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1988

# Reauthorization: Hearings and Reports (1990): Speech 07

Annie Dillard

Nancy Stevenson

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**Authors**

Annie Dillard, Nancy Stevenson, James Veninga, and Stephen Nissenbaum

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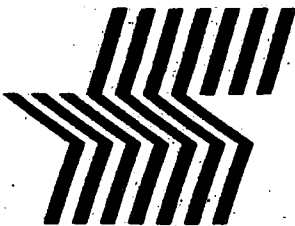
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**MAKING THE CASE FOR  
THE HUMANITIES**

**Testimony Submitted to the  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior  
of the U.S. House of Representatives  
March 17, 1988**

**Annie Dillard  
Nancy Stevenson  
James Veninga  
Stephen Nissenbaum**

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STATE HUMANITIES  
COUNCILS**

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MAKING THE CASE FOR  
THE HUMANITIES

Written Testimony before the  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior  
of the U.S. House of Representatives  
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by  
Annie Dillard, author

Nancy Stevenson, President  
Federation of State Humanities Councils

James Veninga, Executive Director  
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## Introduction

Each year, the federal budget process through which funds are allocated to government agencies, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, begins with hearings before appropriations subcommittees. It is at these hearings that humanities organizations make their case for the funding they need to continue and expand their programs. The Federation Board of Directors in 1988 set as its appropriations goals for FY 1989 a funding level of \$25 million for the Division of State Programs of the NEH and funding parity between NEH and NEA over the next three years.

The appropriations hearings are an opportunity for groups such as the state humanities councils to articulate, not only for Congress but for themselves as well, the role that they play in American society and the contribution that they make to the enrichment of the lives of American citizens. The 1988 hearings included oral testimony on behalf of the state humanities councils by Federation President Nancy Stevenson of Illinois and Executive Director James Veninga of the Texas Committee for the Humanities. Annie Dillard submitted written testimony, which Nancy Stevenson read. Also testifying, on behalf of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, was Stephen Nissenbaum, Chair of the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy. Their statements provide an eloquent description of the value of the public humanities and their crucial place in American life.

We all lead the life of the mind. When we teach our children not to hit or steal, we are passing on the great ideas of moral philosophy. When we claim our rights as citizens, we invoke a social contract. When we defend our freedom or our neighbors' freedom, we hearken to one of the most stirring ideas of western thought.

When we decide how to vote, when we pray, when we debate an issue, and when we fall in love, we are participating in the humanities. When we reflect on the changes in our own lives, when we recognize some of the things we love about the world, and when we resist loss and death with all our strength--we are participating in the humanities. All adults think and choose; all adults reflect and wonder. The humanities address our deepest contemporary concerns.

**Annie Dillard**  
**Middletown, Connecticut**

Written testimony submitted to the  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior  
of the U.S. House of Representatives

March 17, 1988

**Written Testimony  
of  
Nancy Stevenson  
President  
Federation of State Humanities Councils**

My name is Nancy Stevenson. I am President of the Federation of State Humanities Councils and I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today with these distinguished members of the humanities family.

Whether we represent the interests of educational or cultural institutions or our individual interests as students, teachers, as readers or citizens, we come together to support the breadth of activities in the humanities, for every field-- history, as well as physics--needs continued research and development to remain lively. We must have fellowships. And we must all support the preservation and conservation of texts and artifacts. We need libraries and universities, museums and public forums. All work in the humanities--for a general or an academic audience--profits from attention to these basics.

It is essential that we bring the humanities into the mainstream of American life. The humanities have an integral part to play in the discussion of the major issues of our day. Many of the great texts of the Western tradition arose in response to controversy. It is the humanities which help us debate national concerns, of ethics, for example--medical, business or political. It is the humanities which help us plumb the reflections of the elderly, break down the barriers of isolation, allow us to talk to each other across differences of race, gender or family experience, help communities inventory their bonds of history and place, console in sorrow and, no less important in American life, the humanities give us delight, wonder, laughter.

Recognizing this importance, the Federation requests an increase in funding for the NEH over a three-year period until it reaches parity with the NEA. We do not wish to diminish support for the arts but to show by equal funding that our society values the institutions which feed our curiosity, provide access to ideas, help us process the information with which we are bombarded, and give us opportunities for civic conversation.

