

5-1995

# Can the National Endowment for the Arts Survive?

Dominic Melone

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Can the National Endowment for the Arts Survive?

By  
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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Departmental Honors and the University Honors Program

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May 1995

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## Introduction

Government funding for the arts has been around since people first came up with the idea of collective good and safety in numbers. The ruling priests of Sumer in ancient Iraq commissioned everything from vases, statues, and pyramid like structures called ziggurats (Fleming, 1992: 35-41). The pharaoh's of Egypt hired thousands of artists to decorate their tombs deep inside the pyramids (Fleming, 1992: 54). From the great civilizations of Greece, Rome, China, to the fiefdoms of the Middle Ages, and throughout the present day, governments have employed artists to glorify, inspire, and express that which can not be communicated verbally or in writing.

Historically, artists have worked within boundaries of public acceptance. During the Renaissance, contests for public works such as buildings and large sculptures were often held by the city-states and monarchies. In this relationship, artistic expression was limited by the tastes of the ruling class (Fleming, 1992: 375). This association began to change with the advent of the Salons in France.

The Salons were the first government sponsored exhibitions. These exhibitions were created in response to the King's founding of the Academie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture in 1648. The creation of Salons was in fact a political move to justify the Academie. Works of art (mostly paintings) were submitted to the Salon, where a panel of government appointed academics served as the jury. The panel was considered a fair system of evaluation since the panel was made up of "peers." If a work of art was chosen to be exhibited it almost guaranteed the success of the artist (Mainardi, 1990: 155). The Salon

exhibition was very popular with the French public, academics, artists, and royalty.

Yet, by the mid-18th century many people (especially impressionist artists) began criticizing the Salon as dictating artistic taste and in turn catering to one style of art, the art of the realist. The realist represented the prevailing academic ethos of the day (Mainardi, 1990: 156). This sounds very similar to some of the criticisms directed at the National Endowment for the Arts by many liberal and experimental art groups. The government sponsored Salon survived until 1881. Patricia Mainardi writes, ". . . the State could no longer see any benefit in continuing to subsidize an exhibition over which it had virtually no control" (Mainardi, 1990: 157).

I believe the United States government currently confronts the same questions faced by the French government in 1881. But opponents of the NEA cite not only control as an issue, but necessity as well. The Contract with America and a sweeping anti-government populism have embroiled the NEA in a fight for its survival.

In this thesis, I explore the history of NEA, in particular I will focus on the relationship between the NEA and Congress. In chapter 1, I will discuss the history of the NEA until 1989. Chapter 2 explores the background of the crisis which began in 1989. In particular, it discusses Serrano's Piss Christ and Maplethorpe's exhibit The Perfect Moment, which pushed the NEA to the forefront of criticism among many members of Congress. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 discuss Congressional actions regarding the NEA from 1989 until

1994. Finally, I will speculate on possible outcomes for the future of government sponsorship of the arts in the United States.

# Chapter 1

## Prelude to a Crisis

We sometimes speak of 'an inspired age', or a 'creative epoch', but then we are only speaking metaphorically. But the facts correspond to figures of speech: eras, no less than artists, have their afflatus, and a society can be inspired. And that is the problem we should study- the relationships between the forms of art, the interflow of vitality from organizations to individuals, the generation of creative activity in the group, between persons and associations. When we have considered those problems in all their aspects- climatic, ethnic, economic, social- then, perhaps, we shall be in the position to give direct support and encouragement to the arts (Reed 66).

In 1780, John Adams wrote, "I must study politics and war, that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture. . ." (NEA, 1985: 5). The federal government has done very little since that time for the arts. However, there have been a few notable exceptions. The creation of the Smithsonian Institution in 1846 and the establishment of the National Conservatory of Music by President Benjamin Harrison in 1891 were noteworthy additions to the country (NEA, 1985: 6).

The first major arts program undertaken by the federal government was by the Works Project Administration (WPA). In 1935, the WPA sponsorship of programs such as the Federal Writers Project, the Federal Theater Project, the Federal Art Project and the Federal Music Project put thousands of artists to work (NEA, 1985: 7). The Federal Music Project alone involved 16,000 musicians. Between the years of 1935 and 1943, the WPA spent 160 million dollars on the arts. However, the WPA's goal was to employ people,

not to support art (Zeigler, 1994: 6). It was not until two decades later that art for the sake of art became a reality within the federal government.

The National Endowment for the Arts began as a plank in John Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign. Kennedy later called for a federal advisory agency on the arts (Zeigler, 1994: 13). President Kennedy said, "I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him" (NEA, 1985: 12). On June 12, 1963, he established the President's Advisory Council, however he did not live to see its members appointed. Yet, his successor, Lyndon Johnson, carried on the fight with the help of notable Democratic party leaders: Senators Claiborne Pell, Joseph Clark, and Hubert Humphrey. On March 10, 1965, Pell introduced the bill that became the National Foundation on Arts and Humanities Act (Zeigler, 1994: 13-15).

This bill faced little opposition within the Senate and passed by a voice vote. However, within the House the bill encountered opposition. Opponents of Pell's legislation claimed that a national foundation will stifle private support and individual creativity. They also claimed that the bill was "ram rodded" through committee (CQ Almanac, 1965; 621). Republicans and southern Democrats formed a coalition against the bill (CQ Almanac, 1965; 622). However, this coalition was not strong enough to defeat the bill. When Robert P. Griffin (R-MI) made a motion to recommit (kill the bill), the motion fell on deaf ears and went down to defeat by a 128-251 roll call vote.



This vote effectively destroyed opposition to the bill and with minor amendments, passed the House by a voice vote. The Senate agreed to House amendments by voice vote on September 16, 1965. On the 29th of September President Johnson signed Public Law 89-209 into law, effectively creating the National Endowment for the Arts (1965 CQ Almanac: 621).

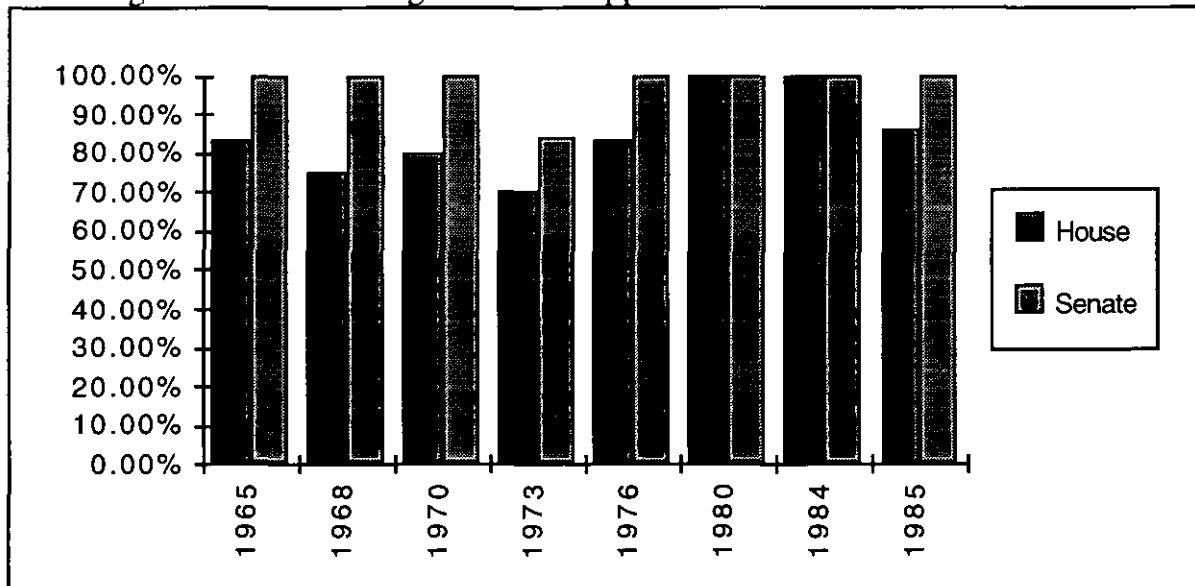
The act creating the NEA states,  
. . . that the practice of art and the study of the humanities requires constant dedication and devotion and that, while no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence, it is necessary to appropriate for the Federal Government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry, but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent. . . . (Public law 89-209, 1).

This goal began rather humbly with only 5 million dollars being appropriated for fiscal year 1966 (CQ Almanac, 1965; 621). In fact, the first budget only totaled 3,261,308 million dollars (NEA, 1990: 335).

Early support for the foundation was strong. The first grant made by the NEA was the presentation of a \$100,000 check to the American Ballet Theatre. The New York Herald Tribune later stated that, "The Treasury of the United States has saved a national treasure. Not directly, perhaps, but the taxpayers, through the government's recently established National Council on the Arts, saved the American Ballet Theatre from extinction" (NEA, 1985; 18). At this time, the general feeling throughout Washington was that the endowment played a vital role in American lives.

Figure 1-1 shows that the NEA enjoyed wide support on both sides of the aisle in Congress until 1989. It illustrates the percentage of support for the NEA by Congress through 1985. This includes all votes (voice and roll call). There were only 18 votes taken in a twenty-three year span. In fact, 1985 was the last year a vote was taken on the NEA before the Serrano and Mapplethrope controversy in 1989. In only five years, from 1989 to 1994, Congress took 44 roll call votes. I will discuss these votes in chapter 3.

Figure 1-1 Congressional support for the NEA until 1989



In the early years in which the NEA enjoyed widespread congressional support, presidents were also strong advocates for the arts. For example, in 1969, President Nixon asked Congress to double federal subsidies for the arts and to reauthorize the endowment that was due to expire June 30, 1970. Nixon made this request in the midst of difficulties for the national economy. In defense of his request he said, ". . . I believe that the need for a new impetus to the

understanding and expression of the American idea has compelling claim on our resources" (1969 CQ Almanac: 112).

