

THE AGENDA FOR THE HUMANITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Stephen R. Graubard



American Council of Learned Societies

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On March 16–18, 1989 ACLS sponsored a conference on “The Humanities in the 1990’s: Perspectives on Research, Education, and the Liberal Arts.” The conference, cosponsored by the National Humanities Center and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, took place at the Center’s beautiful building in Research Triangle, North Carolina, where a group of eminent scholar-teachers gathered to discuss recent developments in and future directions for scholarly research and education in the humanities, as well as the general environment for higher education in the coming decade

The full results of the conference will appear in published form, but its tone was set by Stephen Graubard’s elegant keynote address entitled “The Agenda for the Humanities in the 1990’s”. Graubard, the Editor of Daedalus and Professor of History at Brown University, established the very high level of discourse that characterized the entire conference by offering an historical perspective on current issues and by insisting that humanistic scholarship and its responsibilities must be understood in the broadest possible way. The talk, which was referred to repeatedly throughout the conference, did what few keynotes do: it actually established a full and appropriate context for some of the more particularistic issues raised later in the weekend. Indeed, Graubard’s address was so thoughtful and so powerful that ACLS believes it merits publication on its own. We are, therefore, very pleased to be able to offer it as the eighth in our series of Occasional Papers.

America's colleges and universities are today, collectively, the best in the world. No one would have made that claim in 1939, and not because Americans were more modest then. One cannot be certain that such a claim will still be made in 2039, or indeed, even in 2014. To say this is not to sound a tocsin. It is simply to remind you that "supremacies" are won and lost.

The last half century has been a good one for the humanities and for higher education generally in this country. To assert this, to make the statement so categorically, may seem deliberately provocative, flying in the face of powerful contrary opinion, failing to make sufficient distinctions between the conditions that prevailed in the 1950's and early 1960's, and what has been common more recently, since Berkeley and Vietnam. I would be the last to deny the significance of both for higher education, and indeed for the nation, but one can easily exaggerate their importance, ignoring other long-term trends that may have had greater significance.

Am I saying that the higher educational system is flawless, without blemishes, that it comes as close to being perfect as any human institution can be? Am I wholly satisfied with what now exists? Of course not! My concern — and it may seem an exceedingly modest one — is to express bewilderment with those who, out of historical innocence, personal pique, professional disappointment, or unreasoning fear, have managed to persuade themselves that a once-wonderful system of American higher education is today embattled, in rapid decline, that standards are falling, dramatically, that an earlier American scholarly accomplishment is being compromised. I do not believe this.

Indulge me then, if you will, in a few cursory observations. First, allow me to say what I have argued elsewhere, that the best of America's colleges are today incomparable — specifically, in the instruction they give and in the opportunities for scholarly research that they provide. They are vastly superior in both respects to anything now common in Europe, Asia, or Latin America. I could go further and say that many of our less celebrated institutions, while not able to claim anything like these levels of distinction, are substantially improved over what they and their analogues were half a century ago. I accept that there are some exceptions to this, but I see no general "declension."

On the contrary, I see unprecedented opportunities having been

created in the last half century, in many different forms, for previously excluded classes. The American higher educational system has shown a remarkable capacity for growth, innovation, invention, and renovation.

Why is this significant? Because the same cannot be said for any number of other American institutions. No one, I think, would argue that America's rail system compares today with what is common either in Western Europe or in Japan. America's health care system, despite the excellence of American medical research, is not today the envy of the world; nor, for that matter, are its social welfare programs, its urban housing, public or private, its capacity to cope with many of the more insidious social conditions created by drug abuse, homelessness, and violent crime. These situations, and others like them, are properly preoccupying. For those of us in higher education, however, and for many others in the larger society, there is one other condition that ought to command our attention.

However sanguine I may appear to be about developments in America's colleges and universities in the last half century — and I know that not everyone will subscribe to the opinions I have expressed here — no one, I think, can be at all sanguine about America's schools, at the primary or at the secondary level. To speak of them as a “national disaster” is rhetorical, excessive; suffice it to say that few have managed to cope with a vast array of social and intellectual problems of very great complexity.

To speak candidly about the problems of America's schools is exceedingly difficult. Too many raw nerves are touched. Too many susceptibilities are called into question. In these circumstances, there is hand-wringing and perceptual expression of concern, but too little is actually done.

