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It is a pleasure to welcome you to Baltimore. This great city is renowned for many reasons. Not least of which is that it is the home of the Baltimore Orioles, the parent team of my beloved Rochester Red Wings for 42 years. But there are other reasons as well. 199 years ago, Francis Scott Key penned the verses of “The Star-Spangled Banner” on a ship in the harbor outside during the Battle of Baltimore in the War of 1812. Many important cultural personalities called Baltimore home over the years. There is Edgar Allan Poe, who is buried not far from here. For many years, on the anniversary of his death, an anonymous admirer left on his grave a rose and a half-empty bottle of brandy—evermore. And of course there is also John Waters, the creator and director of the movie *Hairspray* and many other films in which the odd and marginalized subvert the smothering stasis of respectability.

Waters was preceded in the first decades of the last century by H. L. Mencken, the caustic “Sage of Baltimore,” who occupied what is probably now an unfilled role: critic, commentator, public intellectual, and aggressive tormentor of the anti-intellectual. In 1926, Walter Lippmann wrote that Mencken was “the most powerful personal influence on this whole generation of educated people.” Mencken was known for his sharp retorts. When asked why, if he disliked American politics so much, did he stay in the country, Mencken replied “Why do people go to the zoo?” When the president of a university worried that the cause of a rash of undergraduate suicides was reading “too much Mencken,” Mencken replied that suicides among college presidents would be the best possible improvement for American higher education.¹ More recently, Baltimore was featured as the setting for the television drama *The Wire*, a gripping and bracing depiction of individual dignity struggling against the urban despair of the drug trade. I have learned that many members of the Executive Committee of the Delegates, which plans our annual meeting, had viewed this series in its entirety, once, twice, perhaps three times over.

But probably the most important point of Baltimore’s history relevant to our -enterprise today is that this is where the American research university was born, with the founding of The Johns Hopkins University in 1876. This was, according to sociologist of knowledge Edward Shils, “perhaps the single

¹ Marion Elizabeth Rodgers: *Mencken: The American Iconoclast* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 306–8.

most decisive event in the history of learning in the Western hemisphere.”² Hopkins’ first president, Dwight Coit Gilman, had served previously as the first president of the University of California, and in that position he had articulated the mission of the public university in terms that still resonate today. But Hopkins was to be a new model of higher education in North America. The purpose of the university, Gilman maintained, was “the acquisition, con-servation, refinement and distribution of knowledge. . . . It is the universities,” he declared “which edit, interpret, translate and reiterate the acquisitions of former generations both of literature and science. Their revelation of error is sometimes welcomed but it is generally opposed; nevertheless the process goes on, indifferent alike to plaudits and reproaches.”³

The Johns Hopkins University experiment was not just a new institutional form for doctoral education, based largely on German models with the graduate seminar as the driving engine; the university was also the seedbed of many of our learned societies, such as the American Historical Association, the Modern Language Association, and the American Economic Association. The research university and the modern learned society were born together and bound together in a common project: valorizing the research enterprise and the idea of the teacher-scholar.

The new research universities also saw themselves as a public knowledge project. When William Rainey Harper recruited prominent faculty to the new University of Chicago he often promised them the resources to publish two journals, one scholarly and one public. One of our member societies takes the same approach today: the magazine *Archaeology Today* is the popular sibling of the *American Journal of Archaeology*, both published by the Archaeological Institute of America. Other of our societies have efforts in different media such as the MLA’s radio program *What’s the Word?*, or the new “Archipedia” of the Society of Architectural Historians, an online source of information about significant buildings of the United States. One question we will confront at this meeting is to what degree we can think of MOOCs as a vehicle for public knowledge.

How is this overarching project of the research university faring today? What is the place of our fields in it? Later this month, I will be speaking at a conference at the University of Michigan on the future of the liberal arts in the research university. The conference organizers have suggested that Hanna Holborn Gray’s *Searching for Utopia* might be a springboard for discussion. This collection of her 2009 Clark Kerr Lectures focuses mostly on two intertwined strands of the DNA of liberal education as exemplified by two other prophets of the research university: Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago and Clark Kerr of the University of California.

I cannot do justice here to Hanna Gray’s nuanced treatment of these thinkers, but I would like to focus on two points of her analysis. First, the great educational projects and visions of a Hutchins or a Kerr are limited and shaped by even greater social, political, and economic forces, especially as those forces are mediated by the proximate factors of university politics and faculty ideas. Second, these limitations do not necessarily spell defeat, for a project can succeed against these forces if it maintains a strong normative core.

Hanna Gray chose “Utopia” as a title to denote the high-level aspirations of educational reformers. But

² Edward Shils, “The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University,” in Alexandra Oleson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), 28.

³ Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 272–73.

she also grounds it with reference to Thomas More's *Utopia* of 1516. What was the place of education and learning in his imaginary? More, Gray notes, placed the learned in a prominent role, but in the public sphere, not the university. On his island of Utopia there are no formal institutions of instruction, no campuses or cloisters; instead, the wise and well-spoken deliver public lectures to all comers. Not online, certainly, but openly, and to the masses.

In More's own words:

All the void time that is between the hours of work, sleep and meat, that they be suffered to bestow, every man as he liketh best himself. . . . [They may] bestow the time well and thriftily upon some other science as shall please them. For it is a solemn custom there, to have lectures daily early in the morning [given by those] chosen and appointed to learning . . . Howbeit, a great multitude of every sort of people, both men and women, go hear lectures, some one and some another, as every man's nature is inclined.⁴

Perhaps one can see in More's description the outlines of the earliest imagined not-for-credit MOOCs: Medieval Open Opinionated Conversations.

Turning to the very real university of today, Gray notes that, "To read the literature on higher education over the past fifty years is to discover a litany of perpetual alarm and imminent catastrophe." But she counsels wisely that despair is unwarranted for "the state of our universities in general remains very strong and that the tendency to see all imperfections or problems as inevitably fatal is absurdly excessive."⁵

I could not agree more; nevertheless, Gray goes on to make a statement that I must take issue with: "public perceptions of universities seem little affected by what universities say about themselves." This may be, but I think we need to try. The public may not accept the self-conceptions of the academy, but that is all the more reason for us to redouble our efforts to put the case in new terms. We should distill the argument, not water it down.

Some of you may have heard Brown University president Christine Paxson address the annual meeting of the National Humanities Alliance this past March in Washington, D.C., where she considered, from an economist's standpoint, how to measure the value of the humanities. Among her many excellent points, and I encourage those of you who missed her speech to read the transcript in its entirety online, Paxson emphasized that a broad and capacious research enterprise is the best preparation for an unpredictable future. As she put it, "We do not always know the future benefits of what we study and therefore we should not rush to reject some forms of research as less deserving than others. We certainly want to know that benefits will accrue from all of the research and conversations taking place on a lively college campus. But we should be prepared to accept that this value may be difficult to measure and may not be clear for decades or even centuries."

Let me share with you some important efforts currently underway to make clear the public value of the humanities.

⁴ Thomas More, *Utopia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 67.

⁵ Hannah Holborn Gray, *Searching for Utopia: Universities and Their Histories* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2011).

Many of you may know that members of both houses of Congress asked the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to form a commission to identify actions that government agencies, civil society partners, and the education community can take to maintain national excellence in the humanities and social sciences. I am one of the 52 members of this commission, which met three times over the past year in cities across the U.S. to consider how to bolster the humanities and social sciences in our country. In addition, at six forums organized across the country, members of the commission received testimony from individuals and institutional representatives about the importance of the humanities to their communities, to their local economies, indeed, to the very social fabric of our increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

Glenna Wallace, chief of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, spoke last September at a session highlighting the importance of the humanities and social sciences not just as the product of academic labor but as a vital force in public life. The commission's website has a video recording of Chief Wallace's remarks, during which she speaks quite poignantly about the debilitating losses suffered by her tribe over the past 200 years. I would like to quote just a bit of it here.

In that loss, do we really realize what was taken away from us? In my opinion, it can be summarized in the word "humanities." Our language was taken from us, our dress was taken from us, our hairstyles were taken from us, our religion was taken from us, our culture was taken from us, our freedom to express ourselves was taken from us. I've been sitting here and listening and it seems to me that the emphasis is upon how much does it cost to provide the humanities and I say to you from my experience I think that question should be turned around and say what is the cost of not providing humanities. And I can tell you that . . . [w]e have found that our people are not able to hold jobs because in many cases they don't know who they are, they don't have an identity, they have had a spirit taken away from them. Our success with our people comes when we are able to give that identity back, when we are able to give that spirit back to them, when we are able to give the humanities, to provide them. We do not know our history, and if the humanities are not funded, we will not know our history of what happened.⁶

