

Statement on the FY-1995 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 Stanley N. Katz, President, American Council of Learned Societies, on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Stanley N. Katz, President of the American Council of Learned Societies and Senior Fellow in Public and International Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University.

ACLS, of which I have been the president for the past eight years, is a private organization which was chartered by the Congress in 1982 to represent the humanities within this country and abroad. We are a consortium of 53 learned societies representing the breadth of the fields in the humanities and social sciences, whose individual members number approximately 300,000 scholars, teachers and other professionals. ACLS provides more than \$1,000,000 per year from its own endowment for humanities post-doctoral fellowships. We publish scholarly reference works. We sponsor research and teaching in foreign area studies. We support American studies outside of the United States, and U.S. research abroad. We work with public school systems across the country to enhance humanities content, X through 12. We work to encourage and support the system of scholarly communications, from libraries to scholarly publishing, and we strive especially to adapt the new technologies to the service of humanities teaching and research.

It may also be of interest to you that the bulk of my public service activities are with a wide range of humanities and educational organizations. I am, for instance, a trustee of the National Humanities Alliance, Southern Methodist University, the Newberry Library (Chicago), the Supreme Court Historical Society, the British-American Arts Association, Independent Sector, and the Institute of European and Asian Studies (Chicago) I serve as chairman of the boards of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Papers of the Founding Fathers, Inc. I am an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Antiquarian Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Council on Foreign Relations. My life is pretty much devoted to working for the humanities.

It is a pleasure to testify before you today and to represent the National Humanities Alliance and its membership of more than seventy-five scholarly and professional associations, organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, institutions of higher education, state humanities councils, university-based and independent humanities centers, and others concerned with national policies affecting work in the humanities.

In my testimony today I wish to focus on the role of scholarly research within the grant-making programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities in the context of the emerging configuration of economic and institutional problems confronting humanities research as the century nears its conclusion.

First, I want to stress the centrality of scholarship for all of the activities supported by NEH. Research supported by both the Research and Fellowships and Seminars Divisions is a prerequisite for the success of the programming supported by the other NEH Divisions. Without a vibrant research community, constantly engaged in the reexamination of old problems and the

development of new knowledge, the Public Programs, State Programs, Preservation and Access and Education Divisions would have neither the substance nor the personnel necessary to carry out their mandates. All of the public and educational activities carried out by the Endowment depend upon a healthy humanities research sector -- just as the research community needs to be constantly informed and energized by interaction with the educational and public domains.

Examples of this interdependence have frequently been cited before this subcommittee, but I would like to refresh your memories briefly. Scholar/teachers comprise 50% of the membership of the state humanities councils, and perhaps a higher proportion of those who actually deliver public programming for the councils. When ACLS awards a post doctoral fellowship, our award letter reminds the awardee that his/her research may be of interest to his/her state humanities council, and states that we will send a copy of the award letter to the executive director of the council. We encourage our awardees to contact their state councils, and to volunteer their services. Similarly, when NEH funds expensive media projects such as videos, the filmmakers must assemble a group of scholarly advisors with experience relevant to the project. Needless to say, every program of the Division of Preservation and Access depends upon the interaction of scholars and librarians (and others).

Chairman Sheldon Hackney has made similar use of scholarly advice in formulating his recent initiative for a National Conversation on pluralism. I was one of a remarkably diverse group of scholars, assembled in Chicago this March by the MacArthur Foundation and NEH, which spent two days discussing the potential range of issues to be addressed in the National Conversation -- an activity to be supported out of funds from the Division of Public Programs. One of the most important criteria for the choice of discussants was clearly the pertinence and originality of their research. I believe it is not an exaggeration to say that the Endowment could not conduct its work without and growing and healthy American research community.

But I particularly want to draw attention to the range of activities supported by the Division of Education. It will be obvious to all of you that we do not want our youngsters taught the science of an earlier age. What good would it be to teach biology as it was understood before Crick and Watson discovered DNA, or physics as it was taught before the dramatic modern discoveries of the composition of the atom? I hope it will be similarly clear that we should not teach our youngsters outmoded notions of history, literature, music or philosophy. The fields of the humanities have been transformed dramatically in the past generation, and K-12 education must reelect what we now know and teach our college students. One of the principal tasks of the Division of Education is to translate and transmit new humanities knowledge for the use of American schools.