The Federation requests an allocation of \$25 million for the state humanities councils for FY1989. Congress created the state humanities councils to bring the general public and the scholar together in conversation and discovery for their mutual benefit. After fifteen years of development the state programs now have a body of evidence proving that the idea is an



overwhelming success. Each council has a rotating board of volunteers, half academic and half public members. We estimate that there have been nearly 10,000 active participants on state boards and many times that many who have worked on our programs. These boards are supported by small staffs.

By knowing their states and reaching out to other civic and cultural institutions, the councils make connections between and among groups where none existed before and where it has been assumed effective linkages could not be made. For example, the Illinois Humanities Council funded "Looking Backward to Look Forward," a community history project conducted by Bethel New Life, a then relatively unknown center in an all black area of the near-west side of Chicago, where there were few social programs of any kind. Unearthing and collecting the stories of the community was one of the first steps taken by Bethel New Life toward community redevelopment. Now, several years later, Bethel New Life has initiated several job creating cottage industries, built self-help housing, started a comprehensive health clinic and is beginning a cultural plan for the community. Other institutions are beginning to invest there. In preparation for this testimony, I interviewed Lynda VonDreele, the leader of "Looking Backward to Look Forward." She tells why Bethel New Life began economic planning with a history project: "You can't do redevelopment without the underpinnings. Bricks and mortar do not make a community. It takes the recognized abilities of people, commitment to human values and institutions to make a community whole. The people who settled here came to the North to seek educational opportunities and freedoms they could not find in the South at that time. They participated in cultural activities, left memories, scrapbooks, stories of pride and achievement. By pointing back to the fabric of this community, it helps people reach into those values and pull them out again. I agree with director, 'you can't do economic development without histories.'"

It is worth taking note of how state councils spend the money you allocate. The group requesting regrant funds from a council assumes at least half of the cost of the program. At the outset, therefore, the government money is doubled. Then, the grantee and state council often raise additional funds from private sources in support of the project, multiplying the government investment once again. When we have treasury funds to award, those funds are not released until the grantee has gathered all its resources. Thus, the government's money is not spent until the project is a sure thing. Further, state councils now create their own programs to fill special needs turning to local sources for added funds. In Illinois, we estimate that each federal dollar generates three dollars within the state from individual, corporate, and philanthropic sources for public humanities projects.

State councils are models of the federal process at work. The programs in each state reflect the state concerns, strengths and population. Vermont and Florida have reading programs in public libraries reaching people in small communities throughout the state. Pennsylvania celebrated "The Year of the Pennsylvania Writer" with eight regional conferences involving both writers and readers. The discussions of biography, history, poetry reached beyond the conference audiences through newspaper supplements, book displays and exhibits in public libraries, and forty satellite events. Virginia brought leaders in science, medicine, industry and government together with scholars of history, law, theology, philosophy for three public discussions on controversial issues: "Coal: Its Environment, its Future," "Intelligence Testing," and "Genetic Engineering." Massachusetts provided a scholars-in-residence program for police officers in collaboration with the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Training Council to designed to help the police with the difficult ethical and discretionary decisions they face on a daily basis. Oregon combined a major exhibit, a lecture series, teacher institute, tabloid reader, slide-talk show to create lively and informed debate about "Liberty under Law: Magna Carta to the Constitution."

The councils have impact on issues of national concern, such as education. Connecticut began teacher institutes in 1977, well before the series of reports about the crisis in education. By 1985, it was reported that 39 state councils had conducted or sponsored over 300 programs for teacher development. The Florida Council provides teacher training for the state. The California and Rhode Island councils have initiated programs of scholars in the schools which are now spreading across the country as the teacher institutes did years ago. The beauty of these state council initiatives is that they start small, they grow out of a local network linking universities, cultural institutions with the schools, and they work. Good ideas and successful formats spread rapidly through the national network of state councils. Collaboration and sharing are tools the councils know how to use.

Federal support created the state councils and this committee has been a vital force in their development. The state programs have broadened their base beyond government funding and will continue to expand their means and their mission. The Federation of State Humanities Councils is committed to work with the councils to provide new resources. The excitement generated by these programs is a challenge to fill unmet needs. More communities should be given the opportunity to "look backward in order to move forward." More high school teachers should have the opportunity to take some time for research and discussion with scholars in order to take new vigor and inspiration to their classrooms. More citizens

should be able to talk and think together about the values they hold dear. We look to you for continued and additional funds to meet this challenge.

