Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to illuminate the workings of the American government and offer context around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. And now your hosts, Nia Rodgers, public affairs librarian and Dr John Aughenbaugh, political science professor.

Hello listeners. Welcome back to the podcast. Today Aughie is off mike, he's in the room but he's off mike because we have a special guest today with us. This is Hillary Miller. She is the scholarly communications librarian here at VCU and that means that she knows all of the things about copyright and open access and all that other kinds of stuff. She specializes in helping students and professors access those materials and find ways to publish in those kinds of materials. So welcome Hillary.

Thanks for having me.

Thank you for being here and you are going to help me get on a postage stamp, because I want to be on a postage stamp. So how do I do that?

All right, so you want to be on a postage stamp. Well, there are some criteria that are set out these days. There's a whole committee that actually sits around and makes these decisions and you can submit yourself to them if you're interested.

They're called the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee. Very prestigious, very exciting work, I'm sure. Actually it does sound kind of fun. The more I researched this, the more I was like, "I want to be on that committee." I feel like my grandparents would be really proud, it's just this prestigious American institution and you meet a lot of the criteria actually.

I'm fabulous.

You're fabulous. Yeah. So you're American. That is good.

That's helpful.

You have to have some kind of impact, significant impact on America and have a widespread national appeal and significance. So I feel like the podcast is kind of like building your national profile and once you get sort of widely recognized, you could submit yourself and make a case.
N. Rodgers: So far the criterion are like me and Kim Kardashian and the Muppet's and there's a whole bunch of people meet these criterion so far, so this is not super hard. I mean to be well known, to be infamous or famous. Like me, Kim Kardashian and Ted Bundy, all fit in this category so far.

H. Miller: So Ted Bundy. No. So it has to be positive. They're not going to put anything negative on a stamp. National disasters.

N. Rodgers: Oh, okay. So 9/11.

H. Miller: Well known serial killers. No, I don't think that 9/11 and other disasters like that would be commemorated through a postage stamp. It's really supposed to hold up things that are good and great and cool about America.

N. Rodgers: Fabulous.

H. Miller: Yeah. So they are looking for people who have made extraordinary and enduring contributions to American society or history or culture. But here's the catch.

N. Rodgers: That's where me and Kim fall out there, sorry. She might be making that but I'm not. Okay.

H. Miller: So the the other catch, they are not concurrently, they say, considering anyone who is living, they don't put living people on postage stamps. You have to wait at least three years after someone dies, actually to submit them for this. So please, please don't be in a hurry to get your face on a postage stamp.

N. Rodgers: Yeah, me or Kim actually, that would not be good for either one of us.

H. Miller: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: So wow, you have to be dead. So is that like, no, let me back up and ask it in a different way. John McCain is considered by many to be an American patriot, served his country in Vietnam and in the Congress, he's been dead about six months. Can his family start to put him up for consideration now? Does it take three years to get that process through or is that ... And I'm sure it wouldn't just be his family, there are many, many people who feel like he has served well and would be a positive person to put on a stamp.
H. Miller: Yeah. So I think they say they won't consider it until three years. And then with the production, the where's the picture going to come from? Are they going to commission it? Or are they going to have an artist do it? Or are they going to take it from somewhere else? Do they need to get the rights to do that? It could be a few more years as well.

N. Rodgers: Oh, okay. So this is not a zippy project.

H. Miller: No.

N. Rodgers: Okay, this is something that's going to take a while. So I probably don't have the patience to be on a stamp, is also part of it. So postage stamps are copyrighted, you said, because you just said that they have to pay for the picture potentially if they're using someone else's art.

H. Miller: Yeah, so and that's actually how I even got into this podcast. I am not an expert on postage stamps or the postal service. I got into this because we were talking about copyright and I said, "Hey I found out this interesting thing about the post office." So yeah, you're right. So you work with a lot of government documents, federal government works are generally almost never copyrighted. And the reasoning behind that is that works created by the government should be freely available to those who are governed. But there's a catch to that. So there are some independent agencies that get treated differently. So they actually do get to keep their copyrights. And for the post office, it's interesting, it used to be cabinet, cabinet position, cabinet office. And in the 70s they moved over to being independent and at that point they became a copyright, rights generating organization.

