

Common Ground, Enduring Light

In Celebration of Illinois Humanities' 50th Anniversary

Let us thank the stars for The Humanities
for stewarding the collective memory
of those who came before and those yet destined still
to bring light into this century.

Today, we step off the sidelines and into the history books.
Migrating from our outdated definitions, we must turn our minds
to look where they are afraid to look. Towards the catalogs
of human experience. Let us take the path that some are afraid to take;
to remember—to learn—from our collective histories, successes, and mistakes.

This is a moment of invigoration.
A time for renovations, not restorations.
An opportunity to innovatively design
a society in which all are recognized,
all appreciated and divine.

Tonight, we gather—steady, rooted, and bright;
luminous palms over our hearts, our minds lit by the fight.
This moment is the seed of a life-giving season.

We get what we give, so give for this reason:
We cannot thrive without the other. We depend on each other.
So let empathy, then, be your beacon
as we rush towards our harvest season.

We in Illinois know endurance. We know what it is to burn.
Begun in the key of perseverance and in the register of return.
On the grounds of the Council of Three Fires, we have always known
what it was to stand firm, what it required to make for everyone—a home.

Mandates may attempt to steal from us our very selves.
that which gives us life, that which makes us well—
The resources designed to benefit the whole, to heal us,
to keep us connected to our many cultured souls.

They might attempt to drag us from the humanness of our compassion
into a devastating silo of a night.
But they cannot deter our progress; they cannot deter the fight.

Tell me, what else comes after memory but the making?
What else comes after witness but the work?
We not only keep the stories; we carry them forward,

each of us a lantern lit against the dark.

The Humanities are not relics, they are the rhythm beneath tomorrow's song—
They are the compass for justice, the pulse that keeps us strong.
Illinois is our living archive, our seedbed, and our stage.
And we will not wither into silence but blaze a path for each new age.

We stand, not as echoes now, but as the emissaries of our time.
Not as footnotes in their essays but as complete chapters in the story of how this country
realigned.
On common ground, we will find our grace, in enduring light, we will hold the space.

Together, we will sketch new declarations—affirm
the dignity of every person, every human
in these United States.

Because what is remembered is never lost.
What is honored is never gone.
And what is human, when woven together,
can be infinitely glorious, wondrously strong.

May we safeguard the archives that hold our memories! Let the libraries shout out the names!
May the classrooms brim with courage! May the streets resound with our refrains!
May Illinois stand as signal fire—with our prairie roots and courageous flame—
proclaiming that what we build together
cannot and will not be erased, cannot and will not be tamed!

For we are the Humanities: the keepers of memory, the stewards of time,
bringing context to the fight, giving illumination to the heart and mind.
We step forward, together, onto common ground.
Together, we are the enduring light. Together, we shine and crown.

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