March 17, 1988

**Written Testimony  
of  
James Veninga  
Executive Director  
Texas Committee for the Humanities**

Mr Chairman, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I am very pleased to appear before you to discuss the vitally important work of the state humanities councils.

My name is James F. Veninga, and I have served as Executive Director of the Texas Committee for the Humanities since 1975. I have had the good fortune of observing and participating in the growth and development of this national program. What began as an experiment in public humanities has become an institutional reality. This remarkable program is serving the humanities well. More importantly, it is serving American democracy well. I am pleased to offer thoughts as to why this is so.

A very useful report was published this past November by a group of nationally recognized scholars, writers, and educational administrators, titled The Humanities and the American Promise. Over the course of eighteen months, the Colloquium on the Humanities and the American People met at the University of Virginia on four different occasions to "discuss the relationship--as it has been and as it should be--between adult Americans and those areas of intellectual activity known as the humanities."

The report underscores the progress that has been made in our country in providing learning opportunities in the humanities for adult Americans. While the Colloquium did not set out to examine or evaluate any particular institution or program, it did devote considerable space in its report to state humanities councils. The report notes how the state councils have "given shape to a curriculum in the humanities [that] appears to satisfy a real social need, even a hunger, felt by many adults." Every year, according to the Federation of State Humanities Councils, upwards of 25 million Americans take part or benefit from approximately 4,000 humanities programs--conferences, symposia, library reading programs, lectures, exhibits, film, and special radio and television programs.

But what, one must ask, is the shape and content of this curriculum, and in what ways does this curriculum and the programs that flow from it serve the humanities and American democracy?

The shape is wide and deep. The curriculum encompasses all the traditional disciplines of the humanities as well as newer

interdisciplinary studies, including women's studies, Black studies, Mexican-American studies, Native-American studies, medical and environmental ethics, film studies, and folklore and folk culture. The curriculum includes concern for traditional subjects--the history of ideas in Western culture, major themes in American and European literature, the history of American politics, and so forth. But it also includes concern for newer subjects and interests, including, for example, the impact of television on American society, ethical issues arising from advances in medical technology, land use and other environmental concerns, civil rights, and the problem of punishment vs. rehabilitation in recent American penal theory and practice.

As with the case of curricula in schools or universities, this curriculum for public humanities in America can best be described by application--particular projects that provide learning opportunities for Americans. I begin with a few examples of projects funded by the Texas Committee for the Humanities.

Last October, 2,500 citizens from San Antonio and surrounding cities attended the third annual Inter-American Bookfair, established to highlight contemporary literature south and north of the United States-Mexico border. In conjunction with the Fair, in which 70 presses displayed 1,000 new book titles, there were lectures, readings, and discussion programs. Writer and actress Maya Angelou gave a dazzling presentation to an audience of 600. Her theme was 'the power of poetry, the ability of words to lift the human spirit and to understand the human legacy. Chilean novelist Isabel Allende, who has lived in Venezuela since the Pinochet coup in 1973, read passages from her latest novel and discussed its social, political and cultural background. As noted by a San Antonio newspaper, "Allende's slight, trembling voice gave evidence to the horror of the book's inspiration, almost as if she could not bear to read the words she had written."

Literature was also the focus for a project in Dallas--but this time the focus was on classical works. The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, a remarkable community-based organization founded a decade ago, sponsored, with support from the Texas Committee, the NEH, and local donors, an intensive four-week summer institute for secondary school teachers in the North Texas area. Fifty-two teachers of English participated in a rigorous course of study in tragedy and comedy, focusing on great works of literature in the Western tradition. Evaluation reports received from the participants are moving and give hope for the further renewal of the humanities in our schools. "I discovered anew the love of teaching that drew me into the profession in the first place," wrote one teacher. Another: "I think that I can say, without a doubt, that every one of us has been transformed in a profound

way by our experience here at the Institute." And another: "The reinforcement received sent us back to our jobs with a renewed sense of excitement and commitment."

