CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

HUMANITIES

415/391-1474

Dear Walt,

Thanks for the rubbers (galoshes)...and for the articles. They were both inspiring (the articles, that is). After our conversation Friday evening, I called home and decided I was needed more there than in Santa Barbara. Unfortunately, my plane sat on the runway from 8:45 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. I got home, grumpy but glad to be there, about 3:30!

The Vietnam/Reading and Discussion proposal was rejected --again--apparently by the Chair--again. I'm stubborn, but I may have to find an alternative avenue until Dr. Cheney is gone.

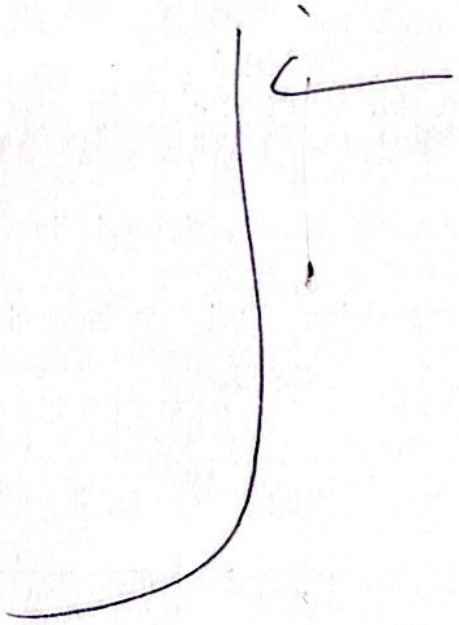
Please let me know the next time you'll be in the Bay Area. I'd like to arrange a meeting with Marty Krasny, who once ran the Aspen Institute programs, and talk about what a Public Humanities Center should/could do. If they close the Presidio up here, one of those buildings could be the Center.

As always, thanks for the invitation and the fellowship. I had a great time with the class and a wonderful time with

312 Sutter Street Suite 601 San Francisco, CA 94108

you and Lois.

See you on March 2!



James Quay
February 10, 1989
U.C. Santa Barbara

Conference: "Professing the Humanities Today: Paradigm Change and the Institutional Framework"
Session: "Further Reflections on the Scholar in Society"

The Learning Society and the New American Legacy

With the assurance that your participation will not be seen as an endorsement of cultural literacy, I'd like to conduct a brief survey. How many of you are familiar with Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind? [many hands] Don Hirsch's Cultural Literacy? [slightly fewer hands] Merrill Peterson's The Humanities and the American Promise? [very few hands] Lynne Cheney's Humanities in America? [a few more hands] I'm here today, as a civilian, to speak about the subject of the two reports that have not been widely read: the humanities for the adult public.

Academic arguments rarely make news or sell books, but in the last six years, arguments over school curricula have done both. When Don Hirsch published his article on cultural literacy in 1983, discussion about the curriculum was still confined to the campuses, but by the next year, William Bennett had used the first of his three "bully pulpits" to move the argument into public view, first by publishing a list of "30 books every high school student should read," then by issuing a report challenging teachers to "reclaim a legacy." By the time Hirsch published his book on Cultural Literacy in 1987, Allan Bloom had written his way to the best seller list by accusing people like you of closing American minds and abandoning the classics. Only last spring, campus debate over a required Western Culture course at Stanford University grabbed national headlines when Bennett criticized the Stanford faculty for replacing some of the "dead white guys" who once monopolized the course with some women and non-European authors.

Whatever you may think of the merits of their case, Bloom and Bennett

seized the offensive early and have framed the debate in the public's mind. Until last month, the scholarly response was sporadic and unorganized. Thus, late as it is, Speaking for the Humanities is a welcome addition, and while it is too early to tell if it will attract the same kind of attention as Bloom and Bennett did, they have at least been answered. Readers of the latest Chronicle of Higher Education know that the report has already provoked a response from NEH Chair Lynne Cheney (February 8, 1989 p. A40).

Speaking for the Humanities addresses a number of charges levelled at humanities scholars, but I'll limit myself to the debate over a core curriculum. The report's authors don't think the old core of great books can or should be retained. "We have learned to ask whether universalist claims do not in face promote as a norm the concerns of a particular group and set aside as partial and limited those of other groups" (Speaking for the Humanities, p. 16). If you read only classics by European white males, you expose students to a perspective limited to one gender and one race, and in today's multi-cultural America, this kind of ethnocentric reading list just won't do.

