

Coping With Democracy, Coping with the Culture War: A Policy History of the National Endowment for the Humanities

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Coping With Democracy, Coping with the Culture War: A Policy History of the National Endowment for the Humanities

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Abstract: In 1965, at the height of the Great Society, when there was also a consensus about the importance of the humanities to edify American life, Congress established a federal agency to support them: the National Endowment for Humanities (NEH). Shortly thereafter arose a sea change in scholarship and education in the humanities, which by the 1980s became an issue in the broader U.S. culture wars. Many scholars and intellectuals became sharply divided over such questions as the authors and books to prioritize and include in liberal arts curricula, modes of interpretation of texts, and perspectives on the goodness (or lack thereof) to be found in Western civilization and American history. This policy history examines how, in this changing context, the NEH has managed to endure and how it has interpreted and carried out its mandate to support the humanities. It is divided into two parts.

Part I tells the story of how the NEH has maintained itself; how it has survived attempts at termination, achieved budget increases and sustained losses, and how it has set its budgetary priorities. This analysis of organizational maintenance traces the evolution of the national debate over federal funding for culture, looking at how the major political parties have changed position on this issue over time. It examines how the NEH built a clientele, the state humanities councils, to bolster its support in Congress. And it looks at how changes in party positioning and related developments in the culture

war effectively empowered that clientele—with the effect of helping save the agency when threatened with abolishment, but also giving that clientele greater influence over the NEH’s policies and budgetary priorities.

Part II explains how the NEH’s internal bureaucratic structure has operated during the culture wars. When the agency was founded, Congress established a structure with the goal of empowering the NEH to make decisions on the basis of nonpolitical expertise in the humanities, assuming that the agency would need to be able to resist pressures to award grants to favored constituencies at the expense of merit. Part II analyzes how that structure has operated in a different and wholly unanticipated context, one in which many of those who could claim the mantle of expertise have become polarized on issues such as multiculturalism and the importance of “great books.” It compares the bureaucratic structure at the NEH with the structures and practices that have evolved at other federal grant-making agencies: the National Endowment for the Arts and National Science Foundation. The analysis shows how the structure at NEH has enabled Democratic and Republican appointed chairmen to push the substance of grant-making in progressive and traditional directions, respectively, despite continuity of formal rules, procedures, and professional staff.

This dissertation concludes with an assessment of what can be expected from the NEH in regard to its durability, budgetary priorities, and grant-making under Republican and Democratic administrations.

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PREFACE

I've benefitted greatly from the support and encouragement of many people over the course of researching and writing this dissertation, a project that has been seven years in the making.

First, I must thank my daughter, Lucrezia Azélie, who was born just days before I completed the manuscript. The imminence of your birth gave me the extra motivation I needed to wrap things up.

My dissertation committee, composed of R. Shep Melnick (chair) and Ken Kersch and Kay Schlozman (first and second readers), was both supportive and highly accommodating. They stuck with me as I spent years on this project, most of them while I was working full-time at Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. For all of the conference calls you took, chapter drafts you read, and constructive feedback you provided, I am truly grateful.

Research for this policy history involved speaking with many people who have been involved with the NEH, even from its earliest days. In the bibliography, more than 70 interviewees are listed. These interviews—with former staffers, former members of the National Council on the Humanities, former chairmen, people involved with the state humanities councils, and others—were some of the most interesting, exciting, and, frankly, entertaining, parts of my research, especially when people recalled events and personalities from the past. I am deeply grateful for the generous gift of their time.

Some interviewees and others who supported my research have been especially helpful. Professor Lawrence Mead of New York University was invaluable in helping me

gain access to the NYU library as I was finishing this project. Malcolm Richardson, a long-serving NEH staffer, was a source of great encouragement early on, in addition to recommending and connecting me with other interviewees. Larry Myers, director of the NEH's Office of Planning and Budget fielded numerous inquiries as I sought to understand the agency's appropriations process. Frank Shaw and Peter Losin of NEH have been as dedicated public servants as they come, always responding promptly to my inquiries about NEH grants. Esther Mackintosh, president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, in addition to being interviewed, lent me back issues of *Federation Reports* and *Federation Review*, the organization's old trade publication, which gave invaluable insight into the history of the councils. Mindful of how harrowing dissertations can be, Esther, thankfully, has not insisted on their prompt return.

When the going's been tough, I've leaned on family and friends. At times when I felt directionless and frustration set in, Mom encouraged me as she always has. Dad's continual asking, "How's your dissertation coming?" was a sign that he hadn't given up on my finishing, even as completion loomed far in the distance. Rick Barry has been a source of inspiration since we became friends back in sixth grade. My ride to high school, best man at my wedding, and all around brother from another mother, Rick has pushed me to "rise and grind" and reach the conclusion of this milestone, among others.

Lastly, I thank my wife, Mary Elizabeth. You've patiently endured my weekend departures to the coffee shop and never stopped telling me, "You're so close." These are just more reasons why I'm the lucky one.

INTRODUCTION

“Legislators of democracies and all honest and enlightened men who live in them must therefore apply themselves relentlessly to raising up souls and keeping them turned toward Heaven. It is necessary for all those who are interested in the future of democratic societies to unite, and for all in concert to make continuous efforts to spread within these societies a taste for the infinite, a sentiment of greatness, and a love of immaterial pleasures.”¹

September of 1965 was the moment in American history when national legislators took up Tocqueville’s charge most directly and enthusiastically. It was then, at the height of the Great Society, that Congress passed and President Lyndon Johnson signed legislation to establish the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, composed of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In the founding statute’s statement of purpose, Congress boldly declared, among other aspirations:

(2) that a high civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone but must give full value and support to the other great branches of man’s scholarly and cultural activity;

(3) that democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens and that it must therefore foster and support a form of education designed to make men masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant;

Congress further stated, “the world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 519.

founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit."²

In setting up the NEA and NEH, Congress sought to provide at least a partial solution to a concern held by many critics of democracy: how to maintain higher forms of culture in a society that is inclined toward materialism and other excesses. Unlike the federal art projects of the New Deal, for example, the NEA and NEH were not justified primarily in terms of creating jobs for unemployed artists and writers. Nor was Congress responding primarily to concerns about the need to improve civic literacy or the use of culture in American foreign policy, though such concerns were in the air. Rather, it was thought that the federal government should support culture so as to lift people's sights above mere economic concerns, make for a better quality of life, and simply embrace a function that was a hallmark of a civilized nation.

As of the writing of this dissertation, the NEA and NEH still exist—and with more than 50 years of hindsight, they present something of a puzzle. How was it that the federal government came to establish bureaucracies with such a sublime mission, how have they since endured, and how have they interpreted and carried out their mission in practice? These questions become all the more interesting in view of two factors. The first pertains to another of Tocqueville's insights, which is that efforts to edify democracy can run the risk of being undermined by democracy itself. The second is the rise of the culture wars.³

² *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965*, Public Law No. 89-209, 79 Stat. 845 (1965): 845-55.

³ James W. Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990): 31.

In regard to the humanities, specifically, it is easy to imagine that a federal agency dedicated to fields such as philosophy, literature, archaeology, art history, and so on would struggle to acquire the political support it would need to thrive. The American mind, after all, is often oriented toward practical affairs. Given the pressing needs that Congress is now called upon to address, from unemployment to healthcare to infrastructure, not to mention foreign affairs, it is difficult to conceive of how the humanities could rise to the level of an urgent priority relative to other needs.

Then there is the question of what conception of the humanities—a vague and often confusing term—this agency would seek to advance. This question becomes especially charged in light of stark divisions that have arisen among scholars and educators over the nature and purpose of the humanities, conflicts that have become part of a broader U.S. culture war. Particularly since the 1980s, intellectuals have sparred over numerous issues concerning the substance of humanistic education and research. In literature courses, for example, which books and authors are worthy of inclusion in the curriculum? Are some inherently more important or deserving of study than others? Does the history of Western civilization represent the rise of human freedom, equality, and excellence? Or has it largely been a story of oppression and marginalization of certain groups? Debates over the status of the “Western canon” and multiculturalism have divided scholars, as well as spilled over into the public square, especially in the context of debates over K-12 history standards, museum exhibitions, and efforts by universities to encourage certain forms of diversity.

The purpose of this policy history is to understand how the NEH has coped, or failed to cope, with these challenges, and what its manner of coping has meant for what it

has ended up funding. The primary concern, therefore, is with the substance of what the agency does, and why it does it.

“Policy history,” as Paul Pierson has explained, is “an unfolding story of *policy development*.” To understand policy development means to “pay attention to processes that play out over considerable periods of time.” It is by focusing on the processes at work, the relationships between various institutions, actors, and other political developments, that we can understand outcomes that are of interest. Policy history, says Pierson, can “refine our expectations about the possibilities and constraints of contemporary politics.”⁴ In this sense, I hope to shed light on what we can expect from the federal agency charged with supporting the humanities at a time when, as many have argued, the humanities are in crisis.⁵

I divide this policy history into two sections. Part I is on what James Q. Wilson referred to as “organizational maintenance”—the need for a bureaucracy to acquire autonomy and resources. This section examines how the agency came to be founded, how it has obtained budgetary increases and sustained losses, survived the threat of termination, and how its budgetary priorities have come to be determined. It primarily concerns the relationship of the NEH and its chairmen with Congress, the presidency, interest groups, and the general public. Part II is focused on how the agency operates internally and how it has come to make grant decisions in the context of the culture war. This section looks at the design of the agency’s bureaucratic structure, the assumptions

⁴ Paul Pierson, “The Study of Policy Development,” *Journal of Policy History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 34, 48.

⁵ See, for example, Stanley Fish, “The Crisis of the Humanities Officially Arrives,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2010, https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/11/the-crisis-of-the-humanities-officially-arrives/?_r=0 and Verlyn Klinkenborg, “The Decline and Fall of the English Major,” June 22, 2013, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/opinion/sunday/the-decline-and-fall-of-the-english-major.html>.

that informed the original design, and how the structure has functioned in the culture-war context—one that was wholly unanticipated by the agency’s founders. In both sections, I tell the story of how the NEH has been forced to cope with the challenges of democracy and the culture war.

In the remainder of this introduction, I elaborate on the nature of the challenges posed by democracy and the culture war—with the NEH has had to cope in both its organizational maintenance and in its process of awarding grants.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRACY

By the challenge of democracy, I refer to how certain democratic values and dispositions are inimical to the very purpose of the NEH—which was, from the outset, a self-consciously elitist initiative. When Congress founded the agency, it did so with the express purpose of countering what it saw as deficiencies within democracy itself. There was a sense that, but for a federal foundation dedicated to supporting the humanities, America would not do enough in areas such as literature, history, and classics. Science and technology would receive a disproportionate amount of resources, attention, and esteem, while citizens would take their ethical and spiritual bearings from trivial, lowest-common-denominator forms of entertainment. Scholars in the humanities were viewed as uniquely capable of ameliorating the dehumanizing effects of democratic culture. Therefore, in setting up the foundation, professional humanists were to be the ones who largely determined how federal funds would be spent, with applications subject to scholarly peer review. Democratically elected politicians could not be trusted to steward

the resources of such a foundation in a way that would fulfill its mission of uplifting the nation. Yet, per Tocqueville referenced above, the very deficiencies of democracy that make such countervailing measures necessary also threaten to undermine them.

Perhaps the greatest democratic disposition that we would expect to pose a challenge is people's limited understanding of and appreciation for the study of "the humanities," which, at the time of the founding of the NEH, was generally associated with liberal education. Liberal education, traditionally understood, is ordered toward the pursuit of truth about the highest things, such as the good life, the just political order, and beauty itself. That pursuit, which may never cease, is an end in itself. It is a form of education that can give people the freedom to see through and beyond the prejudices and assumptions that are part of modern society. As per the founding statute, it is a form of education that can make people masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant. Yet many Americans do not intuitively view such an education as a valuable or worthwhile endeavor.⁶

Tocqueville observed that Americans were exceptional in the degree to which they were preoccupied with improving their material wellbeing. He attributed this partly to America's democratic social state, a condition in which the demands of work and the pursuit of wealth leave people with little leisure and discourage spending time on purely theoretical inquiry.⁷ However, there were several unique factors that exaggerated this disinclination towards cultural and theoretical pursuits. One of these factors, he argued, was the legacy of Puritanism in the settling of New England, a religion which "is

⁶ For a discussion of the tensions between liberal democracy and liberal education, see, Daniel E. Cullen, "Liberal Education and Liberal Democracy," in *Liberal Democracy and Liberal Education*, ed. Daniel E. Cullen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017): 3-13.

⁷ Tocqueville, 414, 434.

naturally little favorable to the fine arts and permits literary pleasures only with regret.” Another factor was that the Americans found themselves in an undeveloped continent, which offered innumerable opportunities to become wealthy, which helped fuel people’s dedication to commerce. Moreover, because of the United States’ ties to England, which retained an aristocratic heritage, Americans were able to import the fruits of scientific, artistic, and literary genius without having to develop them on their own.⁸

In the early 1960s, Richard Hofstadter offered an account of the American mind that drew upon Tocqueville’s observations. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Non-Fiction in 1964, Hofstadter’s *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* offers further insights into the challenge that we would expect democracy to pose to the NEH. Hofstadter defined anti-intellectualism as a “resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it.”⁹ Like Tocqueville, Hofstadter attributed it largely to the nation’s religious heritage and fierce commercial spirit. Of religion, Hofstadter argued that the nature of American evangelical Christianity led people to be distrustful of intellectual elites. Not only did American evangelicalism emphasize intuition and the heart in spiritual matters, but it had also been opposed to older, more established forms of Protestantism that had professional clergy. Commerce, in Hofstadter’s account, set the tone of society from early on and encouraged a dismissive attitude toward culture, especially among men. Beyond religion and commerce, America’s general commitment to the notion of equality fostered an anti-intellectual attitude in the nation’s politics and

⁸ Tocqueville, 429-30.

⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963): 7.

approach to education. Whereas intellect represents a claim to distinction, America gave pride of place to the “common man.”¹⁰

Given the ways in which the American mind, oriented primarily toward practical affairs, can be ill-disposed toward the concept of liberal learning, it should not come as a surprise that many would resist the idea that the government should subsidize it, especially relative to more immediate and wide-felt needs. In the years following the 2008 financial crisis, various governors sounded this reluctance as they criticized the idea of public support for humanistic studies at state universities. For example:

- In 2011, Governor Rick Scott of Florida called for shifting funding at public universities to programs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, math). In a talk-radio interview, Scott said:

You know, we don’t need a lot more anthropologists in the state. It’s a great degree if people want to get it, but we don’t need them here. I want to spend our dollars giving people science, technology, engineering, math degrees. That’s what our kids need to focus all their time and attention on. Those type of degrees. So when they get out of school, they can get a job.¹¹

- In 2013, Governor Patrick McCrory of North Carolina advocated for legislation that would base subsidies for public colleges and universities on post-graduate employment rather than enrollment. McCrory, appearing on the same radio program as Governor Scott in 2011, said:

If you want to take gender studies that’s fine, go to a private school and take it. But I don’t want to subsidize that if that’s not going to get someone a job.¹²

¹⁰ Hofstadter, 47-51.

¹¹ Adam Weinstein, “Rick Scott to Liberal Arts Majors: Drop Dead,” *Mother Jones*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2011/10/rick-scott-liberal-arts-majors-drop-dead-anthropology>.

¹² Kevin Kiley, “Another Liberal Arts Critic,” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 30, 2013, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/01/30/north-carolina-governor-joins-chorus-republicans-critical-liberal-arts>.

- Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker’s original 2015 budget proposal amended the University of Wisconsin system’s mission statement, inserting language about “[meeting] the state’s workforce needs” while removing, among other sentences, “Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.” (Following a backlash, the proposed changes were retracted and called “a drafting error.”)¹³
- In 2016, Governor Matt Bevin of Kentucky proposed basing subsidies to state colleges and universities on the graduation rates of certain degree programs, favoring STEM over the humanities. Said Bevin:

There will be more incentives to electrical engineers than French literature majors. There just will. All the people in the world that want to study French literature can do so, they are just not going to be subsidized by the taxpayer.¹⁴

The governors’ statements reflect a longstanding American skepticism about the worth of liberal studies, as well as the view that it is *not* the government’s responsibility to support them.

Even assuming that there is to be such an agency, the democratic spirit also challenges the idea that professional humanists ought to be the ones directing the distribution of funds. When the NEH was founded, it was assumed that grants would have to be determined mainly by scholars in the humanities, for they were the ones that had the knowledge and expertise to know what kinds of research and education truly

¹³ Philip Bump, “Scott Walker moved to drop ‘search for truth’ from the University of Wisconsin mission. His office claimed it was an error.” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/02/04/scott-walker-wants-to-drop-search-for-truth-from-the-university-of-wisconsin-mission-heres-why/>.

¹⁴ Adam Beam, “Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin wants state colleges and universities to produce more electrical engineers and less French literature scholars,” *US News and World Report*, January 29, 2016, <http://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2016-01-29/in-kentucky-a-push-for-engineers-over-french-lit-scholars>.

could edify and uplift the nation. Yet, per Hofstadter, scholars' claim to distinction is something that the democratic spirit resists.

The spirit of elitism in which NEH was formed—to have an agency dedicated to immaterial concerns and to vest much decision-making in select scholars—has been opposed by what we may call a spirit of populism. The populist spirit, which draws upon certain democratic instincts, has long influenced American politics and public discourse. Populist rhetoric, in general, casts the primary political conflict as one between ordinary, virtuous citizens and an oppressive elite. The primary charge against elites, whether they are business moguls, government bureaucrats, academics, or members of media is that they have “ignored, corrupted, and/or betrayed the core ideal of American democracy: rule by the common people who expected their fellow citizens to advance by diligence, practical intelligence, and a faith in God alone.”¹⁵ In debates over the NEH, attacks on the existence of the agency itself and its use of scholars to evaluate applications and decide on grants awards have been challenged in ways that bear the hallmarks of populism. As described below, the rise of the culture wars helped feed into this democratic or populist challenge.

THE CULTURE-WAR CHALLENGE

The founders of the NEH in Congress anticipated the challenges from democracy. The bureaucratic structure was designed so as to empower the chairman of the agency to

¹⁵ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995): 2.

follow the recommendations of scholars in the humanities in making grants—and to resist the pressures of elected officials who may want to direct grants to favored constituencies, irrespective of the merit of the proposed projects. To foster greater grassroots support for the agency among the general public—a public that may not have an intuitive appreciation for the value of the humanities—Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) insisted on the establishment of state humanities councils, NEH affiliates in every state and territory.

Yet by the 1980s, another major challenge to the NEH arose, one that was unforeseen by the agency's founders: the culture wars. When the agency was founded, it was understood that the humanities at times necessarily dealt with controversial topics. But in 1965, Congress did not foresee the sea change that was on the verge of occurring within the humanities, in which more traditional notions of liberal learning were jettisoned, while scholars embraced a much greater focus on previously understudied (some would call them marginalized) groups. Nor did legislators anticipate a situation in which scholars, educators, and intellectuals, the supposedly nonpolitical experts, would become bitterly divided over issues from curriculum content to the interpretation of American and Western history—and that these disagreements would spill over into public discourse and debate.

Sociologist James Davison Hunter introduced the notion of “culture wars” in an eponymously titled book in 1991 as a way of making sense of the rise of social and political conflicts in which cleavages did not fall along the lines of class or religious denomination as they previously often had. In controversies over such issues as the family, abortion, school curricula, the arts, and the humanities, opponents fell into camps that Hunter characterized as “orthodox” and “progressive,” with both sides encompassing

religious adherents in addition to the religiously unaffiliated.¹⁶ Patrick Buchanan, who ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for president in 1992, invoked the culture-war concept in his speech at that year's GOP convention, saying:

There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America.¹⁷

At the heart of the culture war, according to Hunter, is a conflicting understanding of the nature of moral authority, “the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on.” Nothing less than the power to define reality, and in turn, define what constitutes a normative way of life, is at stake. Those on the “orthodox” side, even if they affiliate with different religions, share the belief that moral standards derive from an authority that is objective, transcendent, and eternal, and does not change with the times. On the “progressive” side, “truth tends to be viewed as a process, as a reality that is ever unfolding.” Religiously affiliated progressives tend to believe that their church’s moral teachings, even those long established, can change and be conformed to modern ideas of justice and equity. While religiously unaffiliated people tend to fall more on the progressive side, some can be found in the orthodox camp as well. This latter group includes “secular conservative and neo-conservative intellectuals” whose “commitment to natural law or to a high view of nature serves as the functional equivalent of the external and transcendent moral authority revered by their religiously orthodox counterparts.”¹⁸

¹⁶ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

¹⁷ Patrick J. Buchanan, “Culture War Speech: Address to the Republican National Convention,” August 17, 1992, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text/>.

¹⁸ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 42-46.

Culture-war battles take place in the arena of “public culture,” with the terms of debate set by elites. Public culture encompasses laws, the division of responsibility between government and other actors, notions of what constitutes civic virtue and patriotism, and the “collective myths surrounding [a nation’s] history and future promise.” Elites “are the ones who create the concepts, supply the language, and explicate the logic of public discussion.” The elites with the greatest influence in shaping the discourse over public culture are those whom Hunter calls “knowledge workers,” such as think tank fellows, lobbyists, public interest lawyers, journalists, and activists. While academics contribute to shaping public culture, rarely does their scholarship reach the general public directly; it is mediated through knowledge workers.¹⁹

A number of scholars have since challenged the culture wars thesis, contending that the vast majority of Americans are not polarized into opposing camps and that ideologically-driven agitators are not very consequential for American politics.²⁰ Hunter, in response, has said that while many of his critics view culture as the sum of values and opinions held by individuals, as recorded in surveys, he interprets “culture” as the symbols and ideas that frame public debate. Those symbols, as he argued in *Culture Wars*, are the products of elites, who take on influential roles when concrete conflicts arise. Even if the majority of people tend toward the middle, elites frame debates in polarizing ways and put forward stark choices in terms of policy options.²¹

¹⁹ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 52-60.

²⁰ See, for example, Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), and Morris Fiorina with Samuel Abrams and Jeremy Pope, *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Longman, 2011).

²¹ James Davison Hunter, “The Enduring Culture War,” in *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, ed. James Davison Hunter (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006): 10-40.

Education is one of the public arenas in which culture wars take place. From kindergarten through college, schools do not simply provide students with technical skills that can help them succeed economically. Schools inculcate students with notions of civic and moral virtue. Colleges and universities, which help form the next generation of leaders, have loomed large in the culture wars. As with other public arenas, culture wars concerning higher education pit orthodox and progressive elites against one another.²²

The culture-war controversies in higher education pertain to “the ongoing struggle to define *in practical terms* the mission of the modern university itself.” Disputants on both sides pledge fealty to principles such as “academic freedom” and “open-minded inquiry,” but disagree fiercely on what they mean in practice, namely because the pursuit of knowledge has to take place within certain boundaries. Academia has always had to establish criteria with respect to education and research.²³ Controversies arise in setting such criteria in areas such as curriculum content, the rules governing free speech on-campus, decisions on what to publish, the regulation of student groups, admissions policies, and the hiring of faculty.

Many of the culture wars within higher education—and within the humanities, in particular—have centered on the concept of “multiculturalism.” To simplify, multiculturalism refers to the idea that no culture or society should be viewed as superior to others, and that cultures that have previously been oppressed or marginalized deserve greater recognition and to have their perspectives heard. In practice, this means, for example, that in developing humanities curricula, so-called classic or canonical works do not necessarily deserve pride of place. Given that those texts were written mostly by

²² Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 211-12.

²³ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 213.

white European males, most of whom have long been dead, they present a biased view of reality. To make up for this bias, the curriculum should also include other perspectives, especially those of previously ignored, oppressed, and marginalized groups such as women, gays and lesbians, racial minorities, the disabled, and people of third-world countries. Since the 1970s, various fields have arisen to provide these perspectives, such as women's studies, black studies, and queer studies. Affirmative action in admissions and faculty hiring, along with speech codes intended to prevent hostile expression directed towards the aforementioned groups, are other ways in which colleges and universities have sought to put the multiculturalist ethos into practice.²⁴

In an essay on the culture wars, Daniel Bell presents “three distinctive turns” which characterize those intellectuals whom Hunter would call “progressive:”

- *aesthetic*—the spread of a relativism that denies the idea of standards and judgment in art;
- *sociological*—the replacement of class by race and gender as the meaningful terms for social divisions in society and the cruxes of power;
- *philosophical*—the denial of Western civilization as the source of our basic questions in epistemology, morals, and politics, and the rejection of required readings of classical works in the university curriculum.

These “turns,” Bell argues, are related to several intellectual movements, including postmodernism and deconstructionism. These intellectual trends undermine ideas that had been central to the study of the humanities around the time of the founding of the NEH, including the notion that there is a definable “canon” of great works, the distinction

²⁴ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 215-218.

between high and low culture, and the notion that in interpreting texts, the goal is to arrive at an authoritative reading—namely, the author’s intended meaning.²⁵

The intellectual elites representing the “orthodox” side in the higher-education culture wars have tended to come from outside of the academy, often holding fellowships at conservative think tanks or writing for conservative journals and magazines. In general, what unites the “orthodox” side is the impulse toward the notion of transcendental authority, which can take the form of divine authority, natural law, or an objective notion of human excellence.²⁶ Intellectuals on the “orthodox” side disagree with each other as to what is ultimately true, as well as which truths are accessible to human reason. However, they are often in agreement on what the biggest, most important questions are and the texts and thinkers that should provide at least the initial guide to asking and thinking through them.

In debates between so-called progressive and orthodox intellectuals, “politicization” is a charge that both sides level against one another. Orthodox intellectuals have claimed that the multiculturalist aim of including new perspectives is less about broadening the search for truth and really about promoting a left-wing political agenda, one that is critical of capitalism, the United States, organized religion, and a traditional notion of the family. They say that for all the talk of “diversity,” advocates of multiculturalism “rarely if ever propose courses in Irish Catholic, Greek American, Asian American, Jewish, or Protestant Fundamentalist studies.” And while universities strive to recruit more racial minorities as students and faculty, they do not make similar efforts in

²⁵ Daniel Bell, “The Cultural Wars: American Intellectual Life, 1965-1992,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1992): 97.

²⁶ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 45-6.

regard to the religiously affiliated or those who lean conservative politically.²⁷ But, according to the proponents of multiculturalism, past humanities curricula were themselves politicized. Western Civilization courses, they argue, promoted a culture that has historically been oppressive toward many subgroups, racial minorities and women in particular.

As Hunter says in summation:

representatives from each side of the cultural divide fervently believe that they properly uphold the principles of academic freedom—and that it is the other side that has politicized and thus tainted the atmosphere of academic inquiry.

Given the perceived stakes of these controversies and that they pertain to ultimate questions about moral authority, “the culture war yields little or no middle ground.” As a result, culture war disputes have “an interminable character.”²⁸

We would expect that the rise of the culture wars would present challenges for the NEH—and indeed they have. For one thing, culture wars have exacerbated part of the challenge from democracy. The notion that scholars and educators in the humanities were attempting to impart un-American or leftist ideas helped fuel populist calls to terminate the agency. Moreover, grant-making, especially in regard to more interpretive projects, would necessarily invite controversy. Decisions on whether or not to fund orthodox versus progressive projects would entail the agency’s coming down on either side of the culture war—or at least that is how critics of agency would be inclined to appraise the situation, given the ways in which culture-war controversies end up being framed. Per Hunter, above, there is no middle ground. Further, the process that the NEH had

²⁷ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 218.

²⁸ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 220.

developed to evaluate and determine grant awards was not designed in anticipation of a stark divide in elite opinion about the purpose and substance of the humanities.

DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

As noted above, this dissertation is divided into two parts. As policy history, each part seeks to understand key outcomes by looking at how various processes have played out over time. Part I (chapters 1 – 6) focuses on organizational maintenance, which encompasses the NEH’s survival, the size of its budget, and determination of budgetary priorities. The main processes that this part examines include how the political parties have changed position in regard to federal funding for culture, how the interest-group context has changed, and the reputations garnered by various agency chairmen. Part II (chapters 7 – 9) seeks to explain how the NEH has made grants in the context of the culture war. By relying upon various models of gradual institutional change, namely “conversion” and “drift” (explained more fully in the introduction to Part II), I seek to explain how the bureaucratic structure has operated in a context that was unforeseen by the agency’s founders.

Another way of articulating the purpose of this policy history is to understand what the NEH funds and why it funds it. The agency was founded with a serious purpose, a mission akin to what Tocqueville said should be of concern to all “honest and enlightened” legislators and citizens. This policy history seeks to understand what we can

expect of the NEH, given the possibilities and limitations inherent to the U.S. political system and political culture.²⁹

²⁹ Lawrence Mead, "Public Policy: Vision, Potential, Limits," *Policy Currents: Newsletter of Public Policy Section APSA*, February 1995, 1.

PART ONE: ORGANIZATIONAL MAINTENANCE

At the 2015 annual meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA), there was a panel session, “The National Endowment for the Humanities at Fifty.” After panelists spent the first part discussing what the NEH had accomplished and the difference the agency had made in the humanities, the moderator asked their opinions on areas in which the agency—or the idea of the agency—had failed. James Grossman, the AHA’s executive director and a former vice president for research and education at Chicago’s Newberry Library, opined that the NEH “has not succeeded in establishing a national constituency for the humanities.” Grossman was quick to add that one might not have reasonably expected NEH to accomplish this; only that one might have hoped that it could have.¹

Grossman’s lament implies something important about the beginnings of the agency: it was founded in the absence of a politically influential constituency. The history of the NEH is, in effect, the story of the political fortunes of an elite idea. At the height of the Great Society, the idea that the arts and humanities were important to edifying and uplifting American life, and that therefore the federal government ought to support artists and scholars, had great political purchase. The next fifty years have been a story of how

¹ James Grossman, “The National Endowment for the Humanities at Fifty” (panel remarks at the 129th annual meeting of the American Historical Association, New York, New York, January 4, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-CNcJZnKhY>.

the NEH has coped as that idea has failed to inspire the enthusiasm that it did in 1965—and, at times, attracted great hostility.

Organizational maintenance, according to James Q. Wilson, refers not only to a bureaucracy's survival, but also to its ability to acquire autonomy and resources.² While Wilson says that organizational maintenance is the “special responsibility” of the bureaucracy's executive, Part I looks at more than just the role of NEH chairmen (though this does factor into the analysis).³ Part I traces the course of high-level debates about the federal government's role in supporting the arts and humanities, focusing largely on the positions that the Democratic and Republican Parties, as well as elements therein, have taken at different times. Part I examines why the parties have changed positions on questions such as whether or not the NEH ought to exist, what it ought to symbolize, and what kinds of programs and activities it ought to sponsor. These debates have often been framed in terms of elitism versus populism, with Republicans and Democrats falling on different sides of that cleavage at different times and in different contexts.

In addition to tracing these high-level debates, Part I analyzes the importance of the clientele that the NEH cultivated: the state humanities councils (SHCs). Part I looks at how the introduction of this clientele transformed the agency's interest-group context, how the councils have promoted the durability of the agency, and how they have affected NEH's budgetary priorities.

Part I proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 discusses the founding of the NEH and its initial interest-group context, which bore the hallmarks of what Wilson referred to as

² James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989): 196.

³ Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, 181.

“majoritarian politics.” Congress, in establishing the NEA and NEH, responded to a national consensus about the importance of the arts and humanities in uplifting the nation; there were no influential interests groups mobilized for or against the agency.

In chapter 2, I draw upon David Karol’s model of party-position change to explain the development of the politics of the NEH during the 1970s.⁴ The initial lack of influential interest groups who cared about the NEH opened up the possibility for dramatic party-position change. President Nixon, to the surprise of many, decided to champion the Endowments, which ended up bringing many congressional Republicans to their cause. Once the NEH had achieved bipartisan support, debates over the agency became focused more on what it ought to symbolize and the criteria it should use to distribute grants. In these debates, some Republican politicians and conservative intellectuals came to embrace something akin to the original Great Society vision for the cultural agencies as patrons of high culture that awarded grants according to strict use of peer review. On the elitism-populism cleavage, these Republican politicians and conservative influencers fell squarely and, at times, proudly on the side of elitism or “excellence.” Democrats, in contrast, began calling for a broader distribution of grants, particularly to racial and ethnic minorities that had become important constituencies. Though the Republican Party still retained a populist element of its own, which continued to resist the notion of federal funding for culture, that element was uninfluential throughout the 1970s.

As discussed in chapter 3, Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI), the main legislative founder behind the agency, wanted the NEH’s political fortunes to rest on something

⁴ David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

solider than the idea of the value of federal funding for culture. In the 1970s, at his insistence, the NEH established the state humanities councils partly to introduce more citizens to the humanities, as well as to cultivate grassroots support for the Endowment. The NEH not only established councils in all 50 states, federal territories, and District of Columbia, but the agency also helped launch and fund a national organization that came to represent the SHCs' collective interests: the Federation of State Humanities Councils. The introduction of the state councils led to shift in the interest-group context, from majoritarian to what Wilson referred to as "client" politics, in which there is "a dominant interest-group favoring [an agency's] goals."⁵ With the state councils, the SHCs gained a supportive clientele based in states nationwide. But at the same time, the councils represented a potential competitor to the NEH, particularly regarding the allocation of resources. For decades, the NEH sought to reap the advantages of having a state-based constituency, while keeping the SHCs under its control, leading to a relationship that was, at times, fraught with tension.

Chapter 4 explains how, as the culture wars escalated in the 1980s, the terms of debate and party positioning again changed. When the decade began, Republicans and conservative intellectuals promoted a vision of the NEH as a symbol of excellence, which meant that it was to favor scholarly research over public-facing programs, such as the state humanities councils, and determine grant awards on the basis of strict peer review. Yet as the decade wore on, this vision lost purchase within the GOP. The Religious Right, which was opposed to the very existence of the NEA and NEH, became an

⁵ Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, 76.

important constituency within the party, leading some Republicans to become increasingly hostile toward the cultural agencies, the Arts Endowment in particular.

But even as conservative opinion leaders became alienated from academia and denounced trends in scholarship and education in the humanities, they remained supportive of the NEH. This was primarily because of the reputation of the Republican appointees who led it during the heyday of the culture wars: William Bennett and Lynne Cheney. Through their use of the bully pulpit, Bennett and Cheney established themselves as resolute opponents of progressive trends in the humanities, giving Republicans and conservative influencers confidence that the NEH was still doing well by America (under Cheney, the agency's budget surpassed the NEA's for the first time in history). But following the election of President Clinton and Cheney's replacement with University of Pennsylvania president Sheldon Hackney, widely denounced on the Right as symbolic of cultural rot in academia, the NEH was left in a vulnerable position.

With the loss of bipartisan support for the principle of federal funding for culture, the state humanities councils became all the more important for the maintenance of the overall NEH. Chapter 5 explains how the state councils became an influential clientele, capable of drawing admiration from politicians of both parties. The positive standing of the SHCs in Congress, including among some Republicans, probably contributed to saving the NEH when some GOP leaders sought to abolish it, along with the NEA, in 1995. While Congress ended up cutting the NEH's budget by approximately 40 percent, the brunt of the cuts affected the agency's grant-making in research, education, and public programming. The SHCs' appropriation level was hardly reduced; in turn, they came to receive a greater share of overall NEH funding. The NEH also began to defer to

the SHCs' demands for greater autonomy and independence, goals which they had long sought. The defunding crisis effectively completed the reshaping of the NEH's interest group context to one largely characterized by client politics.

The development of the politics of the NEH following the 1995 defunding crisis is the subject of chapter 6, the final chapter of Part I. In the context of Republican hostility to the idea of federal funding for culture and waning Democratic enthusiasm, the NEH has still managed to maintain itself. Yet the politics of the NEH have come to have little if anything to do with debates over the substance of the humanities and much more to do with simply who is receiving the agency's dollars. The state humanities councils have remained the most influential advocate for the NEH in Congress, promoting a continuation of funding for the Endowment while seeing their share of the grant budget increase. The NEH has also impressed upon Congress its commitment to serving rural areas, Native Americans, and veterans. Even when President Donald Trump proposed terminating the NEH, the Republican-controlled Congress resisted the plan and decided to continue to appropriate funding, citing their appreciation of the state councils and service to particular constituencies, without any mention of the research and education grant-making that had once been the agency's core work. Even as the sublime ideals that inspired the founding of the NEH no longer have political purchase, the agency itself has found a way to carry on.

1.0 THE FOUNDING OF THE NEH

The NEA and NEH are outliers in the history of the federal government's support for culture. Prior to 1965, not only had the federal government been reluctant to support culture in general, but when it did, its initiatives had much more explicit civic and economic aims. For example, from the founding period through the late nineteenth century, presidents and other political officials made repeated, unsuccessful attempts to found a national university, with the civic goal of imbuing future leading citizens with sentiments and beliefs that aligned with the aims and principles of the American republic.¹ New Deal initiatives such as the Federal Art Project, Federal Writers' Project, and Federal Theatre Project were focused, first and foremost, on providing job opportunities for the unemployed, who happened to be artists and writers.² From 1936-1941, the U.S. Office of Education ran the Federal Forum Project, sponsoring hundreds of town hall meetings across the country. The purpose of these meetings was to bring citizens together to discuss important issues and differences of opinion respectfully, help them grow in understanding of national and international issues, and promote continuing

¹ George Thomas, *The Founders and the Idea of a National University: Constituting the American Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

² Sheila D. Collins and Naomi Rosenblum, "The Democratization of Culture: The Legacy of the New Deal Art Programs," in *When Government Helped: Learning from the Successes and Failures of the New Deal*, eds. Sheila D. Collins and Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 207-232.

education, among other civic goals.³ Furthermore, in the early years of the Cold War, the federal government supported cultural exchanges with other countries; in this case, the goals pertained to foreign-policy (described in brief below).

The NEH, in contrast, was imbued with a mission to support high culture at least partly for its own sake. This mission reflected the uniqueness of the moment in which the agency was founded. As Stanley Katz, former president of the American Council on Learned Societies (ACLS), has opined, 1965 was the only year in American history in which the NEH could ever have been established.⁴

The founding of the NEH bears the hallmarks of what James Q. Wilson referred to as “majoritarian politics,” meaning the agency came about not at the behest of powerful interest groups, but because of a broad consensus. Majoritarian policies have a base of support among the general public and elites, and objections to their enactment tend to be on the basis of principle; namely, that the policy in question represents an inappropriate expansion of the federal government.⁵ Because majoritarian agencies impose broad costs on society in exchange for broad benefits, it is unlikely that interest groups will mobilize either on behalf of or in opposition to the agency. In the case of the NEH, at least initially, the broad cost to society represented an increase in discretionary spending in exchange for cultural uplift.

The great danger that majoritarian agencies have to fear is that they will behave in such a way as to inspire an organized foe, something akin to which happened to the NEH

³ David Goodman, “Democracy and Public Discussion in the Progressive and New Deal Eras: From Civic Competence to the Expression of Opinion,” *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 2 (2004): 90-94. See also, William M. Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

⁴ Stanley Katz, interview with author, July 25, 2013.

⁵ James Q. Wilson, “The Politics of Regulation,” in *The Politics of Regulation*, ed. James Q. Wilson (New York: Basic Books, 1980): 367.

in the mid-1990s (as described in chapter 5). As David Lewis notes in his study of agency termination, “administrative agencies never escape the politics that created them.”⁶

Though the NEH’s interest group context changed significantly with the establishment of the state humanities councils, the agency’s political fortunes have always rested, to a degree, on how compelling its mission or perceived purpose is to the nation as a whole.

The founding of the NEH occurred because of a confluence of factors, which never had obtained before and dissolved shortly thereafter. For a brief moment in time, in the mid-1960s, academics, public intellectuals, and the general public had a shared conception of the content of the humanities and believed that they were valuable to American life. This consensus was incorporated in President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society agenda. And with lopsided Democratic majorities, the 89th Congress translated that consensus into a new federal bureaucracy.

1.1 GENERAL EDUCATION AND WESTERN CIV

The NEH was founded at a time when many citizens and scholars associated the liberal arts and humanities with a sympathetic, if not celebratory study of Western Civilization. Courses in Western Civ were then central to what was known as “general education,” a movement that began in the early 20th century as a reaction against several transformative trends in American higher education. These included the decline of the classical liberal arts curriculum, increase in specialization within disciplines, and

⁶ David Lewis, “The Politics of Agency Termination: Confronting the Myth of Agency Immortality,” *The Journal of Politics* 64, no. 1 (2002): 92.

students' having the opportunity to choose from a variety of elective courses. General education, intended for non-specialists and geared toward freshmen and sophomores, was, in many respects, a civic enterprise. It was intended to provide educated citizens with a set of shared values and common base of knowledge, which were thought to be important to the flourishing of democracy. According to Gilbert Allardyce, "General education, therefore, was a philosophy of unity: unity of knowledge, unity of the curriculum, unity of education and life."⁷

Western Civ courses focused on great books and presented a Whiggish view of history, equating "civilization" with the rise of freedom in the United States and the nations of Western Europe, whose fates were bound together in the two world wars. Along with Civ, international relations (IR) courses had become common after World War I. IR courses, "hopelessly jingoistic by later professional standards of objectivity," also told a story of the rise of liberty, with professors "[tracking] the steady rise and expansion of American freedom in an otherwise hostile world."⁸

World War I was integral in spurring colleges and universities nationwide to develop Western Civ courses, with the federal government even playing a role. In 1918, when American troops were being conscripted for the Great War, colleges and universities partnered with the War Department to establish Student Army Training Corps (SATC). Based at more than 500 colleges and universities, SATC sought to prepare 125,000 students for military service. Part of this program involved the "War Issues Course," compulsory for all participants. Combining material from a range of

⁷ Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (1982): 698.

⁸ Christopher Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012): 139.

disciplines, the course was intended to give the conscripts an understanding of the nature of the European conflict, as well as the kind of society they were being asked to defend. Professors of history, government, philosophy, economics, and literature patriotically came together to plan and teach this course. When Arthur M. Schlesinger surveyed history programs at colleges and universities after the war, he found that faculty had become inspired to educate freshmen to be “intelligent citizens of the republic and the world.”⁹ According to Allardyce, “This was the environment that formed the Western Civ courses.”¹⁰

The start of the Cold War inspired a renewed sense of urgency for general education. Policymakers and higher-education leaders viewed colleges and universities as having a critical role to play in the formation of enlightened democratic citizens. Christopher Loss, in his account of the role of higher education in American state building, argues that general education during the Cold War can be understood as an attempt to fortify America’s “vital center.” Many educators, policymakers, and researchers at the time believed that education could help keep students from buying into radical political ideologies of the Left, namely, communism, and could also help lead them discard racial prejudice, the great blight on American democracy.¹¹

Two major reports on higher education, published in the mid-1940s, spoke to the importance of liberal arts education in the formation of democratic citizens. In 1945, Harvard University published a report, *General Education for a Free Society*, the product of a committee of faculty members convened by university president James Bryant

⁹ Arthur Schlesinger, “The History Situation in Colleges and Universities,” *HO* 11 (1920): 103-106, quoted in Allardyce, 708.

¹⁰ Allardyce, 708.

¹¹ Loss, 122.

Conant. Among many recommendations, the committee proposed a Western Civ course, “Western Thought and Institutions,” as a requirement for all students. The committee did not prescribe a specific curriculum, but suggested that works by the following authors be considered for inclusion: Aquinas, Machiavelli, Luther, Bodin, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Adam Smith, Bentham, and Mill.¹² Two years later, President Truman’s Commission on Higher Education issued a report that also presented the liberal arts as central to general education, but unlike the Harvard report, emphasized the study of America and the West’s interaction with the rest of the world.¹³

Though general education was at the height of its prestige in the early Cold War years, it was already in decline. Harvard, for example, did not follow the recommendations of the 1945 report. Faculty rejected the Western Civ course and, over time, students were allowed to fulfill general-education requirements through an increasing number of curricular options.¹⁴ However, it was not until the second half of the 1960s that colleges and universities began explicitly to disavow the earlier general-education ideal. In response to campus protest movements and minority activists’ demands for group recognition, colleges and universities embraced “a new rights-based conception of democratic citizenship that was intimately connected to an energetic pluralist politics known as diversity.”¹⁵ Dramatic changes to the liberal arts curriculum followed from the diversity ideal, including the rise of new disciplines such as black studies and women’s studies, as well as the end of compulsory Western Civ courses. Yet

¹² Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society, *General Education in a Free Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945): 216, <https://archive.org/details/generaleducation032440mbp>.

¹³ Loss, 138.

¹⁴ Allardyce, 717.

¹⁵ Loss, 213.

the conscious abandonment of general education did not pick up in earnest until the latter half of the 1960s.

The peak years of general education came at a time that has been considered the golden age of higher education, characterized by the “three p’s” of prosperity, prestige, and popularity.¹⁶ More Americans were attending college than ever before, with enrollments rising from 2.7 million in 1950 to more than 7.9 million in 1970, spurred partly by the GI Bill. The increase in college attendance likely contributed to a growing appreciation for higher forms of culture among the general public, as well as respect for intellectuals. In 1964, Richard Hofstadter won a Pulitzer Prize in Non-Fiction for his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. Toward the beginning of the book, Hofstadter claimed to observe that more and more Americans were questioning the country’s habitual hostility toward intellectuals:

In the past, American intellectuals were often discouraged or embittered by the national disrespect for mind, but it is hard to recall a time when large numbers of people outside the intellectual community shared their concern, or when self-criticism on this count took on the character of a nation-wide movement.¹⁷

Hofstadter interprets the public’s growing respect for intellectuals as a reaction against the McCarthyism of the early 1950s and the surprise launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union. The launch of Sputnik impressed upon people the idea that improving education had to become more of a national priority.¹⁸ Historian Thomas Bender points to additional phenomena that may have encouraged a growing respect for intellectuals at the time. The Great Depression had “discredited the business elite, who had historically been

¹⁶ John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): 260.

¹⁷ Hofstadter, 3.

¹⁸ Hofstadter, 3-5.

a major source of anti-intellectualism in the United States.” In addition, people were impressed with what they viewed as the results of Keynesian economics, “an academic theory of acknowledged utility.”¹⁹

1.2 CULTURAL ENRICHMENT FOR THE MASSES

In the decades following World War II, the growing American middle class was seeking out more opportunities to expose themselves to higher forms of culture—to art, music, and literature that were more intellectually demanding than lowest-common-denominator entertainment. Fred Siegel offers the following statistics in this regard:

The public’s expanding taste and increased income produced a 250 percent growth in the number of local symphony orchestras between 1940 and 1955. In that same year, 1955, 15 million people paid to attend major league baseball games, while 35 million paid to attend classical music concerts. The New York Metropolitan Opera’s Saturday-afternoon radio broadcast drew a listenership of 15 million out of an overall population of 165 million.

When NBC aired a three-hour broadcast of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* starring Laurence Olivier in 1956, the program drew 50 million viewers.²⁰

The Book of the Month Club (BOMC), founded in 1926, was of a piece with efforts by the general public to consume more serious forms of culture. A five-judge panel comprised of literary professionals, such as professors, novelists, and newspaper editors and columnists, chose books at least as much for their quality as their commercial

¹⁹ Thomas Bender, “Politics, Intellect, and the American University, 1945-1995,” in *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines*, ed. Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998): 24.

²⁰ Fred Siegel, *The Revolt Against the Masses: How Liberalism Has Undermined the Middle Class* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014): 112-3.

potential. In the 1930s and 1940s, the panel chose books by such authors as George Orwell, Arthur Miller, Truman Capote, and Ernest Hemingway. Social critic Dwight Macdonald derided the Club in his famous essay, “Masscult and Midcult,” saying, “the best that can be said is that it could be worse.” But according to Fareed Zakaria, writing with more than forty years of hindsight, “Actually it could have been a lot worse. Although never overtly intellectual or academic, the BOMC found high-quality literature that could appeal to a broad audience.”²¹

Popular consumption of high culture was exemplified by the Great Books movement, which was at its height in the 1950s and early 1960s. This phenomenon originated at the University of Chicago, spearheaded by university president Robert Hutchins and philosophy professor Mortimer Adler. Hutchins and Adler sought not only to give classical works of Western Civilization a pride of place in the school’s curriculum, but also bring the wisdom of the books to the general public. They believed that the positivist, empiricist, value-free social science that was ascendant in the academy during the early twentieth century was inimical to democracy and provided a basis for totalitarianism.²² According to historian Benjamin McArthur:

Hutchins had been preaching since the early 1930s that an “education for democracy” must rest on the immutable tenets laid forth by the great works of our Western tradition. That message won a wide hearing in a nation hungry for guidance.²³

²¹ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003): 216. Macdonald is also quoted here.

²² Alex Beam, *A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008): 70. For a broader discussion of debates in the academy about the philosophical basis of democracy during the first half of the twentieth century, see Edward A. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value* (University Press of Kentucky, 1973).

²³ Benjamin McArthur, quoted in Beam, 70.

Amy Kass, who has chronicled the evolving place of the liberal arts at the University of Chicago, interprets Hutchins and Adler as having:

transformed a technique of general education into a vision of salvation; they believed their Bildungsideal could save mankind and the modern world from moral decay and physical destruction...The Great Books movement, in short, offered an intellectual surrogate for, or supplement to, attendance in church.”²⁴

In 1947, Hutchins and Adler launched the Great Books Foundation, located in Chicago, which sought to stimulate broad public interest in the best works of the Western tradition. The Foundation worked to foster Great Books reading groups, which, according to journalist Alex Beam, were convened “in public libraries, in church basements, chamber of commerce offices, corporate conference rooms at IBM and Grumman Aircraft, in private homes, on army bases, and, yes, in prisons.”²⁵ Moreover, if the Foundation’s statistics on participation are to be believed, there were “50,000 Americans enrolled in groups in 1947 and, after dipping to around 25,000 in the 1950s, rose back to around 47,000 in 1961.”²⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica produced elegant editions of the books, ideal for display in the home, with sales peaking at 50,000 sets in 1961. Of the sets sold by Britannica, it is questionable how many were actually read. Text was laid out in double columns, printed in nine-point Fairfield type.²⁷ Nevertheless, the purchase of these books suggests that segments of the general public had at least some esteem for historic texts of the Western tradition, at least in principle.

²⁴ Amy Kass, quoted in Beam, 74.

²⁵ Beam, 65.

²⁶ Beam, 68.

²⁷ Beam, 95, 106.

1.3 ELITE FEARS OF MASS CULTURE ON THE RIGHT AND LEFT

In the decades leading up to the founding of the NEA and NEH, intellectuals expressed serious concern about the dangers of mass culture and the importance of preserving high culture. Thinkers from across the political and ideological spectrum viewed these as important issues, from Russell Kirk, Ernest van den Haag, and Irving Kristol on the Right to Dwight Macdonald and Irving Howe on the Left. Despite sharp disagreements on various issues, there was at least some overlap among liberal and conservative intellectuals about the dangers facing high culture in modern society, as well as the role that high culture could play in the edification of democracy. According to Herbert Gans, “The socialist criticism of mass culture was in some ways similar to that of the conservatives, although it was not hostile to political democracy or to social and economic equality.”²⁸

Gans identifies four major themes in the criticism of mass or popular culture. The first is the “negative character of popular culture creation;” unlike high culture, it is produced with the goal of making a profit. The second theme is that popular culture debases high culture by borrowing from it; both in terms of copying its content and employing talented artists and writers, who would otherwise be engaged in the production of high culture. The third theme is that popular culture has harmful effects on the audience; that graphic, escapist, titillating forms of entertainment are emotionally, intellectually, and culturally destructive. Fourth, mass culture is harmful to society as a

²⁸ Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis of Evaluation and Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1999): 67-8. Gans does not include Kristol in his list of conservative and liberal mass-culture critics, from which the other names listed above are drawn. However, as I note below, Kristol wrote on this issue, shared similar concerns, and remained attentive to cultural issues throughout his career as a public intellectual.

whole, lowering the level of civilization and “also encouraging totalitarianism by creating a passive audience peculiarly responsive to the techniques of mass persuasion used by demagogues bent on dictatorship.”²⁹

Some intellectuals proposed higher forms of culture as an antidote to the destructive influence of mass culture. They viewed the arts and humanities in a similar way in which Tocqueville viewed religion; as a countervailing force to the more debasing tendencies of life in a commercial republic.³⁰ According to Joli Jensen, intellectual critics of mass culture understood “art” in distinction to lower forms of cultural expression; as “instrumental high culture—a way to uplift and refine the people.”³¹ Critics also saw artists and intellectuals as having a pivotal role to play in helping save the blinkered masses from the debasement of popular entertainment. If the arts and humanities were the saving religion, artists and intellectuals were to be the priests and ministers. Indicative of this perspective is the question posed in a 1959 *Daedalus* symposium, “How can intellectuals ensure that the mass audience is protected from the bad effects of mass culture, and (if possible) exposed to the good effects of art?”³²

Given the urgent need to promote high culture, perhaps there was a role for the federal government. Irving Kristol, called the “godfather of neo-conservatism,” made precisely this argument in a short 1963 article, “Of Newton Minow and Matthew Arnold.”³³ Thirty years later, Kristol would claim that the National Endowment for the

²⁹ Gans, 29. For an elaboration of these themes, see, in its entirety, Gans, “The Critique of Mass Culture,” in *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 29-88.

³⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 517-21.

³¹ Joli Jensen, *Is Art Good for Us?: Beliefs about High Culture in American Life* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002): 117.

³² Jensen, 122-3.

³³ Irving Kristol, “Of Newton Minow & Matthew Arnold,” *The New Leader* 46, no. 1 (1963): 18-20.

Arts had become “mission impossible” because of changes in the art world; namely, because it had become so nihilistic and hostile to the bourgeois way of life.³⁴ But in 1963, Kristol saw that there could be a role for the federal government in supporting elite culture. Because of what the article suggests about the state of elite opinion at the time, it is worth discussing it at some length.

Newton Minow, appointed chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) by President John F. Kennedy, became a controversial political figure, scorned by many in the broadcasting industry. In his first address as FCC chairman, before the National Association of Broadcasters, “Television and the Public Interest,” he admonished his audience to consider their responsibility to the nation. He told those present to consider not only ratings in choosing which programs to air, but also the need to provide edifying options along with entertaining ones, especially for children. Minow’s speech has been mostly remembered for his biting assessment of what constituted much of the programming of the day. He said:

When television is good, nothing—not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers—nothing is better.

But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there, for a day, without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland.³⁵

³⁴ Irving Kristol, “The Capitalist Future” (1991 Francis Boyer Lecture, AEI Annual Dinner, Washington, D.C., December 4, 1991), <http://www.aei.org/publication/the-capitalist-future/>.

³⁵ Newton N. Minow, “Television and the Public Interest” (lecture before the National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1961), <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm>.

Those words, “vast wasteland,” were the most memorable of the speech, used in the title of a front-page headline the following day in the *New York Times*. Television producers did not take kindly to Minow’s admonitions. Sherwood Schwartz, the producer behind the mid-1960s sitcom, *Gilligan’s Island*, indicated his feelings for the FCC chairman by naming the characters’ shipwrecked boat the *S.S. Minnow*.³⁶

Kristol opened his article acknowledging that his feelings toward Minow were “not unmixed.” He believed that Minow was abusing his power by intimidating certain television stations whose programming he disliked. Nevertheless, Kristol continued, “I must also say that I think Mr. Minow is on the side of the angels.” Minow, in Kristol’s view, was focused on a “real and serious problem...How may a democracy control its own self-destructive impulses?” Kristol explained that Minow, in his admonitions and actions vis-à-vis broadcasters, had a kindred spirit in Matthew Arnold, the Victorian poet and social critic. Arnold believed that the health of a society depended on its people acknowledging the difference between things that are “elevated” versus things that are less-so. In pre-democratic times, the clergy and aristocracy preserved this distinction and kept it in the people’s view. But with the withering of those hierarchies, the responsibility of keeping the citizenry mindful of “things that are elevated” fell to the state.³⁷

Kristol acknowledged the dangers of entrusting this task to the government, but was sympathetic to the idea. To involve the government in upholding higher forms of culture, precautions would be necessary. In this vein, Kristol proposed to “work by indirection...through prudent legislation, discreet regulation, generous tax exemptions,

³⁶ James Warren, “Never Mind the ‘Vast Wasteland.’ Minow Has More to Say,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/us/08cncwarren.html?_r=0.

³⁷ Kristol, “Of Newton Minow & Matthew Arnold,” 18-19.

negotiated dispensations (from trade unions, for instance), and—yes, occasional downright special privileges.” Kristol concluded his essay stating:

A policy of this kind could help repair the life of this nation, and bring it into harmony with those moral causes that govern the standing and the falling of states. Always assuming, of course, that we really believe there are such moral causes.³⁸

Though Kristol did not propose the establishment of a federal arts and humanities foundation, the logic that he put forward—acting by indirection—was the same logic behind the NEA and NEH. As will be explained below, while the foundation was to bring government support to bear on the arts and humanities, government officials were not to assume a domineering role. Rather, the foundation was supposed to make decisions on the basis of the non-political expertise of artists and scholars.

