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Nomination Hearing (1993)

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## Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): News Article 01

Stephen Burd

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# THE CHRONICLE

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"Why doesn't this country have a 98-per-cent literacy rate? We know how to do that."

DePaul U.'s dean of education: A19

"Graduate students interested in conducting research on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust find it virtually impossible to do so in many history departments."

The senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum: A52

"I think that when we get past the PC thing, we can address the real problem, which is the lack of intellectual curiosity in the university."

Dean of the graduate faculty at the New School for Social Research: A15

"The time has come to stop covering up these civil-rights violations and to make some concrete changes in the responsibilities of the schools."

An advocate for disabled people, on the bias they face at colleges: A18

"One residence-hall staff member confronted an intoxicated, disruptive student rumored to have a gun. When I asked why he had not called the police, he said,

"We're not allowed to call the police."

A professor, on crime and harassment in residence halls: B1

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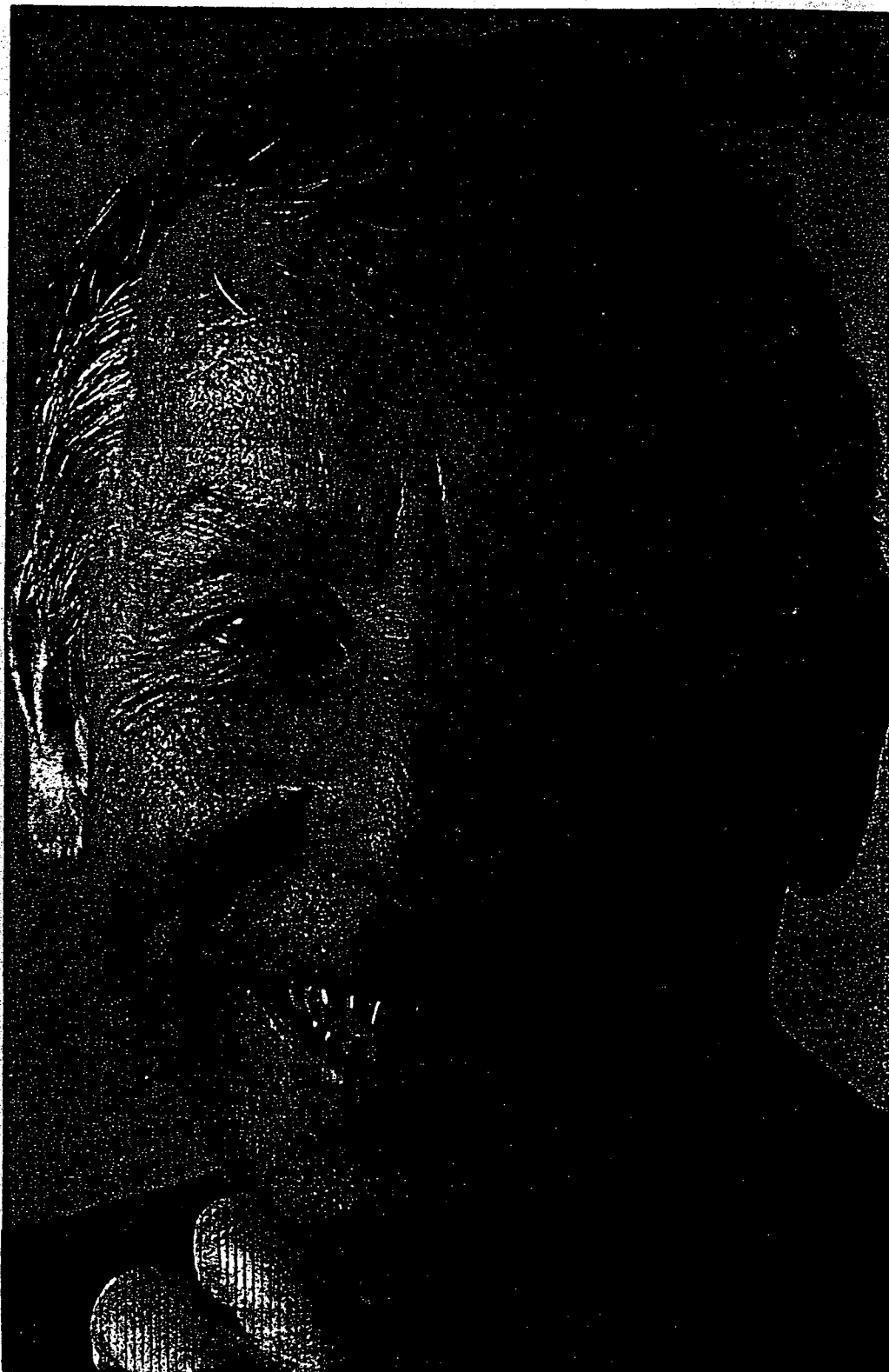
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ARND BRONKHORST FOR THE CHRONICLE