H. Miller: And that came into effect in the late 70s after a copyright law renewal as well. So postage stamps that were released 1977 and before are in the public domain. That's anything that is not protected by copyright. 1978 and after they are protected by copyright. So I think they do even have some people on staff who create artworks. They commission artworks. And yeah, sometimes they even license their own postage stamps to other people. So if you want to put it on a t-shirt or a puzzle or something, you've got to go through the copyright office to get the rights to do that.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. My parents do puzzles and I found one that's all stamps. It's a thousand pieces and it's all stamps, which drove them massively crazy, which was part of my goal. But it's also really neat because they are a mixture of old stamps and relatively new stamps that I am assuming that the puzzle company paid them to be allowed to do that.
H. Miller: Yeah, they get a, I think between eight and 10% royalty, they ask for, on products that are sold with their postage stamps on it.

N. Rodgers: So what goes on postage stamps?

H. Miller: So it's gotten different over time. But from the beginning it was pretty much founding fathers, a surprising number of transportation related things. So pony express riders and trains and then steam ships when those came out. And there was actually, when I was-

N. Rodgers: Tell me that there's a series of cars. Are there cars?

H. Miller: There are cars. Actually, so when I was researching this, what has been on postage stamps? And in the 1980s and 90s there was this whole transportation series. And I mean every kind of transportation you could think of. So here's some, a milk wagon, a circus wagon, a baby buggy, a dog sled, a tandem bike, a sea plane. I mean they covered, I don't know why. I don't know why. Maybe this was a collector transportation thing.

N. Rodgers: If you could get from here to there, it was on the postage stamp.

H. Miller: It was on a stamp.

N. Rodgers: You said something about collectors just then. So collectors, I know there's a name for that.

H. Miller: Philatelist.

N. Rodgers: Philatelist. And so they get stamps, generally speaking, and mount them in some way where they are not, they have not had the postage.

H. Miller: Right.

N. Rodgers: They have not been stamped by the post office.

H. Miller: Yes.

N. Rodgers: But the rest of us slap a stamp on there and off it goes. And we don't really think about the copyright of it. We don't really think about who owns the image, but as stamps became copyrighted, so how is it that I can own one if it's a copyrighted thing? I mean isn't that part of the whole issue of copyright is that I can't actually technically own that. Although I own the
stamps. I buy them from the post office and I take them home and if I never do anything with it, it's mine, mine, mine.

H. Miller: Yeah. So there's an idea in copyright, it's called the doctrine of first sale. So this works the same way with books. It's actually why we can loan books from the library. So once you own a physical object, a book, a stamp, even if it has a copyrighted image or a work or something in it, you own the object. So you get to do with the object what you want to do. So you can buy a book, you can get rid of it, you can give it to someone else, you can loan it out of a library. But what you can't do is make a copy of it. So you couldn't take your stamp and make a photocopy of it and start selling your own stamps. Well you definitely can't do that because that would be very much even worse than copyright. Don't do that.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

H. Miller: Don't print your own money. Don't create your own stamps.

N. Rodgers: Oh I guess stamps are technically money.

H. Miller: They are, yeah.

N. Rodgers: That's why the Secret Service, the Department of Treasury, that comes after you.

H. Miller: It's just straight revenue generating.

N. Rodgers: Although, I would love to see somebody who printed thousands of stamps as their currency. That seems like a really lame way to go about currency. But okay, so you're not obligated to use the stamps, that's why stamp collectors can keep them. So can stamp collectors sell them in those shows and stuff or is that one of those gray areas where the government says, "Look a Pterodactyl." When they look off in a different direction because they don't want to know.

H. Miller: No, they can sell them, they can sell the objects all they want to, especially really rare ones or things, they can sell the object itself. But they can't, again, they can't make a copy of it. So if you wanted to publish a book on stamp collecting, you'd probably need to go to the post office to get permission to reprint all those images of stamps. As long as they were, 1978 and forward.

N. Rodgers: And everything before that, you could just claim.
H. Miller: You can do whatever you want with those.

N. Rodgers: So you could make art out of all that stuff. For our art students, if you decide to make stamp art, you could just buy a whole bunch of stamps and make it into something. But you can't alter the, you can't copy the image or alter the image. Because the rights to the image are owned, I assume in perpetuity. Do they own them forever or is this fall under that weird copyright thing where it's 20 years plus the length of time that somebody is alive, I don't even remember what it is. There's death and 20 years and other stuff involved in copyright.

