



# National Humanities Alliance

**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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REGARDING FISCAL YEAR 2006 FUNDING FOR THE  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES**

**MARCH 18, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance and its members, we are pleased to submit written testimony for the record in support of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The National Humanities Alliance respectfully urges Congress to support funding of \$153.1 million for FY 2006 for the National Endowment for the Humanities, an increase of \$15 million above the FY 2005 level and the President's request. This funding will strengthen the NEH core programs and further the reach of the NEH's highly successful *We the People* initiative.

The National Humanities Alliance is a coalition of more than 80 national, state, and local nonprofit organizations, including scholarly and professional associations; higher education associations; organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, and state humanities councils; university-based and independent humanities research centers. The Alliance was founded in 1981 to advance the cause of the humanities by promoting the common interests of its members with regard to national policy and legislation affecting scholarly research and public understanding of the humanities.

### *Funding Background*

While we are pleased that the President's budget request continues funding for the NEH *We the People* program, we are disappointed that the administration has recommended flat funding for this initiative and for the NEH core programs at the FY 2005 level of \$138.1 million. Level funding will not allow the agency to maintain the current reach of its programs.

We recognize that Congress faces unusually difficult choices this year, and are asking the committee to recommend a modest funding increase for the agency of \$15 million. While this sum does not nearly meet the many needs for which the agency was created, it would make an impact, and help ensure the long-term effectiveness of this agency that is critical to the civic life of our democracy. We are especially concerned about the long-term impact of inflation and other pressures on the agency's ability to carry out the mandate for which it was established. The funding table below illustrates the decline, both in nominal and constant dollars, in the agency's spending levels.

**Table:** NEH Appropriations, FY 1970-2005 (in millions of dollars)

Fiscal Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2004	2005
Nominal Value	8.9	79.1	150.1	139.5	156.9	172.0	115.3	135.3	138.1
Constant Value (2004)	43.1	277.9	344.1	244.9	226.8	213.2	126.4	135.3	134.5

Note: ‘Nominal’ values are the amounts appropriated by Congress. ‘Constant’ values (expressed in 2004 dollars) are adjusted for inflation according to the annual CPI-U data. The estimated inflation rate for 2005 is assumed to be the same as in 2004.

The National Endowment for the Humanities was established forty years ago as an independent grant-making agency of the federal government to support research, education, and public programs in the humanities. As the founding legislation of the NEH says, “Democracy Demands Wisdom.” In a recent public address, NEH Chairman Bruce Cole echoed these statements when he spoke eloquently of the need for a national investment in teaching and learning in the humanities. “Knowledge of our history is not a luxury, it’s a necessity... Democracy is not self-sustaining; it needs to be learned and passed down from generation to generation. We have to know our great founding principals, how our institutions came into being, how they work, what our rights and responsibilities are.”<sup>1</sup> An appreciation of the relationship of the humanities to democracy was a key factor in the establishment of the NEH forty years ago and remains so today. In 2005, NEH is operating at less than half of its demonstrated capacity of even 30 years ago; yet at no time has the work of NEH been more critical to the survival of our democracy, the global competitiveness of our workforce, and our national security.

There is great need and demand for the leadership and support provided by the NEH. In FY 2004, the NEH reviewed 4,921 grant proposals (requesting a total of \$363.0 million in federal funds). The NEH Council recommended the approval of 1,090 applications. Due to funding constraints, only 22 percent of the requests were funded in the past fiscal year.

### *We the People*

Increased funding for the NEH will go a long way to extend the reach of the NEH *We the People* initiative to advance understanding of American history, culture, and civics. The program was launched by President Bush in response to numerous polls and surveys over the past decade, which indicate that many Americans lack even a basic knowledge about their nation’s history. In a White House Rose Garden Ceremony in September of 2002, President Bush described the need for the expanded NEH program: “Our Founders believed that the study of history and citizenship should be at the core of every American's education. Yet today, our children have large and disturbing gaps in their knowledge of history... Ignorance of American history and civics weakens our sense of citizenship.”

The White House initially pledged \$100 million for *We the People* over three years, and we are pleased that it has now waived the three-year limit to allow it to be continuing program. While only now entering its third year of funding, the initiative has already been highly successful. To date, more than 300 projects have received funding through the program, working through each of the core

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Cole, National Press Club, November 16, 2004

program divisions of the NEH. The initiative consists of projects sponsored directly by NEH, and grants made through the agency's other program divisions. A critical aspect of the *We the People* initiative is that because it works through the NEH core programs, it can broaden the reach of these divisions by freeing funds for other highly-rated projects. More detail on the NEH core programs, and examples of *We the People* projects supported through them, is provided below.

*We the People* has drawn scholars, teachers, filmmakers, museum professionals, librarians, and others engaged in humanities work to develop projects on the most significant events and themes in American history and culture. It has provided significant new resources to each of the state humanities councils, and is truly reaching communities nationwide.