The most remarkable educational phenomenon of the last 50 years, perhaps, is that there has been such a glaring discrepancy between what has been achieved in America's colleges and universities and what has happened in its elementary and secondary schools, public and private. Higher education, for all its faults and failings, has on the whole prospered; primary and secondary schools have experienced ever-growing difficulties. The conundrum, too rarely addressed, is why colleges and universities have been able to profit from rapid and continuing expansion — and, indeed, have come almost to depend on it — while schools have reeled under the

pressure of numbers, and of much else, being unable to accommodate rapid social change. How, then, can the top be healthy when the bottom is rotting? Is it possible that I simply fail to see the rot at the top? Is all my prating about American higher educational “success” in the last 50 years an illusion? I think not.

Allow me, if I may, to return to the year 1945. It is not a year that figures prominently on the historical calendar of all humanists, though it should, for it is the year of the explosion of the atom bomb over Japan and the official ending of World War II. Those who are more provincial may also recall it as the year of *General Education in a Free Society*, the so-called Harvard “Redbook,” thought to have been immensely influential in post-war undergraduate curriculum reform. I admire the book, for its quintessential World War II rhetoric, its idealism, its 19th-century prose. Yet, more relevant to our purposes — certainly to mine, asked to discuss an agenda for the humanities and higher education generally in the 21st century — is not the Harvard report, the wartime labor of a group of professors who did not leave Cambridge for Washington or foreign parts, but the report of another group, produced more hastily, again in response to a presidential request, but not from one who sat in the Harvard Yard. It was Franklin Roosevelt who asked for this report; it was Harry Truman who received it. I refer, of course, to Vannevar Bush’s *Science: The Endless Frontier*, presented by Bush and his collaborators on July 5, 1945, in response to an invitation originally issued from the White House on November 17, 1944.

The Bush report, without its appendices, was impressively brief, some 40 pages in all. While it lacked the rhetorical flourishes of *General Education in a Free Society*, it was incomparably more influential, particularly for the scientific community. More to the point, however, because its subject was science — with radar, penicillin, the need for a National Science Foundation and a larger federal involvement being principal themes — is its remarkable relevance for our subject (the humanities and higher education).

I intend no offense to anyone when I say that I know of no analogue to *Science: The Endless Frontier* in the humanities. The need for such a document today is acute. Is it possible to imagine one being written in this calendar year? What would it emphasize? How would it build on the work of other commissions concerned with the

humanities? What would it find useful in the report of the Commission on the Humanities, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, published in 1980? What use, if any, would it make of the work of the commission established in the 1960's by the ACLS, collaborating with the Council of Graduate Schools and Phi Beta Kappa, which, among other things, recommended the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities? Or, would it move in quite other directions? What might these be? Is it at all possible that the Bush report, putatively about the sciences, could prove particularly useful in such an endeavor? Even to raise that question suggests that I am a great admirer of that report.

I am prepared to argue that it would prove useful, that it might indeed provide a model for a humanities report in 1989. Why do I say this? Because the Vannevar Bush report is neither nostalgic, technical, nor skeptical; factual in the best sense of the term, it is genuinely informative on a number of things that are unknown, or, having once been known, are today forgotten. Its scholarly apparatus is spare; its statistics are presented in a form calculated to appeal to even the least number-crunching among us. They always make sense.

Any number of points can be drawn out of the Bush report; I will dwell on a few. Thus, for example, it is not insignificant, in my view, that Vannevar Bush chose as Chairman of his Committee on the Discovery and Development of Scientific Talent not a noted scientist but a prominent humanist, Henry Allen Moe, the head of the Guggenheim Foundation. The Moe Committee was asked to respond to the question posed by President Roosevelt: "Can an effective program be proposed for discovering and developing scientific talent in American youth so that the continuing future of scientific research in this country may be assured on a level comparable to what has been done during the war?" The Committee's response is worth quoting:

As citizens, as good citizens, we therefore think that we must have in mind while examining the question before us — the discovery and development of scientific talent — the needs of the whole national welfare. We could not suggest to you a program which would syphon into science and technology a disproportionately large share of the Nation's highest abilities, without doing harm to the Nation, nor, indeed, without crippling science . . . Science cannot live by and unto itself alone.

A self-denying proclamation, by a wily chairman, a spokesman for the humanities, wrested from a committee composed overwhelmingly of scientists? Not at all. The whole of the Bush report is replete with commitments to such values. This was not simply a *pro forma* bow in the direction of the humanities. It was integral to a larger purpose, the explicit formulation of a simple message: the educational system of the United States had never been adequate; the experience of war had taught a lesson — talent was a scarce resource; it needed to be cultivated.

