



Presented by:
**The Association of
American Cultures
(TAAC)**

Hosted by:
**Rhode Island State
Council on the Arts
(RISCA)**

Providence, Rhode Island
August 2 – 4, 2013

Conference Report Executive Summary

"As Americans struggle with complex visions of race and social justice, artists are on the frontline and acknowledge the necessity to insert new empowering stories..."

-Rinku Sen

"Follow your heart, follow your curiosity, so do something that makes you feel good inside, something that makes a difference—that makes a change."

-Cesar Chavez



Open Dialogue 13 Conference Report

Executive Summary

Narragansett Elder Dawn Dove's blessings and the drums of *Eastern Medicine Singers* ushered in the opening of The Association American Cultures (TAAC) biennial national diverse cultures arts symposium, ***Open Dialogue 13: People, Places and Policy***, held for the first time in New England, in Providence, Rhode Island August 2 to 4, 2013. The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA), hosted the 250 artists, arts managers, and cultural workers showcasing the vibrant and diverse arts of New England and reflective of our pluralistic society. Our common purpose was to share experiences, inform, and advocate for an inclusive, democratic, cultural policy.

Inter-generational participants mixed and mingled with arts leaders, artists of diverse backgrounds and disciplines and elected officials—inclusive of the City, State, and Rhode Island's Congressional Delegation. Performers and exhibitions representing diverse art disciplines and all major 'ethnic specific communities' from New England, shared the stage with Providence's architectural assets. The *creative capital* of the nation's 13th state, provided concrete testimony as to how cities reinvent and rebuild themselves by investing in the arts and culture sectors; illustrated how arts and culture communities grow and serve as catalysts for growth and economic prosperity—attracting business investments, tourists, and elevating the quality of life for residents.

Keynote speaker Rinku Sen's compelling presentation, ***Key Concepts in Racial Equity***, echoed the tensions and challenges of race, immigration, and arts equity in ***The Open Dialogue: Defining American Cultures*** plenary session. As Americans struggle with complex visions of race and social justice, artists are on the frontline and acknowledge the necessity to insert new empowering stories, definitions and strategies that enable us to move forward toward a new vision(s) of cultural equity and pluralistic harmony, in which individuals and the collective can see 'race' and still *do* the right thing.

The TAAC's ***Open Dialogue 13: People, Places and Policy*** conference brought vital discussions on identity, identification of arts-business models, cultural democracy, cultural interdependence and the need for TAAC to take the lead in the on-going discussion. Conference attendees explored case studies, research, and skill-building in concurrent sessions on a rich variety of topics and issues. Indigenous multi-generational residents of color and recent migrant experiences present compelling opportunities for broader engagement and interactions, because as Congressman Langevin reminded us, "the arts don't divide us—they unite us." Without ignoring the compelling funding inequities for arts and artists of color, we are our best models, said attendees. We can guide stewardship of cultural assets with support of innovative models for preservation of one's own culture without disrespect for another's is essential. Others noted, "the role the arts, tempered in the grassroots across community, can breakdown boundaries.' In the artists' role as ambassadors and guardians of culture, this conference was a common ground and opportunity for a redesign of strategies to generate access to broader funding sources and audiences. The arts' utility in sustaining ancestral memory, traditions, and history—sustenance for future generations—compels us to explore ways in which to invest in innovative collaborations with other industries (i.e. healthcare, engineering, and education, etc.), concurred several speakers

Rebecca Blunk, Executive Director, New England Foundation on the Arts, adept in her leadership role within the creative economy, underscored the responsibility of foundations to seek innovation and support the powerful

engine of growth and community vitality. Blunk introduced Michael Orlove, (Director of Artist Communities and Presenting & Multidisciplinary Works for the National Endowment for the Arts), who addressed the complexities inherent in arts communities, shared the impact of the waves of immigration on his life as central to shaping his vision for public service and preparation for an arts management career. With a thematic emphasis on “curiosity, community, change, and creativity,” he conveyed his epiphany: where people of different backgrounds converge and collide are likely places for discomfort and displacement as there are places for spirit of inter-group cooperation, empowerment and racial justice.

Through participatory workshop sessions, attendees were able to explore and expand the possibilities of how to better serve the multiple interests of diverse peoples by recognizing the legitimacy and value of the artists’ work within local communities, regionally, and on the wider stage of our American society. A total of 9 workshops with 29 speakers were presented. Central to the variety of experiences, were the vibrancy of the youth participants showcased in the **Youth Expo** (*Performance/Visual Art Panel Discussion*) and **ZuKrewe** at AS220’s Main Gallery. They confidently illustrated how art has a social impact and influences them to impact their communities.

An evening performance at AS220 show that organization’s arts’ vision for inclusion and broader equity serves as an incubator for emerging artistic talents, providing housing for resident and visiting artists, sustainability of programmatic elements through a mix of non-profit and profit generating real estate investments and projects—a template which can be exported beyond New England.

Randy Rosenbaum, (Executive Director, RISCA) facilitated ***Open Dialogue: Defining American Cultures***, a dynamic exchange on identity and the labels we wear, which make some feel boxed in and incomplete, underscoring the reality that labels are powerful and dangerous. Whereas, there are multiple ways to define ourselves, identity is situational; “labels” that are a means to leverage access to resources are also market driven exercises of power in someone else’s hands. Others on the panel were Salvador Acevedo, Byron Au Yong, Dawn Dove, Philip Horn and Monique Johnson.

Out of political necessity, TAAC’s next steps will include the collection, analysis and distribution of arts and cultural research data, as the ***Plural Culture Project*** has done; inclusion of youth voices and participants (i.e. Youth Advisory Committees); exploration of best practices models and strategies, challenges and policy issues with special attention to the changing demographic environments—in ways that are respectful of culture and intellectual property – and equitable for all people.

We thank our Sponsors and Scholarship Supporters, who provided over 100+ scholarships to first time attendees to the TAAC conference: **National Endowment for the Arts, Rhode Island Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA), Boston Foundation, New England Foundation for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Illinois Arts Council Agency, D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and Aramark**. We commend our RISCA Hosts: Randall Rosenbaum, Elena Calderon Patiño, and Simone Spruce-Torres, TAAC conference coordinator, for an exceptional event.

Notes by J. Bela Teixeira, August 6, 2013.