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Democratic Vistas for the Humanities

Richard J. Franke

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America *Imagining*

Democratic Vistas for the Humanities

Richard J. Franke

Foreseeable
Futures #1

Position Papers from *Imagining America*



From the Director: What Is Imagining America?

Dear Reader:

This publication inaugurates Imagining America's new series of position papers, *Foreseeable Futures*. I wish you provocative reading, and I invite you to share your reactions with us.

Richard J. Franke's essay was first delivered as the keynote address at our 2000 national conference in Chicago. That conference celebrated our accomplishments as a partner program of the White House Millennium Council and looked ahead to our future as a national consortium. *Democratic Vistas for the Humanities* offers a capacious framework within which to imagine the future of campus-community partnerships in the arts, humanities, and design.

There is a common misconception in some corners of America. It tells us that there is an unspoken, impregnable boundary between scholars—creating and enlightening from their ivory towers—and the civic groups who actually put good ideas into practice in their communities.

Imagining America challenges that misperception. Our organization announces—though it has by no means invented—a turning point in how artists and intellectuals have begun to connect with their communities. Now more than ever, American universities are stepping out into their surrounding communities to collaborate in significant cultural programs and projects. Neighborhood historians are collaborating with professors to track the evolution of the Underground Railroad. A university choreographer is commissioned to do a theatrical piece about the Black Bottom, and what emerges is a new level of mutual inspiration.

These are but two of hundreds of projects around the country in which artists and humanists are working across university-community boundaries. We started *Imagining America* in order to connect universities, the communities they serve, and like-minded organizations.

Colleges and universities are developing the cultural programs and centers needed to support new commitments. Joint inquiry and creation are transforming scholarship. Participants on all sides are learning from each other. The dynamics of making and understanding culture are being unequivocally changed across the country.

Yet there hasn't been a national network of participants until now. So the true dimensions of this movement have been invisible. And those engaging in such work around the country have been unable to connect to and learn from one another.

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Imagining America helps focus the combined energies of higher education and the public arts and humanities on 'building the commons. What we've found is that when American artists, humanists, and designers talk about what most interests them, they agree more often than not. The big ideas are shared: citizenship; migration; justice; identity; civil society; place and geography; history and memory; health and the body. And my own favorite cultural trend, a surprising boom in poetry. There is a startling—and little noticed—degree of cultural consensus about what matters, a consensus that spans the exaggerated divide between academic and public culture.

We've found the same unity in the experience of project-based work. Each project creates its own complicated, hard-won network. Participants pass through innumerable changes, learning experiences, and the complex process of inventing a common language.

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Simply put, Imagining America is working to connect the dots so that scholars at all levels across the country can learn from each others' experiences, support each other, share resources, and inspire higher goals.

Imagining America's founding partner, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, has established, the Woodrow Wilson Public Scholarship Grants. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation, these grants are helping to fund outstanding campus-community cultural partnerships from San Antonio to Buffalo, from New Brunswick to Seattle.

We present an annual conference each fall and participate in humanities and arts events nationwide. We've also created a comprehensive, web site that serves as an important resource for university-community projects (www.ia.umich.edu).

Publishing Richard J. Franke's eloquent and stirring position paper in support of the humanities is another way Imagining America is stirring the pot. Stay tuned as more innovators set forth their foreseeable futures as this series of position papers grows in the years to come. And please contact us with your own responses, suggestions, and visions.



Julie Ellison
Director
Imagining America



Steel Bokhof Photography

This inaugural number of the Foreseeable Futures series, position papers from Imagining America, features Richard J. Franke's keynote address at Imagining America's national conference, held on November 13, 2000 at the Chicago Historical Society. The conference was co-sponsored by the Chicago Historical Society, Northwestern University, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the University of Michigan, the White House Millennium Council, and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Richard J. Franke

Chairman Emeritus, The John Nuveen Co.

Mr. Franke, a graduate of Yale University, with an MBA from Harvard, spent his entire business career as an investment banker with John Nuveen and Co. In 1974 he became Chief Executive Officer and served until his retirement in June of 1996. In 1990, he was appointed to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, and he currently serves on the boards of the Illinois Humanities Council, Orchestral Association of Chicago, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Humanities Festival and the Newberry Library. In 1990, as Chairman of the Illinois Humanities Council, Mr. Franke spearheaded the development of the Chicago Humanities Festival, now an annual event that brings together Chicago's premier cultural institutions in a literary and artistic celebration of the humanities. In recognition of his leadership Mr. Franke received the Illinois Humanities Council's Public Humanities Award in May 1994. In February 1995, he testified before a congressional Appropriations Subcommittee to support federal funding for the humanities and the arts. In January 1996, he became Chairman of Americans United to Save the Arts and the Humanities, a national cultural Advocacy organization made up of business and community leaders. Mr. Franke received The Newberry Library Award for outstanding contributions to the humanities in May 1997. Mr. Franke was chosen by President Clinton to receive the National Humanities Medal in a ceremony at The White House, in September of 1997. He received the Distinguished Service to the Humanities Award of the Phi Beta Kappa Society in October of 2000.

Democratic Vistas for the Humanities

My lifelong passion for the arts and the humanities began at Yale, where I graduated with a degree in history. Since finishing a career in investment banking at The John Nuveen Company, my days are filled doing advocacy, board work, speaking engagements, and funding for the humanities. It is my time and my treasure. Whether through my experience with the Chicago Humanities Festival, the boards of Yale and the University of Chicago, or a weekly reading group, I have actively sought out the arts and humanities both as a source of personal guidance and as a public mission.

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The question I would like to address specifically here is simple in its articulation and, like all serious questions, elusive in its solution: How do we bring scholars and artists to a larger audience?

Before directly addressing the question, I would like to step back for a moment first to define some terms and then to ask why it is important to reach a larger audience.

In the past several years there have been numerous efforts at defining the role of the arts and humanities in public life. The terms arts and humanities belong together in this discussion. They share very similar roles in public life. But I would argue that the distinction between the terms has more to do with the separation established by the National Endowments as opposed to a meaningful difference in their public function. Most often, the difference is described in this manner: the arts constitute objects and events, whether sculpture or plays, and the humanities concern themselves with the interpretation of those objects and events.

Of course, this is a very simplistic dichotomy. The arts are just as often interpretations of social and political phenomena or other works of art. The medium may be dramatic or sculptural as opposed to the written word, but the arts are always, to some degree, about interpretation. At the Chicago Humanities Festival, we consider the humanities to include everything from scholarship to sculpture and from linguistics to performance. So when I refer to the humanities, I consider it to include the arts and the traditional humanities, much as the Greeks did in the classical period.

In all the recent discussions about the humanities in public life, there is a tacit assumption that the humanities do have a role in public life and that it is important that they have a more prominent role. But if we can elucidate the reasons why it is so important for scholars and artists to reach a larger audience and have a more prominent role in the public imagination, we can discern the challenges and opportunities in reaching new audiences. Simply put, when we know why we do what we do, then we can better understand how to do it.

One important way of interpreting the history of America is as a history not only of democracy, but also of democratization. From its foundation we can trace a slow process of democratization in all aspects of American life. This, of course, has not occurred without enormous resistance and violence. From the American Revolution to the Civil War and universal suffrage, from the New Deal and the creation of social security to the struggles and ideology of the civil rights movement, we witness how the process of

"By simultaneously defining the public sphere and appealing to our most personal sense of beauty and meaning, the humanities offer precisely the right balance."

democratization has moved from a strictly political arena to a broader social one. With the advent of mass media and the dramatic expansion of higher education in the twentieth century, we can discern an overall democratization of culture.

In the second volume of *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville writes extensively about the democratization of culture. Coming from the French aristocracy, he takes a fundamentally critical position with regard to democracy and art. Well-reasoned, provocative and insightful, Tocqueville's argument is thus useful for comparison and should not be disregarded. Forty years after the publication of *Democracy in America*, however, Walt Whitman called for a truly American, democratic art in his book, *Democratic Vistas*. There he provides some ideological foundations for the democratization of culture and envisions a bold new art born purely of democracy. Even in 1881, Whitman understood the democratization of culture as a necessary part of the American experiment:

Anything worthy to be called statesmanship in the Old World, I should say, among the advanced students, adepts, or men of any brains, does not debate today whether to hold on, attempting to lean back and monarchize, or to look forward and democratize—but how, and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize.

But Whitman was ahead of his time in this respect, and as such, the democratization of culture did not come without opposition. About twenty years after *Democratic Vistas* was published, Henry James and Henry Adams expressed concern about the limitations of a democratic culture. H.L. Mencken and many others soon followed with overt contempt. With the late twentieth century emergence of mass media, pop culture, feminism, and multi-culturalism, Whitman's vision of a democratic culture has become a presumption rather than a clearly articulated position.

But the humanities have historically been training for the aristocracy. And, as Tocqueville argues, doesn't democracy dim the brilliance of the brightest humanists? Keeping the long history of this question in mind, and acknowledging the complexities of the issue, it is important to re-state clearly why culture should be democratized.

Most American universities are founded on the notion that the purpose of higher education is to prepare citizens for a productive, responsible life. While in practice this purpose may be obscured, in principle it is an important goal and represents a fundamental commitment to democracy. Many would argue that much of higher education today is little more than preparation for profes-

sional life. Of course, universities must meet the practical demands of the times and the students. An increasingly technological society needs more and more training. But a well-trained society is not necessarily a democratic society.

For a truly healthy democracy, we need a well-informed citizenry capable of making complex political, social and moral decisions. The humanities are the best training for such critical thinking. Philosophy, history, art and literature all present complex moral, intellectual and emotional situations. Artists and scholars offer multiple interpretations and viewpoints of such situations, thus initiating a dialectic. Once engaged in a debate, people learn to think for themselves and develop their own judgement.

The humanities offer an opportunity to experiment with ideas and learn from other people's perspectives. A citizenry exposed to the humanities is able to identify and articulate the issues most important to their lives, and in turn, meet the challenges and ambiguities of the world more responsibly and with greater clarity.

One of the most important responsibilities of the humanities is to safeguard the public sphere from domination by any single force or ideology. Endowed with a faculty for representation, the humanities have a special responsibility in representing both the traditional and the unexamined or forgotten perspectives, sometimes raising uncomfortable questions. A free-market society committed to democracy turns to its scholars and artists for protection from corruption and injustice. One of their main roles in public life is to remind us of what is at stake in our policies and attitudes and to insure that our public sphere is truly public.

With this function in mind, along with the humanities' development of critical competence among the citizenry, education in the humanities can neither be limited to an elite group nor to a brief period of study in a citizen's life. The humanities should be available to everyone at all times in our lives. Just as any citizen can walk into any public library and gain access to a world of knowledge, so too should that same citizen have access to culture. The goal is lofty, some may even say impossible. But it represents a fundamental principle we should always strive to achieve.

Democracy, however, is not strictly about the public good. In fact, we more often today hear about the rights of individuals and the freedom of choice. As Tocqueville reminds us, every person seeks his or her individuality in an

"In order for scholars and artists to reach a larger audience must they sacrifice standards of excellence for accessibility? Dumb-down scholarship for mass appeal?"

In addition to my recent work in the humanities, I have also spent my entire professional career—forty-one years—at one company: The John Nuveen Company. Extraordinary growth and change marked the twenty-two years that I was CEO. In an age of rapidly advancing technology and shifting markets, the formula for success was always changing. One of the most important things I came away with from my years at Nuveen is that the world in which we operate is fundamentally unstable and unpredictable.

When I consider what prepared me best for the changes and uncertainties at Nuveen, I realize that my MBA certainly has been important in providing the necessary skills to manage the routine details of a business enterprise. Yet I also recognize that business school courses taught in the mid-1950s were not enough to prepare me for the challenges that faced Nuveen in the last thirty years. I believe that business courses being taught today are not, by themselves, enough to prepare students for the changes that will be shaping business decisions in the next thirty years. In fact, I am convinced that my study of the humanities and the encouragement of such study among employees at Nuveen have been crucial not only to my personal enrichment, but also to Nuveen's success.

As a relatively young CEO, I was looking for ways to encourage collaboration and new thinking among the employees. The people who rose to leadership positions at Nuveen usually had excellent technical skills from their formal training in professional schools, but I always looked for a humanities background as a lynch pin to their success in the company. As a way of developing new thinking at Nuveen, we introduced lectures, study groups and other company-sponsored educational programs. We encouraged employees to become involved with not-for-profit organizations. Leadership roles can come quickly to those who work in volunteer organizations. By supporting these organizations, we encouraged a civic-minded, inquisitive culture at Nuveen. I began giving talks on important subjects completely outside the field of our work—on history, education, health care, ethics and theatre. We brought in scholars and authors to discuss their work. The programs promoted cooperation and collaboration among employees in ways that we had not previously experienced. At the same time, this kind of study taught young leaders the importance of expansive thinking and developing their own judgment. It offered them an opportunity to experiment with ideas, to


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grow by taking risks and to learn how to change their minds when new information or insight emerged.

