

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH WILLIAM “BRO” ADAMS

SUBJECT: THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES 2015

MODERATOR: MYRON BELKIND, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MYRON BELKIND: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome. Before we begin, I would like to ask all of you to stand and observe a minute’s silence in memory of the terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, the French satirical publication whose editor and four leading cartoonists were among the 12 killed at the newspaper last Wednesday. We honor their memories and their contributions to our profession and to the freedom of the press. And as a mark of special respect to those who died, we at the National Press Club are observing a minute’s silence in their memory at the start of every event at the club this week, including with our annual membership meeting tomorrow.

[moment of silence] Thank you very much. Please be seated.

Welcome again. My name is Myron Belkind. I'm an adjunct professor at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, the former international bureau chief with the Associated Press, and the 107th President of the National Press Club. The National Press Club is the world’s leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession’s future through our programming with events such as this while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at press.org.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today’s event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are club members. And so if you hear applause in our audience, I'd note that members of the general public are attending, so it’s not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and public radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we'll have a question and answer period and we'll ask as many questions as time permits.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd like each of you at the head table to stand briefly as your name is announced. From the audience's right, Edamo Odeffa [?], a Hubert Humphrey Fellow in the Fulbright Scholars program; Jamila Bey, freelance journalist; Sarah Wire, Washington correspondent for the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*; Carol Schneider, President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and guest of our speaker; Nick Apostolides, Deputy CEO of the United States Capitol Visitors Center and co-organizer of this luncheon. Thank you, Nick. Betsy Broun, Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and guest of our speaker; Jerry Zremski, Washington bureau chief for the *Buffalo News*, chair of the Speakers Committee, and a former National Press Club president.

Skipping over our guest of honor for a moment, Amy Henderson, historian emeritus of the National Portrait Gallery and co-organizer of this luncheon. Thank you, Amy, and thank you again, Nick. Phillip Lewis, Vice President of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and guest of our speaker; Thorston Eisengerich, Director for Press and Information at the Austrian Embassy; George Thompson, President of Thompson & Associates. (Applause)

This year marks the 50th birthday of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency that is funded by taxpayers. Our speaker today has chaired the organization since mid-2014, and we hope to hear Bro Adams' plans for marking that anniversary. Like its sister organization, the National Endowment for the Arts, the NEH has weathered its share of politically charged controversy over the years, the most cultural debates have largely been eclipsed in recent years and NEH's \$146 million budget grants generally go to state humanities councils, museums, research, and educational institutions.

A native of Michigan, Adams has degrees from Colorado College and the University of California at Santa Cruz. His formal education was interrupted by three years of service in the army including one year in Vietnam. It was partly that experience, he says, that motivated him to study and teach in the humanities. He has said, "It made me serious in a certain way. And as a 20 year old combat infantry advisor, I came face to face acutely with questions that writers, artists, philosophers and musicians examine in their work starting with what does it mean to be human?"

Later, he coordinated the great works in western culture program at Stanford University and served as vice president and secretary of Wesleyan University. He became President of Bucknell University in 1995, and President of Colby College in 2000. Last spring, President Obama nominated Adams to serve as the tenth Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Bro Adams. (Applause)

MR. ADAMS: Thank you, Myron, for those nice words and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for coming. It's great to be here at the National Press Club, and I want to thank its organizers for inviting me and giving me this chance to talk about NEH and the wonderful work that we're doing. I'm also very grateful for the inspiration of the cupcakes. (Laughter) We've been talking a lot about the 50th at NEH and we haven't talked yet about cupcakes. But I know now that that's what we're going to do. And that's all I have to say on the planning for the 50th today. But there will be cupcakes.

Some additional expressions of thanks to those here today, I want to thank my colleagues from NEH, including members of our National Council and our National Trust, the National Humanities Trust, for being with us today. And I want to especially thank Judy Havemann for helping make these arrangements. My guests at the head table, you've heard them announced, Phil Lewis, Carol Schneider and Betsy Broun are great colleagues, passionate advocates for the humanities and I'm honored by their presence.

I'm also very grateful to friends and colleagues from other humanities organizations around the region. And many friends here today from Colby College, where I had the honor to serve as president for 14 years. Thank you all for coming.

I've come today, particularly, to announce an important new initiative at NEH, one that I think will bring humanities scholars and organizations to the forefront of discussions of American life. But first, and by way of some important context for that, I think I want to talk a little bit about NEH, its history and its role in our cultural life in the United States.