Part of the strength of the curriculum that underlies the state humanities program has been a deep concern for the relationship between the humanities and issues of contemporary public life. Last fall, the Institute for the Humanities at Salado, with major funding from the Texas Committee, sponsored a three-day conference entitled "Understanding Evil." The Salado Institute, located in a small village 40 miles north of Austin, has emerged as a symbol of the growth of public humanities in the state and nation. The conference, attended by 250 citizens--the maximum number that local facilities could handle--brought together an extraordinary group of scholars, writers, and thinkers--psychoanalyst Rollo May, former member of Congress Barbara Jordan, author and professor of history Jeffrey Russell, author and Rockefeller Foundation president Richard Lyman, professor and minister Samuel Proctor, holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg--to name a few--to case light on this darkest of subjects, what Sir Laurens Van der Post, speaking to the audience on film from his home in London, described as "the greatest problem of our time."

What an extraordinary event--250 Texans, from all walks of life, willing to give up a weekend to learn what some of the world's greatest thinkers--past and present--have to say about the nature of evil. This conference was covered by most of the major daily newspapers in the state and by the Boston Globe and the Chicago Tribune. And on the 28th of this month, a 90-minute documentary film of this event, narrated by Bill Moyers, will be broadcast nationally on PBS.

I believe these Texas programs are representative of the state program nationally and representative of the components of a very rich national curriculum for adult Americans.

For example, the Maine Humanities Council is devoting considerable resources to a multi-faceted project focusing on the history of exploration and settlement in the Northeast region from 1498 to 1700. This project is drawing on the insights of scholars from multiple disciplines in developing a traveling exhibition of maps, a symposium, an international conference, and other public programs.

In the Midwest, the Great Plains Chautauqua, sponsored by humanities councils in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, is in its tenth year. The heart of the Chautauqua program is the nightly open-air tent performance in which an historical character--Thomas Jefferson, Abigail Adams, Henry Adams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, among others--delivers a 35-minute monologue followed by a 50-minute dialogue with the

audience. This program continues to expand, to generate spin-off programs, and to gather such a following that families plan vacations around the programs and communities compete vigorously for the privilege of hosting the scholars who play these historical figures.

The Illinois Humanities Council, with funding from the NEH and the MacArthur Foundation, continues its remarkable six-year program emphasis on "Inventing Illinois." The Council is supporting projects throughout the state that explore each year a range of topics--the settlement of the state, working in Illinois, and the nature of leadership.

These and thousands of other efforts sponsored each year demonstrate the extent to which this curriculum and program are of, by, and for the people. The program is of the people in that state councils respond to worthy project ideas of local, community-based organizations and institutions. The program is by the people in that all councils are governed by volunteer citizens and all councils call upon interested citizens and various constituencies in developing program plans. And the program is for the people in that the mission of all the councils is to enhance public understanding and appreciation of the humanities.

Yet it is true that from time to time the state humanities program has had its critics. There have been those who believe that the humanities belong inside the academy, and that endeavors in the humanities outside the academy are somehow inferior. And there have been those who tend to believe that the work of councils, like the work of scholars in the academy, should shy away from controversial issues of contemporary life, that scholars in the humanities have little to contribute to analysis of policy concerns. Fortunately, the work of state councils proves these critics to be wrong.

Indeed, it can be demonstrated that this national curriculum in public humanities has enriched immeasurable scholars in the humanities and the academy itself. I think particularly of the work of state councils on state and regional studies, on women's history, on minority history and culture, on folk culture, and on other subjects that have called for interdisciplinary work. These efforts have had a most positive impact on our schools and colleges and universities.

One of the great challenges facing the next generation of scholars will be that of integration and synthesis. In the development of public school and university curricula, in the writing of history books and in the editing of readers and anthologies, such work needs to be done to incorporate scholarship in the newer disciplines into traditional studies, courses, and progress. In meeting this challenge, these

scholars will do well to look to the state humanities program where integration and synthesis form the heart of what we do, melding the old and the new, relating the past to the present, the traditional with the non-traditional, the known with the unknown, the comfortable with the uncomfortable.

The charter for the NEH includes the mandate to help create and sustain a climate that encourages freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry. It gives me great pleasure to report that the state councils are hard at work meeting this mandate.

Although much has been accomplished, we know that our work to advance public understanding of and appreciation for the humanities has only begun. We also know that recent accomplishments would not have happened without the strong support of this Subcommittee.

During the past seven years, state councils have labored in an environment that threatened greatly reduced federal support. Indeed, despite the diligent efforts of many, the amount appropriated in outright funds for state councils for FY1988, \$21.3 million, is \$500,000 less than the amount appropriated for FY1984 and \$2.6 million less than the amount appropriated for FY1981.

