

***Testimony of Stephen J. Greenblatt, Professor, Harvard University,  
On Behalf of the National Humanities Alliance***

**Before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**On the FY-2001 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities**

**April 6, 2000**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Stephen Greenblatt, Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University. I am a member of the Executive Council of the Modern Language Association and the Board of Directors of the American Council of Learned Societies. My own research has focused mainly on Shakespeare and Renaissance literature, about which I have written and edited a dozen books. My career as a scholar was launched some thirty years ago when I received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for Younger Humanists - that term "younger," alas, is no longer applicable to me - enabling me to finish a book on Sir Walter Raleigh. I am currently the associate general editor of the Norton Anthology of English Literature, a textbook that serves in a large number of American high schools, colleges and universities as the principal introduction to the riches of literature written in English. I would like to present the two hefty volumes of the Norton Anthology, along with my recent edition of Shakespeare's complete works, to Chairman Regula, as tangible evidence of what the humanities means to me personally.

It is a pleasure to testify before you today. I represent the National Humanities Alliance and its membership of eighty-five scholarly and professional associations; organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, higher education and state humanities councils; university-based and independent humanities research centers and other organizations concerned with national cultural policies. A list of NHA members is attached.

The President is proposing an overall budget for the National Endowment for the Humanities in the next fiscal year of \$150 million - a \$34.7 million increase over the present fiscal year. We who teach the humanities understand that a 23% increase in a single fiscal year is substantial but urge the Subcommittee to consider the context of this request. In FY-1995, NEH began the year with \$177 million in support of a vibrant set of programs and entered FY-1996 with its budget slashed to \$110 million. Had NEH not received these cuts, and allowing for the impact of inflation and cost of living increases, the NEH budget today would be \$200 million. While significant, the increased funding called for in the President's budget request still falls far short of NEH's funding level before the cuts. When the cuts occurred, many valuable projects of service to the American people had to be terminated, others were thrown into disarray, and the whole concept of national support for the humanities seemed imperiled. "The prospect of hanging wonderfully concentrates the mind," Samuel Johnson remarked. Believe me, ours has been sufficiently concentrated, and we are ripe for renewal. We believe that the President's arguments in favor of the significant increase requested for this valuable agency - developed under the leadership of Chairman William Ferris - are persuasive. This year's budget request represents a careful blend of rebuilding of programs; new, focused initiatives; and pump-priming funds aimed at increasing the flow of private dollars to supporting humanities activities. We urge you to appropriate the President's full request of \$150 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities for FY-2001. At the same time, we urge full funding of the President's request for FY-2001 of \$150 million for the National Endowment for the Arts and \$33.4 million for the Office of Museum Services.

I want to speak briefly about only one of these programs, to which I have a direct personal connection. For more than three decades, I have had the privilege of teaching at two great universities, Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley. These institutions are among our national treasures and fittingly draw talented students and scholars from all over the world. But though I have taken and continue to take immense pride and delight in my brilliant students, I come before you today to testify that one of the most thoroughly rewarding teaching and learning experiences I have ever had are the three NEH-funded seminars that I directed for college teachers. As you may know, the NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes are for bright and ambitious teachers from high schools, as well as higher education institutions where the teaching load tends to be heavy, the scholarly resources tend to be light, and support for research tends to be non-existent. NEH funding enables these talented teachers to take advantage of institutional resources to which they would not otherwise have access, and to spend four to six weeks during the summer renewing the intellectual passion, the love of learning, that brought them to the classroom in the first place. The participants, as I can bear witness, work incredibly hard and return to their home institutions with recharged energy, an energy that not only shows itself in scholarly articles and books but also in a reinvigorated teaching. I felt that my own contribution was reaching not simply the few dozen members of the seminar but thousands, even tens of thousands, of students from all over the country.

NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes focus on many subjects; my own happened for obvious reasons to be on Shakespeare. But why should any American tax dollars go to encourage the study of an English playwright who died in 1616 and never set foot on our shores? Why, for that matter, Dante or Cervantes, Jane Austen or Tolstoy, or hundreds of other towering writers and artists who lived far from us in time and space? Because they, along with American-born writers like Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, are essential figures in our culture. They transmit crucial values, ask difficult questions, and contribute to the pursuit of happiness that we claim as part of our national birthright. If that happiness is not going to be instantly reducible to material objects, if it is to have a moral and spiritual and aesthetic content, then our country needs the humanities.

NEH funding is a sign that members of Congress believe that the humanities - which includes the appreciation and study of language and literature (my own fields), as well as history, archaeology, political science, philosophy, and others - is in the national interest. Unlike many nations, we have no one dominant cultural tradition, no unifying myth of origins, no single set of songs and dances that confers upon us our collective identity. Our strength lies in our multifariousness and our mobility, and it is precisely these qualities that make the humanities so vital. For we do not receive our identity ready-made; instead we are obliged to fashion ourselves. If I study Shakespeare, to take this single example, it is not because I have received his works as my natural inheritance - like so many Americans, my grandparents did not speak English as their mother tongue - but because my education has enabled me to choose to do so freely.

The NEH plays a vital role in this process of national self-fashioning. It does so in many different ways:

- The NEH strives to preserve the nation's cultural and historical legacy through preservation of print and material culture, research, education in schools and colleges, and informal education in museums, libraries, historical organizations, through the programs of the state humanities councils and through quality programming for television and other media. In the area of brittle books, for example, NEH funding and expertise have been vitally important in keeping our cultural heritage from quite literally crumbling into dust.

- NEH programs are critical to addressing the nation's future needs in education. As we are frequently reminded by Chairman Ferris, the humanities make up more than two-thirds of the nation's K-12 curriculum, a majority of our nation's teachers report feeling inadequately prepared in their subject area and the Department of Education estimates that by the end of the decade, we will need 2 million new teachers. As discussed, NEH summer seminars and institutes are the catalyst for revitalized teachers and college faculty, for tens of thousands of students each year. With demand for participation routinely exceeding availability by 75%, this is a clear example of NEH's readiness to make use of additional funding in responding to critical national need. Last year, NEH introduced an exciting new pilot project called the Humanities Teacher Leadership competition to help elementary and secondary school teachers share the benefits of their participation in seminars and institutes with other educators and schools at home. In FY-2000, out of 250 applications, NEH anticipates being able to fund 49 seminars and institutes. With the full funding requested for FY-2001, NEH would be able to fund 62 Summer Seminars and Institutes and 75 Humanities Teacher Leadership awards.
  
- NEH funding helps Americans of all ages into or back into lifelong learning through public programming developed by state humanities councils as well as museums, libraries, and historical societies.
  
- NEH has played a leading role in making technology accessible for teachers, researchers, preservationists and others in the humanities community as well as many members of the public. For example, NEH's popular EDSITEment project helps teachers, families, and students navigate the sometimes bewildering maze of the Internet by directing them to more than 70 educational sites on the Internet. Each site is selected through a rigorous merit review process for its excellence in content and design, and its usefulness in the classroom
  
- NEH stimulates significant private funding for public projects in the humanities. The agency reports that since 1965, \$354 million in third-party giving has been stimulated by Endowment matching grants, and \$1.24 billion private non-federal has been generated by Challenge Grants.

There is so much more that we can do, even with a modest increase in our support. The present budget proposal calls for new initiatives in archaeology and folklore, grants that would enable the public to enrich its understanding of the past and to enlarge its appreciation of the traditional customs and art forms of a wide range of peoples.

In a world full of hatred, rivalry and sectarian violence, we owe it to ourselves and to our children to foster such mutual understanding. We look to the humanities to help us realize a vision that Shakespeare voices in one of his last plays:

*Every man shall eat in safety  
Under his own vine what he plants, and sing  
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours.*