H. Miller: They're treated as a corporation. So it's probably, oh my gosh, what is that? It's a little different. It's the life of the creator plus another 90 years or it's a long time. Copyright lasts a really long time.

N. Rodgers: So how did they get the images of famous people on there or famous stuff on there? Those images are often owned. We mentioned earlier the Muppet's, there was a Muppet series of stamps. I know because I loved them when they came out. But the Muppet's are an owned corporation, so they just pay the corporation to put the ...

H. Miller: They do pay sometimes but they don't pay much. So and there is actually- 

N. Rodgers: "Hey man, I'll give you five bucks if you'll let me put your picture on a stamp." I mean is it ...

H. Miller: Yeah they could. So they could. So a couple of ways they could commission new art, they could make their own but-

N. Rodgers: Oh a stamp in my image but not actually an image of me. I see, okay.

H. Miller: But if they, so yeah ... So they do licensing. So there's a really interesting, actually copyright story that I want to tell you, while I was doing this research and it's where I'm getting a lot of my insider information about how the money and the copyright and things work in the copyright office.

H. Miller: So the question about the post office and where they get their images from, there is a story that I want to tell you that I uncovered that I discovered while I was working on the research for this podcast. And I thought it was really interesting and it tied it all right back into copyright, which made me nerd out about it.
H. Miller: So you may have heard this story a couple of years ago. It actually got some pretty extravagant mainstream coverage. So the postal service has this series of stamps that they've done several times, of the Statue of Liberty. Different shots of the Statue of Liberty. And they're really popular and it's a great patriotic image, it's something that people love to buy, people love to use.

N. Rodgers: My parents bought a bunch of those.

H. Miller: Yeah. So they went to this website, they went to Getty Images, which is just sort of a stock photo licensing site and they found an image that they really liked close up of the face of the Statue of Liberty and they got the rights to use that picture, maybe a couple thousand dollars from Getty. And normally when you have a picture of an artwork or a sculpture or something, you probably need to get the rights for that sculpture as well. But the Statue of Liberty is really old. It's in the public domain. It's not protected by copyright. Even if it ever was, because a government made it and gave it to another government.

N. Rodgers: France gave it to us. So I doubt they said, "And we have copyrighted this thing for you."

H. Miller: "So we transfer the copyright to you in perpetuity." No.

N. Rodgers: Probably not. They probably just said, "Here and take this big piece of copper. Enjoy."

H. Miller: Yeah. So ...

N. Rodgers: I'm sure it was more dramatic than that. But anyway.

H. Miller: So they took this picture. They loved it. They put it on the stamp. They didn't have to pay much money for it. In fact, I won't spoil, the court case that resulted from this whole incident, they said that they have never paid more than $5,000 for anyone, for any kind of image.

N. Rodgers: Oh well, then they're never going to put Kim Kardashian on one, if her estate can control the amount because I can't imagine the Kardashian West estate settling for 5,000. But anyway, so they've never paid more than 5,000 for an image?

H. Miller: No and it's interesting that you mentioned that, because they brought up some examples too. I think Walt Disney was one and the Andy Warhol
estate were two examples of ones where people didn't, they didn't even ask for money for it because it's just such an honor. It's free PR to be put on a postage stamps. So you might be surprised that there are people who they don't care about the money. It's just cool to have your face on a postage stamp. I mean would you argue over $5,000 if you were going to get on there?

N. Rodgers: Oh heck no. I would want to be on a stamp doing something, I mean, I would want it to be a flattering image. That's all I would want. I mean, of course I was dead, I probably wouldn't care. But barring that, I would want it to be a flattering image because that's what you want and you want it to be your best, you. But I'm sure, I mean every stamp that I've seen, they tend to be really quite pretty.

H. Miller: Yeah. And that's why they picked this one of the Statue of Liberty, the closeup of her face. They said, "This is just, it's beautiful, it's expressive." And it was also not the Statue of Liberty.

