

**Written Public Testimony of Dr. James R. Grossman, Executive Director
American Historical Association**

**Submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies**

**On behalf of the American Historical Association & the National Humanities Alliance
March 12, 2012**

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of FY 2013 funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). I am James Grossman, Executive Director of the American Historical Association. This statement is submitted on behalf of both the AHA and the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), a coalition on which I serve as a member of the board of directors.

Funding Overview

For FY 2013 we strongly urge the Subcommittee to provide no less than \$154.3 million in funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities, the same amount requested by the Administration. This represents an \$8.2 million increase over the final FY 2012 appropriation (\$146 million). The NEH budget has suffered a significant funding reduction over the last two years -- more than \$21 million (13.2%) between FY 2010 and FY 2012, almost entirely in program funds. In addition, the agency is still trying to recover from cuts totaling nearly 40 percent that were made in the mid-1990s.

At its nominal funding peak in FY 1994, NEH's total budget was equivalent to \$271.5 million in 2012 inflation-adjusted dollars. At its peak in real dollars in FY 1979, the agency's appropriation equaled \$455.8 million in current dollars -- three times the FY 2012 level. I have worked closely with NEH staff for more than two decades, and I have been consistently impressed by the efficiency and fairness with which they have dealt with these cuts; but I have also seen the damage that has taken place because the Endowment can no longer adequately support humanities infrastructure and projects.

Impact of the President's Budget

Program Funds - At the level proposed by the Administration, the FY 2013 NEH budget would nearly equal its FY 2011 level (\$154.7 million). However, the proposed increase would still restore only \$5 million in program funds, which are proposed at \$124 million in FY 2013, compared to \$118.6 million enacted for FY 2012 (still far below the \$140 million enacted for FY 2010). The remaining \$3 million of the proposed increase for FY 2013 would be set aside for administration to help cover anticipated relocation costs associated with the pending redevelopment of the Old Post Office.

Competitive Grants - Within the President's request, funding for NEH competitive grants would increase by \$2.6 million, from \$68.8 million in FY 2012 to \$71.4 million in FY 2013. This

includes small increments for each of the NEH's core program divisions and offices: Research, Education, Preservation & Access, Challenge Grants, Digital Humanities, and Public Programs. We are pleased to see these increases, as we have been especially concerned about the long-term erosion of funding suffered by competitive grants programs, which stand at only 40% of their value (in real dollars) in FY 1994.

Although modest, the increments proposed by the President would have a significant impact. For example, at the proposed FY 2013 level, the NEH Research Division could make 24 more awards than in FY 2012. This means that an additional 22 individual scholars could receive fellowships, and two more collaborative research projects could receive continuing support. This kind of support is vital for humanities faculty. It enables recipients to devote themselves to intensive, systematic research—the kind of research needed to produce new understandings of American and world history and literature. NEH's continuing support can enable a long-term project to continue, leveraging additional institutional support, and providing unique research opportunities for participating graduate and undergraduate students. Similarly, the NEH Education Research Division could enable 265 additional teachers to revitalize their knowledge of the humanities through participation in summer workshops; approximately 33,000 high school students would benefit from this valuable professional development for teachers.

National Needs

The NEH founding legislation articulates the imperative of federal support for the humanities: *“An advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future.”* At a time when globalization has connected the world's societies and economies, and when America plays a central role in political developments in every continent, the wisdom of this statement is more evident than ever. We cannot afford to abandon the study of America's and the world's languages and literatures, religions and governments, traditions and innovations. Without the knowledge that the humanities provide, we cannot understand our own past or the present condition of the world.

We do our humanities work well in the United States. American higher education remains the best in the world—a beacon for students across the liberal arts disciplines and an inspiration for the teaching and modeling of creative and critical thinking. The research funded by the NEH is essential to maintaining that standing, which enables American universities to attract students from every continent eager for the value of an American liberal education.

This is not, however, an argument for complacency; it is not a defense of the status quo. The same technological forces that are transforming the physical, biological, and social sciences are transforming the humanities as well. Humanists are using the new resources of the digital age to reformulate age-old questions about human experience and find new answers for them; to explore new ways of making the humanities accessible and relevant. The NEH has played a leading role in supporting this work, not only financially but through such initiatives as its acclaimed “EDSITEment” web site, which effectively spreads the word about the superb digital resources that NEH grants have made available to teachers.

The NEH's impact extends well beyond our classrooms and research institutes. The humanities are a lifelong enterprise and a public resource. America's museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions play a central role in humanities education. Partly thanks to the NEH, they now offer a range of digital resources that have already transformed the way in which the general public discovers and experiences the past and the world of culture. Like universities, these institutions can do more—especially if the NEH, which has played a vital role in mobilizing new digital techniques and designing more creative approaches to the integration of educational and cultural institutions, can continue to support these efforts.

