

campaign—what the *New York Times* called “a 21st century version of the muscular propaganda war that the United States waged in the 1940s.” Within months veteran public relations executive Charlotte Beers was confirmed as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy. But her first project, the Shared Values Initiative—an ad campaign featuring on-camera endorsements of democracy and the American way by U.S. citizens of the Islamic faith—was, to put it bluntly, “laughed off the air.” Viewed by many as ineffective and by some as counterproductive, the costly ad campaign scarcely aired. After a discreet interlude of several months, citing health concerns, Beers quietly exited her State Department post.

With the exception of those few intrepid travelers who might sing, play an instrument, recite a poem, or deliver an informal lecture while overseas, Americans as *individuals* don't possess much capacity to carry our expressive life abroad. But our *collective* expressive life embodied in movies, music, and TV shows does offer the world insight into American ideas and values. And we should be concerned about what messages get out; as President Bush's post-9/11 comments suggest, we harbor a suspicion that what the world thinks of us has importance—a feeling that can, in times of conflict, expand into an unsettling notion that the image of America projected by art and entertainment might be a critical component of our national security.

Historically, governments have accepted an inevitable flow of art and ideas from one culture to another; these cultural connections have developed naturally and organically. But today government purposefully interferes with cultural relations and exchanges in two ways. First, we engage in “cultural diplomacy,” what Richard Arndt defines as an effort “to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests.” Second, government intervenes in commerce by actively promoting the distribution of U.S. arts products around the world.

America's cultural mainstream—our collective expressive life—grounded in grassroots art making and carried across borders in CDs, movies, and radio and television broadcasts, constitutes an essential metaphor for our democratic values. The diversity of America's arts practices and the feisty individuality of jazz and abstract expressionism

FOUR America, Art, and the World

The right to be represented to the rest of the world by art that fairly and honestly communicates America's democratic values and ideals.

Late in his October 2001 press conference on “the state of our war against terror,” with his eyes on the finish line, President Bush asked rhetorically why “vitriolic hatred” of America exists in some Islamic countries: “I'm amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about, that people would hate us. . . . Like most Americans, I just can't believe it. Because I know how good we are, and we've got to do a better job of making our case.” In her postconference analysis for ABC News, commentator Cokie Roberts distilled the president's musings to a simple phrase. “President Bush,” Roberts observed, “thinks their propaganda is better than ours.”

Within weeks the White House named a quartet of administration communicators tapped to shape and implement America's wartime public relations effort. The team was charged with crafting a global ad

honestly convey the character of a free society. Bill Clinton accurately observed, "I think it's probably not wrong to say that Elvis Presley did more to win the Cold War when his music was smuggled into the former Soviet Union than he did as a GI serving in Germany." Even in the 1960s, when our nation struggled to implement domestic civil rights policy, the American arts system stood out as an arena in which diverse voices could find acceptance, respect, and opportunity. Many of the art forms at the heart of America's cultural mainstream have arisen directly from minority populations; the expressive life of such populations might never see the light of day in hierarchical societies. Culture was a kind of proxy for a broader sense of democracy and American life. So when jazz took the stage as an accompaniment to Eastern European resistance to cold war Soviet hegemony, it served as a two-part metaphor, simultaneously symbolizing the power of individual free expression to energize a coherent whole and the ability of America's black minority to affect the character of the mainstream in a free nation. This is powerful stuff; jazz, rock 'n' roll, modern dance, and abstract painting stand as art forms that connect with both the aesthetic sensibilities and the political and economic aspirations of all who engage them. But however potent the message, art delivers it gently; it's an invitation to, not a shove toward, the virtues of democracy.

If Americans have the right to assume that the windows we open to the outside world offer an accurate view of the character of our society, our government, and our values and reveal the truth of life in a plural democracy, we must answer these questions: How accurately does the world see us? Do the messages conveyed by our culture abroad help keep us safe and strong? Are government programs and global media corporations that move culture around the world making citizens of other countries more knowledgeable, more empathetic?

Unfortunately, two diverging trends in cultural exchange have conspired to answer those questions with a resounding "No!"

As William J. Holstein wrote in the *New York Times*, after the cold war "we decided that history was over and we had won." As a result, since the late 1980s the United States has cut back on cultural diplomacy and exchange while simultaneously promoting whatever movies, TV shows, and CDs would sell in the global marketplace. The character of our

culture abroad has been radically transformed by the collapse of public diplomacy and the explosion of trade in U.S. cultural goods. In 2005 the National Science Board reported that funding for cultural exchange was cut by nearly a third between 1989 and 2003. But over roughly the same period, international revenue generated by entertainment on film and tape rose from \$1.68 billion to \$8.85 billion, an increase of more than 400 percent. Given this transformation, it should be no surprise that today American culture abroad is what will sell—and it is culture that often alienates the very populations whose respect we need. As media critic Martha Bayles points out, much of our newly privatized de facto diplomatic exchange system circulates content that violates "norms of propriety still honored in much of the world."

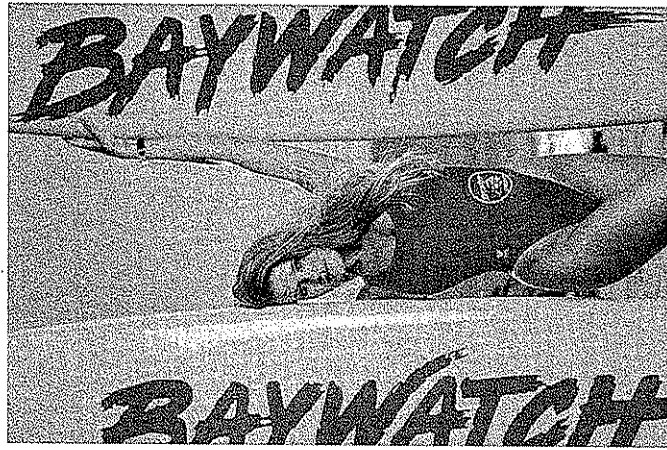
We don't have to look far for evidence. Beers's successor as undersecretary for public diplomacy, Margaret Tutwiler, was an experienced State Department hand. She had emerged as a familiar media figure during the administration of George H. W. Bush, when her position as official spokesman afforded her frequent opportunities to engage reporters during televised State Department press conferences. Tutwiler took on the public diplomacy post early in 2004 after a two-year stint as U.S. ambassador to Morocco. In speaking engagements in the weeks leading up to her confirmation as undersecretary, Tutwiler employed an anecdote drawn from her ambassadorial experience to frame one of the challenges facing the United States as we work to communicate our values to the world: Every evening, in a country with an illiteracy rate of about 33 percent, some of Morocco's most impoverished citizens drive home to villages lacking electricity, take the battery out of the car, bring it into the house, hook it up to the TV set, and tune in to *Baywatch*. On both occasions when I heard her speak, Tutwiler's story extracted audience titters and mild head-shaking. *Baywatch!* Of all things!

