

Remarks of Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities  
South Carolina Humanities Council  
1994 Humanities Festival  
Beaufort, South Carolina  
January 14, 1994

Journalists habitually these days refer to the electorate as disgruntled and cynical. Scholars and intellectuals agree. Writing in Newsweek Magazine (January 3, 1994), Cornel West, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, notices "a creeping Zeitgeist of coldheartedness and mean-spiritedness" accompanying what he refers to as the "full-blown market culture" that enveloped America in the 1980s, leading to "the gangsterization of culture - the collapse of moral fabric and the shunning of personal responsibility in both vanilla suburbs and chocolate cities. Instead of reviving traditional values, the strong patriotism and social conservatism of the 1980s has ironically yielded a populace that is suspicious of the common good and addicted to narrow pleasures. . . . American democracy is quietly threatened by internal decay."

Meanwhile, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, William Bennett in the Wall Street Journal (December 10, 1993) trots through the litany of our social ills that almost any citizen can recite: violent crime at frightening levels, a mounting epidemic of illegitimate births, twenty percent of our children growing up in poverty, the proliferation of single parent households, scandalous divorce rates, drug and crime beset neighborhoods, and educational performance of our students in

elementary and secondary schools that does not compare favorably with other industrialized countries. More important, beyond the quantifiable indices of behavior, he detects "a coarseness, a callousness, a cynicism, a banality and a vulgarity to our time. There are too many signs of a civilization gone rotten." "In my view," he goes on to observe, "the real crisis of our time is spiritual."

We should take it very seriously when social critics from the Left and the Right agree on the condition of society, even though they may disagree on the cause and the cure.

Why the cynicism? Why the alienation? Why the spiritual malaise? The short answer is that the new geopolitical forces of the still evolving "new world order" and the newly visible economic forces of the global marketplace are battering a society whose bonds of social cohesion have been loosening for a quarter of a century or more. This is not the place to try to explain in detail the fundamental economic, demographic, and social forces that have an atomizing effect on society, but they are real, and they have been acting over a long period of time.

In addition, the basic confidence and optimism thought to be embedded in American national character were dealt severe blows in the early 1970s by the loss of the war in Vietnam, the disgrace of the presidency in the Watergate scandal, and the

economic shock of the Arab oil embargo, which was perhaps the first painful message that our economy was vulnerable to developments and decisions in the world economy over which we had no control.

Into this condition of attenuated solidarity, "the politics of difference" have introduced another sledgehammer of fragmentation. During the turbulent decade of the 1960s, almost all the values and verities of middle-class life were challenged by the counterculture, leaving the domain of values a contested territory. The cultural consensus of the 1950s was destroyed in the process, and we have not yet fully developed a new consensus.

In addition, the Civil Rights Movement provided a paradigm of progress through protest. Movements on behalf of other groups that had been excluded from full participation in American life (women, gays and lesbians, the handicapped, Native Americans, Latinos, and to some extent Asian Americans) adopted that paradigm. Radical chic was replaced by ethnic chic. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the flowering of the cult of ethnicity "challenges the unifying concept of a unique American identity . . . in our politics, our voluntary organizations, our churches, our language."

Then, the collapse of the Soviet system, while lifting our spirits in hopes for the spread of human freedom, has also

unleashed pent up ancient animosities. Around the globe, we see conflict and violence sowing misery along the fault lines of race, religion, language, and ethnicity -- just the sorts of divisions being brought to our attention by the politics of difference and by the increasing cultural diversity of our population. As the insecurities of a rapidly changing world are luring Americans and others into clutching and reasserting their parochial identities, Americans must wonder if Bosnia and Azerbaijan are previews of our future.

Small wonder that reasonable voices have lately been saying that we have been paying too much attention to our differences and not enough attention to the things that hold us together. From the other direction, however, we continue to hear assertions of what Charles Taylor refers to as "the politics of recognition," the notion that there are still disadvantaged groups in America whose members will never feel equal or really part of America until their group is recognized in some way as being legitimate and equal. There is truth in both of these positions.

We find ourselves caught in a dilemma. All of our legal rights are universal in nature and apply equally to all citizens as individuals. Yet, we know that racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination exists, and that group identities are real factors in our lives. Ethnic politics has been a staple on

the American political scene for more than a hundred years and is still very much present in our system. The dilemma is that our legal rights are for individuals, but our politics are for groups.

That this is more than an academic argument is clear if one recalls the hand-to-hand combat of school board battles involving such issues as bilingual education or Afrocentric curricula, the dispute over the literary canon at the college level, or the court decisions seeking to remedy patterns of discrimination in voting rights cases by requiring redistricting or changes in the form of local government so as to guarantee the minority community representation on the legislative body. In each of these cases, and others you can probably think of, public authorities are being asked to confer some sort of official status on a particular cultural group. Large parts of the public sense that this form of particularism is a problem in a system based on universal values of individual rights. Simply saying that everyone must respect everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

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Yet, a solution must be found if we are to recapture a confident sense of shared values that will let us then deal with divisive public policy issues with a common goal in mind. What is needed is nothing short of a national conversation about our shared values and what it means to be American.

It will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation and vigorous attempts to hold at bay their feelings of impotence and powerlessness. Public life seems barren and vacuous. And gallant efforts to reconstruct public-mindedness in a Balkanized society of proliferating identities and constituencies seem farfetched, if not futile. Even the very art of public conversation - the precious activity of communicating with fellow citizens in a spirit of mutual respect and civility - appears to fade amid the noisy backdrop of name-calling and finger-pointing in flat sound bites."

Nevertheless, the challenge of our time is to revitalize our civic life in order to realize a new birth of freedom. All of our people - left, right and center - have a responsibility to examine and discuss what unites us as a country, about what we share as common American values in a nation comprised of so many divergent groups and beliefs. For too long, we have let that which divides us capture the headlines and sound bites, polarizing us rather than bringing us together.

This is to be a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must grapple seriously with the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and I believe the National Endowment for the Humanities can stimulate and

facilitate the discussion. The NEH will not bring answers, but we will bring questions, and we will invite the state humanities councils into full partnership in sponsoring and stimulating the conversation.

My own notion of the meaning of American pluralism is still evolving, and in any case is certainly not prescriptive, but it might help for me to sketch some elements of it here. My answer has as its preface a belief that there is an American identity that is different from the identities of any one of the ethnic groups that comprise the American population, that is inclusive of all of them, and that is available to everyone who is American. It is an identity that has been shaped by the buffeting and melding of individuals and groups in North America over the last three hundred years.

I believe that the most important thing we share as Americans is a belief in our political system, in the values that are enshrined in the Constitution, and in the open democratic system for determining who makes and enforces the laws, and that the laws should be consistent with those principles.

Further, in the land of opportunity, we believe in equal economic opportunity for individuals. We know that we do not provide perfect equality of opportunity, but it is an ideal that we hold dear, and we have historically provided enough

opportunity to keep individual hope alive and to maintain faith in the ideal.

We also have a history that belongs to all Americans, whenever their ancestors happened to have migrated to these shores. That history is a proud one, but it has some dark spots, and we must come to terms with those imperfections as well as the glories. I am a white Southern male, but I claim as part of my own story the experiences of Italians and Irish and Jews coming into America through Ellis Island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the experiences of African Americans who lived in the South with my ancestors and saw it from their own point of view, or more recently the experiences of South Asians and Latinos. My story should be theirs as well, and we all possess together the national story, the resultant of many different vectors, the story of our being able to find solutions, to rise to historical challenges, and find ways to transform particular interests into the national interest.

Beyond these fundamental building blocks, there are certain precepts that might help us as we go through the discussion of what it means to be American. The traditional way of handling cultural differences has been to think about a public sphere and a private sphere. In the public sphere only universalistic rules are legitimate and only individual rights are legally protected. In the private sphere, we can give voice and form to our

birthright identities without being any less American. This distinction still goes a long way in sorting out the conflicts between the universal and the particular.

Indeed, if there is no distinction between the public and the private, all values would be up for political adjudication, and that is not a system I find very attractive. One of the factors causing the current sense of urgency about this subject is the feeling that the public or political sphere has been encroaching on the private sphere. "Let your culture be your politics," the cultural radicals of the 1960s chanted. "All politics are personal, and all personal relationships are political", assert some contemporary activists. Where in all of this are the ordinary virtues that we ought to be able to expect from each other? Perhaps they can emerge from the conversation.

It helps to realize also that our national identity is dynamic. Because it is constantly being reinvented by the interactions of the constituent cultural groups and by our constantly expanding historical experience, our national identity is an evolving one. In addition, we should realize that all ethnic groups have permeable boundaries, and that the meaning of any particular identity will change over time. What it felt like to be a white Southerner in 1865 is different from what it felt like in 1950, and it is different again today. What it means to be a Jew in America is different today from what it was in 1940.

History has a way of changing who we think we are.

However farfetched it may seem to Cornel West, I believe we must "reconstruct public-mindedness" despite the proliferating identities and fragmenting constituencies of the contemporary scene. Without a confident sense of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. So, the first step away from the sort of nihilistic materialism that Professor West decries is to define our common identity, and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of sacrifice. Put another way, public-mindedness will naturally appear in a healthy polity because its citizens have a sense of belonging and because they believe in its purposes. People want to feel part of something that has meaning that is larger than themselves. Our society seems to have lost some of that meaning at this very critical time.

I believe therefore that we must recommit ourselves as individuals and as a society to the ideals of our common heritage and to our obligations to each other as Americans. We must cherish the values we share, honor the fundamental importance of the family to society, treat each other with respect, recognize the dignity and equality of each individual, and rejoice in the strength derived from the rich mixture of cultures that have come together to create the unity of America. We must, in short, revitalize our civic life so that we may continue to hold aloft

**for all the world to see the beacon of democracy just as our founders envisioned more than two hundred years ago.**

Remarks made by Sheldon Hackney  
Association of American Colleges  
January 19, 1994  
Washington, DC

I want to talk to you tonight about the haunting question posed by Rodney King in the midst of the multi-ethnic riot in South Central Los Angeles in the spring of 1992: "Can we get along?" Can we find a way for Americans from different ethnic groups to treat each other with respect? Can we perfect our system so that justice is blind to all of the group differences that divide us? Can we learn to draw strength from our diversity while working together for common goals? America is being tested yet again. We must find a way to answer "yes" if we are to survive as a democratic society.

Colleges have a good story to tell in this regard because at least they are grappling with the task of building a single community out of many. They are at work trying to fulfill our national motto, "E Pluribus Unum." The American Association of Colleges in particular has a good story to tell because of your project, "American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning," that seeks to provide guidance to higher education about how to help our society respond to the challenge of diversity. I cannot think of anything more important for an educational association to be doing on the eve of a new millennium.

The short answer to the question of how to make pluralism work is simple. It is what colleges and universities try to do for themselves continuously: create community -- create a common sense of belonging and of mutual regard among a variegated set of strangers. The existential search is for some purpose or meaning in life that transcends the self, perhaps some recognition of one's relationship to the sacred order that underlies the social order, so that one is willing to subordinate individual self-interest for the common good, or the cynics would say at least one is willing to do it when the annual giving solicitation arrives from the alumni office.

We know that if we look for a model on campus for harmonious community, we usually find it on the basketball team or some other sports team (if they are winning). There, the purpose of the organization is clear. Everyone wants to achieve that purpose, so there may be differences about tactics but never about the fundamental goal. Everyone recognizes that individual success is linked firmly and directly to the success of the group, so that the individual's fate is the same as the fate of the group. Most importantly, universal values pertain; everyone on the team is judged by the same standards. It works. How nice it would be if real life were so simple.

Nevertheless, the national society needs a renaissance of civic virtue. There is nothing in our current litany of

discontents that would not be improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole: gridlock in Washington, the corruption of the democratic process by special interest groups, crime and violence besetting our neighborhoods, children growing up in poverty, the malfunctioning family, the coarseness of our daily lives, the moral quagmire of public life.

I was just visiting Savannah, Georgia, and learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the history of a residential community there called Cuyler-Brownsville. One of the people interviewed remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic virtue than that. Everyone looks out for everyone else, feels responsible for everyone else. It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, but some analogous sense of identification is needed.

The key to this on the national level is to have some clear notion of what it means to be American. We need to be aware of what we share with each other as citizens so that our mutual responsibilities will be more readily accepted.

Reasonable voices have lately been saying that we have been paying too much attention to our differences and that is why our

mutual obligations are not being fulfilled. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the flowering over the last two decades of the cult of ethnicity "challenges the unifying concept of a unique American identity . . . . in our politics, our voluntary organizations, our churches, our language."

From the other direction, however, we continue to hear assertions of what Charles Taylor refers to as "the politics of recognition," the notion that there are still disadvantaged groups in America whose members will never feel equal or really part of America until their group is recognized in some way as being legitimate and equal. There is truth in both of these positions.

We find ourselves caught in a dilemma. All of our legal rights are universal in nature and apply equally to all citizens as individuals. Yet, we know that racial, ethnic, gender and religious discrimination exists, and that group identities are real factors in our lives. Ethnic politics has been a staple on the American political scene for more than a hundred years and is still very much present in our system. The dilemma is that our legal rights are for individuals, but our politics are for groups.

The traditional way of handling cultural differences has been to think about a public sphere and a private sphere. In the

public sphere only universalistic rules are legitimate and only individual rights are legally protected. In the private sphere, we can give voice and form to our birthright identities without being any less American. This distinction still goes a long way in sorting out the conflicts between the universal and the particular. Indeed, if there were no distinction between the public and the private spheres, all values would be up for political adjudication all the time, and that is not a system that I find attractive.

Yet, a solution must be found if we are to recapture a confident sense of shared values that will let us then deal with divisive public policy issues with a common goal in mind. What is needed is nothing short of a national conversation about our shared values and what it means to be American.

It will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation and vigorous attempts to hold at bay their feelings of impotence and powerlessness. Public life seems barren and vacuous. And gallant efforts to reconstruct public-mindedness in a Balkanized society of proliferating identities and constituencies seem farfetched, if not futile. Even the very art of public conversation - the precious activity of communicating with fellow citizens in a spirit of mutual respect and civility - appears to fade amid the noisy backdrop of name-calling and finger-pointing

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What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously with the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and I believe the National Endowment for the Humanities can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion, the AAC's "American Commitments" project will play a significant role, and academics across the country should join in the discussions in their communities outside the walls of academe.

The outcome, of course, is contingent. As the NEH comes not with answers but only with questions, we simply do not know how the conversation will turn out and what we all will learn from it. My own notion of the meaning of American pluralism is still evolving, and in any case is certainly not prescriptive, but it

might help for me to sketch some elements of it here to illustrate what one answer might be.

My answer has as its preface a belief that there is an American identity that is different from the identities of any one of the ethnic groups that comprise the American population, that is inclusive of all of them, and that is available to everyone who is American. It is an identity that has been shaped by the buffeting and melding of individuals and groups in North America over the last three hundred years.

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shores. That history is a proud one, but it has some dark spots, and we must come to terms with those imperfections as well as the glories. I am a white Southern male, but I claim as part of my own story the experiences of Italians and Irish and Jews coming into America through Ellis Island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the experiences of African Americans who lived in the South with my ancestors and saw it from their own point of view, or more recently the experiences of South Asians and Latinos. My story should be theirs as well, and we all possess together the national story, the resultant of many different vectors, the story of our being able to find solutions, to rise to historical challenges, and find ways to transform particular interests into the national interest.