## **NEH Core Programs**

While the *We the People* special initiative is presently the most visible NEH initiative, the core programs of the Endowment, which have developed over the last four decades, are the backbone of federal involvement in the humanities. Unfortunately, in recent years, funding for the NEH core programs has declined in moderate but real terms. Additional funds are needed to sustain the long-term grant-making ability of the agency in the following areas:

**Research** - Scholarly research is the engine that provides content and structure for all other humanities activities. Research grants facilitate basic research and original scholarship in all fields of the humanities, including languages, linguistics, literature, history, law, philosophy, archaeology, comparative religion, ethics, and art history. Fellowships and grants awarded by the research division are among the most coveted by American scholars. Projects supported by NEH fellowships and summer stipends for college and university teachers, and independent scholars have, over the years, produced more than 6,000 books including eleven Pulitzer Prize winners. Collaborative Research grants support original scholarship conducted by teams of researchers. Scholarly Editions grants support the preparation of texts and documents that are currently inaccessible or available in inadequate editions. Projects involve significant literary, philosophical, and historical materials and translations.

**Education** - Education is, of course, at the center of the NEH mission. Education grants strengthen teaching and learning in schools, colleges, and universities through teacher training institutes and seminars, through curriculum development, and through online tools for teachers, parents, and students. A *We the People* initiative managed through this division is the new NEH teacher training/professional development program called "Landmarks of American History," which offers a series of workshops for K-12 and community college teachers at important historical sites across the United States. Upcoming workshop sites for 2005 include the Kituah Cherokee Landmark near Cherokee, North Carolina; Mount Vernon in Arlington, Virginia; the Alamo, in San Antonio, TX; and Civil Rights Landmarks in Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, and Tuskegee, AL.

**Preservation** - Through the Preservation and Access Division NEH makes grants to preserve unique historical, cultural and intellectual materials; for collection development and catalogs; and for encyclopedias and other projects. An exciting new project made possible through *We the People* is the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP), a multi-year partnership between the NEH and the Library of Congress to convert microfilm of historically significant U.S. newspapers published between 1836 and 1922 into fully searchable digital files. More than 30 million pages of newspapers will be made accessible online to students, teachers, parents, scholars, historians. The Preservation

division is also making significant contributions to understanding and preservation of world cultures. In 2003, the NEH announced a special initiative, "Recovering Iraq's Past," to support projects that preserve and document cultural resources in Iraq's archives, libraries and museums. Awards in 2004 included a digital library of cuneiform tablets documenting Mesopotamian civilization from 3300 B.C. to 100 A.D.

**Public Programs** - It is through NEH-funded public humanities programming that the endowment works most directly with the American public. From traveling exhibits in local museums and libraries to film, television and radio productions, NEH public programs reach literally millions of citizens in communities throughout the U.S. Recent projects include the Emmy-award winning documentary *Benjamin Franklin; The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courty Art and Culture in Western Asia*, a traveling museum exhibit which recently won the Alfred Barr Award for Museum Scholarship from the College Art Association; and a series of bilingual reading and discussion programs called *Family Portraits*, which drew readers to over 150 libraries in eight western states, as well as New York and Florida. "America's Historic Places" is a *We the People* initiative that encourages the use of historic sites to address themes and issues central to our nation's history.

**Federal State Partnership** - The network of 56 state humanities councils has proven to be very effective in delivering humanities programming to small towns and rural areas that might not otherwise have access to such programs. Funding for *We the People* will continue to provide significant new resources to state humanities councils, in recognition of the unique role councils play in carrying out these programs at the local level. Through this initiative, councils have developed unique teacher workshops, lectures, reading and discussion programs, exhibitions and public meetings that help local citizens appreciate the events, people and institutions that define the history of their communities and nation. For example, in anticipation of the 400th anniversary of Virginia in 2007, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities has just awarded a consultation and planning grant to the Virginia Council on Indians to help establish a Virginia Indian Heritage Trail and to create a database on publicly-accessible collections and sites where Virginia Indian history and culture are interpreted.

**Challenge Grants** - Challenge Grants strengthen the institutional base of the humanities by stimulating and matching nonfederal contributions to humanities projects, including such hard-to-fund areas as endowment, renovations, and collections development. First-time recipients of a challenge grant must match every federal dollar with three nonfederal dollars, and recipients of subsequent awards must raise four nonfederal dollars for every dollar.

Most programs of the humanities endowment award matching grants, which entail an offer of NEH funding that is conditioned on an equivalent amount of fund-raising by the recipient. Since the establishment of NEH in 1965 through FY 2004, Endowment matching funds have stimulated \$384 million in third-party donations, and NEH Challenge Grants have leveraged another \$1.46 billion in institutional support. A small investment in the American people through NEH goes a long way.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We appreciate the support of this committee for our nation's cultural and intellectual resources through the National Endowment for the Humanities.