. Arts education was one of the topics of discussion and got the Committee thinking about how to play a role.

From the outset the President’s Committee entered a national conversation on arts education and promoted the role of the arts and humanities in school achievement. At the time, arts education was on decline. Many national foundations that had funded arts education just years before had ceased that support. Early research showed little arts education was reaching lower income communities—the children who needed it most.

As the President’s Committee surveyed the landscape early in the term, there were strong advocacy organizations valiantly carrying the message for the arts in public education, thousands of arts teachers in schools doing the work each day, and many high-quality arts education organizations making a real difference in individual schools. But federal leadership and action on the issue was lacking.

The President’s Committee set out to place the arts as central to education. The Committee determined to begin with a report and eventually create a pilot program to illustrate the need for the arts.

In an initial, successful effort, the Committee worked closely with the U.S. Department of Education on developing the Promise Neighborhoods grant program. This collaboration resulted in grant application guidelines that included a competitive preference for applications featuring arts education programming. The Committee supported this change by collaborating on a speech for then Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in which he called access to arts education in high poverty schools “an equity and a civil rights issue”—the first Secretary of Education in the country’s history to do so.

In the process of exploring an innovative concept called Artist Corps, the Committee began to capture ideas outlining the challenges. The resulting report, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools*, was the first federal report in more than a decade to document the benefits of arts education and best practices in the field. This report confirmed that the arts could be a contributor to broader education reform.

The Committee pivoted from the Artist Corps idea to a more robust engagement on education reform. The widely read report was both a catalyst and a platform for the President’s Committee to raise the visibility of arts education in America. The Committee hosted several “Arts Education Conversations” for local and national education, government, and business leaders.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.”

—President Barack Obama

As part of this engagement effort, the President’s Committee showcased extraordinary principals, superintendents, and organizations working in arts education in a White House Champions of Change Arts Education roundtable. Led by Committee Vice Chair Mary Schmidt Campbell, then Dean of New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, the roundtable of educators and advocates showcased exemplary arts education programs raising academic performance in low income schools. The White House Domestic Policy Council and the U.S. Department of Education participated and informed this discussion. The report, along with the Committee’s outreach efforts, revealed its new arts education strategy: leveraging the arts to support transformation in America’s highest needs schools.

Results from *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools* positioned the arts as a tool in broader education reform. To demonstrate this premise, the Committee launched Turnaround Arts.

The approach would be provide in depth, arts-based transformation to a cohort of the nation’s most struggling schools—middle and elementary schools in the bottom 5% performing in their state. These schools, each in “turnaround” status, would teach all classes through the arts, provide artist engagements in the schools, and ensure all students received arts education classes. In 2012, the curtain was raised on a pilot program in 8 selected schools.



Many esteemed artists volunteer as Turnaround Artists to engage individual schools, bringing new hope and possibility to each.



Paula Abdul
Trombone Shorty
Marc Anthony
DJ IZ
Elizabeth Banks
Joshua Bell
David Blaine
David Brooks
Jackson Browne
Chuck Close
Misty Copeland
Autumn de Forest
Cameron Diaz

Carla Dirlikov Canales
Silk Road Ensemble
Jesse Tyler Ferguson
Jane Fonda
Paula Fuga
Frank Gehry
Citizen Cope
Josh Groban
Herbie Hancock
Taylor Hawkins
David Hockney
Valerie June
Elton John

Whoopi Goldberg
Jack Johnson
Rashida Jones
Mic Jordan
Barbara Kruger
Nigel Lythgoe
Yo-Yo Ma
Kerry James Marshall
Larisa Martinez
Dave Matthews
Irvin Mayfield
Thom Mayne
Keb’ Mo’

Jason Mraz
Graham Nash
Johnny Nuñez
Edward Norton
Sarah Jessica Parker
Kal Penn
Usher
Tracy Reese
Lil Buck
Tim Robbins
Smokey Robinson
Doc Shaw
Jake Shimabukuro

