

ASSOCIATE THE ARTS WITH CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM

Influence: The Committee is primarily concerned with the effects of media on the participation of visible minorities in Canadian society, but is also aware that government policies regarding the arts have a significant influence on the media.

Dilemma: Arts and culture programs in Canada have accorded a special place to aboriginal peoples, recently transcending the paternalism of earlier periods, but other non-white minorities and some white minorities continue to be largely ignored. In our view, the latest review of Canadian cultural policy by the Applebaum-Hébert Committee did little or nothing to redress this situation. The basic dilemma is that arts officials aim at ethnic neutrality in programming, but the effect of ethnic free programming and policy in Canada has been to discourage the participation of minorities in the arts.

Standards: In the criteria of artistic programming, there appears to be an assumption that high standards in Canada are essentially Anglo-French. Often there is an appeal to international standards, but these appeals are ultimately to classical European standards which further reinforce Anglo-French standards in Canada. The fine arts appear to be exempt from Canadian multiculturalism, and by implication, multiculturalism is applicable only to folk arts and crafts. It is seldom acknowledged that minority cultures have "high" art that deserves a place in Canadian cultural institutions.

Amateur: A drama director from Montreal explained to the Committee that the Canada Council's insistence on serving professional artists has had the effect of discriminating against minorities. Since minority artists receive very few grants or other services from the Canada Council or such bodies, the implication at the official level was that arts in the minority communities were amateur by standards as well as by mode. The Canada Council's view has been ethnocentric because it fails to consider that arts in minority communities are executed less often for remuneration and more often for social purposes. Communal participation in arts is often encouraged in minority communities as opposed to the individualism implicit in the Council's conception of the professional artist.

Less accessible: The longstanding dichotomy in Canada between high art (British or French in origin) and folk arts (originating in other cultural communities) was sharpened by recent administrative changes. Responsibility for the arts shifted to the Department of Communications, which administers the major cultural agencies. At the same time, the Department of Secretary of State retained responsibility for cultural retention in the minority ethnic communities, which comprise about one-third of Canada's population. Writers and artists in both the visible and non-visible ethnic minorities generally feel that programs of the Secretary of State are accessible to them, while programs of the Department of Communications are much less accessible.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Communications should require its major cultural agencies and agencies reporting to the department to support multicultural arts.

RECOMMENDATION

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