As Myron said, on September 29th, 1965, nearly 50 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Foundation of the Arts and Humanities Act. The act created both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. And it was part of a truly remarkable legislative agenda. Consider this, in a brief four year span, the Congress passed in addition to this act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1964, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Social Security Amendments of 1965 which, of course created Medicare and Medicaid, the National Historic Preservation Trust Act of 1966, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act. Wow. I mean, that's really an amazing legacy. And the legacy of these pieces of legislation are, of course, still being debated here in Washington and elsewhere around the country, and maybe around the world. But there's no question at all that they changed this country profoundly and they changed it forever.

In the intervening 50 years, NEH has also changed some things. Since its founding, the agency has made roughly 71,000 grants to individuals and organizations totaling approximately \$5 billion and leveraging an additional \$2.4 billion in private philanthropy. These grants have supported scholars and teachers, colleges and universities, museums, libraries, historical associations and historical sites in every state and territory. They funded the work of documentary filmmakers, radio producer, museum creators, librarians and they've helped many small and large cultural organizations

preserve artifacts, documents, and collections that serve as the building blocks of cultural memory and of history.

They've also enabled humanity scholars and organizations to exploit digital technology increasingly with time for research and presentation in the dissemination of humanities materials and resources.

The most significant result of all this work, I think, and there have been many important ones, but the most significant one I think has been the steady growth of what I want to call the cultural capital of the United States. We've had a lot of partners in this work including humanities councils in every state and territory, state and local governments, private foundations represented by Mellon here today and generous individuals. But without the endowment's leadership and without its symbolic authority and without its singular commitment to the entire nation's cultural legacy and capacity, our cultural foundations which we all benefit from today, would be far less impressive and far less widely appreciated by the American people and by many others around the world.

The importance of cultural capital can be assessed and measured in a number of ways beginning with the breadth and depth of public engagement that it creates and sustains. And two programs, I want to mention, are exemplary. In the early 1970s under the leadership of Chairman Ronald Berman, NEH made the fateful decision to invest aggressively in museums, in documentary filmmaking and in television productions. The results were felt almost immediately. On the museum side, very important part of what we still do, NEH grants supported a number of large and hugely successful art exhibits in major museums around the country including the path breaking Tutankhamen exhibit in 1976 which was seen by nearly eight million people here in Washington, New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans, San Francisco, Seattle and Chicago. In New York alone, nearly 30 percent of the visitors were first time museum goers.

This exhibit, and several others like it, and I'm sure Betsy knows a great deal about this, changed forever the way museums think about their publics and the way the public thinks about museums. It also led, wonderfully, to a Steve Martin satirical song, which you can still access on YouTube. I did it the other day, and I urge you to do it as well. (Laughter)

NEH's investment in documentary filmmaking also has had extraordinary impact, and Ken Burns' work, of course, stands out from all of the films we have done, and there are many more. "The Brooklyn Bridge" came out in 1982, it was followed by "The Life and Times of Huey Long" in 1986, and by the "Civil War," which first aired in 1990 and had in its first viewing 12 million viewers. Ken's most recent film, which I'm sure many people in this room have seen, "The Roosevelts," was seen by 33 million people in the first week of airing on public television stations across the country.

Now, these grant productions are very impressive and they're very important to us, but they represent only the tip of the iceberg of NEH's impact. Millions more

Americans have been touched in some way by the state humanities councils, but NEH supported libraries, museums, historical associations around the country, by the work of NEH funded scholars which include 18 Pulitzer Prize winners and 20 Bancroft prize winners; by NEH seminars and institutes for educators, and by the courses these educators offered in the wake of their NEH experience. And there is also our website EDCITEment, which offers humanities resources to primary and secondary schoolteachers around the country and draws more than three million visitors every year.

Public engagement really matters. It's very important to us, but cultural capital matters in other ways, two I want to mention briefly. The cultural economy is hugely important to the economic health of thousands of communities around the country. I came from one recently, Waterville, Maine. And it is likely to matter more and more as the economy of the United States shifts from being a manufacturing economy to one based on financial services, healthcare, retail, human services, education and so forth.

More important still our democracy relies on the knowledge that citizens have of our political history, and the principles and values that history was built upon and insuring that this story is told broadly and powerfully, is among NEH's most important responsibilities and its accomplishments. The legislation creating NEH and NEA, as some of you know, was inspired by the report of the National Commission on the Humanities, which was formed in 1963 through the combined energies of the American Council of Learned Societies, the Council of Graduate Schools, and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa.

