

"Thanks to the pressure of the cold war and the competition with the Soviet Union, we have assumed the duty of sending our cultural emissaries abroad to prove that our aspirations touch the mind and spirit as well as the body's comforts. The Congress has appropriated about \$2,500,000 each year to help defray the cost of these expeditions of orchestras, soloists, dance troupes, lecturers, and jazz units. And the program has won wide approval.

"But think how impressive would be a far-ranging and penetrating cultural life in Washington itself. The Ambassadors and Ministers and their staffs would relish it and report back home accordingly. The foreign visitors, who come in increasing numbers in the era of the jet plane, would not have to be sold a bill of propaganda goods; they could see and hear for themselves.

"In the long run, societies and nations are esteemed for their humanity and humanism, not their wealth or might. Their values are revealed most searchingly in the caliber of their learning, science, and culture. Washington should be the steadfast showcase of our values. And in the arts this showcase should be large, diverse, and vivid. It should embrace what is established and indisputably great, and it should encourage a ferment of new creative ideas. To take the theater as one example: If New York is the sharpest testing ground of commercial productions, why shouldn't Washington set the Nation an example of how exciting a chain of permanent repertory that could be?

"But how are such enormous goals to be encompassed?

"In the first place, the energy in Washington itself must be released. In a city where policy is made by a few top officials, the habit of initiative has been lulled in many able and imaginative people. The permanent residents, and they are preponderant, must bestir themselves. They must support their institutions and help to create new ones. They should fight hard to prevent the image of the Capital being formed by innocents and know-nothings whom the voters continue to elect and who play a part in making policy for us all.

"Seasoned observers in Washington insist that the caliber of our public servants, elected and appointed, has risen markedly. The old Washingtonians and the new who believe in the destiny of the Capital must join hands to promote it.

"Secondly, there must be an awareness in the highest echelons of leadership that lip-service in the arts is not enough. The men with informed tastes in the arts in executive, legislative, and judicial positions of importance should propound large-visioned ideals and programs. They must be active and unremitting supporters of all that adorns and ennobles life. When they take action they should be sure that they are acting knowledgeably and wisely.

"The National Culture Center, whose noted architect, Edward Durrell Stone, recently made public his designs, is a spectacular case in point. The drawings and blueprints suggest that Washington will get another stately mansion, a vast, domed temple devoted to the performing arts. Congress has voted an attractive 10-acre site near the Potomac. There are detailed reports on how the setting will be beautified. One hears that the multipurpose structure will contain an opera house, a concert hall, a theater, auditoriums, a grand salon useful as a ballroom, restaurants, and outdoor terraces.

"One discovers that the center will be employed for elaborate state occasions like inaugural balls and the reception of distinguished foreigners. One is cheered by the news that it will become a tourist attraction for Americans not even interested in the arts. One reads that a Cabinet member thinks that the center will give the coup de grace to the scornful criticism 'that America is culturally a primitive nation.'

"Unhappily, there is little or no discussion as to what will be performed or who will perform it in the various performance areas. Presumably the National Symphony and various touring attractions will have a new forum. But there is no mention of anything else that is indigenous to Washington, of anything that has been created out of the Capital's own ingenuity and enthusiasm. The Arena Stage and Opera Society, both homegrown and worth while, have scarcely been consulted.

"Thirdly, there must be an adequate financial basis for progress. Consider the case of the National Culture Center again. The hope is that it will be financed by contributions from individuals and institutions all over the United States. But will ceaseless money-raising campaigns be required to fill it the year round and year after year with vital presentations? The boxoffice, we know, will not turn the trick. Is the answer some sort of Government subsidy?