After all, American viewers consider *Baywatch* a fluffy tidbit of American entertainment television, mixing drama and surfside romance, with plenty of buffed, underclad, jiggling female bodies. We know, instinctively, where to place *Baywatch* along the spectrum of serious art making—more meritorious, certainly, than *America's Funniest Home Videos* but obviously lacking the depth and sophistication of *The Sopranos*

or *Law & Order*. More important, watching here at home we understand exactly how much, and how little, *Baywatch* conveys about life in the United States, life in Southern California, or our personal experience should we get a chance to strip down to bathing suits on our gorgeous Pacific Coast beaches. Because we can provide a nuanced context for domestic TV programming, it's easy for us to dismiss, as irrelevant, content so obviously at odds with the way we actually get through our lives. How amusing that Moroccans living in poor villages could be caught up in this lightweight television series!

However, the intent of Tutwiler's anecdote was entirely serious. For nonelite populations in the Middle East, *Baywatch* and its ilk too often function not only as entertainment but as a kind of anthropology as well, serving up what can all too easily be consumed not as exaggerated fiction but as a documentary glimpse into the reality of American life and values. And, according to Tutwiler and others, the view through that window is not helpful; it may provide pseudo evidence to those intent on portraying the United States as a bastion of Godless excess. "A show like *Baywatch* exhibits and reinforces almost every negative stereotype of the U.S. held by Muslim populations," Tutwiler explained. "By allowing our society to be represented overseas by popular art that portrays us as secular, violent, undisciplined and obsessed by sex, we are only making it easier for extremists to recruit terrorists from the poorest villages of many Middle Eastern countries that are critical to the success of our foreign policy and our national security."

Viewed through a foreign policy lens, the popularity of *Baywatch* among nonelite populations in the Middle East is an unfortunate accident. On the other hand, judged only as an international media success story, *Baywatch* stands as a minor triumph of American cultural enterprise. The series' ten-year run required both an unconventional approach to television production and faith in a risky distribution model. According to corporate president Syd Vinnedge, *Baywatch* is the "jewel in the crown" of All-American Television, Inc.—the company that produces and distributes the show. *Baywatch* achieved its standing among All-American offerings by pioneering an approach to international success in television that would have been impossible only a decade ago.



Following *Dallas* and a few years ahead of *Sex and the City*, an innovative business model and free-to-air transmission placed *Baywatch* at the cutting edge of America's de facto twenty-first-century cultural diplomacy. (Photo © CORBIS/SYGMA. Fee: \$265.)

Most domestic viewers may be unaware of *Baywatch*'s international pedigree. Because the show has become thoroughly familiar to American audiences, it will surprise many that the series did not have much of a life on U.S. network television: the program had not quite completed its first year on NBC when low ratings forced cancellation. But the world had turned, and by 1991 a network deal was no longer the only path to television success. In the late-twentieth-century broadcasting environment, the cancellation of a series did not necessarily mean the show was finished, for even as the network ax fell the production team had lined up alternative financing—substantial guarantees for European broadcast on satellite and cable.

Conventional broadcast industry wisdom dictates that a program must have several seasons "in the can" before it can be repackaged for syndication, but *Baywatch* tried a new approach. By the time NBC canceled the one-season series, initial foreign sales—totaling about \$450,000

per episode—appeared sufficient to allow a slendertized *Baywatch* to resume production. Operating on a tight production budget and retaining its star, David Hasselhoff (who took a pay cut and became co-executive producer), *Baywatch* emerged from its one-year stint on NBC with a business model and a global distribution system that would make the program the first American TV series primarily produced for and sustained by an overseas audience.

The innovative approach of the tenacious *Baywatch* team has paid off handsomely; today the series airs on cable or satellite in 140 countries and in 195 major cities of the world. Outside the United States *Baywatch* is available on many “free to air” channels that carry signals directly to set-top boxes equipped with special decoding chips. Unlike American satellite TV that employs dish receivers and cable requiring monthly subscription fees, Middle Eastern countries can tune in FTA channels by purchasing set-top boxes at a onetime cost of between \$20 and \$50. These digital receivers use a thirty-inch antenna; they aren’t encrypted by the service provider and don’t require a subscription. *Baywatch* caught this new wave of transmission technology and its novel revenue streams. Borne by an adventurous global business model, a TV show dismissed by critics, largely ignored by U.S. viewers, and quickly canceled by NBC became the most-watched American dramatic series in the world. More recently, shows like *Sex and the City* carry the *Baywatch* torch. Sad to say, if we want to understand how nonelite populations in the Middle East come to understand American values, we should begin by examining *Baywatch*.

It’s one thing if we *want* Moroccan villagers to learn about the United States by tuning in to the fictional antics of hard-bodied California lifeguards. Framed properly, there may even be an upside to the *Baywatch* take on American romantic love, equality of sexes and races in the workplace, and the societal benefits of dedicated, unselfish professionalism. A student at South Africa’s Rhodes College described the essence of the *Ally McBeal* series as “heterosexual colleagues and friends working closely together for a common objective and sharing each other’s daily life experiences.” But such positives may be beside the point in our current conflict with radical Islam; shows like *Baywatch*, *Sex and the City*, and *Ally McBeal* are also determinedly secular, drenched in sex and near-nudity, and unabashedly

exemplary of American materialism and hedonism. When the 9/11 Commission’s report laments that Middle Eastern views of the United States are too often “informed by cartoonish stereotypes,” its authors might well have had *Baywatch* in mind.

But, ultimately, the tragedy is not the presence of a wildly skewed depiction of life in the United States beamed down by satellites hovering above the Middle East. It is instead the total absence of calculation, coordination, or policy purpose in determining what should stand for America in the television sets and movie theaters or on the radios of citizens of other nations. Anecdotally, we sense that some American television programs and some music and movies might convey an incomplete or downright inaccurate view of American life, and in the same way we understand that other interactions—face-to-face communication among young musicians or athletes, for example—might be just the thing to communicate the remarkable opportunities afforded citizens of a pluralistic democracy. But there has been no institutional conversation, no meaningful engagement of the private sector, about just how America should tell its story. As a society, we have failed in many different ways to make the public interest—our cultural rights—part of America’s arts system, but a failure to present a balanced expressive life abroad can have life-and-death consequences. Indeed, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on Washington, DC, and New York, virtually every observer has identified the current global conflict as “cultural” in character, lamenting the absence of empathy and understanding that might mitigate differences in religion, history, and values.

Margaret Tutwiler’s Morocco-based *Baywatch* anecdote conveyed an unstated but important central fact: as ambassador, Tutwiler could *observe* the impact of American culture on the nonelite village populations, but she lacked the capacity to *shape* that impact in any significant way. Even as a longtime public servant armed with high-level political connections and an important diplomatic assignment, Tutwiler did not have access to the tools required to deflect, reformulate, or counteract the presence of *Baywatch* in the homes of poor Moroccans. It wasn’t that she lacked vision; her tenure in Morocco had enabled her to observe firsthand the intense and positive connection that quickly emerged when American

jazz musicians toured villages and jammed with indigenous players. She could see that more face-to-face interaction of that kind would help offset the message of terrorist recruiters, in the same way she understood how nightly doses of *Baywatch* did the opposite by reinforcing the message that America was a secular, hedonistic, Godless, and ultimately dangerous society.

