

Excerpt from the Report of the Commission on the Humanities

1. All men require that a vision be held before them, an ideal toward which they may strive. Americans need such a vision today as never before in their history. It is both the dignity and the duty of humanists to offer their fellow-countrymen whatever understanding can be attained by fallible humanity of such enduring values as justice, freedom, virtue, beauty, and truth. Only thus do we join ourselves to the heritage of our nation and our human kind.

2. Democracy demands wisdom of the average man. Without the exercise of wisdom free institutions and personal liberty are inevitably imperiled. To know the best that has been thought and said in former times can make us wiser than we otherwise might be, and in this respect the humanities are not merely our, but the world's best hope.

3. The United States is not a nation of materialists, but many men believe it to be. They find it hard to fathom the motives of a country which will spend billions on its outward defense and at the same time do little to maintain the creative and imaginative abilities of its own people. The arts have an unparalleled capability for crossing the national barriers imposed by language and contrasting customs. The recently increased American encouragement of the performing arts is to be welcomed, and will be welcomed everywhere as a sign that Americans accept their cultural responsibilities, especially if it serves to prompt a corresponding increase in support for the visual and the liberal arts. It is by way of the humanities that we best come to understand cultures other than our own, and they best to understand ours.

4. World leadership of the kind which has come upon the United States cannot rest solely upon superior force, vast wealth, or preponderant technology. Only the elevation of its goals and the excellence of its conduct entitle one nation to ask others to follow its lead. These are things of the spirit. If we appear to discourage creativity, to demean the fanciful and the beautiful, to have no concern for man's ultimate destiny—if, in short, we ignore the humanities—then both our goals and our efforts to attain them will be measured with suspicion.

5. A novel and serious challenge to Americans is posed by the remarkable increase in their leisure time. The forty-hour week and the likelihood of a shorter one, the greater life expectancy and the earlier ages of retirement, have combined to make the blessing of leisure a source of personal and community concern. "What shall I do with my spare time" all-too quickly becomes the question "Who am I? What shall I make of my life?" When men and women find nothing within themselves but emptiness they turn to trivial and narcotic amusements, and the society of which they are a part becomes socially delinquent and potentially unstable. The humanities are the immemorial answer to man's questioning and to his need for self-expression; they are uniquely equipped to fill the "abyss of leisure."