

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

NEARTS

A GREAT NATION DESERVES GREAT ART

Nuestra Música

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NEA Chairman Dana Gioia announced the findings of a landmark survey, *Reading at Risk*, at the New York Public Library on July 8th. “This report documents a national crisis,” Chairman Gioia noted at the press conference. Literary reading is in dramatic decline—with fewer than half of American adults now reading literature. The Chairman added, “The decline in reading among every segment of the adult population reflects a general collapse in advanced literacy. To lose this human capacity—and all the diverse benefits it fosters—impoverishes both cultural and civic life.”

Reading at Risk presents the results from the literature segment of a large-scale survey, the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, conducted by the Census Bureau in 2002 at the request of the NEA. This survey investigated the number of adult Americans, age 18 and

the discussion. It documents an overall decline of 10 percentage points in literary readers from 1982 to 2002—a loss of 20 million potential readers. The rate of decline is increasing and, according to the survey, has nearly tripled in the last decade.

The accelerating declines in literary reading among all demographic groups of American adults indicate an imminent cultural crisis. The trends among younger adults warrant special concern, suggesting that—unless some effective solution is found—literary culture, and literacy in general, will continue to worsen. The rate of decline for the youngest adults, those aged 18 to 24, was 55 percent greater than that of the total adult population. Indeed, at the current rate of loss, literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century.

Twenty years ago, just after the NEA’s 1982 survey, the

READING

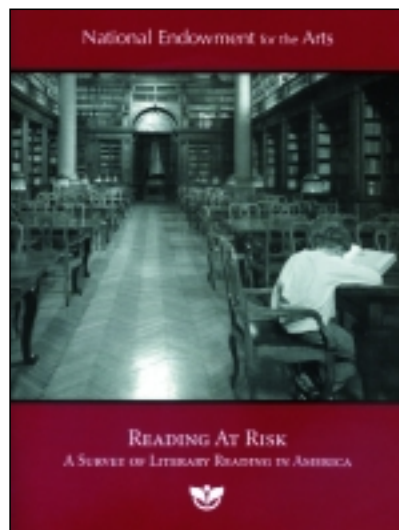
at R!SK

over, who attended artistic performances, visited museums, watched broadcasts of arts programs, or read literature. The survey sample numbered more than 17,000 individuals, which makes it one of the most comprehensive polls of art and literary participation ever conducted.

For the literature section, respondents were asked if, during the past twelve months, they had read any novels or short stories, plays, or poetry. A positive response to any of those three categories was counted as reading literature, including popular genres such as mysteries, as well as contemporary and classic literary fiction. No distinctions were drawn on the quality of literary works.

Reading at Risk provides an invaluable snapshot of the role of literature in the lives of Americans. It comes at a critical time, when electronic media are becoming the dominant influence in young people’s worlds.

Reading at Risk adds new and distressing information to



landmark study *A Nation at Risk* warned that “a rising tide of mediocrity” had overtaken the school system and threatened a generation of stu-

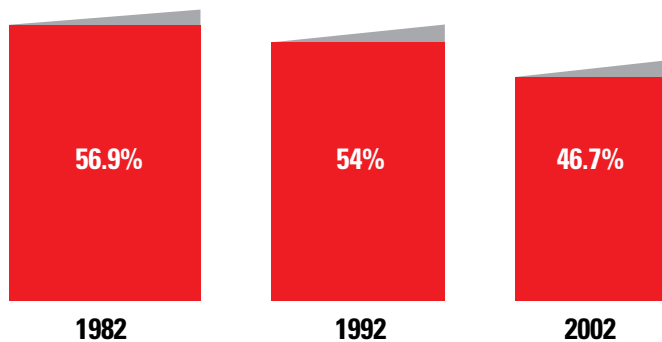
dents. The report sparked a massive reform effort whose consequences are still evolving today.