Margaret Tutwiler couldn't do much to mount a program of cultural communication. Even if the Foreign Service and Department of State had been committed to the one-on-one cultural contact Tutwiler advocated, commercial trade in American movies, CDs, and TV series held all the cards; government broadcasting and exchange efforts were too puny to offset the forces of our arts industries in pursuit of global markets.

Contrary to the fitful efforts of recent years, in decades past the U.S. government approached cultural exchange and diplomacy more aggressively and with a measure of coherence. U.S. efforts to place art and culture in the sphere of international affairs—official, government-sponsored or government-sanctioned activities—first surfaced in the 1930s, after a well-orchestrated effort to advance the Nazi cause in Latin America through cultural export attracted the concerned attention of the Roosevelt administration. The Roosevelt White House responded with the new Division of Cultural Relations launched within the State Department. It was not only an early and direct pushback against Nazi expansionism, but it initiated the long-standing pattern in U.S. international work: bringing in the arts and the humanities as a kind of last resort. As historian Milton Cummings has noted, cultural diplomacy programs in the United States have usually been stimulated by a “perceived foreign threat or crisis.”

After 1941 and the U.S. entry into World War II, the Office of War Information was added to the American effort at cultural diplomacy with the assignment of shaping a propaganda initiative more muscular than the Latin American tours of U.S. visual art initiated in the 1930s. This first-ever wartime cultural initiative established a second pattern in “official” cultural diplomacy—the U.S. tendency to mix cultural exchange with the murkier worlds of intrigue and propaganda. It is perhaps because our

cultural diplomacy has been crisis driven that the two strands of international cultural work—the “case making” effort of building up support for U.S. policies abroad and the more benign efforts directed at international understanding—have coexisted awkwardly. Each approach has had a hand in defining official efforts at diplomacy through culture since World War II.

Any time an external threat was more than military and in part grounded in cultural difference, it became easier for elected officials and career diplomats to allow cultural work to get into the tent that included trade negotiation, global finance, and the destructive power of various configurations of conventional and nuclear arms. In 1946, faced with the postwar task of energizing a new democracy, the United States initiated just such a program of cultural exchange designed to familiarize Germans with the character of the American political system. During the ten years of the project's existence, nearly 15,000 exchanges occurred—mostly involving Germans traveling to the United States.

In addition to moving scholars, artists, and students hither and yon, U.S. cultural diplomacy early on featured the visual arts, an emphasis that continues to the present day. During the cold war struggle with the Soviet Union, the visual arts were especially valuable in transmitting a subtle propaganda message while informing the world of the work of American painters and sculptors. After all, what could be a better metaphor for the unique character of America's freedom than the experimental canvases of abstract expressionist painters? When exhibited alongside Soviet socialist realism, American art of the fifties and sixties presented a stark contrast. As Louis Menand observed in the *New Yorker*, “Abstract painting was an ideal propaganda tool. It was avant-garde, the product of an advanced civilization.” Who could possibly prefer the constrained, message-driven images of happy workers and smiling peasants to the deep, highly personal experimentation of Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, or Willem de Kooning? Surely only the American system could celebrate such inventive art making, and surely the political system that tolerated such unusual and challenging artwork possessed a moral superiority to a system compelled to make its creative citizens toe an ideological line? No doubt many government officials and members of Congress, confused or

even offended by abstract expressionist painting and modern poetry, held their tongues and supported international tours of modern art and artists simply because its allure as democratic metaphor was, at least during the cold war, too obvious to pass up.

Predictably, the cold war era produced America's most extensive investment in cultural exchange of all kinds. As early as 1946 the State Department spent government dollars touring exhibitions of corporate art collections. But it wasn't all sweetness and light (or, later, drips and splatters). Although the utility of modern art in cultural exchange kept negative forces at bay, the marriage of diplomatic purposes and cutting-edge art was never comfortable. Emboldened by early success, program director J. Leroy Davidson used \$50,000 in State Department funds to purchase works for a touring exhibition of modern American art. But in a tripartite reaction that eerily presaged attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts five decades later, conservative political leaders, spurned contemporary artists, and resentful painters in the classical tradition ganged up to attack the legitimacy of the government program, and the exhibition was quickly canceled. The art selected for purchase by Davidson was ultimately sold off as surplus government property.

Other early cold war programs in cultural diplomacy found more secure roles in the federal system. In 1953 the United States Information Agency was created, bringing the Voice of America—which had been a State Department broadcasting program—along with other cultural and educational exchange work under a single government agency. The USIA sustained its independence for more than four decades. At about the same time Public Law 79-584, known popularly as the Fulbright Act, launched the program of academic and cultural exchange that remains a centerpiece of U.S. cultural diplomacy to this day. The contest of political philosophies that pitted the United States against the Soviet Union—competing visions of modernity—possessed a cultural component and sense of urgency sufficient to create a golden era in the government-supported movement of American art abroad. Nevertheless, even duck-and-cover cold war fears were insufficient to cement the role of music, drama, history, and painting into a permanent place in international relations. Perhaps we should not have been surprised.

Remember, the U.S. cultural system and its new arts industries could only trace roots to the early twentieth century, when technology facilitated the emergence of America's populist cultural mainstream. By the cold war our vernacular art making—blues, musical theater, movie drama, jazz—hadn't yet been elevated to its deserved status as a marker of American democracy. In addition, we didn't possess a ministry of culture or department of cultural affairs that might have argued the importance of art to diplomacy; we didn't even maintain an underlying shared belief in the links between art and national identity. It was not helpful that when U.S. policy makers thought about arts and culture at all, they still mostly had in mind the great artistic and philosophical traditions inherited from Western Europe.

U.S. cultural nonprofits sensed opportunity in the instinctive refined-art bias of early efforts at cultural diplomacy, and arts organizations saw international work as a way to expand programming opportunities for orchestras, museums, operas, and dance companies. Thus in the cold war era government-sponsored culture abroad generally translated into exhibitions of painting, sculpture, or performances by dance companies and classical music ensembles. These activities lent themselves to glittering black-tie opening events at U.S. embassies around the world: it was good diplomacy in an era when our task was the promotion of American values to intellectual and political elites. But while cold war conflict could be fought over the minds of newspaper editors, scholars, and political leaders, such elite-to-elite engagement offered only limited opportunities to touch entire populations directly. Today, as we face radical ideologies grounded in poor, nonelite villages in the Middle East and elsewhere, it would be folly to return to the lectures, exhibitions, and performances that defined cold war cultural diplomacy: it is difficult to imagine that a black-tie event in a barricaded consulate featuring great art of the Western tradition will do us much good.

