

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then, the collapse of the Soviet system, while lifting our spirits in hopes for the spread of human freedom, has also unleashed pent up ancient animosities. Around the globe, we see

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

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

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

rights are for individuals, but our politics are for groups.

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

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

It will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation and

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

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

This is to be a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must grapple seriously with the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and I believe the National Endowment for the Humanities can stimulate and facilitate the discussion. The NEH will not bring answers, but we will bring questions, and we will invite the state humanities councils into full partnership in sponsoring and stimulating the conversation.

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

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

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

We also have a history that belongs to all Americans, whenever their ancestors happened to have migrated to these shores. That

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

Beyond these fundamental building blocks, there are certain precepts that might help us as we go through the discussion of what it means to be American. The traditional way of handling cultural differences has been to think about a public sphere and a private sphere. In the public sphere only universalistic rules are legitimate and only individual rights are legally protected. In the private sphere, we can give voice and form to our birthright identities without being any less American. This distinction still goes a long way in sorting out the conflicts between the universal and the particular.

Indeed, if there is no distinction between the public and the

private, all values would be up for political adjudication, and that is not a system I find very attractive. One of the factors causing the current sense of urgency about this subject is the feeling that the public or political sphere has been encroaching on the private sphere. "Let your culture be your politics," the cultural radicals of the 1960s chanted. "All politics are personal, and all personal relationships are political", assert some contemporary activists. Where in all of this are the ordinary virtues that we ought to be able to expect from each other? Perhaps they can emerge from the conversation.

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

However farfetched it may seem to Cornel West, I believe we must "reconstruct public-mindedness" despite the proliferating identities and fragmenting constituencies of the contemporary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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We also have a history that belongs to all Americans, whenever their ancestors happened to have migrated to these

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Remarks by Sheldon Hackney
Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities
175th Anniversary Convocation
Centre College
Danville, Kentucky
January 21, 1994

There was a time when college presidents and faculty labored in honorable obscurity, shielded from public view and public criticism while preparing "the leaders of tomorrow." College then was important, but primarily as preparation for "real life" which commenced at graduation. No longer is this the case. As the culture has become contested territory, as values have replaced Monday night football as the subject of popular discussion, cultural warriors of the Left and the Right have begun to trample the shrubbery in the groves of academe as they wrestle for ideological supremacy.

Complain if you must, but the world has discovered what Isaac Shelby, Ephraim McDowell, and James Birney knew in 1819 when they gathered around Elizabeth Davenport's parlor hearth to invent Centre College: learning is the light of the mind and is required for civilization and democracy. Schools and colleges are therefore extremely important to the health and wellbeing of society and to the future of its people.

The act of civic virtue whose 175th anniversary we are celebrating today is a good occasion to reflect on the state of public-mindedness in our nation today. Cornel West, Professor of

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

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view," he goes on to observe, "the real crisis of our time is spiritual."

I take it very seriously when social critics from the Left and the Right agree on the condition of society, even though they may disagree on the cause and the cure. There is not one of our social ills that would not be considerably improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole. I was just in Savannah, Georgia visiting some NEH funded projects and I learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the past of a residential community called Cuyler-Brownsville. One of the people interviewed remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic virtue than that. Everyone looks out for everyone else, feels responsible for everyone else. It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, but some analogous sense of identification with the whole is needed.

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

underlies the social order and is the source of legitimate authority in the social order.

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

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

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy, with its promise of liberty and equality, could survive, whether the last best hope on earth could endure. Returning to this theme two and a half brutal years later at the dedication of the

military cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that defending the Union was worth the sacrifices exacted by that terrible struggle because the sacrifices made possible "a new birth of freedom."

As a new millennium approaches, we need again a "new birth of freedom", yet reasonable voices have lately been saying that we have been paying too much attention to our differences and that is why our mutual obligations are not being fulfilled. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the flowering over the last two decades of the cult of ethnicity "challenges the unifying concept of a unique American identity . . . in our politics, our voluntary organizations, our churches, our language."

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It will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation

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

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

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

We must recommit ourselves as individuals and as a society to the ideals of our common heritage and to our obligations to

each other as Americans. We must cherish the values we share, treat each other with respect, recognize the dignity and equality of each individual, and rejoice in the strength derived from the rich mixture of cultures that have come together to create the unity of America. We must, in short, revitalize our civic life so that we may equitably resolve our domestic troubles and continue to hold aloft for all the world to see the beacon of democracy. On the as-yet-uncharted terrain of the post-cold-war world, that American task is not yet completed.

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

[Explain what the NEH is]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

should be consistent with the principles in the Constitution.

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

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

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct

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

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



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

THE CHAIRMAN

COMMENTS

by

SHELDON HACKNEY

CHAIRMAN

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

American Film Institute

February 8, 1994

Comments by Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
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When the nation's Jungian analyst finally describes our collective unconscious, it will turn out to be composed of old movies – the stuff of our dreams and anxieties played out in an art form that has come to occupy a central position in our culture. How nice it is, then, for the National Endowment for the Humanities to have helped bring into existence The American Film Institute Catalog: Feature Films, 1931-40, a scholarly tool whose every entry suggests an imaginative world beyond the limitations of our everyday lives, and perhaps even beyond the reach of analysis and commentary.

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

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

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

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and

100 Years of Motion Pictures in Northern New
England.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy,

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

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

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

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

This is more than an academic argument. Simply think of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We also have a history that belongs to all Americans,

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

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

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

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

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

think we are.

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

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

When the nation's Jungian analyst finally describes our collective unconscious, it will turn out to be composed of old movies – the stuff of our dreams and anxieties played out in an art form that has come to occupy a central position in our culture. How nice it is, then, for the National Endowment for the Humanities to have helped bring into existence The American Film Institute Catalog: Feature Films, 1931-40, a scholarly tool whose every entry suggests an imaginative world beyond the limitations of our everyday lives, and perhaps even beyond the reach of analysis and commentary.

