

Fiscal Year 2005 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities

**Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
by Robert Vaughan
Director, Virginia Center for the Humanities and
President, National Humanities Alliance
and John Hammer
Director and CEO, National Humanities Alliance
Regarding Fiscal Year 2005 Funding for the
National Endowment for the Humanities**

2 April 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The National Humanities Alliance (NHA) writes to register our support for President Bush's request for \$162 million for the FY-2005 appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Alliance is pleased to submit testimony in support of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) on behalf of the NHA membership of eighty-nine scholarly and professional associations; organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, higher education, and state humanities councils; university-based and independent humanities research centers and others concerned with national cultural policies.

The humanities are integral to American life and our democratic form of government. Each step in America's journey towards the federal form of democratic government -- the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights -- was formed by individuals steeped in political theory and other humanistic learning. Many of our best leaders of today and yesterday to varying degrees think about the government within a humanities framework (i.e., human rights, the concepts of liberty and balance of power, the relationships between federal, state and local government, etc.). It is especially worth noting that a democracy such as ours is dependent upon a citizenry that understands and acts upon the humanities base from which America grew. If the citizenry forgets that background and framework, our democracy will be in peril. An appreciation of the relationship of the humanities to democracy was a key factor in the establishment of the NEH almost forty years ago.

Congress enacted the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 in order "to promote progress and scholarship in the humanities and the arts in the United States." This act established the National Endowment for the Humanities as an independent grant-making agency of the federal government to support research, education, and public programs in the humanities. In that legislation, Congress defines the term humanities as "the study of the following: languages, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism, and theory of the arts; and those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods."

In a 1987 report entitled "The Humanities and the American Promise," the result of a colloquium funded, in part, by NEH, University of Virginia historian Merrill Peterson provides a definition of the

humanities in terms of its practical importance to democracy, as well as to the intellectual life of each citizen, that may be more illuminating than the statutory description: We think it is misleading to regard the humanities basically as a set of academic disciplines or, even more restricting, as a set of "great books". We identify them, rather, with certain ways of thinking--of inquiring, evaluating, judging, finding, and articulating meaning. They include the developed human talents from which texts and disciplines spring. They are, taken together, the necessary resources of a reflective approach to life. The value of a reflective approach can be best appreciated by considering the alternative: a life unilluminated by reasoning--in short, the "unexamined life" that Socrates described as not worth living. Where the humanities are vigorous, action follows from and is guided by reflection. It is their capacity to change, elevate, and improve both the common civic life and individual lives that make the cultivation of the humanities important to the American people.

The President's request for FY-2005 is \$162 million with \$33 million of the proposed request for continuation of the We the People special initiative. As noted above, we support the President's request. We recognize that Congress faces unusually difficult choices this year in the face of rising deficits and the war on terrorism. But the work of NEH is critical for the American people not only to preserve and provide access to our history and culture but also more specifically to understand our place in the international community and to understand the heritage we are fighting to retain. While the nation must spend hundreds of billions of dollars in defense of our way of life, a \$162 million appropriation through NEH can be seen as a small, but very important, investment in assuring a citizenry that understands the issues underlying this struggle.

On a practical note, we welcome the administration's recognition of the critical role that NEH plays in preserving our historic and cultural record, improving education at all levels, and helping Americans to understand their lives and the life of their nation. While we are not asking the committee to recommend more at this time than the \$162 million proposed for the agency, we want to make clear that the sum does not provide enough for the agency to play the role for which it was created. Basically, the NEH is trying to carry out its important mandate with less than half of the funding in constant dollars that it commanded 25 years ago.

Table: NEH Appropriations, FY 1970-2004 (in five-year intervals, millions of dollars)

Fiscal Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2004
Nominal \$	8.9	79.1	150.1	139.5	156.9	172.0	115.3	135.3
Constant \$ (2004)	42.8	275.9	341.6	243.1	225.2	211.7	125.5	135.3

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.

We the People--A Special Initiative

Shortly after Bruce Cole, the art historian who became the eighth chairman of NEH, arrived at the endowment in late 2001, he began considering ways that the NEH could increase its effectiveness in assisting Americans to understand more fully their history and appreciate the forces and factors underlying our form of democracy. The We the People (WTP) special initiative grew from his discussions with NEH staff and others. The program was first introduced in the agency's FY-2003 request, but shortly thereafter the White House became interested in WTP and saw it as an activity

that promised to strengthen the teaching of American history and culture, while at the same time helping the American public to become more engaged in studying our history. As you may know, the President pledged to provide \$100 million for the WTP initiative over four years. In a White House Rose Garden Ceremony in September of 2002, President Bush introduced the expanded We the People initiative with remarks that included the following: 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.

Now, in its first year with special funding, We the People is stimulating a wide variety of new projects that advance our knowledge of the events, ideas, and principles that define the American nation. The initiative has drawn scholars, teachers, filmmakers, museum professionals, librarians, state humanities council leaders and other individuals engaged in humanities work to develop projects on the most significant events and themes in the nation's history and culture. Another feature of WTP is that it builds upon almost 40 years of significant projects funded by NEH.

RESEARCH AND FELLOWSHIPS--Research is the engine that provides content and sometimes structure for other humanities activities. Documentary editing projects make accessible collections of papers of US leaders in politics, history, literature and other areas. Past grants have supported work on papers of many presidents from Washington to Eisenhower. WTP has been able to fund a number of important projects including the papers of Frederick Douglass (Indiana University) and James K. Polk (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), and the Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution (University of Wisconsin, Madison).