Art and diplomacy were always prickly bedfellows, with focused diplomatic outcomes shoved up against the expressive freedom of art making. Policy leaders had a choice: were they only interested in delivering a tailored propaganda message, or content to simply turn American art loose on the world unedited, confident that the democratic message

would get through on its own? Our State Department generally let art and ideas speak for themselves. However, from the 1950s through the 1980s the Central Intelligence Agency maintained a covert program of support for cultural exchange, research, and the publication of literary and scholarly journals. The CIA programs aimed to shape the opinions of experts and researchers around the world and engaged reputable U.S. scientists, historians, and literary scholars as authors in agency-funded journals and experts in exchange programs (usually without the knowledge of the American intellectuals involved). Although much of this CIA-funded research and cultural exchange was indistinguishable from work developed in straightforward, nonpolitical research and publishing efforts, observers saw the CIA program as crossing the line between scholarship and propaganda. A chamber music performance or art toured behind the Iron Curtain was one thing, but was the manipulation of ideas in a government-funded effort to influence leaders in other countries acceptable behavior in a democracy?

This problem—the challenge of implementing balanced, long-term programs in cultural diplomacy when government instead demands disciplined messaging and quick results—persists to this day. Appointed by President Bush in spring 2005, veteran Bush political adviser Karen P. Hughes is the third undersecretary of state for public diplomacy appointed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Hughes entered a State Department that exhibits entrenched ambivalence about both the meaning of culture in international affairs and the specific value of an arts agenda in achieving foreign policy objectives. Though her close personal relationship with the president should have made it easier to advance her initiatives, Hughes's reputation as a master administration spinmeister pointed toward an agenda strong on message, weak on cultural substance.

In spring 2005 the General Accountability Office criticized the Bush administration for its failure to develop a global communication strategy. In fact, efforts to address culture and communication had been notable nonstarters in the Bush War on Terror. The National Security Council launched two interagency committees in 2002, one dealing with "information strategy," the other with "strategic communication." Nothing

much happened, and they were subsumed under the Muslim World Outreach Policy Coordinating Committee in 2004. Undersecretary Hughes's "listening tour" of the Middle East was a PR fiasco—every bit as counterproductive as the earlier Charlotte Beers advertising campaign. In June 2006 the administration announced a new NSC interagency committee headed by Hughes and charged with a global effort to marginalize extremists, and in September Hughes launched the "Global Cultural Initiative" in a White House ceremony, but the project was for the most part a repackaging of existing NEA and National Endowment for the Humanities programming. In mid-2006, paraphrasing an "insider," *U.S. News & World Report* concluded that "Washington still has no strategic plan on how to fight the ideological war against Islamic radicalism."

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I was in Shanghai on official business and something was seriously wrong with our cultural attaché. Housed in the U.S. Consulate, she had been well informed of my travel schedule long before I arrived in China, but I didn't seem able to get her attention. She would greet me in the hotel lobby at 7:30 A.M., ride with me to an eight o'clock meeting in a government office building, but vanish by 8:20, only to reappear at my side between 10:45 and 11:00, only to disappear again until 1:15 in the afternoon. We never had more than fifteen or twenty minutes together; it didn't make any sense.

My official business in China was to attend the opening ceremonies of the November 2000 Shanghai International Arts Festival, the launch of a major international arts event. In fine Chinese fashion, the festival kicked off with spectacular fireworks and an elaborate program of choreographed music representing the many ethnic communities that make up the nation's diverse cultural landscape. It was only a few days before the 2000 U.S. presidential election, and I traveled with one eye glued to CNN International for clues as to whether the candidate who had sworn me in as NEA chairman, Al Gore, was likely to prevail.

In a country that splits authority over art and culture among dozens of agencies, in which Foreign Service professionals view culture with disdain, and whose government generally ignores culture as public policy,

it's not surprising that the U.S. Department of State can't really go higher than the chair of the NEA, a "small-agency" head, when it seeks a "designated appropriate authority" to represent the nation at gatherings of cultural leaders from around the world. That was my role in Shanghai—a kind of pretend cultural minister—and thus far my meetings had gone pretty well. In the timeless fashion of responsible diplomatic guests, my cultural colleagues from other countries and I had toured the ballet academy, enjoyed a special presentation of excerpts from Beijing Opera, and even met with Sun Jiazheng, then China's minister of culture. In a gigantic hall, interpreters crouched at our sides, we conversed slowly while comfortably sunk back in carryover staples of Mao-era diplomacy—monstrous, slab-sided, elbow-elevating armchairs. On the way back to the hotel, as we dodged traffic in the bicycle-jammed Shanghai streets, my driver turned around and said something to my interpreter, who repeated it in English. "Nixon," he said, "rode in a car just like this."

Although my casual interaction with international colleagues was cordial, I was aware at every turn that I was meeting world leaders in the arts who managed portfolios of funding and influence far beyond anything that had ever been imagined by the Arts Endowment and its supporters. After all, the NEA is just a grant-making agency with a domestic mandate; most of its money is disbursed through a competitive, juried selection process that directs funds to the most effective organizations and the most imaginative arts projects inside the United States. Unlike cultural ministers, the NEA chair does not have authority over U.S. national museums, theaters, or sports stadiums, nor does the NEA advance American art products in global trade. I was meeting with leaders who could, in their own countries and in international affairs, take positions and make commitments that might reshape entire arts systems.

I finally got the answer to my question, why was our Shanghai-based cultural attaché darting in and out of my schedule in ten-minute bites? On the third day of my visit, an assistant from the consulate showed up, and I asked her about the attaché. She replied, "Her bosses don't care much for cultural work, and they wouldn't let her put you on her official schedule. She's been carving out time with you by slicing up her lunch hour into segments so she can link up with you a few times a day." On the way

to the airport I asked directly about what I'd heard, and the attaché confirmed what her assistant had said. "In fact," she told me, "there are several people in the consulate who are so convinced that we shouldn't spend time on cultural work, they would have forbidden me to even meet with you if they'd had the authority to stop me." It was nothing personal, and it wasn't even a State Department attempt to pass judgment on the NEA. Instead, it was an illustration of the fact that in the State Department and the U.S. Foreign Service, an individual, or even an entire consulate or embassy, that gets too engaged in culture can be easily written off as "going soft."

But the idea of "soft" diplomatic work isn't a negative for everybody. Joseph Nye, an intelligence and defense official in the Clinton administration who also served as dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, coined the phrase "soft power" to describe a range of public actions designed to "shape the preferences of others." Nye includes expressive life, political and social values, and trade as elements of a soft diplomatic agenda that has the capacity to advance U.S. foreign policy by growing a foundation of understanding and support. But the commitment to the "hard" alternative—economic influence and military strength—runs deep; although Nye has argued his case over more than a decade in three books, "soft power" has not achieved significant standing with America's key foreign policy actors, the Department of State, the National Security Council, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, or our intelligence agencies. Maybe it's trickle-down thinking from one White House to another. Just as domestic cultural agencies, prejudged as purveyors of lightweight "women's work," have no traction in the West Wing, so is the use of ideas, art, and political ideals as components of foreign policy disdained by America's professional internationalists.