The example I should like to cite is funded by three private philanthropic organizations rather than NEH (because, frankly, the Education Division budget is not large enough to support such large projects), but it is representative of the process NEH supports. ACLS is currently operating a three-year K-12 Humanities Curriculum Project whose purpose is to encourage scholarship among school teachers in order to enable them to bring the best of relevant university scholarship to their elementary and secondary school student. Each year we run a competition for consortia of urban public school systems and local research universities, and fund three or four different projects.

In each project, elementary and secondary school teachers (each teacher representing a team of four in his/her school), are given a year's fellowship at a local university. Each teacher works on a curriculum project, and the group of teachers (gathered in a weekly workshop) work on a joint curriculum project. At the university they audit courses, work with individual university faculty members, and generally become part of the university community. They return to their classrooms the following year and, with their teammates, put their curricula into use (as well as presenting

workshops for other teachers in the district). We have funded projects in Los Angeles, San Diego, Cambridge/Brookline, MA, Denver/Boulder, Minneapolis, Milwaukee and Vancouver, BC.

Such education projects not only play a vital part in the renewal of pedagogical knowledge in the schools, but also in the professionalization of teachers. The motto of the ACLS program is "the teacher as scholar," and I believe it to be clear that our teacher-fellows are returning to the classroom with a new sense of intellectual empowerment and self-confidence. We next propose to attempt to reverse the process, and to try to bring the pedagogical expertise of school teachers to bear upon deficiencies in teaching at the college level, in the belief that there is an inerradicable connection between scholarship and teaching.

In every way, then, the support of research is at the basis of the support and promotion of the humanities in the United States.

Second, I want to stress the indispensability of NEH funding to scholarly research in the humanities.

As oft-reported to this subcommittee, the NEH is by far the largest and most important funder of humanities research in the United States, even though support for the humanities represents less than 1% of the federal research budget. There has not been large-scale private foundation funding of the humanities for a long time -- probably not since the Ford Foundation cut back on its arts and humanities activities in the late 1970's. The A.W. Mellon Foundation remains the largest of the foundation funders, and one of the few private foundations to provide a significant sum annually for humanities research, but even Mellon is a small funder compared to NEH. While it is certainly true that a number of colleges and universities receive private funding for humanities activities (though seldom directly for research), it is important to remember that the national scope and democratic character of the Endowment place it in a unique role for the development of the humanities nationally. Let me give a few examples:

NEH support is critical for the preservation of our cultural heritage and for the provision of access to that heritage. The Division of Preservation and Access has been by far the largest and most influential funder of the national effort to convert brittle books to microfilm, and it has been a leader in other preservation efforts.

One of the newest areas of preservation and access activity is the conversion of text and image to electronic (digital) form. Beyond the simple preservation of cultural materials which will otherwise disappear or be destroyed, conversion to digital form makes these materials much easier to access and to use.

To give another example from my own experience, let me say a few words about the Papers of the Founding Fathers. These are the long-standing efforts to produce scholarly letterpress editions of the papers of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. FFP, Inc. was established more than a decade ago to raise private philanthropic funding for the projects, and we raised several million dollars toward that end. Private funding has now diminished dramatically, however, and at this time all five projects are dependent upon funding from the Research Division at NEH (as well as from the National Historic Records and Publications Commission). We have, however, located a private funder (the Packard Humanities Institute) to produce an electronic version of the unannotated papers of the Founding Fathers -- a task which would not have been possible without the editing projects. A test disk containing all of the Franklin Papers has just been produced by PHI, and we look forward to a single CD-ROM containing complete texts of the papers of the five founding fathers -- to be distributed free to the public and school libraries of the United States. The disk will be fully searchable electronically, and should be

invaluable to students writing papers on George Washington, as well as to the general public. I hope you will agree with me that this is a dramatic example of public-private partnership in the public interest. It is also a dramatic example of the relationship among scholarship, preservation and public access to humanities knowledge.

