

Division of Fellowships and Seminars
National Endowment for the Humanities
Washington, DC 20506

Fellowships for University Teachers: Senior

Assessment of Application by Walter H. Capps,
Department of Religious Studies,
University of California--Santa Barbara,
for Sabbatical Leave Fellowship,

"Religious Studies: The Making of an Intellectual Discipline"

As concerns his interest in the humanities, attested by his long (and acclaimed) record of teaching in the humanities, his active involvement in projects and agencies promoting them, and the scholarship he has brought to bear in doing so, Walter Capps' record is perhaps second to none. His c.v. speaks for itself; but I know personally from working with him in the Council for the Study of Religion in the period 1977-84, when he was President and I the Executive Officer, his deep commitment to the humanities and his skill in interpreting them both to insiders and outsiders. He was appointed to the presidency because of his reputation in the field of religious studies; his work for the Council enhanced that reputation and added to his expertise. I believe the project he is proposing to the Endowment is a significant one, extremely so for religious studies, but certainly for the humanities generally as well. As Capps' proposal makes clear, there is a considerable literature examining the genesis, formation, and growth of religious studies as an academic field. I have contributed some of it myself, first to the "Welch Report" (Claude Welch, Graduate Education in Religion [1971]), then the Council on the Study of Religion Directory of Departments and Programs of Religious Studies in North America (1978, 1981, 1985), and more recently most of the article on religion as an academic discipline in the Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience (1988). I am currently completing my chapters for a volume reviewing the state of the art of religious studies in Ontario that I am co-authoring with two professors from Queen's University professors as part of a state-of-the-art review of religious studies across Canada. The extensive work I did on the history of the study of religion in Ontario, relating it to the culture and intellectual history of the province and of Canada generally, as well as my earlier work, have made clear to me that despite the literature on the subject there is none that does what Capps proposes, with the depth and thoroughness that he would bring to it had he the time to do so. The development of religious studies cannot be understood apart from the intellectual currents of the past two centuries--the

approach and time period that Capps proposes. Given the perduring importance of religion in the Western world, and the urgent need in our day for Westerners to understand its manifestations in the non-Western world where religion, politics, and culture are often so intricately intertwined, a thoroughgoing genetic examination of religious studies--the academic field that devotes itself to such understanding--seems to me fairly important to humanistic scholarship. I find Capps' proposal well conceived and well presented, rather much the way I would do it, although my own predilections would tempt me into looking more closely at social matrices than Capps evidently intends--but then I would probably never finish, and neither would he inasmuch as his present second-draft manuscript of the study already numbers 800 pages. Those data--second draft and 800 pages--suggest strongly to me that Capps would complete the project during a sabbatical. Without such leave--away from Santa Barbara and the United States--I doubt seriously that he would: I know from working with him the many requests for assistance, consultation, and the like that come his way because of his expertise, and which he finds it difficult not to honor. Therefore, I would hope that the Endowment honors his request for a sabbatical-leave fellowship.

Signature Harold Remus Date: July 30, 1990

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