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

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Remarks by Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
At Vanderbilt University
March 30, 1994

Why does it matter who we think we are, either individually or collectively? What difference does it make what image of America is shared by its citizens? The idea of America, though always more rooted in aspiration than reality, has pulled this experiment in democracy forward from the first toward its dream of "liberty and justice for all." That dream, the same one Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke so eloquently about at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington in 1963, has powered one of the noble stories of America, the story of the expansion of the promise of American life to embrace increasing proportions of its citizens. The idea is tutor to the act.

Archibald McLeish, in an essay published in 1949 as a warning against the mounting hysteria of anti-Communism,

wrote, "The soul of a people is the image it cherishes of itself; the aspect in which it sees itself against its past; the attributes to which its future conduct must respond. To destroy that image is to destroy, in a very real sense, the identity of the nation, for to destroy the image is to destroy the means by which the nation recognizes what it is and what it has to do. But the image a people holds of itself is created not by words alone or myths but by its actions. Unless the actions are appropriate to the image, the image is blurred. If the actions deny the image, the image is destroyed A people who have been real to themselves because they were for something cannot continue to be real to themselves when they find they are merely against something."

The question I raise today is not so much about actions that are inconsistent with our image of ourselves as about what we are going to be for now that we don't have "the evil empire" to be against? Do we have a clear and an adequate image of

ourselves in the post-cold-war world, given all the threats to political stability and human welfare both foreign and domestic, given the dangerous fragmentation of a world in which the closeness imposed by modern communications and the global economy has reemphasized the differences within the human family? What is the United States going to be for in the twenty-first century? What picture of an ideal America is going to inform our struggles with current problems? What notion of shared commitments, mutual obligations, civic virtues, will help us come together to solve common problems?

Writing a few days ago in The New York Times (March 27, 1994), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University put the challenge of Minister Louis Farrakhan and his hate-mongering disciple, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, in perspective by quoting Rabbi Yaacov Perrin's eulogy for Dr. Baruch Goldstein, the man who massacred worshipping Palestinian Muslims in Hebron:

"One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail."

"But we have heard this voice before," Gates writes. "It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. We hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst. And, of course, we hear it from some who profess to be addressing the misery of black America." Professor Gates goes on to connect these and other examples of murderous utopianism to the weaknesses of liberalism and to less lethal forms of what he calls identity politics.

"There has been much talk about the politics of identity," Gates writes, "a politics that has a collective identity at its core. One is to assert oneself in the political arena as a woman, a homosexual, a Jew, a person of color. . . . The politics of identity starts with the assertion of a collective allegiance. It says: This is

who we are, make room for us, accommodate our special needs, confer recognition upon what is distinctive about us. It is about the priority of difference, and while it is not, by itself, undesirable, it is – by itself – dangerously inadequate."

Glancing around our nation now does not give one much reassurance. Not only does Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam travel from campus to campus spewing bigotry and leaving divisive squabbles in his wake, but a few weeks ago the National Conference of Christians and Jews released the results of a survey of race relations commissioned by them and done by Lou Harris. The results revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that among Anglo-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, disturbingly high percentages of each group held negative stereotypes of each of the other groups. So much for the myth of "the new majority," the idea that people of color are united against Euro-Americans.

No wonder the village square these days is full of sound and fury.

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

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

recent assassination on the Brooklyn Bridge, tensions among racial and ethnic groups in the United States are in volatile condition.

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

everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

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America, of course, has always been diverse and its diversity

**Remarks by Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
At the Inauguration of Wanda D. Bigham
As President of Huntingdon College
Montgomery, Alabama
March 7, 1994**

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

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

President Bigham, that has now happened to you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

global significance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remarks by Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
At Vanderbilt University
March 30, 1994

Why does it matter who we think we are, either individually or collectively? What difference does it make what image of America is shared by its citizens? The idea of America, though always more rooted in aspiration than reality, has pulled this experiment in democracy forward from the first toward its dream of "liberty and justice for all." That dream, the same one Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke so eloquently about at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington in 1963, has powered one of the noble stories of America, the story of the expansion of the promise of American life to embrace increasing proportions of its citizens. The idea is tutor to the act.

Archibald McLeish, in an essay published in 1949 as a warning against the mounting hysteria of anti-Communism,

wrote, "The soul of a people is the image it cherishes of itself; the aspect in which it sees itself against its past; the attributes to which its future conduct must respond. To destroy that image is to destroy, in a very real sense, the identity of the nation, for to destroy the image is to destroy the means by which the nation recognizes what it is and what it has to do. But the image a people holds of itself is created not by words alone or myths but by its actions. Unless the actions are appropriate to the image, the image is blurred. If the actions deny the image, the image is destroyed A people who have been real to themselves because they were for something cannot continue to be real to themselves when they find they are merely against something."

The question I raise today is not so much about actions that are inconsistent with our image of ourselves as about what we are going to be for now that we don't have "the evil empire" to be against? Do we have a clear and an adequate image of

ourselves in the post-cold-war world, given all the threats to political stability and human welfare both foreign and domestic, given the dangerous fragmentation of a world in which the closeness imposed by modern communications and the global economy has reemphasized the differences within the human family? What is the United States going to be for in the twenty-first century? What picture of an ideal America is going to inform our struggles with current problems? What notion of shared commitments, mutual obligations, civic virtues, will help us come together to solve common problems?

Writing a few days ago in The New York Times (March 27, 1994), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University put the challenge of Minister Louis Farrakhan and his hate-mongering disciple, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, in perspective by quoting Rabbi Yaacov Perrin's eulogy for Dr. Baruch Goldstein, the man who massacred worshipping Palestinian Muslims in Hebron:

"One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail."

"But we have heard this voice before," Gates writes. "It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. We hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst. And, of course, we hear it from some who profess to be addressing the misery of black America." Professor Gates goes on to connect these and other examples of murderous utopianism to the weaknesses of liberalism and to less lethal forms of what he calls identity politics.