1.4 THE HUMANITIES LOBBY GOES TO WORK

By the mid-1960s, for more than a decade, a small group of congressmen had been advocating for federal support for the arts. President Kennedy had expressed support for the idea of a federal arts foundation during his campaign, and with legislative efforts for the arts percolating in Congress, humanists may have sensed an opportunity to push for federal support for literature, history, philosophy, languages, and so on. To that end, in early 1963, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa came together to form the National Commission on the Humanities. This blue-ribbon commission was

³⁸ Kristol, “Of Newton Minow & Matthew Arnold,” 20.

chaired by Brown University president Barnaby Keeney, and its members included several university presidents; academic humanists representing disciplines such as history, English, philosophy, French, and classics; the chair of the United States Atomic Energy Commission; and Arthur Dean, a senior partner of the law firm Sullivan and Cromwell and an advisor to several presidents on foreign affairs. In April of 1964, the Commission published a report, in which it argued that the expansion of humanistic activity was in the national interest and therefore deserving of federal support, and that federal support should be administered by a new independent agency, the National Humanities Foundation.³⁹

The arguments in the report reflected the national consensus about the importance of the humanities described above, from the substance of the humanities to their purported benefits to American life. When the Commission defined the humanities, it did so in a way that aligned with the content of Western Civ courses. The Commission said of the humanities, “The method of education is one based on the liberal tradition we inherit from classical antiquity,” and that the humanities “sustained mankind at the deepest level of being.” By “mankind,” the Commission meant, principally, Europe and the United States:

[The humanities] prospered in Greece and Rome, in the Middle Ages, in the Renaissance, and in the Enlightenment...In the formative years of our own country it was a group of statesmen steeped in the humanities who fused their own experience with that of the past to create the enduring Constitution of the Republic.

At another point in the report, the Commission spoke of the humanities using the words of Matthew Arnold; as “the best that has been thought and said in former times.” And the

³⁹ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities” (1964), https://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/NEH/1964_Commission_on_the_Humanities.pdf.

humanities were presented as providing a source of unity: “We speak, in truth, for what is being defended—our beliefs, our ideals, our highest achievements.”⁴⁰

Like the critics of mass culture, the authors of the report raised concerns about dehumanizing tendencies inherent to the modern world and suggested that the humanities could be an antidote. The increase in human leisure, the Commission argued, presented a grave danger:

When men and women find nothing within themselves but emptiness they turn to trivial and narcotic amusements, and the society of which they are a part becomes socially delinquent and potentially unstable. The humanities are the immemorial answer to man’s questioning and to his need for self-expression; they are uniquely equipped to fill the “abyss of leisure.”

The Commission argued that people needed “a vision [to] be held before them” and that for democracy to flourish, it required “wisdom of the average man.” Moreover, the humanities were necessary in order that America truly benefit from the great scientific advances that were occurring. The Commission stated, “If the interdependence of science and the humanities were more generally understood, men would be more likely to become masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant.”⁴¹ This language about wisdom, vision, and the dangers of technology was repeated verbatim in the enacting legislation of the NEA and NEH.

Perhaps indicative of the confidence that intellectuals felt at the time, as well as the prestige and respect they enjoyed, the Commission attributed a vaunted role to scholars in the humanities. Like the mass-culture critics, the Commission presented scholars as the priests of the religion of the humanities; as the ones who would minister the redemptive power of philosophy, history, and literature to the masses. The

⁴⁰ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities,” 1, 3-4.

⁴¹ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities,” 2-5.

Commission said that scholars in the humanities have “the privilege and obligation of interpreting the past to each new generation of men...” Moreover, “They preserve and judge the fruits of humanity’s previous attempts to depict, to rationalize, and to transcend the world it inhabits.” Furthermore, “It is both the dignity and the duty of humanists to offer their fellow-countrymen whatever understanding can be attained by fallible humanity of such enduring values as justice, freedom, virtue, beauty, and truth.”⁴²

The Commission also noted the potential geopolitical advantages of encouraging the humanities. A National Humanities Foundation, argued the Commission, would help “correct the view of those who see America as a nation interested only in the material aspects of life and Americans as a people skilled only in gadgeteering.” America’s leadership in the world had to be based on more than just power, wealth, and technology. It also must be based on “things of the spirit.”⁴³

As noted above, the understanding of the humanities presented in this report was being displaced at many colleges and universities. Very soon after the publication of this report, more and more colleges and universities began explicitly rejecting the general education ideal and discarding compulsory Western Civ courses. Over the next decade and a half, many scholars within the humanities would contest the Eurocentric perspective found in the report, along with the idea that the humanities were mainly the province of a scholarly elite. In 1980, a second Commission on the Humanities, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, issued a report, “The Humanities in American Life,” in which it said the following about the 1964 report:

Although few people would look back on the early 1960s as an age of American innocence, the earlier Commission’s prescription for invigorating the

⁴² “Report of the Commission on the Humanities,” 3-4.

⁴³ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities,” v, 5.

humanities and our sense of national purpose had a straightforwardness and simplicity that can scarcely be attained today.⁴⁴

Steven Weiland, who served as executive director of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, said in 1980 that the state councils “were organized, fortunately, in a way that implicitly rejected the patronizing attitude of The Commission of [*sic*] the Humanities (1964).”⁴⁵

1.5 LEGISLATIVE PRECURSORS FOR THE ARTS

The Commission on the Humanities report was published when efforts to establish a federal arts foundation were gaining ground in Washington. For at least a decade, a small group of dedicated congressmen had championed greater federal support for the arts, both in the interest of improving the United States’ geopolitical position, as well as to improve the quality of life at home. Opponents of federal support for the arts argued that culture was an inappropriate, even unconstitutional, area in which to involve the national government. They also warned about the prospect of government control over artists and the danger that public money would end up supporting scandalous, morally offensive projects.

In 1957, Senators Jacob Javits (R-NY) and Joseph Clark (D-PA) first introduced legislation to establish a federal arts foundation, with the primary purpose of enabling the

⁴⁴ Commission on the Humanities (1978), *The Humanities in American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980): 8.

⁴⁵ Steven Weiland, “An Introduction to an Introduction,” in *Citizens, Scholars and the Humanities: An Introduction to State Humanities Programs*, ed. Steven Weiland (Minneapolis, MN: Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities, 1980): 4.

performing arts to reach underserved communities. At the time, however, Congress as a whole was only willing to support art as an instrument of foreign policy; mainly to combat communist propaganda that America was materialistic and culturally deficient. Through the International Cultural Exchange and Trade Fair Participation Act of 1956, Congress provided support for artists, dancers, and musicians to visit foreign countries, continuing a program that President Eisenhower had begun two years earlier.⁴⁶

Eisenhower, himself a painter, supported the idea of the federal government doing more on behalf of the arts. In his 1955 State of the Union Address, he stated, “In the advancement of the various activities which will make our civilization endure and flourish, the Federal Government should do more to give official recognition to the importance of the arts and other cultural activities.” To that end, he recommended “the establishment of a Federal Advisory Commission on the Arts within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, to advise the Federal Government on ways to encourage artistic endeavor and appreciation.”⁴⁷ In 1957, Congress held hearings on legislation to enact such a commission. The commission (or “council” as it was called in different versions of the bill) was to be advisory in nature, tasked primarily with preparing studies and making recommendations. The commission would “propose methods to encourage private initiative in the arts and its cooperation with local, State, and Federal departments or agencies to foster artistic and cultural endeavors and the use of the arts both nationally and internationally in the best interests of our country, and to stimulate greater

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *International Cultural Exchange and Trade Fair Participation Act of 1956: Report (to Accompany S. 3116)*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, S. Rep. 1664, 2.

⁴⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 6, 1955, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10416>.

appreciation of the arts by our citizens.”⁴⁸ Congress declined to establish the commission, but passed the National Cultural Center Act in 1958, which led to what became the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The question of government encouragement of the arts was an issue during the 1960 race for President. The Democratic Party platform of that year had a section, “The Arts,” which supported the idea of “a Federal advisory agency to assist in the evaluation, development, and expansion of cultural resources of the United States,” as well as “legislation...to provide incentives for those endowed with extraordinary talent, as a worthy supplement to existing scholarship programs.”⁴⁹ Candidate Senator John F. Kennedy told *Equity* magazine, the journal of Actors’ Equity Association (a labor union representing live theatrical performers), that he was “in fully sympathy” with the proposal by Senators Javits and Clark to set up a federal arts foundation. While the GOP Platform did not have a corresponding section about the arts, it did note cultural exchanges as one of the Eisenhower administration’s accomplishments.⁵⁰ In the same issue of *Equity*, Republican candidate Richard Nixon voiced his support for a federal advisory council, believing that this would be the appropriate first step before considering the creation of a federal foundation.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *A Bill to Provide for the Establishment of a Federal Advisory Commission on the Arts and for other Purposes*, H. R. 3541, 85th Cong., 1st sess. (1957), quoted in U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Federal Advisory Commission on the Arts: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 3541 and Related Bills to Provide for the Establishment of a Federal Advisory Commission on the Arts and for other Purposes*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 2.

⁴⁹ “Democratic Party Platform of 1960,” July 11, 1960, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29602>.

⁵⁰ “Republican Party Platform of 1960,” July 25, 1960, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25839>.

⁵¹ Excerpts from *Equity* magazine quoted in U. S. Congress, Senate, Special Subcommittee on the Arts of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Government and the Arts: Hearing on S. 741, S. 785, S. 1250*, 87th Cong., 2d. sess., 1962, 27-29.

In the 87th Congress, after Kennedy was elected President, arts advocates in Congress introduced bills with several measures to support the arts, including an arts advisory council, grants for states to set up state arts programs, and a federal arts foundation. In regard to the state grants, the goal was to encourage states to set up their own arts programs, which some had already begun. The most prominent state arts program at the time was the New York State Council on Arts, which supported opera, symphony, ballet, theater, and art shows throughout the Empire State. The proposed federal grants program would award matching grants to states to set up agencies or other projects to encourage the arts.⁵² However, none of these proposals—the advisory council, state grants, or federal foundation—were able to pass during that term.

President Kennedy finally established a federal arts advisory council through an executive order on June 12, 1963.⁵³ Senator Hubert Humphrey, one of the most enthusiastic arts advocates in Congress, had proposed that the President set up the council in that manner. Humphrey, in a 1962 letter to August Heckscher, a public intellectual whom Kennedy had appointed special consultant on the arts, suggested that given persistent opposition in the House of Representatives, the President might go ahead and appoint the committee. Should the council prove effective, this would put proponents in the House in a stronger position to fight for statutory authorization.⁵⁴

In December of 1963, the Senate passed legislation to establish both a National Council on the Arts and a federal arts foundation. The Council set up by the statute had

⁵² U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *To Establish a U.S. National Arts Foundation: Report (to Accompany S. 741, as amended)*, 87th Cong., 2d. sess., 1962, S. Rep. 2260.

⁵³ John F. Kennedy, “Executive Order 11112—Establishing the President’s Advisory Council on the Arts,” June 12, 1963, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=59051>.

⁵⁴ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Government and the Arts*, 267-268 (letter from Humphrey to Heckscher, April 18, 1962).

greater heft than the one established by President Kennedy's executive order. Whereas Kennedy's council was comprised of heads of existing federal agencies and up to 30 private citizens, the body established by Congress had a paid full-time chairman and a small paid staff. The federal arts foundation, to be governed by a presidentially appointed director and board of trustees (separate from the Council), would make grants directly in support of cultural projects, as well as matching grants to support arts programs and agencies in the states. Proponents of the bill raised many of the arguments that had been in the air, such as how support for art could enhance America's reputation internationally, the importance of bringing culture to underserved regions, citizens' growing demand for culture, financial needs within the art world, and the benefits of art to the overall quality of American life.

Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, then a Democrat, was the most vociferous opponent of the legislation, arguing that it was an inappropriate expansion of federal power and risked endangering artistic creativity. In his remarks on the Senate floor, Thurmond asserted that the federal government was one of "limited powers" and said, "It would require an imagination of truly artistic, rather than legalistic, talents to justify this measure under the general welfare clause or under any other section of the Constitution." Beyond the constitutionality issue, Thurmond contended that a centralized agency would "eventually lead to sterility of thought and production" and would be unlikely to fund original work. He stressed that since the arts had flourished in America without government support, Washington should continue to limit its participation.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ 109 Cong. Rec. 25263-4 (1963).

The House, still the less enthusiastic chamber, in 1964 passed a bill to establish the National Arts Council, but dropped the provision for a federal arts foundation. Much of the floor debate focused on the idea of federal subsidies for art, with opponents warning that this advisory council was just the proverbial camel's nose under the tent. House opponents, like Senator Thurmond, argued that this was an inappropriate area for federal involvement. Some members charged that the Council and the prospect of a federal arts foundation represented wasteful, frivolous government spending. Other members warned that a federal arts foundation would end up funding work that was morally suspect. Congressman John Ashbrook (R-OH) warned (presciently, as it turned out) that the government would end up funding sexually explicit projects.⁵⁶ Opponents of the legislation on the Committee on Education and Labor authored a brief set of minority views, arguing:

We can fully expect, if this bill is sanctioned, that the Federal Government, in the name of art and culture, will soon be called upon to subsidize everything from bellydancing [*sic*] to the ballet; from Handel to the Hootenanny; from Brahms to the Beatles; from symphonies to the striptease.⁵⁷

After the House passed the arts council legislation, by a vote of 213 to 135, with 82 members abstaining,⁵⁸ the Senate quickly passed the House version,⁵⁹ establishing the National Arts Council.

⁵⁶ 110 Cong. Rec. 20645-64 (1964).

⁵⁷ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Arts and Cultural Development Act of 1964: Report (to Accompany H. R. 9586)*, "Minority Views," 88th Cong., 2d. sess., 1964, H. Rep. 1476, 7.

⁵⁸ 110 Cong. Rec. 20664 (1964).

⁵⁹ 110 Cong. Rec. 20925 (1964).

1.6 THE CORNERSTONE OF THE GREAT SOCIETY

The national consensus about the need to enrich America's cultural life, combined with the Democratic landslide of the 1964 election, paved the way for the enactment of federal subsidies for the arts and humanities. Federal support for culture became part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society agenda, in which the government was to be concerned not only with citizens' material needs (the focus of New Deal liberalism, as explained below), but also with citizens' spiritual aspirations and quality of life. President Johnson's vision for the Great Society bore the hallmarks of intellectuals' concerns about mass culture and the importance of the arts and humanities for improving the quality of American life. In his 1964 speech at the University of Michigan, in which he outlined his vision of the Great Society, LBJ identified improving the "quality of our American civilization" as the biggest challenge confronting the nation. The Great Society, he argued, was a place where "leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness... where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community... where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods." Toward the end of his speech, he charged the graduates:

You can help build a society where the demands of morality, and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the Nation... Will you join in the battle to build the Great Society, to prove that our material progress is only the foundation on which we will build a richer life of mind and spirit?⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the University of Michigan," May 22, 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26262>.

Developments in liberal political thought presaged LBJ's emphasis on spiritual concerns. In a 1956 essay, "The Future of Liberalism," Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. argued that while the "quantitative" liberalism of the New Deal was necessary to confront the economic crisis of the Great Depression, a "qualitative liberalism" was needed to meet the challenges of the new age of material prosperity. Bemoaning the "cultural mediocrity" in which the American people found themselves, Schlesinger wrote that it was urgent to "move on to the more subtle and complicated problem of fighting for individual dignity, identity, and fulfillment in a mass society," calling for, among other things, "the bettering of our mass media, and the elevation of our popular culture."⁶¹ In March of 1965, Schlesinger sent a copy of this essay to Richard Goodwin, an advisor and speechwriter for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, along with a note saying, "I'm glad you fellows are catching up."⁶²

The idea of a federal humanities foundation, after the recommendations of the Commission on the Humanities, quickly attracted supporters in Congress. In August of 1964, several months after the Commission released its report, Congressman William Moorhead (D-PA) introduced legislation to establish such a foundation, saying that it could be "the cornerstone of the 'great society.'"⁶³

In January of 1965, at the start of the 89th session, Senator Ernest Gruening (D-AK) introduced a bill to establish a federal humanities foundation, while Moorhead reintroduced similar legislation in the House. To the consternation of arts advocates,

⁶¹ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Future of Liberalism," *The Reporter*, May 3, 1956, 8-11.

⁶² Schlesinger to Goodwin, March 2, 1965, Office Files of Richard Goodwin, Johnson Library, quoted in Sidney M. Milkis, "Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the 'Twilight' of the Modern Presidency," in *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, eds. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005): 40 (footnote 31).

⁶³ 110 Cong. Rec. 19945 (1964) (statement by Congressman Moorhead).

these bills included the arts within the orbit of the humanities. Senator Javits, therefore, introduced legislation for a federal foundation to support the arts alone.⁶⁴ Throughout the development of what became the final legislation, Javits remained insistent that the incorporation of the humanities not detract from support for the arts, for which he had long fought.⁶⁵

The Johnson administration was not inclined to enact two separate federal agencies.⁶⁶ However, the President had previously expressed sympathy for both the arts and humanities. In a speech at Brown University in September of 1964, he said, “I look with the greatest of favor” upon the recommendations of the Commission on the Humanities for a federal humanities foundation.⁶⁷ In his 1965 State of the Union Address, he pledged to propose a National Foundation on the Arts.⁶⁸

In March of 1965, following several weeks of hearings on various proposed bills, the Bureau of the Budget developed two options for federal support of culture: (1) a National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities to be housed within the Smithsonian Institution; and (2) an independent federal agency composed of two endowments, each with its own chairman and national council. The administration ultimately came down on

⁶⁴ Livingston Biddle, *Our Government and the Arts: A Perspective from the Inside* (New York: ACA Books, 1988): 63-4.

⁶⁵ During hearings, Javits accepted the inclusion of the humanities, but insisted that this not “dilute or divert us from the main issue which has always been before us, to wit, the issue of the performing and other similar arts.” U. S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations: Joint Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare United States Senate on H. R. 334, H. R. 2043, H. R. 3617, and Similar Bills, Part 1*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, 21.

⁶⁶ Biddle, 64.

⁶⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks in Providence at the 200th Anniversary Convocation of Brown University,” September 28, 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26534>.

⁶⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 4, 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26907>.

the side of independence, the preference of artists and humanists. On March 10, Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) introduced The National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, with Senators Gruening and Javits as cosponsors. Companion legislation was introduced in the House by Congressman Frank Thompson (D-NJ), with Congressman Moorhead and others as cosponsors.⁶⁹

With the backing of the President and substantial Democratic majorities in both chambers of Congress (68 Democrats in the Senate and 295 in the House), the legislation passed handily. In the Senate, the legislation twice passed by voice vote, first on June 10,⁷⁰ and then again on September 16, after it had passed the House in amended form.⁷¹ The only opposition came from Senator Thurmond, who, prior to the second vote, reiterated his view that the federal government lacked the constitutional authority to establish such an agency, and that government support would result in mediocre art and the stifling of creativity.⁷²

The House had a more spirited debate over the legislation to establish the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, with various members, mostly Republican, rising in opposition. Opponents raised similar concerns to what they had expressed the previous year when the House debated the establishment of the National Arts Council. Opponents warned about the prospect of government control over the arts, which could foster mediocrity, and concerns about growing the federal budget.⁷³ In a set of minority views, a group of Republican members raised several other objections: what

⁶⁹ Biddle, 121-5.

⁷⁰ 111 Cong. Rec. 13110 (1965).

⁷¹ 111 Cong. Rec. 23980 (1965).

⁷² 111 Cong. Rec. 24168 (1965).

⁷³ 111 Cong. Rec. 23937-84 (1965).

they viewed as a complicated administrative structure; the “myth of American cultural backwardness” that supposedly made this legislation necessary; and the fact that Congress had not considered more indirect ways of supporting cultural development.⁷⁴ In the end, the legislation passed by voice vote, with a motion to recommit failing by a vote of 128 to 251.

Table 1. House Vote on Motion to Recommit the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965⁷⁵

	Aye	Nay	Not Voting
Democrats	50	207	36
Republicans	78	44	17
Total	128	251	53

Much of the opposition to the legislation had to do with the idea of government support for the arts, not the humanities, which were less controversial. Congressman Albert Quie (R-MN), who voted against the legislation, said that had the bill just been for a federal humanities foundation, he would have voted for it.⁷⁶ In his own set of minority views, he explained that it would be appropriate for the federal government to balance its support for the sciences in higher education with support for the humanities.⁷⁷ During debate on the House floor, Congressman Robert Duncan (D-OR), who voted against the legislation, stated that a bill to support the arts alone would not have passed; that the arts needed to be combined with the humanities, given that there was more widespread

⁷⁴ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965: Report (to Accompany H. R. 9460)*, “Minority Views,” 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, H. Rep. 618, 19-23.

⁷⁵ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, “To Recommit H. R. 9460, National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965,” September 14, 1965, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/89-1965/h154>.

⁷⁶ 111 Cong. Rec. 23954 (1965).

⁷⁷ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965: Report (to Accompany H. R. 9460)*, “Additional Views of Congressman Albert H. Quie,” 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, H. Rep. 618, 24.

agreement about the need to rectify the imbalance of federal support for the sciences in higher education.⁷⁸ In later years, Senator Pell also acknowledged that the inclusion of the humanities was necessary to achieve federal support for the arts.⁷⁹

When members of Congress spoke of their support for the humanities, they reflected a view of the humanities like that which was part of general education and presented in the report of the Commission on the Humanities. Senator Ross Bass (D-TN), for example, during hearings, said the following about the importance of bringing federal support behind the arts and humanities:

We need to encourage our young people to know and understand the heritage which is the foundation of our present culture so that they may develop it further. They need to better understand the teachings of such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas and John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Jefferson—to better understand the works of such artists as Michelangelo, Titian, the impressionists, the abstractionists, and the social commentators in paint.⁸⁰

Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) remarked, “as an avid reader, I am presently embarked on a repeat adventure in reading through the complete works of William Shakespeare.”⁸¹ And Senator Gruening (D-AK) spoke of Latin and Greek as “essential to a well-rounded education” and lamented that they were in decline.⁸²

⁷⁸ 111 Cong. Rec. 23965-6 (1965).

⁷⁹ Pell said during a hearing years later, “The arts...rode on the coattails of the humanities...And I remember at that time persuading my colleagues, persuading the ranking minority member: Let us include the humanities, and then maybe finally we will get this idea across of support for the arts, an idea that my colleague from New York had pioneered in developing long before I had come to the Congress.” U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman, of Virginia, to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 94th Cong., 2d. sess., 1976, 12.

⁸⁰ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations: Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare on Bills to Establish National Foundations on the Arts and Humanities, Part 2*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, 555.

⁸¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations*, 633.

⁸² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations*, 638-639.

The Endowments were designed with the goal of awarding grants on the basis of professional standards in the arts and humanities, just as grants awarded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) were awarded according to scientific expertise. Frederick Burkhardt, president of ACLS, said during hearings on legislation to establish a federal humanities foundation, “This would be their foundation, directed by their peers, related to their interests and aims in a way that no bureau or agency within the Government is at present, or is ever likely to be.”⁸³ As will be explained in depth in chapter seven, both the NEA and NEH were structured so as to empower their respective chairmen to follow the recommendations of experts in the arts and humanities; private citizens that the agencies would bring in to evaluate proposals. The founders of the agencies sought to empower the chairmen to resist pressure from politicians; for example, to distribute funding toward favored constituencies or reject proposals because they might seem controversial. These goals were of a piece with the great esteem that intellectuals had at the time.

1.7 CONCLUSION

“It now represents a real consensus of the country.” So said Senator Javits at the passage of the final legislation, which was, for him, the culmination of more than 15 years of work in Congress.⁸⁴ Though arts and humanities organizations, such as ACLS, advocated for the establishment of a new federal foundation, it was not because of their

⁸³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 334, H.R. 2043, H.R. 3617, and Similar Bills, Part 2*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 1965, 282.

⁸⁴ 111 Cong. Rec. 24167 (1965).

political clout that Congress acted. Rather, these organizations introduced the idea at a time when elites and the general public were positively disposed toward the arts and humanities. According to Livingston Biddle, the Pell staffer who shepherded the enacting legislation through Congress (and later became chairman of the NEA), if any interest group was important in securing passage of the bill, it was organized labor, which in 1965 “was identified as a force for good, if not total enlightenment, by a great majority of the Congress and by the administrations, first of Kennedy and then of Johnson.” The AFL-CIO endorsed the legislation, of which Biddle said, “We could not have asked for more than this.”⁸⁵ Yet the NEH’s dependence on a general enthusiasm for the idea of federal support for culture put the agency in a precarious position, which became evident almost immediately after it was enacted.

⁸⁵ Biddle, 86-87.

2.0 PARTY POSITION CHANGE IN THE 1970S

“But, first of all, I would like to say I have heard and seen more converts today than I have in a long, long time. I regret that I did not bring a load of sawdust over to sprinkle in the aisles here in the House Chamber. More Members have been converted to the cause of arts and humanities than I ever expected to hear of in my life.”¹

Thus said a dismayed Harold R. Gross (R-IA) during debate over the 1970 reauthorization of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act. In what came as a surprise to Gross, among others, the GOP abandoned its initial opposition to federal funding for culture, and Republicans in Congress became vigorous champions of the NEA and NEH. Throughout the 1970s, Republicans joined Democrats in increasing the Endowments’ budgets, which reached their all-time real-dollar peak in 1979. For the first half of the 1970s, the Republican and Democratic positions on the agencies were indistinguishable. But beginning in the mid-1970s, while both parties remained supportive of the NEA and NEH, divisions between Republicans and Democrats began to arise over what the agencies ought to represent and how they ought to carry out their mission.

These divisions were often framed as a conflict between elitism and populism. In the 1970s, while Republicans were generally on the side of elitism and Democrats on the side of populism, the elitism-populism cleavage did not fall neatly along partisan lines. A

¹ 116 Cong. Rec 22146 (1970).

minority of Republicans retained the GOP's original opposition to the existence of the NEA and NEH, arguing that they represented the condescension of America's cultural "elite" (a term of opprobrium in this case) and a frivolous waste of taxpayer dollars. Other Republican officials and conservative public intellectuals, however, proudly assumed the mantle of "elitism," arguing that the NEH should focus on promoting high culture, namely academic research and scholarly-driven programs, and making grant decisions on the basis of merit or excellence as determined by strict peer review. In this sense, they embraced something akin to the original Great Society vision for the agency. Democrats exhibited populist, small-d democratic sensibilities in their insistence that the NEH broaden its reach by awarding grants to nontraditional recipients, underrepresented groups, and having the NEH cede control of the state humanities councils to state governments. Some politically liberal intellectuals, though, found themselves more aligned with Republican policymakers and conservative intellectuals, arguing that the Endowments should award funds solely on the basis of cultural excellence.

I approach this analysis of Democratic and Republican positioning on the NEH through the lens of David Karol's theory of party-position change. Karol defines political parties as "coalitions of groups with intense preferences on issues managed by politicians."² By "group," he means a "self-aware collection of individuals who share intense concerns about a particular policy area." Groups are bigger than the organizations that they encompass; for example, the "religious right" is a group that has included organizations such as the Christian Coalition and Moral Majority, and "the labor

² David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 7.

movement” has included different unions. By “issue” he refers to big policy questions, as opposed to specific pieces of legislation.³

Karol argues that position change is a byproduct of the party managing its coalition. He presents three modes of party position change: coalition maintenance, coalition group incorporation, and coalition expansion. Coalition maintenance happens when a party changes its position in response to the demands of a group that is already part of its coalition. Coalition group incorporation happens when a party changes its position to bring in a new a group. Coalition expansion occurs in the absence of groups with a stake or interest in the issue; politicians take a new stand in an effort to appeal to the general public.⁴

The two models that are helpful in explaining the development of the politics of the NEH during the 1970s are coalition expansion in the case of Republicans and coalition maintenance in the case of Democrats. In the early 1970s, the idea of federal funding for the humanities was a “groupless” issue. This meant that President Nixon had the freedom to back the NEA and NEH in an effort to bolster the GOP’s appeal (or at least his own image) among the general public. Republican politicians rapidly changed their stand on the issue at hand; hence Congressman Gross’s lament about the stunning number of “conversions” he witnessed among his fellow Republicans. By the mid-1970s, as the NEH was giving away more money, Democrats had a political incentive to push for a broader distribution of funds to previously underserved populations such as racial and ethnic minorities: groups that were within the party’s coalition.

³ Karol, 8-9.

⁴ Karol, 18-20.

Coalition expansion and coalition maintenance are similar in that they both involve the parties rapidly changing position, and the change is because incumbent politicians take new stands, not because they are replaced. Conversion or “flip-flopping,” therefore, is a major source of party-position change. In fact, to remain ideologically consistent as a Republican or Democrat can require inconsistency—changing one’s views—on policy substance. In such instances, politicians reinterpret the implications of conservative or liberal principles or ideals with respect to a particular issue.⁵

A significant way in which coalition expansion and coalition maintenance differ is in the stability of the policy change. In coalition expansion, because of the absence of groups, the new position is unstable; politicians can easily revert back to the original stance. In coalition maintenance, on the other hand, the new position tends to be stable. Politicians are hemmed in by the demands of pleasing their existing constituents and have little latitude to modify their position.⁶

2.1 THE NEH’S EARLY YEARS: HOSTILE REPUBLICANS LIMIT AGENCY GROWTH

As described in the previous chapter, the NEH was enacted because of a national consensus about the value of federal funding for the arts and humanities. As James Q. Wilson explains in regard to these kinds of policies, “When a consensus evaporates or a symbol loses its power, issues are handled by a process which...gives the advantage to

⁵ Karol, 3, 15.

⁶ Karol, 19.

the opponents of change.”⁷ This aptly characterizes the difficulties that the NEH faced during its first four years. Republicans attacked the NEH for grants that seemed frivolous, capped its budget, and limited the length of its first reauthorization. Democrats demonstrated cooling enthusiasm, with many of them voting with Republicans to limit appropriations and some even voting against the first reauthorization, despite originally having supported the founding of the new federal foundation. Wilson’s account of majoritarian agencies bears hallmarks of Karol’s description of groupless issues; because of the absence of interested constituencies, political support can be unstable. At this point in time, important constituencies within the Democratic and Republican parties were not particularly interested in federal funding for culture.

Shortly after the founding of the NEH, Congress chose to keep appropriations modest, below what it had authorized. In 1967, the House proposed an appropriation of \$3 million in direct program funds for the NEH for the 1968 fiscal year (not counting the appropriation of matching funds in the event of private gifts).⁸ This amount was less than the \$5 million that was authorized. It was also less than the House was willing to give the NEA and less than the NEH had to spend in total the previous fiscal year. In fiscal year 1967, the NEH had \$4.5 million in direct program funds at its disposal—\$2 million from that year’s appropriation and approximately \$2.5 million from the 1966 appropriation, which had gone mostly unspent because the agency needed additional time to get organized.⁹

⁷ James Q. Wilson, “American Politics, Then & Now,” *Commentary* 67, no. 2 (1979): 44.

⁸ 113 Cong. Rec. 10806 (1967).

⁹ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1968: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 2*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 821 (NEH Budget Justification).

During the appropriations debate, House Republicans pushed for limiting spending, with some members calling attention to grants that seemed to epitomize wasteful federal spending. Congressman Durward Gorham Hall (R-MO), who had opposed the enacting legislation, seized on a grant of \$8,789 to UC Santa Barbara art professor David Kunzle for a study on “The History of the Comic Strip.”¹⁰ Hall introduced an amendment to freeze the NEH’s funding at the previous year’s level of \$2 million. Though Hall’s proposal lost by a vote 29-99, his attacks pushed the House to keep appropriations modest.¹¹ When the House and Senate compromised on appropriations, the NEH was awarded \$3.5 million in definite program funds (not counting funding for matching gifts), still below the \$4.5 million in direct program funds which the NEA received.¹²

When it came time to reauthorize the NEA and NEH for the first time, Republicans successfully limited appropriations levels. The bill that came out of the House Committee on Education and Labor authorized appropriations up to \$40 million for NEH program funds in FY 1970, but that figure did not last long. Congressman John Ashbrook (R-OH), who had opposed the founding of the NEA and NEH, introduced an amendment to reauthorize the NEA and NEH for a single year and hold appropriations to what they were in FY 1968: \$4.5 million in program funds for the NEA and \$3.5 million for the NEH. Ashbrook’s amendment passed by a vote of 261-131. He carried nearly the entire Republican caucus, in addition to almost half of the Democrats—including 42

¹⁰ 113 Cong. Rec. 3043 (1967).

¹¹ 113 Cong. Rec. 10816 (1967). Senator Ralph Yarborough (D-TX), a backer of the Endowments, attributed the House’s reluctance to fund the NEH at a higher level to Hall’s attacks. See, 113 Cong. Rec. 11205 (1967).

¹² *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1968*. Public Law 90-28, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 81 (1967): 74-5.

Democrats who had voted for the establishment of the NEA and NEH in 1965.¹³ Later that year, the House passed the conference legislation, which reauthorized the agency for two years and allowed for slightly higher appropriations, by a vote of 194-166. The bill was favored by a majority of Democrats and opposed by a majority of Republicans. Of the 63 Democrats to vote against the reauthorization, 16 of them had voted to enact the NEA and NEH three years earlier.¹⁴

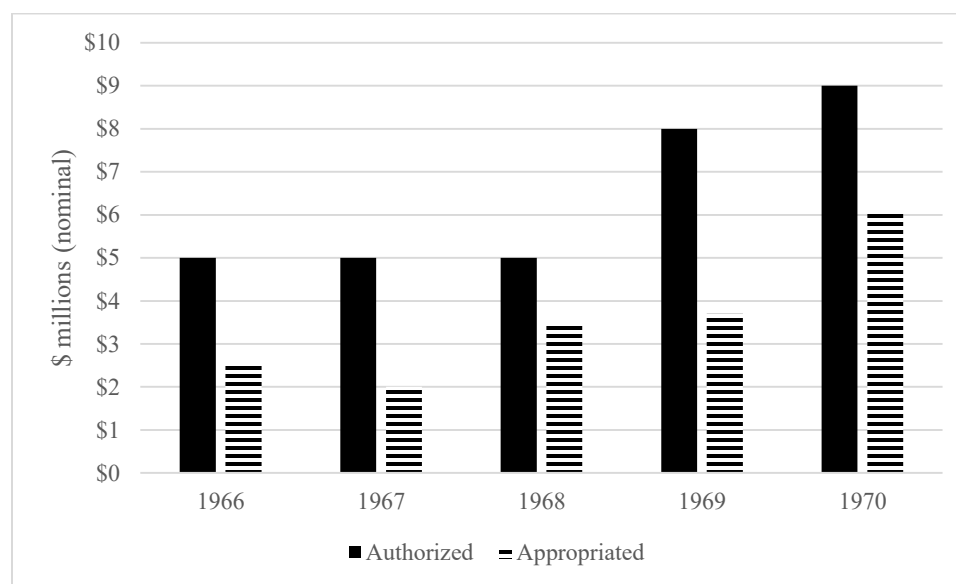
But even with the higher authorization levels in place—\$8 million for FY 1969 and \$9 million for FY 1970—Congress was reluctant to appropriate significantly increased funds. For FY 1969, Congress gave the NEH only \$200,000 more in program funds than the previous year, to the dismay of Senators Javits and Pell, the leading sponsors of the Endowments. Javits noted his “deep concern” and remarked, “apparently neither the Senate committee, nor the House of Representatives, at least so far, realizes the tremendous significance which is attached to these funds in the future of our country and in the hearts and minds of the American people.” He reported having attempted to restore \$1 million in definite funds and \$500,000 in matching funds to both the NEA and NEH in committee, but had “failed, by lopsided votes in both cases.”¹⁵ Four years after the agency’s launch, it was unclear that the NEA and NEH would ever grow at a rate beyond this halting pace.

¹³ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, “To Amend H.R. 11308, a Bill to Amend the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act, by Cutting Authorization from the Committee Approved Level of \$55 Million for Fiscal [sic] and \$80 Million for Fiscal 1970 to \$11.2 Million for Fiscal 1969,” February 27, 1968, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/90-1968/h262>.

¹⁴ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, “Conference Report on H.R. 11308, a Bill to Amend the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act by Extending the Foundation for 2 Years,” June 5, 1968, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/90-1968/h333>.

¹⁵ 90 Cong. Rec. 18855 (1968).

Figure 1. NEH Program Funds, 1966 – 1970: Authorized Versus Appropriated¹⁶



Early leaders of the NEH have spoken to the political difficulties and lack of enthusiasm that the agency dealt with in the early years. In April 1969, the NEH’s first chairman, Barnaby Keeney, was asked what he thought were the agency’s greatest accomplishments. “Surviving!” was his answer. Keeney added, “this is a very vulnerable operation, and it’s an operation that lends itself to controversy. It’s quite easy to make grants that will irritate more people than they will please.”¹⁷ Armen Tashdianian, who joined NEH as a staffer that same year, also spoke to the uncertainty that agency staff felt early on. When asked about how the agency understood its mission, Tashdianian, like his first boss, answered, “Survive.” Tashdianian recalled that after the Great Society Congress ended, there were fears at NEH that the agency risked being eliminated.¹⁸ Ronald Berman, who became chairman in 1971, said that one of the NEH’s “incipient problems” was “the restrained enthusiasm of Congress for the humanities.” According to Berman,

¹⁶ 122 Cong. Rec. 11094 (1976).

¹⁷ Barnaby C. Keeney, interview by Dorothy Pierce McSweeney, April 14, 1969, http://web2.millercenter.org/lbj/oralhistory/keeney_barnaby_1969_0414.pdf, 12-13.

¹⁸ Armen Tashdianian (former NEH staffer) interviewed by author, August 16, 2013.

“while there was a minority in the House and Senate which actively promoted the two endowments the majority might be said only to tolerate them. The purposes of the [NEA and NEH] were often misunderstood, and sympathy for them was not extensive.”¹⁹

2.2 REPUBLICANS CHANGE POSTION

All this changed, however, in 1970. The NEH went from surviving to thriving because of a rapid, dramatic position change by Republicans. President Nixon, in a December 1969 message to Congress, called for reauthorizing the NEA and NEH and increasing their FY 1971 budget to \$40 million. He offered many of the same arguments that proponents of the Endowments had voiced for years, framing it as an issue of advancing “the quality of life.” Nixon closed his message with words that could just as easily have come from President John F. Kennedy or Senator Hubert Humphrey: “Few investments we could make would give us so great a return in terms of human understanding, human satisfaction and the intangible but essential qualities of grace, beauty and spiritual fulfillment.”²⁰

Nixon, in all likelihood, decided to back the NEA and NEH for reasons of both politics and policy. According to Jane Alexander, who served as NEA chairman between 1993 and 1997, Leonard Garment, a Nixon advisor, told her that the President hoped that

¹⁹ Ronald Berman, *Culture & Politics* (New York: University Press of America, 1984): 5.

²⁰ Richard Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress About Funding and Authorization of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities,” December 10, 1969, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2367>.

supporting federal arts funding would mollify antiwar activists.²¹ Nixon also may have truly believed that increasing federal support for culture would be good for America. David Smith, author of a history of the NEA, does not discount political motives, but also argues that Nixon thought that art could help ameliorate social ills. In Smith’s words, Nixon believed that “the American soul was under fire,” with “the threat coming from the counterculture and the growing pervasiveness and acceptance of the pornographic, the obscene, and the anti-American.” Smith interprets Nixon as believing that art had the potential to improve the “moral life” of the nation.²²

Many Republicans in Congress quickly followed Nixon’s lead in regard to the cultural agencies. In 1970, when the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act was up for reauthorization, the House considered a bill to extend the NEA and NEH for another three years. The bill authorized an appropriation level of \$40 million for FY 1971, per the President’s request, and placed no limits on funding levels in FY 1972 and 1973. The House passed the bill by a vote of 262 to 78. The partisan breakdown on that vote was as follows:

Table 2. House Vote in 1970 on Reauthorization Legislation²³

	Aye	Nay	Not Voting
Democrats	163	34	46
Republicans	99	44	43
Total	262	78	89

²¹ Donna M. Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 172.

²² David A. Smith, *Money for Art: The Tangled Web of Art and Politics in American Democracy* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008): 105-6.

²³ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, “To Pass H.R. 16065, a Bill to Amend the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, as Amended,” June 30, 1970, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/91-1970/h286>.

Of the 99 Republicans who voted in favor of the bill, 49 of them were converts from having previously opposed to the NEA and NEH. All of those 49 members had voted against the establishment of the agencies in 1965, against the reauthorization in 1968, or both. The “converts” of that day included, among others, future Republican president Gerald Ford, then a Michigan congressman.²⁴

When it came time to reauthorize the NEA and NEH again in 1973, Republicans voted to do so by wide margins, with a significant number even resisting efforts to moderate spending. Both Representative Jack Kemp (R-NY) and Senator William Proxmire (D-WI) introduced amendments in their respective chambers to limit appropriations increases. Kemp’s amendment would have held appropriations to the FY 1973 level. It failed by a vote of 141 to 248. His measure won a majority of the Republican caucus—but barely. 72 Republicans joined 175 Democrats in voting against it. Of the 72 Republicans, 23 of them had voted against the establishment of the NEA and NEH in 1965 and its reauthorization in 1968. Moreover, when it came time to vote on the final House version of the legislation and House-Senate conference legislation, a majority of the Republican caucus voted in favor of reauthorization.

²⁴ 116 Cong. Rec. 22151 (1970).

Table 3. House Votes in 1973 on Reauthorization Legislation²⁵

	Kemp Amendment			Reauthorization			House-Senate Conference		
	Aye	Nay	Not Voting	Aye	Nay	Not Voting	Aye	Nay	Not Voting
Democrats	39	175	31	185	18	42	181	31	33
Republicans	102	72	19	123	45	25	112	75	7
Independent		1		1			1		
Total	141	248	50	309	63	67	294	106	40

In the Senate, Proxmire's bill would have slowed the increase in budget authorizations relative to the bill reported out of committee: \$120 million versus \$160 million in FY 1974, \$160 million versus \$280 million in FY 1975, and \$200 million versus \$400 million in FY 1976. That amendment was defeated by a vote of 61 to 30, with Republicans voting 29 to 10 in opposition. The Senate went on to approve the reauthorization by wide margin.

Table 4. Senate Votes in 1973 on Reauthorization Legislation²⁶

	Proxmire Amendment			Reauthorization		
	Aye	Nay	Not Voting	Aye	Nay	Not Voting
Democrats	20	32	5	44	7	5
Republicans	10	29	4	31	6	5
Independent					1	
Conservative				1		
Total	30	61	9	76	14	10

²⁵ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, "To Amend H.R. 3926, a Bill to Extend the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act by Cutting Funding to \$81 Million, a Reduction of \$64 Million," June 14, 1973, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1973/h153>; U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, "To Pass H.R. 3926," June 14, 1973, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1973/h155>; and U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, "To Agree to the Conference Report on S. 795, a Bill Amending the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965," October 2, 1973, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1973/h361>.

²⁶ U. S. Congress, Senate, "To Amend S. 395, a Bill to Authorize Funds for the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities for Fiscal Years 1974-76, so as to Provide \$120 Million Increases in the Program through Fiscal Year 1976, Instead of \$400 Million," May 2, 1973, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1973/s105>; and U. S. Congress, Senate, "To Pass S. 795, a Bill to Authorize Funds for the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities for Fiscal Years 1974-76," May 2, 1973, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1973/s107>.

The next two reauthorizations, in 1976 and 1980, also passed with broad bipartisan support. When the 1976 reauthorization legislation came before the House, Republicans supported it by a two-to-one margin. That same year, the Republican Party Platform reflected the GOP's stance in favor of federal funding for the arts and humanities:

The Republican Party is proud of its record of support to the arts and humanities during the last eight years...This upward trend in funding for the National Arts and Humanities Endowments deserves to continue but Washington's presence should never dominate."²⁷

Table 5. House Vote in 1976 on Reauthorization Legislation²⁸

	Aye	Nay	Not Voting
Democrats	199	19	69
Republicans	80	40	25
Total	279	59	94

In 1980, legislation reauthorizing the NEA and NEH for five years passed both houses of Congress on voice votes, with Congressman William D. Ford (D-MI) noting, "I do not believe this is a controversial measure."²⁹

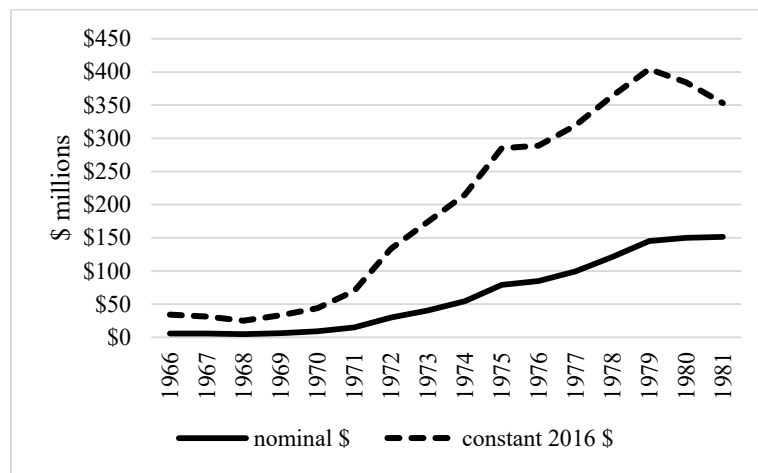
Backed by Democrats and Republicans, the NEH received a significant increase in appropriations, its budget reaching its all-time real-dollar peak in 1979.

²⁷ "Republican Party Platform of 1976," August 18, 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25843>.

²⁸ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, "To Pass H.R. 12838, to Amend and Extend the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, by Providing for the Improvement of Museum Services and by Establishing a Challenge Grant Program," April 26, 1976, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/94-1976/h756>.

²⁹ 126 Cong. Rec. 29946 (1980).

Figure 2. NEH Appropriations: 1966 – 1981³⁰



With Congress demonstrating its support, the NEA and NEH helped their own cause, taking on projects that bolstered their popularity among politicians. In this regard, the timing of the Bicentennial could not have been more fortuitous. The NEA and NEH took ownership of the federal government’s efforts to celebrate this milestone in the nation’s history, which they used as justification to ask Congress for more funding. Though the additional resources enabled some grants that were explicitly focused on the Bicentennial, the higher appropriations ultimately enabled the Endowments to do more of what they were already doing, as well as start new programs. Chairman Berman, in a chapter of his memoir, “Kidnapping the Bicentennial,” explains:

The definition of the Bicentennial was changed: it no longer meant the celebration of a single occasion but the extended activity of NEA and NEH. Leonard Garment had done something taking the combined talents of Willie Sutton and the Duke of Urbino.³¹

As Berman’s deputy chairman Robert Kingston recalls, were it not for the bicentennial, life for NEH would not have been as good.³²

³⁰ Humanities Indicators, “Federal Funding for the Humanities,” <https://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=11>.

³¹ Berman, 32.

³² Robert Kingston (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, April 30, 2014.

In this period of strong bipartisan support, the NEH benefitted from its connection to the NEA more so than the other way around. While the incorporation of the humanities was originally necessary to secure funding for the arts, by the 1970s, the latter had become the more popular of the two. Part of this was because of NEA chairman Nancy Hanks, who had “talent for political persuasion.”³³ The arts were also more intelligible than the humanities, a term that many congressmen still did not understand. Berman recalls:

The Arts Endowment had very quickly become the congressional favorite for a number of reasons. It served large audiences and it did things comprehensible to anyone who watched a performance. It had a fantastically good press. And it was backed by hundreds of institutions well experienced in lobbying for funds.

Therefore, Berman was determined that the humanities would never be separated from the arts.³⁴ Len Oliver, who served on staff at NEH beginning in 1971, remembers how the agency benefitted from its connection to the more popular NEA. As Oliver recalled, Hanks would go before the appropriations committees, and members would “ooh” and “ah.” Then, when it was Berman’s turn and members would ask what he wanted, he would request equivalent funding.³⁵

Still, the NEH also supported programs that increased the agency’s visibility. As Berman noted, he wanted to capture favorable media attention, which could bolster the agency’s standing among policymakers.³⁶ NEH projects that enjoyed greater publicity included traveling exhibitions of art and historic artifacts. The most notable of these was

³³ Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham, eds., *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009), 38.

³⁴ Berman, 10.

³⁵ Len Oliver (former NEH staffer) interviewed by author, May 21, 2014.

³⁶ Berman, 14.

“The Treasures of Tutankhamun,” which was seen by millions of people in several cities and is credited for “helping usher in the era of the blockbuster museum exhibition.”³⁷

Other notable NEH sponsored initiatives of the mid-1970s included:

- histories of each state, produced under the auspices of the American Association for State and Local History
- *The Adams Chronicles*, a TV miniseries that traced 150 years of the family that included U.S. presidents John and John Quincy, which ran on PBS and won four Emmy Awards
- a highly publicized half-a-million dollar matching gift to the New York Public Library³⁸

Of course, members were pleased with what they saw the Endowments doing in their home districts and states. Congressman Gerald Ford, for example, took pride in a sculpture by Alexander Calder erected in his home city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This was a project that had been made possible by a grant from the NEA and matching funds raised locally. Ford said that this project was “a good illustration of what can be done by the city, local leaders and the Federal Government working together.”³⁹ In the Senate, Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), who opposed Proxmire’s efforts to slow the growth of the agencies’ budgets, spoke at length about how NEA and the Arizona state arts council were providing opportunities for children on Hopi and Navajo Indian Reservations. Not only were the programs culturally enriching, but they also taught the children how to make crafts and other goods, like silver items, that could be sold and generate revenue for

³⁷ Meredith Hindley, “King Tut: A Classic Blockbuster Museum Exhibition That Began as a Diplomatic Gesture,” *Humanities* 36, no. 5 (2015), <http://www.neh.gov/humanities/2015/septemberoctober/feature/king-tut-classic-blockbuster-museum-exhibition-began-diplom>.

³⁸ See, Berman, 30-35, for a discussion of these grants and the public attention that the funded projects received.

³⁹ 116 Cong. Rec. 22132 (1970).

the Indians. He noted that \$182,000 in federal funds had helped stimulate \$803,000 in local funds: “the kind of money that this conservative is interested in.”⁴⁰

It is important to note, however, that Republicans came to celebrate these kinds of projects and other initiatives by the cultural agencies *after* President Nixon had chosen to get behind the general idea of federal funding for culture, a decision that may have been motivated more by political calculation than a belief in the power of the arts and humanities to edify the life of the nation. Once the Republican Party became supportive, for as long as the issue of federal funding for culture remained groupless, members of Congress of both parties voted to provide significant appropriations increases. Yet by the mid-1970s, as the Endowments got bigger and greater amounts of funding were at stake, the parties’ positions began to shift in regard to what the NEA and NEH ought to symbolize and how they should carry out their mission. While the cultural agencies retained bipartisan support, more distinctly liberal and conservative positions emerged, with the debate framed in terms of elitism versus populism.

2.3 ELITISM VERSUS POPULISM

Something akin to the original Great Society vision of the NEH as a patron of high culture that awarded grants on the basis of professional standards retained adherents as the 1970s wore on. Yet those adherents were most likely to be conservative intellectuals and Republicans—not Democrats, even though it was largely Democrats

⁴⁰ 119 Cong. Rec. 13776 (1973).

who had brought the Endowments into existence. Politicians and thinkers on the Right seem to adopt this position not only on the basis of its merits, but also in reaction to the position staked out by Democrats, who began to insist that the cultural agencies, the NEH in particular, do more to benefit groups that were part of its constituency, such as organized labor, racial and ethnic minorities, and women. Democrats, in their insistence on broadening the distribution of the NEH's grants, were viewed as populists. Conservatives and some Republican policymakers, in contrast, became vigorous champions of "excellence," of keeping the Endowments focused on supporting projects of the highest quality, as determined by peer review. They came down squarely on the side of "elitism."

The elitism-populism cleavage, however, did not fall completely along partisan lines. Some Republicans maintained the party's original opposition to the idea of federal funding for culture, a position that could also be described as "populist." They viewed the NEA and NEH as "elitist," but in a bad way. In their eyes, the cultural agencies represented arrogance and condescension; as the federal government viewing the common people as so benighted that it was necessary to create new bureaucracies to elevate their sights. At the same time, some politically liberal intellectuals were more likely to side with conservative thinkers and Republicans in opposing Democrats' efforts to push the cultural agencies to use more "political" criteria in awarding grants. They, too, wanted the NEA and NEH to retain a commitment to funding cultural excellence.

The populist element on the Right never stopped believing that it was wrong for Washington to spend tax dollars on culture. When the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act came up for reauthorization in 1970, though many Republican

congressmen were following President Nixon's lead, some Republicans vigorously registered their dissent. In a set of minority views attached to a report by the House Committee on Education and Labor, Congressmen William J. Scherle (R-IA), Edwin D. Eshleman (R-PA), and Earl F. Landgrebe (R-IN) asserted their opposition to the idea of federal funding for the arts and humanities on principle. They denounced the NEA and NEH, saying that they were predicated on a faulty notion: "the myth of American cultural backwardness."⁴¹ This denial of the "myth of American cultural backwardness" was also part of the minority report by Republicans who opposed the establishment of the NEA and NEH back in 1965.⁴² Scherle, Eschleman, and Landgrebe argued that, in fact, America was rich in cultural activity. Not only did the federal government support colleges and universities, but Americans also voluntarily spent great amounts on "spectator activities and entertainment that may well be designated as forms of popular culture." After describing the many ways in which Americans consumed popular culture, they noted:

We are quite aware that our self-constituted intellectual and artistic elite look with contempt on what they regard as these essentially vulgar and lowbrow entertainment and recreation preferences of the vast majority of the American people.

Nonetheless, they argued, even if the majority's tastes are "lowbrow," democracy means that the government cannot force people to consume culture that they do not want. The dissenting Republican said that even if the public demanded that the government

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities: Report (to Accompany H. R. 16065)*, 91st Cong. 2d sess., 1970, H. Rep. 91-936, "Minority Views," 38.

⁴² U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Report (to Accompany H. R. 9460)*, "Minority Views," 89th Cong., 1st. sess., 1965, H. Rep. 618, 21.

subsidize culture, then “the Government if it were to remain genuinely democratic would be compelled to help them secure the kind of cultural fare they wanted and not what a small self-constituted elite decided they should be given even if they preferred something else.”⁴³

Throughout the 1970s, populist opponents of federal funding for culture continued to make hay out of grants that seemed to exemplify wasteful government spending and, even worse, subsidy for the radical Left. In that regard, some of the NEH’s grants in support of the observance of the Bicentennial came under fire. In 1975, Rep. Larry McDonald (D-GA), who happened to be the second president of the John Birch Society, introduced into the *Congressional Record* an article by Patrick Buchanan, “Propaganda Bath Looms for Nation’s 200th Birthday,” about the NEH’s American Issues Forum (AIF). The purpose of the AIF was to encourage citizens across the country to convene and discuss important themes of the American experience. Buchanan harped on the reading list put out by the NEH to foster discussion, claiming that the selections skewed heavily to the Left. While the list included the likes of Woodward and Bernstein, for example, it did not have any texts by William F. Buckley or Irving Kristol.⁴⁴ In 1976, McDonald called attention to \$3,000 that the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, an arm of the Weather Underground Organization, received from the American Issues Forum of Chicago—part of the broader American Issues Forum and a grantee of NEH. The funds helped support a National Hard Times Conference, which, according to McDonald, called for “mass demonstrations and violence” to disrupt the July 4th festivities in Philadelphia

⁴³ U.S. Congress, House, Committee, *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities*, 38-39.

⁴⁴ 121 Cong. Rec. 30144-5 (1975).

later that year.⁴⁵ Yet this populist opposition became a minority stance among Republicans, most of whom followed the lead of Presidents Nixon and supported the idea of federal funding for the arts and humanities.

The policymaker who probably did the most to elevate the elitist vision of the cultural agencies was NEH chairman Ronald Berman, a man who enjoyed both scholarly and conservative bona fides. A Shakespeare scholar who earned his doctorate in English Literature at Yale, Berman was a professor at UC San Diego. In addition to his literature scholarship, in 1968 he authored *America in the Sixties: An Intellectual History*, canvassing and analyzing the major thinkers and controversies of that tumultuous decade. The conservative rag *Human Events* reported that Berman was “a solid conservative,” who “was initially suggested by [*National Review*’s] book review editor, Frank Meyer” and “highly regarded by California’s Gov. Ronald Reagan.”⁴⁶ His nomination was also endorsed by ALCS.⁴⁷ President Nixon appointed him after scholarly organizations protested his first choice, Stephen Hess, a presidential aide. Frederick Burkhard, president of ACLS, had referred to Hess as “totally unqualified.”⁴⁸ *Human Events* also criticized the choice of Hess, saying that he was a liberal Republican.⁴⁹

Berman drew charges of elitism early in his tenure as chairman. In August of 1972, the *New York Times* reported on a conflict between him and staffers in the agency’s Division of Education. Shortly after arriving at the NEH, Berman expressed a desire to veto several grants for college courses that involved subjects such as genocide, lyrics by

⁴⁵ 122 Cong. Rec. 3094 (1976).

⁴⁶ “Conservative May Shake Up Arts and Humanities Foundation,” *Human Events* 31, no. 51 (1971): 3.

⁴⁷ Nan Robertson, “Scholar May Get Humanities Post,” *New York Times*, November , 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁸ Nan Robertson, “Humanities Post of U.S. in Dispute,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1971, 39.

⁴⁹ “Surprising Choice for Humanities Boondoggle,” *Human Events* 31, no. 23 (1971): 3.

Bob Dylan and The Beatles, the book *The Greening of America*, and film *The Harrad Experiment* (Berman was prohibited, however, from vetoing projects retroactively).