For those who have never known (or have forgotten) how uncommon higher education was until well after the Second World War, how uncommon, indeed, was high school graduation, the Bush report must be compulsory reading. American historians of that day, reading Merle Curti's impressive new work, published in 1943, *The Growth of American Thought*, might have come away with a somewhat different message. Curti, writing of the 1920's, attached great importance to the enormous expansion in public school enrollments; 2½ million boys and girls attended high school in the United States in the 1920's; a decade later, the numbers had reached 5 million. Curti, surveying the scene, wrote:

As on the lower levels, higher education responded to the demand of the middle class for whatever promised to promote comfort, economic success, and social prestige. Colleges and universities expanded like balloons as youth from families now enjoying prosperity inflated them to unheard-of dimension. In 1920 the colleges and normal schools together enrolled about half a million students, in 1930 the number was appreciably above a million. The funds available for scholarly research and creative endeavor in the arts exceeded similar funds not only in pre-war America but in any other civilization at any earlier time. The foundations, like the colleges, multiplied in numbers and resources.

Was Vannevar Bush not aware of this? Too good a scientist and too able an administrator — too dependent on talent — how could he fail to recognize the explosion in public education that had taken place, that indeed had been accentuated in certain places in the 1930's? During that depression decade, when the prospects for employment were minimal, parents, sometimes at substantial personal sacrifice,

kept their children in school longer, and, in certain communities, then sent them on to study in low-tuition or free local colleges. Bush knew all this, but it did not lead him to echo Curti's remarks; instead, in its characteristic low-key manner, his report read:

The country may be proud of the fact that 95 percent of boys and girls of fifth grade age are enrolled in school, but the drop in enrollment after the fifth grade is less satisfying. For every 1000 students in the fifth grade, 600 are lost to education before the end of high school, and all but 72 have ceased formal education before completion of college. While we are concerned primarily with methods of selecting and educating high school graduates at the college and higher levels, we cannot be complacent about the loss of potential talent which is inherent in the present situation.

Why did students drop out? Because they could not afford to go on; because schools and colleges providing courses equal to their capacity were not locally available; because business and industry recruited many of the most promising before they had finished the training of which they were capable.

Bush, admirably and succinctly summarizing the conditions of his day, was not explicitly disagreeing with Curti or with others who thought as the Wisconsin historian did, but he was less overwhelmed by the growth of student enrollment, more preoccupied with the character of those enrollments, very concerned with the details of research support, examining them in the '20's, the '30's, and during the war.

In a table entitled "Scientific Research Expenditures and National Income," Bush employed the recently developed national income concept devised by Simon Kuznets. Working retrospectively, Kuznets had estimated U.S. national income to have been just over 74 billion in 1920; it rose to be 87 billion in 1929, and then plummeted to 42 billion in 1932 and 1933, reaching its 1920 level again only in 1940. Industrial research, Bush discovered, had reached 106 million dollars in 1929, growing by very small increments, then, surprisingly, jumped much more rapidly through the 1930's, the depression years, reaching some 200 million dollars in 1939 and 234 million in 1940. Colleges and universities, until 1939, spent about half as much on scientific research as did the federal government and the state governments; all that changed dramatically in 1941 when federal expenditures skyrocketed.

There was more nuance in Bush than in Curti, less romance. Why? Because he started with the premise that there was everything to do, that a great challenge awaited the nation, the challenge of making higher education and secondary schooling more universally available.

The federal government, so recent an arrival on the funding scene, needed to be instructed; it had barely begun to understand the nature of its obligations, let alone the possibilities to be realized from a greater financial commitment. Bush wrote on the eve of a great military success, to which scientists and other scholars had substantially contributed, and not only or principally in weapons development. Medical research figured prominently in the Bush report. The nation was being reminded of what had been done at home.

It is not insignificant that the Bush report, in an approving manner, quoted from a recently published work of distinguished social scientists. *Who Shall be Educated: The Challenge of Unequal Opportunities*, published by W. Lloyd Warner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Martin B. Loeb in 1944, provided arguments that served Bush's purposes. They had written: "The findings of this study, in harmony with the findings of other studies, show that approximately as many of the ablest high school graduates are out of college as are in college." Those remarks allowed Bush to add:

Higher education in this country is largely for those who have the means. If those who have the means coincided entirely with those who have the talent we should not be squandering a great part of our higher education on those undeserving of it, nor neglecting great talent among those who fail to attend college for economic reasons. There are talented individuals in every segment of the population, but with few exceptions those without the means of buying higher education go without it. Here is a tremendous waste of the greatest resource of a nation — the intelligence of its citizens.