Sharpening minds through the humanities is an exercise in which the risk of failure is minimal. A Shakespeare play can dramatically present moral dilemmas or leadership techniques that one can analyze without fear of penalty for errors in judgment. Critical thinking can adapt to and adjust for almost every kind of change. The humanities really offer a preparation for the complexities and ambiguities of life. The knowledge of human nature and culture brings creativity, sensitivity, critical thinking and judgment to business. A company with strong thinkers and articulate leaders can approach the future with great confidence. The most effective training for this kind of leadership is through studying the humanities.

My experience at Nuveen relates to our original question in important and perhaps surprising ways. The humanities are often dismissed in favor of more practical studies. But the Nuveen experience is evidence to the contrary. As ways of doing business change every day, the nature of work is becoming more and more intellectual. Whether in business, law or technology, we spend most of our time presenting ideas to co-workers, colleagues and potential customers. The humanities are fundamentally about representation, the representation of ideas, emotions, and cultures. By studying the most powerful forms of representation, we refine our communication skills and sharpen our critical faculties. As markets are continuously emerging and changing, knowledge of different cultures, histories and values becomes decisive for success. If, in our outreach, we can demonstrate clearly how and why critical skills will improve performance at work, people will begin to think about the humanities differently.

Until now, I have only addressed what the humanities can do for the audience. But the democratization of culture is important not only for the individual citizen. It also serves the health and vitality of the humanities. Simply put, the humanities depend on funding. The more people know about the humanities-the more they care about the humanities-the more funding there is for the humanities. We can turn to the controversy over the National Endowments as a negative example of this. The endowment budgets were cut, in large part, because the legislators did not understand what the humanities are and what they are for. Or put another way, people do not give to the humanities simply because it is good to sup-



port the humanities. They give because they understand what the humanities are and why they are important. People give because they have access to and are actively involved in the questions and concerns of the humanities.

Moreover, broad participation in the humanities can energize the issues and debates with new life and new perspectives. In the best circumstances, accessibility demands clarity from scholars and artists that only serve to strengthen the work. Referring to a literary aristocracy, even Tocqueville acknowledges that "every aristocracy that keeps itself entirely aloof from the people becomes impotent."

But this gets into a complicated area. There is a great need in the academy, as there is in any profession, for a professional vocabulary. All professions have some version of it, because it offers an efficient means of communicating complex ideas among specialists. The humanities have traditionally had both a public and a professional vocabulary, but both kinds of vocabulary have become narrower over the past century. This may be in response to the overall specialization of work and society since the birth of modernism and mass media. Regardless, professional vocabulary is especially problematic for the relationship between the humanities and the public. Quite frankly, the general public seems to resent the special language of the humanities in a way that they do not resent it from other professions. For example, rarely is the charge of inaccessibility or jargon made against the sciences. This resentment, while often based on misunderstanding or misinformation, has a basis in the broad notion that the public sphere is the proper domain of the humanities. Does this mean that scholars and artists are not allowed a form of professional language when they engage the public? Or worse, following Tocqueville's argument, does this suggest that scholars and artists can't present their best work to a broad audience because no one will understand it or be interested? Must museums only present the most palatable or popular work in order to attract large audiences, rather than represent a range of subjects and perspectives?

These questions lie at the heart of our problem today. So much so that I would like to rephrase our original question: how do we connect scholars and artists to a larger audience without compromising the integrity of professional standards, the facts for popularity, or excellence for accessibility?

