

Testimony of Bruce Cole
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities
Before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
March 10, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to speak to this committee once again on behalf of the budget request of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The Administration and the NEH request an appropriation totaling \$138,054,000 for fiscal year 2006. This funding includes a request of \$11,217,000 for our *We the People* initiative to encourage the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture. The request also includes \$88,307,000 for our core grant programs and divisions in support of high quality training programs for teachers; scholarship and research on important humanities topics; preservation of and access to cultural and educational resources; and public programs for millions of Americans, including the projects and programs of the state humanities councils. A total of \$15,449,000 in matching funds is requested to stimulate and match private, nonfederal donations in support of humanities institutions and individual humanities projects. We also request \$23,081,000 for administrative expenses necessary to operate the agency.

For the last two years, I have appeared before this committee to talk about the need to increase Americans' knowledge and understanding of their history and culture. This is an essential part of our mission. Congress created NEH forty years ago to contribute to the wisdom of the American people.

I would like to thank the members of this committee for their support for our efforts to this pursue this objective through our ongoing *We the People* initiative. I also appreciate the critical resources Congress provided to allow us to implement the initiative. New funds totaling \$9,876,000 were appropriated for FY 2004 and the initiative's budget was increased to \$11,217,000 for FY 2005. This money has enabled the initiative to come to fruition.

We the People funds have helped the Endowment put a number of the initiative's key components in place and to support a wide variety of grants in every NEH program division and office. More than 300 projects throughout the agency's core programs have received funding. These projects include collected editions of the papers of Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Thomas Edison, Frederick Douglass, and the First Federal Congress; television documentaries on Alexander Hamilton, John and Abigail Adams, and the California Gold Rush and a radio series on Thurgood Marshall before he was appointed to the Supreme Court; seminars and institutes for teachers on such subjects as "Nationhood and Healing in the Post-Civil War American West," "African Americans and the Making of America, 1650-2000," and "Faulkner and Southern History"; public programs in rural communities that explore themes related to the Lewis and Clark Expedition; and Challenge Grants that help institutions invest in activities that explore significant themes and events in American history, such as an

award to the University of Virginia to help raise funds for its AmericanPresident.org project, an online resource for studying the American presidency.

We have established a number of new grant opportunities within the Endowment's core programs. The new Landmarks of American History program in our Education Programs division is supporting enrichment workshops for teachers at important historical sites around the nation. The program supported 17 projects in its first year and the initial workshops—which were held last summer in such historic places as Raleigh, North Carolina, St. Augustine, Florida, the Vancouver Historic Preserve in Washington, and Mt. Vernon, Virginia—drew 1,900 school teachers. These teachers will communicate their new knowledge of and excitement about these sites to an estimated 240,000 students. Building on the resounding success of this new program, we broadened this year's grant competition to include workshops for community college faculty. We recently announced 20 new Landmarks awards—15 for school teachers and 5 for community college teachers. More than 2,200 teachers are expected to participate in these workshops this summer, including a workshop at Mars Hill College that will examine the economies and cultures of the Blue Ridge Mountains over three centuries.

I recently visited the site of one of these projects, the Thomas Day Education Project, which is held at the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh. Last summer the museum and the Thomas Day Project conducted “Crafting Freedom: Thomas Day and Elizabeth Keckly, Black Artisans, and Entrepreneurs in the Making of America.” One hundred-eighty teachers from across the nation attended the four, one-week workshops, which examined the history, achievements, and material evidence of black antebellum craftsmen. Teachers learned principally about Day and Keckly, two 19th-century African-American entrepreneurs. Day, a free African-American, had the largest furniture company in North Carolina before the Civil War. Keckly was a slave who bought her freedom and became a Civil War-era dressmaker for Mary Todd Lincoln. This workshop will again be held this summer.

NEH and the Library of Congress forged a long-term partnership to support a new *National Digital Newspaper Program* (NDNP) that will convert microfilm of historically important U.S. newspapers into fully searchable digital files and mount the files on the Internet. We recently awarded grants for the first projects under this new grant activity, which will digitize hundreds of thousands of microfilmed newspapers in six states. The award winners will be announced shortly. This complex, long term initiative ultimately will make tens of millions of pages of newspapers accessible online. Anyone who is interested in these rich materials—students, teachers, parents, scholars, historians—will be able to go to their computer at home or at work and, at the click of a mouse, get unfiltered access to the greatest source of our history.