Chief Wallace puts it very powerfully: many in our society take the humanities for granted, but if we do not support them, foster them, advocate for them, we will surely feel it when they are lost. As Dick Broadhead, president of Duke University and co-chair of the commission pointed out last year at the National Humanities Alliance, "The humanities may be cheap to provide for, but they are costly to put at risk." Wallace's testimony is but one of many eloquent arguments for the humanities that emerged from the commission's cross-country listening sessions. I am happy to announce that the Academy will release the recommendations of the report on June 19th, and I look forward to the discussion that the report will engender. For now I want to highlight one thing that the report does particularly well: It firmly situates the humanities, along with the social sciences and physical and biological sciences, into a holistic liberal arts curriculum. The report does not pit the humanities and social sciences against the sciences as competitors for ever unequal portions of university resources and federal dollars. Indeed, the commission demonstrates how the various fields of learning have come to lend vitality to each other and to foster creativity across disciplines.

In addition to the rollout of the commission's recommendations, I am also happy to report that the National Humanities Alliance, now under the able direction of Stephen Kidd, has done excellent work to promote the value of the humanities to a variety of audiences, including some very important

⁶ *The Heart of the Matter—A Film*. American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, www.humanitiescommission.org/.

constituencies in Washington. In an atmosphere in which brevity and bulleted talking points are essential to the toolkit of advocacy, the NHA has done well to focus in on four important benefits of the humanities on civil society.

- 1) First, the humanities promote opportunity for all Americans, as a basic component of the broad-based, lifelong liberal arts education that should form the basis of opportunity for all Americans.
- 2) Second, the humanities foster innovation and economic competitiveness, by cultivating a broadly-educated workforce ready to compete in the knowledge-based, global economy of the twenty-first century.
- 3) Third, the humanities ensure productive global engagement, by providing deep language proficiency, historical knowledge, and cultural literacy that are critical to productive diplomatic and economic engagement with the world.
- 4) Fourth and finally, they strengthen the practice of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, by promoting reasoned, informed dialogue that is critical to productive civic life.

The ACLS Public Fellows program is one of our fellowships that underscores, by its very function, the value that advanced training and learning in the humanities can bring to the public sphere. ACLS developed Public Fellows three years ago to provide postdoctoral, practical fellowships at institutions in government and the nonprofit sector for carefully selected humanities Ph.D.s interested in pursuing careers outside the classroom by choice, rather than circumstance. We launched the program with two key goals in mind: First, that the program would highlight to partnering institutions the value of employing skilled and accomplished young scholars from a variety of disciplines and educational backgrounds. Some employers, such as our partners at the State Department or Human Rights Watch, have been eager to draw on more specialized knowledge that humanities Ph.D.s acquire in their study, such as language skills, intercultural breadth, and understanding of different religious or historical traditions. But all humanities Ph.D.s possess analytical, research, and communication skills that are in all too short supply. Their ability to sift and synthesize the avalanche of information that now cascades through the networked world has become increasingly crucial.

As we anticipated, reports from the first two cohorts of Public Fellows are showing just how quickly the fellows' supervisors and colleagues have come to value the skills that humanities Ph.D.s bring to these positions. We repeatedly hear from representatives at partnering organizations about our fellows' ability to "read into" organizational culture by reviewing and analyzing existing work products at the host organization, which allows them to adapt to unfamiliar communication styles and work processes. The habit of searching out and reviewing a wide variety of materials is a reflex many fellows say they developed as they conducted doctoral-level research.

A second goal of the Public Fellows program, which builds on the first, is to expand the reach of doctoral education in the United States by demonstrating that the capacities developed in the course of attaining a Ph.D. have wide application both within and beyond the academy. As much as our fellows in the field are convincing our non-academic organizational partners of the value of their degrees, the Public Fellows program must also help convince the academic community to broaden its conventional ideas of the ideal Ph.D. career path. This is especially important as doctoral education is likely to be reshaped significantly in the coming years by several forces, not the least of which is financial stringency. As this fellowship program continues to exemplify what are sometimes considered nontraditional employment paths for Ph.D.s, it can shorten or eliminate what is for some a needless and unwanted detour.

