

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE
HUMANITIES**

STATEMENT
OF
SHELDON HACKNEY
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
before the
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ON THE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
AND RELATED AGENCIES
of the
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this distinguished Committee once again to speak on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Mr. Chairman, I know that the FY 1996 budget choices you had to make were not easy. I recognize as well that the 36% budget cut from the FY 1995 appropriation to the FY 1996 conference level imposed on us was a signal that we had not only to make do with less, but that we had to be very entrepreneurial and find new ways to pursue our goals. We are doing just that. But I must also caution that this reduction has not been purchased without an important cost to the nation.

This past year has been an extraordinary time in Endowment history. As early as last summer, faced with the high probability of receiving a significant funding reduction for FY 1996, we began preparing for an orderly transition to a smaller and restructured NEH. Our guiding tenet during this exercise was to try to keep alive--to the greatest extent possible--the Endowment's historic mission of advancing education, research, preservation, and public programming in the humanities throughout the nation.

We finally made the transition to our new organization for our grant programs and operations. Although this action was a direct consequence of the radical reduction in our budget for FY 1996, I would like to point out that to a certain extent the reorganization continues a policy we have been following for the past two years of streamlining, whenever possible, our programming and core processes. My ultimate objective was to reorganize NEH in a way that could maintain a high level of service to the American people and to expand the ways we reach people in rural and urban areas, from school-aged children to adults. Due to the loss in federal funds, I knew that we would have to be creative about finding other ways to meet these objectives.

Before I continue, let me just point out that through all of the budget cut-backs and organizational restructuring the staff of NEH has continued to do the agency's business with the superior level of dedication and professionalism it has always shown in the best of times. It is very gratifying - and I am very proud - to represent this agency to the public as it continues, in spite of all, to honor the commitments we have made to scholars, teachers and citizens throughout the nation.

Having now gone through our painful reorganization and layoffs, we have emerged eager for the future but much smaller. We have shrunk from 276 positions to 170 positions. As part of our effort to make NEH as streamlined and efficient as possible, we have downsized from six divisions to three. And, we have had to

make some very tough decisions about program priorities as we were forced to go from 31 programs to 9.

A number of the programs that we eliminated were programs that probably are not very visible to the ordinary citizen. That is one of our dilemmas that I wanted to explore with you.

Let me give you an example. One of the very good programs that we are no longer doing at all, in any form, is the Younger Scholars Program, which provided small grants of \$2,000 to \$2,500 to high school students and college students in the humanities, to allow them to do a bit of original research and writing on subjects in the humanities during the summer, under the supervision of a scholar. This was a program that did not affect many students--we only made about 150 awards annually. But, this was a fairly expensive program to administer and so we thought that it could not be justified on a relative basis. In making these triage decisions, one of our criteria was to ask: How many lives does a program touch? This program seemed not to enrich as many as some of our other programs.

On the other hand, if you think about 150 young people around the country who had the opportunity to spend the summer studying and writing about a subject in the humanities, the value of the program was not so much that the research that they did could be reprinted and used by other students and teachers, but that there was some symbol that, in America, dreams of the spirit and of the mind were just as important as hoop dreams. And that symbolic loss, I think, is really quite important.

We have been forced to close a number of other important grant programs that I regret losing, such as dissertation grants, study grants for high school teachers, subvention grants to scholarly presses, and a number of others. Several other grant activities--for example, support for archaeological research, undergraduate curriculum development, school and college collaboratives, humanities studies of science and technology, and translations of foreign language texts into English--had to suspend or cancel their grant competitions for the year. In addition, we were forced to adopt a strategy of bundling many of our remaining programs together so that unlike activities will now have to be competing with each other for very much reduced pots of money.

As an example of what these reductions mean in real terms, let me share with you what we have contributed to the nation through the subventions program. This program has enabled publication of: Atlas of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, ed. by Gary Moulton (University of Nebraska Press); Cities of the Mississippi, by John Reps (University of Missouri Press); The History of Cartography, by J.B. Harley and David Woodward (University of Chicago Press); A Writer's Diary, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, (Northwestern University Press); and Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln, ed. by Don E.

Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher (Stanford University Press). Having had to cancel this program, I have no confidence that books of this nature, which have significant scholarly--but little financial--merit, will be published with the same level of intellectual rigor and discipline.

We do not have solid cumulative data on the impact of the FY 1996 cuts. So much of what we fund has an impact not in the short term, but over a far longer period of time due to the "ripple effect" of our grants. What begins as a lonely piece of scholarship, which may be read by only a small number of highly skilled researchers and scholars, is used by a filmmaker and suddenly 250 million Americans have a much richer understanding of our history; or at the same time this scholarship may be incorporated by textbook writers into books which are used by schools nationwide. So you see, we will not know the full effect, the full use, of the work we support for 20 to 40 years. And yet, without your support the constant, cumulative effort to understand our past will be impoverished.

Another example of the ripple effect of the projects we support is to be found in one of our flagship programs--summer seminars and institutes for college and school teachers. In the summer of 1995 this program supported seminars and institutes that were attended by more than 2,600 high school and college teachers around the country. As many as 425,000 students in America were taught by those teachers. That's close to half a million students whose lives were affected by a very modest grant program.

We're trying to protect this program, but it will also receive about a one-third cut because of the reduction in the agency's budget. This program offers teachers an experience that is absolutely transforming; especially for high school teachers, who do not otherwise get a chance to renew themselves intellectually, or to study with the leading scholars. They return to the classroom, not only with new knowledge about a subject area, but really charged up and ready to teach. With FY 1996 funds, however, we will only be able to support 1,400 teachers and reach 220,000 students - almost half as many as we reached last summer. And that means that 200,000 students are the losers.

Individual fellowships are the same way. The scholar who wins one of our fellowship grants is not the one who really benefits. Their research, published in a book or article, may then be used by other scholars, teachers, and their students. So, you can see that it is the student who really benefits.

Another area where we will feel the loss is in our reference works and other research tools that are critical to scholars and to students. The current budget situation is also significantly limiting the Endowment's ability to support projects to preserve fragile books, newspapers, documents, and artifacts held in the

nation's libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions. As this Committee is well-aware, for many years NEH has been the acknowledged leader in the national effort to preserve historical materials that are an important part of our cultural heritage. Because the FY 1996 budget decrease will force us to make fewer and smaller grants, 20,000 brittle books and 230,000 disintegrating pages of historically significant newspapers will not be microfilmed. In addition, 130,000 objects of archaeological, ethnographic, and historical importance to the nation will not be preserved.

The Endowment's ability to stimulate private donations to humanities institutions and projects has also been significantly scaled back as a result of the cuts. The lower appropriation for our Challenge Grants program, for example, means that we will be unable to "leverage" as much as \$20.6 million in new or increased gifts to humanities organizations and institutions across the country. To accommodate these reductions we have had to "stretch out" over longer periods of time our offers of matching funds to current challenge grant recipients.

As we were going through the furloughs this winter, I looked sometimes with envy on the situation of the National Park Service. When the Winnebagos start lining up at the entrance to a national park, and can't get in, the public notices, and people react. In a perverse way, I envied that pain and suffering, because it was visible, and NEH does not have that kind of visibility.

Though our projects touch hundreds of millions of Americans, the American people seldom make the connection that what they are viewing or reading or visiting is funded by NEH. Such is the nature of our grantmaking institution. We do not house a collection like the Smithsonian, or operate a network like PBS or exist as one central library like the Library of Congress. Our funding usually has a different public identity: people know us as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or WETA, or the Chippewa Valley Museum in Wisconsin, or Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. They do not know us as NEH. When the government shuts down there is no dramatic demonstration of the loss of NEH funds like there was at the National Gallery when people did not have access to the Vermeer exhibit.

The closest, I think, that we come in the NEH to the "we'll-have-to-close-the-Washington-Monument" syndrome are the collected editions of the papers of the nation's Presidents and other papers of important historical and literary figures that we support each year. These editions provide an invaluable service to the nation. The original source materials that scholars painstakingly assemble and transcribe are often in fragile condition, composed in handwriting that is difficult to decipher, and scattered among many archives.

Currently ongoing projects include: the George Washington Papers, the Legal Papers of Abraham Lincoln, the Papers of the First Federal Congress, the Dwight Eisenhower Papers, the Frederick Douglass Correspondence and the Andrew Jackson Papers. Unfortunately, all of these are not going to be able to continue. We expect that as many as 30 percent of presidential papers and editions projects we are presently supporting will not receive continued funding. And I think that's going to be a tremendous loss of untold proportions. The greatest country in the world ought to have a documented legacy of the men and women in our history who have contributed so much to America's development. But we can no longer afford it.

In our public programs area, possibly the only high profile area we have, we will be giving fewer and smaller grants for media projects and for museum exhibitions. We will only be able to fund less than half the number of film projects and museum exhibitions we had been supporting. As a result, the American people will have far less access to stimulating programs that provide them with opportunities to explore human history and culture through the humanities.

