

**Congressional Testimony, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
March 31, 2009, Wynton Marsalis, Artistic Director**

Summary Points

The global economic and social crises with which policy makers are grappling, far from distracting us from issues of culture and quality of life, is forcing us all to reflect on how we got here. And how we, as a society, now move forward with the confidence, optimism and moral authority that for long stretches of our history, wisely or unwisely, we rarely feel the need to question.

Active, honest reflection on the relationship between public culture and the ultimate objects of public policy - the good life – is higher than at any time I can remember. This is, for America, a period of frank, necessary and sincere reflection about priorities and purpose. And it is an opportunity to engage with all that is good about our culture, and reemerge wiser, stronger, and kinder.

My perspective is as an educator, a musician and a composer who has seen the transformational power of music from multiple perspectives – from the great concert halls around the world and from modest class rooms around the country. And that experience tells me that jazz has something useful to bring to this task of regeneration.

Jazz is often characterized as among America’s most significant and original contribution to world culture. There is a profound and simple truth to this: jazz encapsulates in so many ways the evolution of many values that are core to and define American identity.

As an advocate of the music, in this context I simply want to suggest that these attributes *are* important ones for the fabric of our society *at this time* and that as we parse the arguments for the place of culture on the national agenda, we need to think carefully about the about the ways in which we transmit these values in our formal and informal music education, in our cultural diplomacy and in the ways in which we re-imagine and regenerate our civic agendas.

But an essential role of artistic endeavor is to create models that teach and mold through their rhetorical power – through the stories they tell and the things we learn about ourselves and teach ourselves in their telling. That is the task of the artist in society – to tell truths that are otherwise neglected and in ways that compel their audiences to understand.