And please to note, this was not planned but it's true, that the leaders of these organizations, Pauline Yu and Suzanne Ortega and John Churchill, are here today. The commission was chaired by Barnaby Keeney, the President of Brown University and later NEH's first chairman, and it included a remarkable array of university administrators, scholars, librarians and museum directors. Interestingly, it also included Tom Watson, Jr., the second president of IBM, and ambassador to the Soviet Union who presumably knew a thing or two about cultural imagination and technological innovation.

The commission had several basic arguments for the establishment of these agencies devoted to arts and humanities that were later used in the founding legislation. I want to mention them briefly. Here they are. "The humanities embrace and enduring human values of justice, freedom, equality, virtue, beauty and truth. Without the deliberate cultivation of these virtues in the public sphere, we risk losing sight of them." American democracy demands that citizens understand its history and its fundamental principles and values. The humanities promote the kind of cross cultural and multicultural understanding that is required in an increasingly interconnected world. Given its economic and military power in the world, the United States must be a leader in the realm of the spirit and ideas. And therefore, has a compelling state interest in developing humanistic knowledge and institutions.

Shaping all of these arguments was the conviction that NEH would have to be focused at once on two related, but slightly different, spheres of activity. On the one

hand, the agency would have to invest in fundamental research in the various fields composing the humanities; philosophy, literary studies, history, archeology, anthropology, language, linguistics, political theory and so forth. At the same time, the founders, and particularly I found, early supporters in Congress were also determined that humanities research have public meaning, influence and impact. The legislation declared unequivocally, “The humanities belong to all the people of the United States,” and accordingly NEH had to be committed not just to the cultivation of the best of what has been thought and known. In the oft-repeated words of Matthew Arnold, but to the public and to where the public actually lives, “the current conditions of national life.” That's also from the legislation.

John Letson, who was an early member of our national council and was an official in the Atlanta public school system, expressed this populist impulse in a wonderful way, which I love. When he called for the NEH “to broaden the general area of the humanities as the equipment,” as the equipment,” of all the citizens. And so for nearly 50 years, NEH has carried on its work with these twin purposes in mind, to insure leadership in the realm of ideas and the spirit while engaging the humanities with the public and with the circumstances of contemporary life.

This marriage of what we think of, or might think of, as the classical and the pragmatic, or the scholarly and the popular, has not always been easy, quite frankly. Like many marriages, my wife discouraged me from saying most marriages, like many marriages it has experienced misunderstanding and even jealousy. But it's also been enormously creative and vital to NEH's success in building the cultural capital of the country.

It's with that achievement in mind, and with an eye to the celebration of our 50th anniversary that the agency is officially announcing today a new initiative called the Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square. As the title suggests, the purpose of this initiative is to engage humanity scholars and organizations with the complex issues playing out in our public lives and to demonstrate the relevance and the power of the humanities in addressing those issues.

The notion of the Common Good itself should be familiar to us, of course. It's central to democratic political theory and practice, and it expresses both the right and the obligation of citizens to debate the general welfare. It is the aspirational goal, the guiding ambition, that anchors citizenship and participation in democratic politics. In evoking this sense of aspiration, I found this passage recently. Ben Franklin said it well, “To pour forth benefits of the common good is divine.”

So our hope at NEH is to encourage humanity scholars and organizations to turn their attention toward public life. More specifically, the initiative invites humanists to engage in illuminating the grand challenges that we now face as a nation. No list of such challenges is definitive, but here are a few about which I think humanists have a lot to say. How can the humanities illuminate both the positive and worrisome ways in which the remarkable advances in information technology are affecting individuals and

communities in contemporary American life? How can the humanities enrich the debate over the appropriate balance of security and privacy, or security and liberty, that technological advances have placed before us? I dare say that in the wake of events in France, this question will become even more powerful and urgent.

How can the humanities deepen public understanding of the meaning of democratic citizenship in the 21st century? How can the humanities contribute to the understanding of the relationships between humans and the natural world, another very urgent matter. How can the humanities illuminate the legacies of recent wars and conflicts and contribute to the achievement of a deeper and broader public understanding of the experience of war? How can the humanities contribute to the full incorporation of veterans into civilian life and help all of us appreciate their unique perspectives?