I think about the "Age of Rubens" exhibition at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio, which attracted more than a quarter-of-a-million people--the largest attendance of any exhibition in the Museum's 93-year history. This was more people than live in the city; it was drawing people from the whole region, of course. And it was a tremendous boost to their economy, generating \$22.8 million in revenues, as well as to the spiritual lives, if you will, of the people who went there to see that show. We will be doing fewer of those.

As I mentioned, we also will not be able to give nearly as many grants for television documentaries as we have in past years. We expect to have to turn down at least half of the best media grant proposals we receive and to offer the projects that we are able to support only about half of the funding they request. Partial funding will require these projects to seek additional money from the private sector at a time when the private sector's support for not-for-profit filmmaking is harder than ever to acquire. It is clear that the American people will have much less access to high quality educational television and radio programming in the humanities as a result of the FY 1996 funding cuts. It means that we may not discover, perhaps, the next Ken Burns--who brought us such documentaries as "The Civil War" and "Baseball"--or the next Henry Hampton--who brought us the "The Great Depression"--because they got their start with NEH funds. And that's going to be a tremendous loss.

The reduction in our budget has also severely restricted our ability to support our nation's libraries. As a consequence, in the coming year America's public libraries will offer significantly

fewer stimulating, educational reading and discussion programs like the "Poets in Person" radio series--on airwaves throughout the nation--or the traveling exhibition: "The Many Realms of King Arthur" which during its 12-week stay at the Houston Public Library attracted 232,000 people, enabling the library to raise \$50,000 in ancillary funds.

The state humanities councils have been cut by 5.4% in the FY 1996 budget. On a relative basis, this cut is far less than the fate of our other programs. However, this budget reduction has come at a cost to the state councils. Already operating on small budgets, they have been forced to cut staff and cancel some of their grant programs. It is central to the mission of the Endowment that we have a strong presence in every state, and I am concerned that the cuts have weakened their ability to meet state needs.

But there is another part of me, and this is the academic in me, the historian, if you will, that says, the heart of the NEH is not necessarily the Civil War series or other public humanities projects, it is the individual work of scholars who receive fellowships and other research grants from us each year to research and write books and articles that expand our knowledge and understanding of the past. This scholarship is the fundamental building block of everything else NEH supports, because all of our projects, whether films or library programs or museum exhibitions, draw upon scholarship in one form or another. NEH is, in fact, the largest single source of support for humanities research and scholarship in the United States. Scholarly books supported by NEH that have garnered a great deal of recent public attention and praise include Professor David Donald's current bestselling study, Lincoln, and critically acclaimed biographies by other scholars on Harriet Beecher Stowe (which won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for Biography), Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Walt Whitman. We've tried to protect these programs as much as possible from the sting of the FY 1996 budget cut because such works are the cornerstones of the humanities and--since they will be consulted by future generations of scholars, students, and other readers of quality works in the humanities--they provide lasting benefits to the nation.

In fact, one of the projects I get most excited about is the Dead Sea Scrolls edition project. Described as one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of the century, the Dead Sea Scrolls include the earliest extant versions of many Old Testament texts and a wealth of other religious writings, many of them previously unknown, which are important for understanding the historical context of early Judaism and Christianity.

In 1980, Eugene Ulrich, Professor of Hebrew Scriptures at the University of Notre Dame, was asked to complete the work of the original editors of the scrolls and bring it to publication. The

Endowment has supported Professor Ulrich's work with five grants since 1986, and two volumes out of five have already been published. The most recently published volume was dedicated to the National Endowment for the Humanities, indicating that without the NEH, these materials would not have been brought into the public domain. The significance of this work is monumental to our understanding of our religious and historic roots. It is but another example of the unglamorous, yet critical work that NEH supports.

Mr. Chairman, I know that I have gone on at length about the extent of our losses this year. But I do believe it is important for this Committee to have a full understanding of what is at stake in the federal funding equation. I must also add that while I am worried about the serious losses that we have suffered, I am still excited about the good things that we can do, at even the current level of funding. It is clear that we can not simply continue to operate the way we did so we are doing things in a very different way.

We are not only trying to make it easier for the people outside the Endowment to use us, to get access to us, but we are also looking for new ways to amplify the benefits of the grants that we can make. This is what we call the "echo effect".

This realization has led me to launch an Enterprise office as part of the Endowment's new structure. As I see it, enterprise is an expression of our commitment to identifying and implementing new ways of doing business. The Enterprise Office has a critical task; and that task is to wake up every morning and to ask the question: how can we find new partners for the things we are doing? How can we amplify the effect, extend the benefits to a wider circle of people, or to a different group of people, out into the future? How can we generate resources, or revenues, if you will, from the products that NEH has helped to create so that these monies can go to support future projects? There are a lot of ways that we can operate entrepreneurially, and we will pursue that quite aggressively.

A small working group within the agency is now hard at work helping me to cull through the many ideas and suggestions we have received thus far. And, later this week, a group of people from around the country will convene at the Endowment to offer their thoughts about how we might proceed.

Let me give you an example of how we should be "enterprising". Over the last thirty years, NEH has supported an impressive collection of films, presidential papers, editions and exhibitions. NEH's preservation efforts have saved millions of books, newspapers, and historic materials. While NEH funding is devoted to the creation of the product, little money exists for dissemination. Unfortunately, whole audiences are precluded from

having access to NEH products because of their cost. This is an ideal area where we could be enterprising about partnering with the private sector. For example, the Library of America series should be in every school library across the country. This is not the case, however, because the cost of the series - available only in a hardbound edition - is prohibitive. NEH's considerable investment in the creation of books and films should have maximum reach and utility. Our products should have a powerful "echo" far beyond their initial audiences.

I am hopeful that we will be successful in our endeavors. I cannot stress enough, however, that the impact of the cuts we have suffered is chipping away at our nation's cultural infrastructure. I am concerned that over time that infrastructure will be greatly eroded. America is the greatest country in the world. Our great civilization can only extend its reach into the future if it has sure footing upon the knowledge of its past.

Nina Cobb, author of the Rockefeller Foundation/Texaco Foundation report recently cited two significant findings: Looking Ahead, Private Sector Giving in the Arts and Humanities. First, the private sector cannot fill the void of financial support for the humanities should the federal presence cease to exist. Secondly, the NEH is the single largest source of support for the humanities nationwide. Next in size and scope to NEH stands the Mellon Foundation, with \$30 million annually. In short, unlike many other agencies, the federal investment in the humanities by far outweighs any other source of financial support for these activities. This fact dramatizes the critical nature of the federal role. It is very much worth the nation's investment to keep that federal effort going at as high a level as possible.

Sigma Xi Address
Sheldon Hackney
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities
Visiting Scholar - Honors Week and
Cecil and Ida Green Professor
Texas Christian University
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THE AMERICAN IDENTITY

Speaking at the University of Texas on October 16, 1995 in the wake of the racially disparate reaction to the jury verdict in the O. J. Simpson murder trial, and on the same day as the Million Man March in Washington by black men for "atonement and reconciliation", President Clinton called upon Americans of all races "to clean our house of racism." "We must be one," he asserted, ". . . all of us, no matter how different, who share basic American values and are willing to live by them." Then, recalling the moments of crises from America's past, when the nation "had the courage to face the truth about our failure to live up to our own best ideals", the President said the country became stronger by becoming more inclusive. "At each of these moments, we looked in the national mirror and were brave enough to say, this is not who we are; we're better than that."

"This is not who we are." Well, who are we? That is the question, and it is a crucial question. Who we think we are shapes what we do. Archibald McLeish, in an essay published in 1949, 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."

Small wonder, then, that in recent months we have witnessed rancorous public disputes about the image of our past: the aborted Enola Gay exhibit, the cancelled American history theme park by Disney near Manassas, the proposed National History Standards, and perhaps the attempted abolition of the National Endowment for the Humanities itself. The question posed by those disputes is, "Who owns history?" Who controls our collective image of ourselves? Who is authorized to tell the country "what it has to do" by holding up the national mirror?

By now we can all recite the litany of domestic social ills threatening our sense of wellbeing; we are also feeling the anxieties of an illdefined "new world order" that have replaced the ironically comfortable certainties of the Cold War; we are painfully aware of the depredations the global market place is visiting upon the domestic economy; we have seen the polls indicating that most Americans (70% in an April 1996 survey) think the country is "on the wrong track", that the younger generation will have a much more difficult time realizing "the American dream" than their parents, that the members of each racial group in distressingly high percentages hold negative stereotypes of the members of each of the other racial groups in the American population; and we have heard critics as diverse as Cornel West and William Bennett declare that America is in a spiritual crisis.

Furthermore, there is a long list of public policy issues whose resolutions will be driven by notions of the American identity: race conscious Congressional districting, affirmative action, immigration, bilingual education, English as the official language, Afro-centric curriculums, teaching values in schools, and perhaps such indirect matters as welfare policy, urban policy, and public education itself. It is time to look again into the national mirror.

