

John Churchill's Remarks Opening the First Panelists' Session
March 29, 2011

Good morning. I am John Churchill, Secretary of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. It is my privilege to serve as moderator of this first session. I come as a representative of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, an organization that since 1776 has had as its aims the celebration and advocacy of excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. Needless to say, the humanities lie at the very core of that interest. So while our scope also includes the social and natural sciences, Phi Beta Kappa's concerns fall squarely and centrally on the humanities, and it is a pleasure to bring the support of our organization into today's activities.

I would like to begin by offering praise and thanks to the Council of Independent Colleges and to the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies for conceiving this event and bringing it to reality. It could hardly be more timely. Thanks are also due to the Luce Foundation and to the Carnegie Corporation for their generous support.

We have before us a day-long conversation. The sessions are distinguished by their topics: first the humanities themselves, with attention to their growing and receding in public prominence and support; then a look at the humanities and the individual; then at public policy questions; and finally, consideration of the future of the institutions that nourish and are nourished by the humanities.

At the beginning, then, we will look at the humanities themselves. Why is our interest, indeed, our passion, invested in these pursuits? How are we to understand the fact that the humanities seem at once to embody the deepest of meanings and yet to carry with them the constant potential for contention, even

discord? How is it that the humanities can seem to be both centers of controversy and objects of official neglect? What are we to think of the apparent inconstancy of the landmarks provided by study of the humanities, prone as they are to the creation of new questions, challenges, and an irrepressible tendency to press beyond established bounds?

To address such questions as these, we have three compellingly well-qualified persons. I refer you to the biographical material in the published program for the Symposium for detail. But let me say that the biography of each of them discloses a distinguished practitioner of the humanities, a scholar, a teacher, a college or university president from among the world's most distinguished institutions. Each of them has added to their scholarly expertise and their scholarly humanity, the humanity of leadership. Appearing without further introduction will be Neil Rudenstine, chair of the board of ARTstor and president emeritus of Harvard University; Steven Knapp, president of George Washington University; and Georgia Nugent, president of Kenyon College. Questions will be entertained after all three have spoken.