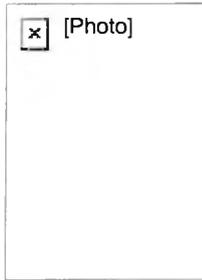


More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: January 1999**

### **Celebrating Black History Month NEH Provides Grants for African American Projects**

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By William R. Ferris

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February is Black History Month, and there is no better time to remember the achievements of two great African American historians. Both had exceptional talent. The NEH has awarded grants of nearly \$1 million to preserve and make available their work.

Margaret Walker Alexander, author, poet and scholar, died recently at age 83. Born into segregated Alabama society, she graduated from Northwestern University in 1935, earned a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, won national acclaim as an author and poet, and moved with her family to Jackson, Miss., where she taught for 30 years at Jackson State University.

Margaret was a living library who wrote 11 books, including fiction, poetry, essays and biographies. She was gathering notes for her autobiography when she died, and what stories she would have told. Her literary talent blossomed through her immersion in the Chicago Renaissance of the 1930s and 40s, when African American achievements in literature, art and music soared to new heights. In 1942 she became the first black poet to receive the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Award, and the success of her first book - *For My People* -- catapulted her to national prominence.

In 1968, she became the founding director of Jackson State's Institute for the Study of Black Life and Culture, which now bears her name and holds one of the nation's finest collections of African Americana. To the end of her life, she was in demand as a speaker, touring the

NEH has awarded a \$131,000 grant to Jackson State's Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center for the Study of the 20th Century African American. The center holds Dr. Alexander's entire output of writings and photographs. The grant is being used to catalog and preserve her work for future generations.

Henry Hampton, documentary filmmaker, died recently at 58. His famous television series *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* won Emmys for writing and received an Academy Award nomination for best feature documentary.

Mr. Hampton's latest series, *I'll Make Me a World*, will air on public television stations nationwide in February. Funded by an \$800,000 grant from NEH, the film is about African American music, literature, visual arts, theater and dance. Please check your local listings for broadcast dates.

Margaret Walker Alexander and Henry Hampton were gifted historians. NEH is delighted to help guarantee that their work will be around to inspire others for a long time to come.

For more information about the NEH and its programs, call 202/606-8671.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

nation giving talks and doing poetry readings on a regular schedule.

In 1970 I began my teaching career at Jackson State, where I admired Margaret's many gifts. Her brilliant lectures brought to life her friends Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright. Margaret's unswerving dedication to learning was an inspiration to all who knew her.

Washington, D.C. Rotary Club  
January 6, 1999

*Rediscovering America Through the Humanities*

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you Gus for that kind introduction. And thank you for inviting me here today. Happy New Year to all of you.

I have lived and worked in Washington, D.C. a little over a year now. It is truly a fascinating city in so many ways, rich in history, tradition, diversity and culture. It is a busy, bustling, growing city. Rotary is responsible for that in so many ways. Congratulations on your professional accomplishments. As this city grows, you are making sure that no one is left behind. That is why the D.C. Rotary Club is a critical part of our future. Congratulations on your seventy-seven years of service to this community.

The list of those who benefit from your generosity is long: the House of Ruth, Mentors Incorporated, and the Greater Washington Boys and Girls Clubs, to name just a few. Many others benefit from your Career Fair, your house renovations through Mi Casa, and your Christmas Holiday Party at the Bowen YMCA. Your reach is truly worldwide through such programs as the Group Study

Exchange program, the Rotary Scholars program, and, of course, Polio Plus. It is abundantly clear that each of you places "service above self." Our nation's capital would be the poorer without you.

I have personally benefited from such service. My father and both my grandfathers were Rotarians. It is no exaggeration to say that I might not have become Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities were it not for a Rotary Foundation Fellowship. More than thirty years ago, the Mississippi state chapter nominated me for a fellowship that allowed me to study at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Luckily, I was selected. I packed my guitar and flew off for what turned out to be the greatest year of my life. I studied, I traveled, and I played my guitar. (And occasionally, I had a sip of Guinness.)

I have many fond memories of Rotarians in Ireland who took me into their homes as I traveled. We swapped stories and sang songs together. They sang "Molly Malone" and I sang "The Rock Island Line." Because they were so friendly and generous with me, I was able to immerse

myself in the Irish culture-and to pass it on. When I returned home to Mississippi, I traveled throughout the state speaking to Rotary clubs and relating my experiences. For me, Rotary Clubs on both sides of the Atlantic formed a unique bridge between the two cultures. It is impossible to stereotype the citizens of another country when you sit at their dinner tables, break bread, and share stories.

My experiences in Ireland sparked my interest in folklore. When I returned to the states, I knew I wanted to explore the many untold stories of the American South. One of those stories was about Ray Lum, a Mississippi mule trader. I once brought Mr. Lum to Yale University where I taught. He actually auctioned off a horse on the campus green. Let me tell you, that raised a few ivy-league eyebrows. I tape-recorded Mr. Lum for several years and published his memories in a book entitled, *You Live and Learn. Then You Die and Forget It All*. I wanted to make sure his great stories were not forgotten.

Through stories we connect to other people and other cultures. Through stories we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation. Through stories we document the sacrifices our heroes have made to defend and preserve those principles. If we cherish the stories of James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR, and Martin Luther King Jr. our democracy has nothing to fear. If we forget those stories we have everything to lose.

Let me assure you, that will not happen as long as there is a National Endowment for the Humanities. I firmly believe the humanities are essential to democracy.

In 1965, Congress established the National Endowment for the Humanities with the warning that, "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." That is a towering task. Wisdom—vision—democracy. At the Endowment, we take our charge very seriously.

For more than thirty-three years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence. We award grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, teacher training, scholarly research and public programs.

Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million, far less than what it cost to make the movie Titanic. But we do a lot with what we have. Think of us as the venture capitalists of culture. We are catalysts. We provide the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval that attracts more funding, public and private. And we plan to do more.

We are working hard with Kathleen Lesko and Fran Cary at the

Humanities Council of Washington, D.C. In the last five years, institutions and individuals in the District have received more than \$35 million from the Endowment and the Humanities Council of Washington D.C. These projects help to preserve the nation's cultural heritage, foster lifelong learning, and encourage civic involvement.

For example, we've been active at the Bowen YMCA—just as you have. We helped fund the film *The Y Guys: The First African American YMCA in the Nation*. Young teens from the Shaw neighborhood researched and filmed community elders talking about how the Anthony Bowen YMCA shaped their lives.

With NEH support, scholars at Gallaudet University are preparing a dictionary of black southern varieties of American Sign Language...Scholars at George Washington University are preparing a documentary history of the first Congress.

We recently awarded the Folger Shakespeare Library a challenge grant to support programs in secondary and elementary schools. Their programs combine active classroom learning with visits from an acting troupe. They also include summer institutes for teachers, children's Shakespeare festivals, and high school fellowships.

When the Honorable Anthony Williams was sworn in as mayor Saturday, he said, "Our citizens deserve the best city in America." I couldn't agree more. The Endowment participated in drafting the mayor's new economic development plan. We are participating in the Downtown Arts Committee and the Heritage Tourism Coalition. And over the last two years we have worked hard with the D.C. Chamber of Commerce and the Historical Society on the Washington Visitor Center project. I believe 1999 will be a significant year for this great city.

What we are doing locally here in the District reflects what we also do nationally. It is part of the National Endowment for the Humanities' theme for the coming years: "Rediscovering America Through The Humanities."

It is fair to ask, why do we need to "rediscover America"? Because each generation faces new challenges, and each generation must look to the past for instruction and inspiration.

As we rush pell-mell into the 21st century we must remember there are American citizens still living in 19th century conditions. As we celebrate Silicon Valley, California, we can't forget Harlan County, Kentucky. As we congratulate ourselves on our economic, scientific, and military progress, we must ask is everyone sharing in the progress? Without a moral compass, we surely will become spiritually lost. But not if we remember

the lessons of Madison, Jefferson, Lincoln, King, Parks, and Roosevelt. They are the beacons on the horizon.

Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said in front of the Lincoln Memorial one hundred years later. No American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down at the front of the bus and fought for hers.

These are just a few of the thousands of great American stories. The Endowment is working to make all of them accessible to all Americans. On Friday, I will be at the Library of Congress to celebrate the publication of the American National Biography. This impressive 24-volume work documents the lives of 17,500 heroic American men and women from all walks of life. It was ten years in the making and the Endowment supported the project every step of the way. Why? Because as John Dewey reminds us, "Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself."

We are trying to improve educational opportunities for everyone. Here are a few of the things the Endowment is doing to help scholars, parents, teachers, and students of all ages.

I know you are working to eradicate polio worldwide through your Polio Plus program. It is the first and largest internationally coordinated private sector support of a public health campaign. You've already contributed more than \$310 million and by the year 2005 that figure will reach \$400 million. In its own small way, the Endowment is trying to do its part.

I know many of you saw a film we funded "Paralyzing Fear: The Story of Polio in America," that aired on PBS recently. It was produced by the Center for History in the Media at George Washington University and funded through the Endowment.

You may have seen other films supported by NEH, a short, recent list includes: Liberty! The American Revolution, FDR, Eisenhower, LBJ, The Great Depression, TR, and A Midwife's Tale, as well as Ken Burns' fine series on the Civil War, the American West, and Baseball. Films are just a part of what we do.

Our special project My History is America's History encourages citizens to learn more about their family's history—and then relate their history to the broader sweep of American and world history. There's an African proverb that says when an old man or woman dies, a library burns to the ground. We're trying to save those libraries.

And we're always looking for help—through new technologies, new partnerships—or both.

More than a year ago, NEH partnered with the MCI corporation, the Council of the Great City Schools and the National Trust for the Humanities in creating EDSITEMent. This new website identifies the 50 best educational websites in literature, history and other humanities subjects. It provides a single, accessible site for parents, teachers, students, and citizens across the country seeking excellent, content-rich web sites. We've received wonderful feedback from the teachers. "I have struck a gold mine," wrote Joyce Taaffe of Marietta, Georgia. "And I will definitely recommend you to my colleagues at Wheeler High School."

We know teachers can take advantage of new technologies only to the extent they are trained to do so. On the heels of our three-year "Teaching with Technology" initiative, we have begun a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium." It is designed to jump-start the process by which U.S. schools and their teachers become competent and comfortable with newly digitized humanities materials and technologies. We have already made grants in Memphis, Milwaukee, Saint Paul, Seattle, San Diego, Fresno, Houston and many other cities across America.

Like Rotary, we are also active around the globe. Let me give you just a few examples... publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls...a revision and expansion of the Encyclopedia of Islam... funding of the seven part documentary series Columbus and the Age of discovery...grants to the International Research and Exchange Board for collaborative research with scholars from the U.S. and Eastern Europe.

We are always looking for new partners. The Sara Lee corporation has pledged \$385,000 to underwrite the Jefferson Lectures at the Kennedy Center in Washington for the next five years. Television producer Norman Lear and his wife Lyn made a stunning gift of \$1 million to support our ongoing projects to preserve presidential papers.

Because we are trying to make it easier for new partners to work with us, we are making changes at the Endowment to make it a more accessible, responsive, visionary organization. We have created five working groups that cut across divisional lines: think of them as our "five avenues of service." They are: international programs; science, technology and the humanities; teaching; regional initiatives; and extending the reach to a wider public.

You may be able to partner with us in one or more of these areas. I believe you can.

First, I would ask for your help in our efforts to reach out to every community across America. Every state humanities council in the country could benefit from the expertise of your local clubs. Our state humanities councils need help with media and technology projects, teacher-training workshops, newsletters, magazines and web sites. They need bright people with creative ideas.

This can be a two-way street. Virtually every state humanities council has a speaker's bureau, and I am sure they will be more than happy to provide local clubs with interesting speakers.

I urge interested local Rotary Clubs to contact state humanities councils directly; they are all listed at the Endowment website. This will be a win-win situation for the local clubs and the state councils.

Second, as I mentioned, we have a host of projects that compliment the goals of Rotary International. I welcome your thoughts as to how the Endowment might best shape a partnership with Rotary International. We can work well together because we share the same goals and principles.

I have a great "client list," a distinguished group of uncommon men and women: Washington, Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, FDR, Ken Burns, Stephen Ambrose, Toni Morrison, and many others. The Endowment helps keep their stories alive so both we and our children can enjoy and learn from them. I know we can find a way to work together, and I promise to make this partnership a major priority at the Endowment.

As I have done at some many Rotary Clubs in the past, I want to leave you with a song.

## **American Historical Association Annual Meeting – Remarks January 8, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Good morning. I'm Bill Ferris, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am delighted that the American Historical Association has allowed us to convene a panel at their annual meeting on "The Region in American History." I am on leave from the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, so regional studies are close to my heart.

We have great plans at the Endowment to offer new support to regional humanities scholarship. This panel will show how a regional focus offers exciting new ways of organizing scholarship and cross-disciplinary studies.

Eudora Welty has written that "sense of place gives us equilibrium....It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are." I think a sense of place is also essential to understanding where you are going, and why. Each of us carries within us a "little postage stamp of native soil," as William Faulkner put it. By exploring the regions that have shaped us, we rediscover what bonds us as Americans.

Whether we are studying the history of Africans in America, taking a new look at Lewis and Clark, or celebrating the sesquicentennial of the California Gold Rush, we must deal with regional studies.

At the National Endowment for the Humanities. "Day One," 33 years ago, the agency has funded many regional projects.

As you know I proposed the creation of a Regional Center for the Humanities in ten region of the country. These centers will serve as cultural hubs that will preserve and disseminate the unique heritage of each region. They will serve as a new platform of learning by broadening public awareness of and participation in the humanities.

Later this month, I hope to announce a public-private partnership to fund the initial planning for the Regional Humanities Centers.

History is at the heart of the humanities, and we are seeing a resurgence of popular interest in history. Thanks partly to work funded by NEH, such as the Ken Burns series on the Civil War, Americans in large numbers are now researching and gathering their own histories.

This is in keeping with our theme at NEH for the millennium: "Rediscovering America Through the Humanities." As historians, your moment has arrived. One study we co-funded, a new book by Roy Rosenzweig of George Mason University and David Thelen of Indiana University, shows that while Americans have a renewed interest in history, they prefer to call it "the past." And, according to Rosenzweig and Thelen, people put their greatest trust for historical learning in real artifacts and living witnesses, not in books and professors. This is a wake-up call to us all. We must connect people in direct ways with the history around them, and help them connect their personal histories with the larger picture of our national life.

It is our job as academic professionals to bring the public into the process of discovering and gathering and living their own histories. Our success in the coming century rests to a large degree on how well we bridge the divide between the priesthood and the populace.

Toward that end NEH continues to fund high-quality work by many of you, and invests increasingly in high-tech ways of preserving and expanding the resources every historian depends on—original sources and raw data.

**National Press Club  
Washington, D.C.  
January 26, 1999**

"The Battle Here at Home"

William R. Ferris  
Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Larry Lipman, for that kind introduction.

It is a special pleasure to be in the company of journalists whose goal is to unravel the threads of myth and reality in our lives. As a Southerner, I am familiar with how we struggle with the myths of our past. William Faulkner once remarked that in the South "the past is never dead. It's not even past."

Like my grandfather, I was raised on "cornbread and recollections" on a farm outside Vicksburg, Mississippi.

(Beauregard story)

Each of us can remember the voice of someone who passed on the wisdom of their learning. Perhaps it was a teacher, a relative, or a friend in your community who changed your life. Alex Haley once told me how his aunts gathered every summer at the family home in Henning, Tennessee. In the evening they dipped snuff, watched the fireflies, and told stories as they rocked on the front porch. Young Alex sat there listening to the tales of ancestors like Chicken George, tales that later inspired his epic, *Roots*.

Everyone has moments in childhood that awaken them. When I look back on my career as a teacher, as a scholar, and now as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, I know that my inspiration to pursue a career in education began in my first school, a school where three teachers taught six grades. I was the only student in the school whose parents had graduated from college. When my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Mrs. Barfield asked her students who was going to college, no hands went up.

Mrs. Barfield pointed her finger at me and said "Billy Ferris, you will go to college. Your parents will make you go."

"No, ma'am," I said. "I ain't going to no college! I AIN'T GOIN' TO NO COLLEGE!"

Well, after one Ph.D., ten books, and 27 years of college teaching, it is obvious that Mrs. Barfield was right. More important, she was right to say what she did in front of me and my classmates. Mrs. Barfield inspired my love of learning and of the humanities. To this day I still hear her voice.

The mission of the National Endowment for the Humanities is simply this: to make sure that those teachers, those wise and learned citizens who enrich our communities, are still there in the next generation. That is what our work supports, whether at the school, university, or community level. Whether we fund specialized research at the Folger Shakespeare Library or gather oral histories among automotive workers in Dearborn, Michigan, we support the humane tradition, the narrative that educates each new generation, that tells us who we are, and where we are going.

The humanities are absolutely essential to the United States in the coming century. Our strength as a democracy depends on our cultural leadership as well as military might and economic power. As we rush pell-mell into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the humanities will anchor us to our past, and guide us with their enduring values. We must remember the lessons of James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, of Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and Frederick Douglass. Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863, and what Martin Luther King, Jr., said one hundred years later in front of the Lincoln Memorial. These are but a few of the thousands of American stories, and our job at NEH is to make them accessible to all our citizens.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the American century because of our music, our literature, our popular culture, all of which shape democratic ideals that are admired and emulated throughout the world. Thanks to the resources that are nurtured by the Endowment -- scholarship and public programs, such as the Ken Burns film series on the Civil War -- America has become an intellectual and cultural breadbasket to the world.

Our citizens understand that a computer-driven, knowledge-based economy favors those with a good education. In the last election voters clearly indicated that education is their number one concern.

The battle for educational excellence will be the cold war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it deserves just as intense an investment as did the cold war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Victory will be measured by the legacy we leave our children. As stewards of our national culture, we will be judged by that legacy.

Education is the index of how well our nation will succeed. The chief

battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be intellectual and cultural, not political and military. The battlegrounds will be the classrooms and libraries of Kansas City and Kyoto, not the streets of Berlin or the jungles of Southeast Asia.

Education is the engine of our nation's growth, and we must respond accordingly. Through the Endowment, the federal government provides programs that give our teachers the tools they need to prepare increasingly diverse student bodies for survival in a rapidly changing world. The NEH, with our \$110 million budget, plays a crucial role as a catalyst for reform and as a nationally recognized standard of excellence.

One of the clear weaknesses in public education today is that too many teachers have not been properly trained. As President Clinton noted in his State of the Union address last week, more than half of our public school students who are enrolled in history are taught by teachers without even a college minor in history. NEH addresses this problem through our summer institutes and seminars, where teachers and professors come together for eight weeks of intensive study. This summer, for example, we are supporting 29 institutes for 550 teachers. Institute topics range from Beowulf to Lewis and Clark to the history of technology. These teachers, with their enhanced skills, shape the lives of more than 95,000 students each year. Teachers tell us that the chance to return to a campus as students after years of classroom grind is the most stimulating experience of their careers, and rededicates them to their educational mission.

Another way NEH seeks to strengthen American education is through our Schools for the New Millennium. In partnership with local colleges, museums, and businesses, we help entire schools raise the skills of all their teachers, a process called "whole school reform." These Schools for the New Millennium integrate computer technology into the curriculum and help teachers stay ahead of the curve of digital learning.

One such school is Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, where teachers are training their students to interview neighbors about the civil rights movement. African-American children from South Memphis routinely pass by the National Civil Rights Museum, which is housed in the old Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King was killed. By interviewing neighbors and relatives, who vividly remember the struggle of the 1960s, students establish a personal connection to the history that surrounds them.

"It's not easy down in the trenches," says Elsie Lewis Bailey, the school principal. "But with creative projects like this, we can make a difference

in kids' lives."

Understanding the crossroads of technology and history will be the key to our civilization in the next century.

Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., rightly points out that "the great point of the humanities is still what it always was: self-knowledge."

While we cannot find wisdom within a computer chip, the chip can help lead us to self-knowledge. At NEH we support research on original documents such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient Greek texts, and our presidential papers. We also create web sites and CD-ROMs that use cutting edge technology to make these rare collections accessible to all people.

NEH is helping to lead American scholarship and public programs into the digital age. My dream is to bring the humanities within an arm's reach of every American – no more than a mouse click or a library away.

In a dramatic study supported by NEH, we recently learned that Americans have a deep hunger for history, especially their own history. The study by Professors Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen is called *The Presence of the Past*. In it, Americans express their desire for a hands-on approach to learning through direct testimony by those they know and trust. Toward this end NEH supports oral history projects through which students and families generate their own genealogical chronicles - - to capture the American narrative before it disappears.

This new study also shows that Americans place great trust in museums, in real artifacts. Asked why, one man, an Oglala Sioux, replied: "Because the bones don't lie." The bones don't lie -- those were the thoughts of the scholar within this man, of the researcher in us all. To support this form of direct education NEH has invested \$350 million in our nation's museums and exhibits.

The public humanities are the humanities that touch every American. When I speak to academic audiences around the nation, I urge listeners to carry the humanities out of the ivory tower and into the streets and roads of their community. We must make King Lear and Huckleberry Finn relevant to youngsters in Peoria and South Central Los Angeles.

One way to bridge this gap is through regional humanities centers. My work at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi over the past two decades convinced me that regional centers are unique resources for the humanities. They tap the energy and enthusiasm of people through what Eudora Welty calls "a sense of place." By exploring regions that have shaped us, we rediscover

American culture.

Regions define our voices as journalists, as teachers, as writers, as musicians. The South, where I grew up, inspired literary and musical voices that are now part of the canon of American culture. Just as the Civil Rights Movement sought to bridge black and white worlds in the 1950s, rock and roll music drew similarly on white country and black blues for its new voice.

[Sing Be Bop a Lula]

In that music we can see a microcosm of how regional culture bridges diverse worlds in a special way. I plan to create a humanities center in every region of the nation. These centers will serve as cultural hubs to promote teacher institutes, museum exhibits, cultural tourism, and television and radio programs on each region. They will offer Nieman-style fellowships to journalists interested in regional studies, and they will develop regional encyclopedias, as we did at the University of Mississippi.

This is one of the many ways that the humanities enrich the quality of our lives. We welcome corporate and philanthropic partners in this undertaking. MCI-Worldcom partnered with the Endowment and the Council of Great City Schools to produce EDSITEment, a website that links teachers to 50 outstanding humanities sites. This one-stop humanities resource on the Internet allows teachers to quickly secure information and generate teacher plans on any topic. When Joyce Taaffe, a teacher at Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia, discovered EDSITEment, she wrote: "I have struck a gold mine."

This past year the Endowment received \$380,000 from the Sara Lee Corporation to underwrite our annual Jefferson Lecture at the Kennedy Center. And television producer Norman Lear and his wife, Lyn, made a stunning \$1 million gift to support the preservation of presidential papers.

This is only the beginning. The task before us is monumental, and it requires a broad national commitment, from the nation's centers of capital as well as from our centers of learning.

Today, I call on our nation's technology leaders to remember how earlier in this century captains of industry invested in America's cultural heritage. While Ford, Mellon, Rockefeller and Carnegie made their fortunes in cars, coal, oil and steel, their most enduring legacy is in museums, libraries, and foundations that support our educational and cultural worlds. I hope today's captains of technology will be remembered as much for their contribution to American culture as to the

information age.

What the NEH brings to education in America is the imprimatur of excellence. Our projects go through a triple peer-review process, and only the best proposals are funded. NEH-funded research projects have yielded more than seven thousand books over three decades. They have won more than 500 scholarly prizes, including nine Pulitzer Prizes, eight Bancroft Prizes, and six National Book awards.

G. K. Chesterton said that education is "the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another," and I believe it is our soul that we need to be concerned about. Today, America is riding the great wave of our economic and military success. But if we beggar our culture through budget cuts, if we devalue the arts and humanities of our nation, we will surely lose the battle for what Faulkner called "the agony and sweat of the human spirit."

How we support our National Endowments for the Humanities and for the Arts is a measure of how we value our culture. Today's NEH budget is \$110 million per year, down from \$172 million in 1995. By contrast, think of our friends at the National Science Foundation whose annual budget is \$3.6 billion – more than the \$3.2 billion the Endowment has invested in America over the past 33 years. We are the Small Business Administration of intellectual life. Our investment has paid off many times over in groundbreaking scholarship, prize-winning books, and enrichment of public education.

Let us be frank: we cannot expect to win the economic and cultural battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we neglect education and the humanities. The work of the NEH costs the American taxpayer 42 cents per year. Taken together, all direct public spending for the arts and humanities in the United States is about three dollars per capita. Compare that with \$39 per capita in Germany, \$35 per capita in France. The city of Berlin, Germany, alone has an annual cultural budget of \$500 million, more than the combined annual budgets of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Less than one month before his death, John F. Kennedy said that he looked forward to an America that will be remembered "not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit." Within two years, that call was answered by the creation of the Endowments. For 33 years, we have kept Kennedy's flame alive.

Now, at this crucial moment, we must reaffirm our priorities. My visits in the White House and on Capitol Hill convince me that we have strong bipartisan support for the work of the Endowment. I look forward to

working with our nation's political, corporate, and educational leaders, and with the American people to deepen America's commitment to the humanities, and through them to strengthen the education of our children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must ensure, as Faulkner said, that "when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded," we don't find ourselves staring silently into an empty room wondering where our heritage and culture went. We must preserve and celebrate the voices of our people, for their stories are our most precious legacy.

Thank you.

**National Conference of Lieutenant Governors Annual Meeting  
Washington, D.C.  
February 17, 1999**

Tools For the 21st Century: A New Perspective on NEH

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you Jack for that kind introduction, and thank you for coming all this way to be here. Jack White is too modest to say so, but his work on behalf of the humanities in Mississippi has enriched the state immeasurably.

Thank you Lieutenant Governor Ronnie Musgrove for inviting me. Ronnie Musgrove is another champion of the humanities in Mississippi. I want to thank him for that and for all he does for the people of my home state.

I am excited to be here because there is so much important humanities work going on in our states. I want to tell you what the Endowment is doing, but I am also anxious to learn from you, to hear how the Endowment can better serve you in your communities around the nation.

I grew up on a farm outside Vicksburg, Mississippi. As a child I learned a lot from my grandfather. He was a wonderful storyteller, and used to tell me he had been raised on cornbread and recollections. One of my favorite stories...

GEN BEAUREGARD STORY

One of the morals of the story is: to get the job done, you need the right tools. Today, I want to talk about the tools we will all need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Your conference theme is "State and Federal Relationships: A New Perspective for a New Century." Today I hope to give you a new perspective on the National Endowment for the Humanities. I want to focus on two of the issues you are tackling: economic development and education.

My message is simple. The humanities are good for business, and they are good for the economy. When we support the humanities, we have

the right tools.

I first want to thank each of you for your support of our state humanities councils.

Thirty-four of our nation's fifty-six state humanities councils now receive support from their state governments. Last year those thirty-four states contributed a total of more than five million dollars to the state humanities councils. Thank you for your efforts.

One important function of the Endowment is to support our state councils. We contributed twenty-nine million dollars to them in 1998, and we have high hopes for increased funding for the year 2000. Our federal/state partnership is working well.

Education is a priority in every state. In 1997, forty-seven state humanities councils sponsored projects for K-12 teachers that reached more than 475,000 teachers. Thirty-eight councils funded projects for K-12 students, that reached more than one million students.

The state councils are serving students of all ages in every part of the country. Their programs take place wherever people gather-in shopping malls, church basements, homes for the elderly, schools, libraries, union halls, and on-line. That is why your continued support for the state councils is so important.

Let me give you just a few examples of what they're doing. I'm sure some will sound familiar...

Last year, I visited the Hill Association in Pittsburgh to take part in the Pennsylvania Humanities Council's *Technology, Communications, and Community*" program. The council has sponsored more than thirty such programs designed to help citizens overcome their fear of technology. The Hill Association program is working so well some elderly gentlemen now call the computer lab the barbershop--because they can gather there and visit with their friends.

Last fall I visited Maine, and learned about the Maine Humanities Council project "Literature and Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care." It has doctors and patients talking about books. A pilot program at the Eastern Main Medical Center had participants reading Camus, Chekov and Faulkner. As one doctor said, "It causes everyone to rethink what health care is all about." Over the course of three years, these seminars will be held at all 41 Maine hospitals.

We are working with the states to promote reading and literacy. The Vermont Humanities Council works with social service agencies

throughout the state on family literacy programs, and Connecticut is working on more than 60 scholar-led book discussions across the state.

One project that is dear to my folklorist heart is under way in Mississippi. Thanks to the hard work of Lieutenant Governor Musgrove. A bill is moving through the state legislature to fund a statewide community oral history project

I am always trying to think of new ways to explain what the National Endowment for the Humanities does.

Consider this Pentium Chip made by Intel. The Endowment is like this chip: small yet powerful. You are not aware of the chip working inside because you are watching the computer screen-the end result. But it is there and nothing happens without it. That is what the Endowment is-a catalyst, a connector. And just like the "Intel Inside" seal, when you see the National Endowment for the Humanities seal, you can be assured of quality.

The Endowment has a modest budget, only \$110 million. By comparison, it cost more than \$200 million to make the movie *Titanic*. But we do a lot with what we have.

For more than thirty-three years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence. We award grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, teacher training, scholarly research, public programs...and cultural tourism. The humanities are good for business.

Nationwide, tourism is big business, second only to health care in terms of our economic future. In 1998, travel spending passed the \$500 billion mark. Cultural tourism is a large slice of this pie. In 1998, almost half of all adult travelers, more than ninety-two million people, included a cultural or historic activity while on a trip. Cultural tourists want authenticity and quality. That's what the Endowment provides.

The Endowment is helping states across the country to develop cultural tourism areas...such as....

The Museum of Work and Culture opened in 1997 in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, at the restored Lincoln Textile Building. The Endowment teamed with the Rhode Island Historical Society, and today the Museum tells the story of how the Industrial Revolution changed an area and a way of life.

In New York City, at 97 Orchard Street, a six-story brick tenement built in 1863 houses the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. It teaches the

public about the lives of urban, working-class immigrants.

Colonists landed at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. In 1996, at Jamestown Island, Dr. William Kelso and his talented team found the site of James Fort. The Endowment was proud to be involved because Jamestown is the story of the birth of our nation. More than 360,000 visitors went to the park last year, 100,000 of them school children.

Everyone has moments in childhood that awaken them. At my first school in rural Mississippi, where three teachers taught six grades, I was the only student whose parents had graduated from college. When my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Barfield, asked her students who was going to college, no hands went up. Mrs. Barfield pointed her finger at me and said, "Billy Ferris, you will go to college -- your parents will make you go." I said, "No, ma'am, I ain't goin' to no college."

Well, after one Ph.D., 10 books, and 27 years of college teaching, it is obvious that Mrs. Barfield was right. Mrs. Barfield inspired my love of learning and of the humanities. To this day I still hear her voice.

There are plenty of great teachers teaching today, plenty of Mrs. Barfields across this country. Yet, as you well know, we need many more. It is difficult to find them...difficult to train them...and difficult to keep them. Almost 30% of our teachers drop out within five years. Couple this with an expanding school-age population and in the coming decade, America's schools will need more than 2 million new teachers. Every state is looking for more Mrs. Barfields. This is especially important for the humanities because at the K through 12 level, the humanities comprise two-thirds of the curriculum.

In his State of the Union address last month, the President made it clear that education was his number one domestic priority. Yesterday, Secretary of Education Richard Riley gave his Annual State of American Education address on the campus of California State University at Long Beach and stressed the same point.

I know all of you have made education a top priority in your states as well. Our children, and learners of all ages, deserve the best tools we can provide. So do the teachers--and they are not getting what they need. In a recent Department of Education survey, less than half of American teachers reported feeling "very well prepared" to meet many of the challenges facing the nation's public school classrooms.

The Endowment acts as a catalyst. Here is how we are helping the nation achieve its education goals.

We are heavily involved in teacher training. Only the Endowment

provides national support for study opportunities for teachers across all disciplines of the humanities.

At our summer institutes, teachers and professors come together for eight weeks of intensive study. This summer, for example, we are supporting 29 institutes for 550 teachers. These teachers, with their enhanced skills, shape the lives of more than 96,000 students each year.

Lynn Schott, a teacher from Kettle Falls, Washington, took part in a Shakespeare in Performance institute and wrote, "It was an outstanding experience, extremely stimulating intellectually...Teachers need such opportunities to learn from colleagues in different regions; we often feel isolated in our own classroom..."

A few years ago, I was fortunate to be involved in a teacher exchange program between Maine and Mississippi. After attending the summer program, one teacher wrote, "The similarities between Maine and Mississippi came through again and again-families steeped in tradition, haunted by their pasts, and drawn to region."

The second way we are helping achieve the nation's education goals is through our new initiative, Schools for the New Millennium. This program creates "whole school reform." In partnership with local colleges, museums, and businesses, we help entire schools raise the skills of all their teachers. We have awarded planning grants in Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. These Schools for the New Millennium integrate computer technology into the curriculum and help teachers stay ahead of the curve of digital learning.

One such school is Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, where teachers are training their students to interview neighbors about the civil rights movement. By interviewing neighbors and relatives, who vividly remember the struggle of the 1960s, students establish a personal connection to the history that surrounds them. "It's not easy down in the trenches," says Elsie Lewis Bailey, the school principal. "But with creative projects like this, we can make a difference in kids' lives."

We are taking advantage of technology to achieve the nation's education goals. The Endowment partnered with MCI-Worldcom and the Council of Great City Schools to produce EDSITEment, a website that links teachers to more than 60 outstanding humanities sites. This on-line resource allows teachers to quickly secure information and generate teacher plans on any topic. When Joyce Taaffe, a teacher at Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia, discovered EDSITEment, she wrote: "I have struck a gold mine."

Another way we work to achieve the nation's education goals is through *My History is America's History*. This program encourages all Americans to learn more about their family's history--and then relate their history to the broader sweep of American and world history. It makes them better citizens, and it brings young and old closer together. I am fond of quoting the African proverb, "when an old man dies, a library burns to the ground." We can't let that happen.

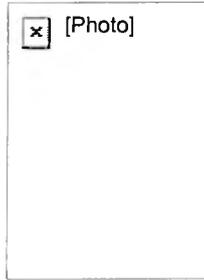
The Endowment does so much...if you have watched a Ken Burns film on PBS...listened to NPR...visited your local museum...used the new American National Biography...you see the Endowment at work. We preserve America's cultural treasures; we create new knowledge, and we disseminate that knowledge so all Americans can benefit... We tell our nation's stories.

Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom--and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down on the front of the bus and fought for hers.

As long as there is a National Endowment for the Humanities, we will keep these stories alive. The humanities are essential to democracy, and we look forward to shaping bold new humanities projects through a partnership with each of you.

Thank you for your support.

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: February 1999**

### **Leaving a Lasting Legacy The Humanities: A Guide for the Millennium**

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By William R. Ferris

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Perched as we are on the brink of the 21st century, anyone might well ask "what will anchor our nation, and what will guide us into the new millennium with a sense of enduring values?" My answer is the humanities -- our history, literature, philosophies, religions -- all of the fundamental elements that together tell our story as a nation. We need to transmit that narrative to each new generation, for it tells us where we've been, who we are and where we are going.

I believe the humanities are absolutely essential to the United States in the coming century. We must remember the lessons of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. These are but a few of the thousands of stories of Americans that the National Endowment for the Humanities is preserving. Through funding for education and heritage-preservation projects nationwide, NEH offers lifelong learning opportunities in the humanities, and we give our teachers the tools they need to prepare increasingly diverse student bodies for survival in a rapidly changing world.

Education is the index of how well our nation will succeed. The chief battles of the 21st century will be intellectual and cultural, not political and military. The battlegrounds will be our nation's libraries and classrooms, where the humanities make up two-thirds of the curricula. Yet today's NEH budget is only \$110 million, down from \$172 million in 1995. By contrast, think of our friends at the National Science Foundation, whose

We cannot expect to win the economic and cultural battles of the 21st century if we neglect education and the humanities. Less than a month before his death, President John Kennedy said that he looked forward to an America that will be remembered "not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit." Within two years, that call was answered by the creation of NEH.

Now, at this crucial moment, we must reaffirm our priorities. We must ensure, as novelist William Faulkner said, that "when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded," we don't find ourselves staring silently into an empty room wondering where our heritage and culture went.

My visits in the White House and on Capitol Hill convince me that we have strong bipartisan support for NEH's work. I intend to work hard with our nation's political, educational and corporate leaders, and with the American people, to deepen America's commitment to the humanities, and through them to strengthen the education of our children in the 21st century. We must preserve and celebrate the voices of our people, for their stories are our most precious legacy.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

annual budget is \$3.6 billion, more in one year than the \$3.2 billion NEH has invested in America during NEH's entire 33-year history.

## **Penn Main Speech February 18, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Wendy, for that kind introduction

I want to thank President Rodin and Wendy Steiner and everyone who has worked so hard to launch the Penn Humanities Forum for inviting me to speak today. It is a thrill to be back at Penn, where my professional career really began. I would not be standing before you as chairman of your National Endowment for the Humanities if it weren't for the wonderful training I received here in the Folklore Department from Kenneth Goldstein, Don Yoder, Tristram Coffin and Dan Ben-Amos. And I know Roger Abrahams is continuing their great work today.

It is a great privilege to be on a program with this group of outstanding scholars. I'd rather just sit and listen to you—but apparently my time has come.

It is a special honor to share this important moment with my predecessor as chairman of the NEH, Sheldon Hackney.

All of us in the humanities community owe Sheldon a very special debt of gratitude. He guided the National Endowment for the Humanities through the most threatening period of its life. The budget cutters were out in full cry almost from the minute Sheldon became chairman, and they took a 40 percent whack out of the NEH. If it hadn't been for Sheldon's unflinching leadership, some people would have shut down the place altogether, to the great detriment of research, education and preservation in this country.

Thanks to Sheldon, I have taken over an NEH that is now on the upswing. President Clinton has asked Congress for a 36 percent increase in our budget for fiscal year 2000, up to \$150 million. That is a good step back toward the \$177 million we had in 1995. And I won't be surprised to see grant proposals coming in soon from the Penn Humanities Forum.

What I really want to do today is congratulate you on the founding of the Forum. I don't need to tell you anything about practicing the humanities: you are already doing it. By creating this dynamic new crossroads of the humanities, you are living what we've been preaching at NEH. You are reaching out to the communities around you—the humanities departments, the great professional schools at Penn, the larger

Philadelphia and Mid-Atlantic region. You delivering the humanities message where it belongs: both to the professionals and to the public.

Your humanities center is the embodiment of the NEH theme as we enter the next century: the future of the humanities is the public humanities. As Wendy Steiner pointed out, the humanities have taken a battering in the culture wars, and a gulf of understanding widened between the priesthood and the public. I believe that our survival as humanities professionals rests on how successfully we can step outside our intellectual towers and reach the widest possible audience. If the public feels disconnected from the work that we do, they might well ask: why should we support you with our tax dollars?

