

Above Criticism: NCAC, PEN America, NEA et al.

by [G. Tod Slone](#) (April 2025)



The Scapegoat (William Holman Hunt, 1854)

The National Coalition Against Censorship [issued an open-letter](#) statement in February signed by a handful of other organizations, including PEN America: “Arts and Free Speech Organizations Sound the Alarm: On Entering a ‘Golden Age’ of Propaganda and a ‘Starvation Age’ of Art and Culture.” In essence, the letter is a thinly-disguised call to protect and maintain the propaganda espoused by its signatories.

As for the so-called “golden age” of propaganda, had it not already reached its height under the Biden regime, which helped lead to the regime’s very downfall? As for the “starvation age,” what does that even mean? Well, obviously,

it means less government funding for art and culture, which ought to be a good thing because inevitably government funding is not objective, but rather ideologically and aesthetically subjective. As an unfunded artist and editor, I am against such funding of art and culture. True, I've never been able to obtain a grant despite having tried, amongst others, the NEA, Mid-Cape Cultural Council, Massachusetts Cultural Council, and Concord Cultural Council. In fact, the latter outright rejected my proposal because immediately after it, the Council stated on its website that it will not fund projects "of a political nature" (see [here](#)). Government funding inevitably provokes artists, writers, etc. to self-censor, especially regarding the funders themselves. Dare bite the hands that feed—the elites at the helms of funding organizations—and risk no more funding.

"Today, a cohort of national free speech and arts organizations expressed outrage at the Trump Administration's recent efforts to establish ideological control over federally-funded cultural initiatives in the United States," announces the cohort itself. But where was its outrage during the Biden regime's [creation of](#) its anti-free speech Disinformation Governance Board and the regime's widespread DEI ideological ever-metastasizing control?

The new study, conducted by the Functional Government Initiative and the Center for Renewing America, identified 460 programs across 24 government agencies in the Biden administration that diverted resources to DEI initiatives.

At least \$1 trillion of taxpayer money was infused with DEI principles, the study states.

The new Trump regime has not created an agency to limit free speech. Biden's speech-control Disinformation Governance Board was short lived because it was egregiously evident that faceless, unaccountable bureaucrats would be deciding what information was false and intending to mislead. Intelligent

ideologues like those at the NCAC and PEN helms simply cannot seem to understand that controlling information is the way to increased power for the controllers. What the Trump regime appears to be doing is getting rid of the past regime's control of information via its subjective labeling determinations of disinformation and misinformation. Today, the bulk of "cultural initiatives" and organizations certainly appear to be ideologically-controlled by the left.

The US Congress controls federal funding of art and culture. Today, the Republican Party has the majority and appears to be backing Trump. The cohort does not mention that. Instead, it notes "an alarming departure from the fundamental democratic principle that the government may not interfere with artistic expression because of hostility toward its viewpoint." And yet in the case of the previous administration's espousal of DEI ideology, it was clearly interfering with artistic expression by promoting and mandating DEI adherence. Create art critical of the latter, and good luck trying to get a grant. The left-wing cohort argues that "Rather than investing in a culture that is vibrant, free, and eclectic, the current administration clearly sees government-supported art as a tool for government propaganda." The terms "vibrant, free, and eclectic" are highly subjective, certainly not objective, and thus serve the propaganda of the cohort, not reality. To illustrate the point, the previous administration, not Trump, anointed a "government propaganda" inaugural poet, Amanda Gorman. Why wasn't the cohort up in arms over that (see [here](#))?

"Recently, the National Endowment for the Arts," noted the cohort, "the country's single largest funder of the arts and arts education, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, which funds research and programming on subjects of history, literature, and philosophy, announced the sudden restructuring of their grant programs criteria as directed and enforced by the current presidential administration." Personally, I fought against the ideological bent of the NEA, which simply

dismissed my request for a grant in one brief sentence: "The artistic merit of the publication is low; the design and readability of the publication is [sic] poor." The NEA judges refused to provide any further information regarding that harsh judgement, despite my request. What precisely their biases were, I'd never know, though had no doubt they conformed to the left-wing arts establishment. I'd openly criticized it in several cartoons and in an [essay](#)." It never deigned to respond. Is that democracy? No. Its cultural autocracy.

"As federal agencies, the NEA and NEH must ensure that project proposals adhere to all Executive Orders," notes the cohort, "including those that prohibit the agencies from providing grants to organizations that have any 'discriminating' programs promoting 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' or for any programs that promote what the administration refers to as 'gender ideology.'"