Russell Simmons
Chad Smith
Esperanza Spalding
Jacqueline Suskin
Kerry Washington
Forest Whitaker
Bernie Williams
Damian Woetzel
Alfre Woodard
John Lloyd Young
Ledisi



Schools received art supplies from Crayola, musical instruments from the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) and artist mentors who would take a special interest in their school. President's Committee member artists were deployed to Portland, Oregon; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Lame Deer, Montana; Des Moines, Iowa; New Orleans, Louisiana; Denver, Colorado; Boston, Massachusetts; and Washington, D.C. Throughout the program, artist members of the Committee, including Chuck Close, Thom Mayne, Edward Norton, Sarah Jessica Parker, Kal Penn, Kerry Washington, Forest Whitaker, Yo-Yo Ma, Damian

Woetzel, Alfre Woodard, and John Lloyd Young, led songs, directed plays, organized photos shoots, and became part of the school community.

Alfre Woodard, who made her first visit to the Rachel B. Noel School in Denver in the fall of 2012, explained the effect. We are "not just trying to grow artists, but we are expanding the students minds and horizons. We are unfolding citizens, helping to create innovators."

Like all the pilot schools, Noel School re-engineered teaching approaches and the curriculum through a rigorous instructional approach. Students there incorporated song, dance,

creative writing, and music in all their classes. Science class students made up stories about superheroes based on the periodic table. At the end of the year all the schools were required to do a stage performance, for some it was the first school play.

The First Lady and Turnaround Artists came through with incredible support for Turnaround Arts students. First Lady Michelle Obama hosted widely acclaimed White House Talent Shows. Hundreds of students were part of preparations for these shows. For two full days, they could be seen playing on the South Lawn, rehearsing dance moves in East Wing salons, and getting a chance to know the White House pets. Aside from opening up the White House, the First Lady would often invite groups of students to come for special



events and made a visit herself to a Turnaround Arts school.

Artists opened their hearts in much the same way. Citizen Cope brought a class of his students to Washington, D.C. paying for all costs and adding a dollar to the price of each of his performances for additional music supplies for students. Josh Groban organized a crowd source campaign for a mural built at his school in Chicago. Misty Copeland got tickets for the students at the school she is mentoring to come to the ballet to see her perform. The generosity is born of a passion for helping

students who, like many of the artists themselves, could be saved by the arts.

Turnaround Arts set out to achieve success that aligns with broader school reform goals outlined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Each school underwent a thorough evaluation. By the end of the pilot program, complete integration of art into the curriculum of underserved schools was found to improve student academic achievement, student attendance, and parent and community engagement.

Booz Allen Hamilton produced a Summary of Key Findings in the 8 pilot schools that became part of the discussion around education reform. The report showed Math proficiency scores up on average 23 percent, Reading up an average 13 percent. Metrics for student attendance, parent engagement, and community involvement all improved while suspensions and other discipline indicators went down. In addition, the Turnaround Arts schools outperformed schools that had received similar amounts of additional federal assistance.

Turnaround Arts grew over the next five years into a national program that included 68 schools in 16 states. An impressive coalition of partners supported the program, including the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the AOL Charitable Foundation, the Aspen Institute, Booz Allen Hamilton, Crayola, Deloitte, the Ford Foundation, Google, the Herb Alpert Foundation, Inktel, iTheatrics, JCPenney Cares, the Keith Haring Foundation, Playing for Change, Little Kids Rock, Music Theatre International, the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, the Rosenthal Family Foundation, SKDKnickerbocker, the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation, the Laird Norton Family Foundation, Americans for the Arts, and the Arts Education Partnership. In 2015, it branched out to include a focus on early childhood education with the U.S. Department of Education and the Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts.

In May of 2016, Turnaround Arts released a powerful music video of artists and students, teachers, and principals, singing *Everyday People*, bringing all schools together to share the message of possibility and success that Turnaround Arts capably embodies. The video was estimated to have had 300 million initial impressions on social media, spreading the word on this creative approach to education reform.