It is our job to answer that question. It is our job to make Huckleberry Finn and King Lear relevant to street kids in West Philadelphia and to adults on Wall Street. It is our job to help Americans find their place in the great stream of our history by teaching them how to gather their own stories and oral histories. It is our job to put the humanities on the Internet and in every public library, bringing the wisdom of our cultural legacy and democratic heritage within a mouse click of everyone.

And I believe we are in a better position to do this than ever before. Two hundred years ago, Thomas Jefferson instructed us that "an enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic." Thirty-four years ago, in founding NEH, Congress put money behind that sentiment when it wrote: "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." Now, on the cusp of a new century, we have a unique opportunity to fulfill those dictates.

We have won the cold war; we are enjoying an economic boom. We have an unprecedented confluence of peace, prosperity, technology and political will. We are finally in a position to bring the humanities to all Americans.

If we seize the moment, we can enter a golden age of the humanities.

If the 20<sup>th</sup> century was "the American century" in terms of military and economic might, then let the 21<sup>st</sup> century be the humanitarian century, the education century, the cultural century. In an exploding global economy, education is the index of how well our nation will succeed. In an information-saturated world, education becomes the engine of national growth.

The battle for educational excellence will be the cold war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it deserves as intense an investment as did the cold war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chief battles will be cultural and intellectual, not

political and military. The battlegrounds will be in the classrooms of Kansas City and Kyoto, in the libraries of West Philadelphia and West Bengal, in the theaters of Pittsburgh and Hamburg, and not in the streets of Berlin or the jungles of Southeast Asia.

To win these battles, we must have the essential tools to fight them. My grandfather used to tell me that he was raised in Mississippi on cornbread and recollections.

My grandfather's point was that you cannot win your battles unless you choose the right weapons. One of those weapons in the coming years will be the Penn Humanities Forum, and institutions like it. With their intense focus on the humanities, their cross-disciplinary approach, their public outreach, and their broad sense of mission, they are the kind of tools we need to win our special "culture wars," by which I mean our battles for educational excellence and support of the humanities.

Every generation should hold its received wisdom up to the bright light of examination. It is our duty to open the windows of inquiry, just as Socrates, Copernicus and St. Thomas Aquinas did. James Joyce and William Faulkner did not become part of the literary canon by leaving things as they were.

As you can tell, I am optimistic about the future of the humanities. If we are to seize our moment of opportunity, we must deal with a number of challenges. One of these is change, both social and technological. Another challenge is that we've already touched on is reconnecting with the American people. And a third, of course, is money.

Let's talk for a moment about change. Those of us who are the keepers of the canon, the great humanities traditions, are sometimes resistant to change. After all, Plato and Shakespeare have served us well for a long time, and their legacy must be preserved.

Yet the world has never changed so fast as in the past half-century, maybe in the past half-decade. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., noted that society is now undergoing a structural shift as profound as the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society two centuries ago. This process is more traumatic than that of 200 years ago because it is faster, more compressed. The computer chip and all that flows from it are reprogramming not just our lives, but our minds, as well.

And yet, Professor Schlesinger said, the main point of the humanities in this era of hyper-change is what it always was: self-knowledge. Self-knowledge: the ability to know who we are and where we are going. Nothing better defines the humanities than that, I think. And as the silicon chip carries us deeper into a virtual reality, we need the spiritual

touchstone of the humanities to illuminate our inner reality.

Our task as humanities scholars in a changing world is to harness technology in that cause. Technology has become the greatest resource for the humanities since the invention of movable type. We are now in a position to make the power of the humane tradition available to everyone, to put the riches of our literature, our history, our philosophy within a mouse click of intellectual curiosity. We can narrow the gap between our academic life and what is sometimes called "real life."

This leads directly to the other great shift in our lives: social change. As we become an increasingly multi-ethnic society, we must find ways to use our new technological prowess to address the needs of a diverse population. Humanities scholars can use all our tools—from Beowulf to the Internet—to bring the healing power of the humanities to our nation, and reconnect with our citizenry.

This is the essential work of the NEH, and we are looking for grant proposals that understand the connection between technology and the humanities. I'm sure this will be part of the work at the Penn Humanities Forum, as well. I am reminded of Faulkner's comment in *Absalom, Absalom*, that the dream of every artist is to etch his "mark on the face of oblivion."

One of the other great challenges we all face is financing. President Clinton has asked for a \$150 million budget for NEH next year. Yet consider that the National Science Foundation, which does for the sciences what we do for the humanities, has a budget this year of \$3.6 *billion*—32 times more grant money than we have. Clearly we're moving in the right direction but we have a long way to go.

NEH funds are part of the intellectual bloodstream of the nation. At any given moment, several thousand Americans are working on hundreds of projects around the country funded by NEH. I like to think of NEH as the Small Business Administration of the thinking world. Seemingly obscure research in quiet libraries turns into prize-winning books and public television documentaries. When we initially funded Ken Burns' research into the Civil War, we had no idea it would become one of the most-watched and talked about TV series of all time.

At NEH, our Enterprise Office reaches out to the business sector and philanthropy for partnerships. MCI-Worldcom has co-financed an innovative new humanities Web site for secondary school teachers called EdSitement. The Sara Lee Corporation has contributed \$380,000 to finance our annual Jefferson Lectures at the Kennedy Center in Washington. And TV producer Norman Lear and his wife, Lyn, made a stunning \$1 million gift to support the preservation of presidential

papers.

Yet the task before us is monumental, and it requires a broad national commitment, from our centers of commerce as well as our centers of learning. Earlier in this century, it was the great captains of industry who turned their wealth to culture, arts and the humanities. Pennsylvania businessmen like Mellon, Pew, and Carnegie made their fortunes in coal, oil and steel. But they are best remembered today for their extraordinary contributions to museums, scholarship and libraries. In later years, the Annenberg and McNeil families made similar gifts to our cultural capital, some of them right on this campus.

Today I call on our new captains of technology in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, and on all successful business people, to remember the great contributions of their predecessors, and to form partnerships with us to guarantee a high quality of education, and a high quality of life, in the United States.

I would like to touch on one other subject, that of regional humanities centers. One of the strengths of your Forum, I think, is that it will inherently have regional outreach. From my own experience at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in Mississippi, I am convinced that regional humanities centers are a unique resource for the humanities. They tap the energies and enthusiasm of people through what Eudora Welty calls "a sense of place." In our quest for the humanities we understandably turn to American regions, for regions define our voices as journalists, as teachers, as writers, as musicians. By exploring the regions that have shaped us, we rediscover what bonds us as Americans, and we renew American culture.

I plan to create a humanities center in every region of the nation. These centers will serve as cultural hubs to promote teacher institutes, regional museum exhibits, humanities tourism, and television and radio programs on each region. They may develop regional encyclopedias, as we did at the University of Mississippi.

This is one of the many ways that the humanities enrich the quality of our lives, and especially the quality of our education. We welcome corporate and philanthropic partners in this undertaking.

As we chart our way into the next century, let us remember that what we in the humanities community are dealing with is America's cultural soul, our intellectual vision of ourselves. The humanities are part of the air we breath, the spiritual matrix that makes our lives different from that of machines or beasts. Where will we be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we've won our economic and military wars but lost our souls?

Let us be frank: we cannot expect to win our economic and cultural battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we neglect education and the humanities. Less than one month before his death, John F. Kennedy told us he looked forward to a nation that would be remembered "not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit." Within two years, that impulse was answered by the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. For 33 years, the endowments have kept Kennedy's flame alive.

Now, at this crucial moment, we must reaffirm our priorities. We must remain vigilant against those who would deprive us of our culture. If efforts to eliminate our arts and humanities programs had succeeded, we could have found ourselves in a Beckett-like absurdity, like "Krapp's Last Tape," sitting alone in an empty room talking to ourselves. "Nothing to say, not a squeak," says Krapp in his final soliloquy. "Never knew such silence."

They will have to find silence without me. Emile Zola said, "I'm here to live my life out loud." Well, I'm here to preach the humanities out loud.

I hope you will join me in this grand effort as we shape the coming century into a golden age for the humanities and intellectual life in America.

Thank you.

PENN LUNCHEON SPEECH TO CULTURAL LEADERS  
February 18, 1999

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Wendy, for that kind introduction. I want to congratulate you, as well as Dean Sam Preston, Dean Rebecca Bushnell, and everyone else who has worked so hard to bring the Penn Humanities Forum to life.

It's a great privilege to be invited here for the Forum's launch. And it is a special delight to be back in Philadelphia and back at Penn where so many good things started for me years ago. I would not be standing before you as chairman of your National Endowment for the Humanities if it weren't for the wonderful training I received here in the Folklore Department from Kenneth Goldstein, Don Yoder, Tristram Coffin and Dan Ben-Amos. And I'm glad to see Roger Abrahams who Chair Department of Folklore and Folklife here today; his work and that of his colleagues will contribute much to the vitalizing of the humanities on the Penn campus.

Much of what I learned about regional culture came from my doctoral studies here, and those studies led to my work at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. Like my grandfather, I was raised in the South on cornbread and recollections. In the South we often had a problem distinguishing between myth and reality.

The story's point is that you cannot win your battles unless you choose the right weapons. And we cannot win the coming cultural and educational battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, unless we choose the right tools. That is why I am so excited about the founding of the Penn Humanities Forum. The Forum, and institutions like it, are exactly the kind of tools we need to win our culture wars. The real culture war is between those who value and preserve our culture, and those who would let it wither. It is between those who think the arts and humanities belong only in the academy, and those who think they belong in the streets, in the inner city, in the homes and towns of all Americans. I am happy to say that we are now winning on both of these fronts. Thanks to the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and to the spirit that guides Wendy Steiner at the Penn Humanities Forum, we are choosing the right tools, and we are giving our humanities new life.

The Penn Humanities Forum is destined to become a focal point, a crossroads for those of you who work in the cultural community. Many of

you here today will no doubt return to participate in the Forum's upcoming programs. Next month's "Celebration of Philadelphia Writers" is a good example of the outstanding contribution that the Forum is already making to the cultural life of this campus and community.

You who represent the cultural community of the city play a special role in bringing the riches of the arts and the humanities to your city. In our interconnected world today, town and gown are closer than ever, and Philadelphia's comeback as a vibrant, forward-looking city is nowhere better illustrated than in its thriving cultural life. Your "Avenue of the Arts" is one example of this great city's commitment to your cultural heritage as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What you have been doing in Philadelphia sends a resounding message to those who believe that we can under-fund the arts and humanities with impunity. In communities across the country, citizens like you have rushed to fill the breach left by congressional cutbacks. You have voted with your sweat and with your pocketbooks. You have sent a clear message that says, we understand the essential role of culture and history. We recognize the importance of our country's intellectual life if we are to continue world leadership in the next century. And we want federal support in that effort.

I bring you good news today. In the 16 months that I have been in Washington, I have seen a significant change in political attitudes. On Capitol Hill, I visit regularly with Congressmen and Congresswomen who tell me how important the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts is for the Nation. They have seen the work of local groups like yours, and they understand how profoundly important your work is to the education of our children and the well-being of our citizenry.

After a period of budget cuts and attacks on the arts and the humanities, the tide is turning. We can expect more support on Capitol Hill, and strong commitment from the Administration. How much can we expect? Well, let me tell you my grandfather's story about the preacher and the chicken.

One day down in the Mississippi Delta, there was this preacher who unexpectedly dropped by for Sunday dinner, as Southern preachers were wont to do in those days. The two little boys in the family were told to wait in the kitchen while the parents fed the preacher a nice meal.

The little boys were starving, of course, and dying of curiosity. One boy lifted his little brother up to look over the transom. Their father was carving the chicken and asking, "How much would you like, Preacher?"

And the preacher said, "Oh, a goodly portion." And the little boy who was holding up his brother asked, "How much is he getting?"

And the little brother says, "Damn near the whole chicken!"

At the Endowment we don't want the whole chicken, just a "goodly portion." In his budget proposal for fiscal year 2000, President Clinton has asked for \$150 million for NEH. That's a 36 percent increase over our current budget and it moves us a goodly portion back towards our 1995 budget of \$177 million, before the congressional cuts.

If this sounds like a lot of money, let me remind you that our friends at the National Science Foundation, who do for the sciences what we do for the humanities, have a budget of \$3.6 billion per year—32 times more money than NEH gets. The city of Berlin, Germany, alone has an annual cultural budget of \$500 million, more than the combined budgets of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The key to the changing public and political attitudes towards the humanities is public outreach. And public outreach is one of the primary goals of the Penn Humanities Forum. In recent decades, as you all know, our work was branded "elitist." Those of you who toil in the cultural vineyards know it does not feel elitist when you are in the trenches of fund-raising or administration. You also know that your greatest satisfaction comes from reaching a wide audience, not an elite one. We are all still trying to imitate Shakespeare, whose genius was to bring the highest art to all people.

You in Philadelphia have gone a long way toward building bridges to the wider community. Your great museums and libraries draw hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. Alongside your fine collections of art and books, you have also become a renowned center of handicrafts, joining the full spectrum of artistic creativity in a single city.

There is one familiar argument that folk art pleases only popular taste, so it's not high art, or real culture. But consider this irony: The National Gallery of Art in Washington recently mounted one of the most successful shows in its history. "Van Gogh's Van Gogh", the show drew up to four thousand visitors per day, and proved that while Van Gogh is still the platinum standard of high culture, he is also the greatest crowd-pleaser. Contrast this phenomenon with the work of a folk artist like Theodora Hamblett, a painter who grew up in Paris, Mississippi. Only a few score people have ever seen Mrs. Hamblett's simple pointillist paintings of life around Paris.

But there are significant, humanistic connections between Mrs. Hamblett

and Vincent Van Gogh. Both painters drew on an internal and external sense of place that deeply shaped their work. Ms. Hamblett painted the little schoolhouse in Paris; Van Gogh the night café in Arles. Both artists worked from a platform of creativity rooted in dreams and visions. When I interviewed Ms. Hamblett's work for a film and book on the sense of place in folk art, she told me that during a hospital stay, she was haunted by a vision of vines, until she was finally compelled to paint them. "After I paint them, then I'm never bothered [again]...," she said. Her visions were released into art.

On Van Gogh's letters to his brother, Theo, he wrote that after stays in a mental hospital. "Though I am often in the depths of misery, I see paintings or drawings in the poorest cottages, in the dirtiest corners. My mind is driven towards these things with an irresistible momentum."

So the old formula is reversed. Van Gogh belongs to our humanities canon despite his popularity; Theodora Hamblett belongs there despite her lack of it.

Our audience is not a narrow priesthood of experts and connoisseurs. Nor is our subject matter limited to the received canon. Gathering local histories, then connecting individual histories and family histories to regional events and national history is one of our key tasks as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As we do this, I think we begin to see the links that bind us together as Americans, and help us see the connections between our humanities scholarship and popular culture.

I'm a great believer in studying regional culture as a way of bridging cultural differences. I'm sure the Penn Humanities Forum will contribute to such studies in the Mid-Atlantic region. Down in the South, we learned in the cauldron of bitter struggle how history, music, and oral traditions can become a healing agent, and a cultural bridge in turbulent times. I grew up in a segregated society that had segregated music. The African Americans had blues and the European Americans had country. Along came a man named Elvis and spun them together and you had rock n roll. And at the very time that segregation was giving way to integration, our music began to merge as well. The music created a new cultural tradition. I've studied this music for years and thought I would end my talk with an example of it. I've had lots of requests today, but I'm going to sing anyway.

Thank you very much.

## **Penn Trustees Speech February 18, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Wendy, for that kind introduction. And thank you, President [Judith] Rodin and Chairman [Roy] Vagelos, for letting me speak to you today. Back in 1966, when I came here as a very nervous graduate student, it never crossed my mind that I might someday be addressing the Board of Trustees of this great institution, much less in my present capacity. This just proves how good a Penn education is, especially in the Folklore Department. I would not be standing before you as chairman of your National Endowment for the Humanities if it weren't for the wonderful training I received in the Folklore Department with people like Kenneth Goldstein, Don Yoder, Tristram Coffin and Dan Ben-Amos. I'm sure Roger Abrahams is continuing the great work of that department today.

I want to applaud President Rodin on her West Philadelphia initiative. Among other things, it will bring the resources of this great university to the educational needs of the inner city that surrounds you. NEH has supported this kind of work for more than two decades. We funded the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute starting in the late 1970s. Yale faculty members joined with inner city school teachers to enrich their curricula and adapt great scholarship to primary and secondary education. The program has been a huge success, so much so that NEH was later able to help the Institute form its own endowment and become an integral part of Yale University. By making a similar commitment at Penn, you are turning your intellectual capital into human capital, the bedrock of the success of our economy and our democracy.

I want to tell you how wise I think it is that the University of Pennsylvania is establishing the Penn Humanities Forum at this critical moment in academic history. Wendy has already told you the details. I would like to give you an overview of what is happening with the humanities on a national scale.

First, there is a new awareness of the importance of the humanities. Across the country, I find people, inside the universities and outside, who sense the need for a grounding in our history, our philosophy, our literature—in all the things that give our lives meaning beyond material achievement and a faster lifestyle in the information age. As things speed up all around us, as the computer takes over our lives more and more, we feel a desire to know the lasting values in our society.

At the same time, we are confronted with a public uneasiness about what the humanities really are, and really do, and how they affect the lives of everyday Americans. In such an environment, it is more important than ever that we open the windows of academe to the outside world. We must engage the general public and create vehicles of outreach to the communities around us. That is precisely what we are doing at The Endowment, and what the Penn Humanities Forum will do.

Some people think the humanities are useful only if you are planning a trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art or the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington. Nothing could be further from the truth. The humanities are the intellectual air we breath, the cultural sea we swim in, the spiritual matrix that makes our lives different from that of machines or beasts. Robert Penn Warren once said, "a fish doesn't think much about water," and the same could be said about our relationship to the humanities. We don't think much about them—until they're not there.

One of your own fellow trustees, Richard L. Fisher, who couldn't be here today, has made the case for us. As you know, Wendy Steiner holds the chair that Mr. Fisher endowed. You may also know that Mr. Fisher did his graduate work at Penn in playwriting. But, as I'm sure you know, he does not write plays today; he writes deals in the New York real estate market. Mr. Fisher has told Wendy that what he learned about language and clarity of thought as a humanities student at Penn played a large role in his business success. And he looks for the same qualities in the young people he hires.

This is the perfect example of why we need a strong humanities program, and why all Americans, in whatever walk of life or business, need a strong grounding in the humanities.

In my travels around the country, one thing has become clear: the future of the humanities is the public humanities. The public humanities are those which reach average Americans. The survival of the humanitarian tradition depends on how successfully we can step outside our intellectual towers and reach the widest possible public. King Lear and Huckleberry Finn must have meaning for the kids in West Philadelphia and for grown-ups on Wall Street. They must be accessible to everyone, whether through computers or through street theater.

For any humanities program of public outreach to have meaning, it must be based on rigorous academic standards and research. As trustees, you know how difficult it is to find funds for fellowships and research sabbaticals within your budgets. A large portion of humanities research relies on outside funding. For a quarter-century, The National Endowment for the Humanities has been the nation's largest single source of post-doctoral fellowships and stipends. We have made nearly

14,000 humanities research grants to more than 400 institutions just like yours.

Here at Penn you have some outstanding examples. The Vergil Project, run by Professor Joseph Farrell of the classics department, not only dealt with original texts by the Roman poet, but created an interactive online database for teachers—exactly the kind of tool the humanities needs in the Internet age. Another Endowment supported project at Penn is the creation of a Web site for the teaching of Shakespeare. It is run by Dean Rebecca Bushnell of the English Department and Dr. Michael Ryan at the Van Pelt Library.

NEH funds are part of the intellectual bloodstream of the nation. At any given moment, several thousand Americans are working on hundreds of projects around the country funded by NEH. I like to think of NEH as the Small Business Administration of the thinking world. What we invest often grows into something much larger than originally envisioned. Seemingly obscure research in quiet libraries often turns into prize-winning books and public television documentaries. When we initially funded Ken Burns' research into the Civil War, we had no idea it would become one of the most-watched and talked about TV series of all time. Books supported by NEH have won more than 500 prizes, including nine Pulitzer Prizes, eight Bancroft Prizes, and six National Book awards.

Primary research with primary documents is the beginning of the humanities food chain. Professor Drew Faust of the Penn history department says her academic career was launched by the work she did 20 years ago on her first book on James Henry Hammond. That work was supported by an NEH grant. Professor Faust is famous now, of course, for *Mothers of Invention*, her prize-winning history of Southern women during the civil war. Dr. Faust's book led the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond to mount a first-ever exhibit on the role of Southern women during the Civil War. But where did the museum turn for the necessary funds to collect the documents and mount the exhibit? To the NEH, of course.

Now I want to raise the issue that trustees and endowment chairmen deal with every day: money. You all probably know that NEH took a draconian 40 percent budget cut back in 1996. But I am happy to report that the political atmosphere on Capitol Hill has improved. Many members of Congress have told me they understand and admire the work of scholars at places like Penn, and humanities groups in cities like Philadelphia. In this new climate, President Clinton has requested a 36 percent increase in our budget to \$150 million for fiscal year 2000. It moves us in the right direction, back toward the \$177 million budget we had before the budget cuts. This is not much compared to our friends at

the National Science Foundation, whose budget this year is \$3.6 billion. They do for the sciences what we do for the humanities, but with 32 times as much money.

Since every American, and especially every American business, has a stake in the quality of education of our citizenry, we need to reach beyond the federal budget into our philanthropic and corporate community for partnerships. I'm happy to report that MCI-Worldcom has partnered with NEH and the Council of Great City Schools to produce a wonderful Web site for school teachers called EdSitement. In addition, the Sara Lee Corporation has granted us \$380,000 to underwrite our annual Jefferson Lectures at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington. And TV producer Norman Lear, and his wife, Lyn, made the NEH an extraordinary gift of \$1 million to support our preservation of America's endangered original documents, books, and papers.

But we need more. The task before us is monumental, and it requires a broad national commitment, from the nation's centers of capital as well as from our centers of learning.

Earlier in this century, it was the great captains of industry who turned their wealth to culture, arts and the humanities. Pennsylvania businessmen like Mellon, Pew, and Carnegie made their fortunes in coal, oil and steel. But they are best remembered today for their extraordinary contributions to museums, scholarship and libraries. In later years, the Annenberg and McNeil families made similar gifts to our cultural capital. Today I call on our new captains of technology in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, and on all successful business people, to remember the great contributions of their predecessors in commerce, and to form partnerships with us to guarantee a high quality of education, and a high quality of life, in the United States.

Make no mistake about it: education is key to America's continued dominance in the global economy. You know that an enlightened citizenry, and an educated work force, are the bedrock of competitiveness in today's fluid, international business climate. Education is the engine of national growth. We cannot expect to win the economic and cultural battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we neglect education and the humanities. The battle for educational excellence will be the cold war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it deserves just as intense an investment as did the cold war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The battlegrounds will be the classrooms and libraries of Pittsburgh and Hamburg, Kansas City and Kyoto, not in the streets of Berlin or the jungles of Southeast Asia.

G. K. Chesterton said that education is "the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another." It is our soul that we need to be

concerned about as we enter a new century. Today America is riding a wave of economic and military success. But if we beggar our culture, we will surely lose the battle for what William Faulkner called "the agony and sweat of the human spirit."

By supporting the Penn Humanities Forum, you are stating your commitment to a future that is not ruled only by bits and bytes. You share with us a vision of a future embedded in the humanitarian traditions that have nurtured our democracy and defined our purpose since our Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia in 1776. With that kind of commitment, the work of the human spirit will go on, and help define the world we leave our children. And for that you are to be congratulated.

Thank you.

**Public Television: The Beacon in the Wasteland  
America's Public Television Stations  
March 1, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Beth, for that kind introduction. David Brueger, thank you for inviting me to be here today. I don't know how you and your small staff at APTS manage to do so much on so many fronts. Congratulations.

First, I must thank you for many fond moments curled up with my daughter early in the morning watching *Sesame Street*. It is hard to say who laughed harder or learned more. *Sesame Street* works on so many levels for adults and children. My congratulations to Elmo and the Sesame Street Muppets on their Grammy Award last week for *Elmopalooza*. I did much of my study of the blues in Leland, Mississippi, Jim Henson's hometown. We truly lost a national treasure when he passed on. I am just thankful his work lives on.

Upon signing the Public Broadcasting Act on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1967, President Johnson said, "Television is still a young invention, but we have learned already that it has immense, even revolutionary power to change our lives. I hope that those who lead will direct that power toward the great and not the trivial purposes."

Ever since May 25, 1953—when KUHT/Houston broadcast the first public television program—you have directed the power of television toward "the great," not "the trivial." Our country is all the better for your having done so. I refer not only to the excellent public television programming, but also to initiatives such as The Annenberg/CPB Project, the Public Television Outreach Alliance, Ready to Learn, Ready to Earn, the WNET Teacher Training Initiative, the Wisconsin Project, the Democracy Project, PBS Online, and many other fine local, regional and national efforts.

Over the decades, the National Endowment for the Humanities, through its grants to independent producers and individual public television stations, has been a proud partner on many important public television projects. *The Adams Chronicles* in the '70s, *Vietnam: A Television History*, and *The Civil War* in the '80s, and *Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote History* in the '90s, to mention just a few.

Over the years, the Endowment has contributed more than 250 million dollars to public television.

Yet our involvement with public television goes beyond just money. We provide support and scholarship. Ken Burns once said,

"Without a doubt, my series on the *Civil War* could not have been made without the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Endowment not only provided one of the project's largest grants, thereby attracting other funders, but also, through grants to other institutions, helped restore the archival photographs we would use to tell our story."

The late Henry Hampton, who created those brilliant PBS programs "Eyes on the Prize," "The Great Depression," and "America's War on Poverty" once said, "...history is a series of openings such that if you're ready and able you can have an enormous impact." I think we have just such an opening today, and I believe we are ready and able to have an enormous impact. The digital age, especially multicasting, offers the opening and we must take advantage of the opportunity. A "grand alliance for community service" can certainly help.

In 1965, Congress established the National Endowment for the Humanities, saying, "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." That is a towering task. Wisdom—vision—democracy. At the Endowment, we take our charge very seriously.

Basically, I like to think of the Endowment as a catalyst. With support and seed money, we get projects started. You carry them through to fruition.

The Endowment has a modest budget, only \$110 million—about forty-one cents per American citizen. By comparison, it cost more than \$200 million to make the movie *Titanic*.

In his new budget, President Clinton has once again shown his strong support for the Endowment, and for public television. The President has requested a five-year public broadcasting digital transition fund totaling four hundred and fifty million dollars.

For the Endowment, the President requested one hundred and fifty million dollars for fiscal year 2000. If these funds are approved, we will be able to increase funding to the Division of Public Programs—the Endowment division that supports media projects. The budget cuts of 1995 and '96, forced 60 percent cuts in this division, definitely left their mark. In 1994, Americans saw 41 endowment-supported films for a total of 71 viewing hours. Projections for 2000 point to a few as eight to ten new endowment-funded films for only twenty-eight hours of viewing time. We want to increase those numbers.

There is significant bi-partisan support for the Endowment on the Hill. I

have met with Representative Tillie Fowler from Florida, Maurice Hinchey from New York, Robert Cramer from Alabama, as well as House Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula. They are all concerned with outreach, and education.

At my first school in rural Mississippi, there was no television in the classroom, much less a computer. Three teachers taught six grades, I was the only student whose parents had graduated from college. When my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Barfield, asked her students who was going to college, no hands went up. Mrs. Barfield pointed her finger at me and said, "Billy Ferris, you will go to college—your parents will make you go." I said, "No, ma'am, I ain't goin' to no college."

Well, after one Ph.D., 10 books, and 27 years of college teaching, it is obvious that Mrs. Barfield was right. Mrs. Barfield inspired my love of learning and of the humanities. To this day I still hear her voice. I think more and more people are hearing a similar voice, a voice calling for quality education for all Americans.

In his January State of the Union address, the President made it clear that education was his number one domestic priority. And two weeks ago, Secretary of Education Richard Riley echoed that point in his Annual State of American Education address. I know all of you have made education a top priority in your states as well.

We face obstacles. In a recent Department of Education survey, less than half of American teachers reported feeling "very well prepared" to meet many of the challenges facing the nation's public school classrooms.

This, helps explain why almost 30% of the nation's teachers drop out within five years. In the coming decade, America's schools will need more than 2 million new teachers. This is especially significant for the humanities because at the K through 12 level, the humanities comprise two-thirds of the curriculum.

How can we work together to address those problems. Your transition to digital transmission and multicasting offer many new opportunities in the field of education and employment training. Let me outline what the Endowment is doing to help the nation achieve its education goals. The more we know about each other, the more creative we can be in our partnership. In addition to supporting public television, the Endowment is....

heavily involved in teacher training. This summer we will support 29 institutes for 550 teachers. These teachers shape the lives of more than 96,000 students each year.

We have a new initiative, Schools for the New Millennium. In partnership with local colleges, museums, and businesses, we help entire schools raise the skills of all their teachers.

We take advantage of technology. The Endowment partnered with MCI-Worldcom, and the Council of Great City Schools to produce EDSITEment, a website that links teachers to more than 60 outstanding humanities sites. EDSITEment now gets 36,000 hits a month.

And we are working to achieve the nation's education goals is through *My History is America's History*. It encourages all Americans to learn more about their family's history—and then relate their history to the broader sweep of American and world history.

We have created five working groups that cut across divisional lines: think of them as our "five avenues of service." They are: international programs; science, technology and the humanities; teaching and lifelong learning; regional initiatives; and extending the reach to a wider public.

We plan to create 10 regional humanities centers in each region of the country. These centers will support research, preservation, education and public programs. The centers will focus on the unique heritage of each region, and they will serve as a new platform of learning, regional in nature, but national in scope.

These centers will coordinate their work with that of other cultural and educational institutions in the area—including public television stations. As local stations with national impact you are in a perfect position to participate.

I have seen how such centers can work. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture, which began 22 years ago, at the University of Mississippi has been successful beyond my wildest dreams. It has been a boon to tourism, preservation, and education in the American South.

Newton Minow—the former FCC Chairman and PBS Chairman among other things said, "The most important educational institution in America is television. More people learn more each day, each year, each lifetime from television than from any other source. All of television is education; the question is, what are we teaching and what are we learning."

Every day you answer that question in the most positive way possible. Every day public television informs, enlightens, and entertains with the best television has to offer.

Thank you for all your great work.

I look forward to working with you in the future. We are natural partners in the effort to strengthen the American character by telling all America's stories.

As you do so well with public television, we work with Endowment programs to provide quality content to all Americans. Like public television, the humanities are for everyone. The humanities encompass our stories, our dreams, our songs. These are our gifts to the nation. We must continue to distribute them... "If public television and the Endowment don't do it, who will?"

Some have said that Elmo could use a new sideman; Bob's been there thirty years. I don't quite measure up to Big Bird, at seven feet nine inches who does, but I can play a mean blue note. So please let Elmo know I am available for his next album. This song is from that great public television program *Mississippi: River of Song*—I worked as a consultant on the film before I came to the Endowment.

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: March 1999**

### **Using Computers in Education NEH Prepares Schools for a New Millennium**

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By William R. Ferris

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Computers are often praised as educational miracle workers, as cures for whatever ails America's classrooms. If only it were that simple.

While the technology is out there, schools are still figuring out how to use it effectively and wisely. The good news, according to a recent study, is that Internet access in public schools increased from 35 to 78 percent over the last four years. The bad news is that there is no systematic, nationwide plan to show teachers the wealth of instructional materials available by computer and how to use computers in their day-to-day teaching. More than 90 percent of the nation's teachers believe that using the Internet boosts student achievement, but 60 percent of the teachers want help in using the computer for instructional purposes.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency, is addressing that need. Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop them into models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum. The humanities are history, literature and foreign languages.

Each of the 20 schools has its own special emphasis. Teachers at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tenn., for example, have their students researching the Internet's resources on the civil rights movement, using that information to do oral history interviews with local folks who lived through that period in our history, and posting their interviews electronically for anyone to access.

Bullard High School in Fresno, Calif., is overhauling its humanities curriculum, including schoolwide training for teachers in the resources of the Internet and weaving of those resources into the lesson plans for teaching California's immigrant experience and Hispanic culture.

The Frontier Regional Middle and High School in Deerfield, Mass., is forming a three-way partnership with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a local museum, which has 31,000 objects documenting the history of western Massachusetts, to put museum material on a Web site so it can be used by the school.

NEH has funded similar projects at schools in Arizona, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. We are firmly committed to developing the use of the computer as a major educational tool in the humanities, and we will be announcing more grants to develop additional Millennium Schools summer.

The computer cannot replace the close study of texts that lies at the heart of

humanities education, but computer-accessible teaching aids can support teachers in ways that help students learn and boost their achievement. It is exciting to know that NEH's Millennium Schools, through their efforts today, will become tomorrow's exemplars of excellence in the educational use of information technology.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

**Imagining America  
White House Ceremony  
11 March 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you Bill, for that kind introduction...as always it is a pleasure to appear with you. It means there are at least two folklorists in the room—which is always dangerous. Bill and I are libel to break out into wild story telling at any time.

My thanks to President Clinton and the First Lady for their continued support for the National Endowment for the Humanities. To know that they understand how important the humanities are to our democracy is a comfort and a source of inspiration.

It is unfortunate the First Lady cannot be here today, because without her we all probably wouldn't be here. It is her vision, creativity, and determination that have made all this possible, and the nation owes her thanks.

Secretary Riley it is an honor to appear here with you. Ellen McCulloch-Lovell of the White House Millennium Council; Bob Weissbuck of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation; President Bollinger and distinguished guests.

NEH and NEA are fortunate in sharing the Old Post Office Building on eleventh and Pennsylvania, just blocks from here. If you have time, please come and visit us. Decades ago, a very smart, insightful and determined woman, Nancy Hanks, saved the building from the wrecking ball. I am glad she did. Every day I enter a magnificent building, see beautiful works of art, and often hear live music that is performed on the atrium stage. These are not frills. Music, art, design, our cultural heritage are the gifts that contribute to our quality of life. That is why I applaud this initiative. "Imagining America" has the potential to affect the lives of millions of Americans. The Endowment is ready to help as much as we can, and I am sure the state humanities councils are ready also.

As I contemplate the two words "Imagining America," I imagine two more words, "education everywhere." At home, at school, in the workplace, in museums, libraries, state historical societies, cars, trains—everywhere. Through its public programs division that is what the Endowment is trying to do. My dream is to bring the humanities within an arm's reach of every America—no more than a mouse click or a

library away.

In a dramatic study supported by NEH we recently learned that Americans have a deep hunger for history, especially their own history. The study by Professors Roy Rosenzweig and David Phelan is called the "Presence of the Past." In it, Americans express their desire for a hands-on approach to learning through the direct testimony of those they know and trust. And toward this end, NEH is supporting oral history projects through which students and families generate their own genealogical chronicles to capture the American narrative before it disappears.

To support this form of direct education, NEH has invested over \$350 million in our nation's museums and exhibits. The public humanities are the humanities that touch every American. We must make "King Lear" and "Huckleberry Finn" relevant to youngsters in Peoria and South Central Los Angeles. Let me tell you what the state of Maine is doing.

In recognition of its leadership role in promoting reading as a lifelong activity, the Maine Humanities Council was designated to serve as the Maine Center for the Book by the Library of Congress. Unless you go deep into the Maine woods, you can't hide from the Maine Center for the book. There are many great programs: Prescription to Read, New Books, New Readers, Family Scrapbooks, and Born to Read.

One mom who took part in "Born to Read" said, "I never knew how important it was until I got started reading to my daughter. I was amazed how much better we communicated. Her speech just got better and better." One dad said, "There are all these great books out there and they're not expensive. I don't think any toy can do what a book can do." Neither do I.

Again my congratulations to all involved in launching this important initiative. The Endowment will do all it can to help.

It is now an honor for me to introduce a man who for decades has epitomized the best in public service. As governor, he did an incredible job serving the people of the great state of South Carolina. Now for the past six years, Secretary of Education Riley, has worked tirelessly on behalf of teachers, scholars, and students of all ages. Please welcome a man I admire and respect, Secretary of Education Riley.

**Two Men Are Worth More Than a Mule, But Not By Much**  
**Address to the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Texas**  
**Council for the Humanities**  
**March 13, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Max Sherman, for that kind introduction. I would also want to thank Dean Ed Dorn for generously hosting this meeting here at the LBJ School, and Harry Middleton, head of the LBJ Library, for having us over to his building for the reception afterwards. There is such an impressive list of other notables in the audience today that I can only greet you all together as distinguished guests and say, thanks for coming.

I want to give special thanks today to "Ab" Abernathy, Sylvia Grider, Tom Green, Americo Paredes, Jose Limon, John West, and other Texas folklorists.

It is a privilege to share with you this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Texas Council for the Humanities. You have an exceptionally rich legacy of humanities in Texas, and you have much to celebrate with your many "human ties."

But before I talk about the many voices of the humanities in Texas, I want to talk about one voice from Mississippi that constitutes a great human tie for me and everyone who hear it. That voice was my grandfather's who grew up in the aftermath of the Civil War and often remarked that he was raised on cornbread and recollections. One of my favorite stories from the era he knew so well was about General Beauregard and a Southern belle.

The point of that story is, you must go into your battles with the right weapons. And, clearly, you in Texas have been going into your humanities and education battles with the right weapons for a long time. One of them is Jim Veninga, who just showed us the wonderful legacy he created for the humanities in Texas during his years as director of the Texas Council. Jim's excellent book on *The Humanities and Civic Education* describes his journey to promote civil society through educational excellence and the cultivation of the humanities. He teaches us lessons about the discovery and preservation of the myths and values of Texas. Jim's book may be *about* the humanities, but at the same time, it is a great body of work *in* the humanities. Congratulations, Jim.

You truly give wings to ideas.

Texans have risen to the task presented by Congress when it founded the National Endowment for the Humanities—to "give full value and support to the ...great branches of scholarly and cultural activity." You are blessed with an embarrassment of riches.

From your music to your literature to your scholarship to your humor; from Noah Smithwick to J. Frank Dobie to Larry McMurtry to Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Texas has produced an unending legacy of moving bodies that speak to the human condition in this constantly changing state. The treasures Texas has given the nation include its Hispanic-American culture, its high-tech industries, and its politicians. It was, after all, President Lyndon Johnson who said "there just simply must be no neglect of humanities."

That is a dictum we take seriously at the National Endowment for the Humanities, and it is one that has been proudly followed here in Texas.

One area of the humanities that I want to talk about today, is the study of myth, history and storytelling, about how we uncover truths that are right around us, that tell us who we are and where we're going. That, it seems to me, is the simplest definition of what the humanities are.

Our National Humanities Medal winner Arthur Schlesinger put it simply. He said: "One of the main points of the humanities is what it always was: self-knowledge." Professor Schlesinger cited Shakespeare as the greatest master of self-knowledge, and he is right. But, we must also recognize that resources for understanding ourselves are often right in front of us, in the legends we grow up with, in the wise people who counsel and raise us, and in the unsung words of folk artists in our midst.

I am blessed by the discovery of truths a generation or two before me by the great Texas folklorists, John and Alan Lomax, and J. Frank Dobie. The Lomaxes, father and son, were America's great song hunters, the men who saved our legacy of cowboy singing and white gospels and black blues from extinction. John Lomax was born in Mississippi, grew up in Texas, and spent most of his professional life here. Mr. Lomax pursued a teaching career in English, but he could never forget his fascination with melodies and songs of Texas cowboys. He had to travel to Harvard, where he got his Ph.D., to discover that it was all right to actually study cowboy songs. The great Shakespeare scholar George Lyman Kittredge taught Lomax that they were the bedrock chronicles of our American experience.

Professor Lomax made as great a contribution to the understanding of

the culture of the South and southwest as anyone ever has. He, and his son, Alan, scoured the landscape with their heavy tape recorder, sleeping out at night under the stars. Not only did they record the great cowboy songs and frontier ballads, but they saved for all time the deeply felt rhythms of black folk songs. By traveling into prisons, they made their best known discovery. At the Angola Prison Farm in Louisiana, they recorded the blues sung by an inmate named Huddie Ledbetter. His performing name was Leadbelly. The Lomaxes were so impressed with Leadbelly's blues mastery that they helped him secure a pardon from the governor and then launched his performing and recording career.

The Lomaxes' put blues into the mainstream of American life. What at that time was simply the idiom of the depressed black minority of the South began to have resonance across cultural borders. As a young man, I was fascinated by the blues and followed the Lomaxes with my own recording equipment and books on the blues. Like John Lomax, I had to travel far from home to find out that it was all right to study the indigenous culture of my native Mississippi as an academic and humanities pursuit. I was a grad student in Dublin, Ireland, unhappy within the cramped confines of a traditional path to a Ph.D. in English. One morning at breakfast, I met Professor Francis Utley of Ohio State University. We were staying at the same bed and breakfast. When Professor Utley heard my lament, he gave me the keys to the kingdom: he said, "Study folklore, young man." Twenty-seven years and ten books later, I have to say that is the best professional advice I ever got.

In the course of my work on the blues, I've been privileged to learn to play the guitar and even play with some friends I made along the way. One of them is B. B. King, who performed the other day in Washington, D.C., at age 73. I consulted with Richard Hull and Jim Veninga about maybe sharing one of my blues songs with you today, and they made numerous requests. But I decided to sing anyway.

I knew I was going to have a hard time getting my arms around the many voices of Texas when I visited my brother-in-law, Jim Magnuson, at the Michener Center for Writers, the last time I was here. I always stop by the Dobie House to see Jim just to soak up some of the atmosphere left behind by Professor Dobie, who is one of my heroes. And we all know the great work Jim is doing there, as witnessed by the fine writing of the fellows at his center, writers such as Joseph Skibell ["sky-bell"], Katherine Hester and Taska Shadix, to mention only three.

Upstairs in Mr. Dobie's library, I found the following line written on a blackboard: "*Dos hombres valen mas que un mulo, pero no por mucho.*" Which means: *Two men are worth more than a mule, but not by much.*

Now, how can you do proper credit to the voices of the humanities in

Texas when they speak with such power as that? That line evokes so much about Texas history, Texas humor, Texas literature, Texas multiculturalism, just plain Texas life! That line could have come from a character in the novels of Cormac McCarthy or Larry McMurtry, in the humor of Larry L. King, or in one of Willie Nelson's ballads. It could even have come from one of my favorite storytellers of all time, a man named Ray Lum.

Mr. Lum was born in the 19th century, and he was a mule trader. His life encompassed the grand transformations of the South between the 1890s and the 1970s. He traded mules, then added horses, then faced the changes of mechanization. Though he was born and grew up in Mississippi, he spent many years in Texas, based in Ft. Worth, where he traded mules by the trainload. He loved Texas because the air was thinner, the rattlesnakes struck faster and the horses bucked harder. He discovered that he made more money selling mules at night than in the daytime because it got up to 120 degrees during the daytime in Fort Worth.

Mr. Lum lived in Vicksburg and did business with my father. Over the years, I recorded Mr. Lum's tales of traveling and trading in America, tales that eventually became a book called, *You Live and Learn, Then You Die and Forget It All*. I wrote the book at the Center for the Humanities at Stanford University a few years ago.

My point is, once again, that the work of the humanities is not always arcane scholarship about faraway topics. A great Texan who understood this is Bill C. Malone. Bill was an East Texas tenant farmer's son who caught "hillbilly fever" as a boy and never got over it. Bill's fascination with country music and the gospel tradition turned into an academic career. His book on *Country Music U. S. A.* is a classic work on the subject.

Let me hasten to say that I do not devalue traditional research and distant travels. On the contrary, I am proud to say that among the \$22 million worth of projects that NEH has funded in Texas in just the last five years, we have supported archaeological work in Turkey, Maya research in Belize, and studies of French medieval coronation texts. That is the good and proper work of the academy, and it is NEH's job to foster it.

At the same time, however, we have funded the collection of oral histories, the Latin American Arts Center in San Antonio, and the wonderful travelling exhibit created by Richard Holland at Southwest Texas State University. The exhibit is called, "No Traveller Remains Untouched: Journeys and Transformations in the American Southwest." With photographs, paintings and other graphic images, the exhibit

captures the rich culture of the southwest. The exhibit is now on display at the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington. From Cabeza de Vaca to John Graves's canoe trip down the Brazos River, we are taken on a journey about journeys.

The exhibit shows that events and people and what they say are important links in our historical chain. What may have seemed commonplace at the time it happened was in fact an important part of our ongoing national narrative. That is why it is important for us to record, to write down, to sift and analyze even the everyday doings of our public and private lives. That is why it is important, for instance, for NEH to continue funding the U.S. Newspaper Preservation Program. The Texas Newspaper Project at the Center for American History here at the University of Texas has preserved more than 170,000 pages of African American newspapers in Texas that were in danger of destruction. It has done the same with Hispanic and English-language publications. The loss of these original sources of information about our history would have been devastating for future scholarship.

As you know, NEH does much, much more than this. The humanities are the intellectual air we breath, the cultural sea we swim in, the spiritual matrix that makes our lives different from that of machines or beasts. Our mission as humanists, especially at NEH, is nothing less than enhancing the mind and the soul of every American through our research, our storytelling, our preservation efforts. Everything we do is aimed at elevating our national educational level, and there several thousand NEH-funded projects under way all over the country on any given day. Through its grant-making, matching funds, and challenge programs, NEH is the heart of the nation's intellectual bloodstream. We are the Small Business Administration of the humanities, planting seed money in fertile fields like the University of Texas and other fine institutions of higher education in this state.

We are especially proud of our summer teacher institutes. Each summer the country's leading scholars are brought together with our most dedicated secondary school teachers for intense summertime refresher courses of up to eight weeks at a time. In Houston, we funded the Common Ground project that brought 240 local teachers into a three-year collaborative project on American literature.

Another area of emphasis at NEH is technology. We are taking the humanities into the digital age. And with more and more people connected to the Internet, we have never been closer to achieving this goal.

A final area I want to emphasize is regional humanities studies. I have called for the establishment of ten regional humanities centers around

the country. With your great legacy of southwestern studies in Texas, you understand why regions are an excellent platform for mobilizing resources, human engagement and research—not to mention getting grant money. My experience at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in Mississippi has convinced me of that.

The many humanities voices of Texas—some of them from a century ago, some of them sitting in this room today—are a shining beacon to every American looking for proof that the humanities matter. You are fighting the battle for our soul, what Faulkner called "the agony and sweat of the human spirit." With the Cold War behind us, the battles for primacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be in the streets of Berlin or in the jungles of Southeast Asia, but in the libraries and classrooms of Brownsville and Beijing, of Kansas City and Kyoto, of Lubbock and Lyon, France. If the 20<sup>th</sup> century was "the American century" in military and economic terms, let us lay claim to the next century as the humanitarian century, the educational century, the cultural century.

It was President Kennedy who told us, just weeks before his death, that he looked forward to an America that would be remembered "not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit."

It was President Johnson who brought Kennedy's dream to fruition with the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

And it is we who owe it to the nation, and to the memory of these great leaders, to put their vision into action. In Texas, you have been doing it so well for the past 25 years. I wish you continued success in your second quarter century.

Thank you.

**Blues Foundation  
Remarks  
Kennedy Center  
March 16, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you for that kind introduction.

I grew up in Mississippi and my roots are in the blues.

The blues appeared in the South toward the end of the 19th century, in states as diverse as Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Texas. In each state performers developed styles that allow the listener to distinguish between Piedmont and Mississippi Delta blue sounds.

Blues artists chronicle the long, difficult journey traveled by blacks.

With roots both in sacred hymns and spirituals and in secular work chants and field hollers, blues artists celebrated the new freedom of blacks as musicians like Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter sang. "If anybody asks you who made up this song, tell 'em it was Huddie Ledbetter, done been here and gone."

The most dramatic chapter on the history of Delta blues artists is their journey from Mississippi to Chicago. Tens of thousands of blacks fled their rural worlds of poverty and tenant farming and sought a better life in the North. By car, bus, and train, they arrived in Chicago and their music forever marked the city.

Like Elwood in the movie the *Blues Brothers*, Americans are clearly on a journey in search of the blues. Today, Hollywood productions, such as *The Color Purple* and *Crossroads* prominently feature traditional blues artists.

I am here tonight, because supporting the Blues, its past, present, and future is an important part of our work at the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Endowment has a long tradition of support for projects about the Blues, including several in which I was personally involved. The Endowment has supported:

- Public lectures about the American Blues tradition hosted by Prince



More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: April 1999**

### **Humanities in Action Why Shakespeare Speaks To Our Time**

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By William R. Ferris

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Nearly 400 years after his death, William Shakespeare is an honored household name universally recognized as the greatest playwright in the English-speaking world. Judging from this year's Academy Award winner for Best Picture, "Shakespeare in Love," people still cannot get enough of the bard.

Just what is the secret of Shakespeare's timeless popularity? He told stories in which he created some of literature's most memorable characters and penned the most beautiful English poetry ever written. He wrote both comedies and tragedies, and we understand the human condition better in our own time because he wrote about it so penetratingly in his.

Shakespeare is for everyone, but he is only one example of the humanities in action. The humanities are the subject areas of history, literature and languages, which taken together offer the best insights we have into our values, traditions and ideals. Focusing on these ideas, discussing them, drawing strength from them and becoming more human because of them is the humanities in action. The humanities bind us together as a nation and help us live more meaningful lives.

At the National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal grant-making agency in Washington, D.C., we provide funding for hundreds of humanities projects each year in the fields of preservation, public programs, education and research.

One of our hottest educational projects is EDSITEMent, a website at <http://edsitement.neh.gov/> that allows you to explore Shakespeare and hundreds of other fascinating topics. You can amble along a timeline of Shakespeare's life, see the 16th-century houses in which he lived and the theaters in which his plays were staged, visit Queen Elizabeth on her throne, study the Renaissance world in which Shakespeare lived, and read about dozens of Shakespeare festivals that take place each year in all parts of the United States.

You can learn about all of the humanities on this wide-ranging website, which is supported by MCI WorldCom Foundation. Like Shakespeare, the humanities link us to each other through a deeper understanding of the human condition. It is the mission of the National Endowment for the Humanities to bring the humanities to you, so that you can see for yourself.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

**Oral History: The Future of the Past  
Southern Oral History Program  
Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina  
April 8, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you so much for that kind introduction. Visiting Chapel Hill always makes me feel like I'm coming home. The legacy of Frank Porter Graham and Bill Friday make this sacred ground for educational and cultural worlds.

Two years ago, President Friday was chosen by the National Endowment for the Humanities to receive the National Humanities Medal, the nation's highest humanities honor. At the White House, President Clinton said that there was no more "revered force in American education today than Bill Friday." That is even truer today than it was then.

There are so many distinguished guests here today, I cannot begin to name you all. But I do want to welcome Alice Barkley, director of the North Carolina Humanities Council, and her colleagues, Harlan Gradin and Janice Periquet [peri-kett]. The North Carolina Humanities Council is an indispensable resource for humanities work in this state, and they have been longtime supporters of the Southern Oral History Project.

John Hope Franklin, Bob Connor, Darryl Gless, John Shelton Reed (Dole), George Tindell, Dan Patterson, Terry Zug, Frank Porter Graham, Tom Rankin

Most important, I want to offer congratulations to you, Jackie Hall, and to everyone associated with the Southern Oral History Project on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Your work over the past quarter-century has shown how rich the South is with historical memory and storytelling. You have pioneered and inspired the study of Southern cotton mill life and of women's voices in the south. And you have demonstrated how scholarship is enriched by oral history.

But I also want to pay special homage to each of you here today who have told your stories, and become part of the great stream of recorded Southern history. Each of you is an historian, and through your life's

story, each of you has taught us.

There is an African proverb that says, "When an old man or woman dies, a library burns to the ground." By recording your oral histories you are preserving those libraries for future generations. You are guaranteeing that our past will have a future that our children's children can learn about the culture they come from.

What you have done in Chapel Hill is what we are preaching, louder than ever, at the National Endowment for the Humanities. Our central theme is "Rediscovering America in the New Millennium." We have funded the collection of oral histories among the automotive worker of Dearborn, Michigan, the rural folk of the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, and the diverse populations of Arizona.

Under our Schools for a New Millennium Program, we are helping Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis show their students how to gather oral histories in South Memphis. This is the historic neighborhood where Reverend Martin Luther King was killed, and where the National Civil Rights Museum is located.

I am proud to say that along with the North Carolina Humanities Council the NEH has made grants of more than \$100,000 over the years to the Southern Oral History Project.

In November, on the cusp of the new century, we are launching a new program that encourages Americans everywhere to gather oral histories and family narratives to enrich our national narrative. It is called "My History is America's History." A special Web site will provide support for collecting family stories and artifacts. It will also show ways of connecting your story to other families' stories of building a timeline of local and regional history.

At NEH, we are harnessing the strength of the computer to empower every American to become an oral historian.

All this is especially gratifying to me as a folklorist. I want to tell you how I got into folklore, because I think it highlights the importance of oral history in understanding a culture, especially Southern culture.

Most of my early playmates were black children whose parents lived and worked on my family's farm. They sometimes took me to Rose Hill Church on the farm, where I heard powerful black spirituals for the first time. They came straight from the heart, without hymnals. A great unwritten history was transmitted through this music.

When I was a teenager, I discovered a blues singer named Lovey

Williams, who performed in his home near a little crossroads community called Rising Sun. Lovey played with driving raw sound that would make you weep.

I knew this was a special sound. It was different from those you could hear on the radio and it was perishable. While at Davidson College in the early 60s, during my vacations I taped Lovey Williams' blues and the services at Rose Hill Church. Then I began to collect stories and songs all over Mississippi, from mule traders to quilt makers.

For a while, I didn't know quite what to do with those tapes of music and stories. They were not accepted as serious work in English Departments. I had to leave the South to rediscover the South. After finishing my master's degree in English at Northwestern University, I spent a year at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. There I met Professor Francis Utey from Ohio State who listened to my lament about my unusable tape recordings. He said, "Go into folklore, young man." It was as though he had handed me the keys to the kingdom.

Well, Jackie Hall and each of you have found those same keys to the kingdom in North Carolina....You have used those keys to open doors to allow people all over the South to tell their stories, to add their lives to the great archive of the American experience. Southern folklife is the heart of Southern culture, and you have celebrated and preserved it.

You have also made key contributions to two tasks that are central to our mission at the National Endowment for the Humanities, public outreach and regional studies.

Oral history, by its very nature, does not retreat into the Ivory Tower. History begins with stories, and your primary research begins with outreach to the storytellers and their tales. Then through your books, films, and exhibitions—you achieve the broadest and best public outreach.

Our universities and colleges will be increasingly judged by how they reach beyond their classrooms. We must play a larger public role in our communities. We must communicate with people who have never set a foot on a college campus—through the Internet, through teacher training, through distance learning, through partnerships with business and non-profits.

Academics have an obligation to function as public intellectuals to share their wisdom and insights beyond the confines of the grove. And here at the Southern Oral History Program, you have done that from the beginning. Our gathering in this room is a microcosm of this new model: academics and non-academics, we are all equal players in the search for

knowledge and understanding.

Your other great contribution to reshaping the academy has been your emphasis on regional study. Everywhere in America, regions define our voices....as teachers, as writers, as politicians, as ordinary citizens.

And no university has made a greater contribution to regional study of the South more than the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. From the groundbreaking research of Howard Odum to the political support of the late Terry Sanford to wonderful work of John Shelton Reed and his colleagues, all who labor in the vineyards of Southern studies see you as our lodestar. From the Chapel Hill tradition, we have learned about the mysteries of myth-making, the power of localism, the great pull of regional identity.

Southern studies have a great future because we have only begun to tell the story. The South is a dramatically changing place and the challenge is to combine its myths and memories with its future and its realities. The South that Thomas Wolfe of Asheville wrote about in *Look Homeward, Angel*, is also the South that Tom Wolfe of Richmond describes in his new novel, *A Man In Full*. We know that musicals like "Kudzu" coexist with the sound to R.E.M., both created in the South. When we travel if we fly on Delta, we stay in a Holiday Inn, we get a shipment from FedEx, we drink a Coke while watching CNN—all are creations of the new South, and all flow out of the old South.

I am convinced that regional study centers are unique resources for the humanities and I plan to create a humanities center in 10 regions of the nation. These centers will serve as cultural hubs to promote the full range of humanities studies and public activities. Here in Chapel Hill, as you join forces with the Center for the Study of the American South, you are setting an example for the rest of the nation.

Faulkner reminds us that, in the South, "the past is never dead—it's not even past." We know that much of our Southern past might be dead if people like you—both scholars and storytellers—had not joined hands over the past quarter-century through the tape recorder. Each of you has made a priceless contribution to American history. And the National Endowment for the Humanities is proud to be able to salute you today.

I want to end with some blues. I want you to know I've had lots of requests from Jackie, Bill Friday and others....but I decided to sing anyway.

Thank you very much.

Now I would like to introduce a couple of people who have a surprise for

use. Lu Ann Jones and Cliff Kuhn (kyune) have been associated with the Southern Oral History Project for a long time, and they have a special presentation to make.

**PERFECT PARTNERS: NEH AND MONTGOMERY COLLEGE**  
**April 14, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Mr. Lyons, thank you for that kind introduction. Thomas Jefferson once said, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should prefer the latter." Fortunately, today we can have both.

The Gazette Newspapers are keeping its community well informed and your company is generously supporting more than sixty-five nonprofit organizations. Your contribution to the civic health of this county and state is an inspiration. I suspect you are also here because there is so much good news to cover today.

This is a great day for Montgomery College; there is so much to celebrate, and I am delighted to be here to celebrate with you.

First, my congratulations to new president Dr. Charlene Nunley. I do not think the Trustees could have made a better choice. Dr. Nunley's list of accomplishments is long, and I know that list will grow even longer as she guides Montgomery College into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What better way to start the new century than with the Paul Peck Humanities Institute? It is so exciting to see this project come together with the help of many different partners—especially the Smithsonian Institution. That is just one of the many reasons the National Endowment for the Humanities knew that this institute would be a rousing success. We are proud to be the major funder. Your success is already clear. Seminars and fund raising are well underway.

My congratulations to all involved in establishing the Paul Peck Humanities Institute....Paul Peck himself, Charles Lyons of the Gazette Newspapers, the Cafritz Foundation, the Fowler Foundation, the Philip L. Graham Foundation, and many individual donors, including Michael Bloomberg, Arthur and Miriam Becker, Robert Costello III, Muriel Rakusin, and faculty and staff of the College. The Institute, under the creative leadership of Dr. Myrna Goldenberg, continues an ambitious and exciting agenda.

The 1998 seminar on the African Diaspora was a tremendous success. The first class of fourteen Fellows from eight disciplines passed their new knowledge on to more than 500 students. The work is on a CD-ROM and also on cable television. The seminar topic this year is "300 years of the

American Worker." The topic for next year is Humanities and Technology.

The Humanities Institute is working with the community to heighten consciousness about the roots and effects of discrimination. The Institute is working with college alumni to organize a countywide book festival scheduled for October of this year. And as you all know, the Institute worked with the critical Literacy Program, business leaders, and county advocates to sponsor tomorrow's town meeting on violence.

The Institute is also working with Wootton High School to develop innovative programs that combine the sciences and the humanities. This is a fascinating development. In his new book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Edward O. Wilson argues that every college student, public intellectual and political leader should be able to answer the following question: "What is the relation between science and the humanities, and how is it important for human welfare?" Good for you that you are raising this crucial question.

The Humanities Institute is also looking at the big picture. The Institute has created a Humanities Alliance which is now developing a master plan for the humanities in Montgomery County.

All these activities will make Montgomery County a better place to live—something the college has been doing for fifty years.

In the past fifty years, Montgomery College has served more than 500,000 students of all ages. Those are great numbers. Montgomery College is reaching out to all members of the community. And the community is responding as is evidenced here today by the presence of so many business executives, elected officials and community leaders.

At the National Endowment for the Humanities we too are trying to expand our reach. Our mission is to bring the humanities into every home in the country. We do that by awarding grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, teacher training, scholarly research, public programs—and special projects such as the Paul Peck Humanities Institute. For more than thirty-four years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence.

Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million—roughly the same as the budget for Montgomery College. Like you, we do a lot with what we have. Think of us as the venture capitalists of culture. We are catalysts. We provide the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval that attracts more funding, public and private. And we would like to do more.

To achieve our goals, the Endowment needs the right tools. That's a lesson I learned from my grandfather. Like my grandfather, I grew up on a farm just outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. I was raised on, as he used to say, cornbread and recollections. I don't have any cornbread with me, but I always carry this recollection...one of my grandfather's favorite stories...

That's a great story—and in a sense that is what the humanities are all about—great stories...exciting stories....important stories.

Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom—and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down on the front of the bus and fought for hers.

Through stories we connect to other people and other cultures. Through stories we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation. If we cherish the stories of Madison, Lincoln, Douglass, Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR, and Martin Luther King Jr. our democracy has nothing to fear. If we forget those stories we have everything to lose. Why?

Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson has warned, "We must confront the danger of historical amnesia. As the sources for understanding our national past deteriorate and vanish, we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

That's why the Paul Peck Humanities Institute is so important, that's why Montgomery College is so important. You are using and creating new tools for learning every day. You are essential to the crucial effort to preserve, protect, and pass on the great American stories. You are essential to democracy.

This college is blessed with a dedicated, talented faculty. To all the professors here please remember the words of Henry Adams who wrote, "A teacher affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops."

This college is equally blessed with bright, energetic students of all ages. To all the students here, please remember the words of John Dewey, "Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself."

To all the civic leaders and citizens of Montgomery County here, you have wisely recognized Montgomery College as the valuable asset it is. I applaud your commitment to this great educational institution.

Thank you all for inviting me here to visit. I hope you will come visit us

at the Endowment. You may be surprised at what you see; we are changing to make it easier to work with us, and we are always seeking new partners. We are less than an hour drive away. Online you can connect in seconds. You can start from the Montgomery College website or go to us directly. Either way, please visit us our website. From our website, jump to EDSITEment, it is a great learning tool for teachers, parents, and students of all ages. It lists all the key humanities websites across the country. We have a new online newsletter NEH Outlook, which I have sent to the college. In real life or online, let's get together.

Many of our important American stories are told and remembered through song. I think Professor Clif Collins would agree with me that Staggerlee is a true classic in his paper. .... " Killin and Thrillin: O Cruel Staggerlee"

**The Hyper-Link between Technology and the Humanities**  
**The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences**  
**17 April 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you Howard for that kind introduction. I am honored to be here to help celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences. Two centuries of intellectual inquiry, two centuries of service to Connecticut and the country are certainly cause for celebration. My congratulations to the Academy for your great work.

As President Franklin Robinson has said of the Academy, "Though we continue to grow, we still remain true to our original mission—fostering scholarship and fraternity."

Today we are here to celebrate the era of Ezra Stiles, Timothy Dwight, Noah Webster, Eli Whitney, and Jonathan Trumbull. We also are here to examine the Global Village of Bill Gates. And to ask why in this age of technology are the humanities more important than ever? Why is the work of the Academy more important than ever?

Should we be rushing pell-mell onto the information superhighway? Many critics, including Cliff Stoll author of the best seller *Silicon Snake Oil*, question the promise of a digital utopia. The debate echoes one that took place more than 150 years ago.

In 1844, the first telegraph line was opened between Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. The race was on to "wire" the country—sound familiar? Samuel Morse predicted the telegraph would make "one neighborhood of the whole country." Sound familiar? Henry David Thoreau disagreed cautioning, "We are in a great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."

I rarely disagree with Thoreau, but in this case I have to...Maine and Texas do have important information to communicate to each other. There are great American stories in Maine and Texas waiting to be told, and part of my job as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities is to discover and disseminate those stories.

The information superhighway can help in that effort. Technology can help us to further our mission. We can use this technology to inform and

educate. Today, volumes of information are accessible at the click of a mouse.

In his 1995 book, *The Road Ahead*, Bill Gates predicted that a wallet PC would soon, "display messages and schedules and also let you read or send electronic mail and faxes, monitor weather and stock reports, and play both simple and sophisticated games." Today, some of you may own a Personal Digital Assistant, or P-D-A as is it called. They fit in the palm of your hand and do everything Gates predicted and more. All this happened in less than four years. Today, technological change is rapid, omnipresent, and often overwhelming.

In his new book, *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, Gates writes, "Radical new uses of the Internet that none of us can accurately predict today will reshape the world as fundamentally in the twenty-first century as the unexpected uses of electricity did in the twentieth—and faster."

The beauty of the Internet is that it unlocks the ivory tower. It makes information easily accessible. But we must use it wisely. We must turn the information age into the age of wisdom...an age where the sciences and the humanities communicate, cross pollinate and help society make wise decisions.

We know that science has triumphed in many areas—on earth and in outer space. Dolly is a fact, and a human clone will soon be just as real. Senator John Glenn has made his second space flight aboard the Shuttle Discovery. Every day scientific breakthroughs are delaying death, enhancing life, and raising fundamental questions about what it means to be human.

But science can only go so far. Thoreau asked, "With all your science, can you tell how it is, and where it is, that light comes into the soul?"

At the Endowment we are trying to help enlighten the soul of society. We're trying to foster wisdom and vision in our citizens. Our task is more important today than ever before.

Decades ago, scientist and novelist C.P. Snow wrote, "Literary intellectuals at one pole—at the other scientists....Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension."

Decades later, in his new book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Edward O. Wilson echoes that sentiment. Wilson argues that every college student, public intellectual and political leader should be able to answer the question: "What is the relation between science and the humanities, and how is it important for human welfare?"

For centuries, the Academy has fostered a dialogue between humanists and scientists. That is why your work is so important.

I know the Academy has received support from the surrounding colleges and universities who are also partaking in the dialogue: Yale, the University of Connecticut, Southern Connecticut State University, Wesleyan and Trinity.

At these great institutions of higher education, faculty and students are adopting the web lifestyle. Students apply, register, submit papers, get grades, and communicate with professors online. The younger generation is showing us how to use these new technology tools to enhance learning.

In 1995, the Endowment held a symposium on "The Humanities and Technology." Patricia Battin, then director of planning at Emory University for the virtual university project said, "it's essential that the community of humanists shape their future by looking carefully at the strengths and weaknesses of the printed page and digital technologies in order to combine the best of both."

The Endowment is a content provider. We preserve, create, and disseminate high-quality educational content. And we empower teachers and students to take full advantage of new technologies. For more than thirty years, we have supported technology projects to distribute ideas and to preserve democracy.

The Endowment is a small, independent, federal agency. Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million, far less than what it cost to make the movie Titanic, less than the annual budget of Montgomery College, a two-year junior college in Montgomery County, Maryland. But we do a lot with what we have. Think of us as the venture capitalists of culture. We are catalysts. We provide the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval that attracts public and private funding.

Since its founding, NEH has fostered individual and institutional excellence. NEH awards grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. We just gave a grant to the Connecticut Historical Society to support the cataloging and storing of 2,850 Connecticut-related broadsides.

Five years ago we gave Yale University \$375,000 to convert microfilm to digital format. In 1998, the Endowment awarded more than 1.6 million in grants to Connecticut....And we plan to do more.

The Endowment has long supported projects in digital technology. From

the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Dartmouth Dante Database in the 1970's to Web sites that were launched last month, the NEH has had the foresight to recognize the potential of new technologies.

For example, the Endowment has a new online magazine NEH Outlook, which I e-mailed to the Academy before I came here. Perhaps some of you saw it. If you did not, please visit our website to learn more about it and us.

Go to [WWW.NEH.GOV](http://WWW.NEH.GOV) to find us. From there, you can link up to EdSITEment. This new website identifies the 50 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects. It provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages. Last month EdSITEment had 41,000 user sessions—with each session averaging fifteen minutes.

NEH supports projects throughout the nation that are digitizing historical documents and putting them on Web sites. The Amistad slave mutiny was dramatically portrayed in Steven Spielberg's movie, Amistad. With NEH support, Mystic Seaport Museum has created an Amistad Web site that allows scholars and average citizens alike to read hundreds of documents that were once scattered in libraries across the eastern United States. The site includes letters from slaves imprisoned after the mutiny, court documents, and the diaries of John Quincy Adams.

NEH is supporting high tech projects that are doing pioneering work in preserving the humanities. Our "Text Encoding Initiative," for example, will help scholars format humanities texts for multiple digital uses. We are also partnering with the National Science Foundation to create standards that provide uniform access to historical and cultural resources, that allow searches across humanities collections in different formats held by many different institutions.

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

I do not need to tell you that change is happening ever so quickly. The faster we move toward the future, the more firmly we need to be grounded in our past. Why?

Because we are in danger of losing our memory as a culture. Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson has warned that, "We confront the danger of historical amnesia. As the sources for understanding our

national past deteriorate and vanish, we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

You create those "sources for understanding." Without scholarly research and debate, we have no new knowledge, no understanding of who we are as Americans.

The truth is that the Endowment, the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, Yale, Wesleyan, Trinity, U Conn and Southern Connecticut State University—are part of the national cultural bloodstream, critically involved in the work of deepening knowledge, broadening our historical base, preserving memory, and creating new works of scholarship and history. New technologies can make such work widely accessible.

This past Monday, I was honored to be in the East Room of the White House as the President and First Lady hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> in a series of Millennium Evenings. President Clinton and the First Lady are strong supporters of the Endowment. To know that they understand how important the humanities are to our democracy is a comfort and a source of inspiration. Monday was a particularly inspiring evening. The National Endowment for the Humanities sponsors the programs. Sun Microsystems is also a sponsor and thanks to Sun the events are available to millions of people around the world via satellite and the Internet.

Monday's topic was "The Perils of Indifference: Lessons Learned from a Violent Century." The speaker was Nobel Peace Prize and Presidential Medal of Freedom winner, Elie Wiesel.

He spoke of the suffering "behind the black gates of Auschwitz." He said,  
....

"In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred.....

Indifference is not a beginning, it is an end.....The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees—not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own.

Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment. And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing

century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil."

As the First Lady pointed out, Elie Wiesel is a great teacher. The story he tells is painful, disturbing, profound and utterly necessary. It must be told again and again so we never forget.

That is the best use of the Internet and all new technology—to distribute the story of Elie Wiesel so millions around the world will hear it. That is what the Endowment will continue to do. I know you will do the same. Thank you for all your great work.

**How Culture Shapes Community**  
**Council on Foundations Annual Meeting**  
**Fiftieth Anniversary**  
**New Orleans, Louisiana**  
**April 19, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Claudine, for that kind introduction.

It is a special honor to take part in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of the Council on Foundations. The great philanthropic work of foundations like yours is one of the true jewels of American culture. It is impossible to imagine the progress we have made in this century in the fields of education, social issues, science and medicine, the arts and especially in the humanities, without the wise and generous contributions of America's foundations. You have much to celebrate this week, and you richly deserve the thanks and congratulations of us all.

I want to talk to you today about how culture shapes a community. This is a subject that is close to the heart of anyone who was raised in the South, and close to the mind of anyone who works in Southern studies. In this part of the country we are acutely aware of how deeply our history, our literature, our music and especially our myths have shaped our society, both now and in the past. In the South, as William Faulkner was fond of saying, "the past is never dead—it is not even past."

I grew up on a farm outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. My grandfather also lived there and often reflected that he had been raised on cornbread and recollections. Myth and reality are always entangled in the South. They have an enormous impact on our culture, and it is often impossible to distinguish between them.

I am reminded of the story of General Beauregard.

Just as the Civil War was opening, he was walking down the street of this little town in Georgia in his fine new uniform and met a young Southern belle walking up the street with her parasol, and she walked up to him and said, "General Beauregard! General Beauregard!"

He looked at her, and says, "Yes, ma'am, what can I do for you?"

She said, "General Beauregard, do you think we can whup them Yankees?"

And he said, "Honey child, don't you worry your pretty little head. We can whup them Yankees with cornstalks."

She said, "Thank you, General Beauregard," and she twirled her little parasol and walked on.

Four years later, General Beauregard was back home, a little worse for the wear. His uniform was faded and torn, and he was walking with a limp, with a cane, and up the street came that same Southern belle, and she recognized General Beauregard and headed straight for him.

She said, "General Beauregard! General Beauregard!"

He says, "Yes, ma'am, what can I do for you?"

She says, "General Beauregard, I thought you said we could whup those Yankees with cornstalks!"

He said, "Yes, ma'am, but those boys just wouldn't fight with cornstalks."

The point is that we have to learn to fight with the right weapons. And in the South, I think we have done just that. That is why you see cities like New Orleans, Memphis, and Nashville thriving as never before. The South has learned that her greatest resource is her own culture, her own history, and her own past. We are increasingly learning to use these resources to shape our communities today.

When you tour the streets of New Orleans, you see a booming convention and tourist industry. That industry is built on an understanding of what is strong and appealing about this city's history—her music, her language, her cooking, her sheer joy of living.

Alex Haley once told me that his favorite city was New Orleans... because it is the only place people seriously plan the meal they will eat in three weeks. But New Orleans culture was not always celebrated. Many of her jazz traditions were once viewed dimly by polite society. The word jazz, in fact, meant to make love. It was the music played in the brothels of Storyville, along Basin Street just a few blocks from here. In Memphis, people looked down on the blues music from the Mississippi Delta and later on Rock and Roll. They were played on Beale Street, the city's tenderloin district and in empty parking lots. Country music suffered the

same questionable reputation in Nashville; it was considered the sound of poor whites and their worlds along Music Row.

Today, we know the esteem in which these musical forms are held, and the great pleasure they bring to millions—and the millions they bring to their local economies. Beginning this weekend, New Orleans will host nearly half-a-million visitors at its annual Jazz Festival, now a major national event. Next month, Memphis anticipates a turnout of more than 100,000 people at the Beale Street Music Festival on the Mississippi River. And in Nashville, Opryland is one of the key engines of that city's economy.

This successful commercialization of indigenous art forms shows how communities can be enriched by their cultural heritage. It shows how they can develop entire industries out of their indigenous culture through cultural tourism.

What we are talking about here is not just how culture shapes community, but how we communicate culture—how we discover, preserve, and share culture, how we transmit it to future generations, shaping communities yet to come.

The culture I know best is Southern culture. When I became director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi 20 years ago, we knew we faced a daunting task in preserving and communicating our culture.

For one thing, much that was rich and worthwhile about Southern history, Southern education, Southern folkways, Southern music and Southern life was in danger of disappearing. Even our great writers—Eudora Welty, Alice Walker, Walker Percy, and Shelby Foote, to name a few—but they could not record everything. We needed a systematic, academically structured approach. We created the Southern Media Archive, the world's largest collection of blues music, conferences on Faulkner, and a teaching program that now awards both bachelor's and master's degrees in regional studies. In addition to that, we came up with the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture.

The Encyclopedia was the biggest single project ever undertaken at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. It took us more than ten years to produce and became a 1600-page book. To our own surprise, the book was a huge success. Featured in many articles in the national press, the Encyclopedia sold more than 100,000 copies. Newspapers pointed out that the volume includes entries on Goo Goo Clusters and Elvis Presley. But it also details the history of our language, of Southern educational institutions, and of great businesses like Coca-Cola and its longtime leader, Robert Woodruff, whose foundation is today a key

supporter of historic preservation in the region. There is even an entry on southern philosophy and foundations.

The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture clearly struck a major chord. Since it appeared, other regional encyclopedias have been produced or are in production—of New England, of Chicago, of New York City, of Georgia, and South Carolina.

What this tells us is that regional studies have both a popular and an academic resonance. And I think this has direct relevance to future grant making by foundations concerned with the importance of culture in our communities.

That is why I have called for the establishment of a network of ten regional humanities centers in the United States. America is a nation of regions. Regions define our voices as teachers, as writers, as philanthropists. Eudora Welty who celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday last week says that a "sense of place" is what gives us equilibrium.... "It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are."

These regional humanities centers will become unique reservoirs of each region's cultural heritage. They will be hubs of research, teaching, publishing and public programs that will reach out to all segments of their community. They will be what historian David Hackett Fischer calls "listening posts" that focus the attention of academics, journalists, and people in the arts on the power of the culture right around them, an what the French call "La Vie Quofidienme" or "Everyday life."

These regional centers will also create new collaborations among scholars and institutions throughout each region. And they will foster cross-fertilization among the fragmented efforts of many institutions. Finally, they will also provide sources of healing and understanding as they deal with regional issues of race, gender and class—lessons that we learned repeatedly at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture.

These ten regional humanities centers will also engage in inter-regional projects. For example, at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, we did a three-year teacher's project with the Center for New England Studies at the University of Southern Maine. We explored not just the differences between New England and the South, but astonishing similarities as well. One teacher wrote, "The similarities between Maine and Mississippi came through again and again—families steeped in tradition, haunted by their pasts, and drawn to region."

Sometimes in the great wash of mainstream media and commercial culture, our regions feel that they have lost their identities. One

university president in the Midwest recently told me that people in his region often feel insecure and forgotten because they are regarded simply as an "overfly land" between the two coasts. As we lose contact with what makes our communities and regions unique, we all feel like we live in an "overfly land." New Orleans once "overflowed" its jazz heritage until it realized its value. This dynamic exists in all our regions: each is unique; each has a rich heritage. One of the main purposes of creating regional humanities centers will be so that no one feels that they live in an "overfly land."

Foundations like yours are already involved in our regional initiative. For the first phase, we are seeking to raise \$1 million to provide planning grants that will provide two 50,000 matching grants to institutions in each of 10 regions that hope to establish regional humanities centers. For this planning phase \$675,000 has already been committed by the foundation world. A number of our nation's foundations are considering significant commitments to this project. They understand the importance of regional centers to the future work in the humanities.

Over the next six years we will raise \$50 million in implementation funds from Congress, corporations, foundations, and individual donors. Each of the ten regional humanities centers will receive \$1 million per year for five years as a challenge grant that requires matching funds on a three-to-one basis. This means that over five years, each center will raise \$15 million to qualify for their \$5 million in NEH support. They, like we, will turn to the philanthropic community. Some of you may soon be looking at grant proposals from the newly created regional centers, and we hope you will encourage their work as an exciting new way to preserve and share our nation's culture.

For decades, we at NEH have seen the philanthropic community as our parallel partner in cultivating the arts and the humanities. Today, with the squeeze on both public funds and foundation money, we need each other more than ever, and we need to partner with the business community as well. The NEH is reaching out for joint ventures wherever our interests overlap. For instance, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation just joined with The Endowment to extend the reach of our summer teachers' institutes in New Jersey. MCI/Worldcomm has partnered with us and the Council of great City Schools to create EdSITEMENT, a major humanities Web site on the Internet. It is used by up to 40,000 teachers and educators each month for help in creating curricula and teaching plans.

One of the most important aspects of communicating culture is to go public. We must not lock ourselves in an ivory tower. The college campus is but the starting point of the labor of the humanities. Public

outreach is a central theme at NEH, and we strongly believe that regional centers are an ideal platform to engage the public in the two-way process of preserving culture.

In my presentations, I urge my colleagues in the academic community to step beyond the limits of the grove and reach out to the communities around them. I believe faculty members have an obligation to function as public intellectuals, to share their insights outside the classroom. At the White House last month, the president of Connecticut College, Clair Gaudiani, proposed the creation of a formal reward structure for academics who carry their wisdom and work into their communities. Connecticut College is one of America's acclaimed small colleges with a high-caliber faculty and student body. It has established a model program of public outreach to New London, its host city, where 70 percent of the school-age children live on public assistance.

Communicating culture is about storytelling. Literature, music, indeed, all the humanities tell the story of our human condition. Taken together, these stories form our national narrative. Within these stories, we discover the power of myth, the strength of identity. Alex Haley once told me how he was fascinated by the stories he heard from his elderly aunts and grandmothers on the front porch of their home on long summer evenings in Henning, Tennessee. On their rocking chairs they would dip snuff and tell stories as the fireflies lit up the night. One particularly accurate aunt could drop a firefly at ten feet. Alex never forgot those stories about his family's African origins. And, as Yeats said, if you believe an idea strongly enough, it becomes reality. Alex was so drawn to his family's story that it finally became the best selling book and television series *Roots*. Today his tale is part of our national narrative.

Through our regional centers, NEH wants to help every American contribute to our nation's story. Under our millennium theme, "Rediscovering America," we encourage family oral history projects. This work will be part of the essential work of the regional hubs.

As we focus on the smallest unit of our national narrative—family stories and individual oral histories—we discover that the regional approach to the humanities also has an international dimension. Throughout the world, there is a new focus on regionalism. For years we received international guests at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture who wanted to see how we ran our program. I led four American delegations to the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow, and I can tell you that scholars throughout the world are intensely interested in setting up institutes to study their own regions.

Communicating culture, shaping community, telling our story—that is

the challenge the humanities face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And it is the choice that the philanthropic world faces as it sets its agenda for the coming century. Together, we have an historic opportunity to ensure that the American narrative is not lost. We have the chance to create the tools for cultivating and transmitting our heritage in the coming century. We look forward to making that journey with you.

And now, just so you know that I did learn something from all my years of studying the blues and writing about Mississippi mule traders, I want to share some Southern culture with you. I have had many requests from Claudine and others here today, but I decided to sing anyway....

**The Humanities in Civic Life  
The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center and the African Grove  
Institute for the Arts  
Dartmouth College  
21 April 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Professor William Cook, for that kind introduction. I am honored to be part of the lecture series for the Nelson Rockefeller Center and the African Grove Institute for the Arts.

William Cook, as chair of the English Department, vice president of the African Grove Institute, and chair of its Board of Governors, you have demonstrated your commitment to public service and the community at large. I applaud the work you are doing, including the new Business/Performing Arts Partnership Initiative with the Tuck school. Your work here serves as a model for other colleges. As does the work of the Rockefeller Center...

The Center that bears his name is living up to the Nelson Rockefeller legacy of public service. And what a legacy...Vice President, four-term governor of New York, president of the Museum of Modern Art, Undersecretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and of course a Dartmouth graduate. Among other accomplishments, I understand he was editor of the school's art magazine while he was here.

Throughout his career, Nelson Rockefeller understood the philosophy of former Dartmouth president Ernest Martin Hopkins, who said:

". . . education is not education if it is simply an education of the specialist...something more is necessary than to become technically expert in the sciences; beauty and art and all that microcosm that we call culture is as essential to man as anything else."

I couldn't agree more and today I want to explain why I think the humanities are essential to our nation's civic life.

In 1965, Congress established the National Endowment for the Humanities, saying, "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." That is a towering task and we take it very seriously.

We do that by awarding grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations, and other cultural institutions. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, teacher training, scholarly research, public programs, and special projects. For more than thirty-four years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence. The Endowment is the single largest source of support for the humanities nationwide.

The Endowment has a modest budget, only \$110 million—about forty cents per American citizen. In contrast, the budget for Dartmouth and its graduate schools is \$383 million, more than three times as much.

We do a lot with what we have. Think of us as the venture capitalists of culture. We are catalysts. We provide the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval that attracts more funding, public and private.

Let me give you an example from right here in New Hampshire, Walpole to be exact...

Endowment funds helped launch the career of filmmaker Ken Burns and made possible the tremendous success of *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, and *The West*. Let me quote Ken:

"Without a doubt, my series on the Civil War could not have been made without the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Endowment not only provided one of the project's largest grants, thereby attracting other funders. It also helped restore the archival photographs we would use to tell our story. I am extremely grateful for all of those things."

We, in turn, are extremely grateful for Ken Burns....Ken once told the following story to Congress.

When Burns was working on his film about the Statue of Liberty, Vartan Gregorian, then president of the New York Public Library (now President of the Carnegie Foundation) gave Burns a tour of the library. Gregorian gestured toward the precious books lining the shelves, and said, "This is the DNA of our civilization." Basically, that is what the Endowment does: It nurtures "the DNA of our civilization." It is an essential mission. The Endowment seeks to bring the humanities into every home in the country. Why is this so important?

Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson warns that, "We confront the danger of historical amnesia. As the sources for understanding our national past deteriorate and vanish, we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

One way we preserve the sources for understanding is through stories. Through stories we connect to other people and other cultures. Through stories we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation. If we cherish the stories of Madison, Lincoln, Douglass, Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR, and Martin Luther King Jr., our democracy has nothing to fear. If we forget those stories, we have everything to lose.

Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom—and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down in the front of the bus and fought for hers.

That is why Dartmouth College, the Nelson Rockefeller Center, and the African Grove Institute for the Arts are so important. You use and create new tools for learning every day. You are practicing the humanities. You are essential to the effort to preserve, protect, and pass on the great American stories. You are essential to the civic health of this country...you are essential to democracy.

Just take a moment to think back on how you arrived here at Dartmouth. At some point in your life, you were inspired to a

love of learning by a parent, teacher, or mentor. They sparked your curiosity—and the spark is now a flame. As John Dewey said, "Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself."

At my first school in rural Mississippi, where three teachers taught six grades, I was the only student whose parents had graduated from college. When my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Barfield, asked her students who was going to college, no hands went up. Mrs. Barfield pointed her finger at me and said, "Billy Ferris, you will go to college—your parents will make you go." I said, "No, ma'am, I ain't goin' to no college."

Well, after one Ph.D., 10 books, and 27 years of college teaching, it is obvious that Mrs. Barfield was right. Mrs. Barfield inspired my love of learning and to this day I still hear her voice.

The Endowment gives voice to the past so we can prosper as a democracy in the future. Through the New Hampshire Humanities Council we are working to do that right here in your state.

The New Hampshire Humanities Council reaches more than 250,000 people in more than 110 communities with its programs each year. In the last five years institutions and individuals in New Hampshire have received more than eight million dollars in grants from your state council from the Endowment. The money go to projects that preserve the nation's cultural heritage, foster lifelong learning, and encourage civic involvement. For example...

Thanks to the New Hampshire Humanities Council, and the great work of Executive Director Charles Bickford, you can participate in...a family history reading program in Dover...an exploration of world religions in Manchester...a discussion of the great myths and their influence on our thinking in Sunapee...to mention just a few humanities events. There are many more such programs coming in the near future, all listed on their web site.

The Endowment has been supporting work at Dartmouth for decades...

The Endowment gave \$390,000 to the Dartmouth Digital Dante project created by Robert Hollander.

The Endowment gave more than \$500,000 to Dartmouth and the University Press of New England to support the publication of the papers of Daniel Webster. Throughout that project, we were honored to work with the distinguished Dartmouth professor Charles Wiltse. The nation owes him a debt of gratitude for his fine work.

The Endowment provided \$745,000 to Dartmouth College to catalogue and microfilm 1,800 historic New Hampshire newspapers such as the *Olive Leaf* of Exeter and the *Wide Awake* of Claremont.

In 1998 the Endowment gave the Hood Museum of Art \$126,000 for a traveling exhibition, a catalog, and educational programs for the exhibit "Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century France."

We are involved in similar programs on a national level. For example...

At the Endowment, we are taking advantage of technology to make connections. The Endowment has a new online magazine *NEH Outlook*, which I e-mailed to some of you before I came here. I hope you saw it. If you did not, please visit our web site to learn more about it and us. Go to [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov) to find us.

From there you can jump to EDSITEment. The Endowment partnered with MCI Worldcom the Council of Great City Schools to produce EDSITEment, a web site that link teachers to more than 60 outstanding humanities sites. This on-line resource allows teachers to quickly secure information and generate teacher plans on any topic. When Joyce Taaffe, a teacher at Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia, discovered EDSITEment, she wrote: "I have struck a gold mine." Last month EDSITEment had 41,000 user sessions—with each session averaging fifteen minutes.

We are heavily involved in teacher training. Only the Endowment provides national support for substantive study

opportunities for teachers across all disciplines of the humanities. This summer we will support 29 institutes for 550 teachers. These teachers shape the lives of more than 96,000 students each year.

Lynn Rigney Schott, a teacher from the small town of Kettle Falls, Washington, took part in a Shakespearean Performance Institute and had this to say, "It was an outstanding experience, extremely stimulating intellectually...Teachers need such opportunities to learn from colleagues in different regions and circumstances; we often feel isolated in our own classroom..."

We have a new initiative, a Schools for the New Millennium, which seeks to create "whole school reform." The Endowment has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. In partnership with local colleges, museums, and businesses, we help entire schools raise the skills of all their teachers. At all these schools, teachers are working with consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

One of the grants went to Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire to support a project focusing on their world studies program.

Another grant went to Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, where teachers are training their students to interview neighbors about the civil rights movement. By interviewing neighbors and relatives, who vividly remember the struggle of the 1960s, students establish a personal connection to the history that surrounds them. As Elsie Lewis Bailey, the school principal says, "It's not easy down in the trenches, but with creative projects like this, we can make a difference in kids' lives."

We want all kids—and adults—to learn more about their family history. That is why we will soon launch "My History is America's History." It will encourage all Americans to learn more about their family's history—and then relate their history to the broader sweep of American and world history. It will make them

better citizens, and it might just bring young and old closer together. I am fond of quoting the African proverb, *When an old man or woman dies, a library burns to the ground*. We cannot let that happen.

So all these stories can be circulated and we can learn more about all Americans, we are working to establish ten regional centers across the country. Today we have interstates and national television programming, and we all watch the same *ER* or *60 Minutes* and see the same evening news. But when we sit at the dinner table, we hear a very different voice that is rooted in the home and the community in which we live. It is the most powerful anchor of who we are as Americans, and ironically that is the world we have failed to study and understand.

In this world unique stories are told, important lessons are learned—about what it means to be an American. In Hanover, Concord, Manchester, Nashua, Durham and cities and town across this country, significant conversations are taking place—in many languages.

Years ago, I was proud to edit the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Right now, Professor Burt Feintuch at University of New Hampshire is working on an *Encyclopedia of New England Culture*. Which I am proud to say the Endowment helped fund. It will be full of fascinating fact and stories.

By creating ten regional humanities centers throughout the country, we hope to spread these, and similar American stories, to a wider audience. These stories explain what it means to be an American. They are our heritage...and our future.

The truth is that the Endowment.... Dartmouth....the Rockefeller Center....the African Grove Institute—are part of our national cultural bloodstream, deepening knowledge, broadening our historical base, preserving memory, and creating new works of scholarship and history. Recently, I witnessed an inspiring piece of our history.

President Clinton and the First Lady are strong supporters of the Humanities. Ten days ago, I was honored to be in the East Room of the White House as the President and First Lady hosted

the seventh in a series of Millennium Evenings. The National Endowment for the Humanities sponsors the programs. Sun Microsystems is also a sponsor, and thanks to Sun, the events are available to millions of people around the world via satellite and the Internet.

Monday's topic was "The Perils of Indifference: Lessons Learned from a Violent Century." The speaker was Nobel Peace Prize and Presidential Medal of Freedom winner, Elie Wiesel.

He spoke of the suffering "behind the black gates of Auschwitz." He said....

"In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred.....

Indifference is not a beginning, it is an end.....The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees—not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own.

Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment. And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil."

As the First Lady pointed out, Elie Wiesel is a great teacher. The story he tells is painful, disturbing, profound and utterly necessary. It must be told again and again so we never forget.

That is why the work you do here is essential to society, and that is why the humanities are essential to society.

## **Testimony before the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee**

**April 28, 1999**

By William R. Ferris, Chairman

National Endowment for the Humanities

I want to thank Chairman Regula, Ranking Member Dicks, and the members of the subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to present testimony today. I am here to speak in support of the President's request for \$150 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities in Fiscal Year 2000. I look forward to working closely with committee members and with your staff as we pursue our common goal of enriching the nation's educational and cultural worlds through the humanities.

Folklorists love to tell stories, so it is appropriate that as a folklorist I chair the agency that is charged with telling our nation's story. It is a story that spans centuries--a story of people like each of us, a story of places like those we come from, of a state like Chairman Regula's Ohio that boasts seven of our nation's presidents--Garfield, Grant, Harding, Harrison, Hayes, McKinley, and Taft, of a state like my home Mississippi that has given our nation writers like William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Tennessee Williams, and Eudora Welty, who celebrated her ninetieth birthday last week.

Each American has a proud tale to tell of family, of roots, of what it means to be an American. This tale is especially important as we enter our next century--our next millennium. It is especially important because we are in danger of losing our stories and with them our memory of who we are as Americans. As interstates and strip malls stretch across every community, we need these stories to ground us in our history and culture.

The humanities are the many voices that shape our lives. They are the voices of our parents and grandparents heard over dinner. They are also the historic voices from the fields of literature, history, and philosophy, voices of Plato and Shakespeare, of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, of Mark Twain and Frederick Douglass.

A strong nation requires an educated citizenry, a people who understand their roots and who can envision their future. For over three decades the National Endowment for the Humanities has protected both our past and our future. Each of our core programs has given critical support to the nation's educational and cultural life. Through our Research and

Education Divisions we support summer seminars and research for teachers that enrich the classroom experience for hundreds of thousands of students each year. Through Public Programs we support high quality television, radio programs, and museum exhibits. Through our Challenge Grants Division we help build Endowment for educational programs. Through Preservation and Access we have saved hundreds of thousands of brittle books and newspapers in every state. And through state councils we help enrich grass roots humanities programs throughout the nation.

Our nation stands at the end of what some have called "The American Century" and on the threshold of a new millennium. The year 2000 also marks the 35th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Our proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2000 is designed to help every citizen "Rediscover America" by strengthening classroom teaching and lifelong learning. Why is the Endowment critical to our nation's future? Because two-thirds of our nation's K-12 curriculum is dedicated to the humanities, because we will need two million new teachers in our classrooms over the next decade, and because four out of five teachers feel inadequately prepared in their subject area.

For over 30 years, NEH summer seminars for teachers have addressed these issues. Before our 36 percent budget cut in 1996, the NEH funded 166 seminars for teachers that reached 417,000 students. Because of the cuts we can now offer only 52 seminars that reach 149,000 students. The proposed budget will allow us to significantly rebuild these programs for our nation's teachers.

And our recently launched Schools for the New Millennium link students, faculty, parents, and administration in entire schools with a museum and a university to develop an exciting new curriculum that focuses on local history and culture.

At the Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, the focus is on the civil rights movement. On the Laguna Pueblo Indian Reservation in the Southwest, it is on Indian religion. And in Milwaukee, the focus is the community's ethnic diversity. Together these programs address the educational needs of both the classroom and the community.

With the help of a gift from MCI/WorldCom, the NEH created EDSITEment, a Web site that links 50 Web sites and allows a teacher to quickly search for subjects like Congress, George Washington, or Martin Luther King. Within minutes the teacher has both information on the topic and a classroom syllabus that outlines how to present the subject at their grade level.

Research is critical to our nation's lifeblood of educational and cultural life. We have supported six Pulitzer Prize-winning books. Here are a few of many nationally recognized books that began with support from the Endowment's Research Division.

Similar support from our Public Programs Division helped launch Ken Burns's television series on the "Civil War," "The West," and "Baseball." Our recently funded film on General Douglas MacArthur will soon air on National Public Television. And next year Ken Burns will air his 20-part series on jazz, which the Endowment also funded.

Because of our budget cuts in 1996, 70 million television and radio fans and four million museum visitors will see these rich programs cut by two-thirds by the end of this year. Our requested budget will address these needs.

With the additional funding requested we will also provide over 11 million new dollars to 56 state humanities councils for their programs. These programs reach into virtually every local community in the nation.

We will expand lifelong learning for all Americans through high quality television and radio programs, museum exhibits, and library reading programs. We will digitize humanities collections in museums, archives, and libraries so that they can be used by every American through the Internet. And we will direct special funding into institutions and communities that have received few if any grants from the Endowment in the past. Our support will be directed toward small and mid-sized museums and libraries; small and mid-sized educational institutions and two-year colleges; historically black, Hispanic, and Native American institutions; and rural and inner city audiences.

As someone who grew up on a farm, I am especially pleased that the Endowment is addressing the needs of rural America. We recently funded *Barn Again!*, an exhibit on barns that examines the American farm and its relation to both the country and the city. Through a partnership with the Utah Humanities Council and other state councils in the Northwest, Midwest, and the South, the exhibit has been shown in over 30 small rural museums in nine states. This June it will open at the Wolcott Mill Historic Center in Ray, Michigan.

We will also reach out to rural America through our Regional Initiative that will create humanities centers in 10 regions throughout the nation. In response to our discussions with congressional leaders, we are requesting support for four of the centers and will raise the remaining funds from private sources.

Finally, we will encourage every American to discover their family history

through our *My History is America's History* project. With the support of the White House we will launch this project in Thanksgiving of this year. It will allow each of us to place our genealogy and family stories on the Internet and to explore time lines that show how our family history connects to national and international events.

As you well know, the National Endowment for the Humanities is the largest single source of funding for the humanities in the United States. We are the keepers of the fire of our nation's educational and cultural worlds, and we have done our work well. For over three decades our work has enjoyed bipartisan support because our programs seek to reach all people.

We urge Congress to approve our request for increased funding so that the Endowment can move forward with an exciting new agenda for the humanities, so that we can celebrate the story of our nation in ways that will touch every American.

**Scholars in the Digital Age**  
**American Council of Learned Societies Annual Meeting**  
**Philadelphia, PA**  
**30 April 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

John, thank you for that kind introduction and for the opportunity to speak to the American Council of Learned Societies. And my congratulations to Clifford Geertz, the Haskins Lecturer. Clifford Geertz has pioneered the study of culture, and his work shaped our vision for the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture in significant ways.

John D'Arm's distinguished leadership at ACLS follows the impressive tenure of Stan Katz. John's fundraising work has been enormously successful. His report on giving to the humanities is a seminal study, one that I and others at NEH quote often. It was my privilege to stand beside John, Stan, and other members of ACLS earlier this year to herald the completion of the American National Biography. This landmark achievement is a wonderful example of NEH's and ACLS's collaborative efforts.

I am especially happy to be back in Philadelphia where I did my Ph.D. in folklore at the University of Philadelphia in the late 60s. NEH will always hold a special place in its heart for Philadelphia, the home of my predecessor, Sheldon Hackney. Sheldon kept NEH alive through those perilous dark days, and laid the solid foundation from which we are poised to move forward today. We are all enormously grateful to Sheldon for his inspiration as a scholar, teacher, and advocate for the humanities.

The relationship between the National Endowment for the Humanities and ACLS has always been central to our lives. There would not be an Endowment had it not been for the leadership of ACLS in the creation of the Endowment in 1964... and in its survival in 1985.

I am here to reaffirm how essential ACLS is to our civic health... to democracy itself. ACLS represents the bedrock, the

intellectual foundation, upon which the humanities are built. Without rigorous research... exhausting inquiry...stimulating debate we cannot have great ideas and new knowledge. I believe in the power of ideas...your power. You keep the important ideas alive. As we all know, the scholar is essential to our society.

Great civilizations crumble and decay from within. As Thomas Jefferson wrote, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." Your work keeps this country in a "state of civilization." Your work is all the more important today as scientific advances and technological breakthroughs radically change our lives by the minute.

Today I want to explore with you how the humanities can flourish in the decades ahead, the digital decades. How can we use technology to expand our reach and link scholars to students of all ages, to the general public?

As Douglas Bennett of ACLS recently wrote, "We believe these technologies can serve us well if we take care in making the transition to using them. But we also believe they may do great damage if we are inattentive or timid or simply dazzled by the technology." I couldn't agree more.

Before we explore these issues, allow me to give you the news from Washington.

Wednesday I testified before the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. As you know, the humanities have a strong supporter in President Clinton. In his budget request to Congress, the President asked for \$150 million for the Endowment for fiscal year 2000. That will be a significant increase over our current appropriation of \$110 million. Our proposed budget has a twin commitment to rebuild core programs and to provide access to the humanities for all Americans.

It is still too early to predict what will happen in Congress this year. But I can tell you that I have been meeting one-on-one with members of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittees in

the House and Senate, and they have responded positively to our objectives. They understand that the humanities are vital to our nation's health. The more they see how humanities programs enrich the lives of citizens across the country, the more they understand our importance. In fact, Chairman Regula urged me at the hearing to remind people throughout the country to tell their members of Congress how NEH's programs benefit them. The more the public sees what we can do for them, the more secure we become.

Basic research and public humanities are critical parts of the humanities spectrum. Three weeks ago, we saw the front-page photo of Dr. Johan Reinhard atop an Andes peak with the mummified Inca children. This amazing discovery helps make the case to the public as to why the humanities are important.

Four years ago Dr. Reinhard discovered another Inca mummy, the 500-year-old "ice maiden," which TIME magazine called one of that year's ten most important scientific discoveries.

Dr. Reinhard wrote at the time: "...the support of the NEH has led to significant contributions to our understanding of man's past. Thanks to an NEH fellowship, I have written a book which deals with the key role of the sacred landscape in interpreting Andean cultures...This led directly to the discovery of the 500-year-old frozen Inca mummy ...The discovery.... simply would not have happened without the prior support of the NEH... It would be of incalculable loss to America—indeed to all countries—if the NEH did not exist to support research that has led to significant advances in our understanding of man's cultural heritage."

As long as the Endowment exists, it will strongly support basic scholarly research.

There is a danger presented by our rush into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson warns, "We confront the danger of historical amnesia. As the sources for understanding our national past deteriorate and vanish, we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

What we are doing at the Endowment, what you are doing, is preserving and creating "sources for understanding." That is why your work is so important for our country. You educate and enlighten the millions of students and citizens you serve.

In the digital age, access is not the issue, accuracy is. Students and citizens are faced with thousands of paths and mountains of information.

What can the Endowment do to help in the effort to create wisdom and vision in our information age? We will continue to work closely with the American Council of Learned Societies. One of the very first grants the Endowment made was \$25,000 to ACLS in 1966. The money went to support travel by American scholars to international meetings. Since then, the Endowment has contributed more than \$44 million dollars to ACLS to support such important projects as the American National Biography.

The Endowment issued challenge grants to ACLS in 1987 and 1991 totaling \$1.25 million dollars. ACLS has "over-matched" those grants to create a \$5.25 million-dollar endowment. That endowment benefits scholars across this country. It is something ACLS has done for decades. Over the past 60 years more than 3,000 scholars have held ACLS Fellowships. That is an impressive record.

As we have for more than thirty-four years, the Endowment will continue to support technology projects. We will also remain old-fashioned in asking one key question, how can technology best be harnessed to help scholars, teachers, students, and citizens learn?

The Endowment has long supported projects in digital technology. We funded the development of technical standards and infrastructure for humanities computing...the creation of excellent digital humanities materials for wide audiences... and the training of teachers and the general public to use technology.

From our support of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Dartmouth Dante Database in the 1970s to Web sites that were

launched last month, the Endowment has worked to harness new technologies for the humanities.

We have two basic objectives—To help you do your job better, and to disseminate your work to a wider audience. My goal as Chairman is to bring the humanities into every home in this country. I want everyone everywhere to know what we can do for them. In the last 16 months I have traveled extensively and can assure you there is a thirst for knowledge across this country. Students of all ages can benefit from your wisdom.

At the Endowment, we are working on new uses of the Internet. For example, last month the Endowment launched a monthly electronic newsletter, *NEH Outlook*, which I e-mailed to ACLS before I came here. Perhaps some of you saw it. If you did not, please visit our web site to subscribe. It is free, and can be found at our web site, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov). There you will discover that we are trying to make it easier for you to work with us. The Research and Education division has been split into two separate divisions to give each more focus. This will strengthen and make more visible our work in research and in education.

To make the Endowment a more accessible, responsive, visionary organization, we have created five working groups that cut across divisional lines: think of them as our "five avenues of service." They are: international programs; science, technology and the humanities; teaching; regional initiatives; and extending the reach to a wider public. The Internet is an integral part of all these initiatives.

From our web site, you can link to EDSITEment. This new NEH web site identifies the 50 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects, sites such as Edward Ayers' "The Valley of the Shadow." EDSITEment provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages. EDSITEment was recently honored by the Computerworld Smithsonian Awards Program for extending the benefits of technology to society and has been named one of five finalists in the education and academia category.

The MCI Foundation underwrote the initial \$500,000 start-up cost in 1997, and MCI WorldCom Foundation has just granted an

additional \$500,000. The money will enable NEH to double the number of outstanding humanities sites on EDSITEment to 100 in the next two years.

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

And the 10 regional humanities centers we plan to support will be linked through electronic classrooms as they deepen teaching, research, and public programs that focus on our nation's regional culture. They will support scholarship through the creation of regional encyclopedias, symposia, and research centers.

The Endowment and ACLS are critical to our national cultural bloodstream because we deepen knowledge, broaden our historical base, preserve memory, and create new works of scholarship and history. New technologies make this work widely accessible.

We must use the Internet to disseminate information. We must turn the information age into the age of wisdom...an age in which science and humanities communicate, and help society make wiser decisions.

In *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Edward O. Wilson argues that every college student, public intellectual, and political leader should be able to answer the following question: "What is the relation between science and the humanities, and how is it important for human welfare?" You are asking just that question during your annual meeting.

Today we have both the opportunity and the obligation to function as public intellectuals, to share our insights beyond the classroom.

Charles Frankel, the Columbia University philosopher, once said

that nothing more important had happened to American scholars than the government's invitation to them through NEH "to think in a more public fashion" and "to teach with...their fellow citizens in mind."

At the White House last month, Clair Gaudiani, president of Connecticut College, proposed the creation of a formal reward structure for academics who carry their wisdom and work into their communities. I encourage you to consider this idea at your own institutions. Connecticut College is one of America's acclaimed small colleges with a high-caliber faculty and student body. It has a model program of public outreach to New London, its host city, where 70 percent of the school-age children live on public assistance.

I know how well such programs can work. In 1978, I was among the first Yale faculty members to participate in the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

Started 21 years ago, the Institute is a hands-on educational venture. It brings Yale faculty together with New Haven inner city teachers in five-month seminars of cross-discipline studies and curriculum development. Its has a direct pay-off in the education of young people who will be the next generation of college students.

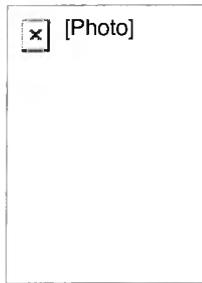
The Institute no longer needs federal dollars. After 16 years of NEH support, it acquired its own endowment and now helps other cities around the country emulate its model.

Here in Philadelphia, President Rodin of Penn just launched the West Philadelphia initiative. It will bring the resources of her great university to the educational needs of the inner city that surrounds it. And isn't that part of our job, part of our obligation?

Less than a month before his death, John F. Kennedy told us he looked forward to an America that would be remembered "not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit." Within two years, that impulse was answered, thanks in large part to ACLS, by the creation of the NEH and NEA. For thirty-four years, the endowments have

kept Kennedy's flame alive. For eighty years, ACLS has been "contributing to the human spirit." Thank you for all your great work. I look forward to working with you in the future.

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: May 1999**

### **Reading the Humanities Grass Roots Nurture NEH Library Programs**

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By William R. Ferris

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National programs sometimes hatch in the most unlikely places. Consider the kitchen where a Vermont book-lover gathered with her friends every other week to discuss a different book. They liked the reading and discussion format so much that they took the idea to their local library, where it caught on in the community. From there, it spread throughout the state and beyond, to New Hampshire, Virginia and New Mexico and became known as "Let's Talk About It."

Fifteen years ago, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded a grant to expand the program to 300 public libraries in 30 states. These were occasions for people to read books on a theme, such as work, family life, ethnic identity, myth, and the individual's rights and responsibilities in a community, and meet with a scholar to discuss insights and sharpen analysis of the subject.

"Let's Talk About It" is one of the most stimulating and provocative programs ever offered in America's libraries, and it is the model for many other reading and discussion programs that NEH has funded.

This year, NEH marks its 15th anniversary of funding reading and discussion programs in the nation's public libraries. The results have been phenomenal. Each year, over 250,000 Americans participate at more than 380 libraries across the nation. Topics include "Poets in Person," focusing on the lives and works of today's poets; "The Language That Unites Us," which explores interactions between Hispanic and Anglo cultures; and "From Rosie the Riveter to

Libraries are our nation's most important vehicles for learning. Located in every community large and small, they provide access to books, audio- and videotapes, and the Internet, and they offer places for the exchange of ideas among people of all ages and backgrounds. The statistics tell the story: There are 15,994 public libraries in America, more libraries than McDonald's. Americans visit libraries three times as often as they go to movies -- a total of 3.5 billion library visits each year. And Americans without computers on line at home, school or work rely on public libraries for Internet access.

It is important that libraries stay healthy. Annual federal spending on libraries, however, totals only 54 cents per person, about the cost of a pack of gum. Much of this support comes from NEH, which in its 34-year career has provided nearly \$500 million for library-related projects including public programs, reference materials, electronic access and preservation of significant collections.

As the nation's largest source of funding for humanities programs, NEH preserves the human heritage, expands knowledge about it and helps Americans learn from it. Funding high-quality programs in libraries is one of the most important ways we carry out our national mission.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

Roosevelt: Americans in World War II," which broadens the format to include viewing and discussion of films.

**The Public Humanities in a Global Age  
The American Forum for Global Education  
Cosmos Club  
Washington, DC  
3 May 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, David, for that kind introduction. Through his magnificent books, David reminds us that the world is a diverse, complex, and fascinating place. He is a valued and trusted member of our National Council for the Humanities. We are so fortunate to have his wise counsel and global perspective as part of our NEH team.

I know the Forum as well benefits from his vision.

I am honored to be here this evening. For almost thirty years, the American Forum for Global Education has helped our nation's schools, colleges, and universities gain global understanding—and the world is a better place because of your work.

We all know that a deeper understanding of the world and its cultures is vital to our own interests as a nation. The crisis in Kosovo, a land that few people in this country could identify four months ago—demonstrates why we all have to promote the study of geography, of foreign language, and of cultural studies. As an international power of the first order, we need to have a deeper understanding of these issues.

My interest in world affairs started long ago...More than thirty years ago, I was lucky enough to win a fellowship to study at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. I packed a typewriter, my guitar and flew off for what turned out to be the greatest year of my life.

I have many fond memories of the people of Ireland who took me into their homes as I traveled. We swapped stories and sang songs together. They sang "Molly Malone" and I sang "The Rock Island Line." I immersed myself in the Irish culture and discovered it is impossible to stereotype the citizens of another country when you sit at their dinner tables, break bread, and share stories.

The first grant the Endowment ever made—\$25,000 to the American Council of Learned Societies—supported travel by American scholars to international meetings. It was the beginning of the Endowment ongoing commitment to global education and global understanding. In the last four years, the Endowment has contributed more than \$107 million

dollars to international projects—including grants to the American Forum for Global education. We also support ongoing scholarly work, such as... publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls...the research that led to Johan Reinhard's discovery of the "Ice Maiden" Inca mummy. . . a revision and expansion of the Encyclopedia of Islam, and IREX exchanges.

Last year, the White House requested an NEH-funded film, "The Gate of Heavenly Peace," as one of its briefing materials before President Clinton went to China. The film is about the pro-democracy movement in China and has also been used as a resource on Capitol Hill.

Closer to home, we need to provide an international education for our children in this new global age. We all know how important this work is; but let me remind you that:

- 2/3 of our nation's k-12 curriculum is dedicated to the humanities.
- We will need 2 million new teachers in our classrooms over the next decade.
- And 4 out of 5 teachers feel inadequately prepared in their subject area.

Our NEH summer seminars for teachers address these issues. Before our 36% budget cut in 1996 the NEH funded 166 seminars for teachers; those teachers reached 417,000 students. Now we can offer only 52 seminars; and the number of students reached is 149,000. This year's Administration budget request calls for a substantial increase from our current level of 110.7 to 150 million. While the proposal works its way through Congress we are stretching what we have as far as possible. We have started after-seminar grants, so teachers in our summer programs can teach other teachers afterward. We are putting seminars and seminar reports on the Internet so they are accessible to greater numbers of teachers. We are examining ways to pool resources with other federal agencies, including the State Department and the Department of Education.

We are always looking for help—through new technologies and through new partnerships. Over a year ago, NEH partnered with the MCI Corporation and the Council of the Great City Schools to create EDSITEment. Through a peer review panel, EDSITEment identifies the 50 best educational websites in the humanities, 40,000 students and teachers visit it each month. It was recently honored by the Computerworld Smithsonian Awards Program for extending the benefits of technology to society. EDSITEment has language, history, and cultural sites linked to learning about Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

EDSITEment is just part of a multi-pronged effort at the Endowment to reach larger audiences. Some of you met our International Working

Group this morning, which is developing new partnerships with the private sector. With additional funds, we can support more teacher seminars and institutes and develop curriculum resources for teachers.

We also plan to create 10 regional humanities centers around the country. These centers will bring together teachers here and abroad, scholars, public policymakers, and learners of all ages. It is an experience that has worked incredibly well at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, where I was director for 18 years before coming to the Endowment. We found surprising—and rewarding—connections between Oxford, Mississippi, and the rest of the world. We began a Faulkner conference there that drew numbers of participants from all over, including what was then the Soviet Union. And in turn, I headed four delegations from the United States to the Gorky Institute in Moscow. The Center became a Non-Governmental Organization of the United Nations. And its work has served as a model for similar institutions in Russia, Africa, and Australia.

We hope to see that work replicated at other regional centers. They will develop summer institutes for teachers to the development of courses from K-12 to the graduate level, as well as regional encyclopedias and other research tools, joint ventures on cultural tourism, traveling museums and even museum exhibitions on the Internet. At the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, for instance, with the help of a Ford Foundation grant, we joined with Columbia University's American Studies Program, the W.E.B. DuBois Institute at Harvard, and the Sorbonne for a symposium on African Americans in Europe, held in Paris.

What all these programs recognize, from Paris to Moscow to sister institutions in our own country, is that people everywhere define themselves through the places where they live. This relationship, which Eudora Welty calls a "sense of place," shapes each of us in deep and lasting ways

And in a world where the "sense of place" is being displaced these days, these educational and cultural anchors are critical. That is why your work at the Forum is so important. Thank you for all you are doing for education around the globe. We will continue to help in every way we can. Thank you.

**The Humanities and Technology**  
**George Mason University**  
**Fairfax, VA**  
**May 4, 1999**

Remarks by William R. Ferris  
Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you Dean Struppa and thank you, Peggy, for this warm welcome. Peggy is a folklorist, as I am, and we share a love for talking with people and learning their history. I come from a long line of Southern storytellers. I grew up on a farm outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. My grandfather also lived there and often reflected that he had been raised on cornbread and recollections. Myth and reality are always entangled in the South. They have an enormous impact on our culture, and it is often impossible to distinguish between them. I like to think that my work as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities is another step along the way. Our agency tells the nation's story, its history. Our challenge is to carry that story as effectively and widely as possible.

Roy Rosenzweig of the history department here, along with David Thelen, has done a study on the way Americans use history in their lives. They interviewed 1,500 people—I am proud to say with NEH funding—and found that Americans do care about their past. They may not like the word history. The word history for them conjured up something done by famous people that you had to read about in school—formal, analytical, distant. The term they liked was the past. It spoke to them of family, race, nation, about where they had come from and what they had learned along the way. And two-thirds of those surveyed said they felt strongly connected to the past when gathering with their families; more than half said the same about visiting museums and historic sites. They felt most unconnected to the past when they encountered it in books, movies, or classrooms. And wisely, Professors Rosenzweig and Thelen have put their findings on a web site, where people can see for themselves. It is [www.chnm.gmu.edu/survey](http://www.chnm.gmu.edu/survey).

This melding of traditional learning with new techniques and technology is what I want to talk about today.

We all should be asking ourselves, as we near the end of the century, what is the state of the humanities today? My short answer is simple: the humanities are in wonderful shape, but we could use some improvements. If we were not debating the purpose and methods of the academy, we would be derelict in our intellectual duty.

It is incumbent on every generation to hold it received wisdom up to a bright light and examine all its facets. Every generation reinterprets Shakespeare to suit its time and place; it is our duty to break the old rules and open the windows of inquiry. After all, that is what Socrates and Copernicus and St. Thomas Aquinas did. Every generation has intellectuals who commit artistic and intellectual treason. James Joyce and William Faulkner did not become part of the canon by leaving things as they were.

The texts must still be taught. Students must wrestle with the original works before they can understand new departures. And the importance of teaching cannot be overemphasized—the backbone of a great university is great teaching, as you at George Mason know.

As humanists, it is our job to preserve the basic achievements of our culture while looking for new ways to examine and interpret them. At the same time, we must be open to new definitions of what our culture is. What was historically the Greco-Roman-Judaeo-Christian legacy did not include black literature, women's literature, American-Hispanic literature. Now these traditions have found their place in our canon.

It is a Jeffersonian ideal to have an academy of ideas that debates the humanities anew in every generation. Public discourse and debate is the measure of a healthy, open society, and that is what America stands for.

Today the humanities face an important challenge: how to enrich our nation's life during a period of rapid change and expanding knowledge. As the silicon chip carries us farther and farther into a virtual world, the power and scope of the humanities—telling us who we are and where we are going—become a touchstone of our reality.

We must ask ourselves: what is the role of the academy in promoting the humanitarian tradition in a way that is accessible to a wider public, and, indeed, reaches out to that public? How do we touch an ever more diverse populace—a public that is saturated with mass culture and information overload?

The public humanities are the humanities that filter through to the average American. That is where the National Endowment for the Humanities plays a special role.

The future of the humanities is the public humanities. Our survival as humanities professionals rests on how successfully we can step outside our intellectual monastery and reach the widest possible public. If the public feels untouched and unenlightened by the work that we do, they might well ask: "why should we support you with our tax dollars?" It is our job to effectively answer that question. It is our job to make Huckleberry Finn or King Lear relevant to street kids in South Central Los Angeles. It is our job to help Americans find their place in the great stream of our history by teaching them how to gather their own stories through oral history and genealogical projects.

In Dearborn, Michigan, NEH is funding a project that teaches students at Henry Ford Community College to research the history of their town by recording the oral histories of the city's auto industry workers. "Oral history has brought a humanities tool into the technical education field," says Professor Rick Bailey, the project director. "For our students, it's an electrifying experience to sit with seasoned automotive professionals and hear them tell their stories. Our NEH grant is fundamentally changing the way we educate people."

Reaching the widest possible public has never been easier, thanks to new technology. We have reached the moment when the scientific leaps of our times are ready to merge with our need for a deeply entrenched humanitarian tradition. The very force that threatens to overshadow the humanities can be harnessed to promote them.

Put simply, the information revolution now enables us to put the humanities at the fingertips of an ever-larger audience, with

ever-deeper penetration into primary resources. Our window to this brave new world is the Internet. NEH supports projects throughout the country that are digitizing historical documents and putting them on Web sites. One example is the Amistad incident, the slave mutiny that was so dramatically portrayed in Steven Spielberg's movie, "Amistad." With NEH support, the Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Connecticut, has created a Web site that allows scholars and average citizens alike to read hundreds of documents that were once scattered in libraries all over the eastern United States. They include letters from slaves imprisoned after the mutiny, court documents, and the diaries of John Quincy Adams.

We are partnering with the National Science Foundation to create standards and procedures for providing uniform access to historical and cultural resources, allowing searches across humanities collections in different formats held by many different institutions.

The work of the humanities reaches deep into the past, but it deals with our present and future, too.

Indeed, I am reminded of Faulkner's comment in *Absalom*, that the dream of every artist is to etch his "mark on the face of oblivion." At the NEH, we are etching our mark on oblivion with laser beams and microprocessors.

While keeping ourselves on the cutting edge of technology, however, the humanities must constantly address another crucial issue: bringing the humanities to all Americans. This is one of the most important goals at NEH. The humanities are not the elite preoccupation of the professional few. They belong to everybody.

To show how life and the humanities are interwoven, through history, through literature, through the preservation of memory is our job as humanities scholars. We must find ways to cross the divide between the priesthood and the populace. Where does all this leave us? If we agree that the humanities are more important than ever in a changing world; if we understand the need for broad public outreach and an expansion of the public humanities through technology—then what is the problem?

A big problem is money, a problem with which we are all familiar. We are especially familiar with it at the NEH because four years ago—our budget was reduced from \$177 million to \$110 million. This took a terrible toll on what we can fund. It would be difficult for NEH to support a great film series today like Ken Burns' Civil War or Baseball. In 1995, before the budget cuts, NEH-funded documentaries took up 71 hours of public television time. This year, we will have only 33 hours. That is a 54 percent cut.

I believe it is our soul that we need to be concerned about. As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, America is riding a wave of success. We have the mightiest economy on earth. We are on the cutting edge of the medical and information revolutions. And yet, because we have beggared our culture, we may lose the battle for what Faulkner called "the agony and sweat of the human spirit."

We have only to look to our neighbors in other industrialized nations to understand how far we lag behind. The NEH budget amounts to 42 cents per American per year. If all direct public spending for culture is lumped together, America comes out to three dollars per capita per year. Compare that with Germany's \$39 per capita in direct public spending, and France's \$35.

So, in addition to public funding, NEH is turning to the private sector for partnerships. The MCI corporation has already partnered with NEH and the Council of the Great City Schools in creating a web site called EDSITEment. EDSITEment is the gateway to 50 of the best humanities sites. Instead of slogging through 65,000 humanities-related sites, teachers and students can go directly to EDSITEment—and 40,000 do each month. They find the best resources on virtually any subject, along with curriculum guides. We have received wonderful feedback from the teachers. "I have struck a gold mine," wrote Joyce Taaffe, a teacher in Marietta, Georgia.

I understand that Roy Rosenzweig and his Center for History and New Media have similar projects with schools in Northern Virginia—one of them, I'm pleased to say, a CD-rom project that we have funded. It is a project on the French Revolution and

was done with local high school teachers who will use it in their courses.

So, technology and the humanities can work together. We have begun an initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium." It is designed to jump-start the process by which dozens of U.S. schools and their teachers become competent and comfortable with newly digitized humanities materials and technologies. By the year 2000, U.S. schools will be well on their way to being wired to the Internet. But the infrastructure is in danger of getting way ahead of the learning curve of usability. That is why we need concentrated doses of training in model settings—and those are the schools for the coming millennium.

As we approach the new century, our guiding theme at NEH is "Rediscovering America." We are capturing American stories and American traditions before they are no longer available. We have five key areas: international programs; science, technology and the humanities; teaching; regional initiatives; and extending the reach to a wider public.

It is clear that our work is more relevant than ever, that the technological revolution is our friend, not our enemy, in making the humanities the central influence on our national character in an age of explosive change.

Less than a month before he died, President John F. Kennedy said he looked forward to an America that would be remembered "not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit." Within two years, that impulse was answered by the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts. For thirty years, the endowments have kept Kennedy's flame alive. Now, at this crucial moment, we must reaffirm our priorities and we must chart our intellectual and cultural course into the next century.

Thank you.

Statement by Chairman Bill Ferris  
"Humanities on the Hill"  
5/6/99

Thank You, Senator Cochran for that kind introduction. It is an honor as a fellow Mississippian to have the privilege to work with you on issues of importance to the nation, and I appreciate your support for the humanities.

I am very pleased to be given the opportunity to join you this morning for "Humanities on the Hill." It is wonderful to be in the presence of so many leaders from the State Humanities Councils, and I would like to also express my appreciation to the Members of Congress and their staffs that are in attendance this morning. I would especially like to thank Gail Leftwich and Esther Mackintosh and their staff at the Federation of State Humanities Councils for their hard work in making this event possible.

I want to commend the Federation for its leadership, as well as the American Association of Museums, the American Association for State and Local History, the American Library Association, the Association of American Universities, the Community College Humanities Association, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, and the National Humanities Alliance for their support of this event.

You are the humanities family and we are honored to work with you toward our common goal of strengthening our nation's educational and cultural institutions.

We are making significant progress in building support for the National Endowment for the Humanities, including our partnership with the State councils. President Clinton has sent Congress a budget request of \$150 million for the Endowment in FY2000, which includes an \$11 million increase to support the work of the state councils.

Programs supported by the fifty-six state humanities councils make it possible for the NEH to extend its reach into every state and to all of the U.S. territories. In recent years, state humanities councils have annually attracted non-federal contributions well in excess of the legislatively required one-to-one match, including more than \$6.7 million in funds from state legislatures. I am proud of our strong partnership with the state councils. Yours is an important voice for democracy, and you are touching the lives of people in every community in your states.

I intend to maintain close contacts with each of you, and one way that we are doing this is through our recently launched *NEH Outlook*, the Endowment's monthly electronic newsletter. Thanks to our Public Affairs Director, Roberta Heine and her staff, we will inform you about the NEH's activities through *NEH Outlook* each month.

I was pleased to testify last week before the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee on behalf of the Endowment's FY2000 budget, and I was to thank Chairman Regula and Ranking Member Dicks for making that opportunity possible. The message that I presented at the hearing was well-received, and a number of issues were thoroughly discussed, including: the current state of the humanities, teacher training, the use of technology in the humanities, our partnership with the states, research, and the status of support for public programs.

Folklorists love to tell stories—so it is appropriate that as a folklorist, I chair the agency that is charged with telling our nation's story. It is a story that spans centuries—a story of people like each of us, a story of places like those we come from. Of a state like my home Mississippi that has given our nation writers like William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Tennessee Williams, and Eudora Welty who celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday two weeks ago. Each American has a proud tale to tell of family, of roots, of what it means to be an American. These tales are especially important as we enter our next century—our next millennium. It is especially important because we are in danger of losing our stories and with them our memory of who we are as Americans. As interstates and strip malls stretch across every community, we need these stories to ground us in our history and culture.

The humanities are the many voices that shape our lives. They are the voices of our parents and grandparents heard over dinner. They are also the historic voices from the fields of literature, history, and philosophy, voices of Plato and Shakespeare, of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, of Mark Twain and Frederick Douglass.

A strong nation requires an educated citizenry, a people who understand their roots and who can envision their future. For over three decades the National Endowment for the Humanities has protected both our past and our future, in partnership with the institutions and organizations you represent. As you well know, the National Endowment for the Humanities is the largest single source of funding for the humanities in the United States. We are the keepers of the fire of our nation's educational and cultural worlds, and we have done our work well, thanks to all of you and your diligent and passionate commitment to the humanities and to their importance in the lives of all Americans.

It is a momentous occasion when the humanities community comes together to speak as one voice—a voice that makes a powerful sound throughout the halls of Congress. Thank you for speaking out on behalf of the humanities.

And to our friends in Congress, I want you to know how much we appreciate your tireless efforts to support NEH at the highest possible funding level. We at NEH will continue to do everything we can to make NEH an agency that serves the interest of your people.

I wish you well in your visits, and I appreciate your taking the time to make your voice heard in Washington. Thank You.

**Millsaps College Commencement  
Jackson, MS  
May 8, 1999**

Remarks by William Ferris  
Chairman National Endowment for the Humanities

Almost seventy years ago, a Shakespeare professor at The University of Mississippi named David Bishop was in trouble.

The Governor of Mississippi was then Theodore Bilbo, a man who felt Bishop's views were too radical to be heard in a public school. He had him fired.

And so, needing a job, Dr. Bishop came to an oasis of education, where there was a tradition of unafraid, open-minded inquiry.

He came to Millsaps.

Students here thought he was great, including a young man from Jackson named William Ferris.

Not me. I'm not that old.

My father.

My father had no idea what he was going to do after graduating from Millsaps. It turned out, that he would fall in love with farming, and run the family farm where I grew up. But all his life I would hear him talk about the people he met at Millsaps, the ideas he had heard—and especially how a Shakespeare scholar could take an Elizabethan playwright and bring him to life—not by showing him making love with Gwyneth Paltrow. He did it simply by virtue of his own insight and intelligence.

So it is an honor for me to be here. I did not go to Millsaps But I have been influenced by this campus in part because it influenced my dad.

He—and my uncle, Lucian Ferris, who also studied here—told us lots of things about their years at Millsaps.

One thing they never described, though, was their commencement speaker.

They probably did not remember much about that speaker—or what he said.

In fact, I do not remember much about my commencement speaker either.

Why are so many of them totally unmemorable?

It is not all their fault. First, your attention is elsewhere. You're anxious to walk across this stage, get your diploma, see your family—or some people that mean more to you than your family.

Second, the advice we give you is pretty traditional. Life is a challenge, we say. Follow your dream. Make a difference.

You already know these things. If you are like I was, graduating in 1964, you will have a lot of questions about the future. It is not likely you will find the answers in a commencement speech.

After all, just because we speakers have lived longer than you does not mean we have answers.

I like the story I heard recently of the elderly man from Jackson, who goes out driving along I-55. He gets a call on the car phone from his wife.

She says, "Frank, watch out. There's a report on the news that some car's on 55 driving the wrong way."

He says, "Not one car. Hundreds of 'em."

Just because you have lived a long time does not mean you are going the right way.

Still, when I look back on my own life, there are a few things I would like to say, that might be helpful.

First, at this point in your life, do not be nervous if you do not know what you will be doing.

Most people do not. We—to quote Corinthians— "see through a glass darkly."

I remember when I was twelve years old, my teacher at Jefferson Davis Academy where I went asked which students planned to go to college. I knew none of the other students would go. I kept my hand down. So Mrs. Barfield pointed at me and said, "Billy Ferris, your parents will make you go." With every eye in the class looking at me, I said, "I ain't going to no college. I ain't going to no college."

But it was not only in sixth grade that my crystal ball was cloudy.

Even in graduate school, I did not know what I might do until I got a Rotary scholarship to study in Ireland for a year, and met a scholar in Dublin named Francis Utle, who recognized my interest in southern traditions, and said, "Why not study folklore?"

It was a wonderful piece of advice.

You know, there are those who think the study of culture only involve researching the great icons of the age. Hundreds of doctoral students for example, write their dissertations on William Faulkner.

He is a great icon. But Faulkner did not write about the rich and famous. He once said he could write for a lifetime and never exhaust the material on his "postage stamp of native soil."

We Mississippians have a rich heritage on this postage stamp. Not just famous people, either.

So, for example, I have been able to write a book about a Mississippi mule trader named Ray Lum. He was not anybody famous. But he grew up on the Big Black River, traded horses and mules from the 1920s to the 1970s and just by listening to this prodigious storyteller and recording the stories he told in his booming voice, I captured at least a small part of our heritage.

And I was able to write about the great blues artists from the Delta, whose artistry has formed an uninterrupted tradition through much of this century, from the little known performers singing at parties and "jook joints" to B. B. King and Muddy Waters.

I also recorded some of the crafts so important in this state—like the work of a woman named Pecolia Warner, who turned out richly patterned quilts from the time she was ten, living in a log house in Yazoo City.

When I was in my elementary school, it was segregated, as were all public schools. And we learned about a south in which all the achievements were those of white Southerners.

Luckily, my own experience taught me different—even as a small boy. Sometimes on the first Sunday of a month I attended Rose Hill Church where black families had worshiped since before the Civil War.

The church stands on a tall hill covered with hundreds of marked and unmarked graves.

There were no hymnals in the pew. Each generation learned to sing from previous generations. After church, a communal lunch of fried chicken, biscuits and iced tea was served on the lawn.

I learned from those families that at school I was only learning part of the story. Our heritage is much richer than—in Shelby Foote's words—

"moonlight and magnolias and pure blood lines."

Like one of Pecolia Warner's quilts, our heritage is the stitched together tapestry of different colors, and of families that have come here from every place on the planet.

In fact, the great story of the last four decades in Mississippi has been our official recognition that the South has been shaped by black people and white people—and by Jewish, Lebanese, Chinese, Irish, Italian and Greek.

Which leads me to my second piece of advice.

Devote some time to finding out about your past.

Why?

Because if you understand your past, if you see where you have been, you will get some clues about what is ahead.

I do not mean this in an abstract way. I mean it in a very practical way.

Certainly this is true for us in Mississippi, when it comes to the matter of race.

Communities throughout this state are trying to create partnerships between African-Americans and white Americans. Those of you who stay in this state—and I hope many of you do—will be part of that struggle, whether you run a factory or run for School Board, whether you are on the Board of the Urban League or coaching Little League, whether you are a politician ... or a parent.

But how can you deal with these worlds unless you understand the complicated, terrible, at once terrifying and heroic events of our past? Unless you understand a Theodore Bilbo—and a Medgar Evers?

This is very much in the Millsaps tradition, of course. In the 60's, during Freedom Summer, people were killed for trying to give black people the right to vote. In the midst of that time, I remember how courageous white Millsaps faculty and students met with Sociology professor Ernst

Borinsky and his students at Tougaloo.

I have always thought that one purpose of education is to teach you to walk in someone else's shoes—to learn to stand outside yourself. At Millsaps in those days, there were students who could sense something of what it felt like to be black in Mississippi. They had learned enough of our past to map out a road to the future—and they wanted black and white Mississippians to walk together on that road.

There are no guarantees from education, of course—even in a place like this.

There are no guarantees that even commencement speakers chosen for their wisdom will give you good advice.

So here is my third point.

Develop a healthy skepticism about the advice you get—including mine.

There is a story President Clinton likes to tell about a politician—probably in Arkansas—going door to door. Comes to a farmhouse with a farmer up on the porch and a big mean-looking dog in the yard.

The politician calls out, "Your dog bite?"

"Nope."

Politician comes inside. And the dog jumps up and takes a big bite out of the man's—leg.

Politician is leaping back over the fence and he yells out, "Thought you said your dog do not bite!"

Farmer says, "That ain't my dog."

There are some things for which you can not depend on other people.

You have to find some answers out for yourself. And it may take a long time.

All of us have read the work of Eudora Welty, who lives only a few blocks from this Campus and has recorded so much of these worlds in her fiction, non-fiction, and photography.

Our families knew each other. And once, when I was talking to her, she reminisced about the time her mother planted a small oak tree in her front yard, and everybody advised her to cut it down.

"She refused to cut it down," Eudora said, "although we had seven giant pines standing around it. Now the pines are gone and the oak tree is majestic."

Just as it takes a lifetime to grow an oak tree, it takes a lifetime to discover who you are.

Just as Eudora Welty's mother rejected the advice of her friends to follow her own convictions, so—sometimes—must you.

For in the end, you have to chart your own path. There will be surprises. But you will have a wonderful time if its your path.

And just as that oak tree in the Welty's front yard grew straight and tall because it was deeply rooted in its native soil, you—whether you are from Mississippi or not—will profit from your own deep roots.

Including your roots in Millsaps.

In the years to come you will travel far from this campus. You will not be walking among these tall oaks, or sitting on the lawn outside Murrah Hall, studying, or on the M-bench where your teacher's holding class. You will not be logging on to a computer at the library or cleaning up after a frat party, or turning in a story to the Purple and White editors.

But wherever you are, while you may not be in this place, Millsaps and the Millsaps' tradition will be in you.

It is a tradition taught here for generations.

It is a tradition that teaches not one right way but a way to think.

It is a tradition that teaches you not what goals to achieve but how to achieve your goals

And if it has not been a place that can answer all your questions—well, no place can do that. You've learned something more important.

You have learned how to look for those answers.

By looking back.

By looking inside yourself.

By trying on somebody else's shoes.

So if, later in life you are looking at the snapshots you have taken of this

day, and you can not remember who that speaker was before you got to walk across this stage to pick up your diploma, that is all right.

I am confident you will remember what that diploma meant.

My father did. So will you.

**Public Radio and the Humanities  
Public Radio Conference  
14 May 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you, Kevin, for that kind introduction. I am honored to be here at the public radio conference. And congratulations to you on your new position as president of NPR. You bring exciting new leadership to NPR as it enters the 21st Century.

Radio has been with me all my life. When I was a boy in Mississippi, my father and I made a crystal radio. It was a magical experience to connect a crystal with a small wire and hear radio, my father had made one as a child also. As a child I listened on Saturday nights to the Grand Old Opry from Nashville and remember the sad honky tonk songs of Hank Williams. As a teenager in the 50s I listened to WLAC, a high-powered blues station from Nashville. And a show called "Randy's Record Shop" hosted by two deejays, John R. Ridebourg and the Hossman, Gene Allen. In many ways John R and Gene Allen shaped rock and roll tradition; before the arrival of deejays like Wolfman Jack and Alan Freed. Blacks and whites alike listened to "Randy's Record Shop," and the show sold blues records and helped launch the careers of B.B. King and others.

So, decades later, I jumped at the chance to host a blues show of my own, Highway 61. "If you've got the heartache..." To sit behind the microphone was a dream come true. I did it for almost ten years. In fact, the show still airs on Mississippi Public Radio. Those Saturday nights on Highway 61, I would get requests from prisoners in Parchman Penitentiary to dedicate a song to a loved one outside the prison walls. Sometimes listeners outside the prison dedicated songs back to the inmates. It was a powerful demonstration of radio's ability to communicate, to create a sense of community—regardless of time, place, or circumstances.

While growing up on a farm near Vicksburg, Mississippi. I was raised, as my grandfather used to say, on cornbread and recollections. Memory is an important part of the South...

I am reminded of the story of General Beauregard.

Just as the Civil War was opening, he was walking down the street of this little town in Georgia in his fine new uniform and met a young Southern belle walking up the street with her parasol, and she walked up

to him and said, "General Beauregard! General Beauregard!"

He looked at her, and says, "Yes, ma'am, what can I do for you?"

She said, "General Beauregard, do you think we can whup them Yankees?"

And he said, "Honey child, don't you worry your pretty little head. We can whup them Yankees with cornstalks."

She said, "Thank you, General Beauregard," and she twirled her little parasol and walked on.

Four years later, General Beauregard was back home, a little worse for the wear. His uniform was faded and torn, and he was walking with a limp, with a cane, and up the street came that same Southern belle, and she recognized General Beauregard and headed straight for him.

She said, "General Beauregard! General Beauregard!"

He says, "Yes, ma'am, what can I do for you?"

She says, "General Beauregard, I thought you said we could whup those Yankees with cornstalks!"

He said, "Yes, ma'am, but those boys just wouldn't fight with cornstalks."

The point of the story is that we need to know the difference between myth and reality. And there is nothing more real than radio. My mother calls it her "Constant Companion" and says the best part is that "you don't have to watch it." Radio is the primary way Americans get their news, music, and information. Through radio we hear the voices of Garrison Keillor, Ray Suarez, Diane Rehm, Ira Glen, and Don Imus. It is the way we talk to each other. It is the way we shape our popular culture.

I want to talk to you today about the very real world of radio and the tools we need for the future. We at the National Endowment for the Humanities want to expand and strengthen our partnership with public radio. Both you and we have stories to tell, about the American experience... from the gospel voices of "Wade in the Water," to the contemporary anguish of a student in Berkeley trying to offer a lifeline to a teenage girl caught in Kosovo.

We are turning more and more to the Internet, to do that. The Endowment has a new online magazine NEH Outlook, which I recently e-

mailed to many of you. Our subscriptions have grown from 12,000 to 15,000 in just one month. You can also visit our web site at [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov) to learn more about us.

The Internet is a powerful communications tool. It transcends time, place and distance. It is changing how we live, work, and play. It offers opportunities to connect with new audiences, to create new communities with shared interests.

In 1997, 57 million people used the Internet. In 1998, more than 102 million people used the Internet. The number of Internet users is almost doubling every year. This vast audience challenges us to redefine our sense of community and how we communicate with the public.

The Endowment is a small, independent, federal agency. Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million—about forty-one cents per American. But we do a lot with what we have and we would like to do more. Think of us as the venture capitalists of culture. We are catalysts. With support and seed money, we get projects started. You carry them through to fruition.

Over the decades, the Endowment, through its grants to independent producers and individual public radio stations, has been a proud partner on many important public radio projects—projects distributed by NPR, PRI, and Pacifica. Just to name a few: The Pueblo Revolt, The Odyssey of Homer, The Jews of Shanghai, Los Corridos, The World of Islam, Will the Circle Be Unbroken?, and Story Lines America, the radio-library partnership exploring our regional literature.

Over the last five years, the Endowment has contributed more than four and a half million dollars to projects like these.

Most recently, as you know, we sponsored a special grant competition to increase the presence of the humanities on the radio. We funded segments of PRI's The World on how immigration has affected American society—and I am happy to learn that their story on "Irish Immigration in Boston" has won a Massachusetts Broadcasters' Award. Congratulations to WGBH and PRI.

We are also funding special editions of Fresh Air with Terry Gross produced by WHYY in Philadelphia. That explore American popular song as a reflection of culture and history. And we are supporting Lost and Found Sound, and This American Life.

The Endowment is also looking for new producers. We are offering Consultation Grants of up to \$10,000 for radio producers who have not received an NEH grant. This support will help producers to consult with

scholars to firmly ground their projects in the humanities.

We would like to do more. We are waiting to see what happens to our budget request on Capitol Hill. Reflecting his strong unwavering support of the Endowment, President Clinton has requested \$150 million for us in the year 2000. In the meantime, we are making changes to make the Endowment a more accessible, responsive organization. The Internet is an integral part of our plans. We have even started the process of putting grant application materials online. And we want our site to serve as a gateway to other Humanities sites around the country.

From our web site, you can link up to EDSITEment. The Endowment partnered with MCI-Worldcom and the Council of Great City Schools to produce EDSITEment, a web site that link teachers to more than 70 outstanding humanities sites. This on-line resource allows teachers to gather information and generate teacher plans on any topic. When Joyce Taaffe, a teacher at Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia, discovered EDSITEment, she wrote: "I have struck a gold mine." Last month, EDSITEment got 70,000 hits averaging 15 minutes each.

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

One such school is Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, where teachers are training their students to interview neighbors about the civil rights movement. By interviewing neighbors and relatives students establish a personal connection to the history that surrounds them. As Elsie Lewis Bailey, the school principal says, "It's not easy down in the trenches, but with creative projects like this, we can make a difference in kids' lives."

We are also creating 10 regional humanities centers that will be located in every region of the country. These ten centers will support research, preservation, education and public programs. That will preserve the unique heritage of each region, and use the Internet to link communities across the country. They will serve as a new platform of learning, regional in nature, but national in scope.

Among other things the centers will:

- Produce radio and television features.
- Develop collections of oral histories, photography, film and sound recordings, and...

- Prepare regional encyclopedias.

I know this regional center project is ambitious, but I have seen how this can work. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture, which began at the University of Mississippi 22 years ago, has been successful beyond my wildest dreams. It has been a boon to tourism, preservation, and education in the region. When the new regional centers are in place, students of all ages will be better able to access the riches of all regions and communities.

It is abundantly clear you have many new, great ideas, about how we can take advantage of the Internet.

I know Kevin and Bill Kling will soon give you a full presentation of the NPR-Minnesota Public Radio plan to create a new online network. This is a very exciting idea, and the combination of national and local content will be powerful. With listeners able to interact with producers and other listeners, you will create a new virtual community with the potential to expand beyond your 20 million public radio listeners.

From Connecticut to California, your local stations are already using the Internet to expand their public services. John Berky and Phyllis Joffe at Connecticut Public Radio are using the Internet to advance their Music Education Outreach Project. At the KCRW web site in Santa Monica you will find more than thirty links to agencies dealing with the refugee crisis in Kosovo including: Doctors without Borders, Oxfam America, CARE, and Save the Children.

Mark Handley of New Hampshire Public Radio is here, and he has quite a story to tell about his online Tax Calculator. New Hampshire has been struggling over the serious issue of how to fund their schools. They just passed a statewide property tax. During the heated debate leading up to passage, New Hampshire Public Radio put a tax calculator on their web site. Any citizen could visit and figure out how much an income tax or a property tax would cost them. More than 10,000 people filled out the tax calculator. Some discovered they would fare better under an income tax. This online, interactive information shaped a major policy debate about education. It created a new audience.

At both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, in Beijing and Belgrade and around the world, NPR news is our most insightful, dependable source for news. And your coverage is expanding to every corner of our nation and the world. New voices are being heard every day because NPR is reaching out to member-stations and new sources. One story exemplifies this effort and the combined power of radio and the Internet—"E-mails from Kosovo." It is the story of a young woman named "Adona," whose e-mails have been featured on NPR's Morning

Edition . She remains deep within the war zone. Since January, a teenage reporter for Youth Radio named Finnegan Hamill has been corresponding with her. Hamill, a high school student in Berkeley, heard about Adona at a church youth group meeting. She wants to leave the country with her family—now the connection has been cut off apparently because there is no electricity—and Hamill has not heard from her in weeks. This incredible story is a beautiful example of why your work is so important.

I want to leave you with one of those blues songs I used to play for the prisoners at Parchman Penitentiary.

**Testimony before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee  
May 27, 1999**

by William R. Ferris, chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you this morning to present testimony on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). I want to make brief opening remarks, and would like to submit my full statement for the record.

I believe that the Endowment has a critical mission for the nation, and has touched the lives of all Americans in positive ways during its 34-year history. Prior to becoming Chairman of the Endowment, I directed the Center for Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, and I can tell you without a doubt that the Center, which has been very successful, was developed in large part because of grant support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Folklorists love to tell stories, so it is appropriate that as a folklorist, I chair the agency that is charged with telling our nation's story. It is a story that spans centuries, a story of people like each of us, a story of places like those we come from. It is the story of the worlds of Robert Frost and Edith Wharton in New England, of worlds like my state Mississippi, that has given our nation writers like William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Tennessee Williams, and Eudora Welty, who recently celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Each American has a proud tale to tell of family, of roots, of what it means to be an American. This tale is especially important as we enter our next century – our next millennium. It is important because we are in danger of losing our stories and with them our memory of who we are as Americans. As interstates and strip malls stretch across our nation, we need these stories to ground us in our history and culture.

The humanities are expressed in a variety of disciplines that define our culture and civilization, fields such as history, philosophy, literature, languages, linguistics, folklore, religion, ethics, archeology, and jurisprudence. The humanities are also the many voices that shape our lives. They are the voices of our parents and grandparents heard over dinner. They are also the historic voices from fields of literature, history, and philosophy, the voices of Plato and Shakespeare, of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., of Mark Twain and Frederick Douglass.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Kennedy, I commend your efforts and those of this Committee, to pursue the reauthorization of the NEH, a small but critical agency dedicated to advancement of the humanities throughout our nation.

As the Committee is well aware, the NEH's legislative authority has not been updated or extended for a number of years. At the same time our annual appropriations from Congress have continued to languish since the severe 36 percent reduction to our budget occurred in FY1996. Neither the nation nor the Endowment is well-served when the agency charged with protecting and advancing our nation's cultural heritage operates without a clear mandate and with unrealistically low funding.

I am here today to argue in support of a strong reaffirmation of the Endowment's leadership role in America's educational and cultural life. The legal authority now governing the agency is working well and allows us to serve the needs of the American people. I therefore urge the Committee to extend this current authority.

When Congress and the Johnson Administration created the NEH in 1965, it was stated in the original authorizing legislation that: "an advanced 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 achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future."

Through our many efforts to promote the humanities, through support for scholarship, research, teacher training, preservation, public programs, and partnerships with state humanities councils, the NEH has sought to fulfill this promise -- and we have an excellent track record of success.

In recent years we have worked especially hard to maintain our core programs for the American people. Through these core programs -- federal/state partnership, education, research, preservation and access, public programs, and challenge grants -- we advance the humanities throughout the United States.

Among the many outstanding examples of projects that federal funding for the humanities has made possible are the documentary editions of the papers of Washington, Jefferson, Eisenhower, and other Presidents of the United States; museum exhibitions such as *The Living Tradition of Yupik Masks* exhibit in Anchorage, Alaska which attracted 189,000 visitors; summer seminars and institutes for teachers that revitalize the classroom experience for their students; and educational films such as Ken Burns's *Civil War*, *Baseball*, and the *American West*, as well as other

documentaries such as last week's broadcast on PBS of the film *MacArthur*, which was one of the highest rated broadcasts in the history of public television.

The NEH has helped preserve hundreds of thousands of brittle books and millions of pages of historically significant newspapers; we serve as a catalyst for research and scholarship; and we partner with state humanities councils across the country to enrich the lives of millions of Americans.

The Endowment has also been involved in significant archaeological initiatives, including the excavation of the first English fort at Jamestown, Virginia, and interpretive work to better understand pre-Columbian civilizations in the Western hemisphere. Another recent project, *Girls Dig It: A Nationwide Archaeological Program for Girls*, will encourage up to 100,000 adolescent girls -- most of whom are from urban, low-income, and minority families -- to explore with scholars all aspects of archaeology.

The Vermont Council on the Humanities, has led the nation in designing reading and discussion programs for adult new readers. Inspired by the Council's success in Vermont, the NEH's Division of Public Programs gave the Council a grant of \$255,000 in FY1998 to expand its "Connections" project to the entire nation. Newly literate adults read classics of children's literature with their families and discuss their ideas, characters, and themes as a family. This project will reach 80 libraries in 27 states over the next two years, including 11 states which have Senators representing them on this Committee.

The Endowment provides critical support for teaching and education: through K-12 initiatives, through support for colleges and universities, and through programs in lifelong learning.

Why is the NEH important to addressing the nation's future needs in education?

Because two-thirds of our nation's K-12 curriculum is dedicated to the humanities; because we will need 2 million new teachers in our classrooms over the next decade; and because 4 out of 5 teachers feel inadequately prepared in their subject area.

For over 30 years NEH summer seminars for teachers have addressed these very issues. Before our 36 percent budget cut in 1996 the NEH funded 166 seminars and institutes for teachers who taught 417,000 students. Because of budget cuts, we can now offer only 52 seminars that reach 149,000 students

The Endowment also helps K-12 teachers use technology in their classrooms. Our "Schools for a New Millennium" initiative has funded twenty planning grants to help teachers develop new electronic tools in middle schools and high schools.

In Memphis, students at the Booker T. Washington High School will collect oral histories and document electronically the civil rights movement in Memphis. West Junior High School in Lawrence, Kansas is creating a state and local history curriculum that will allow students to collect and digitize original documents and photographs, and disseminate these materials on their school's website.

Education technology will have a profound impact on rural schools, because it will allow students to access materials and resources otherwise unavailable to them. One such Millennium School is Frontier Regional Middle and Senior High School, which serves Franklin County, Massachusetts, the poorest and most rural county in the state. Through this project, the American Studies curriculum will be strengthened for grades 7-12 by increasing the use of digitized resources.

These Millennium Schools represent some of the best thinking on how to exploit the opportunities that technology offers to improve teacher training and student learning. NEH will announce another group of planning grant recipients in the fall and hopes to announce implementation grants in FY2000.

With the help of a gift from MCI/WorldCom the NEH created EDSITEment, a website that links 50 websites and allows a teacher to quickly search them for a subject like "Congress," "George Washington," or "Martin Luther King." Within minutes the teacher has both information on the topic and a syllabus for their grade level that outlines how to present the subject in class. We will add 25 new sites to EDSITEment by the end of this year, and will have 100 sites by the end of the year 2000.

Research is critical to our nation's lifeblood of educational and cultural life. We have supported six Pulitzer Prize winning books through our Research Division, including James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom* and Jack Rakove's *Original Meanings*, about the making of the Constitution. Jean Strouse's recent award winning book on J.P. Morgan also began with seed money from the NEH.

We have had many success stories in Public Programs. The NEH was the principle funder for the recently aired program, MacArthur, which I've already mentioned, and next year Ken Burns will air his 20-part series on Jazz which the Endowment also funded. I am also pleased that since 1990, the Division of Public Programs has made grants to WGBH in Boston, Massachusetts, one of the most productive public television

stations in the nation, for ten major television series in the humanities, including: *Africans in America*, *FDR*, *Carnegie*, and *Theodore Roosevelt*.

As someone who grew up on a farm, I am especially pleased to report that the Endowment is addressing the needs of rural America. A recently NEH-funded exhibit that is now touring the country is *Barn Again: Celebrating an American Icon*. The exhibit uses the history of barns in America to study the farm and its relationship with both country and city. With major funding from the Endowment, the Utah Humanities Council and other humanities councils in the Northwest, Midwest, and South, Barn Again has traveled to more than thirty small museums in nine states.

We are expanding our reach throughout America, and we will do even more if additional budgetary resources are provided.

We will expand lifelong learning for all Americans through high quality television and radio programs, museum exhibits, and library programs.

We will continue to digitize humanities collections in museums, archives and libraries so they can be used by every American through the Internet.

We will direct special funding into institutions and communities that have received few if any grants from the Endowment in the past. Support will be directed toward small and mid-sized museums and libraries; historically black, Hispanic, and Native American institutions; rural and inner city audiences; and small and mid-sized educational institutions and two-year colleges.

We will also reach out to rural America through our Regional Initiative that will create humanities centers in 10 regions throughout the nation. In response to our discussions with Congressional leaders we are requesting support for four of these centers and will raise funds for the remaining six from private sources.

Finally, we will encourage every American to discover his or her family history through our *My History is America's History* project. With the support of the White House we will launch this project in Thanksgiving of this year. It will allow each of us to place our genealogy and family stories on the Internet and to explore time lines that show how our family history connects to national and international events.

As you well know, the National Endowment for the Humanities is the largest single source of funding for the humanities in the United States. We are the keepers of the fire of America's educational and cultural worlds, and we have done our work well. For over three decades our

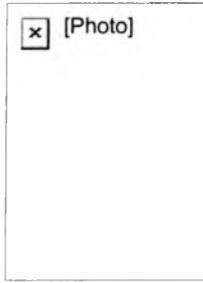
work has enjoyed bipartisan support because our programs seek to reach all people.

I urge the Committee to give us your continued support through a reauthorization that sustains the NEH's ability to do its important work for the nation by enriching the lives of every American.

I look forward to working with you in every way possible to ensure success in this sacred mission.

Thank you.

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: June 1999**

### **Inspiring Educators NEH Summer Institutes Attract Teachers**

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By William R. Ferris

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Now that summer is here, 600 teachers across the nation will be recharging their intellectual batteries, courtesy of the National Endowment for the Humanities. They are attending NEH summer institutes on university campuses nationwide that are designed for teachers who want to deepen their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

This summer we are offering 30 institutes on a broad range of topics in the fields of literature and history. The institutes are from four to six weeks in length, and each is directed by a professor who is a nationally recognized expert in his or her field. These programs are models for teacher development, and we hope to offer more in the future.

A recent U.S. Department of Education study shows that the rigor of a student's high-school curriculum is a better predictor of whether the student will graduate from college than either test scores or high-school grades. For 20 years the NEH has conducted summer programs that help teachers offer a rigorous curriculum in English, history, social studies and foreign languages--the subjects known as the humanities--for their students.

By providing the nation's schoolteachers with opportunities that allow them to return to their classrooms in the fall with deeper knowledge of current scholarship in their fields, NEH helps teachers create more challenging lesson plans and courses that provide students with academic skills that are essential for success in college. And the better grounded students are in reading,

These NEH teacher institutes are especially important because two-thirds of our nation's K-12 curriculum is dedicated to the humanities. Among the topics for this summer's NEH institutes are the Lewis and Clark expedition, the world's mapmaking traditions, Gothic cathedrals and the medieval world, African writers, epic poetry, dramatizing Shakespeare, and the history of technology.

Each fall thousands of students work with teachers who return from NEH summer institutes to their classrooms inspired with new perspectives and ideas. Here is what two of last summer's participants had to say about their institutes:

"I could not have had a better summer. The directors provided our institute with exciting guest lecturers, topics that were challenging, opportunities to work on our own interests, an intelligent and creative group of participants with whom to live and work, and practical ways to use what we learned in our own classes. ...I was sorry to leave."

"My NEH seminar experience was amazing. I teach these writers in my courses, and I will now do so with more depth and understanding. The NEH seminar provided me with valuable contemplation space that is absent in teaching today. It has renewed my sense of purpose."

With such reinvigorated teachers in the nation's classrooms, course content becomes more rigorous, and students will get the intellectual workout that can help them succeed in college.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the*

writing, and problem-solving, the better  
they will be able to carry our nation  
forward into the next century.

*National Endowment for the Humanities.*

**The MarcoPolo Partnership  
National Geographic Society Headquarters  
Washington, D.C.  
8 June 1999**

**William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities**

Thank you Caleb. My thanks to Gil Grosvenor for hosting this important event here at the National Geographic Society. Your Geography Education Program is inspiring thousands of students and teachers in all fifty states.

My special thanks to Bert Roberts, Chairman of MCI WorldCom. None of us would be here today without the foresight and generous financial support of MCI WorldCom. The MarcoPolo Partnership is a powerful idea.

When the National Geographic Society was created 111 years ago, founding member Alexander Graham Bell said, "The world and all that is in it is our theme." And that is our theme today.

Our goal is to put the "world and all that is in it" into every classroom in this country. With the Internet, we can do it, with the MarcoPolo Partnership we can do it. But we need the help of experts like you, so I hope you will all join the effort.

I grew up on a farm just outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. At my elementary school, three teachers taught six grades; I was the only student whose parents had graduated from college. My 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mrs. Barfield, inspired my love of learning and of the humanities. That is why I stand before you today.

But I can not help but wonder what it would have been like to have a wired computer back in that small classroom in rural Mississippi. It certainly would have made Mrs. Barfield's job easier. It certainly would have opened up new worlds to the children in that school.

Today, thanks to President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Secretary Riley, and Linda Roberts, who will speak today—new worlds are opening to students across the country—as we connect our schools to the Internet.

Our challenge is to make sure quality educational content is accessible to

all. To do that we must train teachers to take advantage of technology resources so all students can benefit.

Why is this work important?

- Because we will need 2 million new teachers in our classrooms over the next decade.
- Because 4 out of 5 teachers feel inadequately prepared in their subject area.
- Because 2/3 of our nation's k-12 curriculum is dedicated to the humanities.

At the National Endowment for the Humanities we are absolutely committed to our nation's teachers and students. Our commitment is through grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. You can visit us at [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov). There you can subscribe to our new monthly online newsletter, NEH Outlook and learn more about us.

Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million. But we do a lot with what we have. We are catalysts. We provide the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval to the projects we sponsor and that attracts more funding both public and private.

At the Endowment we constantly look for new tools and new partners to leverage our assets. We were fortunate to team up with Michael Casserly and the Council of the Great City Schools, and Bert Roberts and MCI World Com to create EDSITEment.

EDSITEment identifies the best educational websites in Literature, Art History, Foreign Languages and History. Each month there are more than 40,000 user-sessions of approximately 15 minutes each.

At the top of our home page you see the four features that teachers find most useful.

- A portfolio of top humanities Web sites
- A series of lesson plans for using the sites in the classroom.
- A guide to schools across the country that have partnered with EDSITEment.
- And a customized search engine that takes you quickly to the EDSITEment sites that fit your lesson plans.

When Joyce Taaffe, a teacher at Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia, discovered EDSITEment, she wrote: "I have struck a gold mine."

With Endowment support, Mystic Seaport Museum has created their Amistad Web site that allows teachers and students to read hundreds of documents that were once scattered in libraries across the country. The site includes letters from slaves imprisoned after the mutiny, court documents, and the diaries of John Quincy Adams.

For the diaries of ordinary citizens caught in our nation's Civil War, turn to The Valley of the Shadow. This site offers an expansive digital archive of Northern and Southern community life in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and Augusta County, Virginia—before, during, and after the Civil War. The site includes diaries, newspapers, military records, tax lists, church records, primary sources that document life in the two communities.

While Hollywood recently rediscovered Shakespeare, we have worshipped the bard for a long time. For authentic materials, precise references, and accurate, updated information, this is the key site on Shakespeare.

EDSITEment is an exclusive club. You don't get the EDSITEment "seal of approval" without undergoing a rigorous "merit review" process by two panels. A Peer Review Panel and a Blue Ribbon Panel narrow down the nominations.

When selecting the sites we consider three main criteria—the intellectual quality of the site...its design...and the impact the site can have on teaching and learning. As you can see, the review process is working well.

At home and abroad, from Washington, D.C. to Moscow, EDSITEment is getting rave reviews. We have received e-mail from Italy, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Israel, Thailand, Morocco, and Bangkok.

Recently, Bernie Ebbers, the CEO of MCI WorldCom, and I spoke with Senator Jim Jeffords, chair of the Senate Education Committee. Senator Jeffords was both pleased and excited about all EDSITEment has to offer. The excitement is spreading. EDSITEment was recently honored by the Computerworld Smithsonian Awards Program for extending the benefits of technology to society. With your help, we can build on this great beginning.

Recently, you all saw the front-page photo of Dr. Johan Reinhard atop the Andes peak with the 500-year-old mummified Inca children. This is an amazing discovery and a fascinating story—made possible by the National Geographic Society and by seed money long ago from the National Endowment for the Humanities. What you may not know is that Johan Reinhard was once a NEH fellow studying rituals of the Andes. We

funded his research, his intellectual "base camp" for this exploration.

Now, with the Council of Great City Schools and MCI WorldCom, the Endowment is working to ensure that all students and teachers get to the mountaintop. It is amazing what you can see from up there. Everyone deserves a chance to see that view. The MarcoPolo Partnership offers all of us that chance. I look forward to working closely with you to achieve this dream.

Thank you for your time.

**Baccalaureate Address**  
**Ohio State University**  
**Columbus, Ohio**  
**June 10, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment of the Humanities

The other day, I was searching for an exciting way to begin this speech.

I know openings are important because the celebrated Columbus writer—James Thurber—often gave that advice to budding writers. In fact, when Thurber started working for the Columbus Dispatch in the 1920s his editor told him to spice up his leads. So the next story he wrote began this way:

Dead. That's what the man was when they found him with a knife in his back at 4 P.M. in front of Riley's Saloon at the corner of 52nd and 12th Streets.

Maybe that is why Thurber didn't last long in Columbus. Definitely an attention-getting lead, though.

The fact is, I am not as interested in exciting you as in telling you why *I'm* excited—excited to be here.

It goes back to the 60s when I was a graduate student in English, studying in Ireland. I wanted to teach. I wanted to get my doctorate. But I found much of the formal study of literature deadening.

I liked ballads, folk tales, and the blues. Why couldn't I spend my time reading them along with Milton, Shakespeare, and Faulkner? Why did Ph.Ds in English not consider oral as well as written literature?

And then, one morning over breakfast, I met a Medieval Literature scholar from Ohio State named Francis Utlely. As I was complaining to him, he said, "You *can* study things close to home. You should be studying folklore."

Because of that conversation I did get a degree in folklore. I found that you could have a wonderful career studying blues singers and quilt makers in the Mississippi Delta as well as Wordsworth and Twain.

So, though, I never went to Ohio State, I feel like I owe you a debt of gratitude. It is a debt I would like to repay by repeating Francis Utlely's message to you, on this campus that was home to him for so many

years.

I want to talk about why the study of one's own region is profoundly important. I want to talk about what we are doing at NEH to foster such study. And I want to talk about dreams I hope we work on together, here in Columbus.

I realize I'm advocating an idea that for some people must seem like an anachronism.

After all, this is a moment in history when each day technology seems to diminish the importance of place. Throughout the world, people bought 100 million PCs last year—about as many as color TVs.

Once immigrants left home for America knowing they would never speak to their families again. Now, they send e-mail back home, and use a cell phone to call as they pass through customs.

Americans used to go to a tailor to buy a suit. Now you can sit in Columbus, click onto the Internet and buy one from a tailor in Hong Kong.

Manufacturers used to locate a plant where there was access to a river and rail-lines, where there were skilled workers—and where they were close to markets. In fact, that was Ohio's attraction for 19th Century manufacturers. Now, companies located in Oregon can build a plant in Pakistan and sell running shoes to joggers in Spain.

A sixth grader in, say, Washington, DC, used to have his Mom take him to the library down on Connecticut Avenue, get books from the big oak card catalog in the reading room, and do research helped by a friendly librarian. Today he gets on Encarta, or goes on to the Internet, presses search-find, and doesn't have to leave his bedroom.

We are a mobile nation. Forty-three million of us move once every 12 months. The modal state of birth in Horry County, South Carolina—turns out to be New Jersey.

So why the interest in regions? And why study America's regions—except in the history department? There are many reasons. In fact, the study of regions, so fashionable in the 1930s ... so unfashionable in the 1950s ... is very important in the 1990s.

Why is that? An eloquent answer comes from my favorite writer, Eudora Welty, whose stories are deeply rooted in her own region: the Deep South.

Eudora captures the power of place in her essay *Place in Fiction* as she writes:

"One place comprehended can make us understand other places better. Sense of place give us equilibrium; extended it is sense of direction, too."

I believe that. Interest in the local and regional increases under the weight of globalization. All of us are connected to a place—whether where we grew up or where we live. These places nurture our roots, define our identities, and shape our imagination.

America is a land of regions. We are Americans, yes, but we are also Midwesterners, Southerners, New Englanders, Westerners.

There are many ways of looking at regions. There is the topographical approach: the "Upper Mississippi Valley" or the "Great Plains." There is the historical approach: "The Confederacy." The "Northwest Territory."

In recent years, we have defined regions economically or in terms of lifestyle—the "rustbelt" or the "sunbelt." And places can be widely scattered—like the Jewish Diaspora. Whichever concept we use, knowing one's region lends context to our lives.

One literary work set in this city—Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*—satirizes the hero's attachment to place—to Ohio State. We are meant to laugh at Roth's character, the former Buckeye basketball player who sits in his room endlessly replaying a record with its nostalgia for Columbus.

But nowhere is there a more regional writer, one more concerned with the roots of *his* region—the Jewish Diaspora—than Philip Roth.

Does he reject the values of much of his community? Sure. But regions aren't only important because we absorb their values. Some of the most powerful influences come from those values we reject.

My interest in regional study emerges from my own experience as a Southerner. I began by studying how singers wrote, practiced, performed the powerful personal expressions we call "the Blues." Later I recorded the stories of Ray Lum, a Mississippi mule trader who traded horses and mules for much of this century. Mr. Lum often repeated the phrase "You live and learn. And then you die and forget it all."

I had the privilege of talking to painters, sculptors, quilt makers, and Louis Dotson, a one-string-guitar maker from a Mississippi town called Lorman.

This is not the history that we are accustomed to studying in high school, full of dates and battles and the names of politicians. But it *is* the kind of history that gives us insight into our own lives.

When we study regions we must understand conflict as part of the many ways people interact.

What study of the West would be complete without understanding how women settled the frontier? What study of the South would be complete without a knowledge of race?

What scholar studying the Southwest could ignore the fight for control of land among Anglos, Latinos, and Native Americans?

And in Ohio, whose knowledge of this region would be complete without understanding how the auto industry influenced the rubber industry?

Or—a little further back—how glaciers created the Appalachian Plateau? Or how government policy towards the Northwest Territory changed the lives of those first settlers who came across the Appalachians towards "something big"—the literal translation of the Iroquois word *Ohio*.

How do we encourage this kind of study? Certainly one way is through the university. In fact, I believe universities have an obligation to focus on the communities in which they are based. And regional study is the perfect way to make that happen.

It bonds scholars with their community. It breaks down the historic distinction between town and gown that all too often characterize college towns.

It brings the community into the university in exciting ways. Whether through photography, film, oral history or libraries, regional studies can make our own experience a source for learning.

Through the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, which I directed for 18 years at the University of Mississippi, we confronted the history of our region—both beautiful and nightmarish. We found it valuable for every Southerner, whether they had grown up in the South or moved there a week ago.

By turning young people to oral history—in the way Alex Haley learned from his aunts about his own family history—we create a sense of place, a sense of mystery and beauty. Alex Haley once told me how he was fascinated by the stories he heard from his elderly aunts and grandmothers on the front porch of their home on long summer evenings in Henning, Tennessee. On their rocking chairs they would dip

snuff and tell stories as the fireflies lit up the night. One particularly accurate aunt could drop a firefly at ten feet. Alex never forgot those stories about his family's African origins. And, as Yeats said, if you believe an idea strongly enough, it becomes reality. Alex was so drawn to his family's story that it finally became the best selling book and television series *Roots*. Today this tale is part of our national narrative.

You are doing this in Ohio, too. I didn't have to do much research to find that out. I simply looked at the list of NEH grants to historical societies for regional activity: In the 80's we worked with the Mohoning Valley Historical Society ... with the Ohio Historical Society, here in Columbus ... with the Summit Historical Society in Akron.

In Wilberforce—just last month—the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center opened a wonderful exhibition about the African influence on American dance. It is the kind of exploration that is at the heart of the relationship of folk tradition to so-called high art.

And in 1993 NEH helped the Columbus Museum of Art plan an exhibition on Elijah Pierce—the remarkable Columbus woodcarver, barber, and lay minister.

Since 1966 we have given more than \$640 million—in current dollars—for such projects. We have funded studies of small towns, of large cities, of tribal communities.

We have funded studies of whaling in Alaska, of coal mining in West Virginia, of the judiciary in Hawaii. We have funded studies of town development in Idaho and suburban sprawl in Texas. And we have created national projects that no one region could do economically.

I will give you two examples.

One major NEH project—the United States Newspaper Program—supports a national effort to locate, catalog, preserve on microfilm and make available U.S. newspapers from the eighteenth century to the present.

Second example.

The Dictionary of American Regional English documents spoken and written English in the United States. It is an incredibly rich area.

Think it to yourself: what do you call that strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street?

In the Pacific Northwest it's the "parking strip." In the North Central

states it's the "grass plot." In the Atlantic States it's the "berm."

Here in the Great Lakes area it's the "tree lawn" –except in northeastern Ohio where some folks call it the "devil's strip."

Of course, a lot of us just call it that "whatchamacallit—the grass between the sidewalk and the street."

I'm happy to tell you, we are offering new initiatives under the broad theme: Rediscovering America through Place and Region. I hope that you will send us proposals that bring regional and cultural knowledge to schools or public audiences, proposals that explore the nature of regions and their contributions to American life.

I grew up in Vicksburg, where there was a major Civil War battle.

Many Ohioans died in that battle in 1864. And when the memorial for those brave Ohioans was dedicated early in the century, one man from Ohio who came down for the dedication, fell in love with an ancestor of mine and moved back here with her as his bride.

I never knew them. But twenty years ago, when I was teaching at Yale, my ninety year old grandmother told me this story. She spoke of their son who lived in New York in a home whose walls were covered with portraits of his Ohio and Mississippi ancestors.

His son (she told me) was a student at Yale. I asked for the name of this distant cousin. He turned out to be one of my best students, who played a mean blues harp.

We are all connected. And of course, Ohio is particularly rich in those who built connections, pathways, for America.

Because it lay between Lake Erie and the Ohio River it became the connecting state between east and west. In Dayton two brothers thought they could build a device that could fly people from one part of the world to the next.

And Ohio gave us the great 20th Century symbol of the shrinking globe: John Glenn.

When Senator Glenn went into space again last year, he reaffirmed a message for all Americans: that in 30 years, going into space had gone from being a frontier to something every man could do.

When Glenn and his fellow astronauts walked onto the launchpad, the NASA announcer said, "Six American heroes and one American legend."

And so he is. But Glenn is also very much a part of New Concord, Ohio, its history and tradition. Embedded in his background are the years of spending Sundays in a Presbyterian Church, and hearing his father talk about his days as a fireman on the B&O Railroad.

To understand John Glenn's background is to understand more about America—and ourselves.

So as we explore the Information Highway ... as we pick up a cell phone in Columbus and talk to friends halfway around the globe, let us remember the value of exploring our roots at home.

Let us work together to understand and celebrate the region that contributed to the growth of every one in this audience. It is still necessary to understand where you are.

By understanding *where* you are you will know *who* you are.

Thank you very much.

**Rotary Club of Canton, Ohio  
June 11, 1999**

**OUR STORIES ARE AMERICA'S STORY**

William R. Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Thank you so much for inviting me here today. I know I have my friend and the National Endowment for the Humanities' friend, Congressman Ralph Regula, of your district, to thank for the invitation and the opportunity to speak with you, the business leaders of Canton, about the importance of the humanities to your community, to you, to your children and to your children's children.

According to 19th century Scottish poet, Alexander Smith, "A man does not plant a tree for himself. He plants it for posterity." Think of this tree as the humanities in this country. This tree represents our history, our culture, the richness of the ideals we were founded upon—our humanity.

As Ralph Regula knows, through his strong support of the NEH on Capitol Hill, the sum of our experiences as a people is much larger than any individual experience. But what is equally true is that without our individual "stories" as I like to call them, we have no history, no culture, no foundation for our great nation. So I thank each of you gathered here today for helping keep Congressman Regula in Washington. As a staunch supporter of who we are as a people—which is what the National Endowment for the Humanities is all about—Ralph Regula reminds his colleagues in Congress that the humanities are essential to democracy, that we cannot afford to lose a single story.

In 1965, Congress established the National Endowment for the Humanities with the words, "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." That's you. That's me. We must make sure no one is left out of the mix. That is why I announced last month that the NEH has an exciting new initiative out of which 10 regional humanities centers across the nation will be established. As we embark upon a new millennium, a new era in our history and culture, I think it is only right that we have a new means to preserve, study and create this new chapter in America—to grow a new branch on our tree.

Through the "Initiative for Regional Humanities Centers," we at the National Endowment will establish hubs for supporting research on regional topics, including regional history and culture. We will also develop educational programs. I encourage you in Rotary to support this project, which will include collaborating with the Ohio State Humanities Council, statewide libraries, museums and historical groups. I personally

envison these centers as adding to the root system of our tree so that it will bloom and grow for many many years as we in this great nation share in a common commitment to community and civic life.

My focus is to foster what the beloved Southern writer, Eudora Welty, calls a "sense of place." I grew up on a farm outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. To you, Vicksburg may be a battle from the Civil War, but to me it is home. As a child I ran barefoot each summer in the fields outside Rose Hill Church. I rode horses bareback. I learned to love my family's farm and its people, who were my first teachers. When I was director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, I learned that my understanding of the world is filtered through these earliest experiences. While at the Center I traveled to the Midwest, to New England, the West, the Southwest and to the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow. My aim was to work with colleagues who were developing academic programs focusing on their own regional cultures. What we all recognize and understand is that people everywhere define themselves through the places where they are born and grow up. This relationship, this "sense of place," shapes each of us in deep and lasting ways.

If we cannot reach people in communities such as Canton or Columbus or Akron or Warren or Youngstown, then we are not doing our job. It is at this local level that we teach, preserve and pass on the nation's cultural heritage—and what a rich heritage it is. We pass along this heritage in Mary Regula's National First Lady's Library, housed in the home of Ida Saxton McKinley, one of Ohio's many presidential families. We pass that heritage along through the work of the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, which is microfilming 6,750 historic Ohio newspapers.

In the last five years, people and institutions in Ohio have received \$17 million from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ohio Humanities Council. Their projects preserve our cultural heritage. They foster lifelong learning. They encourage civic development. And you all are an important part of this process.

Your organization has played an important role in my own life. If it were not for a Rotary Foundation Fellowship more than thirty years ago sponsored by your Mississippi State chapter, I would not have studied at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.

Rotarians throughout Ireland took me into their homes. We did a bit of oral history then, swapping stories and singing songs. I immersed myself in their friendly ways and generosity and came out with a rich experience of Irish culture I have never forgotten. When I returned home to Mississippi, I spoke to Rotarians throughout the state as a way

of passing on what I learned and as a way of thanking this organization that has so enriched my life. This cultural exchange, fostered and supported by Rotary International, is essential in our understanding and appreciation of people from different countries. It helps break down barriers of prejudice and stereotypes and replaces them with an understanding and acknowledgment of everyone's humanity. We forge deep friendships with others when we break bread, sing songs, and share stories with them. I know that Rotary International is steeped in these beliefs of education, as suggested by your motto, "service above self." Since 1905 your impressive community-based organization with more than a million members and 29,000 clubs all over the world has been a critical part of the fabric of this great nation. Your history, your generosity, your guiding principles operate not only on the international and national level, but right here in Canton, where the stories of America are being lived day by day, citizen by citizen.

Here in Stark County, I've been told, you have the 4th largest Rotary in a state with 14 clubs. It is impressive to note that each of you sitting here is part of a local organization that goes back 84 years and has more than 300 members. In particular, I applaud your dedication to Polio Plus, an international program, with the goal to eradicate polio "off the face of the earth" as your president, Scott Sandrock, put it. What I see as the beauty of the Rotary is that you make your own choices on what projects to run. Only you can decide what will contribute to the larger good of your community.

With your own "sense of place," you developed the Neighborhood Action Program, known as "NAP." Beginning as an informal gathering place for children with working parents who were just making ends meet, Barb Druessi's front porch has become an after-school haven, a place where children can tell their stories, how the day went, what is bothering them, to someone who will listen and care. Now these children, who are our future, have a safe, supportive environment to go to after school. As we know with the recent tragic events at schools underscoring the alienation of too many of our children, any program where young people have a voice, an identity, a story someone listens to, is essential. I want to personally thank you for the NAP program, which would not have been possible without the Rotary Club of Canton.

Since coming from Mississippi to become chairman of NEH, I have been striving to continue telling the larger "story" of America through its smaller, individual stories—people, places, ideas, objects that cumulatively capture who we were as a culture, who we are and the dreams of who we might be, the dreams of those children being listened to and loved on Barb Druessi's front porch.

Alex Haley once told me how he was fascinated by the stories he heard from his elderly aunts and grandmothers on the front porch of their home on long summer evenings in Henning, Tennessee. On their rocking chairs they would dip snuff and tell stories as the fireflies lit up the night. One particularly accurate aunt could drop a firefly at ten feet. Alex never forgot those stories about his family's African origins. And, as Yeats said, if you believe an idea strongly enough, it becomes reality. Alex was so drawn to his family's story that it finally became the best selling book and television series *Roots*. Today this tale is part of our national narrative.

Building on a program like NAP, we at the National Endowment for the Humanities have created "My History is America's History" to help all of us preserve and share family histories and treasures. This project will pull together family history so that we can all share in how each of our stories make up the multi-patterned story of America.

We will have a Family History Kit and a web site. The kit will explain how to save stories and family heirlooms such as pictures and diaries. The web site will be a modern-day "front porch"—just like Barb Druessi's actual front porch. It will be a cyberplace for anyone to drop by and exchange stories and tidbits. I believe in my heart that these connections across the nation will increase understanding and a sense of pride in what is our shared history.

The Family History Kit and the web site will be introduced this coming Fall. I encourage you as Rotarians to become part of this effort to document and preserve family history in your community.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is the container that holds the stories of who we are. It is like a basket holding shells and colored glass children find on the beach, to examine in the sunlight, to marvel at and touch and know. Each is different, each is wonderful, and together they create a full basket rich with vitality and variety.

As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who received a National Humanities Medal in 1998, has said, the great point of the humanities is still what it always was, self-knowledge. You here in Canton, through your programs, through your commitment to community—both on a local level and in the larger international community—have so much to be proud of. The Federal legislation that established NEH said we should pay "particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history." Each of you has so much to contribute because each of your stories count. Don't forget to share yours and to listen to those of others.

Thank you again for inviting me.

**National History Day Welcome Ceremony  
University of Maryland, College Park  
June 13, 1999**

Remarks by William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

I am happy to be here with this dynamic group as you begin an exciting week of learning, sharing and just plain fun. I had a chance to look at some of your exhibits as I came in—they are really impressive and indicate the fine work you have done this past year. I congratulate you and thank you for letting me join you tonight.

Let me tell you a little bit about how I came to be here. A long time ago (over 50 years) in a galaxy far, far away (in the state of Mississippi) I was born and grew up on a farm where I learned nothing about becoming a Jedi Knight, but lots about what it meant to be a southern boy who, like my grandfather, was raised on "cornbread and recollection."

From the beginning I have loved those recollections - stories of my family, my neighbors and my friends - both black and white. The stories told to me on the back porch on steamy southern nights or on the lawn of the Rose Hill Church where black families have worshiped since before the Civil War. And I began to gather stories of my own. When I was in sixth grade our teacher asked which students planned to go to college. Now, when you are in sixth grade what your friends think is more important than impressing any adult. I knew that none of my classmates would go to college so I refused to raise my hand. Our teacher Mrs. Barfield pointed at me and said, "Billy Ferris, you will go to college. Your parents will make you go." With every eye in the class on me I said, "No ma'am. I ain't going to no college. I ain't going to no college."

Well, Mrs. Barfield was right. I did go to college. In fact, in the best sense, I became a perpetual student, earning a Ph.D., writing 10 books and teaching college for 27 years. Over that time, I developed a particular love for the work of the sons and daughters of the South - from William Faulkner to Elvis Presley—from Alice Walker to Eudora Welty. Each, in their own unique way told a story—a personal history of America.

So, when President Clinton appointed me as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities two years ago, I finally had the perfect job. I am now head of the agency that's charged with telling and preserving our nation's stories. And our nation's stories have been woven over the years from the beautiful and varied threads of each individual, each family, and each region of our land into a strong and

richly diverse tapestry.

Your story and your family's story is part of that tapestry. Whether it's your great-grandfather's story of storming Omaha Beach in World War II or your mother's story of a refugee camp that was her temporary home after leaving Vietnam, it's a story worth telling and a story worth saving.

There is an African proverb that says when an old man or old woman dies, a library burns to the ground. So, I encourage you to get to the old and not-so-old men and women in your family while that library is still open and alive. You might want to start by asking simple questions like "did you have a nickname when you were a kid?" or "what was your first job?" Or questions about times when our country shared common pain or common pride—ask how they felt when President Kennedy was killed or when they saw Neil Armstrong take his first steps on the moon, now an incredible 30 years ago. I am sure you have plenty of your own questions and your family will enjoy giving you their answers.

NEH has sponsored several projects that will help you gather and record your stories. This Thanksgiving, we will launch the *My History is America's History* project. This project will have both a family history kit, which is a tool box of resources that provide everything from advice on preserving family treasures to guidelines for gathering family memories to suggestions on genealogical research. And it will have a Web site that we hope will become a virtual "front porch," where anyone can drop by to swap stories with family, friends, and neighbors whether they live across the street or across cyberspace.

Right now, we are also helping teachers use technology in their classrooms through our "Schools for a New Millennium" project. In Memphis, for example, students at Booker T. Washington High School will collect oral histories and document electronically the civil rights movement in Memphis. West Junior High in Lawrence, Kansas, will create a state and local history curriculum that will allow students to collect and digitize original documents and photographs for the school's Web site.

With the help of a gift from MCI/World Com, NEH created a Web site that you or your teachers may have already visited. It's called EDSITEment and it allows a teacher to quickly search for a subject like "George Washington" or "Martin Luther King," and come up with information and a syllabus that outlines how to present the subject in class. EDSITEment currently links 50 Web sites and that number will grow to 100 over the next two years. In fact, we hit a new record, with over 40,000 uses at EDSITEment last month.

I hope you will take advantage of these resources in your exploration of

your history and our nation's history. Why do I think it's so important to learn about history?

Downtown on Pennsylvania Avenue there's an inscription in front of the National Archives that says, "What is past is prologue." If those words from Shakespeare seem confusing, let me give you an example of what it means. I would be willing to bet that most of you have paid your \$7 or \$8 bucks to George Lucas and have seen Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace. As you know, this movie is the prequel—the story that came before the Star Wars trilogy. So, we already know the outcome. We just don't know why or how it happened. For instance, we don't know how young Anakin Skywalker was lured to the Dark Side. We don't know why the Alliance and the Empire are at war. And we don't know why Princess Leia wears that ridiculous earmuff hairdo. The Phantom Menace satisfies our curiosity and deepens our understanding—at least of the first two issues. I don't know that we will ever understand that hairdo.

American history is like Star Wars. We live in the present so we know how the story turned out. We may not always know how we got here or why it happened exactly this way. But it matters that we learn. And it's not important just because as sociologist James Loewen said, "Those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat the 11th grade."

With change happening at blinding speed, history is what helps keep things in perspective. It helps ground us so that we are not thrown back by the winds of technological change but rather can use them to sail into the future. And, from the founding of our nation, a knowledge of history is essential so that Americans can learn—as Jefferson said—"how to judge for themselves what will secure or endanger their freedom."

This year, as you have studied the history of technological change, you have already discovered some of those lessons. And in discovery, you have tapped into many of the vast resources now available—particularly the Internet. It's a fantastic tool, but keep in mind that it's just one tool and is only as good as its sources. When you go on the Web, think about what movie critic Roger Ebert said, "Doing research on the Web is like using a library assembled piecemeal by packrats and vandalized nightly. Search engines use blinding speed in order to link you to sources that may be completely wrong..."

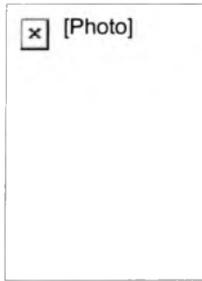
As good historians and researchers, you will know to look behind and beyond the sources to gather a fuller picture of historical events. Sociologist James Loewen suggests five questions that you can use to deal with your sources. First, why was the story written or painted or filmed—in other words, put the source in context. Second, whose viewpoint is being presented—and ask why that makes a difference.

Third, ask yourself if the story is believable, which means would we act that way in the same situation if we had a similar background? Fourth, is the story backed up by other sources, or do other authors contradict it? If so, then we need to dig deeper. And fifth, after reading the story or seeing the picture, how are you supposed to feel about the America that has been presented? If you ask each of these five questions, you will have learned how to study history.

It's real learning, not collecting information, that makes the difference. With round-the-clock news and a jammed Information Highway, the Information Age is rapidly becoming the Information Glut. As the Irish poet William Butler Yeats once wrote, "Learning is not filling a pail—it is lighting a fire."

I am confident that "The Force" will be with you this week and that you will light a fire here at National History Day. That fire that will continue to spark your curiosity, enlighten your intellect, and inspire your lifelong love of learning. Now I would like to close with a bit of musical history that captures our history as a people and the diverse histories of ancestors from Africa and Europe.

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: July 1999**

### **Preserving Heritage NEH Helps Save America's Treasures**

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By William R. Ferris

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The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is working hard to help save Louis Armstrong's house, F. Scott Fitzgerald's manuscripts, the birthplace of Betty Crocker's kitchen, and other priceless gems of Americana before they disappear.

A nation's legacy is that part of the past that we choose to preserve for the future. Year in and year out, however, we lose more and more irreplaceable pieces of America's past through neglect or lack of funds. Historic buildings crumble, rare documents and photographs disintegrate, and collections mold. What can be done to stop this tragic loss of American heritage?

NEH is partnering with other federal agencies, in a White House initiative called Save America's Treasures, to identify and stabilize the nation's most important and imperiled cultural resources before they are gone forever. In planning for the celebration of a new millennium, the White House Millennium Council asked 12 federal agencies to submit lists of endangered cultural artifacts and historic sites that are of national significance and in dire need of treatment.

As the nation's leading advocate of lifelong study of America's cultural heritage, NEH proposed a number of preservation projects, 12 of which have been funded. They are:

- Washburn Mill, birthplace of General Mills, producer of Gold Medal Flour, home of Betty Crocker's kitchen, flour-milling capital of the world from 1880 to 1930 (Minneapolis, Minn).
- Dutch colonial manuscripts dating to the mid-17th century, the earliest records for what became the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and western Connecticut (New York State Archives, Albany).
- Photographs and yearbooks documenting the pioneering work of social reformer Jane Addams from the 1890s to the 1930s (University of Illinois at Chicago).
- Collection of antislavery literature from the libraries of abolitionist leaders (Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.)
- Writer F. Scott Fitzgerald's entire manuscript collection (Princeton University, N.J.).
- The home and studio of Lincoln Memorial sculptor Daniel Chester French (Stockbridge, Mass.,).
- Richmond, Va.'s Jackson Ward neighborhood, the center of the city's African American professional and social life at the turn of the 20th century.
- The largest collection of Thomas Jefferson's letters and writings outside of the Library of Congress
- Home of author Edith Wharton (Lenox, Mass.).

(Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston).

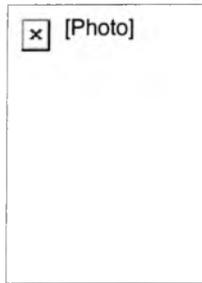
- Jazz legend Louis Armstrong's home (Queens College, N.Y.).
- The original manuscript of "The Star-Spangled Banner," original competition drawings for the design of the U.S. Capitol, and early watercolors of the White House's interior (Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore).

- Home of Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus school of modern design and one of the most influential architects of the 20th century (Lincoln, Mass.).

These materials and sites are among America's proudest and most distinguished treasures. Saving them will cost \$5.25 million, but it is a small price to pay to guarantee our children's and grandchildren's direct access to American history.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: Aug 1999**

### **Digital Downside NEH Addresses Threat of Information Wipeout**

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By William R. Ferris

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If you think the Y2K problem is frightening, ponder this: Most people do not realize that the vast quantities of computerized information we are producing today will not survive as current technology grows obsolete. Whether it is your grandmother's cookie recipes or the government's census records, information stored on computer discs, or CD-ROMs, could be lost or inaccessible in 20 years or less.

The problem has become critical, and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is hard at work seeking solutions.

Digitized collections of historic photographs and manuscripts, government and military records, data on scientific explorations of the universe and the mapping of the human genome—all are at risk of disappearing or becoming inaccessible, because the discs and tapes on which they are stored are perishable.

Videotapes containing family memories deteriorate after 10 years, and CD-ROMs become unreliable after only five years, compared to the more than 300-year life span of microfilm and the even longer life span of acid-free paper.

What can be done? The nation's cultural institutions must develop ways to preserve and ensure future access to computerized collections of historic manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, and audio and video recordings. NEH, the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies have begun the process by funding a pioneering, \$2.3 million preservation project at Cornell University. This project will develop a standard way of organizing computerized collections, preventing data loss in these collections by alerting managers to the periodic need to upgrade aging CD-ROMs and tapes, and making the collections fully accessible on the Internet. All Americans will benefit because the project will ensure that computerized materials important for the study of America will be preserved and accessible for generations to come.

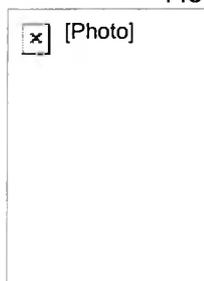
Five other high-tech projects funded by the multi-federal agency collaboration will eventually enable Internet users to hear the music of American popular songs from the colonial era to the present and search their lyrics; examine medieval manuscripts; listen to historic voice recordings of the American presidents, Thomas Edison and Babe Ruth; and study materials on topics ranging from ancient Egypt to the modern world. These projects preserve and bring the humanities—the voices and ideas that shape our world— to all Americans.

We now know that digital formats are fragile and need ongoing attention if they are to be preserved for future generations. An NEH-funded film alerting the public about this problem, called "Into the Future: The Preservation of Knowledge in the Electronic Age," has been airing nationwide for the past year

on public television stations. For more information, call 1-800-NEH-1121 or e-mail [info@neh.gov](mailto:info@neh.gov).

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: Sep 1999**

### **Forging Partnerships NEH Forms Alliance with America's Promise**

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By William R. Ferris

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General Colin Powell is a man with a mission, which happens to match our mission at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in significant ways. Since retiring as chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, where he attained household recognition as a genuine American hero, General Powell has been using his leadership skill, wisdom and popularity to fight on another front in our society: the needs of disadvantaged youth.

The NEH has forged a partnership with General Powell and his nonprofit organization, America's Promise--The Alliance for Youth, to provide educational opportunities that build character and competence in America's young people.

As a federal agency that provides grants to enrich classroom learning, expand humanities content on the Internet, and bring ideas to life through museum exhibitions, public television and radio, and programs in libraries and other community places, NEH is able to work with partners like General Powell to bring the joys of learning and accomplishment to young people.

Among the NEH projects the General endorses is Girls Dig It, a nationwide archaeology program for girls, ages 12 to 14. The project is funded by a \$200,000 NEH grant to Girls Incorporated, a national youth organization represented in 32 states and serving 350,000 girls, the vast majority of whom are from low income families.

In the program, archaeology engages the girls' imaginations about history and folklore. By examining artifacts, girls learn strategic thinking skills as they reflect on the history of a particular place such as an old fort, how its inhabitants worked and lived, and their traditions and culture. The girls develop a new awareness of how objects can speak to us, how diaries and journals make the past come alive, and what the objects in our own everyday world say about us. This exercise of the imagination is at the heart of learning and can point a youngster in positive directions.

Other projects NEH is developing on this theme are new quality-controlled educational web sites about history, foreign languages, art and social studies; curriculum projects that engage students in learning about local, state and national history; family literacy projects in which newly literate parents read along with their children; and hands-on museum exhibitions.

General Powell has mobilized organizations to join him in a national effort to give America's youth opportunities for growth and fulfillment. In carrying out our own mission, NEH is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with America's Promise to help young people discover the rewards of intellectual curiosity and discovery.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

**Indiana University**

**Bloomington, Indiana**

**September 23, 1999**

***Dusenbergs and Microchips***

**William Ferris, Chairman**

**National Endowment for the Humanities**

Henry, thank you for your kind introduction and thank you for inviting me here to this great university in this lovely town. Chairman McDowell, Dean Hanson, Dean Wallace and Chancellor Gros Louis congratulations to you for all the fine work you are doing here on campus.

To the faculty, staff, students and citizens of Bloomington, thank you all for coming. Your presence makes this a true community event.

I'm especially pleased to be visiting the Folklore Institute. Through teaching, special projects and the *Journal of Folklore Research* you are serving your community and the country well. From Pentecostals in southern Indiana to classic car enthusiasts at the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg festival, you cover the waterfront, studying the art, music, dance, customs and rituals of groups around the globe.

One of the professors doing just that is my old and dear friend Henry Glassie, one of the most accomplished folklorists in the country. Henry's talents have led him to many worlds, from Bloomington to Istanbul to Dublin. He excels as a writer, illustrator, and storyteller. This community is blessed to have him, and I am honored to count him as my friend. Henry knows that folklorists love to tell stories, so I'm sure he'll understand that I have to share this story about Henry and Oggie my Parrot. It happened at Yale.

During the mid-70s, I taught at Yale, and Henry was a scholar in residence at the National Humanities Center. I lived in my Spartan bachelor apartment with my pet parrot Oggie, short for Oglethorpe.