"There has been much talk about the politics of identity," Gates writes, "a politics that has a collective identity at its core. One is to assert oneself in the political arena as a woman, a homosexual, a Jew, a person of color. . . . The politics of identity starts with the assertion of a collective allegiance. It says: This is

who we are, make room for us, accommodate our special needs, confer recognition upon what is distinctive about us. It is about the priority of difference, and while it is not, by itself, undesirable, it is – by itself – dangerously inadequate."

Glancing around our nation now does not give one much reassurance. Not only does Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam travel from campus to campus spewing bigotry and leaving divisive squabbles in his wake, but a few weeks ago the National Conference of Christians and Jews released the results of a survey of race relations commissioned by them and done by Lou Harris. The results revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that among Anglo-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, disturbingly high percentages of each group held negative stereotypes of each of the other groups. So much for the myth of "the new majority," the idea that people of color are united against Euro-Americans.

No wonder the village square these days is full of sound and fury.

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

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

recent assassination on the Brooklyn Bridge, tensions among racial and ethnic groups in the United States are in volatile condition.

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

everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

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

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What is our image of the America of the 21st century?
What kind of America do we wish to be? Is America to become, as Arjun Appadurai worries (Public Culture, Spring, 1993), a collection of exiled groups whose members have loyalties only to their own group or perhaps to the homeland rather than to the United States? Are we to be a nation of exiles rather than a nation of immigrants? Should our image be of an undifferentiated America of "melting pot" individuals without any

hyphenated identity? Can it be an America of shared values and commitments that nonetheless retains the modulation of cultural differences, an America in which we are all American AND something else? Can we define what Henry Louis Gates calls "humanism," which starts not with a particular identity "but with the capacity to identify with. It asks what we have in common with others, while acknowledging the diversity among ourselves. It is about the promise of shared humanity."

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

bridge the gap between ideal and reality?

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

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

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

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

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

struggle because the sacrifices made possible "a new birth of freedom."

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

The conversation that I envision will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes (Newsweek Magazine, January 3, 1994) that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation and vigorous attempts to hold at bay their feelings of impotence and powerlessness. Public life seems barren and vacuous. And

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

Despite the difficulties, the conversation must proceed. The objectives are too important to abandon. What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously to define the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and the National Endowment for the Humanities is in the process of encouraging that conversation through a special program of grants, through a film intended for national broadcast on television but which will also be repackaged for use in the nation's classrooms, through

the ongoing activities of the state humanities councils, and through creative partnerships with organizations throughout the country that can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion among citizens from all walks of life.

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

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

Fortunately, there is some evidence of the continuing power of the idea of America that has moved generations of our people to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and people like themselves but for others, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents. When the American Jewish Committee wanted to rally public support against the sort of intolerance being preached by the Nation of Islam, it called upon familiar rhetoric that reveals a particular conception of America and its civic values (New York Times, February 28, 1994).

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

over an impressive and diverse array of leaders).

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

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

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

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

We, the undersigned, believe the best response we

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

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

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

Remarks of Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
Annual Convention of The American Association of Museums
Seattle, Washington
April 25, 1994

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

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global economy has reemphasized the differences within the human family? What is the United States going to be for in the twenty-first century? What picture of an ideal America is going to inform our struggles with current problems? What notion of shared commitments, mutual obligations, civic virtues, will help us come together here in the United States across the fault lines of our cultural diversity to solve our common problems?

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undesirable, it is – by itself – dangerously inadequate."

Glancing around our nation now does not give one much reassurance. Not only does Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam travel from campus to campus spewing bigotry and leaving divisive squabbles in his wake, but a recent survey of opinion within the African American community found a majority (62%) who found some positive elements in Farrakhan's message and also detected a rising amount of black nationalism. Shortly before that, the National Conference of Christians and Jews released the results of a survey of race relations commissioned by them and done by Lou Harris. The results revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that among Euro-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, disturbingly high percentages of each group held negative stereotypes of each of the other groups. So much for the myth of "the new majority," the idea that people of color are united

against Euro-Americans. No wonder the village square these days is full of sound and fury.

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

America, of course, has always been diverse and its diversity

has always been problematic, which is the reason for our motto, "E Pluribus Unum." We take pride in the fact that our nation rests upon a commitment to individual equality and democracy rather than upon ethnicity, but we worry about cohesion, and we bounce back and forth along the continuum between the assimilation implied by the "melting pot" myth and the persistence of pre-American cultural identities assumed by the metaphor of the national quilt or the mosaic.

What is our image of the America of the 21st century? What kind of America do we wish to be? Is America to become, as Arjun Appadurai of the University of Chicago worries (Public Culture, Spring, 1993), a collection of exiled groups whose members have loyalties only to their own group or perhaps to the homeland rather than to the United States? Are we to be a nation of exiles rather than a nation of immigrants? Should our image be of an undifferentiated America of "melting pot"

individuals without any hyphenated identity? Can it be an America of shared values and commitments that nonetheless retains the modulation of cultural differences, an America in which we are all American AND something else? Can we define what Henry Louis Gates calls "humanism," which starts not with a particular identity "but with the capacity to identify with. It asks what we have in common with others, while acknowledging the diversity among ourselves. It is about the promise of shared humanity."

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

we talk about the extent to which it does not exist and how to bridge the gap between ideal and reality?

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

analogous sense of individual identification with the whole?

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

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

those great documents.

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

The Civil War thus became a test of whether democracy, with its promise of liberty and equality, could survive, whether the last best hope on earth could endure. Returning to this theme two and a half brutal years later at the dedication of the

military cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that defending the Union was worth the sacrifices exacted by that terrible struggle because the sacrifices made possible "a new birth of freedom."