It helps to realize also that our national identity is dynamic. Because it is constantly being reinvented by the interactions of the constituent cultural groups and by our constantly expanding historical experience, our national identity is an evolving one, though it is also true that certain of the core values persist because they seem to be reinforced by succeeding waves of immigration and additional historical experience.

In addition, we should realize that all ethnic groups have permeable boundaries. Thus, while the melting pot has never been perfect, a tremendous amount of assimilation has gone on and

continues to go on. At the same time, the cultural identities of constituent groups within America also have persisted.

Moreover, the meaning of any particular identity will change over time. What it felt like to be a white Southerner in 1865 is different from what it felt like in 1950 and it is different again today. What it means to be a Jew in America is different today from what it was in 1940. History has a way of changing who we think we are.

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct public-mindedness in America. Without a confident sense of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of sacrifice.

We must recommit ourselves as individuals and as a society to the ideals of our common heritage and to our obligations to each other as Americans. We must cherish the values we share, treat each other with respect, recognize the dignity and equality of each individual, and rejoice in the strength derived from the rich mixture of cultures that have come together to create the unity of America. We must, in short, revitalize our civic life so that we may continue to hold aloft for all the world to see

the beacon of democracy just as our founders envisioned more than two hundred years ago.

Remarks by Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities  
to the U.S. Conference of Mayors  
January 27, 1994

[Explain what the NEH is]

It probably does not come as a surprise to the nation's mayor's that the "Index of Social Health", a combination of sixteen measures of social and economic wellbeing put together by the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy of Fordham University, has declined by half since 1970. You struggle every day with the reality of homeless people on the streets, the shortage of jobs, neighborhoods beset with drugs and violence, schools that are overwhelmed by the barriers to learning faced by their children, the AIDS pandemic, families in crisis, the deterioration of the fiscal infrastructure, and inadequate resources to deal with any of that. It might even have occurred to you to wonder how the humanities could be relevant to any of that. Fair question.

Not long ago I was watching a call-in program on C-Span

when the subject was the reauthorization of the NEH in the House of Representatives. I was particularly dismayed by one caller from a large, distant state who asserted that the NEH provided nonessential activity that could be dispensed with, given the budgetary pressures of the moment. Garbage collectors, this eloquent caller argued, do an essential service for society. If they were to quit doing it for a short period of time, we would all notice it. If they were to quit for a long time, society would be in crisis. In contrast, no one would notice if the NEH ceased operating.

I was wounded to the quick, so I did a fast search and discovered that the NEH had supported a lecturer in Seattle whose topic was "Taking Care of What's Left Over: A Century of Garbage in Western Civilization," a lecture that explained the complexity of the issues surrounding waste disposal today by looking at them in historical context; and in Philadelphia we had supported the

production of a documentary film exploring America's garbage problem, the culture that spawns it, and our efforts to contend with it. Now, I would not want to rest the fate of NEH on convincing a mayor who is worried about how he can control labor costs, reduce tipping fees, or get a trash to steam plant built against the wishes of the neighbors that the solution is to be found in the history and philosophy of garbage.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which the answers to our most pressing problems begin with a thorough understanding of them and, more importantly, with a shared sense of the community's need to find the answers. Tough problems don't get solved without the commitment of the public, and there is in our nation today a crisis of public-mindedness.

Cornel West, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, writing in **Newsweek Magazine**, (January 3, 1994) about the

legacy of the 1980s notices "the gangsterization of culture - the collapse of moral fabric and the shunning of personal responsibility in both vanilla suburbs and chocolate cities. Instead of reviving traditional values, the strong patriotism and social conservatism of the 1980s has ironically yielded a populace that is suspicious of the common good and addicted to narrow pleasures . . . . American democracy is quietly threatened by internal decay."

Meanwhile, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, William Bennett in the **Wall Street Journal** (December 10, 1993) trots through the litany of our social ills and concludes that, beyond the quantifiable indices of social decline, there is "a coarseness, a callousness, a cynicism, a banality and a vulgarity to our time. There are too many signs of a civilization gone rotten." "In my view," he goes on to observe, "the real crisis of our time is spiritual."

I take it very seriously when social critics from the Left and the Right agree on the condition of society, even though they may disagree on the cause and the cure. Furthermore, President Clinton in Memphis just a few weeks ago called our current national predicament "a crisis of the spirit" and two days ago he wove through the State of the Union Message the thread of the American values of work, and family, and opportunity and responsibility that must be reinvigorated if we are to succeed as a society.

There is not one of our social ills that could not be considerably improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole, because the political will to find a solution would be easier to mobilize. I was just in Savannah, Georgia with the dynamic Mayor Susan Weiner, visiting some NEH funded projects and I learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the past of a residential community called Cuyler-Brownsville. One

of the people interviewed remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic virtue that. Everyone looks out for everyone else, feels responsible for everyone else.

It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, or even on a city-wide level, but some analogous sense of identification with the whole is needed. Two things are required if each of us is to be willing to subordinate our individual self-interests on occasion to the good of the whole: we must feel a part of the whole, and we must see in that whole some moral purpose that is greater than the individual.

As a new millennium approaches, we need to invoke again that larger common purpose, but we find ourselves divided by

racial, ethnic, religious, and other cultural differences, so that we have difficulty coming together for the common good.

There is something of a dilemma here. All of our legal rights are universal in nature and apply equally to all citizens as individuals. Yet, we know that racial, ethnic, gender and religious discrimination exist, and that group identities are real factors in our lives. Ethnic politics have been a staple on the American political scene for more than a hundred years and are still very much present in our system. The dilemma is that our legal rights are for individuals, but our politics are for groups.

This is more than an academic argument. Simply think of such difficult issues as immigration, bilingual education, Afrocentric curricula, or voting rights litigation. In most of these cases, and others that you can probably think of, public authorities are being asked to confer some sort of official status on a particular

cultural group. Large parts of the public sense that this form of particularism is a problem in a system based on universal values of individual rights. Simply saying that everyone must respect everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

So, we must distinguish between the public sphere, in which we all should appear as equal individuals, and the private sphere, where we can give form and voice to our birthright identities. Indeed, we must enlarge the public sphere of shared values and common identity, and we must create a larger civic space in which citizens can come together to discuss and resolve mutual problems. The humanities and the NEH can help you do that.

Here in D.C. the local humanities council is sponsoring a project called "City Lights" that brings together the people living in public housing to capture their pasts through oral history, a

process that creates a sense of community and a new sense of identity among people who listen to each other's stories, perceive commonalities, and get a new view of themselves as the subjects of history rather than its object.

In St. Louis, the Cochran Public Housing Project, once beset by crime, physical decay and despair, turned into a model of hope for inner city tenants. Now, an anthropologist is in residence with the housing project to explore the social mechanisms that led to successful tenant management and a renewed sense of community.

In Hartford, as a result of a program conducted by the Connecticut Humanities Council, new social studies curricula are now in place in the public schools for the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, and more than two-thirds of the teachers in those grades have attended special professional development programs to prepare to teach these curricula, which respond to a state mandate

to include diverse cultural perspectives. The program depends heavily on bringing the resources of the local colleges, universities and museums into primary schools.

In Cleveland, an NEH grant made possible a two-day forum on the challenge of race in our major urban centers. In St. Paul, issues of assimilation, tradition, language and cultural mores are the focus of a theater and discussion program sponsored by the East Side Arts Council with NEH support. In Boston, we have recently funded a project that will produce the report of a regional study group that has been investigating the humanistic aspects of environmental issues. Their report is entitled, "Creating a Sense of Place in Urban Communities." The list of examples could go on for as long as your patience would permit.

The point here is that in every city there are cultural resources that can be of immense value to city leaders as you

work to create both a better understanding of the issues that confront them and a stronger sense of community that will allow the city to come together to solve common problems. The humanities in general and the NEH in particular can be your allies in the task of improving the quality of life in the city.

Working with state humanities councils, libraries, museums, schools, colleges, churches, labor unions and other institutions that know the local communities in the cities across the land, we can bring people together to explore and define the meaning of being American, to discover our common values.

Indeed, I envision a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously to define the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and I believe the National Endowment for the Humanities can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion.

This will be a risky enterprise, because the NEH comes only with questions -- not answers. The outcome is therefore unpredictable, contingent as it is on the course of the discussion and on what we learn from each other as we talk. All of our people - left, right and center - have a responsibility to examine and discuss what unites us as a country, about what we share as common American values in a nation comprised of so many divergent groups and beliefs.

My own notion of the meaning of American pluralism is still evolving, and in any case is certainly not prescriptive, but it might help for me to sketch some elements of it here to illustrate what one answer might be. My answer has as its preface a belief that there is an American identity that is different from the identities of any one of the ethnic and racial groups that comprise the American population, that is inclusive of all of them, and that is available to everyone who is American. We also have a history,

with its glories and some imperfections, that belongs to all Americans. I am a white Southerner, but I claim as part of my own story the experience of Italians and Irish and Jews coming into America through Ellis Island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the experiences of African Americans who lived in the South with my ancestors and saw it from their own point of view, or more recently, the experiences of South Asians and Latinos. My story should be theirs as well, and we all possess together the national story, the resultant of many different vectors, the story of being able to find solutions, to rise to historical challenges, and find ways to transform particular interests into the national interest.

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should be consistent with the principles in the Constitution.

Further, in this land of opportunity, we believe in equal economic opportunity for individuals. We know that we do not provide perfect equality of opportunity, but it is an ideal that we hold dear, and we have historically provided enough opportunity to keep individual hope alive and to maintain faith in the ideal.

It helps also to realize that our national identity is dynamic. Because it is constantly being reinvented by the interactions of the constituent cultural groups and by our constantly expanding historical experience, our national identity is and has always been an evolving one, though it is also true that certain of the core values persist because they seem to be reinforced by succeeding waves of immigration and additional historical experience.

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct

public-mindedness in America. Without a sense of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral vacuum of our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of sacrifice. I can think of no higher secular purpose than the principles of democracy enshrined in our founding documents as goals towards which America should always be striving.

Good luck to each of you, and I hope to be talking with you during this national conversation.

Remarks by Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities  
Sunday Morning Breakfast Club  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
February 2, 1994

Journalists habitually these days refer to the electorate as disgruntled and cynical. Scholars and intellectuals agree. Cornel West, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, writing in **Newsweek Magazine**, (January 3, 1994) notices "a creeping Zeitgeist of coldheartedness and mean-spiritedness" accompanying what he refers to as the "full-blown market culture" that enveloped America in the 1980s, leading to "the gangsterization of culture - the collapse of moral fabric and the shunning of personal responsibility in both vanilla suburbs and chocolate cities. Instead of reviving traditional values, the strong patriotism and social conservatism of the 1980s has ironically yielded a populace that is suspicious of the common good and addicted to narrow pleasures . . . . American democracy is quietly threatened by internal decay."

Meanwhile, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, William Bennett in the **Wall Street Journal** (December 10, 1993) trots through the litany of our social ills that almost any citizen can recite: violent crime at frightening levels, a mounting epidemic of illegitimate births, twenty percent of our children growing up in poverty, the proliferation of single parent households, scandalous divorce rates, drug and crime beset neighborhoods, and educational performance of our students in elementary and secondary schools that does not compare favorably to other industrialized countries. More important, beyond the quantifiable indices of behavior, he detects "a coarseness, a callousness, a cynicism, a banality and a vulgarity to our time. There are too many signs of a civilization gone rotten." "In my view," he goes on to observe, "the real crisis of our time is spiritual."

I take it very seriously when social critics from the Left and

the Right agree on the condition of society, even though they may disagree on the cause and the cure. Moreover, President Clinton in Memphis just a few weeks ago called our current national problem "a crisis of the spirit", and last week in the State of the Union Message he wove through his text the thread of values that need revitalization: work, family, equal opportunity, and responsibility. There is not one of our social ills that would not be considerably improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole.

I was just in Savannah, Georgia visiting some NEH funded projects and I learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the past of a residential community called Cuyler-Brownsville. One of the people interviewed remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic

virtue than that. Everyone looks out for everyone else, feels responsible for everyone else. It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, but some analogous sense of identification with the whole is needed.

Two things are required if each of us is to be willing to subordinate our individual self-interests on occasion to the good of the whole: we must feel a part of the whole, and we must see in that whole some moral purpose that is greater than the individual. Our problem is our inadequate awareness of what might be called the sacred order that underlies the social order and is the source of legitimate authority in the social order. As Richard Sennett has written, (Authority, p. 3) "Without ties of loyalty, authority, and fraternity, no society as a whole, and none of its institutions, could long function."

At an earlier defining moment in the nation's history, on the

eve of the outbreak of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, speaking between his election and his inauguration, in Philadelphia in Independence Hall where the declaration of Independence and the constitution had been drafted, found the meaning of America in its mission of being the exemplar for the world of the ideals of human freedom and equality set forth in those great documents.

On that occasion, Lincoln said, "I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this [Union] so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that **all** should have an equal chance." It was not only about slavery but about slavery as a violation of the principles of democracy.

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy,

with its promise of liberty and equality, could survive, whether the last best hope on earth could endure. Returning to this theme two and a half brutal years later at the dedication of the military cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that defending the Union was worth the sacrifices exacted by that terrible struggle because the sacrifices made possible "a new birth of freedom."

As a new millennium approaches, we need again a "new birth of freedom", but we find ourselves divided by racial, ethnic, religious, and other cultural differences, so that we have difficulty coming together for the common good. Reasonable voices have lately been saying that we have been paying too much attention to our differences and that is why our mutual obligations are not being fulfilled. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the flowering over the last two decades of the cult of ethnicity "challenges the unifying concept of a unique American identity . . . . in our politics, our voluntary organizations, our churches, our language."

From the other direction, however, we continue to hear assertions of what Charles Taylor refers to as "the politics of recognition," the notion that there are still disadvantaged groups in America whose members will never feel equal or feel really part of America until their group is recognized in some way as being legitimate and equal. There is truth in both of these positions.

We find ourselves caught in a dilemma. All of our legal rights are universal in nature and apply equally to all citizens as individuals. Yet, we know that racial, ethnic, gender and religious discrimination exists, and that group identities are real factors in our lives. Ethnic politics have been a staple on the American political scene for more than a hundred years and are still very much present in our system. The dilemma is that our legal rights are for individuals, but our politics are for groups.

This is more than an academic argument. Simply think of

such difficult issues as immigration, bilingual education, Afrocentric curricula, or voting rights litigation. In most of these cases, and others that you can probably think of, public authorities are being asked to confer some sort of official status on a particular group. Large parts of the public sense that this form of particularism is a problem in a system based on universal values of individual rights. Simply saying that everyone must respect everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

The traditional way of handling cultural differences has been to distinguish between a public sphere and a private sphere. In the public sphere only universalistic rules are legitimate and only individual rights are legally protected. In the private sphere, we can give voice and form to our birthright identities without being any less American. This distinction still goes a long way in sorting out the conflicts between the universal and the particular. Indeed,

if there were no distinction between the public and the private spheres, if everything were always in the public domain, all values would be up for political adjudication all the time, and that is not a system that I find attractive.

Yet, a solution must be found if we are to evolve a confident sense of shared values that will let us then deal with potentially divisive public policy issues with a common goal in mind. As the writer, Irwin Shaw, observed, "America is a country of many cultures, some clashing with each other, some complementary, some a volatile combination of simultaneous attraction and rejection. We are in need of all possible bridges between citizen and citizen" (quoted in New York Days by Willie Morris, p.329). What is needed is nothing short of a national conversation about our shared values and what it means to be American.