How can the humanities assist the country in addressing the challenges and opportunities created by the changing demographics in many American communities? How can the humanities illuminate the enormous promise of new biomedical technologies and procedures and deepen our understanding of the complex ethical questions that they raise?

Beginning this month, NEH will welcome proposals in all of our appropriate grant programs for projects that draw on the resources and methods of the humanities to engage in public understanding of these and other important dimensions of our life. Several specific areas are worth mentioning. A few weeks ago, in anticipation of today's announcement, NEH launched the public scholars program, which will provide support for well researched books in the humanities intended to reach a broad public audience. The program aims to encourage scholarship that will be of interest, broadly, to the public and it will have lasting impact.

Under the rubric of the Common Good, the endowment also intends to expand its standing together initiative, which supports projects and grants connecting the humanities to the experiences of veterans and war. This initiative has already supported work in 50 states and all the territories through a special grant we made last spring. And we hope that it will be able to provide even more support in the next budget year.

As part of the Common Good initiative, we are very pleased to announce today a new collaboration with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I'm so pleased that Phil Lewis is here. The Open Book project is designed to give second life to outstanding, out of print books in the humanities by making them freely accessible to the public as e-books. I'll say that again, freely accessible as e-books. This is our first collaboration of this kind with Mellon which, of course in its own right, has been a leading funder of the humanities since its founding in 1969.

And finally, the museum, libraries and cultural organizations program at NEH will encourage proposals for public humanities, programs that reach new, underserved or underrepresented audiences. In this regard, we've just announced a major partnership

with the American Library Association supporting community programs nationwide on the theme of Latino Americans: 500 Years of History.

We believe that the Common Good is important and timely for several reasons. First, we're convinced that the Common Good will be good for the humanities and for humanities scholarship. We're all aware, all of us, of recent criticisms that humanists have become too inwardly and too professionally focused. This initiative will provide encouragement and support to scholars who wish to demonstrate the relevance of their professional abilities and interests to American life.

My recent experience in talking about this with people suggests that this encouragement will be welcomed, both in and outside the academy. Within the academy, there is growing concern about the confines that the tenure system places on what is and is not regarded as legitimate scholarship. And beyond the academy, I think there is a hunger for the particular angle of vision that humanists can bring to public concerns. Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* in a piece many of you might have seen, spoke for many last summer when he said, "For me, the humanities are not only relevant but also give us a toolbox to think seriously about ourselves and about the world."

The prospect of thinking seriously about ourselves and the world is what drew me, and most humanists I know, into the profession. We were convinced that ideas matter in the everyday world. We believe that the humanities are valuable because their study depends our capacity to sort out the meaning of our experience.

As Myron said, I know this in a very particular way. Returning from the Vietnam War and the turbulence of the 1960s, the humanities offered me a way of thinking about what I'd witnessed. I found in them perspective and meaning. And since coming to NEH, by the way, I've been very pleased to note that other, more recent combat veterans, have been affected in a similar way by some of the programs that we have offered to veterans.

A more engaged and public-facing humanities profession will be good for the country as well, for most of the great challenges, most of the great challenges we face as a nation, the challenges that define our times and that will increasingly determine our future, are not essentially problems of a technical or scientific nature. They are almost exclusively about our values, about our fundamental beliefs and ideas and assumptions, about our histories, and about our cultures. These are the proper domains of the humanities and its learning and its thinking.

The public-facing humanities can help us understand where we've been, what we value and believe and where we're headed. By way of example, and at the risk of being just a little provocative, and maybe too topical, consider the scorching experience we've been through in the last few months in this country regarding the issue of race. This is hardly a new topic in American history and life, but it's one that appeared to some for a brief period of time to have become less pressing. It's hard to believe now, but remember that in the wake of the election of 2008, some people even spoke of a post-racial society.

And then came Ferguson and Staten Island and Bedford-Stuyvesant. It's not clear how this difficult passage we're in now and the broader conditions from which it comes will be resolved and what exactly resolution means, but I think most people would agree that there can be no adequate understanding of our current situation without a better appreciation of the history of race relations in the United States, of our cultural assumptions and divisions, and of the ways in which we actually live in and perceive the world. Plenty of work there for historians and ethnographers and social philosophers, among others. Plenty of ground for reflection and questioning for all of us.

I could use other examples, but I think you see my point. We need the forms of understanding and knowledge embodied in the humanities, historical knowledge, cultural knowledge, emotional and psychological knowledge because they illuminate the conditions of our lives. And they insert us more deeply into our own experience. The result is not the sudden disappearance, by the way, of the things that vex us, but a deeper understanding of who we are, how we got here and how we might lead better lives.