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

The conversation that I envision will not be easy. Cornel West, for instance, writes that, "confused citizens now oscillate between tragic resignation and vigorous attempts to hold at bay

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

Despite the difficulties, the conversation must proceed. The objectives are too important to neglect. What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously to define the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and the National Endowment for the Humanities is in the process of encouraging that conversation through a special program of grants, through a

film intended for national broadcast on television but which will also be repackaged for use in the nation's classrooms, through a bulletin board on the internet, through the ongoing activities of the state humanities councils, and through creative programming partnerships with organizations throughout the country, including importantly museums, that can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion among citizens from all walks of life.

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

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct public-mindedness in America. Without a sense of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of

our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of our loyalty. I hope you can find a way to help in that task.



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

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

April 27, 1994

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee on the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies to testify on behalf of the FY 1995 appropriations request for the National Endowment for the Humanities. The American public and the humanities community alike owe a great deal of gratitude to this Subcommittee for its steadfast commitment to NEH. I share your concern and interest in the Endowment's mission and look forward to working with you over the coming months and years to extend the agency's remarkable record of service to the nation.

As a citizen, scholar, teacher, and university president, I have long been intimately aware of NEH's importance to our nation's intellectual life. Since becoming Chairman in August of 1993, I have had the distinctly pleasurable experience of participating in the operations and activities of this vital national institution. I must say that my job has been eased considerably by the talented federal employees I have found at NEH: I have been greatly impressed with their knowledge, expertise, professionalism, and dedication to the mission of the Endowment. I have also been heartened by the thousands of private citizens who annually serve the agency, the humanities, and the nation as panelists and reviewers in our review system. And, in my relatively short time as Chairman, I have come to see firsthand the many exemplary results of the agency's grant programs--some examples of which my division directors, as I understand is customary, will illustrate for you during the hearing today.

As we explained in some detail in the narrative introduction of our budget request to Congress, I believe that the Endowment can play a more active role in raising the visibility of the humanities in American life. To this end, we have recently set in motion a special initiative that is designed to spark what we are calling "A National Conversation," centered on the theme of pluralism in America. Through this initiative, we will help create opportunities for Americans to speak to each other not only about the nature of their many diverse backgrounds and beliefs--such diversity has, of course, always been a distinguishing characteristic of American society--but also about what holds us together as a nation. I believe this conversation is of critical importance at this fractious moment in our history and that the disciplines of the humanities can help us to understand and appreciate our distinctive plural society and the meaning of our nation's motto, E Pluribus Unum (one out of many). The humanities can make major contributions to a national conversation about pluralism because the disciplines of the humanities can provide important information and insights into this subject and encourage citizens to engage in serious

reflection and reasoned and civil discussions about it. The preliminary conversations we have had thus far in a number of forums around the country have been promising. In conjunction with other humanities organizations and institutions, particularly the state humanities councils, we are now working to facilitate discussions in cities, towns, and communities all across the nation. In addition to these forums, the Endowment is launching an agency-wide effort to encourage humanities institutions, organizations, scholars, and teachers to develop projects and submit applications focused on this subject to our regular grant competitions.

While our pluralism initiative will be a special emphasis of our activities in FY 1995 and for the remainder of FY 1994, the Endowment will, of course, continue to pursue its primary mission of providing support for fresh, challenging, innovative, high quality projects in all fields of the humanities: scholarly research that creates new knowledge and insights and that preserves and makes accessible the best works and ideas of the past; educational programs that improve instruction in the humanities in our schools and colleges; and public programming that creatively and imaginatively draws people with varied backgrounds and from every part of the country into the humanities.

No single approach in promoting progress in the humanities is adequate by itself; all of our programs are complementary and mutually supportive and share the common objective of encouraging excellent projects that involve all of our citizens in the study and appreciation of the humanities. Our programs are also interconnected: A project we support in one area of the Endowment will frequently have an impact on or influence a project or projects elsewhere in the agency.

I understand that members of this Subcommittee, as well as many members of Congress, are interested in learning more about the geographic and demographic breadth of the Endowment's grant programs and the capacity of the grants we make to benefit a significant number of Americans. Let me assure you, first of all, that the humanities projects receiving funding from NEH do indeed reach Americans of diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds in all areas of the nation. We support high quality projects and programs in the humanities that every year enable many thousands of Americans to visit interpretive exhibitions of history and culture in small and large museums and to participate in library reading and discussion groups; millions of citizens to view informative, thought-provoking films on public television that elucidate the history and culture of America and other nations; thousands of teachers and faculty members, who collectively teach tens of thousands of American schoolchildren, to participate in rigorous humanities seminars and institutes that revitalize their teaching; countless numbers of humanities

scholars, students, and general readers to consult significant works of scholarship and research in the humanities; and dozens of libraries and archives to preserve thousands of books, documents, and items of material culture that constitute a significant part of the nation's cultural legacy. As the largest single source of support for the humanities in the United States, the agency has served for almost thirty years as the major catalyst for helping the humanities grow and flourish throughout the nation. It is the highest priority of my tenure as Chairman of NEH to build on this admirable record and to bring the benefits of the humanities into the lives of even more Americans.

The more than 2,000 public programming, education, and scholarly research grants the Endowment makes each year are awarded to institutions, organizations, and individual teachers and scholars in all states and territories of the nation. While an NEH grant typically is awarded to a single institution or organization (or, in the case of many scholarly research projects, to an individual scholar), there is also a "multiplier effect" associated with our awards; that is, the benefits of our awards extend well beyond the immediate grantees. Moreover, not only do our grants reach huge numbers of Americans in addition to the award recipients, but they also reach these Americans with high quality projects in the humanities. Many grants to institutions or organizations that are based in large cities and populous states, for instance, often directly benefit other communities throughout the country: Library reading groups or museum exhibitions typically will travel to other institutions in several states; humanities teachers attending NEH education institutes and summer seminars will be drawn from dozens of schools across the nation; and scholars working on collaborative projects or attending conferences supported by the Endowment will come from colleges and universities in many different states and regions. To cite just one example of the extraordinary "multiplier effect" of many of the Endowment's grants: A \$435,000 grant NEH made recently to the American Library Association in Chicago is supporting a national traveling program of reading groups and exhibitions in public libraries exploring the legend of King Arthur in the context of history, literature, art, and music. Beginning this fall and continuing for the next two years, the program will tour 64 libraries in towns and cities from coast to coast including libraries in Derry, New Hampshire; Tiffin, Ohio; Albany, Georgia; Lafayette, Louisiana; Brookings, South Dakota; Glendale, Arizona; Carson City, Nevada; and Salem, Oregon.