This view persists despite the fact that residents of every part of the globe, when surveyed, listed American television, music, and movies, along with American political values, as among the most liked elements of American society. But those respondents were less enthusiastic about the spread of American ideas and customs abroad. Brought forward as symbols of what is both most liked and least attractive about the United States as a global actor, it would seem that our expressive life should be

an attractive and productive arena for the work of career diplomats. Instead, it seems that the disregard for culture that permeates government continues to separate expressive life from foreign policy agendas. It is a sad irony that although experts and government leaders continually cite the need to build global support for U.S. culture and values, the same individuals are so infected with distrust of cultural work that they have been nearly paralyzed when it comes to creating programs that can engage a soft agenda.

Just look at what's happened since 9/11.

We've spent hundreds of millions of dollars launching and maintaining radio and TV networks targeting the Middle East. Alhurra TV costs more than \$40 million annually; Radio Sawa, \$12 million. Despite the fact that unedited American music is readily available on TV, radio, and Internet outlets in the region, Radio Sawa eliminates offensive words from American popular songs, a practice Martha Bayles dismisses as "quaint." And Alhurra, eschewing VOA's fidelity to accuracy and balance, is widely ignored as a mere purveyor of propaganda. For example, Alhurra didn't cover Abu Ghraib prison abuses until four days after the *60 Minutes* special report aired. In fact, congressional critics of Alhurra learned that top management of the U.S. government station were generally unaware of exactly what content was being aired, because none spoke Arabic. And the GAO still found that as of 2006 "there is no interagency strategy to guide State's, BBC's [Broadcasting Board of Governors], and other federal agencies' communication efforts."

Indeed, despite a post-9/11 consensus that culture and communication are key components of our struggle against radical Islam, we are less effective in cultural work than we were in 1990, at the end of the cold war. America's global competition with the Soviet Union and communism, uniquely framed as a struggle of ideas, justified an investment in expressive life as a component of international relations sufficient to support the Voice of America, the U.S. Information Agency, and the Fulbright exchange program. The collapse of Soviet Russia at the end of the 1980s pulled the rug from under cold war programming, and the Clinton administration reduced funding for the Voice of America, cut the State Department's Public Diplomacy budget, and eliminated the USIA

altogether. What was left of the USIA became part of the Department of State, and its cultural work was transformed into a program of international aid that stressed not culture but infrastructure—roads, water and sewage systems, and the like. In the mid-1960s the USIA had 12,000 employees; today the State Department has about 6,700 working on USIA-style programs. The U.S. commitment to communicating with the world through culture had always been reluctantly supported and meagerly funded; in the 1990s even that small investment was scaled back. We have not yet recovered.

Even back in the 1980s, with the cold war going strong, America's diplomatic apparatus did not view cultural interaction as a frontline weapon in the struggle against Soviet communism. And the few strategies of cultural exchange that *had* maintained a measure of traction during the decades-long cold war had been dismantled or cut back by the time of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Richard Arndt, a former State Department official, offers a blunt assessment of our commitment to cultural work around the world: "Today the cultural dimension of diplomacy has been slashed, its independence compromised, its values blurred, its human resources driven away, its budgets strangled, and its honest servants befuddled by misguided reorganizations and meretricious rhetoric." Not the best backdrop against which to mount a new war of ideas.

But, even as our government's enthusiasm for international cultural work was waning, America's arts industries were steadily expanding their global reach. The trend lines form a giant X; as the cold war and official cultural exchange wound down, exports of U.S. cultural products ramped up, increasing fivefold between 1980 and 1998. If our State Department, USIA, and Voice of America could for a time claim credit for bringing America's pluralistic expressive life to the world, by the late 1990s such assertions rang hollow: responsibility for the spread of American art had been taken over by big U.S. movie, broadcasting, and music companies. Although it is easy to criticize American efforts at public diplomacy—they lean too far toward propaganda; they are poorly funded—at least during the cold war period citizens could be assured that what got out through the Voice of America or the USIA tour had to some extent been vetted and that the artwork or performance was at least

generally congruent with American values and with the U.S. diplomatic agenda.

As the private sector ramped up, filling all gaps in the availability of American culture around the world, any sense of a coordinated cultural message was overwhelmed by the expanding arts trade. Fueled by the global ambitions of U.S. film studios, recording companies, and broadcasting companies and supported by a generalized enthusiasm for American products throughout the world, American popular entertainment could now be found everywhere. And technology, always the handmaiden to cultural innovation, played a role once again: cable television and direct-to-satellite broadcasts were important new channels for the distribution of American "content." U.S. broadcasting and film industries generated billions in annual foreign sales. For movies, foreign distribution has become critical; today only one in ten films can recover its cost from domestic revenues alone. With global trade in U.S. arts products ascendant and "official" cultural exchange diminished or dismantled, how did a post-cold war, 1990s approach to arts around the world actually play out?

While representing the State Department in fall 1999, I encountered the *de facto* power of media industry cultural diplomacy firsthand. The occasion was an informal meeting of thirty ministers of culture at a new conference center in the city of Oaxaca, in south central Mexico. I attended as the U.S. government official who most resembled a cultural minister, serving in a different setting as the department's "highest appropriate authority." The "official" agenda of this unofficial meeting was "cultural diversity," but the subtext was defined by the expanding efforts of France and Canada to use the concept of diversity and international protection of indigenous culture as levers to create an "exclusion" separating out cultural products as a special category within NAFTA-style free-trade negotiations and agreements. The protection of cultural diversity, Canadian-style, was nothing more than a cynical reworking of "diversity" into a justification of barriers designed to turn back U.S. movies, magazines, and television shows.

I was accompanied at the conference by Omie Kerr, cultural attaché for our embassy in Mexico City; our task was to head off efforts by France and

Canada to convince other cultural ministries (from Spain, the Sudan, and Switzerland, for example) to cosign a document advancing a cultural trade position detrimental to U.S. interests. The sessions were long and tedious; headphones on and off to follow intricate maneuvering through simultaneous translations connecting French, Spanish, and English speakers. However, in proper diplomatic fashion, conversation outside the formal discussions was relaxed and friendly. At an evening reception on a patio bathed in a sunset glow, Benjamin Gbane, the cultural minister representing South Africa, approached me with a question. "Chairman Ivey," he began, "would you help me understand your government's policy in relation to an incident that recently occurred in my country?" Once I had respectfully disclaimed any special mastery of U.S. foreign policy, I agreed to listen.

Gbane explained that about a year earlier his government had begun to consider the implementation of local content regulation—a rule requiring that South African radio and TV stations devote a specified percentage of entertainment programming to music, dance, and drama produced in South Africa. Such a rule had been in place for years in Canada, which, like a number of other nations, had used domestic content rules to prevent imported U.S. music and television programs from pushing aside the work of homegrown arts industries. "We had not even begun to seriously consider how such a rule would be implemented, and we received a very sharp phone call from your embassy," Gbane continued. "I thought your official State Department position was to encourage diversity and to acknowledge the importance of protecting indigenous art? If that is your position, how could we have received such an official phone call?"