Looking to the future, the Committee has positioned Turnaround Arts for further expansion and to serve as a resource for every school district with an interest in this approach. The Committee has invested in greater public awareness of Turnaround Arts' approach, has created a strategic partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and has ensured the program's financial future into the next Administration. Turnaround Arts is developing an online toolkit to bring its work to any school in the country. It continues to enjoy support from core funders and new partners.



“Today I am proud to sign a law that is going to make sure that every student is prepared to succeed in the 21st century.”

—President Barack Obama

In 2015, after years of the Committee demonstrating the importance of the arts in education reform, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, making the arts and humanities central to the

bill's description of a “well-rounded education.” The bill now makes funds available at the state and local level for arts integration and arts education programs that advance education reform: programs like Turnaround Arts.



Film Forward

In 2006, when AFI Project: 20/20 was launched as a film-based diplomacy effort, the core purpose of the program was to support filmmakers and their films by creating opportunities for audiences and filmmakers to share common stories, insights, and values. By launching a new partnership with the Sundance Institute in 2010, the President's Committee leveraged the assets and experience of this predecessor program to broaden its outreach to young and diverse audiences, as well as emerging filmmakers.

The programs' multicultural roster of independent films challenge its audiences to examine, reflect, and experience the impact that stories can have on individuals and societies. The deep

dive into humanistic themes in these films introduces a new generation to other cultures and new ideas, dispelling misconceptions.

Film Forward discussions and exchanges are not just between audience and filmmaker, but also between films themselves, which creates a multiplicity of views on a subject. Like the 2014 Detroit visit, which created a multifaceted conversation on the consequences of violence as experienced in three different films—*Fruitvale Station*, *Dancing in Jaffa*, and *Valentine Road*. Over the program's lifespan, films have ranged from highly-regarded independent features, such as *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, to lesser known documentaries that address racial justice, artistic freedom, or family violence. And it's not unusual for these lesser-known documentaries and films to win Emmys

or an occasional Academy Award, as did *20 Feet from Stardom*, nor for a Film Forward artist to win a National Humanities Medal, as did Stanley Nelson.

As filmmaker Stacy Peralta summarized, “We all want to believe that art bridges divides, crosses boundaries and connects people, and in this wired digital age, with everything at our finger tips, this crazy street level idea called Film Forward, with a mandate to culturally hop fences and cross pollinate people with people, ended up working. At least for this filmmaker it did—and I believe it worked for all of those I met along the way and for our entire team. It was non-digital, totally analog, down and dirty, and carried out on the most basic gut level; eye to eye, hand shake to hand shake, and hug to hug. And it worked.”

“We see opportunities to place the arts and humanities at the forefront of cultural diplomacy overseas.”

—Committee Co-Chairs Margo Lion and George Stevens, Jr.

In the absence of a U.S. Cultural Ministry, and with representatives of every cultural agency as members of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, the President’s Committee plays a role in U.S. cultural diplomacy.

When the 2010 earthquake threatened cultural heritage in Haiti, the Committee responded hand in hand with the Smithsonian and other cultural agencies to begin the work of preservation. The Smithsonian Institution and the President’s Committee collaborated to create the Haiti Recovery Project. It included the Committee, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, with support from the Broadway League, the

International Trade Association for Broadway, and the Broadway Community. These private funders made it possible to take steps immediately with federal funding and support to follow.

The Haiti Recovery Project helped the two nation’s governments to assess, recover, and restore the cultural and historic materials damaged by the earthquake. A building in Port-au-Prince that once housed the United Nations Development Program was leased as a temporary conservation site where objects retrieved from the rubble could be assessed, conserved, and stored. It also became the training center for dozens of Haitian nationals, who would eventually take over this conservation effort.

When President Obama made his historic visit to Cuba, it was the President’s Committee that led the first official visit, just one month later. The cultural mission to Cuba included the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Smithsonian. It concluded with the public announcement of seven bilateral collaborations, the first government-to-government initiatives to advance the policy of normalizing relations with Cuba.