Broad reach and impact are central to all of our public programming in the humanities. For example, with the major funding that we provide each year to the state humanities councils in all 50 states and six territories the councils sponsor humanities programs that reach tens of thousands Americans from all walks of life in school auditoriums and on

college campuses; local museums and libraries; community centers, public housing projects, court houses, and state capitols; Indian reservations; and church and grange halls. The projects supported in the Endowment's Public Programs division also make the humanities widely accessible. These grants include major television productions, like Henry Hampton's The Great Depression series last fall and Ken Burns' acclaimed The Civil War series, that are viewed by many millions of Americans each year. (I think the Subcommittee will be interested to know that Mr. Burns' much anticipated new documentary series--Baseball--will premiere this fall on PBS.) The Endowment also annually supports a large number of museum exhibitions; reading groups in libraries; and symposia, lectures, and conferences throughout the nation that create a multitude of opportunities for Americans to learn about the humanities outside of the traditional classroom setting. NEH grants are allowing many other fine public humanities projects to take place that benefit Americans in a wide array of venues and locations, for example:

- * The Jewish Museum in New York received \$200,000 from the Endowment for an exhibition entitled "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews." The exhibition explores the rich history of interaction between these two groups in the United States in the twentieth century. After opening in New York City in the spring of 1992, the exhibition has traveled to museums and cultural centers in six additional cities throughout the country--including, in Baltimore and Philadelphia, joint showings at African-American and Jewish museums--and is currently on view at the Chicago Historical Society. This educational exhibition on a timely subject is the kind of project that the Endowment wishes to encourage as part of our new American pluralism initiative.
- * The Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia, was awarded \$160,503 for a project focusing on the ethical, social, religious, and legal issues related to advances in modern medicine and technology. In a series of forums and community discussions, the project is bringing together humanities scholars and medical and technological experts to examine these issues in the context of ethical systems, legal theories, and theological thought and through a study of history, philosophy, and literature.
- * The Utah Library Association, in cooperation with other Western library organizations, received \$173,500 from NEH to support a three-year series of reading and discussion groups organized around three topics: South African literature, Native American culture, and the mythology of the American West. Readings for these sessions have included works by Nadine Gordimer, Louis Nkosi, and Alan Paton; D'Arcy McNickle, N.Scott Momaday, and Janet Campbell; and Larry

McMurtry, Tony Hillerman, and Maxine Hong Kingston. The objective of the project is to reach small and remote towns in the region with quality reading programs. Since 1991, citizens in dozens of cities, towns, and communities scattered across Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico have participated in the programs.

NEH's education grants also have a wide impact and influence beyond the immediate results realized by the grantee institution. For example, the 160 or so humanities institutes and summer seminars for teachers we support each year are attended by more than 3,000 teachers of the humanities from all over the nation. The ultimate beneficiaries, however, are the tens of thousands of American students--in rural, inner-city, and other classrooms as well as in colleges and universities--who receive better instruction in their humanities courses in the years to come because they are taught by teachers who have been intellectually invigorated after participating in an NEH-sponsored institute or seminar. Also, all NEH Education division grantees are required to disseminate the results of their projects as widely as possible so that other institutions may emulate successful Endowment-supported activities. All grant products of elementary and secondary projects, for example, are made available through the U.S. Department of Education's vast electronic dissemination network called ERIC (Education Resources Information Center).

The Endowment also supports many other humanities education efforts that are helping America's students develop the intellectual tools they need to compete and succeed in the global economy. We are working with other federal agencies and with non-federal groups and organizations, for example, to develop and implement challenging standards in the core subjects of history, foreign languages, geography, and the arts. These standards projects are vital components of the "Goals 2000" legislation, which was recently passed by Congress and signed into law by the President. Additional examples of NEH's support for significant humanities education projects include:

- * Endowment funds of \$61,928 are making possible a seminar for school teachers this summer at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, on "The Poetry of Wordsworth and Keats." Fifteen teachers of the humanities drawn from schools around the country will be led by Kenyon literature professor Ronald Sharp in intensive study of the major poems of Wordsworth and Keats. (A summer seminar held last summer at Kenyon, conducted by professor of history Peter Rutkoff, brought together fifteen school teachers from thirteen states, including three teachers from Ohio schools.)
- * The University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, received \$143,915 from the Endowment in FY 1993 to develop a series of courses that will integrate the humanities with

the teaching of the natural sciences and the social sciences. Once implemented, these team-taught interdisciplinary courses will annually reach an estimated 700 students at the university. This project is being supported through the Endowment's new cooperative program with the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education that is encouraging institutions to integrate the humanities and the sciences in their curricula.

- * Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, received \$236,268 from the Endowment for a curriculum development project organized around the theme of "Human Heritage." This grant allowed thirty-four faculty members from Fort Lewis College and from two small, regional community colleges--San Juan Community College in Farmington, New Mexico, and Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona--to design a required interdisciplinary two-semester freshman course focusing on the development of Western, Chinese, and Native American cultural traditions. The course will help advance the institutions' missions to educate Native Americans to the growing importance of the Pacific Rim and to the need to understand Western civilization in a global perspective.