I know that words like insight and understanding and illumination make some people short-tempered, "That's exactly what's wrong with the humanists," I can hear the grumpy anti-humanists say. "They never get to the bottom of things." And, of course, that's true, if by the bottom of things we mean the end, as in a cure for disease. But, if we're honest with ourselves about how we live in our personal lives and in our lives with others, we know that we never get to the bottom of things in this particular sense. But sometimes, we get wiser.

I do not mean by this to undervalue other forms of knowledge, STEM for instance, the progress of science and technology is hugely important to the country and to all of us. And so we have reasonably invested a great deal of time and energy and resources in the advancement of STEM in the government, in education and in the private sector. But as we do, we must keep other important investments in mind, especially our investments in the humanities; not just because they're the source of great beauty and pleasure, which of course they are, but because we depend upon these forms of knowledge just as surely as we depend on scientific knowledge.

The National Endowment for the Humanities will certainly continue its investments in research, in education, in public programs of all kinds, in the preservation of cultural and historical materials, in the digital humanities, in institution building and the state and local humanities organizations. And the cultural capital of this country will continue to expand as a result, in major cultural institutions in cities, in libraries, museums, historical sites, in colleges and universities and high schools and in the work of humanities scholars.

And by way of the Common Good, we'll also make a difference by encouraging humanities scholars and organizations to think and speak about things that matter in the public world. We all can make a difference in this sense. If I'm right that the humanities are central to the preservation of our cultural legacy and our history and to our capacity to address the challenges we face as a nation, then they are everyone's business, everyone's

responsibility. We need to defend them and we need to promote and we need to support the institutions in which they live and flourish.

NEH will celebrate its centenary in 2065, most of us won't be around, at least I'm sure I won't be around, to learn how the next 50 years have gone and how an additional \$5 billion and maybe more, I hope it is, will have contributed to our country's cultural resources. But some future chair will be maybe here speaking to the humanities community and its friends about the impact of 50 more years of leadership in grant making. And I'm certain that the report will be worth hearing.

In the meantime, thank you for coming today, for your interest and support of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. BELKIND: Thank you, Chairman Adams, for a very insightful speech. And as a journalist, thank you for making news with the announcement about the Common Good initiative. First question, at the NEH you championed a new public scholar program to, in your words, inspire humanity scholars to do a different kind of work, to make sure it enters into the public realm where it can matter and have impact. What kind of impact do you feel public scholarship can and should have in our society today?

MR. ADAMS: Thank you for the question. Well, as I was just saying, I think that kind of work can enter into this broad realm of public discussion of these matters that are so important to us, and that they will in that way provide greater insight into where we go with those issues. We all live and we are always engaged in our history, our culture, our ideas and our values. And to the degree that humanists can contribute to that sphere, or those spheres, it will do a lot of public good.

Humanists don't agree about these things, by the way, so there will be discussion and debate, as there should be. But I think it's by attaching themselves to those problems and to those challenges that humanities scholars can make a great difference in our public discourse.

MR. BELKIND: Your major new NEH initiative is called the Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square. What is the 21st century's public square?

MR. ADAMS: Complicated. The public square has a sort of resonance of different times when we all could gather around the town square and debate the public good. Of course, we're a very far-flung country now. We're big in numbers, we're big in territory, and we have this entirely new and revolutionary thing called information technology and the internet to deal with.

So the public square looks and feels quite different from what it used to be. And indeed, I think there are interesting questions about exactly what information technology has done to the public square and how it's changed it. That means that we're going to have to speak in many different kinds of ways to these things, including ways that are

more congenial to that sphere, the internet information technology and all associated things. And who knows? We might be supporting scholarship soon that is no longer expressed in a scholarly or academic monograph. Beyond the book, we may be going beyond the book with that kind of humanities work. Indeed, I think if we didn't go beyond the book, we probably would be losing ground. So, that's part of the meditation on the public scholar program, is how those thoughts and contributions will be expressed.

MR. BELKIND: When you became NEH chair, you spoke about the two strains of public humanities; the legacy of Matthew Arnold's idea about how humanities enrich us because they are "the best of what has been thought and said," and also William James' idea that humanities have a pragmatic purpose to shape "the conduct of life." In today's diverse and global universe, are there still timeless questions and conducts?