Much of the research being carried out under WTP is through fellowships to individual scholars. Three examples of the wide range of topics are: Gershwin: A Critical Biography (Howard Pollack, University of Houston); Northern Sierra Miwok Oral Literature and History (Suzanne Wash, Independent Scholar, Davis, CA); and The Republicanism of James Madison: the Authority of Public Opinion (Colleen Sheehan, Villanova University).

EDUCATION--Education is, of course, at the center of the WTP initiative. One example of this is a new NEH teacher training/professional development program called "Landmarks of American History," which offers a series of workshops for school teachers held at sites of historical distinction in the United States. "Landmarks of American History" seminars include: The Mark Twain House Teacher Workshop, focusing on Twain's work, cultural legacy, and his era in American history; Crossroads and Conquest: People, Place, and Power on the Vancouver National Historic Reserve--History and cultures of Vancouver and the historic Northwest; and Planned and Preserved: Savannah's Three-Century History.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS--It is through NEH-funded public humanities programming that the endowment works most directly with the American public. From travelling exhibits in local museums and libraries to film, television and radio productions, NEH media projects reach literally millions of citizens in communities throughout the US. WTP documentary films focus on such key figures in American history as Andrew Jackson, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, and John and Abigail Adams. Other national public projects supported through WTP include:

- When Women Went to WWII -- The University of North Carolina, Greensboro is developing a traveling exhibition for libraries that provides interpretive programs about women in military service during World War II;

- Transitions in the Apache World: The Fort Apache Legacy -- With this grant, the White Mountain Apache (Fort Apache, Arizona) will develop a permanent exhibit including both traditional culture and the changes that took place after establishment of Fort Apache.

STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS--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. WTP funding, which will be distributed in the summer, will permit each council to increase activities significantly. Examples of SHC plans include:

- North Carolina will expand its "Let's Talk About It" reading and discussion program in libraries. A new series to be developed jointly with the North Carolina Center for the Book is *The South: Recapturing Our Identity Through History*;
- Pennsylvania will expand the history section of its speakers bureau. Pennsylvanians will be able to participate in lecture/discussions on such topics as: *The Scots Irish in Pennsylvania*; *Pittsburgh Melting Pot: The Faces of Western Pennsylvania*; and *Betsy Ross and the Making of an American Legend*;
- Virginia is undertaking four projects on "We the People and 2007" (2007 being the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, "the germ of the American Republic"). Activities include an oral history project entitled *Virginia's Stories*, a speakers bureau involving Virginia writers, and radio programs on Historic Jamestowne.

PRESERVATION AND ACCESS--The WTP initiative is supporting an impressive array of activities, from the digitization of 19th century US newspapers to the preservation of state archives. Examples of current projects include:

- Pennsylvania Newspaper Project: Microfilming (Pennsylvania State University, Main Campus, University Park)--The preservation microfilming of approximately 222,210 pages of newspapers, as part of Pennsylvania's participation in the US Newspaper Program.
- Preserving the Past and Ensuring the Future (Alaska State Library and Archives, Juneau)--the preservation assessment of 19th-c. territorial and 20th-c. statehood records of Alaska.
- Preservation Assessment of Architectural Drawings Collections (University of Washington Libraries, Seattle)--The preservation assessment of a collection of architectural drawings that document the history of building in the Puget Sound area from the 1870s to the present.

CHALLENGE GRANTS--Challenge grants have also thrived under We the People, with awards going to such institutions as the Georgia Historical Society, Massachusetts Historical Society, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture (Spokane), University of California, Berkeley (library), and University of Washington (museum).

Note: There are other programs with federal funding entitled "We the People". The program at NEH is unique because it is centered upon the agency's past activities and capitalizes on its strengths in terms of staff, first-rate peer review process, and focus on humanities content. Other initiatives, such as the Department of Education's civics education program, may complement NEH's effort but certainly will not duplicate it.

We the People and NEH's Core Programs

As you know, the \$27 million increase for NEH is almost entirely devoted to the We the People special initiative. The peer review process at NEH, from which all successful applications must

emerge with very high ratings, is itself highly respected and often emulated. The impact of the We the People initiative has been very positive across the core programs of the NEH. NEH's planning office reports that overall applications are up 8%, with significantly greater increases in select areas such as Summer Stipends (up 10% and Summer Seminars (up 20%.) The WTP funding can broaden the reach of core programs by directly funding select applications submitted to core programs, thereby freeing funds for other highly rated projects.

While the We the People special initiative is serving at present as the most visible of NEH's activities, the core programs of the Endowment, which have developed over the last four decades, are the backbone of the federal involvement in the humanities. The NEH is the largest single funder of humanities programs in the United States. The leadership provided by NEH is critical for the national effort to:

- develop Americans' knowledge and understanding of the nation's history and traditions, its values and beliefs;
- preserve and provide access to our nation's historical and cultural resources;
- strengthen teaching and learning in history, literature, language and other humanities subjects in schools and colleges;
- facilitate research and original scholarship in the humanities;
- provide opportunities for lifelong learning in the humanities for all Americans;
- strengthen the institutional base of the humanities.