The National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity, a project of the National Endowment for the Humanities, does just that. It invites diverse groups of Americans to come together -- by teleconference, on the internet, through the radio, in face-to-face discussion groups -- to talk and to listen to each other about what holds us together as a country, about shared values in a heterogeneous society, about common commitments in a society that contains all the divisions of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion that are the source of sectarian violence in almost every other quarter of the globe, about the unum in our national motto, E Pluribus Unum.

The National Conversation has been underway for only a few months, so the projects are still in their early stages.

(Endnote #1) On the other hand, the Conversation was two years in the making, and I have travelled all over the country talking about it, conducting trial conversations, seeking advice, and listening to Americans respond. There are already lessons that can be drawn from it. This, then, is an interim report.

The first thing to be said is that Americans are eager for the National Conversation. They may be a little puzzled at first if the subject is defined in its most abstract form, but the feeling of social fragmentation, of people drifting apart from one another, is very much on their minds, so they recognize the topic and understand its purpose. In addition to describing the project to dozens of audiences and seeking the advice of a score or more of interested groups, I conducted six "pilot conversations" in communities that differed in geography, ethnic composition and economic base. The groups were composed of diverse cross sections of their communities and of people who had not known each other previously. In each case, the groups spontaneously asked at the end of the evening if there was a way they could come back together to continue the discussion. This was a testament to the recognition of the importance of the topic, its protean nature, and also to the reality that it takes some time before participants begin to trust each other enough to express something of their deeper feelings, fears, and dreams.

(Endnote #2)

There are, of course, flash points and dead ends to worry about in these discussions, but the conversation has an integrity and a currency that draws people along with it across the tiger pits of discord and suspicion. (Endnote #3) Perhaps a few vignettes from some of the discussions I have lead will hint at the rewards and lessons of the conversation.

I went for my first "pilot conversation" to Garden City,

Kansas, a remote "meat factory" town in the middle of the prairie. There, physically tough, low wage jobs in the slaughter houses have attracted recent Hispanic and Asian immigrants, making the small town quite diverse. The group that gathered at the public library was as diverse as the town, but the conversation went smoothly. They talked of tolerance, the rewards of pluralism, the challenge of equal opportunity, and the ideal of democracy. There were very few points at which tensions could be observed. At the conclusion, after the discussants had all left, I asked the host if I had heard an honest discussion. "Yes," he said, "but at its most polite level." I had, he thought, heard what the group thought would make their community look good in the eyes of a visitor, especially a visitor from Washington. I was disappointed. Crushed might be a more accurate word. My long years of experience as a teacher had failed me.

On the way home on the plane, however, I began to think of the conversation in a slightly more positive way. This diverse group, after all, when it wanted to present itself in the best possible light, had reverted to a set of civic values that the town may not have lived by but which they recognized as shared ideals -- "our own best ideals," as the President said. True, they had not been able to talk candidly in front of a stranger about how they fell short of their ideal, but they held in common a notion of civic virtue that was inclusive and tolerant and based on equal access to justice and opportunity. I felt a

little better, demonstrating perhaps the power of rationalization.

I travelled not long after that to Detroit and spent a wonderful evening talking about America with a group that was racially and ethnically very diverse, but was generally well educated and prosperous. The group was not shy, but it found itself agreeing in short order with a particularly articulate Euro-American man who argued that the essence of Americanism was a reliance on the Constitution and the political system it defined, along with a commitment to equal individual opportunity, self-reliance and maximum individual freedom. When it became clear that a surprising agreement had been reached, one of the group looked around and said, "I wonder if the underclass would agree with us?" The ways in which opportunity is structured by class almost always came up in these discussions, along with other social justice issues.

In Boston, I found myself engaged with a group that was not designed to be a pilot conversation but nonetheless fell naturally into a feisty discussion of the American identity. After that discussion had been boiling along for a while, a young Latino activist was recognized, looked steadily around the big table and said in a voice full of challenge, "I am not an American. There is nothing about me that is American. I don't want to be American, and I have just as much right to be here as any of you." What an American thing to say - squarely in the great tradition of American dissent. He was affirming his

American identity even as he was denying it. I think he was also launching a preemptive strike against the threat of exclusion by declaring that he did not want to be included, and he was announcing that his pre-American identity was very important to him and he did not want America to deprive him of it.

I was conversing in Oklahoma City long before it became a national symbol for both the cynicism that is corroding American democracy and for the kind of communal solidarity in the face of catastrophe that is the antidote to our cynicism.

In Oklahoma City, after much talk of grievances held by various American groups, as well as about the ideals of equal opportunity and equal justice, a Chinese American man told his story. He had been born and raised in China and had been fortunate enough to have been sent by the government to the United States to get his PhD. Like a lot of his compatriots in that first wave of Chinese students, he defected. He stayed in America and now is a college teacher. For a long time, he said, he thought that for him the appeal of the United States was the higher standard of living, the material comforts it afforded. Then, he told us, he began to realize that what he valued most in his new American identity was freedom. "Here," he said, "no one tells me where I must live, what job I can have, what I can read, what I must think, what I can say, how many children I can have.

Houston is an interesting city because it does not have a racial majority. It is about a third Anglo-American, a third

African American, and a third Hispanic. The group that came together to discuss the meaning of being American represented those major communities plus the smaller Asian American portion of the population. At one point, after the group had been discussing family and how America viewed older people, a Vietnamese American made a powerful point through a poignant autobiographical statement. In all cultures influenced by Confucian thought, he said, family is the highest value, and older people are revered as being wise and deserving honor.

He had thus devoted his life to his family. He had risked everything to escape Viet Nam, and he had managed against great odds to get his family to the United States. Once in Houston, he had worked very hard to earn a living in a strange land. He was now teaching English as a second language to mostly Chicano young people (prompting from me Yogi Berra's famous response to the news that a Jew had been elected Mayor of Dublin, "Only in America!"), and he devoted all his resources to his family. By working very hard and saving, he had managed to provide a good education for his two daughters. They had just graduated from college and had gotten good jobs, but, he said with resignation more than anger in his voice, "They do not bring their money home!" That is, they were not pooling their money with his as if they were part of the family unit. What he was really saying, of course, was that his daughters had become individualistic Americans while he was still culturally Vietnamese.

In Lawrence, Massachusetts, a Cambodian American and a

Vietnamese American argued over the value and wisdom of bilingual education. The Cambodian American took his daughter out of the program after the second year because, according to him, she could read neither Cambodian nor English. One inferred from all he said, however, that he was very intent on blending into his new surroundings. On the other hand, the Vietnamese American was pleased with the same program because he thought it was very important for his children to maintain their cultural identity. Among the other reasons he cited for this was the fact that he had gotten an enormous amount of help from the Vietnamese community in getting started after his immigration. The ethnic community as a support group is an old story in America.

Out of all these conversations comes my sense that almost all Americans have an answer to the question of what it means to be an American, even though it may be somewhat inchoate until it is summoned up into full consciousness and tested. When examined, the question, "Who are we?", turns out to be three related questions: (1) what principles of governance for our common life should we hold dear, (2) what widespread traits of character or typical behavior give evidence that we share ideals of admired behavior and definitions of unacceptable behavior, and (3) how do we think about or describe the whole, the "ONE", and what does that imply about who is really included in the nation. "How wide the circle of we?"

The answer to the question of what it means to be an American usually begins with a belief in the universal values

expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, a belief that what keeps our differences from developing into major conflict is a shared commitment to the idea of democracy, an agreement about how to resolve our disagreements. "Civic nationalism", this is usually called, and it is the foundation of almost all popular conceptions of the American identity. The ever changing size and shape of the gap between aspiration and achievement is a central theme of American history.

There are dilemmas, to be sure. For instance, Liberty and Equality sometimes pull in opposite directions, yet we are committed to both. For another instance, participants almost invariably expressed a desire to be tolerant of differences growing out of the cultural traditions or beliefs of another group; but some different practices are apparently too much to tolerate. The more obvious examples of this are polygamy, female genital mutilation, ritual drug use, the subordination of women, putting the health of children at risk because of a religiously based refusal to use modern medicine, and so forth. The problem comes when trying to define what class of things must conform to the moral judgment of the majority of citizens and what class of things can be allowed to be different. Cultures may be equally legitimate, but they are not equally admirable in their every feature.

Assuming that this dilemma can be managed without rupturing the social bonds, the question then becomes, "Is civic

nationalism enough to hold us together?" Most Americans with whom I have talked so far think that it is not, but they also believe that there is an American culture - "conventional ways of believing and behaving" - that is shared across regional, religious, ethnic and racial lines. The problem is that for almost every trait one can cite as being characteristically American, there is its opposite as well. One can construct a veritable Yin and Yang of American culture.

Americans believe in equality and are instinctively suspicious of people who "put on airs." Yet, Americans are also fascinated by celebrities. We love to see exceptional people do exceptional things, and we are just as eager to see them crash after attaining exalted heights. Icarus could be a naturalized American.