Another example of the relationship among scholarship and public access coming directly from our work at ACLS would be the ongoing project to produce a completely new national biographical dictionary. We began publication of the Dictionary of American Biography in 1927, but felt that a new version was needed before the end of the century. In cooperation with Oxford University Press (and with partial funding from the Research Division of NEH) we will publish the American National Biography in 1997. The ANB, all 20 millions words of it, will appear as 20 volumes in letterpress -- and as a single CD-ROM. The 1800 biographies of famous Americans are being written by more than 1000 scholars. This is another example of public-private partnership in funding for a work which is heavily used in the schools and in public libraries and of the need for private scholarship in the public service.

I could give many comparable examples of the significance of Research and Fellowships funding from NEH on the health of humanities scholarship in this country, but time does not permit me to do so. Let me summarize by saying that my argument is: 1.) that humanities research is basic to the health of the public culture of the United States as supported by NEH, and 2.) that NEH is far and away the most significant funder of such research and of our public culture.

Third, I would like to underscore the importance of NEH to the maintenance of the institutional infrastructure for humanities research in the United States.

I have already indicated the importance of NEH direct support of individual scholars through its Research and Fellowship programs, but I also want to indicate the vital significance of NEH support of those institutions (other than colleges and universities) which facilitate the conduct of scholarship: independent research libraries, historical societies, museums, residential humanities research centers, learned societies (and of course ACLS itself).

Such institutions have always had a hard time sustaining themselves, but their situation is increasingly precarious. The fundamental problem is that most of them are endowed institutions, for whom low interest rates mean very small returns on endowment investments and consequent shortfalls in operating budgets. They also suffer from the general decline in private philanthropy which for the past fifteen years or so has hit hard at the financial soundness of all non-for-profit organizations. Unlike social service providers, however, the opportunities to enhance income by instituting or raising fees for service for humanities research institutions are slim or nonexistent. Unlike arts organizations, they do not normally sell tickets for admission to performances or exhibitions.

As do individual scholars, most of these institutions serve portions of the general public as well as scholarly researchers. The most frequent users of historical society archives, for instance, are citizen genealogists researching their own family histories. The recent decision of the National Council of NEH to permit a third round of applications for the Challenge Grant program is an encouraging sign of the Endowment's recognition of the importance of the role of the infrastructural organizations, for the Challenge Grant program has been especially crucial for them. But there is not enough money in the program, and we will have to continue to search for new mechanisms of support for humanities organizations.

Fourth, I hope the subcommittee will recognize the special difficulties facing individual humanities scholars these days. The situation for university-based scholars is deteriorating rapidly:

Cutbacks in state funding, declines in returns from endowments, decreases in indirect cost recovery from the federal government have, as you well know, put higher education in serious financial difficulty. You may not, however, be aware of the impact of cost-cutting on humanities scholarship. One response of educational institutions has been to increase course loads for faculty members, and to increase the size of individual courses. The changes have been born disproportionately by humanities faculty, who have always taught the largest number of undergraduate students -- it is much easier to increase the size of classes in history or literature than those in biology, and humanists seldom have research grants to "buy up" their own teaching time in order to do research. The result of increases in undergraduate instruction is to decrease time available for research.

It is seldom understood that the humanities research community has been particularly hard hit by library fund shortages. One important source of support for library book and serial purchases has been university federal indirect cost recovery. As the universities recover less and as university budgets in general come under severe strains, funding for book purchases has declined. A recent Association of Research Libraries report shows, for instance, that the proportion of university research budgets allocated for library expenses has declined from 3.91% in 1982 to 3.32% a decade later. These cutbacks fall especially painfully on humanists, the scholars of the book, for whom the library is their laboratory.

University budgetary constraints also harm humanities research in other ways. Most universities do not provide computers for faculty without research grants to purchase research equipment, and (as I have already noted) few humanists have research grants. Universities subsidize faculty e-mail accounts, but it is clear that cost recovery for electronic and hard copy information delivery will shortly transform that situation to the detriment of those who mostly pay for their own research. ACLS and others in the humanities and arts communities are currently advocating affordable access to the National Information Infrastructure for humanities and arts researchers, but this too will be an uphill battle.

A different sort of pressure comes from the "knowledge explosion" of the last generation or two, which has made it difficult for contemporary scholars to be generalists in the traditional mode. When I was in graduate school, for instance, it seemed reasonable to think that I could read all of the existing monographic literature in my field (early American history, which covers the period from 1600 to 1800, as well as the history of Britain under the Tudors, Stuarts and Hanoverians). No one would think that reasonable (or possible) today. Too much has been written, and the field has been extended by important specialized research on women, economics, law, demography, Indians, literature, slavery, architecture and more. Some of this scholarship is narrow and of limited general interest, but cumulatively it has enriched our understanding of life in colonial North America beyond anything that could have been imagined when I received my Ph.D. in 1961. And yet both educational and political pressures now push in the direction of requiring humanists to become generalists. To move in this direction will require a lot of hard thought, planning and financial support.

The bottom line is that humanists are now doing more and better research -- research that is the basis for all public activities in the humanities -- and yet they have radically declining financial resources at their disposal. Merely to maintain our humanities research system of scholars and institutions -- incomparably the finest humanities system in the world -- we will have to increase our financial resources. And NEH is perilously close to the only game in town for that purpose.

Fifth, we must therefore hope for increased support for the Divisions of Research, and Fellowships and Seminars. Although we welcomed the series of increases in the overall NEH budgets during the 1989-1992 period which made some progress in restoring the Endowment's purchasing power, the general trend in appropriations for the two Divisions that directly support scholarship has been flat for nearly 15 years. It is these two divisions that nurture our future scholars and help us maintain our scholarly capacity. Some examples of the impact of many years of flat funding are:

Fellowships for University Teachers: there has been a steady downward drift. In 1985, 132 of these grants were awarded whereas in 1993 that figure had dropped to 116. Likewise, the Fellowships for College Teachers and Independent Scholars reached a high point of 142 awards in 1987, but only 102 were awarded in 1994. It should be noted here that unlike virtually all privately funded fellowships, NEH has been regularly adjusting its stipend for inflation.

Dissertation grants: we were especially grateful to the subcommittee for the initial funding for the Dissertation Grants program in the FY-92 appropriation. We emphasize now as we did then that these awards are, in a sense, a very small additional investment to complete the expensive graduate education programs of top students. These awards do not draw students to graduate education, rather they provide vital assistance to them in completing their degree programs. The applicant response when the program became operational in 1993 was phenomenal -- there were 1475 full applications from 150 institutions for the fifty \$17,500 grants, a ratio of almost 30 to 1. In the FY94 competition, for which no more than 10 applications would be accepted from any one institution, there are more than 750 applicants for 25 awards at the reduced level of \$14,000 -- thus maintaining the appalling ratio of 30 to 1. Because of vagaries in the budgeting process - particularly for carryover funds (which was the case because NEH did not have sufficient time to develop carefully the dissertation program in FY-92) -- the dissertation program has only been kept alive by scraping funds from every other program in the division (including discontinuance of the valuable Travel to Collections program).

In conclusion, I want to argue that investment in the humanities is essential to the economic, cultural and social well-being of American society in the century that is about to begin.

Secretary of Labor Reich and other analysts of the work force tell us that today's college graduates should expect to hold four or more different sorts of jobs in their work lives. We are beginning to understand that the ideal of lifetime employment for a single major corporation will not be characteristic of a modern high technology, postindustrial society. Most workers will be knowledge workers, and their principal skill will be their capacity to think critically and creatively.

Where will they learn such skills? -- in an enhanced liberal arts education. Who will provide the core for such an education? -- the humanities faculty. What we will need to do is to strengthen our humanities capacity if we are to equip ourselves for national success in the economic competition of the twenty-first century. Luckily, compared to the natural sciences, the humanities are relatively cheap. But we must not allow them to wither in the decade of the '90's.