Both sides in the debate assume important connections exist between the curriculum, American culture, and American democracy, connections which my limited time forces me to assume rather than argue for. The ACLS writers would say that students in this democracy must be exposed to cultural diversity, while Bennett and Bloom would insist they be exposed to a common legacy. In quiet moments, and we need some quiet moments, I think both sides would agree that we shouldn't have to choose between a common legacy and cultural diversity, especially in a nation where diversity is a legacy.

In fact, scholars have been reclaiming a legacy, albeit one quite different from the one William Bennett has in mind: what I shall call "the New American Legacy." This Legacy includes the great books of Western Europe, to be sure, but it also includes perspectives found in books that have never been called "great" and perspectives that never found their way into books at all, perspectives of women, people of color, and working class people. The New American Legacy must include these perspectives as it must include the traditional legacy that the new perspectives supplement, criticize, and alter.

Unfortunately, it is easier to add to the legacy than it is to add to the list of requirements. There are only so many courses a student can be required to take and only so many books you can require in those courses. Thus for every work representing a new perspective which is added to the required list, a "classic" must be removed. A gain for one side means a loss for the other.

I won't comment further on the problem you face as professors making curricular choices, except to say that, given limitations of time and space, the choices are only likely to get more difficult. But I am convinced that even the best of solutions will not provide students with as much of the New American Legacy as they need. Your students will require continuing exposure to that legacy after they leave your campuses. Their parents need it now. Whether you feel that your students need to read more Great Books or more new perspectives, your curriculum must be supplemented by programs for adults.

Now I understand why the ACLS regards Lynne Cheney as unfriendly, but

while her politics are conservative, her instincts are populist, as Bloom's and Bennett's are not, and in her report, she praises scholars for their work in public humanities programs. A network of institutions she calls "the Parallel School"--museums, libraries, public television, historical societies, and state humanities councils--is busy creating programs that bring both the great books and new perspectives to adults. These programs--in the form of exhibits, literary and documentary films, radio programs, lecture series, reading-and-discussion groups--are doing for adults what college courses do for students: exposing them to the experience of people in times, places, and skins quite different from their own. As citizens of an increasingly multi-cultural America, we need such exposure, lots of it, and the popularity of such programs proves that the need and passion for the humanities does not end with graduation.

The most effective education report of the decade, A Nation at Risk, strongly endorsed the need for more adult education, but though an astonishing number of its recommendations were acted on by state legislatures and educational agencies, its broadest injunction--"Educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society"--has gone largely unnoticed (A Nation at Risk, p. 13).

The term "learning society" is the title of Robert Hutchins' last book, written twenty years ago, and describes, in the words of A Nation at Risk, "a society committed to a set of values and to a system of education that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity, from early childhood through adulthood, learning more as the world itself changes" (p. 13). Writing in 1968, Hutchins assumed that growing affluence,

a dissolving class structure, and an increase in leisure time were combining to make education every adult's birthright. In the 1990s, these assumptions need to be re-examined and revised, but I think the accelerating rate of demographic change, unforeseen by Hutchins, has only made the need for a Learning Society--and the New American Legacy--more immperative.

Though there have always been scholars sympathetic to public programs, I am encouraged by renewed interest in adult education recently shown by distinguished scholars. Cheney's Humanities in America, for instance, actually complements an earlier report by historian Merrill Peterson entitled The Humanities and the American Promise. Where Cheney presents anecdotes, Peterson presents an argument which echoes the man he has devoted his scholarly life to, Thomas Jefferson: "an appeciation of the thought and expression of American culture is an imperative of good citienship in this democracy" (Humanities and the American Promise, p. 5). Philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre, in a lecture entitled "How to be a North American," offers a slightly different rationale. "Like members of all other societies," he writes

> we need to share in a common conversation and to understand each other as participating in a common enterprise whose one story is the story of us all, so that our present conversation emerges from the extended, complex but nonetheless in some ways continuous debates of the past. Yet those of us in America who come together do so from a variety of cultures, with a heterogeneous variety of pasts and a variety of stories to tell. If we do not recover and identify with the particularities of our own community...then we shall lose what it is that we have to contribute to the common culture. (pp. 11-12)

Both Peterson and MacIntyre, and Don HIrsch as well, assume important connections between civic or cultural or multi-cultural literacy and the

survival of American democracy. I am convinced that Hirsch, MacIntyre, and Peterson can be kneaded into a coherent rationale for adult humanities programs. This task needs more care and sustained study than I can give it, however, and I hope that a cooperative venture by the ACLS and the Federation of State Humanities Councils, the Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities, will make the articulation of such a rationale a high priority.