The itinerary of the Delegation included both lively scholarly and artistic events and exchanges, as well as meetings with Cuban government officials and directors of cultural institutions. Several ongoing cultural exchanges were

discussed with the Cuban government during the trip, and many were announced on the final day of the delegation at a bilateral press conference at the Gran Teatro in Havana. These included the NEH announcing a grant to bring art conservation exchange to Cuba and the NEA announcing dedicated funds for artist exchanges between the U.S. and Cuba. The Secretary of the Smithsonian read a joint statement about future collaboration with his Cuban government counterpart. The Committee announced several opportunities to highlight Cuban successes in out-of-school time youth programs, resulting in conferment of a National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award upon Cuba, as well as possible artist exchanges taking



Todos Somos Americanos

By Committee Member Kal Penn

The flight from Miami to Havana is just over 200 miles, about the same distance as New York to Washington, D.C. We touched down at Jose Marti International Airport in less time than it takes to make a pizza, and in so doing became the first official U.S. Cultural Delegation to Cuba. There have been wonderful, detailed accounts of this historic visit, and its function (cultural diplomacy), nature (friendly and collaborative), and outcomes (artistic and financial commitments), so I won't rehash those here. What I'll focus on instead is the immeasurable component of art itself in the rebuilding of relationships at a people-to-people level.

The opportunity to share the universal joys and struggles of family life, of putting food on the table, of love and loss, of great friends—with an entire country that has been estranged for decades—that is something truly significant. The arts nourish the soul and unify the human spirit. Thanks to the work of Presidents Obama and Castro, the beginning of this relationship between the United States and Cuba is now.

In Havana we met with our artist counterparts: musicians, dancers, filmmakers,

actors, authors. We watched films together, played music and danced together, discussed at length the challenges and rewards of producing art in Cuba and in America. We wanted to know if Cuba's incredible system of arts schools is an actual meritocracy. (It is.) They wanted to know why despite having world-class films and musicians, our public funding for arts & culture is so abysmal (it's complicated).

We experienced what President's Committee Co-Chair George Stevens called, "the shock of recognition" that happens, "when creative people from different worlds come together." I'll never forget the incredible pianist Miguel Ángel De Armas Junior, who I met next to the art collective Fabrica de Arte Cubano. He worked his way through some spotty English, and my Spanish is nonexistent, but there we were, communicating for hours through this "shock of recognition" about how we approach the subtexts of emotion and joy towards a global audience in much the same way. Wow, all of these years of prohibition, and here we are, two artists younger than the embargo, recognizing the same humanity between our audiences, our societies.

The new US/Cuba relationship allows these artistic conversations for the first time. We'll preserve histories, advance ideas together, and build a more lasting peace than that achieved through traditional paradigms. And change has come. What a wonderful time to celebrate understanding through art.



place in schools in each country. Press coverage of the Delegation appeared in the Washington Post, New York Times, Huffington Post, the Miami Herald, and National Public Radio.

Members of the 2016 U.S. Cultural Delegation included Jane Chu, Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts; William Adams, Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities; David Skorton, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute; George Stevens, Jr. and Margo Lion, Co-chairs of the President's Committee

on the Arts and the Humanities; Megan Beyer, Executive Director of the Committee; and Committee members Rick Arriola, Stephanie Cutter, Fred Goldring, Pamela Joyner, Eric Ortner, Ken Solomon, Janet Keller, Anne Luzzatto, Kal Penn, Alfre Woodard, John Lloyd Young, Liz Manne, Kim Taylor, Jill Cooper Udall, and Andrew Weinstein. Artist members of the delegation included Joshua Bell, Adele Chatfield-Taylor, Martha Clarke, John Guare, DJ IZ, Lourdes Lopez, Larisa Martinez, Dave Matthews, Smokey Robinson, and Usher.

Throughout the eight years, the President's Committee was called upon to participate in diplomatic programming during official state visits. When Nordic leaders and the Prime Minister of Singapore made official visits to Washington, the Committee presented a program and performances by Turnaround Arts students and National Student Poets. National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award winners were often called upon to perform at events as were the National Student Poets.