The NEH Role

The NEH is the lead federal agency with the mission to create, preserve, and disseminate knowledge in the humanities—knowledge that is essential to healthy public culture in a democratic society. Each year, NEH awards hundreds of competitive, peer-reviewed grants to a broad range of nonprofit educational organizations and institutions, and to individual scholars, throughout the country. Grantees include two- and four-year colleges, universities, research institutes, museums, historical societies, libraries, archives, scholarly associations, K-12 schools, television/film/radio producers, and more. These grants help support educational advancement; professional development; and institutional activities for thousands of students, teachers, faculty, and others engaged in the humanities in communities across the U.S. every year. By enhancing the work of our cultural institutions, colleges, and universities, they create jobs because such institutions attract tourists and students from abroad. The American economy, as much as its public culture, benefits from high quality work in the humanities.

The NEH stands at the center of much of this work. The reputation of the NEH's peer review process helps its grantees attract significant non-federal funding for humanities projects nationwide. More than once, I have seen NEH funded projects attract and benefit from further support provided by corporations and foundations. These funders specifically asked about the process by which these initiatives had won NEH funding, and made clear that they viewed NEH peer review as a certification of quality.

But the support that the NEH can provide for such projects today does not meet the needs of our nation's best work in the humanities. The demand for humanities project support far exceeds available funding, rendering NEH grants extremely competitive. In FY 2011, NEH received 5,710 grant proposals representing \$552.6 million in requested funds, but could fund only 905 (15.8%) of these applications. This figure is strikingly low when compared to recent rates as high as 32% reported by grant-making agencies like the National Science Foundation.

Underfunding is pervasive. There is too little money for digital humanities projects, which often represent the cutting edge in teaching and research, and for the public film, radio, television and digital media projects that reach a national public; for professional development for teachers who need (and want) to learn how to use new media in humanities education; for preserving great collections, many of them fragile and in need of conservation, as state support dwindles; for challenge grants to help institutions build their own capacities and offer the kind of leverage that attracts new donors and builds habits of philanthropy; and for the individual fellowships and collaborative research projects that promote new understandings of the past and the present.

Without stronger support, enterprises from university research to public education will lose capacity, and as they do our ability to deal with the complexities of the world will dwindle.

Conclusion

I am especially grateful for this opportunity to testify on behalf of funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities. I represent two organizations, but I also speak as a historian whose work has benefitted from NEH support. I wrote my first book on an NEH fellowship, and I will immodestly note that this book has been read by thousands of college and high school students as part of their history education. Scholars at the outset of their careers need similar opportunities to generate such work, and I lament the decline in resources available to the NEH to provide such support.

I have also spent considerable time on the other side of the NEH's table, serving on peer review panels across a wide range of program areas. No system is perfect; but the NEH peer review process allocates funding according to merit more fairly and effectively than any other of which I am aware. I regularly encourage colleagues to serve on NEH review panels not only because such experience is useful to the preparation of future applications, but more important because I consider this activity an essential aspect of our public roles as humanities scholars. If we do not support the work of the NEH, if we do not lend our time and expertise to the rigorous process of peer review, we cannot ask our fellow citizens, the taxpayers of the United States, to lend their support as well.

This Subcommittee stands as steward to many of our nation's greatest shared cultural and natural resources, and we recognize that you face especially difficult and complex choices in crafting the FY 2013 Interior appropriations bill. We are also deeply grateful for the strong support that the Subcommittee has demonstrated for the NEH over the years. We hope that you will continue to consider the NEH as a vital investment in the nation's global competitiveness, the strength and vitality of our civic institutions, the preservation and understanding of our diverse cultural heritage, and the lives of our citizens. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

The American Historical Association is a non-profit membership association founded in 1884 and chartered by Congress in 1889 to promote historical studies and the dissemination of historical research. As the largest and oldest historical society in the United States, the AHA serves historians representing every historical period and geographical area. Our 14,000 members include academics at universities, two- and four-year colleges, museums, historical organizations, libraries and archives, as well as also independent historians, students, K-12 teachers, government and business professionals, and other individuals who, whatever their profession, possess an abiding interest in history.

The National Humanities Alliance was founded in 1981 to advance public support for the humanities. With 104 organizational members, the Alliance encompasses a broad range of humanities-related disciplines and institutions, and is the only organization that represents the humanities community as a whole. Its members, and the thousands of teachers, scholars, humanities organizations and institutions they represent, use NEH grants to maintain a strong system of academic research, education and public programs in the humanities.