Herbert McArthur, the director of that division, ended up resigning over his disagreements with the new chairman. McArthur said that he believed in interpreting the Endowment's mandate broadly, encouraging innovation in humanities education and relating the humanities to current issues. Berman, when interviewed about the dispute, was adamant that a good humanities education involved introducing students to high quality works even if they proved challenging. According to the *Times*, Berman stated, in a prideful tone, "The humanities are a very hard thing." Quoting Irving Kristol, he said, "So much that passes for educational innovation is an excuse for leveling down." To the charge of elitism, Berman responded, "You can be accused of elitism if you confine it [education] to the elite, but you can't be accused of elitism if you bring the best to the most."⁵⁰

This idea of bringing the best to the most captured Berman's approach to how the NEH ought to approach public programming, a major source of contention between him and Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI), and a controversy which further encouraged the framing of debate over the agency as one of elitism versus populism. In his memoir, Berman explained:

My own business in managing NEH was, I thought, to keep the humanities professional while making their benefits available to the public. Scholars could do the scripts for something like the *Adams Family Chronicle* and the public could enjoy good television. Art experts could arrange for the organization and interpretation of an exhibition on French Impressionism, and the public could enjoy museums even more unreservedly. What I should not do, I thought, was to

⁵⁰ Linda Charlton, "Humanities Endowment Thrives Amid Internal Strife," *New York Times*, August 18, 1972, ProQuest Historic Newspapers.

redefine the humanities as in themselves sources of direct public benefit, or give to constituencies or pressure groups funds in the name of the humanities.⁵¹

Of paramount importance to Berman was to maintain the integrity of the humanities, understood as professional academic disciplines with their own standards. Only thus could the humanities bring about the benefits they were actually capable of delivering, namely, helping people grow in intelligence. Berman resisted the notions found, for example, in the 1980 report, *The Humanities in American Life*, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, which claimed that the humanities could help foster goodwill and civic responsibility. As Berman noted, “The study of literature or of language, it had been acknowledged from Cardinal Newman on, did not make men better or more reasonable; it only made them more able.”⁵² To pretend otherwise, or, as he said above, view the NEH as a mere conduit of public funds to different groups, undermined what the humanities really were.

Senator Pell, however, had a different view of how the NEH should go about uplifting the nation. Like Nixon, Pell’s perspective may have been driven by both political considerations and a sincere belief in what he was arguing. For Pell, it was insufficient for people to experience high culture produced by professionals. In Pell’s view, ordinary people themselves had to receive the actual grant money and carry out humanistic activities in the ways in which they saw fit. This position may have reflected a genuine belief that just as anyone could be an artist, anyone could also be a humanist.⁵³

⁵¹ Berman, 157-8.

⁵² Berman, 157.

⁵³ Thomas Roberts (first director of the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities) interviewed by author, January 8, 2016.

Yet Pell may also have taken this position in the interest of pleasing groups that were important components of the Democratic Party's constituency.

For years, Pell reiterated his interest in seeing the NEH directly benefit and support people other than academics. In 1970, when the NEH was up for reauthorization, Pell expressed to Chairman Barnaby Keeney his concern that "the humanities program might get too much into the esoteric field, supporting post-doctoral studies, and even helping graduate students through their doctorate." He asked Keeney, "What about those who have no college degrees? A shoemaker who is a shoemaker by trade, but a humanist by avocation."⁵⁴ During Berman's first confirmation hearing, Pell posed similar questions, asking the nominee's views on "trying to spread the humanities around to the grassroots;" of awarding grants "to people who did not have the benefit of a Ph. D. or even an A.B. or a high school diploma, but were skilled or interested or believers in the humanities and were developing some area of expert knowledge."⁵⁵

The disagreement between Berman and Pell came to a head during debate over the 1976 reauthorization, which coincided with Berman's nomination by President Ford to a second term as chairman. In the Senate version of the reauthorization legislation, Pell proposed transitioning the state humanities councils (SHCs) to state government agencies, just like the state arts councils were. As will be described in the following chapter, the SHCs were nonprofit organizations, founded and funded by the NEH in

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Joint Hearings before the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate on H. R. 15196 and S. 3238*, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, 78-9.

⁵⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Nomination: Ronald S. Berman, of California, to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 8.

every state and federal territory beginning in the early 1970s, with the twin goals of engaging more citizens with the humanities and cultivating political support for the NEH. When the NEA and NEH were founded, the enacting legislation contained a provision to provide matching funds to states to set up state arts agencies. But there was no provision for state-based humanities affiliates (NEH undertook founding them in response to pressure from Congress). Pell wanted to provide a basis for the state humanities councils in the authorizing statute, as well as enable them to focus programming on the kinds of ordinary citizens that he wanted to reach.

Berman, however, did not agree with Pell's plan to transition the SHCs from nonprofits to state agencies. Under the arrangement between the NEH and SCHs at that time, the Endowment exerted considerable control over what the SHCs did, including restricting them to supporting public-facing programming geared toward out-of-school adults. The NEH did this to prevent the SHCs from replicating what the Endowment was doing at the federal level through its main grant divisions—research in particular. But under Pell's plan, the SHCs would have the autonomy to fund whatever they wanted. Moreover, their governing boards would be appointed by governors. Until that point in time, the SHCs' board members, many of whom were local academics, chose their successors.

Berman was concerned with the prospect that, under Pell's plan, the state councils would start funding scholarly research projects, but without the kind of vetting that the NEH's rigorous peer-review process provided. Research proposals, he argued, were much more appropriate to be evaluated at the national level. The National Council on the Humanities, the NEH's presidentially appointed advisory body, prepared a report critical

of Pell's proposal, which Berman referred to during reauthorization hearings.⁵⁶ While Pell appeared to liken the NEH to the NEA, Berman argued that it was more appropriate to view NEH as a counterpart to the National Science Foundation (NSF). Like NSF, the NEH was concerned with advancing knowledge that pertained to specific academic disciplines, which were listed in the founding statute. Berman said:

To support serious work in either [the sciences or humanities], as the Council suggests, requires evaluation and judgment by the best minds available according to national—and even international—standards of merit. The Council fears a falling-away from such criteria, and my feeling is they are right.⁵⁷

State government agencies, in the view of Berman and the Council, could not be counted on to evaluate proposals according to the highest standards and generate truly meritorious humanities projects. Furthermore, because the SHCs had to apply for funding in the same way as other grantees, which meant that they themselves were also subject to peer review, there could be greater confidence in the quality of their programs.⁵⁸

Pell, however, was not convinced. He was displeased with how he perceived the NEH was allocating grants under Berman's leadership. During hearings, Pell told Berman, "I would not be frank if I did not say that I have a certain sense of letdown on the Humanities side."⁵⁹ Too many grants, he believed, even among the state humanities councils, were going to academia. Pell believed that the state arts councils "have done a

⁵⁶ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975: Joint Hearings before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate on H. R. 7216 and S. 1800*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 138-148 ("The Establishment of State Humanities Agencies: Examination of a Proposed Amendment to the Authorizing Legislation of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities—A Briefing Paper of the National Council on the Humanities, September 1975").

⁵⁷ U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 135 ("Prepared Opening Statement of Dr. Ronald Berman, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities").

⁵⁸ U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 195.

⁵⁹ U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 205.

far better job...in developing diversified, popularly supported, constructive programs at a grassroots level.”⁶⁰

Berman tried to convey his commitment to reaching “the grassroots” through discussing the high-quality initiatives that were broadly accessible. Notable efforts in this vein were *The Adams Chronicles* which aired on PBS and the NEH’s “Courses by Newspaper” program, through which scholars authored a series of articles on a topic in the humanities, which ran in hundreds of newspapers nationwide.⁶¹ Yet Pell still found the NEH’s efforts wanting. During Berman’s reconfirmation hearing, Pell said, “I said I expected people in those occupations [grocers and lumberjacks] as amongst others to be the beneficiaries of the Humanities programs in their own terms and in their own way.”⁶² At another point in the reconfirmation hearing, Pell quizzed Berman on how much money had been awarded to “women’s organizations, business organizations, labor groups, bilingual groups, senior citizens groups, and handicapped organizations,” some of which were then important Democratic constituencies.⁶³

Pell blocked a vote on Berman’s confirmation to a second term as NEH chairman, which provoked an outcry among intellectuals, conservative ones especially, but some on the Left as well. Conservatives lionized Berman for opposing legislation that, in their view, would degrade the NEH, changing it from a bastion of high standards to a dispenser of pork. They also blasted Pell as a philistine. So vicious and numerous were

⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 124-5.

⁶¹ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman, of Virginia, to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 94th Cong., 2d. sess., 1976, 133.

⁶² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman*, 240.

⁶³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman*, 46.

the detractors that Pell suggested he had been the victim of an “orchestrated campaign.”⁶⁴

William F. Buckley, for example, ridiculed Pell’s proposal and the notion that grants could enable mechanics and other laborers to write, paint, and sculpt in their leisure time.⁶⁵ George Will, in a column for the *Washington Post*, “High Culture and Basic Politics,” praised Berman’s dedication to the principle of merit. Will lauded the NEH as a “success” in government and commended the agency’s system of evaluating proposals:

It uses the guidance of 5,000 experts who are the (dare one use the words?) “best and the brightest” of the nation’s humanistic scholars. But there is nothing objectionable about this. NEH’s mission is to help sustain high culture in a commercial society.

Though Will would later call for the abolishment of the NEH, in the mid-1970s, he expressed a perspective that resembled the Great Society vision for the agency. He closed the op-ed saying:

But a government need not apologize for using agencies like NEH and persons like Dr. Berman to attend to matters of the nonscientific mind. Although less narrowly utilitarian than most government concerns, they are at least as important.⁶⁶

Some liberal intellectuals joined conservatives in defending Berman against Pell. *The New Republic* published an editorial, “Blocking Berman,” stating:

For close to a year Pell has waged an erratic and hyperbolic vendetta against Berman, making ill-conceived demands that NEH become a local patronage dispenser, rather than the keeper and patron of standards in humanistic scholarship and mass education it has been.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Human Resources, *Nomination: Hearing on Joseph D. Duffey, of the District of Columbia, to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977, 6.

⁶⁵ William F. Buckley, “Heading the NEH Pell-mell for Philistia,” *Washington Star*, July 27, 1976, included in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman*, 14.

⁶⁶ George Will, “High Culture and Basic Politics,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 1976, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁷ “Blocking Berman,” *New Republic*, September 4, 1976, included in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman*, 16.

As will be explained below, some intellectuals, though politically liberal, opposed what they saw as Democrats' efforts to broaden the distribution of NEA and NEH grants at the expense of excellence.

Notions of “elitism” and “populism” continued to frame the debate over the NEH following Berman's departure and his replacement by Joseph Duffey. It was widely believed that Duffey's nomination had more to do with his political credentials than knowledge about the humanities—though he did have a Ph.D. from Hartford Seminary and had taught there and at Yale Divinity School as an adjunct professor (at a young age he was ordained a minister in the United Church of Christ). When President Carter appointed Duffey to head the NEH, the latter was serving as Assistant Secretary of State for educational and cultural affairs. He had been a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1968, 1972, and 1976 and had worked on the Carter presidential campaign. He ran for the Senate himself in 1970 in Connecticut as an anti-war candidate, winning the Democratic primary but losing the general election, which was a three-person race. He was national chairman of the Americans for Democratic Action from 1969 to 1971. From 1974 to 1977, he was the chief administrative officer and spokesman for the American Association of University Professors. He was married to Ann Wexler, who was a deputy under secretary of Commerce under President Carter.

Conservatives were alarmed about the potential implications of a Duffey chairmanship for the NEH. Hilton Kramer, who in the early 1970s had praised the National Endowment for the Arts for the professionalism of its bureaucracy,⁶⁸ issued an

⁶⁸ “For it seems to me that this money is being spent with a remarkable understanding of what our museums are doing and what their present needs are...There is a professional intelligence at work in this program that is truly impressive...So far as I am able to judge, these grants are based on professional judgment rather than political considerations. They are also implemented with a minimum of bureaucratic fuss, and

apocalyptic warning in the pages of the *New York Times*, where he served as art critic. Kramer left the *Times* in 1982 and founded *The New Criterion*, a conservative cultural affairs journal. Despite the title of Kramer's article, "The Threat of Politicization of the Federal Arts Program," much of it had to do with the humanities. Kramer pointed to a White House memo to the committee charged with finding a new chairman for the NEH, which stated that the nominee "should probably be familiar to organized labor, ethnic organizations, community and junior college organizations, and principal educational broadcasters, as well as more familiar non-academic humanities groups like research libraries," and that "the endowment's most important initiatives will almost certainly be in non-traditional and public areas, while its base remains in academia." Kramer interpreted this direction from the White House as follows:

The code words are unmistakable in their meaning. In short, numbers—rather than quality, knowledge or distinction—are now to be the touchstone of achievement.

Kramer decried attacks on the notion of "elitism," denounced "Senator Pell's philistine notions of culture," and concluded with high praise for what the NEA and NEH had been during their first ten years, while warning of what they could become:

...the endowments have by and large done an outstanding job in upholding the "leadership" of the "best" in both the arts and the humanities. In this sense, but in no other, they have indeed been elitist—and at times, perhaps, not even elitist enough. This is why they have earned our respect and gratitude. They have been a great success, and their loss would have terrible consequences for our culture. This is why so many are now so anxious about the new era we are entering.⁶⁹

are guided by professionals who know what they are doing..." Hilton Kramer, "Money for the Museums," *New York Times*, March 11, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁹ Hilton Kramer, "The Threat of Politicization of the Federal Arts Program," *New York Times*, October 16, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

George Will expressed similar reservations about Duffey as NEH chairman in an op-ed for the *Washington Post*, “An Endowment that Should Stay ‘Elitist.’”⁷⁰

Subsequent media coverage appeared to vindicate conservatives’ fears about the direction that Joseph Duffey would seek to take the NEH. In December 1977, for example, the *New York Times* published an article by Robert Brustein, dean of the Yale School of Drama, “Whither the National Arts and Humanities Endowments?” Brustein traveled to Washington, D.C. to interview Duffey, congressional leaders such as Senator Pell, and the new chairman of the NEA, Livingston Biddle. Brustein’s conversations did not leave him confident that the Endowments would focus their limited resources on the most exemplary projects. He reported, for example, a conversation he had with Pell, who discussed his hope that the NEH might fund a program in which ordinary citizens in “barren” areas such as Montana and Nebraska would sit around wood-burning stoves and deliver papers on great books. Brustein reflected:

It was true enough, as has been charged, that these agencies were being “politicized,” but the politicization went much deeper than the intervention of pressure groups, vested interests and meddling politicians...Once fully professional and oriented toward the artist and the scholar, the Endowments were now preparing to spread their relatively meager moneys among educationalists, audiences and amateurs as well, on the essentially political assumption that any resources generated by the people should benefit all the people immediately and simultaneously.⁷¹

A 1979 story in the *New York Times*, two years into Duffey’s tenure, reported that the NEH had been making grants of a more “populist” nature. According to the *Times*:

After several months of investigating the two agencies responsible for Federal cultural support, it is possible to say that there is now a discernable and growing trend toward the politically popular policy of assisting newer, more

⁷⁰ George Will, “An Endowment that Should Stay ‘Elitist,’” *Washington Post*, August 11, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷¹ Robert Brustein, “Whither the National Arts and Humanities Endowments?” *New York Times*, December 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.³

regionally dispersed “populist” groups rather than traditional “elitist” cultural institutions.

Several new NEH grantees highlighted by the *Times* included the Labor Institute for Human Enrichment, part of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Labor Study Center; the National Council of La Raza; the Farmers Union; and the Conference of Mayors Research and Education Corporation. The percentage of funds that went to organizations in New York, home to many “established humanities organizations,” declined from 23 percent in 1977 to 19 percent in 1978, while funding to the ACLS went from \$2.7 million to \$2 million between 1976 and 1978.⁷²

In this context, the parties’ rhetoric about federal funding for culture became more distinct. Recall that when Nixon announced his support for the NEA and NEH, his rhetoric was indistinguishable from what agency proponents had said during the Great Society era. But in the mid-to-late 1970s, Democrats began to call upon the Endowments to do more to encourage the nation’s cultural diversity and serve minorities, not only by expanding access to the humanities to these communities, but also by giving greater recognition to their own unique cultural contributions. Republicans and conservative intellectuals, in contrast, stressed the importance of merit and excellence.

Chairman Duffey, in his prepared statement for hearings on reauthorization legislation, discussed the NEH’s felt obligation to focus on neglected constituencies—and not simply by bringing the best to the most. He stated, “our strength as a nation of nations is made manifest in the cultural pluralism that mirrors the diversity of our citizens.” The NEH, in Duffey’s view, needed to empower different groups to pursue

⁷² John Friedman, “A Populist Shift in Federal Cultural Support,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1979. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

their own expressions of culture. He explained, “Of special concern to us is the need to provide assistance to ethnic and other minorities who seek to use the humanities to illuminate their separate cultural traditions, to enrich their personal lives, and to increase their contributions to our common cultural life.”⁷³

As chairman, Duffey sought to put this commitment to pluralism into practice.

According to Stephen Miller:

In order to show that he was trying to help blacks, Hispanics, and women to get more grants, Duffey created new staff positions—liaisons to minority groups. These staff members would help minority applicants with their proposals, if not exactly write them. Duffey also tried to ensure that more members of minority groups were chosen to serve as peer reviewers.⁷⁴

The increased use of minorities as peer reviewers was an objective that Congress tacitly affirmed in the 1980 reauthorization. In the section that authorized the chairmen of both Endowments to make use of advisory panels, Congress amended it to say that they “shall have broad geographic *and culturally diverse* representation” (the italicized words represent the addition that came in the 1980 amendments; the insistence on geographic diversity on panels was inserted in 1973).⁷⁵

These moves came as the NEH was being pressured by groups representing blacks and women. Representatives from the Congressional Black Caucus, for example, met twice with Chairman Duffey in 1977, in which they called for greater NEH support for blacks, whom the Caucus estimated received less than three percent of the agency’s

⁷³ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Arts, Humanities, and Museum Services Act of 1979: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources on S. 1386*, 96th Cong., 1st Sess., 1979, 300 (“Statement of Joseph D. Duffey”).

⁷⁴ Stephen Miller, *Excellence and Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1984): 59.

⁷⁵ *Arts and Humanities Act of 1980*, Public Law 96-496, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 94 (1980): 2588; and *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1973*, Public Law 93-133, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 87 (1973): 465.

funding, and for Hispanics, whom were estimated to receive even less. Duffey also met with representatives from women's groups, who "urged inclusion of more women in the peer review process, more grant awards to women, and more studies of subjects relating to women."⁷⁶

The rhetoric of the Democratic Party Platform of 1980 reflected the party's shift in emphasis toward making the NEA and NEH more supportive of ethnic minorities. The previous three platforms—1968, 1972, and 1976—had continued to explain the Democratic Party's support for the Endowments in terms that had been used during the Great Society period:

- 1968: We will encourage support for the arts and the humanities, through the national foundations established by a Democratic Congress, to provide incentives for those endowed with extraordinary talent, enhance the quality of our life, and make productive leisure available to all our people.⁷⁷
- 1972: Support for the arts and humanities is one of the benchmarks of a civilized society. Yet, the continued existence of many of America's great symphonies, theatres and museums, our film institutes, dance companies and other art forms, is now threatened by rising costs, and the public contribution, far less than in most advanced industrial societies, is a fraction of the need.⁷⁸
- 1976: We recognize the essential role played by arts and humanities in the development of America. Our nation cannot afford to be materially rich and spiritually poor.⁷⁹

Quality of life, productive leisure, civilized society, and materially rich and spiritually poor—and the explicit mention of higher forms of culture (great symphonies, for example)—were all part of the Great Society vision of how the arts and humanities could

⁷⁶ American Association for the Advancement for the Humanities, "Peer Review: Under Attack and Changing," *Humanities Report* 1, no. 1 (1979): 9-10.

⁷⁷ "1968 Democratic Party Platform," August 26, 1968, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29604>.

⁷⁸ "1972 Democratic Party Platform," July 10, 1972, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29605>.

⁷⁹ "1976 Democratic Party Platform," July 12, 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29606>.

edify American life. But in 1980, while pledging support for the NEA and NEH, the Democratic Platform also noted the Party's commitment to:

Seeking greater recognition for the rich cultural tradition of the nation's minorities. We will work to meet the cultural needs of minorities, encourage their greater participation in the performing arts on a national level, and provide grants for the arts in low-income neighborhoods.⁸⁰

This was the first time that the Democratic Party Platform had noted its belief in serving minorities, specifically, through federal funding for the arts and humanities.

Republican Party Platforms prior to 1980 had actually been ahead of the Democrats in terms of noting how the NEH, under GOP leadership, had sought to support minorities. The Republicans' 1972 platform stated, "The [NEH] also supports programs to raise levels of scholarship and teaching in Afro-American, American Indian and Mexican-American studies, has broadened its fellowship programs to include junior college teachers, and stresses adult or continuing education, including educational television and film series."⁸¹ The 1976 Republican Party Platform stated, "We Republicans consider the preservation of the rich cultural heritages of our various ethnic groups as a priority goal."⁸² Perhaps the best way to interpret this rhetoric is to view it as part and parcel of the GOP's efforts to use federal funding for the arts and humanities in an attempt at coalition expansion; in this case, to signal its concern for minorities.

By 1980, however, Republican rhetoric about federal funding for the arts and humanities had come to focus on the notion of excellence. The 1980 GOP Platform made

⁸⁰ "1980 Democratic Party Platform," August 11, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29607>.

⁸¹ "Republican Party Platform of 1972," August 21, 1972, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25842>.

⁸² "Republican Party Platform of 1976," August 18, 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25843>.

no overtures toward minority groups. Rather, it criticized the Carter Administration for having “crudely politicized [the NEA and NEH], lowering their standards of excellence and increasing federal control over them.” In their platform, Republicans pledged to “restore...the integrity of federal programs in this area.”⁸³ During the 1980 campaign, then-candidate Reagan echoed criticisms about “politicization” at the NEA; the notion that the Carter administration had made grant decisions based on geographical considerations as opposed to the quality of what was being proposed. Reagan said that, if elected, “merit and merit alone” would determine which artists received grants. He also said, “the arts, unlike some other activities, demand excellence and discipline.”⁸⁴

The most vigorous call to renew a commitment to excellence within the NEH came from the Heritage Foundation in its 1980 *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*. This 1,000 page tome presented analyses and policy recommendations for all cabinet departments, independent regulatory agencies, and other select organs of the federal government. *Mandate*, a project that began in 1979, was intended to “[assist] the transition to a new administration in the event that a conservative president were elected in 1980;” to present a conservative agenda for the first 100 days.⁸⁵ The chapter on the NEA and NEH was authored by Michael Joyce, who was then executive director of the conservative John M. Olin

⁸³ “Republican Party Platform of 1980,” July 15, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25844>.

⁸⁴ Richard Christiansen, “Reagan’s Funding Proposals Give Arts a Case of the Jitters,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 8, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸⁵ Edwin J. Feulner, Jr., “Foreword,” in *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1981): vii.

Foundation. Future NEH chairman William Bennett, who was then heading the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, was a consultant to the assessment.⁸⁶

Joyce, in his analysis of the NEH, equated excellence with academic scholarship and research, as determined by peer review. Like the early proponents of a federal humanities foundation, Joyce suggested that the NEH could help provide ballast against some of the more unsavory aspects of American democracy (though with rhetoric that stressed the notion of excellence):

At its best, the NEH stands for excellence, the highest fruit of the pursuit of liberty. As a true friend of democracy, the NEH can teach the nation the limits of equalitarian impulse.

Joyce called for refocusing the agency on scholarship, “an important cultural goal,” as opposed to more public-facing programs. Joyce insisted that the NEH:

rescind guidelines for racial or ethnic quotas applied to the grant review and evaluation processes...The criterion of excellence should be applied to selection of application reviewers as well as to the applications themselves...It must be explained that the discovery of excellence in minority groups, and its reward, is discouraged, not encouraged, by such quotas.

Joyce recommended serious review or outright termination of certain grant programs, while saying that the Fellowship Division “could usefully receive more funding and other support...In general, the Fellowship Division is solid because of its concern for scholarship.”⁸⁷

Though champions of elitism and excellence were more common, or at least more vocal on the Right, some politically liberal intellectuals voiced similar concerns about the

⁸⁶ Hilton Kramer, “Reagan Aides Discuss U.S. Role in Helping Arts and Humanities,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1980, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸⁷ Michael Joyce, “The National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts,” in *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1981): 1040, 1041, 1043-1044, 1046.

direction of the NEA and NEH under the Carter administration. In April 1978, Brustein, quoted above, joined Michael Straight, who had served as deputy chairman of the NEA under Nancy Hanks, in publicly debating Duffey and Cornell history professor Mary Beth Norton, whom Carter appointed to serve on the National Council on the Humanities. The question that they debated dealt with the notion of elitism in the arts and humanities and policymaking at the Endowments.⁸⁸ Straight, upon resigning as acting chairman of the NEA, lodged scathing attacks against the Carter administration's management of cultural policy, criticizing the political nature of his appointments. Livingston Biddle, whom Carter had appointed chairman of the NEA, had served as an aide to Senator Pell. Straight also claimed that "pressure groups" of women and blacks aimed "to put Government funding of the arts on a quota basis."⁸⁹

While Straight and Brustein were partisans of excellence over equity, neither could be said to be politically conservative. Straight had previously been a member of the Communist Party, a KGB collaborator, and speechwriter for FDR. Brustein, who spent most of his career in drama, began blogging on culture and politics for The Huffington Post in 2006, in which he has expressed admiration for President Barack Obama. Yet when it came to federal cultural policy, both men believed that the Endowments should be focused on supporting creative genius and less concerned with the constituencies that received funds.

⁸⁸ "'Elitism' in Arts and Humanities Units is Debated," *New York Times*, April 27, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Henry Mitchell, "The Great Elitism Debate: Sparta Versus Athens in New Haven," *Washington Post*, April 27, 1978, Nexis Uni.

⁸⁹ Grace Glueck, "Endowment Head Decries 'Politics,'" *New York Times*, October 12, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Straight said, "The cancer of political interference has begun to undermine the credibility of the endowments."

2.4 THE FRAGILITY OF THE GREAT SOCIETY IDEAL

For its first fifteen years, the NEH was subject to wildly varying political fortunes, going from embattled to thriving to being pressured to adjust how it interpreted its mission. Groups, as well as the absence of groups, were critical in these developments. Because there were no groups interested in the agency at first, there was an opportunity for coalition expansion, which President Nixon chose to embrace. But for this decision, it is questionable whether the NEA and NEH would have grown significantly or quickly. Prior to that decision, Republicans were generally opposed to the Endowments and they had attracted Democrats to the cause of keeping their budgets from growing significantly. If Nixon had not surmised that backing federal funding for the arts and humanities could be politically advantageous, the NEA and NEH could possibly have withered.

By 1980, the vision that had inspired the founding of the NEH—the federal government as patron of high culture to counter democracy’s ills—still had champions. Yet whereas the original proponents of that vision had mostly been Democrats, by that time, they were more likely to be Republican and on the conservative end of the ideological spectrum. Democrats, whose constituency included racial and ethnic minorities, labor unions, and other groups, began to push for the NEA and NEH to be more responsive to the interests of those constituencies and distribute greater funding toward them, both through the national Endowments and the state councils. Republicans, in contrast, became advocates of excellence and the notion that the NEH ought to make decisions on the basis of scholarly peer review.

Though the idea of federal funding for the arts and humanities had achieved bipartisan support, that support was potentially fragile. Democrats, though still supporters

of the NEA and NEH, were increasingly concerned with how the agencies were directly benefitting their constituencies. Republicans, for their part, backed federal funding for culture, but that support was not anchored in any constituency. Their championing of “excellence” and “merit,” though probably sincerely felt by some proponents, also may have been a position taken to distinguish themselves from Democrats and appeal to voters who opposed the idea of special privileges for minorities.

Given the agency’s political instability, it stood in need of advocates with the incentive to mobilize on its behalf. Because those advocates did not exist at the outset, the agency had to create them. That is the story of the origin of the state humanities councils, told in the following chapter.

3.0 CONSTITUENCY BUILDING: THE FORMATION OF THE STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS

As described in the previous chapter, the political vulnerability of the NEA and NEH was evident shortly after their enactment. Following their establishment in a moment of great headiness, enthusiasm in Congress for the arts and humanities dissipated quickly. Senator Pell, the legislative founder of the NEH in particular, was concerned about its chances for long-term sustainability. During the late 1960s, the Endowments gained little in the way of appropriations, as Democrats joined with Republicans to slow the growth of their budgets. Though the 1970s turned out to be a period of tremendous budget growth, it was because of President Nixon's unexpected decision to champion the arts and humanities, a move at least partly intended to improve his own political standing.

As of 1970, even with support in Congress, the NEH lacked a constituency with the incentive to mobilize and advocate on the agency's behalf. Though the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and other scholarly organizations had elevated the idea of a federal humanities foundation in public discourse, academics in the humanities were not inclined toward doing the work of advocating for the agency over the long term. Barnaby Keeney, the NEH's first chairman, spoke of the professoriate's limited appetite for lobbying. In a speech to the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, Keeney recounted that in 1967, a congressman who was supportive of the NEH sent letters to a list of

65,000 people, many of whom were presumably scholars in humanistic disciplines, in an effort to generate letters back to Congress. Of those 65,000 recipients, only 500 took the time to write. “That was a real shocker, and discouraged members who believed that they had a background of public support.” Keeney then said of his fellow academics, “We’re in the habit, politically, of eloquently endorsing something, following our eloquent endorsement with silence and inaction, as happened before, and happened again.”¹

But academics’ limited interest in lobbying is perfectly understandable in view of the incentives at stake. The NEH, from the very beginning, awarded grants on a competitive basis. While scholars and cultural institutions no doubt appreciated having another potential source of funding, there was no guarantee that they would be grantees. Lobbying Congress on the NEH’s behalf does not necessarily lead to a grant, especially considering how competitive some programs can be.

Senator Pell wanted more people writing letters, but this could not be expected from academics. The NEH needed a constituency with a strong incentive to do so. Herein lies the establishment of the state humanities councils (SHCs). Though Pell also sought policy objectives through the SHCs, they were founded very much in an effort to bolster the agency’s viability.

But at the same time, for all of the political advantages that the state humanities councils could confer on the NEH—such as channeling federal funds to states that were not receiving much in the way of agency dollars and increasing its visibility among the general public—they also represented a potential challenge to the Endowment, should they develop an agenda and priorities of their own. As Eric Patashnik has explained in his

¹ Barnaby Keeney, Speech to United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, University of Indiana, September 10, 1970, 14-15, Box 110: VIII, 35, papers of Barnaby Keeney, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives.

study of the sustainability of general-interest policy reforms, while the cultivation of clienteles is often essential to sustain such reforms, those clienteles “can *themselves* become threats to the general good” (italics in the original). Patashnik says, “Reformers thus must worry not only about whether vested interests will emerge after reform, but about whether vested interests can be constrained if they do.”²

The early history of the state humanities councils represents an attempt by the NEH to cultivate a clientele, reap the attendant political advantages, and still keep that clientele under its control. This helps account for the particular manner in which the Endowment formed the SHCs in the first place: as independent nonprofits, supported by the NEH, but restricted to a narrow set of activities, unlike the state arts councils after which they were modelled, which were state government agencies. The NEH was also partly responsible for founding the organization that would become the SHCs’ main advocacy group: the Federation of State Humanities Councils. The formation of both the SHCs and the Federation would eventually play integral roles in the sustainability of the NEH—as well as the determination of its budgetary priorities. The introduction of the SHCs inaugurated a change in the NEH’s overall interest-group context, from purely majoritarian politics to something that also bore the hallmarks of what James Q. Wilson referred to as “client politics,” in which there is “a dominant interest group favoring its goals.”³

² Eric M. Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Changes Are Enacted* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008): 176-7.

³ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989): 76.

3.1 A GRASSROOTS CONSTITUENCY FOR THE HUMANITIES

Early on, Senator Pell urged the NEH to cultivate a broader base of political support and viewed the state arts councils as a possible model to emulate. As Pell explained to Keeney during a hearing on the agency's 1970 reauthorization:

...speaking as a politician, the lower the organizational level you get to, the more your grassroots support, the more visibility you have, and the easier it is to help yourself here on the Hill. In this regard the State arts councils have done a rather conspicuously excellent job.⁴

State arts councils were a feature of the 1965 legislation that established the NEA and NEH. Through them, Congress sought to pursue several goals, including increasing access to the arts, providing a degree of local control over public funding of the arts, and fostering broader political support for public arts funding.⁵

During the early 1960s, support for the idea of a national state arts program grew along with support for the idea of a federal arts foundation. The New York State Council on the Arts, established in 1960, set a precedent for what a state arts agency could accomplish in terms of increasing access to arts in underserved communities.⁶ Legislation to establish a state arts program was introduced in the Senate in 1962,⁷ and August

⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Joint Hearings before the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate on H. R. 15196 and S. 3238*, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, 77.

⁵ Julia Lowell, *State Arts Agencies 1965-2003: Whose Interests to Serve?* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2004): 5, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG121.html>.

⁶ Mel Scott, "The Federal-State Partnership in the Arts," *Public Administration Review* 30, no. 4 (1970): 379-80.

⁷ See, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *To Establish a U.S. National Arts Foundation: Report (to Accompany S. 741, as amended)*, 87th Cong., 2d. sess., 1962, S. Rep. 2260.

Heckscher, President Kennedy's Special Consultant on the Arts, suggested it as a possibility in his 1963 report to the President.⁸

The 1965 legislation authorized funding for the NEA to help states set up and maintain state arts agencies. The NEA provided planning grants to states that did not yet have arts councils and annual grants for operations thereafter, which were to be matched by state appropriations. Prior to 1960, only six states had arts agencies, and of those "Utah was the only one with an active program using state funds."⁹ But, by virtue of the offer of federal matching funds, by 1966, every state and territory with the exception of Samoa had some form of arts agency (a Samoa council eventually launched as well).¹⁰ However, it was not until 1974 that all 50 states put up appropriations of their own.¹¹

The state arts councils were formed as state agencies, governed by independent boards composed of unpaid private citizens appointed by public officials, typically the governor. The boards made decisions on grants with the advice of expert panels. The purpose of this structure was to insulate grant decisions from political pressure and help ensure that they were made on the basis of artistic merit.¹²

⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, *The Arts and the National Government: Report to the President Submitted by August Heckscher Special Consultant on the Arts*, May 28, 1963, July 11, 1963, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, S. Doc. 28, 28.

⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 11308*, 90th Cong. 1st sess., 1967, 81 ("A Review of Programs and Planning of the National Endowment for the Arts").

¹⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate and House of Representatives, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare and Committee on Education and Labor, *Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1967: Joint Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate and the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives on S. 2061 and H.R. 11308*, Part 1, 90th Cong. 1st sess., 1967, 148 (National Council on the Arts and Government, "1967 NCAG Annual Report").

¹¹ Lowell, *State Arts Agencies 1965-2003*, 5.

¹² Julia F. Lowell and Elizabeth Heneghan Ondaatje, *The Arts and State Governments: At Arm's Length or Arm in Arm?* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2006): x, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG359.html>.

Early on, many state councils struggled to obtain much in the way of state funds, and it is questionable how much actual grassroots support for the arts they really helped foster. According to Julia Lowell, “[State arts agencies’ (SAA)] initial role as conduits for federal arts money—combined with their emphasis on major urban institutions and mostly high art forms—meant that most SAAs didn’t enjoy strong grass-roots political support within their states.”¹³ Nevertheless, leading congressional advocates of federal support for culture were pleased with the state arts councils, or at least the concept. Senator Pell said of the state arts councils, “Quite honestly, this is what has given us the political support we have needed to keep the program going.”¹⁴

The authorizing statute, however, did not contain a similar provision for state humanities programs. Though Pell wanted the NEH to start one, at least on an experimental basis, Chairman Keeney was reluctant to do so.¹⁵ Part of the difficulty, in Keeney’s view, was that it was unclear what a grassroots, locally-based humanities program would be, and how citizens might respond. Keeney told Pell during a congressional hearing:

I think there would be certain difficulties with this, because there is not presently very considerable public activity in the humanities as there is in the arts, and a successful program requires public activity to continue.

I rather suspect that that public activity needs to be stimulated over a period of years.

Program quality was another open question. Keeney said:

¹³ Lowell, *State Arts Agencies 1965-2003*, 5, 8.

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committees, *Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965* (1970), 197.

¹⁵ Keeney, soon after his chairmanship ended, publicly regretted not establishing state humanities councils, saying that doing so would have helped bring the humanities to the general public. But while heading the agency, he was always reluctant to go in this direction. Barnaby Keeney, Speech to United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, 7.

I think it is fair to say that I would expect that grants that would be made by that mechanism might be the lower intrinsic quality than grants that will be made through the national council, but possibly of greater interest.¹⁶

In a letter to Senator Pell, Keeney was even more direct:

The truth of the matter is that I am not sure it will work. I am quite unimpressed with what the State Councils in the Arts do, excepting with their political impact, and I am afraid of that.

In that same letter, he also raised the prospect of state humanities councils pressuring Congress to fund them at the expense of national programming. This was a danger he saw with respect to the arts councils, noting that “their pressure on the Arts Endowment now is such that if they get their way, the Arts Endowment will have less program funds for national programs in 1973 than in 1971, unless the authorization is made quite large.”¹⁷

What became the main bone of contention between Chairman Berman and Senator Pell—the prospect that state councils would seek to replicate what the NEH was doing nationally, such as research, but without the quality control provided by serious peer review—was of serious concern at the outset. According to John Barcroft, the legendary bureaucrat who was responsible for launching the Endowment’s state humanities effort, this fear was felt throughout the agency.¹⁸ Armen Tashdian, another early staffer, said that the NEH feared that implementing a state program would lead to “vanity projects” in local areas and divert funds from what was already a tiny budget.¹⁹

Following the 1970 reauthorization, the NEH understood that to satisfy its congressional overlords, it would have to begin some kind of locally based humanities

¹⁶ Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (1970), 77.

¹⁷ Letter, Barnaby Keeney to Claiborne Pell, February 16, 1970, Records of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of the Chairman, Correspondence with Federal Agencies, 1965-1976, Box 2, Record Group 288, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁸ John Barcroft, email message to author, September 6, 2014.

¹⁹ Armen Tashdian (former NEH staffer) interviewed by author, August 16, 2013.

program. But for the insistence of Senator Pell and other congressmen, it is questionable whether the NEH would have undertaken such an initiative. In 1982, NEH deputy chairman Geoffrey Marshall said the following about the origins of the state councils:

...the state humanities program did *not* arise because of a clamor for it from the citizens of the nation. There was no significant grass roots pressure on the NEH or on Congress for a state humanities program. Professors had never heard of such a thing. Citizens had never experienced such a thing. Europeans didn't do it and neither did the Russians.²⁰

But Pell thought that it was essential to cultivate greater grassroots support, and Congress made it clear that inaction on the issue would have consequences. In 1971, the House appropriations committee reduced the NEH's budget relative to NEA's by \$2 million because of the lack of a state program.²¹ The NEH feared that if it persisted in not setting up a state program, Congress might cut its budget, or worse.²²

This pressure from Congress came just as Keeney's term ended and Wallace "Wally" Edgerton took over as acting chairman. Unlike his predecessor, Edgerton was eager to get the state program started. A former Senate staffer, Edgerton believed a state humanities program could help foster congressional support for the NEH, just as the NEA had used the state arts councils to its advantage.²³ Edgerton, who served as acting chairman for a year and a half—the amount of time it took for the Nixon administration to settle on

²⁰ Geoffrey Marshall, "Our Circumstances in FY 1982," *Federation Reports* 5, no. 1 (1982): 20.

²¹ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, "Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program," January 26, 1972, 3, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files. See also, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 1972: Report (to Accompany H.R. 9417)*, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, H. Rep. 92-308, 30.

²² Jamil Zainaldin (former president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils) interviewed by author, June 10, 2015. See also, Cheryl Dickson (former president of the Minnesota Humanities Commission), interview by Clarke A. Chambers, July 3, 1995, <http://purl.umn.edu/49121>. According to Dickson, "In fact, finally, in 1970, which is five years after the Endowment legislation, the Congress threatened the NEA [sic] and said, 'If you don't get the state-based programs going, we're going to cut your funds. You've promised for too long and nothing has happened.'"

²³ Tashdian interviewed by author.

Ronald Berman and for him to be confirmed—made starting a state program a priority of the NEH.

3.2 THE FOUNDING OF THE STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS

The NEH, in its development of the state-based humanities program, sought to secure the political advantages of broadening its reach, while avoiding having to compromise its programmatic agenda and commitment to supporting scholarly excellence. If the NEH was to launch a state-based program, the agency wanted to be sure that it would leverage its political clout on behalf the agency's agenda—and not develop its own competing set of priorities. These considerations lay behind the laborious efforts that the NEH put into launching the program, as well as the highly specified way in which it structured the program initially.

Given pressure from Congress to begin a state humanities program quickly, the NEH considered early on the possibility of working through state arts councils because this would represent the fastest way of distributing federal funds at the state level. Though the NEH briefly experimented with this approach, as described below, the agency quickly decided not to pursue that path. Barcroft, at the time, said that working through the state arts councils would have been “disastrous, both in terms of program quality and in terms of long-term political efficacy.” The state arts councils lacked the knowledge to carry out good humanities programs and were unlikely to promote them as enthusiastically as their arts programs. Barcroft told Chairman Berman that the director

of the Michigan Arts Council had told him, “you must know that when you deal with arts councils you’re going to get our second best effort.”²⁴

Before describing in detail how the NEH went about establishing the state program, it is worth saying a bit about Barcroft. Those who knew him say that he was brilliant and driven, an all-around force of nature, which made him well suited to design and implement this ambitious initiative.²⁵ Barcroft had been one of the NEH’s first staffers, arriving in June of 1966. Barcroft worked in the NEH’s Office of Planning and Analysis (OPA), eventually serving as director. As an undergraduate at Brown University in the 1950s, he had gotten to know Barnaby Keeney and remained friends with him during his graduate studies at the University of Minnesota, where he earned a Ph.D. Before joining the NEH, he taught early modern European history, English history, and Tudor-Stuart history at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. Barcroft left the NEH in 1969 to become provost of New College in Sarasota, Florida, only to return in January of 1971 as director of the Division of Public Programs.²⁶

²⁴ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, “Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program,” 3.

²⁵ Loren Ghiglione, who was Barcroft’s assistant in the NEH’s Office of Planning and Analysis, described his former boss as extremely bright, a chain-smoker, and a workaholic. Loren Ghiglione (former NEH staffer) interviewed by author, July 30, 2014. An early state council executive director referred to him as the “crazy genius” who got the program going. Director interviewed by author. Another early director holds a mental picture of Barcroft, an excellent schmoozer, holding a drink and cigarette in one hand while gesticulating passionately and dramatically with the other. Director interviewed by author. Carole Watson, who served at the NEH for nearly 40 years, beginning as a program officer in the Division of State Programs, refers to him as “the brilliant mind behind the state councils.” Even though she came to the NEH in 1978, after Barcroft had left the agency, it was then still custom for new program officers in the Division of State Programs to meet him for lunch at a D.C. hotel restaurant, where he would hold court and “infuse us with enthusiasm and encourage us.” She jokingly noted that when she arrived at the agency, she thought, “[The NEH] had hired me, but would John approve?” Carole Watson, “The History of the State Humanities Councils” (panel remarks at Humanities Texas’s Fortieth Anniversary Program, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, December 6, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2167&v=G0wGSHqbmLQ.

²⁶ John Barcroft interviewed by author, September 5, 2014; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1976: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 4*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 881-2 (Biography of John Barcroft).

The NEH initially experimented with three different approaches in six pilot states. All three involved the state-based entity “re-granting” NEH funds, matched with private resources (either dollars or in-kind support), to sponsor “public activity in the humanities.”²⁷ In Oklahoma and Maine, the NEH awarded funds to the state arts councils to launch a humanities component. In Missouri and Georgia, the NEH worked through university continuing education and extension programs. In Oregon and Wyoming, the state-based program took the form of a “de novo” committee.²⁸

The NEH staff determined that the best way to proceed was through de novo independent committees, which it went on to found in all 50 states, territories, and District of Columbia (the state-based efforts were called “committees” before they generally became referred to as “councils”). To get started in a given state, the NEH first recruited a “catalyst group” of five or six people who were involved or at least interested in the humanities. The groups usually included academics in the humanities, university administrators, heads of local cultural organizations such as libraries and historical societies, corporate people, and labor union officials. Forming these catalyst groups took considerable effort on the part of NEH staff, requiring extensive research, generating lists of dozens if not more than 100 prospects, cold-calling, and follow-up. The catalyst groups were then invited to Washington, D.C., where Barcroft briefed members on the goals of the state program and worked with them to brainstorm ideas for the program in their respective states.²⁹ Bruce Sievers, who was the founding executive director of both

²⁷ Memorandum, Wallace B. Edgerton to Members of the National Council on the Humanities, “State-Based Public Humanities Programs,” August 11, 1970, 2-3, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

²⁸ Geoffrey Marshall, “A Thumbnail History of the State Humanities Program,” 1978, 1, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

²⁹ Marshall, “A Thumbnail History of the State Humanities Program,” 3-5; Barcroft credits a man named William Fleischmann—then an economics Ph.D. who was in between jobs—with doing the herculean task

the Montana and California humanities councils, recalls that Barcroft was particularly effective at energizing and inspiring the core groups to get things going.³⁰

When the catalyst group returned home, it would apply to the NEH and receive a planning grant. During the planning period, the core group would recruit additional members and grow the committee to between 12 and 20 people, all of whom would serve as unpaid volunteers, as well as hire a temporary staff. The committee would convene meetings throughout the state to introduce the initiative, gauge local organizations' interest in applying for funds, and determine a theme for the re-grant program (a requirement of the NEH). Upon the conclusion of the planning period, the state committee would apply to the NEH for an operational grant, which would cover administrative expenses and be used to make re-grants to local humanities groups, provided re-grant funds were matched either dollar-for-dollar or with in-kind services. State committees would eventually incorporate as independent nonprofit (501c3) organizations.³¹

The NEH was deliberate in the order of states in which it proceeded, starting with rural states that were, in some respects, more manageable than big, humanities-rich states such as New York and California, two of the last states to have committees.³² Starting with more rural states sent a message to Congress that the NEH was serious about

of recruiting the core groups. Hired as an NEH consultant, Fleischmann cold-called dozens of people in each state, obtained referrals, and did the necessary follow-up to put together the groups. John Barcroft interviewed by author, January 4, 2016.

³⁰ Bruce Sievers interviewed by author, December 28, 2015. Estus Smith, a member of the core group that formed the Mississippi state humanities council recalls, "I went with the original group to meet with John Barcroft at the National Endowment for the Humanities. And during the course of that, his thesis basically was that humanities would die if left to reside only in the academy and that in some way there needs to be a mix of the academy and the public." Estus Smith, interview by Tom Ward, August 14, 1997, <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/spcol/coh/cohsmith.html>.

³¹ Marshall, "A Thumbnail History of the State Humanities Program," 5-6.

³² Bruce Sievers interviewed by author.

reaching populations that did not already have much access to the humanities.³³ It might not have been coincidental that many members of the Interior appropriations subcommittee, which determined the NEH's budget, hailed from western states.

The staff believed that this approach, though "laborious," had significant advantages. By choosing the initial members of the catalyst groups, the NEH could have greater confidence that they would understand the Endowment's goals. Barcroft foresaw a process, over the long-term, of "assimilating [groups] to a full understanding of NEH," which would help strengthen the quality of state programs. Because members of the committees usually hailed from universities or had connections with scholars, they were well positioned to get academics in fields such as history, philosophy, and literature to consider how they might interest local communities—the state program's main objective. Furthermore, it was in the Endowment's interest to establish these independent committees quickly, so as to prevent state arts councils from becoming the designees of NEH funds. When it was clear that the NEH was about to begin a state program, the Associated Councils of the Arts urged state arts councils to change their names to "arts and humanities councils," if they did not already bear that title. Barcroft feared that if a state agency set itself up to become the recipient of NEH state grants, it would be politically difficult to direct funds elsewhere.³⁴

The NEH was very specific about the kinds of activities the state committees were to undertake. The agency wanted to ensure that the committees' programs were thoroughly based in the humanities, had the potential to generate wide audiences, and

³³ Julie Van Camp (former program officer, Division of State Programs) interviewed by author, August 5, 2014.

³⁴ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, "Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program," 3-5.

would not replicate what the NEH was doing through national grant competitions in areas such as research, fellowships, and education. The NEH, therefore, established six principles, intended to promote a sense of uniqueness and coherence to the state humanities program. They were:

- (1) The humanities should be central to all aspects of the committee's program.
- (2) Scholars in the humanities should be involved centrally in each project funded by the state committee.
- (3) All grants of a state committee should support projects dealing with public policy issues.
- (4) The committee should have a carefully chosen state theme, and the theme should be central to each project.
- (5) Projects should involve the adult, out-of-school public.
- (6) The committee objectives should be achieved by making grants.³⁵

The third principle, that all re-grants support projects that related the humanities to public policy issues, was perhaps the strangest attribute of the early state committees, though there were clear purposes behind it. Barcroft believed that the focus on public policy would make the programs of greater interest to average citizens and help cultivate a greater base of support:

It undercuts a common public (and Congressional) perception of the humanities as frivolous fields which only a leisured class can enjoy, and permits the state-based groups to attract the interest of new constituencies for the humanities. (E.g., labor—the chairman of the Alaska humanities group is Dwayne Carlson, the president of the State AFL-CIO.)³⁶

The policy requirement also partook of the idealism of the era, in which many people believed that it was time for serious discussion and reflection about the nation's values, and that the humanities had insights to contribute.³⁷ Congress, in the agency's 1968 and

³⁵ Marshall, "A Thumbnail History of the State Humanities Program," 3.

³⁶ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, "Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program," 13.

³⁷ Robert Klaus, "The Humanities and Public Policy," in *Citizens, Scholars and the Humanities: An Introduction to State Humanities Programs*, ed. Steven Weiland (Minneapolis, MN: Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities, 1980): 50; Jamil Zainaldin interviewed by author.

1970 reauthorizations, explicitly encouraged the NEH to do more to relate the humanities to pressing issues, amending the statute's definition of "humanities" to include "the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life."³⁸ The NEH viewed its state program as a way of complying with its congressional mandate.³⁹

The Oregon committee, one of the pilot efforts, provides an example of early programming, in which the focus was on relating the humanities to public policy for the out-of-school adult public. The inaugural theme of the Oregon committee was "Man and the Land." According to the NEH, "programs developed by historians, philosophers, and other humanists will aid public discussion of the ecological and land-use questions that are particularly of public concern in Oregon."⁴⁰ Three of the first projects sponsored under the auspices of "Man and the Land" were "aimed at rural areas of the state not usually serviced with educational programs" and were designed to "bring humanists and humanistic insights into dialog with the public." The Oregon Historical Society was to produce a book and film strip about land use in Oregon. The Oregon State System of Higher Education was to produce a documentary and work through its extension agents to convene lectures and discussion groups based on it. And the Jackson County Library

³⁸ *An Act to Amend the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965*, Public Law 90-348, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 82 (1968): 188; *The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1970*, Public Law 91-346, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 84 (1970): 443.

³⁹ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975: Joint Hearings before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate on H. R. 7216 and S. 1800*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 144-5 ("The Establishment of State Humanities Agencies: Examination of a Proposed Amendment to the Authorizing Legislation of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities—A Briefing Paper of the National Council on the Humanities, September 1975").

⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1973: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 3*, 92nd Cong. 2d. sess., 1972, 617 (NEH budget justification material).

was to develop traveling exhibits that would then be the subject of discussion sessions at local libraries.⁴¹

Not all state committees were enthusiastic about the public-policy requirement, with some directors wanting to do purer humanities projects that were unrelated to a current issue. Tom Roberts, the first director of the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities, recalls that in many projects, the policy angle felt “thrown in.” He also remembers a time in which he was frustrated not to be able to partner with the Rhode Island Historical Society on a project because it did not involve public policy.⁴² Barcroft, however, viewed the public policy element as essential to the state program. The policy dimensions, combined with the other principles, helped give focus to the councils’ activities:

It is clear, then, that this is not a general support program for the humanities at the state level. State-based groups do not give fellowships, support research, or make grants to educational institutions for internal purposes. Beyond this, it is not a general support program for public activity in the humanities; on the contrary, it is highly focused around a theme (and the better the theme is, the less generalized the state-based group’s support is), it concentrates on public problems, and it takes a rather hard-nosed view that the humanities, essentially as Congress has defined them, should be the focus of support.⁴³

The policy focus also gave the state-based program “its moral urgency.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1972: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 5*, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 437 (“Nature and Objectives of an NEH State-Based Program in the Humanities”).

⁴² Thomas Roberts (first director of the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities) interviewed by author, January 8, 2016.

⁴³ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, “Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program,” 10.

⁴⁴ John Barcroft, “The Three Threats to State Programs” (originally presented at a national conference of state humanities programs in Washington, D.C. in 1973), in *Citizens, Scholars and the Humanities: An Introduction to State Humanities Programs*, ed. Steven Weiland (Minneapolis, MN: Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities, 1980): 114.

Though the state committees were formally independent organizations, the NEH sought to maintain them as an integrated part of the Endowment. Unlike the state arts councils, which were state agencies with freedom to support whatever they pleased, the state humanities committees were limited in what they could do and managed much more directly by the NEH. The NEH conceived of the state committees as complementing its national initiatives and as potential vehicles for enhancing the impact of the programs it sponsored. Barcroft, for example, imagined that state committees might sponsor local programs about a film supported by the Endowment.⁴⁵ In 1973, the NEH offered the following description of its state-based effort:

The [State] Committee acts as an arm of the Endowment to fund locally initiated programs throughout the state. This program is an attempt to reach the citizen at the “grass-roots” level and to give the responsibility for mounting humanities activity to those who will directly participate in those activities.⁴⁶

Supported originally through grants from the NEH’s Division of Public Programs, the state committees had to apply for funding in the same way as any other prospective grantee, whether a university, museum, or historical society. The state councils were required to prepare funding proposals, which were then peer-reviewed, evaluated by the staff, reviewed by the National Council on the Humanities, and then approved by the chairman. The state arts councils, by contrast, received NEA funding as a matter of course, provided states put up matching appropriations.

⁴⁵ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, “Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program,” 4.

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare and Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1973: Joint Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on the Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate and the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives on S. 795, S. 916, S. H.R. 3926, H.R. 4288, Part 1*, 93rd Cong., 1st sess., 1973, 643 (“Appendices to the Statement of Ronald Berman, Chairman, on the Reauthorization of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, March 1973; Appendix IV: NEH State-Based Program – Historical Background/State Committees”).

The NEH, through implementing this vision for the state humanities councils, sought to preserve the integrity of its national grant programs, as well as meet Congress's goal of expanding its reach among the general public and fostering greater public support for the agency. Barcroft believed that the NEH could not assume that the state committees would automatically support the Endowment or be of the same mind. He believed that the NEH was going to have to work hard to ensure that the committees remained supportive of its overall mission and their particular role in that mission.

Barcroft explained to Chairman Berman:

It is exceedingly important for state-based groups to have a sense that they are “part” of NEH; otherwise, they may become moribund, or worse, misunderstand and undervalue our national programs of fellowships, research, and education, as well as our national public programs...Down the road, we are going to have to find a way to keep them informed about and sympathetic to all NEH activity (just as the Arts Endowment does with their state arts agencies.) This will make them more effective spokesmen for us within the states, and also can help to avoid a situation in which our interests and theirs are not mutually supportive.⁴⁷

But to the NEH's dismay, proposed legislation for the 1976 reauthorization opened up the possibility of undermining its intentions for the state program.

3.3 THE 1976 REAUTHORIZATION

Senator Pell, as discussed in the previous chapter, was disappointed in the performance of the state humanities committees. He believed that the arts councils were doing a far better job of reaching the populations of their respective states and that the

⁴⁷ Memorandum, John Barcroft to Ronald Berman, “Program Definition and Problems, State-Based Program and Special Projects Program,” 14-15.

SHCs' grant-making was too academic in nature. Moreover, the state humanities committees raised less in matching money than the arts councils.

Pell attributed the SHCs' shortcomings to the NEH's (and Berman's) attempt to exercise control over the program. He claimed that the NEH's policy of "centralization" had "tended to cloak the Endowment programs in elitism and hindered imaginative efforts to bring the richness of humanistic studies to bear on the lives of the average American."⁴⁸ Pell did not admire how the NEH had been influential in the formation of the SHCs' first boards and how the boards appointed successor members. Pell likened the NEH's role to "the anointing by some Federal official of chosen people within the State who must pay very close attention to a Washington base."⁴⁹ During Berman's hearing for re-confirmation, Pell noted that while Democrats usually tend to favor the federal government, in this case, he thought that the programs were better left in the hands of the states.⁵⁰

To remedy these problems, in the 1976 reauthorization process, Pell proposed legislation that would have placed the state humanities program under the control of state governments. In Pell's proposed reauthorization measure, the language organizing the state humanities program was nearly identical to the language organizing the state arts program. Under his proposal, state governments would designate the entity to receive federal funding for its respective state humanities program, which would have the freedom to carry out the same kinds of activities as the NEH did nationally, whether

⁴⁸ U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman, of Virginia, to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 94th Cong., 2d. sess., 1976, 11.

⁴⁹ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 124.

⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Nomination: Hearings on Ronald S. Berman*, 28.

research or public-facing programs. Moreover, each state was guaranteed, at minimum, \$200,000 in federal funding, though the federal government could fund, at most, 50 percent of the state's program; i.e., matching funds would be required.⁵¹

Chairman Berman and the National Council on the Humanities firmly opposed Pell's proposal, which, in their view, raised the specter of what the NEH had long sought to avoid: replication of national grant programs at the state level. In response to Pell's proposal, the National Council on the Humanities authored a report arguing for retaining the state program's original structure. The crux of the Council's argument, as discussed in the previous chapter, was that because the humanities represented academic disciplines, they should be viewed more like the sciences than the arts. The Council reminded Congress that although the NEA and NEH were founded together, it was because of "administrative convenience coupled with political necessity." Like scientific research, scholarship in the humanities is evaluated by standards that transcend geographic borders, which is why federal resources were best distributed through a national competition. The establishment of 50 separate entities, charged with advancing the humanities, "must inevitably imply the parochializatin [*sic*] of research and teaching, the duplication of experimental efforts, and the gradual dismantling of national strength in the humanities."⁵²

The Council insisted that keeping the SHCs as independent nonprofit organizations, led by voluntary boards of directors, was superior to turning them into state agencies. As state agencies, the councils could be more reluctant to tackle

⁵¹ *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1976*, S. 3440, 94th Cong., (1976).