Haiti Recovery Project

The Haiti Recovery Project was developed in response to the 2010 earthquake, which devastated the island killing over 250,000 and claiming the homes of 1.5 million. Amidst the destruction, Haiti's cultural heritage was in jeopardy. The Committee and its partners stepped in to help.

Actor and Committee member, Forest Whitaker described the situation this way, culture is what "made them defeat Napoleon, achieve independence, and abolish slavery. And it's kept them going in a very, very impossible situation."

The Project assessed, recovered, and restored over 500 cultural and historic

materials and it rescued 20,000 historical artifacts, dating back to pre-Columbian times. It also trained dozens of Haitians in conservation to assume the work once the relief teams departed.

Members of the Haiti Recovery project included Margo Lion, Co-chair of the President's Committee; Mary Schmidt Campbell, Vice Chair of the Committee; Rachel Goslins, Executive Director of the Committee; Committee Members Rick Arriola, Pamela Joyner, Olivia Morgan, Ken Solomon, and George C. Wolfe; Marsha Semmel, Acting Director with the Institute of Museum and Library Services; G. Wayne Clough, Secretary,

and Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, with the Smithsonian Institution. Traci Slater-Rigaud, Director, Coming Up Taller Program, also attended. Supporters who joined the delegation included Paul Libin, Chairman, and Nina Lannan and Charlotte St. Martin with the Broadway League, Bill Hillman with Affirmation Arts, and filmmaker Jonathan Demme.

In total, the Haiti Recovery project both saved thousands of priceless Haitian cultural assets and helped equip the nation to maintain and continue the work.



"This is the beginning of a love relationship."

—Smokey Robinson,
2016 U.S. Cultural
Delegation to Cuba



“We tell each new class of National Student Poets that they are leaders and their voices can contribute to national and community discussions, on every stage and at every table in the nation.”

—Olivia Morgan, Member of the President’s Committee

Credit: Official White House Photo by Amanda Lucidan



When 14-year old poet Moira Bass read one of her poems in the East Room of the White House before a couple of hundred guests in the spring of 2011, she became the inspiration for a new Committee arts education venture.

Moira and 80 of her peer young poets participated in a workshop as part of the First Lady’s first poetry event at the White House. Esteemed poets who led the workshop and also read their work at the White House included Aimee Mann, Rita Dove, Common, and Billy Collins. This electric event galvanized several ideas into a broader vision for Committee member Olivia Morgan, who took the next steps in shaping a new program.

After the release of *Reinvesting in Arts Education Report*, Morgan said she was, “looking for a role for us in showing young Americans the importance of writing in the Twitter age and the power of refining their voices and sharing them with confidence.” Her subsequent work with Moira in getting her ready to read at the White House revealed what this role might look like in the form of a new program that would single

out a handful of the best high school student poets writing original work. Besides nurturing self-expression, this program would also engage schools, libraries, museums, community writing programs, and a host of other community partners to help showcase, nourish, and support these young writers as they engaged with their peers and others around their passion for poetry.

Initially, the President’s Committee partnered with 826DC, founded by writer Dave Eggers, to bring writing into the lives of youth, to host a series of poetry workshops for teens. Ultimately, in November 2011, the Committee, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artists & Writers launched the National

Student Poets Program (NSPP), the nation’s highest honor for young poets (grades 9-11) presenting original work. Since its inception, First Lady Michelle Obama has been both a fan of, and an inspiration for its growth and expansion.

She remarked to the Class of 2014 during their appointment ceremony, “[W]e started this program because we wanted to nurture the passion and creativity of our young people. And we wanted to help them engage with their communities, and we wanted to do our part to share the gifts and wonders that poetry offers with a new generation.”