Omie had overheard the question, and I looked to her for guidance. She shrugged; the official policy at State *was* to be supportive of local efforts to preserve cultural heritage and identity; she had no idea what would have prompted such an embassy call. But the question stayed with me through the conference and after, and whenever I was around State Department specialists or administration internationalists, I'd ask about the apparent contradiction between official policy and that embassy phone call. I confirmed that State had treated the sensitive issue diplomatically, and although the department was frequently dismayed by the

negative trade effects of local content rules, official policy had continued to recognize the right of nations to protect the integrity of culture and heritage.

I finally got my answer a year after the Oaxaca meeting. I had been asked to address a group of senior State Department career staff. Unlike political appointees who come and go with changes in administrations or the White House mood, career professionals provide expertise, continuity, and institutional memory in federal agencies. Sure, at times they dig in and resist change, but career staff are generally deeply patriotic and unflinchingly loyal to the mission of their department or agency. Today I was speaking to the best of the best—top professionals at State, thirty leaders who had competed to take a year away from their regular assignments and tour the world, engaging issues critical to international relations. I brought them up to date on the NEA and its relationship with Congress and described my vision for the future of federal arts funding. After my talk I took questions, and on a sudden whim I asked if they would take one from me. As I completed my anecdote—Oaxaca, Minister Gbane, local content, and the embassy phone call—several heads were nodding in recognition. "Oh, I know," somebody spoke up. "It was the USTR; somebody with the U.S. Trade Representative's Office got wind of the local content rule. They called the embassy and got the embassy to complain to the minister. It happens all the time." Again, there was widespread nodding in agreement.

The explanation made perfect sense; just as the arts industries had become the primary purveyors of American culture to the world, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative had emerged as their advocate—a major actor in semiofficial arts diplomacy. After all, our State Department had never placed emphasis on cultural work; in the Foreign Service time spent as cultural attaché was little more than an anchor dragging down a diplomatic career. But business leaders had long suspected that, in State, trade issues also played second fiddle to diplomacy based on aid and military might. As far back as the Kennedy administration, pro-business legislators had sought to bypass normal diplomatic channels. Using the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 to appoint a representative for trade negotiations within the administration, Kennedy issued Executive Order 11075 creating

the Special Representative for Trade. By 1974 the position had acquired permanent status within the executive branch; in 1980 President Jimmy Carter increased the number of employees attached to the office and approved the name change to United States Trade Representative. Even as other government efforts at cultural exchange wobbled after the cold war, the Office of the USTR grew, emerging as a leading actor in overseas work in film, recording, and broadcasting.

In part, the expanding role of the USTR in the global distribution of U.S. culture was simply a result of growth in the export of audiovisual arts products. In addition to their earning power, cultural exports have remained uniquely immune to issues of trade imbalance—a perennial bright spot in U.S. foreign trade. At the same time, indigenous arts industries in other countries have been incapable of creating products of sufficient appeal to export anything close to the amount of U.S. film, television, and sound recordings that are imported. In fact, non-U.S. domestic arts industries have even had great difficulty competing with American culture in their home markets; hence a tendency for governments to embrace protectionist restraints on trade designed to shore up domestic media production. But even in the face of growing U.S. trade deficits and pushbacks from countries resentful of the power of U.S. movies and CDs abroad, year after year America's cultural industries have been able to proudly proclaim their arts products "America's biggest export." (There are signs, however, that America's automatic hegemony in entertainment products is on the decline; India's Bollywood film industry is an export powerhouse.)

In part because U.S. arts products are so successful on the global scene, audiovisual material and other intellectual properties have surfaced as major points of contention in international trade negotiations and agreements. Persistent efforts to create exceptions to free trade in arts products put forward by countries on the receiving end of America's cultural juggernaut have engaged the staff of the USTR in near-continuous negotiation. The unique character of U.S. arts products has effectively immunized American movies, CDs, and television programs from the effects of global competition. It has never been much of a challenge to pump up demand for the products of America's cultural mainstream; instead, our

heritage and culture, Sheila Copps. Copps was a major proponent of Canada's anti-American cultural content restrictions. Beginning nearly a decade before the 1999 meeting, Copps and her counterpart in the French Ministry of Culture had developed a strategy to seize control of an emerging issue in diplomacy—the protection of the integrity of tribal and nonelite cultures in an environment of global trade. But Copps and her allies had an ulterior motive—the reconfiguration of *cultural diversity* into a headline behind which countries could project trade barriers resistant to U.S. audiovisual exports. They used the attractive notion of *diversity*, to, as George Will wrote, “attempt to legitimize cultural protectionism.” By bundling diplomatic and trade issues and aligning the combination under the hot-button diversity question so important to emerging nations and minority populations, Copps effectively packaged a trade issue in a fashion that didn't fit the mandate of any single U.S. agency. Our State Department, weak on culture, had been supplanted in arts trade by the USTR's Office, which lacked a mandate to take on issues of cultural rights and diversity and thus was rarely even at the table when UNESCO, the U.N., or other diplomatic forums took up the demands of indigenous and minority communities around the world.

By positioning the diversity/protection issue in the policy void between the uninterested authority of State and the limited portfolio of the U.S. Trade Representative, Copps had brilliantly hit the ball right between first and second base, dividing the talents of America's primary global actors and ensuring that nobody (or only an official as relatively insignificant as the NEA chair) would effectively represent U.S. positions on protectionist trade policy. By the time I met with the thirty ministers of culture gathered “informally” in Mexico, Minister Copps and her colleagues had, for nearly ten years, patiently assembled a coalition of like-minded ministries determined to extract audiovisual materials and other arts products from international free trade agreements. In fall 2005 the long-term plan to plant protectionist trade policy inside the Trojan horse of diversity came to fruition; UNESCO passed a convention on diversity containing the key trade provisions promoted by Canada and France. The final vote was 148 to 2, with only Israel and the United States voting no. Sheila Copps had left her position as Canada's minister of

cultural industries have been challenged to set in place mechanisms of distribution, licensing, and payment strong enough to offset the ability of illegal duplicators to serve demand through pirated copies. Both in size and in their ability to vanquish competition, America's arts exports hold unique stature in the U.S. foreign trade agenda. When we read of contentious negotiations surrounding NAFTA, GATT, the World Intellectual Property Organization, and the World Trade Organization, arts products are certain to be at the heart of many disagreements.

As the official trade advocate for the U.S. arts industries, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has emerged as the most powerful single actor advancing America's expressive life abroad. Long-standing antipathy to cultural work within the State Department, the elimination of the USIA, and the ambivalence of elected leadership regarding the value of international arts exchange has in a sense left the USTR's Office as the “only man standing.” If the USTR's Office can direct an embassy of the United States to intervene in the internal affairs of an ally on behalf of the U.S. domestic recording industry and if that intervention advances a trade position somewhat at variance to the posture of the State Department, it is clear that today trade in culture trumps diplomacy.

