



CultureWork

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A CALL TO ACTION FOR 2004 (AND BEYOND)

[Thomas Tresser](#)

Read This Out Loud:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain, George III, is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare,

SOC Code	Occupation type
15	Computer & Mathematics
17	Architecture & Engineer
19	Life, Physical & Social Sciences
25	Education, Training & Library professionals
27	Art, Design, Entertainment, Sports & Media

And...

CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS	
SOC Code	Occupation type
11	Management
13	Business & Financial Operations
23	Legal Occupations
29	Healthcare Practitioners & Tech Operations
41	High-End Sales & Sales Operations

By Florida's reckoning, there are 15 million Super-Creatives, or about 12 percent of the U.S. workforce. He calculates there are some 23.3 million Creative Professionals, or about 18 percent of the workforce. All together, the Creative Class consists of some 38.3 million Americans, roughly 30 percent of the total workforce. [4]

What is the Creative Economy?

John Howkins, a British author and television producer has consulted to over thirty governments on matters of cultural policy. His 2001 book, "The Creative Economy – How People Make Money From Ideas," estimates that creativity-based industries produced some \$960 billion in revenue in America in 1999. [5] He lists the components of the Creative Economy as:[6]

- Advertising
- Architecture
- Art
- Crafts
- Design
- Fashion
- Film
- Music
- Performing Arts
- Publishing
- Research & Development
- Software
- Toys & Games
- TV & Radio
- Video Games

This is the economic sector where the most value will be created and the highest-paying jobs will be. The creative economy is projected to grow by a 4.8 percent compound annual growth rate through 2007. [7]

Is there a set of shared values across the Creative Class?

Creativity is also a key to the nonprofit arena – where people who have visions of a better world act to create new organizations and programs to change society.

In the mid-1990's, I was a volunteer for two years in a metropolitan-wide citizen organizing effort for Chicago. It was led by staff from the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The IAF was founded by Saul Alinsky over 50 years ago. The IAF helps create large, regional organizations whose members are other institutions, such as churches and synagogues, community organizations and labor unions. This organization of organizations brings citizens voices and values into the political and civic power equation. When I took the training that the organizers offered to get volunteers oriented, I remember the trainer shared some insights about how the IAF works with citizens to help them acquire the skills and energy to work together to solve their own problems.

One of the key principles the trainer emphasized was that education and a certain shared experience is needed by the people leading community change efforts – “Imagination precedes implementation” was what he wrote on the board. I was struck by that simple but profound observation.

What this means, as I have grown to see it is, that in order to change the world for the better, you first (1) must be aware of conditions that need changing and (2) you are able to imagine a better situation – some better picture of the world that you want to see happen. That attribute of constructive imagination is, I believe, exactly akin to the visioning that artists and other creative individuals engage in on a regular basis in order to do their work.

Both creative workers and social change agents have the passion, ability and energy to see a different, a better, a heightened state and overlay it over the world as it is. It’s as though they say to themselves. “I see where we are, I don’t like what I see. I see where we need to be. Now I’m going to act to bring the world to align with that vision.” Both artists and change agents then reach for their respective tools and materials to build that vision.

Donald MacKinnon, at the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research (IPAR) of the University of California at Berkeley, did extensive research on personality and motivational characteristics or personal qualities that contribute to a person’s creative potential. [8] He found that creative people are:

1. Intelligent
2. Independent in thought and action
3. Intuitive
4. Have a strong sense of destiny
5. Original
6. Open to experience, both the inner self and the outer world
7. Have strong theoretical and aesthetic interests

Dr. Robert Alan Black, a creativity consultant and writer, has listed a number of traits that creative people have. [9] These include:

1. sensitive
2. not motivated by money
3. sense of destiny
4. adaptable
5. tolerant of ambiguity
6. observant
7. perceive world differently
8. see possibilities
9. question asker
10. can synthesize correctly often intuitively
11. able to fanaticize
12. flexible
13. fluent
14. imaginative
15. intuitive
16. original
17. ingenious
18. energetic
19. sense of humor
20. self-actualizing
21. self-disciplined
22. self- knowledgeable
23. specific interests
24. divergent thinker
25. curious
26. open-ended
27. independent
28. severely critical
29. non-conforming
30. confident
31. risk taker
32. persistent

From my own experience and reflection, I’ve compiled my own short list of the shared characteristics of creative people. They are:

- Seeks and creates beauty
- Tolerant and open to new ideas and experiences

- Challenges authority
- Wonders and muses – asks “Why?” and “Why not?”
- Masters skills and engages in life-long learning
- Works alone and in ensembles
- Passionate and compassionate

Can you imagine that a group of people who share these types of traits might hold values that have some degree of congruence? How might we move in the public arena if we acted on those values and based public policy on them?

What is the Relationship Between Creative Work and Policy?

Creativity is renewable and endless. It exists everywhere and in inexhaustible abundance. I believe that unleashing creativity will result in continuing prosperity and self-renewal. Based on this assumption – and standing on the shared values mentioned above, I turn to a set of statements that could be used to guide public policy across a wide range of issues.