The core of the program is a poetry ambassadorship carried out by the five poets, who each represent



different regions of the country. Two key elements define the year for these young poets—creating a community service project and doing events during National Poetry Month in April. Each class has added some new dimension to the program: The Class of 2012 set the bar for the program's two core programmatic components—the community service projects and the events during April's National Poetry month. The Class of 2013 was the first class invited to the Aspen Ideas Festival, which is now a fixture of the program, and provides the poets with unique leadership development experiences key to their role as ambassadors. And the Class of 2014 incorporated new partners like the Poetry Foundation, which brought the National Student Poets together with their spoken word counterparts and Google, which helped broaden the reach of these young leader poets through social media. In addition, in 2014, the program added opportunities for alumni to continue their role as poetry leaders through a collaboration with the University of Iowa's International Writing Program and its "Between the Lines" program for young writers. Here, two NSPP alumni served as mentors and workshop leaders



Save America's Treasures

As one of the most successful historic preservation programs in American history, Save America's Treasures stimulated understanding among citizens and public officials about the role and contribution of these treasures to the American experience. Almost 1,300 grants totaling \$318 million went toward the rescue, rehabilitation, and reuse of this nation's most significant structures, artwork, documents and artifacts. This body of work reflects a new vision of preservation that embraces both the tangible and intangible expressions of this nation's genius and values.

The Committee oversees the overall management of the program with the National Park Service, on behalf of the White House. Awards under this Committee were made from 2009-2010 until funding for SAT was suspended in 2011. Yet its function, purpose and guidelines remain

permanently authorized, so the Committee continued its role in supporting the program and enlisted the American Architectural Foundation as the program's new private partner to tell the story of these projects and build on the program's success.

Prior to the suspension of its funding, SAT helped to save such critical American artifacts as the 9/11 Museum's "Last Column" and the Jim Crow Railcar, one of the centerpieces of the new Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture. Also during this time, Save America's Treasures preservation grants made it possible in part for the Sewall-Belmont House to be designated as a National Monument in 2016 and for Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings to be nominated as a group for World Heritage Designation in 2015, with six of the ten structures in this collection receiving SAT awards.

for peer writers from Russia, Arab-speaking countries, and the U.S. Throughout these years, the Bernstein Family Foundation has supported a scholarship for each Poet.

Since the inception of NSPP, poets have taught teachers how to present poetry; poets have done workshops with women inmates; and poets have led creative writing workshops with veterans and middle-school students on a reservation. The program has showcased poets in venues as prestigious as the National Book Festival and Lincoln Center, to a rural school with a student population of 38, and in libraries and museums



from Birmingham to Boise. The White House has invited poets to read for foreign dignitaries, introduce the President and First Lady at poetry events and participate in workshops with notable poets like Billy Collins and Q Tip. Each class has been immersed in contemporary poetry through workshops led by leading poets like Ed Hirsch, Terrence Hayes, and Claudia Rankin. They interacted and learned from poets at the prestigious Dodge Poetry Festival and the Poets Forum. All the while engaging with other young adults sharing their passion for poetry, particularly with spoken word poets during their time at the Aspen Ideas Festival. At Aspen, poetry was both a bridge between young writers of different perspectives, cultures, and life experiences and a force for creative collaboration as they collectively forged an original poem and performance.

A peer program to the National Student Poets, the National Spoken Word Ambassadors program was created in partnership with key decision makers of NSPP, as well as the National Endowment for the Hu-



manities. The Ambassadors program selects five exemplary young spoken word poets for a year of community outreach events, addressing key humanistic issues in partnership with scholars. Like the National Student Poets, these Ambassadors host events in local communities bringing spoken word and dialogue to underserved communities.

The Committee arts education initiatives—Turnaround Arts and the National Student Poets Program—proved that there is no one model of arts education which works. It also proved that greater recognition, collaboration, empirical research and integration of arts education across sectors were key elements in transforming an emerging national community of practice.

“These outstanding programs are expanding horizons, changing lives, and helping young people fulfill their dreams.”

—First Lady Michelle Obama

Credit: Steven Purcell



“Your story is enough, and it matters. So tell it, and tell it well.”

It was not until André Massey Jr. joined the Savannah-based literary organization, the Deep Center, that he was told, for the first time, his words were important. There, André finally found encouragement and mentorship to confidently explore his creativity and embark upon a personal journey of discovery through literature and writing. He explains, “I joined Deep and found out things about myself I never knew. I can write poetry. I released my emotions in my writing, and I felt free.”