# Clinton Names U. of Pennsylvania Chief to Take Over Humanities Endowment

Scholars praise Hackney as even-handed, moderate

By Stephen Burd

**P**RESIDENT CLINTON last week nominated the president of the University of Pennsylvania, Sheldon Hackney, to be chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Mr. Hackney issued a statement saying he was "honored," but he declined to comment further until he is confirmed by the Senate.

Higher-education lobbyists and humanities scholars welcomed the nomination, especially praising Mr. Hackney for being fair and having an open ear to both traditional and innovative approaches to scholarship.

Liberal scholars, who frequently clashed with endowment leaders in the Reagan and Bush Administrations, were gleeful about the change at the NEH. "It is not a secret that the Reagan and Bush appointees were rigid ideologues who created an atmosphere of siege and combat," said Jon Wiener, a professor of history at the University of California at Irvine. "Sheldon Hackney is going to end the state of siege, depoliticize the endowment, and return it to the old-fashioned standards of quality—the kind of quality that is recognized in the university, which includes multiculturalism and gender studies."

## 'EMINENTLY FAIR AND REASONABLE'

Mr. Wiener said he had thought of Mr. Hackney as an "eminently fair and reasonable person" ever since Mr. Hackney flunked him for a history course he took at Princeton University. "He was absolutely

WASHINGTON



MARCY KATE FOR THE CHRONICLE

Jon Wiener, a professor of history at U. of California at Irvine: "Sheldon Hackney is going to end the state of siege."

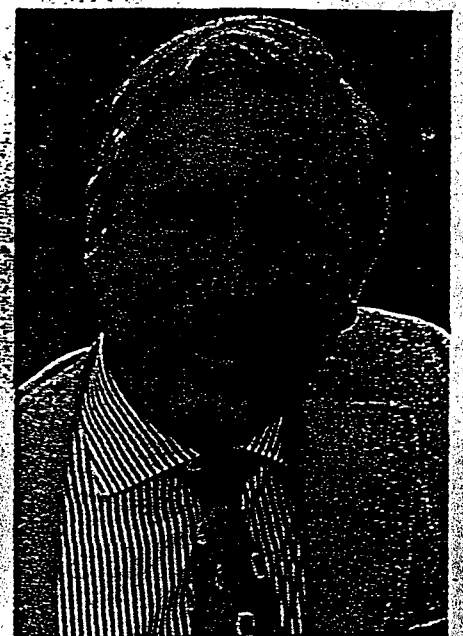
mind in the spring of 1966," Mr. Wiener said.

The president of Brown University, Vartan Gregorian, who recommended Mr. Hackney for the job, said: "Sheldon Hackney will be an excellent choice. He is judicious and reflective, and has high standards. You cannot ask for more."

## REPUTATION AS A MODERATE

Advocates of a traditional curriculum said they were not displeased by the choice. They cited Mr. Hackney's stature in academe and his reputation as a moderate.

"On some aspects of educational policy, he marches to a different drummer than we do," said Stephen H. Balch, president of



MURRAY HAYNES FOR THE CHRONICLE

John Agresto, president of St. John's College: Some fear that the new leadership may revert to a liberal populism—the humanities as "ethnic food fairs."

"But he is an intelligent, open-minded man of integrity, and, as president of one of our leading universities, he is certainly a figure of genuine stature in higher education."

Still, traditional scholars, who celebrated the endowment's conservative tilt under William J. Bennett and Lynne V. Cheney, said they had concerns about the directions the endowment could now take. Some worry that Mr. Hackney, as a former university president, may turn the NEH into a cash cow for such professional academic societies as the Modern Language Association and the American Council of Learned Societies.