Americans proclaim that hard work is its own reward, but we are also constantly on the lookout for get-rich-quick schemes. From the gold rush to the land rush to their modern-day equivalents in Wall Street and Las Vegas, we think there must be a way to get rich without having to sweat. The lottery is a poor man's investment in the American Dream.

Americans thus may be motivated by greed, but we are also the most philanthropic people on the face of the globe. We are materialistic, but we have the highest percentage of church members among the developed industrial nations. New Age cults and mysticism thrive amongst people who are pursuing the main chance.

We are heterogeneous in almost every imaginable way, and tolerance of difference is thought to be a virtue; but we have sprouted the Ku Klux Klan, the Nation of Islam, Know Nothings, Anti-Masons, Militias, and assorted nativist groups.

Ninety percent of Americans describe themselves as middle class, and middle class virtues are enshrined in our Puritan heritage. Yet we are also the land of instant gratification, of minute rice and fast food, of hot tubs and easy credit, of Hollywood escapism and theme park fantasies.

We think of ourselves as a practical and self-reliant people, but we have been host to more utopian experiments in communal living than any other nation on earth. That is what the Branch Davidians were doing in Waco, for instance.

Competition is such a natural thing to Americans that almost every activity is organized into a contest so that we can find out who is the best at it. On the other hand, our national imagination is full of the icons of cooperation: barn raisings and corn huskings, wagon trains going west and communities rallying in selfless solidarity after a hurricane or flood or terrorist's bomb.

Individualism is an American fetish, but our real genius is for large-scale organization -- witness the transcontinental railroad and telegraph, corporate giants like IBM and GM, the winning of World War II, putting a man on the moon, and our devotion to team sports.

President Clinton in his Austin speech mentioned optimism as

a traditional American trait, and he is certainly right, but there is also a long and honored tradition in Puritan America of the Jeremiad. Cassandra is frequently found as the author of a book on the best-seller list.

I believe that it is virtually impossible to tell which one or the other member of these antipodal pairs is more typical than the other. The pairs indicate fault lines in the culture, locations where there is active stress. They are interesting for that reason.

Bearing in mind the questionable claim of such cultural traits to being useful in distinguishing Americans from others, it is nonetheless interesting to know how Americans think of themselves. Participants in the National Conversation mentioned not only the foregoing traits but a number of other characteristics they thought were especially American: a high value placed upon free speech and the other individual freedoms protected by the Bill of Rights; a tendency to favor the underdog; a belief that people should have a second chance and that social mobility is a good thing; the expectation of progress and that "things should work"; the belief that striving for success is the normal condition of life, and that individuals are obliged to attempt to improve themselves and their circumstances; that choices should be available; that education is a ladder for social mobility; and that individuals have a duty to contribute to their communities.

When one moves from individual traits to the task of

imagining the group, one discovers three conventional categories in use. Most writers agree that the dominant cultural style at least until the 1960s was Anglo-American (growing out of British and later out of more general European heritage), and that members of other groups were expected to conform to it.

The social revolution of the Sixties not only opened up the mainstream of opportunity to members of ethnic and racial minorities, but it replaced the notion of a single acceptable cultural style with a multiplicity of equally legitimate cultural heritages, an orientation known as pluralism. By then the theory of pluralism, rooted in the work of Horace Kallen and popularized first by Randolph Bourne, was half a century old.

The idea of America being a melting pot has existed since Hector St. John de Crevecoeur defined "this new man, this American" during the Revolutionary struggle, but it did not become popular as a goal of social policy until Israel Zangwill's play in 1908 struck a responsive chord amidst the anxieties about the lack of social cohesion resulting from the flood of immigration from eastern and southern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Anglo-Conformity does not work as a model because it does not allow the sort of dual and mixed identities that many Americans want, and because it denigrates the non-European heritages of many Americans. The Melting Pot metaphor provides for the huge amount of assimilation that has actually gone on in the United States, but it does not accommodate itself to the huge

amount of persistence of pre-American cultural identities that is also part of our reality. Not only do these pre-American cultural identities persist, but Americans want to maintain them and will resist any notion of Americanism that requires the obliteration of these identities of descent.

Cultural pluralism, on the other hand, comes in many forms, but in its most equalitarian form it does not recognize the historical fact of the primacy of British, European and Western Civilization's cultural parentage. All heritages are equally legitimate, but all were not equally influential. Furthermore, there is a separatist version of Pluralism that views the United States as simply a holding company for a collection of nations, an umbrella organization for diasporic national fragments whose members get their identities from, and owe their loyalties to, non-American states. Such a vision of America is seen as a worrisome deviation by most Americans. Even more important, pluralism in any of its current guises does not provide for a shared American culture, an identity that all citizens have equal access to, an identity that actually exists and that most Americans want. For these reasons, existing forms of pluralism are inadequate. Americans seem to want a way to think about diversity that is not provided by any of these existing models but goes beyond them.

There is a new conception of the American identity that one can assemble out of the talk created by the National Conversation and out of recent scholarship. (Endnote #4). First, the new

conception is rooted in "civic nationalism", a shared belief in our democratic governance system and the universalistic values to which we committed ourselves in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Second, there is a sense that out of our history has come a set of meanings and attitudes and preferences and typical behaviors and tastes that amount to a national character. However difficult it is to specify it with accuracy, it is nonetheless real, and it is recognized by other Americans, and especially by foreigners encountering Americans.

Third, the new way of thinking about the American collectivity allows for both a common American identity and an identity of descent, and even a mixed or multiple identity of descent. It accommodates itself to the American devotion to mobility, both geographic and social. It permits change over time -- change in the boundaries of identities and in the meaning of identities, as well as permitting the creation and demise of identities. It accounts for both assimilation and for the persistence of pre-American identities. (Endnote #5)

Most important, it recognizes the hybridity of American culture. That is, it reflects the understanding that when various world cultures encountered each other in North America over long periods of time, the relationships were not simply those of dominance and submission but of mutual influence. The resulting American culture therefore may be built on a British and European base, but it is more accurately understood as a hybrid of many

cultures, and that it is not identical to any of its root cultures.

The National Conversation about American Pluralism and Identity is roaring along now, so I invite you to join in. There is no more important topic before the public at this time. You may draw your own conclusions from the conversation, of course; The National Endowment for the Humanities only provides questions and stimulating reading lists. You provide your own answer.

My own belief is that there is a national identity that we can share in a way that brings us together so that we can more easily solve our common problems but that also honors our differences. Based in democracy, this identity guards individual rights but recognizes the need for a sense of duty to the community. I worry that rights based individualism on the Left, and market driven libertarianism on the Right, will leave insufficient room for a common vision for the common good. The question absent from our national catechism is, "What do I owe to my fellow citizens?"

I believe, further, that there is an inclusive historical narrative in which we all recognize not only the stories of our kith and kin but in which we acknowledge 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.

ENDNOTES

(1) Thus far, the NEH has awarded \$1.3 million for 29 projects through the special grant competition, and \$3 million for 33 additional projects that competed in our regular programs but are substantially related to the theme of the National Conversation. A film that is still in preparation and a small amount of extra funding for the state humanities councils are extending the conversation even more broadly. The cumulative total of projects funded through November 1995 is 1,540 "conversations" in 224 cities and towns in 39 states.

(2) There are certain criticisms that the National Conversation has had to face. Critics on the Right accused it of being a covert effort to impose a multicultural ideology on a naive public. Critics on the Left suspected that it was a camouflaged attempt to reimpose a pre-1960s Anglo-American version of the American identity. Some said there is no real problem in the United States, so why talk? Others insisted that the nation state is archaic and the source of much human misery, so we should be talking about cosmopolitanism. The search for cohesion is fundamentally misguided, another argument insisted, because it

would deprive "the Other" of the right to a nonconforming identity. If the conversation is in English, isn't that already an oppressive statement? Talk is like crabgrass and doesn't need subsidizing, ran one line of criticism, missing the distinction between idle chatter and a purposeful humanities conversation based on a text. What will you do, asked journalists circling like vultures over the cultural battlefield, when people start shouting at each other rather than talking to each other? Indeed, was not the subject so charged with emotion that talking about it might make it worse? Despite these attempts to make the National Conversation seem controversial, it has enjoyed an enthusiastic reception by humanities and public interest groups and by the general public.