If this task is as important to the health of this country as Peterson, MacIntyre and I think they are, we shall need much more than a rationale. We shall need commitments from the institutions of both the Parallel School and higher education in to create and enhance the Learning Society in this country. We shall need an institution dedicated to the study and support of the public humanities, for though dozens of new humanities centers are being established all over the country, not <u>one</u> of these new centers has the public humanities as its primary focus. The NEH and the Federation of State Humanities Councils have not, perhaps cannot, provide this function and the National Humanities Center takes little interest in it as well. I believe we need a Public Humanities Center, here on the West Coast, to provide research and development for such programs and to survey the content and impact of the many programs now funded <u>ad hoc</u> by NEH and the state humanities councils.

There are some steps that can be taken now. I appeal to directors of campus humanities centers to reach out to public audiences whenever possible. I know at times it seems a full-time job just reaching out to the campus community, and I know too that not all conferences or symposia will

be appropriate for the general public, but there are surely topics that will benefit from having intelligent nonprofessionals on the dais or in the The audience. One of the consequences of President Gardner's systemwide humanities initiative is that proposals to CCH from UC departments or institutes has fallen to almost zero. This is understandable: why go through the Council's application process, when adequate funds are available from a campus center or the Humanities Research Institute? From the Council's perspective, the drop in proposals from U.C. is not bad news, unless it means that U.C. sponsors no longer feel an imperative to reach the public with their programs.

Secondly, the reward system needs modification. While updating its file of California Humanities scholars, CCH recently sent out a simple survey. I have 200 responses and though I can't claim the percentages are representative, I think the weighting of the responses is significant. About half of the respondents had never participated in a public humanities program, but they would be willing to. 98% thought such participation was an extension of their responsibilites as teachers, 96% thought it an extension of their responsibilties as scholars, and 94% saw it as an extension of their responsibilities as citizens. Very few saw it as a distraction from either their scholarship or their teaching. U.C. professors as a class, by the way, varied from the others very little.

Scholars participated in public programs despite their overwhelming conviction that their participation influenced promotion and tenure not at all. Two-thirds thought it influenced their scholarship positively and more than three-quarters thought it influenced their teaching positively. Not

one respondent thought it influenced their teaching negatively. So you won't hear any scholar-bashing from me. I know of too many examples of scholars surrendering honoraria when a project runs into budget difficulties or bringing their material to public venues for little or no reward. But again, if this work is as important to the national interest as I think it is, it should be professionally recognized and rewarded.

Like a good child of the sixties, then, I want to ask you to "ask not only what your culture can do for you, but what you can do for your culture"; however, like a good adult in the eighties, I'll temper this appeal to public interest with an appeal to self-interest. If this survey is sound, scholars report that participating in adult programs is good for teaching and good for scholarship. It is also pleasing to legislators, who don't always understand the need to increase humanities research budgets. Unlike scientists and engineers, humanists will never fatten their research budgets with appeals to national defense. And even the imperative of a New American Legacy will never bring funds equal to those of Star Wars. Nevertheless, public programs are demonstrably popular with public officials concern with their constituents.

Those constituents care about the humanities. Early this week I visited a reading and discussion group that began five years ago. A UC Extension Great Books discussion class was left stranded when their instructor refused to go beyond the 16th century and UC Extension couldn't find anyone to replace him. Members of the class went out, located a scholar, and continued on their own. Why? I wanted to know. One was a scholar gypsy, no longer in academe, who didn't want to lose touch with

serious literature. Others said they wanted to keep their brains alive. Their work was technical or fragmentary, and they wanted a leisure activity that was both analytical and social. Others liked the kind of discussion that ensued when the only reward was knowledge of the book and each other's company: no course requirements, no credits, no grades, no degrees. You remember those kinds of discussions? They're the kind that made many of us become humanists in the first place. These discussions need to be informed by the new perspectives as well.