⁵² U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 142, 143.

controversial issues, assuming that they would retain their focus on relating the humanities to public policy. State agencies would likely involve higher administrative costs, while the SHCs' use of volunteers saved money. Ensuring "quality and extent" of humanities programs, not changing the administrative structure to become state agencies, was most important to broadening the constituency and political support for the humanities.⁵³

The state committees joined NEH in opposing Senator Pell's proposal. At joint House-Senate hearings on reauthorization held in November of 1975, the chairmen of the Minnesota, Virginia, Nebraska, Vermont, and Rhode Island committees all testified to the accomplishments of their programs and opposed the plan to transition the councils to state agencies.⁵⁴ Barcroft recalls being copied on hundreds of letters that the state committees sent to Congress stating their opposition to Pell's plan.⁵⁵

The final reauthorization legislation did not require the SHCs to become state agencies; but neither did it preserve NEH's full control over them. The SHCs received the freedom pursue the same activities as the NEH. The legislation also permitted the NEH to receive applications for state program funding from any appropriate entity within each state, including the existing nonprofit committees (opening up the possibility that another entity, other than the one initiated by NEH, could also apply to become the state's humanities council). The reauthorization gave governors the opportunity to appoint two board members to the state committees and up to half the board members if a

⁵³ U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 143-7.

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, House and Senate, Committees, *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1975*, 211-34.

⁵⁵ John Barcroft interviewed by author, January 4, 2016.

state matched the federal grant with state appropriations. The state councils were required to adopt policies to ensure broad representation of people from within the state and a regular rotation of members.⁵⁶

In summation, the 1976 reauthorization complicated the NEH's plans for how it would relate to and control its clientele. The legislation had given the SHCs greater independence from the NEH; no longer could the agency formally restrict them to certain activities. Moreover, the NEH was required by law to dedicate at least 20 percent of its budget to the state program. However, the legislation still required the state committees to apply to the NEH for funding, leaving in place a process through which the NEH could still exert some influence. While the SHCs interpreted the legislation as having given them independence and solidifying their existence, the NEH still felt a sense of ownership; that it was still the parent and the SHCs still the children.

3.4 THE FEDERATION OF STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS

The relationship that developed between the NEH and state councils was, in the words of one state council director, “sometimes collaborative, sometimes confrontative”—and was so “since the beginning.”⁵⁷ While the NEH and SHCs were interdependent, their objectives were sometimes in conflict. The task of managing these conflicts fell partly to an organization that was a creature of both the NEH and SHCs: the Federation of State Humanities Councils (as it later came to be called). The Federation

⁵⁶ *Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act of 1976*, Public Law 94-462, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 90 (1976): 1971-4.

⁵⁷ Cynthia Buckingham, “The Recognition of Excellence,” *Federation Reports* 7, no. 1 (1984): 23.

was a vehicle through which the SHCs asserted more of their own collective voice, as well as a means through which the NEH exerted some influence over them. From the beginning, the Federation was also viewed as a potential lobbying force for both the SHCs and NEH. Investigative journalist Michael Mooney, in his 1980 broadside against the NEA and NEH, *The Ministry of Culture*, cast the Federation as “an organization NEH created, funded, and maintained as its own lobby to carry out NEH’s own policies in the states.”⁵⁸ But the reality was more complex, with the Federation inspiring suspicion from both the NEH and the SHCs. Though the Federation eventually came to see itself primarily as the SHCs’ voice in Washington, D.C., it took years for it to work out this sense of its identity and its standing vis-à-vis its members and the NEH.

Pressure for such a national representative organization for the state humanities committees began in the mid-1970s. Some of the pressure was the result of administrative necessity. The NEH, a grant-making agency, was not suited to administer the state humanities committees spread throughout the country. It had become increasingly difficult for NEH staff and the state committees to communicate efficiently, for example, resulting in frustration on both sides. It is likely that if the Federation had not been established, the NEH would have found another organization, a university or corporation perhaps, to which to outsource various administrative functions.⁵⁹ Pressure was also coming from the SHCs, which believed that a national organization could help provide them with greater collective voice and facilitate inter-council cooperation.

⁵⁸ Michael M. Mooney, *The Ministry of Culture: Connections Among Art, Money and Politics* (New York: Wyndham Books, 1980): 348.

⁵⁹ Letter, Martin D. Schwartz (former chairman, Indiana Committee for the Humanities) to Cora Norman, (former executive director, Mississippi Committee for the Humanities) May 30, 1979, Box 2, Folder 27, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

In the mid-1970s, several state committee executive directors—the paid professionals who oversaw day-to-day operations—began discussing the possibility of forming such a group. Barcroft, upon learning this, was appalled, viewing it as a potential challenge to NEH authority.⁶⁰ But Barcroft also saw that a national organization of state committees was inevitable, so he ended up favoring the creation of a federation. Initially, however, he sought to form the federation working with the committees’ volunteer board members, not the puckish directors.⁶¹

With financial support and guidance from the NEH, a group of state committee chairmen developed a plan for a national organization, which was endorsed overwhelmingly at the national meeting of state committee chairmen in Seattle in August of 1976. In 1977, the Federation for Public Programs in the Humanities came into being, its name reflecting the SHCs’ early focus on public-facing efforts.⁶² The organization’s bylaws allowed for both volunteer board members and paid executive directors to serve on each state committee’s delegation to the Federation’s governing body.⁶³ By then, Barcroft was leaving the agency, and it is unclear whether the board members had similar reservations about the executive directors’ participation.

⁶⁰ Bruce Sievers interviewed by author.

⁶¹ Bruce Sievers interviewed by author. Dwight Hoover, who served as a consultant to the committee of state committee chairmen who laid the groundwork for the Federation, says that the “impetus” for its formation had come from Barcroft. Dwight W. Hoover, *Middletown: The Making of a Documentary Film Series* (Philadelphia, PA: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992): 35.

⁶² Edgar F. Shannon Jr., “History of Developments Leading to a National Organization of State-Based Committees in the Humanities,” 1977, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files; “Background,” Box I Folder 33, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

⁶³ Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities, “Constitution and By-Laws of the Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities,” 1977, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

The Federation's potential as an advocacy or lobbying entity was apparent from the start. This was a sensitive issue, given the Federation's close ties to the NEH. When the House voted on the conference version of the 1976 reauthorization, Rep. Albert Quie (R-MN) spoke approvingly of the state councils' plans to form a national organization, but said that he would object if the NEH were to fund it:

If that were the case, it would lessen the potential organization's independence from the endowment, and would mean that the endowment would, directly or indirectly, be funding whatever lobbying or political activities a national organization might engage in.

Congressman Brademas echoed Quie's concern and said that he preferred that the organization seek private funds.⁶⁴ Because the Federation came into being with NEH support and was almost certain to receive at least some Endowment funds,⁶⁵ it is not surprising that the group of chairmen who were planning the Federation disclaimed that it would be a lobbying organization. The committee was very intentional in its decision not to locate the Federation in Washington, D.C.⁶⁶ Though the Federation would eventually move to the nation's capital in 1986, it spent its first nine years based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

When the Federation incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization in 1979, the question of its advocacy role was still a sensitive matter. The Federation ultimately decided that it was appropriate to take on a limited set of "lobbying" activities as permitted by law. These activities primarily involved informing the state committees

⁶⁴ 122 Cong. Rec. 32717 (1976).

⁶⁵ State Humanities Planning Committee, "Questions and Answers About the Proposed Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities," 4, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

⁶⁶ "It will be centrally located in a major city, easily accessible to all member state-based committees. The present thinking of the Interim Committee is that Washington would not be the city." State Humanities Planning Committee, "Questions and Answers About the Proposed Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities," 6.

about legislation and policies affecting the state humanities programs and informing Congress and federal agencies about what the SHCs were doing.⁶⁷ These were activities that the founders of the Federation had foreseen; that it would “aid in the exchange of information with legislative and executive leaders in government.”⁶⁸ In the run-up to the 1980 reauthorization, for example, when Pell again sought to encourage the councils to transition to state agencies, Federation leaders worked to inform Congress of how the councils were succeeding in their nonprofit form.⁶⁹ When the Reagan administration intended to cut the NEH’s budget in half, the Federation kept the councils informed about the state of the appropriations fight in Washington and urged present and former state committee members to contact their congressmen, notifying them of what cuts would mean locally.⁷⁰

Despite the initial misgivings of Representatives Quie and Brademas, there is little evidence to suggest that members of Congress were deeply concerned with what the Federation was doing in regard to lobbying, even as the NEH provided much of the organization’s funding through contracts for various services. Early on, the Federation was of far greater concern to staff inside the NEH, as well as an object of concern to some of the SHCs themselves. Because of the Federation’s murky origins, as a joint creature of both the councils and the NEH, parties on both sides viewed the organization

⁶⁷ Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities, “Records and Minutes: Executive Committee Meeting, Washington Hotel – Washington, D.C.,” April 9, 1979, Box 1, Folder 7, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

⁶⁸ State Humanities Planning Committee, “Questions and Answers About the Proposed Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities,” 5.

⁶⁹ Memorandum, Betsy McCreight (then Federation executive committee chair) to Chairpersons and Executive Directors, Member States, “1980 NEH Reauthorization,” March 29, 1979, Box 2, Folder 39, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

⁷⁰ Memorandum, Betsy McCreight (then president, Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities) to Chairs and Executive Directors, State Humanities Programs, “Legislative Update,” February 24, 1981, Box 1, Folder 31, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

with some suspicion. Staff at the NEH perceived the Federation as a potential adversary, while some of the councils suspected that it was a means through which the NEH might try and exercise control. Some state council directors saw the Federation in this light when it began sponsoring orientation conferences for new state committee chairmen, with funding provided by the NEH. According to James Veninga, a longtime director of the Texas committee, “It probably was not a coincidence that these orientation meetings began as the state councils were claiming autonomy.”⁷¹

In 1979, the House Appropriations Committee conducted an investigation of both the NEA and the NEH. In regard to the Federation, the Committee noted how staff at the NEH had serious concerns:

In the opinion of some NEH staff, the Federation as presently conceived is an unofficial “lobbying” organization. Endowment personnel have advised the Investigative Staff the Federation is beginning to make NEH very “nervous.” Because of ill-defined goals and an inadequate statement of purpose, Endowment personnel believe the Federation represents a rather nebulous entity. According to NEH staff, the Endowment was responsible for the genesis and growth of the Federation. NEH, at the time, perceived an unqualified need for such an organization; however, according to NEH officials, the Endowment reached this conclusion without sufficient afterthought. As a result, the Endowment is now involved in a confrontation situation with an organization almost entirely funded with Endowment money. NEH personnel have advised the Investigative Staff the Federation has begun to challenge Endowment policies on divergent issues.⁷²

The NEH, in its response to the Committee, said that the Federation was an initiative of the state committees and denied that it was involved in lobbying. It did not, however,

⁷¹ James F. Veninga, Prefatory Material, “Three New Threats to the State Humanities Programs” (1981), in *The Humanities and the Civic Imagination: Collected Addresses and Essays, 1978-1998*, ed. James F. Veninga (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999): 62.

⁷² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1980: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 12*, 96th Cong. 1st sess., 1979, 524 (Surveys and Investigations Staff, “A Report to the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives on the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, Volume II, The National Endowment for the Humanities,” March 1979).

address the charge that the Federation and the Endowment were “involved in a confrontation situation.”⁷³

However, despite the suspicion and occasional distrust, the Federation probably did more to defuse tensions between the SHCs and the NEH than exacerbate them. Steven Weiland, the first long-serving executive director of the Federation, believes that the NEH was smart to sponsor the Federation, in part because it gave the state committees a separate place to complain. The Federation and the NEH’s Division of State Programs generally worked well together, keeping one another informed about developments in the states and at the NEH.⁷⁴

3.5 TOWARD CLIENT POLITICS

During an appropriations hearing in 1979, Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) spoke to Chairman Duffey about the importance of the state arts and humanities councils on the Hill:

Your Endowment and the Arts Endowment have thrived because of strong State committees. As soon as you do away with those State committees, you will lose your support in the Congress. That is all there is to it. They are the people who contact us individually... Not a year goes by that my Alaska committee doesn’t see me here at their own expense and also insist on seeing me in Alaska...

My point is that I really think you are making a big mistake—and I said this to your colleague with the National Endowment for the Arts—if you don’t encourage the growth of those committees. They are your lobbying group. They

⁷³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1980*, 582-5 (“Response of the National Endowment for the Humanities to the Report of the Surveys and Investigations Staff of the House Appropriations Committee,” March 1979).

⁷⁴ Steven Weiland interviewed by author, July 21, 2015.

are the people who get you the support and, I think, will maintain your Endowment.⁷⁵

Though Stevens may have overstated the political importance of the SHCs in 1979—after all, the NEH had obtained bipartisan support and entered a period of budgetary expansion before the state humanities program even existed—he was prescient in saying that they would maintain the Endowment.

However, the SHCs did not end up gaining clout simply by virtue of spending money in their respective states and across congressional districts—important as that was. The SHCs became a dominant interest group with the potential to achieve their interests because of the rise of the culture wars and the Republican Party’s changing position toward federal funding for the arts and humanities. That story is the subject of chapter five; the following chapter is on how the culture war influenced changes in party positioning.

⁷⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1980: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations on H.R. 4930, Part 4*, 96th Cong. 1st sess., 1979, 3521.

4.0 PARTY POSITIONING: 1980 – 1995

On January 15, 1987, as many as 500 Stanford undergraduates marched in protest of the university's core humanities curriculum, "Western Culture." Joined by civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, the students chanted, "Hey hey, ho ho, Western Civ has got to go." Among the program's various requirements was that all students read the same 15 works of religion, literature, and philosophy, beginning with the book of Genesis and concluding with Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In 1986, Stanford's Black Student Union had criticized the course as "racist" for its failure to include any books by black writers. Hispanic and feminist student groups followed suit, alleging that the curriculum was biased against them, too. Stanford's Faculty Senate soon thereafter decided to replace "Western Culture" with a new program, "Culture, Ideas, and Values," which included writings by more women and minorities. The protest and Stanford's curricular change drew national headlines. In 1988, Secretary of Education William Bennett, who had previously served as chairman of the NEH, debated Stanford President Donald Kennedy on PBS's MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour on Stanford's decision.¹

¹ Larry Gordon, "Stanford Debates Its View of Western Culture," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1988, <https://stanforddailyarchive.com/cgi-bin/stanford?a=d&d=stanford19880420-01.2.2>; Leslie Saul and Erik Sten, "Kennedy, Bennett face off; CIV hits TV," *Stanford Daily*, April 20, 1988, <https://stanforddailyarchive.com/cgi-bin/stanford?a=d&d=stanford19880420-01.2.2#>.

All this took place at the height of what has been called the “Canon Wars,” a dispute over the content of college humanities curricula that became an issue in the broader American culture wars. The debate centered on whether curricula should retain a focus on what were previously considered great works of the Western tradition or be more inclusive of writers representing marginalized groups. Several books published in the late 1980s and early 1990s helped elevate the Canon Wars in public discourse. These included *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom (1987), *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* by E. D. Hirsch (1987), *Tenured Radicals* by Roger Kimball (1990), and *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* by Dinesh D’Souza (1991).²

The culture wars had significant political repercussions for the idea of federal funding for the arts and humanities. Most consequentially, the Republican Party returned to the position held by many of its members when the NEA and NEH were first established: culture is not an appropriate sphere for federal action. The growing importance of the Religious Right as a Republican constituency group, one that was hostile toward the Endowments, was a major driver of this position change. Excellence and merit, as it turned out, had no constituency. Conservative intellectuals, who previously championed those principles, along with strict reliance on peer review, became hostile toward funding an academy that they viewed as corrupt. When conservative intellectuals and politicians supported the NEH during this fraught time, it was increasingly because it was headed by people in whom they had confidence: William Bennett and Lynne Cheney, who garnered reputations as intransigent opponents of

² Rachel Donadio, “Books on the Canon Wars,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/16/books/review/16dona-list.html>.

progressive intellectual trends in the academy. Democrats, to the extent that they supported the NEH, generally maintained the position that they had staked out in the 1970s. With minorities being a key part of the Democratic base, the party insisted that the NEH do more to support the cultural expression of certain racial and ethnic groups. But by the early 1990s, even some Democrats were suggesting that culture was not an appropriate area for federal involvement.

4.1 NO CONSTITUENCY ON THE RIGHT FOR EXCELLENCE

To recap, beginning in the mid-1970s during the Pell-Berman controversy over reforms to the state humanities councils, conservative intellectuals argued that the NEH, at its best, was a symbol of excellence, and that by adhering to scholarly peer review and favoring research over public-facing programs, it could fulfill its mission of supporting high culture. Conservative intellectuals kept up the drumbeat for excellence as the Carter administration appeared to push the NEH in a more populist direction, with the Heritage Foundation intoning that the agency could “teach the nation the limits of equalitarian impulse.” Candidate Reagan insisted that the NEA award grants on the basis of “merit and merit alone,” and the 1980 GOP Platform criticized the Carter administration for having politicized the Endowments and lowering standards of excellence. Though the ideal of excellence may have exerted some influence within the Reagan administration early on, it failed to become a dominant or even minority position within the GOP as the 1980s wore on.

When Ronald Reagan was elected president, there was a divide on the American Right over what to do with the NEA and NEH. There was broad agreement that the Carter administration had politicized the agencies, but there was a lack of consensus about the appropriate response. Some of Reagan's advisors, as well as Republican-leaning intellectuals such as economist Milton Friedman and Ernest van den Haag, called for abolishing both the NEA and NEH. Others, however, believed that it was possible to reform the NEA and NEH and restore a commitment to high standards and excellence.³ The *New York Times* took the latter view in an editorial most likely authored by Hilton Kramer, "Stop Funding Artistic Circuses." The *Times* disparaged the direction that the NEA and NEH had taken under the Carter administration, but concluded, "The answer is not to eliminate the Endowments, or to cut their funds, but to redeploy them."⁴ Because Reagan was a former actor, but also committed to trimming the federal budget, there was great uncertainty in regard to what course of action he would recommend concerning the Endowments.⁵

In June 1981, Reagan formed the Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities, charged with making recommendations on several questions, including how to increase private support for the arts and humanities and "potential improvements in the management, organization and structure" of the NEA and NEH.⁶ The body was co-chaired by actor Charlton Heston (for the arts), University of Chicago president Hanna Gray (for the humanities), and Daniel Terra (for government). The task force, which

³ Hilton Kramer, "Reagan Aides Discuss U.S. Role in Helping Arts and Humanities," *New York Times*, November 26, 1980, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴ "Stop Funding Artistic Circuses," *New York Times*, December 15, 1980, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵ Richard Christiansen, "Reagan's Funding Proposals Give Arts a Case of the Jitters," *Chicago Tribune*, February 8, 1981, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Executive Order 12308—Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities," June 5, 1981, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=43910>.

included such notable conservatives as Harvard professor Edward Banfield and philanthropists Joseph Coors and Richard Mellon Scaife, met with some initial skepticism and fear. Heston and Gray had to reassure the public that the group had not been created for the predetermined purpose of recommending the abolishment of the Endowments.⁷ When the Task Force issued its report in October, it did not propose terminating the NEA or NEH. It found, “Basically, the National Endowments are sound and should remain as originally conceived.” The Task Force had a few specific recommendations, such as reinvigorating the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities, which had been established by the original statute but had seldom been active during the preceding 15 years; the establishment of a program of Presidential Fellows in the Arts and Humanities, to support young individual scholars and artists; and reforms to the tax code to encourage individual and corporate donors. But as for the NEA and NEH, the Task Force found that they “have functioned well in their present structure.” The Task Force endorsed the peer review process as “a fair and effective system for grant-making at both Endowments.”⁸

President Reagan accepted the Task Force’s recommendation, in that he did not propose zeroing out the Endowments, though he did seek to cut their budgets significantly—by half of what the Carter administration had requested for FY 1982 (or 44 percent of FY 1981). When it came to NEH, the administration’s proposed cuts followed the principles that Michael Joyce had laid out in the Heritage Foundation’s *Mandate for Leadership*, namely, the identification of excellence with serious scholarly research and a

⁷ Carla Hall, “White House Arts & Humanities Group Meets,” *Washington Post*, June 16, 1981, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸ Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities, “Report to the President,” October 1981, 2, 11.

skepticism toward the value of much of the NEH's public-facing programs. Under the administration's proposal, the entire Division of Public Programs was to be cut by 60 percent and the Division of State Programs, which oversaw the state humanities councils, by 45 percent. Scholarly research, in contrast, was to be relatively spared. Fellowships for university scholars and college teachers, for example, were only to be cut by eight percent. Though the proposed budget eliminated one of the NEH's fellowship programs, it was the one that had provided sabbaticals for professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and journalists.⁹ Incidentally, this was a program that Senator John Tower (R-TX), who favored abolishing the NEH, had singled out in 1980 as an egregious example of wasteful federal spending.¹⁰

Congress, however, did not go along with the administration's proposed cuts. In the end, the NEH budget was reduced by about 14 percent in FY1982, with reductions more evenly distributed across programs.¹¹ For the next several years, Congress continued to appropriate more funding for the NEH than the administration requested. Chairman William Bennett and his deputy chairman, John Agresto, though, were pleased to request below what Congress wanted to appropriate. Agresto noted that requesting a smaller budget gave them leverage with Congress, which could not use the prospect of funding reductions to pressure the agency.¹² As the following graph indicates, following the modest budget cuts early in Reagan's first term, appropriations to the NEH remained relatively flat for nearly 15 years. Because inflation had been tamed, the agency did not

⁹ American Association for the Advancement for the Humanities, "NEH budget request: unprecedented retrenchment," *Humanities Report* 3, no. 4 (1981): 15-16.

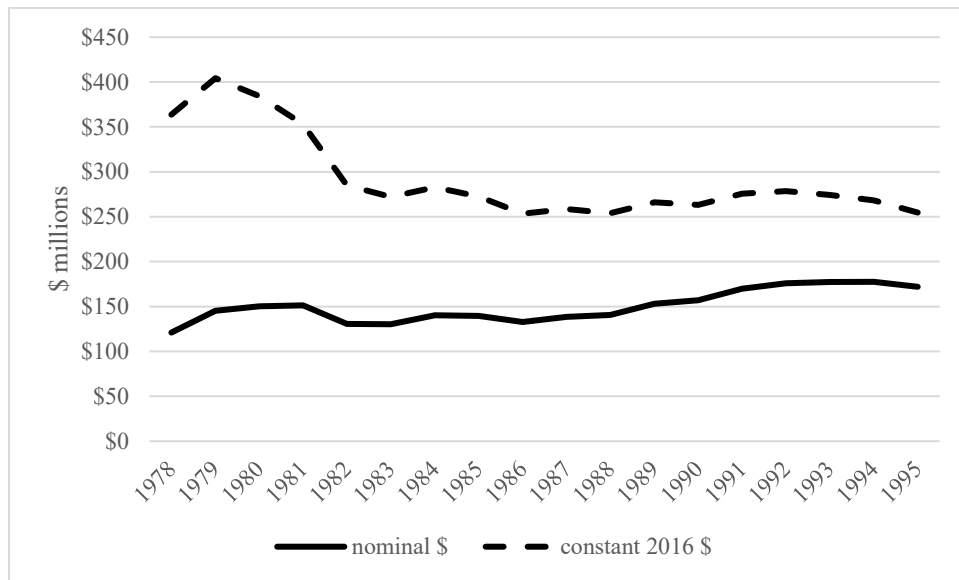
¹⁰ 126 Cong. Rec. 9822 (1980).

¹¹ See, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1983: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 3*, 97th Cong., 2d. sess., 1982, 888-891 (budget justification materials).

¹² John Agresto (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, June 23, 2015.

lose much ground in terms of real dollars even as Congress held the budget flat for much of the 1980s. As explained below, in the early 1990s, with the NEH under Lynne Cheney’s leadership, Congress increased the Endowment’s budget to its all-time high in nominal dollars. Yet it was still well below the real-dollar peak reached in the late 1970s.

Figure 3. NEH Appropriations: 1978 – 1995¹³



Because the NEH’s budget was so tiny relative to other federal expenditures, members of Congress generally ignored the agency.¹⁴ But when it came time to reauthorize the NEA and NEH in 1985, Democratic and Republican priorities for the cultural agencies reflected the importance of constituencies within their respective coalitions. Democrats, as they had beginning in the late 1970s, insisted that the NEA and NEH be more favorable toward women and minorities. On the Republican side, “excellence,” it turned out, had little purchase. Some Republican members were focused

¹³ Humanities Indicators, “Federal Funding for the Humanities,” <https://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=11>.

¹⁴ Jason Hall (former director, NEH Congressional Liaison Office) interviewed by author, March 24, 2015.

on the moral quality of what the NEA was funding, echoing concerns of the Religious Right, while others pushed for greater support for rural Americans.

The reauthorization measure put forward by the House Committee on Education and Labor did not propose any structural changes to the NEA and NEH. The Committee did, however, urge the Endowments to be more favorable toward populations that had previously been underserved or underrepresented in cultural fields. In the Committee's report, "cultural diversity" and "heritage" had become watchwords. While the Committee encouraged both Endowments to do more on behalf of cultural diversity, it singled out the NEH as a laggard in this regard, noting its "very grave concerns" with the agency.¹⁵

The Committee reported that during hearings it had "heard of declines in and underrepresentation of gender studies and women scholars and black studies and minority scholars."¹⁶ One person to testify to this development was Marjorie Lightman, a historian representing the National Council for Research on Women. She argued that the NEH was not funding research about gender in proportion to the academy's interest in the theme. Lightman explained that NEH's support of gender-related research had declined by more than half from 1981 to 1983, and that while the total amount had rebounded in 1984, the vast majority of grants were small. She suggested that the reason for the NEH's treatment of women may have had to do with the way in which the agency was selecting peer reviewers.¹⁷ (How the NEH's grant-making system operated under Republican-appointed chairmen, beginning with William Bennett, is the subject of chapter nine.)

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Arts, Humanities, and Museums Amendments of 1985: Report together with Supplementary and Additional Views (to Accompany H.R. 3248)*, 99th Cong., 1st sess., 1985, H. Rep. 99-274, 14.

¹⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Arts, Humanities, and Museums Amendments of 1985*, 14.

¹⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Reauthorization of Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Joint Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Select*

The Committee also struck back at the ideal of “excellence” that had been a rallying cry for conservatives. In its report, the Committee approvingly quoted from the testimony of Bruce Sievers, who was then executive director of the Walter and Elise Haas Fund and a founding director of two state humanities committees. During hearings, Sievers called upon the NEH to “encourage an interpretation [of the humanities] beyond a single mainstream conception of the western tradition of the humanities.” Sievers also said, “There is a danger of being seduced by a kind of ideology of quality in which ‘excellence’ becomes a code word for conventional.”¹⁸

The Committee proposed a series of amendments to encourage the Endowments to be more favorable toward women and minorities. Amendments affected the following areas, among others:

- Preamble: The Committee added a provision to the statute’s declaration of purpose, stating that education in the arts and humanities should enable Americans to “recognize and appreciate...the diversity of excellence that comprises our cultural heritage.”
- Definition of Humanities: The Committee modified the definition of the humanities, stating that it included “the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to *reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history* and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life” (added language in italics).
- Authorized activities: The Committee authorized the chairman of the NEH to:

Education and the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, 99th Cong., 1st sess., 1985, 475.

¹⁸ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Arts, Humanities, and Museums Amendments of 1985*, 15.

- “initiate and support programs and research which have substantial scholarly and cultural significance and that reach, or reflect the diversity and richness of our American cultural heritage, including the culture of, a minority, inner city, rural, or tribal community.”
- In regard to supporting publications of scholarly works, the Committee amended the statute such that the chairman “shall give particular regard to scholars, and educational and cultural institutions, that have traditionally been underrepresented”
- National Council on the Humanities: In regard to the selection of members, the Committee added the following admonition: “In making such appointments, the President shall give due regard to equitable representation of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities who are involved in the humanities.”

Though the Committee was generally approving of the work of the cultural agencies, through these amendments and similar measures affecting the NEA, it sought to make the Endowments more responsive to various segments of the population.¹⁹

When the Committee bill was considered by the full House, Republicans offered hardly any resistance to this new focus on particular groups. Only one Republican, Congressman E. Thomas Coleman (R-MO), objected to the aforementioned aspects of the bill. Coleman praised the NEA and NEH’s historic “focus on quality” and use of peer review to make funding decisions. He articulated the agencies’ mission in a way that harkened back to the high ideals of their founding; as the “support of excellent projects which provide an understanding and appreciation of the foundation of our civilization and

¹⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Arts, Humanities, and Museums Amendments of 1985*, 37, 45-46, 53.

country.” Coleman was “dismayed” by what the Committee had done in charging the Endowments to give special regard to particular groups, noting that Congress had shown “remarkable” restraint in having resisted this direction since the establishment of the Endowments 20 years earlier. He argued that the Endowments were already open to anyone who wanted to apply, that the staff were more than willing to help any and every applicant, that the NEA and NEH were already giving grants to underserved populations, and that not even a majority of witnesses who testified called for such changes. According to Coleman, “Only a few witnesses, representing particular special interests, called for special privileges for applications from their own groups.” Though he supported the reauthorization of the agencies, he chose to register these concerns about the proposed changes to the law.²⁰

During the debate on the House floor, Republicans demonstrated far greater concern about the moral quality of projects that received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts than the ideal of excellence. Earlier that year, Congressman Dick Armey (R-TX) charged the NEA with having awarded “grants for poetry, stories, and other writing that is extremely pornographic in nature.”²¹ As it turned out, the poems that Armey referred to had not been funded by the NEA—only that the Endowment had made grants to the poets who had authored them (the grants sponsored other work). Armey, however, was still disturbed that the offending poems were part of the portfolios that NEA panelists had used to review and recommend grants. When the reauthorization bill was in committee, Congressman Steve Bartlett (R-TX) had proposed an amendment that

²⁰ 131 Cong. Rec. 24807-8 (1985).

²¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation of the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1985: Report together with Supplemental and Dissenting Views (to Accompany H.R. 2245)*, 99th Cong. 1st sess., 1985, 12 (“Dissenting View of Richard Armey”).

would have kept the NEA from funding anything that panelists deemed “patently offensive to the average person and lack serious literary or artistic merit.” The Committee, however, rejected this proposal.²²

Armey, determined to correct the deficiencies he saw at the NEA, introduced an amendment on the House floor that was in the spirit of what Bartlett had proposed. Armey’s amendment included a provision requiring advisory panels to recommend grants only for projects that “in the experts’ view, foster excellence, are reflective of exceptional talent, and have significant literary, scholarly, cultural, or artistic merit.” Armey’s amendment passed. Congressman Tom DeLay (R-TX), who criticized the NEA on similar grounds as Armey, followed with an amendment to limit the reauthorization from four years to two, which also passed.²³

Armey and DeLay’s efforts reflected the growing influence of the Religious Right as a constituency in the Republican Party. As early as 1980, there were reports that the Moral Majority, then only a year old, favored abolishing the NEA and NEH.²⁴ When Armey introduced his amendment, he referred to getting calls from people who had seen a disconcerting report on the NEA aired by the Christian Broadcasting Network.²⁵

In making their critiques of the NEA, Armey and DeLay channeled some of the populist sentiment about federal funding for culture that had been part of the GOP since the founding of the Endowments, even as a majority of Republicans had come to back

²² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Arts, Humanities, and Museums Amendments of 1985*, 67 (“Additional Views of the Honorable Richard K. Armey”).

²³ 131 Cong. Rec. 27129-27133 (1985).

²⁴ Carla Hall, “Reagan and the Endowments,” *Washington Post*, November 23, 1980, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1980/11/23/reagan-and-the-endowments/ae59df74-1976-43ae-9464-d6e49c0d1054/?utm_term=.3a988eb243be; and Sandra Reeves, “The Reagan Era Begins With Mixed Signals For the Humanities,” *Humanities Report* 3, no. 1 (1981): 11.

²⁵ 131 Cong. Rec. 27130 (1985).

them. Armey, during hearings, justified imposing stricter standards on what the NEA could fund in terms of responding to the interests of the people: “He who pays the tab plays the judge.”²⁶ DeLay grounded his amendments in the democratic principle of majority rule, saying that the NEA “must...remain focused to the desires of the majority of the people and should look for ways to fund arts that will give enjoyment to the greatest number of people in this country.”²⁷ This call for the NEA to mind the “desires of the majority,” though, contravened the original spirit of the law, which, as discussed in chapter one, was a self-consciously elitist measure, aiming to edify the nation at large through supporting professional artists and humanists. But because of many Republicans’ growing distrust of “elite” culture and resistance to that culture among an important constituency, this original understanding of the Endowments was becoming harder to accept on the Right (though some never accepted it to begin with).

During debate over the reauthorization, Republicans even joined Democrats in pushing the legislation in the direction of having the Endowments focus on previously underserved groups, rural populations in particular. Congressman Steve Gunderson (R-WI) introduced an amendment with several provisions geared toward that objective. His amendment modified one of the more sublime parts of the organic statute’s statement of purpose (inserted language in *italics*, deleted language in [brackets]):

That democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens and that it must therefore foster and support a form of education *and access to the arts and the humanities*, designed to make [men] *people of all backgrounds and wherever located* masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant

²⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Reauthorization of Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965*, 562 (Statement of Congressman Richard Armey).

²⁷ 131 Cong. Rec. 27132 (1985).

Gunderson's amendment also modified a new section which required the NEA to collect national data on the state of the arts in America. His amendment called on the NEA to collect data specifically concerning rural communities and report on the extent to which its programs reached these areas. Gunderson's amendment passed without objection.²⁸

The 1985 reauthorization passed the House with strong bipartisan support, 349 to 57.²⁹ Yet as the debate over the legislation indicated, the original Great Society vision for the agency as patron of high culture (with a fair amount of consensus as to what that "culture" was) had increasingly less purchase within the parties. Democrats were concerned with encouraging the NEH to support the cultural expression of minority groups within its coalition. Republicans, for their part, wanted the cultural agencies to support rural Americans and, in response to complaints from the Religious Right, demanded stricter oversight of what the NEA sponsored. Further, as suggested by the testimony of scholars who criticized the NEH for insufficiently supporting identity studies, there were signs that the NEH would not be a neutral player in the escalating culture war. The chairmen who led the agency during this fraught time—William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and Sheldon Hackney—reinforced this perception about the role of the NEH.

²⁸ 131 Cong. Rec. 27129 (1985).

²⁹ 131 Cong. Rec. 27138 (1985).

4.2 AGENCY REPUTATION IN THE CULTURE WAR

When the NEH was founded, it was assumed that the agency would award grants on the basis of nonpolitical expertise, just as the National Science Foundation did. At that time, there was a fair amount of consensus as to what the humanities were. Strom Thurmond, for example, never quibbled with his Democratic colleagues' paeans to Shakespeare, Aquinas, Michelangelo, Greek, and Latin. But as the humanities themselves ceased to be perceived as nonpolitical, many came to view the NEH as a political agency—in that it favored more canonical or multiculturalist notions of the humanities. The individuals tapped to lead the agency garnered reputations as being strongly on either side of this divide. Their reputations, in turn, rubbed off on the NEH. This had consequences particularly for the Republican Party's positioning toward the agency.³⁰ So long as the NEH was headed by an opponent of progressive intellectual trends, Republicans could still have some confidence in how it would operate. Yet once that situation no longer obtained, and with the Religious Right generally opposed to federal funding for culture, the GOP had little reason not to become hostile.

William Bennett and Lynne Cheney cultivated their reputations as opponents of progressive intellectual trends through a vigorous use of the bully pulpit. More so than previous chairmen, Bennett and Cheney addressed the American people directly. As the culture war escalated, Bennett and Cheney helped make the humanities more of a public

³⁰ For a discussion of how the reputation of an agency head can influence the agency's overall reputation, see Patrick S. Roberts, "FEMA and the Prospects for Reputation-Based Autonomy," *Studies in American Political Development* 20 (Spring 2006): 57-87.

issue, criticizing developments in K-12 and university curricula, as well as what they perceived to be anti-Western sentiments on the rise in the humanities.

When Bennett was appointed chairman, Irving Kristol, who had lobbied President Reagan on his behalf, advised him to manage the NEH in a way that did not make waves—lay low, do your job, never apologize, and never explain. Bennett, however, declined to follow this advice. According to John Agresto, Bennett had two rules: tell the truth and have fun.³¹ In 1985, William Kristol discussed Bennett’s leadership style at some length in a profile of three Reagan appointees. Kristol quotes Bennett who gave a “first law” for political appointees:

Before someone else tells the world what you’re doing, what you’re about, get the bull by the horns and tell everyone—loudly and clearly and repeatedly—what it is you intend to do, and why you’re doing it. You need, first and foremost, to articulate a vision of what the agency should be. If you don’t act as if you had the ball, if you don’t put yourself on the offensive, setting the terms of debate around your agency, then you’re on the defensive, and that’s no place to be.³²

Throughout the entirety of his chairmanship, Bennett was on the offensive, stating clearly what he viewed as the value of the humanities and what the agency should and should not support.

Within four months of being sworn in as chairman, Bennett made headlines for criticizing a project that the NEH had funded indirectly. The project in question was a documentary film supported by the Wisconsin Committee for the Humanities, “From the Ashes...Nicaragua,” which ran on public television. In a front-page *New York Times* story, “Humanities Chief Calls PBS Film Propaganda,” Bennett was quoted as saying

³¹ John Agresto interviewed by author.

³² William Bennett, quoted in William Kristol, “Can-Do Government,” *Policy Review* 31 (Winter 1985): 63.

that, in his view, the film did not represent the humanities. Bennett deemed the film a biased presentation, a “hymn to the Sandinistas,” and undeserving of federal funds.³³

Bennett proactively sought to spur greater public discourse about trends in the humanities and challenge views that were ascendant in the academy. In 1984, at a time when some humanities educators were questioning whether works that were previously deemed “canonical” deserved pride of place in curricula, Bennett sought to show that there was actually a fair amount of consensus on texts that students ought to know. He asked 250 people from across the political spectrum to send him their list of ten books that they thought all high school graduates should be familiar with—and asked *Washington Post* columnist George Will to invite his readers to do the same. Based on the submissions received, there was, in fact, a fair amount of consensus around certain texts. According to Bennett, “Almost every person agreed on five vital sources: the Bible, Shakespeare, America’s founding documents, the great American novel “Huckleberry Finn” and classical works of mythology and poetry, like the Iliad and the Odyssey.”³⁴ William Kristol, in the profile referenced above, was impressed by Bennett’s use of the press in this instance. Kristol said, “the coverage of that story did as much as to further his agenda of fostering a kind of back-to-basics movement in the humanities as any of the NEH’s grants or any of his formal speeches.”³⁵

Bennett’s most consequential public act as chairman, though, was likely his authorship of, “To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education,”

³³ Irvin Molotsky, “Humanities Chief Calls PBS Film Propaganda,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1982, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁴ William J. Bennett, “The Conservative Case for Common Core,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 2014, ProQuest Digitized Newspapers. See, George Will, “What to Read? Start with Genesis,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 1984, ProQuest Historical U.S. Newspapers; George Will, “What to Read (Cont’d.)” *Washington Post*, August 12, 1984, ProQuest Historical U.S. Newspapers.

³⁵ Kristol, 64.

published in November 1984, just months before he would depart the NEH to become Secretary of Education. While he prepared this report in consultation with an advisory group of teachers, scholars, and administrators, he claimed sole authorship. In the report, Bennett criticized what he viewed as the decline of humanities education in colleges and universities, placed much of the blame on professors and university administrators, and called for restoring the serious study of Western Civilization to the core of the college curriculum. Reported on widely by the press, “To Reclaim a Legacy” became a focal point in the growing debate over multiculturalism in higher education. Reviews of the report appeared in publications such as *The New Republic* (twice) and *The New York Review of Books*, while several academic journals published articles in response.³⁶ When Bennett was up for confirmation as Secretary of Education, the *New York Times* ran a brief story on him, calling attention to how he had influenced public discourse over the humanities. According to the *Times*, “William J. Bennett has been such a staunch advocate of the classical approach to the studies of humanities that he has stirred a loud debate not expected to be found in those staid precincts.”³⁷

Lynne Cheney, Bennett’s successor, picked up where he left off. The wife of a Wyoming congressman (and future Secretary of Defense and Vice President), Cheney

³⁶ Leon Botstein, “Balancing the Books,” *New Republic*, February 11, 1985, 25-28; Ann Hulbert, “Curriculum Commotion,” *New Republic*, May 6, 1985, 27-31; Andrew Hacker, “The Decline of Higher Learning,” *The New York Review of Books*, February 13, 1986, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1986/02/13/the-decline-of-higher-learning>; Robert Scholes, “Aiming a Canon at the Curriculum,” *Salmagundi* 72 (Fall 1986): 101-117; E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Marjorie Perloff, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, John P. Sisk, and J. Mitchell Morse, “Responses to Robert Scholes,” *Salmagundi* 72 (Fall 1986): 118-163; Robert Scholes, “Afterword on Canons” *Salmagundi* 72 (Fall 1986): 164-5. See also, Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990). Much of Kimball’s polemic focuses on the debate that surrounded “To Reclaim a Legacy.” See also, Kevin V. Mulcahy, “The Humanities and the Failure of American Higher Education: Reactions to William Bennett’s ‘To Reclaim a Legacy,’” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 20, no. 2 (1986): 98-102.

³⁷ Irvin Molotsky, “William John Bennett,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

entered office already enjoying a degree of notoriety. She also had an interest in speaking directly to the public. Just like Bennett, Cheney began her tenure by assailing an NEH-funded program that appeared on public television: “The Africans,” a nine-part series that explored the continent’s geography and climate, along with its social, cultural, religious, and political heritage. Other sponsors had included the BBC, PBS, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Annenberg/CPB Project. Cheney criticized the series for lacking a balanced treatment of the issues involved, saying, “The thesis is to blame all the moral, economic and technological problems on the West.”³⁸ Cheney successfully obtained permission from the Federal Communications Commission to remove the NEH from the list of the sponsors of the series.³⁹

As chairman, Cheney issued a series of reports about the state of the humanities in America, calling attention to problems at both the K-12 and collegiate levels. Though Congress only required the NEH to issue a report on the state of the humanities every two years, Cheney authored them annually. In her inaugural report, “American Memory: A Report on the Humanities in the Nation’s Public Schools” (1987), Cheney highlighted the loss of serious, content-rich curricula in subjects such as literature and history. Her final report, “Telling the Truth: A Report on the State of the Humanities in Higher Education” (1992), warned of how colleges and universities were elevating political agendas over the pursuit of truth, describing how this trend was manifested in speech codes, as well as the pressure that some students felt to censor their opinions in the classroom, among other problems. In the intervening years, Cheney issued four additional annual reports on issues

³⁸ Irvin Molotsky, “U.S. Aide Assails TV Series on Africa,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁹ “National Endowment Withdraws From Film,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

in humanities education, relishing the role of truth teller and seeking to maximize the potential of the agency's bully pulpit.⁴⁰ News coverage of Cheney's reports not only highlighted the report's concerns with the humanities, but they also resulted in greater publicity for the chairman herself. For example, following the release of her 1989 report, "50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students," the *Boston Globe* ran a piece about Cheney entitled, "Champion of the Basics."⁴¹

Conservative opinion leaders, who were already inclined to respect Lynne Cheney because of her husband, lionized her for her calls to strengthen humanities education and opposition to ideologically progressive developments in academia. Don Gibson, a civil servant who spent 20 years at the NEH, says that Cheney cultivated support among conservative commentators such as George Will, Charles Krauthammer, and the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*.⁴² And when culture-war controversies struck the Endowments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Cheney only increased her prominence and gained an even stronger reputation among conservatives.

One of those controversies was the Senate's rejection of President George H. W. Bush's nomination of Carole Iannone for a seat on the National Council on the Humanities. Iannone, who had a doctorate in English Literature, was then an adjunct instructor at NYU, in addition to holding positions at the National Association of Scholars, a nonprofit that is generally associated with conservative academics. Organizations such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Council

⁴⁰ For an overview of Cheney's reports, see Mary Burgan, *What Ever Happened to the Faculty?: Drift and Decision in Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006): 61-64.

⁴¹ John Robinson, "Champion of the Basics," *Boston Globe*, December 14, 1989, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴² Donald D. Gibson, *Iowa Sky: A Memoir* (Shoulder Friends Press, 2013): 169.

on Learned Societies (ACLS) opposed the nomination, with those critical of Iannone arguing that she lacked appropriate credentials; in particular, that she did not have a strong publication record. Iannone's writing had appeared mainly in non-peer reviewed conservative outlets such as *Commentary*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *National Review*.⁴³

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee defeated the nomination by a nine to eight vote, with all Republicans and one Democrat, Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, voting for the nominee and all other Democrats in opposition. According to coverage in the *New York Times*, committee co-chairmen Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) "engaged in an often fiery exchange" as Iannone's nomination was debated. Hatch, with "his voice rising in frustration," noted, "If this is not political correctness, what is it?"⁴⁴ Following the vote, Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) took to the Senate floor to denounce the Committee's action. Moynihan took umbrage at the fact that Iannone's opponents had dismissed her publication record, given that some it had appeared in *Commentary*. Moynihan noted that many of the early writers for *Commentary* came from New York's working class—a constituency that, in his view, was increasingly unwelcome within the Democratic Party. Toward the end of his speech, Moynihan suggested that Iannone's identification with that constituency was part of the reason for her rejection:

I very much fear Professor Iannone's troubles arose not from the quality of her work, but from her genes, social and otherwise. She is an Italian, Catholic ethnic with a working class background.

⁴³ "Politics Among the Humanists," *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1991, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁴ Barbara Gamarekian, "Humanities Nominee Rejected in Senate," *New York Times*, July 18, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/18/arts/humanities-nominee-rejected-in-senate.html>.

Moynihan concluded, “Professor Iannone has now been banned in the Democratic Party. What greater fortune could befall an American intellectual in this decadent fin de siècle. I wish her well.”⁴⁵

The conservative commentariat seized on this incident as yet further confirmation of how biased the academic humanities had become—and how Lynne Cheney was valiantly fighting the intellectual trends that would corrupt and destroy America. George Will, in a piece for *Newsweek* on the Iannone nomination, referred to Cheney as “secretary of domestic defense.” Will said:

The foreign adversaries her husband, Dick, must keep at bay are less dangerous, in the long run, than the domestic forces with which she must deal. Those forces are fighting against the conservation of the common culture that is the nation’s social cement. She, even more than a Supreme Court justice, deals with constitutional things.⁴⁶

Cheney also drew praise for keeping the NEH from being plagued by the kind of scandal that dogged the NEA: the sponsorship of morally offensive projects. In 1989, it was discovered that NEA funds had supported exhibitions featuring Andre Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, a photograph of a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine, and photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe that contained homoerotic content, as well as others that some thought may have constituted child pornography.⁴⁷ As the NEA was under fire, the NEH distinguished itself as the more responsible Endowment, surpassing the budget of its sister agency for the first time in history in 1993.

The media and commentators attributed the NEH’s success to Cheney’s leadership. The *Wall Street Journal* ran a story praising Cheney for keeping the NEH

⁴⁵ 137 Cong. Rec. 19092 (1991).

⁴⁶ George Will, “Literary Politics,” *Newsweek* April 21, 1991, <http://www.newsweek.com/literary-politics-202084>.

⁴⁷ Smith, 197.

from being harmed by the scandals at the NEA and for “leading a national debate over the role of the humanities.”⁴⁸ The *New York Times* published a piece, “The Endowment that has Stayed out of Trouble,” reporting that some viewed Cheney’s “political skill” as responsible for President George H. W. Bush proposing a greater budget increase for the NEH than NEA.⁴⁹ Irving Kristol, in a 1992 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, “What Shall We Do With the NEA?,” sung Cheney’s praises. It is worth quoting from at length:

Another idea making the rounds is to figure out a way the NEA could be reconstructed to bear a greater resemblance to its sister organization, the National Endowment for the Humanities. The NEH may get as many zany proposals as the NEA, but Lynne Cheney, its chairman, along with her staff and her Advisory Council, cull them more intelligently and more bravely. As a result, NEH has for the most part avoided the bitter public and political controversy that swirls around the NEA. In addition, the NEH did sponsor the television series on the Civil War, which was a world-wide success. Obviously, under Ms. Cheney it is doing something right.

The trouble with cloning the NEH, however, is that there is only one Lynne Cheney, and comparable leadership for the NEA is going to be hard to find. It is now being suggested, therefore, that Ms. Cheney become chairman of both the NEH and the NEA, with deputies serving as chief operating officers. It is an attractive idea, and we may be hearing more about it.⁵⁰

Kristol’s op-ed exemplified a change in conservatives’ outlook on the NEH that had developed throughout the 1980s. When the decade began, conservative intellectuals said that the NEH could serve America provided it adhered to standards of excellence, resisted quotas, and relied on peer review. But as a result of the culture war and conservatives’ alienation from much of the academic humanities, as well as the growing importance of

⁴⁸ Kenneth H. Bacon, “NEH Head Lynne Cheney Sheds Her Low Profile to Champion Educational Focus on ‘Great Books,’” *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 1990, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁹ William H. Honan, “The Endowment That Has Stayed Out of Trouble,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1990, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁰ Irving Kristol, “What Shall We Do With the NEA?” *Wall Street Journal*, March 16, 1992, Factiva.

the Religious Right, Republicans' and conservatives' support of the agency had much, if not everything, to do with the person leading it.

Cheney further reinforced this perspective on the NEH and the idea that it was not a nonpolitical agency when she announced her resignation shortly after the election of Bill Clinton as president in 1992. Her resignation was to be effective Inauguration Day, 16 months before her term was set to expire. Gibson, the civil servant cited above, though a man of the Left and in disagreement with many of Cheney's views about the humanities, wished that his boss had finished out her term. Under the agency's statute, the chairman serves for fixed four-year terms, not at the pleasure of the President. This allows the chairman to overlap administrations. Joseph Duffey, whom President Carter had appointed, for example, served as chairman during much of Ronald Reagan's first year in office. Gibson believed that Cheney's decision to depart at the outset of a new administration further reinforced the notion that the NEH was a political agency, not one that simply supported the humanities.⁵¹

Cheney's successor, University of Pennsylvania president Sheldon Hackney, inspired little confidence in conservatives that the NEH would resist the ideological trends within humanities that they found so alarming. A scholar of American history, Hackney had a record of teaching and publishing in the humanities, as well as experience as a high-level administrator. But in light of two incidents that took place at U. Penn during the spring semester of 1993, right around the time of his appointment, Hackney

⁵¹ Gibson, 172-3.

became for conservatives a symbol of all that was wrong with the academy—"the pope of political correctness," as critics referred to him.⁵²

Both incidents involved conflicts between black and white U. Penn students and accusations that Hackney had violated the free speech rights of the white students involved. In the first, a freshman student, Eden Jacobowitz, was charged with racial harassment under Penn's speech code for directing the term "water buffalo" at a group of black sorority sisters who were making noise outside his dorm room one Saturday night. Jacobowitz, an Israeli, claimed that his use of "water buffalo" was not a racial slur, but the translation of a Hebrew slang term for a loud or rowdy person. In the second incident, a group of black students attempted to steal a print run of the independent newspaper, *Daily Pennsylvanian* (DP). The students sought to confiscate the papers in response to the writings of DP writer Greg Pavlik, who had previously used his column to criticize the ethics of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and what he viewed as U. Penn's hypocrisy in responding to student misconduct when black students were involved. The offending students received little in the way of punishment.⁵³

Regardless of whether Hackney was in the right, his reputation among conservatives was irredeemable. George Will and Charles Krauthammer penned critical op-eds, referring to his actions at U. Penn.⁵⁴ The *Wall Street Journal* editorial board

⁵² Michael Ross, "Clinton Nominee Hits Slander 'by Slogan,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1993, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-06-26/news/mn-7399_1_sheldon-hackney.

⁵³ For an overview of the events, see, Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 245-247. Hackney defends his actions in his memoir; see, Sheldon Hackney, *The Politics of Presidential Appointment: A Memoir of the Culture War* (Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2002). A critical account of Hackney's conduct can be found in Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silverglate, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

⁵⁴ George Will, "At Penn, Principle or Political Fashion?" *Washington Post*, April 29, 1993, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Charles Krauthammer, "Spineless at Penn," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1993, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

expressed concern that if Hackney was confirmed, he would “[imbue] NEH...with the ethos of the American campus today.”⁵⁵ Even after his chairmanship ended, Hackney’s reputation as a PC scourge persisted. Beginning in 1997, *U.S. News and World Report* columnist John Leo established the mock “Sheldon Award.” At first, the award went to the college president “who did the most to look the other way when students stole and/or burned whole stacks of campus newspapers.” Leo later broadened eligibility to include offenses against free speech on campus generally.⁵⁶

In Congress, some Republicans indicated their reservations about the NEH now that it was no longer under conservative leadership. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), who voted against Hackney’s nomination, gave a speech on the Senate floor to that effect. Helms praised Bill Bennett for “infusing the agency with the courage to stand up to the smug bureaucrats and their acolytes in academia who, until then, had pretty much dictated who and what was favored in the disbursement of NEH funds,” and feared that Hackney would “undo the good” that Bennett had accomplished.⁵⁷ During hearings on agency reauthorization in 1993, Dick Arme said that he did not believe that either the NEA or NEH ought to exist. Up until then he had directed most of his criticism toward the NEA, but because Lynne Cheney had departed the NEH, he no longer “[had] a reason to feel deferential” in that regard.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ “Mr. Hackney’s Nomination,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 1993, Factiva.

⁵⁶ On the creation of the “Sheldon Award,” see Hartman, 246. See also, John Leo, “University Presidents Battle for Honors in Spinelessness,” *Real Clear Politics*, April 30, 2006, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/04/university_presidents_battle_f.html.

⁵⁷ 139 Cong. Rec. 18097 (1993).

⁵⁸ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Hearing on the Reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum Services: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Education and Labor*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., 1993, 12.

Once in office, Hackney further alienated conservatives through his signature initiative, the National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity. The purpose of the National Conversation was to encourage citizens across the United States to gather and discuss difficult, often divisive issues respectfully and intelligently. To that end, the NEH developed a set of questions and guidelines that could help frame discussions and awarded grants to local organizations to convene the meetings. The Endowment developed the program in consultation with a blue-ribbon advisory group, which attempted to span the ideological spectrum and represent various perspectives on multiculturalism. Members including Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Diane Ravitch, James Q. Wilson, William Galston, Martha Nussbaum, Nathan Glazer, and Stanley Katz, among others.⁵⁹ In a speech entitled, “Beyond the Culture Wars,” Hackney presented the conversation as a helpful response to a degraded public discourse.⁶⁰ Between 1994 and 1996, the NEH sponsored more than 1,500 conversations in 225 towns and cities.⁶¹ Though the Conversation made an effort to respect different ideological perspectives, some conservatives were unreceptive. George Will, for example, mercilessly mocked the enterprise.⁶² Even vaunted literature professor Stanley Fish said of the National Conversation, “This is typical liberal talk.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Stephen Burd, “A National Conversation that Avoids ‘Ideological Warfare,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 16, 1994, A26.

⁶⁰ Amy E. Schwartz, “Hackney Comes Out Swinging,” *Washington Post*, November 17, 1993, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶¹ David Goodman, “Democracy and Public Discussion in the Progressive and New Deal Eras: From Civic Competence to the Expression of Opinion,” *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 2 (2004): 110.

⁶² See George Will, “Sheldon Hackney’s Conversation,” *Newsweek*, April 17, 1994, <http://www.newsweek.com/sheldon-hackneys-conversation-187116>; George Will, “The Conversation Kit,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶³ Stephen Burd, “Humanities Endowment Steps Up Plans for a ‘National Conversation,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 15, 1993, A22.

4.3 THE NEW REPUBLICAN POSITION: TERMINATE THE NEH

By the run-up to the 1994 mid-term elections, the NEH's standing among Republicans had weakened considerably. The GOP's lingering support for the agency was largely a legacy of President Nixon's efforts at coalition expansion decades earlier, a legacy that had been sustained at least partly because the agency been chaired by Republican appointees. But with Sheldon Hackney as chairman, many conservatives had become skeptical about what the NEH was going to fund. Moreover, the Religious Right, which was generally hostile to federal funding for culture, was an ever more important part of the GOP coalition.

Just before the election, a scandal broke that gave conservative politicians, activists, and influencers all the more reason to believe that the NEH was bound to fund projects of an anti-American bent—and therefore should be terminated. The scandal involved a set of proposed national history standards that the NEH had sponsored. This was part of an initiative launched by President George H. W. Bush, who in 1991 called for voluntary national tests in core subject areas. The NEH, then chaired by Cheney, and the Department of Education awarded grants to the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) at UCLA to develop the standards.