As the Public Fellows program enters its third year, we are gratified to see its initial successes. The program has grown each year, starting with eight fellows in the first, and 13 in the second; now 20

fellows will be placed in the third. Awareness of the program has spread among aspiring Ph.D.s and host organizations alike. This year, applications to the program more than doubled. Another promising sign is that many of our learned societies are pursuing complementary paths toward broadening the career horizons of humanists. In the past year, both the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association devoted significant space in their annual meeting programs to issues related to nontraditional career paths for recent Ph.D.s. The societies have long played an important and active role in aiding scholars in their professionalization. As they increasingly embrace and legitimize non-academic career options for Ph.D.s, and as more talented and industrious humanities scholars forge new paths in alternative and non-academic sectors, the public's valuation of humanistic training can only grow. Both AHA and MLA have also received grants from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to explore this issue further. We look forward to working with them and others to reassert and reinforce the public value of the humanities Ph.D.

The ideal relationship between intellectual pursuit and pursuing a career, wherever it may take you, is of course on the minds of all of you gathered here today, not merely because so many of you are called on to advise your own undergraduate and graduate students who feel the creeping pressure of an inhospitable job market. Recently, the musicologist Don Randel, former president of the University of Chicago, and, more recently, of the Mellon foundation, wrote about the many possible answers to the question, "Why study musicology?" This question can become quite pointed, with parents worried about future careers for their children, and politicians feeling pressed to enact policy with only the shortest-term economic returns in mind. Although Randel did not doubt that the students trained as musicologists have skills immediately transferable to a number of careers, he noted that the value of studying musicology was less in "the specific technical aspects of musicological training but the values that underlie that pursuit. I have always thought that if there must be deans and provosts and presidents I want them to have my values. This has led me to be a dean of arts and sciences, a provost, a university president, and . . . a foundation president, jobs that have not left much time for musicology but that have enabled me to apply both the values and the intellectual tools I developed as a musicologist. These are values and habits of mind that can be lived in activities well beyond academe. The more the better."⁷

This year, we have seen a transition in Mellon's leadership, and soon we will see a transition at our great public humanities effort, the National Endowment for the Humanities. We all will have an opportunity to honor Jim Leach when he speaks to us at our luncheon, so now let me just briefly note how fortunate we have been to have had such a humane man leading the humanities.

We at ACLS value all of our philanthropic partners, and I am pleased that we have a new one: the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. The Ho Foundation is a new philanthropy based in Hong Kong and established by the generosity of a family with deep roots in that great city. You may have seen the announcement in March of the foundation's gift of \$10 million to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum to endow a new curatorial position in contemporary Asian art. Bringing contemporary Chinese creativity to global audiences is one of the foundation's interests, but so is preserving and interpreting the cultural monuments of the past. Another of the foundation's significant donations supported restorations of Beijing's Forbidden City.

I first visited the Ho Foundation's offices in 2011 to explore the possibility of working together. Our discussions quickly focused on the foundation's interest in Buddhist studies, a commitment that most

⁷ "What I Do in Musicology": Thoughts from the Field," *AMS Newsletter* 43.1 (February 2013): 5, www.ams-net.org/newsletter/AMSNewsletter-2013-2.pdf.

recently had led to the creation of the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University and the endowment of a professorship there. This interest resonated with our Council's long and deep experience: As we often note, at its first meeting in 1920, the Council specified work in China studies as a priority for the nascent ACLS, and those efforts continue to flourish today, thanks to such generous supporters as the Luce Foundation, with whom we began a new fellowship program this year, and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, as well as generous individuals, like Professor Donald J. Monro of the University of Michigan, who created a fund for the study of Chinese philosophy, and the friends of the late Professor Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr. of the University of California, Berkeley, whose gifts support fellowships on the history of China. If one definition of the humanities is the study of how humans create and convey meaning, then it is easy to see why the study of religion is one of the core concerns of the humanities. Another field-shaping initiative was the ACLS Committee on the History of Religions, which helped make the comparative study of different faith traditions the focus of academic inquiry. Religious traditions are, almost by definition, rooted in history, but they are not merely fixed intellectual artifacts, for they are continuously reflected upon, interpreted anew, and applied to contemporary problems and concerns.

We continued discussions with the Ho Foundation's able staff and I had the opportunity to meet with the foundation's board this past March. Following these very productive and collegial exchanges, I am delighted to announce today the new Robert H. N. Ho Foundation/ACLS Program in Buddhist Studies. This new program will offer pre-doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships, grants for collaborative research, and funds for colleges and universities wishing to host visiting professorships in Buddhist studies. We will open the first competition for these awards in July and make the first selections next March. I should emphasize that this new venture will be our first truly global program: It will be open to applications from scholars throughout the world with no restrictions as to citizenship or site of research. I want to thank the Ho Foundation for its confidence in the ACLS. This is a welcome opportunity to enact the ideals of a truly borderless scholarship.