Support from Congress, the executive branch, and strong leadership helped to propel NEA growth. There was a marked increase in funding for the NEA during the 1970s. A decrease in funding from 1976 to 1977 can be explained by an accounting problem. The fiscal year was extended in 1976. Instead of ending on July 1 the fiscal year was extended until September 30. As a result, 36.7 million dollars were included in the 1976 budget that would have normally been included in the 1977 fiscal year.

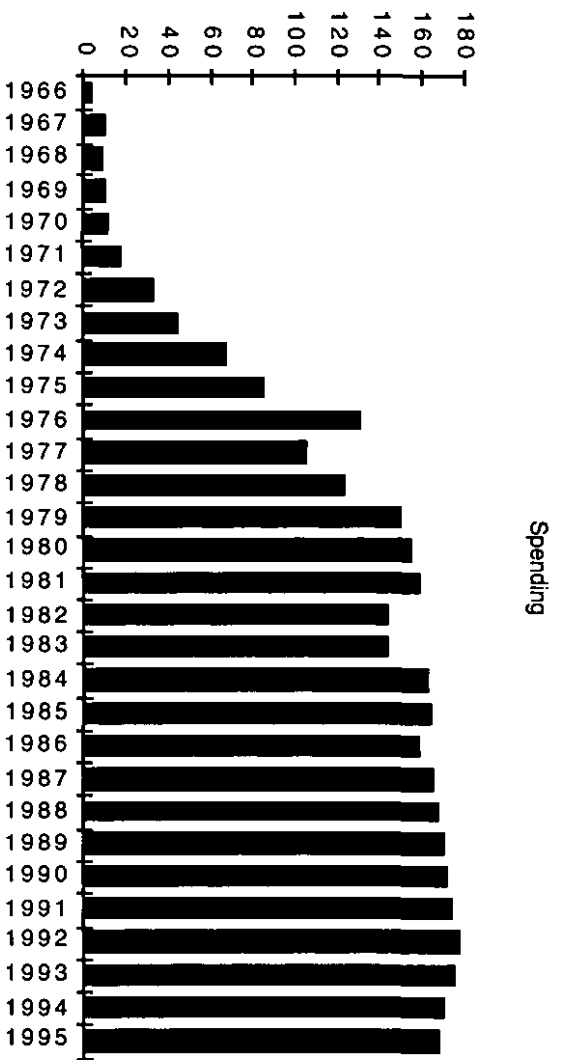
During the 1980's the NEA grew only nominally. Ronald Reagan, an actor before he entered politics, had a long standing affiliation with arts and art groups. His wife Nancy was also a supporter of the arts. She said, "The Endowment was established at a crucial stage in the growth of the arts. . . . Largely because of the Endowment, today artists do not have to move to big cities in order to create their art. The arts have become so widely recognized and respected as a profession that today artistic life and creativity can occur virtually anywhere in this nation" (Biddle, 1988: 511). Soon after entering the White House, Reagan appointed a Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities. Its purpose was to review the performance of both Endowments and to find ways of increasing the participation of private groups and individuals into the Endowments decision making process (NEA, 1985: 39). While appointing members to the task force President Reagan said, "Our cultural institutions are an essential national resource. They must be kept strong" (NEA, 1985: 39).

Even though Reagan was a supporter of the arts, his main concern was with a defense build-up. In 1981 Reagan's Office of Management and Budget recommended a 50 percent cut in the NEA (Biddle, 1988; 494). Some people in the arts community began to believe that the Task Force was being used as a way to justify the cuts. However, the Task Force concluded in its report to the President that the endowment was sound and that it helped to spawn private contributions, set standards, and spur innovation (Biddle, 1988; 505-506).

The favorable Task Force report and staunch support from some members of Congress (Sidney Yates in particular) helped to transform a proposed 50 percent slash into a 6 percent cut. This was the first serious threat to the NEA. During the rest of Reagan's presidency NEA funding increased slowly. It was not until the Serrano and Mapplethorpe grants that the real crisis began.

The Serrano and Mapplethorpe grants which contained questionable material caused a lot of debate in Congress starting in 1989. This debate did not necessarily result in a funding cut. Funding for the NEA continued to creep upward and peaked in 1992, three years after the crisis began. However, since 1992, funding has been on a downward slide. Funding figures do not tell the whole story. Often, there have been requests for funding in excess of those actually appropriated to the NEA and opponents have quelled those requests. Thus the slight increase in funding from 1989 to 1992 can actually be seen as defeats for the NEA (Zeigler, 1994; 50). Figure 1-2 shows the amount of appropriations from 1966 until 1995.

**Table 1-2. NEA Authorizations from 1965 to 1995.**



## Chapter 2

### So This is Art? The Battle Begins

All civilization and culture are the results of the creative imagination or artist quality in man. The artist is the man who makes life more interesting or beautiful, more understandable or mysterious, or probably, in the best sense, more wonderful. His trade is to deal with illimitable experience. It is therefore only of importance for the artist to discover whether he be an artist, and it is for society to discover what commitment it can make to its artist (Goldwater and Treves, 1972: 462).

The following figures 2-1 through 2-4 are all examples of artwork sponsored by the NEA. The first three figures are "acceptable" or "safe" forms of art. They run very little chance of offending the viewer. However, the same cannot be said about figure 2-4. It is a study of light and its effects on the human body. Incidentally, the body is a naked male with an erect penis. It is no wonder that figure 4 helped to cause the firestorm over NEA funding in 1989. The photograph was part of an exhibit by Robert Mapplethorpe entitled, The Perfect Moment. This exhibit along with the work, Piss Christ by Andres Serrano, sparked a fierce debate over what the NEA should fund and whether the NEA is the type of government organization Americans want to fund.



Fig. 2-1.

Bronze bust of John. F. Kennedy by Robert Berks,  
Creative America: Arts and the Pursuit of Happiness. (Washington,  
D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts), p.23.

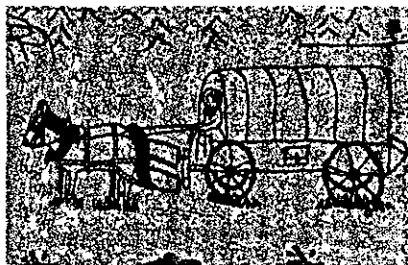


Fig 2-2.

Detail from tapestry  
Creative America: Arts and the Pursuit of Happiness. (Washington, D.C.:  
National Endowment for the Arts), p. 7.



Fig. 2-3.

A scene from one of the plays in *A Texas Trilogy* by Preston Jones,  
Creative America: Arts and the Pursuit of Happiness. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for  
the Arts), p. 4.

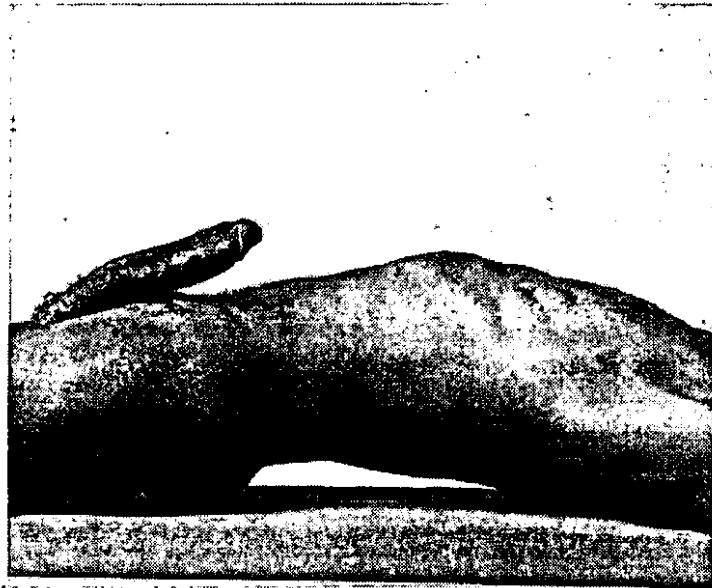


Fig 3-4.

*Christopher Holly* by Robert Mapplethorpe  
Zeigler, Joseph, Arts in Crisis: The National Endowment for the Arts versus America (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, Inc., 1994), p. 74.

In 1987, Andres Serrano was one of ten artists chosen by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) to receive a visual arts award of 15,000 dollars. A tour was also arranged for their works. The exhibit was to tour Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Richmond. In 1989, Philip L. Smith saw this exhibit in Richmond. Smith wrote a letter to the editor of The Richmond Times-Dispatch, in which he expressed his disgust at seeing Serrano's work. He became outraged by Piss Christ which was a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine (Zeigler, 1994: 69).

This letter found its way to Reverend Donald Wildmon. He is a preacher and head of the American Family Association (AFA). The AFA is a fundamentalist and extreme right religious group which openly campaigns against what they deem to be immoral, obscene, or offensive. The AFA had led attempts to boycott The Last Temptation of Christ and forced Pepsi to cancel a 5 million dollar contract with Madonna because of her music video, Like A Prayer (Zeigler, 1994:



70). Serrano's work, coupled with his NEA funding prompted the AFA to begin an all out campaign against the NEA.