Reading at Risk reveals an equally dire situation, a culture at risk. The NEA calls upon public agencies, cultural organizations, the press, and educators to take stock of the sliding literary condition of our country. It is time to inspire a nationwide renaissance of literary reading and bring the transformative power of literature into the lives of all citizens.

Reading at Risk: 10 Key Findings

Decline in Literary Reading

Percentage of US Adults Reading Literature



1 The percentage of adult Americans reading literature has dropped dramatically over the past 20 years.

2 The decline in literary reading parallels a decline in total book reading.

3 The rate of decline in literary reading is accelerating.

4 Women read more literature than men do, but literary reading by both groups is declining at significant rates.



5 Literary reading is declining among whites, African Americans, and Hispanics.

6 Literary reading is declining among all education levels.

7 Literary reading is declining among all age groups.

8 The steepest decline in literary reading is in the youngest age groups.

9 The decline in literary reading foreshadows an erosion in cultural and civic participation.

10 The decline in reading is due to increased participation in a variety of electronic media, including the Internet, video games, and portable digital devices.

Shakespeare Comes to LA

The National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with Shakespeare Festival/LA (SFLA), co-sponsored *Shakespeare Comes to LA* to bring professional productions and educational activities to stages and schools throughout Los Angeles. This summer festival was an extension of the NEA's nationally acclaimed *Shakespeare in American Communities* initiative.

On May 17th at LA's Mark Taper Forum, to mark the



launch of the festival, students and other special guests gathered to honor the greatest playwright in the English language. The event included the debut of a short film produced especially for the NEA, "Why Shakespeare?" Directed by Larry

Bridges, it featured Tom Hanks, Martin Sheen, Michael York, and Christina Applegate, among others, reminiscing about their theater experiences and love of Shakespeare.

The Hobart Shakespeareans, a remarkable troupe of students from the local Hobart Elementary School, and Los Angeles-based Circle X Theatre Company performed at the event.

"We're here today to celebrate bringing the magic of Shakespeare to those who have not yet experienced the wonder and excitement of seeing a live, professional production of Shakespeare," said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. "Los Angeles is my hometown, and I am delighted that the Arts Endowment is able to partner with Shakespeare Festival/LA to bring these productions to thousands of students."

Ben Donenberg, producing artistic director for SFLA, commented, "I'm thrilled about the partnership with the Arts Endowment and fascinated by the many different ways the various theater companies approach and interpret Shakespeare. It's a real pleasure to be able to offer these local and national companies free-of-charge so that they are accessible to absolutely everyone."

Left: NEA Chairman Dana Gioia presents a Chairman's Medal to Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director of the Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum. Below: Hobart Shakespeareans perform at the Mark Taper Forum. Photos: Ryan Miller/Capture Imaging





NEA Jazz Master James Moody performs with the Billy Taylor Trio at the White House. Photo: Vance Jacobs

A Salute to NEA Jazz Masters

On June 22, President George W. Bush recognized the National Endowment for the Arts' Jazz Masters program in a celebration of Black Music Month. This concert, entitled *A Salute to NEA Jazz Masters*, took place in the East Room of the White House and featured three NEA Jazz Masters and six young musicians. Those NEA Jazz Masters were pianist Dr. Billy Taylor performing with his trio, drummer Chico Hamilton, and saxophonist James Moody. The student musicians are part of *Jazz and the New Generation*, a program conceived and directed by Dr. Taylor and presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Education Department.

In his remarks President Bush noted, "These performers and many others carried forward the tradition of black music in our country. We take great pride in this heritage. We're grateful to every musician who keeps that heritage so rich and so vital today."

NEA Chairman Dana Gioia noted the "joy, wisdom and consolation" that jazz offers and its "testament to the power of art to speak across cultures."