In addition to the broad impact of the Endowment's public programming and humanities education projects, NEH grants for scholarship and research in the humanities have a wide reach--in fact much wider than may be readily apparent. NEH annually supports the work of scholars in virtually every state of the nation; through our International Research Organizations program, we also make it possible for hundreds of American scholars to conduct humanities research in other countries. But it is through the many books, articles, and other intellectual materials produced by NEH grantees--which will be consulted for generations by other scholars, students of the humanities, and general readers--that the true impact of the Endowment is realized. Many of these scholarly projects also directly inform the teaching and learning of the humanities in the nation's schools and colleges as well as in public education programs in museums, libraries, and similar institutions--an example of the "interconnected" nature of our programming. In addition, as this Subcommittee is well aware, the Endowment also annually provides significant national support and leadership for preservation activities--such as the microfilming of thousands of brittle books and serials and the maintenance and stabilization of collections of millions of fragile archaeological, ethnographic, and historic objects--that are ensuring that the resources needed for projects and programs in the humanities are widely available and accessible. In FY 1993, NEH funds helped many significant humanities research, scholarship, and preservation projects to take place such as:

- * Dr. David Rood at the University of Colorado, Boulder, received \$182,705 from the Endowment to lead a team of scholars that is producing a dictionary and grammar of Osage, a nearly extinct Native American Sioux language. With these research tools in hand, scholars will now be able to reconstruct the ancestral language of this important group of North American Indian languages, which will have compelling significance for research in Amerindian linguistics, historical linguistics, and the prehistory of North America. In addition to providing vital linguistic information, the dictionary will contribute to the study of Native American cultural history.
- * Dr. Charles Martin of the University of Texas, El Paso, received a \$30,000 fellowship from the Endowment to study the history and development of integrated college sports programs in the South. Dr. Martin's research focuses on the history of the shift from segregated athletic programs at historically white universities in the 1940s to the multiracial programs of the early 1980s. Because sports play such a prominent role in southern culture, this study will provide us with a valuable new perspective for examining the history of changing race relations in the South in the crucial decades following World War II.
- * The Endowment has been providing major support for a number of years to the "Freedom and Southern Society Project" at the University of Maryland in College Park. Directed by Dr. Leslie Rowland, this award-winning project is producing a multi-volume documentary history that traces the transformation of black life from slavery to freedom in the South and to date has published four volumes, plus two selected volumes of materials aimed at popular audiences. One of the latter volumes, Free at Last, is a selection of the History Book Club, is already in its second printing, and has been used for dramatic public readings in New York City, Baltimore, and Washington.
- * The Endowment awarded \$498,247 to AMIGOS, a Dallas, Texas, bibliographic service organization serving five Southwestern states (Arizona, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), for three years of field services to meet the preservation needs of libraries and archives in towns and communities in the region. The 345 libraries, archives, and other institutions belonging to AMIGOS hold resources important for humanities research that are endangered and are in need of preservation. NEH's funding helps AMIGOS make state and regional presentations on preservation issues, operate a series of preservation training courses, and conduct site visits and provide preservation services to individual member institutions.

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As you can see from this small sampling of grants, federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities supports a broad range of activities that provide wide and diverse benefits for Americans. The Endowment makes serious contributions to the educational and cultural life of our nation that go well beyond the "cost" of the budget we are requesting for FY 1995. Indeed, our request represents a commitment by the federal government to the humanities of less than 70 cents per person in the country, a modest sum for the federal government to invest in this vital national endeavor.

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

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

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

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

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

"But we have heard this voice before," Gates writes. "It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. We hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst. And, of course, we hear it from some who profess to be addressing the misery of black America." Professor Gates goes on to connect these and other examples of murderous utopianism to the weaknesses of liberalism and to less lethal forms of what he calls identity politics.

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

is – by itself – dangerously inadequate."

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

days is full of sound and fury.

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

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

United States are in volatile condition.

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

therefore does not solve the problem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Remarks of Sheldon Hackney
Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities
At the Commencement Exercises of
York College
York, Pennsylvania
May 14, 1994*

*President Waldner, Trustees, members of the class of
1994,
friends and family of the class of 1994, what a pleasure it is
for me to be here. In fact, I can not think of a single place
on earth that I would rather be at this instant. You probably
feel the same way. This is the first year in thirty years that I
have not spent on a college campus, so I listened with great
interest to the remarks of Ms. Blair speaking for the
members of the class of 1994. I infer from her charming
remarks that nothing has yet changed in my absence.*

I was reminded, however, of the advice once given at a

Commencement by Bob Hope. He looked out at the graduating class and said, "As you go forth from this protected and lovely academic environment into the cold cruel world where you will have to cope with the problems of war and poverty and pestilence and injustice, I have only one bit of advice for you: don't go!" Recognizing that you have to go, I want to talk today a bit about your futures -- your futures as Americans.

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

the means by which the nation recognizes what it is and what it has to do. "

The question I raise today is, do we have a clear and an adequate image of ourselves in the post-cold-war world, given all the threats to political stability and human welfare both foreign and domestic, given the dangerous fragmentation of a world in which the closeness imposed by modern communications and the global economy has reemphasized the differences within the human family? What is the United States going to be for in the twenty-first century, now that we don't have the "Evil Empire" to be against? What picture of an ideal America is going to inform our struggles with current problems? What notion of shared commitments, mutual obligations, civic virtues, will

help us come together to solve common problems?

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

"But we have heard this voice before," Gates writes. "It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. We hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst. And,

of course, we hear it from some who profess to be addressing the misery of black America." Professor Gates goes on to connect these and other examples of murderous utopianism to the weaknesses of liberalism and to less lethal forms of what he calls identity politics.

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

undesirable, it is -- by itself -- dangerously inadequate."

