

**Prepared Statement of Bruce Cole  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities  
Before the  
Education and Labor Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities  
U.S. House of Representatives  
May 8, 2008**

---

Madame Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to appear before you to speak on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). I wish to begin by giving you a sense of the Endowment's overall mission, and then discuss the ways we are fulfilling this mission through our programs and initiatives.

Our agency's enabling legislation declares that "democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." The Endowment fosters this wisdom and vision by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. Since its funding in 1965, NEH has proved to be an effective way for the federal government to promote the study and understanding of history, literature, philosophy, languages, and other humanities subjects throughout the nation.

The NEH provides grants for high-quality projects that seek to preserve and provide access to cultural and intellectual resources in the humanities; strengthen humanities teaching and learning in the nation's schools and institutions of higher education; facilitate basic humanities research and original scholarship; and provide opportunities for all Americans to engage in lifelong learning in the humanities. The Endowment also provides significant support for the projects and programs of our essential partners, the 56 state humanities councils. NEH grants typically go to cultural institutions, such as museums, archives, libraries, colleges, universities, public television and radio stations, and to individual scholars. In fiscal year 2007, we received approximately 4,500 applications and awarded nearly 900 grants.

As a taxpayer-funded agency, we believe an essential part of the Endowment's mandate is to democratize the humanities and bring their benefits to citizens across our nation. In recent years, we have pursued several new initiatives to fulfill this mandate. The most prominent of these is our *We the People* program, now in its sixth year. This program seeks to encourage and strengthen the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture.

We created this program to meet a real and significant challenge: In recent years, numerous surveys and tests have shown that our society is growing less familiar with our origins and key institutions, and our citizens less informed about their rights and responsibilities.

The NEH has a crucial role to play in addressing this worrisome trend. Through *We the People*, we are leading a renaissance in knowledge about American history and ideals. Since its inception in 2002, the program has received over \$66 million in support from the President and Congress. The Endowment has used these funds to provide over 1,400 *We the People* grants — and these grants have gone to every state and territory in the Union.

Today, I want to discuss the newest element of *We the People*—an initiative called Picturing America. On February 26, I joined President Bush and the First Lady at the White House for the national launch of this initiative, which supports *We the People*'s mission in a unique and exciting way.

Americans are united not by race or religion or birth. Instead, we are bound by ideas and ideals that every citizen must know for our republic to survive. That survival is not preordained: the habits and principles of our democracy must be learned anew and passed down to each generation. Picturing America helps us meet this challenge, by using great American art to ensure that our common heritage and ideals are known, studied, and remembered. Works of art are more than mere ornaments for the elite; they are primary documents of a civilization. A written record or a textbook tells you one thing—but art reveals something else. Our students and citizens deserve to see American art that shows us where we have come from, what we have endured, and where we are headed.

With this in mind, the NEH has chosen notable works of American art that will bring our history and principles alive for students and citizens of all ages. Picturing America includes masterpieces of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, and decorative arts, including beloved works such as Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, Norman Rockwell's *Freedom of Speech*, and Frank Lloyd Wright's "Fallingwater" house. The featured works range from pre-colonial times to the present.

Through Picturing America, NEH is distributing forty large, high-quality reproductions of these masterpieces to tens of thousands of schools and public libraries across America, including public, private, parochial, and charter schools, and home school associations. And they get to keep these reproductions permanently, ensuring that the initiative's impact will be felt for decades.

Along with the reproductions, schools and libraries will receive an in-depth teachers resource book, which helps educators use Picturing America to teach history, literature, and other subjects. The Endowment has also created a dynamic online resource for all Americans, located at <http://picturingamerica.neh.gov>. This site provides access to the images, resource book, and scores of lesson plans, and also provides detailed information on the art and artists.

The scope of this program is unprecedented for the NEH. Through Picturing America, we are extending the Endowment's reach exponentially. We are broadening public awareness of the humanities by bringing American history and art to millions of young people and their families. In January we began accepting applications for the fall 2008

Picturing America awards. By the time we reached the application deadline on April 15, Picturing America had received more applications than NEH received for *all* its grant programs over the past six years.