Others fear that the new leadership may soften the focus on serious scholarship and instead revert to what they call the liberal

## Government &amp; Politics

## Clinton Picks U. of Pennsylvania Chief to Take Over Humanities Endowment

*Continued From Preceding Page*  
populism of the endowment in the Carter Administration—the humanities as “ethnic food fairs,” said John Agresto, the president of St. John’s College in New Mexico.

### SPEECH AND HARASSMENT CODES

Still others were troubled by the imposition of speech and harassment codes at the University of Pennsylvania under Mr. Hackney’s leadership. The university’s policy punishes “abusive language or conduct” aimed at causing “direct injury to an identifiable individual, on the basis of his or her race, ethnicity, or national origin.” This policy is less severe than an earlier version, which was abandoned after a federal court ruled that a similar policy at the University of Michigan was unconstitutional.

Some faculty members said the codes did not reflect the sensitivity to academic and intellectual freedom that Mr. Hackney espouses. “There seems to be a gap between Mr. Hackney’s beliefs and the behavior of some of his subordinates at the university,” Mr. Balch said.

For that reason, he added, “it will be worth watching carefully his ability to lead the staff at the NEH to make sure that they reflect the open-minded outlook Mr. Hackney has—to insure that scholarly work is not judged according to a political agenda.”

Mr. Hackney, who is well regarded as an expert in the history of the South, has been Penn’s president since 1981. He has won praise there for raising close to \$1-billion in the last five years, completing the university’s conversion to a residential college, and improving

its undergraduate education. He has regularly taught a history course for undergraduates.

But Mr. Hackney has been criticized by a number of professors there for not being a dynamic academic leader.

In moving to Washington, Mr. Hackney is taking a dramatic pay cut. He earned \$285,000 in academic 1991-92, according to the university’s federal tax form. The NEH chairman earns \$123,100 a year.

### NO SURPRISE

Mr. Hackney’s nomination came as no surprise to humanities researchers and lobbyists, who have been predicting that he would be named since February.

Speculation about who would be chosen started in December, the day after Mrs. Cheney announced that she would step down after six years. (Despite the election of Mr. Clinton in November, Mrs. Cheney could have served for two more years.)

Lobbyists for the humanities immediately flooded the Clinton transition team with the names of potential chairmen, but it was not until early February that Mr. Hackney expressed interest in the position. Reportedly he first backed the candidacy of Gary B. Nash, a professor of history at the University of California at Los Angeles, but then, for unknown reasons, decided to jump in himself.

Sources familiar with the process say the transition team first approached Mr. Gregorian of Brown University, who turned down the offer. In an interview, Mr. Gregorian would not confirm that he had ever been asked to take the job, but

said that he had taken himself out of consideration in December because of commitments to Brown.

Mr. Hackney leaped to the top of the heap as soon as he indicated he was interested, the sources said. Primarily, this was because the Administration was intent on choosing a candidate with impressive scholarly credentials. Humanities lobbyists and researchers point out that Mr. Hackney also has close ties with the President.

Mr. Hackney's wife, Lucy Jenkins Durr Hackney, served on the board of the Children's Defense Fund with Hillary Rodham Clinton. According to the Federal Election Commission, Mrs. Hackney donated \$1,000 to Mr. Clinton during the Democratic primaries last spring.

#### OCTOBER ENDORSEMENT

Mr. Hackney joined 222 other college presidents, administrators, and trustees in October in publicly endorsing Mr. Clinton over George Bush in the Presidential campaign. Mr. Hackney said at the time that he had never previously made a political endorsement while serving as a college president.

"These are unusual times and the country is in something of a crisis," he said then, explaining his decision to endorse Mr. Clinton. He said that he liked the Arkansas Governor's economic program and his national-service proposal.

When the search for an NEH chairman started, many humanities scholars pushed for Mr. Gregorian, who is seen as a "celebrity" of academe. But now they say they are content with what they call the President's more temperate choice.

"We've had our share of stars at the NEH," said one humanities lobbyist. "What we really need now is someone who can bring a steadiness and stability to the endowment, who can calm things down and bring people together. Hackney seems to be the right man."

Mr. Hackney may not find his first few months so easy.

His nomination may face opposition from such conservative lawmakers as Sen. Jesse A. Helms, the North Carolina Republican, who denounced Mr. Hackney's support in 1989 for an exhibit of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe.

