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# Humanities Endowment in Controversy Over Columbus Anniversary

*Continued From Page A5*  
1492 be contrasted, and that the consequences of their encounters with each other be assessed.

## 'Lack of Even-Handedness'

The N.E.H. rejected the proposal in September, telling the applicants that reviewers had concerns about "a lack of even-handedness in the film's approach, with distressing

aspects of Aztec culture being minimized, while the excesses of the Spanish are emphasized." The applicants say that copies of the comments by the peer-review panel tell a different story. Five of the panelists gave the proposal the "highest recommendation," and the other two gave it the next highest rank, "strongly recommended." The reviews called the treat-

ment of the period "excellent and sorely needed," "a model for how a major proposal should be made," and "superb," according to the evaluations. The proposal was sent to three outside evaluators after it had been approved by the peer-review panel. One scholar called it "entirely worthy of N.E.H. support," in the written review, another stated "it

would be hard to suggest improvements," and a third praised parts of the program, but objected to one segment for depicting Spanish rule in the Americas as too harsh. "We had been told by several sources that Cheney had personally reversed approval of the grant, so we decided to appeal to her directly," says Ms. Roelker. At a September meeting, she

says, "Mrs. Cheney repeatedly referred to our bashing of Columbus and the Europeans, and said that the Spanish- and Italian-Americans would be up in arms if taxpayer money supported such a project." Says Ms. Brandt, the documentary's producer: "There's a double standard being applied: It's o.k. to talk about the barbarism of the Indians, but not about the barbarism of the Europeans. That's a political bias—it's the fight to see Western civilization as the only civilization worth studying."

"The program is just the usual thing that comes out of historical reflection—a mixed picture," says Natalie Zemon Davis, a professor of history at Princeton University and a member of the advisory board for the series. Ms. Davis and other historians say the rise of the new social history, with its focus on the lives of non-elite people and non-written records, has coincided with growing attention to race and ethnicity. Those developments have pushed research on the 15th and

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**"The endowment is not hostile to critical inquiry into any subject or culture. Our guidelines do state, however, that projects be balanced."**

16th centuries beyond the European explorers to look at the native populations they encountered. The emphasis is on the exchange of cultures—and on the negative as well as the positive aspects of the encounter.

James M. Lockhart, a professor of Latin American history at the University of California at Los Angeles, wrote a review of the 1492 grant proposal. "I don't know what N.E.H. means," he says. "It just presented a perspective that is so standard in scholarship it's almost old hat."

#### Too Hot to Handle

The producers of 1492 also say that while the N.E.H. deemed their series too hot to handle, other agencies seemed to have no such qualms. The project has been endorsed by both the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission, the official federal sponsor of the quincentenary programs, and by Spain '92, the Spanish government's equivalent. The National Gallery of Art plans to show the series at its Columbian exhibit next year.

The scholars working on 1492—*Clash of Visions* are not the only applicants to question whether the N.E.H. may be uncomfortable with a cross-cultural approach to the quincentenary.

National History Day, an independent corporation established in 1974 to encourage the study of history among secondary-school students, is planning its 1992 program around the theme "Discovery, Encounter, Exchange in History: The Seeds of Change."

Last summer, with N.E.H. support, it sponsored an institute at the Library of Congress "to introduce secondary-school teachers and li-

### Predocutorial Fellowship Awards For Minority Students

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The National Institute of General Medical Sciences announces a new predocutorial fellowship program for minority students. This program provides up to 5 years of support for research training leading to a Ph.D. or combined M.D.-Ph.D. degree in the biomedical sciences.

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### FACULTY SCHOLARS' AWARDS

Each year the William T. Grant Foundation makes awards to up to five investigators whose research contributes to understanding the development and well-being of children, adolescents and youth. Awards are for five (5) years, totaling \$175,000 including indirect costs.

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Applicant institutions and individuals should obtain the brochure outlining the application procedure from:

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brarians to global and cross-cultural perspectives related to the quincennial commemoration."

The institute was designed to develop materials and serve as a model for four regional institutes this summer, to be conducted by the Newberry Library in Chicago, and the history departments at the University of New Mexico, the University of Maryland at College Park, and the University of California at Berkeley.

#### 'We Remain Puzzled'

Douglas W. Foard, now secretary of Phi Beta Kappa, worked on initial plans for the project while he was on the N.E.H. staff. "I thought it was implied there would be follow-up money," he says. "It just seemed logical, once the endowment had made a substantial commitment to the project, to see it had a broad impact."

In November, however, the endowment told National History Day that it would be given only a small percentage of the money for one regional program—if matching funds could be raised. Then, last week, the program was told that the agency had reversed itself and would provide full funding for one institute this summer.

"We remain puzzled by N.E.H.'s timing and by the reduced funding for a national program that can now have only regional impact," says David D. Van Tassel, founder of National History Day and a recent winner of the N.E.H.'s Charles A. Frankel Award for service to humanities programming. Mr. Van Tassel is a professor of history at Case Western Reserve University. "What is so frustrating is that we don't really know what happened," says Lois Scharf, director of National History Day. "But given Mrs. Cheney's outspoken defense of Western culture in the past, we have some concern that she is unsympathetic to our cross-cultural perspective."

