

Statement on the FY-1988 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities

Before 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, Speaking on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance

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I am happy to have the opportunity to testify before you today and to represent the National Humanities Alliance and its membership of more than fifty scholarly and professional humanities associations, museums, libraries, institutions of higher education, and state humanities councils. I am pleased as well to be able to express my support for the programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Let me begin by saying that my own association with the Endowment goes back many years. I have served on numerous peer review panels for a variety of Endowment programs. I chaired the NEH-funded American Issues Forum: Chicago Committee (1974-76) and served on the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities (1979-1985), and I have been fortunate enough to receive support from the Endowment for my own scholarly work. I believe I know the Endowment and its history very well and that I am in a position to speak with some authority on the role that it has played in the past and can play in the future in the intellectual and cultural life of the United States. Moreover, in my current position as President of the American Council of Learned Societies, I have an especially broad acquaintance not only with the programs of the Endowment, but also with the entire universe of research and programming in the humanities. This acquaintance has only reinforced my feeling that the Endowment performs a unique role that is not a could not be filled by any private foundation or any government agency.

Let me begin my remarks today by commenting about what I take to be the general significance of NEH in our national life. Then I will turn to a particular example of the way in which that significance has been especially apparent in the last several years.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is, without question, not only the largest but also the most important funder of research and programming in the humanities in this country. For those of us in the scholarly community, it makes all the difference in the completion of our scholarly work, in the improvement of our teaching, and in our capacity to bring the results of our work to the general public. For the public-at-large, it is not too much to say that NEH, along with the National Endowment for the Arts, helps to keep us a civilized people, standing as it does for the highest aspirations not only of this society but of the many societies, past and present, whose cultures have helped to shape the world in which we live.

These sentiments are not merely the special pleading of an ivory tower intellectual; they represent instead a genuine evaluation of NEH's critical importance. Indeed, I would venture to say that few of the activities of the federal government give as much "bang for the buck" as NEH.

Let me give you just a few examples. Let us say that the Endowment provides a research fellowship to Professor Jones at a major university who is writing a book on the subject of "Theater and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain." After a productive year of research and writing (at a maximum cost of \$27,000), she publishes a book on the subject and integrates the material she has uncovered into her graduate teaching. In addition, she begins teaching an undergraduate course on theater and popular culture at her university. Her book will be purchased by most college

and university libraries as well as numerous individuals and public libraries. It will have thousands of readers, some of whom will be pursuing a professional interest, others of whom will simply be interested in the topic. All of them will learn something from the book; there is no telling what other sorts of contributions to culture will arise from those readings.

The graduate students of our fictional professor will themselves go on to become teachers and scholars; their education will be enriched by the knowledge our prototypical fellowship awardee gains during her fellowship and they will, in their turn, write books and teach courses of their own.

Most of the undergraduates in the course on theater and popular culture will probably never study the subject seriously again, but they will have been touched and changed by what they have learned. They will be better educated, more humane, and more civilized for having studied with professor Jones. They will, in fact, be better citizens for having been exposed to professor Jones and her scholarship. Some of them will also become elementary and secondary teachers. In that capacity, they will have the opportunity to pass on Professor Jones humane sensibilities, if not every detail of her work on nineteenth century theater.

Professor Jones may also give an occasional public lecture in her local community; she may participate in audience seminars when her local repertory theater produces a nineteenth-century British play. Perhaps she will participate in a panel discussion on her local educational TV station. All of this for only \$27,500! In many ways then, not all of them obvious, NEH's investment in Professor Jones and her work will be repaid many times. In short, even a small grant from NEH is like a stone tossed in a pond, sending ripples in every direction and benefiting a larger audience than might at first be apparent.

If the benefits of NEH's programs are so clear in its support for the research efforts of individual scholars, how much more so they are in its educational and media activities; in its support for libraries and museums; in its critically important support for the preservation of our cultural records in libraries, state historic societies, and other cultural institutions; and in its support for the magnificent activities of state humanities committees. And if the public benefits so enormously from NEH's support for relatively obscure scholarly research, how much greater the benefit is when the Endowment determines to make a major effort in an area of humanistic learning in which there is already broad public interest and an obvious and established public need. It is on such a subject -- the Bicentennial of the Constitution of the United States -- that I wish to concentrate the balance of my testimony for I believe it presents a most compelling case for funding the Endowment at the levels established in the 1985 reauthorization legislation rather than following the Administration's recommendation for a reduction of some 12 million dollars below the appropriation for the current fiscal year.

I have been widely quoted in the press in recent months to the effect that the Bicentennial has been something less than a complete success from the point of view of the scholarly community. I am perhaps particularly sensitive on this point since, as Editor of the *Oliver Wendell Holmes Devise, History of the Supreme Court* and a constitutional scholar myself, I have had too many occasions to observe the inadequacies of our coming national observance. I do not wish to reiterate those views here. I do want to say, however, that I believe that I speak for many of my colleagues in the field when I say that the activities of NEH in this regard have been one of the few bright spots in those Bicentennial activities that have already occurred as well as in those that are planned for the next several years.