Glancing around our nation now does not give one much reassurance. Not only does Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam travel from campus to campus spewing bigotry and leaving divisive squabbles in his wake, but a recent survey among members of the African American community disclosed a rising degree of black nationalism and a majority (62%) who found some positive elements in Minister Farrakhan's message. A few months ago, the National Conference of Christians and Jews released the results of a survey of race relations commissioned by them and done by Lou Harris. The results revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that among Anglo-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans,

disturbingly high percentages of each group held negative stereotypes of each of the other groups. So much for the myth of "the new majority," the idea that people of color are united against Euro-Americans. No wonder the village square these days is full of sound and fury.

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

Take for example the angry debates in state legislatures around bills to make English the official language of the

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

That this is more than academic is clear if one recalls the hand-to-hand combat within school boards involving such issues as bilingual education and Afrocentric curricula, the dispute over the literary canon at the college level, or the court decisions seeking to remedy past patterns of discrimination in voting rights cases by requiring

redistricting or changes in the form of local government so as to guarantee the minority community representation in the legislative body. In that case and in others you can probably think of, public authorities are being asked to confer some sort of official status on a particular cultural group. Large parts of the public sense that this form of particularism is a problem in a system based on universal values of individual rights [American Indians being an exception in that they have citizenship as individuals but also group rights conferred by treaties]. Simply saying that everyone must respect everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

Furthermore, how is one to embrace cultural equality when one is aware of so many practices one may not

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

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

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

What is our image of the America of the 21st century? What kind of America do we wish to be? Is America to become, as Arjun Appadurai worries (Public Culture, Spring, 1993), a collection of exiled groups whose members have loyalties only to their own group or perhaps to the homeland rather than to the United States? Are we to be a nation of exiles rather than a nation of immigrants? Should

our image be of an undifferentiated America of "melting pot" individuals without any hyphenated identity? Can it be an America of shared values and commitments that nonetheless retains the modulation of cultural differences, an America in which we are all American AND something else? Can we define what Henry Louis Gates calls "humanism," which starts not with a particular identity "but with the capacity to identify with. It asks what we have in common with others, while acknowledging the diversity among ourselves. It is about the promise of shared humanity."

Can we identify those values and commitments we need to share if we are to be a successful society? Are our cultures so diverse that we would risk undermining the

integrity of some group if our schools sought to inculcate in our children the belief that it is wrong to lie, cheat or steal? Is a belief in the Constitution and our political system enough to hold us together without violent friction between members of different groups? To what extent can any inclusive national identity enlist our loyalties if it does not squarely face the issue of social justice? If equal opportunity is to be part of the American ideal, shouldn't we talk about the extent to which it does not exist and how to bridge the gap between ideal and reality?

There is not one of our considerable number of social ills that would not be greatly improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole. I was in Savannah, Georgia not long ago visiting some NEH funded projects and

I learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the past of a residential community called Cuyler-Brownsville. One of the people interviewed remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where everyone looks out for everyone else, or, as he put it, "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic virtue than that. Everyone feels responsible for everyone else. It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, but some analogous sense of identification with the whole is needed. One can believe that every society is based upon the general fulfillment of civic duties, the recognition that there are some things that citizens owe to each other, without threatening to impose a repressive authoritarian regime.

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

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

exemplar for the world of the ideals of human freedom and equality set forth in those great documents.

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

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

The challenge of our time is to revitalize our civic life in order to realize a new birth of freedom. All of our people - left, right and center - have a responsibility to examine and discuss what unites us as a country, about what we share as common American values in a nation comprised of so many divergent groups and beliefs. For too long, we have let what

divides us capture the headlines and sound bites, polarizing us rather than bringing us together.

The conversation that I envision will not be easy.

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

Despite the difficulties, the conversation must proceed. The objectives are too important to neglect. What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously to define the meaning of the American identity in a pluralistic society. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and the National Endowment for the Humanities is in the process of encouraging that conversation through a special program of grants, through an information kit that will be given to anyone interested in conducting a conversation, through a film intended for national broadcast on television but which will also be repackaged for use in the nation's classrooms, through a computer bulletin board on the internet, through the ongoing activities of the state humanities councils, and

through creative partnerships with organizations throughout the country that can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion among citizens from all walks of life, age groups and communities.

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

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct public-mindedness in America, and we must create a public sphere in which all Americans can discuss with each other matters of mutual concern. Without a sense

of shared values, individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of our loyalty. I hope each of you individually and the institutions of which you are a part will find a way to participate in this conversation about the American identity. It is very important.

You may draw your own conclusions from that conversation. My own belief is that there is continuing power in the idea of America that moved Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., that has moved generations of our people to sacrifice in order to build a better life not just for themselves and people like

themselves but for others, that has called forth the best in Americans in national crises, that has enlarged our sense of ourselves so that we more nearly approximate the universal ideals set forth in our founding documents.

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

Remarks by Sheldon Hackney
Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
At the Annual Convention of the
National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies
Fort Worth, Texas
June 6, 1994

We gather here in safety and in comfort and in freedom while a quarter of the globe away ceremonies mark the 50th anniversary of D-Day, on which 3 million men and women from many different nations gave up their safety and comfort and freedom in order to make possible a better world.

One should ponder the tragedy of a war that took 120 million lives world-wide, but one should also remember the individual sacrifice of that great collective endeavor and find in it a lesson for the present.

It is a lesson about duty and purpose.

It must be a lesson about duty and purpose in a world transformed by the Cold War and the end of the Cold War.

It should be a lesson about duty and purpose in a nation

changed by advances in technology and by the social revolutions of the Sixties and afterward.

War, you see, is just a dramatic and heightened example of the sort of thing society calls upon every citizen to do in prosaic and less total ways every hour of every day: the willing suspense of the pursuit of individual, short-term self-interest in favor of the common good.