MR. ADAMS: I think there are such questions. And, for example, in some of this veterans programming we've done, we've supported a very unique entity in New York at NYU called the Aquila Theater Project and they have been using, speaking of timeless works, Greek tragedy in and with the production support provided by and for veterans. And it's been very interesting for me to see how timeless those texts are with respect to the issues that veterans are facing.

I attended a reading group in Maine funded by NEH through our state group in Maine, the Maine Humanities Council, in which veterans of three wars, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, were reading *The Odyssey* with a scholar from the University of Southern Maine. Now, *The Odyssey* is a book about coming home from war; if there ever was one, that's the book. And I was, again, quite struck and pleased by how passionate these participants were about that text and how revealing they felt it was.

So there are some dimensions of these timeless attributes of the humanities. But we also need to be very attentive to the ways in which our current cultural circumstances has shaped all of these questions. And I think combining the best of what has been thought and said, the timeless with our current dilemmas, challenges, opportunities, I think that's where the real power of this material comes out.

MR. BELKIND: Thank you. Is there such a thing as "cultural literacy" today that underlies civic engagement and ideas about the public good?

MR. ADAMS: Absolutely, and the reason I mention more than once in my talk this traditional American political tradition, historical and philosophical political theoretical, is that literacy in the democratic context involves a deep acquaintance with those things. We're all worried, I know you are, I certainly am, about the level and intensity of political participation. A lot of people are worrying about this. It's not going to get better, certainly, without a real national commitment to those cultural and historical legacies and to the revisiting of what that original material means in the contemporary political and social context.

So, reengaging civic engagement in that sense is a big thing for NEH. It ought to be a big thing for anyone who cares about democratic politics in the United States.

MR. BELKIND: A follow on question. Is political partisanship eroding the common good? And if so, what can be done about that?

MR. ADAMS: Well, that's an easy question. (Laughter) Is it eroding it? Absolutely. And the sense of national community that's necessary to democratic politics has, I think, been badly affected by that kind of oppositional politics. I suggested in my remarks when I mentioned the challenges that we face, that this challenge, the intensity of these political and almost always cultural divisions, as being important material for humanists to take up. So without having an answer, I would say that as a field for discussion in humanistic research and writing and communication and expression, it's a hugely important question. And we ought to be letting ourselves loose as humanists on that question and trying to understand those divisions better, what drives them and how we might find our way to other forms of community. So I don't have an answer. I do have some medicine.

MR. BELKIND: How could the humanities help illuminate the debate between security and privacy in our digital world?

MR. ADAMS: Well, as I said, this is a very urgent question. It's become urgent because of our own recent history with what some people regard to be overly invasive forms of technological intrusion. So it's been a big issue here. The Snowden controversy, of course, raised it in another way. And now it's been raised in still another way in France. And how we balance these things, how we provide room for both sides of this value proposition in our lives and in the work of our government and official and unofficial organizations, I think is hugely important.

I think, again, here this is an area where people are a lot smarter than I am and with a lot more specific knowledge have a lot to say. I was talking with one of our grantees, Jeff Rosen, at the National Constitution Center recently, and we hoped to have some kind of discussion there at the center on the constitutional sort of issues that are present here. But to get beyond the white hot material of this into a more deliberate and well paced reflection, for example, in the context of our constitutional past and guarantees of liberty and so forth, I think would be very helpful.

We're going to be tested seriously in this. In France, a place I know something about, is going to be really tested on this in the next few weeks and months and years, I dare say. So it's going to become a more important conversation and I think whether it's from a constitutional point of view or other kinds of philosophical points of view, I think again it's something that humanists can ventilate and help us think through.

MR. BELKIND: Thank you. Speaking of the digital world, it seems that the internet is designed to shorten attention spans. That being the case, do you have any

concerns that young people who live through their phones and communicate primarily through text will never develop an appreciation for the humanities?

MR. ADAMS: Yes, I do, lots. It suggests two things to me. We've got to be more creatively engaged, all of us, but NEH and other organizations that support educational institutions, in the implications of that technology in school settings for the way in which the humanities curriculum is advanced and talked about and presented and taught. We haven't done much in that area, and I think we have to approach it.

I think we also have to find, and we're doing this I think much more at NEH than the first, is we need to find ways of making humanities material, what's the right way to put this, presentable, understandable, and engagingly available in all kinds of technological settings. We've actually started working, I hope this doesn't surprise people in this room, we've worked on things like games and apps and other things that make this technology marry, connect, to some of the humanities work that people are doing.