The NCHS, led by education professor Charlotte Crabtree and historian Gary Nash, was itself an NEH initiative. In 1987, the Department of Education set out to establish research centers dedicated to studying K-12 education in areas such as math, literature, science, and all elementary school subjects (it later added the arts). That same year, the NEH announced that it would dedicate \$1.5 million to establish a similar research center focused on the teaching of history—and chose UCLA as the site. Cheney

admired Crabtree's work on the development of California's *History-Social Science Framework* for the K-12 curriculum.⁶⁴ The *Framework* promoted a greater emphasis on history as opposed to social studies, which some education reformers faulted for not being sufficiently grounded in traditional academic disciplines, among other problems. The *Framework* also sought to strike a "middle ground between the new multiculturalism and a traditional canon." Crabtree and the other minds behind the *Framework* "proposed a model of multiculturalism that, while expanding the canon to include hyphenated Americans, nevertheless took for granted a shared conception of American national identity."⁶⁵ While Nash had a reputation as a liberal, Cheney found him acceptable because of Crabtree's recommendation (she had applied to the NEH for the grant in support of the center). Nash had also been involved in editing the Houghton-Mifflin textbook series that was aligned with California's *Framework*, books that Cheney referred to as "the best history/social science curriculum in the nation."⁶⁶

When the standards were released in 1994, Cheney was not pleased with the final project and acted immediately to set the terms of national debate. In an October *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, "The End of History," Cheney excoriated the standards, claiming that they emphasized America's failures, minimized the country's achievements, and neglected some of its great citizens and statesmen. Cheney explained that, according to a member of the committee which oversaw the drafting of the standards, "the 1992 presidential election unleashed the forces of political correctness." When it came to preparing standards for world history, according to that same member, the American

⁶⁴ Linda Symcox, *Whose History?: The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002): 86.

⁶⁵ Symcox, 77.

⁶⁶ Symcox, 87. Cheney quoted in Symcox 80.

Historical Association (AHA), the national association of professional historians, pushed for a diminished focus on Western civilization. Cheney's op-ed concluded with a call to arms:

Preventing certification will be a formidable task. Those wishing to do so will have to go up against an academic establishment that revels in the kind of politicized history that characterizes much of the National Standards. But the battle is worth taking on. We are a better people than the National Standards indicate, and our children deserve to know it.⁶⁷

The completion of the standards and Cheney's denunciation of them could not have come at a worse time for the NEH. In the November elections, Republicans won majorities of both chambers of Congress for the first time in 40 years, backed by strong support from the Religious Right. Following the election, the Christian Coalition issued "Contract with the American Family." Among the policies advocated in that document was the privatization of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Christian Coalition evinced the same kind of populist perspective on federal funding for culture that the Endowments' right-wing opponents had voiced since the 1960s. The Christian Coalition argued that culture was simply not an appropriate object of federal spending and should be left to the private sector. The National History Standards and the offensive NEA grants were evidence that the agencies could not be trusted to steward public funds worthily, and that it was time to privatize them.⁶⁸

Republican congressmen in the House called for terminating the cultural agencies and received strong support from none other than Bennett and Cheney. In hearings held

⁶⁷ Lynne V. Cheney, "The End of History," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 1994, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁸ Christian Coalition, "Privatizing the Arts," in *Contract with the American Family* (Nashville: Moorings, 1995), 105-119.

by the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, both former chairmen testified on behalf of abolishing the NEA and NEH. When Congressman Sidney Yates (D-IL), with whom Bennett had sparred years ago when he was chairman, asked if the NEH could be a force for good depending on who was in charge, referring back to the latter's tenure, Bennett answered emphatically, "No. No. No, it cannot. You cannot. I mean, we tried this but I think the corruption is too endemic."⁶⁹ Though Bennett did not address the NEH's peer review system directly, he noted that peer-review panels could be unfairly biased. He recalled, for example, a panel that opposed awarding a religious studies fellowship grant to a Baptist minister on the grounds that the applicant was a religious believer and therefore could not be objective.⁷⁰

Cheney, like Bennett, argued that it was impossible to keep the Endowments from funding politically tendentious projects. In her testimony, which was adapted as an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Kill My Old Agency, Please," she stressed the sorry state of the humanities and spoke of the problem of grantees departing from what they had originally proposed, as she claimed had happened with the national history standards.⁷¹ In her testimony and in a subsequent op-ed she authored for the *New York Times*, "Mocking America at U.S. Expense," she highlighted her willingness to veto proposed projects "that had politics as their goal." Yet, she said, "one can hold back the ocean only so long."⁷²

⁶⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Downsizing Government and Setting Priorities of Federal Programs: Hearings Before Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 1*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, 984.

⁷⁰ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Downsizing Government*, , 982.

⁷¹ Lynne V. Cheney, "Kill My Old Agency, Please," *Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷² Lynne Cheney, "Mocking America at U.S. Expense," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1995, A29. See, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Downsizing Government*, 940-1 ("Testimony of Lynne V. Cheney").

Conservative pundits added to the chorus of voices calling for the termination of the Endowments. Following the GOP victory in November 1994, Charles Krauthammer admonished Congress to abolish the NEA and NEH, saying that the history standards had proven that they cannot “be kept out of the hands of the academic left” and were “beyond redemption.”⁷³ George Will, who less than 4 years earlier had praised the NEH as “the best part of the government,” called for ending both Endowments in an op-ed in January of 1995, “Give Them the Ax.”⁷⁴

Amidst these calls for ending the NEH, Catholic University history professor Jerry Muller, a self-identified Republican and “cultural conservative,” weighed in with an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, “A Conservative Defense of the Humanities Endowment.” Though Muller agreed with Bennett in his assessment of various intellectual trends that had a corrupting influence on the humanities, he disagreed that the NEH was exacerbating the problem. Based on his own assessment of the NEH’s grant-making, Muller contended that the agency focused far more on supporting scholarship, editions, and other programs that upheld “the best that has been thought and said in the world.” Then, in words that harkened back to the rhetoric of right-of-center intellectuals in the 1970s and early 1980s, Muller remarked:

Conservatism properly understood (as it is not by the libertarians, religious fundamentalists and populists who have sometimes usurped the label) is elitist... The task of cultural conservatives ought to be to chastise our cultural elites when they embrace trash, and to combat the declining moral level of our commercial culture.

⁷³ Charles Krauthammer, “The First 100 Days: A Hardball Agenda,” *Washington Post*, December 2, 1994, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁴ George Will, “‘New History’: The Schoolmasters’ Revenge,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 1991, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; George Will, “Give Them the Ax,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The NEH, according to Muller, had not reached the level of corruption that Bennett and Cheney had claimed and could still carry out the task of ennobling the broader society.⁷⁵ Yet the grander vision behind Muller's defense of the NEH had come to have little to no purchase within the American Right. Given the ascendancy of the Religious Right as a major component of the Republican Party's constituency, supporting the NEA and NEH was no longer in the GOP's electoral interests, as it may have been in the 1970s, when President Nixon thought that it could burnish the party's standing with the general public.

Even some Democrats, too, expressed an openness to terminating the NEA and NEH. While most Democrats remained generally supportive of federal funding for culture, albeit with waning enthusiasm, some centrist Democrats, also called "New Democrats," favored devolving the arts and humanities, along with other policy areas, to the state and local levels of government. In 1993, the Progressive Policy Institute, a center-left think tank that was called "Bill Clinton's idea mill," published *Mandate for Change*. Like Heritage's *Mandate for Leadership*, though not nearly as long, *Mandate for Change* presented a slate of policy proposals and analyses on numerous issues. In regard to the arts and humanities, *Mandate* stated, "no federal role is justified," something that Lynne Cheney did not fail to point out in her congressional testimony.⁷⁶ Leon Panetta, President Clinton's chief of staff, also took the New Democrat line on the Endowments.⁷⁷

In 1995, the Great Society vision for the NEH became a casualty of the culture wars. The idea of the NEH as a patron of high culture, necessary to help counter some of

⁷⁵ Jerry Z. Muller, "A Conservative Defense of the Humanities Endowment," *Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁶ David Osborne, "A New Federal Compact: Sorting Out Washington's Proper Role," in *Mandate for Change*, eds. Will Marshall and Martin Schram (New York: Berkley Books, 1993): 251.

⁷⁷ Division of State Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities, Transcript: "Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership," April 9, 1994, Henley Park Hotel, Washington, D.C., 194, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

democracy's excesses and encourage spiritual uplift, was, politically speaking, dead. Yet despite the loss of support for the original idea that had inspired its establishment, the NEH as an organization proved durable, thanks in no small part to the influence of the state humanities councils. As the culture wars escalated and conservatives and Republicans grew hostile towards academia and "elite" culture, the state councils improved their political standing, such that they could promote the durability of federal funding for culture more broadly, albeit with changed priorities.

5.0 THE STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS AND THE NEH: THE TAIL WAGS (AND SAVES) THE DOG

The culture wars may have doomed the prospects for a national consensus about the idea of federal funding for culture. But the culture wars have not yet resulted in the termination of the NEH. When the NEH was under fire in the mid-1990s, the state humanities councils (SHCs) proved their worth as a supportive clientele, but also leveraged their political influence to pursue their own priorities at the expense of the Endowment's. The state councils lobbied to save the Endowment—and meanwhile, they ended up achieving many of the objectives they had long sought, including a greater share of the NEH's budget and more autonomy and respect. These were objectives that the NEH had resisted up until that point.

The state councils' enhanced political clout did not occur simply as a result of spending federal money in states and congressional districts countrywide, as important as that was. Several other factors contributed to enhancing their standing with politicians, especially among Republicans, including changes in the content of their programs and the people that they recruited to serve on their boards. As the culture wars escalated, some on the Right became more supportive of the state councils than the Endowment, reversing what had been the conservative position. The culture wars, in effect, ended up empowering the councils vis-à-vis Congress, and therefore, also vis-à-vis NEH. But for

the culture wars, it is questionable how quickly and successfully the councils would have been able to achieve their goals when they conflicted with those of the NEH.

5.1 DISTANT AND TENSE

“Distant and tense” was how Sheldon Hackney, upon assuming the chairmanship, described the relationship between the state humanities councils and NEH.¹ For nearly 20 years following the 1976 reauthorization, the NEH and state humanities councils were locked in a relationship that was both mutually beneficial and sometimes uneasy. They were interdependent, in that the state councils depended on the NEH for funding, while the NEH depended on the councils to be able to claim a broader reach into states and congressional districts that did not receive many grants through the agency’s other programs. At the same time, the SHCs and NEH had different interests and priorities. The SHCs wanted a greater share of the budget, as well as greater autonomy vis-à-vis the NEH. The SHCs perceived a condescending attitude from the NEH, sensing that many agency bureaucrats, like much of academia, looked down upon the idea of public humanities programs.

Following the 1976 reauthorization, tensions persisted over how the SHCs would take advantage of the programmatic freedom that Congress had granted. The NEH was still concerned that the states might seek to replicate what the Endowment was doing on a national level. In late 1977, the Division of State Programs suggested an amendment to

¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Committee on Appropriations, Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1996: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 8*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, 40 (“Statement of Sheldon Hackney”).

the authorizing legislation that would “limit state committee grant-making to projects designed for the benefit of adults, chiefly those not in school.” The proposed amendment would have discouraged the committees from sponsoring fellowships, research, and education programs focused on schools which, up until that point in time, had been the NEH’s exclusive domain.²

Jacob Neusner, a Brown University religious studies professor who was appointed to the National Council on the Humanities in 1978, voiced these concerns in a letter to Steven Weiland, executive director of the Federation:

There can be no more confrontations. There can be no more power-plays. There can be no “demands” laid up against the people in Washington. The state commissions cannot demand what the NEH does not have, which is, more money than Congress appropriates; nor can they pretend to be what they are not; nor can they lay claim to tasks and to functions which, in point of fact, they are not constituted to carry out and do not have the staff to effect.

Neusner told Weiland that the NEH’s work in areas such as fellowships, research, education, and public programs were beyond the reach of the state councils: “these are not areas on which the state commissions can hope to contribute, let alone to take over.”³ Weiland, in response, took exception to Neusner’s claim that the councils sought to “take over” NEH activities. Given the councils’ limited resources, they were focused on continuing their existing programs. But Weiland also said that they “certainly can contribute to the other divisions of the Endowment if called on to do so.” He said that the

² Office of State Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities, “The State Programs in the Humanities: A White Paper,” December 1977, 10, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

³ Letter, Jacob Neusner to Steven Weiland, December 7, 1978, Box 1, Folder 7, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

councils felt that many at the NEH, save for staff in the Division of Public Programs, dismissed what they were doing.⁴

Though Congress had guaranteed every state a minimum level of funding, the NEH still required the councils to apply for grants every two or three years, just as if they were scholars applying for fellowships or museums applying for funding for a specific exhibition. Unlike the NEA, which awarded funding to state arts councils (state government agencies) as a matter of course, the NEH technically did not have to award the funding allocated for state programs to the existing state humanities councils. It was hypothetically possible that another organization in a state could attempt to compete with the existing humanities council and apply to become the designee of NEH funds—though this never happened. While the NEH sometimes put conditions on the councils’ grant awards, requiring that they improve programming or their administration in varying respects, no SHC was ever denied funding.⁵ According to Jamil Zainaldin, former director of the Federation and director of the Georgia council, there was a fair amount of “pantomime” about the whole application process, since it was understood that it was next to impossible for a council to be turned down.⁶ James Veninga, longtime director of Humanities Texas, has written that state councils were “irritated” by the NEH’s speaking of “funding proposals,” given that Congress had appropriated dedicated funding for the state councils. Though the councils accepted the need to report on their activities in the interest of accountability, “some councils were concerned that the NEH was seeking too much control over the councils.” Veninga further explained:

⁴ Letter, Steven Weiland to Jacob Neusner, December 28, 1978, Box 1, Folder 7, Martin D. Schwartz Papers, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections.

⁵ B.J. Stiles (former director, Division of State Programs) interviewed by author, August 26, 2015.

⁶ Jamil Zainaldin interviewed by author, June 6, 2015.

This tension between a federal agency desirous of control and many state councils desirous of independence, grounding their accountability more in their responsibility to the citizens of their respective states than to the federal government—a matter that Senator Pell had sought to encourage in the 1970s—festered throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, heightened, undoubtedly, by state council responses to some of the policies and emphases of Bill Bennett and Lynne Cheney, appointees of Presidents Reagan and Bush to the NEH.⁷

A policy that likely did much to increase tensions between the NEH and the councils in the 1980s was William Bennett's introduction of a competitive element into the funding process. Prior to Bennett's installation as chairman, while the requirement to prepare and submit a proposal may have been laborious and annoying, at least it had no implications for the councils' funding; the NEH awarded funds over the congressionally required minimum according to a formula that took the size of the state into consideration. Yet Bennett, like other conservatives of that era, wanted to push the NEH in the direction of "excellence." To that end, he inaugurated Chairman's Awards for Excellence—grants of up to \$75,000, for which councils were invited to apply. This was within Bennett's right, as the authorizing statute gave the chairman discretion over a portion of the funds allocated to the states, over the minimum amount that each was guaranteed.⁸ Bennett, as discussed at greater length below, had been openly skeptical about the SHCs' program quality even since before becoming chairman. As chairman, he perceived some of their activities as amounting to left-wing political advocacy, as noted in the previous chapter. The councils also funded a higher rate of applications than the NEH did. Whereas the NEH had a funding rate of approximately 25 percent, according to

⁷ James F. Veninga, Prefatory Material, "Three New Threats to the State Humanities Programs" (1981), in *The Humanities and the Civic Imagination: Collected Addresses and Essays, 1978-1998*, ed. James F. Veninga (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999): 62-3.

⁸ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1983: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 11*, 97th Cong., 2d. sess., 1982, 1090-1092.

Bennett, the SHCs funded projects at a rate of “two or three out of four applications.”

Therefore, he said, “It is not unduly, rigorously competitive.”⁹

The state councils were not pleased with the prospect of having to compete against each other for funding, especially at a time when the NEH’s overall budget was being cut and the councils were guaranteed less money. Cynthia Buckingham, the assistant director of Utah Humanities, wrote an article in *Federation Reports* indicating the councils’ frustration with the new funding competition, comparing the councils to students who ask their teachers, “Does this count for my grade?” Buckingham explained:

During its first decade, NEH’s state program was considered a “noble experiment” in public education. Nobody claimed to have the right answers, or even to have posed all the right questions. Advice—from NEH, other state humanities councils, academia, or the community—on how to conduct an effective program was likely to boil down to ‘try it and see how it works.’

Under the new dispensation, however, the NEH graded state councils on an A-F scale, as opposed to pass-fail, as it were, and the grade could matter in terms of how much funding a council might receive.¹⁰

What made the excellence awards particularly frustrating for the councils was that many found it difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain why some were graded more highly than others. In the aforementioned article, Buckingham profiled six councils that the NEH considered excellent in 1983. She refrained, however, from offering an evaluation as to why the NEH felt them deserving of special funding, saying, “that would require comparisons with the other proposals submitted last spring (not to mention a crystal ball).” The NEH made its decisions based on reports from the SHCs on how well they

⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1985: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations on H.R. 5973, Part 2*, 98th Cong. 2d. sess., 1984, 261.

¹⁰ Cynthia Buckingham, “The Recognition of Excellence,” *Federation Reports* 7, no. 1 (1984): 23-4.

thought that their programs met the Endowment's criteria for excellence. Yet just as when it comes to grading papers, the evaluation of these assessments "involves much subjectivity."¹¹

Timothy Glines, a program associate for the Minnesota Humanities Commission, penned an article in *Federation Reports* that also tried to make sense of the Endowment's exemplary projects program. His main takeaway from reviewing the proposals behind the seven projects that received awards was that none of the councils, save perhaps the Texas council, was doing anything too far out of the ordinary. Glines surmised that the NEH probably did not have a priori ideas about what it considered excellent and that it came to those decisions after seeing what the councils were doing.¹²

The most extensive, spirited critique of excellence awards and the review process *in toto* came from Robert Cheatham, director of the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities. He argued that the problems were not attributable to the NEH staff or who the chairman happened to be. The root problem was that the NEH had not revised its protocols in response to the 1976 reauthorization and remained stuck in the mentality that prevailed when the Endowment first launched the state programs. Though Congress had given the councils a basis in statute, guaranteed funding, and granted them the freedom to determine their own programming, the NEH still felt a responsibility for their success or failure. Moreover, the NEH was used to awarding grants for concrete projects, not fostering the development of living institutions, which is what the SHCs were.¹³

¹¹ Buckingham, 23-4.

¹² Timothy C. Glines, "Grants for Exemplary Projects in the States, 1983: A Review," *Federation Reports* 7, no. 2 (1984): 20.

¹³ Robert Cheatham, "The 1984 Southern Regional Meeting and After: Ruminations on the Relationship Between the NEH and the State Councils," *Federation Reports* 8, no. 1 (1985): 33-34.

In his essay in *Federation Reports*, Cheatham gave several reasons why the same processes used to review, say, a proposal for a project on Milton, were inappropriate for evaluating state councils. First, there was the issue of determining the panelists. While it is feasible to identify the leading Milton scholars and assemble a panel from that group, it is less clear who are the appropriate peers or experts regarding the state councils, partly because the NEH did not allow people who were then currently involved in state councils to serve as reviewers (“presumably because we could not be trusted to be fair to our colleagues”). But, as Cheatham argued, past service as a state council director or board member was not necessarily an indication of being qualified: “As we all know, there are council members and there are council members, project directors and project directors.” Secondly, while the Milton scholars likely have a consensus about “what constitutes good Milton scholarship,” the state councils did not share a uniform set of standards to evaluate programs. An approach that works well in one state might not be appropriate for another state. And third, there is the issue that what is really being evaluated is the *proposal*, not the actual *institution*. Cheatham said:

Give a master of prose a living being to describe, let him understand his audience, and he can make that audience love that being, not by lying or by being false in any way, but simply by bringing to life in words a conception of that being which his audience can love.”¹⁴

But despite Cheatham’s complaint and the frustrations felt by other councils, the system remained as it was for the next decade.

When Sheldon Hackney was nominated to replace Lynne Cheney as chairman, during his confirmation hearing, he said that he believed that the relationship between the

¹⁴ Cheatham, 35.

SHCs and NEH could be “improved” and that he would focus on the issue if confirmed.¹⁵

Hackney, upon becoming chairman, expressed an interest in opening up discussion about relations between the NEH and the councils.

In April 1994, Hackney seemed to follow through on this intention. That month, the NEH convened a consultative group on the topic of “NEH-state councils partnership,” which brought together Endowment officials, leadership from the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and state council leaders. The proceedings indicate that many of the same decades-old tensions persisted. Participants who represented the state councils spoke to frustrations with funding levels, the proposal process and exemplary awards, and the general attitude they felt was coming out of the NEH. Of that attitude, Ken Gladish, then executive director of the Indiana Humanities Council, said that he perceived a degree of disrespect; that certain divisions were skeptical about the “quality” and “intellectual integrity” of the SHCs’ programs. According to Gladish:

there is some perception from time to time, that really what the state councils are doing, (because we are not doing original research or whatever the case may be), is kind of, it is nice, it is civic, it is public, but it is not really the heart of the real work of the agency.¹⁶

Robert Cheatham, also in attendance, claimed that sometimes he was approached by applicants with low-quality projects who had been told by the NEH to bring their shoddy work to their state council.¹⁷

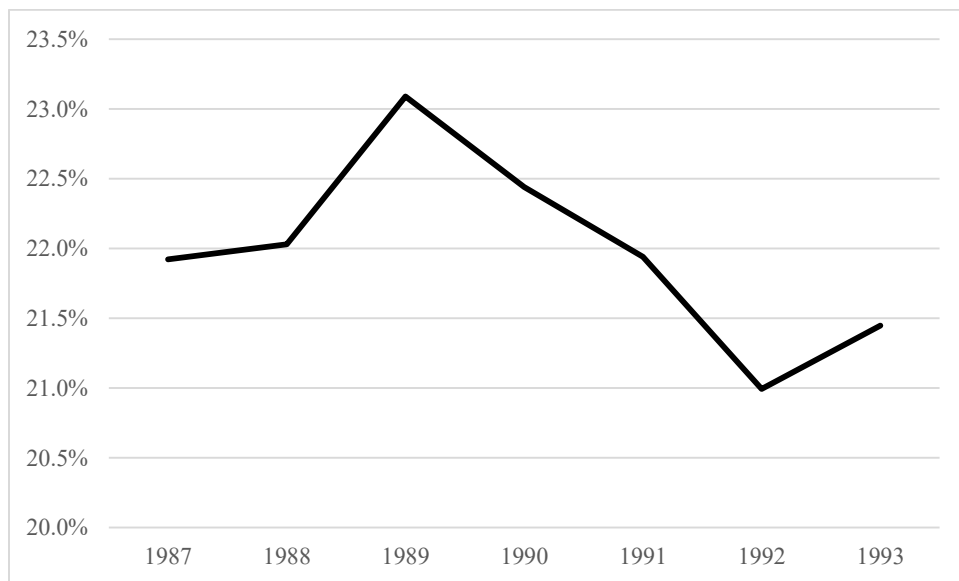
¹⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Nomination: Hearing of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources on Sheldon Hackney, of Pennsylvania, to be Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., 1993, 19.

¹⁶ Division of State Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities, Transcript: “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 9, 1994, Henley Park Hotel, Washington, D.C., 18-19, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

¹⁷ Division of State Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities, Transcript: “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 8, 1994, Henley Park Hotel, Washington, D.C., 94, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

Funding levels remained a significant concern. Bennett, who was skeptical of the value of the state councils, sought to keep them funded at the congressionally mandated minimum of 20 percent of NEH program funds.¹⁸ During the early years of the chairmanship of Lynne Cheney, who was more favorably disposed toward the councils (described below), their share of funding increased. But toward the end of her tenure, as the agency's overall budget grew, the allocation for the state councils rose at a slower rate than for other areas. As a result, the portion of grant program funds that went to the SHCs declined, bringing the amount back toward the congressionally mandated minimum.

Figure 4. Percentage of NEH Program Funds Appropriated for State Humanities Councils: 1987 – 1993¹⁹



During the consultative group, Cheatham also spoke about frustrations over money. He found it galling that when the NEH presented its FY 1995 budget request to Congress, the agency had asked for an increase in funding for its own administration,

¹⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1985*, 261.

¹⁹ Data taken from NEH budget justification materials.

while keeping its request for state councils flat. This would mean that any increase in spending on administration for state councils would result in reduced programming. Cheatham suggested that if the NEH did not make any overtures to the councils in regard to funding, the SHCs might pressure the Federation to petition Congress to increase their allocation to 35 percent in the next reauthorization legislation.²⁰

Furthermore, participants at the consultative group questioned the appropriateness of maintaining the application process and the competitive exemplary awards. Arnita Jones, director of the Organization of American Historians who also served on the Federation board, said that the process seemed “like a dinosaur” and “increasingly perfunctory.”²¹ While some of the participants said that having to do the proposal was helpful in that it encouraged long-range planning, it did not make sense to have a process that resembled a competition, given that it was almost impossible to get turned down. Cheatham said that he would prefer a system that more closely resembled accreditation, one that involved dialogue between the state councils and the NEH, rather than a process that “results in a review letter that really doesn’t comprehend our program.”²² Marion Cott, who was a longtime director of Humanities Kansas, in an interview, spoke of increasing frustration with the old funding process. She said that at first it was helpful, then burdensome, and finally ridiculous. It was hard to take seriously the idea that people in Washington could helpfully evaluate what the council was doing in Kansas.²³

²⁰ “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 9, 1994, 189-190.

²¹ “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 9, 1994, 68-69.

²² “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 9, 1994, 85.

²³ Marion Cott interviewed by author, June 29, 2015.

5.2 STATE COUNCILS IMPROVE THEIR STANDING

As the tensions between the SHCs and NEH persisted, the councils' political standing improved. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the councils faced skepticism and hostility from certain elements of the Right, such as proponents of humanistic excellence, as well as Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians. Some Republican congressmen were also concerned about councils' sponsoring ideologically liberal programs. But as the 1980s wore on, the councils improved their standing, causing less controversy and putting themselves in a position to win support in Congress. Again, as noted above, this was not simply the result of spending federal money in states and locales. Several factors contributed to the councils' growing clout.

The state councils' focus on relating the humanities to public policy, originally a requirement imposed by NEH, drew sharp criticism. Many academics were resistant to the whole concept of public humanities programs,²⁴ with some finding the public-policy dimension particularly absurd. William Schaefer, who served as executive director of the Modern Language Association from 1971-1978, did not mince words in his assessment of the councils:

...most of the NEH state-based programs with which I am familiar have been an embarrassing waste of time and money in their efforts to evoke useful commentary from humanist scholars on such subjects as soil erosion, medical ethics, censorship, or pollution of the environment...our intrusions into these areas have come off badly and tend to do more harm than good.²⁵

²⁴ John Barcroft interviewed by author, January 4, 2016.

²⁵ William D. Schaefer, "Still Crazy After All These Years," *Profession* 78 (Modern Language Association, 1978): 5, quoted in Robert Bennett, "The Humanities as Experience and a Plea for State Program Leadership in Promotion of the Study of the Humanities," *Federation Reports* 2, no. 9 (1979): 38.

Benjamin De Mott, an Amherst College English professor and a member of the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, also had harsh words. In regard to a project that sought to use *Madame Bovary* as a means of drawing insights into the problems of doctors in working in provincial areas, De Mott said, “I guess it worked, but that’s about as goddman remote as you can get. The whole enterprise was hilarious and repugnant.”²⁶ Robert Nisbet, a conservative Harvard sociologist who served on the National Council on the Humanities during the 1970s, accused the NEH of “[subjecting] the humanities to the values of populism and egalitarianism” and said of the councils, “There is nothing too trivial, hackneyed, irrelevant, even obscene to get its funding.”²⁷

Conservative intellectuals, like many academics, were critical of the idea of relating the humanities to public policy. Though the 1976 reauthorization had relieved the SHCs of this requirement, to relief of some council directors, some councils continued to sponsor projects that sought to bring humanistic wisdom to bear on current issues. Bennett strongly criticized the public policy focus of many state councils before he became chairman of the NEH. In 1978, the Federation invited Bennett, then serving as executive director of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, to speak on a panel at its national meeting. Bennett acknowledged that there were “successes” when it came to the state councils, but was critical in his overall judgment, saying that some of their programs were “very boring...principally because their speakers are boring.” The incorporation of public policy had forced humanists to speak on subjects about which

²⁶ Quoted in Charles Trueheart, “State Humanities Committees: Difficulties Remain, But They Fare Well,” *Federation Reports* 2, no. 6 (1979): 36.

²⁷ Robert Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982): 178, quoted in James F. Veninga, “The Humanities and Public Life” (1982), in *The Humanities and the Civic Imagination: Collected Addresses and Essays, 1978-1998*, ed. James F. Veninga (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999): 79-80.

they knew little and for which they had little personal passion. In Bennett's view, it was absurd to:

hire speakers who know about Shakespeare or medieval history or moral philosophy, to talk about soil erosion or terrorism or the Bakke case, subjects which they did not love, for which they did not have any affection, and about which they often lacked any knowledge."²⁸

Bennett made similar criticisms upon becoming chairman. In an interview for the NEH's magazine, *Humanities*, Bennett warned that expecting humanists to offer insight into public policy issues would be to "write a check that we can't cash." Bennett questioned the idea that humanists could somehow make people moral and resisted what he saw as the implied premise behind programming that sought to combine the humanities and public policy, namely, that the humanities are worthless unless they have some immediate tie-in to current events.²⁹ The report on the NEH in the Heritage Foundation's *Mandate for Leadership* also criticized this dimension of state council programming.³⁰

The focus on public policy also entailed a danger that programming could veer into advocacy, an accusation that some Republican congressmen leveled against the SHCs in their home states (recall that Bennett made similar accusations regarding the film *Out of the Ashes...Nicaragua* sponsored by the Wisconsin state council). In 1983, Senator Steven Symms (R-ID) and Congressman Denny Smith (R-OR) requested a GAO investigation in response to projects about Russia that their states' humanities councils had undertaken. The Oregon Committee for the Humanities had awarded grants for two projects called, "What About the Russians?" One of these projects was a five-day

²⁸ William Bennett, "Who's Doing the Talking?" *Federation Reports* 2, no. 5 (1979): 10-11.

²⁹ Ruth Dean, "A Conversation with William J. Bennett," *Humanities* 3, no. 2 (1982): 3.

³⁰ Michael Joyce, "The National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts," in *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1981): 1041-2.

symposium, for which the applicants proposed featuring “presentations on religion, art, literature, history, and social/political thought in Russia.” Because the program organizers believed in disarmament, a group of local citizens protested the project, claiming that federal funds were being used for “political action.” The Idaho Association for the Humanities had sponsored a project called “Russian Awareness Week,” involving “an examination of the values, attitudes, lifestyle, and cultural makeup of the Soviet people and the discussion of current Soviet/American relations from a historical perspective.” Russian Awareness week included “presentations in schools, community based events, and a 1-day conference entitled, “What About the Russians?” The conference keynote address was delivered by former Idaho senator Frank Church, a Democrat.³¹

The GAO found that while the Oregon council likely avoided funding advocacy, the conference sponsored by the Idaho council did not. An NEH official who attended the Idaho conference reported that the “thrust and timing of the conference as a whole seemed to be focused less on the humanities background than on current political issues.” Senator Church’s keynote “had nothing of the humanities in it...it was strictly advocacy...no attempt at balance.” The GAO suggested that recent events may have contributed to the diminishment of humanities content in the program. Shortly before the conference, the Soviet Union had shot down a Korean Air Lines flight, and participants were asked to address the incident. The GAO concluded that, overall, given the nature of projects that sought to relate the humanities to public policy issues, questions of advocacy—and instances of advocacy itself—would be impossible to eliminate entirely.

³¹ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Advocacy In National Endowment For The Humanities’ Projects Funded By Five State Councils*, GAO/GGD-85-23 (Washington, D.C., 1985), 5-8.

But the GAO also found that the NEH and state councils were serious about trying to prevent advocacy from occurring, and that “there have only been a few projects in which advocacy questions or concerns have been raised.”³²

Neither were Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians supportive of the SHCs early on, namely because they interpreted “humanities” as secular humanism. In the early 1980s, citizens in Maine heckled, picketed, and protested state humanities council activities, believing them to be “godless” in nature. The council in Oklahoma met with similar difficulties. According to Anita May, then the Oklahoma council’s executive director, “Humanist means atheist among some of our church-related groups.”³³ Such was the discontent among conservative Christians, that some viewed them as a potential threat to the endurance of the state councils. Stephen Miller, in his 1984 study of the NEH, noted, “Although the opponents of so-called secular humanism have mounted only sporadic attacks on NEH, in the future they may increase their outcry, especially against state humanities committees.”³⁴ In 1981, Veninga said that “growing antagonism to humanistic thought from religious and political groups to the far right” represented a threat to the state humanities program.³⁵

Yet as the 1980s wore on, the opposite happened. In fact, as the religious right became an ever more important part of the Republican Party’s constituency, the councils’

³² U.S. General Accounting Office, 8-9.

³³ Donna Shoemaker, “State Committees in Maine and Oklahoma Enter a Second Decade,” *Humanities Report* 3, no. 3 (1981): 11.

³⁴ Stephen Miller, *Excellence and Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984): 56.

³⁵ James F. Veninga, “Three New Threats to the State Humanities Program” (1981), in *The Humanities and the Civic Imagination: Collected Addresses and Essays, 1978-1998*, ed. James F. Veninga (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999): 65.

standing among GOP leaders improved. Various factors were at work, beginning with a more supportive chairman.

Lynne Cheney put forward a very different attitude toward the councils than her predecessor. Cheney, who hailed from Wyoming and spent part of her career as editor of *Washingtonian* magazine, had more populist sensibilities than Bennett. Cheney's misgivings about the state of the humanities in higher education also likely contributed to her viewing the councils more favorably. In her 1988 report, "Humanities in America," Cheney praised what she referred to as the "parallel school," the constellation of organizations that had developed alongside established educational institutions that were teaching citizens about history, literature, and philosophy and inspiring them to ask fundamental questions. Cheney presented the state councils as an important component of this parallel school, praising them for reaching millions of people annually and for having "become increasingly skilled at bringing what Matthew Arnold called 'the best that has been thought and known' to diverse audiences."³⁶ In a 1990 appropriations hearing, Cheney said, "There has never been a Chairman of the Endowment that has supported the State Councils to the degree that I have..."³⁷

This is not to say, however, that there were not some tensions between Cheney and the councils, many of which were led by directors of a far more liberal political persuasion. According to Veninga, "Many in the state humanities councils were concerned that, despite legislatively-granted autonomy, they too might be criticized,

³⁶ Lynne V. Cheney, *Humanities in America: A Report to the President, the Congress, and the American People* (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 1988): 24.

³⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1991: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 12*, 101st Cong., 2d. sess., 1990, 226.

especially through the proposal review process, for supporting projects that often drew on newer scholarship, especially minority and women's studies."³⁸ Eugene Leach, who served as chairman of the Connecticut Humanities Council, wrote an essay for the final issue of *Federation Review* (as *Federation Reports* was renamed) arguing that the state councils did not share the view of Victorian culture critic Matthew Arnold and his modern-day acolytes. Leach rejected a vision of the state councils as "colonial outposts of the academic humanities, inviting the natives to appreciate the superior wisdom that originates in the universities." Public humanities programs should entail a shared authority between scholars and the people, "whose experience, interests, and instincts deserve to be taken into account."³⁹ Though Leach associated the Arnoldian legacy explicitly with Bill Bennett, the article could also be read as an act in defiance of Cheney. She had written her doctoral dissertation on Matthew Arnold, invoked him as her lodestar when she was about to take the reins as chairman, and characterized the work of the state councils in Arnoldian terms.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the councils still recognized that she was far more supportive of them than Bennett, at least in her rhetoric. Robert Vaughn, founding president of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, said in 1990, "We have been

³⁸ James F. Veninga, Prefatory Material, "National Public Radio Commentary" (1988), in *The Humanities and the Civic Imagination: Collected Addresses and Essays, 1978-1998*, ed. James F. Veninga (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999): 111.

³⁹ Eugene E. Leach, "Beyond the Arnoldian Legacy: Reflections on the Mission of the Public Humanities," *Federation Review* 9, no. 5 (1986): 65, 66.

⁴⁰ See, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Nomination: Hearing Before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources on Lynne Vincent Cheney, of Wyoming, to be Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 99th Cong., 2d. sess., 1986, 8. In her nomination hearing, she opened with the following explanation of her understanding of the humanities:

My own favorite definition comes from Matthew Arnold, a man with whose writings I spent some rather intense years as a graduate student. Over and over again, Arnold in his writings refers to the humanities as "the best that has been known and thought in the world."

He believed that study of this excellence would enable us to view the world from a wider vantage than we usually do, from a perspective where questions of transcendent importance were at the forefront of consciousness.

blessed recently by the NEH Chair's enthusiastic endorsement of public programs and her outspoken endorsement of state councils."⁴¹ And according to Veninga, "No previous chairs of the NEH championed public programs and the state councils like Lynne Cheney."⁴²

Councils also began to focus more on sponsoring programs that were less likely to generate controversy. Freed from the public policy requirement, many councils pursued projects in areas such as local history, culture, and art, partnering with museums, libraries, and historical societies.⁴³ Cheatham, in an interview, explained how the Tennessee council's programs helped make it easier to persuade Republicans about its value. He said, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "We do apple pie."⁴⁴ Ester Mackintosh, president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, believes that the state humanities' programs became "safer" throughout the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁵

Trends within the history profession supported the councils' focus on local history. Social history, which stresses the study of "so-called ordinary people" and "history from the bottom up," is an approach that aligns well with the humanities councils' efforts to engage communities throughout their states.⁴⁶ As part of this focus on

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Hearings on the Reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Humanities—Volume 3: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education*, 101st Cong., 2d. sess., 1990, 206.

⁴² James F. Veninga, "The Civic Function of the Humanities" (1989), in *The Humanities and the Civic Imagination: Collected Addresses and Essays, 1978-1998*, ed. James F. Veninga (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999): 129.

⁴³ James Smith and Rudi Anders, "'New Directions' for State Programs," *Federation Reports* 2, no. 8 (1979): 17.

⁴⁴ Robert Cheatham interviewed by author, September 4, 2015.

⁴⁵ Esther Mackintosh interviewed by author, September 11, 2015.

⁴⁶ Social history stresses the study of "so-called ordinary people" and doing "'history from the bottom up,' with its disregard of elites..." It was tied with new forms of doing demographic history, which were "encouraged by the belief that older literary evidence, usually elitist, and inevitably subjective, was untrustworthy." The new demographic history stressed quantitative endeavors, mining records of "births, marriages, deaths, and wills," far more likely to result in "an objective, 'scientific' picture of at least some

local history, for example, both the NEH and state councils have been involved in funding oral history projects.⁴⁷ At the 1994 working group, Cheatham noted, “I think in fact the history profession is further along in understanding the state councils than even the other disciplines...Because we work more closely with them, and there are ways that our programs are developing scholarship, even.”⁴⁸

Through their re-grants to support local cultural organizations and educational efforts, councils developed constituencies throughout their states.⁴⁹ Veninga suggests that the early councils were focused on constituency building perhaps even to a fault, and possibly at the expense of quality or coherence in their programs:

If a particular community in your state has not benefited from humanities funds, and a grant application finally arrives, there is an innate tendency to fund the project, even if it might suffer from content weaknesses, for it is assumed that all citizens in the state—in all locations—should be given the opportunity to benefit from the program.⁵⁰

At the 1994 consultative group, the state councils’ broad reach was a recurring theme.

Anita May said, “it’s obvious that the strength of state humanities councils is it gets the Endowment to every nook and cranny of the country.”⁵¹

aspects of the past.” David Gordon, “The Joys and Sorrows of Diversity: Changes in the Historical Profession in the Last Half Century,” *Society* 50 (April 2013): 143.

⁴⁷ “During the late 1960s and 1970s, oral history projects rode the crest of increasing grant funding for such work and fed directly into the social history movement in the United States. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and state humanities councils, founded at almost the same time as the Oral History Association (OHA), generously funded oral history projects through the early 1980s. A 1981 issue of the Oral History Association Newsletter listed thirty-two NEH grant awards, ranging from \$400,000 to a local historical society in Nebraska to \$2,500 to a youth center in Rochester, New York. Funding from humanities organizations on both the national and state levels enabled academics and local communities alike to engage in oral history activities.” Rebecca Sharpless, “The History of Oral History,” in *Handbook of Oral History*, eds. Thomas Lee Charlton, Lois E. Myers, Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006): 27.

⁴⁸ “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 9, 1994, 131-2.

⁴⁹ “Undoubtedly, our constituency has expanded greatly over the past number of years, especially among those institutions and organizations that must be our allies: museums, libraries, historical organizations.” Veninga, “Three New Threats to the State Humanities Programs” (1981), 64.

⁵⁰ Veninga, “The Humanities and Public Life” (1982), 74.

⁵¹ “Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership,” April 8, 1994, 141.

Councils that dealt with more conservative congressional delegations learned to describe their work in more congenial ways. Cott explained that when interacting with the Kansas delegation, she presented the council's work in terms of a focus on the state's "heritage."⁵² Pressures that the councils felt during the Bennett and Cheney chairmanships may have contributed to how they articulated what they did. At the 1994 consultative group, Cheatham said that during the 12 years of "totalitarianism," "the states adapted their language to the new realities, but they didn't have to adapt their vision."⁵³

Beyond program content, the state councils' board structure has proved an essential component of their political influence. Structured as nonprofit organizations, the state humanities councils are governed by volunteer boards. From their inception through the early 1990s, the boards were comprised of roughly half academics and half members from the public.⁵⁴ The Federation, skittish early on about doing lobbying of its own, conceived of the volunteer board members as having responsibilities for advocacy.⁵⁵ A great advantage of the board structure has been to bring on influential citizens, some of whom had access to Republicans—or were prominent Republicans themselves. Tom Roberts recalls, for example, that Iowa senator Chuck Grassley, a Republican, would attend the Federation's Humanities on the Hill event because of people he knew on the

⁵² Cott interviewed by author.

⁵³ "Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership," April 9, 1994, 102.

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1985: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities on S. 1264*, 99th Cong., 1st sess., 1985, 232 (statement of Nancy Stevenson on behalf of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils").

⁵⁵ "Promotion on behalf of the state-based humanities program will remain the voluntary responsibility of private individuals from the state-based committees who can best know and describe the value of their projects." State Humanities Planning Committee, "Questions and Answers About the Proposed Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities," 5, NEH Digital Repository, Office of Federal/State Partnership, Administrative Files.

Iowa council.⁵⁶ In addition, some Republican state council members have ended up getting elected to Congress. Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS), a key Republican backer of the NEH, served on the Kansas council in the 1970s before her election in 1978. Congressman Leonard Lance (R-NJ), the Republican co-chair of the Congressional Humanities Caucus in 2015, was formerly a member of the New Jersey Council on the Humanities.

5.3 THE CLIENT COMES THROUGH—AND COMES OUT ON TOP

With their bolstered standing, the state councils were in a position to advocate for the NEH when threatened with termination in 1995. Jamil Zainaldin, who served as Federation president during the defunding crisis, stressed the importance of the state councils, maintaining that they were integral in saving federal funding for both the arts and the humanities. In his recollection, “the arts were in a place where they could not have a national voice at that time. They were, quote-unquote, the problem.” Zainaldin has stressed the importance of the state council board members in particular:

The humanities councils came forward and did some very major advocacy and frankly lobbying, and not them, but their board members. Because, by this point, by the mid-90s, the board members of the state humanities councils are...decision makers in your own state. You can pick up the phone and make the call to the member of Congress. And occasionally that member of Congress was the chair of an appropriations committee, or the chair of a subcommittee, or in the leadership. And they did. They picked up the phone, and the call was made.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Thomas Roberts (first director of the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities) interviewed by author, January 8, 2016.

⁵⁷ Jamil Zainaldin, “The Federation, NEH, and the State Councils” (panel remarks at Humanities Texas’s Fortieth Anniversary Program, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, December 6, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rvszPM1jTY>.

Zainaldin says that state council board members with ties to the Christian Coalition helped convince the organization's leader, Ralph Reed, to remove the NEH from the Coalition's "target list."⁵⁸ Esther Macintosh, who was also at the Federation in 1995, said that in the midst of the funding crisis, the councils were able to rally letters from their constituents. Councils were able to show that cuts to the NEH would affect local programs, to which even more "hard-nosed" congressmen would be sympathetic.⁵⁹

When the NEH was threatened following the 1994 midterm elections, Chairman Hackney made several decisions that appeared to reflect an acknowledgment of the Endowment's dependence on the councils. Hackney eliminated the NEH's Division of State Programs and replaced it with a new Office of Federal State Partnership, which was placed directly under the chairman's office. The number of program staffers was cut from 10 to 5, signaling that the NEH would exercise less oversight of the SHCs. Hackney did away with exemplary awards, which meant that councils no longer competed against one another for funding budgeted for the councils; from then on it, funds were to be distributed according to a formula. Councils also gained the opportunity to compete for grants from the Endowment's other divisions, over and above their allotment of state program funds.⁶⁰

The ensuing debate over the cultural agencies in Congress reflected the rising standing of the councils relative to the rest of the NEH. Republicans, who no longer embraced a vision of the NEH as a patron of high culture, were inclined to favor the state

⁵⁸ Jamil Zainaldin, "Public Works: NEH, Congress, and the State Humanities Councils," *The Public Historian* 35, no. 1 (2013): 44-5.

⁵⁹ Esther Mackintosh interviewed by interview, September 11, 2015.

⁶⁰ Stephen Burd, "NEH Shakes Up Its Award-Making Structure, Restoring Popular Challenge-Grant Office," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 30, 1994, A33.

councils and culture that was generated locally. Even in the House, where there was the greatest pressure to terminate the NEA and NEH, the state councils were treated more favorably. The House Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities passed a bill to defund the NEA and NEH after a period of three years, during which time 80 percent of the Endowments' funding would go to state arts and humanities councils. The Committee argued that "arts and humanities priorities are best established at the State and local levels" and praised the state arts agencies and humanities councils for their focus on "local art, history and literature." In the Committee's view, "State and local programs not only help individuals understand who they are and where they are, but, more importantly, they offer an alternative to mass media markets and decisions made hundreds or thousands of miles away." The Committee argued that local projects are more likely to generate matching funds, states and locales could be more effective than the Endowments in education projects, and that devolving funds would advance "the promotion of community" and the "promotion of State and local traditions."⁶¹

The Senate, though less inclined to eliminate federal funding for the arts and humanities, also demonstrated a growing affinity for the state councils. The Committee on Labor and Human Resources, chaired by Senator Kassebaum, passed a bill to reauthorize the Endowments for five years, which, unlike the House version, did not phase them out. Under the Senate bill, the NEH would have three grant categories: Partnership, National Significance, and Research and Scholarship. Partnership, the category that covered the state humanities councils, was to receive 30 percent of the

⁶¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities, Arts, Humanities, and Museum Services Amendments of 1995: Report together with Minority Views (to Accompany H.R. 1557)*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, H. Rep. 104-170, 10-11.

agency's program funds, an increase from the 20 percent minimum set in 1976. In addition, state councils would assume teacher training programs in the humanities, an area that had previously been under the purview of the agency's national grant-making.⁶²

Neither the House nor Senate measure made it to the floor for a vote. But despite the lack of reauthorization, Congress agreed to appropriate funds and keep the Endowments alive. While both chambers approved steep cuts to the NEH's overall budget, they left the councils relatively spared. The House bill cut the NEH by 47 percent, explaining that the new funding levels were consistent with the plan to phase out the NEH over three years. The brunt of the cuts were directed toward the Divisions of Research, Education, and Public Programs, collectively slashed by 69 percent, from \$75.4 million down to \$28.6 million. The Office of Preservation and Access, which supported efforts to save deteriorating collections at libraries, museums, historical societies, and archives, received a smaller cut of 23 percent, from \$22 million to \$17 million. State councils were targeted with the smallest reduction: a cut of 16 percent, from \$28 million to \$23.4 million.⁶³ The Senate, like the House, favored the state councils, focusing cuts on other NEH program areas. Research, Education, and Public Programs were reduced by 52 percent and Preservation and Access by 23 percent. The Senate did not cut the state councils at all, leaving them with \$28 million.⁶⁴ In the conference legislation for FY 1996, the House and Senate compromised on the Senate's

⁶² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Arts, Humanities, and Museum Amendments of 1995: Report together with Minority Views (to Accompany S. 856)*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, S. Rep. 104-135, 3, 15.

⁶³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 1996: Report together with Dissenting Views (to Accompany H.R. 1977)*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, H. Rept. 104-173, 107.

⁶⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 1996: Report (to Accompany H.R. 1977)*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, S. Rept. 104-125, 102-3.

higher overall appropriation levels.⁶⁵ The state councils were cut 5 percent, but because there were unobligated funds from the previous fiscal year, they ended up not experiencing a reduction in federal support.⁶⁶

The outcome of the 1995 defunding crisis vindicated Senator Claiborne Pell's insistence that the NEH develop a state-based program. As he told Barnaby Keeney, "the lower the organizational level you get to, the more your grassroots support, the more visibility you have, and the easier it is to help yourself here on the Hill."⁶⁷ When the agency was under fire, the SHCs may have been the only meaningful group to pressure Congress on the NEH's behalf. According to a study of lobbying for higher education, academic humanists made few efforts to urge Congress to support the NEH:

...most academics have no intention of lobbying and often ignore local and national politics. For example, even as Republican leaders considered eliminating the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 1995-1996, most faculty humanists did not respond with communications to members of Congress.⁶⁸

Again, part of this boils down to incentives. Scholars, colleges, and universities will endure with or without the NEH. The same cannot be said for the state humanities councils.

⁶⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Making Appropriations for the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies, for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 1996, and for Other Purpose: Conference Report (to Accompany H.R. 1977)*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, H. Rept. 104-402, 65.

⁶⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1997: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 3*, 104th Cong., 2d. sess., 1996, 359 (NEH budget justification material).

⁶⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives and Senate, Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Joint Hearings before the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate on H. R. 15196 and S. 3238*, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, 77.

⁶⁸ Constance Ewing Cook, *Lobbying for Higher Education: How Colleges and Universities Influence Federal Policy* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998): 155.

The crisis also effectively empowered the state councils to achieve their agenda vis-à-vis the NEH. But for the threat of termination, it is questionable whether the NEH would have changed its relationship to the councils as quickly and as dramatically as Chairman Hackney did following the 1994 election. The consultative group, discussed above, took place in April of 1994, and while some concerns were expressed about the NEH's political insecurity, with one staffer bringing up moderate Democrats' interest in devolving the arts and humanities to the states, Don Gibson said that the agency was "reasonably sanguine" about the prospects of being reauthorized.⁶⁹ During the conversation, Carole Watson, who was director of the Division of State Programs, defended the existing relationship between the NEH and the councils. Watson articulated a vision of the state councils as part of the NEH; that each division had its distinctive mission.⁷⁰ This was an understanding that harkened back to John Barcroft's views in the early 1970s. Watson also defended the seriousness of the NEH's process of requiring the councils to apply for funding and subjecting their proposals to peer review.⁷¹ It is perhaps even more doubtful that the NEH would have gone along with a reallocation of funding priorities, shifting resources away from what had been the agency's core areas from the beginning, such as research and education, and toward the state councils.

⁶⁹ "Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership," April 9, 1994, 203.

⁷⁰ "Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership," April 8, 1994, 60-61.

⁷¹ "Consultative Group: NEH and State Councils Partnership," April 9, 1994, 69-70.

5.4 A NEW POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR THE NEH

The defunding crisis marked a clear end to the era of bipartisan support for the idea of federal funding for the arts and humanities and inaugurated a new political context. With the migration of the Religious Right into the GOP and the sea change in the humanities in higher education, it no longer made political sense for Republicans to back the idea of the federal government as a patron of high culture. Democrats, at the time, were divided, with moderates in the caucus favoring devolving the arts and humanities to the states. In this context, the state humanities councils, which supported noncontroversial local history projects and populated their boards with local influencers, were in the best position to defend the agency, as well as advance their interests. Hence, the NEH's political context had changed from one characterized by majoritarian politics, with the maintenance of the agency largely dependent upon the national consensus about the value of the arts and humanities, to one that also bore the hallmarks of client politics. As will be explained in the following chapter, in this new context, the NEH's durability has depended largely upon the influence of the state councils, which have gained an increasing share of congressional appropriations for the Endowment. Though politicians remain supportive of the NEH as an institution, it is not because they are supporting a grander vision of cultural uplift.

6.0 NEH IN A FRACTURED REPUBLIC

Yuval Levin notes in *Fractured Republic* how striking the Great Society's emphasis on culture appears in hindsight. Federal funding for the arts and humanities and public broadcasting, he argues, was a conscious effort to foster and preserve the cultural and civic unity that emerged during the first half of the 20th century, a time in which American life became consolidated on many fronts.¹ So far, this policy history has traced how the NEH has fared and coped as that unity has dissolved. This final chapter of Part I on organizational maintenance describes the state of the agency since the defunding crisis of the mid-1990s through the beginning of the presidency of Donald J. Trump, an era in which that fracturing Levin describes has continued apace.

6.1 PARTY POSITIONING: 1995 – 2017

Since the mid-1990s, federal funding for culture has receded as a prominent issue. Though various Republican leaders and conservative influencers have called for abolishing the NEA and NEH, Republicans in Congress have not seriously attempted to do so. While Democrats have retained their historic support for the cultural agencies,

¹ Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016): 57.

rarely have they been in a position to increase funding significantly. Democrats have held the presidency, House, and Senate simultaneously for just two out of the 22 years beginning in 1995. Moreover, nondefense domestic discretionary spending has been squeezed in general, particularly since 2010.² The parties no longer argue about the NEH like they once did; talk of elitism, populism, merit, and diversity are very much in the past. Some Republican and Democratic rhetoric has even converged to a degree. In defending the continued existence of the NEH, members of both parties have come to fall back on the value of promoting cultural heritage. Agency reputation throughout this period has continued to be closely connected to the person of the chairman. Presidents Clinton and Bush's appointments (post-Sheldon Hackney) helped defuse Republican hostility toward the NEH, just as the appointment of Jim Leach by President Obama helped reignite the opposition of conservative opinion shapers.

After the failed attempt to defund the NEA and NEH, the 1996 Republican Party Platform still called for terminating these agencies. Yet in Congress, for the duration of the Clinton administration, Republicans were content (or resigned) to maintaining them. Republican hostility even waned in the House, where the enthusiasm to defund the NEH had been greatest. In 1997, Congressman Steve Chabot (R-OH) proposed an amendment to the Interior appropriations bill to abolish the NEH, just as he had in 1995. Though the measure was defeated in 1995, at least then a majority of the Republican caucus had supported it. This was not the case in 1997. 36 Republican members who had voted to defund the NEH in 1995 switched to oppose termination two years later.

² Brian Riedl, "Obama's Fiscal Legacy: A Comprehensive Overview of Spending, Taxes, and Deficits," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, September 2017, <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/obamas-fiscal-legacy-comprehensive-overview-spending-taxes-and-deficits-10669.html>.

Table 6. Votes on Chabot Amendments in 1995 and 1997 to Defund the NEH³

	1995 Vote			1997 Vote		
	Aye	Nay	Not Voting	Aye	Nay	Not Voting
Republican	136	93	2	92	132	3
Democrat	12	183	7	4	195	7
Independent		1			1	
Total	148	277	9	96	328	10

In the immediate aftermath of the defunding crisis, Republican lawmakers also continued to show more support for the NEH than the NEA. In the final budget agreement for FY 1996, Congress awarded the NEH \$10.5 million more than the NEA. When the FY 1997 budget was under consideration, a group of 20 House Republicans sent a letter to Ralph Regula (R-OH), the pertinent committee chairman, advocating for keeping the NEH's budget at that higher level, though made no mention of the NEA.⁴

President Clinton likely placated many Republicans through his choice of William Ferris to succeed Sheldon Hackney as chairman. Ferris, like many Republican leaders in Congress, was from the South. He was an anthropologist and folklorist from the University of Mississippi, where he was also director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Both of Mississippi's Republican senators, Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, approved of his nomination. Ferris was confirmed unanimously, without even a hearing. Clinton also appointed a southerner to chair the NEA. William Ivey of Tennessee, who was executive director of the Country Music Foundation, was supported by that state's two Republican senators, Fred Thompson and Bill Frist.⁵

³ Vote on H. Amdt. 551 (Chabot) to H.R. 1977 (104th), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/104-1995/h518>; Vote on H. Amdt. 232 (Chabot) to H.R. 2107 (105th), <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/1997/roll270.xml>.

⁴ Paulette V. Walker, "Humanities Endowment Appears to Be Gaining Political Support," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 24, 1996, A24.

⁵ Paulette V. Walker, "Clinton Picks Mississippi Scholar to Lead the Humanities Endowment," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 5, 1997, Nexis Uni; Paulette V. Walker, "Clinton Seeks Increases for Arts

Ferris, as chairman, responded to the political pressures of the moment by pushing the NEH in what many perceived to be a more populist direction. For example, he established an initiative called “Extending the Reach” to direct more grants toward states that had previously not fared as well in securing NEH funding, as well as institutions that Presidential Executive Orders had identified as deserving of special favor, such as historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges. Ferris also sought to spearhead an initiative to start ten regional humanities centers throughout the country, which would focus on research, education, and public programming about each region’s “distinctive culture.”⁶ Congress, still led by Republicans, was sufficiently satisfied with the performance of the NEH under Ferris and appropriated small budget increases for FYs 2000 and 2001.⁷

Though Ferris managed to keep Congress appeased, scholars were displeased with the shift in emphasis away from more classical fields and activities. Progressive- and traditional-leaning scholars expressed disappointment in the direction of the NEH, harkening back to a similar situation that occurred during the Carter administration, when liberal and conservative defenders of high culture were united in criticizing Chairman Joseph Duffey’s perceived efforts to base grant decisions on political considerations (geography and constituency) instead of scholarly excellence. Stanley Katz, who had left the ACLS and was director of the Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, noted scholars’ disappointment with Ferris, saying of the chairman, “He’s

and Humanities, Hoping for New Climate in Congress,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 13, 1998, Nexis Uni.

⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 2001: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 4*, 106th Cong., 2d. sess., 2000, 955.

⁷ Humanities Indicators, “Federal Funding for the Humanities,” <https://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=11>.

got no strategic view of the humanities. He doesn't have a vision of what the academic humanities are or where they fit." Steve Balch, president of the more conservative National Association of Scholars, said of Ferris's interest in regional centers and folklore, "you're not talking about the type of high culture that the N.E.H. was created to support," such as history and ancient languages.⁸

In 2001, when Ferris's term as chairman was set to expire, Senators Cochran and Lott called upon newly elected President George W. Bush to nominate him for a second term.⁹ Yet President Bush opted instead for University of Indiana art historian Bruce Cole, who had previously served on the National Council on the Humanities. When Cole took office, in Congress the NEH enjoyed a fair degree of bipartisan good will, or at the very least bipartisan forbearance. But while Republicans were no longer seeking to terminate the agency, they still kept spending down. By 2001, the NEH's annual budget stood at \$120 million, \$10 million more than it had after the 1995 defunding crisis—but below the \$150 million that President Clinton had requested.¹⁰

Throughout the Bush presidency, Congress kept the NEH's budget flat, with the exception of a new initiative: "We the People." The NEH launched "We the People" in the wake of the 9-11 terrorist attacks to promote education about American history and the nation's ideals. President Bush formally announced "We the People" at a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden in September of 2002. In his speech, the President explained that children have "seen that evil is real" and that they needed to know "why

⁸ Ron Southwick, "Scholars Fear Humanities Endowment Is Being Dumbed Down," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 6, 2000, Nexis Uni.

⁹ Ron Southwick, "Top Republicans Urge Bush to Keep Ferris as Head of Humanities Endowment," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 23, 2001, Nexis Uni.

¹⁰ Ron Southwick, "Democrats Support Cultural Endowments," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 13, 2001, Nexis Uni.

their country is worth fighting for.” “We the People” was one of three federal initiatives that the President announced that day. The others were “Our Documents,” a project of the National Archives and National History Day, and a White House Forum on American History, Civics, and Service.¹¹

Congress did not meet the administration’s full request of \$25 million for “We the People,” instead appropriating \$10 million. Even still, this \$10 million increase represented the biggest single-year boost in the agency’s budget since 1991. Congress went on to increase funding for “We the People” to \$11 million in FY 2005, and then to \$15 million annually from 2006 through 2008. “We the People” even remained an NEH initiative, with dedicated funding from Congress, years after Bruce Cole’s tenure as chairman ended.¹² With additional appropriations for “We the People,” the NEH was able to expand grant-making in existing programs, as well as launch new ones. For example, the NEH increased funding for editions of the writings of important American figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Thomas Edison, and Frederick Douglas. New initiatives under the “We the People” banner included:

- Landmarks of American History program, which sponsored workshops for K-12 teachers at historic sites
- *We the People Bookshelf*, which sent collections of books related to a specific theme (each year had a new theme, such as “courage” and “freedom”) to libraries nationwide
- An annual “Heroes of History” lecture

¹¹ George W. Bush, “Remarks Announcing the Teaching American History and Civic Education Initiatives,” September 17, 2002, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=64688>.

¹² The record of funding for “We the People” can be found in NEH budget justifications.

- “The Idea of America” essay contest for high school juniors¹³

Toward the end of Bruce Cole’s tenure, the NEH began another special initiative under “We the People,” “Picturing America,” which sent reproductions of masterpieces of American art, along with teaching guides, to schools across the country.¹⁴

Some scholars and practitioners in the humanities were initially concerned about “We the People,” fearing that pressure from the administration might lead to biased programming at the NEH.¹⁵ But in the end, most scholars and practitioners, as well as politicians of both political parties, admired what became of the initiative. If nothing else, “We the People” meant an increase in funding for the agency.¹⁶ Clement Price, the member of the Obama administration’s transition team in charge of evaluating the NEH, said that “We the People,” at first, struck him as “old-school” American history. But after learning more about the initiative and seeing programming it had sponsored, he concluded that “We the People” was “not a conservative stalking horse.”¹⁷ Jim Leach, Cole’s successor, also thought that “We the People” was an “excellent” program and tried to expand it.¹⁸

Conservative intellectuals also supported “We the People” and were generally pleased with Chairman Cole’s leadership. George Will praised Cole for “repairing the

¹³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations for 2006: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 4*, 109th Cong., 1st sess., 2005, 986-8 (NEH budget justification materials).

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations for 2009: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 4*, 110th Cong., 2d. sess., 2008, 940-1 (NEH budget justification materials).

¹⁵ Brian C. Jones, “History Lesson,” *Providence Phoenix*, October 11, 2002, accessed August 2, 2013, <http://www.providencephoenix.com/archive/features/02/10/10/RIH.html>.

¹⁶ John Hammer, head of the National Humanities Alliance, said that “We the People” “was the best thing that’s happened in eight years.” Anne Marie Borrego, “Humanities Endowment Returns to ‘Flagging’ Nontraditional Projects,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 16, 2004, Nexis Uni.

¹⁷ Clement Price interviewed by author, July 23, 2013.

¹⁸ James Leach interviewed by author, May 25, 2016.

ravages of the 1990s, when his two immediate predecessors made the NEH frivolous”¹⁹ and lauded “Picturing America” specifically.²⁰ At the close of Cole’s tenure, the National Association of Scholars published a tribute to him on its website, stating, “After eight years of trivialization and drift, Bruce restored the Endowment to its original mission, enrichment of the humanities as a source of national strength.”²¹ Conservative intellectuals such as Heather Mac Donald and Yuval Levin authored praises of Cole after his death in 2018.²²

But following the election of Barack Obama, conservative elites and leading Republican politicians renewed calls for terminating the agency—especially after the GOP retook the House in 2011, backed by the populist Tea Party movement. In 2011, the House Republican Study Committee presented a budget plan that included abolishing the NEA, NEH, and Corporation for Public Broadcasting—just as the Contract-with-America Congress had sought.²³ During the 2012 presidential campaign, the Republican nominee, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, called for defunding those agencies, noting that while he appreciated what they did, the country needed to find areas to cut spending.²⁴ In 2015, the House Budget Committee, chaired by Congressman Paul Ryan

¹⁹ George F. Will, “History’s Cultural Comeback,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2002/12/26/historys-cultural-comeback/583976f3-24af-4001-b095-727513fcab72/?utm_term=.c2a397d6f8a8.

²⁰ George F. Will, “A Tiny Bit of Artful Government,” *Washington Post*, December 25, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/24/AR2008122401587.html>.

²¹ Steve Balch, “Bruce Cole: A Tribute,” National Association of Scholars, November 14, 2008, https://www.nas.org/articles/Bruce_Cole_A_Tribute.

²² Heather Mac Donald, “A Defender of the Humanities,” *City Journal*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.city-journal.org/html/defender-humanities-15670.html>; Yuval Levin, “Bruce Cole, 1938-2018,” *National Review*, January 9, 2018, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/455299/remembering-bruce-cole-yuval-levin>.

²³ Mike Boehm, “House Republicans unveil plan to end federal arts and humanities agencies and aid to public broadcasting,” *Culture Monster*, *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2011, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/01/congress-republicans-nea-neh.html>.

²⁴ Andy Serwer and David Whitford, “Mitt Romney: Rich taxpayers will pay their share,” *Fortune*, August 15, 2012, <http://fortune.com/2012/08/15/mitt-romney-rich-taxpayers-will-pay-their-share/>.

(R-WI), who had been Governor Romney’s running mate and later Speaker of the House, made the same recommendation, arguing, “Federal subsidies...can no longer be justified. The activities and content funded by these agencies go beyond the core mission of the federal government.”²⁵

Jim Leach, who served as chairman of the NEH between 2009 and 2013, provoked hostility toward the agency from conservative intellectuals and journalists. A former Republican congressman from Iowa, Leach had endorsed Barack Obama for President in 2008. Unlike all of his predecessors, Leach did not have a doctorate in a humanistic field, though he had been a supporter of the NEH in Congress, helping found the Humanities Caucus in the House. His nomination was viewed by some as a reward for having supported the President.²⁶

As chairman, Leach launched a special initiative called “Bridging Cultures,” which focused on “the role of civility in bridging differences and sustaining democracy in America” and enhancing Americans’ understanding of the Muslim world.²⁷ In his speech in September 2009 announcing “Bridging Cultures,” Leach spoke to both of these priorities. He referred to President Obama’s June speech at Cairo University on relations between the United States and Muslim world, describing it as “one of the great humanist speeches of our time.” As for what he viewed as the decline of civility in the public discourse, Leach referred to Congressman Joe Wilson (R-SC), who, during the 2009 State of the Union, cried out, “You lie!” in response to President Obama’s claim that his

²⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Budget, *The Path to Prosperity: Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Resolution*, April 2014, http://budget.house.gov/uploadedfiles/fy15_blueprint.pdf.

²⁶ Andrew Ferguson, “Civility, Obama Style,” *The Weekly Standard*, August 8, 2011, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/civility-obama-style/article/577787>.

²⁷ Rasmi Simhan, “Bridging Cultures, an NEH Special Initiative,” June 16, 2011, <http://www.neh.gov/news/bridging-cultures-neh-special-initiative>.

proposed health care reform would not provide insurance for illegal immigrants. Leach noted how citizens accused the President of policies that are “communist” or “fascist,” saying that while such words are protected by the First Amendment, “the question is whether they nonetheless are part of a vocabulary of hate, jeopardizing social cohesion and even public safety.” Toward the end of his remarks, Leach explained his decision to endorse Barack Obama for President: “I had become convinced that seldom had a more natural humanist been chosen to represent his party for national office.”²⁸

Leach’s speech alarmed conservatives, who worried about what it portended for the direction of the NEH. Peter Wood, president of NAS, weighed in with an article, “Politicizing the NEH.” While NAS had expressed satisfaction with President Obama’s choice of Leach several months earlier,²⁹ Wood was deeply concerned about “Bridging Cultures.” Wood accused Leach of being “perilously close to politicizing the National Endowment for the Humanities,” in that he was attempting to use the agency to advance the President’s agenda. Wood, an academic anthropologist by training, also criticized the content of Leach’s remarks, arguing that the new chairman evinced a confused, shallow understanding of the concept of “culture.”³⁰ The Powerline blog, a conservative site, chimed in with a post, “Jim Leach’s Bridge to Nowhere,” charging Leach with having “become something of an Obama mouthpiece.”³¹

²⁸ Jim Leach, “Bridging Cultures: NEH and the Muslim World” (speech, Carnegie Corporation of New York, New York, NY, September 29, 2009), <http://www.neh.gov/about/chairman/speeches/bridging-cultures-neh-and-the-muslim-world>.

²⁹ National Association of Scholars, “NAS Pleased By Leach Nomination to NEH,” June 4, 2009, https://www.nas.org/articles/NAS_Pleased_By_Leach_Nomination_to_NEH.

³⁰ Peter Wood, “Politicizing the NEH,” National Association of Scholars, October 10, 2009, https://www.nas.org/articles/Politicizing_the_NEH.

³¹ Scott Johnson, “Jim Leach’s Bridge to Nowhere,” *Powerline*, October 13, 2009, <http://www.Powerlineblog.com/archives/2009/10/024698.php>.

Two initiatives that took place under the auspices of “Bridging Cultures,” The Muslim Journeys Bookshelf and the Civility Tour, seemed to vindicate conservatives’ predictions that Leach would use the NEH to advance President Obama’s agenda. The Muslim Journeys Bookshelf took a similar format as the We the People Bookshelf. This program, sponsored in part by grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, and carried out in partnership with the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University and the American Library Association Public Programs Office, sent a collection of books and films dealing with Islam to libraries across the country. The NEH described the Bookshelf as “an invitation to hear from a diverse set of voices—those of Muslim men and women across time and place—about their daily experiences with their families and communities, and with literature, art, and religious belief.”³² Conservatives assailed the selection of books for presenting what they argued was a biased version of Islam and for not addressing more contentious issues, such as the question of the connection between terrorism and the religion’s teachings, as well as the treatment of women in the Muslim world.³³ Under the auspices of the Civility Tour, Chairman Leach visited all 50 states, giving lectures and talks on the danger “polarizing attitudes” and “divisive rhetoric of anger” posed to a healthy democracy.³⁴ He also criticized the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of

³² NEH, “About Muslim Journeys,” <http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/about>.

³³ Marvin Olasky, “Stacking Library Shelves,” *World Magazine*, May 17, 2013, https://world.wng.org/2013/05/stacking_library_shelves; Daniel Pipes, “The National Endowment for the Humanities’ Latest Project,” *National Review Online*, May 24, 2013, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/349208/national-endowment-humanities-latest-project-daniel-pipes>.

³⁴ Curt Suplee, “Leach Completes Civility Tour,” NEH, June 19, 2011, <http://www.neh.gov/news/leach-completes-civility-tour>.

Citizens United v. FEC (2010) that dealt with campaign spending, calling it, in one speech, the Court's "gravest historical error," second only to *Dred Scott*.³⁵

Conservative opinion shapers skewered "Bridging Cultures" and Leach himself. Scott Johnson of Powerline wrote in a recap of Leach's chairmanship, "In no area was Leach a more willing tool than in his use of the NEH to propagandize for the Obama administration's wishful thinking about Islam." Powerline blasted Leach's call for civility as "little more than an excuse to call out and condemn Obama's political opponents, including the Tea Party, for the effrontery of their dissent from the administration's agenda."³⁶ *The New Criterion*, the conservative standard bearer of cultural criticism, published editorials calling for the abolishment of both the NEA and NEH, citing Powerline's watchdogging of Chairman Leach and calling attention to a conference that the NEH had sponsored at the University of Hawaii's East-West Center, which was sympathetic to Japan and cast the United States as imperialistic and oppressive.³⁷

William "Bro" Adams, Leach's successor, proved far less controversial and, like Chairman Ferris, directed agency resources in ways that was more likely to satisfy Republicans. A career academic and university administrator, Adams was also an Army veteran, who served a yearlong tour in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. His signature initiative, "The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square," was less controversial than Leach's focus on Islam and the Civility Tour. One of the initiatives

³⁵ Jim Leach, "Democracy for Sale," *Boston Globe*, October 14, 2012, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/10/13/jimleach/LzSFIRx20POtAKoxCASxiL/story.html> (op-ed was adapted from speech delivered at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, MA on October 7, 2012).

³⁶ Scott Johnson, "How Chairman Jim Turned the NEH Into a Tool of the Obama Administration," *Powerline*, June 6, 2013, <http://www.Powerlineblog.com/archives/2013/06/how-chairman-jim-turned-the-neh-into-a-tool-of-the-obama-administration.php>.

³⁷ "The NEH vs. America," *The New Criterion* 29, no. 4 (2010): 1-3; "NEA-ification of the NEH," *The New Criterion* 29, no. 7 (2011): 2-3.

that the NEH pursued under the auspices of the Common Good was sponsoring programs for veterans, such as discussion groups that make use of humanistic texts.³⁸

This is not to say that conservative opinion shapers did not take issue with some NEH grants during Adams's tenure. The Washington Free Beacon, a right-of-center news site, picked up where Powerline left off as the Right's NEH watchdog. The Free Beacon published several stories on NEH grants that appeared frivolous or tendentious, such as:

- a \$250,000 grant for a traveling exhibit on mass incarceration³⁹
- a \$156,340 grant for public forums in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania partly about food deserts⁴⁰
- a \$6,000 summer stipend for a scholar working on a study of French lesbian activism⁴¹
- a \$25,200 grant for a project entitled, "Traditional Spiritual Practices and the LGBT Community in a Black Pentecostal Church Coalition Project"⁴²

Yet throughout the remainder of the Obama presidency, the NEH provoked less controversy on the Right than it did under Leach.

The Democratic Party has remained generally supportive of the NEA and NEH.

This is partly because the states that receive the most funding from the NEH are

³⁸ The NEH initiative focused on veterans is called Standing Together: The Humanities and the Experience of War, <http://www.neh.gov/veterans/standing-together>.

³⁹ Elizabeth Harrington, "Feds Spend \$250,000 for Traveling Exhibit on Mass Incarceration," *Washington Free Beacon*, February 2, 2016, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/feds-spend-250000-traveling-exhibit-mass-incarceration/>.

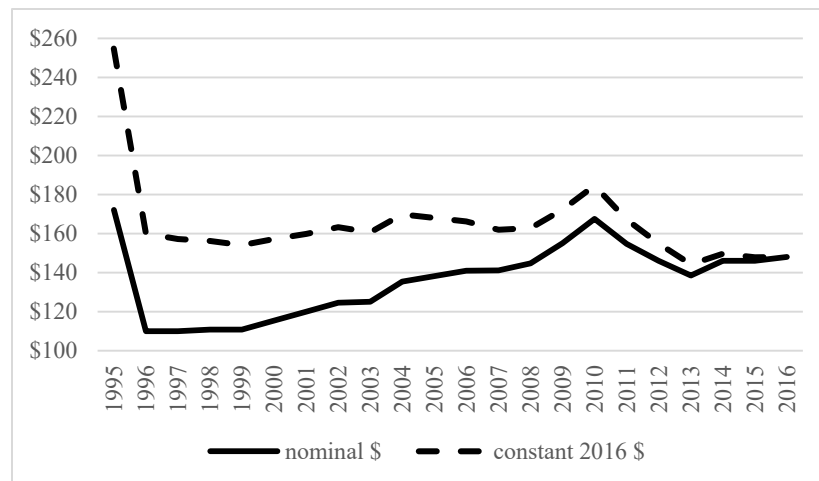
⁴⁰ Elizabeth Harrington, "Feds Spend \$156,340 to Talk about 'Food Deserts,'" *Washington Free Beacon*, February 3, 2016, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/feds-spend-156340-to-talk-about-food-deserts/>.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Harrington, "Feds Spend \$6,000 Studying 'History of French Lesbian Activism,'" *Washington Free Beacon*, March 25, 2016, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/feds-spend-6000-studying-history-of-french-lesbian-activism/>.

⁴² Elizabeth Harrington, "Feds Spend \$25,200 Studying the Experiences of Black LGBT Pentecostals," *Washington Free Beacon*, December 18, 2015, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/feds-spend-25200-studying-the-experiences-of-black-lgbt-pentecostals/>.

represented by Democrats. In 2014, the top three states to receive NEH funding were New York, Massachusetts, and California, states whose congressional delegations are predominantly Democratic (those three states took in a combined 28 percent of total NEH grant dollars).⁴³ When the Democratic Party controlled Congress for the first two years of the Obama presidency, it increased the NEH’s budget to \$168 million in 2010, the highest it had been since 1995. Yet following the Republican takeover of Congress in 2011, the Endowment’s budget has decreased and remained below \$150 million for several years beginning in 2012. These budget cuts reflect, in part, an overall tightening in regard to discretionary federal spending. Arts activists, however, were disappointed with President Obama’s budget requests for the NEA.⁴⁴ Yet given the Republican Party’s control of Congress, big requests would most likely have gone nowhere.

Figure 5. NEH Appropriations: 1995 – 2016⁴⁵



⁴³ Humanities Indicators, “Federal Funding for the Humanities.”

⁴⁴ Mike Boehm, “Obama Budget: Good for D.C. Museums, not for NEA and art grants,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-obama-arts-budget-smithsonian-nea-national-gallery-kennedy-center-20140304-story.html>; Mark Vallen, “Obama’s 2016 Arts Budget,” Art for a Change, February 3, 2015, <http://art-for-a-change.com/blog/2015/02/obamas-2016-arts-budget.html>.

⁴⁵ Humanities Indicators, “Federal Funding for the Humanities.”

Since the year 2000, all Democratic Party Platforms except for 2004 have stated support for the NEA and NEH, often presenting federal funding for the arts and humanities as supporting America’s “cultural heritage.” On the occasion of the Endowments’ 50th anniversary, President Obama sent a brief congratulatory message using precisely that terminology. The President said, “President Johnson’s vision—of a society that honors its artistic and cultural heritage and encourages its citizens to carry that heritage forward—endures as an essential part of who we are as a Nation.”⁴⁶

President Donald Trump, after assuming office, adopted what was, by 2017, the quasi-official Republican Party position: abolish the NEA and NEH.⁴⁷ Many opinion leaders on the Right praised the President’s proposal, restating many of the arguments that conservative opponents of the Endowments have made since they were initially established: that they were unconstitutional, catered primarily to the interests of wealthier Americans, and had been captured by the cultural Left. American Greatness, a right-of-center commentary website that was founded to flesh out and advocate for policies that aligned with the general themes of Trump’s campaign, featured two articles about whether to abolish the NEH specifically. Even though the contributors, University of Texas philosophy professor Robert Koons and *New Criterion* editor Roger Kimball, disagreed over whether to defund the agency, both contended that it was corrupt to core. Koons proposed repurposing the NEH to advance education about Western Civilization,

⁴⁶ Barack Obama, “50th Anniversary Message from President Obama,” September 28, 2015, <https://www.neh.gov/news/press-release/2015-09-29>.

⁴⁷ Office of Management and Budget, *America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*, 2017, 8, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2018_blueprint.pdf.

partly through instituting national exams for high school and college seniors. Kimball replied that because “elite culture” was so corrupt, the NEH was irredeemable.⁴⁸

2017 might have been the most politically precarious moment for the NEH in its history. Previous Republican presidents—Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush—had all supported the cultural agencies. And when previous Republican-controlled Congresses proposed abolishing the NEA and NEH, they faced a Democratic President (Clinton and Obama). In 2017, in contrast, the circumstances seemed aligned to favor abolishment.

Yet Congressional Republicans rebuffed President Trump’s proposal to eliminate the NEA and NEH. In 2017, the House Appropriations Committee voted, instead, only to trim their budgets by \$5 million each. The Committee gave three sets of reasons for its decision to continue support for the NEH. First, the Committee noted “the broad bipartisan support” for what the NEH was doing on behalf of veterans. Second, the Committee praised the NEH’s support for Native Americans “in preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage.” And third, the Committee commended the NEH’s support for the state humanities councils, praising them for “the scope and reach of public humanities programming in Congressional districts across the nation, which serve rural areas, promote family literacy, and support cultural tourism that contributes to local economies.” The Committee made not a single mention of what the NEH did for research

⁴⁸ Robert C. Koons, “A Call to Mend, Not End the NEH,” *American Greatness*, April 24, 2017, <https://amgreatness.com/2017/04/24/call-mend-not-end-neh/>; Roger Kimball, “The NEH Can’t Be Mended, So End It,” *American Greatness*, April 25, 2017, <https://amgreatness.com/2017/04/25/neh-cant-mended-end/>.

or education in the humanities, or even the national public-facing programs that it sponsors.⁴⁹

Republicans in Congress simply refused to embrace the calls of party elites, from Speaker Ryan to President Trump, to terminate the cultural agencies. But as the Appropriation Committee’s report made clear, while congressional Republicans were willing to support the NEH, they was not primarily concerned with supporting the humanities as such. Rather, the Republicans were voting to support veterans, Native American’s cultural heritage, and activities taking place in their respective states and congressional districts through the state councils.

The NEH’s budgetary priorities reflect Congress’s interest in supporting the state councils and special chairman’s initiatives—at the expense of what used to be the agency’s core program areas. In 2011, the NEH’s total program budget stood at \$113 million, with the state councils taking 38 percent. In 2017, the program budget stood at \$111 million, with the councils taking 41 percent.

Table 7. Share of NEH Program Budget by Area⁵⁰

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Research	14%	13%	13%	14%	14%	13%	12%
Education	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	11%
Public Programs	13%	12%	12%	13%	13%	12%	11%
Preservation and Access	15%	14%	14%	14%	14%	14%	13%
State Councils	38%	37%	37%	39%	39%	39%	41%
Digital Humanities	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Chairman’s Initiative	4%	6%	6%	3%	3%	5%	7%

⁴⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2018*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., 2017, 90-1, <https://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/23918.pdf> (draft).

⁵⁰ Data taken from NEH budget justification materials.

6.2 THE NEW FEDERAL-STATE PARTNERSHIP

Since the 1995 defunding crisis, the state humanities councils have remained a critical, if not *the* critical, constituency for the NEH. In a political context in which opinions about federal funding for culture generally range from hostile to indifferent, the state councils have taken steps to strengthen themselves as institutions. The NEH's primary concern in regard to the councils has been to encourage their strength as institutions; the Endowment has been far less interested, indifferent, even, in what the councils do programmatically. Ever since the mid-1990s, when the councils became all the more politically essential, the NEH has largely ceded to their demands for greater autonomy, a more streamlined funding process, and greater overall respect.

A new funding process was one of the major changes that the NEH implemented in an effort to make its relationship with the councils more of a partnership. Recall that prior to the defunding crisis, the state councils were treated like other grantees, required to apply for grants, with their proposals subject to peer review, even though it became unheard of for a council to be turned down. The NEH, which still felt a sense of ownership and responsibility over what the councils did, offered the councils substantive feedback on a number of issues, such as whether dollars were too concentrated in certain parts of the state, whether some disciplines were overrepresented in programming, and whether scholars were being used properly.⁵¹ Even into the early 1990s, the NEH looked closely at what the councils were doing programmatically. Rick Ardinger, who began working for the Idaho Humanities Council in 1991, remembers that when he started, a

⁵¹ Julie Van Camp (former program officer, Division of State Programs) interviewed by author, August 5, 2014; Edie Manza (former director of Federal/State Partnership) interviewed by author, January 5, 2016.

program officer from the NEH told him that the Council was not rejecting a high enough percentage of applicants.⁵²

Since the mid-1990s, the funding process has borne greater resemblance to an accreditation, precisely what Robert Cheatham had suggested at the 1994 consultative group discussed in chapter 5. The NEH has developed a process that is more of a collaborative effort and less of the agency exercising oversight. When a state council is up for review, it prepares and submits to the NEH a narrative self-assessment. The NEH reviews that assessment and convenes a specially-formed site visit team, which includes an NEH staffer and two outside members. The NEH chooses the external site visitors from a list of suggestions submitted by the council. Over a two-to-three day period, site visitors interview council staff, board members, program partners, and participants. The site visitors prepare a report, which the council then has the opportunity to review before it goes to the NEH, and ultimately to the National Council on the Humanities. There is no longer any form of peer review, nor do the councils receive grades. At the conclusion of the process, the councils receive five-year funding commitments. Edie Manza, who headed the Office of Federal-State Partnership for nearly 20 years before retiring in December of 2015, said that the NEH's goal was to have a process that the councils saw as beneficial and not just a hoop through which they had to jump. The NEH wants the councils to feel at liberty to identify their strengths and weaknesses; it has no interest in making them feel "reprimanded" or "scolded."⁵³

Unlike in the past, under the new Federal-State Partnership, the NEH is far less "picky" about what the councils choose to do programmatically and more concerned with

⁵² Rick Ardinger interviewed by author, June 26, 2015.

⁵³ Edie Manza interviewed by author.

good organizational governance. The NEH is particularly interested in seeing the councils form strong boards. Prospective board members have to understand what is expected of them and be willing to work hard, especially as boards have taken on additional responsibilities. One advantage of strong organization is that by ensuring a fair and open process for making grants and supporting projects in the states, councils can improve their reputations, which is critical when the idea of government funding for the humanities is challenged. The NEH encourages the councils to examine how they recruit board members, form board committees, develop partnerships in their states, relate to state legislatures, and develop their own staff.⁵⁴

The state councils themselves have also focused on reforming their boards since the defunding crisis. When the NEH's state program began, the primary responsibility of a state-council board was to review proposals and make re-grants with NEH money. When this was boards' primary task, they were generally split between academics and other interested citizens; sometimes local corporate and labor leaders, as well as leaders of local cultural institutions. But as federal funding has gotten tighter and the political climate more uncertain, state councils have changed board composition. Given the councils' increasing need to fundraise, they have sought to bring more foundation and corporate people onto their boards. According to Jamil Zainaldin, former president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils and president of the Georgia Humanities Council, "Today many Council governing boards have more in common with the local United Way than with higher education, though this reflects funding and resource needs

⁵⁴ Edie Manza interviewed by author.

more than any change in mission.”⁵⁵ At the same time, councils have become more intentional about bringing Republicans who care about the humanities onto their boards.⁵⁶ Some councils have also delegated the re-grant process to a separate board subcommittee, with the plenary boards focused more on questions of governance.⁵⁷

Finally, as noted above, a greater portion of the NEH’s budget goes to the councils. Prior to 1995, that portion of funding was kept near the 20 percent minimum mandated by Congress. Following the crisis, it was raised to 35 percent. As of 2017, the percentage of the NEH’s grant funds going to the SHCs stood at more than 40 percent. While some at the NEH may prefer that more resources go to areas such as research, the agency appears reconciled to the reality that the councils deserve a greater share—and will receive it. At a 2014 conference, Carole Watson, then acting chairman, spoke about the loss of funding that the NEH sustained in 1995. She explained that the NEH was “forced to see what our core values were by what we kept and what we had to let go...At this stage, we’re pretty sure that we made those choices and that they were the right ones.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Jamil Zainaldin, “Public Works: NEH, Congress, and the State Humanities Councils,” *The Public Historian* 35, no. 1 (2013): 46.

⁵⁶ Esther Mackintosh interviewed by author, September 11, 2015.

⁵⁷ Esther Mackintosh interviewed by author.

⁵⁸ Carole Watson, “The Federation, NEH, and the State Councils” (panel remarks at Humanities Texas’s Fortieth Anniversary Program, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, December 6, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rvszPM1jTY>.

6.3 CONCLUSION

At the founding of the NEH, there was a large consensus as to what the humanities were and how they could edify the polity. Since the culture wars, this has definitively not been the case. Yet because of the state humanities councils, the agency has remained durable despite culture wars, with the councils having captured a greater share of the agency's grant funds. The politics of the agency no longer deal with the actual content and substance of the humanities. The most that many politicians will say about the humanities is that they advance cultural heritage, a platitude vacuous enough so as not to offend anyone, and reach certain populations.

But even as the NEH finessed the culture wars in its relations with Congress, the agency must still make funding decisions that bear on contested questions in the humanities. Though Congress is largely indifferent to the content of what the NEH supports in regard to scholarly research, public programs, and education, provided the work does not appear blatantly morally offensive or anti-American, cultural elites are not. The question of how the NEH has coped internally with polarization in the humanities is the subject of the following section.

PART TWO: BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE

“NEH’s mission is expressed through grant making. We started out and continue to be a grant-making agency. That’s how I describe myself when I’m on the plane and someone asks me what we do. We make grants in various areas. Various chairmen will come along and will have an initiative or a theme, but 99 percent of what we do is make grants...We see our leadership through the various divisions through which we make grants...We make grants. That’s what we do.”¹ – Carole Watson, NEH acting chairman (2014)

To describe the NEH’s mission as “We make grants” is simple enough. But the NEH makes those grants in the context of a culture war, in which the humanities have become controversial and many humanists have become polarized into “progressive” and “orthodox” camps, to return to James Davison Hunter’s terminology. The broad question that this section of the dissertation tackles is, how has the NEH, in its grant-making, coped with the polarization that has beset the humanities?

The previous section on organizational maintenance explained how the culture wars have resulted in a greater portion of the NEH’s budget being passed through to the state humanities councils. Politicians, moreover, no longer argue about how the NEH ought to carry out its mission or debate the grander vision of cultural uplift it ought to pursue. But even as this has occurred, the Endowment still makes grants in support of interpretative projects that will touch upon controversial issues and questions. In some of

¹ Carole Watson, “The Federation, NEH, and the State Councils” (panel remarks at Humanities Texas’s Fortieth Anniversary Program, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, December 6, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rvszPM1jTY>.

its grant-making, the NEH will invariably advance certain ideas, lines of research, or educational efforts that align more with one side in the culture war than the other.

The chairman of the NEH is a political appointee, and at least some of the individuals who have held the position have not been shy about indicating where they stand on various controversies within the humanities. William Bennett and Lynne Cheney, for example, issued reports in which they criticized university humanities curricula for a declining focus on Western civilization and threats to free speech on campus. The special initiatives undertaken by Democratic appointees Sheldon Hackney and Jim Leach, the National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity and Bridging Cultures, respectively, dealt with multicultural themes. But does the chairman bring his or her ideology to bear on the NEH's grant-making in its core, run-of-the-mill programs? And, if so, how does he or she accomplish that bureaucratically?

Based on public discourse, one could get the impression that the chairman has both a significant influence and is fairly limited in his or her capacity to direct grant-making. Scholars and commentators on the Left, for example, have decried Republican appointees such as Bennett and Cheney for "politicizing" the grant-making process; for outright rejecting applications that peer reviewers rated highly because they took a more progressive perspective, or finding ways to derail those applications at various points in the review process.² On the Right, in contrast, some have claimed that the chairman's capacity is fairly limited. Bennett and Cheney both said this in 1995 when they testified

² See, for example, Stephen Burd, "Chairman of Humanities Fund Has Politicized Grants Process, Critics Charge," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 1992, A1, A32-A33.

that the NEH ought to be terminated.³ Roger Kimball, editor of the conservative journal, *The New Criterion*, opined that both NEA and NEH are “captives of the cultural Left and no new Chairman, be he the reincarnation of Pericles, can do anything about that.”⁴

Part of the difficulty in ascertaining the influence of the chairman is that the NEH is, in many respects, a black box. The NEH publishes all of the grants that it awards. But everything that takes place up until the chairman approves those grants is not accessible to the public. The agency does not make public the applications that were rejected, peer reviewers’ evaluations of applications, the actions of agency staff, the recommendations made by the National Council on the Humanities, or actions made by the chairman (other than the chairman’s decision to sign off on the applications that are funded). Nor is this information available under the Freedom of Information Act.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, in this section I have gone “under the hood,” as it were, to understand how the agency makes grant decisions and how its bureaucratic structure works. Through interviews with former agency officials and staff, reviews of journalistic accounts of agency actions and agency records, and an analysis of grants made under an NEH fellowship program, I have sought to ascertain the influence that a chairman can have. I conclude that the chairman is not inconsequential in regard to the ideological thrust of the NEH’s grant-making. Even as progressive intellectual trends have become ascendant within the academic humanities, pace Kimball, a chairman need not be the “reincarnation of Pericles” to influence what the NEH funds. Bennett and

³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Downsizing Government and Setting Priorities of Federal Programs: Hearings Before Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 1*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, 940-1, 984.

⁴ Roger Kimball, “The NEH Can’t Be Mended, So End It,” *American Greatness*, April 25, 2017, <https://amgreatness.com/2017/04/25/neh-cant-mended-end/>.

Cheney, hence, were far too modest in their assessment of what a chairman can accomplish.

This section treats the NEH and its grant-making in the culture war as a case study of how institutions can evolve and how policy outcomes can change even as formal rules remain the same. The grant-making processes at the NEH are largely the same as they were when the agency was founded. Yet the surrounding context has changed dramatically. When the agency was established, it was assumed that the humanities largely dealt with the history of Western civilization and “the best that has been thought and said.” But over the past half century, other perspectives within the humanities have displaced this approach.

To understand how the NEH’s bureaucratic structure has functioned amidst this changing context, I draw explicitly from the model of gradual institutional change put forward by James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen. They argue that institutions, in general, are not “self-enforcing” and that agents’ interpretation and implementation of rules are key in affecting how institutions end up distributing resources. They argue that actors seek to exploit the ambiguity that exists in certain rules, and that “where we expect incremental change to emerge is precisely in the ‘gaps’ or ‘soft spots’ between the rule and its interpretation or the rule and its enforcement.”⁵

Two modes of change which Mahoney and Thelen (and others) describe as “conversion” and “drift” are particularly helpful in explaining the evolution of the NEH since the start of the culture wars and the operation of its bureaucratic structure. In cases

⁵ James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change,” in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, eds. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 10, 14.

of conversion, actors influence the outcomes of institutions by interpreting and enforcing the same rules in new ways. In cases of drift, actors influence outcomes by enforcing the rules in the same manner as before, but procuring a different result because of changes in the external environment.⁶ How one appraises whether conversion or drift is occurring can depend on how one views the substance of the issue at stake.⁷ This is very much the case with respect to the NEH. Conservatives who oppose the dominant trends in the humanities have, in effect, accused Democrat-appointed chairman Sheldon Hackney, for example, of subjecting the NEH to harmful drift. Conservatives say that when a chairman manages the agency in a passive fashion, simply allowing the peer review process to churn along, the NEH can end up funding projects that advance a left-wing political agenda. Progressives who welcome newer intellectual trends, in contrast, have accused Republican-appointed chairmen of subjecting the NEH to illegitimate conversion, abusing their power to prevent quality projects from being funded simply because they do not align with their ideological views.

This analysis focuses a great deal on how actors have interpreted the roles of the following offices: the chairman, the National Council on the Humanities, and professional staff. Though the statute has remained largely unchanged, it has allowed for “gaps” and “soft spots” between the wording and how the offices and duties are carried out. In a changing cultural context, the bureaucratic structure has allowed the politically appointed leadership to push the NEH in progressive and orthodox directions.

⁶ Mahoney and Thelen, 15-16.

⁷ Philip A. Wallach, “Competing Institutional Perspectives in the Life of Glass-Steagall,” *Studies in American Political Development* 28 (April 2014): 26-48.

The chapters in this section proceed as follows. Chapter 7 discusses the founding of the NEH, explaining why its founders chose the bureaucratic structure that they did and their goals. Chapter 8 explains how that structure evolved and functioned for roughly 15 years before the start of the culture war. Chapter 9 describes how that structure has functioned since the culture wars.

7.0 DESIGNING THE NEH

The National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 gave few specifics as to how the NEA and NEH would function in practice. Of the legislation's 11 pages, less than two are dedicated wholly to the establishment of the NEH. Congress set up each Endowment with a chairman and national council, both appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The chairman of each Endowment was allowed to form a professional staff, as well as "utilize from time to time, as appropriate, experts and consultants, including panels of experts."¹ Beyond this, all the details, including the organization of the NEA and NEH into divisions and the systems that they would use to review, evaluate, and approve grant applications were left to the discretion of their respective chairmen.

In its terseness, the legislation embodied many assumptions about how the NEA and NEH would operate and to what ends. The main assumption was that the Endowments would operate in a manner similar to the National Science Foundation (NSF). This was the main goal of the scholars who lobbied for a federal humanities foundation. By 1965, the NSF had evolved in such a way as to reconcile the values of nonpolitical scientific expertise and accountability to government, as well as enjoy the

¹ *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965*, Public Law 89-209, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 79 (1965): 852.

confidence of the American people. When Congress designed the NEA and NEH, it sought to achieve a similar goal: the reconciliation of expertise and accountability, the avoidance of government control over grant-making, and the public's confidence in the new federal cultural foundation.

7.1 HUMANISTS LOOK TO THE NSF

As Terry Moe has argued, “Structural politics is interest group politics.” To understand why bureaucracies are organized the way they are, it is important to begin not with politicians, but with the relevant interest groups. Those groups “know that their policy goals are crucially dependent on precisely those fine details of administrative structure that cause voters’ eyes to glaze over.”²

At the founding of the NEH, scholars in the humanities were the group most concerned with the proposed foundation's administrative structure. As described in chapter one, in the early 1960s, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and other groups came together in calling for a federal foundation that would support research and education in fields such as history, literature, philosophy, and anthropology. They wanted this new foundation to make grants according to the standards and criteria of their respective academic disciplines.

Thus, scholars proposed that the new federal humanities foundation resemble the National Science Foundation. In their view, just as the NSF was governed by scientists and

² Terry M. Moe, “The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure,” in *Can the Government Govern?*, eds. John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution 1989): 269.

responsive to the needs of scientists, so too should the federal humanities foundation be governed by humanists and responsive to the needs of humanists. Frederick Burkhardt, president of the ACLS, spoke to these objectives in explaining why Congress should establish a new federal agency dedicated to the arts and humanities rather than work through an existing entity such as the Smithsonian or Office of Education. Burkhardt explained that a foundation governed like NSF would be critical for achieving the confidence of scholars and artists. He said, “This would be their foundation, directed by their peers, related to their interests and aims in a way that no bureau or agency within the Government is at present, or is ever likely to be.”³ As the 1964 Commission on the Humanities stated, “It is encouraging to note that the federal government in its massive program of subsidy for the sciences and technology has not imposed control and, indeed, has not even shown an inclination to control the thoughts and activities of scientists.”⁴

7.2 THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION: RECONCILING EXPERTISE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND EFFICIENCY

During the early history of the NSF, many of the issues that Congress and the agency had to sort out involved how to reconcile expertise, accountability, and efficiency. The goal was for the agency to support serious scientific research. But unlike a private

³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 334, H.R. 2043, H.R. 3617, and Similar Bills, Part 2*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 1965, 282.

⁴ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities” (1964), 8, https://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/NEH/1964_Commission_on_the_Humanities.pdf.

foundation, the NSF was a public agency spending public money. Congress and the NSF had to work out how the agency would make decisions according to scientific expertise, but still remain accountable to the American people vis-à-vis their elected officials. Moreover, Congress and the NSF had to cope with the fact that as the agency grew, it was deciding on thousands of applications annually. In addition to meeting the demands of accountability and expertise, the NSF had to operate with greater efficiency.

When Congress proposed the establishment of a federal science foundation in the late 1940s, in its design for the agency, authority was to be vested entirely in the foundation's board. In this regard, Congress followed the plan put forward by Vannevar Bush in his 1945 report, "Science—The Endless Frontier." Bush, who headed the government's wartime Office of Scientific Research, called for a federal foundation to support basic research in medicine and the natural sciences. In his report, Bush proposed an administrative structure in which the foundation was headed by an unpaid board of private citizens, appointed by the President. According to Bush's plan, the board was to hire a chief executive officer (the director) to oversee administrative functions. The board was also to appoint sub-boards to oversee each of the Foundation's program divisions: Medical Research, Natural Sciences, National Defense, Scientific Personnel and Education, and Publications and Scientific Collaboration. In selecting members of the sub-boards, the main board was to consider recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences.⁵ Because Bush sought to enable federal support for scientific

⁵ Vannevar Bush, *Science, the Endless Frontier: A Report to the President on a Program for Postwar Scientific Research* (Washington, D.C.: National Science Foundation, 1960): 34-36, <https://ia800207.us.archive.org/12/items/scienceendlessfr00unit/scienceendlessfr00unit.pdf>.

progress while avoiding governmental control over research, he proposed a structure that gave control primarily to scientists, not politicians.

Congress passed legislation based on Bush's plan in 1947, but President Harry Truman pocket-vetoed it. Though a supporter of a federal foundation for scientific research, Truman argued that the bill's structure prevented the President from discharging his constitutional duty of ensuring that the laws are faithfully executed. In his explanation for the veto, Truman highlighted the fact that the director was not responsible to the President, "for he would be the appointee of the Foundation and would be insulated from the President by two layers of part time boards," among other objections. The President encouraged Congress to develop new legislation that made the foundation more accountable to government.⁶

In response to Truman's objections, Congress passed a new version of the foundation, which the President signed into law in 1950. Under the revised administrative structure, both the board and the director were to be appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Because the Foundation consisted of both the National Science Board and the director, the result was a "two-headed structure" that was "unusual" for a federal agency.⁷ Yet the National Science Board (NSB) still held the lion's share of formal authority. The NSB was responsible for developing and establishing NSF policies and programs, was required to approve all funding awards, and was charged with appointing members of the divisional committees (the equivalent of the sub-boards in

⁶ Harry S. Truman, "Memorandum of Disapproval of the National Science Foundation Bill," August 6, 1947, <http://trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/viewpapers.php?pid=1918>. See also, "The National Science Foundation: A Brief History," July 15, 1994, <https://www.nsf.gov/about/history/nsf50/nsf8816.jsp>.

⁷ J. Merton England, *A Patron for Pure Science: The National Science Foundation's Formative Years, 1945-57* (Washington, D.C.: National Science Foundation, 1983): 348.

Bush's plan). The President could not appoint the director until the Board had an opportunity to make recommendations. Furthermore, the director had only those powers granted explicitly by the statute and those delegated to him by the NSB, which retained all residual authority.

Yet over time, the authority of the NSB and its involvement in various tasks receded in favor of the director. By 1965, the NSB was focused primarily on bigger-picture policy issues. It had become largely removed from the process of approving grants, as well as division-specific policy matters—an evolution that both the Board and director welcomed. This was mainly because the NSF grew too large for the NSB to be involved in what had become relatively minor matters.

As the NSF's budget grew from \$8 million in 1954 to \$16 million in 1956 to \$40 million in 1957,⁸ it became impractical for the part-time board members to approve each and every award. In FY 1959, the NSF “awarded approximately 1,900 grants and contracts in support of basic science research, and 3,700 fellowships for scientific study or work, each of which had to be specifically approved by the Board.”⁹ Not only was the volume of grants too much to handle—by that point in time the NSB was mainly rubberstamping staff recommendations anyway¹⁰—it was also questionable whether the Board members had the scientific knowledge to evaluate proposals. While members had scientific backgrounds, many of them were by then in university administrative positions and “for the most part their own work in the laboratory had ended.”¹¹

⁸ England, 217.

⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Amending the National Science Foundation Act: Report (to Accompany S. 2468)*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959, S. Rep. 732, 2.

¹⁰ Marc Rothenberg (former NSF historian), email message to author, June 2, 2016.

¹¹ England, 120.

In 1959, in response to this growing workload, Congress amended the NSF's authorizing statute to permit the Board to delegate authority to the director to approve grants without its prior review. Soon after the amendment became law, the Board authorized the director to approve all fellowships and decide on grants and contracts less than \$250,000, provided they did not "involve policy considerations." The Board went on to make subsequent delegations of authority to the director, including awards of up to \$500,000 per year and \$2 million total and up to \$1 million for the construction of research facilities. Thus, by the mid-1960s, the NSB was involved in approving only about 50 awards per year.¹²

The NSB believed that its involvement in approving grant awards was unnecessary, even inappropriate, provided the peer-review system was operating properly. In 1966, the Board opposed a proposed amendment to the authorizing legislation that would have restricted the NSB's ability to delegate grant-making authority to the director beyond the amounts it had already approved. The Board argued that the size of the award mattered little; if a grant program had a problem, then it was just as likely to arise with small grants as big ones. For this reason, the Board believed that it should focus on making sure that general policies were sound. Though Congress still ended up amending the statute in 1968 to require NSB approval of larger grants, it did so over the objections of the Board and the director.¹³

¹² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Science and Technology, *The National Science Board: Science Policy and Management for the National Science Foundation, 1968-1980: Report Prepared by the Science Policy Research Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress for the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology, Transmitted to the Committee on Science and Technology*, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983, 57-8.

¹³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *The National Science Board*, 63-6.

Neither did the NSB remain deeply involved in the work of specific divisions. Early on, shortly after the NSF was founded, the Board believed that at least two of its members should sit on each divisional committee. However, Alan Waterman, the NSF's first director, was able to persuade the Board against this idea, preferring that it concern itself with broader policy areas.¹⁴ As a result of executive orders, the NSB lost oversight of the divisional committees and the authority to appoint committee members, many of whom have been among the most prominent scientists in the nation.¹⁵ Reorganization Plan No. 2 in 1962 changed the jurisdiction of the divisional committees, so that rather than reporting to the NSB, they reported to the director. Reorganization Plan No. 5 in 1965 replaced the divisional committees with a system of advisory committees, whose members were appointed by the director. Also in 1965, at the request of the director, the Board changed its own committee structure from working committees that paralleled the divisions to three major committees dealing with broader issues. The first committee focused on how the NSF related to the various scientific fields; the second, administrative issues involving proposal review; and the third, long-range planning over the next five to ten years.¹⁶

One of the key functions that the NSB retained was to maintain the confidence of the broader scientific community, as well as reinforce the idea that the agency was serving the nation in its entirety. According to the statute, the persons nominated for appointment as members:

¹⁴ England, 171-2.

¹⁵ Marc Rothenberg interviewed by author, April 19, 2016.

¹⁶ Dr. Eric Walker (NSB chairman), congressional testimony, quoted in U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Science and Astronautics, *The National Science Foundation: A General Review of Its First 15 Years: Report of the Committee on Science and Astronautics Prepared by the Science Policy Research Division, Legislative Reference Service, Library of Congress for the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Development*, 89th Cong., 2d. sess., 1966, H. Rep. 1219, 17-18.

- (1) shall be eminent in the fields of the basic sciences, medical science, engineering, agriculture, education, or public affairs;
- (2) shall be selected solely on the basis of established records of distinguished service; and
- (3) shall be so selected as to provide representation of the views of scientific leaders in all areas of the Nation.

The statute also required that the President “give due consideration” to recommendations for NSB nominees from scientific and educational organizations including the National Academy of Sciences, the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities, the National Association of State Universities, and the Association of American Colleges.¹⁷

When President Truman nominated the first cohort of board members, his administration sought to ensure that the NSB reflected the diversity of the nation. William Carey of the Bureau of the Budget made the following recommendation in regard to choosing the first slate of nominees:

It should not be an all-male case; recognition should be given to women where possible. We should make an effort to have one or more Catholics included. One or more Negroes should also be included. In the area of public affairs, we should recognize labor’s interests as well as industry’s. One or more federal research men should be included. Geographic dispersion is, of course, necessary.¹⁸

In the first class of board members, the White House managed to achieve a balance of prestige and national diversity, covering most of Carey’s categories, save labor and the federal government. The NSB included two blacks, two women, and a Catholic priest. In terms of geographic distribution, seven hailed from the Northeast, six from the

¹⁷ *National Science Foundation Act of 1950*, Public Law 81-507, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 64 (1950): 150.

¹⁸ Carey to S. R. Broadbent, April 3, 1950, BOB, Series 39.33, file unit 95—NSF Personnel, quoted in England, 116.

Northcentral, seven from the South, and four from the West. All but four members held appointments at colleges and universities. Seven were college or university presidents and represented a mix of institutions: Johns Hopkins, Harvard, West Virginia State College, California Institute of Technology, University of Wyoming, University of Missouri, and University of Wisconsin. There was also a balance among the scientific disciplines represented. Nine members were from math, physics, and engineering; and another nine were from biology and medicine.¹⁹

The NSB continued to prize this kind of diversity. For at least 30 years it was a self-perpetuating body and, in selecting successive members, maintained an understanding that certain seats belonged to various constituencies and kinds of institutions.²⁰ According to a 1983 congressional report on the NSB, "...the President generally adopts NSB's recommendations for replacements of its own members. Only about six of 110 NSB members have not been among Board nominees."²¹

By virtue of its composition, the NSB lent public credibility to the agency, enhancing the NSF's freedom to make judgments that its staff deemed best. That same congressional report described the NSB as "a consensus generating body—a body which reconciles the independence of science with public demand for accountability in determining priorities for Federal research expenditures." The NSB "lends prestige to and depoliticizes the agency" and provides cover for the director in the event that he needs to make a controversial decision.²²

¹⁹ England, 119-20.

²⁰ Marc Rothenberg interviewed by author, April 19, 2016.

²¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *The National Science Board*, 11.

²² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *The National Science Board*, 12.

With the NSB having removed itself from the approval of grants, decisions on grants came to be made primarily at the level of the professional staff. The main actors who recommended which proposals to fund were program directors, themselves scientists, who served as either permanent staffers or “rotators” on leave from their universities. To arrive at recommendations, program officers drew upon their own expertise, the evaluation of outside experts (obtained through “ad hoc mail reviews” or convening in-person panels of experts), and site visits.²³ Though program directors relied heavily on peer review, they understood that outside evaluations were not ultimately authoritative. While program directors were expected to take external reviews into account, they were still expected to exercise their own judgment in making final funding recommendations, which were then subject to review by supervisory staff.²⁴

Program directors evinced an understanding that the NSF should fund scientific research of the highest quality and that “science policy should respond to scientists’ needs.” According to Merton England, author of a history of the Foundation’s formative years, “Unashamed of being called elitists, the program officers cultivated their agency’s growing reputation as a *foundation* dedicated to excellence, not unlike such counterparts in the private realm as Ford and Rockefeller.”²⁵ The idea that the NSF should be administered, in certain respects, more like a private foundation than a government bureaucracy, was prevalent when the agency was developing its policies. One of the critical policy decisions that followed from this perspective was to award funds primarily through grants instead of contracts. Whereas a contract can imply a predetermined result,

²³ George T. Mazuzan, “‘Good Science Gets Funded...’: The Historical Evolution of Grant Making at the National Science Foundation,” *Science Communication* 14, no. 1 (1992): 67-8.

²⁴ Mazuzan, 69.

²⁵ England, 349.

grants imply greater freedom for the scholar and suggest that the outcome of the research is geared toward the advancement of science and the public interest.²⁶

7.3 HUMANITIES FOUNDATION GOALS

The scholarly organizations which lobbied for the establishment of the NEH aimed to achieve something similar to the situation that prevailed at the NSF: a federal humanities foundation that made decisions on the basis of expertise in the humanities, while enjoying the nation's confidence. To that end, the Commission on the Humanities proposed a bureaucratic structure very similar to that of the NSF. The Commission recommended that the new foundation be composed of a board, director, and staff. Both the board and director were to be appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Like the NSB, the board was to be vested with formal authority. Though the Commission was not too specific in divvying up authority between the director and the board, it seemed to favor the board. In describing the nature and purpose of the proposed foundation, the Commission attributed agency to the board in the following respects:

Under the provisions of a National Humanities Foundation Act, the Board should be empowered to determine and carry out its program with an appropriation made by the Congress of the United States...The Board should have the authority to experiment with ways in which the Foundation's general purposes can best be carried out, but under no conditions whatsoever should it attempt to direct or control the scholarship, teaching, or artistic endeavor which it supports.

The members of the board, like the members of the NSB, were to be chosen based on their expertise and experience in the humanities, arts, and education and “should

²⁶ Mazuzan, 65 and Rothenberg interviewed by author.

represent a wide spectrum of American life.” Further, the President should not appoint a director of the humanities foundation until the board made its recommendations.²⁷

The Commission said that the foundation should have divisions, but did not specify how they should be organized or what areas of the humanities they should represent. However, the Commission did say, “At the discretion of the Board, each division might well have an advisory committee composed of eminent persons in the field involved,” possibly implying that the divisions be organized by academic field, as they were at the NSF. The Commission anticipated some form expert review, proposing that fellowships, for example, be decided on by “committees or juries composed of scholars, writers, and artists whose work has achieved distinction, with the majority of the members still productive.” It also suggested that the foundation might work “indirectly through organizations devoted to these same ends in whose selection processes the Foundation has confidence.” Though the Commission did not mention ACLS explicitly, this may have been one of the “organizations” it had in mind.²⁸

Congress shared the same ultimate objectives as scholars: to establish a federal foundation that would make grants according to nonpolitical humanistic expertise. Yet Congress and the Johnson administration also insisted that the new foundation be accountable to the government. To that end, unlike at NSF, Congress chose to vest all formal authority in the chairman of the NEH. The National Council on the Humanities, the counterpart to the NSB, was made purely advisory in nature. Recall that under the original NSF legislation, the NSB had formal authority in many key areas, including the actual approval of funding awards. The National Council on the Humanities, in contrast,

²⁷ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities,” 9, 14-15.

²⁸ “Report of the Commission on the Humanities,” 12-15.

was given two main tasks. According to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, the National Council shall:

- (1) advise the Chairman with respect to policies, programs, and procedures for carrying out his functions, and
- (2) shall review applications for financial support and make recommendations thereupon to the Chairman.

The chairman was prohibited from acting on an application, either positively or negatively, until he received the Council's recommendation. Though unlike at the NSF (prior to the NSB's delegations of authority), the Council did not have to sign off on a grant for it to go through. All it was required to do was provide a recommendation, which the chairman, in theory, could either accept or reject.²⁹

When the legislation to establish the NEA and NEH was being debated, the House rejected a proposed amendment to make all grant awards subject to the approval of the National Councils on the Arts and Humanities, just as NSF was structured originally. Proponents of the amendment argued that placing formal authority in a council of private citizens would help guarantee the "autonomy of the arts" and more reliably advance the public interest. Congressman Frank Thompson (D-NJ), one of the bill's supporters and a dogged proponent of federal arts legislation, opposed the amendment, explaining that the White House favored giving ultimate authority to the chairman because it was easier to trace responsibility to a single person than a group. Thompson said, "[The Johnson administration] feel[s] it should belong in the Chairman, who is responsible to the President who, incidentally, is not only anxious but perfectly willing to accept ultimate responsibility for his action."³⁰

²⁹ *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965*, 851.

³⁰ 111 Cong. Rec. 23976 (1965).

Congress believed, though, that despite the national arts and humanities councils' lack of formal authority, they would still ensure that the NEA and NEH would remain governed by and in the interests of professional artists and humanists. It was assumed that the backing of a prestigious board would provide the chairman with cover to make grants and start programs that were validated by experts, but might be deemed controversial.³¹ Congressman William Moorhead (D-PA) said that the prestige of the council members would enable the Endowments to "withstand any improper pressure from government." He explained, "I suggest in this Foundation we are creating not an institution of Government but an institution designed to be able to talk back to Government."³² It was also assumed that the requirement that the councils review applications and make recommendations would keep the chairman from acting unilaterally and abusing his formal power. As Congressman Moorhead said during debate on the House floor, the chairman of the NEA (and by extension, the chairman of the NEH) would "be in trouble" if he departed too often from the Council's recommendations.³³

The Commission on the Humanities likely assumed (and may have hoped) that just as the professional staff at the NSF had come to dominate decision-making, the same would be true at a federal humanities foundation. When the NEH's legislation was being developed in 1965, the ACLS favored allowing the National Council on the Humanities to dispense with its role of advising on grants. During hearings on the proposed arts and

³¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1967: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare on S. 2061, Part 2*, 90th Cong., 1st. sess., 1967, 331 (remarks by Senator Pell).

³² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Arts and Humanities Foundations: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 334, H.R. 2043, H.R. 3617, and similar bills, Part 2*, 89th Cong., 1st. sess., 1965, 255.

³³ 111 Cong. Rec. 23976 (1965).

humanities foundation, Burkhardt recommended that the section of the legislation requiring the National Council on the Humanities to advise the chairman on grants be amended to resemble the statute governing the NSF as it was amended in 1959.

Burkhardt said:

Specifically, I think it would make both the Chairman's and the Council's lives easier to add the following, which is adapted from section 5(b) of the National Science Foundation Act, and I quote:

Or unless such action is taken pursuant to the terms of a delegation of authority from the Council to the Chairman.³⁴

This would have permitted the Council to dispense with its review of applications, leaving decisions completely in the hands of the chairman and, in turn, the staff. Congress, however, did not include this recommendation in the original legislation. Yet this question of whether the National Council should dispense with review of grants would remain an issue in debates over the structure and operations of the NEH for decades to come.

7.4 CONCLUSION

The NEH's bureaucratic structure implemented in 1965 reflected the assumption that the agency would and should reflect the interests and ideas of scholars in the humanities; that the agency would defer largely to their judgment about what ought to be funded. In this unique moment of American history, it was widely assumed that the research and teaching that went on in universities had the potential to edify the nation. As

³⁴ National Arts and Humanities Foundations, Part 2, 285.

described in chapter one, this notion had some degree of purchase among elites and the general public. The agency was set up to resist the “political” pressures envisioned by the founders, namely, pressures to turn the NEH into a pork barrel and shy away from projects that were worthwhile but might seem controversial to the public. With an all-powerful chairman that was both checked and backed by an eminent National Council on the Humanities, the NEH was thought to have a structure that would foster deference to nonpolitical humanistic expertise, but at the same time allow for accountability to the government.

8.0 BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE EVOLVES

From the founding of the NEH through President Reagan's appointment of William Bennett as chairman—the years of the agency's history prior to the escalation of the culture wars—the Endowment developed a bureaucratic structure that has remained largely the same to this day. The assumptions that were prevalent at the time of the agency's founding continued to shape how the structure developed during these years. The NEH was to advance humanistic excellence, making decisions on the basis of professional standards. This understanding became the ethos of the professional staff and was behind the agency's fervent embrace of peer review. It was also assumed that the NEH would have to fend off challenges of a political nature, such as the pressure to award funds to constituencies favored by politicians at the expense of a commitment to merit. This concern, which Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) raised early on, contributed to keeping the National Council on the Humanities involved as a final layer of application review, a departure from the model set by the National Science Board, which dispensed with acting on most proposals.

8.1 ENSHRINING PEER REVIEW

The authorizing statute left much to the discretion of the chairman of the NEH, including how the agency would make use of professional staff and external reviewers, as well as how to organize the agency into divisions. When the NEH was getting started in the late 1960s, its early leadership and staff looked to the NSF as a model for how it should operate.¹ Like the NSF, the NEH viewed itself much like a private foundation. The NEH's professional staff came to oversee a system in which all eligible applications were subject to review by outside experts, and their evaluations became the staff's main criteria for recommending whether to fund or decline proposed projects. The staff developed a culture of seeing the NEH as a unique agency within government, one that was dedicated to the humanities and prized intellectual seriousness.

An area in which the NEH departed from the NSF was in its divisional structure, organizing itself by project type instead of academic discipline. Whereas the NSF's authorizing statute established several divisions based on various disciplines—Medical Research, Mathematical, Physical, and Engineering Sciences. Biological Sciences, and Scientific Personnel and Education—the legislation establishing the NEH did not name specific divisions or programs. With the freedom to organize itself as it saw fit, the NEH established divisions based on project type. The first NEH divisions were Fellowships and Stipends, Research and Publication, and Education and Public Programs, in addition to an Office of Planning and Analysis. By 1969, the NEH had established separate divisions for Education and Public Programs. The early divisions corresponded roughly

¹ John Barcroft interviewed by author, September 5, 2014.

to the part of the statute which lists what the chairman is authorized to do, including supporting research, awarding fellowships and grants for workshops, and fostering public understanding and appreciation for the humanities.² The NEH may have also gone this route because the humanities encompass so many disciplines; it would likely have been impractical, if not impossible, to have a division for each one, especially in the beginning when the budget was limited.

Neither did the authorizing legislation say how the NEH was to make use of peer review. The statute provided only that the chairman had the authority “to utilize from time to time, as appropriate, experts and consultants, including panels of experts.”³ Free to develop its own processes, the NEH implemented a system in which standard practice was to subject all applications to external evaluation. That system, which has remained largely the same for the past 50 years,⁴ operates as follows.

When applications are received, staff in the appropriate division perform an initial analysis to ensure that they are eligible and have no technical problems. Program officers form panels of outside experts who are charged with evaluating eligible proposals on their merits. The panelists assign initial grades along the following scale: E for excellent; VG for very good; G for good; SM for some merit; and NC for not competitive. Depending on the grant program, program officers will sometimes send proposals to additional outside reviewers with highly specialized knowledge; for example, a proposal for a research project dealing with an ancient language for which there are few relevant

² *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965*, Public Law 89-209, *U. S. Statutes at Large* 79 (1965): 850.

³ *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965*, 852.

⁴ Bruce Cole, “What’s Wrong with the Humanities,” *Public Discourse*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/02/16248/>.

experts. Panelists will take these supplemental external evaluations into account when determining initial grades. Panelists then travel to Washington, D.C. and meet as a group to discuss their assessments. At the conclusion of the meeting, typically chaired by the program officer, panelists can change their initial grades if they so choose.⁵

Program officers then work with division heads to prepare a list of proposals to recommend for funding, basing their recommendations primarily on the panelists' assessments and the program budget. The divisions then send their recommendations to the members of the National Council on the Humanities. Since 1967, the Council has divided itself into committees that correspond to the divisions. Program officers provide Council members on their respective committees with one-to-two page write ups about the projects they recommend for funding, describing them and the panelists' reviews. This practice of providing write ups on projects resembles the practice that staff at the NSF employed early on, before the NSB delegated to the director the authority to make grants without its approval.⁶

The National Council on the Humanities then convenes in Washington, D.C., typically for two days: a Thursday and a Friday. Over time, the Council has met either quarterly or thrice annually. On Thursday, the Council committees meet with the division staff and discuss the projects that have been recommended for and against funding. On Friday, the Council committees present their recommendations to the full Council, which then agrees on a final slate of recommendations for the chairman. It then falls to the chairman to decide on the Council's recommendations: either to approve or decline

⁵ National Endowment for the Humanities, "NEH's Application Review Process," accessed June 17, 2016, <http://www.neh.gov/grants/application-process>.

⁶ J. Merton England, *A Patron for Pure Science: The National Science Foundation's Formative Years, 1945-57* (Washington, D.C.: National Science Foundation, 1983): 166.

recommended projects. Because the Council's work is purely advisory, the chairman is not formally bound by what it recommends.

A 1968 memo from Chairman Barnaby Keeney to NEH senior staff indicates that the use of panelists had, by that point in time, become prevalent inside the agency. The occasion of the memo was that Keeney had directed several proposals to the Office of Planning and Analysis for review instead of the main program divisions. In response to questions from senior staff, Keeney explained:

Planning and Analysis handled these particular proposals because I told them to. I told them to because I wish speedy action on these. I intend to continue to refer proposals to Planning and Analysis when I feel that they can better accomplish them than can the Divisional machinery, which shows some signs of becoming rigidified. I do not intend the program of the Endowment to become a prisoner of the Divisional structure in programs, nor do I intend for it to become a prisoner of the panels.⁷

Yet contrary to Keeney's hopes, it appears that the NEH largely did become a "prisoner of the panels," in the sense that nearly all proposals are evaluated in the manner described above.

The NEH staff developed a reputation for professionalism and an unwavering commitment to the use of peer review. In 1990, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a retrospective of the NEH on the occasion of its 25th anniversary, which spoke very highly of the staff and the agency's processes:

The endowment's professional staff is one of exceptional quality and integrity, among the very best in the federal service. And, despite criticism, its peer-review procedures—the most thorough and unbiased in the humanities—have become the standard against which others are measured.⁸

⁷ Memorandum, Barnaby Keeney to Messrs. Redding, Bradford, Barcroft, Hedrich, Roschwalb, "Planning and Analysis Recommendations," April 25, 1968, Records of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of the Chairman Internal Memorandums, 1966-1977, A – D, Box 1, Record Group 288, National Archives at College Park.

⁸ James M. Banner Jr., "At 25, the Humanities Endowment Faces New Perils," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 16, 1990.

Former staffers have spoken of the strong *esprit de corps* at the NEH, as well as the professionalism and dedication of the career staff. Jason Hall, who was the NEH's congressional liaison during the 1980s, compared the agency to the Sierra Club, in the sense that the staff shared a strong sense of purpose.⁹ Armen Tashdianian, who served at the NEH from 1969 through the mid-1980s, said that the staff provided "a lot of free overtime," very dedicated as they were to the agency's mission.¹⁰ As noted above, during the NEH's formative years, staffers conceived of the agency as more akin to a private foundation than a federal bureau—just as did staffers at the NSF.¹¹

The academic pedigree of early staffers, the division directors in particular, may have contributed to the high-mindedness of the culture and insistence on professionalism. Early directors had been trained as academics, often at elite schools. James Blessing, for example, was the first director of the Division of Fellowships and Stipends, a position he held through 1983. He then led the Challenge Grants division until he left the NEH around 1986. Blessing had earned a B.A. in English from Princeton, an M.A. from Harvard, and a Ph.D. from Stanford.¹² Guinevere Griest joined as a program officer in Fellowships in 1969, became deputy director in 1973, and retired in 1995 as director of the Division of Research Programs. She had earned her B.A. from Cornell and M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, in addition to having been a Fulbright scholar at

⁹ Jason Hall (former director, NEH Congressional Liaison Office) interviewed by author, March 24, 2015.

¹⁰ Armen Tashdianian (former NEH staffer) interviewed by author, August 16, 2013.

¹¹ Roger Rosenblatt, who served as director of the Division of Education in the early 1970s, said that there was an inclination at NEH to "suspend belief that it is a government agency." *Government and the Humanities: Toward a National Cultural Policy*, ed. Kenneth W. Tolo (Austin, TX: Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, 1979): 80. Ken Kolson said that, early on, Endowment staff created a quasi-myth that NEH was a private foundation. Kenneth Kolson (former staffer) interviewed by author, August 20, 2013.

¹² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1976: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 4*, 94th Cong. 1st sess., 1975, 883.

Cambridge.¹³ The Research Division was first headed by J. Saunders Redding, a prominent black historian who, according to the *New York Times*, “is believed to have been the first black to teach at an Ivy League institution.”¹⁴ A two-time Guggenheim Fellow, Redding had earned an M.A. from Brown University and did further graduate studies at Columbia.¹⁵ His successor, William Emerson, who served at the NEH from 1969 through 1973, had a B.A. from Yale and Ph.D. from Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar.¹⁶

Politically-appointed staff and members of the National Council, including Republican appointees, have praised the professionalism of the career staff and the seriousness with which they take the process of evaluating proposals. Leon Kass, who served on the Council in the 1980s, spoke of the “heroic work” that staff undertook in managing the flow of proposals and getting them reviewed. Kass also spoke of a principle at NEH, confirmed by others, that the NEH provides money for “excellent proposals” and not “excellent people.” This means that even if the applicant is a prestigious scholar, shoddy proposals will not get funded. There is a recognition on the part of the staff that the NEH’s budget represents taxpayer money and should only go toward truly meritorious work.¹⁷ Celeste Colgan, who served as deputy chairman under

¹³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1986: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 11*, 99th Cong. 1st sess., 1985, 8.

¹⁴ C. Gerald Fraser, “J. Saunders Redding, 81, Is Dead; Pioneer Black Ivy League Teacher,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1988, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/05/obituaries/j-saunders-redding-81-is-dead-pioneer-black-ivy-league-teacher.html>.

¹⁵ “Redding, J. Saunders (1906-1988),” <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/redding-j-saunders-1906-1988>.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Saxon, “William Emerson, 74, Historian and Director of Roosevelt Library,” *New York Times*, June 8, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/08/nyregion/william-emerson-74-historian-and-director-of-roosevelt-library.html>.

¹⁷ Leon Kass (former member, National Council on the Humanities) interviewed by author, July 9, 2013. In its response to a 1994 report by the GAO on the use of peer review by various federal agencies, including the NEH, the NEH said, “We fund applications in the humanities, we do not fund academic reputations: Applicants that are well-known in the humanities must, like all other applicants, develop a significant

Lynne Cheney, spoke of the “unbounded respect” she had for the program officers.¹⁸

John Agresto, who served as Bill Bennett’s deputy, singled out Harold Cannon, a long-time bureaucrat who served as director of the Research and Challenge Grant Divisions, for praise. Agresto said that Cannon was careful, “almost too careful,” and that “no junk” would get by him, which is partly why Bennett and Agresto had him head up the Office of Preservation when it first started.¹⁹ Andrew Hazlett, a politically-appointed staffer who worked in the chairman’s office under Bruce Cole, who self-identified as a libertarian and questions whether the NEH even ought to exist, said that his expectations about government workers were upended when he went to the Endowment. He was impressed by the quality of the staff, many of whom had Ph.D.’s and continued to publish in their respective fields. He concluded that NEH grants, even tiny stipends for summer research, must represent some of the most carefully vetted federal dollars to leave Washington, D.C.²⁰

The core task of the NEH’s professional staff is to convene panels of peer reviewers to evaluate proposals and then develop recommendations for funding based primarily on those external evaluations. In forming peer-review panels, the staff look for people who have the background necessary to evaluate the merits of a particular proposal, while aiming to make them as broadly representative of the nation and types of institutions as they can. Because the staffers often have advanced degrees in the humanities, they sometimes tap into their own personal networks. Though the choice of

project and submit a quality application if they expect to receive serious consideration for funding.” U.S. General Accounting Office, *Peer Review: Reforms Needed to Ensure Fairness in Federal Agency Grant Selection*, GAO/PEMD-94-1 (Washington, D.C., 1994), 120.

¹⁸ Celeste Colgan (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, April 29, 2016.

¹⁹ John Agresto (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, June 23, 2015.

²⁰ Andrew Hazlett (former staffer) interviewed by author, August 2, 2013.

panelists can influence what ends up getting funded, and staffers can become personally vested in some applications and desire to see them funded, the impression I received from interviews is that this is not the staff's foremost concern in forming panels.

The most urgent task that the staff faces is simply to form the panel in a timely fashion so as to keep up with the NEH's grant cycles, which is not always easy. Program officers cannot rely on financial incentives to get people to serve as panelists. The work is hardly lucrative, especially given the time demands involved. As of 2015, panelists received an honorarium of \$250 to review a batch of proposals, the number of which varies by grant program, and to spend at least a day in Washington, D.C (travel, lodging, and per diem expenses are also provided). Malcolm Richardson, a long-serving former staffer, said that some people liken being an NEH panelist to jury duty. Some agree to serve out of a felt obligation as a scholar or practitioner, and some like doing it to see what is happening in the field.²¹ NEH program officers regularly ask past grantees to serve as reviewers, not only because they tend to be competent people, as their grants attest, but also because they can often be counted on to feel an obligation to give back to the agency. One staffer said that sometimes the most important criteria for a panelist is whether he or she is available to be in Washington, D.C. on the date when the in-person panel session is to take place.²²

The staff, in their management of the peer-review process, adopted early on a posture of "standing back" and responding to what the various academic fields put forward.²³ When panels convene in Washington, D.C., NEH program officers chair the

²¹ Malcolm Richardson (former staffer) interviewed by author, June 20, 2013.

²² Thomas Adams (former program officer) interviewed by author, January 15, 2016.

²³ Jason Hall interview by author.

meetings, but refrain from opining on what should or should not get funded.²⁴ According to a former long-serving staffer, division staff are, for the most part, “slavishly” committed to the panelists’ evaluations when they prepare lists of recommended projects for the National Council.²⁵ A study by the General Accounting Office found that, at the NEH, like the NSF and NIH, the reviewers’ scores were “the most important factor affecting whether a proposal was funded.”²⁶ There are occasional instances in which the staff will disagree with the panelists’ recommendations on the merits.²⁷ Moreover, some staffers will occasionally decline to recommend a project, even when it has been ranked highly, knowing that the chairman will deem it unacceptable for ideological reasons. The extent to which that happens, though, is impossible to say. One staffer I interviewed spoke to this reality. But another staffer denied ever doing this, noting a commitment to advocating for any project that seemed deserving.²⁸ In these cases, it may boil down to differences in personality. But for the most part, staff base their recommendations primarily on the grades given by panelists (the work of program officers in more ideologically fraught times is discussed at greater length in the following chapter).

This posture of deferring to the external reviewers and responding to what scholars and humanistic institutions considered to be their needs was instilled early on. Congress and the original humanities advocates were clear that they did not want federal funding to lead to federal control, and the NEH did not disagree. Ronald Berman, the NEH’s second chairman, spoke of how the NEH followed this principle. In a 1974 speech

²⁴ George Farr (former staffer and former director, Office of Preservation) interviewed by author, July 17, 2014.

²⁵ Kenneth Kolson interviewed by author.

²⁶ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Peer Review*, 78.

²⁷ Kenneth Kolson interviewed by author.

²⁸ Former staffers interviewed by authors.

to the Association of American Universities, he said, “Just as the divisional structure reflects the Endowment’s purpose, the mechanism by which it operates reflects the agency’s commitment to respond to the humanistic community, rather than to prescribe for it” (underlining in original).²⁹ He made a similar point in a speech to Phi Beta Kappa the previous year: “The mechanics of Endowment operations are simple enough. We initiate very little...The projects supported, therefore, reflect the interests and needs of the humanistic community; they are not prescribed by some government plan.”³⁰

Craig Eisendrath, a program officer in the Division of Education, expressed something of this sentiment in a letter he wrote to Irving Kristol, who was then a member of the National Council for the Humanities in the mid-1970s. Toward the end of the letter, Eisendrath explained that the NEH should not attempt to control the content of grantees’ work. It is worth quoting from at length:

Finally, I think we must let schools make up their own programs and not attempt to regulate too minutely their particular content. Part of the reason might be a modesty on our part about what is and what is not useful as teaching material for a particular student body, although, of course, we must have standards about what is massively shoddy or unsuitable. But beyond this it is simply not the business of the federal government to prescribe what is and what is not acceptable education on anything other than quite broad educational grounds. We must let schools come to us with what they want to do, qualitatively judge that effort as a whole, and decided to assist or deny assistance. There will be some schools, for example, which may choose to use material quite critical of the United States. I do not think we should attempt to prevent them from doing so, providing their programs as a whole are educationally [sound?] and not coercively political. To condition our support on the removal [of?] particular readings would represent not

²⁹ Ronald S. Berman, “Address to the Association of American Universities,” October 22, 1974, 6, Records of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of the Chairman, Speeches of the Chairman, Oct. 1966-Aug. 1970; May 1972-Nov. 1976, Box 4, Record Group 288, National Archives at College Park.

³⁰ Ronald S. Berman, “Chicago PBK Award,” December 4, 1973, 5. Records of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of the Chairman, Speeches of the Chairman, Oct. 1966-Aug. 1970; May 1972-Nov. 1976, Box 4, Record Group 288, National Archives at College Park.

only an infringement [*sic*] of academic freedom, but the assumption on the part of the Endowment of the role of commissar which is clearly not our role.³¹

A congressional investigation in the late 1970s also noted the NEH's insistence on being responsive and reactive, as opposed to prescriptive, though the investigators viewed this as a deficiency. The investigative staff believed that the NEH was abrogating the leadership role in the humanities that, in its view, the statute had intended. The investigative staff said that the NEH "allowed the various project applications submitted from the field to become a surrogate national policy, shaping the program direction and emphasis of the Endowment."³² The NEH, in its response to the investigators, said that Congress had never intended for the agency to behave in a dictatorial fashion. The NEH accused the investigators of not paying close enough attention to the actual wording of the statute. The specific wording was that NEH would develop a "national policy of support" and "a national policy for the promotion of progress and scholarship." The Endowment insisted that this was hardly the same thing as a "national humanities policy," the term used by the investigative staff.³³ In this regard, the NEH was adhering to Congress's intent, which was simply to provide federal support for what scholars in the humanities were doing, not seeking to impose a government agenda on fields such as history or philosophy.

³¹ Letter, Craig Eisendrath to Irving Kristol, 4. Records of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of the Chairman Internal Memorandums, 1966-1977, D – E, Box 2, Record Group 288, National Archives at College Park.

³² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1980: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 12*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979, 486 ("A Report to the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, on the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, Volume II, The National Endowment for the Humanities," Surveys and Investigations Staff, March 1979).

³³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1980*, 545-6 ("Response of the National Endowment for the Humanities to the Report of the Surveys and Investigations Staff of the House Appropriations Committee," March 1979).

8.2 THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE HUMANITIES

One of the main differences between the bureaucratic structures of the NSF and NEH pertained to the status of their respective boards: the National Science Board and National Council on the Humanities. Whereas the NSB was originally vested with formal authority, the NCH had none. By law, the latter was in a purely advisory capacity. Despite this difference, however, humanists who advocated for the NEH likely assumed—and hoped—that the NCH would play a similar role as the NSB. Recall that by 1965, the NSB had delegated away much of its formal authority to the NSF’s director and had largely removed itself from the process of awarding grants. The NSB concerned itself mainly with advising the NSF on broader matters and helped shore up the agency’s credibility with both scientists and the American public. Though the early NCH seemed to conceive of itself in similar terms as the NSB, by the late 1970s, the Council understood its main role was to be a final reviewer of grant applications. Congress insisted upon keeping the NCH involved in this function, believing, as did the founders of the Endowment, that the Council could help provide cover for the chairman and give him or her the wherewithal to resist inappropriate pressure from politicians.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, membership on the National Council on the Humanities largely followed the pattern established by the NSB. Members were chosen to enhance the prestige of the NEH and bolster the confidence that both practitioners in the humanities and the general public had in the agency. In 1969, Gerald Else, who was vice chairman of the Council, explained:

The Council was set up deliberately by the enabling Act as a broadly based group representing the public at large. Its function is to bring the point or points of view of the community as a whole—including education, science, business, and the arts, as well as the humanities—to bear on the problems of the Humanities as a national concern...³⁴

Such a membership could also provide cover to the chairman in the event of controversial grants.

President Johnson's first appointees to the NCH constituted a Blue Ribbon group, whose members represented a mix of humanistic disciplines, regions, types of institutional affiliations, races, and religions. Scholars on the Council included, among others:

- Gustave Arlt, head of the Council of Graduate Schools, one of the sponsoring organizations of the 1964 Commission on the Humanities
- Kenneth B. Clark, the professor of psychology whose work was central in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision
- Robert Goheen, a classicist who was president of Princeton
- Adelaide Cromwell Hill, an African American female professor of sociology who headed the Boston University African Studies Center
- Robert Lumianski, a professor of medieval English and chairman of ACLS
- Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J., a leading Catholic theologian

The diversity of scholars on the board was enhanced by an archaeologist/anthropologist from the University of Arizona, a professor of French literature from the University of Wisconsin, a government professor from University of Texas, Austin, and a law

³⁴ Letter, Gerald F. Else to President Richard Nixon, February 21, 1969, 1, in "Minutes of the Eleventh Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," February 17-18, 1969, 46, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

professor from Montana. Corporate America was covered by the president of Textron, an industrial conglomerate based in Providence, Rhode Island, and by the chairman of the board of Ball Brothers Company, a diversified manufacturer based in Muncie, Indiana. Labor had its representative in a leader of the United Steelworkers of America. The Council had a representative from the natural sciences: Robert Bower, a physicist, who was director of the Bureau of Social Science Research. (The NSB, in like fashion, at one time included Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame, so as to have a perspective from the humanities.) Filling out the Council were a composer from Los Angeles, a Chinese architect from New York, the art critic for *Newsday*, an author of Appalachian fiction from the South, and Reverend Robert Warren Spike, a Protestant divinity professor and civil rights activist.³⁵

When it came time to appoint the first round of replacements in 1968, President Johnson continued in the spirit of the NSB, at least to some degree, in which seats represented certain constituencies. Though terms on the Council are for six years, a third of the original class was appointed for a two-year term and another third for a four-year term, so as to begin the regular rotation of members. Many of the new appointees had analogues among the departing cohort:

- Fr. Murray left and was replaced by another Jesuit priest, Fr. Walter Ong, S.J., an English professor (and later president of the MLA).
- Adelaide Cromwell Hill left and was replaced by another African American, Stephen Wright, president of the United Negro College Fund.

³⁵ National Endowment for the Humanities, First Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1966, 1967, 21.

- Rev. Robert Spike, who died before his term was supposed to end in 1970, was replaced by another Protestant minister, J. William Morgan, pastor of University Methodist Church in Austin, Texas.
- Meredith Wilson, a composer and conductor from Los Angeles was replaced by Jacob Avshalomov, a composer and conductor from New York.
- John Letson, a school superintendent left and was replaced by Allan Glatthorn, the principal of Abington High School of Abington, Pennsylvania.³⁶

It is even possible that, just as the NSB was self-perpetuating, the first Council members may have had some hand in designating their successors. At the November 1967 Council meeting, the NCH reviewed the names of 167 people that various organizations had recommended, as well as offered some of its own recommendations.³⁷

The next group of members, appointed in 1970 for terms ending in 1976, did not replace departing members one-for-one. However, the appointments still seemed to be made in the interest of diversity and prestige:

- Robert O. Anderson, a businessman and philanthropist, was chairman of the board of Atlantic Richfield, Co., an oil company (and the only member of this cohort not to have a Ph.D.).
- Lewis White Beck was a professor of philosophy at the University of Rochester.
- Leslie Fishel, Jr. was a scholar of African American history and president of Heidelberg College in Ohio.

³⁶ National Endowment for the Humanities, *Third Annual Report*, 1969, 73.

³⁷ "Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," November 1-3, 1967, 29, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

- Leslie Koltai was chancellor of Metropolitan Junior College District in Kansas City, Missouri.
- Sherman Emery Lee was director of the Cleveland Museum of Art.
- Herman Hodge Long, an African American, was president of Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama, a historically black college.
- Rosemary Park was vice chancellor, Student and Curricular Affairs, at UCLA.
- Arthur Peterson was chairman of the Department of Politics and Government at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio.³⁸

Though President Nixon made these appointments, he did so before Ronald Berman came on as chairman. As described below, the next round of appointments, in 1972, appear to reflect Berman's influence.

During the first several years of the NEH's existence, especially as the number of applications began to increase and the agency implemented its peer-review system, the Council grappled internally with how it should carry out the requirement in the law that it make recommendations on grants.³⁹ Minutes of early Council meetings suggest that the NCH seemed intent on following the practice in place at the NSF, which was to rubberstamp applications for smaller grants recommended by the staff and concern itself primarily with larger awards.⁴⁰ At the February 1968 meeting, the Committee on

³⁸ National Endowment for the Humanities, *Fifth Annual Report*, 1971, 63.

³⁹ This came up at least as early as the January 1967 meeting. The question arose regarding "whether the committee and the Council were simply to rubber stamp the panel's recommendation." *The National Endowment for the Humanities During the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, November 1963 – January 1969, Volume III*, 21.

⁴⁰ At the May 1967 Council meeting, "it was suggested" (the minutes do not indicate by whom) that the Council adopt different approaches to larger versus smaller grants. For larger grants, such as \$300,000 for the MLA editions of American authors, the full Council should review projects on their merits. But for smaller grants, the Council should concern itself primarily with "the procedure by which judgments on applications are made, and that guidelines should be developed on the extent to which the committees and the Council will second guess panelists." "Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the National Council on the

Research and Publication “reported it felt its purpose, in general, was not to second guess panelists on individual applications but to concern itself with the establishment of policy and procedures under which there could be confidence about the choice of projects being recommended for approval and disapproval.”⁴¹ In addition, like the members of the NSB, many early NCH members “were not practicing scholars,” so it was questionable what kind of evaluation they could provide.⁴²

In 1967, around the time of the NEH’s first reauthorization, when the NCH had developed a policy of rubberstamping most applications that the peer reviewers had recommended, Congress considered amending the statute to allow the Council to dispense with advising on some grants.⁴³ During hearings, Chairman Keeney explained that it was common for private foundations to provide their officers with the authority to award grants without board review, at least for grants of smaller amounts.⁴⁴ Not only was this common practice for foundations, it was also arguably becoming an administrative necessity at the NEH due to the volume of applications. The Endowment received approximately 1,600 applications the previous year. Keeney said that it troubled the Council members to have to vote on projects that they had not studied in depth. He also

Humanities,” May 22-23, 1967, 12, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁴¹ “Minutes of the Eighth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” February 12-13, 1968, 16, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁴² *The National Endowment for the Humanities During the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson*, 172.

⁴³ In 1967, Congress considered an amendment to allow the NCH to waive the requirement that it review applications “below a specified amount and within the terms of endowment policies.” U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Amendments to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 11308*, 90th Cong. 1st sess., 1967, 2.

⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Amendments*, 45.

stressed that the ability to bypass Council review would enable the NEH to make small “preliminary grants” if a ripe opportunity presented itself and timing was of the essence.⁴⁵

Senator Pell, however, was wary of removing the Council from the grant-review process. He explained that Congress had required Council review in order to provide the chairman with political insulation for decisions he would have to make, especially given “the explosive nature of some of the ideas” that can come up in the humanities. Pell was also concerned that the amendment “could bring up the question of the Chairman exercising a czar-like role in his field.”⁴⁶ Congress had made the same arguments about the importance of the Council at the founding the agency, when it vested all formal authority in the chairman.

Probably because of Pell’s skittishness about doing away with the Council’s recommendation on grants, the Senate version of the reauthorization allowed the Council to wave its responsibility to advise on grants only up to \$5,000. The House version capped such grant awards at \$10,000. At the May 1968 NCH meeting, before a final conference version of the reauthorization legislation had been prepared, the Council adopted a resolution delegating to the Chairman the authority to approve or disapprove of requests up to \$10,000 without its recommendation.⁴⁷ Congress soon thereafter sided with the House version on the amount.

But after Barnaby Keeney received the authority to award small grants without first getting the NCH’s recommendations, he made little use of it. The same was true of

⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1967: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare on S. 2061, Part 2*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 329-30.

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1967*, 329-31.

⁴⁷ “Minutes of the Ninth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” May 6-7, 1968, 26, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

Wallace Edgerton, who succeeded Keeney as acting chairman. Both made sparing use of what came to be known as “chairman’s grants.” Between quarterly National Council meetings, never once did either Keeney or Edgerton make more than nine of them. Many of the chairman’s grants seemed to have been made because timing was of the essence, the justification that Keeney gave to Pell in arguing for this prerogative. Between when the reauthorization was passed in June of 1968 and the next Council meeting in November, Keeney made nine chairman’s grants. Seven of them were for summer workshops on Negro history for college and university faculty members. If Keeney had needed the Council to give its recommendation on them, the workshops might not have been able to take place.⁴⁸ 11 of Edgerton’s 33 chairman’s grants were planning grants to launch state humanities committees, an initiative that Congress was insistent that the NEH pursue.⁴⁹

The question of whether to expand both the NEA and NEH’s authority to approve grants without first having the recommendation of their respective National Councils came up again during debate over the 1973 reauthorization. The Nixon administration’s proposed version of the reauthorization raised the ceiling on chairman’s grants for both Endowments from \$10,000 to \$25,000 and allowed up to 10 percent of grants to be awarded in this fashion. The administration explained that allowing the NCH to delegate this authority to the chairman would enable the NEH to respond more effectively to emergency situations. But that was not the only justification. The administration argued

⁴⁸ “Minutes of the Tenth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” November 18-19, 1968, 8, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁴⁹ Chairman’s grants are listed in the minutes of the meetings of the National Council on the Humanities. Edgerton was acting chairman for the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first meetings (August 1970 – October 1971). National Council on the Humanities, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

that if the Council was confident in the judgment of the external peer reviewers and the process in place in certain grant programs, then the NEH could reasonably relieve the Council of having to provide its own recommendations. The Council could then dedicate more of its time to larger questions of policy.⁵⁰ In effect, the Nixon administration favored making the NEA and NEH more like the NSF, where the NSB deferred to the judgment of staff and outside reviewers on the merits of particular applications and dedicated more of its time to agency-wide issues.

The National Council on the Humanities seemed to agree with the administration's view of the matter. In 1972, the Council recommended raising the ceiling of awards that could be given without Council review from \$10,000 to \$50,000.⁵¹ According to the minutes of the February 1972 Council meeting, "There was a feeling that the volume of material presented to the Council members has become so large as to be difficult to deal with."⁵² However, while the Council recognized the need to make processes more efficient, there were still some reservations about delegating this authority to the Chairman. Fr. Ong, for example, supported the Administration's proposed \$25,000 ceiling, but did not want as much as 10 percent of NEH funds to be distributed via this mechanism, the cap set by the administration's bill.⁵³

⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate and House, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare and Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1973: Joint Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on the Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate, and the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, on S. 795, S. 916, H.R. 3926, H.R. 4288, Part 1*, 93rd Cong., 1st sess., 1973, 387.

⁵¹ Memorandum, Joseph Schurman to Members of the National Council on the Humanities, November 2, 1973, in "Minutes of the Thirty-First Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," February 21-22, 1974, 34, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁵² "Minutes of the Twenty-Second Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," February 14-15, 1972, 8, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁵³ "Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," May 24-25, 1973, 9, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

On the NEA side, Nancy Hanks and the National Council on the Arts also favored the administration's proposal. In her prepared testimony on the reauthorization, though Hanks did not bring up the National Science Foundation explicitly, her argument about increasing the ceiling for chairman's grants reflected a view that the NEA be allowed to run more like the NSF. Hanks explained that the National Council on the Arts did not think that it needed to add its judgment to that of the external reviewers and that it should be paying attention to policy matters, such as program guidelines.⁵⁴

In the reauthorization legislation that passed, Congress raised the ceiling on chairman's grants to \$17,500. This new ceiling represented a compromise between the Senate, which proposed increasing it to \$15,000, and the House, which proposed increasing it to \$20,000. Senator Pell, once again, maintained that review of grants by the National Councils was important to protect the chairmen from political pressure. When Chairman Hanks was testifying, Pell told her that if the White House were to apply pressure for the NEA to fund certain local bicentennial projects, "it would be very had [*sic*] for her to resist."⁵⁵ Backing from the National Council on the Arts, however, could give her the wherewithal to fund what the agency thought was best. Both the House and Senate acknowledged the Councils' heavy workload, but insisted that they remain involved in recommending grants, saying that this level of review was important in order to encourage projects of high quality. Despite raising the ceiling on award size, Congress did not want the chairmen to make extensive use of chairman's grants. The House Committee on Education and Labor stated, "The Committee wishes to make clear that it

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate and House, Committees, *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1973*, 299 ("Statement of Nancy Hanks").

⁵⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate and House, Committees, *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1973*, 244.

does not anticipate that the Chairmen will utilize the full 10 percent authority provided... This authority should be used on a very limited scale and only to the extent necessary.”⁵⁶

Chairman Berman was content to abide by Congress’s preference for a limited use of chairman’s grants. At the February 1973 Council meeting, NCH member Sidney Hook asked Berman why he made so few of them. According to the minutes, Berman was “convinced that it is important that as many NEH grants as possible receive a Council recommendation because that lends added prestige to the grant.”⁵⁷ Even when the GAO recommended that the NEH increase its use of chairman’s grants following the 1973 reauthorization, Berman remained reluctant to do so. At the August 1974 Council meeting, according to the minutes, Berman said that he wanted the NCH to review “the great majority of applications because if such review is not given, he would be deprived of the benefit of their knowledge and experience which he considers to be a protection to him.”⁵⁸ This “protection” could refer to the possibility that the NCH discover a project that does not deserve funding, or the notion that the NCH’s backing would provide Berman with cover to make a grant that some politicians might find disagreeable.

Yet just as the Council remained involved in making recommendations on grants, the nature of its membership departed from the original composition. As described above, the NCH was initially composed in a manner following the NSB, in which members were chosen with the goal of representing the humanities and various constituencies. But after

⁵⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities: Report (to Accompany H.R. 3926)*, 93rd Cong. 1st sess., 1973, H. Rep. 93-255, 19.

⁵⁷ “Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” February 22-23, 1973, 9, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁵⁸ “Minutes of the Thirty-Third Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” August 15-16, 1974, 6, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

Berman became chairman, Presidents Nixon and Ford ceased to follow the earlier practice. Of the full slate of Council members appointed between 1972 and 1976, roughly a third were practicing scholars, another third were Republican leaning business people, philanthropists, and their spouses, and the remaining third was composed of university presidents and other individuals. Of the scholars and intellectuals, some were known conservatives, such as Irving Kristol, Jeffrey Hart, Sidney Hook, and Robert Nisbet. While the NCH continued to rubberstamp many of the staff's recommendations, it is possible that Berman appreciated having scholars like them as a final check on what was coming through the grant pipeline.

The makeup of the Council was not lost on Richard Kostelanetz, a professor of literature, whose application to the NEH for a project called, "The New Literature," was turned down. In a 1978 essay critical of the Endowment, he made the following observations about the NCH. Of the members appointed in 1972 and 1974, he wrote:

Four of these sixteen appear to be businessmen whom I could not find listed in *Who's Who in America* (Ashley, Solow, St. Johns, Hewitt); one wonders how their names came to the attention of the NEH (and yet evaded the ever-sollicitous Marquis Co.). A fifth (Luis Ferré) is less a civil servant than the former proprietor of Puerto Rico's largest cement company. Two Council members are culturally active wives of very rich philanthropists. Four are politically conservative polemicists (Hart, Hook, Kristol, and Nesbit [*sic*]). None whom I can publicly trace was born after 1931 except Kilson, who also appears to be the sole black.

Of the class of 1976, Kostelanetz said:

In sum, to the supreme Council were added three academic chiefs, two newspaper publishers, two old-style political hens, a military-industrial lobbyist, and one token bona fide scholar, all of whom were also born before 1930.

Kostelanetz continued:

Anyone aware of the plurality of American culture can see that this appointed panel is a scandalously unrepresentative crew, stacked to the political

right and to age against youth. Were we not otherwise informed, we would think these “distinguished citizens” were trustees of a right-wing think tank, or a retreat for retired academics, or a high-faluting school desk company. (Perhaps the NEH is a front for something else.) The thought of getting stuck with *them* on a sinking ship would give most of us scholarly applicants nightmares....

I for one would honestly have more confidence in an NEH Council composed, say, of a random sample of readers of this magazine, or, say again, of Howard Cosell, Alex Karras, Muhammad Ali, and Billie Jean King. At least, *their* decisions would be less deleterious.

One job for the Carter administration will be flushing out the hidden legacies of the Nixon-Ford years.⁵⁹

By the late 1970s, the National Council had come to view making recommendations on grants as its primary responsibility, despite the statute requiring that it also advise on policy.⁶⁰ Staff at the NEH may have discouraged Council members from getting too involved in policy matters. At the August 1974 meeting, Hanna Gray, a member of the Council who would soon become president of the University of Chicago, asked about the NCH’s role in developing the NEH’s budget, given that many boards were involved in this task. According to the minutes, deputy chairman Robert Kingston told her that while the Council was welcome to participate in developing the budget, its role was necessarily limited. Kingston explained that the Council “is an advisory body, not a board of trustees, and ultimate budget decisions are made by the Office of Management and Budget in preparing the President’s budget requests.” If Council members wanted to have a hand in influencing the budget, they should share ideas with agency staff.⁶¹ However, this was something that many members probably lacked the

⁵⁹ Richard Kostelanetz, “The National Endowment for the Inhumanities,” *College English* 39, no. 5 (1978): 598-9.

⁶⁰ Mary Beth Norton, who was appointed to the Council in 1978, said that by then, the NCH viewed recommending grants as its primary role, not advising on policy. Mary Beth Norton interviewed by author, May 6, 2016.

⁶¹ “Minutes of the Thirty-Third Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” 9-10.

time or inclination to do. Furthermore, given the way the composition of the Council changed under Presidents Nixon and Ford, many of the members, especially the Republican-donor types, may not necessarily have been the most qualified to think about broad issues in the humanities.

Any chance that the allowance of chairman's grants, however limited, could lead to a reduction in the Council's role of application review died as a result of how Chairman Duffey used (or abused) them. Duffey made more extensive use of chairman's grants than his predecessors, prompting concerns among the NCH and drawing public scrutiny. Recall that the Nixon administration had proposed increasing the ceiling on chairman's grants partly to allow the NEH to function more efficiently and more like the NSF. The administration believed that the NCH should be able to dispense with having to make recommendations on grants if it was confident in the peer-review procedures being used. Reducing the number of applications that they had to recommend on would have allowed the Council to devote more of its time to advising on policy. Duffey, however, seemed to use chairman's grants in an effort to bypass peer review.

On at least two occasions during Duffey's chairmanship, Council members balked at applications to add funding to chairman's grants that had already been made. At the November 1978 meeting, the Council was presented with an application to add \$5,600 to a project that had already received a chairman's grant. Chairman Duffey had made a chairman's grant of \$17,500 (the maximum allowed) to the Organization of American Historians for a project, "Women in the Humanities, a Planning Grant." Robert Hollander, a member of the Council, opposed the project, claiming that it represented advocacy and not research, and emphasized that neither the original application nor the

supplemental request had gone through panel review. The Council ended up voting to approve the supplemental grant, though not without internal division: 8 were in favor, 4 were opposed, and 2 abstained.⁶² At the August 1979 meeting, a similar situation arose, in which the Council was asked to recommend additional funds for a project supported by a chairman's grant. Hollander noted his concerns and, according to the minutes, Blanchette Ferry Rockefeller (wife of John D. Rockefeller III) "also was disturbed by this grant." She felt that chairman's grants were reserved for special situations and that they should not obligate the NEH's divisions to continue supporting certain projects.⁶³ Furthermore, Hollander expressed alarm over the amount of money Duffey was distributing through these grants, nearly \$1 million in 1979.⁶⁴

Duffey was publicly accused of political bias in his use of chairman's grants. Terry Krieger, a former NEH staffer, wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, "it seems that the purpose of many of his Chairman's Grants has been not so much to enhance the humanities as to advance social causes or please politically important groups." Recipients of Chairman's Grants had included "the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council of La Raza, the National Italian-American Foundation, the National Coalition of Cuban-Americans, the National Consumers League, and the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union."⁶⁵

⁶² "Minutes of the Fiftieth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," November 16-17, 1978, 17, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁶³ "Minutes of the Fifty-Third Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," August 15-17, 1979, 24, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁶⁴ "Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," November 14-16, 1979, 17, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

⁶⁵ Terry Krieger, "Thoughts on Mr. Duffey's Humanities Endowment," *Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 1979, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

When Bill Bennett became chairman, he reformed the NEH's policy in regard to chairman's grants in response to the perception that they had been abused under the previous chairmanship. (Applicants had come to believe that the chairman had a discretionary fund and that it could be easier to obtain a chairman's grant than go through the regular process.⁶⁶) Under Bennett's new policy, organizations that sought grants outside of the standard review process had to justify why their situation was a real emergency and funds were needed immediately. Bennett even renamed chairman's grants as "emergency grants," reinforcing their true purpose.⁶⁷

8.3 CONCLUSION

During the 1970s, before the buildup of the culture wars, the NEH's bureaucratic structure operated largely as intended. While still in its formative years, the NEH developed processes to make expert judgment the dominant criteria in determining grant awards, an approach that Republicans, in particular, strongly encouraged. Chairman Ronald Berman was adamant about the use of peer review and about being responsive to the needs expressed by professional humanists as opposed to prescribing what scholars should be doing. This was the same goal expressed by the scholarly organizations that advocated for the establishment of the NEH, as well as the founders in Congress. The Nixon administration even sought to allow the National Councils on the Arts and

⁶⁶ "Minutes of the Sixty-Sixth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," November 4-5, 1982, 10, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities; "Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," 17.

⁶⁷ "Minutes of the Sixty-Sixth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities," 10.

Humanities to dispense with review of a portion of applications if they thought that the underlying peer review processes were sound, just as the National Science Board had done (though Berman still preferred to maintain the Council's involvement as a final screen).

As the founders predicted, the NEH came under pressure to distribute funds to favored constituencies, possibly at the expense of excellence, with Chairman Duffey clearly out to achieve this goal. Yet Duffey did so partly by working around the NEH's standard processes; for example, through making chairman's grants to ethnic organizations. In this situation, the National Council ended up playing the role that the founders had hoped, to a degree: certain members objected and challenged his actions as inappropriate. But even Duffey himself was still generally supportive of the principle of peer review—"not because it's the wisest way to make judgments, but because it's the safest. It's safer than having the chairman or even members of the National Humanities Council sitting around the table as a group of wise men."⁶⁸

Yet the NEH's structure, with its emphasis on peer review, was originally premised on the notion that there was consensus as to what constituted nonpolitical expertise in the humanities. But with the rise of the culture war, many scholars and intellectuals became polarized into multiculturalist and canonical camps. How the NEH's structure has functioned in that context, one that was wholly unanticipated by the agency's founders, is the subject of the following chapter.

⁶⁸ Malcolm G. Scully, "'Fuss' and Controversy at Humanities Endowment: Some Cultural Questions May Never Be Free of Politics," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 27, 1982, 13.

9.0 MAKING GRANTS AMIDST A CULTURE WAR

At least since the early 1980s, the NEH's bureaucratic structure has operated in a context for which it was not designed. When the agency was founded, Congress anticipated that the major conflicts would be between the interests and ideals of professional humanists and the desires of elected politicians. Hence, the agency was designed so as to empower the chairman (and constrain the chairman, if need be) to follow the recommendations of experts in the humanities. But as the culture wars escalated, scholars, educators, and intellectuals—those who could claim the mantle of expertise—became sharply divided over the content and purpose of the humanities. In this new context, the NEH's bureaucratic structure has enabled chairmen to influence the ideological direction of grants. Though the NEH's formal rules and processes have stayed the same, Democratic- and Republican-appointed chairmen have executed those rules and processes in different ways to different outcomes.

In public discourse, Republican appointed chairmen such as Lynne Cheney have been accused of “politicizing” the NEH. By this, scholarly critics have meant that such chairmen have refused to defer to the staff-run peer-review process; that they have abused their power to prevent the NEH from funding projects that panelists rated highly, but to which they were ideologically opposed. In their defense, Republican appointees and their supporters have claimed that, in fact, they have sought to *depoliticize* the NEH;

to prevent the agency from funding politically tendentious projects and keep it focused on work that advances humanistic excellence and presents balanced perspectives.

Conservatives, in turn, criticized Cheney's successor, Sheldon Hackney, for taking a passive stance toward the grant-making process. They argued that his decision to let the staff run the process and not intervene has effectively enabled "politicized" projects to get funded.

To return to the theory of institutional change described in the introduction to Part II, the operation of the NEH's bureaucratic structure since the 1980s represents a case of "conversion" under Republicans and a case of "drift" under Democrats. The Republican appointees have repurposed aspects of the bureaucratic structure to push the NEH to fund work that is less reflective of progressive academic trends. Democratic appointees, in contrast, have allowed the agency to function largely as originally designed, but with the result that it will fund some kinds of projects and approaches to the humanities that the founders would not have expected. When the NEH was founded, it was assumed that the humanities were focused largely on Western civilization—and viewed Western civilization in generally positive terms. But now that trends such as multiculturalism have become ascendant, the Endowment's processes, if left to run on their own, are more likely to result in the funding of such projects.

This chapter begins with a presentation of an analysis of grants awarded under the NEH's "Fellowships for University Teachers" program. This analysis of what the agency has funded at different times suggests that the chairman influences the ideological direction of grant-making (multiculturalist versus canonical). There is a likely explanation for the fact that grant-making moves in a more progressive and less canonical

direction under Democratic administrations: chairmen take a passive approach, allow the staff to administer the process, and let the agency reflect mainstream judgment in academia. This is what the founders had wanted, even if they had different expectations for what would constitute the humanistic mainstream. What calls for more explanation is how Republican-appointed chairmen have been able to work within the same rules to push grant-making in the opposite direction.

Following the presentation of the analysis of fellowship grants, this chapter identifies various points in the grant-making process in which the chairman of the NEH can exercise leverage. These leverage points come into sharp relief when the structure of the NEH and the power of its chairman are compared with how the NEA has operated, at least in the past. When the NEA was engulfed in controversy in the late 1980s, Congress formed an Independent Commission to audit the Endowment for the Arts and assess its processes for awarding grants. The Commission found that the NEA's political leadership, and even the career staff to a degree, had been marginalized from the process in favor of the expert panels.

While the NEH was organized under essentially the same statutory language as the NEA, the bureaucracy of the former evolved such that the chairman had more opportunity to take an active, assertive role in the grant-making process. Since the start of the cultural wars, Republican-appointed chairmen have, at times, aggressively taken advantage of the prerogatives at their disposal. Though critics find these strategies illegitimate, these chairmen have not done anything per se illegal; rather, they took advantage of the lack of specifics in the organizing statute in ways that the founders of

the agency never anticipated. But then again, neither did the founders of the NEH anticipate the sea change that has occurred within the humanities.

9.1 GRANT-MAKING: FELLOWSHIPS FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

As chairmen come and go, the NEH's underlying grant-making process remains largely the same. Professional staff, in interviews, said that irrespective of whoever was the chairman, their main task remained the same: to convene panels to evaluate applications. Bruce Cole, who served as chairman from 2001 to 2009, has also noted how the NEH's processes have changed little from the time the agency was founded.¹ Yet while the process stays largely the same and staff turnover can be low, chairmen come in with different perspectives on the humanities. Does the NEH's grant-making reflect these perspectives?

To get at this question, let us consider grants awarded under the NEH's Fellowships for University Teachers program over a 20-year period. If the divisive issues in the humanities are going to crop up anywhere, interpretive academic research is as likely a place as any. Fellowships, moreover, have been a particular cause for concern for Republican-appointed chairmen. Celeste Colgan, who served as deputy chairman under Lynne Cheney, said that while she had great admiration for what the NEH was doing in many areas, from research to library projects, fellowships "called out for watching." Applications that were questionable, if not "outlandish," were more likely to come out of

¹ Bruce Cole, "What's Wrong with the Humanities," *Public Discourse*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/02/16248/>.

the fellowships programs.² Bruce Cole, in an article he authored years after serving as chairman, said that he was disappointed with most of the fellowship applications the NEH received: “applicants often viewed their research exclusively through the same predictable lens of race, class, gender, theory, or some trivial aspects of popular culture.”³

This analysis encompasses 764 grants made in the years 1991-1992 (232), 1994 (107), 1999-2000 (178), 2002 (84), 2007-2008 (96), and 2010 (67). Those years were chosen because they represent different stages in the political lifecycle of the NEH. 1991-1992, 1999-2000, and 2007-2008 are years after which a Republican or Democratic presidency had the opportunity to put its full stamp on the NEH, appointing not only the chairman, but all members of the National Council (it takes six years for the full Council to be replaced). 1994, 2002, and 2010 all mark the first full year of a new chairman appointed by an administration of a different party than the previous one. While the chairman has had an opportunity to begin advancing an agenda, two thirds of the NCH represent holdovers from the previous administration. As the political leadership has changed, there has been consistency in the professional staff. From 1991 through 1994, the division that oversaw this particular grant program was headed by Marjorie Berlincourt; from 1999 through 2002 it was headed by James Herbert.

First, it is worth noting how certain grantee characteristics stayed the same even as chairmen have changed. The geographic distribution of grants and the most highly represented disciplines change little. California, New York, Massachusetts, and Illinois—states with many universities, including prestigious ones—are almost always in the top five in any given year. In terms of which disciplines receive the most funding, history

² Celeste Colgan (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, April 29, 2016.

³ Cole, “What’s Wrong with the Humanities?”

projects of one kind or another, such as U.S. history, European history, art history, and so on, tend to fare well irrespective of the political party in power.

Table 8. Distribution of Fellowships for University Teachers Grants by State: States that Came in the Top Five⁴

	1991-1992	1994	1999-2000	2002	2007-2008	2010
California	X	X	X	X	X	X
New York	X	X	X	X	X	X
Massachusetts	X	X	X	X		X
Illinois	X	X	X			X

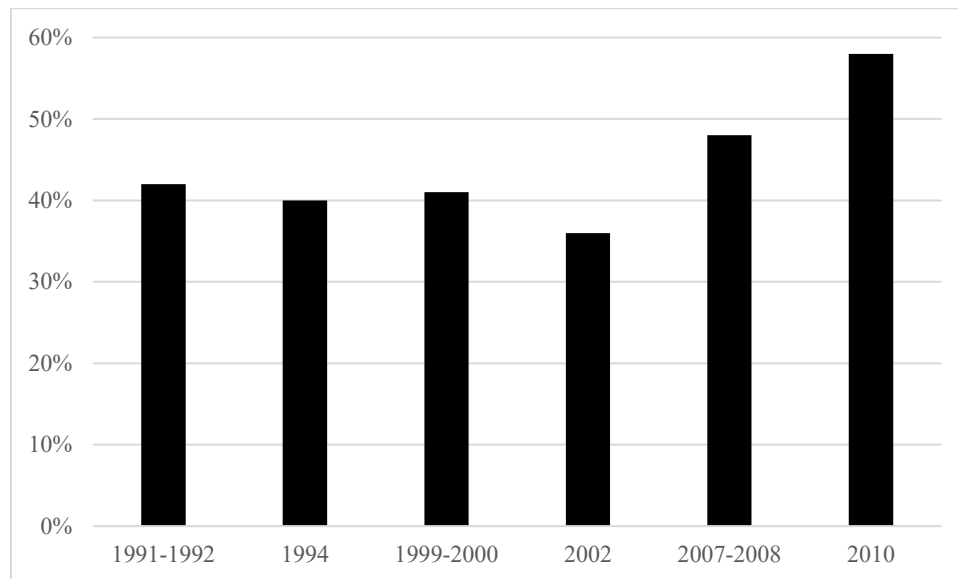
Table 9. Distribution of Fellowships for University Teachers Grants by Discipline: Disciplines that Came in the Top Five⁵

	1991-1992	1994	1999-2000	2002	2007-2008	2010
British Literature	X	X	X	X	X	X
Art History and Criticism	X	X		X		X
European History	X	X	X	X	X	
Music History and Criticism	X	X		X	X	X
U.S. History	X	X	X		X	X

⁴ Fellowships for University Teachers Grants can be downloaded at www.neh.gov; calculations by author.

⁵ Fellowships for University Teachers Grants can be downloaded at www.neh.gov; calculations by author.

Figure 6. Percentage of Fellowships for University Teachers Grants in Support of History Projects⁶



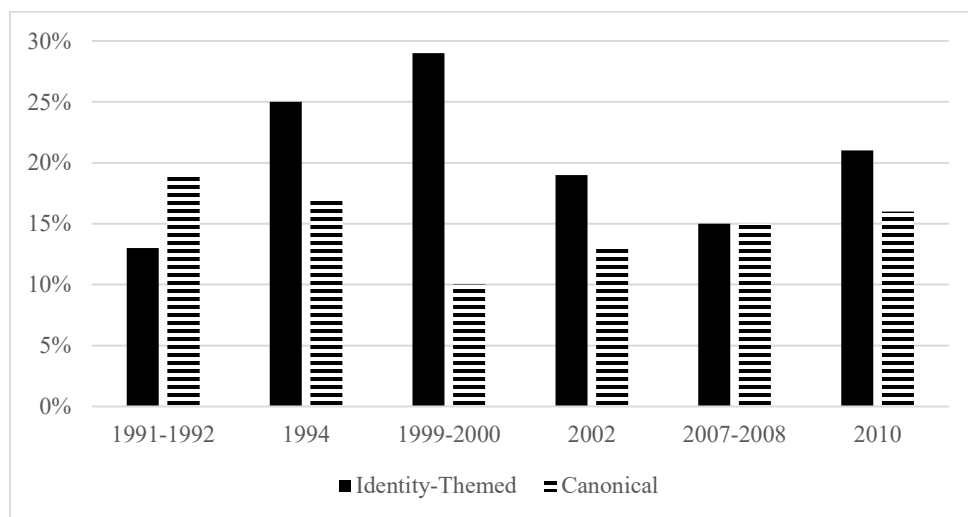
The ideological direction of grant-making, however, changes with new presidential administrations. To ascertain whether there was a shift in this regard, I noted if grants were of a canonical or progressive nature. Because most fellowship grants result in either a book or journal article, it was possible to glean the substance of most sponsored projects. A project was coded as canonical if it dealt with any author or text listed in the appendix of Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*.⁷ A project was coded as identity-themed if the scholar approached the topic through the lens of race, class, or gender or focused on a marginalized population, such as indigenous peoples, women, slaves, racial minorities, and so on. This information was obtained typically through summaries on Amazon.com and Google Books, book reviews, and article abstracts.

⁶ Fellowships for University Teachers Grants can be downloaded at www.neh.gov; calculations by author.

⁷ Harold Bloom, "Appendix A-D," in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/l/literature/bloom/complete.html#C>.