N. Rodgers: It was a fake Statue of Liberty?

H. Miller: It was the sculpture that's in Las Vegas.

N. Rodgers: No.

H. Miller: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: The one that's in New York-New York or the casino?

H. Miller: So the artist's last name was Davidson. So he found out they'd been using this stamp and it was his work and he sued them. And they had been selling this for, I don't know how many years, they had sold nearly five billion stamps and that was about $2 billion in sales. And so we talked about this, that mostly when you're buying a stamp, you are paying for the cost of postage. So most of the money that they got was put back into delivering the mail, that was used for those camps. But they were really popular, collectors bought them, people bought them. And what happens when people buy stamps is there is this known percentage that they even talked about in this lawsuit of stamps that never get used or they just get lost or the ones that are kept by collectors. And it's actually pretty, they know about how many of this tends to be. So that is actually just revenue and profit on top of it.
H. Miller: So they go to trial and this is where the post office says, "Well, we would've given him up to 5,000. We never pay more than 5,000 for things." So the plaintiff, the plaintiff's lawyer team, the artist and the defendant, the postal service, both bring in their expert witnesses on copyright and licensing and how much money is owed. So you will not be surprised to say that the postal services expert witness said, "Oh we think about $10,000 is probably fair." Now the artist brought in an expert witness who calculated all of this, just all sorts of math. And based on the ones that weren't sold and how much, how popular it was, he said, "Actually I think it should be about $53 million."

N. Rodgers: Holy cow. Little bit of a difference between the 10,000 and 53 million.

H. Miller: And so the court settled somewhere in between $10,000 and $53 million and they awarded him $3.5 million from the post office.

N. Rodgers: Wow. And I assume the post office paid it.

H. Miller: I assume so.

N. Rodgers: Because otherwise the post office would have to go to jail, which would be embarrassing and sad. So that's, but that's pretty unusual, that's pretty unusual. Okay, so first of all, someone got fired over that because someone didn't find out where the actual, what the actual image was of.

H. Miller: I guess so. I don't know if anyone actually got fired for it.

N. Rodgers: Really? You should research the image. So the message here, the takeaway here for-

H. Miller: Well you kind of wonder did Getty Images not have good metadata on their image that told you this is not the real statue of Liberty? I don't know.

N. Rodgers: Well but even so, you'd think that the post office wouldn't just buy something off a website, that they'd have some sort of contract. And someone didn't do their due diligence and they're like, "Oh it just is a pretty image." And they didn't think, "This might be the image of something that's not actually the image that we think it is." So that's kind of an interesting corporate mismanagement. It's a corporate mistake that they made there that cost them dearly. Although not as dearly, I mean, it didn't cost them anywhere near what they made, which is, because there's that 3 billion figure you have there in the middle that they walked away
with, without having to deliver mail for. So they still come out pretty well. But do we know how much the post office makes on stamps every year?

H. Miller: That's a good question. So I had a really hard time and I will tell you, I was up rather late last night looking through their financial reports.

N. Rodgers: You're such a librarian.

H. Miller: I know. And I couldn't find it out. So there's just kind of lump reporting of revenue and most of what they break down is like the revenue, it's about the actual operations of running a post office. Some about their, what the things they own that are physical property, like buildings and that kind of stuff. But I couldn't find a lot about their "intangible assets," their intellectual property. I found an interesting white paper all about how they're not utilizing their brand licensing enough and how people really love and trust the brand of the postal service. And so that is potentially a source of revenue or a source of an asset for them. But I couldn't find this information.

H. Miller: Now in this lawsuit, we mentioned puzzles earlier, they shared a little bit of information about some of that licensing that they do. So they take maybe eight to 10% of profits from things that are sold with postage stamps on them. So that was puzzles. They mentioned a series of vintage metal signs that had some kind of postage stamps on them. But that's not a very, that's probably not highly revenue generating. Because you're waiting for people to want to put it on a puzzle. You're hoping that people will buy the puzzle. I really think the real place that they're making money on stamps is when I stick a sheet in the back of my junk drawer and never use them or it falls down behind the furniture or it gets wet and I have to throw them out or something.

N. Rodgers: Or you don't use them until the price has gone up. And then you can't use them without buying the 1 cent or the two cent. And then you're like, "I'm just not going through this." And you throw them away because you can't be bothered. Or you use two or three on a letter that you probably could have used one and a half on, but you're trying to make sure that it gets where it's going.