It will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that,

"Public life seems barren and vacuous. And gallant efforts to reconstruct public-mindedness in a Balkanized society of proliferating identities and constituencies seem farfetched, if not futile. Even the very art of public conversation - the precious activity of communicating with fellow citizens in a spirit of mutual respect and civility - appears to fade amid the backdrop of name-calling and finger-pointing in flat sound bites."

Nevertheless, the challenge of our time is to revitalize our civic life in order to realize a new birth of freedom. We – all of us, left, right and center - have a responsibility to examine and discuss what unites us as a country, about what we share as common American values in a nation comprised of so many divergent groups and beliefs.

What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard

and in which we must struggle seriously with the meaning of American pluralism. The National Endowment for the Humanities will help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion.

This will be a risky enterprise, because the NEH comes only with questions and not with answers. The outcome is unpredictable, contingent as it is on the substance of the discussion and what we learn from each other as we talk. My own notion of the meaning of American pluralism is still evolving, and in any case is certainly not prescriptive, but it might help for me to sketch some elements of it here to illustrate what one answer might be.

My answer has as its preface a belief that there is an American identity that is different from the identities of any one of the ethnic and racial and religious and nationality groups that comprise the American population, that is inclusive of all of them,

and that is available to everyone who is American. It is an identity that has been shaped by the buffeting and melding of individuals and groups in North America over the last three hundred years.

I believe that the most important thing we share as Americans is a belief in our political system, in the values that are enshrined in the Constitution, and in the open democratic system for determining who makes and enforces the laws, and that the laws should be consistent with the principles in the Constitution.

Further, in this land of opportunity, we believe in equal economic opportunity for individuals. We know that we do not provide perfect equality of opportunity, but it is an ideal that we hold dear, and we have historically provided enough opportunity to keep individual hope alive and to maintain faith in the ideal.

We also have a history that belongs to all Americans,

whenever their ancestors happened to have migrated to these shores. That history is a proud one, but it has some dark spots, and we must come to terms with those imperfections as well as the glories. I am a white southern male, but I claim as part of my own story the experiences of Italians and Irish and Jews coming into America through Ellis Island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the experiences of African Americans who lived in the South with my ancestors and saw it from their own point of view, or the experiences of South Asians and Latinos more recently. My story should be their story as well, and we all possess together the national story, the resultant of many different vectors, the story of our being able to find solutions, to rise to historical challenges, and find ways to transform particular interests into the national interest.

It helps to realize also that our national identity is dynamic. Because it is constantly being reinvented by the interactions of the

constituent cultural groups and by our constantly expanding historical experience, our national identity is an evolving one, though it is also true that certain of the core values persist because they seem to be reinforced by succeeding waves of immigration and additional historical experience.

In addition, we should realize that all ethnic groups have permeable boundaries. Thus, while the melting pot has never been perfect, a tremendous amount of assimilation has gone on and continues to go on. At the same time, the cultural identities of constituent groups within America also have persisted.

Moreover, the meaning of any particular identity will change over time. What it felt like to be a white Southerner in 1865 is different from what it felt like in 1950 and it is different again today. What it means to be a Jew in America is different today from what it was in 1940. History has a way of changing who we

think we are.

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct public-mindedness in America. Without a sense of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral vacuum in our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of sacrifice. I can think of no higher secular purpose than the democracy enshrined in our founding documents as goals towards which America should always be striving. As John Dewey wrote, democracy is the highest moral achievement available to human communities. Ours is therefore an important enterprise.

*Prob.  
Gomery*

Comments by Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
American Film Institute  
February 8, 1994

When the nation's Jungian analyst finally describes our collective unconscious, it will turn out to be composed of old movies -- the stuff of our dreams and anxieties played out in an art form that has come to occupy a central position in our culture. How nice it is, then, for the National Endowment for the Humanities to have helped bring into existence The American Film Institute Catalog: Feature Films, 1931-40, a scholarly tool whose every entry suggests an imaginative world beyond the limitations of our everyday lives, <sup>but not</sup> ~~and~~ perhaps ~~ever~~ beyond the reach of analysis and commentary.

The exhaustive care with which Patricia King Hanson and her colleagues approached this task is evident in the 5,528 entries and

3,800 pages of the three volumes, making it the authoritative source of information about films in this period. Theirs is a triumph not so much of the will but of the heart. Scholars and buffs will benefit from these three volumes for many years to come, not to mention the 1893-1910, 1941-50, 1951-1960 volumes also.

I was pleased to discover upon arriving at the NEH as an enthusiastic cinephile that the NEH has been active in providing support for the preservation and study of film. The cinema is a young art and an even younger humanistic discipline, yet even today NEH has funded studies *that are still underway* with such interesting titles as:

**Before Nickelodeon: E.S. Porter and the Edison Company**

**Films of the Civil Rights Movement**

and

**100 Years of Motion Pictures in Northern New England.**

As I said in the beginning, NEH is extremely proud to have been able to have played a role in this critical enterprise we unveil  
*However far behind the scenes we are, it is a worthy role.*  
tonight. Let me also add, Jean Firstenberg and AFI deserve our thanks and praise for paying serious attention to such an important area.

**Remarks by Sheldon Hackney**

**Chairman**

**National Endowment for the Humanities**

**At the Inauguration of Wanda D. Bigham**

**As President of Huntingdon College**

**Montgomery, Alabama**

**March 7, 1994**

I am delighted to be here for the inauguration of Dr. Wanda Bigham as President of this old and distinguished institution, though I do have the feeling that it is too late for her to take the advice that I could have given her had she consulted me in a timely manner. Like the commencement address that Bob Hope gave, as he looked out at his audience of departing seniors: "You are about to leave this wonderfully friendly and nurturing environment, this community of scholars, this home away from home and go out into the cold cruel world, and my advice to you is – DON'T GO!" Likewise, I might have advised Dr. Bigham, "Don't do it."

Alas, it is too late for that now, thus confirming my theorem: if you do whatever you do well enough, you will soon be rewarded by being put in a position that doesn't allow you to do it any more.

**President Bigham, that has now happened to you.**

I resort, therefore, to my fallback position, recognizing that she has already made the error of agreeing to serve as President. Having been a university president for eighteen years, I have acquired more wounds than wisdom, but I nevertheless bring a sampling from my store of accumulated observations. These are meant as friendly guidance for President Bigham, a sort of modern-day Machiavelli: The Prince in academic drag.

Madam President, people both close and far, from low estate and high, with little knowledge or much, will be able to tell you with unwavering certitude exactly what to do in each and every case that you will face. Listen carefully and give their advice exactly the weight it deserves.

Some presidents are perplexed about how to lead the faculty. Indeed, leading the faculty is a lot like herding cats: it is easy as long as you are content to have them go wherever their whims take them – and they will love you for it.

**Please remember, however, that any faculty member worth his tenure can raise self interest to the level of moral principle without the least hint of a blush.**

**One of your duties will be to defend the freedom of the student press. Relish the irony in this because surely the first target of their freedom-to-criticize will be you.**

**Five percent of the students on every campus are misfits and malcontents. One of life's great mysteries is how they always seem to rise to positions of leadership on the campus newspaper and the student government.**

**Remember, Madam President, most decisions amount to choosing whom you wish to have mad at you. If the decision were not dangerously divisive, someone else would have made it long ago.**

**The best of all possible worlds is when a controversy pits equal numbers of equally important people and groups against each other, so that you have to choose between them. As you are going to be**

equally criticized no matter what you decide, you might as well simply do what you think is right. That has a nicely liberating feel to it.

Further, in any contentious situation, once the decision maker has announced the decision, the winners disappear and the losers raise hell. That is, those who agree with the decision will maintain a decorous silence, there being nothing further to gain, and something to lose, by public display, but those who do not agree will protest, there being nothing to lose and something perhaps to gain. The president will look and feel as if the whole world is against her. The result is that you should not expect a lot of thanks or a lot of friends.

Leadership these days being all about perceptions, rather than about reality, a charming Methodist modesty will be appreciated by few and unrecognized by most. Be guided therefore by the maxim, "nothing promotes the possibility of success more than the appearance of success." Therefore, promote yourself and your

**school shamelessly. On the other hand, if Mike Wallace of "Sixty Minutes" calls, just say, "NO!"**

**What you may not know, Madam President, is that my own mother was a student at Huntingdon College in the 1920s, when it went by another name. She hated it. It was the school to which her father, a Methodist minister, wanted her to go. It was a fine college even then, of course, but more importantly it was all women, a protected environment, as close to a cloister as Protestants get. Furthermore, it was far away from the temptations of Birmingham. My father, the chief tempter against whom the protection was needed, remembers coming down from Birmingham to call on Elizabeth Morris. That phase of the courtship consisted of sitting stiffly for long dull hours in the auditorium, in separate rows as required by regulations, under the stern gaze of a Huntingdon dorm mother. Exactly what my grandfather intended. How my mother managed her escape to the liberal and hedonistic environment of Birmingham Southern College, I am not sure, but**

I believe she had to give her solemn oath that she would finish college. She did – and was married very shortly thereafter. I, at least, am thankful for that.

So, as you take on one of the most difficult and one of the most important jobs in America, it is a special pleasure to be in my own home state, at an institution with family connections, and in my wife's home town. With all due respect to Mayor Folmar, I think of Montgomery as being "presided over" by my mother-in-law, Virginia Foster Durr, a great heroine of the South who stood by her husband and her principles through some of the most trying times in the life of this town and the life of this nation. During two defining epochs, Montgomery has been the focus of the nation's struggle over the meaning of the principle of equality set forth in the Declaration of Independence, epochs in the nation's history that were painful but that propelled us forward in our continuing attempts to understand and to fulfill the promise of American life, epochs that were intensely local yet took on national and even

**global significance.**

We stand now on the threshold of a new era in which the local and the global will be linked in interactive and unpredictable ways, an era that was ushered in by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dismantling of the Soviet system, and the end of the bipolar Cold War. The "new world order" is still in the process of evolution and definition. It is either unipolar or multipolar (we are not yet quite sure how best to think about it); it is safer from the threat of nuclear holocaust but more vulnerable to communal and regional violence, as we are learning in Somalia and Bosnia and Kuwait and Sri Lanka and countless other potential flashpoints; it is a world in which the motto of the business leaders of the new economic order is, "think globally and act locally;" it is a world in which globalization and localization are going on at the same time.

Robert Kaplan in last month's Atlantic Monthly sketched a nightmare scenario for the world over the next fifty years. Population will double from the current 5.5 billion people, and 90%

of the increase will occur in the underdeveloped countries of the world. The tremendous pressure of population on the world's resources will cause a dramatic degradation of the environment that is already underway, and that will lead to the movement of masses of people across national boundaries in search of life-sustaining opportunity as we can already see in West Africa and the Caucasus and in milder amounts in the United States and Europe, and that will result in the obliteration of allegiances to political states and the loss of ability of nation states to govern. The end result will be widespread anarchy, the dissolution of civilized society. It is not a pretty picture. Tribalization, some experts are calling it.

The extrapolation of existing trends is always a tricky business, of course, and there are countervailing forces at work. Arjun Appadurai of the University of Chicago, for instance, in the journal Public Culture (Spring 1993), points out that "tribalization" is a misleading term because the communities that tend to claim first loyalties when change becomes threatening are various. Language,

**ethnicity, religion, race, clan and other factors may provide the principle of solidarity depending on the circumstances, so it is more accurate to view these conflictual communities as being more malleable and more of a social construct than is implied by the word "tribe," and membership in the group is much more fluid than one would think.**

**Nevertheless, the implications of the Kaplan scenario are serious . As Appadurai writes, "More bluntly, neither popular nor academic thought in this country has come to terms with the difference between being a land of immigrants and being one node in a postnational network of diasporas."**

**America has always been diverse and its diversity has always been problematic, which is the reason for our motto, "E Pluribus Unum." We take pride in the fact that our nation rests upon a commitment to individual equality and democracy rather than upon ethnicity, but we worry about cohesion, and we bounce back and forth along the continuum between the assimilation implied by the**

"melting pot" myth and the persistence of pre-American cultural identities assumed by the metaphor of the national quilt or the mosaic.

**What is our image of the America of the 21st century, an America that may be making its way in the postnational world? What kind of America do we wish to be? Is it, as Appadurai suggests, a collection of exiled groups whose members have loyalties only to their own group or perhaps to the homeland rather than to the United States? Should it be an undifferentiated America of "melting pot" individuals without any hyphenated identity? Can it be an America of shared values and commitments that nonetheless retains the modulation of cultural differences, an America in which we are all American AND something else? Can we identify those values and commitments we need to share if we are to be a successful society. Is a belief in the Constitution and our political system enough to hold us together without violent friction between members of different groups?**

Those questions are so important that the National Endowment for the Humanities is fostering a national conversation, to be conducted in hundreds of gatherings around the country and in various ways through the electronic media, focused on questions about American pluralism and what it means to be American, what values do we share and what holds us together? Americans need to talk to each other, and to listen to each other, about such questions in order to exercise our responsibilities as democratic citizens in directing the affairs of the nation. It is a conversation in which all voices should be heard and all points of view considered. You will be hearing more about this continuing conversation and I hope you will participate when the opportunity presents itself. Indeed, I hope you will create your own opportunity to have this conversation.

The context of the American conversation about who we are and where we want to go is made more complex by the undefined and still evolving "new world order." While a devolution into sub-

national communities is clearly going on, so is the growth of trans-national organizations that are claiming larger and larger proportions of the loyalty of individuals. As Appadurai suggests, there are such groups as international relief and refugee agencies, multinational corporations, Habitat for Humanity, Amnesty International, World Vision, the various environmental action organizations, the Olympic movement, and so on, not to mention international terrorism and international criminal cartels, nor multilateral organizations of sovereign states such as the UN, the European Community, GATT, the Organization of American States, and so on. More and more human activity is being carried out by both non-governmental and governmental organizations that span the barriers between sovereign states.

Our lives are being affected as never before by developments and events half way around the world, yet we live our lives in our local communities. Is this to be a fatal disconnection, or is there a way to manage the transitions back and forth between the local

and the global. Just as I think the United States has a special role to play in the world by demonstrating how a society can be successful while being culturally diverse, I think colleges and universities have a crucial role to play in enabling their students to transit comfortably between the local and the global, to celebrate their own culture in an inclusive way while respecting other cultures that are inclusive, to manage and apply knowledge in the increasingly high-tech economy and increasingly complex socio-political world, to function comfortably in both familiar and unfamiliar territory.

Colleges are critical switching devices in an increasingly fragmented world. People come into college with one set of possibilities for their futures, and they leave with those possibilities multiplied. College is a futures exchange. It is a place that connects students to each other, to their local communities, and to the broader currents that are moving all communities all over the world. Moreover, while the college serves its local community (as

a source of education and the economic growth that comes from more highly educated people, as an economic engine simply from its own operations, as an enlightened citizen, as the provider of cultural life) it also plays its role in the international world of learning. Rooted in the local community, the college can connect that community to the world of knowledge as well as to those distant events and developments that increasingly reverberate in one's neighborhood, making those events less strange, less threatening, more understandable.

Mediating between the local and the global may be a schizophrenic sort of existence for an educational institution, but it is a crucial role in our increasingly problematic world. If we can not maintain these two poles in dynamic equilibrium, our future will be dark. To colleges such as Huntingdon we must look to take up that added challenge and to master it. I therefore wish Huntingdon College and President Bigham the very best of luck. Our fate is in their hands.