Before we can reach any conclusions about how to connect to a larger audience, we first need to consider the

history of the problems in reaching larger audiences. The main problem is relatively simple: the specter of elitism. In general, Americans are very ambivalent about what they perceive as high culture and elitism. There are certainly many reasons for this and a number of well-researched books trace the history of popular culture and high culture in America. But for our purposes, it is reasonable to assume that most Americans have a problem with elitism. The emergence of mass culture and its outspoken critics such as Henry Adams, Clement Greenberg, and Hilton Kramer have led inevitably to the public perception of elitism in so-called "high culture", which, it is safe to say, includes all the scholarly and traditional artistic disciplines. Tocqueville described a similar situation in 1840, and as a result argued that, with few exceptions, democratic nations would always "prefer books which may be easily procured, quickly read, and which require no learned researches to be understood."

Essentially, Tocqueville sets the tone for the question concerning the possibilities of democratic culture. Will a democratic people aspire to anything other than the lowest common denominator? This debate rages well over a century until we reach the middle age of mass culture and the beginning of postmodernism. There, for the first time, a shift occurs both within the academy and in the general public. In her book *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Susan Sontag notes the dissolution of the split between high and low art in American culture. With feminism, the civil rights movement and the pervasiveness of television and film, academics broadened their definition of culture and history to include women's history, African-American history and popular culture. For the past three decades in the academy there has been an explosion of alternative histories and theories of mass media. Traditional narratives and subjects are no longer the only possibilities for legitimate work. On the artistic and academic side, we have witnessed a democratization of subject matter and a new cultural pluralism emerge.

But the problem is not solved with cultural pluralism in the academy. Despite the democratization of legitimate subject matter, scholars are still beholden to professional standards and traditional notions of expertise. I mentioned earlier that no profession is without standards or its own special vocabulary. But the specialization and professionalization of the humanities has led to similar charges of elitism once made against high culture. In his book *American Culture American Tastes* Michael Kammen clearly charts the history of American cultural

"So in response to the question of why scholars and artists should be connected to a larger audience, there is one resounding answer: democracy."

pluralism and effectively summarizes the current situation when he writes:

The writing of history has been democratized because it has become more inclusive. Yet inclusiveness in terms of gender, ethnicity, race and class has not made history more accessible or popular to general readers. History still reaches a remarkably restricted audience even though it can no longer be fairly accused of elitism. Populism does not inevitably translate into popular appeal.

How can we bridge this divide? In order for scholars and artists to reach a larger audience must they sacrifice standards of excellence for accessibility? Dumb-down scholarship for mass appeal? Absolutely not.

But, for all the reasons I suggested before, I believe that scholars and artists have a special responsibility in a democratic society. Of course, not all artists and scholars need to directly engage the public. This is both an impractical and unreasonable demand. But as part of a professional mission, the humanities should have an active role in public life. Just as any business has research and development departments, it also has its marketing and sales people. So too the humanities need artists and scholars who can appropriately represent the broader work of colleagues to a large and diverse audience.

But as there are unique responsibilities with the humanities, there are also particular difficulties with any effort at outreach. Television and film, because of the diversity and size of their audiences, offer both a promising and a problematic opportunity. The most common problem with any effort to popularize history or literature is that such attempts too often gloss over areas of scholarly dispute for the purpose of narrative integrity or dramatic tension, or even worse, completely overlook facts in order to draw the biggest audiences. On the other hand, there have been many instances in which popular film has done a great service in opening a public discussion about history or introducing people to great works of literature. Some of the Vietnam movies that came out in the 1980s were effective in presenting the complexities and the horrors of that war. Almost every year, new interpretations of Shakespeare on film capture new audiences or renew interest in the plays. Needless to say, the free market does not preclude integrity from its final product.

Television and film, however, are neither the only way to reach larger audiences, nor are they necessarily the best way. One of the most important aspects of study-



Collaboration

ing the humanities is that it often emphasizes the legitimacy of multiple perspectives with regard to any given subject. What are the origins for the Civil War? What makes modern art modern? Of course, there are many different answers to these questions. By emphasizing the points of disagreement in a debate, we emphasize how different perspectives emerge out of a single object or event. This is precisely what was so valuable for us at Nuveen in learning about these debates. In an indirect, but engaging manner you see the limitations of a single perspective, but also recognize the necessity of taking a position. As we learn to look for the logic of different perspectives, we come to make better informed, more responsible decisions, whether at work or as citizens.

Representing artistic or scholarly debate can be difficult. But because it is such an important part of the humanities, it is crucial that these debates reach a larger audience. Controversy and debate do generate public interest in new material and renew interest in familiar or traditional subjects. Besides, given the right circumstances, everyone enjoys a good debate. Take the hotly contested debates about the Western canon as an example. Whichever side of the debate you were on, and however poorly the media represented the perspectives and ideas at stake, there has not been greater public interest in a humanistic question in recent memory. The culture wars are certainly a separate issue from what we are discussing today, but they do provide a compelling example of how people get interested in the humanities when they understand, even in the most rudimentary forms, the basic terms of the debate. With that in mind, we need to make a concerted effort to inform the public about the nature and history of the crucial debates in the most clear and concise manner possible. From there, the public can understand the terms of the debates and even begin to participate.


Many museums have tried to address this situation by offering audio tours of the larger exhibitions. The audio tours clearly and succinctly describe the historical conditions of the artist and the art. This allows the viewer to appreciate more fully the decisions of the artist and to reflect on how the reception of the artwork has changed over time. It is a relatively simple concept. There is a compromise, however. The explanation often separates the viewer from the work itself. As a result, the viewer may miss what is so important about the humanities: active and personal engagement with the material. It is difficult to introduce and inform without some compro-

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mise. We simply need to be aware of what we are compromising when we make such decisions.

There are, of course, other ways of finding larger audiences and emphasizing the debates. I have been the chairman of the Chicago Humanities Festival since its inception in 1990. My interest in starting the festival grew out of my personal passion for the humanities and from my work at Nuveen. Inspired by the tremendous changes taking place in Germany and Eastern Europe, the first festival began with a small core of people who focused the program on freedom. As a group, we were committed to the idea that the humanities play a decisive role in public life, that they not only represent our most hallowed traditions, but like Socrates' gadfly, confronted orthodoxy, asked uncomfortable questions and represented the forgotten and oppressed. As a result, we wanted to provide the broadest access and venue for the humanities' reception. Discussions, lectures and presentations clearly offered the most appropriate format for fully engaging the audience in the complexity of a given subject. Thus, we came up with the idea of a one-day open university where people could choose from a list of classes based on their own interests.

Early in the planning stages, we saw the need for collaboration among other cultural institutions to create a platform, a larger stage upon which to present the humanities to a broader audience. We sought out some of the major cultural institutions in Chicago and were met with enthusiastic cooperation. This lent the festival an immediate legitimacy that would have taken years to gain on its own. But more than that, institutional collaboration provides the festival with two essential components for success. First of all, collaboration provides expertise—expertise with regard to subject matter and to a particular institution's discipline and audience. Despite the public's wariness of and ambivalence about professional academic language, people do seek out the authority of scholarly research and cultural institutions. They want to know that what they are learning has been tested and can be backed up by research that the profession promotes. Second, collaboration with other cultural institutions allows us to provide a new form of outreach to a participating institution while expanding their core audience. By presenting a panel on architecture at the Chicago Historical Society, we can take advantage of its reputation, draw on its audience and also attract new audiences to the Historical Society because of our outreach. Conversely, we can present the same panel at the Alliance Française and



attract for them an entirely new audience (in this case those interested in architecture). Both strategies work. In either case, the festival's combination of subject and location generates new intellectual activity for the public at appreciative institutions.

Ultimately, the festival is the product of a working coalition of leading cultural, civic and educational institutions. It is important for universities and cultural institutions to recognize the benefits that come with collaboration. Just by going to a new place, people change their attitude toward that place, becoming less intimidated. With the festival, we enhance the importance of a single event by making it part of a larger, stimulating cross-cultural experience.

But we are still circling around what I believe is the key to the festival's success.

How have we been able to draw over 50,000 people to the festival this year? There is a number of contributing factors. One of our main objectives is to make the humanities available to all. We understand access to culture as a fundamental human right. In order to ensure that goal we make virtually all events available for \$5.

Early on in planning the festival, we also recognized that the festival needed focus. Subsequently, each year the festival planners select a fundamental human concern as the festival's theme, focused enough to capture the imagination and broad enough to attract a large and diverse audience.