N. Rodgers: But also do people send mail anymore? I mean that's kind of a, what Amazon though, Amazon is, I guess one of their bigger customers now for doing that sort of last mile delivery.
H. Miller: They are, but I hear they lose money on that, and I don't know quite as much about that, but I hear that they do a lot of Amazon delivery and they end up losing some. So they're definitely in financial straights now. They've actually, as I was learning about this, they have done some feasibility or financial studies, profitability studies on postage stamps. And this whole, I don't know if it has as much to do with copyright as a way to license and generate revenue, but more about making stamps cool and popular so that maybe more people are going to want to go grab this new series or this new image. And then a percentage of that doesn't get used. It's just profit.

H. Miller: So they've done these studies. There was a postmaster general, former postmaster general Benjamin F Bylar. He retired from that position and then he became a member of this Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee, and he resigned in protest with a letter that became public, I don't think he made it public. But he was really objecting to this idea that we're trying to make stamps profitable. We're trying to put, he felt like too much pop culture, too much, just pretty artwork and things on them instead of really, what makes America great, the great things about the United States. The famous people, the national sites and monuments and national parks. And he actually had a pretty great quote. He referred to this push for profit seeking has led to "An abundance of pretty and popular culture subjects." And he even went so far as to express it as, "Prostituting their goal in pursuit of possibly illusory profits."

N. Rodgers: Was he 900 years old when he said that? I mean, do you know what I mean? That sounds like, doesn't that sound like an old guy, "You kids get off my lawn with your pretty stamps." But the reality is that the post office has to compete. There are a lot of competitors and standing out in whatever way you can. And if that means popular figures or pretty images or images in a series. Like I said, I bought the Muppet ones because they were cute. I don't even know if I've ever used them.

H. Miller: There's another Muppet series coming out this year. It's all Sesame Street. I'm so excited.

N. Rodgers: Oh, I can't stand it. I'll have to buy them all and then I'll have to put them away and forget that I own them because that's what happens with stamps. But also the post office, one of the most trusted parts of government, it's got a really high approval. I mean when we talked about approval ratings, we can't even talk about Congress's approval rating or the President's approval ratings because they're always in the pits, relatively speaking. But I think the post office has this enormously high sort of, "We believe in
the post office." Kind of rating. So clearly it's working. So he was just like a crazy old dude.

H. Miller: No. It could have been just a culture change. You know what I mean?

N. Rodgers: Well that's true.

H. Miller: We're not just putting national monuments, we're putting Muppet's on it. Although I will say Sesame Street and they said this in their, they called it one of the most influential and beloved children shows. I mean, and that's true. It's because it's a 50th anniversary. And generations of children across the world have seen that show and learn from that show. So I think that's an example. I don't know what, because he's passed away, I don't know what he would think of that. Is this just pop culture or is this something that is really enduring and impactful that America has produced.

N. Rodgers: Have they moved into monument status by sheer existence of, and what they've done. You're right. Educating children across the world. I know that you mentioned to me something about they've done special Muppet's in special parts of the world.

H. Miller: Yeah, yeah.

N. Rodgers: For children who are under duress in various countries. I think you mentioned Syria. So of course that's part of what we perceive as American greatness is this idea that we reach out and we do for other countries and we try to help as much as we can, especially children.

H. Miller: It's also a question, I think it brings up who gets to decide what is great about America, because that was the phrase he used, "We want to highlight the things that are great about America." Who gets to decide? So I have this whole list here in front of me, which I'm not going to read to you, but it was sort of for reference about what has been on postage stamps. So it's founding fathers, it's great Americans, it's national sites and things, and you would not be surprised to know that it's not always been very diverse.

N. Rodgers: Oh, shocking. It's been mostly white folks. No, say it isn't so. Okay, so are we changing that now?

H. Miller: We are changing that we've gotten more diverse over time, more representation of women and people of color and indigenous peoples. And
popular culture I think is another way of breaking down this idea that it's only things that are historic monuments or wars or whatever, that we need to commemorate.

N. Rodgers: Do they commemorate the wars?

H. Miller: They do, they have commemorated some wars, the victory of the war though, not the negative but the victory of the war. So I think it's interesting, there's points and counterpoints to this, like one pointy hat I saw, last summer the post office released its very first scratch and sniff postage series for their summer treat series or whatever. [crosstalk 00:25:36] And this year they're coming up with a spooky Halloween silhouette series. And I'm like, "Okay that's a little bit cheesy. That's not really celebrating anything unique or great to America."

N. Rodgers: So are you in his camp or are you in my camp with, we should just put anything we want to on a stamp. Because part of me thinks, let the market decide. If a stamp comes out and it's not popular, it won't sell. I have, when they put them out, when I go to the post, I know I'm a billion years old and I still mail things don't judge, so I go to the post office and I buy stamps and the guy pulls out the super boring ones and I'm like, "I don't want those." And then he pulls out the ones that are the cherry blossoms or some thematic, one year they did all the reindeer, all of Santa's reindeer. I love those kinds of stamps, so those are the ones I pick. Well clearly I'm deciding with my money, which ones are "great." I'm putting that in air quotes and I'm sorry listeners, you can't see my air quotes, but I just used some. I'm deciding what's great by the way I purchase or don't purchase.

N. Rodgers: So I'm little, I get his point it, I understand that you don't want to make them just any old thing, but by the same token, if you left it to only great things, then you'd have to decide what's great. And that comes back to your question of who gets to decide that and apparently it's this little, well, is it a little group of advisory people or is it a big group?

H. Miller: It's pretty big. I want to say it's like a couple dozen or a dozen or something. So you mentioned sort of what's popular and what sells. There was one interesting example and I think everyone will probably be somewhat familiar with this sort of flashpoint, the most popular, can you guess, actually, which stamp it was that has been the highest selling ever before?

N. Rodgers: Ever? I'm going to guess an Elvis stamp.
H. Miller: It was Elvis.

N. Rodgers: Was it Elvis?

H. Miller: It was Elvis.

N. Rodgers: Because I mean, come on, it's Elvis. My mother would have bought 400 of them just by herself, so I'm sure ...

H. Miller: And they actually, so when they had that really popular Elvis stamp that came out, they actually were debating between older Elvis and younger Elvis, and they had the public vote.

N. Rodgers: Was Elvis alive at this time, or had he passed?

H. Miller: No. He had passed.

N. Rodgers: So that rule has always been in place, that three years past death rule. Okay.

H. Miller: I think so, yeah.

N. Rodgers: So, oh no, because older Elvis was not nearly so pretty as younger Elvis.

H. Miller: Yeah. So they sent out, the postal service actually sent out ballots to people to send in to vote on this. And then People Magazine, I think, sent out a bunch of ballots too. And they had the people vote and the people, yes, definitely, they voted for young Elvis and it was their most popular selling commemorative stamp ever. So there are some things that are, maybe he wouldn't, I would have objected to this, but like that is clearly something beloved in American culture. And it showed in the way it sold.

N. Rodgers: I wonder who would be the Elvis of modern, gosh, would that even be a thing? Oh, let's not go there because then I'm just going to drag us down into a pit of despair. I wonder if they ever did a Beatles stamp? We should look that up.

H. Miller: They did do, I found this, they did a Beatles series. This is one of those interesting examples where, but they're not American.

N. Rodgers: B-E-A-T not B-E-E-T.
H. Miller: They've probably done the bugs as well though. They do some flora and fauna, which is my area, that I really love those. No they did some Beatles stamps and it's interesting. There are some things that are not necessarily American but that have been highly influential on American culture or that America has influenced. So they did this series of Beatles songs that were either titled or inspired by American styles of music or set in America or something.

N. Rodgers: I think that they recorded, didn't they, in Alabama? I think they recorded down there at one point. Briefly. Maybe I have them mixed up with the Rolling Stones. Oh no. Oh no, that's terrible.

J. Aughenbaugh: I was the Stones.

N. Rodgers: Was it the Stones? Aughie's voice from the side of the room. It was the Stones, sorry. But anyway ...

J. Aughenbaugh: The Beatles last concert was in the states.

N. Rodgers: The Beatles last concert? Where was it?

J. Aughenbaugh: I want to say either Shea stadium in New York or Candlestick park in San Francisco.

N. Rodgers: Holy cow. Big, big shows. So the take away for us with stamps is they're cool and they're interesting. You can own it, once you buy it. But getting on one not so easy.

H. Miller: Nope.

N. Rodgers: And so my original question about John McCain, I know that astronauts have been on them, I know that some Congress people have been on there, so it's not out of the realm of possibility that he will eventually be on a stamp.

H. Miller: No, definitely not. And they've done some series before, even he could be released in a whole series of great Americans or something, which they've done before.

N. Rodgers: Have they done all the Presidents?

H. Miller: They absolutely do all the Presidents.
N. Rodgers: So Donald Trump will be on a stamp at some point?

H. Miller: Yes. And yeah, every ...

N. Rodgers: Hey.

J. Aughenbaugh: What color is the hair? I'm sorry.

N. Rodgers: Oh, be nice. The thing about being, the thing about it being on a, I mean the thing about it is that the post office is neutral when it comes to the party of the person who has served.

H. Miller: Yes. This is where that three year rule, I think even comes from with people who have died is that you always make and release a postage stamp, three years after the death.

N. Rodgers: Post the President's death. Okay. So regardless of their party, regardless of anything like that. Okay, that's good because that's what they should be. If you were talking about great Americans, you shouldn't be picking from parties. You shouldn't be trying to make those kinds of decisions in that way. If everybody can agree that Presidents are by the nature of the presidency, great, then they should be on there.

N. Rodgers: Cool. Is there anybody who's been on one that I would think, really?

H. Miller: Oh, that's a good question. I don't think so. I mean, I have a list here. There's, hold on, let me pull this up. I was really excited, I mean, I'm not necessarily saying I'm going to become a philatelist after this, but I am much more into stamps now as a result of this, so I'm going to blame you if that happens. No, I think there was a-

N. Rodgers: So many blame me for so many things. You would just have to get in line.

H. Miller: So they've done a famous American series that was in the 1940s so it had authors on it. It had Mark Twain poets like Whitman, educators, like Booker T Washington. They did scientists and composers and inventors and artists. So they have put all kinds of people on stamps.

N. Rodgers: I think Miss Ella was part of that. Ella Fitzgerald. There was a jazz series too, I think at one point.

H. Miller: They've done different music series.
N. Rodgers: I remember hers because it was beautifully done. I mean it was a really good image of her.

H. Miller: Yeah. And in 1978 I believe, and that was the same year they started being copyrighted as well, they started a black heritage series and every single year, it started with Harriet Tubman, and every year they have released a new one, a new person in this series as well. So things are becoming more representative of what America is over time.

N. Rodgers: That's good. I'm happy with that. I'm happy that there's nobody that makes me sad that they're on a stamp, like we didn't put, you know, Pol Pot on a stamp or anything like that, which I'm grateful for. And I'm glad that we are diversifying because we should be, that's part of the melting pot of the United States.

N. Rodgers: And if we can just get the right image of the Lady Liberty on there, that'd be awesome instead of the one from Vegas. Although there's nothing wrong with Vegas. But it's funny, people will say, "I've seen the Eiffel Tower, I saw it in Vegas." I'm like, "Well you saw a tiny replica of the Eiffel Tower." But you know what? We take what we can get.

N. Rodgers: So thank you so much for coming and talking to us about the copyright on the stamps and about the post office in general. I think I'm amused by your old guy with his prostituting of the post office stamps, which I think is a kind of an extreme response. But I also see what he's getting at and it is nice that there is a commemorative aspect to the stamps, that it's deliberately commemorative so that we can, as a nation look back through. And by the way, if anybody wants to know, we have books in the library, in [inaudible 00:34:11] library that are, stamps, commemorative stamps over the years because the post office puts those out on a fairly regular basis. They put those books out and they go to depository libraries. So if you are wondering if we have them, we do and you are welcome to come and look at the older stamps and see the different series that Hillary has talked about today. Thank you so much, Hillary.

H. Miller: You're welcome. Thank you.

Announcer: You've been listening to Civil Discourse brought to you by VCU Libraries. Opinions expressed are solely the speaker's own and do not reflect the views or opinions of VCU or VCU libraries. Special thanks to the Workshop for technical assistance. Music by Isaa Hopson. Find more information at guides.library.vcu.edu/discourse. As always, no documents will harm to the making of this podcast.