State councils continue to make dramatic progress in securing corporate, foundation, and individual contributions--as well as state appropriations--to support their programs, although Treasury Matching funds, our best stimulus to private giving, have not kept pace with the expanded opportunities that have come with a maturing program; indeed, there have been reductions in these funds.

Councils in a number of states that have not benefited from generally good economic times have been particularly hard hit. Texas, for instance, remains in a deep recession, and the total revenues of the Texas Committee for the Humanities, compared to 198, are down by approximately 30 percent--a percentage that reflects declines in both federal and private funding.

To ensure a strong and vibrant state humanities program and to move the program forward, I endorse completely the proposal of the Federation of State Humanities Councils that the state program be funded at \$25 million in fiscal year 1989.

I also believe that steps should be taken this year to ensure that the National Endowment for the Humanities, by fiscal year 1991, achieve funding parity with the National Endowment for the Arts. I know of no sound argument that can be put forward as to why the present imbalance in funding for the arts and the humanities should continue.



One finds in the authorizing legislation for the NEH a vision of America as a learning society. One finds a vision of citizens in touch with history and culture, a vision of citizens understanding the world about them, and a vision of citizens translating this understanding into civic action. This vision is as important today as it was in 1965. Perhaps it is more important, for the world continues to grow in complexity. The well-being of the nation and of our democratic institutions depends on a thoughtful, reflective citizenry.

The curriculum that I have been describing and the projects that flow from it undergird and carry out this vision. This curriculum, unique in the history of the nation, is, as I have noted, of by and for the people. It draws its strength from the imagination and creativity of the American people.

Our goal is to help weave the humanities into the social fabric of America. State councils are planning now the programs, emphases and projects that will take them into the 1990s, efforts that involve nothing less in intent than the opening of the American mind. The humanities, like life itself, are inherently forward-looking. We are doing that, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the distinguished members of this Subcommittee, for your continued commitment and support.

March 17, 1988

**Written Testimony  
of  
Stephen Nissenbaum  
Professor of History  
University of Massachusetts**

Chairman Yates, I am Stephen Nissenbaum, Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts. I am here to testify about the FY 1988 appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities. I do so on behalf of 35 historical organizations which collectively comprise the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History. (The largest of these are the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians.)

This is a time when many voices lament the waning of our sense of history--our collective "American History." But it is also a time when historians, whether as scholars, teachers, or public humanists, have been working assiduously and imaginatively to devise strategies to preserve and enrich that collective memory. The National Endowment for the Humanities has played a notable role in supporting our effort. Perhaps the best way I can represent my profession on this occasion is by sharing with you something of how my own professional work has intersected with the NEH.

The Endowment was established by Congress in 1965. Three years later, I earned my doctorate in early American cultural history. Since that time I have been actively trying to make links between my work as a scholar and my work as a teacher, and, more recently, between both of those and what has rather awkwardly been called the "public humanities."

There have been three principal occasions when my work has been supported by the NEH. Let me describe each of them. First, about a decade ago, I received from what is now called the Division of Fellowships and Seminars a generous stipend that permitted me to take an entire year's leave of absence from my teaching duties. (The maximum fellowship stipend at that time was, as I recall, \$20,000--an amount that amply covered what was then my salary for the entire year. To put matters in perspective, the current maximum fellowship stipend is now up to \$27,500--an amount that would barely permit me to go on leave for a single semester!)

What did the Endowment--and the public--receive in return for its support? First, I completed a book on which I had been working for some years, a book about sexuality, diet, and health in mid-19th century America--a period when many Americans became obsessed for the first time with physical fitness, and convinced that their well-being depended on strict control of their

dietary and sexual practices. I came to this subject at about the same moment that many Americans were once again looking to fitness as a way to achieve well-being. My book, Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America tried to illuminate the tensions of Jacksonian society, but also helped provide a perspective on those of our own culture.

During the same fellowship year, I collaborated with my colleague Paul Boyer to edit a three-volume collection that brought into print for the first time the complete testimonies and legal documents associated with the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692. Finally, I made substantial progress that year on a third major project: studying the career of Nathaniel Hawthorne to explore the development of authorship as a profession in mid-nineteenth-century America. I later published two essays about Hawthorne, one of them an introduction to the new Modern Library edition of The Scarlet Letter.