In 2015, the Deep Center was awarded the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award (NAHYP) by First Lady Michelle Obama, the nation’s highest honor for afterschool arts and humanities programs that reach youth with great potential, but limited opportunities. Like the other honorees, the Young Author Project is a national model for using the arts and the humanities to develop skills and improve academic success, as well as help improve the social, civic, and emotional wellbeing of these students. Unique to this program is its project-based learning curriculum, which merges

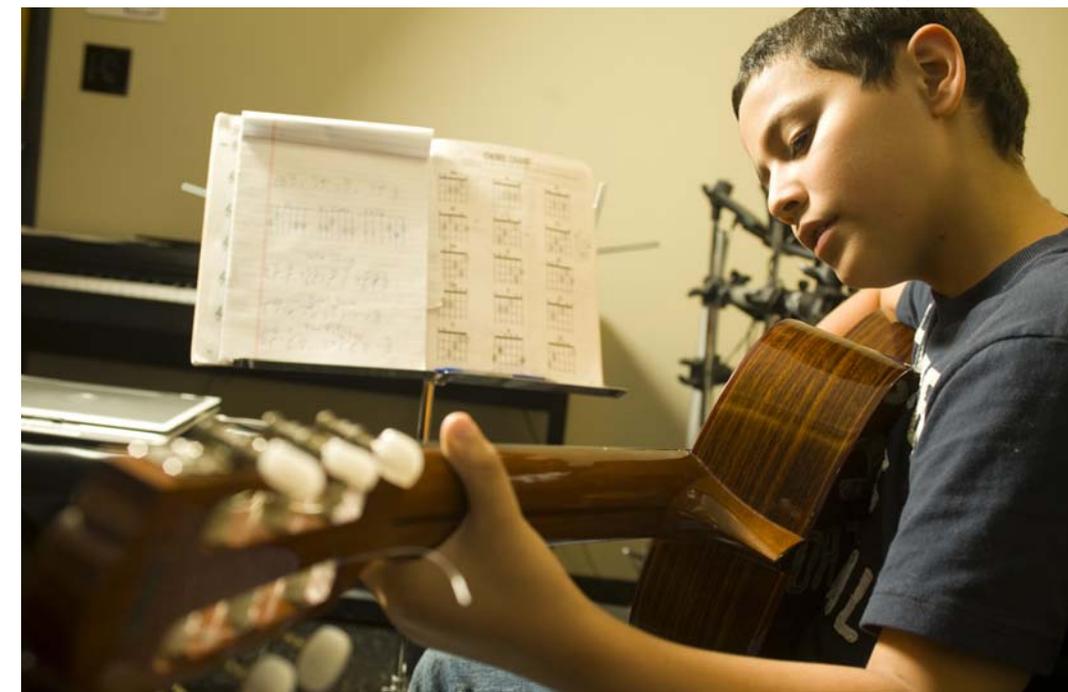
writing instruction, literary analysis, and one-on-one mentoring with intensive writing and creative self-expression.

In 2010, the Committee reinvigorated the awards program that was previously known as “Coming Up Taller” by rebranding the honor and naming it the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards. The program took on a new graphic identity, a new logo and web site, and a redesign of the annual awards publication. To introduce the new brand, NAHYP’s official media sponsor, Ovation TV, created public service announcements about the program and about the awardees. A newly restructured summer confer-

ence provided concrete strategies for NAHYP winners to leverage their award for effective communications and improved fundraising outreach.

The next step in NAHYP’s transformation was summarized best by Committee member Vicki Kennedy, who described NAHYP as a “mighty award [that] could serve as an anchor and a catapult or a catalyst beyond the White House ceremony.” From the beginning, the President’s Committee’s leadership role through NAHYP helped to advance the field of creative youth development (CYD). In collaboration with the National Guild for Community Arts Education and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the

Credit: Lou Jones



President's Committee commissioned a research study to gather, synthesize, and begin to organize priorities and ideas for a strategic agenda. Building on interviews and focus groups with youth and adult leaders, a national survey subsequently gathered additional empirical data from practitioners and policymakers in the CYD field on the impact and defining qualities of these programs. The resulting report, *Setting the Agenda*, became the framework for the first National Summit on Creative Youth Development.