What I'm calling for is nothing so grand as a paradigm shift; rather it is a recognition of a national cultural and educational priority to reach adults with humanities programs. Here in California, our problem is not so much to fill a void as to elbow our way in among dozens of competing entertainments, but the record shows that a growing number of adults, when exposed to solid humanities programs, will attend. If it's important to American democracy that we get the Great Books and the new perspectives to American students, it's just as important to get them to American adults. Thank you.

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"Community in Orange County"

continued from p.2

the notion that living a morally coherent life is purely private, that it is something you do by yourself all alone. And that certain things occur in the public sphere having to do with the provision of the wherewithall to allow you to think about those things in a private life. That makes a certain sense with respect to the state and the economy. But when it begins to be the major notion of education, we're really in trouble. If education is about skills and competence and competitiveness and math scores and computer literacy, then it's emptied out of what education has always meant, which has to do with character and citizenship and a sense of where one stands in relation to the past and what it is to lead a good ethical life. So certainly the educational institutions have to have a much deeper sense of what this real core is which we call the humanities.

"If education is about skills and competence and competitiveness and math scores and computer literacy, then it's emptied out of what education has always meant, which has to do with character and citizenship and a sense of where one stands in relation to the past and what it is to lead a good ethical life."

Quay: Is there a size beyond which we are not talking about a community anymore? I remember one woman at the meeting said that the strangest thing about southern California was that there wasn't any sense of a division. You couldn't tell when your community or township ended and another one began. Is a boundary of some kind necessary to the existence of community?
Bellah: I think there does have to be a sense of boundary. It certainly is true that one kind of community requires that you know the people, that you have a sense of who they are, that you recognize them in that sense of knowing their name—at least that much. But there is also this wonderful capacity we have to generalize. For some people the world is their community. I do think there is a capacity to move well beyond the face-to-face situations in ways that are not entirely vacuous.
Quay: And that would still be community?
Bellah: The danger of the word "community" is that for many people it means only the face-to-face. But we need to insist that we are concerned with recovering a much stronger sense of the public, of participation in the whole fate of humanity and certainly in the whole fate of this nation. We don't just mean we want to have strong families and strong churches and leave the rest of the world out.

Orange County Organizations

continued from p.1

The Jewish Community Center of South Orange County will present a day of storytelling as two popular dramas of the old Yiddish theater, "The Golem of Prague," and "The Dybbuk" will be dramatically introduced by an artist/folklore scholar who will also give a slide presentation on the history of some Eastern European communities. These traditional narratives focus on the themes of community survival as well as on individual and community relationships. For more information about the program which will be held on May 21 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center, 298 Broadway, Laguna Beach, contact Sherry Leiter at (714) 497-2070.

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by James Quay

Executive Director of CCH

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Whatever you may think of the merits of their case, Bloom and Bennett seized the offensive early and have framed the debate in the public's mind. Until last month, the scholarly response was sporadic and unorganized. Thus, late as it is, *Speaking for the Humanities*, the ACLS Occasional Paper just released, is a welcome addition, and while it is too early to tell if it will attract the same kind of attention as Bloom and Bennett did, they have at least been answered. Readers of the latest *Chronicle of Higher Education* know that the report has already provoked a response from NEH Chairman Lynne Cheney (February 8, 1989).

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"In quiet moments, and we need some quiet moments, I think both sides would agree that we should not have to choose between a common legacy and cultural diversity, especially in a nation where diversity is *a legacy."*

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The Learning Society

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School and higher education in order to create and enhance the Learning Society in this country. We shall need an institution dedicated to the study and support of the public humanities, for though dozens of new humanities centers are being established all over the country, not *one* of these new centers has the public humanities as its primary focus. The NEH and the Federation of State Humanities Councils have not, perhaps cannot, provide this function and the National Humanities Center takes little interest in it as well. I believe we need a Public Humanities Center, here on the West Coast, to provide research and development for such programs and to survey the content and impact of the many programs now funded *ad hoc* by NEH and the state humanities councils.

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The above address was presented at the conference, "Professing the Humanities Today: Paradigm Change and the Institutional Framework" sponsored by the Interdisciplinary Humanities Institute at UC Santa Barbara on February 10. The session Dr. Quay participated in was titled, "Further Reflections on the Scholar in Society."