The way government connects with the movement of American culture in the world illustrates a major thread of my argument: In terms of both domestic and foreign issues, what passes for cultural policy work in the U.S. system is split into small pieces parceled out among dozens of federal agencies, administration offices, and congressional committees. But what is merely dismaying on the domestic scene can be dangerous and tragic when played out in international affairs. The movement of American culture abroad, a transfer of creative expression that takes place absent any central conversation about goals, principles, or content, too readily provides an inaccurate portrait of American society while simultaneously failing to anticipate coming problems in trade, rights, and distribution that will turn back our enviable history of success in global cultural commerce. Ironically, other countries have taken advantage of the fact that America's cultural portfolio is divided to actually counteract our trade agenda.

The Oaxaca meeting where I learned of the USTR's intervention in South African public policy had been organized by Canada's minister of

heritage and culture more than two years earlier, but her plan, taking full advantage of our disjointed approach to art abroad, worked brilliantly. Ministries of culture or departments of cultural affairs frequently combine cultural and trade issues in a single portfolio. Then and now the chair of the NEA has no such broad responsibilities—only limited contact with the State Department, none with the USTR's Office, and none with the National Security Council. So by the time I met the Canadian-French juggernaut in Oaxaca, it was too late in the game to head off a vote on a final meeting report antagonistic to U.S. interests. But I learned a lesson: on a very important trade issue, our incoherent system of managing cultural issues had put America behind a diplomatic and trade policy eight ball.

Bringing American culture abroad in the right way can be an important tool of diplomacy, even a national security asset, but it's not a magic wand. Sometimes people don't like us because of what we're doing, not because of the way our art, ideas, and values are presented by embassies, touring entertainers, and media. David Rieff frames the question this way: "Is hostility toward the United States based largely on misperceptions of America's actions and intentions or on a genuine dislike of the power America wields around the world?" One thing is clear: today's market-driven model of cultural interaction hasn't helped our image abroad. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, "In Brazil, 52 percent held a favorable view of the United States in 2002; by the following year that had dropped to 34 percent. In Russia, the pro-American portion of the population dropped from 61 percent to 36 percent over a year." In spring 2004, also according to Pew, 93 percent of Jordanians had a somewhat or very unfavorable view of the United States, in Morocco the numbers were a bit better: negative opinions were held by only 68 percent.

But can the arts help when war, terrorism, or other acts of violence subvert the civil exchange characteristic of "normal" diplomatic relations? I believe they can play an important role.

In times of general accord it's possible for diplomacy to be transactional: I give you money, trade advantages, access to information or other resources, and I then get something in return. But when military action, trade sanctions, or conflicts over human rights create intractable policy differences, transactional diplomacy that aims at short-term *quid pro quo*

outcomes may be impossible. Acknowledging the reality that periods of heightened conflict make it difficult for nations to trade favors, political scientists in the United Kingdom have embraced the concept of mutuality—trust based on a shared understanding of long-term values and aspirations; the kind of nontransactional trust we place in family members or close friends. After World War II the United States could draw from a deep well of this kind of nonspecific trust, and it is fair to argue that today we are suffering from the long, slow evaporation of that reservoir.

Mutuality is a mechanism for building long-term trust, and art and culture—as arenas of *difference without conflict*—can be its handmaidens. If cold war cultural diplomacy was about getting political elites in other countries to respect the values of our market democracy, mutuality serves a pressing contemporary need: letting common people around the world know that we—the only superpower in the world—respect the values of others. However, because mutuality, by definition, rises above the dispute of the day, it can be a hard policy sell at home. After all, mutuality, like soft diplomacy, doesn't promise short-term solutions, requiring instead lasting two-way communication and a real acceptance and understanding of the overarching goals of even those who oppose us: mutuality is less about talking loudly and more about listening well. Even in the halcyon days of the cold war, when public diplomacy was an important gear in the engine of international affairs, almost all our work was in the "send" mode, using touring, international broadcasting, and subsidized intellectual journals to "get our message out." Today post-9/11 insistence on quick results eliminates long-term solutions: no time for the luxury of Joe Nye's soft diplomacy; we want effective transactions right now. In addition, whether through Arabic-speaking TV networks or Muslim-targeting ad campaigns, we're almost entirely caught up in pounding away at the delivery of our message.

It shouldn't be this way. Ideally, when policy disputes make short transactional diplomacy impossible it should be possible to regroup, to slowly rebuild trust on the foundations of mutuality. However, in the face of pressure to reverse global negative views of the United States, it is probable that Undersecretary Hughes and company were never afforded

an opportunity to pursue mutual concerns or long-term trust with the nonelite populations of the Middle East.

Other countries are way ahead of us when it comes to cultural work bold enough to grow mutual interests from entrenched mistrust. In September 2007 the British Museum opened an exhibition on Qin Shi Huangdi, China's first emperor. The exhibition, which included terracotta warriors from Xi'an, was given five stars by London's *Times*. As an opinion piece in the *Financial Times* observed, the British Museum, targeting not only China but also Iran, "has been at the forefront in using cultural links to deal constructively with 'difficult' countries." Denmark and Sweden invest actively in efforts to introduce musicians and other artists to audiences in the United States. Trade and culture officials regularly scope out U.S. music festivals, work to influence critics, and subsidize recordings and tours for acts. According to the *New York Times*, Canadian artists can assemble grants and loans to cover up to 75 percent of expenses. In Australia the government provided nearly \$2 million in grants to eighty acts, just for the export of their music. One goal, of course, is market development, but the positive diplomatic impact of direct contact with popular musicians from outside the United States is undeniable.

The incoherent voice of our expressive life abroad is telling evidence of the absence of commitment and coordination around public interest goals in the implementation of U.S. cultural policy. When *Baywatch* or *Sex and the City* trumps Alhurra TV, when Canada's minister of heritage and culture can redefine *diversity* and *cultural heritage* without our noticing, and when short-term trade interests overrule State Department principles, the public interest is not being served; our right to expressive life as a vehicle for authentic communication and understanding is denied. Obviously, framing a more coherent international message is challenging in a democracy. We must take care: organized expressive life easily tips over into propaganda, and the desire to craft content to convey a specific message can undermine First Amendment rights.

Given our devotion to free expression and open markets, what can we do to sustain our right to an international cultural message that accurately presents both America's creativity and American values? First, even if the power of media products makes it unlikely that our official instruments

of cultural diplomacy will ever be restored to positions of cold war dominance, much can be accomplished by simply coordinating the efforts of the many entities that have some responsibility for the movement of art and culture around the world. Certainly the U.S. State Department, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative are the lead actors; in addition, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of Homeland Security manage programs that use scholarly research, art, and culture on a global stage. Both the National Security Council and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative are proven models for coordinating the efforts of many departments and agencies.

Journalist George Lesser, writing in the *Washington Post*, had a simpler proposal: "Re-create the USIA as an independent agency charged with conducting public diplomacy." Perhaps Lesser is right. But it will need to be a very different USIA—one tasked with a twenty-first-century challenge, to communicate both the dream of democracy and the validity of our long-term goals and our regard for the heritage, values, and aspirations of others. Bringing back the cold war USIA just won't work.