Wildmon sent a letter denouncing Piss Christ to his supporters. He also sent a letter of protest to every member of Congress, containing a copy of Piss Christ (See Figure 2-5) (Ziegler, 1994: 71). This outraged many congressmen including Representative Richard Armey (R-TX), Senator Alphonse D'Amato (R-NY) and Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC). On May 18, 1989, Senator D'Amato led the charge against Serrano and the NEA on the Senate floor. He ripped up a Serrano catalog and then jumped up and down on it. After he finished his theatrical introduction he said,

. . . if this is what contemporary art has sunk to, this level, this outrage, this indignity -some may want to sanction that, and that is fine. But not with the use of taxpayers' money. If we allow this group of so-called art experts to get away with this, to defame us and to use our money, well, then we do not deserve to be in office (Zeigler 1994:72).



Fig. 2-5

*Piss Christ* by Andres Serrano, Cibachrome, 60 x40 inches.  
*Art Journal*, 50 (Winter 1991): 91

Soon thereafter a number of the senators wrote a letter to Hugh Southern, acting chair of the NEA, protesting NEA funding of Serrano's work. Zeigler writes, "The senators who signed this letter were not all rabid rightists; some of them are moderates; including John Kerry, Dennis DeConcini, Pete Wilson, Wendell Ford, Tom Harkin, and Arlen Specter" (Zeigler, 1994: 73).

The crisis may have been averted if the Serrano incident was the only controversial event involving the NEA in 1989. But Robert Mapplethorpe's exhibit, The Perfect Moment ensured a showdown between art advocates and the "religious right." The exhibit received a 30,000 dollar grant from the NEA. Samuel Lipman wrote, ". . . it became known that the NEA was funding a traveling exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, containing many homoerotic and sadomasochistic images, including one of a man urinating into another man's mouth and another of a man with a whip handle protruding from his anus . . . ." (See Figures 2-6 and 7) (Lipman, 1990: 23).



Fig. 2-6

*X Portfolio, Jim and Tom, Sausalito.* by Robert Mapplethorpe  
*Art Journal*, 50 (Fall 1991): 17



Fig. 2-7

*X Portfolio, Self Portrait* by Robert Mapplethorpe  
*Art Journal*, 50 (Fall 1991): 20.

With the controversy shrouding the Mapplethorpe exhibit, American Family Association president Don Wildmon called for totally revoking NEA's funds (Lawton, 1990: 52). The "religious right" began its attacks in earnest. Most of the religious rights interest in NEA funding can be attributed to the fact that these groups take an active role campaigning against things which they deem morally undesirable. Dr. James C. Dobson, president of Focus on the Family said, "Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America" (Detweiler, 1992: 247).

The "religious right" can claim a powerful following, along with the American Family Association and other fundamentalist groups who campaigned against the NEA. The most prominent of these groups are Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, and Focus on the Family. Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition has 450,000 members (Zeigler, 1994: 76). Focus on Family publishes a public issues' magazine, Citizen; it has a circulation of 300,000.

Concerned Women for America claims a membership of 600,000. The American Family Association Journal reaches an audience of 400,000 (Detweiler, 1992: 248).

The American Family Association took out full page ads in newspapers headlined, "Is this how you want your tax dollars spent?" (Lawton, 1990: 52). Religious groups also urged members to contact their Representatives and Senators. Wildmon turned up the heat on Congress by pointing out NEA support for David Wojnarowicz, a gay who was doing "homoerotic" work (Zeigler, 1994: 77). They sent photos of his work to members of Congress. One photo was of Jesus with a needle in his arm.

Meanwhile, the NEA and the arts community were reeling from the attacks. The NEA named a new Chairman, John Frohnmayer, whose appointment came one week before Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) moved to abolish the NEA on July 12, 1989 (Frohnmayer, 1993: 36). The supporters for the arts hardly had a chance to defend themselves and Congress was already discussing abolishing the NEA.

## Chapter 3

### The Battle in Congress Begins

Life is more important than art but life is meaningless without art (Finley, 1990: 21).

The question of NEA funding and authorizations ultimately rests in Congress. To some extent presidents, chairmen, the art community, and interest groups all influence the debate. However, it is Congress and only Congress that can make the final judgment on authorization and appropriations. Therefore, I have chosen to discuss the rest of the crisis in conjunction with congressional actions and in particular this chapter explores the beginning of the crisis in 1989.

Within Congress there is often talk about ideology and party loyalty. The NEA crisis is an issue which conjures up these loyalties and ideologies. By evaluating the 44 roll call votes taken from 1989 to 1994, one can clearly see the strong relationship to party and vote. In general, Republicans vote in large numbers against the NEA and the Democrats vote in large numbers for the NEA.

The tables I present in this chapter present a breakdown of each roll call vote. The votes are categorized according to party affiliation and whether the votes were recorded as a yes or no. I then assigned a Yule's Q score to each roll call vote. Yule's Q is a measure of association. The formula is: 
$$Q = \frac{AD-BC}{AD+BC}$$

The letters refer to the values in the cells of a fourfold table located as follows:

A	B
C	D

Q scores vary from +1.0 for a perfect positive association to -1.0 for a perfect negative association. A Q value of 0 occurs when there is no association. Thus, the farther the Q score is from 0 the stronger the association or the greater the split along party lines (Buchanan, 1969; 57).

On July 12, 1989 there were three proposed cuts to the NEA introduced in the House of Representatives. The most drastic of these was Dana Rohrabacher's (R-CA), proposal to cut the NEA funding completely. Rochanbacher did not deny artists have the right to express themselves. He said, "Artists can do whatever they want on their own dime" (Frohnmayr, 1993: 36). However, Rochanbacher went on to denounce the works of Serrano and Mapplethorpe calling it trash. He then went on to say, ". . . censorship is not the solution; the answer is getting the government out the arts" (Hager, 1989a: 1753).

Rochanbacher's proposal did not go far. It was defeated by a voice vote (Hager, 1989a: 1763). However, there still remained the question of appropriations. Dick Armey (R-TX) moved to cut 10 percent from the Endowment's funding. Charles Stenholm (D-TX) proposed an amendment to Armey's cut, inserting language so that the endowment would only be cut 45,000 dollars-the amount of the Serrano and Mapplethorpe grants (Frohnmayr, 1993; 36). A heated debate then followed on the House floor. Armey insisted, "The issues

that we address here are issues of the heart" (Hager, 1989a: 1763).  
 Armev and supporters of his amendment wanted to punish the NEA.

In the end the House decided a slap on the wrists would suffice and the members adopted the Stenholm amendment by a 361-65 vote. Democrats and Republicans were supportive of this measure with 95 percent of the Democrats and 69 percent of the Republicans supported the amendment. The House then rejected Cliff Stearns (R-FL) proposal to cut the NEA by 5 percent. Only 7 percent of the Democrats supported this measure, while 45 percent of Republicans supported it. Finally, by a vote of 332-94, the House approved Armev's amendment as amended by Stenholm (Hager, 1989a: 1763). Here, only 66 percent of Democrats supported the cut indicating that many Democrats did not want the NEA to be cut at all. Tables 3-1, 2, and 3 show the breakdown of each vote by party and the corresponding Yule's Q score.

**Table 3-1. HR 2788. Fiscal 1990 Interior Appropriations/ Arts Funding Cuts of 45,000 Dollars. July 12, 1989.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	95% 241	69% 120	85% 361
AGAINST	5% 12	31% 53	15% 65
TOTALS	253	173	100% 426

Yule's Q = .80

**Table 3-2. HR 2788. Fiscal 1990 Interior Appropriations/ Arts Funding Cuts of 5 percent. July 12, 1989.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	7% 1 8	45% 7 7	22% 9 5
AGAINST	93% 2 3 5	55% 9 3	78% 3 2 8
TOTALS	2 5 3	1 7 0	100% 4 2 3

Yule's Q = -.83

**Table 3-3. HR 2788. Fiscal 1990 Interior Appropriations/ Arts Funding Cuts per Army. July 12, 1989.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	66% 1 6 8	95% 1 6 4	78% 3 3 2
AGAINST	34% 8 6	5% 8	22% 9 4
TOTALS	2 5 4	1 7 2	100% 4 2 6

Yule's Q = -.83

The Senate Appropriations Committee adopted the House cut of 45,000 dollars. Yet, the Senate committee went further and barred NEA funding to the two local art groups which funded the controversial Serrano and Mapplethorpe grants. They also approved a 100,000 dollar study of NEA grant-making procedures (Zeigler, 1994: 79). This did not however, quell debate in the Senate. On the night of July 26, Jesse Helms (R-NC) introduced Amendment 420.

The "Helms Amendment" as it became known provides:

None of the funds authorized to be appropriated pursuant to this Act may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce (1) obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to the depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts; and (2) material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion; or (3) material which denigrates,

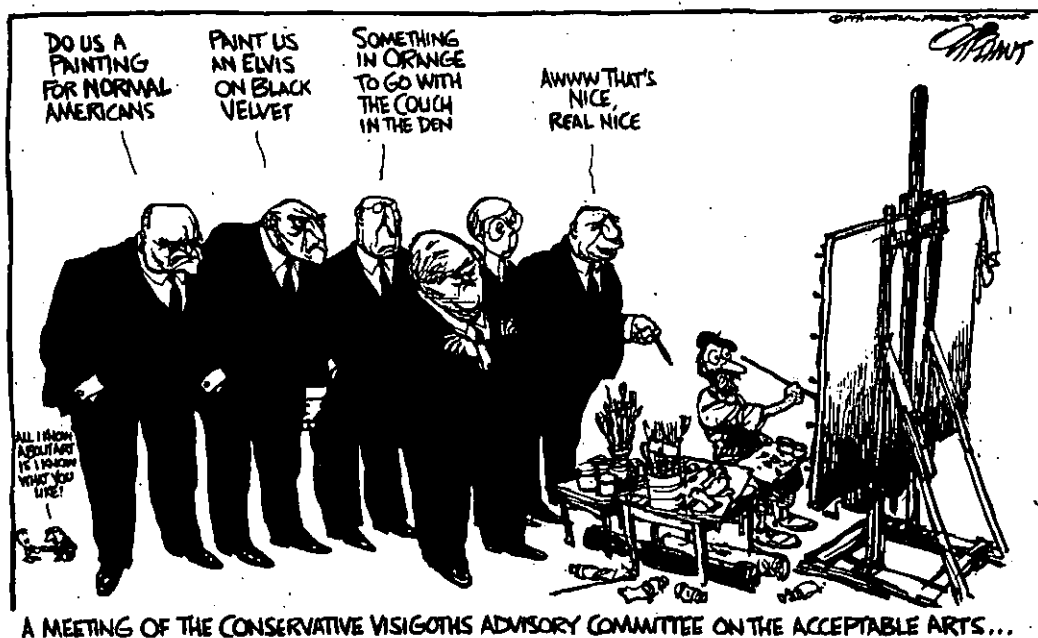


debases, or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin (Zeigler, 1994: 79).