**Remarks by Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
Before the Annual Meeting of the  
American Council of Learned Societies  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
April 29, 1994**

**Archibald McLeish, in an essay published in 1949 as a warning against the mounting hysteria of anti-Communism, wrote, "The soul of a people is the image it cherishes of itself; the aspect in which it sees itself against its past; the attributes to which its future conduct must respond. To destroy that image is to destroy, in a very real sense, the identity of the nation, for to destroy the image is to destroy the means by which the nation recognizes what it is and what it has to do."**

**The question I raise today is, do we have a clear and an adequate image of ourselves in the post-cold-war world, given all the threats to political stability and human welfare both foreign and domestic, given the dangerous fragmentation of a world in which**

the closeness imposed by modern communications and the global economy has reemphasized the differences within the human family? What is the United States going to be for in the twenty-first century, now that we don't have the "Evil Empire" to be against? What picture of an ideal America is going to inform our struggles with current problems? What notion of shared commitments, mutual obligations, civic virtues, will help us come together to solve common problems?

Writing a few weeks ago in The New York Times (March 27, 1994), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University put the challenge of Minister Louis Farrakhan and his hate-mongering disciple, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, in perspective by quoting Rabbi Yaakov Perrin's eulogy for Dr. Baruch Goldstein, the man who massacred worshipping Palestinian Muslims in Hebron: "One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail."

**"But we have heard this voice before," Gates writes. "It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. We hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst. And, of course, we hear it from some who profess to be addressing the misery of black America."**

**Professor Gates goes on to connect these and other examples of murderous utopianism to the weaknesses of liberalism and to less lethal forms of what he calls identity politics.**

**"There has been much talk about the politics of identity," Gates writes, "a politics that has a collective identity at its core. One is to assert oneself in the political arena as a woman, a homosexual, a Jew, a person of color. . . . The politics of identity starts with the assertion of a collective allegiance. It says: This is who we are, make room for us, accommodate our special needs, confer recognition upon what is distinctive about us. It is about the priority of difference, and while it is not, be itself, undesirable, it**

**is – by itself – dangerously inadequate."**

**Glancing around our nation now does not give one much reassurance. Not only does Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam travel from campus to campus spewing bigotry and leaving divisive squabbles in his wake, but a recent survey among members of the African American community disclosed a rising degree of black nationalism and a majority (62%) who found some positive elements in Minister Farrakhan's message.** A few months ago, the National Conference of Christians and Jews released the results of a survey of race relations commissioned by them and done by Lou Harris. The results revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that among Anglo-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, disturbingly high percentages of each group held negative stereotypes of each of the other groups. So much for the myth of "the new majority," the idea that people of color are united against Euro-Americans. No wonder the village square these

**days is full of sound and fury.**

**As effective as the politics of difference have been in bringing previously excluded groups into the mainstream of American life (one might, in fact, say because the politics of difference have been so effective in giving formerly silent groups access to the national public address system), rancorous debates are increasingly occupying our attention.**

**Take for example the angry debates in state legislatures around bills to make English the official language of the state, an act that is primarily symbolic and is emotionally resisted for that very same reason (nineteen states have such laws; Maryland just turned down an "official English" bill). The growing debate over immigration policy will be no less clamorous. From South Central Los Angeles to Crown Heights, from Libertyville to the recent assassination on the Brooklyn Bridge, tensions among racial and ethnic groups in the**

**United States are in volatile condition.**

**That this is more than academic is clear if one recalls the hand-to-hand combat within school boards involving such issues as bilingual education and Afrocentric curricula, the dispute over the literary canon at the college level, or the court decisions seeking to remedy past patterns of discrimination in voting rights cases by requiring redistricting or changes in the form of local government so as to guarantee the minority community representation in the legislative body. In most of these cases, and others you can probably think of, public authorities are being asked to confer some sort of official status on a particular cultural group. Large parts of the public sense that this form of particularism is a problem in a system based on universal values of individual rights [American Indians being an exception in that they have citizenship as individuals but also group rights conferred by treaties]. Simply saying that everyone must respect everyone else's ethnic identity**

**therefore does not solve the problem.**

**Furthermore, how is one to embrace cultural equality when one is aware of so many practices one may not admire: polygamy, genital mutilation, the subordination of women in various other ways, the rejection of life-saving science, authoritarian social structures, ethnocentric and racist beliefs, etc. On what occasions and in what circumstances should the practices of cultural minorities give way to the general society's rules, regulations and expectations?. At the same time, how can an inclusive American identity be defined so as not to obliterate the particular cultural identities that make America's diversity so enriching? These are complex matters that require careful thought.**

**America, of course, has always been diverse and its diversity has always been problematic, which is the reason for our motto, "E Pluribus Unum." We take pride in the fact that our nation rests**

**upon a commitment to individual equality and democracy rather than upon ethnicity, but we worry about cohesion, and we bounce back and forth along the continuum between the assimilation implied by the "melting pot" myth and the persistence and mutual separation of pre-American cultural identities assumed by the metaphor of the national quilt or the mosaic.**

**What is our image of the America of the 21st century? What kind of America do we wish to be? Is America to become, as Arjun Appadurai worries (Public Culture, Spring, 1993), a collection of exiled groups whose members have loyalties only to their own group or perhaps to the homeland rather than to the United States? Are we to be a nation of exiles rather than a nation of immigrants? Should our image be of an undifferentiated America of "melting pot" individuals without any hyphenated identity? Can it be an America of shared values and commitments that nonetheless retains the modulation of cultural differences, an America in which we are**

all American AND something else? Can we define what Henry Louis Gates calls "humanism," which starts not with a particular identity "but with the capacity to identify with. It asks what we have in common with others, while acknowledging the diversity among ourselves. It is about the promise of shared humanity."

Can we identify those values and commitments we need to share if we are to be a successful society? Is a belief in the Constitution and our political system enough to hold us together without violent friction between members of different groups? To what extent can any inclusive national identity enlist our loyalties if it does not squarely face the issue of social justice? If equal opportunity is to be part of the American ideal, shouldn't we talk about the extent to which it does not exist and how to bridge the gap between ideal and reality?

There is not one of our considerable number of social ills that

would not be considerably improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole. I was in Savannah, Georgia not long ago visiting some NEH funded projects and I learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the past of a residential community called Cuyler-Brownsville. One of the people interviewed remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where everyone looks out for everyone else, or, as he put it, "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic virtue than that. Everyone feels responsible for everyone else. It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, but some analogous sense of identification with the whole is needed.

Two things are required if each of us is to be willing to subordinate our individual self-interests on occasion to the good of the whole: we must feel a part of the whole, and we must see in

**that whole some moral purpose that is greater than the individual. Our problem is our inadequate awareness of what might be called the sacred order that underlies the social order and is the source of legitimate authority in the social order.**

**At an earlier defining moment in the nation's history, on the eve of the outbreak of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, speaking between his election and his inauguration, in Philadelphia in Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had been drafted, found the meaning of America in its mission of being the exemplar for the world of the ideals of human freedom and equality set forth in those great documents.**

**On that occasion, Lincoln said, "I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this [Union] so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but hope to the world for all future**

time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." It was not only about slavery but about slavery as a violation of the principles of democracy and the sanctity of the Union because with the Union rested the world's hope for democracy.

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy, with its promise of liberty and equality, could survive, whether the last best hope on earth could endure. Returning to this theme two and a half brutal years later at the dedication of the military cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that defending the Union was worth the sacrifices exacted by that terrible struggle because the sacrifices made possible "a new birth of freedom."

The challenge of our time is to revitalize our civic life in order to realize a new birth of freedom. All of our people - left, right and

**center - have a responsibility to examine and discuss what unites us as a country, about what we share as common American values in a nation comprised of so many divergent groups and beliefs. For too long, we have let what divides us capture the headlines and sound bites, polarizing us rather than bringing us together.**

The conversation that I envision will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation and vigorous attempts to hold at bay their feelings of impotence and powerlessness. Public life seems barren and vacuous. And gallant efforts to reconstruct public-mindedness in a Balkanized society of proliferating identities and constituencies seem farfetched, if not futile. Even the very art of public conversation - the precious activity of communicating with fellow citizens in a spirit of mutual respect and civility - appears to fade amid the backdrop of name-calling and finger-pointing in flat sound bites."

**Despite the difficulties, the conversation must proceed. The objectives are too important to neglect. What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously to define the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and the National Endowment for the Humanities is in the process of encouraging that conversation through a special program of grants, through a film intended for national broadcast on television but which will also be repackaged for use in the nation's classrooms, through a bulletin board on the internet, through the ongoing activities of the state humanities councils, and through creative partnerships with organizations throughout the country that can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion among citizens from all walks of life, age groups and diverse communities.**

**This will be a risky enterprise, because the NEH comes only**

**with questions – not answers. The outcome is therefore unpredictable, contingent as it is on the course of the discussion and on what we learn from each other as we talk.**

**However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct public-mindedness in America. Without a sense of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of our loyalty. I hope each of you individually and the institutions of which you are a part will find a way to participate in this conversation about the American identity. It is very important.**

**Fortunately, there is some evidence of the continuing power of the idea of America that has moved generations of our people to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and**

**people like themselves but for others, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents. When the American Jewish Committee wanted to rally public support against the sort of intolerance being preached by the Nation of Islam, it called upon familiar rhetoric that reveals a particular conception of America and its civic values.**

**"We are Americans, whose diversity of faith, ethnicity and race unites us in a common campaign against bigotry," (read the copy of the advertisement that ran in the New York Times (February 28, 1994) over an impressive and diverse array of leaders).**

**"We are Americans, who know the rights and dignity of all of us are jeopardized when those of any of us are challenged.**

**We are Americans, who reject the ugly slanders of the hatemongers seeking to lift up some Americans by reviling others.**

**We are Americans, born or drawn to this land, children of immigrants, refugees, natives and slaves, whose work together honors the history of the civil rights struggle and makes it live, for all Americans.**

**In recent weeks, leaders of the Nation of Islam have gained wide attention for their verbal attacks on whites, women, Jews, Catholics, Arabs, gays, and African Americans who criticize their persistently divisive message.**

**We, the undersigned, believe the best response we can give to those who teach hate is to join our voices, as we have so often joined forces, in a better message – of faith in each other, of shared devotion to America's highest ideals of freedom and equality.**

**"We must learn to live together as brothers," the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "or we will all perish together as fools. That is the challenge of the hour."**

**Together, we strive to meet that challenge. For with all our differences, we are indeed united, as Americans."**

Remarks by Sheldon Hackney  
Freshman Convocation  
Georgetown University  
September 16, 1994

I am delighted to be here with you this afternoon. Being a new neighbor, I want to explore my surroundings. Before the end of the day, also, I hope to discover what exactly a "Hoya" is. It is not in my spellcheck. Now, I am not engaging in ridicule here. That is not a stance that can be adopted by anyone who has just spent thirteen years as president of a university whose mascot is a "Quaker," leading to such ironic cheers in the football stadium as "rip 'em up, tear 'em up, give 'em hell, Quakers," or the more graphic "Go Quakers, kill, kill, kill."

I must confess at the outset that my mood today is full of ambiguity, if not outright cognitive dissonance. Here we sit in freedom and comfort and safety, while not too many miles away several thousand of our fellow citizens have given up their freedom and comfort and are preparing to risk their lives on our behalf, to reinstall democracy in Haiti. Whatever you think of the policy that is being followed with regard to Haiti, the men and women who will carry out that policy are simply doing, in a dramatically intensified way, just what we are all asked to do in less heroic and safer ways every day: don't run the red light even if you are in a hurry, pay your taxes even if you need the money yourself, don't be a burden on your neighbors even if it is a drag to have to work, etc. It may be a long way from such minimal good citizenship to military service, but the way is along a single continuum.

For democracy to work, we must all be interested enough in the larger public good, and in the long-term success of the society, to be willing to forego occasionally the pursuit of our own immediate self-interest in myriads of small ways, and sometimes in big ways. Democracy is a conversation between the many and the one.

My incipient guilt, however, comes from the fact that as this very important drama of democracy is being played out, I have personally been caught up in a swirl of activities aimed at promoting the premier on Sunday night of "Baseball, A Film by Ken Burns," a documentary that has been funded in large part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. How can I be spending my time being a husckster for a mere game when there are life-and-death events going on around me? Did I mention that it is Sunday night at 8 PM on WETA?

Indeed, given all the dire needs of our society, how can I justify spending tax dollars on a sports film -- that will be seen Sunday evening at 8 PM on Channel 24 broadcast, channel 6 on local cable? Don't miss it.

If you watch all nine "innings" of the documentary, all 18.5 hours, you will understand why the current baseball strike occurred, why the season was terminated, and why so many Americans are angry about it. To be sure, there are those who say the game of baseball is fifteen minutes of excitement crammed into three and half hours of somnolence, but Americans seem to care pasionately about it. Take, for example, the story of the Little League coach who called his star player over to explain

about good sportsmanship. "Johnny," he said, "on this team there will be no temper tantrums, there will be no profanity, we will not yell derogatory things at the umpire, we will not insult the opposing players, there will be no sulking if we lose the game -- is that clear?" "Yes, sir," said Johnny. "Well", said the coach, "if you understand that, do you think you can explain it to your father, or am I going to have to ban him from the games?"

In our fractured and fragmented modern life, baseball is one of the shared experiences that provides common ground for a diverse America. It holds us together. Some wags insist that America is held together by the pursuit of sex, money and sports. That reminds me of the comment that Oscar Levant made on the divorce of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio, "It proves that nobody can be successful at two national past times."

Baseball is the source of much of our humor, and most of it seems to flow from Yogi Berra, one of the greatest catchers to play the game, but not one of the games great intellects.

school teacher in St Louis

90% of hitting is mental, the other half is physical  
if the fans don't want to come out to the ballpark,  
nobody is going to stand in their way.

it ain't over till its over

"You don't look so hot yourself."

His son claims . . . (streakers)

"I never said most of the things I said."

Despite the humor, baseball is a prism through which one can examine large areas of American social history: race relations in

particular, but also gender relations, labor-management relations, immigration, ideals of heroism and villainy, personal virtues and American national character. Baseball, the game and the film, offers a thousand and one morality plays in which we are instructed about the human condition and the important things in life. (Did I say it premiers Sunday at eight?)

More important, for us here today, baseball provides a metaphor for the paradoxical duality of the many and the one. Of all our team sports, it is the most individualistic. Each player's performance can be clearly observed and statistically measured, yet the most important statistic is the team's score in the game and its won-lost record for the season.

When Bo Belinsky, a pitcher for the Angels, was asked to explain how he lost a game 15-0, he said, "How do you expect a guy to win any games if you don't get him any runs?" Each player's success is in some large measure dependent on the success of the team. It is now a cliche for a star who has won the batting title or the Cy Young award or the MVP award for his league to say he would trade in all the personal prizes and recognition for the experience of being on a team that wins the world series. The success of the team is important to the individual.

We all want individual recognition, but we also want to belong to something of worth that is bigger than we are. That is part of the romance of the many and the one in the secular world. I will leave it to Father O'Donovan to draw attention to the parallel of this to the Christian paradox of being able to gain

one's life only by giving it up. The selfhood that matters comes from selflessness.

The college years on which you are just now embarking present a particular form of this same paradoxical duality. We learn from Eric Erikson that these years of emerging maturity are typically the years in which one must resolve one's identity crisis, decide what kind of person one wants to be. Maturity, of course, is wanting to be the kind of person one is able to be. Much of the search for that identity is trial and error, as well as observation, exploring, trying out different personas, extending one's experience personally and intellectually so that new possibilities for life are entertained. This can lead to the sort of self-absorbtion, the sort of self-indulgent solipsism, that is unlovely at best and disasterously self-destructive at worst.

The apparent paradox is provided by the fact that these years are also the time when one should be learning how to make and maintain intimate friendships. You will discover that you will make friends here at Georgetown who will remain your close friends throughout your life, even if you get geographically separated. To make a friend, however, you have to learn to trust someone else with some of your secret self. That is not easy. It is like putting your head on the chopping block and giving someone else the ax. That is why marital divorces hurt so much and why they so frequently become cruel and ugly. To have a soulmate, however, you must give someone else the key to your innermost being. You can't really do that unless you know what

your innermost being is. You can't love another person until you love yourself. You can't trust another person until you trust yourself. The self and the other emerge together, mutually dependent. I maintain also that one can best discover who one is through engagement with others, through activity, even through service -- another manifestation of the creative tension between the one and the many.

Back in the broader secular world, Alan Wolfe has called attention to the tension between liberalism, understood as personal liberty, and democracy, understood as the will of the majority; this is also the tension between the many and the one. Wolfe writes, "The predicament of liberal democracy is that liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy denies the logic of liberalism, but neither can exist without the other."

Scholars interested in the problems of contemporary life and in economic development have begun to focus on what they are calling "social capital" as distinguished from "human capital" (education, skills, training, traits of character, etc.) and "physical capital" (natural resources, roads, bridges, communications linkages, means of production, etc.). Robert Putnam, a Political Scientist at Harvard, did a study of regional governments in Italy to try to identify why some were successful and some were not. The variations in success were not strongly correlated with any of the usual variables (education, wealth, resources, etc.). Success was statistically best explained, however, by measures of citizen engagement, and the social networks of civic involvement seem to precede rather than follow

the success. This is to say that the most important thing in making a neighborhood or a society or a university a wholesome place to live, and to provide improved life chances to those who live there, is citizen involvement.

This recognition of the importance of the village in the raising of the child would be good news without any qualification if it were not also true that in the United States every measure of civil involvement has been trending down for over two decades and is still in decline (PTA membership, church attendance, Kiwanis clubs, voter turnout, etc.). Contemporary Americans have fled from the public square to sit isolated in front of television sets, or at their computer terminals, or in their "edge cities", or otherwise in the pursuit of private and individual satisfactions. This is both physical (one of the reasons the streets are less safe these days is because there are fewer people on them), and it is psychological (the popularity of radio talk shows attests to the desire of people to break out of their isolation, even if that proves to be a frustratingly unsuccessful way of doing it).

No wonder we are living with so much cynicism and distrust! The downward trend in measures of civic involvement over the past twenty-five years is mirrored by the plummeting level of confidence expressed by the public in the presidency, in the Congress, in the news media, and in every institution in American life. As we draw apart from each other in our private and perhaps self-indulgent pursuits, we grow suspicious of each other, and we become less and less capable of common action.

[Explain the prisoners dilemma and the problem of the commons].

"Democracy begins in conversation," wrote John Dewey. It can not exist without a certain level of mutual trust, without citizen's caring enough about the success of the whole to forego on occasion the rewards of atomistic competition. That is why the NEH is sponsoring a "national conversation on American pluralism and identity," on what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century, on what principles and common commitments hold Americans together and make it possible for our ethnically and racially and culturally diverse society to be successful as a democracy. Through a program of grants, a film intended for broadcast on public television and use in the nations classrooms, an interactive bulletin board on the Internet, a conversation kit that will be made available to anyone or any group that wishes to conduct its version of the conversation, the NEH seeks to bring together unprecedented numbers of Americans to talk and to listen to each other about shared values and the meaning of America. It is a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and all points of view represented. Only in that way can we revitalize our sense of our communal life.

This will be a risky enterprise, because the NEH comes only with questions -- not answers. The outcome is therefore unpredictable, contingent as it is on the course of the conversation and what we learn from each other as we talk.

However large the task, I believe we must reconstruct networks of mutual engagement of the kind that will serve as "social capital." We must revive public-mindedness. We must rediscover the truth that individualism is a group activity. We must create a public sphere in which Americans can discuss matters of mutual concern. Without a sense of common belonging, we are doomed to narcissistic failure. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of our public and our private lives is to define our common commitments and shared principles, and to find in our common identity a moral purpose that is worthy of our loyalty.

You may draw your own conclusions from our conversation. My own belief is that there is continuing power in the idea of America that moved Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., that has moved generations of our people to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and for people like themselves but for others who are different, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents.

I believe that there is a master historical narrative in which we all recognize not only the stories of our kith and kin but in which we recognize that we all are playing roles in a common story, in which we are all linked to each other across barriers of time and boundaries of race, in which we share the shame of our mistakes and the glory of our achievements, in which

the meaning of America is to be found in the common ground of its aspirations of liberty and justice for all.

Remarks of Sheldon Hackney  
Installation of Frederick Nahm  
President of Knox College  
Galesburg, Illinois  
October 14, 1994

Trustees, distinguished guests, students and faculty, ladies and gentlemen, President Nahm, my friend and former colleague, what a pleasure it is for me to be here with you today, here in the land of Lincoln, virtually on the spot where the fifth Lincoln-Douglas debate took place in 1858. That debate was over slavery in the territories, but it was really about the American identity and the purpose of the nation. Lincoln was an exponent of a view that has come to be called "American exceptionalism," the idea that the nation has a moral purpose, that it has been chosen by God to set an example for the world. "Let us realize," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson toward the end of his life, "that this country, the last found, is the great charity of God to the human race." "Let these wonders work for honest humanity, for the poor, for justice, for genius, and for the public good."

I believe we face similar challenges of purpose today. To Lincoln in his debates with Stephen A. Douglas, the question was whether or not African Americans were included in the promises of the Declaration of Independence. Similarly, today, the questions have to do with who is included in those promises and what do they mean as we approach the third millennium.

As I have been worrying about those profound questions a great deal lately, I find it especially pleasant to be back on a college campus where, as Emerson told us in "The American Scholar," "The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances." I hope to get some such benefit from Professor Hane while I am here.

It is especially nice to be here now, in the fall, with the promise of a new academic year stretching out before us. In this particular case there is the added pleasure of an exciting new era in Knox's distinguished history beckoning us into the future. In my new life in the nation's capitol, I miss the rhythms of the academic year. Last spring, I could not tell that summer had arrived because there was no Commencement ceremony in my life -- and no summer vacation either. I am temporarily disoriented. My mental calendar starts in September, but it is now the final busy month of the federal fiscal year and not the beginning of another academic year. It still does not feel natural.

The exhilaration of the boundless opportunities of the fall on a campus always seemed to me to be in tension with the natural literary use of the fall as a symbol of aging and the end of possibility. As the poet, John Berryman, writes:

"Fall is grievy, brisk. Tears behind the eyes  
almost fall. Fall comes to us as a prize

to rouse us to our fate."

American culture loves these binary opposites, these apparent paradoxes. Take for example the drama that is played out during the traditional college years, which are years of emerging maturity. For students, it might be called the drama of distinctiveness and belonging.

We learn from Eric Erikson that the task of these years is to resolve one's identity crisis, to determine what sort of person one wants to be. Maturity, of course, is deciding to be the sort of person that one is capable of being. Much of this search for one's individual identity is trial and error, experimenting with different roles and various personas, exploring, observing, extending one's experience personally and intellectually so that new possibilities are entertained. The horizon seems limitless, but it can also lead to self-absorption, the sort of self-indulgent solipsism, that is unlovely at best and disastrously self-destructive at worst. The focus is inward.

The apparent paradox is provided by the fact that these years are also the time when one should be learning how to make and maintain intimate friendships. The urge to individuality is countered by the urge to be part of a group, to be accepted, to have the badge of outward approval that comes with comradeship. The focus is outward.

The self and the other emerge together, mutually dependent. You can usually best discover who you are through engagement with others, through activity, through service. That is why the college years are a time of both lonely introspection and togetherness, a time when individuals are learning to be confidently independent but also fervently seek membership in larger groups -- a manifestation of the creative tension between the many and the one.

Something of the same tension between the many and the one struck me as being at the core of our national pastime, under whose spell I fell this fall even as the strike was prematurely ending the season. My season continued, as I hope yours did, by watching "Baseball, A Film by Ken Burns." (I love the hubris of that title, it is something like saying "Knox, A College by Frederick Nahm.") Because NEH was a major funder of "Baseball", I had an excuse for watching, so I did.

If you watched all nine innings of the documentary, all 18.5 hours, you will understand why the current strike occurred, why the season was terminated, and why so many Americans care about the sport. To be sure, there are those who say the game of baseball is fifteen minutes of excitement crammed into three and a half hours of somnolence, but the stately pace and reverential tone of the documentary are appropriate for an activity that is so woven into our communal lives.

Take, for example, the story of the Little League coach who called his star player over to explain about good sportsmanship. "Johnny," he said, "on this team there will be no temper tantrums, there will be no profanity, we will not yell derogatory things at the umpire, we will not insult the opposing players, there will be no sulking if we lose the game -- is that clear?" "Yes sir," said Johnny. "Well," said the coach, "if you understand that, do you think you can explain it to your father, or am I going to have to ban him from the games?"

In our fractured and fragmented modern life, baseball is one of the shared experiences that provides common ground for an increasingly diverse America. It helps to hold us together. Some wags insist that America is held together by the pursuit of sex, money and celebrity. That reminds me of the comment that Oscar Levant made about the divorce of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio, "It proves that nobody can be successful at two national pastimes."

Despite the humor, baseball is a prism through which one can examine large areas of American social history: race relations in particular, but also immigration, gender roles, labor-management relations, ideals of heroism and villainy, personal virtues and vices, and American national character. Baseball, the game and the documentary, offers a thousand and one morality plays in

which we are instructed about human nature and the human condition.

More important, baseball provides a metaphor for the paradoxical duality of the many and the one. This is probably the central tension in our culture, focused as it is on the cult of individualism and self reliance in a country whose real genius is for organizing human beings into large-scale enterprises, politically, economically and militarily. Of all our team sports, it is the most individualistic. Each player's performance can be clearly observed and statistically measured, yet the most important statistic is the team's score in the game and its won-lost record for the season.

When Bo Belinsky, a pitcher for the Angels, was asked to explain how he lost a game 15-0, he said, "How do you expect a guy to win any games around here if you don't get him any runs?" Each player's success is in some large measure dependent on the success of the team. It is now a cliche for a star who has won the batting title or the Cy Young award or been named the MVP to say he would trade in all the personal recognition for the experience of being on a team that wins the world series. The success of the team is important to the individual.

We all want individual recognition, but we also want to belong to something of worth that is bigger than we are. That is

part of the romance of the many and the one. Alan Wolfe of Boston University has called attention to the tension between liberalism, understood as personal freedom from governmental or external constraint, and democracy, understood as the will of the majority. This is also the tension between the many and the one. Wolfe writes, "The predicament of liberal democracy is that liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy denies the logic of liberalism, but neither can exist without the other."

Scholars interested in the problems of contemporary life and in economic development have begun to focus on what they are calling "social capital" as distinguished from "human capital" (education, skills, training, traits of character, etc.) and "physical capital" (natural resources, roads, bridges, communications linkages, means of production, etc.). Robert Putnam, a political scientist at Harvard University, did a study of regional governments in Italy to try to identify why some were successful and others were less so. The variations in success were not strongly correlated with any of the usual variables (education, wealth, resources, etc.) Success was statistically best explained, however, by measures of citizen engagement, and the social networks of civic involvement seem to precede rather than to follow the success. This implies that the most important thing in making a neighborhood or a society or a college a wholesome place to live, and to provide improved life chances to those who live there, is citizen involvement.

This recognition of the importance of the village in the raising of the child would be good news without any qualification if it were not also true that in the United States every measure of civic involvement has been trending down for over two decades and is still in decline (voter participation, PTA membership, church attendance, visiting a neighbor, etc.). Contemporary Americans have fled from the public square to sit isolated in front of television sets, or at their computer terminals, or in their "edge cities" and suburbs, or otherwise in the pursuit of private and individual satisfactions. This is both physical and psychological.

No wonder we are living with so much cynicism and distrust! The downward trend in measures of civic involvement over the past twenty-five years is mirrored in a Harris poll that has been taken continuously since 1964 which shows a plummeting level of confidence expressed by the public in the presidency, the Congress, the news media, and in every institution in American life. As we draw apart from each other in our private and perhaps self-indulgent pursuits, we grow suspicious of each other, and we become less capable of common action. It is a worry.

"Democracy begins in conversation," wrote John Dewey. It can not exist without a certain level of mutual trust, without citizens caring enough about the success of the whole to forego

on occasion the rewards of atomistic competition. Two things are required if each of us is to be willing to subordinate our individual self-interests on occasion to the good of the whole: we must feel that we belong to the whole, and we must see in that whole some moral purpose that is greater than the individual. Our problem is our inadequate awareness of what might be called the sacred order that underlies the social order and is the source of legitimate authority in the social order.

At an earlier defining moment in the nation's history, on the eve of the outbreak of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, speaking between his election and his inauguration, in Philadelphia in Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had been drafted, found the meaning of America in its mission of being the exemplar for the world of the ideals of human freedom and equality set forth in those great documents.

On that occasion, Lincoln said, "I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this [Union] so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." It was not only about slavery but about slavery as a violation of the

principles of democracy and the sanctity of the Union, because with the Union rested the world's hope for democracy.

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy, with its promise of liberty and equality, could survive, whether the last best hope on earth could endure. Returning to this theme two and a half brutal years later at the dedication of the military cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that defending the Union was worth the sacrifices exacted by that terrible struggle because the sacrifices made possible a "new birth of freedom."

The challenge of our time is to revitalize our civic life in order to realize a new birth of freedom. To that end, the National Endowment for the Humanities is sponsoring a "national conversation on American pluralism and identity," on what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century, on what principles and common commitments hold Americans together and make it possible for our ethnically and racially and culturally diverse society to be successful as a democracy. Through a program of grants, a film intended for broadcast on public television and use in the nation's classrooms, an interactive bulletin board on the internet, a conversation kit that will be made available to anyone or any group that wishes to conduct its version of the conversation, the NEH seeks to bring together unprecedented numbers of Americans to talk and to listen to each

other about shared values and the meaning of America. It is a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and all points of view represented. Only in that way can we revitalize our sense of our communal life.

This will be a risky enterprise, because the NEH comes only with questions -- not answers. The outcome is therefore unpredictable, contingent as it is on the course of the conversation and what we learn from each other as we talk.

However large the task, I believe we must reconstruct networks of mutual engagement of the kind that will serve as "social capital." We must revive public-mindedness. We must rediscover the truth that individualism is a group activity. We must create a public sphere in which Americans can discuss matters of mutual concern with each other. Without a sense of common belonging, we are doomed to narcissistic failure. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of our public and our private lives is to define our common commitments and shared principles, and to find in our common identity a moral purpose that is worthy of our loyalty.

You may draw your own conclusions from our conversation. My own belief is that there is continuing power in the idea of America that moved Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., that has moved generations of our people

to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and for people like themselves but for others who are different, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents.

I believe that there is a master historical narrative in which we all recognize not only the stories of our kith and kin but in which we recognize that we all are playing roles in a common story, in which we are all linked to each other across barriers of time and boundaries of race, in which we share the shame of our mistakes and the glory of our achievements, in which the meaning of America is to be found in the common ground of its aspirations of liberty and justice for all.

Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities  
Guest Lecturer  
Humanities Lecture Series  
University of Kansas  
October 18, 1994

I am delighted to be here and to be back on a university campus. Not only have I spent almost all my adult life in universities, but I believe in their crucial role in a modern democracy and I am committed to the search for truth that is the essence of the purpose of the university. There was a time when even secular truth had a more certain feel to it. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his classic essay, "The American Scholar," "The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances.

We have learned in the interim that truth is more contingent than that, and that claims of possession of the truth may foreshadow authoritarian nightmares. As Andre Gide therefore admonished us: "Believe those who search for the truth, but be wary of those who have found it."

Czeslaw Milosz in his book, The Captive Mind, quotes a bit of East European folk wisdom that I find compelling. "When someone is honestly 55% right, that's very good and there is no use wrangling. And if someone is 60% right, it's wonderful, it's great luck, and let him thank God. But what's to be said about 75% right? Wise people say this is suspicious. Well, and what

about 100% right? Whoever says he's 100% right is a fanatic, a thug, and the worst kind of rascal."

I am delighted to be here in that spirit of intellectual humility and adventure, and I am especially delighted to be here now, in the fall, with the promise of a new academic year still stretching out before us. In my new life in the nation's capitol, I miss the rhythms of the academic year. Last spring, I could not tell that summer had arrived because there was no Commencement ceremony in my life -- and no summer vacation either. I am temporarllly disoriented. My mental calender starts in September, but that month is now the final busy month of the federal fiscal year and not the beginning of another academic year. It still does not feel natural.

The exhilaration of the boundless opportunities of the fall on a campus always seemed to me to be in creative tension with the natural literary use of the fall as a symbol of aging and the end of possibility. As the poet, John Berryman, writes:

"Fall is grievy, brisk. Tears behind the eyes  
almost fall. Fall comes to us as a prize  
to rouse us to our fate."

American culture loves these binary opposites, these apparent paradoxes. Take for example the drama that is played out during the traditional college years, which are years of

emerging maturity. For students, it might be called the drama of distinctiveness and belonging, or recognition and togetherness.

We learn from Eric Erikson that the task of these years is to resolve one's identity crisis, to determine what sort of person one wants to be. Maturity, of course, is deciding to be the sort of person that one is capable of being. Much of this search for one's individual identity is trial and error, experimenting with different roles and various personas, exploring, observing, extending one's experience personally and intellectually so that new possibilities are entertained. The horizon seems limitless, but it can also lead to self-absorption, the sort of self-indulgent solipsism, that is unlovely at best and disasterously self-destructive at worst. The focus is inward.

The apparent paradox is provided by the fact that these years are also the time when one should be learning how to make and maintain intimate friendships. The urge to individuality is countered by the urge to be part of a group, to be accepted, to have the badge of approval that comes with comradeship. That focus is outward.

The self and the other emerge together, mutually dependent. You can usually best discover who you are through engagement with others, through activity, through service. That is why the college years are a time of both lonely introspection and

togetherness, a time when individuals are learning to be confidently independent but also fervently seek membership in larger groups -- a manifestation of the creative tension between the many and the one, which is also the central tension of liberal democracy.

Something of the same tension between the many and the one struck me as being at the core of our national pastime, under whose spell I fell this fall even as the strike was prematurely ending the season. My season continued, as I hope yours did, by watching "Baseball, A Film by Ken Burns." (I love the hubris of that title.) Because NEH was a major funder of "Baseball", I had an excuse for watching, so I did.

If you watched all nine innings of the documentary, all 18.5 hours, you will understand why the current strike occurred, why the season was terminated, and why so many Americans care about the sport. To be sure, there are those who say the game of baseball is fifteen minutes of excitement crammed into three and a half hours of somnolence, but the stately pace and reverential tone of the documentary are appropriate for an activity that is so woven into our communal lives.

Take, for example, the story of the Little League coach who called his star player over to explain about good sportsmanship. "Johnny," he said, "on this team there will be no temper tantrums, there will be no profanity, we will not yell derogatory

things at the umpire, we will not insult the opposing players, there will be no sulking if we lose the game -- is that clear?" "Yes sir," said Johnny. "Well," said the coach, "if you understand that, do you think you can explain it to your father, or am I going to have to ban him from the games?"

In our fractured and fragmented modern life, baseball is one of the shared experiences that provides common ground for an increasingly diverse America. It helps to hold us together. Some wags insist that America is held together by the pursuit of sex, money and celebrity. That reminds me of the comment that Oscar Levant made about the divorce of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio, "It proves that nobody can be successful at two national pastimes."

Despite the humor, baseball is a prism through which one can examine large areas of American social history: race relations in particular, but also immigration, gender roles, labor-management relations, ideals of heroism and villainy, personal virtues and vices, and American national character. Baseball, the game and the documentary, offers a thousand and one moralities plays in which we are instructed about human nature and the human condition.

More important, baseball provides a metaphor for the paradoxical duality of the many and the one. This is probably the central tension in our culture, focused as it is on the cult

of individualism and self reliance in a country whose real genius is for organizing human beings into large-scale enterprises, politically, economically and militarily. Of all our team sports, it is the most individualistic. Each player's performance can be clearly observed and statistically measured, yet the most important statistic is the team's score in the game and its won-lost record for the season.

When Bo Belinsky, a pitcher for the Angels, was asked to explain how he lost a game 15-0, he said, "How do you expect a guy to win any games around here if you don't get him any runs?" Each player's success is in some large measure dependent on the success of the team. It is now a cliche for a star who has won the batting title or the Cy Young award or been named the MVP to say he would trade in all the personal recognition for the experience of being on a team that wins the world series. The success of the team is important to the individual.

We all want individual recognition, but we also want to belong to something of worth that is bigger than we are. That is part of the romance of the many and the one. Alan Wolfe of Boston University has called attention to the tension between liberalism, understood as personal freedom from governmental or other external constraint, and democracy, understood as the will of the majority. This is also the tension between the many and the one. Wolfe writes, "The predicament of liberal democracy is that liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy

denies the logic of liberalism, but neither can exist without the other." This mystical mutual dependence of opposing ideals is so important to us that we should worry when it gets out of balance.

Scholars interested in the problems of contemporary life and in economic development have begun to focus on what they are calling "social capital" as distinguished from "human capital" (education, skills, training, traits of character, etc.) and "physical capital" (natural resources, roads, bridges, communications linkages, means of production, etc.). Robert Putnam, a political scientist at Harvard University, did a study of regional governments in Italy to try to identify why some were successful and others were less so. The variations in success were not strongly correlated with any of the usual variables of human or physical capital (education, wealth, resources, etc.) Success was statistically best explained, however, by measures of citizen engagement. Furthermore, the social networks of civic involvement seem to precede rather than to follow the success. This implies that the most important thing in making a neighborhood or a society or a college a wholesome place to live, and to provide improved life chances to those who live there, is citizen involvement.

This recognition of the importance of the village in the raising of the child would be good news without any qualification if it were not also true that in the United States every measure of civic involvement has been trending down for over two decades

and is still in decline (voter participation, PTA membership, church attendance, visiting a neighbor, etc.). Contemporary Americans have fled from the public square to sit isolated in front of television sets, or at their computer terminals, or in their "edge cities" and suburbs, or otherwise in the pursuit of private and individual satisfactions. This flight is both physical and psychological.

No wonder we are living with so much cynicism and distrust! The downward trend in measures of civic involvement over the past twenty-five years is mirrored in a Harris poll that has been taken continuously since 1964 which shows a plummeting level of confidence expressed by the public in the presidency, the Congress, the news media, and in every institution in American life. [Explain, using New York Times magazine article on "Antipolitics" which describes the public as being in a "sullen, surly mood." That mood is explained in the article by the following:

stagnant living standards since 1970

rising crime

proliferation of sources of (bad) news

rise of spending by special interests

gridlock

high expectations of the President

To that add the Hackney explanation:

the 1960s as a cultural watershed

blows to national self-confidence (1973 - Watergate, loss of war in Vietnam, Arab oil embargo, etc.)

Politics of difference

Rights based liberalism vs. greed -- both are individualistic]

As we draw apart from each other in our private and perhaps self-indulgent pursuits, we grow suspicious of each other, and we become less capable of common action. It is a worry.

"Democracy begins in conversation," wrote John Dewey. It can not exist without a certain level of mutual trust, without citizens caring enough about the success of the whole to forego on occasion the rewards of atomistic competition. Two things are required if each of us is to be willing to subordinate our individual self-interests on occasion to the good of the whole: we must feel that we belong to the whole, that our personal fate is bound up in the fate of the whole, and we must see in that whole some moral purpose that is greater than the individual. Our problem is our inadequate awareness of what might be called the sacred order that underlies the social order and is the source of legitimate authority in the social order.

At an earlier defining moment in the nation's history, on the eve of the outbreak of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, speaking between his election and his inauguration, in Philadelphia in Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had been drafted, found the

meaning of America in its mission of being the exemplar for the world of the ideals of human freedom and equality set forth in those great documents.

On that occasion, Lincoln said, "I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this [Union] so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." It was not only about slavery but about slavery as a violation of the principles of democracy and the sanctity of the Union, because with the Union rested the world's hope for democracy.

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy, with its promise of liberty and equality, could survive, whether the last best hope on earth could endure. Returning to this theme two and a half brutal years later at the dedication of the military cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that defending the Union was worth the sacrifices exacted by that terrible struggle because the sacrifices made possible a "new birth of freedom."

The challenge of our time is to revitalize our civic life in order to realize a new birth of freedom. To that end, the National Endowment for the Humanities is sponsoring a "national

conversation on American pluralism and identity," on what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century, on what principles and common commitments hold Americans together and make it possible for our ethnically and racially and culturally diverse society to be successful as a democracy. Through a program of grants, a film intended for broadcast on public television and use in the nation's classrooms, an interactive bulletin board on the internet, a conversation kit that will be made available to anyone or any group that wishes to conduct its version of the conversation, the NEH seeks to bring together unprecedented numbers of Americans to talk and to listen to each other about shared values and the meaning of America. It is a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and all points of view represented. Only in that way can we revitalize our sense of our communal life.

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You may draw your own conclusions from our conversation. My own belief is that there is continuing power in the idea of America that moved Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., that has moved generations of our people to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and for people like themselves but for others who are different, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents.

The sanctity of the individual and the promise of individual rights contained in the Constitution are central to any understanding of the meaning of America, but I believe radical individualism by itself, resting only on the entitlement of individuals to protection from the government and from other individuals, is an impoverished notion of America. As the self has been liberated from the demands of religious obligation and from the demands of society, it has also been separated from a sense of itself, a sense of personhood. Personhood derives from our relationships to people, groups, things, ideas outside of

ourselves. Relationships that confer meaning inevitably come with demands or obligations or duties. Take away the obligations and you take away the relationships and thus you take away the meaning that is one's identity. One then becomes a rootless individual in a sea of meaninglessness.

I believe, further, that there is a master historical narrative in which we all recognize not only the stories of our kith and kin but in which we recognize that we all are playing roles in a common story, in which we are all linked to each other across barriers of time and boundaries of race, in which we share the shame of our mistakes and the glory of our achievements, in which the meaning of America is to be found in the common ground of its aspirations of liberty and justice for all.

[END]

Comments of Sheldon Hackney  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities  
At the Michigan Humanities Council  
Twentieth Anniversary Celebration  
November 10, 1994

I take as my text some words of John Dewey written about sixty years ago but still pertinent to our situation:

What Philosophers have got to do is to work out a fresh analysis of the relations between the one and the many. Our shrinking world presents that issue today in a thousand different forms. . . . How are we going to make the most of the new values we set on variety, difference, and individuality -- how are we going to realize their possibilities in every field, and at the same time not sacrifice that plurality to the cooperation we need so much? How can we bring things together as we must without losing sight of plurality?

THE ONE AND THE MANY -- that is my subject, the dynamic tension between an important pair of opposite tendencies in our culture. I recall being intrigued by something that the poet, Donald Hall, said in his televised interview with Bill Moyers. He recited a little poem and then explained it, only to be told by Moyers that the poem had an entirely different meaning to him. Hall confessed appreciatively that he had never thought of the poem in the way Moyers interpreted it, and then he said, "A poem frequently has at the same time the meaning the poet intended and the opposite meaning as well."

I was reminded immediately of Sigmund Freud's crack that neurotic symptoms are both punishment and reward, and I kept thinking about the implications of Hall's profound observation. It soon occurred to me that nature seems to be filled with examples of binary opposites that complete each other:

Male-Female

North and South poles of magnets, and of earth  
The genetic code arrayed along strands of the double helix  
So it is with culture, especially American culture. For  
every strongly asserted trait of national character, the culture  
appears to produce, perhaps as a reaction formation, its opposite  
as well:

Equality -- Celebrity

Hard Work -- Get rich quick

Greed -- Philanthropy

Materialism - Religiosity

Delayed gratification -- Instant everything (rice, coffee,  
soup -- we are the land of fast food, quickee divorces and drive-  
in churches)

The linked pair of American cultural opposites that  
interests me tonight is individualism and organization -- the  
many and the one.

One revealing American arena in which to observe the  
mutuality of the many and the one is baseball. I hope you  
watched, as I did, the Ken Burns documentary, "Baseball, A Film  
by ken Burns." It was a fortuitous gift this fall, a way of  
extending the foreshortened season. Because NEH was a major  
funder of "Baseball", I had an excuse to watch, so I did.

If you watched all nine innings of the documentary, all 18.5  
hours, you will understand why the current strike occurred, why  
the season was terminated, and why so many Americans care about  
the sport. To be sure, there are those who say the game of

baseball is fifteen minutes of excitement crammed into three and a half hours, but the stately pace and reverential tone of the documentary are appropriate for an activity that is so woven into our communal lives.

Take, for example, the story of the Little League coach who called his star player over to explain about good sportsmanship. "Johnny," he said, "on this team there will be no temper tantrums, there will be no profanity, we will not yell derogatory things at the umpire, we will not insult the opposing players, there will be no sulking if we lose the game -- is that clear?" "Yes sir," said Johnny. "Well," said the coach, "if you understand that, do you think you can explain it to your father, or am I going to have to ban him from the games?"

In our fractured and fragmented modern life, baseball is one of the shared experiences that provides common ground for an increasingly diverse America. It helps to hold us together. Some wags insist that America is held together by the pursuit of sex, money and celebrity. That reminds me of the comment that Oscar Levant made about the divorce of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio, "It proves that nobody can be successful at two national pastimes."

Despite the humor, baseball is a prism through which one can examine large areas of American social history: race relations in particular, but also immigration, gender roles, labor-management

relations, ideals of heroism and villainy, personal virtues and vices, and American national character. Baseball, the game and the documentary, offers a thousand and one morality plays in which we are instructed about human nature and the human condition.

More important, baseball provides a metaphor for the paradoxical duality of the many and the one. This is probably the central tension in our culture, focused as it is on the cult of individualism and self reliance in a country whose real genius is for organizing human beings into large-scale enterprises -- politically, economically and militarily. Of all our team sports, baseball is the most individualistic. Each player's performance can be clearly observed and statistically measured, yet the most important statistic is the team's score at the end of the game and its won-lost record at the end of the season.

