

Chapter 4. A Shared Dream

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When Leonard Slatkin and I were growing up, we experienced an America that had not only helped win the Second World War but also strived to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Treaty of Versailles. Even before the war ended, we began building the United Nations and later, under the Marshall Plan, provided the economic support needed for Western Europe's recovery, while concurrently supporting the recovery of a democratic Japan. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were established at Bretton Woods in 1944, followed by the World Health Organization in 1946. The passage of the GI Bill enabled many returning servicemen and women to attend college, leading to the growth of the middle class. In 1947, the United Nations adopted a plan for dividing Palestine between resident Arabs and the large number of Jewish people displaced by the War, and in 1948, the State of Israel was established. That same year, Harry Truman integrated the armed forces.

As children and adolescents, we were proud to be part of a nation that asserted all men and women were created equal by God, believing that we represented the city on a hill that Governor John Winthrop spoke of in 1630 as a beacon of positive good for the rest of humanity. In 1955, Jonas Salk's vaccine against polio came into general use. When I traveled to Europe for the first time in 1957, I was proud to visit America Houses all over Germany and Austria and listen to the Voice of America broadcasting our message behind the Iron Curtain. In the fall of 1960, when I was in Vienna on a Fulbright, my wife and I regularly invited our new Austrian friends to our apartment to listen together and discuss the broadcast debates between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. As a junior faculty member at Princeton in 1964, I was among many who rejoiced in our nation's future when Lyndon Johnson passed urgently needed civil-rights legislation.

From the self-assured nation of my youth, we seem to have transformed into a powerful economic and military complex, more focused on isolationism than addressing the challenges of an increasingly interconnected, overpopulated globe armed with nuclear

weapons. This situation is worsened by an incessant barrage of entertainment and constant dishonesty, undermining our ability for critical thinking, attentive listening, and building strategic alliances among friends. All of this occurs amid repeated references to “fake news,” a willingness to distort the truth, a struggling middle class, rising homelessness, growing mistrust of people from other continents and immigration, a rapidly increasing number of billionaires, a surge in military-veteran suicides, declining interest in reading, rising addiction to technology and cell phones with shortened attention spans, an apparent collapse of our federal government’s three branches’ independence, attempts at preventing fair elections, mounting indifference to dangerously unbalanced budgets, and increasing disregard for national investment in infrastructure and education, both in K-12 and higher education sectors.

Since our international competitors seem to recognize that our negligence in these areas will inevitably lead to our long-term disadvantage, I am deeply concerned about the lives of our children and grandchildren. We once were a nation that cared about human rights, international peace, and the freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly. However, I fear we have become a country primarily driven by the pursuit of victory and wealth accumulation, regardless of the consequences.

Certainly, Leonard Slatkin and I understand that it is impossible to turn back time. However, we long for an America that reestablishes the values we once recognized and our ability to lead the world by being worthy of emulation. To help achieve these goals, we envision the establishment of a new, privately funded national foundation for the arts. This foundation would commission and produce new American works of art (music, theater, film, dance, and visual art) for children, adolescents, and adults, focusing on both the triumphs and challenges of American history.

The mission of such a foundation would be to help the United States reestablish the positive values many of us believed in during our younger days: the universal dignity of all human beings; the importance of the freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, and the press; and the values derived from studying the arts—skills such as attentive listening, hard work, empathy, and the understanding that achieving anything of value requires collaboration and compassion rather than anger and resentment.

In an era when more people are compelled to migrate from increasingly dangerous parts of the world, this foundation would produce art that highlights the agonizing decision a woman faces when considering terminating a pregnancy, and emphasizes that we are, at our core, a nation of immigrants who have learned to live together with respect for each other’s health, religion, and ideas.

We dream of an America where we take pride in the works of various composers and musicians, exemplifying American compositional excellence. Imagine an America where nationally distinguished leaders draw our attention to new works of art deserving national recognition. To ensure the survival and growth of symphony orchestras, we need several mutually supportive societal changes that foster their continued existence:

- A societal awareness of the importance of developing innovative means to teach music and other arts in public schools, possibly integrating them into the study of history. (For example, examining Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* provides insight into American racism in the 1920s and '30s.)
- Reorganization of professional orchestras that encourages a new business model and fosters teamwork.
- A national investment in a growing repertoire of orchestral music recognized internationally as a collection of musical masterpieces.

In the face of numerous challenges, including economic issues and the ongoing impact of the coronavirus, it is time for the development of a new American private foundation for the arts. While the initial investment of several billion dollars may seem substantial, it is important to remember that there are over 2,000 Americans with a net worth of \$1 billion or more. The wealthiest 400 Americans saw a 40% increase in their net worths, totaling \$4.5 trillion. If these 2,000 individuals contributed an annual million dollars to such a foundation, we could count on an annual \$2 billion to fund the arts in America. To capitalize that amount and harvest 5% annually for the arts, we would need an initial endowment of \$2 billion, a relatively small investment compared to the potential impact on our country.

At my request, Leonard Slatkin has written a brief essay below outlining a complementary focus for our envisioned foundation.

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