With the Senate floor almost empty before the August recess, there was a small but futile attempt to block the amendment. Senators Edward Kennedy, Timothy Wirth, Claiborne Pell, and Daniel Moynihan all expressed their displeasure, but in the end the amendment passed by a voice vote (Zeigler, 1994: 79).

The "Helms Amendment" outraged NEA supporters. Sidney Yates (D-IL), a long time supporter of the Endowment said, "[i]t's impossible to write language [defining obscenity or indecency]. Even the Supreme Court can't write language of that kind" (Hager, 1989b: 2177). Many NEA supporters including Pat Williams (D-MT) argued that the "Helms Amendment" is really a form of censorship. Many have taken to this argument and political cartoonists have made light of it (See Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1



*Southern Illinoisian*, 25 January 1995, p. 1D.

The House addressed the "Helms Amendment" with two votes on September 13, 1989. The first was a motion to call the previous question (or end debate) on a motion offered by Representative Regula (R-OH); it prevented an amendment from being offered to instruct House conferees to agree to the "Helms Amendment." The motion was agreed to by a vote of 264-153. Table 3-4 shows that Democrats widely supported the measure with 85 percent of those voting casting their support for ending debate. Republicans clearly wanted to debate the measure further with 69 percent casting votes in opposition to the measure. Regula then made a motion to instruct House conferees on the fiscal 1990 Interior Department appropriations bill to agree to the Senate amendment placing restrictions on lobbying for federal funds, and to ask the conferees to address concerns raised by the "Helms Amendment". This motion was agreed to by a 410-3 vote. Table 3-5 shows that both parties believed the issued deemed further investigation with 99 percent of both parties voting for the motion. Both of these motions can be seen as favorable to the NEA.

**Table 3-4. HR 2788. Fiscal 1990 Interior Appropriations/Previous Question. Sept. 13, 1989.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	85% 212	31% 52	63% 264
AGAINST	15% 37	69% 116	37% 153
TOTALS	249	168	100% 417

Yule's Q = .85

**Table 3-5. HR 2788. Fiscal 1990 Interior Appropriations/Instruction of Conferees. Sept. 13, 1989.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	99% 242	99% 168	99% 410
AGAINST	1% 2	1% 1	1% 3
TOTALS	244	169	100% 413

Yule's Q = -.16

On September 28th, Senator Mitchell (D-MA) made a motion to table or otherwise kill the "Helms Amendment" This motion was agreed to 62-35. Table 3-6 indicates that once again Democrats supported the NEA in large numbers with 81 percent in support of killing the "Helms Amendment." Many senators had a problem with the language of the "Helms Amendment" (Fessler, 1989: 2550). The next day a deal was struck by the conferees on HR 2788. What this cumulated into was the enactment of Public Law 101-121. This law was originally introduced by Sidney Yates on June 29th. Yates contended in his law that obscenity should be judged in accordance with the 1972 Supreme Court case *Miller v California*. However, in conference the Yates proposal was merged with the "Helms Amendment. It was agreed that there would be a ban on the use of NEA and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funding of works which the endowments judged obscene and without significant literary, artistic, political or scientific value (Fessler 1989: 2550).

**Table 3-6. Fiscal 1990 Defense Appropriations/ National Endowment for the Arts Obscenity**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	81% 43	43% 19	64% 62
AGAINST	19% 10	57% 25	36% 35
TOTALS	53	44	100% 97

Yule's Q = .70

Public Law 101-121 was attached to the 11 billion dollar Interior Appropriations bill. It was approved along with an appropriation of 171.3 million dollars for the NEA. Despite all the controversy the NEA's fiscal 1990 budget was up more than 2 million dollars from fiscal year 1989 (Zeigler 80). The NEA only lost 45,000 dollars of potential funding and was required to police itself.

Overall, the NEA did not fair badly in 1989. Samuel Lipman writes, ". . . congressional arts advocates were forced to allow some restrictive language in the Endowment's 1990 budget, and to establish a commission to study the NEA's grant-making process, in particular its peer-panel system. The restrictive language is of dubious clarity and applicability; as for the study commission, at this point it seems little more than another hypocritical effort by supporters of public arts funding to whitewash the activities of those responsible for its administration" (Lipman, 1990; 23).

However, this was not the end of the NEA's troubles. As one will see in chapter 4, the crisis only grows in 1990.

## Chapter 4

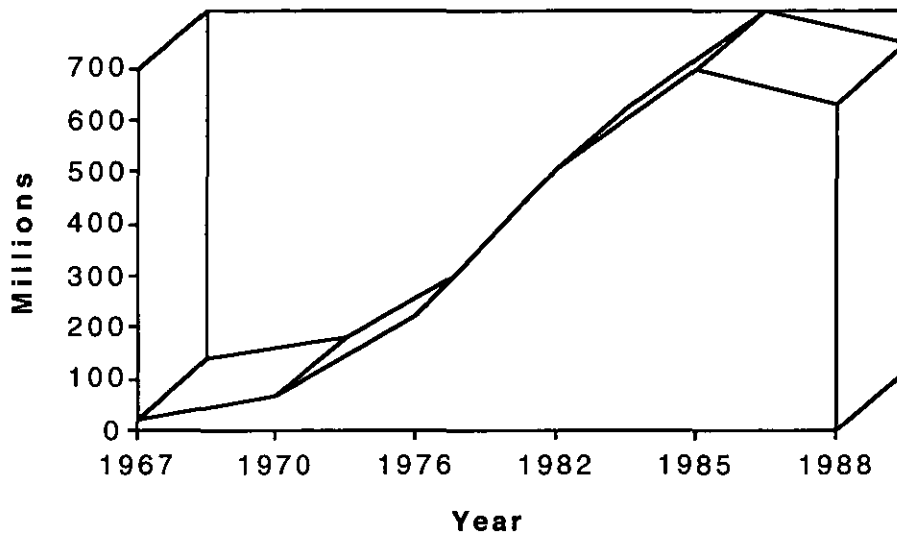
### 1990 A New Decade, But Not A New Beginning

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak (Berger, 1977; 7).

The year 1990 came, but the problems did not go away. The solutions of 1989 only stalled the battle until a new legislative session. Why is there so much conflict regarding the NEA? Is it because the NEA gives too many outlandish grants or is it something rooted deeper in our culture? Paul Cezanne once said, "Taste is the best judge. It is rare. Art only addresses itself to an excessively small number of individuals" (Goldwater, 1972; 364). Is it true that art, the epitome of culture only appeals to a small portion of the population?

Much of the conservative Republican argument against the NEA is rooted in the belief that the NEA only serves an elite portion of the population. The assumption behind this thinking is that the only people concerned with art are artists themselves and their rich patrons. It is noteworthy that since the creation of the NEA in 1965 private giving, corporate giving, and the number of art institutions are on the rise (Zeigler, 1994; 63). Figure 4-1 shows the growth of corporate giving to the arts from 1967 until 1988. This growth extends throughout the United States, and is not limited only to major cities.

Figure 4-1. Corporate Giving to the Arts From 1967 to 1988



NEA proponents point to such growth figures as an indication of the widespread appeal the NEA has generated. They claim that it is unfair to judge the impact of such a diversified government agency by a handful of potentially offensive grants. They claim that art is a viable aspect within society and artists are often associated with great nations: Italy is associated with Michelangelo, France with Monet, and the Dutch with Rembrandt. On May 16, 1990, Representative Pat Williams said about Jim Henson's death, "[p]rior to 'Sesame Street,' who would think America would mourn the loss of a little green frog" (Zuckman, 1990b; 1566).

If one compares Congressional members on both sides of the issue, one finds that they are polar opposites along the ideological spectrum (See Table 4-1). I have identified 12 leading members of Congress involved in the NEA debate and then matched each with their 1989 ranking by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA).

The members are then split into two camps; Pro NEA and Con NEA. The ADA ranks Congressional members according to their liberalism. A high ranking means that the members agree with the ADA and they are considered liberal.

Table 4-1. 1989 ADA Ranking of Congressional Members.

Pro NEA	ADA Ranking	Con NEA	ADA Ranking
Yates (D)	100	Armey (R)	0
Wirth (D)	95	Stearns (R)	0
Kennedy (D)	85	Helms (R)	5
Pell (D)	85	Coleman (R)	5
Williams (D)	80	Rohranbacher(R)	10
Moynihan (D)	75	Gunderson (R)	20

This table indicates that the NEA issue is not only split along party lines, but also ideological lines.