The colleges and universities of America did not suddenly open their doors more widely because Vannevar Bush, in a report of the President, asked them to do so. Congress did not pass the GI Bill of Rights because Bush devoted a whole section of his report to that subject; it read, quite simply, "The Generation in Uniform Must Not Be Lost." Even the most distinguished reports do not, by themselves, generally have cosmic consequences. Bush simply contributed to the

creation of a national understanding that had not previously existed. The war, in its many dimensions, made him even more bold; unafraid to look at his society, seeing no reason to flatter it and being disinclined to deny its shortcomings, he produced a report that was eloquent in its understatement, powerful in its immodest recommendations. These things could not have been achieved without striving for a certain kind of candor.

Are we in a position to do something of the same at this time? Can we bear to look with any degree of objectivity at our higher educational institutions but also at our schools? Can we recognize how much the future of the humanities, and more importantly, the welfare of this society and others, may depend on our understanding of the unique opportunities provided by this moment in history?

America's colleges and universities have become more "popular" institutions; they are enrolling unprecedented numbers of students. They were already doing this, even before the war, as Curti knew. Europeans, the inventors of the university, were not always overwhelmed by American innovations on what they conceived to be their original model. After the war, expansion of an even more important kind occurred, accepting as it did the principle that social mobility, and economic productivity — not to speak of learning and scholarship — could only be increased and advanced through making higher education available to substantially greater numbers.

On both sides of the lecture platform — in numerous colleges and universities, and not only those thought to be the best — men and women whose parents had no experience of higher education assumed their seats, as if by right. The differences between the 1930's and the late 1950's were extraordinary. A generation of refugee scholars, many of whom had experienced great difficulties in finding employ during the 1930's, frequently having to settle for second best or nothing at all, were made welcome, not least in the more prominent institutions. Barriers, rarely acknowledged openly, that had existed against certain religious and ethnic groups, were lowered. The situation of the Jews in American academic life, for example, is a subject that has been frequently told, though only in part. Great numbers of men and women entered as students because of the GI Bill of Rights and other federal legislation that gave a "bonus" to ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen in a form fundamentally different

from what was provided after World War I. A good number — older than the traditional American graduate or undergraduate student, sometimes married and with children — wandered far from their homes and found educational opportunity in places they had never thought to enter.

The financial barriers to further education were greatly eased. Many, habituated to think of work or careers in terms set by their parents and their communities, discovered wholly new possibilities in America's colleges and universities. Not surprisingly, some, including many who were exceptionally talented, began to think of teaching and scholarship as a career. Appointments became plentiful, particularly as higher educational institutions grew, as new ones multiplied, as American colleges and universities sought to make up for what were now seen to have been the enrollment deficits of the war years. Indeed, the whole higher educational system grew; new disciplines emerged; fields were substantially redefined; new competences acquired during the war, in language training, as much as in the sciences and technology, became academically valuable.

Some arrived without great academic experience — battle did not always provide such; men spending thousands of hours in boredom, on ships or stations halfway around the world, did not always use that time to read or to engage in intellectual discourse. In the country of second and third chances, they were being offered a new kind of hospitality; the colleges and universities were providing access to new careers. It is scarcely surprising that some opted for the academic life. Nor is it surprising that their excitement communicated itself to new generations of students — younger men and women who had missed the war — but who now thought it wholly reasonable to continue their educations beyond high school.

We all know that college and university catalogues can be remarkably concealing of the true character of an institution; many are elaborate "puffs," publicity brochures, produced to entice. Yet, any serious study of the course catalogues of the pre-war period, when compared with those of two or three decades later, can only suggest how great an intellectual revolution was wrought, how significant it was in certain fields. Many of the traditional course offerings survived, of course, sometimes in forms instantly recognizable. Others, however, were substantially changed, responding to new interests, occasionally

faddish and ephemeral, but more often expressing a changed perspective on what learning could be, what questions and modes of inquiry were reasonable, why late 19th and early 20th century scholarship did not provide the only standards useful in determining the legitimacy of a scholarly endeavor.

This was very obvious in the natural sciences; it was no less true in the humanities and the social sciences. Many institutions, once satisfied to offer a handful of courses in the humanities, intended to “acculturate” or “cultivate” the young, emerged as major centers of research and teaching, giving that term a definition it had never known in the pre-war period. Individuals, corporations, and foundations contributed support to sustain such instruction and scholarship, again on a quite unprecedented scale. The establishment of the National Endowment for the Humanities, while perhaps not as critical for the humanities as the National Science Foundation had been for the sciences, made an enormous difference, particularly in certain fields, and for certain kinds of scholarship.