Since 1982, NEH has undertaken a special initiative to celebrate the Bicentennial of the Constitution. That initiative has already yielded results which, from the perspective of the scholarly

community, fully justify the expenditure of the \$22 million thus far allocated, not including an estimated additional two million dollars of expenditure by state humanities committees. A full list of these projects is attached herewith, but some commentary on typical projects may suggest not only the variety of ways in which NEH has assisted with appropriate Bicentennial celebrations, but also the extent to which those celebrations extend beyond the academic community to the general public.

In November of 1986, the Endowment approved a fellowship award to Professor R. Kent Newmyer of the University of Connecticut on the subject of "Chief Justice John Marshall and the Constitution." Newmyer's researches will eventuate in a book on Marshall, arguably the person who most critically shaped the role of the Supreme Court in Constitutional interpretation. Newmyer is a distinguished scholar and his book will make a critically important contribution not only to the study of the history of the Court, but also to our understanding of the process of government during the nation's formative early years under the Constitution.

Beginning in 1982 and continuing through 1986, the Endowment supported the production of The Encyclopedia of the American Constitution under the general editorship of Leonard W. Levy of the Claremont Graduate School. It has also supported the creation of The Founder's Constitution, edited by Professors Phillip Kurland and Ralph Lerner of the University of Chicago. This encyclopedic collection of documents is designed to illuminate how the Constitution was conceived, ratified, and interpreted by the founders of the American Republic. Both of these superb reference works have now appeared, and they will stand as monuments of scholarship for years to come. No decent library will want to be without them.

Since 1983, through grants to Project '87, the joint effort of the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association, the Endowment has supported the publication of a quarterly magazine entitled This Constitution, each issue of which is sent to more than 10,000 readers. A central resource to planners of Bicentennial programs, its chief value has been in making available to teachers and to general readers scholarship on the Constitution rarely consulted previously outside the scholarly community. These articles have been reprinted in many forms; now a collection is available through Congressional Quarterly, demonstrating once again that the dollars the Endowment invests in these projects reach far beyond their initial recipients.

In November of 1983, the Endowment approved an award to Professor Isaac Kramnick of Cornell University to conduct a special institute for 25 high school teachers on the subject of "The American Constitution: Its Origins and Evolution." The objective of the institute was to provide these teachers with ideas and materials that will be of use to them in teaching high school students about the Constitution.

In August of 1986, the Endowment approved a grant to Professor Paul Gilje of the University of Oklahoma to establish a special program of seminars on the historical, philosophical, and cultural contexts of the Constitution, but this will be a rather different setting for the study of the Constitution. The students will be adults -- "non-traditional" learners -- who will be given the opportunity to learn a bit more about the Constitution in a setting designed especially for them and not directed at younger, full-time college students.

One could multiply these examples many times, but they are typical of the extraordinarily good and important work that the Endowment has been supporting these past few years. Let me make just a few observations about the various Bicentennial programs since I believe their character and quality exemplify all of the Endowment's programs.

First, those who have thus far received Endowment grants in the Constitution initiative are drawn from many backgrounds: Some are scholars at our best universities, some are school teachers, some are connected with professional associations, some are working in state programs of one kind or another, and so on. What they all share, however, is a desire to build knowledge of the Constitution and communicate that knowledge to a wider public.

Second, the audiences to whom these efforts are directed are as diverse as the recipients of the awards. They cannot be easily characterized either in sociological terms or in ideology and politics. They reach across a broad spectrum of perspectives and backgrounds and represent a healthy cross-section of opinion and point of view. Projects have been selected for awards on the basis of the quality of the work they propose, and only on that basis. That, in my view, is how it should be.

Third, very few of these programs would have happened at all if it had been left to private funders or individuals to undertake them. No private foundation or group of foundations can afford so broad a view of humanistic research and its dissemination as NEH has. Without the NEH's mandate publicly appropriated resources, our celebration would be reduced to parades and place mats embossed with the text of the Constitution.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a very important and insufficiently recognized relationship between the support NEH has given to the work of individual scholars -- support without which humanistic scholarship in general would be grievously injured -- and the support the Endowment has also given to programs with a more public orientation. It is simply impossible to offer the sort of superb public program that NEH has been supporting without also supporting the painstaking researchers of individual scholars. The former literally feeds off the latter. And this is true in the general run of NEH programs as it is in the Bicentennial programs.

Let me conclude simply by emphasizing the vital significance of NEH as a force for education in the broadest sense. That is, the programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities permit us to discover both who we are and who we are not. In that sense, they offer us, as a society, the knowledge of self that is the essence of all humane education. As citizens, they expose us to the most transcendent values and aspirations of our nation and permit us thereby to play an informed and therefore responsible role in a democratic society. For this, if for no other reason, I urge the committee to recommend funding of the Endowment for fiscal year 1988 at the authorized and thus support its critically important work.