Organized by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the President's Committee, and the National Guild for Community Arts Education, the Summit convened more than 200 CYD

thought leaders, practitioners, funders, and policy makers from across the country to discuss and formulate a national policy agenda, encompassed in a report, *Collective Action for Youth: An Agenda for Progress Through Creative Youth Development*. In brief, the report articulated the purpose and value of creative youth development; asserted its place as central to ensuring young people's academic, professional, and personal success; and identified five key imperatives for CYD programs nationwide to amplify the effect of their programs on students, families, and communities.

Given the Committee's sustained support of NAHYP, throughout 18 years and spanning three Administrations, it

is one of the founding leaders of the CYD movement. By recognizing exceptional CYD programs at the highest level, adding muscle and capacity to the field of practice, and contributing to the creation of a coalesced identity and strategic agenda for CYD, the President's Committee is an anchor for this field of practice. The Committee has solidified these efforts through a formal Creative Youth Development National Partnership with the National Guild for Community Arts Education, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and Americans for the Arts, which collectively works to advance this community of practice and increase access to CYD organizations for children and youth across the United States.



The National Arts And Humanities Medals and White House Cultural Events

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities is proud to sponsor various special initiatives that recognize artists and scholars, broaden arts awareness and celebrate this nation's cultural life. The President's Committee has organized and supported numerous cultural events at the White House, including "A Broadway Celebration" to honor the arts and demonstrate the importance of arts education, produced by Committee member George Wolfe and Committee Co-Chair Margo Lion and the first White House Dance Series created by Co-Chair George Stevens, Jr. and member Damian Woetzel. One of the key feature

of many of these White House cultural events is the Committee's support for hundreds of school children from across the country to study in the afternoons with the master artists, the same dancers, singers, and performers, who perform in the evening.

The President's Committee also launched the first evening celebration of artistic and scholarly achievement of the recipients of the prestigious National Medal of the Arts and the National Humanities Medal presented by the President each year.





“American artists, historians and philosophers have helped enable us to find our common humanity.”

—President Barack Obama

When the Committee was constituted in the fall of 2009, members were uniformly optimistic, with a “Yes We Can” approach. But times were difficult. The recession had begun in earnest, taking a disproportionate toll on the non-profit arts and humanities sector. Private giving was down and falling further. Arts education, after eight years of federal policy narrowing the curriculum and severe budget cuts at the local and state level, was at an historic low. After a decade of diplomacy couched in largely military terms, there was less attention to the power of culture to bridge boundaries and win hearts and minds.

When faced with these challenges, this Committee exerted leadership through its private partners and public members to reinvigorate this nation’s cultural sector. Children and teachers were encouraged, supported, and lauded for hard work towards educational achievement in and through the arts, and films and filmmakers engaged audiences here and abroad around ideas and issues of the day. From Haiti’s disaster response to carrying the President’s policy to normalize relations with Cuba,

the Committee was ready to make cultural diplomacy a first response. Awards were made to preserve the creative genius, places, and history of the nation. Artists and scholars were showcased and honored at numerous White House events, and the amount of funds the Committee raised increased dramatically for arts and humanities projects programs, organizations and nonprofits.

The value of a strong arts and humanities sector may be more important today than in most periods of our history. Civilizations often turn to the arts and humanities in times of great change. As we are challenged by new economic and technological changes, environmental threats and dynamic geopolitical conditions, the arts and humanities serve as a guidepost and a lifeline. Those in the arts and humanities fields sense the same pull today. Through promoting greater arts and humanities resources, increased cultural diplomacy, and policies putting arts and humanities into our education system, the Committee worked to enrich our cultural life and address the issues of our day.

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