One day Henry was in the apartment sketching Oggie. Here's Henry all hunched over doing his best John James Audubon imitation, ornithologist and illustrator all rolled into one. Oggie wasn't having any of it. Finally Oggie just swooped over and bit a button right off Henry's jacket. I don't think it was a comment on Henry's artwork. Oggie wasn't that smart.

Oggie had a vast and quite colorful vocabulary and he wasn't afraid to use it. B.S.

did not mean Bachelor of Sciences to Oggie. Sometimes I'd be on the phone, and in the background Oggie would imitate a shrieking laugh. The other person on the line would ask, "Who's that?" I would answer, truthfully, "It's the parrot." Oggie would then shriek, "Ahhh, B.S." I would try to explain, and Oggie would shriek, "OK, bye now." I can't tell you how many people hung up on me.

My students loved Oggie. Sometimes as they got to know him, he bit them...so many in fact that Oggie picked up the word, "Ouch." Oggie provided full service; he would bite you, and then say "ouch" for you. Oggie was so popular one year he had his own page in the Yale yearbook.

Now, I'd like to think there was a moral to that story, but I defy you to find one... maybe it's--don't look a gift parrot in the beak. I think I'll just fall back on Mark Twain and say, "...persons attempting to find a moral in [this story] will be banished."

Today I want to explore with you how the humanities can flourish in the decades ahead, the digital decades. How can we use technology to expand our reach and link scholars to students of all ages and to the general public? How can the humanities help to build a greater sense of community?

I firmly believe the humanities are more important now than ever before... especially in the digital age...especially in our culture that sees acts of violence far too often.

Indiana University is addressing these issues with courage and creativity. As it always has...

The great educator and former President of Indiana for decades, Herman B. Wells is a visionary, an inspiration, and a defender of academic freedom. Early on, he had a dream for this university and he fought the battles to make sure the dream was realized. Today Bloomington is a fascinating international community and Herman B. Wells can take much of the credit for that.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is a small agency. Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million. Let me put that in perspective. Your School of Medicine attracted \$115 million in 1998-99 in grants from outside sources.

Our mission is to bring the humanities into every home in the country. We do that by awarding grants to America's schools, colleges, universities (such as I.U.), libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, teacher training, scholarly research, public programs, and special projects. For more than thirty-four years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence.

We believe that every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No

American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom--and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down on the front of the bus and fought for hers.

Through such stories we connect to other people and other cultures. Through stories we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation. Through such shared stories we create a sense of community.

Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson has warned, "We confront the danger of historical amnesia. As the sources for understanding our national past deteriorate and vanish, we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

That is why your Folklore Institute is so important, that is why Indiana University is so important. And that is why the Endowment is proud to work with you.

In the last five years, institutions and individuals in Indiana have received more than \$12 million from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Indiana Humanities Council.

The Endowment gave \$300,000 in challenge grants to Indiana University Press to create an endowment to support monograph publishing in the humanities. We gave \$539,000 to I.U. and the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis to catalogue and microfilm 5,864 historic Indiana newspapers, including *The Brazil Manufacturer and Miner*, *Republican Progress*, and the *Democratic Banner of Liberty*.

In the last 10 years, IU faculty members have won 27 yearlong fellowships

for their work in an amazing range of fields, including: religion, American literature, romance languages, sociology, anthropology, theater, philosophy, European history, and Folklore.

We have made 11 Summer Stipend awards to IU in the last ten years with an equally impressive range. We have funded work on Plains Indian Native Literature, and Karen Vitelli's excavation results at the Franchti Cave.

I regret that I do not have time to visit a different kind of cave while I'm here—the virtual reality "cave." I know IU is in the forefront of work on Internet2 and the Abilene network. The prospects of this work are mind-boggling. Artist Margaret Dolinsky summed it up when she said; "It used to be that I could just slap my art on the wall. But today I can live in it." That is what technology can do. Technology can take us virtually anywhere, anytime, and that is the blessing, the curse, and the challenge.

You see the blessing when Janos Starker's historic performance with Mstislav Rostropovich is webcast before a worldwide audience. The curse is when you see

hateful ranting and dangerous information on the web. The challenge in the digital age is to educate users...to help them find the wheat and avoid the chaff.

That is why I think IU's plan to create a school of Informatics is so promising. We need to explore and evaluate the roles information science, technology, and digital media are playing in society. I hope Henry and his colleagues at the Folklore Institute will bring invaluable resource to those discussions.

Last year 11% of incoming IU freshman applied online. Today's students have grown up online. The web world is familiar to them, they know how to navigate-- but they come to this university to learn how to make judgments...to learn how to separate the wheat from the chaff on the web.

What can the Endowment do to help? From our support of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Dartmouth Dante Database in the 1970s to Web sites that were launched last month, the Endowment has worked to harness new technologies for the humanities.

At the Endowment, we are working on new uses of the Internet. For example, the Endowment recently launched a monthly electronic newsletter, NEH Outlook, which I e-mailed to many of you before I came here. Perhaps some of you saw it. If you did not, please visit our web site to subscribe. It is free, and can be found at our web site, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov).

From our web site, you can link to EDSITEment. This new NEH web site identifies the 50 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects, sites such as Edward Ayers' "The Valley of the Shadow." EDSITEment provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages.

As IU sought out Microsoft for an innovative software licensing deal, we turned to the MCI Foundation for help with this EDSITEment. The MCI Foundation underwrote the initial \$500,000 start-up cost in 1997, and MCI WorldCom Foundation has recently given us an additional \$500,000. The money will enable NEH to double the number of outstanding humanities sites on EDSITEment to 100 in the next two years.

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate computers, CDs, and cable TV into the humanities curriculum.

Since 1995, the Endowment has made five grants to IU for "Teaching with Technology" projects. CD ROMs are in development on the Musical Instruments of West Africa, and the cultures of Africa, as well as a joint project with the American Indian Studies Research Institute and the White Shield School in North Dakota on Arikara language and culture. The Endowment has also helped fund a Web site

called *Prehistoric Puzzles*, which involves collaborative problem solving using case studies of African archeological sites.

These are all important, innovative technology projects. IU and NEH can be proud of their work. But it is not enough. We face additional challenges, as this community knows all too well.

The July 4<sup>th</sup> shooting of Won-Joon Yoon was a senseless tragedy carried out by a man filled with hate. My heart goes out to each of you in the community, as you come to terms with this awful event. Such tragedies have become all too common in recent years.

Even before this tragedy, I know IU was acting to address such issues through the panel on youth violence held this past summer...and attended by the Dalai Lama, and former FBI director William Sessions. IU assistant professor Jonathan Plucker said then, "People who think that school violence is a passing tragedy that will go away are really kidding themselves. A tremendous effort from many sectors that goes beyond the schoolyard will be needed before this problem is eradicated." That means we all have to help.

At the Endowment, we are not involved in counseling or criminal justice. But we do seek to build bridges over troubled waters...to remind all citizens of their connection to the past, to their own "postage stamp of native soil," as Faulkner called it. At the Endowment we have two new initiatives designed to help Americans get in touch with their past, and their sense of place.

To broaden the range of voices from the historic canon to include those of all people, we are launching an initiative called "My History is America's History" that will use oral history to explore the lives of every American.

We also plan to create 10 regional humanities centers around the nation. This effort has direct relevance to anyone concerned with our communities.

America is a nation of regions. Eudora Welty who celebrated her 90th birthday last year says that a "sense of place" is what gives us equilibrium...."It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are."

These regional humanities centers will be hubs of research, teaching, publishing and public programs that will reach out to all segments of their community. The centers will also create new collaborations among scholars and institutions throughout each region. Finally, they will provide sources of healing and understanding as they deal with regional issues of race, gender and class.

Perhaps, in some small way, these programs will help to combat hatred and violence. As educators, and humanists; it is our job to confront such issues. It is our job to chronicle the great American stories from our past and present. To talk

about our heroes—national heroes and everyday heroes in town meetings, in classrooms, on the web and on the street corner.

I told Henry that since John Mellencamp couldn't be here tonight, I would try and substitute. I heard that President Brand sang a solo in a jazz class last year so I thought I would follow his lead. For folklorist music is a special window through which we understand our worlds. This country blues describes the rural worlds where I grew up in rural Mississippi. "Baby Please Don't Go."

**Denver Public Library**

**Denver, Colorado**

**October 1, 1999**

***Roots of the Blues***

**William Ferris, Chairman**

**National Endowment for the Humanities**

Thank you Patty for that kind introduction. Thank all of you for coming and making this a community event; with many of our state humanities council people here it is a national event.

I want to thank my hosts...Patricia Nelson Limerick, Tom Precourt, and Charles Wilkinson of the University of Colorado Center of the American West...Maggie Coval and the Colorado Endowment for the Humanities, happy anniversary and congratulations on 25 years of service to the state...and Rick Ashton and the Denver Public Library.

I was just in Michael Graves's home state of Indiana. He has certainly done a fascinating job here. In 1889, when City Librarian John Cotton Dana started Denver's first public library in a wing of Denver High School, he called it a "center of public happiness." If only he could see you now! This is truly a center of public happiness, information, and excitement.

The Endowment is very pleased to be working with all of you. Maggie Coval and the Colorado Endowment have been reaching out to every person in this state. They just announced a new ethics initiative that will explore ethics in medicine, law, and education. This fall they will host a series on Growth and Community in Colorado. And I know many of you enjoyed their very successful Strings in the Mountains festival this past summer. Every year through their expansive programs they reach tens of thousands of people across this state.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is proud to support the Denver Public Library's important project to catalogue and digitize more than 35,000 historic photographs of the Old West.

Patricia Limerick and Charles Wilkinson are a vital source of scholarship on the west for everyone across the country. Patty and I share a similar view on the importance of regional studies.

By way of explaining why she embraced regional history Patty once said, "I thought it would make us better neighbors...I thought that regional identity could provide the cultural and social glue to put a fragmented society back

together...Indians, Hispanics, Asians, Blacks, Anglos, business people, workers, politicians, bureaucrats, natives, and newcomers, we share the same region and its history."

I couldn't agree more.

I believe that each of us defines ourselves through the place where we were born and raised. The sense of place shapes us in deep and lasting ways. Each of us carries within ourselves a "little postage stamp of native soil," as William Faulkner put it. It is to this place that we go to find our clearest, deepest sense of identity. Think how this vast, varied, expansive land has shaped you and your children. I believe that these places, memories, and values are essential to life and should not be abandoned in the name of progress. One way we preserve these memories is through music and song, and that is what I want to explore with you tonight.

I grew up in Mississippi and my roots are in the blues...listening to the blues, playing the blues, singing the blues. I even had a radio show on the blues called "Highway 61." To sit behind the microphone was a dream come true for me, and I did it for ten years. In fact, the show still airs on Mississippi Public Radio. "If you have the heartache..." When I did my two-hour blues show on Saturday night, I often received letters from prisoners in Parchman Penitentiary who requested that I dedicate blues to their sweethearts outside the prison walls. Their sweetheart in turn dedicated songs back to the inmates. It was a vivid demonstration of the power of the blues. Over the decades, that power has spread and influenced the whole country.

Before I try to explain the blues, let me first play a "blue note." Musicians play with it, bend it, experiment, and improvise with it.

This blue note is credited with loosening up ragtime music, paving the way for jazz improvisation, influencing gospel music, and creating rock and roll. The blues form and blues instrumental techniques were very prominent in most rock-and-roll styles through the 1960s and have continued to be important factors in this music's development up to the present.

So without the blues, during your teen years, instead of sock hops, many of you would have been going to Tarantella formals.

Going back centuries, the blues came from the fields, from black people living in slavery, in desperate, back-and-heart-breaking conditions. Their music spread when they were freed. As scholar Bill Malone notes.

"Emancipation saw the migration of black musicians from the country to town, from town to town, to other parts of the South, and ultimately to cities all over the North."

With roots both in sacred hymns and spirituals and in secular work chants and

field hollers, blues artists celebrated the new freedom of blacks as musicians like Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter sang. **[SING]** "If anybody asks you who made up this song, tell 'em it was Huddie Ledbetter, done been here and gone."

The blues appeared in the South toward the end of the 19th century, in states as diverse as Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Texas. In each state performers developed styles that allow the listener to distinguish between Piedmont and Mississippi Delta blue sounds. **[PLAY]**

The most dramatic chapter on the history of Delta blues artists is their journey from Mississippi to Chicago. Tens of thousands of blacks fled their rural worlds of poverty and tenant farming and sought a better life in the North. By car, bus, and train, they arrived in Chicago and their music forever marked the city.

There are many children of the blues, but arguably only one father—W.C. Handy. In part we know this because he told us so in his autobiography *Father of the Blues*. Handy got one of his first big engagements in Chicago at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. By the turn of the century, and this is no surprise to me; Handy was the leader of a band sponsored by a black fraternal organization in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Clarksdale is home to the Delta Blues Museum, and the hometown of Muddy Waters, Sam Cooke, and the Reverend C.L. Franklin (Aretha's dad).

The turning point for Handy and the blues came in 1912 when he published *Memphis Blues*, followed soon by *Saint Louis Blues* and *Beale Street Blues*. **[PLAY]** Handy's publishing opened the door for other songwriters—black and white. Handy can be credited with bringing the blues international attention. But he had help from some formidable women—Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith.

If W.C. Handy popularized folk blues, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith took the blues to the city—including Chicago and New York. Ma Rainey was famous in her own right, and secure enough, to help Bessie Smith in her career. In the 1920s, Bessie sang with the best, including Louis Armstrong, James P. Johnson, and Benny Goodman. She earned the title "Empress of the Blues." Sadly, she died in Clarksdale, Mississippi in 1937 after a car accident. Reason enough for the rest of us to sing the blues.

Another migration occurred during, and immediately after World War II. This northern migration in search of economic and social freedom brought another wave of the blues from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago and other cities. And, obviously, another wave of people. The blues are sung by and for people. The call and response is basic to the blues. **[PLAY/SING]**

In the 1940s, you might have heard T-Bone Walker, or harmonica player Sonny Terry, or boogie-woogie pianist Meade Lux Lewis. In the 1950s, Professor Longhair, a.k.a. Roy Byrd was the pioneer of New Orleans R&B, and a major

influence on Fats Domino. You might have heard his classic, "Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand." In Chicago in the 1950s, Muddy Waters and Howlin Wolf reigned—but I must point out, both came from Mississippi originally.

Like Elwood in the movie the *Blues Brothers*, Americans are clearly on a journey in search of the blues. Today, Hollywood productions, such as *The Color Purple* and *Crossroads* prominently feature traditional blues artists.

Supporting the Blues, its past, present, and future is an important part of our work at the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Endowment has a long tradition of support for projects about the Blues, including several in which I was personally involved. The Endowment has supported:

- Public lectures about the American Blues tradition hosted by Prince George's Community College in Maryland.
- Fellowships to study "Blues Music in the Mississippi Delta."
- Renovation of the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi.
- Summer seminars for teachers on "The Blues as History, Literature, and Culture" at the University of Mississippi in Oxford.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is proud to support education projects for teachers to learn how the Blues can fit into the classroom.

The blues seek to connect. The blues are America's most deeply indigenous music—and the music is a key to the history of race relations in this country. That's why the story of the blues is a significant and fascinating story, southern and American. That's why I want to spread that story. That's part of my job as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. With your indulgence I'd like to discuss how the Endowment, with your help, can preserve and disseminate such stories.

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To broaden the range of voices from the historic canon to include those of our own people, we are launching an initiative called "My History is America's History." That will use oral history to explore the lives of every American.

We also plan to create 10 regional humanities centers around the country. Regional studies have both a popular and an academic resonance. These regional

humanities centers will be hubs of research, teaching, publishing and public programs that will reach out to all segments of their community.

At the Endowment, we are also working on new uses of the Internet. For example, the Endowment recently launched a monthly electronic newsletter, NEH Outlook, which I e-mailed to many of you before I came here. Perhaps some of you saw it. If you did not, please visit our web site to subscribe. It is free, and can be found at our web site, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov).

From our web site, you can link to EDSITEment. This new NEH web site identifies the 50 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects, sites such as Edward Ayers' "The Valley of the Shadow." EDSITEment provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages.

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

Again, to learn more about the Endowment, please visit us at [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov).

The history of the blues is incredibly rich and diverse...it is America's original and most influential contribution to the world's music, and it's alive and evolving every single day.

Thank you for listening.

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: October 1999**

### **Honoring Excellence Humanities Medal Awarded to Great Americans**

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By William R. Ferris

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When Steven Spielberg strode across the stage on Sept. 29 at Washington, D.C.'s Constitution Hall to receive yet another award in his exceptional filmmaking career, it wasn't because his work entertains people. This time the award was conferred by the President of the United States in recognition of Spielberg's skill in bringing history and literature to life for millions of Americans.

Spielberg received a National Humanities Medal, sponsored annually by the White House in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), for his portrayal of World War II in his Academy Award-winning films "Saving Private Ryan" and "Schindler's List," his portrayal of the 1839 mutiny on a Spanish slave ship in "Amistad," and his portrayal of 20th-century rural African American life in "The Color Purple." In making the award, the President announced that Spielberg is making an 18-minute film that will be shown New Year's Eve at the American Millennia Celebration on the mall in Washington, D.C.

Spielberg is one of eight distinguished Americans who received NEH's 1999 National Humanities Medal from the President for distinguished contributions to the nation's cultural life. The other recipients are:

Patricia M. Battin, a librarian who organized and led a national campaign to save millions of disintegrating books published between 1850 and 1950. She galvanized congressional support for a national program to microfilm these brittle books, thereby preserving their

Garrison Keillor, the creator, writer and host of Minnesota Public Radio's weekly variety program, A Prairie Home Companion. He is also host of The Writer's Almanac, a five-minute radio program about literature broadcast daily on stations throughout the nation, and author of several bestselling books.

Jim Lehrer, journalist, editor and anchor of The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, public television's award-winning nightly news program. He has also written novels, plays and memoirs.

John Rawls, one of the 20th century's most influential political philosophers, who is widely read among political scientists, economists and legal theorists for his views on justice, basic rights and equal opportunity.

August Wilson, two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright whose plays present an epic story of the black experience in America over the course of a century. He is an influential promoter of the advancement and preservation of black theater and performing arts.

The National Humanities Medal honors individuals whose work has deepened the nation's understanding of the humanities, broadened citizens' engagement with the humanities, or helped preserve and expand Americans' access to important resources in the humanities. The humanities carry the voices of one generation to the next through history, literature, philosophy, religion, languages, archaeology and related subjects that make up the record of human civilization.

Recipients of the National Humanities

content as a significant part of the record of American civilization.

Taylor Branch, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and journalist whose books have earned him the reputation as a national authority on Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, one of the nation's preeminent scholars of the New South. She is founding director of the Southern Oral History Project at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, which is shaping scholarship, education and public programs about the contemporary South.

Medal are selected by the President of the United States. Annually NEH assists in the selection process by soliciting nominations for the medal and forwarding them to the White House for final consideration by the President.

This year's National Humanities Medalists are distinguished individuals who have set the highest standards for American cultural achievement. They are gifted people with extraordinary powers of creativity and vision, and their work in preserving, interpreting and expanding the nation's cultural heritage represents an incalculable public service.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

Federation of State Humanities Councils  
Annual Meeting  
Denver, CO  
Oct. 2, 1999

Remarks by William Ferris  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities

A hundred and thirty four years ago, after Appomattox, a surgeon in General Lee's Army of the Confederacy left camp in Virginia, and headed home to Mississippi.

He walked the whole way, keeping a diary each night. He had a lot of frightening experiences during the war. Who wouldn't, operating in makeshift hospitals without anesthesia, after some of the bloodiest battles in human history? But later he wrote that in the entire experience of that war, that final trip south was the most frightening of all.

No, I'm not talking about *Cold Mountain*.

This surgeon was real -- an ancestor of mine. I know about him because my family preserved the diaries and letters that he wrote. As they have preserved so much else. That's how I know about my immigrant ancestors -- two Dutch brothers, Dutis the Minor and Dutis the Major. Dutis the Minor took the name Minor. His descendant, John Minor, was the first Dean of the University of Virginia Law School.

It is how I know about the branch of the family that moved to Alabama -- but kept in touch over two centuries. It's how I know about a family named Ferris in Ireland -- their letters talk about the void left in villages there because so many of their friends were coming to America.

There is nothing unique about my ancestors, except in the sense that every life is unique. The richness of their lives, their involvement with the history of this country--that is shared by the ancestors of all of us in this room.

But the other day, when I sat looking at a collection of photos copied letters, and diaries one of my cousins sent me, I thought the effort of preserving it was special. And I was grateful.

Because in these people struggling to survive, struggling for education, I could see myself. They are, in effect, the collective memories of my family.

Today, I would like to talk about the way we in the humanities work together to preserve the collective memory of the human family.

I will talk about how we do that in an age when so much attention seems focused on technology.

I will talk about how the humanities can thrive in the Information Age.

And I will talk about how we can strengthen this partnership between federal and state groups, which has already accomplished so much.

We are not the first to value memory, of course.

Daniel Boorstin in his book *The Discoverers* has a wonderful chapter in which he talks about how ancient civilizations revered it.

And why not? In the days before writing, how else was wisdom to be transmitted? The Greek Goddess of Memory was a Titan. Socrates actually worried that writing could be harmful because it would "create forgetfulness in the learners' souls."

As a folklorist, I like to remind people that written literature is a recent phenomenon. Beowulf, the Iliad, the Pentateuch -- all originated as oral tradition.

At one point they existed only in the meticulously worked on memories of those who sung and chanted them.

Actually, there were those who worried when Gutenberg invented movable type -- not to mention things we don't even think of as inventions, like page numbers and a table of contents. They thought the new technology would cripple the most valuable thing we had: memory.

Today we live in an age when there is such excitement about a new form of writing technology.

This year, seven people will log onto the Internet for the first time every second. We read the Washington Post online. Those long, ornate letters of the 19th Century? Our way is to peck out hasty e-mails and press Send before we even correct the spelling.

You don't even have to write postcards anymore. Nokia has a device where you can take a picture of yourself atop, say, Pikes Peak with a digital camera, and instantly send it with a message through your cellphone to a company.

The company downloads the picture and e-mails it to your friends before you've gotten back down the mountain. For two dollars.

Amazing stuff.

But wouldn't it be the greatest irony to enter the next century with a kind of historic amnesia. Wouldn't it be sad if in the midst of our greatest economic power in history ... at a time when we have won the ideological battles of this century we lose the memory about who we are?

Wouldn't it be wrong to place these amazing technologies in our schools -- but not be able to ease a teacher shortage of over 2 million or the fact that 4 of 5 teachers say they are inadequately trained?

This is where your work is so valuable.

I see this everywhere I go.

Last year, the work you did reached audiences of more than 145 million. You sponsored discussions. You held exhibitions. You created literacy programs and Chautauqua programs. You reached people on radio and television.

You reached into every state and every territory of this country.

You created networks linking colleges, high schools and state departments of education. You made museums and libraries part of the daily lives of American families.

In Idaho, forty history teachers gather at Northwest Nazarene College to study Idaho and the American West.

In Texas, the Council for the Humanities brings teachers to weeklong workshops on ways the new technology can help classroom teachers.

In California, the California Council produces "History Alive" making students see the Gold Rush as more than an event to be memorized in a textbook.

In Louisiana and Maine and North Carolina, people with vision work out a way to teach reading that involves those who have found reading an obstacle to opportunity.

In my home state of Mississippi, the state council has begun an oral history project, getting people to talk and record the memories of their town or family.

I don't mention these projects because they are unusual. I mention them because they are typical.

They enrich the lives of everyone they reach.

Take Montana, where the Montana Historical Society brought 350 people together to examine the history of the Bozeman Trail.

For seven years in the 1860s, it was a conduit for settlers and miners, and a bloody battlefield between the U.S. Army and Sioux, Crow, Apaches and Blackfeet. It influenced the lives of thousands of Montanans who have only the vaguest idea of its existence.

Isn't that memory worth preserving -- not in a romanticized way but with realism and attention to accuracy?

I believe it is.

There are those who question the value of government's involvement in the humanities.

They argue that anything worthwhile should be accomplished by the unfettered

hand of the marketplace.

Of course, much in the humanities is.

But not everything.

I notice those who object to the public humanities don't make that argument when it comes to building a highway, or a state university -- or a pension system for working people.

The fact is, though, that just as Americans have found it useful to pool our resources when we build a road, so it is useful to become partners in the road to memory.

At a time when we spend \$8 billion a year on cosmetics in the United States do we really begrudge the NEH budget of \$110 million -- 41 cents per person?

I doubt it.

The small amount of the federal budget that supports the humanities represents a partnership -- a compact -- among Americans of every background to work together to preserve our common heritage.

And so is the partnership that we have forged between Washington and each state federation.

Two examples.

In Massachusetts, the Foundation there has a planning grant from us to develop an interactive website linking Massachusetts history museums. This will be a place where people can explore what it was like to be a child at different moments in our history. Whether its Plimouth Plantation for the 17th Century ... Paul Revere House for the 18th ... or the Tsongas Center for Industrial History for the 19th ... Massachusetts students can take advantage of these resources no matter where they live or what time of day or night.

We have also developed what we call the My History Is America's History project.

We did it with the help of Buena Vista Publishing and Genealogy.com. And the way we describe it, this is a kind of virtual "front porch" for Americans.

You will be able to visit [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org) and explore tales from history that make sense of your own lives. You can post stories or photographs online. You can discover more about your ancestors. You can search for your family online. You can create a family tree.

It shouldn't escape notice that both projects make use of the Internet.

Because, really, Socrates was wrong.

In one of the Dialogues he describes how the Egyptian God who invented letters was reproached because his discovery would make people "trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves."

But actually writing, printing, the telephone -- and now the Internet, if properly used, can enhance, enrich, and preserve memory.

At NEH that is what we intend to do.

In fact, we are working on a database for state humanities councils that will do some great things.

You will be able to use it to submit compliance data electronically. You will also have access to the aggregate statistics.

And that is just the beginning. We are going to build on this project, developing a comprehensive database on the activities of state humanities councils so if one of you gets a terrific new idea -- everybody can learn about it.

We demonstrated the website this morning. If you missed it -- we will have a second performance tomorrow.

You know, all this talk about memory reminds me of the story of Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Like my ancestors he was also in the Civil War -- on the other side. In fact there is a picture of him as a young man, standing on a battlefield with Lincoln.

He was on the Supreme Court more than 60 years later, in the early days of the Roosevelt administration. By then, he was a jurist who had personally experienced many of the events that now form the collective memory of America.

But at the end of his career his own memory was failing. And one time on a train the conductor came by to ask him for his ticket. Holmes fumbled around, patting his pockets.

The conductor recognized him, though. He said, "Don't worry, Mr. Holmes. It doesn't matter where your ticket is."

Holmes said, "I'm not worried about where my ticket is. The question is, where am I going?"

That's our question, too.

And the answer for Americans lies -- partly -- in the work we do together.

After all, just as my own family is enriched by the stories and photos we have of our own ancestors, so is the American family enriched by what we do to bring those stories alive.

So, thank you for the work you have done. Thank you for the work you will do.

In the years ahead, let us strengthen a partnership begun almost 35 years ago with technology that didn't exist and we couldn't imagine.

Let's work to strengthen our libraries.

Let's work to strengthen our schools.

Let's work to enlarge the resources of our universities.

Let's work together in every place where Americans go to look in a book, take an encyclopedia volume down from the shelf, go to hear a lecture -- or log onto the Internet.

For the path to the future opens widest to those firmly rooted in our past.

And if we strengthen our own partnership, we will strengthen those roots, whether for people in Montana wanting to learn about the settling of the west ...people in Massachusetts with a yen to experience life at Plymouth Rock ...or someone in Mississippi wanting to find out more about a young doctor taking a long walk home after a long war.

## **The English-Speaking Union**

### **Washington, DC**

**October 13, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman

National Endowment for the Humanities

Graham, thank you for your kind introduction. President Beshers and members of the English-Speaking Union, thank you all for inviting me here today. It is clear that you are a very active chapter of the ESU, with your annual Shakespeare competition, English in Action, and Scholarship programs. You are providing opportunities, changing lives, and making the nation's capital a better place to live. You have been very generous with your time, energy and money. Sir Evelyn Wrench would be very proud indeed.

We share many goals. I want to discuss some of them with you here today and explain why I think the humanities are more important than ever in this day and age. I am also here to listen to your ideas and answer any questions you might have about the Endowment.

But first let me briefly discuss the one love we all share, the love of the English language...and its entire 500,000 plus words, spoken by almost one billion people today—not bad in a world of six billion. It is a rich, vibrant, and diverse language, drawing from many sources. As Emerson said, "The English language is the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven."

It wasn't always so. When Julius Caesar invaded Britain for the second time in 54 B.C., English did not exist. By Shakespeare's day six million Englishmen spoke English, and in 1649 English replaced Latin as the language of all legal documents in England. Three centuries later, the primacy of English was clear.

In 1977, when the American spacecraft Voyager was launched toward Jupiter, it carried a greeting from the people of Earth. Kurt Waldheim of Austria, then Secretary General of the United Nations, recorded the greeting...in English.

Washington, D.C., as we all know, is an international city. And we all know that a deeper understanding of the world and its cultures is vital to our own interests as a nation. It is also in our national interest to have the world understand us better. While understanding starts with communication—and a common language helps,—and it is furthered through education.

Just as you at the English Speaking Union are, we at the Endowment are involved in such issues, we always have been, and we always will be. Shakespeare is a key part of our program...and yours. As one ESU volunteer noted, "When you

understand Shakespeare and you can show other people what he means, you feel like you've conquered the world."

At the Endowment we would like to replicate that type of feeling for every teacher and student. We too focus on the Bord to do so.

Over the last ten years, the Endowment has awarded 9.4 million dollars in grants for Shakespeare projects...including many grants to the Folger Shakespeare Library.

In fact since 1987, the Endowment has spent more than 2.5 million dollars supporting the Folger and Oregon institutes for school teachers of Shakespeare.

The Folger Shakespeare Library's institute for schoolteachers on Teaching Shakespeare, to be offered in the summer of 2000, will be the eighth time that a variation of this popular institute will be offered.

The Southern Oregon State College's Center for Shakespeare Studies has been offering its institute for schoolteachers for years. In 1999, the "Shakespeare in Ashland: Teaching from Performance" marked the 10<sup>th</sup> time this popular institute was offered. The institutes take place during the Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Lynn Rigney Schott, a teacher from the small town of Kettle Falls, Washington, took part in the 1996 Shakespeare in Performance Institute. She wrote, "Thanks to the NEH I have gained an even greater enthusiasm for Shakespeare's work and a deeper understanding of his genius. I look forward to sharing my excitement with my students."

We recently awarded the University of Pennsylvania a grant to create a Web site devoted to teaching Shakespeare through the use of digital facsimiles of historical sources related to the times and work of William Shakespeare. We are funding a project at Clemson University for South Carolina schoolteachers that will examine classical and Renaissance views of Africa and Africans as seen through four plays by William Shakespeare.

One of the more creative grants we have awarded went to a kindergarten teacher to study of the fairy tale in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. The teacher reworked the plays into appealing narratives for young children.

We are now in Phase III of our support to the Shakespeare Electronic Archive Project at MIT. Some of you may be familiar with it. This is a multimedia collection of Shakespeare's plays, film performances, and scholarly tools that will be delivered over the Internet. Much of it is now on videodisk. Students can compare clips from classic films, such as, Olivier's *Hamlet* and Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, and even Mel Gibson's *Hamlet*. Users can also display texts of Shakespeare's

plays, and access photos of theater productions, illustrations, and commentaries on the text. Through the use of the system, the text of a Shakespeare play can be juxtaposed with its performance in ways that were never possible before.

The project is also an example of how the Endowment acts as a catalyst, a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. The Gates Foundation has just given 25 million dollars to MIT to create a Virtual University based on the Shakespeare Electronic Archive Project. Soon the reach of this project will be virtually limitless.

You all remember George Bernard Shaw's witticism, "England and America are two countries separated by the same language." There is an old Hindi proverb that says "language changes every eighteen or twenty miles."

This holds true across this great country. And that's what makes our language durable and vibrant. At the Endowment, we are helping to document these differences. Frederic G. Cassidy, Professor of English, Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, is the chief editor for *The Dictionary of American Regional English*. (DARE) is a comprehensive reference work of the regional and folk speech of the U.S. The Dictionary builds on almost 100 years of archival materials and interviews with more than 3,000 people in rural and urban areas across the U.S. John Gross wrote in the New York Times, "...the dictionary will rank as one of the glories of contemporary American scholarship..." Three volumes in a series of six have been published to wide acclaim.

I think the Endowment got involved in this project in part because it is so much fun. For example, now I know what people from Wisconsin mean when they say someone "has beans up his nose," i.e. their motives are suspect. Do you know what a "bone orchard" is? A cemetery. And if you're a great dancer you "cut the pigeon wing."

Very soon the Endowment will launch a new initiative, "My History is America's History" to help all of us preserve and share family histories and treasures. This project will pull together family history so that we can all share in how each of our stories make up the multi-patterned story of America. We did it with the help of PSI Net and Genealogy.com.

This is a virtual "front porch" for Americans. Soon you will be able to visit [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org) and explore tales from history that make sense of your own lives. You can post stories or photographs online. You can discover more about your ancestors. You can search for your family online. You can create a family tree.

With the help of private funding, we will create 10 regional humanities centers around the country. These regional humanities centers will be hubs of research, teaching, publishing and public programs that will reach out to all segments of their community.

The centers will bring together teachers here and abroad, scholars, public policymakers, and learners of all ages. It is an experience that has worked incredibly well at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, where I was director for 18 years before coming to the Endowment. We found surprising—and rewarding—connections between Oxford, Mississippi, and the rest of the world.

We began a Faulkner conference there that drew numbers of participants from all over, including what was then the Soviet Union. And in turn, I headed four delegations from the United States to the Gorky Institute in Moscow. The Center became a Non-Governmental Organization of the United Nations. And its work has served as a model for similar institutions in Russia, Africa, and Australia. At the Center, with the help of a Ford Foundation grant, we joined with Columbia University's American Studies Program, the W.E.B. DuBois Institute at Harvard, and the Sorbonne for a symposium on African Americans in Europe, held in Paris.

At the Endowment, we are also working on new uses of the Internet. For example, the Endowment recently launched a monthly electronic newsletter, NEH Outlook. Perhaps you have seen it...if you did not, please visit our web site to subscribe. It is free, and can be found at our web site, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov).

From our web site, you can link to EDSITement. This new NEH web site identifies the 50 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects, sites such as Edward Ayers' "The Valley of the Shadow," which is about two towns on the opposite sides of the Civil War. EDSITement provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages.

When Joyce Taaffe, a teacher at Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia, discovered EDSITement, she wrote: "I have struck a gold mine."

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

One such school is Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, where teachers are training their students to interview neighbors about the civil rights movement. By interviewing neighbors and relatives, who vividly remember the struggle of the 1960s, students establish a personal connection to the history that surrounds them. As Elsie Lewis Bailey, the school principal says, "It's not easy down in the trenches, but with creative projects like this, we can make a difference in kids' lives."

You are making a difference in the lives of children with your work at the Bell Multicultural School here in Washington, D.C. I applaud all you for taking part in the *English in Action* program that reaches children and adults throughout the city.

Congratulations on all your great work.

Thank you for inviting me.

## **Preserving Our Heritage**

### **West Virginia Humanities Council**

#### **Charleston, West Virginia**

**October 14, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman

National Endowment for the Humanities

Ken thank you for that kind introduction. I want to congratulate you, the staff of the West Virginia Humanities Council, Joseph Jefferds, your Board of Directors, and the many people doing such great work for the Humanities here in West Virginia. I am very excited to be here during your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

Governor Underwood, Mrs. Underwood, and members of the state legislature, thank you for coming. David Ice, Secretary of Education and the Arts, congratulations on the 136<sup>th</sup> birthday of the state of West Virginia. I especially want to thank you all for your generous support for the humanities here in West Virginia. The state has increased its annual appropriation from \$250,000 to \$300,000 this year...that puts West Virginia in the top tier of state support to the humanities. It is more than just the money though, when the top elected officials in the state come out for an event such as this, they are showing all citizens how important the humanities are to our daily lives. Congratulations to all of you.

I am flattered you asked me to deliver the eighteenth annual McCreight lecture in the Humanities.

To follow in the footsteps of, among others, Senator Byrd, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Ken Burns and Mary Lee Settle is indeed an honor...especially when Dr. Willard McCreight is here as well as Betsy McCreight's sister, Sally Richardson and her husband, Don.

As you all know, this lecture honors Betsy McCreight who helped build the foundation for the West Virginia Humanities Council. She was here at the very beginning, a founding Board member in 1974, and served as Treasurer, Vice-President, and President during her tenure. She worked hard for the state of West Virginia; she also worked hard for the whole country as President of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils. Her legacy serves as both an example and an inspiration to us all.

I know Ken Sullivan has been inspired. He has only been Executive Director here

for two years, but already he has done the unexpected. He and his staff have taken a great state program and made it even better. As a fellow folklorist, I am not surprised. I have long admired his fine work as editor of Goldenseal Magazine and his folklore programs in West Virginia.

Among other projects, Ken has an ambitious capital campaign underway to preserve the historic Hubbard House.

Ken's effort to save this landmark is a perfect example of what I want to talk about tonight—preserving our heritage. The First Presbyterian Church knew it inherited a significant property that needed preservation. The Kanawha Valley Historical and Preservation Society started the campaign to raise awareness of the significance of Hubbard House. The newspaper took up the story, and the whole community got behind the effort.

When it is refurbished the entire community will benefit from the House because its historic downstairs rooms will be used for public humanities programs.

The Hubbard House has a rich, fascinating history. Part of that history includes its use as hospital for Union troops during the Civil War. On September 13, 1862, Confederate General Loring fired a cannonball from across the river, about where the University of Charleston is now. It went right through the roof of the Hubbard House. Somehow, some way, somebody preserved that cannonball over all these decades. It was presented to the West Virginia Humanities Council this past June by the First Presbyterian Church. The cannonball was nicely wrapped in a white package with lime green ribbon—quite a contrast to how it was originally presented. The Hubbard House is only a mile from here, I urge you all to stop by and see it soon. I couldn't drag the house here, but I do have the cannonball. Here it is...[Chairman Ferris produces cannonball] What a story. What a symbol.

And it just happens to remind me of another great Civil War story. One with a lighter note. (As a folklorist, Ken knows it is a very dangerous thing to put a folklorist in front of a live, captive audience. The stories just keep coming.)