(3) With financial and logistical assistance from the MacArthur Foundation, we brought together in Chicago a group of scholars to help us sharpen our focus, define our questions, and explore the subject. They were enormously helpful. They were: William Galston, Henry Louis Gates, Nathan Glazer, Amy Gutmann, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Stanley Katz, Martin Marty, Martha Minow, Martha Nussbaum, Diane Ravitch, Renato Rosaldo, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Richard Sennett, Catherine Stimpson, Rennard Strickland, Ronald Takaki, Michael Walzer, Iris Marion Young, and Jamil Zainaldin. James Q. Wilson could not attend that meeting but participated in other ways and provided a short essay for the resource kit. The resource kit is available from the NEH; phone 1-800-NEH-1121

(4) In addition to my discussions and pilot conversations, and in addition to the advisers listed above, my thinking about the American identity has been enriched and informed by my reading in the works of the following scholars and writers, though my ideas do not coincide completely with any of them: Joyce Appleby, "Recovering America's Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism," The Journal of American History (September 1992); Sheldon Wolin, The Presence of the Past (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Os Guinness, The American Hour (New York: The Free Press, 1993); Jean Elshtain, Democracy on Trial (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Robert Bellah, et al., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Arthur Mann, The One and the Many: Reflections on the American Identity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); John Higham, "Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique", The American Quarterly (June 1993); Charles Taylor, Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, edited and introduced by Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Potter, Freedom and Its Limitations in American Life, edited by Don Fehrenbacher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976); Benjamin Barber, Jihad Versus McWorld (New York: Times Books, 1995); David Hollinger, Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Michael Lind, The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Lawrence Fuchs, The American Kaleidoscope:

Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1990); James Davison Hunter, The Culture Wars (New York: Basic Books, 1992), and Before the Shooting Begins (New York: The Free Press, 1994); and Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

(5) As David Hollinger writes in Postethnic America, "Postethnicity prefers voluntary to prescribed affiliations, appreciates multiple identities, pushes for communities of wide scope, recognizes the constructed character of ethno-racial groups, and accepts the formation of new groups as part of the normal life of a democratic society."

Comments of Sheldon Hackney
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities
Commencement Convocation
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh Civic Arena
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
April 28, 1996

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Among the buzz words and phrases falling loosely from the lips of politicians and pundits these days is "the American Dream," a concept best defined perhaps by President Clinton's 1992 campaign mantra: in America if you work hard and play by the rules you will be rewarded.

The problem is that opinion surveys find that a majority of Americans now believe that economic opportunity will not be as available to Americans in the future as it has been in the past, and seventy per cent of respondents in national sample polls now say the country is "on the wrong track." Focus groups discover people disoriented by the breakdown of the social contract assumed by "the American Dream", worried about social cohesion, frustrated by the breakdown of rules, sensing drift rather than purpose in our national life, and unsure about the current meaning of being an American. Everyone seems to agree that the American Dream, the mythic focus of America's hope for the future, is dead, or at least that it should be listed in critical

condition. The disagreements have to do with who killed it and how to revive it.

Voices on the right blame government itself. One can find this point of view most intelligently set forth in a Hudson Institute book edited by Lamar Alexander and Chester Finn entitled The New Promise of American Life, a conscious play on the title of the Herbert Croly classic of 1909. According to the Hudson Institute authors, Croly's book, The Promise of American Life, laid out a fatally flawed plan for replacing a civil society based on local communities and volunteer organizations with a national consciousness and commitment to social justice to be achieved through an active national government. That plan has been followed since that time by "progressive liberals" through the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier, and the Great Society with results that can now be seen to be disastrous, at least in the view of these authors. The task of current conservatism, therefore, is simply to undo the mistakes of progressive liberalism by disassembling big government.

Unreconstructed liberals, if you can find any these days, would argue that it is precisely the raw market, without the countervailing and moderating influences of government, that produces extremes of poverty and plenty, with all the social friction and loosening of social bonds they generate. More importantly, in a society committed from the first to both liberty AND equality, the unequal access to political participation that is the result of vastly differing economic

resources among citizens corrodes the democracy that is THE central value of our nation.

Whether or not twentieth century American political history can be read simply as a working out of Croly's program, and I think it can not, the conspiratorial charge that government bureaucrats are arrogant and that government itself is the largest threat to personal freedom seems find some confirmation in Waco and Ruby Ridge. It is one of many ironies in the contemporary political scene that the marching song of the Far Right sounds suspiciously like the anti-FBI tune sung from behind the barricades by the Far Left not so many years ago.

For the less conspiratorial, there is radical individualism's assumption that if everyone would simply behave properly and take care of himself, then all our problems as a society would disappear. This is very close to the old liberal orthodoxy that maintained that there is no common interest apart from the sum of all our individual self-interests. To compound the ironies, it was the radical left in the 1960s who introduced the concept that "the personal is political", that all conventions of behavior were statements about power relationships and thus were fair game for politics in whatever form. Lately, it has been the religious right that has dragged matters thought by most Americans to belong in the private realm into the political arena. It is as if the scruffy, hirsute, cavorting young anarchists and hedonists at Woodstock in 1969 have been bathed, coiffed, dressed by Brooks Brothers and Ann Taylor, and

marched forth as the squeaky-clean libertarian or religious Right. Individualistic strands of contemporary liberalism and conservatism have much in common. No wonder that the pathological extremes of these two tendencies, the Freemen and the Unabomber, enjoyed the same wide open spaces of Montana.

Furthermore, one of the major reasons that there is so little and so ineffective counterargument against the conservative revolution in the public arena these days is that liberals agree with much of the conservative diagnosis. Current government programs do not seem to be dealing effectively with crime, drugs, broken homes, high divorce rates, children having children, homelessness, neighborhoods held in thrall by violence, stagnant personal income, the great and growing disparity of wealth, and an increasing sense that the society is fraying and fragmenting. Something is going on here!

A clue to that something is provided by the distinguished sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset, in his recently published book, American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword. As Lipset points out, Alexis de Tocqueville, the extraordinarily perceptive French aristocrat who travelled in the United States in the 1830s, was the first to notice that America was an exception among European societies in its devotion to self-reliance, in antagonism toward strong government, and in the absence of patterns of class deference (as if the Revolution had severed American society from the feudal residue derived from monarchies, aristocracies, and established churches). Lipset amasses cross-

national survey data that demonstrate convincingly that the United States is still exceptional among industrialized nations of the contemporary world in the individualistic attitudes of its citizens (not "subjects"), in popular suspicion of government, in the absence of class consciousness, and in public support of the private, competitive market as the best guarantor of economic opportunity and security.

Furthermore, in a finding that will not give comfort to some brands of conservatives, Lipset demonstrates that Americans are still the least governed, have the lowest tax burden, are provided with the lowest levels of health care and other protections and benefits, and struggle under fewer regulations than any other society in the "first world." This is discomfoting because the U.S. ranks at or near the top in social pathologies: crime, homelessness, divorce, infant mortality, and so forth. It thus becomes very difficult to argue that less government is going to eliminate those social pathologies in the United States when societies with much more government rank much lower in social pathologies.

The data are overwhelming. American exceptionalism is alive and well, and therein may lie the problem. Lipset central thesis, in fact, is that there is a double edge to America's devotion to individualism. The cultural commandment to succeed, the very achievement orientation that may be responsible for American vitality, has a mirror image. If one can not succeed by fair means, one can succeed by foul -- hence, high crime rates.

In a loosely stitched, antistatist society such as Lipset documents the United States as being, there are fewer informal constraints, more social room for nonconformity and deviance, and more gaping holes in whatever social safety net does exist.

So, even though on the surface the old politics still holds sway -- that is, the Right still advocates less government as the solution to all ills and the Left still advocates compassionate government -- a new politics is struggling to emerge. The old rhetoric of left and right appears outmoded, simply irrelevant to the real fault lines in the contemporary American psyche. That is why so many political ironies are evident, beginning with the spectacle of Pat Buchanan arousing significant support in the Republican primaries with very un-Republican anti-corporate, anti-elitist, anti-immigrant rhetoric. That is why there is so much unrecognized agreement between the left and the right.

There is, for instance, a great deal of agreement across political frontiers about the threats to the American Dream: economic insecurity stemming from technological change and a fiercely competitive global marketplace, the disintegration of the family, the decline in public and private morality, decreasing civility, the Balkanization of American society, violence, drugs, poverty, homelessness and other trends that erode the quality of life. Cures for these ills are still out of focus because the debate is carried on in terms of the old political lines: less government versus compassionate government. The real divide is between rights and responsibilities,

individualism and community, entitlements and duty, liberty and equality -- polarities that cut across traditional left and right differences.

The public discussion of the American Dream is our current way of talking about this new array of concerns. I am here primarily concerned with a potentially disastrous error that is being made by both Left and Right: the assumption that the American Dream is only about economic opportunity and that it is only for the individual or for the individual's intergenerational family.

American culture, in the anthropological sense of being comprised of the conventional ways of believing and behaving, revolves around several axes, but one of the most important is defined by the poles of individualism and organization. John Wayne, the icon of lonely heroism, and Alfred Sloan, the founding genius of General Motors, seem to struggle for the soul of America. That struggle merely continues the seventeenth century argument between Roger Williams and John Cotton about the tension within religiously focused communities between orthodoxy and freedom of conscience.

I have long thought it to be the greatest irony that the fierce love affair of the American imagination with individualism, from Natty Bumppo to Clint Eastwood, obscured the reality that our national genius is really for large scale organization: building the transcontinental railroads, running the telegraph and electricity lines, building industrial giants

such as Standard Oil and U.S. Steel, going to the moon, winning World War II and the Gulf War, and similar feats of large-scale organizing to apply technology to a common purpose.