I don't know where the next Steve Jobs, Jimi Hendrix, Jonas Salk, Jane Addams or Cesar Chavez will come from. Who will be the next pioneer or innovator whose work will immeasurably enrich life? We need to think seriously about how to nourish, maximize, and accelerate creativity in order to create an environment in which such individuals will emerge and thrive.

Every person has something precious and important to offer community and our economy. The marketplace of ideas should always open and welcomes all comers regardless of skin color, sexual orientation, religious preference, or economic circumstance.

However, you do need to be able to read, write, communicate and be healthy enough to move about and engage with your fellow citizens. Poverty, racism, disease and isolation are barriers that keep people out of the marketplace of ideas. Society can help or hinder citizen's access.

If opportunity and access to resources is restricted to certain people because of some pre-conceived prejudice, then losing the ideas and creations these people might generate is the likely outcome.

The United States' founding documents, if taken seriously and implemented rigorously, protect from this risk. Elected officials should take note and honor them.

The President and Congress should provide leadership in maximizing individual and collective creativity as a national priority.

For example, consider the appointment of a National Director of Creativity whose job it will be to thoroughly examine the state of American creativity and recommend to the next President and Congress ways to preserve and extend this vital national resource. This could be accomplished in part through recognizing a strong and effective system of public education as a necessary condition for giving all the basic tools of a creative person, the ability to read, imagine, and think critically.

An open and tolerant society should be seen as a necessary condition that allows new thoughts and ways of being to flourish and spread. Policies based on control, surveillance, and fear are counter productive.

Because all people are creative, though creative in different ways, the opportunity to make and experience art and cultural content should be a universal aspect of education and community life. Also contributing would be:

- Universal Health Care
- Fully funding Head Start
- \$1 billion for the National Endowment for the Arts in order to provide direct support artists and arts organizations
- Protecting the First Amendment
- Campaign for 100% adult literacy by 2010
- A laptop computer for every public elementary school teacher and student
- Free high-speed Internet connections - a digital Commons open to all
- Lifting travel and immigration restrictions and expanding student, science and cultural exchanges
- Establishing a National Creativity Day to celebrate, create and daydream!

And - most radical of all - might we ask educators, business leaders and civic leaders to adopt a Creative mindset that is generative, future-oriented, risk-taking, nurturing, fair, compassionate and non-authoritarian?

Let creativity be the cornerstone of a new civic metaphor and a new metric for measuring and rewarding progress. Let creativity be valued for its essence - not as an extra but as an essential element of education and commerce.

How Can I Be Involved?

“Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it” – Brecht

Calling all members of the Creative Class: it's time to publicly act on your private values. Involve yourself in civic life. Join your Chamber of Commerce, participate in your neighborhood improvement organization, volunteer at your church – and, most definitely run for office! Run for school board, city council, county commissioner, zoning board – some position that's local and where a newcomer has a chance to make an impression.

Participate in civic life as a creative person – as an artist, or programmer or arts administrator, whatever you are -- play up your creative skills and experience. Creative thinking is needed in civic life!

New perspectives and ways of thinking about pressing social issues are desperately needed. bringing the values associated with creativity into public service IS refreshing and change-making.

This is your world. If you want to see your values, beliefs, hopes and dreams reflected back to you from your elected officials and the policies they enact – if you want to see America flourish as the most creative nation on the planet, then start using your creativity to help imagine America for 2004 and beyond!

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The preceding was adapted from a speech delivered at the Institute for Community Arts Studies, University of Oregon at Eugene on October 24, 2003. Info: <http://aad.uoregon.edu/index.htm>.

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Thomas Tresser is the Lead Organizer for The Creative America Project (www.creativeamerica.us), which advocates and educates artists and creative professionals to seek elective office. He is working on a book, *Creative America 2004: A Call to Action* that calls on creative workers to get involved in civic and electoral activities. Besides acting in some 40 shows and producing over 100 plays, special events, festivals and community programs, Tom organized support for pro-arts candidates in the 1992 and 1994 election cycles. He was director of cultural development at Peoples Housing, in north Rogers Park, where he created a community arts program that blended the arts, education and micro-enterprise development. He served as marketing and client services director at Executive KnowledgeWorks, an executive development consulting firm.

Most recently, Tom served as a marketing director and community affairs manager for OurHouse.com, an e-commerce start-up. He was recently appointed Visiting Fellow in Arts and Culture at DePaul University College of Commerce's Ryan Center for Creativity & Innovation. He taught "Arts and Public Policy" at Roosevelt University, "Producing Live Events" at Columbia College and will be teaching "Creativity and Public Policy" at DePaul University in 2004. Tom has made the case for developing a Creativity platform to several candidates for major office: Rod Blagojevich (when he was running for Governor of Illinois), Barak Obama (candidate for U. S. Senate, Illinois) and Gov. Howard Dean (candidate for President).

EDITOR'S NOTE: Richard Bear, Editor of **CultureWork** for the last seven years, is moving on to oversee the University of Oregon Newspaper Indexing Project. The Department of Arts and Administration faculty, staff, and students wish to thank him for his thoughtful supervision of this broadside. Visit Richard's current project at: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/govdocs/indexing/news.html>.

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