Another reason the NEA controversy does not go away is the fact that art groups are sometimes stunned by the swift action taken by Congress. For almost thirty years, the NEA has had an easy run at things. Religious Right-Wing groups quickly mobilized against the NEA, won the ear of many Congressional members, and pushed their cause forward. Art groups did not begin to heed the call to arms until 1990, but the counter-movement was unorganized. The Religious Right strove forward like a well drilled and polished army. Art advocacy groups resembled a rag tag outfit of misfits. Anne Murphy, head of the American Arts Alliance said, "A lot of people who support the endowment are grappling with how to handle the

situation. Fifteen or twenty ideas are floating around on Capitol Hill - none of them formulated. Everyone is asking a lot of questions" (Gamarekian, 1990; 7E). Although NEA supporters have been disorganized they nevertheless have some very powerful allies in Congress including Yates and Williams. They would need them since the NEA's authorization was due to expire on September 30.

The first eventful incident of 1990 happened on April 7th. The Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati and its director, Dennis Barrie, were indicted on obscenity charges. The museum was displaying Robert Mapplethorpe's exhibit, The Perfect Moment. Which along with Andrea Serrano's Piss Christ had touched off the crisis in 1989 (Zuckman, 1990a; 1140). Then, on April 10th Representative Dana Rohrabacher headed a group of 61 House members who wrote President Bush urging legislative restrictions on the NEA and asked for the President to ensure the NEA does not fund obscene works of art. Of the 61 members who signed the letter, 58 of them were Republicans (Zuckman, 1990a; 1140).

The next major event happened on May 12 when the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) proposed shifting 60 percent of the NEA funds to the states. The law, as it stood at the time left the NEA with 80 percent and 20 percent went to the states. The National Assembly soon withdrew its proposal stating that they were only tossing the idea around. But, Representative Thomas Coleman (R-Mo), and Representative Steve Gunderson (R-WIS) both endorsed the idea and began to push for legislation (Zuckman, 1990b; 1566).



On May 15, Representative Pat Williams (D-MT), introduced President Bush's proposed reauthorization which would extend authorization for five years. It did not contain any restrictions on NEA grants. Although a staunch supporter of the NEA, Williams said, "I believe it would be very difficult to pass language through the House that didn't ratchet down what is perceived to be the NEA's ability to fund illegally obscene works" (Zuckman, 1990b; 1566).

Yet, two days later Williams withdrew the reauthorization bill and called a summit of major arts groups. His hope was to form a unified position. Representative Steve Gunderson said about the summit, "It's sort of like bringing the House Republican leadership together to decide whether they want to be Republicans or Democrats. It's not the right crowd" (Zuckman, 1990b; 1566).

Williams believed, however that art groups have not discussed the issue together and by bringing them together they stood a better chance at getting the NEA reauthorized. Williams called the group he brought to the summit, The United Arts Group. The Group was a diverse sprinkling of concerned citizens who all backed the NEA made up the group. The group met for three days before it released a statement in which they backed the five-year reauthorization without content restrictions, and called for court determination of obscenity. They also rejected the NASAA proposal to give 60 percent of NEA funding to the states. They stated,

"In the heat of this debate we have all, to some degree, lost sight of the fundamental consensus that underlies a free and civilized society: that freedom of expression is among our most important and cherished rights and that accountability in the expenditure of public funds is essential to the democratic process" (Zeigler, 1994; 102).

Williams then submitted his bill to the House Education and Labor Committee. This bill included the conclusions of the summit that there should be no content restrictions, no change in the state-federal funding ratio, and the NEA should be reauthorized for five years. The committee' unable to agree sent the bill directly to the full House (Zeigler, 1994; 103). Again, Williams acknowledged that he thought the bill only stood a 50 percent chance of surviving unchanged (Lawerence, 1990; 1968).

Meanwhile, in September 1990 the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee agreed to the reauthorization of the NEA. In order for the bill to make it out of committee, a compromise was made regarding the obscenity issue. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) sponsored an amendment which stated that the NEA would not be restricted. However, if an artist uses an NEA grant to produce artwork which is deemed obscene or in violation of any child pornography laws by a court of law, that artist will have to repay the grant. If the artist can not afford to repay the grant the NEA could require the state or local art agency that gave the artist the money to repay the grant. There was widespread support of this amendment; it passed the committee by a 15-1 vote. It also had support from art groups. Anne Murphy, Executive director of the American Arts Alliance said, "I think they have put together a pretty good blueprint for the resolution of this" (Zuckman, 1990c; 2920).

When the reauthorization bill reached the House floor it had 26 amendments pending. Most of these bills were carbon copies of each other and the vast majority were dropped (Zuckman, 1990c; 2921). Yet, the number remains as a testament to the way this issue had

intrigued Congress. Two years earlier the NEA was a side note in the Interior Department's budget.

The first amendment which the House had a roll call vote on was an amendment by Crane (R-IL), to abolish the NEA. It was soundly defeated 64-361 (See Table 4-2). Democrats were solidly against it, while 70 percent of the Republicans also against it.

**Table 4-1. HR 4825. Fiscal 1991-95 NEA Authorization/Abolishment. October 11, 1995.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	5% 1 2	30% 5 2	15% 6 4
<b>AGAINST</b>	95% 2 4 1	70% 1 2 0	85% 3 6 1
<b>TOTALS</b>	2 5 3	1 7 2	100% 4 2 5

**Yule's Q = -.79**

The next amendment came from Representative Rohrabacher (R-CA). It was a five page document which specified numerous changes to the NEA (Zuckman, 1990c; 2921). It included a ban on obscene work as defined by the Federal Communications Commission's definitions of indecency. It also includes provisions such as a ban on works of art desecrating the U.S. flag and works of art that contain any part of a human embryo or fetus (CQ Almanac, 1990a; 144-H). This amendment was also soundly defeated by a 175-249 vote (See Table 4-3), with 76 percent of the Democrats voting against it and Republicans supporting the bill at a 66 percent rate.

**Table 4-3. HR 4825. Fiscal 1991-95 NEA Authorization/NEA Funding Standards per Rohrabacher. October 11, 1990.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	24% <b>61</b>	66% <b>114</b>	41% <b>175</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	76% <b>191</b>	34% <b>58</b>	59% <b>249</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>172</b>	100% <b>424</b>

**Yule's Q = -.72**

Pat Williams then made a move to ease some the pressure about the obscenity issue by submitting an amendment. His amendment stated that the NEA chairperson is required to take into consideration the general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values in the U.S. Like the Senate bill, Williams provides that artists convicted of obscenity must repay their grants. This bill passed easily, paving the way for authorization (See Table 4-4). Ninety percent of all house members voting on the bill cast favorable votes, with 96 percent of the Democrats and 82 percent of the Republicans in support of the bill.

**Table 4-4. HR 4825. Fiscal 1991-95 NEA Authorization/NEA Funding Standard per Williams. October 11, 1990.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	96% <b>240</b>	82% <b>142</b>	90% <b>382</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	4% <b>11</b>	18% <b>31</b>	10% <b>42</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>173</b>	100% <b>424</b>

**Yule's Q = .65**

The actual authorization bill came up next and passed with amendments, by a 349-76 vote (See Table 4-5). This time more

Republicans defected, but in the end 82 percent of the total votes were in support of authorization.

**Table 4-5. Fiscal 1991-95 NEA Authorization/ Passage. October 11, 1990.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	93% 235	66% 114	82% 349
AGAINST	7% 17	36% 59	18% 76
TOTALS	252	173	100% 425

Yule's Q = .75

There were two other roll call votes in the House on the NEA in 1990, but they were of little significance and made no changes in the law.

In the Senate, there were two roll call votes. The first was on an amendment by Helms (R-NC), that, ". . . would prohibit the NEA from using federal funds to promote, distribute, disseminate or produce materials that depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual or excretory activities or organs" (CQ Almanac, 1990b; 60-S). Like bills of this nature in the House it was defeated (See Table 4-6). Once again, the partisan factor is significant: a slight majority of Republican senators sought to punish the NEA while the Democrats strongly supported the arts agency.

**Table 4-6. HR 5769. Fiscal 1991 Interior Appropriations/ NEA Obscenity Law. October 24, 1990.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	11% 6	52% 23	29% 29
AGAINST	89% 49	48% 21	71% 70
TOTALS	55	44	100% 99

Yule's Q = -.80

After the defeat of Helms' amendment, Orin Hatch's amendment to require artist to repay their grants if convicted of obscenity was accepted by a 73-24 vote (See Table 4-7). Interestingly a greater proportion of Democrats supported the amendment than Hatch's Republican colleagues. Many Republicans felt that the bill did not sufficiently place constraints on the NEA's grant making process.

**Table 4-7. HR 5769. Fiscal 1991 Interior Appropriations/NEA Obscenity per Hatch. October 24, 1990.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	80% 43	44% 19	64% 62
AGAINST	20% 11	56% 24	36% 35
TOTALS	54	43	100% 97

**Yule's Q = .66**

The Senate and the House could not agreed to the five year authorization. In a compromise the conferees agreed to authorize the Endowment for another three years (CQ Almanac, 1990; 567). This was a clear sign that members of Congress wanted to keep a close eye on the NEA.

## Chapter 5

### The Saga Continues

I write poems for poets and satires or grotesques for wits. . . . for people in general I write prose and am content that they should be unaware that I do anything else. Robert Graves (Reed, 1955; 53).

The above quote is not only true for poetry, but the arts and humanities in general. Most works of art and literature do not appeal to people in general. Does this mean, however that these works lack merit. William Faulkner was not a "popular writer until very late in life. Yet, today his works are considered among the great literary works of the modern age. Faulkner had to write movie scripts in order to make ends meet. Could he have created more books for us to enjoy if there was a NEA during his time? Would an NEA have funded a Faulkner? Content restrictions in art mandate that art should be created in a certain vain and creativity is often overlooked for fear of offending someone or some group.