This is not simply a matter of myth versus reality, for there is reality in both our admiration for individualism and our need for community. The winning of the West looms large in our collective memory, but wagon trains and barn raisings (not to mention the U.S. Army) were a greater part of the Western experience than lonely heroes: be they Mountain Men or gold prospectors.

We worship exceptional individual achievement so much that we have organized an Olympic training program to systematize the "production" of individual American athletes who can compete internationally. Clearly, the American identity is importantly implicated in this linked pair of polar opposites: individualism and organization.

It is of the utmost importance to observe, however, that Tocqueville noted not only the "exceptionalism" of American individualism and self-reliance, but the companion urge of individual Americans to join together in voluntary organizations of all kinds for every imaginable purpose. Individualism and organization are not so much in tension with each other as they are reinforcements of each other. One might even argue that precisely because America is so individualistic, and because it lacks the continuing post-feudal institutions and conventions that provide everyone with a place in society, and because it is

such a heterogeneous society of immigrants and outsiders, Americans are exceptionally devoted to community, to belongingness.

As Jennifer Hocschild writes in her book, Facing Up To The American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of America, as part of the explanation of middle class black rage and the fact that working class blacks believe much more in the American Dream than middle class blacks, "They've (middle class blacks) achieved success in a narrow sense, but not in the wider sense of individual satisfaction and appreciation by the rest of society." "The American Dream," she concludes, "is about dignity, respect, connectedness, and belonging."

America has been the most hospitable society on the face of the globe to utopian experiments in communal living. From John Winthrop's Puritan "City on a Hill" to the Branch Davidians, from the Henry George Single Taxers of the late nineteenth century to the Summer of Love in 1967 in San Francisco, from Brook Farm in the 1840s to The Farm (the late 1960s countercultural collective in Tennessee), from the Old Order Amish who resist all innovation to the Mormons who adapt to modernity quite nicely, thank you, some Americans always seem to be trying to perfect community.

We must not ignore the non-material parts of the American Dream. America is not just about the chance for individuals to get rich, as vivid a part of our image as that is. It is about a dream of justice and human community. It is about a society that

not only tolerates, but that encourages, individuals in their quest for full realization -- vocationally, intellectually, and spiritually. It is about a society of immigrants and other outsiders whose ideal is inclusion in the larger society.

The tension in our thinking about the American identity - the tension between individualism and community - is also a form of the religiously significant human desire to be recognized as a unique individual and at the same time to belong to something larger than the individual. The sentiment that I have always found most moving has been self-sacrifice. Perhaps this is because I am a Christian and the central concept of Christianity is self-sacrifice (in emulation of Christ's sacrifice for humankind), but I am moved to tears by almost all forms of self-sacrifice -- martyrs for a noble ideal, parents for their children, soldiers for their unit or for their cause, even the athlete who accepts an unglamorous role uncomplainingly because it will make the team better. Such self-sacrifice does not happen unless the individual has identified in a profound way with the larger purpose. The individual must feel that some essential part of his being is bound up in the larger group or higher purpose. Purpose is important. It is the source of meaning.

A second definition of American exceptionalism is the belief that America was chosen by God for a special mission. That divine purpose originally was to be the "city on a hill" that John Winthrop envisioned in 1630, a beacon to the world

indicating how God intended for communities to be organized and individual lives to be lived. That religious exceptionalism was transformed during the American Revolution so that the secular version of the nation's purpose was to demonstrate for humankind the glories of democracy. It is this democratic mission that Lincoln talked about in the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural, that Whitman and Emerson waxed eloquent about, that Woodrow Wilson converted into a crusade, that Ronald Reagan invoked as the counterpoint to Communist authoritarianism. To be sure, this is a powerful and dangerous faith, but one that also has the capacity to provide moral authority for our continuing struggles to achieve the universalistic ideals set forth in our founding documents, some purpose beyond material comfort and individual enrichment.

Society neither needs nor demands dramatic acts of self-sacrifice frequently, but it does need daily acts of self-discipline, of modifying our pursuit of our unbridled selfish interests in recognition of our duty to others so that the common enterprise can prosper. We think of these individual accommodations as "citizenship," or "civic virtue" as Machiavelli would have termed it.

The American Dream is too powerful and too important to be defined simply in material terms or in terms of isolated individuals. For the last two decades, we have witnessed the rights-based individualism of the Left pitted against the greed-

based individualism of the Right. What gets crushed between them is the "common vision of the common good."

The American Dream should imply a society whose common good is more than the sum of the individual self-interests of its citizens. It is about our mutual obligations and how none of us can be fulfilled unless all of us are included in the promise of American life.

That would be an exceptional society indeed!

Remarks of Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
At the Second Santa Barbara Conference
on the Arts and Humanities
"Nurturing the Imagination: A Nation in Crisis?"
May 17, 1996

Thank you very much Chancellor Yang. I am very pleased to be with you at this second citywide Conference on the Arts and Humanities. This is an example of not one but two of the things I am committed to that I think our nation needs desperately: a bridging of the town-gown divide, and a revitalization of "the public square", that is, the sort of bringing together of citizens to converse with each other about important matters affecting their common life that is such a critical part of civic renewal. You are providing a model for the nation.

I am also pleased to gain a close-up view of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, your coordinator of the conference. I have watched Simon Williams and Leonard Wallock from afar with great approval. The Center they direct is an important part of what I think of as the institutional infrastructure of the humanities in American life, organizations that preserve, interpret and present our heritage as human beings so that we can better understand who we are.

Understanding who we are these days, how we got here, and where we ought to be going, is no mean feat. We have been unsettled over the last three decades by rapid changes in social values, a multiplication of the permissible; we suffer from the economic dislocations flowing from revolutionary advances in

technology and caused by the need to compete in a global marketplace; and we remain uncertain about the shape of the as-yet-undefined new world order that is to replace the comfortable though terrifying certainties of the Cold War. These disparate forces have one common feature: they make our lives less predictable. Tomorrow is not likely to be like today, but we can not be sure what it will be like. That is why anxiety levels are so high among Americans, even though objective conditions seem so favorable. Seldom have peace and prosperity been greeted with such suspicion.

People don't like change. We want stability. As our society ages, this desire for the comforts of the familiar will increase. That is perhaps what is happening now. The baby boomers, that demographic bulge in the age profile of the country that has now reached middle age, having caused the social and moral revolutions of the 1960s, are now trying to restore the legitimacy of the traditional values and the authority figures they trashed in their youth.

Whatever the cause of the social pendulum's periodicity, we are left with an apparent contradiction: we want stability, yet we strive for change; we honor tradition, yet we reward the innovators. There are few billionaires who have not destroyed old businesses by introducing new ones. One of the ironies of American history is that business leaders have been the most revolutionary class.

Conversely, the dust bin of institutional history is full of

organizations that were once successful but failed to keep themselves relevant to the changing times. Many are the candlestick makers who did not learn how to make electric lamps. As the classic business-school case study has it, railroads made the mistake of thinking they were in the railroad business when they were really in the transportation business, so they were left far behind by trucks, busses and airplanes. The moral is that we should not think of ourselves as being masters of a certain technology, but rather as fulfilling a particular human need, using whatever technology is available.

Our ambivalence about change is undoubtedly rooted in basic human desires. We want our lives to be predictable, and we want to feel connected to our past; yet we crave improvement and we do not know that we are alive unless there is change. Stasis is death. When the line on the oscilloscope monitoring our heart beat goes flat, the pain is over but so is life.

The most important aspects of life are bound up in this sort of revealing paradox. Contradictions are the fishing holes that let us search beneath the frozen surface of culture for morsels of meaning. For example, we all want at the same time to be recognized as unique individuals AND to feel ourselves part of something larger and more significant than we are by ourselves. American culture is fascinated with the lonely hero, from Natty Bumppo to John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. Yet, the real American genius is for large-scale organization, from the transcontinental railroads to putting a man on the moon. Americans believe in

both liberty and equality, but those two ideals frequently pull in opposite directions.

There are many more, but change and stability is the focus of the present ice fishing expedition. Why can't we simply push the freeze frame button? The very earliest evidence of human existence (tools more beautiful than they needed to be, personal ornaments and decorative clothes, cave drawings) reveals humans in the act of aesthetic creation. We are, apparently, imaginative by basic nature. We were also from the first engaged in making sense of our existence by abstracting it into symbols. Preserving emblems of hunting and gathering on cave walls 30,000 years ago not only "recorded" life but also transformed it's representation into a realm of ritual and transcendent meaning. Every act that seeks to express a lasting truth is also an act of transformation. Every attempt to grasp and fix in place the meaning of our lives also creates a new way of viewing it.