But a resuscitated USIA, a slightly reconfigured USTR's Office, or even our cultural agencies—the NEA, the NEH, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Library of Congress—can help define and coordinate international cultural communication. In some ways, because they already engage trade, touring, and scholarly exchange year in and year out, these agencies are best equipped to lead a new approach to cultural work abroad. Of course, ultimate responsibility for U.S. foreign policy resides in the White House, and here, unfortunately, the long-standing, bipartisan lack of interest in cultural work exhibited by one administration after another will make it especially difficult to find the interagency juice necessary to pull competing agendas into a coordinated effort.

When the long-anticipated "National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication" emerged in summer 2007, the plan promised to "identify, highlight and nurture common interests and values" and provide "expanded arts and cultural partnerships," but it clearly tilts away from cultural diplomacy toward "strategic communication." Among other things, the plan fails to mention the role of trade in music,

television, and film as a component of the U.S. image and message abroad. Available only as a draft in fall 2007, the Center for Strategic and International Studies Commission on "Smart Power," co-chaired by Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye, of soft-power fame, called on the United States to "move from eliciting fear and anger to inspiring optimism and hope." If the commission's report gains policy traction, culture will be an important part of any resulting initiative.

Predictably, discussion of cultural issues lies buried in chapter 12 of the 9/11 Commission Report, and it has taken the Bush administration nearly six years to develop a coordinating committee on culture and communication—interrelated facts, each symptomatic of an absence of interest and urgency at the top. Further, it is important to recognize that we would not find the words *culture* and *art* in the official authorizing language of many of the agency actors that actually work with expressive life, so there's no existing statutory mandate requiring attention to the character and impact of our expressive life abroad. It should thus come as no surprise when agencies and offices find themselves working at cross purposes as, for example, when Radio Sawa or Alhurra broadcast programming that contradicts what is aired on VOA's English and Arabic stations, or when programming that undercuts the content of "official" American entertainment runs on free-to-air satellite stations, to say nothing of trade practices that effectively offset State Department commitments to diversity of content. In fact, cultural authority is scattered so randomly among international actors that it is not even clear which agency is best equipped to lead the discussion should a serious coordination effort ever be launched. An updated USIA can help, but an independent department of cultural affairs or a standing White House national cultural council would be even more effective.

Once we decide which of our actors inside government can best speak for the nation on international cultural matters, we need to make our commercial media industries partners in the pursuit of America's diplomatic agenda. The First Amendment properly protects the purveyors of culture abroad from any attempt by government to restrict or edit the content of what they sell in foreign movie theaters or on cable or satellite television. However, there's nothing wrong with bringing in top entertainment pro-

ducers to think through what *might* be done to coordinate our cultural message without trampling on First Amendment rights. For example, perhaps episodes of shows like *Baywatch*, *Dallas*, and *The Sopranos* can be framed by experts who, speaking in the language of a targeted country or region, can place the plot elements in context. It's not a perfect idea, and just explaining that American women don't wear bikinis *all* the time won't turn around negative views of the United States, but at least we can begin to search for niches within entertainment products where official public-interest objectives for culture abroad can function effectively alongside the goals of commercial distributors of movies, records, and media.

We can also find ways to offset the perception that our media exports are suppressing indigenous arts industries. Trade negotiator Carol Balassa of the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has argued that we should soften the impact of our exported entertainment by helping to build up the domestic production and distribution capabilities of other nations around the world—especially the capacity of those countries with emerging film and broadcasting industries, or those that find American culture offensive or oppressive. Again, the solution is not perfect, but strong domestic arts industries in other countries can allow homegrown products to find their way to theater screens and satellite channels, thereby making it less necessary for countries to construct strategies for keeping U.S. movies and television out.

The role of our nonprofit arts communities in a twenty-first-century initiative of cultural diplomacy and mutuality is uncertain. In the elite-to-elite atmosphere of the cold war competition between U.S. and Soviet political and economic models, the fine arts played an obvious role. But U.S. nonprofits failed to develop their own foreign exchange policy objectives; our orchestras, museums, and dance companies never moved beyond the view that government-supported culture abroad was primarily an additional revenue stream. To play a role in today's overarching global struggle, nonprofits must develop a vision of public service, pitch their efforts away from economic and intellectual elites, and partner with the for-profit cultural industries that are the big dogs of U.S. art abroad. The sector may not be up to, or even open to, the task. On the other hand, our

foundations are well positioned to lead. But if rap lyrics, dance beats, and three-on-three basketball workshops in remote villages are the currency of mutuality, our grant makers will need new partners.

Some challenges to America's cultural rights—access to heritage, training in the arts, and linking public policy with the insight of artists—exhibit a subtle character and are only now beginning to enter our national conversation. But the state of American culture abroad is different: our inability to gather our cultural assets into something approaching a coherent diplomatic message constitutes a tragic failure of imagination in public policy.

We need to take action now.

The U.S. cultural system is defined partly by public policy but mostly by corporate practice, and in an open society purveyors of art in the global marketplace are, most properly, under no obligation to bend their artistic visions to suit some foreign policy objective. But Americans have the right to expect that the totality of our expressive life abroad responsibly conveys an accurate picture of American life and values. This citizen expectation—our right to representative culture abroad—would be reasonable in any era. It is crucial at a time when our values are competing for the goodwill and hopes of nonelite populations around the globe. Just as an incoherent approach to cultural trade allowed substantial U.S. interests to ride on the modest negotiating skills of the head of our federal arts funding agency, the absence of a “center” around which to hold a conversation about art as a democratic metaphor abroad too often allows the marketplace to define America's message to the world. Two months after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President Bush observed, “Too many have the wrong idea of Americans as shallow, materialistic consumers who care only about getting rich or getting ahead.” With the United States served by a policy system uninterested in coordinated cultural exchange and willing to carelessly cede the movement of expressive life abroad to media industries, neither we nor our president should be surprised when our character is defined not by assertions that we are “good people” but instead by the image of a gaggle of hard-bodied beauties romping on a Kodachrome rendering of a California beach.

FIVE Art of Lasting Value

The right to know about and explore art of the highest quality and to the lasting truths embedded in those forms of expression that have survived, in many lands, through the ages.

In northern Michigan, March is still the dead of winter. It was blowing hard enough to make me think twice about driving the upper road to Hancock—a route guaranteed, when the wind was from the northwest, to hand you nine miles of dusty, sideways-blowing snow. I sure didn't want to spend late-night hours digging out of a drift when there was school the next day. Most seniors had it pretty easy, but my mother was one of the high school teachers, so there was no way I could be late. But there were no longer any movie theaters operating in my town; we had to plan on a drive to and from Hancock to see a film.

In the end I took a chance, and the weather was fine. Sitting nearly alone in the Pic Theater, I saw *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*, in Portuguese), the French-produced film that retells the Greek legend of Orpheus and his love, Eurydice, through the language, music, and atmosphere of the 1959