Even after the overwhelming approval of the three year reauthorization in 1990, which included a provision to leave the obscenity question to the courts, NEA opponents continued to push the issue of content restrictions. Congress continued to battle over content restrictions.

The first action of 1991 was the now annual tradition of voting on an amendment sponsored by Philip Crane, (R-IL) to eliminate the NEA. Consistent with past precedent, the amendment to Interior Department appropriations was soundly defeated by a 66-360 vote on June 25, 1991 (See Table 5-1). The partisan nature of the support

for Crane's position is reflected in the negative Yule's Q score of  $-.82$ : with 33 percent of the Republicans and only 5 percent of the Democrats voting for the amendment.

**Table 5-1. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/ Eliminate Funding for the NEA. June 25, 1991.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	5% 1 2	33% 5 4	15% 6 6
AGAINST	95% 2 5 0	67% 1 1 0	85% 3 6 0
TOTALS	2 6 2	1 6 4	100% 4 2 6

Yule's Q =  $-.82$

That same day Stearns (R-FL) proposed an amendment to cut the NEA by 7.4 million dollars (CQ Almanac, 1991; 48-H). This was also rejected, but not as soundly as Crane's amendment. In fact it was a very close vote, defeated by a 196-227 vote (See Table 5-2). Again the Republicans supported cutting funds in big numbers with 77 percent in favor of the cut.

**Table 5-2. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/ Cut Funds for the NEA by 7.4 Million Dollars. June 25, 1991**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	28% 7 2	77% 1 2 4	46% 1 9 6
AGAINST	72% 1 8 9	23% 3 8	54% 2 2 7
TOTALS	2 6 1	1 6 2	100% 4 2 3

Yule's Q =  $-.79$



Meanwhile in the Senate, Kassebaum (R-KS) made a motion to cut 10 percent from the NEA budget. This found little support on the Senate floor and the proposal failed by a 27-67 vote (See Table 5-3). Only 5 percent of the voting Democrats supported the motion. While 62 percent of the Republican Senators voted in favor of the bill. The Yule's Q score of -.93 indicates that most of the variation in this table is explained by partisan affiliation.

**Table 5-3. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/ National Endowment for the Arts Cuts. September 19, 1991.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	5% 3	62% 24	29% 27
AGAINST	95% 52	38% 15	71% 67
TOTALS	55	39	100% 94

Yule's Q = -.93

At this point, NEA's political fortunes take a dramatic turn for the worse. Senator Jesse Helms struck with an amendment to prohibit the NEA from funding projects that depict or describe, in an offensive way, sexual or excretory activities or organs. Shaking the pillars of art and shocking most observers, the amendment passed by a 68-28 vote. Two years before, Jesse Helms was hard pressed to find a Democratic support for his obscenity bill, but on September 19, 1991 he received 43 votes, a majority were Democratic votes (See Table 5-4 and compare Table 4-6).

**Table 5-4. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/NEA, Helms amendment on obscenity. September 19, 1991.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	60% 33	88% 35	71% 68
AGAINST	40% 23	12% 5	29% 28
TOTALS	55	40	100% 96

**Yule's Q = -.66**

There was not another roll call vote on the NEA in the House until Sidney Yates made a move to defend the endowment from another content restrictive amendment. He made a motion to table an amendment by Representative Dannemeyer (R-CA).

Dannemeyer's amendment instructed conferees to insist upon the passage of the Senate amendment to prohibit the NEA from funding projects depicting or implying sexual or excretory activities or organs. Yates' motion was defeated by a 180-243 roll call vote (See Table 5-5). The Dannemeyer motion was then passed by a substantial majority, 286 to 135 (See Table 5-6).

**Table 5-5. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/NEA, motion to table Dannemeyer amendment. October 16, 1991.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	63% 165	9% 15	43% 180
AGAINST	37% 98	91% 145	57% 243
TOTALS	263	160	100% 423

**Yule's Q = .88**

**Table 5-6. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/NEA motion by Dannemeyer to instruct conferees. October 16, 1991.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	54% <b>1 4 0</b>	92% <b>1 4 6</b>	68% <b>2 8 6</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	46% <b>1 2 1</b>	8% <b>1 3</b>	32% <b>1 3 4</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2 6 1</b>	<b>1 5 9</b>	100% <b>4 2 0</b>

**Yule's Q = -.81**

Interestingly, a majority of Democrats voted in favor of this law. Laws of this nature had been introduced in the past and Democrats soundly defeated them (Compare Table 4-3). This is the first time to date in which Democrats voted against the NEA (both in the House and Senate). One of the reasons that may suggest the shift in position is the lack of strong leadership in the NEA. Explaining about the NEA's leader Frohnmayer, Joseph Zeigler writes, "Frohnmayer's primary problem was that it was impossible to know exactly where he stood. While the right attacked him for being permissive, the left accused him of embracing conservative prejudices" (Zeigler, 1994; 135).

Frohnmayer's most controversial actions were the rejection of four grants to performance artists in 1990. He overrode the recommendations of a panel of theater experts. The four artist became known as the "NEA 4." Many liberals called Frohnmayer's actions a form of blacklisting and censorship. But in 1991 the endowment decided to award grants to two of the NEA 4, Tim Miller and Holly Hughes (Wallis, 1992a; 25). This inflamed ideological

conservatives and sent mixed messages to everyone concerned. Members of Congress were beginning to lose patience with the Endowment and the conservative right refused to let the issue slip away until they felt it was resolved. For many, this meant more restrictions.

The Dannemeyer amendment appeared to be a major victory for NEA opponents, but was soon nixed in a deal that would become known as, "corn for porn". In 1991, many members of Congress from Western states wanted to eliminate a rider in the Interior budget which would have doubled the fee for grazing cattle on federal lands. In order to kill the grazing bill Western members of Congress' conference committee struck a deal with NEA supporters on the committee. Westerners agreed to vote against the Dannemeyer amendment and NEA supporters agreed to vote against the cattle grazing amendment. Thus, members of the conference committee struck a deal eliminating both the NEA amendment and the Cattle grazing amendment (Wallis, 1991; 29).

On October 24th, in the House, Lowery (R-CA) made a motion to recommit the conference report with instructions to conferees to accept the Senate restrictions on the NEA. But the motion failed to find enough support and was narrowly rejected by a 205-214 vote (See Table 5-7).

**Table 5-7. HR 2686. Fiscal 1992 Interior Appropriations/  
Recommittal Motion. October 24, 1991.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	30% 77	80% 128	49% 205
AGAINST	70% 181	20% 32	51% 213
TOTALS	258	160	100% 418

Yule's Q = -.81

John Frohnmayer was fired by President Bush on February 22, 1992. President Bush was facing strong opposition in the Republican primary from Pat Buchanan and many observers saw the move as a way of robbing Buchanan of an issue he could use against Bush (Wallis, 1992b; 35). Anne-Imela Radice was then appointed to the chair and she immediately began pandering to the conservatives. Jack Rosenberger writes, ". . . Radice said that she fully intended to veto grants for sexually explicit art works or projects that dealt with 'difficult subject matter' " (Rosenberger, 1992; 27).

As a Result, in 1992 there was very little action in Congress regarding the NEA. Yet, Philip Crane again called for the elimination of the NEA and once again he was defeated and once again the partisan nature of the split is evident in table 5-8; Yule's Q equals -.88.

**Table 5-8. HR 5503. Fiscal 1993 Interior Appropriations/NEA Elimination. July 22, 1992.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	5% 1 3	45% 7 2	21% 8 5
AGAINST	95% 2 4 0	55% 8 8	79% 3 2 8
TOTALS	2 5 3	1 6 0	100% 4 1 3

Yule's Q = -.88

The only other roll call vote on the NEA in 1992 was an amendment from Stearns (R-FL) to keep the level of NEA funding in fiscal 1993 at the same level as fiscal 1992. This amendment was adopted by a 251-171 vote. Table 5-9 illustrates the vote on this punitive measure. With 94 percent of Republicans and 38 percent of Democrats in favor of the measure. Clearly, support for the NEA had eroded.

**Table 5-9. HR 5503. Fiscal 1993 Interior Appropriations/NEA Funding Level. July 22, 1992.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	38% 9 7	94% 1 5 4	60% 2 5 1
AGAINST	62% 1 6 1	6% 9	40% 1 7 0
TOTALS	2 5 8	1 6 3	100% 4 2 1

Yule's Q = -.93

## Chapter 6

### Clinton's First Year

We have neglected the gift of comprehending things through our senses (Arnheim, 1974; 1).

The year 1993 marked the beginning of a new presidency. Bill Clinton was the first Democrat to hold the executive office since Jimmy Carter. For the arts endowment, it appeared that its trial might finally end. President Clinton is a self-professed art supporter and when he was elected, a Democratic majority was in control of both chambers of Congress. Signaling his personal involvement with the arts, Clinton delighted many when he played the saxophone at his inaugural ball. On that same day, Anne-Imela Radice resigned as chair of the NEA. The President then appointed Ana Steele as acting chair; she had been with the NEA since its creation in 1965 (Wallis, 1993a; 29).

Yet, a new president did very little to stop the attacks from Congress. On July 14, 1993 the attacks resumed and were kicked off by what was then regarded as a legendary tactic; Philip Crane (R-IL) offered an amendment to the Interior Department appropriation to abolish the NEA. By a 105-322 vote, his proposal was rejected again (see Table 6-1).

