Humanities for Business & Society Conference
Remarks, delivered at Steelcase on October 19, 1983

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When one chooses to support the necessity of the Humanities for Business and Society, an opening quote from Plato, Aristotle, or perhaps Machiavelli, Thomas Moore, or Shakespeare would be most appropriate. I am not going to do that. But to maintain my own reputation as one deeply interested in the Humanities, I want to assure you I have not neglected their works this past season, but I must confess that at present I am swept along by the mass of America's reading public doing my part to catapult James Michener's latest volume _Poland_ to the top of the best seller list. From that work I quote the fictional Polish Count Lubonski who is addressing both a Lithuanian and a Ukrainian colleague:

"To justify becoming a nation, the land and the people must have produced a unifying culture. By culture I do not mean folklore, cooking patterns or nationalistic myths. I mean music which all respond to. I mean architecture which constructs buildings of spatial and utilitarian importance. I mean conscious poetry, not doggerel. I mean great novels which generate and define a people's aspirations. And above all, I mean the creation of a philosophy which will underlie all acts passed by your parliaments, all utterances made by your teachers and professors.

Gentlemen, the accumulation of such a culture requires time and the dedication of men and women who know what they're doing. (Here he paused, almost afraid to make his next statement. Then, walking briskly back to face his visitors, he spoke.) You Ukrainians have not had time to build such a culture, and if you try to establish a state of your own with inadequate foundations, it will collapse. Vondrachuk, I assure you, it will collapse, probably within ten years, because you lack the
cohesive background upon which to build. You lack the music, the architecture, the beautiful town squares, the great novels. I concede, the poetry you have, thanks to one man who would understand what I'm saying, your fellow Shevchenko, who almost single-handedly gave the Ukraine a soul."

There are many elements necessary to construct and preserve a society within a nation. Nations do not survive well, if at all, without a strong economy and either military power or military protection from a military power. But I agree with the fictional character Count Lubonski that there must be a culture, a human condition linking people in some common bonds before an acceptable national society can exist. Feelings, values, perceptions of life and reality reveal themselves through literature and poetry, music, philosophy and religion. These are the avenues through which the thoughts, emotions, and feelings of people are made into a heritage, and they also become the system of values that sustain and protect that heritage. These are often varied and contradictory, at times diametrically opposed, but they must exist, be a part of a society before a modern society can exist, certainly before any group or groups of people can be a nation.

I will make the extreme statement that a society cannot survive or at least be remembered as a society unless it has or leaves a record of its humanistic expression. In the past it has been the humanistic contributions of one time that have linked it to another and it is through humanistic expressions that one period has influenced the future. What we call the Humanities have been until our recent industrial, technological revolution the major distinguishing characteristic of human species. Religion, philosophy, music, art
and literature have communicated what being human is. They have revealed the species for what it is.

Count Lubonski made a good point I thought about the necessity of a deep developed, and varied culture for a national society, but you remember he was doing so to persuade the Lithuanians and Ukrainians, who had different problems, to join Poland so that there would be military and economic power sufficient to sustain a national society. That's the other side of the coin. If one comes to the conclusion that well developed humanistic expression is necessary for a society to be called a society, or for any long term national life to exist other than a propped up travesty on national life, then one must ask under what conditions can humanistic expression best be developed. Certainly freedom is quickly put forward, and undeniably freedom is helpful. Yet the literature, music and art of Russia and even more recently the Soviet Union has distinction, deals with the depths of a people, and comes from a society never noted for the kind of freedom we hold to be inalienable. No, it flourishes best when business, commerce and agriculture sustain more than subsistence living, when education is encouraged whether the society is elitist or democratic in its approach, and when there is enough power to preserve at least for a period of time a relative stability. The stability gives rise to increased commerce, and though interrupted in the past by wars, the commerce leads to greater wealth. Depending on the distribution of the wealth, a culture can develop with a high level of humanistic expression.

Not always have the philosophers and artists of a culture
expressed themselves or were interpreted in ways that lead to peace and a higher level of civilization. Yet, the best in civilization, according to our values, has always been accompanied by a high level of humanistic expression and active commerce. Successful business is one of the best ways, if not the best hope, for providing a civilization in which man can probe most successfully his own nature and the perceptions and ideas that flow from that probing.

When free to soar under any circumstances, the pursuit of the humanities leads the species to greater self-understanding and insight can (but there is no guarantee) enhance those conditions under which a stronger economy can evolve. The humanities are necessary for business and society just as strong business in a stable society is the foundation for the pursuit of humanistic study. The question is almost a chicken or egg one.

After taking a rather long time to spin out my rather simple and easily attacked theories on the assigned subject, I conclude with a few categorical statements about what we should do to encourage the humanities in our society which has already developed a rather high culture despite what some in countries with a longer history might say.

1): A democracy to survive in the future requires a high level of human understanding from its citizens. This is best provided on a formal basis through the educational system. At present the level of understanding or sensitivity to literature, art, music, etc. varies widely according to family background and environment. Each school district should assign to an appropriate
person or persons the task of assessing the receptivity of all its students at all levels, and design the kind of programs in humanities that will encourage the indifferent to gain interest, and the sensitive to increase understanding and to see how that understanding will apply positively in whatever their pursuits.

2) To single out the study of foreign languages for special mention is appropriate because our nation does so poorly in that field. There is a failure in our business community to comprehend its need for more people who can speak the major languages of the world. We not only must understand others in a shrinking world, we want to do business with them in a way that our economy will be strengthened. Knowing other languages is essential for both. I believe the agitators should be found in the schools as well as the market-place.

3) Studies in the Humanities for business executives are provided by many colleges and universities throughout the country. Such programs have proven themselves successful in improving executive performance. More can be done on the local level. Schools take courses on technology, management, finance, economics, etc. into places of business. There may be advantages to the employer, and society in general, if on occasion literature, history, art and even music became a part of the on-site curriculum in our local business establishments. Who knows what quality of attitude towards self and others might improve our common life.