Lorenzo Martínez, 2003 NEA National Heritage Fellow, with his band, *Reflexiones*. Photo: Jim Saah

Nuestra Música

The National Endowment for the Arts welcomed Latino musicians to the nation's capital on June 23rd with Latino NEA National Heritage Fellows concerts and workshops. In partnership with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the NEA sponsored these events as part of *Nuestra Música: Music in Latino Culture*, a program of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

The Latino NEA National Heritage Fellows are six artists representing traditions originating in Mexico, New Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico—with instruments ranging from violin to *jarana* (small guitar) and *timbales* to *batá* drums. These musicians are among 33 Latino artists honored through the NEA National Heritage Fellowship program, which confers the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. Each year, the NEA awards \$20,000 fellowships to 10 master folk and traditional artists. These fellowships, awarded through nominations from the public, recognize the recipients' artistic excellence and support their continuing contributions to our nation's traditional arts heritage. The NEA National Heritage Fellowship program began in 1982.

NEA Chairman Dana Gioia, who is of Mexican descent, said, "It gives us great pleasure to partner with the Smithsonian Institution, and the University of New Mexico, in presenting these six NEA National Heritage Fellows. These artists, whose music demonstrates the compelling diversity and depth of musical traditions practiced in the United States, promise to provide exciting concerts and workshops."

Operation Homecoming: Fort Drum

Writing Workshop Series begins in New York

“How many of you want to write fiction?”

A few tentative hands went up—all of them clad in the olive green uniforms of the 10th Mountain Division. These students were also soldiers at Fort Drum, New York.

The question was posed by Richard Bausch, noted author, and member of the faculty of the Arts Endowment’s *Operation Homecoming*. In early June, Bausch was joined at Ft. Drum by author and journalist McKay Jenkins and, together, they led the NEA’s first writing workshops for military personnel who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most of the soldiers in the Ft. Drum workshops were fresh from a long tour in Afghanistan.

Operation Homecoming will include writing workshops at military bases conducted by nationally known authors of all genres, to encourage returning troops and their families to write about their wartime experiences. The NEA plans to take the best of that writing and publish an anthology that will be available to the public.

“If there’s a way that we experienced writers can offer them some of the techniques that we’ve learned over the years, maybe this will allow them to gain access to some of these stories and transform them from

memory into something that is actually on the page,” said Jenkins, who added that he thoroughly enjoyed the dialogue with these soldiers.

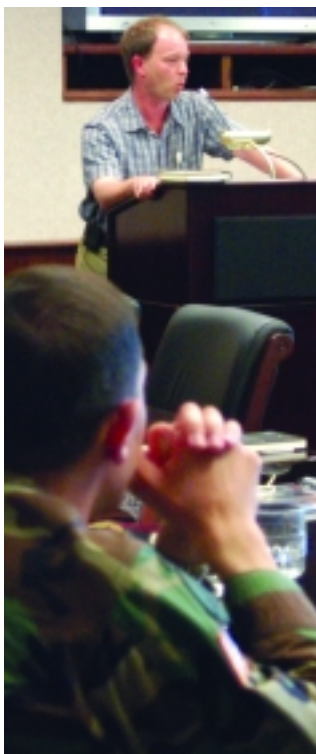
Jenkins was given an especially warm welcome at Ft. Drum. His book, *The Last Ridge: The Epic Story of the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division and the Assault on Hitler’s Europe*, has special resonance on the base.

“The real news from the front is going to come from the people who are living it, from the individuals. So, a program like this is going to encourage that,” said Bausch, who is himself a Vietnam veteran, as well as the author of such books as *The Last Good Time* and *The Stories of Richard Bausch*.

Nearly 50 soldiers and family members took part in the workshops themselves, and several others took time with the authors in more informal settings such as the “windshield” tour of the base.

Submissions for the anthology have been arriving at the NEA since *Operation Homecoming* was announced in April. The enthusiasm from that announcement has led the Department of Defense to request that the program be expanded to include more bases.

Operation Homecoming is made possible through the generous support of The Boeing Company.



McKay Jenkins (left) and Richard Bausch (above) discuss the art of writing with soldiers at Fort Drum, New York. Photo: Betty Doherty, US Army MWR

NEA Spotlight:

Allegro Foundation

The National Endowment for the Arts recently gave a \$10,000 grant to the Allegro Foundation (Charlotte, NC) in order to begin a weekly dance program at Rama Road Elementary School—and while the size of the grant was not exceptional, the students in the class were extraordinary.