If the federal government never assumed the importance for the humanities that it had for the sciences, the colleges and universities of the country, with state or private funds, became the great 20th-century patrons of the humanities. In their employment policies, as in their sabbatical leave programs, in the fellowships they created and the new possibilities they afforded for foreign research and travel, they established a way of life for many thousands of scholars fundamentally different from anything known before the Second World War. Who, looking at the situation today, can doubt what this has meant for those who entered one of the major academic disciplines in the humanities, and used this knowledge and experience in their classrooms?

Was there, then, no negative side to all this? There was, of course. Some in the humanities, in their inflated opinions of themselves, fueled by their new grandiose titles and novel privileges, like other of their academic colleagues, neglected their teaching responsibilities, taking far too little advantage of them, seeming to despise them. Others, less secure, but still required to “produce,” and quite incapable of doing so at the levels now required, busied themselves with make work — university faculty politics, or, more dangerously, student politics. Opportunity for scholarship — in a mass profession — does not necessarily automatically translate into significant scholarly

achievement. Nor, for that matter, does it necessarily translate into respect for the higher educational enterprise or indeed, for greater personal civility. The greatest loss of these last years may have been in the erosion of a sense of community, even of a sense of pride. These are problems that ought properly to preoccupy us, though they cannot be allowed to conceal other more grave problems that exist, or the more extraordinary opportunities that beckon.

If our purpose is not only to indicate where we are now, but where we intend to go, if we can imagine doing in 1989 what Vannevar Bush managed to do in 1945, doing it for the humanities as he once did it for the sciences, we must begin with an appreciation of what we now have, knowing that it is not nearly enough. If Vannevar Bush, in his characteristic understatement, started by celebrating the fact that 95 percent of boys and girls of fifth grade age were enrolled in school, his purpose was not to exult but to draw attention to the losses that followed, that he deemed catastrophic. There may be an advantage, in my view, in adopting a similar stance. We may start, quite properly, by celebrating the country's remarkable libraries, which are incomparable in the world today, not to speak of the country's museums, of a variety and magnificence as to rival the best in Europe, providing facilities that make instruction and scholarship in the humanities a sheer delight. New humanities research centers provide incomparable retreats for longer or shorter periods. One could go on and cite any number of such impressive and important post-war innovations.

If one chose to be more lighthearted, wishing to take aim at the Cassandras of recent times who have been so scathing of the humanities, one might look into statistics on book publication. One might discover that more copies of Plato's *Republic* are sold in the United States today than in any other part of the world — principally for classroom use — and that this number is greater than any that can be established for the whole first century and a half of the nation's existence. These are ludicrous statistics, useful for polemical or ideological debate, but ultimately meaningless. So, also, with any attempt to list the great scholarly books of our time, to prove that we have not lost our capacity for creative research in the humanities. These are banal responses to irresponsible criticism. They leave the agenda-making power with individuals who are fundamentally mistaken about the nature of the educational crisis that today confronts us.

What Bush and his colleagues detected in 1945 remains true; too many of those who go to college, including many from the most economically privileged segments of our society, are massively unprepared for serious study, for anything that can be properly termed learning appropriate to adults. We may no longer speak of the "gentleman's C," of the revolving doors of certain state universities, which admit all who graduate from high school and then expel them after freshman year — all fully documented in the Bush report — but the problem of educating the advantaged young remains.

America's elementary and secondary schools are today, even more than in 1939, overwhelmingly segregated by social class. Havighurst knew this; so did Bush, Conant, Moe, and all the others who contributed to *Science: The Endless Frontier*. Family, now, as then, remains the single most important determinant of the educational opportunity available to children. Then, as distinct from now, only small segments of the middle class went on to college or university. Today, almost all do, in one way or other.

Almost all of America's elementary and secondary schools are today predominantly social class segmented; residence, a function of income, determines to a great extent what public school a child goes to, whether a private option exists, what kinds of instruction and socialization are offered. Though the predominantly middle class schools, whether in the suburbs or the cities, differ significantly in quality, with many emphasizing social and athletic accomplishments over academic distinction and a good number asking very little of their students, infantilizing them in a hundred ways — these schools are all successful transmission belts; they send their students — almost all of them — to the community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities of the country. There, too, we find marked differences in educational quality. All, however, enjoy a common advantage; they are accepted as suitable "landing places" for the young, on their way to adulthood and profitable employ.

If many institutions are obliged to lower their standards to guarantee a full complement of students, they do so willingly, often covertly. Achievement counts for less with institutions anxiously waiting for paying customers. In the case of public institutions, where enrollment figures may powerfully determine legislative appropriations, there may be no less an incentive to seek live bodies. Access has

become nearly universal in America today for children of the middle class. The problem, today as yesterday, when opportunities were more limited, is to improve substantially the motivation and preparation of those who attend. Given the multiplicity of institutions — given the number of places — there is room somewhere for all able to pay the tariff or able to claim some other significant accomplishment, athletic, personal, or extra-curricular. Postponement, not so much of gratification but of real accomplishment, from school to college, from both to graduate or professional school, has become a characteristic middle-class habit.