Peggy K. Liss, an independent scholar, is the chief historian for a quincennial television program called *The Buried Mirror*. Written and narrated by the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, the program explores the diverse cultural strands that run throughout the history of Spain and Spanish America. The program was turned down by the N.E.H. "It was conveyed to us that the decision was made at the top levels, and not by the peer-review panel," says Ms. Liss.

#### 'Balanced' Projects Sought

The program has won sponsorship from the Smithsonian Institution, Spain '92, and private investors in Spain, and will be shown on PBS next year.

Are these examples isolated cases?

Although Mrs. Cheney declined to respond to questions about N.E.H. grants, she issued this statement through her spokesman:

"The endowment is not hostile to critical inquiry into any subject or culture. Our guidelines do clearly state, however, that media projects must be balanced. Skepticism must be applied evenhandedly. I would also note, as a general matter, that the Endowment's constituency includes Americans of all backgrounds: Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Native-American,

Asian, African, Latino—to name a few. Because we are such a diverse culture, it is all the more important that projects exhibit a balanced approach to all groups."

Most observers agree that the N.E.H. has been one of the leaders of the federal quincennial celebration. As early as 1983, agency staff members "went around to the scholarly community and said, 'If we want good public programs in 1992, we'd better start thinking about the research for them now,'" recalls John Alexander Williams, a former N.E.H. staff member who became executive director of the federal quincennial commission and is now a professor of history at Appalachian State University.

The minutes of planning conferences make clear that, from the beginning, the N.E.H. intended "to adopt an ethnohistorical and multicultural perspective on the Age of Discovery."

Indeed, Helen Nader, a professor of history at Indiana University who participated in the conferences, says the agency "has funded a lot more work on the Americas than on the European background to the period—maybe because that's the area in which most scholars work."

#### Support Is 'Drying Up'

Phi Beta Kappa's Mr. Foard points out that the N.E.H. has helped finance major archaeological finds—such as translations of early sources, research on American Indians, the discovery of the lost capital of the Spanish domain La Florida under a Marine Corps golf course in South Carolina, and more.

"But recently, N.E.H. has been failing to live up to its early expectations," he adds.

"N.E.H.'s very impressive support for the quincennial appears to be drying up in the last few years," agrees James P. Kiernan, coordinator of the Quincennial Commemoration Program of the Organization of American States.

To date, the endowment has awarded more than \$18-million outright in quincennial grants and more in matching funds. At last November's council meeting, it gave eight individual fellowships for research on the quincennial and no money for public programs. That, N.E.H. sources say, marked the first time that so little money had been awarded for the quincennial since the early 1980's.

"Part of the problem is that the quincennial never become a national priority, and none of the federal efforts have been well funded," says Mr. Williams. Indeed, N.E.H. officials stress that its quincennial program is just an "initiative"—a call for proposals with no separate money earmarked to support them.

Another part of the problem may be the growing controversy over the quincennial. American Indian groups in the United States have picketed museum exhibits to protest their alleged Eurocentric bias. The federal quincennial commission is mired in controversy over allegations of financial mismanagement and insensitivity to Indian and minority-group concerns, and corporate sponsors are said to be leery of the dispute.



Lynne Cheney: "Because we are a diverse culture, it is all the more important that projects exhibit a balanced approach to all groups."

Some observers say it is public debate that the N.E.H. is nervous about. "I've been at scores of university quincennial programs that have had N.E.H. support," says U.C.L.A.'s Mr. Lockhart. "But it appears there are different criteria applied when something is safely within the academic world and when you go public."

Says James S. Ackerman, a pro-

**"It just seemed logical, once the endowment had made a substantial commitment to the project, to see it had a broad impact."**

fessor emeritus of fine arts at Harvard University and a member of the 1492—*Clash of Visions* advisory board: "It's just the potential to reach millions through a medium like television that the N.E.H. seems to fear."

Some critics say there is a pattern to N.E.H. grant making. Interviews with former staff members, peer-review panelists, and applicants paint a picture of top agency officials overturning peer and staff evaluations to avoid topics deemed controversial. Many of the sources asked not to be identified by name.

"Basically, the people at the top are cowards," says one. "Rather than being in the forefront of thought and discourse in the disciplines, the N.E.H. is going with very conservative approaches."

#### 'You Become Cautious'

Another source says: "Sometimes it's been hard for even the program officers to know why grants that have had strong peer evaluations were turned down. It doesn't happen all the time, but when you've been burned once or twice, it has a chilling effect. You become very cautious about the whole spectrum of what you recommend."

Many of the overturned grants are said to deal with non-Western cultures or racial and ethnic diversity in the United States. The curator of one non-Western exhibit that was twice turned down for N.E.H. support requested copies of the project's peer-review evaluations. He says they were glowing.

"I don't think the N.E.H. has a bias against non-Western subjects as such," he says. "The problem is controversy. However, those fears have racial overtones, because of the kinds of topics white America finds so controversial."

Take, for example, the case of a group of scholars who have worked with WGBH, the public television station in Boston, to produce a television series on Latin America, to be called *Americas*. "I thought we had about as good recommendations from peer-group reviews of any project I'd ever seen," says Alfred Stepan, dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, who worked on the project. When it was turned down by the N.E.H., "there seemed to be a feeling that the difficulty was with our interdisciplinary approach, and with our effort to link history with a discussion of present-day problems," he says.

"N.E.H. seemed to be applying a very narrow definition of the humanities," he adds. The program has received support from a number of private foundations, and will be shown on PBS next year.

Says John Womack, a professor of history at Harvard University who worked on the program: "There's no way you can deal with Latin America, or particularly with U.S.-Latin American relations, and avoid controversy. My fear is first that Mrs. Cheney is defining controversy as something the endowment shouldn't support, and secondly that she is defining what is controversial."

Mr. Womack has refused to serve on N.E.H. peer-review panels because, he says, "I don't think my opinions will be taken seriously." Sources at the N.E.H. say others have taken the same position.

Concern for the way the peer-review process works at the N.E.H. goes back well before Mrs. Cheney's arrival in 1986. Peer-review committees rotate, making it difficult to know who is serving on them at any given time. Moreover, the legislation establishing the en-

dowment gives the chairman the final authority to make grants.

"Regardless of the specific actions of this chairman, or any chairman, there is a basic flaw in the legislation: It accords the chairman too much unchecked discretionary authority for effective public accountability," says Stanley N. Katz, president of the American Council of Learned Societies.

Last fall, the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, which was then considering legislation to reauthorize the endowment, included language in its report "to emphasize its long-standing request to the National Endowment for the Humanities that names of all review panelists be readily available to any interested party . . . to ensure the accountability of the N.E.H. review panel process."

#### Evaluations Overturned

At a House appropriations subcommittee hearing last month, Mrs. Cheney was asked whether she had ever overturned peer-review evaluations, and, if so, whether she did so because of fear of controversy. Mrs. Cheney answered that she had in the past rejected, and would reject, grants when a project lacked "balance." She declined to say how many times she had overturned grants that had been strongly recommended by peer panels.

Some Congressional sources say Mrs. Cheney has been given high marks for keeping the N.E.H. out of the sort of vitriolic public controversy that engulfed the National Endowment for the Arts last year, when some charged it with sponsoring pornographic work. Some scholars also say that N.E.H.'s awarding of grants is no more political now than it has ever been.

"The chairman is a political appointment, after all, and that always has some impact," says the representative of an association in the humanities who declined to be identified. "But the process is not necessarily bad: Making the chairman answerable to politics is a form of public accountability." ■

## Scholarly Awards

### College Art Association

WASHINGTON

At its annual meeting here last month, the College Art Association honored 14 researchers for outstanding teaching, publications, and research.

James Ackerman, Harvard U., and Timothy J. Clark, U. of California at Berkeley: for distinguished teaching of art history.

Elizabeth Broun, National Museum of American Art—*Albert Pinkham Ryder* (Smithsonian Institution Press); and Donna DeSalvo, New York City—*"Success Is a Job in New York . . .": The Early Art and Business of Andy Warhol* (Grey Art Gallery of New York U. and Carnegie Museum of Art): for distinguished catalogues in the history of art.

William Dailey, U. of the Arts, and Sylvia Lark, U. of California at Berkeley: for distinguished teaching of art.

André Hayum, Fordham U.—*The Isenheim Altarpiece: God's Medicine and the Painter's Vision* (Princeton University Press); and Kenneth E. Silver, New York U.—*Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton University Press): for distinguished books in the history of art.

Patricia Leighton, U. of Delaware—"The White Pearl and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism" (*Art Bulletin*, December 1990): for the best article to appear in the association's journal.

Gridley McKim-Smith, Bryn Mawr College; Greta Anderson-Bergdoll, Bonn; Richard Newman, Boston Museum of Fine Art; and Andrew Davidhazy, Rochester Institute of Technology: for research that contributes to the understanding of art through the application of knowledge and experience in conservation, art history, and art.

Lowery Stokes Sims, Metropolitan Museum of Art: for distinction in art or architecture criticism.

### American Association for the Advancement of Science

WASHINGTON

Five scientists were awarded prizes last month at the association's annual meeting in Washington.

Margaret J. Geller and John P. Huchra, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Cambridge, Mass.: for an outstanding paper published in *Science*.

Adrian R. Morrison, U. of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine: for advancing scientific freedom and responsibility.

Wolfgang K. H. Panofsky, Stanford U.: for efforts to seek a greater role for science and technology in promoting international security.

William Rathje, U. of Arizona: for advancing the public understanding of science and technology.