Each of the books and essays that resulted from my fellowship year acknowledges with pride the support I received from the NEH. The Endowment asks for such acknowledgement, and it would be a breach of manners not to provide it. But my colleagues around the nation and abroad are well aware that an NEH award also carried the assurance that a proposal has survived to rigorous competition by a jury of one's scholarly peers. The Endowment's "imprimatur," as one historian has termed it, is a badge of honor.

But that "imprimatur" is only a side-effect of the Endowment's support and not its purpose. What NEH support is really for is to assist scholars in making broadly available to their colleagues and students, and to the American public, the historical resources (whether in the form of documentary materials, interpretations, or teaching strategies) that can preserve and enrich the public memory. For example, the three-volume collection of Salem witchcraft documents I co-edited a decade ago has been used in most of the articles and books written about the subject since that time, and those writings have reached a wide audience through textbooks, plays, and even television.

My second major experience with an NEH-sponsored project is a case in point. In 1983-84 I served as historical advisor to a movie about the Salem witchcraft trials, a three-hour "docudrama" aired on the PBS American Playhouse series. It bore the title "Three Sovereigns for Sarah," and starred Vanessa Redgrave as a woman accused of witchcraft in 1692. Production of the movie was supported by what I have been told was then the single largest one-year grant ever awarded by the NEH. "Three Sovereigns for Sarah" was based--loosely--on a book, Salem Possessed, which I had previously written in collaboration with my colleague Paul Boyer; and the film also made extensive use of

the testimonies included in the three-volume collection of documents that Professor Boyer and I had prepared during my NEH-supported fellowship year. Because of the conditions of the NEH's grant to the producer--let me emphasize that point--I was able to play a significant role in revising the original screenplay of "Three Sovereigns for Sarah," and I was also able to be present on the movie set, in constant contact with the cast and crew, during the six weeks the film was in production.

While the filmmaker did not accept all my suggestions, I believe that "Three Sovereigns for Sarah" has helped its viewers understand that the Salem witch trials were not some senseless aberration but rather that they were the troubled and plausible acts of ordinary and even well-meaning men, women, and children. Drawing on my book Salem Possessed, the film suggested that the accusations of witchcraft were part of a larger social crisis, and not the product of "superstition" or "hysteria." (Do we use such words when we wish to reassure ourselves that it is only people who are not fully "human" who are capable of doing terrible things?)

My third major experience with the NEH has been with the Division of State Programs. That experience began in 1985, when I was elected a member of my state humanities council, the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy, and it continued last year when the Foundation board elected me its Chair. The MFH&PP provides a splendid instance of collaboration between humanities scholars, the public, and a federal agency. It is also a microcosm of the NEH itself. The Massachusetts Foundation operates on a relatively small scale, and with what I believe is remarkable efficiency. Our total regrant budget for FY'88 is just over \$300,000. Our major grants rarely exceed \$15,000; and our "mini-grants" are for no more than \$1,500. A very large proportion of our grants go to support historical projects: for example, a series of lectures about the history of Jewish women in America; a conference on the history of Afro-American women and the vote; a museum exhibit displaying the long history of Boston's black population; a portable bicentennial play called "The Other Boston Tea Party" and a specially commissioned film about Shays' Rebellion (two projects that celebrated the Constitution's bicentennial). Most recently the Foundation has conducted a major project, supported mostly with non-federal funds, which has placed scholars who will explore the changing nature of work over the past fifty years, in active collaboration with residents of the five communities. I can think of no better example of historical scholarship transformed into--and generated by--the public humanities.

As a humanities scholar who has now worked on both sides of the desk--as a recipient and also a grantor of public monies--I can assure you that this system works. It is productive. It makes a difference. And it is lean and accountable, depending

on many hours of volunteered time and skill. That is a point I wish to emphasize--the willingness of scholars to donate their time to the NEH, by reading proposals, for example, or serving on panels.

Take the board of the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy, for example. Ours is a working board, whose twenty-four members carefully read, discuss, and act on close to 100 proposals each year. For all this time and work we receive no financial compensation. We do it out of the conviction that we must give something back in return for the support each of us has received. But we also do it out of the conviction that our service is important, that it makes a real difference in the shape of public policy and the texture of people's lives.