## Sheldon Hackney

**Date of birth:** December 5, 1933

**Education:** Vanderbilt University, B.A., 1955; Yale University, M.A., 1963; Ph.D. in history, 1966

**Current position:** President of the University of Pennsylvania since 1981

**Previous academic positions:** Assistant professor of history at Princeton University, 1965-68; associate professor of history at Princeton University, 1968-72; provost and professor of history at Princeton University, 1972-75; president of Inland University, 1975-81

**Current and past board memberships:** Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum in Philadelphia; American Council on Education; Association of American Universities; Campus Compact Executive Committee; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Chairman); Committee on Rights of Historians of the American Historical Association (chairman); Committee to Support Philadelphia Public Schools; Consortium on Financing Higher Education (chairman); Educational Testing Service; *Journal of Southern History*; NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc.; Philadelphia Committee; National Collegiate Athletic Association Presidents' Commission; Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities

**Books:** *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama*, Princeton University Press, 1969; *Populism: The Critical Issues*, Little, Brown and Co., 1971; co-author of *Understanding the American Experience: Recent Interpretations*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Inc., 1978; co-editor of *Partners in the Research Enterprise: University-Corporate Relations in Science and Technology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983

**Recent articles:** "Dealing With Campus Rape," *Higher Education and National Affairs*, February 25, 1991; "Campuses Aren't Besieged by Politically Correct Storm Troopers," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 3, 1991; "Don't Relegate Education to the Marketplace," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 12, 1992

**Hobbies:** Watching movies, reading novels and biographies, baking bread, playing golf and tennis, and logging

The University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art housed the exhibition for five months, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

**PRESSURES FROM CONGRESS**

Once in office, Mr. Hackney will face pressures from Congress to cut costs, a potentially controversial debate over the agency's reauthorization, and a search for a new research-division director who can bring the troubled unit together. The division's former director, J. Rufus Fears, was let go after the endowment began an investigation into his management practices.

Until next January, when President Clinton can name 10 of his own members of the NEH council, Mr. Hackney will have to work with 26 members chosen by Presidents Reagan and Bush. Many of those members are known for their strong Republican ties and their skepticism toward newer scholarly fields and approaches.

These are the academics who approved of Mrs. Cheney's charges, made in numerous reports and statements, that the nation's universities were dominated by liberal scholars using their classrooms to indoctrinate their students.

**'FEARS ARE EXAGGERATED'**

Mr. Hackney is expected to offer substantially different views. He wrote an opinion piece for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1991 called "Campuses Aren't Besieged by Politically Correct Storm Troopers." In it, he said: "Happily, I can report that such fears are greatly exaggerated. There are two warring factions on the contemporary campus battlefield: cultural dissidents to the left and traditionalists to the right. However, the

largest camp (in which I include myself) resides somewhere in no-man's land (excuse me . . . no-person's land), ducking the shrapnel from the PC bombs exploding in the popular press."

He concluded his piece by stating, "to fulfill its educational mission, a university must not be captured by any orthodoxy—except a devotion to freedom of inquiry."

Marvin Lazerson, dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, said Mr. Hackney had shown himself to be "one of the foremost advocates of the free expression of ideas in universities."

Mr. Lazerson said this was most apparent when Mr. Hackney took on Senator Helms over the Mapplethorpe exhibit. The Senator said

the federally supported exhibit should be canceled because it included works that were "obscene" and "pornographic."

**SOME CRITICS AT PENN**

Mr. Hackney vigorously fought those charges. In an opinion piece in *The Chronicle* (September 6, 1989), he wrote: "It is ironic that at the same time we were applauding the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square with its demands for expanding the scope of public discourse in China, a little group of willful men was busy in Washington attempting to limit expression in the Land of Liberty."

Mr. Hackney's tenure at the University of Pennsylvania is not universally hailed. One professor, who wished to remain nameless,

said Mr. Hackney was a weak leader who stood out only as a fund raiser. "Basically, most people at Penn would agree that Sheldon Hackney is not an academic leader," he said. "He is not a very imaginative person."

That kind of complaint from critics—that he has shown little vision—hounded him at the University of Pennsylvania. But many disagree with it.

"He doesn't spout a lot of rhetoric, but he has a very strong sense of what higher education is supposed to be about," said Mr. Lazerson, who is scheduled to take over as acting provost in July. "His bully pulpit at the NEH will be about the support for the free exchange of ideas. That is the central thing you can say for him." ■