It is likely that this analysis undercounts both categories. Bloom's list omits figures that many scholars would consider part of the Western Canon, including Moses Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant. Some might also view projects about Medieval or Renaissance art or history in general as representing a more classical approach to the humanities. Book summaries, moreover, may not capture the totality of a scholar's approach, so some projects that had identity or multicultural themes may have been missed. Nevertheless, the analysis resulting from this approach still suggests that the ideological direction of grant-making changes under Democratic- versus Republican-appointed chairmen.

Figure 7. Percentage of Fellowships for University Teachers Grants in Support of Canonical Versus Identity-Themed Projects⁸



According to this analysis, progressive versus canonical projects trend in inverse directions. The percentage of identity-themed projects rises under Democratic administrations and falls under Republican; the inverse happens in regard to canonical projects. The percentage of multiculturalist projects starts at 13 percent in the final years

⁸ Fellowships for University Teachers Grants can be downloaded at www.neh.gov; calculations by author.

of Lynne Cheney's chairmanship and rises to 29 percent in the final years of William Ferris's chairmanship. During this same time period, the percentage of projects with a canonical focus declines from 19 percent to 10 percent. The identity-themed versus canonical trends then proceed in an inverse fashion during the Cole chairmanship, with progressive grants falling to 15 percent and canonical projects rising to 15 percent. During the first full year of the Leach chairmanship, the percentage of multiculturalist projects begins to climb upwards to 21 percent, though, interestingly, so do canonical projects, up to 16 percent. As indicated by the changing percentages from 1991-1992 to 1994 and the change from 1999-2000 to 2002, a significant change in emphasis can occur shortly after the installation of a new chairman. Furthermore, recall that these changes happened when the Fellowships for University Teachers program was overseen by the same career staffers.

9.2 LEVERAGE POINTS: A COMPARISON WITH THE NEA

As discussed earlier, the chairman of the NEH has full formal authority when it comes to the approval of grants. While the chairman can use panels of experts to evaluate applications and must receive the advice of the National Council, he or she is not bound by law to accept their recommendations. In practice, though, chairmen rarely go against the final set of recommendations that the Council provides. While chairmen do, on occasion, approve a grant that the NCH has recommended against or decline a grant that the NCH recommended positively, these are rare instances. Lynne Cheney, for example,

testified that she accepted the Council’s recommendations on 99.7 percent of all grants.⁹ To influence the direction of grants, Republican-appointed chairmen, like Cheney, have successfully utilized leverage points within the long advisory phase—before projects reach them for final approval or decline. These main leverage points within the NEH’s bureaucratic structure, prior to the chairman having to make a final decision, are the formation of peer-review panels, the preparation of grant guidelines for prospective applicants, and the review of applications by the National Council on the Humanities.

These leverage points come into sharp relief when a comparison is made with how the NEA has operated, at least in the past. When it was discovered that funds from the Arts Endowment had supported exhibitions featuring a photograph of a crucifix in a jar of urine and sexually explicit photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, Congress established an Independent Commission to audit the NEA and its process for awarding grants. The Commission’s analysis focused much on accountability and expertise, the same principles that were at issue in the founding of the Endowments and the NSF. In the view of the Commission, while the NEA favored expertise, the agency did not do enough to remain accountable to the American people. The NEA’s expert panels had come to dominate the grant-making process, with the politically appointed leadership and even the career staff insufficiently involved, a situation that the Commission deemed unacceptable. According to the Commission, “the original system [of awarding grants] no longer works as it once did, for reasons that the NEA’s founders could not have foreseen.” The main reason was that the country had become “polarized” on cultural

⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1992: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 6*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., 1991, 464.

issues in a way that America was not in 1965. The Commission said that while the NEA had to insist on artistic excellence, the agency also had to “be accountable to all of the American people”—including more religiously orthodox people who would find the aforementioned works of art offensive.¹⁰

At the time of the audit, the NEA made use of two kinds of expert panels: policy panels and grant advisory panels. Both sets of panels were appointed for year-long terms, with members’ eligible to serve for up to three years. Policy panels were similar to the advisory committees of the divisions within the NSF. Policy panels advised the NEA on how it related to specific fields and made recommendations on “priorities, practices, guidelines and the allocation of resources for individual programs.” Grant advisory panels reviewed and rated applications, not only judging applications on their merits, but also recommending the size of grant awards and reconciling grants with the program budget.¹¹

In its audit, the Commission suggested that NEA staff, which had become marginalized from decision-making at the expense of the outside panels, may have felt that their primary loyalty was to the artistic fields that their programs supported, as opposed to the chairman.¹² The NEA’s internal structure, with grant program areas corresponding to artistic fields, may have encouraged this development. Like the NSF, whose divisions correspond to disciplines within the sciences (e.g., Molecular & Cellular Biosciences; Environmental Biology; Civil, Mechanical & Manufacturing Innovation; Ocean Sciences; Chemistry; Mathematical Sciences; Physics; etc.), the NEA’s programs

¹⁰ Independent Commission, *A Report to Congress on the National Endowment for the Arts, Submitted by the Independent Commission*, September 1990, 2-3.

¹¹ Independent Commission, 26, 30.

¹² Independent Commission, 64, 72.

correspond to artistic fields (e.g., Dance, Opera, Literature, Music, Folk & Traditional Arts, etc.).

The National Council on the Arts, which the Commission wanted to see become more active, had long been a marginal player in the grant process, mainly providing a perfunctory approval of the panels' recommendations. A decade before the Independent Commission's audit, an investigation by the House Appropriations Committee came to a similar finding about the role of the National Council on the Arts. The Appropriations Committee's investigative staff found that the NEA did not provide the Council "with sufficient information in a usable form to accomplish its responsibilities" of advising the chairman both on policy and on grants. The investigative staff noted that of the three-day Council meetings, only two to three hours were dedicated to grant review, with each program considered for an average of four and a half minutes. Prior to the meetings, Council members received one- or two-sentence summaries of projects recommended by the panels. If members had questions about proposed projects, staff answered their questions directly; rarely were their questions brought to the full Council's attention. According to the investigative staff, "The Advisory Council relies completely on the individual program review panels for grant review, a posture the Investigative Staff believes mitigates the Council's legislated responsibility of project review."¹³

In its response to the investigative staff, the NEA argued that the Council's lack of involvement in grant evaluation was a feature of the grant-making system, not a bug.

¹³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1980: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part II*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979, 869-70 ("A Report to the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, on the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, Volume I, The National Endowment for the Arts," Surveys and Investigations Staff, March 1979).

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the early 1970s, both National Councils on the Arts and Humanities had favored removing themselves from the grant process, just as the National Science Board had done. The NEA, which went in that direction, responded to the investigative staff that in the authorizing statute, Congress had listed the Council's responsibilities as advising the Chairman with respect to policy and with respect to grants, *in that order*. The Council decided to dedicate more of its time to policy issues, relying on panels to review the merits of individual applications. The Council had instituted "application review groups" in 1975, but retired them in 1977 in an effort to "streamline the process." The Council believed that making its role in the grant-review process more efficient was important so as to have more time to advise on broader Endowment policies. The NEA said of the Appropriations Committee's findings:

The report seems to assume that the National Council, meeting for two and a half days, four or five times a year, should be intimately familiar with 18,000 – 20,000 applications which result in 4,500 grants. This is absurd.¹⁴

The Independent Commission made several recommendations on how to strengthen the authority of the chairman and involve the National Council. To strengthen the chairman meant, in part, limiting the role of the panels. The Commission recommended that the panels focus primarily on judging the artistic merits of proposals; they should no longer determine the size of particular grants or reconcile awards with Endowment program budgets. Ideally, panels would recommend more worthy projects than the NEA had resources to fund, requiring the chairman to exercise judgment.

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1980*, 961-2 ("Response of the National Endowment for the Arts to the March 22, 1979 Report of the Surveys and Investigations Staff, House Appropriations Committee, April 4, 1979").

Neither should the panels be the primary authors of program guidelines. According to the Commission:

Because guidelines articulate the policies and priorities of the agency, their formulation falls within the purview of the Chair. She/he should take the responsibility for proposing guidelines for all programs.

The chairman must also take responsibility for the composition of the panels, “[ensuring] that the membership of panels represents a variety of aesthetic and philosophical views.”

The chairman’s term should be coterminous with that of the President, thereby strengthening the sense that the person in charge of the Endowment is accountable to the President in office who had appointed him. The staff, moreover, should adopt an attitude of accountability to the chairman, rather than to their artistic fields.¹⁵

The Commission’s main recommendation to make the National Council on the Arts “more active” in the process was for it to reinstate committees to provide an additional tier of review of applications. The Commission believed that because the Council represents the arts generally instead of specific fields, it could bring a broader perspective to bear than the panels. These Council committees, designed to be interdisciplinary in nature, would make their own evaluation of the proposals in select Endowment programs. They would then forward to the full Council two sets of recommendations, their own and those from the panels.¹⁶

Though the Commission did not say so explicitly, in making these recommendations, it was calling for the NEA to operate less like the NSF, where grant decisions were made primarily by the staff in consultation with outside experts, and more like the NEH. Particularly under Lynne Cheney, who was chairman when the

¹⁵ Independent Commission, 63-8.

¹⁶ Independent Commission, 69-70.

Independent Commission did its audit, the principle of “checks and balances”¹⁷ was alive and well at NEH.

9.3 CHECKS AND BALANCES AT NEH

Across the board, the Independent Commission’s recommendations for how the NEA should operate—in a manner more accountable to the American people—were already in place at the NEH. In fact, in the early 1990s, some scholars argued the NEH’s politically-appointed leadership was *too* powerful and needed to be reined in. The National Humanities Alliance, an advocacy group representing scholarly organizations, colleges, and universities, proposed making only a third of the members of the National Council on the Humanities appointed by the President, so as to limit the influence of the chairman over who was named to it (under the Alliance’s plan, the other two thirds would have been appointed by Congress). Critics of Cheney also wanted the NEH to reemphasize the importance of peer review in grant-making decisions.¹⁸ Stanley Katz, then president of the American Council of Learned Societies, said, “Regardless of the specific actions of this chairman, or any chairman, there is a basic flaw in the legislation: It accords the chairman too much unchecked discretionary authority for effective public accountability.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Independent Commission, 63.

¹⁸ Stephen Burd, “With Cheney Gone, Humanities Groups Hope Congress Will Focus on How the NEH Can Better Serve Scholars,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 20, 1993.

¹⁹ Karen J. Winkler, “Humanities Agency Caught in Controversy Over Columbus Grants,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 13, 1991.

The main difference between Republican- and Democratic-appointed chairmen, at least since the early 1980s, has been that the former have taken advantage of the leverage points at their disposal, particularly with respect to the formation of panels and use of the National Council on the Humanities as a second layer of review. In so doing, Republicans have been accused of “politicizing” the NEH; of disrespecting the agency’s peer review process. Yet these chairmen and their defenders have argued that because of trends in the humanities, such actions are necessary to keep the NEH from funding projects that are politically tendentious. Moreover, Republicans have acted within the letter of the law, albeit taking advantage of the statute’s lack of specificity and using various bureaucratic features of the agency in ways that the NEH’s founders never anticipated. Democratic appointees, in contrast, have managed the agency in a more passive fashion, intervening little, if at all, in the grant-making process. Under those chairmanships, the agency has been run in a manner closer to the NSF. These differences in management of the bureaucratic structure has likely helped account for the changing focus of the NEH’s grant-making, at least in some programs.

9.3.1 The NEH Chairman and the Panels

The NEH’s panel system, while at the core of the grant-making process, is less autonomous than the system that prevailed at the NEA at the time of the Independent Commission’s audit. NEH grant panels traditionally have evaluated proposals only on their merits. Whereas NEA panels concerned themselves with reconciling grant awards with program budgets, NEH panels have focused solely on the quality of the applications.

It has been up to the division staff to make funding recommendations that go to the National Council on the Humanities.

During the panel-review and post-panel-review phase, divisions have long been expected to bring potentially controversial applications to the attention of the chairman. A draft memorandum from Deputy Chairman Wallace Edgerton to Chairman Ronald Berman suggests that the NEH, by the early 1970s, was developing protocols to ensure that the chairman had an opportunity to take a closer look at applications that could be controversial in advance of Council meetings.²⁰ According to Malcolm Richardson, whose career at the NEH stretched from the early 1980s through 2016, the staff look out for the chairman and want to make sure that he or she is not “blindsided by controversy.”²¹

Bruce Cole, when chairman, encouraged the division staff to apply their own judgment and expertise when developing recommendations, given that they themselves had advanced training and experience in the humanities. While the staff were supposed to take the panelists’ recommendations seriously, Cole did not want them to conceive of themselves as “clerks,” merely recording the external evaluations and passing them along.²² Recall that the Independent Commission had criticized the NEA’s staff specifically in this regard.

The involvement of the chairman’s office in the formation of NEH peer review panels has been a controversial issue, particularly during the chairmanship of Lynne

²⁰ Draft memorandum, Wallace B. Edgerton to Ronald Berman, “Grant Review Process,” 1-2, (undated), Records of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of the Deputy Chairman, Memorandums, 1966-1973, Box 1, Record Group 288, National Archives at College Park.

²¹ Malcolm Richardson (former staffer) interviewed by author, June 20, 2013.

²² Bruce Cole interviewed by author, April 15, 2016.

Cheney. There were allegations that she acted inappropriately by insisting upon including more conservative panelists. In 1992, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ran a story reporting that, according to former agency personnel, Cheney made sure panels included at least one person who was a “hostile” critic of non-traditional scholarship. Former staff members said that the chairman’s office had started to provide program officers with lists of scholars from which they should draw when assembling panels. According to one peer reviewer interviewed for the article:

The last several times I’ve been on a panel, they included this avowed right winger, and he walked into the room like he was a member of the NEH staff. He reliably represents the radical right in judging projects. And if he puts down “very poor,” that’s the end of it.²³

Don Gibson, in his memoir, said that staff were upset that Cheney circulated lists of preferred panelists, who presumably would recommend against proposed projects so that she would not have to deny them on her own.²⁴

Cheney and her senior staff denied any malfeasance on their part. They countered that the volume of proposals, panels, and panelists would have made this kind of engineering nearly impossible.²⁵ When Cheney was questioned about the *Chronicle* story by Congressman Sid Yates (D-IL), she said that the extent of her involvement in suggesting panelists is that when she is “out on the road” and happens to meet people who might be good, she shares their names with staff. The NEH, after all, is always in

²³ Stephen Burd, “Chairman of Humanities Fund Has Politicized Grants Process, Critics Charge,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 1992, A32.

²⁴ Donald G. Gibson, *Iowa Sky: A Memoir* (Shoulder Friends Press, 2013): 165.

²⁵ Burd, “Chairman of Humanities Fund Has Politicized Grants Process, Critics Charge,” A32.

search of new people to serve on panels. Jerry Martin, who served as deputy chairman, said that when the staff form panels, the chairman's office never overrules their choices.²⁶

Because information about the formation of specific peer review panels is unavailable, it is impossible to say with certainty which side's claims are closer to the truth. Cheney's critics have even said that proving wrongdoing is hard.²⁷ Another possibility, though, is that staffers took it upon themselves to ensure greater ideological diversity among panelists, once it was understood that this was what the chairman expected. Celeste Colgan, who served as deputy chairman under Lynne Cheney, said something to this effect. She said that while the politically-appointed staff had no hard agenda, they wanted to support work that would be for the good of civilization and of enduring value and significance. When the program officers understood this focus, they *asked* the senior staff for recommendations on panelists.²⁸ Furthermore, it is important to remember that the staff's most urgent task often is simply to form the panels, which, as discussed in chapter eight, can be difficult. If the chairman's office has panelists who are willing to serve, the staff may be inclined to use them, even if they may disagree with some of their perspectives on the humanities.

This possibility becomes easier to imagine in light of the sense of accountability that the staff have felt toward the chairman's office. Harold Cannon, a long-time

²⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1993: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 9*, 102nd Cong. 2d. sess., 1992, 927.

²⁷ Stanley Katz accused Cheney of "the radical politicization" of the NEH; that she had turned the Council into "a narrow organization representing a tiny spectrum of the ideological reality the American intellectual community" and "loaded the endowment's peer review committees with people who rejected individuals' grants on partisan grounds." However, he acknowledged that such charges "are almost impossible to document." Charles Truehart, "Lynne Cheney to Resign as Humanities Chief," *Washington Post*, December 2, 1992, Nexis Uni.

²⁸ Celeste Colgan (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, April 29, 2016.

bureaucrat who served as director of Research and Challenge Grant Divisions, as well as the Office of Preservation when it first began, would tell his subordinates, “We all work for the chairman.”²⁹ Bill Bennett, though an outspoken critic of trends in academia, did not encounter stiff resistance from the professional staff during his time as chairman. William Kristol, who profiled his leadership strategy, noted that Bennett “has found it possible to marshal cooperation and even support from the civil service.” According to Kristol, “on the whole Mr. Bennett has found the civil service so ‘governable’ that he has brought in only five or six political appointees to join a professional staff of about 250.”³⁰ Neither does John Agresto, who served as Bennett’s deputy, recall the staff being confrontational.³¹

The NEH’s divisional structure may have contributed to the professional staff’s sense of accountability to the chairman. While the NEA’s grant programs are organized by artistic field, the NEH’s divisions are based on project type and welcome applications from all humanistic disciplines. Probably because of this, the NEH’s divisions have never had field-specific advisory bodies, akin to the advisory panels that have been used by the NSF and NEA. Such bodies otherwise constitute an additional layer of bureaucracy between the chairman’s office and the professional staff.

The development of grant program guidelines presents another way in which the chairman of the NEH can influence what the Endowment funds, or at the very least, the applications that come in. At the NEA, the Independent Commission found that program advisory panels developed the guidelines; not so at NEH. Because the chairman of the

²⁹ Harold Cannon interviewed by author, June 27, 2014.

³⁰ William Kristol, “Can-Do Government,” *Policy Review* 31 (Winter 1985): 64.

³¹ John Agresto (former deputy chairman) interviewed by author, June 23, 2015.

NEH develops the guidelines, he or she can encourage applications that pertain to particular themes. Even though all applications are evaluated the same way, the chairman's guidelines can affect the pool of proposals from which it will make selections. Bill Bennett, for example, had an initiative focused on the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution and encouraged applications for "studies covering the range of philosophical and historical questions raised by the Constitution and the founding period," while under Sheldon Hackney, divisions encouraged proposals that related to his initiative, "A National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity."³²

Though Congress did not appropriate any special funding for Bennett's bicentennial initiative, NEH still funded projects that fell under this theme, with several large grants going to conservative organizations and scholars. Bennett set up an office inside NEH to encourage proposals to the various divisions on his theme. Some notable grants that were made included:

- The Claremont Institute, "A New Order of the Ages: The American Constitutional Heritage," \$343,689: To support a three year project of annual conferences, a lecture series, a speaker's bureau, local library exhibits and publications designed to examine and elucidate the continuing relevance of the political thoughts of the American Founding.
- American Enterprise Institute, "A Decade of Study of the Constitution," \$249,544: To support a series of three conferences and three books of essays on constitutional issues (Robert Goldwin, project leader).
- University of Dallas, "Constitutionalism in America," \$483,113: To support a program of scholarly research and public education, including three conferences, annual lectures, several public forums and teachers' institutes, and the publication of books and pamphlets. (Thomas West, project director)

³² National Endowment for the Humanities, "Guidelines and Application Forms: 1985-86 Fellowships," 5, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, Grant Programs & Opportunities; National Endowment for the Humanities, "1996-1997 NEH Fellowships," 3, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, Grant Programs & Opportunities.

- Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies, \$150,000: To support a two-year series of public conferences and lectures on the constitutional principles of separation of powers and economic liberties. The first conference will be held in Atlanta, the second in Chicago; the lectures will be held around the country; and printed material will be produced.³³

Had it not been for the special initiative, it is possible that these organizations may not have applied and would not have received funding. It is important to note, however, that many other groups that submitted proposals in response to the initiative, which may also have been conservative or right-of-center, were turned down. In fact, NCH member Ellis Sandoz expressed concern that so many bicentennial related projects were being declined. Agresto, who was then assistant chairman, said that the panels had high standards and that the NEH sought to honor the bicentennial “by the quality, not the quantity of applications funded.”³⁴ Just because a proposal had to do with the U.S. Constitution in no way guaranteed funding; it still had to pass the rigors of the NEH’s review system.

Signals from the chairman’s office can also discourage certain applicants. A program officer who served in the Public Programs Division in the 1980s said that some people assumed that they would never get funded by Lynne Cheney and did not bother to apply.³⁵ Bruce Cole said that more right-of-center scholars felt the same way during Sheldon Hackney and Bill Ferris’s terms.³⁶

³³ Records of these grants can be found at www.neh.gov.

³⁴ “Minutes of the Seventy-Fourth Meeting of the National Council on the Humanities,” November 7-9, 1984, 27, NEH Digital Repository, Public Reading Room, National Council on the Humanities.

³⁵ Glenn Marcus (former program officer) interviewed by author, August 7, 2014.

³⁶ Bruce Cole interviewed by author, April 15, 2016.

9.3.2 National Council on the Humanities: Flagging Proposals and Stacking Committees

When Congress designed the NEH, it intended for the National Council on the Humanities to empower the chairman to follow the recommendations of the peer reviewers and constrain him in the event that he pursued a questionable direction in grant-making. The NCH began as a blue-ribbon group, broadly representative of humanistic disciplines and covering various constituencies, similar to the National Science Board. The makeup of the NCH was to instill both professional humanists and the general public with confidence in the agency. Yet in the context of the culture war, under Republican administrations, the NCH has taken on a different function. Rather than empower the chairman to follow the advice of peer reviewers and resist more run-of-the-mill “political” pressures, the NCH has empowered Republican chairmen to decline proposals that they think are politically tendentious or frivolous, even when the peer reviewers have graded them highly. A negative recommendation by the NCH can provide cover for the chairman, saving him or her from having to be the one to decline a project that panelists had rated highly and the staff recommended.

To repurpose the NCH, Republican-appointed chairmen have done three things: ensure that its membership includes eminent conservative humanists; stack certain Council committees with Republican appointees; and flag proposals for the NCH to give special scrutiny. Democrats and progressive scholars have criticized these tactics as politicizing the Endowment; for inappropriately interfering with the staff-run peer-review process. Yet none of these tactics are, *per se*, illegal. The statute says nothing about Council committees or about flagging. To recall Mahoney and Thelen’s theory of

institutional change, this is an instance in which agents are taking advantage of the gaps or ambiguity between the wording of the statute and how it is to be enforced.

When it was President Reagan's turn to nominate his first batch of Council members, his appointments were not geared toward bringing the NCH back to the kind of composition it had in the late 1960s. But unlike Presidents Nixon and Ford, neither he did load the Council with Republican businessmen. Beginning in 1982, many Republican nominees have been among the most prestigious humanities scholars in the nation who lean conservative in some way.³⁷ Of the first 21 members appointed by President Reagan, six of them were professors of political philosophy, several of with connections to the "Straussian" school: William Allen, Walter Berns, George Carey, David Lowenthal, Ellis Sandoz, and Fr. James V. Schall, S.J. Other scholars of that early group included historian Gertrude Himmelfarb (also the wife of Irving Kristol) and bioethicist Leon Kass.³⁸

During the chairmanship of Lynne Cheney, who was of a more populist bent than Bill Bennett, a larger number of non-academics received appointments to the Council, drawing criticism from scholarly groups.³⁹ But even then, the Council always had a core group of prestigious conservative academics. Scholars appointed during the Cheney years included Paul Cantor, Bruce Cole, Hillel Fradkin, Donald Kagan, Alan Kors, Harvey Mansfield, Gary McDowell, and Condoleezza Rice.⁴⁰ Not only were such members more

³⁷ A former Council member who was appointed by President George W. Bush said that it is much easier for conservative scholars to be appointed to the NCH, namely because there are so few of them in the humanities. Former council member interviewed by author.

³⁸ Members of the National Council on the Humanities can be found in NEH annual reports.

³⁹ Christopher Myers, "2 Scholarly Organizations Say Humanities Endowment Council Hasn't Enough Academics; Chairman Calls Complaints 'Elitist,'" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 10, 1991, A19, A22.

⁴⁰ When Mansfield was appointed, he said, "I'm going to adopt a West Point approach and sound the guns against those in the humanities who want to destroy the greatness of our intellectual past." Karen J.

inclined toward an appreciation of canonical works, but they were also accomplished scholars. According to a former Council member, they were the kinds of people who could really “pick apart a proposal” and sometimes had to “set the staff right.”⁴¹ Some scholars, though, criticized President George H. W. Bush’s appointments, arguing that they were not in accordance with the Endowment’s authorizing legislation, which said that members should “provide a comprehensive representation of the views of scholars and professional practitioners in the humanities.” These critics, who were supportive of feminism, multiculturalism, and deconstruction, objected to the “one-sided nature of recent appointments and nominations.”⁴²

The main leverage point where members of the NCH can influence the grant-making process are the Council committee meetings. These take place on Thursday, on the first day of the Council’s two-day sessions. The full Council, which convenes on Friday, generally ratifies what the committees have recommended. Most Council members have only given serious thought to the grants reviewed by their respective committees. In addition, while the full Council will occasionally discuss specific applications that might be controversial for one reason or another, the timing of the plenary meeting—Friday morning—does not encourage extensive deliberation. One former member noted that members are often checking their watches during the session, concerned about catching their afternoon flights out of Washington. Another former member said that as the Council works through its agenda, if a member brings up too

Winkler, “A Conservative Plans to ‘Sound the Guns’ at NEH,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 16, 1991, A5.

⁴¹ Former National Council on the Humanities member interviewed by author.

⁴² “Washington Update,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 15, 1992, A30; see also, Scott Heller, “2 New Groups Hope to Organize the Academic Left Against Conservative Scholars and the NEH,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 1992, A15-A16.

many items for discussion, it feels like the student who asks one too many questions in class. Further, the NEH has stopped serving lunch following the meeting, which may provide even another disincentive for the members to have drawn-out discussions.⁴³ Thus, the NCH subcommittee meetings are the main opportunity for Council members either to advance a proposal that the staff and panelists recommend against or recommend against a proposal that the staff had favored.

Republican-appointed chairmen have pressed their advantage at this stage of the process by stacking certain committees with conservative members, particularly when the partisan composition of the Council has been in transition. Because the members' terms are staggered, roughly a third of the Council is replaced every two years, meaning it takes six years to renew the entire body. According to Mary Beth Norton, a Carter appointee to the NCH who served until 1984, therefore overlapping with part of Bennett's tenure, "Bennett accordingly concentrated the first Reagan Council appointees on the two committees he especially wanted to control: Fellowships and General Programs."⁴⁴ In 2004, during Bruce Cole's first term as chairman, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that Clinton appointees were being concentrated on the committee overseeing the federal-state partnership, which awards grants for the state humanities councils. Though this Council committee provides recommendations to the state councils, the grants go through as a matter of course. One Clinton appointee, Evelyn Edson, described the federal-state committee as "essentially a committee to be powerless."⁴⁵ Lynne Cheney, in contrast, was not accused of stacking committees. Because she became

⁴³ Former National Council on the Humanities members interviewed by author.

⁴⁴ Mary Beth Norton, "Bill Bennett's NEH," *Scholar and Educator* 10, no. 6 (1986): 7-8.

⁴⁵ Anne Marie Borrego, "Humanities Endowment Returns to 'Flagging' Nontraditional Projects," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 16, 2004.

chairman in 1986, she enjoyed a Council that had nothing but Republican appointees. Malcolm Richardson said that under Lynne Cheney, the NCH, “with a few exceptions, resembled nothing more than an Eastern European parliament in pre-*glasnost* days. They voted the party line.”⁴⁶

NEH records bear out the claims that Republican-appointed chairmen have, in fact, concentrated Republican-appointed Council members on certain committees. When Bill Bennett became chairman, he did not do this immediately. From the July 1982 through November 1983 meetings (six in total), Bennett distributed the first nine Republican-appointed Council members across the committees. The committees for Education and State Programs, Fellowships, and Research and Policy generally had a composition of two Republicans and four Democrats.⁴⁷ General programs, which oversaw public-facing humanities programs such as media, museum, and library grants, tended to have at least three Republicans. For the first four meetings, the ratio on the General Programs committee was three Republicans to three Democrats; the next two meetings the ratio was four to three; and the next two meetings the ratio was three to three. Bennett began stacking certain committees with holdover Democratic appointees and others with Republican appointees beginning in the February 1984 meeting. For that meeting and the next seven, the composition of the Education committee was four Democrats to one Republican. Not coincidentally, Bennett had undertaken a significant reform of the Education Division, redesigning its grant categories to encourage deeper

⁴⁶ Stephen Burd, “Conservatives on NEH Advisory Board Charge Hackney Had Political Motives in Personnel Move,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 1, 1993, A29.

⁴⁷ “Republican” or “Democrat” refers to the president who appointed them, not the Council members’ actual voter registration. Bill Bennett, after all, was himself a registered Democrat when appointed chairman of the NEH.

study of core texts in the humanities. Challenge grants was the other committee that had a Democratic majority, three to two. Beginning in August of 1984, the other committees—Fellowships, General Programs, Research, and State Councils—had four to one Republican majorities.⁴⁸

Bruce Cole began stacking Council committees early on. For the July 2002 meeting, after President Bush had nominated a new class of Council members, Cole concentrated Democratic members on the Federal-State committee (four Democrats, zero Republicans) and Preservation committee (three Democrats, one Republican). The Education, Public Programs, and Research committees, by contrast, all were majority Republican; respectively, three to two, three to one, and three to one. For the next two years, while the Council was still fairly mixed, Cole continued to place several Democrats on the Federal-State committee. Out of eight meetings between July 2002 and May 2004, only once did Republicans constitute a majority on that committee; four times there was an equal number. The Research committee, by contrast, always had a solid Republican majority; twice it was wholly Republican.⁴⁹

Democratic chairmen, in contrast, have not handled committee assignments in this fashion. Under Sheldon Hackney, the partisan divide of all of the committees reflected the overall composition of the Council. After President Clinton had the opportunity to appoint a slate of Council members, for the next six meetings, the holdover Republicans constituted majorities on each and every committee, typically three to two. It was not until the November 1996 meeting that a Council committee had a majority of Democrat-appointed members: Preservation and Challenge grants had a four to three Democratic

⁴⁸ “National Council on the Humanities Committee Assignments” (provided to author by NEH).

⁴⁹ “National Council on the Humanities Committee Assignments” (provided to author by NEH).

majority. The other two committees that meeting had a Republican majority and a tie. Jim Leach also maintained balanced committees during his chairmanship.⁵⁰

Republican-appointed chairmen have taken further advantage of the NCH through a practice known as “flagging.” During the Thursday committee meetings, Council members spend most of their time discussing projects that have been flagged prior to the meeting. Only when a project has been flagged prior to the in-person meeting do the Council members receive the actual full proposals to review. If there are no or few flagged proposals, the Thursday committee meetings can be short. Flags may come from Council members themselves, the division staff, or the chairman’s office. The extent to which Council members flag proposals depends on the individual. One former member said that it seemed as though members who were retired, and with more time on their hands, were more likely to flag than those who were not.⁵¹ A division director explained that one member of his Council committee always flagged a few projects, believing that it was his responsibility to look at the details of at least some proposals.⁵² Another former Council member said that because he took his role seriously, he often flagged proposals (and followed by saying that his service on the Council was typical of academics putting no value on their time).⁵³ Division staff flag proposals for Council committee review usually in cases in which they disagree with the panelists’ recommendations, if the division staff would appreciate more input, or to bring something potentially controversial to chairman’s attention.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ “National Council on the Humanities Committee Assignments” (provided to author by NEH).

⁵¹ Former National Council on the Humanities member interviewed by author.

⁵² Former NEH division director interviewed by author.

⁵³ Former National Council on the Humanities member interviewed by author.

⁵⁴ Former staffers interviewed by author.

Flagging that originates in the chairman's office has been far more controversial and has been done primarily by Republican chairmen. According to a former Council member who served during the Cole years, it was easy to tell the difference between proposals that had been flagged by the division staff versus the chairman's office.⁵⁵ In 2004, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on the rise of flagging under Chairman Cole and suggested that much of it was politically or ideologically driven. Pedro Castillo, a professor of history at the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Council member who had been appointed by President Clinton, was interviewed for the piece. According to Castillo, "My sense is that if it's something that's not traditional—having to do with gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or the Middle East—it gets red-flagged." The *Chronicle* also reported that some flagged proposals that peer reviewers had rated highly were rejected, while others with lower marks were funded. Chairman Cole and deputy chairman Lynne Munson told the *Chronicle* that they flagged proposals for review out of a concern for quality, not ideology.⁵⁶ Munson, when interviewed for this dissertation, defended flagging, explaining that unless a proposal was flagged, the Council would not review it. Recall that prior to the Council meetings, NCH members receive one-to-two page write-ups of the projects that the staff recommend and list of all those that they recommended be declined. Unless proposals are flagged, the Council members have little to do.⁵⁷

Democratic-appointed chairmen, in contrast, have been reluctant, even resistant, to flagging. This is because they are generally more comfortable with the work of the

⁵⁵ Former National Council on the Humanities member interviewed by author.

⁵⁶ Anne Marie Borrego, "Humanities Endowment Returns to 'Flagging' Nontraditional Projects."

⁵⁷ Lynne Munson interviewed by author, March 25, 2015.

staff and confident in the recommendations of the peer reviewers. Bill Ferris, who seldom flagged proposals, said that because the peer-review process is so rigorous, flagging by the chairman should not be necessary. He bases this perspective partly on his own experience as a former NEH grantee. Getting a grant from the NEH is not easy. The staff, in his experience, insist on quality and make applicants work hard. Ferris spoke of his personal experience as an applicant to the NE; of having his own applications turned down, but eventually receiving funding after he had worked with the staff to improve his proposals. Furthermore, as chairman, he saw it as part of his duty to avoid even the perception of impropriety. He stressed that “it would have been wrong” to have intervened in the process and said that he bent over backwards to draw a clear line between his role as chairman and the work of the staff. He said he related to the divisions by blessing the peer-review process.⁵⁸ Jim Leach said that with respect to flagging, he was “vastly closer” to Bill Ferris than Bruce Cole.⁵⁹ Leach spoke of his great respect for America’s academic community and said that, as chairman, one of his priorities was to protect the peer-review process as it existed. Sheldon Hackney, who made headlines in the *Chronicle* for his decision to diminish the use of flagging, said that his approach stemmed from his desire to work collaboratively with the staff. He explained that if he were to question the staff’s judgment through flagging, “it would undermine our ability to work together closely.” Moreover, “I want them to think of themselves as part of a single enterprise that includes the chairman.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ William R. Ferris interviewed by author, April 29, 2016.

⁵⁹ James Leach interviewed by author, May 25, 2016.

⁶⁰ Stephen Burd, “New Chairman of Humanities Endowment Curtails Practice of ‘Flagging’ Potentially Controversial Grant Applications,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 2, 1994, A24.

Hackney's decision to limit the use of flagging by the chairman's office was praised by scholars, NEH officials, and humanities lobbyists as depoliticizing the agency, while criticized by conservatives for making it easier for politicized and lesser-quality work to receive funding. Among Hackney's critics was none other than Bruce Cole, who in 1994 was a member of the National Council on the Humanities. Cole said, "By refusing to flag applications for review by the national council, Sheldon Hackney has, I believe, abrogated one of his most important oversight responsibilities as chairman."⁶¹ A decade later, when flagging returned under Cole's chairmanship, Stanley Katz, a former president of ACLS, spoke of his reservations with the practice in general, saying, "I think that on the whole, flagging is a bad idea, and it is always subject to abuse." He also said, "Certainly in the past, I am convinced that it was used for very bad reasons."⁶²

Flagging by the chairman's office has the potential to influence which projects the Council members review closely, if only because it saves them the trouble of having to flag for themselves. Edward Delattre and John Searle, both Republican appointees to the NCH, protested Hackney's policy of not flagging, saying that the Council should be consulted on grants.⁶³ Mary Beth Norton, quoted above, responded to Searle and Delattre in a letter to the editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In her letter, she spoke of her time on the Council, when she would arrive in D.C. ahead of Council meetings and ask staff to pull proposals. (In an interview for this dissertation, Norton said that, in advance of Council meetings, NEH staff would place bets amongst themselves on the

⁶¹ Stephen Burd, "New Chairman of Humanities Endowment Curtails Practice of 'Flagging' Potentially Controversial Grant Applications."

⁶² Anne Marie Borrego, "Humanities Endowment Returns to 'Flagging' Nontraditional Projects."

⁶³ Stephen Burd, "Conservatives on NEH Advisory Board Charge Hackney Had Political Motives in Personnel Move."

proposals with which she would disagree with their assessments.) She concluded her letter with the following advice to Delattre and other Council members: “Do thy homework.”⁶⁴ In other words, if they were serious about their responsibilities, they would not have to rely on the chairman’s office to flag.

9.4 CONCLUSION

During her confirmation hearing in 1986, Senator Pell asked Cheney about allegations that the NEH’s internal processes had been politicized under Bill Bennett. Cheney, in response, said:

I am aware that that kind of charge has surfaced in the past. As I have looked at the Endowment as an outsider and looked at the peer review system, though, it seems to me it would be an incredibly difficult system to politicize, even if one should be so motivated.⁶⁵

But despite the complexity of the NEH’s grant-making system—or perhaps *because* of its complexity—Republicans have found opportunities to favor the funding of more classical, traditional, or canonical humanities projects and discourage more identity-themed ones. In so doing, they have not done anything illegal or in violation of the formal rules, which have stayed the same. Rather, Republican appointees have found ways to repurpose them in order to keep the NEH from funding projects that, in their view, advance leftist political agendas, as opposed to humanistic excellence. Again, how one

⁶⁴ Mary Beth Norton, Letter to the editor, “A Historical Perspective on the Humanities Endowment,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 19, 1994.

⁶⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Nomination: Hearing Before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources on Lynne Vincent Cheney, of Wyoming, to be Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 99th Cong., 2d. sess., 1986, 28.

evaluates their actions will likely depend on how one appraises intellectual trends in the humanities. If one is supportive of trends such as multiculturalism, then the assertiveness vis-à-vis the peer-review process will appear illegitimate. But to those who oppose such trends, Democratic appointees' passivity is deserving of censure, as it will likely allow tendentious projects to receive funding.

CONCLUSION

“The *politics of culture* refers to the contestation of power over cultural issues. This would include the mobilization of parties and rank-and-file support, the organization of leadership, the formation of special-interest coalitions, and the manipulation of public rhetoric on matters reflecting the symbols or ideals at the heart of a group’s collective identity... Though culture is implicated at every level, the politics of culture is primarily about politics.”¹

The NEH was founded with the loftiest of goals: to foster and nurture wisdom, vision, and high culture in America. This policy history has examined how the mundane aspects of American politics—from party positioning to the demands of constituency building to the details of bureaucratic structure—have affected the pursuit of that mission. Founded at a time of consensus about the substance of the humanities and their importance to American life, the NEH as had to cope with the breakdown of that consensus over the past 50 years.

In this conclusion, I note a few potential directions for future research. This dissertation made use of several theoretical models to explain how the politics of the agency have developed over time. I will suggest how findings from this dissertation might help reinforce and refine these theories.

Beyond this, I will offer a few reflections on what we might expect from the NEH in its current political context. In terms of organizational maintenance, thanks to the state

¹ James Davison Hunter, “Liberal Democracy and the Unraveling of the Enlightenment Project,” *The Hedgehog Review* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2017), http://iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2017_Fall_Hunter.php.

humanities councils and the NEH's strategic direction of funds to favored constituencies, the agency has become quite durable, even as leading Republican politicians continue to call for its termination. Because the politics of the NEH have become "primarily about politics," the agency has, in effect, elided the controversies that have become so intense within the humanities. In regard to making grants that bear on contested approaches in the humanities, the agency's bureaucratic structure and processes have allowed for something of a compromise between orthodox and progressive camps. Because the chairman has the ability to push the substance of grants in either direction, when a new political party wins the presidency, the other side then gets a turn. Even as both sides have reasons to dislike the current bureaucratic structure, especially when controlled by their opponents, it is difficult to conceive of reforms that both sides would find acceptable.

POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The main purpose of this dissertation was to understand the NEH. The theoretical models discussed in this dissertation were in service to that end. Yet for scholars seeking to develop those theories further, this research on NEH could help reinforce and possibly even refine those models—party position change and gradual institutional change, in particular.

Party Position Change and the Nature of Party Ideology

David Karol argues, “reliance on ideology among politicians as an explanation for party position change is problematic. It can explain too much.” He contends that the makeup of a party’s coalition drives what becomes the “conservative” or “liberal” position on an issue.² The NEH presents a clear case of how this can happen, especially on the Republican side. The GOP did not come to embrace the idea of terminating the NEH because that was the “conservative” position. Rather, termination became the “conservative” position because that was what an important Republican constituency—the Religious Right—demanded.

Consider that over the span of 20 years, from 1976 to 1996, the GOP Platform went from calling for an increase in federal funding for the NEA and NEH to advocating for the termination of both Endowments. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the “conservative” position, found among intellectuals and some Republican politicians, was to insist on “excellence” and “merit.” This perspective aligned with the critique of mass culture and concerns about the fate of high culture that both liberal and conservative intellectuals put forward in the 1960s around the time of the founding of the NEH. It was understood that high culture was important to edify American life and that the federal government could encourage it. Michael Joyce’s critique of the NEH, published in the Heritage Foundation’s 1980 *Mandate for Leadership*, reflects a confidence that the agency could serve the noble ends for which it was established, provided it prioritized

² David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 15.

research and adhered to the use of peer review over favoring applicants from certain constituent groups.

Yet in the end, there was simply no constituency for this vision for the agency. Even as there were occasional “conservative” defenses of the NEH and recommendations on how the agency could better advance high culture, they were nonstarters within the Republican Party. Even conservative intellectuals such as Irving Kristol and George Will, who appreciated and understood the importance of high culture—and who once wrote favorably about governmental efforts to advance it—came to favor shuttering the cultural agencies. Neither Will nor William Bennett and Lynne Cheney, who testified in favor of abolishment, sought to offer a vision for how NEH might still address what had previously been viewed as a serious problem: the maintenance of high culture in a commercial society. Instead, they embraced the populist opposition to the idea of federal funding for culture pushed for by the Religious Right, a Republican constituency of increasing importance.

This turn of events reinforces Karol’s argument about how constituency shapes ideology, as well as his view about the limited role of intellectuals in driving position change.³ For scholars interested in developing further insights into the relation between elite ideas, intellectuals, ideology, and party position, the history of the NEH provides a rich case for inclusion in a broader study.

³ Karol, 188.

Gradual Institutional Change

Mahoney and Thelen, after developing their model of institutional change, invite other scholars to apply it to new cases and assess it empirically.⁴ Part II does just that, applying the concepts of conversion and drift to the NEH. But there is more empirical work that can be done regarding the NSF, NEA, and NEH to test and possibly refine their model. These three federal foundations began with a similar goal—to have the government fund projects on the basis of relevant expertise. They were all founded, moreover, at a time when the United States had achieved a high degree of national unity; the era in which the “vital center” reigned supreme.

Part II argued that the NEH had evolved in such a way that the chairman had the opportunity, much more so than at the NSF and NEA, to influence the direction of grant-making, even as the formal rules remained constant between presidential administrations. Republican appointees have taken advantage of various leverage points in the process, repurposing features of the agency to push grant-making in a more conservative and less multiculturalist direction—a case of conversion. Democratic appointees, in contrast, have allowed the agency’s processes to operate as designed and, as a result, fund work that reflects mainstream academic trends. Though the founders had intended the agency to fund mainstream academic work, what has since become the mainstream in the humanities is different than what the founders assumed, arguably making for a case of drift.

⁴ James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change,” in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, eds. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 32.

The comparative qualitative analysis of the three federal foundations in Part II suggests that the chairman of the NEH has been more empowered relative to his counterparts at the NEA and NSF. Yet a more in-depth comparison of how these institutions evolved and have implemented the directives found in their authorizing statutes could provide greater insight into institutional change. Moreover, it is possible that an empirical analysis of grant-making at NEA and NSF, similar to the analysis of the Fellowships for University Teachers program (chapter 9), could suggest that political leadership may influence the substance of grants at those agencies, too.

The chairmanship of Dana Gioia, who led the NEA from 2003 to 2008, might provide a fascinating case study in this regard. In an interview with a former NEH bureaucrat, I was told that Gioia effectively transformed NEA into an operating foundation. Under his leadership, NEA launched major national initiatives such as Shakespeare in American Communities, Jazz Masters, and American Masterpieces, in which local organizations applied to participate. Gioia's leadership resulted in the sponsorship of projects that were widely praised, including by conservative intellectuals.⁵ This approach differed markedly from the tactics pursued by Republican-appointed chairmen at the NEH. It is possible that the limits on the chairman of NEA over the agency's grant programs may have favored this approach. Mahoney and Thelen's model of "layering," in which new rules are introduced "on top of or alongside existing ones," may aptly characterize what happened at the NEA during the George W. Bush presidency.⁶ But it would take a sustained analysis to ascertain whether and to what extent this was the case.

⁵ Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham, eds., *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009), 149-162.

⁶ Mahoney and Thelen, 15-17.

WHAT WE CAN EXPECT FROM THE NEH

The refusal of the Republican House of Representatives in 2017 to vote to abolish the NEA and NEH, even when, for the first time, a Republican president proposed doing so, suggests that the cultural agencies have become durable institutions. Yet the agency's organizational maintenance is no longer based on a consensus about advancing a vision of cultural and spiritual uplift—nor has it been about that for quite some time. Though the importance of nurturing high culture was an idea that gained elite and popular support in the mid-1960s, it has since lacked a meaningful constituency and never acquired one. The organizational maintenance of the NEH has come to depend primarily on the influence of the state humanities councils, the reputation of the chairman, and the perception that NEH is serving particular communities such as Native Americans. When it comes to articulating a broader significance of the humanities, politicians seem to have coalesced around the notion of “heritage,” a term that is sufficiently vacuous to be inoffensive, as well as aligns with efforts to celebrate local and ethnic culture.

As NEH persists, its budget will likely remain far below what it was in the late 1970s—just before the culture wars began to escalate. Given the group compositions of the Democratic and Republican Parties, neither has a strong incentive to fight for greater funding for the NEA and NEH. The agency's budget grew the fastest in the early-to-mid 1970s. At the time, federal funding for culture was a “groupless” issue, and President Nixon backed the idea to burnish the GOP's image, or at the very least, his own. But today, given the importance of rural, southern, and Evangelical Americans to the GOP's coalition, it is harder to imagine that a Republican president would be inclined to champion the NEA and NEH. It is not inconceivable that the budget could grow

significantly, but this is most likely to come about because a president happens to think that the humanities are very important or makes the NEH part of a broader initiative that is not simply about the humanities. Recall, for example, that President George W. Bush helped increase the NEH's budget as part of a broader effort to promote civic education in response to 9-11. Democrats, beginning in the late 1970s, have often seemed more concerned with ensuring that a larger, more equitable portion of grants goes to their constituent groups such as women, labor unions, and racial and ethnic minorities, rather than expand the agency's budget overall.

Of the NEH's tiny budget, it is not inconceivable that a greater portion will be passed through to the state humanities councils. Because of the local programming that they sponsor and the placement of local influencers on their boards, they have become a dominant clientele. Now that the relationship is conceived as one of "partnership," it is easy to imagine that the councils will gradually push for as much as half of the agency's funding, especially if the overall budget remains flat or is reduced.

Within the interpretative work that NEH still funds, the ideological emphasis of grant-making will likely continue to seesaw between more conservative and mainstream academic trends, depending on whether the chairman is a Republican or a Democratic appointee. When Democratic appointees are in office, they will most likely manage the agency in a passive manner, rubberstamping what the staff-run grant-making process churns out. Republicans, in contrast, will likely be more vigilant in ferreting out applications that they deem tendentious, using the various leverage points at their disposal, including the proximity of the chairman to the division staff, grant guidelines to encourage certain kinds of applicants, and the National Council on the Humanities as a

second layer of review. It should be noted, however, that at least one conservative public intellectual has questioned President Trump's choice of John Parrish Peede to lead the agency, given his invocation of the importance of "inclusion" and of "breaking down barriers of race, of gender, of class," all progressive watchwords.⁷ Yet as of the writing of this dissertation, it is too early to assess the effects of his leadership on the NEH.

Partisans on both sides of the culture war may find this situation untenable, especially when the opposing political party is in power. Progressives will decry conservative chairmen for politicizing the NEH; conservatives will decry when progressive chairmen allow funding for projects that appear politically biased, frivolous, or anti-American. However, the status quo may be the best for which either side can hope.

It is difficult to conceive of administrative reforms that both sides would find acceptable and that would be guaranteed to serve either side's objectives over the long term. For example, recall that toward the end of Lynne Cheney's tenure, the National Humanities Alliance called for limiting the power of the chairman by having only a third of the National Council's members be appointed by the President and the rest chosen by Congress. In that moment, such a change may have limited Cheney, but the recommendation also reflected the politics of the time. In the early 1990s, Republicans had won the presidency in five of the previous six elections, while Democrats always controlled at least the House of Representatives. Since then, the political dynamics have been reversed, with Democrats winning the presidency more than Republicans, but

⁷ John Parrish Peede, "The Humanities in Relationship" (2017 National Humanities Conference, Boston, MA, November 4, 2017), <https://www.neh.gov/about/chairman/speeches/the-humanities-in-relationship>, quoted in Heather Mac Donald, "A Defender of the Humanities," *City Journal*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.city-journal.org/html/defender-humanities-15670.html>.

Republicans more often controlling Congress. Had the Alliance's plan gone into effect, for much of the Clinton and Obama administrations, the chairmen they appointed would have had to deal with Council members chosen partly by the Republican-controlled Congress. This reform would potentially have led to a confrontational situation between the chairman and the Council. The fact that the chairman can have Council members that are in line with his or her agenda may serve to help the NEH run more efficiently and less likely to have internal disputes.

As per the quotation from James Davison Hunter above, the politics of culture are mostly about politics. The sometimes bitter controversies over the nature and content of the humanities—defenders of Great Books versus defenders of multiculturalism—have had, to be sure, a bearing on the politics of the agency—particularly on the reputations of the chairmen who have led it. But at the same time, the controversies over the humanities themselves have, more often than not, been of marginal importance to the functioning and maintenance of the agency. This is partly because the NEH was designed not as a ministry of culture dedicated to an explicitly defined notion of art, literature, and scholarship, but more as a bureaucratic mechanism for distributing federal funds based on the recommendations of people outside of government. Though the founders of the agency had assumptions about what the humanities were and what such a federal foundation would likely sponsor, the actual institution they established was oriented more around processes than substantive notions of the humanities.

The agency and its professional staff embraced this understanding of the NEH from the get-go. With the understanding that “we make grants,” the staff has focused on keeping the internal processes moving—receiving applications (often far more than the

agency can fund), assembling panels of outside reviewers, convening them in Washington, preparing recommendations for the National Council on the Humanities, having the Council meet in Washington, and then, once the chairman makes decisions, continue with the process anew. Even when conservative, Republican-appointed chairmen have sought to steer the NEH away from funding progressive scholarship and programs, their actions have been subtle. This is not to say that their actions are inconsequential; as chapter nine argues, they are not. But chairmen such as William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and Bruce Cole have still had to work within a set of formal rules that remain the same.

In conclusion, the politics of the NEH have reached a new equilibrium. Conflicting visions of cultural uplift are no longer central to the debate, nor are concerns about “elitism” or “populism” in grant-making. Politicians are focused far more on who gets funding, regardless of what it is spent on, with an inclination to pass greater portions of the budget to their local constituents through the state councils. Meanwhile, the progressive or orthodox thrust of grant-making will likely shift when the administration changes parties, and then back again once a new administration comes in. Some lovers of the humanities may be disappointed by the declining importance of the substance of the humanities in the politics of the humanities. But in the absence of a cultural consensus, perhaps the NEH, in its present form, is the most that a culturally divided democracy can expect of a cultural agency.

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Amy Bridges (former NEH panelist), July 31, 2013.

Cordelia Candelaria (former NEH staffer), July 22, 2014.

Harold Cannon (former NEH director, Division of Research Programs, Office of Preservation, Office of Challenge Grants), June 27, 2014.

Paul Cantor (former member, National Council on the Humanities), August 14, 2013.

Robert Cheatham (former CEO, Humanities Tennessee), September 4, 2015.

Bruce Cole (former NEH chairman), April 15, 2016.

Celeste Colgan (former NEH deputy chairman; former member, National Council on the Humanities), April 29, 2016.

Marion Cott (executive director, Kansas Humanities Council), June 29, 2015.

Joseph Duffey (former NEH chairman), May 23, 2014.

Diane Eisenberg (former NEH staffer), May 28, 2014.

Richard Ekman (former director, NEH Division of Education Programs), June 30, 2014.

Joy Evans (former NEH staffer), June 27, 2013.

George Farr (former director, NEH Division of Preservation and Access), July 17, 2014.

William Ferris (former NEH chairman), April 29, 2016.

Loren Ghiglione (former NEH staffer), July 30, 2014.

Nancy Giglione (former NEH staffer), August 1, 2014.

Dana Gioia (former NEA chairman), February 2, 2017.

Allen Guelzo (former member, National Council on the Humanities), July 29, 2013.

Timothy Gunn (former NEH staffer), June 30, 2014.

John Hale (former NEH staffer), August 4, 2014.

Jason Hall (former NEH congressional liaison), March 24, 2015.

John Hammer (former executive director, National Humanities Alliance), August 13, 2013.

Andrew Hazlett (former NEH chairman's office staffer), August 2, 2013.

Arnita Jones (former NEH staffer), June 24, 2014.

James Jones (former NEH program officer), July 3, 2014.

Leon Kass (former member, National Council on the Humanities), July 9, 2013.

Stanley Katz (president emeritus, American Council on Learned Societies), July 25, 2013.

Robert Kingston (former deputy chairman), April 30, 2014.

Gail Leftwich Kitch (former president, Federation of State Humanities Councils), January 22, 2016.

Kenneth Kolson (former deputy director, NEH Division of Education Programs and Division of Research), August 20, 2013.

James Leach (former NEH chairman), May 25, 2016.

Thomas Lindsay (former NEH deputy chairman), June 11, 2013.

Janice Litwin (former NEH staffer), August 6, 2014.

Esther Mackintosh (president, Federation of State Humanities Councils), September 11, 2015.

Joyce Lee Malcolm (former director, NEH Division of Research Programs), May 2, 2016.

Edie Manza (former director, NEH Office of Federal/State Partnership), January 5, 2016.

Glenn Marcus (former NEH staffer), August 7, 2014.

Wilfred McClay (former member, National Council on the Humanities), April 22, 2016.

Lynne Munson (former NEH deputy chairman and special assistant to the chairman), March 31, 2015.

Larry Myers (director, NEH Office of Planning and Budget), July 2 and August 1, 2013.

Mary Beth Norton (former member, National Council on the Humanities), May 6, 2016.

Leonard Oliver (former NEH program officer), May 21, 2014.

Joseph Phelan (NEH staffer), July 11, 2013.

Thomas Phelps (former NEH staffer), July 8, 2014.

Michael Poliakoff (former NEH program officer), May 6, 2016.

Clement Price (member, Obama transition team for NEH), July 23, 2013.

William Rice (former director, NEH Division of Education Programs), April 1, 2016.

Malcolm Richardson (former NEH senior partnership officer), June 21, 2013; January 27, 2015.

Thomas Roberts (former executive director, Rhode Island Council on the Humanities), January 8, 2016.

Roger Rosenblatt (former director, NEH Division of Education Programs), June 21, 2014.

Mark Rothenberg (former historian, National Science Foundation), April 19, 2016.

Marsha Semmel (former NEH program officer and director, Division of Public Programs), January 15, 2016.

Bruce Sievers (former member, National Council on the Humanities; former director, Montana and California state humanities councils), December 28, 2015; April 25, 2016.

Anita Silvers (former member, National Council on the Humanities), April 29, 2016.

B. J. Stiles (former director, NEH Division of State Programs), August 26, 2015.

James Stoner (former member, National Council on the Humanities), March 21, 2016.

Armen Tashdinian (former NEH staffer), August 16, 2013.

David Tebaldi (executive director, Mass Humanities), February 10, 2016.

Julie Van Camp (former NEH program officer), August 5, 2014.

Steven Weiland (former executive director, Federation of State Humanities Councils), July 21, 2015.

Steven Wheatley (vice president, American Council of Learned Societies), December 18, 2014.

Peter Wood (president, National Association of Scholars), December 22, 2014.

Jamil Zainaldin (former president, Georgia Humanities Council; former president, Federation of State Humanities Councils), June 10, 2015.

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House of Representatives. Committee on Education and Labor. *National Arts and Humanities Foundations: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 334, H.R. 2043, H.R. 3617, and similar bills, Part 2*. 89th Cong., 1st sess., February 24; March 22, 23, and 24, 1965.

House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1968: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 2*. 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967.

Senate and House of Representatives. *Arts and Humanities Amendments of 1967: Joint Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate and the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives on S. 2061 and H.R. 11308, Part 1*. 90th Cong. 1st sess., July 12 and 13 1967.

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- House of Representatives and Senate. *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Amendments of 1973: Joint Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on the Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate and the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives on S. 795, S. 916, S. H.R. 3926, H.R. 4288, Part 1*. 93rd Cong., 1st sess., March 6, 7, and 8, 1973.
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- House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. *Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1991: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Part 12*. 101st Cong., 2d. sess., 1990.
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