**Table 6-1. HR 2520. Fiscal 1994 Interior Appropriations/NEA Elimination. July 14, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	6% 15	52% 90	25% 105
AGAINST	94% 238	48% 83	75% 321
TOTALS	253	173	100% 426

**Yule's Q = -.89**

The next day Representative Solomon (R-NY) requested a separate vote on Cliff Stearns' (R-FL) amendment to cut the NEA by five percent. It was adopted by a 244-173 vote (See Table 6-2).

**Table 6-2. HR 2520. Fiscal 1994 Interior Appropriations/NEA cut by five percent. July 15, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	33% 81	95% 163	59% 244
AGAINST	67% 164	5% 9	41% 173
TOTALS	245	172	100% 417

**Yule's Q = -.95**

Stearns who had been successful in cutting the NEA by 3 million dollars in 1992, had succeeded again, cutting the NEA by 8.7 million dollars. His backers included moderate Democrats and fellow Republicans. Several of his supporters made reference to material they received from the Christian Action Network, a right-wing lobbying group. The material included information about two art shows at the Whitney Museum which were indirectly funded by the NEA. Though these shows were not as controversial as the



Mapplethorpe or Serrano grants, they did deal with taboo subjects such as rape (Wallis, 1993b; 27). However, the Senate Appropriations committee voted to restore 4.3 million dollars that the House had cut leaving the NEA budget at 170.2 million dollars. This is close to the same level the Endowment received back in 1988 (Wallis, 1993b; 27). Yet, the restoration did not end the NEA's problems. The Endowment still faced the reauthorization battle of 1993.

Six months after taking office President Clinton announced Jane Alexander, an actress and activist, as his choice to head o the Endowment. Becoming the new chair on August 7, 1993, Alexander came to the office with little administrative experience (Wallis, 1993c; 27). Unfortunately, a lack of managerial skills was one of John Frohnmayer's major faults as chair of the NEA. Moreover, Alexander was positioned during a very hostile time, just as Frohnmayer had been. She had very few bargaining chips to deal with Congress.

Then, as Congress was gearing up for the authorization fight another incident occurred. Over the summer David Avalos, Louis Hock, and Elizabeth Sisco handed out ten dollar bills to migrant workers in an effort to spark discussion about immigration laws. They received the money from the San Diego MCA as part of a project called Dos Ciudades/Two Cities. This project was funded in part by the NEA (Cash, 1993; 35). The project helped to fuel the argument against continued support for the Endowment.

On October 14, 1993, the House began discussing reauthorization of the NEA, NEH, and Institute of Museum Services.

After agreeing to call the previous question the House adopted House Resolution 264 to consider authorization of the NEA, NEH and the Institute of Museum Service for 1994 and 1995. Table 6-3 shows that it was adopted by a close vote. This vote was so polarized along partisan lines that it yielded a perfect association on the Yule's Q. What had already been a polarized issue appears to become completely polarized.

**Table 6-3. HR 2351. National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities/ Authorization. October 14, 1993**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	90% 2 2 3	1% 1	53% 2 2 4
AGAINST	10% 2 4	99% 1 7 1	47% 1 9 5
TOTALS	2 4 7	1 7 2	100% 4 1 9

**Yule's Q = 1.0**

Thereafter, there were two attempts to cut the NEA. The first was another attempt by Philip Crane to eliminate the NEA, but once again he failed. Table 6-4 shows that only 6 percent of Democrats and 51 percent of Republicans supported Crane's amendment. Representative Doran (R-CA) then proposed an amendment to cut by 40 percent the NEA's funding for fiscal year 1994. This proposal was also rejected, this time by a 151-281 vote. Table 6-5 shows that this remains as ever a partisan issue yielding a Yule's Q of -.92.

**Table 6-4. HR 2351. NEA Elimination. October 14, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	6% 1 4	51% 8 9	24% 1 0 3
AGAINST	94% 2 4 0	49% 8 5	76% 3 2 5
TOTALS	2 5 4	1 7 4	100% 4 2 8

Yule's Q = **-.89**

**Table 6-5. HR 2351. Cut NEA Funding by 40 percent. October, 14, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	10% 2 5	72% 1 2 6	35% 1 5 1
AGAINST	90% 2 3 2	28% 4 8	65% 2 8 0
TOTALS	2 5 7	1 7 4	100% 4 3 1

Yule's Q = **-.92**

The next amendment voted on was a direct response to the NEA's indirect funding of a cash giveaway to migrant workers. Representative Cunningham (R-CA) made a motion to recommit HR 2351, this motion would have sent the bill back to committee with an amendment prohibiting the Endowment from providing assistance to illegal aliens (CQ Almanac, 1993; 122-H). Table 6-6 shows how close this amendment came to winning. The amendment only lost by four votes in a highly partisan vote. The vote yielded an almost perfectly negative association with a Yule's Q score of **-.97**. Republicans

overwhelming supported the amendment while the Democrats by a wide margin opposed it.

**Table 6-6. HR 2351. National Endowment for the Arts/ Illegal Aliens. October 14, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	19% 47	94% 163	50% 210
AGAINST	81% 203	6% 10	50% 213
TOTALS	250	173	100% 423

Yule's Q = -.97

The final bill the House considered in 1993 was the actual authorization bill which extended authorization for two years. The bill provided 174.6 million dollars to the NEA in 1994. It also provided the National Endowment for the Humanities with 177.5 million and the Institute for Museum Services with 28.8 million dollars. Table 6-7 shows that although the vote was not very close, it was again a very partisan one. The Yule's Q score was a positive .93. Ninety-five percent of the Democrats voted in favor of the bill, while only 39 percent of the Republicans came out in support of the bill.

**Table 6-7. HR 2351. National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities/ Passage. October 14, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	95% 235	39% 68	72% 303
AGAINST	5% 13	61% 106	28% 119
TOTALS	248	174	100% 422

Yule's Q = .93

Meanwhile, Senator Jesse Helms took it upon himself to ask for the elimination of the NEA. His amendment went down to defeat by a 15-83 vote. Like the House, the Senate was not prepared to eliminate the Endowment. In fact, the Senate exhibited less support for Helms' motion than the House had for Crane's motions (see Tables 6-1 and 6-4) Table 6-8 shows that only 15 percent of the Senate supported Helms. Within his own party, Helms was only able to win 26 percent of the vote.

**Table 6-8. HR 2520. Fiscal 1994 NEA Appropriations/ Elimination. September 14, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	7% 4	26% 11	15% 15
AGAINST	93% 51	74% 32	85% 83
TOTALS	55	43	100% 98

**Yule's Q = -.63**

Yet, Helms was not finished attacking the NEA. He also submitted an amendment that would have required the NEA to distribute its funds to the states based on population. Senator Jeffords (R-VT), a fellow Republican, made the motion to kill the bill. Table 6-9 shows that this was agreed to by a 57-39 vote. The Yule's Q was a .77 with 80 percent of Democrats in favor and 67 percent of Republicans opposed.

**Table 6-9. HR 2520. National Endowment for the Arts/  
Funding to the States. September 15, 1993.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	80% 43	33% 14	59% 57
AGAINST	20% 11	67% 28	41% 39
TOTALS	54	42	100% 96

**Yule's Q = .77**

The final roll call vote in the Senate was another motion from Jeffords to kill a Helms' amendment. Helms had proposed eliminating the NEA's ability to fund individuals. Table 6-10 shows that Jeffords motion was agreed to by a 65-30 vote. This vote yielded a .91 Yule's Q score. This vote had a partisan breakdown very similar to House votes on the NEA. Only 37 percent of the Republicans were in favor of the motion, while 93 percent of Democrats voted for the motion.

**Table 6-10. HR 2520. National Endowment for the Arts/  
Kill Amendment prohibiting Grants to Individuals.  
September 15, 1994.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	93% 50	37% 15	68% 65
AGAINST	7% 4	63% 26	32% 30
TOTALS	54	41	100% 95

**Yule's Q = .91**

As important as these victories may seem, there is little reason for NEA supporters to rejoice. The Endowment ends up taking a 4.2

million dollar cut in the 1994 budget as the result of a conference committee agreement (Congress, 1994; 29). Incidents such as the cash giveaway to migrant workers continued to hurt the agency's image with Congress. But, an indirect grant of 150 dollars to performace artist Ron Athey in the summer of 1994 may have permanently damaged the Endowments image and possibly its very existence.

## Chapter 7

### The Athey Incident

We are haunted by the vision of a small, delicate body dissected by crowds of eager lay surgeons and lay analysts. And we feel tempted to assume that art is unsure in our time because we think and talk too much about it (Arnheim, 1974; 1).

In 1994, when Ron Athey performed his Excerpted Rites Transformation, he stirred the cauldron in which the NEA has been simmering since 1989. Athey received his funding from the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One hundred fifty dollars of that money came from a grant made to the Walker Art Center by the NEA. His performance consists of making cuts in the back of another artist. He then used towels to soak up the blood and ran the towels onto a clothesline which he extended over the audience (Landi, 1994; 46). Initial reports claimed that the audience was panicked by blood dripping on them and that the blood contained the HIV virus. However, there was no dripping blood, the audience was not panicked, and the blood did not contain the HIV virus. Ron Athey is HIV positive, but his blood was not blotted onto the towels (Landi, 1994; 46).

Congress was outraged by the Athey performance and it spurred yet another round of debate on the NEA. Some former supporters of the NEA decided to withdraw their support. One, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) even made a recommendation to cut the NEA (Landi, 1994; 46).



The first bill that was voted on in the House was Philip Crane's annual amendment to eliminate the NEA. Table 7-1 shows that still there is not much support for the elimination of the NEA. Only 6 percent of the Democrats and 55 percent of the Republicans supported the measure.