When Bo Belinsky, a pitcher for the Angels, was asked to explain how he lost a game 15-0, he said, "How do you expect a guy to win any games around here if you don't get him any runs?" Each player's success is in some large measure dependent on the success of the team. It is now a cliche for a star who has won the batting title or the Cy Young award or been named the MVP to say he would trade in all the personal recognition for the experience of being on a team that wins the world series. The success of the team is important to the individual.

We all want individual recognition, but we also want to belong to something of worth that is bigger than we are. That is part of the romance of the many and the one. Alan Wolfe of Boston University has noted the tension between liberalism, understood as personal freedom from governmental or other external constraint, and democracy, understood as the will of the majority. This is also the tension between the many and the one. Wolfe writes, "The predicament of liberal democracy is that liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy denies the logic of liberalism, but neither can exist without the other." Too much liberty, one might observe, is anarchy and leads to the tyranny of the strong; too much democracy is authoritarianism and leads to the tyranny of the majority. The required balance between freedom and order rests on a mystical mutual dependence of the opposing ideals of liberty and democracy. That balance is so important to us that we should worry when it threatens to go awry.

Scholars interested in the problems of contemporary life and in economic development have begun to focus on what they are calling "social capital." They distinguish social capital from "human capital" (education, skills, training, traits of character, etc.) and from "physical capital" (natural resources, roads, bridges, communications linkages, means of production, etc.). Robert Putnam, a political scientist at Harvard University, did a study of regional governments in Italy to try to identify why some were successful and others were less so.

The variations in success were not strongly correlated with any of the usual variables of human or physical capital (education, wealth, resources, etc.) Success was statistically best explained, however, by measures of citizen engagement. Furthermore, the social networks of civic involvement seem to precede rather than to follow the success. This implies that the most important thing in making a neighborhood or a society or a college a wholesome place to live, and to provide improved life chances to those who live there, is citizen involvement.

This recognition of the importance of the village in the raising of the child would be unalloyed good news if it were not also true that in the United States every measure of civic involvement has been trending down for over two decades and is still in decline (voter participation, PTA membership, church attendance, visiting a neighbor, etc.). Contemporary Americans have fled from the public square. As John Staudenmaier suggested brilliantly in his talk earlier today, they are too psychically exhausted by "media fatigue" to participate in the discussions in the public square. So, we Americans sit passive and isolated in front of our television sets, or at our computer terminals, or in our "edge cities" and suburbs, or otherwise in the pursuit of private and individual satisfactions. This flight is both physical and psychological.

No wonder we are living with so much cynicism and distrust! The downward trend in measures of civic involvement over the past

twenty-five years is mirrored in a Harris poll that has been taken continuously since 1966 which shows a plummeting level of confidence expressed by the public in the presidency, the Congress, the news media, and in every institution in American life.

Several weeks ago, the New York Times ran a cover story entitled "Antipolitics" in which the editors describe the public as being in a "sullen, surly mood." That mood is suggested in a series of stories, from which the reader could infer that the cause of the nasty public mood is to be found in such factors as stagnant living standards, rising crime, the proliferation of sources of news and thus the bombarding of the public with an overabundance of information, most of it negative, the dramatic rise in spending of special interest groups, gridlock in Washington, and impossibly high expectations of any President of the United States.

Those factors are undoubtedly real, but they are not sufficient to explain the long-term decline in American confidence as measured by the Harris poll (or a similar Gallup poll, for that matter). This is not the place to develop a complete explanation for what has been happening in America over the past three decades or more, but I believe any adequate explanation would have to begin with a recognition of the 1960s as a watershed in American history, a significant reordering of attitudes and relationships that have not yet been reintegrated into any sort of coherent notion of what the society is and where

it is going.

The sixties were years during which America took giant strides forward in social justice and inclusiveness, and during which countless subtle and no-so-subtle barriers to individual fulfillment were torn down, but the sixties had a dark side as well: self-indulgence, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and delusions of revolutionary transformation were all too prevalent. More importantly, even the positive changes had unintended consequences and perhaps unavoidable costs such as divisiveness.

All the social justice movements of the post-war era began in the decade of the sixties broadly defined, beginning with the civil rights movement ignited by the Brown decision in 1954, but including the women's movement, the gay and lesbian rights movement, the disabilities movement, the American Indian movement, and other movements on behalf of groups previously excluded from full participation in American life. These thrusts on behalf of social justice certainly ought to be seen as another proud step toward fulfilling the promises inherent in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, a step toward a closer approximation of the universal values in those great founding documents, but they also were occasioned by a great deal of social turmoil. The anti-war movement that was such a defining element of the decade was incredibly divisive, leaving tears in the social fabric that have not yet healed.

Furthermore, the counterculture that we sometimes think of

primarily in terms of styles and taste and music and dress was actually a frontal assault on the verities of the middle class. As middle-class culture is marked by planning for the future, doing one's duty, postponing gratification, respecting established authority, trusting the institutions of American life, and respecting one's elders; the counterculture urged us to live spontaneously and creatively without being imprisoned by the stultifying conformity of middle class life, not to trust anyone over thirty, to question authority, to recognize that human relationships are fleeting so personal loyalty and commitment are outworn virtues that interfere with self-actualization, and otherwise to live for the moment. It was an entirely different orientation to the world. Even though it did not gain the adherence of anything close to a majority of the population, it did influence attitudes and values profoundly.

Then, in 1973-74, in a brief span of months, three events occurred that shook the confidence of America in itself. Watergate, the Arab oil embargo, and the full awareness that we would leave Vietnam without a victory. America's innocence, traditional optimism and belief that all problems had solutions were fundamentally shaken.

Through the seventies and eighties, not only did the social justice movements continue to practice and profit from the politics of difference, but the individualism of rights-based liberalism competed with the individualism of material greed.

Christopher Lasch called it the "culture of narcissism" and Tom Wolfe dubbed the eighties the "me decade." Missing from the public discussion was what Os Guiness laments as a "common vision for the common good."

As we draw apart from each other in our private and perhaps self-indulgent pursuits, we grow suspicious of each other, and we become less capable of common action. It is a worry.

"Democracy begins in conversation," wrote John Dewey. It can not exist without a certain level of mutual trust, without citizens caring enough about the success of the whole to forego on occasion the rewards of atomistic competition. Two things are required if each of us is to be willing to subordinate our individual self-interests on occasion to the good of the whole: we must feel that we belong to the whole, that our personal fate is bound up in the fate of the whole, and we must see in that whole some moral purpose that is greater than the individual. Our problem is our inadequate awareness of what might be called the sacred order that underlies the social order and is the source of legitimate authority in the social order.

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meaning of America in its mission of being the exemplar for the world of the ideals of human freedom and equality set forth in those great documents.

On that occasion, Lincoln said, "I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this [Union] so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." It was not only about slavery but about slavery as a violation of the principles of democracy and the sanctity of the Union, because with the Union rested the world's hope for democracy.

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conversation on American pluralism and identity," on what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century, on what principles and common commitments hold Americans together and make it possible for our ethnically and racially and culturally diverse society to be successful as a democracy. Where along the continuum from melting pot to mosaic are we to find the appropriate image to describe an American identity suitable for the twenty-first century?

Through a program of grants, a film intended for broadcast on public television and use in the nation's classrooms, an interactive bulletin board on the internet, a conversation kit that will be made available to anyone or any group that wishes to conduct its version of the conversation, the NEH seeks to bring together unprecedented numbers of Americans to talk and to listen to each other about shared values and the meaning of America. It is a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and all points of view represented. Only in that way can we revitalize our sense of our communal life.

This will be a risky enterprise, because the NEH comes only with questions -- not answers. The outcome is therefore unpredictable, contingent as it is on the course of the conversation and what we learn from each other as we talk.

However large the task, I believe we must reconstruct networks of mutual engagement of the kind that will serve as

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You may draw your own conclusions from our conversation. My own belief is that there is continuing power in the idea of America that moved Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., that has moved generations of our people to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and for people like themselves but for others who are different, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents.

The sanctity of the individual and the promise of individual rights contained in the Constitution are central to any understanding of the meaning of America, but I believe radical individualism by itself, resting only on the entitlement of individuals to protection from the government and from other individuals, is an impoverished notion of America. As the self

has been liberated from the demands of religious obligation and from the demands of society, it has also been separated from a sense of itself, a sense of personhood. Personhood derives from our relationships to people, groups, things, ideas outside of ourselves. Relationships that confer meaning inevitably come with demands or obligations or duties. Take away the obligations and you take away the relationships and thus you take away the meaning that is one's identity. One then becomes a rootless individual in a sea of meaninglessness.

I believe, further, that there is a master historical narrative in which we all recognize not only the stories of our kith and kin but in which we recognize that we all are playing roles in a common story, in which we are all linked to each other across barriers of time and boundaries of race, in which we share the shame of our mistakes and the glory of our achievements, in which the meaning of America is to be found in the common ground of its aspirations of liberty and justice for all.

[END]

**Remarks of Sheldon Hackney  
Federation of State Humanities Councils  
November 19, 1994  
San Antonio, Texas**

**In the midst of World War II, thirteen months before D Day, Lewis Mumford told an audience that the humanities, of all things, were crucial to the American war effort. He didn't mean that the troops should put their weapons aside and simply heave books at the enemy. He meant that they should recognize that what they did was "bound up with the fate of humanity itself." "What indeed are the humanities for," Mumford asked, "if they are not to serve humanity?"**

**It was shortsighted to think that only military and economic mobilization mattered in the thick of war. Mumford explained that the humanities were essential, too, because they helped soldiers and citizens gain "insight into the rational purposes, the significant goods, and the ultimate ends of human**

life—into all the things that are worth living for, struggling for, fighting for, and, if need be dying for." Far from being a luxury at a time of crisis, the humanities made it possible for Americans to look beyond their immediate interests, to cultivate "a firm sense of political responsibility," to find and work toward "common goals."

We aren't at war now, at least not of the shooting variety, but we too need the humanities. We need them because we face our own crisis. The "sullen and surly" public mood, as the New York Times termed it, showed up in the election results ten days ago, revealing a society anxious about its cohesiveness, angry about the social pathologies that blight its collective life, unsure about its future. As Os Guiness phrases it, there is no common vision for the common good.

In the United States, every measure of civic involvement has been slipping for over two decades and is still in decline (voter participation, PTA membership, church attendance, visiting a neighbor, etc.). Contemporary Americans have fled from the public square to sit isolated in front of television sets, or at their computer terminals, or in their "edge cities" and suburbs, or otherwise in the pursuit of individual satisfactions. As we draw apart from each other in our private and perhaps self-indulgent pursuits, we grow suspicious of each other, and we become less capable of common action. Under siege, with the terrain clouded by smoke, the temptation is to hunker down in our cultural fox holes and lob votes at whoever is still above ground, whether or not there is any connection between our actions and the sources of our discontent.

Our work—the work of the National Endowment and the

State Councils—is more vital now than ever. The humanities have an essential role to play in combatting cynicism, nihilism, and fragmentation because they recognize the possibility of civic solidarity. They begin with the assumption that we can see, hear, and feel beyond our own limited experiences. This is the assumption behind the NEH-sponsored book group in Salt Lake City that holds discussions about South Africa, native American culture, and the mythology of the American West. It is the assumption behind a reading and discussion program about the Renaissance world of Christopher Columbus supported by the NEH and the New England Foundation for the Humanities. It is the assumption behind an NEH-supported project in Fort Bend County, Texas to create a "living history" interpretation of a Texas farm family in the 1820s. It is the assumption behind countless outstanding state projects.

I am especially impressed with what is happening in Ohio. The Ohio Humanities Council (OHC) in 1992 held five public meetings around the state to find out what citizens were interested in. In those meetings, Ohioans expressed their worries about rapid social change and the kind of community life that one could expect in the future, worries about the changing economy, secure neighborhoods, a decent environment for families to raise children in, quality education, and proper care for senior citizens. There was anxiety about American values and identity.

In 1993, the OHC began a three-year examination of the ways Ohioans have lived in their cities and towns, the stories they share about what separates them and what brings them together. "Read All About It" is a newspaper project that is one of the results of a two-year project entitled "Community Reconsidered." On a statewide basis, it examines the way the

**press and broadcast media reflect and shape our understanding of community life, social change, and what it means to be an American.**

**Also in 1993, the OHC developed several other statewide projects: two book discussions, with introductory essays by Robert Coles and Scott Russell Sanders; a video discussion series on labor history, with an essay by Oberlin historian Clayton Koppes. In 1994, the OHC launched a speakers bureau, which is in over a hundred sites in the first year, and a pilot project for the elderly in southern Ohio. "My Own Country" is a book-length collection of first-person narratives about early life in Ohio, drawn from diaries, journals, and letters, will serve as the centerpiece for public programs as the state approaches its bicentennial in 2003.**

**I could multiply these examples many times, because the**

entire practice of the humanities is based on the belief that human beings have the capacity to imagine and understand lives and cultures other than their own. That is why they are called the humanities. They can range across time and space, they can acknowledge diversity, difference, and conflict, but they do so with the implicit faith that the disciplined imagination can bridge temporal, spatial, and cultural distances.

They are a kind of communion. Our work and the work of the humanities as a whole become a way of exploring what we share, staking out common ground without obliterating difference, and building a public sphere. As Mumford explained, "An individual who has not yet entered into these realms has not yet reached the full human estate." The cultivation of the humanities "will perhaps bring back into our practical activities the powers of vision, of imaginative anticipation, and of ideal reference often so conspicuously

**absent."**

When I talked with you last fall, I said that my mission as chairman of the NEH would be to deepen and broaden the participation of Americans in the humanities. I also said that the NEH could not accomplish this mission without you. The belief that the humanities matter, that they enrich lives, take us outside ourselves, create empathy, and foster understanding is our common ground. The NEH and the state councils share a commitment to making American life more humane by bringing more and more Americans into the humanities. I am here again, as I put it a year ago, to sing a song of partnership.

The difference now is that instead of proposing a partnership, I can talk about its blossoming. In the past year, the Endowment and the state councils have worked together to

launch a national conversation on American pluralism and identity that will help to revitalize our sense of public-mindedness and community. Production has started on a film intended for broadcast on public television and for use in the nation's classrooms in the fall of 1995. An interactive bulletin board will soon light up the internet. We are about to begin distributing a conversation kit to anyone or any group that wishes to conduct its version of the conversation. We are receiving applications for our special competition in the Division of Public Programs.

As you know, the state councils have received \$10,000 each in extra program funds for the conversation, and they are playing a central role in the project. In fact, they have been pioneers. The Oklahoma council is building on its "Many Peoples: One Land" exhibits by developing guides for a reading

and discussion series; "Many Peoples: One Land" presents a historical overview of the ethnic groups that have settled Oklahoma. In Oregon, an exhibit about the culturally diverse residents of Columbia Villa, a Portland housing project, will serve as a catalyst for discussions on ethnicity, identity, and the effect of cultural differences on common values. The West Virginia council is sponsoring twelve series of forums on American Pluralism and Identity at various locations, both urban and rural, around the state. In Maryland, the council has launched a multi-faceted discussion among people across the state on the theme "Strength Through Diversity." Last month, the Council sponsored bus tours of Baltimore to explore the city's many communities.

I never envisioned the conversation in terms of rigid distinctions between national, state, and local efforts. It is, and

should continue to be, a true partnership in which all our contributions intersect and feed into one another. The conversation is a cooperative endeavor in both form and substance.

That kind of cooperation may be best illustrated by a success story. In 1982, Laurel Ulrich, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, became involved in the public humanities through the Maine state council's "Maine at Statehood" project, where she led workshops and public programs on domestic life. The following year she participated in a community oral history project funded by the New Hampshire Humanities Council that documented the lives and work of women in New Hampshire. The project led to an award-winning theater production called "It Had To Be Done So I Did It," which is still performed in the state several times a year. Professor Ulrich was on an NEH Summer Faculty

Fellowship when she discovered an 18th-century diary by a midwife named Martha Ballard in the Maine State Archives. In 1985, she received a year-long NEH Fellowship for University Teachers to research and write A Midwife's Tale, a book that uses Ballard's diary to invite us into the daily life of a rural colonial New England community and the roles women played in it. The book, as many of you know, won almost every important award, including the Pulitzer Prize. Now, with funding from the Endowment, A Midwife's Tale is being made into a movie. Professor Ulrich continues to participate in the activities of the New Hampshire council, including teacher institutes, conferences, lectures, and an oral history project on telephone operators in rural New Hampshire. Last year, she received one of our Charles Frankel Awards.

We can point with pride to the fact that her work was

supported both by the state councils and by the NEH. With the resources of the Endowment, what we helped nurture together will soon reach a much wider audience. A brilliant piece of scholarship will find its way into the lives of people in every state, and they too will have an opportunity to imagine experiences far away in time and culture. This is our mission. This is what partnership can accomplish.

Our partnership has blossomed in other ways as well. Since we last met, I have opened up public programs so that state councils can compete for grants, including grants in the national conversation's special competition. I have capped exemplary awards and distributed the released funds to the state councils. I have added funds to the state council grants to assure level funding despite the rise of administrative costs at the Endowment caused by pay increases and other imposed

costs. I have announced that henceforth we will hold the directors and chairs meetings in conjunction with the meeting of the Federation, adding the money saved to the program funds to be distributed to the state councils.

The Endowment has also maintained close and regular communication with both the Federation and the individual state councils, and we will keep looking for ways to improve our communication. I have enjoyed my many visits to state council meetings and events, most recently just this fall in Nevada, Oregon, Wyoming, New Hampshire, Utah, and Michigan. In the fifteen months that I have been in office, I have been in thirty states.

Now, with the spirit of partnership in full flower, I can take our next steps, the logical extension of the partnership idea and of the steps already taken. We will be opening all the

divisions of the NEH, including Challenge Grants, to applications from state councils. We have already received some very competitive state council proposals in Public Programs, and my hope is that by inviting the councils to compete across the Endowment we will demonstrate how the state councils offer programs of the highest quality in every area of the humanities.

I look forward to establishing a new mechanism, perhaps special working groups, that will allow us to discuss ways of further developing our partnership. We need, for example, to talk about how we might increase the involvement of the state councils in the peer review process. The councils are already represented on panels in Public Programs, but we need to expand that representation to other parts of the Endowment. We will work with the Federation and the state councils on

such issues as exemplary awards, programs that might be jointly offered by the NEH and state councils, and how to touch as many Americans as possible. It is also imperative that the state councils get involved with educational reform and Goals 2000 by working with their state and local agencies to make sure that they include the humanities as part of their efforts. The states are where the action will be in the educational reform movement, and the Endowment is eager to help you in the fight to improve humanities education in elementary and secondary schools across the country.

Finally, I will change the organizational structure at the Endowment through which the relationship between the NEH and the state councils is realized. This change is meant to symbolize the new relationship we are seeking to build and maintain, and it is meant to provide a structure that will

encourage the kind of cooperative patterns we desire. I am replacing the Division of State Programs with the Office of Federal-State Partnerships to be located in the office of the chairman. Carol Watson will become the Director of that office and Special Advisor to the Chairman. With Carol as a member of the Chairman's Staff, it will be much easier for me to be involved in the activities of the federation and the state councils, and the new arrangements give organizational expression to the fact that the relationship between the NEH and the state councils is different from the relationship between the NEH and ordinary grantees. With these new policies and organizational structures in place, with the partnership in being, the future beckons.

Indeed, I believe it does beckon despite the current political situation, though we must take the new realities in

Washington very seriously. The tectonic plates of politics, astride which we stand in Washington, have shifted in a dramatic way, and serious tremors are rumbling through our joint enterprise. We do not know what the future holds for the NEH, and as the institutional extension of the NEH, the state councils are also at risk. The situation is exceedingly fluid; our posture should therefore be flexible. The one thing of which I am absolutely certain, however, is that the humanities community needs as never before to be arrayed together in mutually supportive ways. Our partnership gives us an indispensable tool with which to cope with this dynamic situation.

The irony of the situation is that even though the election makes plain the pressing need for the sorts of construction of meaning and reconstruction of community that the humanities

can provide, we will be questioned as never before. I welcome that scrutiny, and hope you will as well. If the review is fair, it provides a great opportunity for us to make our case, to explain to a finally attentive audience just what we do and how necessary we are in a society that is in doubt about itself in so many ways.

It may turn out to be true, of course, that this will not be a fair review. It will rather be an attempt to devalue us and what we do by manipulating distorted images that prey upon anxieties and drive wedges among individual and groups. Be thou not slothful in preparing for such a harsh reality. The only thing better than a cogent argument is a majority of the votes.

Nothing is more important to a democracy than wisdom in the people. As we are the midwives of wisdom, the health of

**our democracy depends on our efforts. We must not let the nation down.**

Remarks of Sheldon Hackney  
American Anthropological Association  
December 1, 1994  
Atlanta, Georgia

As a historian, I want to begin by thanking you for your contributions to my discipline. Anthropologists have given historians ways of thinking about culture that have taken us beyond Matthew Arnold's exclusive and a historical notion of "the best that has been thought and said" and allowed us to open up exciting areas of inquiry. We now study cultures--plural--rather than Culture with a capital "C". In recent years, thanks to anthropological insights, we have seen a flowering of research into working-class and middle-class cultures, oral and print cultures, African-American and ethnic cultures, female and male cultures, commercial cultures and cultures of consumption, and the list goes on. Previously unheard voices from the past have begun to be heard, in large part because of changes in the way we conceive of sources, texts, and artifacts. Materials that meant nothing to us a generation ago are now full of possibilities, again thanks to anthropology's more expansive conception of culture.

By the time we got a hold of this more expansive conception--which the historian Warren Susman summed up as "patterns of behavior and belief, values and life-styles, symbols and meanings"--it was old hat to you. But it stands as one of the most fruitful examples of trans-disciplinary influence that I can think of. This kind of crossing of disciplinary boundaries is a sign of health in

the humanities and social sciences. Henry Louis Gates has praised the influence of anthropologists on his field of literary criticism. "We have to get away from the paradigm of disciplinary essentialism," he says: "imagining the boundaries of disciplines as hermetic, imagining our architectures of knowledge as natural or organic." It is one of my goals as Chairman of the NEH to encourage efforts to make more permeable the institutional and methodological walls that often isolate teachers and scholars from one another and from a larger public.

When I think about the projects that the NEH is currently supporting, I am struck by how many of them deal with culture in the anthropological sense. The directors may not be entirely aware of their debt, but that lack of awareness is itself one of the surest signs that disciplinary borders have been successfully breached. Borrowed theory has passed into everyday practice. Take, for example, the Tunica-Biloxi Cultural Center and Museum in Marksville, Louisiana, which received an NEH grant to help repair and preserve its collection of cemetery artifacts that reflect the history of early eighteenth-century trade between the French and the Biloxi Indians. Or the student from Massachusetts who received one of our Younger Scholars grants to study "Charismatic Religion and Race Relations: The Asuza Street Pentecostal Revival." Or the young historian from Tennessee who received an NEH summer stipend to continue his work on "The New South Frontier: Life in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, 1865-1920." Or the doctoral candidate from Ohio

who received an NEH dissertation grant to complete her thesis, "Horizons Lost and Found: Travel, Writing, and Tibet in the Age of Imperialism"

A second way in which anthropology has exerted its influences on history and other disciplines is by calling into question our ability to make certain kinds of generalizations. Long before anybody had uttered the words "post-structuralism" and "post-modernism," anthropologists were warning about the dangers of drawing sweeping conclusions about human thought, behavior, and institutions. What seemed universal was actually particular--limited by geography or time. David Hollinger has described an older tendency to make "claims about or claims on behalf of all humankind for which the salient referent was later said to be but a fragment of that elusive whole." To its critics, as Hollinger puts it, this "species-centered discourse. . . served to deracinate and to efface the varieties of humankind through the use of too parochial a construction of our common humanity." It almost goes without saying that the first important twentieth-century critics of what we might call parochial universalism were Boasian anthropologists. Ruth Benedict wrote in 1934, "It is the inevitability of each familiar motivation that we defend, attempting always to identify our own local ways of behaving with Behaviour, and our own socialized habits with Human Nature."

This puncturing of false universalisms has released scholarly

energies and produced an abundance of discoveries. But it has also had a serious down side. Taken to its extreme, the attack on parochial constructions of our common humanity becomes an attack on all constructions of our common humanity. Once it reaches this point, words such as "human," "humanism," "humanity," and "humanities" start to be used as epithets; they are either naive or reactionary. Hollinger describes a shift from "species-centered discourse to ethnos-centered discourse." In its extreme form, "ethnos-centered discourse" denies the possibility of any common ground between various groups and cultures. We should not or cannot envision anything except the local, the parochial, and the particular.

I do not see this as simply an academic problem--in the mistaken sense of "academic" as insular and irrelevant. It is a crisis in American society at large. This is not the place to try to explain in detail the fundamental economic, demographic, social, and intellectual forces that have had an atomizing effect on American society, but they are real and they are worrisome. In the United States every measure of civic involvement has been declining for over two decades (voter participation, PTA membership, church attendance, visiting a neighbor, etc.) Contemporary Americans have fled from the public square to sit isolated in front of television sets, at their computer terminals, in their "edge cities" and suburbs, or they have retreated into a politics of identity that has introduced another level of isolation and fragmentation.

The humanities have a vital role to play in rediscovering common ground and rebuilding the public sphere. I am not suggesting that we return to the false universalisms of the past. But I am urging that we teach our students and show our audiences the complex ways in which the humanities recognize the possibility of imagining and understanding lives and cultures other than our own. The humanities--and I am including anthropology here as the most humanistic of the social sciences--are based on the faith that the human imagination can bridge temporal, spatial, and cultural distance. We should not conceal the difficulties involved in this undertaking, but we should not be deterred by them either. I am in full sympathy with the idea behind this panel. It is time to venture beyond the intellectual imperialisms and parochialisms of the past, to transcend the reductionism at either end of that spectrum.

James Clifford--who, by the way, is an ethnographer with a doctorate in history--talks about the problem of "being in culture while looking at culture." An awareness of this "predicament," as he calls it, does not prevent us from making and publicizing the effort to move past the paralyzing belief in essential differences and unbridgeable gaps. I have heard many suggestions today that point the way beyond epistemological, political, and ethical paralysis. Fredrik Barth warns against making "culture" synonymous with "difference" and urges us instead to engage in a "commerce of knowledge and judgement." Nancy Sheper-Hughes explains how the

post-modernist turn has become "an excuse for political and moral dalliance" and reminds us that observing and listening can be actus of empathy, compassion, recognition, and solidarity. Several speakers invoke the term "interactions" as a better way of conceptualizing culture. I find this interest in cultural interactions very exciting and encouraging. In place of the old universalisms and the old and new parochialisms, the humanities must begin to explore conjunctions and confluences, overlaps and intersections. As Russell Jacoby has written, "The choice is not between a counterfeit universality (we are [interchangeable] members of one species) and forced particularism (we are only members of ethnic and racial groups)." In a world of barbed-wire borders and warring camps, we must reassert the faith that boundaries of knowledge and culture can be crossed.

Let me mention a wonderful example. James Goodman, a historian, published a book this year about the Scottsboro case in Alabama in the 1930s. The book is called Stories of Scottsboro because it recounts the events from multiple perspectives. While he recognizes the inevitable problems of cultural and temporal distance, Goodman sympathetically reconstructs the viewpoints of the black male defendants, the white female accusers, the southern judge and prosecutors, and the radical northern defense attorneys. This is a marvelous work of imagination. It captures the spirit of the humanities--the belief that it is worth the effort and the risks to open our minds and hearts to experiences with which we

cannot possibly have easy or immediate familiarity. Its embodies what Gates calls a "human notion of the humanities" which "moves us away from the division us/them implications of tracial defenses of the humanities and removes a source of cultural alienation that is clearly breeding disenchantment and disillusionment . . . ."

With this "human notions of the humanities" in mind, I believe that it is imperative for us to broaden and deepen American's participation in the humanities. At the NEH, I have taken a number of steps to realize this goal. As you may know, we have launched a "national conversation on American pluralism and identity," on what it means to be an America in the twenty-first century, on what principles and common commitments hold American together and makes it possible for our ethnically and racially and culturally diverse society to be successful as a democracy. Through a program of grants, a film intended to spark conversations across the country, an interactive bulletin board on the internet, a conversation kit that will be made available to any group that wishes to conduct its version of the conversation, the NEH seeks to bring together unprecedented numbers of Americans to talk and to listen to each other about shared values and the meaning of America. Our approach, if I can borrow Rob Borofsky's word, is "processual." We cannot find common ground by force or fiat. Only through participation and interaction, through dynamic processes, can we get beyond cultural essentialism and the politics of identity.

As John Dewey wrote, "Democracy begins in conversation." This is a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and all points of view represented. I encourage you, as teacher, scholars, social scientists, humanists, and citizens, to participate. (The toll-free numbers, by the way, are 1-800-NEH-1121.)

As part of my mission of opening up the humanities, I have made some administrative changes to streamline the Endowment and facilitate the process of applying for grants. Soon, instead of six divisions there will be four divisions at the NEH. By merging the functions of the Divisions of Fellowships and Seminars into the Divisions of Education and Research and by making State Programs part of the Chairman's office, I am trying to make the Endowment more accessible and more user-friendly. You won't have to expend quite so much energy trying to figure out where to apply. I hope that this will encourage more of you to take advantage of our resources. I especially want to urge younger scholars to seek NEH support as you work to create and disseminate new knowledge.

Lourdes Arizpe has invited us to rethink culture as the "cultivation of humans" to create a better future." Let me suggest a practical step in this direction. Just as we need to cross the boundaries between disciplines, we also need to involve a larger public in what we do. There is creative work to be done in building partnerships between scholars, teachers, museums, libraries, community groups, and the mass media. The NEH recently

sponsored a Modern Poetry Association series of reading, listening, and discussion programs that use the works of major contemporary American poets, taped interviews with them, and scholar-led readings at local libraries. Virginia Polytechnic Institute, also supported by the NEH, is conducting community discussions and producing videotapes that focus on ethical issues in modern medicine and technology. Another NEH grant is helping Southwest Texas State University develop a public lecture series, book discussion groups, a film series, and an exhibition on the Native American Southwest. I ask you to think of imaginative ways to bring Americans into the humanities, by seeking NEH support, by working with state humanities councils, and by establishing new forms of cooperation.

The humanities, as I have said, are not simply academic. They have the power to enrich and transform lives. They have the power to explode dangerous universalisms and equally dangerous parochialisms. They have the power to create and strengthen connections between people, to embrace diversity and to deepen our sense of community, to build what Robert Putnam calls "social capital"==social networks of citizen involvement, to revive public-mindedness. Cultural imperialism and cultural essentialism are opposite sides of the same coin. Both are failures of imagination. As critically engaged humanists and social scientists, our purpose must be to make imagination succeed.