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# National Endowment for the Arts: News Articles (1980): Editorial 01

Jeffrey St. John

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CLAIBORNE PELL, R.I.  
CHAIRMAN

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

TO: AC 10/8/80

FROM: WY

The attached column is from Washington Report, a publication of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, with a claimed national circulation of 75,000.

I thought you should be aware of it. You might even want to ask the endowments for a rebuttal, including examples of grants to some "conservative" projects.

# Washington Report

Published by the Chamber of Commerce  
of the United States

DR. RICHARD L. LESHER

*President*

DR. CARL GRANT

*Vice President, Communications*

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*Manager, Publishing Group*

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Volume 2, Number 12

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## BY-LINE

## The Taxpayer-Financed Cultural Battle Against Capitalism



Jeffrey St. John

**R**OANOKE RAPIDS, N.C.—This is the textile town that Hollywood made famous with the film "Norma Rae," winning Sally Fields an Oscar this spring for Best Actress. The film, no box office money-maker, is to be seen this fall in a re-run on ABC-TV and supported by advertising from private business. The plot of the film, however, clearly blackens the entire textile industry as greedy exploiters of southern textile workers while northern unions are cast as heroic saviors.

"Norma Rae" is based on a mixture of real and fictional unionizing efforts of a former Roanoke Rapids textile employee of the J.P. Stevens company, Crystal Lee Sutton, now a paid organizer and publicist for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. The ACTWU has been trying for almost two decades to organize Stevens' eighty plants in the Carolinas as part of a long-range strategy to unionize the entire South, a region which President Carter needs for re-election to a second term. Having failed over 15 years with a secret ballot election, a massive, union-sponsored Stevens boycott since 1976, and the combined muscle of Congress and the federal government, the ACTWU apparently saw "Norma Rae" as a new weapon in its long war against Stevens.

### Best Pro-Union Film

In fact, Mrs. Sutton admitted last June during a screening of the film on Capitol Hill for pro-union lawmakers and union officials that "Norma Rae" was "the best pro-union movie ever made."

Since Hollywood first started reaping huge profits from the movie business, a certain segment of the industry has always seen monetary and political profit in making motion pictures that cast businessmen as greedy barbarians. Television programs made by Hollywood have carried on this cultural war against capitalism. Now, however, the federal government appears to have joined the cultural war on capitalism.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) on March 9, 1979, approved a \$743,965.39 grant to left-wing movie producer Barbara Kopple to film a TV documentary to be offered to the taxpayer-supported Public Broadcasting Service.

The Dec. 1, 1978, application by Kopple reveals that she received \$29,000 for "research" of the TV film project from the National Endowment for the Arts, sister to the NEH, and the New York State Council of the Arts and Public Broadcasting Service.

All this taxpayer-financed funding is being used to complete "Rapids Change," a TV epic based on real life interviews with white and black Roanoke Rapids textile workers and developed from the personal experiences of Mrs. Sutton, as was "Norma Rae." Kopple admitted to the Associated Press in an interview on Aug. 3, 1980, the film "is going to be more than an organizing tool, it's not only about one person, it's about the community of textile workers in Roanoke Rapids. We really want it to get under the skin of those people."

This pro-union, anti-Stevens bias is clearly evident even in the 36-page synopsis submitted to the NEH by Kopple. "Work has always exacted a fierce toll on the health of the workers," Kopple states

in the NEH application. "The closer a worker is to the 'raw'—unprocessed—fiber the more likely he or she is to contact a respiratory illness . . . The rate of injury is high (second only to mining). Alcoholism soars above the national average. Every window in a mill is bricked up. Social life in the family is a studied escape from the pressure and tedium of the mill."

Each of these assertions is open to serious challenge by Stevens, its employees, the residents of Roanoke Rapids, and the textile industry. At least one assertion is an outright distortion. For example, J. P. Stevens plant manager Jessie "Jay" Crawford told this writer in an interview here that "The unions claimed that we bricked up the windows in the plant so that the workers wouldn't be able to see out and be distracted from their work. We really bricked up the windows to keep from losing both heat and air conditioning in the winter and summer."

Of the twenty-one "consultants" listed by Kopple on the NEH application, not one is from Stevens or the textile industry. Four of the consultants listed as from the textile industry deny that they ever gave Kopple permission for use of their name or ever heard of the project. For example, Elizabeth Grant is listed on the funds application and identified by Kopple as "willing to let us use her mill" for the filming at Glen Raven Mills, N.C. However, Roger Grant in a letter to the National Endowment dated Sept. 3, 1980, states: "We hereby inform you that we had no knowledge of this project prior to August 29, 1980, and that at no time and in no way did we agree to allow our facilities to be used for this project. The grant application misrepresents and falsifies facts so far as it concerns this firm."

A similar letter is said to have been written to NEH by Robert Scott, former Governor of North Carolina, who is also listed by Kopple. Scott is said to have expressed surprise at the use of his name and even the existence of the film project. Frances Close Hart, also listed as a consultant, recalls a brief conversation in which Kopple said only that "we are making a movie about the textile industry." Hart's family holds stock in the textile firm Spring Mills and denies ever authorizing use of the family name or agreeing to offer any assistance to the film project.

### Art As Political Tool

Since their founding during the Johnson administration, both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts have become political tools for the White House. During the Carter administration, according to the New York Times in May of 1979, federally funded culture and art have taken a new and highly politicized direction. Not only are both bureaucracies for the arts and culture headed by Carter partisans who worked for his election in 1976, but the nature of the grants seems to favor those who can help President Carter get re-elected in November.

Grants since 1977 have flowed, according to the Times, to the National Farmers Union (\$150,000), U.S. Conference of Mayors (\$200,000), the Labor Institute for Human Enrichment of the AFL-CIO (\$30,000) and the National Council of LaRaza (\$15,500), a left-wing organization.