**Table 7-1. HR 2520. National Endowment for the Arts/ Elimination. June 22, 1994.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	6% <b>1 6</b>	55% <b>9 7</b>	27% <b>1 1 3</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	94% <b>2 3 4</b>	45% <b>7 8</b>	73% <b>3 1 2</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2 5 0</b>	<b>1 7 5</b>	100% <b>4 2 5</b>

**Yule's Q = -.90**

The next attack on the Endowment took the form of an amendment proposed by Representative Bachus (R-AL). The amendment would cut 93 million from the NEA's budget and asked for the elimination of grants made directly to artists and art groups. Like the Crane amendment, it also received very little support. Table 7-2 shows that it yielded a Yule's Q score of -.91, with 8 percent of Democrats for and 36 percent of Republicans against the cut.

**Table 7-2. HR 4602. National Endowment for the Arts/ reduce by 93 million. June 23, 1994.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	8% <b>1 9</b>	64% <b>1 1 3</b>	31% <b>1 3 2</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	92% <b>2 3 2</b>	36% <b>6 4</b>	69% <b>2 9 6</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2 5 1</b>	<b>1 7 7</b>	100% <b>4 2 8</b>

**Yule's Q = -.91**

Yet, when it came to a smaller cut the Democrats were not hesitant to vote for it. Sidney Yates (D-IL), a long time supporter of the NEA proposed cutting the NEA by 1 percent (House, 1995a). The Yates' move might be considered damage control. However, the last time Yates attempted damage control was in 1989 when he proposed cutting the NEA by 45,000 dollars because of the Mapplethorpe and Serrano grants. Yates' amendment won by a 217-214 vote. Table 7-3 shows that 80 percent of Democrats and only 8 percent of the Republicans came out in favor of the cut. This marks a fundamental shift on the part of Democrats who have traditionally opposed any budgetary cuts to the NEA. It appears the Democrats were scrambling for cover in the hope of taking only minor casualties.

**Table 7-3. HR 4602. National Endowment for the Arts/ Yates amendment to reduce the NEA by 1 percent. June 23, 1994.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	80% <b>2 0 3</b>	8% <b>1 4</b>	50% <b>2 1 7</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	20% <b>5 1</b>	92% <b>1 6 3</b>	50% <b>2 1 4</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2 5 4</b>	<b>1 7 7</b>	100% <b>4 3 1</b>

**Yule's Q = .96**

Yates won his amendment, but a revote was demanded. The second time around the Republicans were able to secure enough votes to defeat the amendment. Table 7-4 shows that on the revote only 6 percent of the Republicans were in favor of the amendment, as opposed to the 8 percent that voted for the amendment the first time.

**Table 7-4. HR 4602. Revote on the Yates amendment. June 23, 1994.**

	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	TOTALS
FOR	80% 198	6% 11	49% 209
AGAINST	20% 51	94% 165	51% 216
TOTALS	249	176	100% 425

**Yule's Q = .97**

Representative Dicks (D-WA) then proposed an amendment to cut the NEA by 2 percent. Surprisingly, the Democrats also came out in support of this amendment. Table 7-5 shows that 83 percent of Democrats and only 8 percent of Republicans were in favor of the amendment. Again, Democrats were in favor of a cut. A small cut compared to what most Republicans were pushing for, but it represents a significant change in the nature of support the NEA might hereafter expect. Endowment supporters went so far as to point out the fact that many press reports of Athey's performance had been exaggerated (Landi, 1994; 46). However, Congress had clearly become fed up with the NEA. The only remaining question is by how much should the Endowment be cut? Yet, both parties were extremely divided on the particulars to this question (refer to the

Yule's Q score in Table's 7-1 through 7-5). Democrats favored minor cuts, while Republicans pushed for deep cuts.

**Table 7-5. HR 4602: Dicks amendment to reduce the NEA by 2 percent. June 23, 1994.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	83% <b>2 0 7</b>	8% <b>1 4</b>	52% <b>2 2 1</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	17% <b>4 2</b>	92% <b>1 6 2</b>	48% <b>2 0 4</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2 4 9</b>	<b>1 7 6</b>	100% <b>4 2 5</b>

**Yule's Q = .97**

In the Senate there was only one voice vote during 1994. In an attempt to provide legislation that would prohibit grants such as the one Athey received, Jesse Helms proposed prohibiting NEA funds from being used to fund art that involved the drawing or letting of blood or the mutilation of human beings. This did not receive widespread support after Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) pointed out that many paintings of war scenes in the Capitol building would violate Helms' constraints. Table 7-6 shows that 79 percent of the Democrats and 8 percent of the Republicans were in favor of tabling Helms' amendment. This vote yielded a Yule's Q score of .87.

**Table 7-6. HR 4602. Table Helms Amendment on Drawing Blood. July, 25, 1994.**

	<b>DEMOCRAT</b>	<b>REPUBLICAN</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>FOR</b>	79% <b>4 1</b>	21% <b>8</b>	54% <b>4 9</b>
<b>AGAINST</b>	21% <b>1 1</b>	79% <b>3 1</b>	46% <b>4 2</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>5 2</b>	<b>3 9</b>	100% <b>9 1</b>

**Yule's Q = .87**

Although Helms' amendment was the only roll call vote in the Senate during 1994, the NEA was damaged when the Senate approved a 5 percent cut in NEA without a roll call vote. Later House and Senate conference committee members agreed to the 5 percent Senate cut (Landi, 1994; 46). In the end, the Athey incident resulted in the worst NEA cut since the Endowments crisis began in 1989. It may be a signal that the new Congress with its Republican majority may emasculate or even eliminate the NEA altogether.

## Chapter 8

### What Does the Future Hold?

The future holds nothing else, but confrontation (Public Enemy, 1991).

In this thesis I have focused on the history of the NEA and in particular its relationship with Congress since 1989. In order to make sense of the Congressional history, I have examined the roll call votes since 1989 that directly address the NEA. Based on my analysis, it is clear that the NEA is a very partisan issue.

The 104th Congress (1995-1996) marks the beginning of a new chapter in legislative history. For the first time in four decades Republicans have control of both the House and Senate. The Republicans now hold a 54 to 46 majority in the Senate and a 230 to 204 majority in the House of Representatives. The Republicans led by Representative Newt Gingrich swept into Congress on the promise to deliver the Contract With America. The contract contains ten sweeping reforms that the Republicans intended to pass within the first 100 days (Robinson, 1995; 27).

Although elimination of the NEA was not part of the Contract With America, it did become a Republican priority. By late January 1995, two hearings were already held on the Endowment. However, the debate over NEA will not become center stage until the NEA reauthorization bill is discussed in early June (Robinson, 1995; 27). It is interesting that the NEA was not mentioned in the Contract With America, since the NEA has been a focal point of the Republicans since 1989. One can only speculate about the reasons. It is

important to note, however, that the only issues which were included in the Contract received a 60 percent or higher approval rating in a public opinion poll conducted for the Republicans (Garrett, 1995; 54). Although, the NEA has received some negative press since 1989, it retains a high approval rate from the public. A poll conducted by Louis Harris in 1992 found that 60 percent of those polled approved of federal support for the arts (Zeigler, 1994; 121).

Based on the previous votes in Congress, I do not believe that the opponents of the NEA will find enough support to eliminate the Endowment. Since 1989, each time Congress voted on proposals to eliminate the Endowment, the measure was soundly defeated. In the seven roll call votes to eliminate the NEA the support for elimination happened in the House on June 22, 1994. Twenty-seven percent of those voting were in favor of destroying the NEA. Only 55 percent of the Republicans supported the measure. Table 7-1 clearly suggests that Republicans are not sufficiently united to eliminate the NEA. At the same time, 94 percent of the Democrats opposed the legislation, indicating a unified position. Thus, while there is a Republican majority in the 104th Congress, it does not mean that the NEA will be eliminated.

I do believe, however, that the NEA will be cut by a substantial amount. All of the major NEA opponents listed in Table 4-1 are still in Congress. Only one outspoken proponent of the NEA, Senator Wirth is not a member of the 104th Congress. As the Yule's Q analysis reveals, party affiliation is an important factor. When it comes to cutting the NEA, the Republicans have to be unified against the NEA and indeed it is true that Republicans have supported every

major funding cut, while Democrats have opposed these cuts. Most of the Yule's Q scores evidence a very strong association between party and voting on the NEA; one roll-call vote reflects a perfect association:  $Q = 1.0$ .

I suspect that this relationship will hold true in 1995. As I indicated in Chapter 7, the only remaining question is by how much the Endowment will be cut. Democrats will likely support a small cut, whereas Republicans will push for larger cuts. The new Republican majority will probably succeed in making a substantial cut.

My personal opinion is that the NEA should remain intact, receive a funding increase, and if possible a real endowment should be established to free the NEA from Congressional clutches. It is sad to think that we live in a country so devoid of an appreciation for culture that we would consider cutting an arts program costing only about 64 cents or the cost of two stamps per citizen (Robinson, 1995; 27). Then too the United States of America does very little to fund the arts compared to other western nations. For example, Canada spends the equivalent of 32 dollars per capita in support of the arts. Germany spends 27 dollars, France 32 dollars and Sweden 35 dollars per capita on the arts (Schuster, 1985; 45).

The federal government provides very little support for the arts; it is expending only 161 million dollars for fiscal year 1995. Yet, cutting this meager figure has become an issue. Many people have developed a false opinion about artists and art groups. They believe that artists constitute an elite group that does nothing to address the concerns of "real people." I find it hard to believe that



these "art critics" have ever been given the opportunity to appreciate "art for arts sake." In my opinion, if the Endowment continues to be cut there is little chance that these people will ever get that opportunity.

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