I am delighted that the state humanities councils have joined us as active partners in the initiative. The state councils are helping to ensure that the initiative reflects the needs and interests of citizens across the nation. In FY 2004, we provided \$3,760,000 in funding to the councils, thus enabling them to develop an impressive array of local and statewide *We the People* projects. The councils are sponsoring reading and discussion programs, lectures, exhibitions, and Chautauqua performances that illuminate our nation's history and culture. I have been gratified by the early successes of these projects and have visited with some of the councils as they launched their activities. The Washington state council, for example, is commemorating the anniversaries of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Lewis and Clark expedition; the Oklahoma Humanities Council is supporting a Great Plains Chautauqua and a reading and discussion program on topics on American democracy; the West Virginia Humanities Council is supporting special programming addressing Western Virginia's separation from Virginia and the issues that

led to statehood; and the Alabama state council is supporting local exhibitions on Alabama agricultural history. To enable every council to continue to participate in the initiative again this year, we increased *We the People* funding for the councils to \$4,240,000. I look forward with great anticipation to seeing the variety of projects the councils will support with these funds.

In partnership with the American Library Association, the Endowment established a special *We the People Bookshelf* program for the nation's school and public libraries. Through this program, NEH annually makes available to 1,000 libraries a set of 15 classic works of literature that convey important themes from American history and culture to an audience of young readers. Each year the program will explore a different theme—the first year's theme was "courage." Books were sent to libraries in towns and communities in every state of the nation including, for example, Polk County Library in Columbus, North Carolina; Grant Center for the Expressive Arts Library in Tacoma, Washington; Cullman County Public Library in Cullman, Alabama; and Susanville District Library in Susanville, California. This year's *Bookshelf* theme, "freedom," includes such classic titles as Longfellow's *Paul Revere's Ride*, Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, and Catherine Drinker Bowen's *Miracle at Philadelphia*. We will announce the first set of 500 winners of this year's books shortly.

We established two new special grant categories in our Public Programs division related to the themes of *We the People*. "America's Historic Places" supports projects that use one or more historic sites to address themes central to American history and "Family and Youth Programs in American History" supports projects designed to encourage intergenerational learning about significant topics in U.S. history and culture. Eleven awards were made in these categories, including projects that will develop new interpretations of Jefferson's Monticello and Andrew Jackson's The Hermitage, a project to develop weeklong summer camps for young people to explore themes on American history and culture, and the development of a website, "ExplorePAHistory.com," that explores both Pennsylvania and American history as presented on Pennsylvania state historical markers.

The NEH Challenge Grants program offered special awards for educational and cultural institutions to strengthen their programs that advance knowledge of the founding principles of the United States. The first awards under this new emphasis were made in FY 2004, including grants to the Maryland African American Museum, the new National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, and the Florida Department of State to endow archaeological research and public programming at Mission San Luis, an important site of Spanish and Native American interaction in the early colonial era.

FY 2004 was the second year of two other special *We the People* projects: the "Heroes of History" lecture and "The Idea of America" essay contest for high school students. The "Heroes of History" lecture provides an opportunity for an acclaimed humanities scholar to tell the story of heroic figures in American history or to speak on the importance of heroes in forging our national identity. Last year's lecturer—writer, scholar, and co-chairman of the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, Harold Holzer—spoke on "Abraham Lincoln, American Hero" at Ford's Theatre. "The Idea of America" essay contest competition encourages students to research and analyze aspects of our nation's history and democratic principles. Medals and cash awards were presented to a grand prize winner and five runners up at ceremony held in conjunction with the "Heroes of History" lecture. The 2004 contest—in which students were asked: "How does President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address reflect America's founding ideas, and what is the relevance of the speech today?"—drew more than 1,500 entries from 11th-grade students across the country. For this year's competition, students are asked to describe how the tenets of

totalitarian movements of the 20th century differ from the ideals that unite Americans, and how those ideals embodied in the American founding prevailed.

The funds we are requesting for the *We the People* for FY 2006 would enable us to continue providing support for excellent and diverse programs such as these. In FY 2005 and FY 2006, new elements also will be introduced, including a special program aimed at elementary and middle schools on key works of American art; support for projects to digitize copies of scholarly editions and reference works on important figures and events in American history and culture; a special Armed Services version of the popular *We the People Bookshelf* program; and a national history bee for elementary and middle school students.

In FY 2006, NEH's core programs also will continue to support high quality projects in all fields and disciplines of the humanities. Our time-tested programs promote excellence in scholarship and expand public knowledge of the humanities. We will also continue to extend the reach of our programs to ensure that Americans of all backgrounds and from all regions are able to learn more about the humanities.