None of these options exist for children of the inner cities of America, overwhelmingly poor, black, and Hispanic. The children of poverty in an earlier period, whether native-born or immigrant, rarely made their way through high school; very few before the 1930's could aspire to a college education. The Bush statistics are eloquent on this point. If the dropout problem — not so defined — was serious in 1945, as it had been for decades before, it is more so today. The schools of the poor — what some would more crassly call the schools of the “underclass” — are overwhelmingly storage facilities; for a minority, sometimes minute, able to go through and graduate, there is today some prospect of higher education, given the remarkable innovations at the tertiary level in recent decades. For the others — the overwhelmingly majority — there is only the prospect of jobs at low wage in low-prestige employ, or of something even worse, long-term unemployment. The problems of motivating the young to learn, even at the minimal levels common in many middle-class elementary and secondary schools, seems positively herculean in the ghetto schools. The hopes of Vannevar Bush and his colleagues have not been realized, certainly not for the poor in America today.

Education, at the higher level, being voluntary, has space for those with serious intellectual and professional ambitions, and also many others who have neither, who understand that a degree will help them. Higher educational institutions have learned how to choose their student clienteles, and when there is need to go “up-market,” how to do this. Elementary and secondary schools, particularly in the public sector, have no such options. Required to admit all — not only in the inner cities but also in suburbs and towns — many children arrive who are disinclined to study, who are physically or psychologically

unprepared for making such an effort, who may be experiencing severe problems at home, who often live in troubled communities, that make even the “slums” of the last century and of the pre-war period seem almost civilized and salubrious by comparison. These problems are certain to continue in the coming decades, though one can hope for some amelioration. The gravity of the situation — its sheer complexity — requires that the more stable institutions of this society, and the colleges and universities must be ranked as such, need to do more to cope with problems created by inferior schooling. When, in a quantitative field like mathematics — where competence can be easily tested — it is discovered that American students rank below those of all other major industrial societies, there is a serious problem, almost certainly duplicated in the humanities.

It is imperative that higher educational institutions not be beguiled into imagining that their task is principally to go down into the schools, to bring knowledge to the heathen — to tell principals and teachers how to run their schools — or even to persuade their graduates to go down, to sacrifice themselves, to make school teaching their life’s work. Such policies, however commendable, are unlikely to create fundamental reforms. The articulation of a few principles — as with the Bush report — is what is urgently required today. What, then, might these be?

First, to acknowledge, openly, that the colleges and universities of the country have a prime obligation to be concerned with schooling, public and private, secondary and elementary. There is no single universe of higher educational institutions. It is inconceivable that Harvard will perceive the problems of education or provide the incentives for its improvement in the same way that a mass state university will, or that either will act in the manner that a struggling institution, dependent on tuition income, may be required to do. Still, all can make education (certainly at the secondary level) a prime concern. Whether the most favored alter their college entrance requirements — setting new ones that may serve as goals for more imaginative instruction in the schools that traditionally aspire to see their students admitted — whether they choose to introduce new summer sessions for the less privileged in all their high school years, whether they opt for the creation of a preparatory college year, intended to remedy certain of the academic deficiencies that are

known to exist, or whether they elect wholly other procedures not now attempted, there is much that these favored and oversubscribed institutions can in fact do. Others, less advantaged, ought to aspire to provide other kinds of help, appropriate to their financial and human resources. It is unconscionable that institutions of the distinction of many in the United States persist in imagining that their greatest achievement is to be able to seduce many young people to apply, using all the techniques of Madison Avenue to persuade them to do so, and then boasting of the numbers who have in fact been turned away. A more admirable policy would be to set standards that are just and sensible, to help make it possible for those who wish to meet such standards to do so, in a way that is economically viable, intellectually respectable. If the colleges and universities of the country acknowledged this as one of their prime responsibilities, defining their standards in quite different ways, and pursuing very different policies to help aspiring students to achieve such competences, whether in the humanities or the sciences, the results could be significant.

A nation that did not believe it demeaning to alter its higher educational enterprise in the 19th century to accommodate agricultural and engineering research and instruction, seeing both as legitimate and necessary, need not be afraid to tackle the problems of the American city, impoverished in so many vital functions, beleaguered in ways that make references to New York as the New Calcutta seem only slightly hyperbolic. The colleges and universities cannot be expected to resolve the problems of the American city — whatever that phrase may mean — but they can do an enormous amount to alleviate those problems, and not only by contributing to their proper definition and creating a greater understanding of their nature.

