

## ***Testimony on the FY-1998 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities***

**Presented to the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by Werner Gundersheimer, Director, Folger Shakespeare Library, on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance**

**March 5, 1997**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Werner Gundersheimer, an historian specializing in the European Renaissance and director of the Folger Shakespeare Library. Currently, I also serve as president of the National Humanities Alliance.

It is a pleasure to testify before you today and to represent the National Humanities Alliance and its membership of nearly ninety 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.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to express support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the President's request for \$136 million in Fiscal Year 1998. We urge the committee to accept and recommend to the House of Representatives \$136 million for the coming federal budget year. At the same time, we wish to go on record in support of the President's recommendation of \$136 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and \$26 million for the museum portion of the budget for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities recently released *Creative America: A Report to the President*, a carefully drawn analysis of the complicated web of resources on all levels that form the support system for culture in the United States; the report also includes recommendations on strategies for improvements in areas of need. The report is strongly supportive of the importance of healthy arts and humanities enterprises and underscores their relationship to values in a democracy. In an essay commissioned by the committee, Benjamin Barber writes "The arts and humanities are civil society's driving engine, the key to its creativity, its diversity, its imagination, and hence its spontaneity and liberty". While recognizing that federal contributions to the arts and the humanities comprise a small fraction of the overall enterprise -- higher education institutions are by far the largest source of support for humanities activities -- the committee concludes that the reductions in federal support were sending an unfortunate message of "a lack of value for the role of culture in society". The committee has a number of recommendations ranging from intensified preservation activities to protect our cultural heritage to enhancing knowledge of other countries and their cultures. The major recommendation for the NEH, NEA, and IMLS, and a key to the federal role in many other areas, is to increase spending levels for three agencies to \$2 per capita by the year 2000. While that is a major jump from the 88 cents per capita in FY-1997, it is much less startling when viewed from the \$1.42 per capita invested in the agencies in 1995.

When Congress approved the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, two key purposes for increasing federal involvement in the humanities were:

*"a high 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;" and*

*"democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens and it must therefore foster and support a form of education, and access to the arts and humanities, designed to make people of all backgrounds and, wherever located, masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant."*

In the three decades since its establishment, the National Endowment for the Humanities developed and nourished programs in support of scholarship education, and public humanities of the very highest distinction. Many NEH programs such as the preservation of decaying print materials; development and publication of scholarly editions of writings of Presidents and other major historical figures; creation of imaginative programs by state humanities councils, media, museums, and libraries that engage and provide access for the public; improved humanities education; and nurturing of technology in scholarship have become models for the world. The major beneficiaries of all of these activities are the American people -- students in the schools and higher education institutions, teachers on all levels, and the general public.

NEH entered FY-1995 with a budget of \$177 million and robust, highly competitive programs. Following a \$5 million rescission, and a 36% cut, the agency budgets for FY-1996 and FY-1997 were set at \$110 million -- still critically important for both the public and the humanities community. But the disproportionate reductions have a very high price both immediately and in the future for all areas of activity. To compare before and after, in FY-1996:

- NEH's seminars and institutes for high school and college teachers supported participation of 1,400 teachers who in turn will reach 220,000 students with intellectually reinvigorated instruction. This is in contrast with the 425,000 students who benefited when 2,600 teachers participated in these programs in FY-1995;
- NEH projects to preserve fragile books, newspapers, documents, and other artifacts held in the nation's libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions have been at the forefront of the effort to save such materials. FY-1996 grants force NEH to make fewer and smaller grants. As a result, 20,000 brittle books and 230,000 disintegrating pages of historically significant newspapers will not be microfilmed. In addition, 130,000 objects of archaeological, ethnographic, and historical importance to the nation will be preserved;
- In its program for preparation of scholarly editions of the papers of presidents and other important historical and literary figures, NEH's support is central to projects searching out and drawing together key documents from thousands of repositories in virtually every state. Due to the reductions, NEH was forced to end the special program for these papers. This has meant that the 50 on-going editions projects have been placed in competition with 400 collaborative research projects for no more than 20 awards. Unless a less draconian budget situation can be arrived at -- and NEH proposes an American Legacy Editions initiative in the President's proposed budget -- no more than 3 or 4 of the on-going presidential projects will continue to receive NEH funding;
- NEH support for museum exhibits, television and radio programming and other public activities has been substantially reduced. This means NEH may not discover the next Ken Burns, who brought such documentaries as "The Civil War" and "The West", or the next Henry Hampton, who brought "The Great Depression" -- both of whom got their start with NEH funds;
- Underlying all NEH programs and activities scholarship, the fundamental building block for everything else NEH supports -- all NEH projects, state humanities council, film, library,

museum, and educational -- draw upon scholarship in one form or another. NEH is the largest single source of support for humanities scholarship and programming in the United States.

The President's request for FY-1998 will allow the agency to begin restoring some of its reduced capacity in all of the areas mentioned above. More comprehensively -- and in response to what could become a major American loss -- the American Legacy Editions Initiative is intended to give a chance of survival and completion to a number of scholarly editions projects by strengthening their financial bases and accelerating their progress. Increases in a number of areas of particular need will bring more resources to programs under greatest pressure, e.g., Challenge Grant Program.

As mentioned above, in 1965, a bipartisan Congress found that federal support was needed because "a high civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone..." With the caveat that we are not questioning support for science, I wish to comment on the glaring disparity in support of science and the humanities -- Daniel Callahan, the distinguished philosopher and ethicist, who recently stepped down as president of the Hastings Center, shared an unpublished essay Science and the Humanities: Mutual Interdependence, Disparate Funding which reads in part:

*"The humanities have been one of the principal means of educating and stimulating people to reflect upon the goals of national, public, and private life. They have provided a necessary and valuable complement to the work of the sciences. The sciences and the humanities need and profit from each other. Mutually, they enrich the lives of everyone, in ways they could not do alone... [there is a mystery as to] why there is such a financial difference between the federal resources made available to the sciences and those made available to the humanities. That difference is approximately 100 to 1 in favor of the sciences. Is that because the sciences are thought by the public to be 100 times more valuable to our national and private life than the humanities? Perhaps so, but that does not seem likely. Is it perhaps because, economically, the sciences are thought to make a greater contribution to national prosperity? Perhaps so, but the still important place given to the humanities at all levels of education, and in public life, suggests that they have their own contribution to make, some of it economic. It is perhaps that the humanities are understood as somehow more academic and removed from real life than the sciences? That would seem odd given the fact of a national commitment to basic research, often with no immediate practical end in mind, and the centrality of American universities for scientific research and education."*

A word on private philanthropy and the humanities -- The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities is calling for a national initiative to renew American philanthropy for the arts and humanities, and other charitable purposes. Humanities organizations including the NHA will, of course, cooperate in such an undertaking and welcome the suggestion. However, given various ideas in Congress in recent years about privatization of some agencies including the NEH, we wish to draw the attention of the Appropriations Committee to a study conducted by the Rockefeller Foundation and published by the President's Committee in 1996 entitled Looking Ahead: Private Sector Giving in the Arts and the Humanities, written by Nina Kressner Cobb. The two most significant findings vis a vis the humanities were:

- the private sector cannot fill the void of financial support for the humanities should the federal presence cease to exist; and
- the NEH is the single largest source of support for the humanities nationwide compared to the private sector and to other units of government.

Mr. Chairman, my colleagues and I are appreciative of your willingness to hear the case for the endowments and to seek Rules Committee action to protect them in the absence of formal authorization. We believe the NEH and its sister agencies perform critically important functions for the American people. We trust that you will carefully consider the President's request and will once again argue for their protection before the Rules Committee.