



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

# Humanities Overview

The Endowment was created by the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 following recommendations by the National Commission on the Humanities, which had determined that a disproportionate federal emphasis placed on science and science education endangered the study of the humanities from elementary schools through postgraduate programs.

**WHAT DO WE DO?** NEH supports research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities by funding top-rated competitive, peer-reviewed proposals as determined by independent, external reviewers. At an annual cost of about 50 cents per capita, NEH brings high-quality historical and cultural experiences to large and diverse audiences in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and five territories.

## **WHAT ARE THE HUMANITIES?**

As defined in NEH's enabling legislation, the humanities include the study and interpretation of languages, literature, history, philosophy, comparative religion, the history and criticism of the arts, and related fields of study.

## **WHY ARE THE HUMANITIES IMPORTANT?**

As NEH's legislation makes clear, "An advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future." Democracy, citizenship, and the humanities are inextricably linked. Especially in our increasingly pluralistic society, the humanities are essential to a shared understanding of what it means to be an American.

## **WHAT ROLE DO WE PLAY IN THE AMERICAN QUALITY OF LIFE?**

Over the past 46 years, NEH has played an essential role in advancing the nation's understanding and appreciation of the humanities. With NEH support, scholars and cultural organizations have:

- Undertaken research leading to the publication of more than 7,000 books, 16 of which have won Pulitzer Prizes, including James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom*, and 20 of which have received Bancroft prizes.
- Produced major reference works such as the highly acclaimed Dictionary of American Regional English.
- Supported archaeological excavations leading to the discovery of the original fort at Jamestown, the tomb of King Midas, and a lost language of the North coast of Peru.
- Edited and begun to digitize the papers of George Washington, Dwight Eisenhower, and nine other presidents, as well as eminent figures such as Mark Twain, George C. Marshall, Jane Addams, Albert Einstein, and Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Mounted major exhibitions that have traveled the country, including the blockbuster "Treasures of Tutankhamen" seen by five million people and the recent "Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul."
- Digitized millions of newspaper pages from the earliest days of the republic, thereby preserving and making accessible to the public the "first rough draft" of history.
- Trained 95,598 teachers and professors on topics such as Congress and American History and Shakespeare in the Classroom.
- Played a pivotal role in the creation of a new branch of scholarship, the digital humanities.
- Produced acclaimed documentaries such as Ken Burns' *The Civil War*.