Last year NEH funding supported more than 1,200 humanities projects in all states of the nation, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories. The products of NEH grants, as well as the projects funded through the state humanities councils, annually reach millions of Americans of diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. In addition to the *We the People* projects I have already mentioned, some of our other noteworthy accomplishments include:

- More than 1,100 teachers from every state of the nation participated in NEH-supported summer seminars and institutes during the summer of 2004. The ultimate beneficiaries of these projects are thousands of students who will be taught each year by these intellectually reinvigorated teachers. NEH's education programs are based on the idea that students benefit most when their teachers have a mastery of their disciplines and are themselves actively engaged in learning. Teacher-participants in recent seminars, institutes, and workshops have come from a wide array of schools and colleges across the country, including Central High School in Rutherfordton, North Carolina; the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington; the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga; and Putnam City High School in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- In FY 2004 the 56 state humanities councils supported thousands of high quality humanities projects that reached millions of Americans. These programs included reading and discussion programs, speakers' bureau presentations, local history projects, films, exhibitions, teacher institutes and workshops, literacy programs, and Chautauqua-type historical performances. Whether through grant-making or their own programs, state humanities councils strengthen the cultural and educational fabric of their states by reaching into rural areas, urban neighborhoods, and suburban communities.
- NEH continues to play a key role in preserving the cultural heritage infrastructure of Iraq. In 2003, we announced a special initiative, "Recovering Iraq's Past," to support projects to preserve and document cultural resources in Iraq's archives, libraries, and museums, or to disseminate information relating to the records of civilization in Iraq from the earliest times to the present. Eight grants have been awarded thus far,

including an education and training program that will enhance the professional knowledge and skills of up to 25 Iraqi librarians and archivists; an online preservation tutorial in Arabic on the treatment and care of books, manuscripts, image and recorded sound collections, papyrus, and clay tablets; and a digital library of cuneiform tablets at the Iraq National Museum that documents Mesopotamian civilization from 3300 B.C. until A.D. 100.

- In addition to print and online editions of the collected papers of noted Americans, other NEH awards made in the last year to produce authoritative research tools and reference works include editions of the works of Giuseppe Verdi and the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley; a digital catalog of medieval and renaissance manuscripts in the collections of major U.S. libraries; an online dictionary of Sumerian, the first documented written language dating from 3300 BC; and a dictionary of Old English. Serious works of scholarship such as these are important resources for scholars, students, and teachers.
- Recent award-winning NEH-supported film documentaries that were viewed by millions of Americans include the multi-part film biography, *Benjamin Franklin*, which received an Emmy award for outstanding non-fiction special, and a documentary examining the historic 1938 heavyweight boxing match between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, which won the Erik Barnouw Award for best historical documentary from the Organization of American Historians. Programs currently in development include documentaries on the origins and history of writing; the theft, destruction, and survival of Europe's art treasures during the Third Reich and the Second World War; and a history of the Mexican Revolution.
- During 2005, 38 traveling exhibitions and 114 long-term exhibitions funded with NEH support will appear in 44 states and the District of Columbia, and reach millions of Americans. NEH-supported reading and discussion programs also are providing opportunities for citizens to engage in lifelong learning in the humanities. Notable projects include major exhibitions such as *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353* and *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Children from the Classical Past* and traveling exhibitions and programs such as *Heroes of the Sky: Adventures in Early Flight, 1903-1939*, which commemorates the 100th anniversary of flight; *Assimilating America: The Life and Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*; and *Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln's Journey to Emancipation*, a traveling exhibition that incorporates more than 60 rare documents and drawings on Lincoln's role in the emancipation of slaves during the Civil War.
- In FY 2004 the Endowment released more than \$10.3 million in Challenge Grant funds to match more than \$30 million in private, nonfederal contributions to institutions with long-term plans to enhance their humanities activities. The agency released another \$5.7 million in funds to match donations to other NEH-supported humanities projects. Encouraging private-sector support for cultural activities is an important goal of both the Administration and Congress—NEH matching funds have proven to be an effective means of leveraging private contributions on behalf of the humanities.

The Endowment's FY 2006 budget and program plan will allow the agency to continue to enliven the educational and cultural life of our nation. These are of course difficult times when it comes to the federal budget. We believe that federal agencies entrusted with taxpayers' money always should strive for judicious use of limited resources and accountability while delivering a high level of service to the American people. The proposed FY 2006 NEH budget would be a responsible investment for the nation to make in the humanities, an investment that would yield dividends for years to come.