So we need to do much more of that, too. But I think all of us, in the ways that we're involved with secondary education, have to also be involved with this in schools, school curricula decisions, school planning because it's got to be-- I mean, I'm not a secondary school teacher. I have a daughter who's just graduating from high school. I know what her attention span is like. (Laughter) And I don't think it's just that she doesn't like talking to me. I think there's a lot of work to be done there.

MR. BELKIND: Today's headlines illuminate the polarizing political and cultural issues that permeate American life. How can the humanities enrich public understanding about the meaning and opportunities of democratic citizenship today? Can the humanities enable people to connect to our founding political principles and values in 21st century terms?

MR. ADAMS: Yes, absolutely. I was reading an interesting piece the other day by Robert Bellah, and he talked about a famous social philosopher in the American setting. And he was talking about important moments of civic humanism, a term I like. And he said in that context that the most important moment of civic humanism in American history was, of course, the founding, or the constitutional founding moment. So here you have a bunch of very smart people, Madison and Jefferson and Hamilton and others writing pieces-- I guess the contemporary analog would be blogs-- writing piece in newspapers now collected in the *Federalist Papers* and arguing about the Constitution. Of course, there was another side to this, which we don't often resurrect and remember, the anti-Federalists. They were very smart people, too. They lost the argument, but it was an argument. And it was one that took place in a very public space, the space of newspapers, as they then were understood.

And these authors, brilliant amazing people, who by the way were deeply versed, we shouldn't forget this, deeply versed in the humanities tradition going all the way back to the Roman and Greek republics, were democracies, they were making these arguments in this very public way to the people who were going to decide this.

There are other moments of great civic humanism in American history, but we need to gin up another one now and we need to connect it to the past. But we also need to connect it to the contemporary state of political institutions, organizations and all of that. But it's very lively, it's very important. We don't do it very well, I don't think. I mean, we talk in worshipful ways about the Constitution and the Declaration. We don't often read it and talk about it. We also don't bring it forward and play it out in our contemporary circumstances and we need to do much more of that, I think.

MR. BELKIND: In 1965, as you pointed out, President Lyndon Johnson signed legislation establishing the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities and in 1996, the Institute of Museum and Library Services was created. These three federal grant making organizations constitute our country's arts and culture and policymakers. Isn't it time to consolidate these functions and create a cabinet level Secretary of the Arts?

MR. ADAMS: And humanities, I hope. Secretary of the Arts and Humanities.

MR. BELKIND: Sure. I'm sure the White House would like any editing in this suggestion.

MR. ADAMS: That question's been asked of me quite a bit, and most ferociously by my wife, who has been pestering me about this. It's a very fair and interesting question. I've been reading a lot in the history of our agency and sort of just next door to it NEA's history. And we've had 50 years now of this separation, not in spirit, of course, but in working fact. And for a lot of reasons, I think personally it would be very hard to consolidate these organizations and include IMLS, which is another very important resource in the building of cultural capital in the United States.

I think it would be difficult. Now, it's not inconceivable, so I don't want to say it's inconceivable. But it would be hard. I do think there are ways in which we could enjoy many more collaborative efficiencies. By the way, the OMB agrees with me on this, because they talk to us a lot about it. And that's a good thing, they should. So I can see there could be a lot more integrated, particularly on the administrative side.

On the programming side, 50 years is a long time so it will need to be chairs of those organizations and leaders of those organizations including IMLS who have a lot of courage and patience.

MR. BELKIND: What is the funding outlook for the NEH under the new Republican Congress? Do you anticipate budget cuts? And if so, how will your agency cope with them?

MR. ADAMS: It's a question on everyone's lips, obviously, in these agencies and beyond. And the simple answer is I don't know. And I don't think anybody knows, frankly, yet. I will say this, that is I have visited with members of our appropriations

committees in both the Senate and the House. I've been impressed by how well the members are able to grab onto and connect to what we do in ways that are important to them. This question about democracy history political fundamentals resonates with virtually everybody. But there are many other ways in which I think members are interested in what we do. And they understand what we do.

So naturally, we'll be talking a lot about what we actually do and that's-- these grants are so important, 71,000 of them over 50 years, because they touch local communities. Every one of them, almost, is about a local community in some way. So, we got to keep making that pitch. We also need to make this argument about the public relevance of the humanities and how not only much poorer we would be without them and without the work we do, but how much-- how incapacitated we would become if we didn't have the leadership of these institutes doing what they do.