Clearly, the problem with DEI is the left's forcing it down the throats of citizens (artists, etc.). Criticize it in an art project and no funding for you. Eliminating egregious DEI discrimination is a good thing, not a bad one.

The cohort then evokes the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in DC, which many consider an elitist organization. Trump fired its director. "The recent changes mark a sharp shift away from the founding principles of both institutions," argues the cohort. "The NEA and NEH were created together to "enable [Americans] to recognize and appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of our lives, the diversity of excellence that comprises our cultural heritage, and artistic and scholarly expression." Again, the use of highly subjective terms like "aesthetic," "diversity of excellence," and "scholarly expression" serves those employing them, certainly not objectivity. How easy for them to argue something or someone not to be "aesthetic," "diversity of excellence," and "scholarly." Terms like those should be avoided in an effort

to favor objectivity and reality, as opposed to subjectivity and ideology. And of course, the problem with the arts is the inevitable un-objective determinations made by arts curator censors. Trump will simply attempt to replace those determinations with those made by his administration and proponents.

The cohort further argues that “Celebrating and honoring the ‘diversity of excellence’ that constitutes our cultural and historical milieu is simply not possible when all art and scholarship must first pass a partisan litmus test [...].” And yet was not such a test already embedded by the previous regimes ... and within the administrative realms of the NEA, NEH, and Kennedy Center? Clearly, art and culture that depends on tax-payer funding cannot be truly independent. How aberrant that the cohort cannot seem to comprehend that!

“Rather than laying the groundwork for a ‘golden age’ of art, these new changes promise to starve the cultural sphere,” laments the cohort, “and put what’s left of it in service to the federal government. This new embrace of propaganda is as much a threat to the arts as it is to democracy.” Clearly, the so-called new “embrace of propaganda” was the one embraced by the cohort itself prior to the Trump regime, that of DEI ideology! Psychological projection has become a hackneyed response of ideologues nowadays. Blind to that, the cohort further laments that its own left-wing ideological conformity might be replaced, though of course not putting it in such simple terms. “In the face of these blatant efforts to subject the arts to ideological conformity, our nation’s cultural leaders—the curators, librarians, directors of cultural spaces, museum trustees, artists, theater directors, authors, or publishers—are now left to uphold the founding American values of freedom of expression.”

The cohort concludes: “Without principled resistance, the current administration achieves its greatest victory of all: preemptive self-censorship and culture of compliance.” In

essence, its own “preemptive self-censorship and culture of compliance” might very well and hopefully be eliminated.

Finally, as a common American citizen, once again I must ask why those at the helms of the National Coalition Against Censorship and PEN America did not/do not consider that my own free expression has been ostracized by their curators, librarians, poets, artists et al. I have even been punished by several no-trespassing decrees (see [here](#) and [here](#)). And why did they not respond to the criticisms I’ve sent them over the years? Do they really somehow believe that they are above criticism?

N.B.: For my past criticisms regarding the NCAC, PEN America, and the NEA please see the following essays and satirical cartoons:

https://theamericandissident.org/orgs/national_endowment_for_the_arts.html

<https://www.globalfreepress.org/contributors/usa/g-tod-slone/3936-15-threats-to-free-speech-2015-an-egregious-and-purposeful-omission>

<https://www.globalfreepress.org/contributors/usa/g-tod-slone/3415-pen-an-ethical-consideration>

<https://www.globalfreepress.org/contributors/usa/g-tod-slone/3825-pen-an-ethical-consideration-part-ii>

https://theamericandissident.org/orgs/national_coalition_against_censorship.html

<https://www.globalfreepress.org/contributors/usa/g-tod-slone/3936-15-threats-to-free-speech-2015-an-egregious-and-purposeful-omission>

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G. Tod Slone, PhD, lives on Cape Cod, where he was permanently banned in 2012 without warning or due process from Sturgis Library, one of the very oldest in the country. His civil rights were being denied because he was not permitted to attend any cultural or political events held at his neighborhood library. The only stated reason for the banning was “for the safety of the staff and public,” yet he has no criminal record and has never made a threat. His real crime was that he challenged, in writing, the library’s “collection development” mission that stated “libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view.” His point of view was somehow not part of “all points of view.” In November 2022, he requested the library [rescind its banning decree](#), which it finally did. He is a dissident poet/writer/cartoonist and editor of [The American Dissident](#).

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