



## CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It is my privilege to present to you the 2008 annual report of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

At the White House in February, I joined President Bush and Mrs. Bush to launch the largest and most ambitious nationwide initiative in NEH's history: Picturing America, the newest element of our *We the People* program. Through Picturing America, NEH is distributing forty reproductions of American art masterpieces to schools and public libraries nationwide—where they will help students of all ages connect with the people, places, events, and ideas that have shaped our country.

The selected works of art represent a broad range of American history and artistic achievement, including Emanuel Leutze's painting of *Washington Crossing the Delaware*; Mary Cassatt's *The Boating Party*; the Chrysler Building in New York City; Norman Rockwell's iconic *Freedom of Speech*; and James Karales's stunning photo of the *Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965*. Accompanying the reproductions are a teacher's guide and a dynamic website with ideas for using the images in the study of American history, literature, civics, and other subjects.

During the first round of applications for Picturing America awards in the spring of 2008, nearly one-fifth of all the schools and public libraries in America applied for the program. In the fall, the first Picturing America sets arrived at more than 26,000 institutions nationwide, and we opened a second application window for Picturing America awards that will be distributed in 2009. Working in concert with other federal agencies, the NEH was also able to bring Picturing America to all 20,000 Head Start learning centers nationwide, Department of Defense schools at home and abroad, and select National Park Service sites.

While Picturing America was a focal point of attention this year, the NEH continued its work to promote excellent humanities scholarship, education, and public programming through its core programs. As the Endowment's efforts in the digital realm matured, we announced the transformation of our Digital Humanities Initiative into a permanent Office of Digital Humanities, or ODH. Among its many accomplishments in 2008, ODH inaugurated new collaborative grant programs with peer agencies in the United Kingdom and Germany, and launched a new initiative to explore how supercomputers can be used for humanities research.

All of NEH's widely varied initiatives and grant programs are united by a single, overarching purpose: to democratize the humanities and make their insights available to every American citizen. The humanities are not mere luxuries, or amusements for idle moments. They are ever-renewing gifts that enlighten and enrich the lives of every citizen—and the wisdom they offer is essential to the health of our democracy. Through its good work, the NEH continues to make a vital contribution to our national life, to our quest for truth, and to the great conversation of our civilization.

**BRUCE COLE**

*Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities*