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from Judith O'Sullivan
June 1983

In establishing the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1965, Congress defined the agency's mission as the encouragement of scholarship and education in and the fostering of public understanding and appreciation of the humanities. While avoiding an overarching definition of the term, it identified the humanities as a body of disciplines. Further, Congress has established other agencies which help to make clear its intent regarding the NEE. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts supports the arts, the National Science Foundation supports the sciences and the social sciences, and a host of agencies deal with matters of social welfare. The NEE is the only Federal agency devoted both broadly and exclusively to the support of the humanities.

✓ [The mission of the state committees, like that of the Endowment as a whole, is carried out by granting funds. Through their review of grant proposals and through the projects that they fund, committees fulfill their mandate. Committees and the Endowment, therefore, must return again and again in the review of projects to the fundamental question--Is it the humanities? We must carefully distinguish a humanities project from one that is primarily in the arts or the social sciences, or one that is essentially humanitarian in its intent. We must avoid bias or advocacy in our projects. Whereas analysis and judgment are at the heart of work in the humanities, these judgments must be arrived at in a reasoned and disciplined manner. We must be thoughtful about the use of scholars in funded projects. They must participate as scholars, bringing the knowledge and skills of their disciplines to bear upon the subject at hand, and not as individuals expressing intuitive thoughts and personal opinions.