Last year, the principal of this small school in Charlotte, Hugh Talbert, asked the Allegro Foundation to help its students with disabilities. The problem was funding, and as a new school year approached it seemed that the program would be cancelled. Fortunately, US Representative Sue Myrick and NEA Chairman Dana Gioia intervened, and with a special grant the Allegro Foundation was able to offer the class right on schedule.

Representative Myrick was particularly delighted, announcing that, “Allegro is a wonderful organization,

The Allegro Foundation serves more than 300 children in four public schools, and four community outreach programs.

taking children with disabilities and teaching them in ways traditional schools can't. I am glad the new NEA chairman, Dana Gioia, took a special interest in this organization and worked to secure funds for them.”

Allegro is a musical term that denotes a lively or fast tempo. The Allegro Foundation is aptly named, as it provides students with disabilities and their typically developing friends with a unique opportunity to participate in dance and movement instruction together. Allegro serves children with mental retardation, Down syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and cancer—as well as children at risk. Classes not only improve their mobility, concentration, attention span, and independence, but also enhance their social skills.

The Allegro Foundation's unique mission and curriculum were developed by its founder, Pat Farmer, a professional dancer and choreographer who started it in

Los Angeles in 1991. The Pacific Foundation for the Performing Arts, as it was then called, began with eight teachers hired from her dance studio.

In 1998, Farmer returned to her hometown, Charlotte, to continue teaching children with disabilities; she moved the foundation, changed its name, and reached out to the community for support. Her foundation now serves more than 300 children in four public schools, and four community outreach programs. In an age when music and arts classes are systematically cut from school budgets, Allegro's programs demonstrate the role that arts can play in educating children with disabilities. Grants like the NEA's are helping Allegro to expand its programs so that it can reach even more of the 15,000 disabled students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community.

The founder of the Allegro Foundation, Pat Farmer, with some of her students.



September

13-15 Operation Homecoming

Writers workshop with Jeff Shaara and Evan Wallach at Fort Richardson; Anchorage, AK
For information: <http://www.arts.gov/national/homecoming/index.html>
Contact: (202) 682-5410

18-20 17th Annual Midwest Arts Conference—

Kansas City, MO
 NEA Chairman Dana Gioia, *keynote speaker*,
 September 18
For information: www.artsmidwest.org/programs/mac_04/
Contact: (612) 341-0755

18 NEA Jazz Masters on Tour—

Kansas City, MO
 Performance by Roy Haynes; Gem Theatre,
 American Jazz Museum
For information:
www.nea.gov/national/jazz/touring.html
Contact: (202) 682-5762

October

1 NEA National Heritage Fellows Concert—

Washington, DC
 Concert by the 2004 National Heritage Fellows;
 Lisner Auditorium, George Washington
 University
For information:
<http://www.ncta.net/heritage.html>
Contact: (202) 682-5067

9 National Book Festival—Washington, DC

Organized by the Library of Congress and
 hosted by First Lady Laura Bush; on the
 National Mall between 7th and 14th Streets
 The NEA is sponsoring the Poetry Pavilion
For information: www.loc.gov/bookfest/press-room/index.html
Contact: (888) 714-4696

21-22 NEA Jazz Masters on Tour—Newark, NJ

Performance by Chico Hamilton;
 Arts High School
For information:
www.nea.gov/national/jazz/touring.html
Contact: (202) 682-5762

**27-29 Meeting of the National Council
 on the Arts—**Washington, DC

For information:
www.nea.gov/about/NCA/About_NCA.html
Contact: (202) 682-5400

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The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation’s largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

ON THE COVER:

Nati Cano’s Mariachi Los Camperos performing at the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, as part of Nuestra Música: Music in Latino Culture.
Photo: Jim Saah



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