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Take for example the angry debates in state legislatures around bills to make English the official language of the state, an act that is primarily symbolic and is emotionally resisted for that very same reason (nineteen states have such laws; Maryland just turned down an "official English" bill). The growing debate over immigration

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Remarks of Sheldon Hackney
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities
National Flag Day Luncheon
Omni Inner Harbor Hotel
June 13, 1994

I attended a birthday party on Saturday that was held on a large boat cruising around Baltimore harbor. It was my first time there, and I could not help but be struck by the sight of Fort McHenry. My friends and I even spoke briefly about Francis Scott Key and the writing of the Star Spangled Banner, and we could not remember why he was on that British frigate watching the bombardment in 1814 during the war we call The War of 1812, an event elevated into the realm of powerful myth by Key's poem and its subsequent musical version that became our National Anthem. I also remembered the line from Frederich Nietzsche, "Only a horizon ringed with myths can unite a culture."

I was also moved last week by the ceremonies marking D-Day, heroic events happening fifty years ago and a quarter of the globe away, yet transcending time and space with the urgent reminder of our moral debts and our human interconnectedness. As we sat here in safety and in comfort and in freedom, images and words recalled that distant day when three million men and women gave up their safety and comfort and freedom in order to make possible a better world.

One should certainly ponder the tragedy of a war that took 120 million lives world-wide, but one should also remember the individual sacrifices of that great collective endeavor and find in it a lesson for the present.

That lesson is about duty and purpose, words we don't use often enough these days.

It is a lesson about duty and purpose in a world transformed by the Cold War and the end of the Cold War.

It is a lesson about duty and purpose in a nation changed by advances in technology and by the social revolutions of the Sixties and afterward.

War, you see, is only a dramatically heightened example of what society calls upon every citizen to do in prosaic and ordinary ways every hour of every day: the willing suspense of the pursuit of individual, short-term self-interest in favor of the common good.

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."

The question I raise today is, do we have a clear and an adequate image of ourselves in the post-cold-war world, given all the threats to political stability and human welfare both foreign and domestic, given the dangerous fragmentation of a world in which the closeness imposed by modern communications and the global economy has paradoxically reemphasized the differences within the human family? What is the United States going to be for in the

twenty-first century, now that we don't have the "Evil Empire" to be against? What picture of an ideal America is going to inform our struggles with current problems? What notion of shared commitments, mutual obligations, civic virtues, will help us come together to solve common problems?

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

"But we have heard this voice before," Gates writes. "It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. We hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst. And, of course, we hear it from some who profess to be addressing the misery of black America." Professor Gates goes on to connect these and other examples of murderous utopianism what he calls identity politics.

"There has been much talk about the politics of identity," Gates writes, "a politics that has a collective identity at its core. One is to assert oneself in the political arena as a woman, a homosexual, a Jew, a person of color. . . . The politics of

identity starts with the assertion of a collective allegiance. It says: This is who we are, make room for us, accommodate our special needs, confer recognition upon what is distinctive about us. It is about the priority of difference, and while it is not, by itself, undesirable, it is -- by itself -- dangerously inadequate."

Glancing around our nation now does not give one much reassurance. Not only does Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam travel from campus to campus spewing bigotry and leaving divisive squabbles in his wake, but a few months ago, the National Conference of Christians and Jews released the results of a survey of race relations commissioned by them and done by Lou Harris. The results revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that among Anglo-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, disturbingly high percentages of each group held negative stereotypes of each of the other groups. So much for the myth of "the new majority," the idea that people of color are united against Euro-Americans. To the contrary, it appears to be a war of all against all. No wonder the village square these days is full of sound and fury.

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

increasingly occupying our attention.

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

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

Because some groups are claiming rights as a group, simply saying that everyone must respect everyone else's ethnic identity therefore does not solve the problem.

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

America, of course, has always been diverse and its diversity has always been problematic, which is the reason for our motto, "E Pluribus Unum." We take pride in the fact that our nation rests upon a commitment to individual equality and democracy rather than upon ethnicity, but we worry about cohesion, and we bounce back and forth along the continuum between the assimilation implied by the "melting pot" myth and the persistence and mutual separation of pre-American cultural identities assumed by the metaphor of the national quilt or the mosaic.

What is our image of the America of the 21st century? What

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

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

There is not one of our considerable number of social ills that would not be considerably improved if each of us felt a sense of responsibility for the whole. I was in Savannah, Georgia not long ago visiting some NEH funded projects and I learned about an oral history project that is reclaiming the past of a residential community called Cuyler-Brownsville. One of the people interviewed

remembered his childhood in that neighborhood. His memory was that it was the kind of place where everyone looks out for everyone else, or, as he put it, "everybody's momma could whip everybody's kid." I can't think of a better definition of community or of civic virtue than that. Everyone feels responsible for everyone else. It would be utopian to aspire to the same level of community spirit on a national level, of course, but some analogous sense of identification with the whole is needed.

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

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

On that occasion, Lincoln said, "I have often inquired of

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

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

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

The conversation that I envision will not be easy. It is booby-trapped with emotional sensitivities, animosities, and widely varying perspectives. Despite the difficulties, however, the conversation must proceed. The objectives are too important to neglect. What I envision is a national conversation open to all Americans, a conversation in which all voices need to be heard and in which we must struggle seriously to define the meaning of American pluralism. It is a conversation that is desperately needed, and the National Endowment for the Humanities is in the process of encouraging that conversation through a special program of grants, through a film intended for national broadcast on television but which will also be repackaged for use in the nation's classrooms, through a bulletin board on the internet, through the ongoing activities of the state humanities councils, and through creative partnerships with organizations throughout the country that can help to stimulate and facilitate the discussion among citizens from all walks of life, age groups and diverse communities.

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

However large the challenge, I believe we must reconstruct public-mindedness in America. Without a sense of shared values,

individuals are not willing to subordinate personal self-interest to the common good. Our first step out of the moral nihilism of our public and private lives is to define our common identity and to find in it a moral purpose that is worthy of our loyalty. I hope each of you individually and the institutions of which you are a part will find a way to participate in this conversation about the American identity. It is very important.

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

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