Now that folktale tells us a lot about the south. Noted civil war historian Shelby Foote was in Washington, D.C. recently to speak with members of Congress about the humanities and how important region and history are to our country. You might know him from his multi-volume history of the civil war, his fiction, or his appearance on Ken Burns's *The Civil War*. Shelby was kind enough to speak at the Endowment and someone asked him why southerners are so obsessed with the Civil War. Shelby paused and said that he had had a few fistfights in his younger years—and won most of them. But he said the ones most vivid in his memory... were the ones he lost.

Through his many historical works, Shelby Foote has preserved an important part of our nation's heritage. The West Virginia Humanities Council is doing the same thing in this great state. And we can all do it on a personal level, through family

history...Let me tell you a true story...a serious one...

A hundred and thirty four years ago, after Appomattox, a surgeon in General Lee's Army of the Confederacy left camp in Virginia, and headed home to Mississippi. He walked the whole way, keeping a diary each night. He had a lot of frightening experiences during the war. Who wouldn't, operating in makeshift hospitals without anesthesia, after some of the bloodiest battles in human history? But later he wrote that in his entire experience of that war, that final trip south was the most frightening of all.

This surgeon was an ancestor of mine. I know about him because my family preserved the diaries and letters that he wrote. As they have preserved so much else.

There is nothing unique about my ancestors, except in the sense that every life is unique. The richness of their lives, their involvement with the history of this country--is shared by the ancestors of all of us here tonight. But the other day, as I looked at a collection of family photos, copied letters, and diaries I realized that in the stories of my ancestors struggling to survive, struggling for education, I could see myself. They are, in effect, the collective memories of my family.

It is my job to preserve these stories for my family. It is your job to preserve your stories for your family. It is our job to preserve West Virginia's stories for this state and the nation. And it is our job to preserve America's stories for our country and the world.

In essence, that is what we do at the National Endowment for the Humanities. We preserve and disseminate crucial American stories.

The Endowment is a small agency. Ours is a modest budget, only \$110 million. Our mission is to bring the humanities into every home in the country. We do that by awarding grants to America's schools, colleges, universities, libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, teacher training, scholarly research, public programs, and special projects. For more than thirty-four years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence.

Our guiding theme as we steer toward the new millennium is "Rediscovering America." This term focuses on preserving and capturing American stories and American traditions.

We believe that every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom--and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down on the front of the bus and fought for hers.

Through such stories we connect to other people and other cultures. Through stories we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation. Through such shared stories we create a sense of community.

Why are all these stories so important?

Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson has warned, "We confront the danger of historical amnesia. As the sources for understanding our national past deteriorate and vanish, we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

This cannonball is a source for understanding, Hubbard House is a source for understanding, the soon to be published West Virginia Encyclopedia will be an incredible source for understanding.

I just attended a workshop with Ken Sullivan about state encyclopedias. I cannot wait to see yours when it is done next year...2,500 entries from people all over the state covering the history of the Mountain State...its people, culture, folklore, agriculture, architecture, handcrafts, government, fine arts, festivals, archaeology, towns, cities, and literature. That's just one of the many important services the West Virginia Humanities Council is providing. The Council's current five year theme is "Making Connections: The Ways of Community."

Well, the Council is making thousands of connections in communities across this great state...The list is long....

Medical Ethics forums in Beckley, Bluefield, Wheeling, and Elkins.

The spring bus tour to the eastern mountains and southern coalfields...with stops in Helvetia...Droop Mountain Battlefield to learn about famous Civil War battles....Pence Springs...and Thurmond.

Teacher seminars throughout the state on such topics as folklore, the Arab Middle East, the classical Greek world, women's history, the Civil War, and Shakespeare.

Traveling exhibits--free of charge--on the Bill of Rights, the Marshall Plan, the U.S. Senate, Martin Luther King, and William Wordsworth.

The *History Alive!* program is especially exciting for children and adults. West Virginia scholars portray famous figures from history such as William Casey Marland, Pearl Buck, Ida B. Wells, Dr. Henry Ruffner, and Booker T. Washington.

That is why the West Virginia Humanities Council is so important. And that's why the Endowment is so proud to work with you.

In the last five years, institutions and individuals in West Virginia have received more than 2.1 million dollars from the Endowment for a variety of projects that

help to preserve cultural heritage, foster lifelong learning, and encourage civic involvement. The Endowment has awarded grants to Montserrat Miller at Marshall University, Mark MacWilliams at Bethany College, and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and John McKivigan at West Virginia University. And the Endowment is supporting the creation of a CD-Rom and teachers guide on the history of coal mining in West Virginia

The Endowment is also supporting the preservation of historic newspapers. More than 1,100 historic newspapers covering the early history of the state are being cataloged and microfilmed.

These West Virginia programs reflect what we are doing on a national level.

This fall, the Endowment will launch an exciting new initiative, "My History is America's History" to help all of us preserve and share family histories and treasures. This project will pull together family history so that we can understand how each of our stories make up the multi-patterned story of America. We did it with the help of PSI Net and Genealogy.com.

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We also plan to create 10 regional humanities centers around the country. Regional studies have both a popular and an academic resonance. These regional humanities centers will be hubs of research, teaching, publishing and public programs that will reach out to all segments of their community.

At the Endowment, we are also working on new uses of the Internet. For example, the Endowment recently launched a monthly electronic newsletter, NEH Outlook, which I e-mailed to many of you before I came here. Perhaps some of you saw it. If you did not, please visit our web site to subscribe. It is free, and can be found at our web site, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov).

From our web site, you can also link to EDSITEment. This new NEH web site identifies the 50 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects, sites such as Edward Ayers' "The Valley of the Shadow," which is about two towns on the opposite sides of the Civil War. EDSITEment provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages.

Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching of the humanities. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

As you can see, we are busy working for all Americans. We all have an important story to tell...and preserve.

I believe that each of us defines ourself through the place where we were born and raised. The sense of place shapes each of us in deep and lasting ways. Each of us carries within ourself a "little postage stamp of native soil," as William Faulkner put it. It is to this place that each of us goes to find our clearest, deepest sense of identity.

Eudora Welty whose ancestors are from West Virginia, celebrated her 90th birthday last year. Eudora has written that a "sense of place" is what gives us equilibrium...."It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are."

I believe that these places, memories and values—our heritage-- are essential to life and should not be abandoned in the name of progress. We must preserve and pass on the best of the past.

A native West Virginia said it well. Author Cynthia Rylant may live on the west coast now, but West Virginia memories are still with her. This is how she recalls her childhood...

*I remember always feeling a part of a really large family of about 100 people in Cool Ridge, West Virginia. I regarded all the adults as parents and felt looked after by everybody, so I grew up feeling really safe and welcome, welcome into everybody's home, safe knowing I could go into anybody's home for help.*

What a precious, powerful memory of a very special place.

Thank you for inviting me to your special state.

###

**Starr Foundation**

**New York City**

**October 22, 1999**

**William Ferris, Chairman**

**National Endowment for the Humanities**

Thank you, Florence (Davis), for inviting me here, and thanks to each of you for coming today. For over three decades, the National Endowment for the Humanities has jointly supported projects with many of you the foundation's represented here:

- With the Starr and Luce Foundations we supported a Yale University Press project on Chinese culture and art.
- With the Ford Foundation, we supported ACLS and SSRC area studies programs, and
- With Ford and Luce we provided support for ASIANetwork, to cite just a few examples.

It is a privilege for me to be here today, to have this opportunity to explore areas of shared interest, and to consider ways we might work together.

We all know that understanding the world and its cultures is vital to our own interests as a nation. No one here needs to be convinced of that.

The greatest problem is that a large portion of the American people do not understand why what happens thousands of miles away matters to us as a nation.

While our production of International knowledge and the scholarly enterprise has grown, we have failed to share this knowledge with wider audiences.

The United States has developed a strong, sophisticated infrastructure for the study of other cultures. I am proud to say that for thirty four years the National Endowment for the Humanities has contributed to this effort in many ways... through support for individual scholarship; for the development of research tools such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, bibliographies, and historical atlases; by training teachers at all levels; and by producing teaching materials, most recently through web technology.

While this work does not often attract public attention, sometimes we are pleasantly surprised. At the White House in October of 1997, the President of China presented President Clinton with *Three-thousand Years of Chinese Painting*. The volume, the first of a projected 75 volumes on Chinese culture and civilization, is the result of collaboration between scholars in the US and China, and was supported by Starr Foundation, Luce Foundation and Endowment grants to Yale University Press.

- NEH funds Americans who work with international scholars on various projects, that range from an archaeological dig in Peru to the *Oxford History of the British Empire*.
- NEH supports resources for the study of other cultures, such as the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, *A Directory of Collections for African Studies in the US*, and a translation of Mao Zedong's speeches and writings.
- We support the preservation of brittle books, such as works dealing with Italian history and pre-Soviet law at Harvard, the Arabic collection at Princeton, and Soviet legislative documents and materials documenting the career of Juan Peron at Stanford.
- NEH summer seminars and institutes on topics, such as Japanese cultural history and "Church and Society in Modern Russia," help undergraduate faculty and high school teachers deepen their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

In the last four years, the Endowment has contributed more than \$107 million to programs that address the history and culture of other nations.

The greatest problem facing each of us is that a large portion of the American people do not understand that what happens beyond our borders matters to us as a nation.

We live in a Global Village where many Americans do not know their neighbors. Americans do not understand the history and culture of the rest of the world. There is a large gap between scholarship and public understanding, and as the world gets smaller each day, this gap gets wider.

We must work together to close this gap.

At NEH we plan to support the creation of teaching materials for school and college curricula. These resources will harness new technology we are supporting online materials for teaching Russian language and culture, and a CD-ROM database on "Art and Life in Africa."

We will encourage education school faculty to work closely with humanities faculty, as we are doing with a grant to the World History Association.

We will encourage public programs that address topics dealing with other cultures their religious beliefs, their history, their literature, music and dance through rapid responses to "hot spots" in the world we will of engage public study of topics such as the history of the Balkans, Islamic fundamentalist movements, and the history of India and Pakistan's struggle over Kashmir. Our goal is to create public engagement with cultures and peoples before they become "hot spots" and grab the headlines.

Through documentary films, websites, discussion and reading groups in public libraries, and museum programs, we will build a foundation for understanding other cultures and countries.

Last year, the White House requested an NEH-funded film, "The Gate of Heavenly Peace," as one of its briefing materials before President Clinton went to China. The film is about the pro-democracy movement in China and has also been used as a resource on Capitol Hill.

These goals cannot be achieved by any one institution acting in isolation. We are here today in search of partners.

Here with me today are Christine Kalke, who coordinates our international activities through our office of Strategic Planning; Bruce Robinson, senior academic advisor in the NEH's Division of Education, and Nancy Sturm, head of our Enterprise Office.

Chris chairs the NEH International Working Groups that over the last six months has reviewed NEH's 35-year history of support for projects on the history and culture of other nations. The group has set forth a number of recommendations for ways our agency can focus its resources on the issues I described earlier. We are honored to have this opportunity to talk with you today about International education and how we might work together.

Thank you.

**Community College Humanities Association  
National Conference  
Chicago, Ill  
Oct. 29, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities

Dr. Mittelstet, thank you for that kind introduction.

For a folklorist from Mississippi who plays the blues, a trip to Chicago is natural – Sweet Home Chicago, to borrow from bluesman Robert Johnson.

And Chicago is the perfect place for this meeting. Carl Sandburg's "city of the big shoulders" is in many ways a city that symbolizes the spirit of community colleges with their inclusive approach, in the tradition of Sandburg and Lincoln, Studs Terkel and Muddy Waters.

The tenements and clubs of post-World War II Chicago were fertile soil for blues from the Mississippi Delta, when thousands of black Americans fled rural poverty and tenant farming for a better life in the North.

McKinley Morganfield was born in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, in 1915 and raised by his grandmother on the Stovall Plantation near the town of Clarksdale. He learned to sing while he worked in the cotton fields, and he got his nickname because he was fond of playing in a muddy creek.

Muddy Waters left the Mississippi Delta for Chicago in the early 1940s, and his electric guitar defined the Chicago blues sound.

What does this all have to do with the humanities? Everything.

The blues tell stories – stories that have as much to say to people in the urban north as to those in the rural south, to whites as to blacks. As they moved up the river, their character changed from country to city. But wherever the blues are played, they tell our story.

The humanities – history, literature, philosophy, religion – together tell our story as a nation. It is the humanities, which will guide us into the new millennium with a sense of enduring values. This anchor in our past gives us the stability to chart new courses for our future.

Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863 and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No

American should forget how Frederick Douglas stood up and fought for his freedom – and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down in front of the bus and fought for hers.

Through such stories, we connect to other people and other cultures. Through such stories, we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation.

Music is a window on our culture as Americans – and in my case as a southerner.

It was music that led me to folklore. To underscore the importance of oral history in understanding a culture, especially Southern culture, let me tell you of my story.

My first playmates were black children whose parents lived and worked on my family's farm in Mississippi. They sometimes took me to Rose Hill Church on the farm, where I first heard powerful black spirituals. The congregation sang straight from the heart, without hymnals. Their great unwritten history was transmitted through their sacred music.

As a teenager, I discovered a blues singer named Lovey Williams who performed at his home in a little crossroads community called Rising Sun. Lovey played with a driving raw sound that would make you weep.

I knew this was a special sound. It was different from those you heard on the radio. During college vacations in the early '60s, I taped Lovey Williams' blues and religious services at Rose Hill Church. I began to collect stories and songs all over Mississippi, from mule traders to quilt makers.

I didn't know quite what to do with those tapes of music and those tales. They were not accepted as serious work in English departments. After finishing my master's degree in English at Northwestern University, I spent a year at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, where I met a professor from Ohio State. When he learned about my tape recordings, he said, "Go into folklore, young man." It was as though he had handed me the keys to the kingdom.

Regions define our voices as teachers, as writers, as musicians. The South, where I grew up, inspired literary and musical voices that are now part of the canon of American culture. The blues are central to any understanding of the South as a region.

Through music, we understand how regional culture bridges diverse worlds in a special way. Through the blues, we can trace African roots in the rural South that shaped country blues. Let me show you what I

mean...

Play – "Baby Please Don't Go"

Alongside the blues, country music was birthed in the South from the British Ballad, the song that tells a story. Hank Williams, the father of Honky Tonk music, was influenced by the ballad as well as a local blues street singer in his Alabama town named Tee Tot. I'd like to play something by Hank Williams...

Play – "Honky Tonk Blues"

Things changed again in the 1950s with the beginning of the Civil Rights movement and the birth of rock 'n roll, which served as a bridge between black and white musical worlds. Elvis Presley, the father of white rock 'n roll, was heavily influenced by the blues. And Muddy Waters is in both the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Muddy once remarked that "the blues had a baby and they called it Rock and Roll." I'd like to play one more piece for you ...

Play – "Be Bopalula"

The legacy of the Chess Record Company and great artists such as Muddy Waters continues today. I hope many of you have the chance to hear the blues while you're here.

I said that Chicago symbolizes the spirit of community colleges. Poets have seen this city as a place with a strong back and a democratic spirit ...a place where every human being as worth and ability.

Poem – "John Lee Hooker" by Sterling Plumpp

Community colleges are probably the most democratic educational institutions in the nation. They serve all people – in the inner cities, in the suburbs and in isolated rural areas. Wherever you live in this country, there is a community college. You give many first, a second or a third chance. You serve women who stayed home to raise children, factory workers who need skills for new jobs, recent immigrants and retired workers.

Yous is a uniquely American approach to education – available to people of all ages and backgrounds. And that is exactly what we are trying to do at the endowment – to reach out to all Americans wherever they live, whatever their background ... to reaffirm their history and their culture through the humanities.

Community colleges are a critical partner in this endeavor. Half our

nation's undergraduates are trained humanities in your classrooms. That is a staggering figure. And for many of these students, the only humanities courses they will ever take is at the community college. So the role of community college faculty in humanities education in this country is enormous.

In recognition of the important role of community colleges, we gave David Berry, the Executive Director of your association, our highest honor – the National Humanities Medal. He was the first community college educator to receive this award.

Everyone here knows of David's tremendous contribution to the advancement of the humanities in community colleges. And in Washington, we know what an effective fund raiser he is for humanities projects.

When President Clinton conferred this honor on David Berry, he called community colleges "remarkable institutions" that offer opportunities to people who once would never have been able to dream of them.

NEH also acknowledged the central role of community colleges in the humanities by asking Alicia Juarreo of Prince George's Community College in Maryland to serve on our National Council. Alicia is here today, and I thank her for her contributions.

NEH awarded Prince George's Community College a grant that enabled 20 members of their humanities faculty to study mythology with the noted classicist, Bernard Knox. The project led several participants to publish papers in scholarly journals and greatly improved the visibility of the humanities on campus. The college has since received grants from the state of Maryland for a public lecture series on mythology and additional NEH grants to host summer institutes for college teachers on Greek culture, for programs for school teachers on African-American history and to create a series of public programs on the blues in which I participated before coming to NEH.

Community colleges set the standard for what has become a major trend in higher education – connecting students and classes with their community.

Because you are so well connected to your communities, you will be an important part of our initiative to create 10 regional humanities centers throughout the nation. These centers will serve as cultural hubs to promote teacher institutes, museum exhibits, cultural tourism and television and radio programs on each region.

Planning grants will be announced next month, and I encourage you to

be in touch with the application institutions to let them know how you would like your interests represented. We are anxious to know what your needs are.

We have already begun to work together on some exciting projects. Montgomery College in Maryland is using an NEH Challenge Grant to endow a humanities institute in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution. Many of you heard about their program yesterday. College faculty and students will participate in joint seminars, the first of which was a huge success. It was on the African Diaspora, taught by Dr. Rex Ellis, director of the Smithsonian's Center for Museum Studies. The first class of 14 fellows passed their new knowledge on to more than 500 students. The work is on both CD-ROM and cable television.

The seminar topic this year is "300 Years of the American Worker." Next year it will be "Humanities and Technology." This is a very exciting project.

We also expect community colleges to be an important part of our "My History is America's History" project which will encourage every American to discover his or her family history.

This project is a virtual "front porch" for Americans. You will be able to visit [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org) and create a family tree. My History will allow each of us to place our genealogy and family stories on the Internet, and then to explore time lines that show how our family history connects to national and international events.

We know that millions of Americans are dedicated historians without knowing it. They compile photo albums, collect antiques, keep diaries.

But "history" as it is often presented in textbooks leaves many people cold. "My History is America's History" will help Americans see history as a living world. We want to capture and preserve American stories and traditions before they are lost.

We have already begun work with community colleges in this area. The NEH has funded a family history project for CCHA called "Faces of America." The pilot program is at San Diego Mesa College, whose president Constance Carroll is here today. The project will gather family photographs from area residents, exhibit the photos and hold discussions on how these photos relate to national events and traditions. This is exactly the kind of effort "My History is America's History" will support. We have brochures on My History available here today.

NEH also is funding a project for CCHA called "Advancing the Humanities through Technology." I congratulate the colleges chosen last week to

develop plans that use technology to improve the study of humanities texts and topics. For any of you missed the deadline – or whose proposal was not accepted – I encourage you to inquire about humanities focus grants available directly from the NEH. Bonnie Gould and Judy Jeffrey Howard are here with me to answer your questions.

As Americans increasingly embrace technology, NEH supports new opportunities to enhance their experience with the humanities.

We have launched Schools for a New Millennium, a three-year initiative for schools – in partnership with local colleges, their community and local businesses – to develop digital resources for the humanities classroom.

We have our first awards to 20 schools across the country. Two middle schools in Naples, Florida, are developing a web-based course on the migrant experience for children of migrant workers. A high school in Grinnell, Iowa, is working on an interdisciplinary 10th – grade American history and literature course on the Great Depression, using online materials. An elementary school in Washington state is developing a new curriculum on the history of the Pacific Rim, using digital resources.

The future of the humanities – as it always has – lies with the American people ... and that is exactly where community colleges stand.

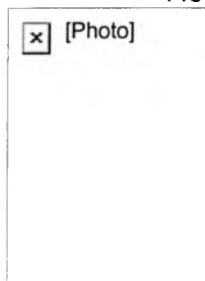
When he gave David Berry his medal, President Clinton remarked that community colleges, by putting the humanities "front and center," are inspiring citizens of the next century.

Indeed, your institutions make real Thomas Jefferson's 200-year-old ideal of an enlightened citizenry. We salute you and want to be your partner at every step of this journey.

I would like to close with a bit of musical history that has a special connection to Chicago and the worlds of Chess Records.

Play – "Hey Bodiddley"

More of the Chairman's columns are available [here](#).



## **News USA: November 1999**

### **Telling America's Stories History as a Family Adventure**

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By William R. Ferris

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With the arrival of holidays, we often share family stories when we gather at meals. At these times each of us becomes a historian without being aware of it, as we pass along family stories, like heirlooms, from generation to generation. Through our own family history, we are part of an ancestral legacy that connects us to national events in American history. So when we tell our family's stories, we discover American history in a very personal way.

Family stories are the heart of *My History Is America's History*, a program created by the National Endowment for the Humanities to mark the millennium. We created My History because we firmly believe that family stories are national treasures that offer each of us an important personal relationship with America. Through these stories, we connect in a profound way with both the history of our family and that of the nation.

My History helps us rediscover America as we establish our family's ties to American history through stories that are near and dear to our heart. Whatever our age, when we explore family traditions, we acquire a deeper knowledge of our roots, and we discover how national events in American history have touched our life and the lives of our ancestors. Many Americans are already preserving their family histories, but for those of us who need help in getting started, My History offers important support. Each of us inherits rich, complex stories from our family, and with the help of My History, preserving these stories will become an exciting adventure for the entire nation.

The project's website -- <http://www.myhistory.org/> -- serves as a virtual "front porch," where we invite each American to pull up a chair and add his or her family stories to an online archive. Like the many colors in a patchwork quilt, each family story will contribute an important piece to our nation's story.

At NEH we believe that each and every family story is important. Your family stories define you as an individual, just as they connect you to distant places and significant events in American history. It is time to celebrate these stories and to see how they fit together to tell the great story of America's history. The arrival of the millennium is an exciting historical moment, and we can be sure that future generations will look back and reflect on its meaning. Through My History each of us will make the millennium a personal event that will be long remembered.

Imagine what your family's history would mean to you had it been collected by earlier generations. You owe it to yourself and to those generations who will follow to explore your own family and their connections to American history. Through My History, you can create a personal time capsule whose value will grow for each generation that follows you. So take a few hours this week and begin your own journey as you discover the history of your family and of America.

For more information, please call NEH toll free at 1-877-NEH-HISTORY, or check our website at <http://www.myhistory.org/>.

*William R. Ferris is chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

My History's guidebook provides tools that will help you preserve your own family stories. Among these tools are sample questions to use when you interview your relatives; tips on preserving family photographs, letters and videotapes; and classroom projects in family history for students. My History shows you how to keep a journal, interview relatives, do genealogical research, and organize family activities such as quilting. You can also create a family history museum, compile a family cookbook, make a family photo album, collect oral histories of relatives on tape, and much more.

## **The Humanities in the Digital Age**

### **UMBC Address**

**November 10, 1999**

William Ferris, Chairman

National Endowment for the Humanities

Tom, thank you for your kind introduction and thank you for inviting me here. I understand the university was recently named as one of "America's one hundred most wired colleges." That is a great accomplishment.

My congratulations to you, Tom, on your new position as head of the Center for the Humanities here. Under your leadership, I know the Center will continue to excel as it has under Daphne Harrison. Professor Harrison and I share both a love of the humanities and a love of the blues—of the great female vocalists like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Clara Smith, and Ida Cox.

UMBC's chair of Modern Languages and Linguistics, Professor Angela Moorjani, has said, "The very essence of the humanities is that they challenge us to ask the hard questions of life." I couldn't agree more.

I want to explore how the humanities can flourish in the decades ahead, the digital decades. How can we use technology to expand our reach? to link scholars with students of all ages and with the general public?

The humanities are more important than ever before in the digital age. Here at UMBC, your programs address both technology and the values of our society. Let me mention a few.

- There is the Meyerhoff Scholars program, which was singled out as a success story by the College Board Task Force.
- There is the Research Park's new tenant RWD Technologies with its new Applied Technology Laboratory.
- There is Shriver Center's Community Led Education and Reduction Corps combating lead poisoning, which recently received \$2.3 million from HUD.
- The Shriver Center was also recognized for its leadership in developing student character. The Templeton Guide called it a prototype for urban education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Years ago, the scientist and novelist C.P. Snow wrote of his time, "Literary intellectuals at one pole--at the other scientists.... Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension."

As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can't afford a "gulf of mutual incomprehension" between humanists and scientists. UMBC has an important role to play as a model.

Let me talk for a moment about my own agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities. We have a budget of \$110 million and we are bringing the humanities into every home in the country. We do that by awarding grants to America's schools, colleges, universities (such as UMBC), libraries, museums, archives, and public radio and television stations. These grants are used for cultural preservation projects, for teacher training, scholarly research, public programs, and special projects. For more than thirty-four years, the Endowment has fostered individual and institutional excellence.

Every American should know what Lincoln said at Gettysburg in 1863, and what Martin Luther King Jr. said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. No American should forget how Frederick Douglass stood up and fought for his freedom--and how, one hundred years later, Rosa Parks sat down on the front of the bus and fought for hers.

Through such stories we connect to other people and other cultures. Through stories we pass on to the next generation the principles that define our nation. Through such shared stories we create a sense of community.

Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson has warned us of the danger of what he calls "historical amnesia."

"As the sources for understanding our national past deteriorate and vanish," he said, "we will gradually lose our sense of identity, our capacity to understand who and what we are, how we got that way, and why."

That is why the Center for the Humanities and the university itself are so important. And that is why we want to continue to work with you.

Twenty years ago, the Endowment helped the foreign language program here get started with two grants. A pilot grant of \$50,000 in 1979, and an implementation grant of \$200,000 in 1982.

With grants this past year the Endowment helped Professor Suzy Anger with her work on "The Priority of Ethics," and Deborah Hellman with her work on "Two Concepts of Discrimination." And we just funded an important project of the

Linguistics and English Departments on Caribbean Culture. This eighteen-month research effort, directed by Alex Nathan, will cover history, literature, music, art, folkways, and film. It will result in upper-level undergrad and graduate courses in French and Spanish, and a general education course in English—all on Caribbean culture.

And to we share another important link: When she is not working as a program officer at the Endowment, our own Janet Edwards is an adjunct faculty member at UMBC. We are both fortunate.

At UMBC and at the Endowment, we all know technology is a powerful tool. Technology can take us virtually anywhere, anytime, and that is both a blessing, and a challenge.

You see the blessing in all this wired university is doing, including online information describing the impressive collections of the Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery where we meet today.

Today's students have grown up online. The wired world is familiar to them, they know how to navigate--but they come to this university to learn how to make judgments...to learn how to separate the wheat from the chaff on the web. You are helping them do that here at UMBC.

What can the Endowment do to help? From our support of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Dartmouth Dante Database in the 1970s to Web sites that were launched last month, the Endowment has worked to harness new technologies for the humanities.

At the Endowment, we are working on new uses of the Internet. For example, this year the Endowment launched a monthly electronic newsletter, NEH Outlook, which I e-mailed to many of you before I came here. Perhaps some of you saw it. If you did not, please visit our web site to subscribe. It is free, and can be found at our web site, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov). We are thrilled with its continuing success. In just seven months, our listserv has grown from 11,000 to more than 18,000 subscribers. We will have our new website up next week with sound recording and motion pictures being streamed out to users.

It will serve as the home base for EDSITEment, our nationwide effort with MCI that identifies 65 best educational web sites in English, history and other humanities subjects. Just one example, Edward Ayers' "The Valley of the Shadow" tells about two towns on opposite sides in the Civil War. EDSITEment provides a single, accessible site for parents, professors, and students of all ages.

The MCI Foundation underwrote the initial \$500,000 start-up cost in 1997, and MCI WorldCom Foundation has granted an additional \$500,000. The money will enable NEH to double the number of outstanding humanities sites on EDSITEment to 100 in the next two years. Just last month, EDSITEment had 57,000 "user

sessions," not hits, user sessions.

That is just one part. Through a new initiative called "Schools for a New Millennium," NEH has awarded grants to 20 schools nationwide to develop models of how to use computer technology to enrich teaching. At these schools, teachers are working with scholars and consultants to integrate high-tech resources, including computers, CDs, cable TV and more, into the humanities curriculum.

These are important, innovative technology projects. They provide new avenues for learning, for communicating. But there are deep challenges for our society as a whole, troubles for which the humanities will help to find some answers.

The events of this past week demonstrate the challenge: in Honolulu seven shot and killed, in Seattle, two shot and killed. In Wyoming a second conviction in the beating death of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard. At our schools and in our communities we confront violence.

Such events have become all too common in recent years. When I was at Indiana University in September, they were still mourning the loss of student Won-Joon Yoon, who was shot on the Fourth of July by a man on a shooting spree. Indiana professor warned, "People who think that school violence is a passing tragedy that will go away are really kidding themselves. A tremendous effort from many sectors that goes beyond the schoolyard will be needed before this problem is eradicated." That means we all have to ask how we can help.

I believe this dilemma is one of the "hard questions of life," Professor Moorjani talking about when she said the essence of the humanities is that they challenge us. We stand challenged today.

One psychiatrist has defined evil as, "militant ignorance." At the Endowment, we do seek to make connections...to remind all citizens of their connection to the past, their connection to place, their connection to each other.

At the Endowment we have two new initiatives designed to help Americans do just that. This Thanksgiving we will launch an initiative called "My History is America's History," an NEH project in cooperation with the White House Millennium Council. It encourages each of us preserve our family stories as a link to our country's history. We have a guidebook that explains how to tape a grandfather's story, how to find clues in old photographs. Our website is already up, and you can download the guidebook yourself and put your own family stories on it. The address is **[www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)**. We have some wonderful partners--Genealogy.com, PSINet Inc., the National Association of Broadcasters, Family Fun magazine.

As we look at our families, we also look at the places we live. In another major initiative, we are creating 10 regional centers around the country. These will explore how different parts of the country have shaped us.

The writer Eudora Welty, who comes from my own Mississippi and who celebrated her 90th birthday last year, writes eloquently about the "sense of place." She agrees that it is what gives us equilibrium, for "it is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are."

These regional humanities centers will be hubs of research, teaching, publishing and public programs that will reach out to all segments of their community. They will create new collaborations among scholars and institutions throughout each region. And they will provide resources for healing and understanding as they deal with regional issues of race, gender and class—lessons that we learned repeatedly at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, where I spent 18 years.

These programs will help to combat "militant ignorance." Both as educators, and as humanists; we must embrace the great American stories from our past and present. We must talk about our heroes—great heroes and everyday heroes in town meetings, in classrooms, on the web and on the street corner. We must remind all that what unites us as a nation is a belief in tolerance, and a commitment to diversity. As UMBC demonstrates, this is a dream that can be achieved.

This is a wonderful, energetic campus. Thank you for inviting me.

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## **Humanities Council of Washington, D.C.**

### **Public Humanities Awards**

**16 November 1999**

#### **William Ferris, Chairman NEH**

Linn, thank you for your kind introduction. I am happy to be here for your 1999 Public Humanities Awards. The work you do is essential to the life of this great city.

Linn is somewhat new as executive director, but certainly not new to the humanities. She worked at the National Endowment years ago. Congratulations on your new job; the Council will have a fine future with you as executive director. I know that the Council has a fine future because there is a fine past to build upon thanks to Alice Norris, the chair of the council. We also have Council member Charlene Drew Jarvis here. Thank you for your support of the humanities. Clearly, there is no lack of leadership in this room tonight.

For a strong nation, we need people who understand their past and who can envision their future. That's why the public humanities are so important. For decades now, the D.C. Humanities Council and the National Endowment have worked together to protect our past and to secure our future.

Let me tell you tonight about two exciting new projects to carry the humanities into even more places.

We want to broaden the range of voices we hear when we talk about our history. To do this, this Thanksgiving we are launching an initiative called "My History is America's History." It is an NEH project in partnership with the White House Millennium Council. Its message is that each of us has a story to tell that links us to our country's history. What we are saying is: "Follow your family's history and discover America's history." We have produced a guidebook that tells how to save old family documents and photographs. Beginning November 21st, we will also have a website [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org). There, we will all be able to share our histories together.

The second project is about sharing not only our stories but the place where we live. To open our history to different voices we plan to create 10 regional humanities centers around the country. America is a nation of regions. Eudora Welty, who celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday last year, says that a "sense of place" is what gives us equilibrium... "It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are."

The future of the humanities is the public humanities. Our survival as humanities professionals rests on how successfully we can reach the widest possible public. Clearly, you know "where you stand." You are reaching out to citizens all over the district to preserve local history and culture and doing a great job—as you have for the past nineteen years.

One clear example is the Writers Corp program, which recently won a "Coming Up Taller Award from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. I was there at the ceremony when Isaac Colon III, a very talented young poet, read one of his poems—which the crowd loved.

And the Endowment is proud to be working with you on the Folklife Festival on the Mall for next year when Washington, D.C. will be one of the featured locales.

The many voices of this place come together in an appropriate way tonight. The featured speaker is a woman who has spoken in many ways—as an instrument of learning, as a clarion of civil rights, as the uplifting voice of Sweet Honey in the Rock. She is now the Distinguished Professor of History at the American University, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon.

I have known Bernice since the early 60s when she organized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's *Freedom Singers*. She took the song *We Shall Overcome* all over the south and made it an anthem. She once said that *We Shall Overcome*, "released a kind of power and required a level of concentrated energy I did not know I had." Now we all know about Bernice's power, her concentrated energy, and I would add-- her courage. At a pivotal time, a volatile time, in this nation's civil rights struggle, Bernice Johnson Reagon was on the front lines time and time again. She is an activist and an academic.

She and her colleagues created the idea of public humanities programming at the Smithsonian. The 1980 conference "Voices of the Civil Rights Movement" was her idea, and I am proud to say that the Endowment funded that meeting.

Bernice is also a composer and performer of excellence. Her music as moved millions. Many of you know her as the founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock. This group is itself a public humanities institution. With every song there is a story, an interpretation of our history and culture. The Endowment took part in two of Bernice's projects, notably *Wade in the Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions*, and also *Africans in America*. She is Washington's and the nation's greatest treasures: Please welcome Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon.

[*Dr. Bernice Reagon speaks for 25 minutes*]

### **Chairman Ferris**

The success of the Humanities Council of Washington D.C. can be traced to the strong support of leaders such as Linda Cropp. She knows what public service

means; she knows how important the public humanities are. As do tonight's award winners...and I am honored to be here tonight to take part.

Our first award goes to the Barry Farms Resident council. Ms. Ferrell, Ms. Banks, and Ms. Marlow—please join me onstage.

This award recognizes the Barry Farms Resident Council's energy, initiative, and creativity in working with children and teens. The Humanities Council's three programs at Barry Farms—the DC WritersCorps, Barry Farms Teen Writing Club, and Books for Kids—would not exist without the commitment of the Resident Council. Dorothea Ferrell, Regina Banks, and Sharon Marlow have been tireless in their efforts. They lead reading circles, solicit book donations, chaperone field trips, and promote all these programs to key District agencies. They are the engines making the literacy and creative writing programs grow in their community. The Resident Council has been instrumental in the success of the Books for Kids program. This success has spread because the Humanities Council has duplicated their programs at other public housing communities in the city. This award reads: "1999 Outstanding Public Humanities Institution awarded to Barry Farms Resident council for your dedication to promoting the public humanities in the District of Columbia by providing humanities education to children and teens in the Barry Farms community." Congratulations to the Barry Farms Resident Council and Dorothea Ferrell, Regina Banks, and Sharon Marlow.

The Latin American Youth Center is another outstanding Public Humanities Institution in our city. Accepting for the Center is the Executive Director Lori Kaplan. Please join me onstage.

The Humanities Council recognizes the Latin American Youth Center for its 25 years of working with youth in the District of Columbia. The Center serves 400 young people a day at its headquarters at Columbia Road and 14<sup>th</sup> Street Northwest and at sister sites in various schools. The Center recently created the Latino Community Heritage Center. Organized by community members and scholars, funded in part by the Humanities Council, the Heritage Center documents, preserves and disseminates the rich history of the Latino community in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood.

The Heritage Center's permanent exhibition tells the history of Latinos through the stories of four families who came to the district from the Dominican Republic, Peru, Chile, and El Salvador. The Center is an archive and research resource, a venue for community dialogue, and soon will be a heritage tourism attraction. The Humanities Council is pleased to present this award to you Ms. Kaplan, and to the Latin American Youth Center. The award reads: "1999 Outstanding Public Humanities Institution awarded to Latin American Youth Center for your dedication to promoting the public humanities in the District of Columbia through the creation of the Latino Community Heritage Center." Congratulations.

Everyone knows how important education is to our children and our country. The next award goes to an outstanding D.C. educator, Ms. Lee Epps. Ms. Epps, please join me on stage.

The Humanities Council is pleased to recognize the work of Lee Epps, principal at Charles Hart Middle School. Ms. Epps is also a writer. It is not easy facing that blank page, but she never blinks. She writes. She has the gift of passing on the excitement she feels about the literary arts to her students. It is a rare gift. Since 1997, she has worked closely with the Humanities Council's DC WritersCorps program to pilot the Youth Poetry Slam League. She provided space, access, and advice, all of which helped the Hart Middle School become the flagship school in the WritersCorps program—that is now replicated at all eleven DC Public Middle Schools. Hart Middle School is the two-time reigning champion of the Youth Poetry slam League. In addition, 35 Hart students have won awards for their writing, including the Parkmont and Larry Neal Awards. Ms. Epps is currently planning a Communications Magnet Program at Hart.

Her motto is CHARACTER. It stands for: celebrate, honor, achievement, respect and caring to emerge as role models. Ms. Epps has character and integrity. It is my pleasure to present this award that says: "1999 Outstanding Educator awarded to Lee E. Epps for your dedication to promoting humanities education in the District of Columbia and for your exceptional commitment to the students of Charles Hart Middle School." Congratulations.

Our final award is for Outstanding Public Humanities Scholar. Ira Berlin, please join me on stage.

The Humanities Council is especially delighted to honor eminent historian Ira Berlin, because he is a former Humanities Council board member. As a Board member, he strengthened the work of the Council with his good judgment, sense of humor, and commitment to scholarship and the sharing of that work with the public.

His work is vitally important. As a history professor at the University of Maryland, Dr. Berlin has dedicated himself to exploring one of the nation's most controversial and charged topics—the history of slavery. Twenty-four years ago, he founded the Freedman and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland, from which has come a multi-volume documentary history of emancipation. He also produced the groundbreaking project *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation*.

In their own voices, women and men tell both heart-rending and uplifting stories of their lives in slavery—and their movement into freedom. Ira Berlin's recent publication, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* received the first Frederick Douglass Book Prize from the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance and Abolition at Yale University. It is my honor and pleasure to present this award that reads: "1999 Outstanding Public

Humanities Scholar awarded to Ira Berlin for your dedication to promoting the public humanities in the District of Columbia." Congratulations.