The focus of the new Ho Foundation/ACLS program points to another important dimension of the public value of the humanities: They are the repository of knowledge of traditions, practices, and thoughts distant in time and space from us. Princeton historian Anthony Grafton made this point very well in the deliberations of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences when he wrote:

A substantial part of humanistic work has to do with preservation: preserving languages, preserving skill in the authentication and interpretation of works of art, preserving long-form, demanding expository writing. Of course, all of these areas also produce innovations: new pedagogies for classical languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek and Latin, for example, as well as for the whole range of modern languages. But there are central humanistic skills, largely traditional in nature, such as the editing and interpretation of difficult texts in little-known languages, which American universities have fostered and preserved.

The humanities are also the repository of the means for inquiring into the question of value. This is not to say that they teach a catechism of received values. As Robert Maynard Hutchins put it, "all attempts to teach character directly will fail. They degenerate into vague exhortations to be good, which leave the bored listener to commit outrages that would otherwise never have occurred to him." Former ACLS board chair Howard Mumford Jones wrote in 1959, "Perhaps nobody knows how to make any human being better, happier, and more capable, but at the very least the humanities, humane learning and

humanistic scholarship help to sustain a universe of thought in which these questions have meaning, and in which adults may have the opportunity to work out such problems for themselves.”⁸

During World War II, an ACLS committee published a book on the role of education in a threatened democracy. They premised their argument on the question of value, asserting that,

The importance of liberal education can hardly be exaggerated. The war which is now being waged involves . . . a conflict between two radically divergent philosophies . . . If democracy is to make headway against authoritarianism, it must rely on a form of education which is as effective for the promotion of democratic ideals and the liberal spirit as propaganda has been effective for the achievement of authoritarian ends. . . . The humanities . . . perform a function which justifies their being given a central place in liberal education in our democratic society. Basic to the American ideal is the belief in the value and dignity of the individual. . . . Anything that promotes human individuality . . . is a truly liberal or liberating agent, and hence of the greatest value to our democracy. Whoever believes in democracy must believe in the value and dignity of the individual, and whoever believes in this must believe that the disciplines which deepen and personalize human individuality should be allotted a central role in a liberal curriculum.⁹

As I move to a conclusion, attentive listeners will notice that I haven’t recited the catalog of very real challenges facing the humanities and the academy in general. They are lamentably familiar to all of us, and at the top of any list is the rise of policy frameworks that focus on short-sighted vocationalism and instrumentalism, rather than education and knowledge creation. We know the problems, but I think we should see what our opportunities are. Dwight Coit Gilman and the others who founded The Johns Hopkins University had the opportunity to build new structures and establish new practices that would ignite the growth of knowledge. Our opportunity today is to conserve the structures and practices we know to be startlingly effective while also devising new modes producing knowledge that can catalyze work of existing structures.

We have in the last half-century seen many structural innovations. Next year will be the 50th anniversary of the report of the Commission on Humanities that helped convince Congress to establish the National Endowment for the Humanities. Almost one-fifth of ACLS member societies have been founded since 1963. Add to that list the humanities centers, digital humanities centers, and state humanities councils that have been established as well. I imagine, however, that in the future innovations are less likely to take on the form of creating new institutions and structures and more likely to be adopting new practices.

What about the next 50 years? If the humanities are to live out their full promise we must embrace the opportunity to bring to the public perspectives on the great demands of our time: embracing diversity, navigating complexity, promoting creativity. We have the opportunity to conserve and make meaningful the heritage of past thought and human expression. We have the opportunity, indeed the obligation, to bring forward insistent questions of value grounded in the vision of individual human dignity that undergirds the humanities. We must never lose sight of what Shawnee leader Glenna Wallace reminds us: that the humanities are not an academic special interest but an essential element of a vibrant and healthy society.

⁸ Howard Mumford Jones, *One Great Society: Humane Learning in the United States* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1959), 181.

⁹ Theodore M. Greene, Charles C. Fries, Henry M. Wriston, William Dighton, *Liberal Education Re-Examined: Its Role in a Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), xiii, 69, 70.