The initiative also enjoys support from a wide range of federal partners, including, to date, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Office of Head Start, and the National Park Service. The Endowment has also forged partnerships with a number of non-federal supporters who are helping to extend Picturing America's impact, including the American Library Association and the History Channel, as well as private philanthropists.

We are also excited about the role the state humanities councils will play in this initiative. The councils have been integral to the success of the *We the People* program, and we look forward to their contributions to Picturing America.

By appealing to our young peoples' eyes, Picturing America will make an indelible impression on their minds and hearts. These masterpieces will give millions of students and their families a deeper understanding of American history and principles—and that will help make them better citizens.

Another way the Endowment is democratizing the humanities is through our work in the digital humanities. The humanities are a dynamic enterprise, and NEH has a duty to stay abreast of changes in the field and provide leadership where it can be most effective. Digital technology is bringing the humanities to a vast new audience, and changing the way scholars perform their work. It allows new questions to be raised, and is transforming how we search, research, display, teach, and analyze humanities resources.

To focus the Endowment's digital efforts and ensure their effectiveness, we created an agency-wide Digital Humanities Initiative in 2006. In the brief time since its inception, the initiative has instituted several grant categories, attracted many new grant applicants to the NEH, and funded a wide range of innovative projects. To date, the Endowment has made 57 awards for projects that are now exploring new approaches to studying and disseminating the humanities. More than half of these grantees had never received NEH awards, which suggests that we have tapped an important unmet need.

Building on the success of the initiative and demonstrating our long-term commitment to this new frontier in the humanities, we recently transformed the initiative into a permanent Office of Digital Humanities. This office will work with other NEH staff and scholars, and with other funding bodies, both in the United States and abroad, to pursue the great opportunities offered by the digital humanities.

The international nature of the digital humanities is particularly important. Digital technology allows scholars from different nations to collaborate more closely. To this end, the Endowment is actively pursuing joint efforts with our international peers, which helps to fulfill the charge in our founding legislation to “foster international programs and exchanges.” For example, we recently joined with the United Kingdom's Joint

Information Systems Committee to sponsor a program of Transatlantic Digitization Collaboration Grants. These grants will help build a “virtual bridge” across the Atlantic through support of digital projects that will unify American and British collections of artifacts, documents, manuscripts, and other cultural materials.

Last year NEH also entered into a partnership with the National Research Council of Italy, and we are working on other collaborations with agencies in Japan, China, Germany, and Mexico. Digital technology offers the Endowment an unparalleled opportunity to fulfill our mandate to bring the humanities to every citizen. We are pursuing that opportunity aggressively.

The Endowment’s grant-making programs continue to support high quality projects in all fields and disciplines of the humanities. These time-tested and cost-effective programs advance scholarship, education, preservation, and public understanding in the humanities throughout the United States. In FY 2007, NEH funds supported nearly 1,100 humanities projects in all states of the nation, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories. An additional 2,000 awards were made, in partnership with the American Library Association, to libraries through our annual *We the People Bookshelf* program. The products of these grants, as well as the projects funded through the state humanities councils, annually reach millions of Americans of diverse backgrounds. In addition to the projects I have already mentioned, some of our other recent noteworthy grants and accomplishments include:

- More than 4,200 teachers from every state of the nation participated in NEH-supported seminars, institutes, and workshops in 2007. Summer seminars and institutes were offered on such diverse subjects as Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, the works of Mark Twain, World War II and its legacy in France, the plays of William Shakespeare, the significance of Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, and the art of teaching the Italian language through Italian art. Landmarks of American History workshops were held for schoolteachers at Mount Vernon, Pearl Harbor, the FDR library and museum at Hyde Park, and Ellis Island. 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.
- The 56 state humanities councils supported thousands of high quality humanities projects that reached millions of Americans. These 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 sponsoring 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.
- Recent NEH grants to produce authoritative editions of the papers of notable Americans and other world figures, as well as other research tools and reference

works, include the papers of Abraham Lincoln; a Documentary History of the First Federal Congress; an edition of the correspondence of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning; a scholarly translation of a collection of ancient Jewish writings, including the Dead Sea Scrolls; and an interactive website featuring the cartographic history of water systems in ancient Rome. NEH also is supporting a project at New York University to digitize thousand of pages of Afghan books, serials, and documents published between 1870 and 1930 that are currently held in public and private collections in the United States, Europe, and Afghanistan. Serious works of scholarship such as these are important resources for scholars, students, and teachers.

- We are continuing our special initiative and partnership with the National Science Foundation to document the world's endangered languages. This initiative supports projects that create, enhance, and deepen our knowledge of the estimated 3,000 currently spoken languages that are threatened with extinction in the near future. Thus far, NEH has provided 53 awards totaling nearly \$4.5 million for projects to record, document, and archive information relating to these languages, including the preparation of dictionaries, lexicons, and databases. For example, recent grants are supporting the preparation of a dictionary of Klallam, an endangered Salishan language spoken in Washington state and Vancouver Island; the documentation of the linguistic characteristics of the Comanche language; and a project at the University of California, Berkeley that is enhancing access to linguistic materials that document over 130 endangered American Indian languages.
- Notable NEH-funded television productions that aired on PBS recently examined key aspects of American history and culture, as well as the history of other nations. The epic series, *The War*—a 14-hour, seven-episode film by noted filmmakers Ken Burns and Lynne Novick—aired last fall and was watched by nearly 40 million Americans. The series covered key events of World War II as seen through the eyes of people in four communities in the United States. The Endowment also provided funding for a two-hour documentary on Alexander Hamilton, architect of the modern American economy, champion of a strong central government, and leader of one of the nation's first political parties. The prime-time broadcast of this film on PBS was accompanied by an extensive website with special features that included an interactive timeline, teacher's guide, and video streaming. Another recent film NEH-supported, *The Rape of Europa*, is now being shown through theatrical release and at film festivals nationally and internationally. Adapted from a National Book Award-winning history by Lynne Nicholas, the documentary tells the story of the looting of European art treasures by the Nazis during World War II and the efforts to restore these artworks to their rightful owners.
- The Endowment also is supporting projects related to the observance of bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln in 2009. To date, NEH has invested more than \$4.7 million in projects that will be available to the public

during the bicentennial. This includes, for example, the creation and nationwide circulation of a panel exhibition, “Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation,” that incorporates rare documents and drawings on Lincoln’s role in the emancipation of slaves during the Civil War. The exhibition is scheduled to travel to more than 100 libraries through early 2010. With a grant of \$345,000 from NEH, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has created an exhibition and guided tours at the newly restored *Lincoln Cottage* in Washington, DC, which was used by Lincoln and his family as a seasonal retreat from 1862 to 1864.

- Building on our support for projects related to our 16<sup>th</sup> President, the Endowment has embarked on a long-term initiative to observe the sesquicentennial of the Civil War in 2011. We have already supported a number of planning projects, including a broad-based Civil War Sesquicentennial Project hosted by the Chicago Historical Society; an exhibition and programs on the war in Missouri; workshops in Mississippi for community college faculty on “*War, Death, and Remembrance: The Memory and Commemoration of the American Civil War*”; and the preservation of Civil War muster rolls by the Pennsylvania Heritage Society. In 2009, the interest among cultural organizations to mount such programs will intensify, and NEH is prepared to invest *We the People* funds to support these teaching and learning opportunities.

Today I have only scratched the surface of the many ways in which the Endowment contributes to the well-being of our nation. We are proud of NEH’s continued role in cultivating the enlightened citizenship that our national survival requires.

Madame Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to discuss the plans and priorities of the NEH.