MR. BELKIND: With only two years left of the Obama Administration, how do you approach making priorities to get as much done as you can?

MR. ADAMS: I was just talking about this with a few people this morning. I think we have to think about the most important things, first of all, and decide what those are and attack also. But also sort them out. Are the things that reasonably can be pursued within that time table? There is a way in which, and I hope it's true, that I and my administration at NEH might have a longer life than that. And I hope that is the case.

But we do understand that there's this big moment coming. So we're trying to be careful in the way we think about priorities and the scope of the work that we agree to take on. We don't want to take on things that couldn't reasonably be done in, say, except for eight years. Well, that's too far. So, we're trying as best we can to sort these out and to be prudent about them.

MR. BELKIND: Some questioners have a concern about the election in two years from now, or rather next year. Would you be open to staying on to serve in the next administration regardless of the political party of the next president?

MR. ADAMS: I think so. You know, I'm not a deeply experienced person in Washington. NEH and NEA and IMLS and some others, are independent agencies. That is to say the work that we do do not carry out or execute in any simple sense and administration's policy in most of the ways we understand that because we give grants and, you know, we're giving grants according to the excellence and impressiveness and persuasiveness of the grantees, of the applicants. And I can imagine a situation in which in a new administration from a different party that work could be done by me and by my colleagues in a way that has integrity and meaning. So it is conceivable to me that that could happen, but I don't know what's going to happen so we'll see.

MR. BELKIND: Thank you for at least responding to the question. I appreciate that. This is the penultimate question before we have what is known traditionally as the last question. Sir, 2015 marks the beginning of the 50th anniversary commemorations of

the Vietnam War. You served in that war. Fifty years on, do you see a lasting effect of that war on our nation's collective sense of its own identity?

MR. ADAMS: Wow, that's a humanities question if I ever heard one. Yes, in some ways I do, I do. I mentioned this amazing legislative agenda that the Johnson administration had coming out of the Kennedy administration. And what's so impressive to me about that time and that achievement is that it was achieved in circumstances that were extraordinarily difficult. Now just remember, I mean there are a lot of people in this room who do remember, how tough those times were and that all of this happened in the midst of those circumstances is really quite amazing to me.

I think there are ways in which that turbulence has deeply affected me and others of my generation. And so in many ways that are cultural and many ways that are political, I think we are a very different place because of that. However, at the same time, we find ourselves coming out of now, what, 15 years, more than 15 years, of almost continuous conflict in circumstances and in sort of political frameworks that are not hugely different. We're still talking about counterinsurgency and counterinsurgency theory. And so, it is one of the reasons I think I'm so interested in NEH's question about the legacy of war is just how we as people think about what we've been through and keeping the memory of what we've been through alive.

And that's difficult, that's a difficult thing to do. But it's very important that we do it. When we go into these situations, we're not thinking very much about what life is like when we come out of them. And, of course, now that we're coming out of them, we are confronted with these very complicated questions about veterans, about their lives, how they get reengaged in civilian life. And those kind of questions need to be on our minds at the beginning, as well as at the end.

MR. BELKIND: We are almost out of time. But before asking the last question, we have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you about our upcoming luncheon. On January 27th, Cheryl LaFleur, Chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will speak about the challenges her agency faces to maintain the reliability of the nation's electricity grid and reasonable prices for consumers.

Next, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug.

MR. ADAMS: Thank you.

MR. BELKIND: And the last question. On a lighter note, you and your wife, Lauren Sterling, were known to have taken to the stage while you served as President of Colby College, literally. You both appeared on stage in a scene in the musical "Annie." Do you have a special love for Broadway musicals, and can we expect to see you on one of the Washington, D. C.'s many theater stages?

MR. ADAMS: I know as to whether we'll appear in Washington on the stage. I know my wife is hoping very much not. We will not be appearing on stage. She humored me. She was a musical stage, musical theater actor, for much of her early professional life and has a wonderful talent and great voice. And she put up with me as we did "Annie" and a piece from "Guys and Dolls," and there were some others. In the jazz concert before we left, we did the great song, "Fever." Would you like to come up Lauren and do-- no, didn't think so. But in any case, my love for musical theater, which is pretty significant, came really from Lauren and she introduced me to all of the great classics and to Sondheim, particularly.

MR. BELKIND: Thank you, Chairman Adams. I have to say thank you all for coming today. We are adjourned. [sounds gavel]

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