I have come to think that the only way to preserve such a heritage of creativity is to "let go" and accept the paradoxical link between preservation and transformation. The very act of recording the present for the benefit of the future, or to transcribe the past for the benefit of the present, also distorts the reality that is being preserved, rips it out of context, emphasizes some things rather than others, creates "meaning" by connecting things, imposing a narrative, noticing this pattern rather than that one. There are rules of logic and evidence, of course, tests for truth that are shared widely and so make

possible agreements about the meaning of particular events and stories. One can not simply say anything one wants, but it is still true that every act of preservation is an act of creation at the same time. The past that we know is not the past that was, and the past that we know inevitably keeps changing with every retelling. The past doesn't stand still.

As a university president, I used to greet parents during freshman week with a little homily about how the only way they could hold on to their children was to let go. Their sons and daughters were maturing at a rapid rate, and the college experience was going to accelerate that race to independence. Trying to maintain the old parent-child relationship was impossible; it would either frustrate the child or rupture the relationship. The wise course was to "let go"; let the child grow up; and let the relationship change as that happened. Actually, my advice was to "let go AND stay in touch." A telephone credit card was worth much more than all the rules and regulations the parents could think of. This is consistent with the "roots and wings" theory of childhood: childhood should give the child a firm grounding in basic values and a sure sense of belonging (roots), as well as the skills (wings) to fly wherever ambition can imagine.

I think a paradox, similar to the parent's dilemma, lies hidden in the subject of this conference: the feeling that technology is the enemy of civilized values, or the fear that popular fascination with science is going to divert public

resources from the arts and humanities and thereby eventually obliterate the educational and public programs that nurture the human imagination.

There are some things to worry about, but there is also a false dichotomy at work here as well. Science and technology are not the enemies of the arts and humanities. When James Watson and Francis Crick discovered the structure of DNA in 1953, it was an act of aesthetic creativity. In a great leap of imagination, they perceived that a double helix, along the strands of which the chemical sequences of nucleic acid we call genes are arrayed, would make sense of the jumble of data they and others had amassed but could not understand. It worked.

Every professional mathematician I have talked to insists that math is essentially an aesthetic occupation, an imagining of symbolic relationships. Thomas Kuhn has taught us in The Structure of the Scientific Revolution that scientists of genius who "discover" a new scientific paradigm do so by imagining a new framework that fits (or "explains") the data better than the old paradigm does. It is creative and essentially aesthetic. In pursuit of creativity, humanists have real allies in scientists.

Furthermore, I think of technology as being morally neutral, profoundly ambiguous, because it can be used for purposes both good and bad. The one thing it is not is stoppable, reversible, ignorable, irrelevant. The failure of the Luddites in early nineteenth century Britain is an object lesson from history.

Even if that were not so clear, those of us in the knowledge

business should welcome any technology that allows us to create it and communicate it more effectively. Yet, there is a danger, as James H. Snider points out in provocative articles in The Futurist and in USA Today (May 15, 1996), that teachers may resist the computer revolution for self-serving reasons, and that there are artificial barriers to the introduction of educational technology into the classroom. Remember the railroads!

My own hunch is that the introduction of computers into the educational process will eventually change it profoundly, in ways we can not now predict, but it will not reduce the need for teachers. It probably will change the function of teachers, but it will do that more slowly than we imagine and less radically than we imagine. As the quality and variety of teaching tools go up, the need will go up also for teachers who understand the developmental needs and learning styles of individual students and can match those needs and styles with available computer-based interactive programs. Mr. Holland taught much more than music. He taught children. The kind of moral compass he provided can never be replaced by computer assisted instruction.

In higher education, as the possibilities of computer assisted, self-paced and distance learning develop, the democratization of education will accelerate, of course, but we will also be forced to reassess the value of traditional four-year, residential colleges and universities. They will survive this reassessment with flying colors, I predict, and there will be a fresh recognition that the most important attribute of the

traditional college and university is its residential nature. It is a twenty-four hour a day, comprehensive, concentrated, multidimensional, fully reinforced learning experience. Living in a supportive, and even inspiring, face-to-face community of scholars provides an experience that is qualitatively different from other "unidimensional knowledge acquisition" processes.

In line with the multiplication of possibilities and choices unleashed in the 1960s, the modes and methods of education are going to explode, but I doubt that schools and colleges will disappear. New activities will take place gradually within existing structures and in traditional spaces. I take some comfort in this regard from the fact that book sales are up and library circulation is strong despite the continuing penetration of television and the computer. It may be that the thirst for knowledge, once stimulated, seeks satisfaction in multiple ways.

The National Endowment for the Humanities thinks that computer-based technology is so important to the future of education that we have launched an initiative in our Research and Education Division called "Teaching With Technology", a competitive grant program that will provide funding for projects that seek to produce or field test high tech learning programs (computer based, multimedia, interactive CD ROM, etc.) or that help teachers become adept at using such learning technology in the classroom. We were overwhelmed by applications at the first deadline last month. Might I suggest in a nonpartisan spirit that we could do so much more for American education, and indeed

for American culture in general, if we had adequate funding from the Congress?

The NEH also, in our Division of Preservation and Access, provides funding for the microfilming of brittle books and decaying newspaper collections that will otherwise disappear in a short while. Increasingly, we are experimenting with preserving such texts in digital form, and in going back and forth between microform and digitization. We also are committed to doing what we can to put humanities materials, either raw texts or "value-added" information, in digital form so they are available to be transmitted on the "Information Superhighway" or whatever the Internet and the World Wide Web may be called in the future.

We tend to get so fascinated with the technology that we forget that we need something of substance to be available for transmission. Otherwise, having every schoolroom wired into the Internet will make absolutely no difference at all.

Maybe none of this will make any difference anyway. Maybe, as some would argue, it is a negative. If you are worried about community in America, you should be interested in revitalizing civil society, those nongovernmental, nonpersonal institutions that bring people together for collective discussion and action. Does the Internet help or hurt? Here again we meet a paradox. The Internet both isolates and connects. We can sit at home or in our offices, in front of our computer screens, and not have to go out and mix and mingle with our fellow citizens. We can remain aloof and alone. On the other hand, at the same time, the

computer terminal connects us to people living all over the world with whom we would not be able to converse otherwise. It is truly ambivalent.

I used to think that it was enough to tolerate such contradictions, to learn to live with such unresolved tensions by keeping the opposing poles in some sort of balance, as the ancient Greeks advised. I now think that it is important to look for a way to bridge the poles, to find perhaps a Hegelian synthesis, a third way.

My current model is provided by science. Throughout the twentieth century we have been arguing about whether genetic endowment or the environment is the chief determinant of human character. Nature versus nurture, the argument is frequently termed, and circumstances have sometimes favored one side and sometimes the other. Interestingly, geneticists and psychologists seem now to be working toward a consensus that not only recognizes that both nature AND nurture are involved in making a person what he or she is, but that the interaction between nature and nurture produces physiological results that amount to a third influence separable from the first two.

In the same way, our devotion to both change and stability should result in our not simply favoring one over the other, or even favoring sometimes one and sometimes the other, or trying to craft a future that contains so many traditional elements and so many imaginative elements, but recognizing that the interaction of the new with the old will produce a future that can be both

imaginatively fresh and reassuringly familiar.

Every new technology is first understood to be just a simple extension of the old. Thus, when the internal combustion engine was first imagined as a source of power for transportation, the vehicles were wagons and carriages with an engine added to them. Only slowly did the automobile evolve as a radically different instrument of social revolution. We are still emerging from that stage of the communications revolution, when the computer was understood as a very fast typewriter, calculator and telegraph.

What does this imply for traditional teachers confronted by revolutionary technology? Well, we should NOT be so taken with the power and presumed economy of computer based technology that we ask ourselves, "How can we design a classroom or a curriculum that can be computerized." Rather, we should ask ourselves, "Are there ways to design educationware that can help us with our traditional educational tasks. Can that educationware liberate new dimensions of the human imagination in ways that books and crayons can not stimulate as well. I think they can, but only if the new and old are creatively fused.

Comments of Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
Annual Meeting of the Federation of State Humanities Councils
New Orleans, Louisiana
September 7, 1996

I am pleased to be back in this charming city, the Big Easy, the City that Care Forgot, because it may provide some counterpoint to my life in the Puzzle Palace on the Potomac. Care may have forgotten New Orleans, but it has not forgotten the humanities.

I am especially glad to be among friends, among shipmates with whom I am sharing the challenges of an extraordinary storm. The NEH took a huge budgetary wave over the bow - green water over the bridge, as we used to say on my destroyer to indicate a terrible storm as opposed to ordinary storms that soaked the bridge with spray and foam.

A year ago our existence was in doubt, yet we are not only still afloat but underweigh. Against all odds, we survived. As we sit here today, our existence is still threatened and our level of funding for 1997 is still in doubt. I am absolutely confident that we will continue to survive AND that eventually we will again be adequately funded. It is the short term that is troubling.

I am proud to be here in the bosom of the family because we were able to hold together when there were powerful forces - and powerful temptations - that would have divided us. That division would have destroyed us, I am sure, but we held together and we survived together. There is a lesson in that.

I am delighted to be here because in the furnace of the last year (to shift metaphors) we have forged a trusting working relationship, the sort of implement that perhaps can only be fabricated when the iron is hot. Jamil and I may not agree with each other all of the time, but we talk to each other a lot, and we always find a mutually satisfactory accommodation.

You are lucky to have Jamil in Washington. He is that rare breed, a humanist with the political instincts of a lobbyist. I would call the Federation the NRA of the humanities, but you might not appreciate the comparison.

Given our situation, it is amazing that personal relationships among the major spokespeople within the humanities community are so good: John Hammer of the NHA, Stan Katz of the ACLS, and all the rest. We are, in fact, much stronger and better organized as a community now than we were eighteen months ago.

I am optimistic because we have - together - taken the initial, long steps toward a new idea of partnership between the NEH and the state humanities councils. We have just begun that important journey, but with every joint step the goal emerges a bit

from the mist on the horizon and the path becomes a little smoother.

I am sure we are all aware that institutional persistence or longevity is not an end in itself. We must never lose sight of the purpose of our efforts, which is to make available as broadly as possible to the American public the transforming power of the humanities.

We are all also increasingly aware that we are living through a flex point in the history of our country: the end of the Cold War; the emergence of a global economy; the acceleration of technological change; the pressure of modernity on natural resources and the environment. There is also the curious disparity of the world's preeminent superpower feeling so anxious at home just at the time its economic system and its political system achieve the status of dominant models abroad.

As we are frequently told by our leaders, we are living in a time of transition. The Big question is, "What are we transitting to?" Where are we going? Who are we? Those are the critical questions.

To answer those critical questions, the NEH has been sponsoring a "National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity," a project that is bringing together Americans to talk and to listen to each other about what it means to be an American, about what unites us in the midst of our diversity, about what we share as Americans.

At the outset, I thought of this conversation as being sharply focused on race and ethnicity, the most visibly divisive elements of our diversity. Race, ethnicity, and the reality of multiculturalism remain at the center of the conversation, but my own thinking has followed the conversation into other arenas from which Americans derive significant parts of their identity. For instance, I just helped inaugurate the American Library Association's twenty-site program called "A Nation that Works," which is about work and the workplace in the lives of Americans. Work for Americans is, of course, a fundamental part of their self-image. Ask an American who he or she is, and you will usually get first a vocational answer (except perhaps in the South, where you might first get a genealogy). We are what we do, as the saying goes.

As I listen to Americans talk about what it means to be an American as we approach the twenty-first century, and as I study the subject, my own thinking is evolving and taking more definite shape. The question of what it means to be an American is, it turns out, a three-part question.

First, how are we to govern ourselves? Overwhelmingly,

Americans agree that the core of the American identity is a commitment to the values contained in our founding documents, and a commitment to the democratic political system set in motion by the American Revolution. Some commentators would add, as Jean Elshtain does, that we need democratic values too, democratic dispositions that recognize the legitimacy of other points of view, a willingness to compromise, and such operational behaviors that make a democratic system function.

Second, who is a full citizen, not just legally but in everyday life? How large is the circle of WE? How do we think about and talk about ourselves in our collective identity? As I listen in on the conversation, Americans want two things at the same time. They want a common American identity that includes all Americans as undifferentiated individuals, without any prefixes or suffixes or special categories, an identity of "just Americans" within which we are all the same. At the same time, they want to be able to maintain their own special cultural identities; they want to remain Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Chinese Americans, African Americans, and so on. There is no necessary conflict between these two identities. We simply need to be clear about what spheres of activity or what occasions are appropriate to each.

Third, there is something called national character, a set of values, beliefs, and traits of behavior that in their balance and strength distinguish the typical American from other human beings. It is very difficult to specify these common characteristics, but non-Americans have a relatively easy time spotting Americans abroad, and most Americans intuitively feel that national character exists.

One of the things that makes it difficult to talk about national character is that for so many of the traits that are usually mentioned as being very American, there is an opposite trait that is also frequently thought of as being very American. Americans are very optimistic, but the jeremiad has been a popular sermon form from the seventeenth century onward, and the best-seller list is liberally sprinkled with books whose titles announce the end of something very important to Americans. Americans believe in the moral value and necessity of work, but we believe in "get-rich-quick" also, from the gold rush to the land rush to Las Vegas to Wall Street.

These little paradoxes of American culture are fascinating, and I have become convinced that understanding them will yield much meaning about the American identity. I am especially interested in the two most important binary opposites of American culture: individualism and community; and liberty and equality. I accept as true the notion that we believe with equal fervor in both poles of these polar opposites. How, then, can that be rationalized; how can we believe simultaneously that being a self-defined and self-

directed individual is our highest moral goal, and at the same time believe that being a loyal and responsible member of a group or a community is the utmost in virtue?

One could think of the culture swinging pendulum-like between the two orientations, so that sometimes one was in the ascendancy and at other times the other was predominant. One might think that the solution to the problem is to be found in holding the competing tendencies in balance or in dynamic equilibrium with each other. I have come to see the importance of finding a way to view the disparate beliefs as somehow reinforcing each other rather than as being opposed to each other, as being mutual rather than antagonistic, as acting together to create a whole that would be very different without the influence of each element on the other. Dan Schilling, who has been thinking fruitfully about the yin and yang of American history, suggested at the Conversation's project directors meeting in St. Paul that an apt metaphor for this sort of bridging might be a marriage. One has a husband and a wife, who are individuals and very different, but together they form a couple, which is more than just two individuals but a thing unto itself. One might also think of a magnet being composed of north and south poles.

It has just occurred to me that there is another very basic phenomenon from physics that might be used as a metaphor for the principle of cultural mutuality that we are interested in. Matter itself is composed of electrons (bearing negative charges) and protons (bearing positive charges). The form in which we perceive the matter is determined by the particular balance of the mix of electrons and protons. Then, to make the metaphor even more appropriate, there is anti-matter composed of positrons (essentially electrons with positive charges) and anti-protons (which are protons with negative charges). Matter itself is an illustration of the mutuality that we find in American culture.

Let me illustrate this briefly with individualism and community. How can they be bridged; how might they be seen as mutually reinforcing? American individualism would be impossible without the constitutional, governmental, communal guarantee of individual rights, the rights to free speech, free assembly, freedom of religious belief, and all the rest. That is mutuality at the most obvious and important level.

Furthermore, a person's power of individuality doesn't really exist outside a community. How can you even be aware of yourself without others with whom to compare yourself? Imagine a single individual on the proverbial desert island. That person may be unconstrained, and therefore very individualistic and self-reliant, but his or her possibilities are severely constrained in a more real sense. Through cooperation, one can accomplish and engage in so much more. It is also true that it is very hard to be "different" when you are alone in the wilderness. As each

additional person is introduced onto the desert island, the possibilities of individualism increase factorially.

More obviously, communities don't exist without individuals who are committed to them.

As I have engaged in this conversation, I have become aware of how much richer has become my own understanding of myself and of my culture. HERE IS THE MAIN POINT! We have gotten used to the double-edgedness, the simultaneity, the mutuality of culture. It is a trivial observation to say that it both shapes us and is shaped by us. It tells us who we are and what it means to be human and what is important; but all of those meanings are altered by us in the course of our living. Culture is not static. It is not simply a given. We are all "situated" in our particularities of time and place and class and race and gender, but we also have the capacity to transcend those particularities and even change their reality, their meaning.

The power of transcendence, however, is available only to those who understand their situation so thoroughly that they can CHOOSE how to live and what to believe and who to be. The humanities - the exploration of the human condition, informed by the record of human experience - offer the gift of choice. It is a precious gift.

Part of the great debate that is raging now, called forth undoubtedly by our almost unspoken sense of living across a historical watershed, with all the anxieties about the uncertain future that implies, is what kind of inequalities can be tolerated in a society committed to both individual freedom and to equality. In its prosaic political form, this is the question, "What is the role of government and how big should it be?"

As John Rawls, his critics, and supporters are amply demonstrating, that is an immensely complex argument about justice. We don't have time to rehearse that argument today.

As the camouflaged version of this argument about the nature of "justice" in a society committed to both liberty and equality rages in the public policy and political arenas, political theorists are increasingly aware that equal citizenship implies equal access to the culture. One can not be a self-directing, self-defining individual without a command of the culture that one shares with others. (Here, I am using the term "culture" in both of its senses: as "conventional ways of believing and behaving;" and as more or less self-conscious efforts to express "meanings" about life through words or music or images or performances.)

It is intolerable for a democratic society to deny the gift of choice to any of its citizens. It is intolerable for the power of individual transcendence to be available only to those who can pay

for it privately.

Our shared mission of bringing the broadest possible public into the enriching, even transforming, power of the humanities is fundamental to a just society. We are therefore not only working in a noble cause, but we have a critical responsibility to the nation. We must not let those with an impoverished notion of democracy and a stunted view of human possibility deny to millions of Americans the dignity that comes from full participation in our culture. We must persist and we must succeed.

Good luck to you in your important work in the humanities.