This year, for the first time, President Reagan has recommended level funding (rather than massive cuts) for the NEH. That is a triumph to be celebrated, and I congratulate the Congress on forcing it. Still, it is not enough. The President's funding recommendation actually contains a cut of about 800,000 in four of the Endowment's Divisions: the Divisions of Education (a \$200,000 cut), Fellowships and Seminars (\$200,000), General Programs (\$300,000) and State Programs (\$100,000). To offset the reduction in these four Divisions is a proposed increase of \$700,000 in the administration of the Endowment, to be used primarily, as I understand, for the purpose of upgrading computers and increasing staff salaries. I hope I am speaking for my profession when I say I wholeheartedly support that increase--but not at the expense of program funds. In fact, the four programs that would be reduced by the President's proposal happen to be the very four that have directly influenced my own work.

Please understand how difficult it is--and also how important--for scholars, in the midst of teaching and academic service obligations, to find the solid blocks of time required for concentrated research and writing. Those activities require as much hard work as the most strenuous physical labor, and as much careful preparation as any athletic event. At my own institution, the University of Massachusetts, faculty members are expected to be productive scholars, but we can expect to receive only a single semester of compensated leave every seven years.

During the nineteenth century, my own period of historical specialization, the public provided even less support for humanities scholarship. Ralph Waldo Emerson, writing about "The American Scholar" in 1837, described a bleak situation. A truly original scholar, Emerson suggested, "plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation," and stands in a "state of

virtual hostility" to American society. Emerson lamented that "public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat"; so that there was "no work for any but the decorous and complaisant."

Emerson's words apply only in part to our current situation. Yes, it would seem once again that "public and private avarice" have made the air we breathe "thick and fat." But this may be as far as it goes. Today there surely is "work"--much work--for those who are neither "decorous" nor "complaisant." For twenty-three years the National Endowment for the Humanities, as cultural representative of the people, has done its part to help insure that even though the work of the American Scholar necessarily remains "slow," it is no longer wholly "unhonored" or even "unpaid." Emerson would be pleasantly surprised at what the Endowment--and the Congress--has done to help preserve our public historical memory. For that I thank you in the name of my colleagues, and I urge you not to let us down now.

March 17, 1988

## Biographies of Witnesses

**Annie Dillard**, native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is adjunct professor of English at Wesleyan University. She has published five books, including Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, which won the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction in 1974. Her most recent book, An American Childhood, describes her experiences growing up in the 1950s.

**Nancy Stevenson**, President of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, is a founding director of the National Building Museum, a member of the advisory committee of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, and a trustee of the University of Chicago. She has served on the board of the Lincoln Park Zoo and the Chicago Urban League. She received her M.A. in American history from American University.

**James F. Veninga** has been Executive Director of the Texas Committee for the Humanities since 1975. He has an M.A. and a Ph.D. in History and Religious Studies from Rice University and in 1984 served as Visiting Professor of American Studies and History at the University of Texas/Austin. He writes frequently on the role of the humanities in American public life and has served as editor and co-editor, respectively, of The Biographer's Gift, and Vietnam in Remission.

**Stephen Nissenbaum**, professor of history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, is the Chair of the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy. He is the author of Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft, which was nominated for a National Book Award in 1975, and Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform. He has lectured widely on various aspects of Early American and 19th century American history, has served on numerous panels, and was historical advisor for the "American Playhouse" production, "Three Sovereigns for Sarah."

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## Publications

The following publications, as well as a complete list of Federation publications, can be obtained by writing to the Federation of State Humanities Councils, 1012 Fourteenth Street NW, Suite 1207, Washington, D.C. 20005.

**Celebrate the Constitution: A Guide to Public Programs in the Humanities, 1987-1991.** Describes model public programs in four formats and includes a list of scholars from each state. \$6.50 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling

**Public Access to the Humanities: A Congressional Forum.** Text of an address presented by George Washington University philosophy professor Peter Caws at a Congressional Forum on Capitol Hill, May 1987. \$3.50

**State Appropriations for State Humanities Councils: An Update.** Report on state councils currently receiving funds from their state government, along with guidelines for initiating and maintaining relations with state government. \$3.50

**After NIMP: Automation in the State Councils.** Survey of computer hardware and software now in use by individual state councils, along with descriptions of several models of computerized management systems. \$3.50

**Representative Public Humanities Programs: 1986 Schwartz Prize Nominees.** Descriptions by format of the fourteen projects nominated for the Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize in 1986. \$3.50

**Humanities Discourse.** Bimonthly publication that discusses issues in the humanities and provides information on state council projects and Federation activities. \$8.00/year