Urban studies, in wholly hitherto unexplored dimensions, only hesitantly and half-heartedly initiated after World War II, and hastily and recklessly abandoned in the 1970's, need to be revived, calling on all the faculties of the university, as much in the humanities as in the social sciences, making use of whatever scientific and technological understanding can be effectively mobilized. If the promise of the Vannevar Bush report, with its confidence in what an expanded educational opportunity can be expected to bring to the individual and the nation is to be realized, it calls for deliberate and persistent efforts to cope with the problems of America's cities, to see these as cultural,

social, and intellectual as much as they are political and economic. Such activity, in my view, transcends almost every other higher educational obligation at this time; it will not be undertaken by others for Americans. The colleges and universities of this country, in making a commitment to the young, exceeding any that is now made by simply providing places for middle-class children, holds the promise of giving a social purpose to higher education that is not today paramount, that would certainly benefit the citizens of this country and of many others abroad.

All this presumes, however, a willingness to confront a much less serious problem, but one that will require attention and imagination in the coming decade. As we are all increasingly aware, a large generation of teacher-scholars in the humanities, but also in other disciplines as well, will be retiring from their greatly expanded departments in the coming decade and in the early years of the 21st century. The academic profession, in a literal sense, needs to be renewed. The problem is made all the more serious because for so many years, in the '70's and '80's, academic appointments were hard to come by; several generations of graduate students were frightened away, or, not uncommonly, received their advanced degrees and then went on to obtain other professional degrees, more useful in the marketplace. The personnel deficit, particularly among those in the junior ranks, in all too many faculties, is literally appalling. Again, these deficits cannot be made good by suddenly increasing graduate school enrollments, advertising the fact that America's colleges and universities will soon be competing, perhaps as never before, for scarce talent, with many positions, in a great many disciplines, becoming open. The most deliberate efforts must be made to recruit able young men and women for academic life.

This cannot be achieved by a central planning mechanism, by suddenly announcing that there are now or soon will be shortages in American history, cultural anthropology, or French literature. The most compelling demand of the next decade, confronting all presidents, deans, and faculties, will be to decide whether to fill a vacant position at all, whether to fill it with someone recognized to be inferior, whether to take major steps to encourage new graduate students, to introduce wholly new kinds of post-doctoral fellowships, particularly for recent Ph.D. recipients, to give special opportunities and privileges

— for research and teaching — to untenured faculty. If circumstances allow younger men and women to assume new obligations, it is to be hoped that they will increasingly be seen as an invaluable human resource, made so by their education. Having chosen a profession unique for its freedom, that can easily degenerate into entrepreneurialism, or, worse, into provincialism and parochialism wholly unsuited to our times, they need to be encouraged to strive for a more ample learning.

All this is made more compelling by a fact that is still insufficiently appreciated — the next decades will provide the most extraordinary opportunities for the humanities, in every way comparable to the limitless horizons opened for science and technology by the experience of World War II. The reasons for this need to be understood.

In a literal sense we are poised before the possibility of intellectual and cultural discovery unprecedented in modern history, exceeding even what we now recognize to have been the great opportunities created by the physical and scientific discoveries of the last half millennium. If Herbert Butterfield was right in believing that the “scientific revolution” of the 16th and 17th centuries “outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements within the system of medieval Christendom,” a view that not everyone will accept, my own thoughts about what is now impending may seem equally excessive. Yet, if, as I believe, the world and its artifacts, its ideas and traditions are now available for study as they have never been before, if all these are intersecting with scientific and social transformations of a fundamental kind, requiring explication, analysis, and criticism, the role of the humanities in the next decades will only faintly resemble what they have been historically, or what they have been since World War II.

It would be foolhardy for me to predict the kinds of comparative institutional and intellectual research in history, literature, the fine arts, philosophy, and religion that may become common. We are too close to our new world, with its peculiar hazards and interdependencies, to imagine what we will do in the coming years to incorporate knowledge of civilizations and traditions that were overwhelmingly foreign to all but a handful of extraordinarily endowed individuals, scholars working

principally in a few major European universities in the last decades of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century. How these ancient civilizations will come to be incorporated into American scholarship — what incentives they will produce for new study of languages and literatures, of artifacts and moral systems once deemed exotic — how this will affect American understanding of the world, how attractive this will prove to foreigners, who, in even greater number, may wish to come to teach or study in American universities in the 21st century, we cannot even begin to guess.