In recent years, we have employed a binary logic: "Birth and Death", "Love and Marriage", "New and Old". This year we focused on the idea of "NOW". We seek our presenters with this broad theme in mind. We look for a diversity of subject matter and scholarly perspectives, from the more traditional areas of study to emerging disciplines. Programs emphasize the debates surrounding a subject and offer multiple viewpoints, drawn from many civilizations and eras. The lecturers are free to speak on almost anything they please as long as it has a relation to the festival's theme. By offering an array of choices, people attending the festival can pick a lecture or presentation based on their own interests and a general idea of the level of sophistication from the brochure material. We feel this arrangement attracts presenters with extraordinary minds and talents to Chicago while appealing to the greatest range of interests and expertise.

We also try to strike a balance between education and entertainment in our programs. This is not to say that we water down any of the presentations, but rather that


Understanding

we look for a play, a concert presentation or a movie followed by a lecture that relates to the festival's theme. This attracts an audience that might not otherwise go to a scholarly lecture. It also serves as an excellent introduction to other aspects of the festival. As any marketer knows, half the job is contacting people and letting them know what you have to offer. From there people can make an informed decision. I say this because I realize how uncomfortable scholars and artists can get about the combination of entertainment and serious subject matter. But all of us involved in the humanities have to recognize that entertainment is a tool, a point of entry for many people. And as such it can be used appropriately without sacrificing the integrity of art or scholarship.

The Chicago Humanities Festival is only one way of answering the question of how to reach a larger audience without sacrificing excellence for accessibility. It does, however, provide some valuable insights as to how we can more generally address the question. By offering a broad theme, the festival can present a range of subjects, some of which may not hold immediate popular appeal. But by presenting such research and creativity within the context of a larger cultural event, we attract new audiences to that work.

The real strength and success of the festival lies in its ability to buoy all those involved. We certainly have been fortunate to have such a cooperative community of institutions in Chicago. But it should be an encouraging example for other regions in the country of the benefits, energy and possibilities that come with collaboration.

At a time when there are so many institutions and businesses competing for our attention every day, we cannot expect an audience for the humanities to simply appear out of nowhere, eager for insight and knowledge. This in conjunction with the academy's intimidating reputation for professional vocabulary suggests that there needs to be a concerted effort at reaching a new audience. We can do this by capitalizing on the traditional strengths of the humanities and presenting them as clearly as possible. These strengths include scholarly expertise and the great tradition of debate in the humanities. There also needs to be a public discussion about how the humanities relate to citizenship and the public sphere. We can emphasize the pragmatic and entertaining aspects of the humanities in our outreach as well. This will bring in new audiences, and even cause some to rethink their attitude about the applications of the humanities.



Not all of those involved in the humanities, especially the artists and scholars, have either the time or the resources to devote to such an effort of outreach. Yet we know how important it is. We need to make the humanities available not merely for survival in an increasingly commercial world, but for the sake of democracy.

Therefore, leaders at universities and cultural institutions must step forward and play an active role in making the knowledge and insight of the humanities a more consistent part of public life, a place to turn to for wisdom, understanding and enjoyment. When Lincoln spoke of a government for, by and of the people, he assumed that the people would have the necessary tools to govern themselves. The humanities are a crucial tool for such government, and a key for leading productive lives in today's world. Therefore, guaranteeing access to the humanities, making them widely available to people of all ages and backgrounds is more critical than ever. A commitment to democracy calls for nothing less.

For more information about *Imagining America*, visit our website at: www.ia.umich.edu.

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INSIDE BACK COVER

Introducing Democratic Vistas for the Humanities

"Mr. Franke speaks eloquently I hope this is the end of one era when the humanities have become more and more insular, more separate from public life, and the beginning of a more generous and muscular confrontation of the humanities and arts with the great issues of our time."

--Robert Weisbuch, President of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

Making Public Culture Work for Everyone: Some Voices on Collaboration

"If you reach out to me, I'm going to snatch you in. [Let's] go beyond the academic walls as they exist today."

-- Timuel Black, educational and community leader and historian.

"I would like to see major universities say, we're here for the long haul, we've been in your community, we have been an employer in your community, and now we are going to be part of your community."

-- Mary Dempsey, Commissioner, Chicago Public Libraries

"Partnerships involve give and take for them to work. But the most important ingredients in all collaborations are trust and respect. Plus a sincere desire to make the collaboration work. These are essential if collaborations are to succeed. It's really very easy folks, and simple. Trust, respect, and sincere desire. That's all that's needed. It's so easy, it's scary."

-- Carlos Tortolero, Executive Director, Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum