

Testimony on the FY-1991 Appropriation for the Library of Congress

Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch (Committee on Appropriations), by Stanley N. Katz, President, American Council of Learned Societies, Speaking on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance

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I am Stanley N. Katz, President of the American Council of Learned Societies, an organization founded in 1919 and chartered by the Congress in 1982 to serve as the national institution for the promotion of the humanities and the humanistic aspects of the social sciences in the United States. ACLS is comprised of 46 professional learned societies, who among them claim more than a quarter of a million individual members. I have received professional training in history and law, and have taught at Harvard, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Chicago and Pennsylvania law schools, and Princeton, where I am concurrently Senior Fellow in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. I am here to speak in behalf of the members of the National Humanities Alliance and more generally the humanities and social science scholarly community of this country.

Let me begin by saying how much the Library of Congress has meant to me personally. Over the 35 years of my scholarly career, I have worked off and on in the library -- primarily in the Manuscripts Division and the Law Library. I am currently the Editor of the Oliver Wendell Holmes Devise, History of the United States Supreme Court, a project based in the Library and chaired by the Librarian of Congress. My graduate students have had fellowships to do research at the Library, and one has published a bibliography of works relating to slavery in the Law Library. The papers of my wife's grandfather, a distinguished Unitarian minister and writer, are housed in the Manuscript Division, as are the archives of ACLS.

The Library of Congress is the greatest single scholarly resource in the world. Perhaps I should stop by saying just that. Nowhere else is there such a vast, varied and rich collection of books, serials, manuscripts, maps, photographs, sound recordings and the other records of the human spirit -- all accessible without charge to citizens of the world. My organization oversees exchanges and research agreements with most of the nations of the world, from the Mongolian People's Republic to the German Democratic Republic (if it is still called that by the time I deliver my oral testimony), and I am familiar with most of the national libraries abroad. None is so rich with material or so open as our own Library of Congress.

I should also like to stress the outreach of the Library. The expert and comprehensive cataloguing done at LC not only saves millions of dollars for public and private libraries around the country, but insures the uniformity and quality control so necessary for adequate bibliographic retrieval. The published union catalogues of books and manuscripts of LC materials are among the most important research tools in all libraries. The serials and foreign language materials at LC are frequently unavailable anywhere else in the United States, and constitute an international treasure. The pioneering working done at LC on the preservation of books with acidic paper and on optical disk technology are of international significance.

I could go on, but the point is simple and can be stated briefly -- the good health of LC is absolutely central to the sustenance and growth of American scholarship, which is, bar none, the finest in the world. The Library of Congress budget has been cut to the point at which its capacity to function is seriously threatened. Over the last six years the LC budget has grown by only 14% -- not even keeping pace with inflation. During the same six year period, comparable national centers such as

the Smithsonian Institution and the National Library of Medicine have grown by 38 to 68%. The unfilled staff positions alone make it impossible for the Library to operate a full range of services at an adequate level, and the backlogs in processing and cataloging are growing and have an adverse impact in libraries throughout the nation. Today, the Subcommittee is considering a proposal for a 22% increase in the LC's budget -- from \$267 million to \$326.5 million. I urge the Subcommittee to support the full amount so that this critical national resource can move toward filling its many empty staff positions and move to diminish the very large arrearages that cost us all so much. LC is in financial trouble, and the consequence is that the vitality of U.S. scholarship is jeopardized.

And not only university research. I first encountered the Library as an undergraduate rooming next to a blind student, for whom I read -- as I saw what the National Library Service for the Blind meant to my friend, I began to appreciate what the national library of a compassionate country could do for all its people. Thirty-five years as a scholar have only strengthened that feeling, and I know that I speak for nearly 300,000 scholars in fifty states when I urge you to fund this essential institution fully.