When, in 1820, Sydney Smith, the noted Edinburgh reviewer, wrote of America, he heaped scorn on a presumptuous people who were prepared to tolerate slavery, while, during the “thirty or forty years” of their independence had done “absolutely nothing for the Sciences, for the Arts, for Literature, or even for the statesman-like studies of Politics or Political Economy.” Such judgments on American intellectual achievements were not at all uncommon in the United Kingdom (or in Europe) for the greater part of the 19th century. While Americans, offended by such patronizing judgments, fretted, protested, and condemned what they saw as rank ignorance and snobbery, it was only in the 20th century that the full dimensions of an earlier American intellectual achievement began to be recognized.

While it would be invidious to single out one individual who made Americans more aware of their intellectual heritage, Perry Miller, certainly, and other humanists of his generation contributed massively to this scholarly enterprise. Not only were they able to discover an American past, hitherto ignored by both Europeans and Americans, but they were able to place it in a context which saw the genius of the country in something other than its remarkable industrial and commercial growth. Perry Miller, celebrating what he chose to call the American legal mentality, knew that compared with “the palatial steamboats, the roaring railroads, the Atlantic cable,” the majesty of a code or even of the Common Law might seem to be a small matter. Yet, it was the Civil War that “terminated a stupendous era of legal thinking” making this “one of its poignant tragedies, if not indeed its most poignant.” Such a judgment, for its scholarly discovery as much as for its passion, is a very partial testimonial to what scholarship in the humanities, today firmly anchored in the United States, while remaining vital also in many places abroad, is committed to providing.

Contemporary societies, while massively disinclined, at least in their mass media representations of the world, to acknowledge either the importance of history or tradition, are in fact ultimately dependent on both. This is particularly true for the United States where memory is fleeting and reputation is ephemeral.

Perry Miller left the greater part of his work on *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* unwritten. We cannot even begin to guess what he would have said had he written book IV, *The Battlefield of Democracy: Education*. It is an absolutely critical subject, still seriously neglected today: education is indeed the battlefield of democracy; it behooves us to gaze calmly at its strange contours, at its many contemporary forms, doing so with a certain compassion and candor.

The debates of recent years have not, in my view, been sufficiently characterized by either. Worse, there has been too little attention given to all that has happened to scholarship, learning, and teaching since the end of World War II. If we care to prepare for the future in the humanities in the way that Vannevar Bush and his colleagues aspired to do for the sciences in 1945, we cannot do better than consider why he thought it necessary to enlist non-scientists in his efforts, why he was unafraid to retail certain facts in plain language, why he so deliberately avoided nostalgia and myth, why indeed he saw the absolute need for a federal presence that had not previously existed. Today, and not only because of budgetary constraints, to call for such a presence — to ask for substantially greater governmental funding — would almost certainly be futile.

Our purpose ought to be to press for a more novel objective — to insist that the role of the colleges and the universities in the advancement of the humanities — in the advancement of learning — has scarcely begun to be exercised. Our aim, in the coming decades, should be to ask what of the traditional (19th century) learning in the humanities deserves attention and respect — why the debate on the meaning of Plato, Erasmus, or Rousseau can never be terminated — why there is a need also to consider additional texts, many that remain exotic and foreign to this society. We are only beginning to acknowledge that Japan, India, China, Mexico, and Egypt — to name only a few — deserve to be known, what a more accurate and nuanced knowledge of such diverse civilizations, and not only in their

contemporary manifestations, could achieve for this society. We have scarcely begun to consider how to study contemporary civilizations. What the rediscovery of Greece accomplished for learned men in the Renaissance, what the rediscovery of Aristotle meant for the medieval church, only faintly hints at what is to be gained from gazing at the modern world and its artifacts in new ways.

Such a view, however, presupposes always that we not neglect the principal lessons of the Bush report. If the scientists were told — admittedly by a humanist — not to neglect the humanities, we need to be told never to neglect the sciences; it is a necessary and essential part of the agenda for the humanities and for higher education generally in the 21st century.

So, also, in our concern with reaching the American people, with opening institutions to those still excluded, to welcome those who wish to join our company — and not only women who now see academic life as a real professional option — we need to acknowledge the potential talent that still waits outside. Before we become too severe about our failings in higher education, which may indeed be grave, we ought to give some thought to those who wish to join us, who need to be instructed on our ambitions and our accomplishments. We need to welcome them, knowing how very desperately we need their support. This, more than anything else, was the message of Vannevar Bush and his colleagues in 1945. It is a message that has become even more compelling today, when the whole world, in all its newly revealed and bewildering complexity, becomes the proper subject of serious and sustained study.