

Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to illuminate the workings of the American Government and offer contexts around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. Now your hosts, Nia Rodgers, Public Affairs Librarian and Dr. John Aughenbaugh, Political Science Professor.

Nia Rodgers: Hey Aughe.

John Aughenbaugh: Good morning, Nia. How are you?

Nia Rodgers: I'm good. How are you?

John Aughenbaugh: I'm good. Listeners, another exciting podcast episode, of course, because all of our podcast episodes are exciting.

Nia Rodgers: Yes, even the boring ones.

John Aughenbaugh: Particularly, we have joining us once again, Eric Johnson from the VCU Libraries. Eric is with us today to discuss the Smithsonian, which for geeks like Nia and I, it ranks right up there. Does it not Nia? With some of our most favorite institutions in the world, right?

Nia Rodgers: Oh, yeah. In my mind, the Smithsonian and the Louvre and the British Museum, those are just world-class institutions. When everybody says in the world, "America is a bit backwards," we can say Smithsonian really quickly to try to counteract the backwardness thing. Eric, is that how you perceive it?

Eric Johnson: Yeah, what I was almost to jumping and saying, "Not only is it great, but it's free compared to your stupid Louvre."

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

Nia Rodgers: That's true. With your pyramid pretend thing in your Tom Hanks movies.

John Aughenbaugh: For me, since I like titles and labels, and catchy phrases, the Smithsonian, the nation's attic.

Nia Rodgers: It's great. Nobody will ever call the Louvre France's Attic. You know what I mean? They just wouldn't.

John Aughenbaugh: As we get into this discussion, Eric is going to talk to us about the castle. There are parts of the Smithsonian, that you're just like, wow. You could go ahead and do an entire movie. Yeah, Tom Hanks, okay. The Louvre. Let's go ahead and spend a little quality time doing a movie with the Smithsonian. Thank you very much. But anyways, Eric, with our discussion with you about the national parks, I'm fascinated by your interests in the Smithsonian. If you could start off the episode by talking with us about your interest in what got you excited about the Smithsonian.

Eric Johnson: Actually, it starts off like I did the national park one. Which is again growing up in Northern Virginia. It was way easy. The Smithsonian are like local museum. All school trips practically felt like they were going to the Smithsonian in some fashion. One museum or another, depending on the ratio of the class or that kind of thing, back when schools used to have school trips which of course is now no longer the case, unfortunately so many ways. Also my dad worked for the metro system. He was an electrical engineer for the metro system, and so we would go downtown pretty regularly. Take the bus to the subway downtown and go to the mall and visit stuff. I really grew up hitting a bunch of different museums just over time at a real interest in natural history, so it was easy to go to the Natural History Museum there. That was my childhood, but then also my first summer job because I'd had such a great experience visiting Smithsonian stuff was at the National Zoo. I worked at the zoo by basically last two summers of high school and first two summers of college. My very first jobs were selling ice cream, out of ice cream stands at the zoo. Including one to Jay Schroeder, former quarterback for the Washington Redskins.

John Aughenbaugh: Oh.

Nia Rodgers: Hey.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

Eric Johnson: Very exciting. He's a very big man compared to my high school self. It was like two summers, second summer boiling up on, it was one of the summers where there were multiple 100 degree days. Up at the top entrance of the zoo, huge black top area, me and a little stand, selling out the ice cream and then drinks and that sort of thing. But then the second two summers, I was there, I was in the education department. So I got to work at the information desk, doing the fun thing of answering questions as people came in, or like I did the elephant information cart by the elephant exhibit in the Elephant House where we had models or casts of elephant poop that we would hold up to show people to talk about elephant diet and that sort of thing.

Nia Rodgers: How big is that?

John Aughenbaugh: We've got to stop right there. That's a first for our podcasts, a reference to elephant poop.

Nia Rodgers: An expert in elephant poop.

John Aughenbaugh: Well done Eric.

Nia Rodgers: Yes.

Eric Johnson: I am here for you.

John Aughenbaugh: You are taking us to August heights.

Nia Rodgers: How big is an elephant poop?

Eric Johnson: Well, the piece which was cast, what I love is the company that has to mold these and paint them, good on them. It's probably eight inches by five or six inches, cylindrical-ish shape.

John Aughenbaugh: All right.

Eric Johnson: Then we also had a piece of hide and some other stuff that we're showing people what they eat, all that good thing as well. Then my last formal experience with them was after my junior year in college, I did an internship at the American History Museum. The Field to factory exhibit at American History, the big exhibit was built in the late '80s about the Great Migration. The migration of Southern rural blacks to urban north. The real change in American demographic pattern, moving from rural south to urban north. What they did was had this exhibit called Field to Factory, which was all about that. For the first time introduced the idea of costumes living history in the exhibit space, which is not something that the Smithsonian has traditionally ever done. They have exhibits you go through and you see it, but here we have like little vignettes that we worked up actually in the exhibits space. We had to be really careful to be there, but don't touch anything.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

Eric Johnson: Display of a house, that chair is okay to touch, but that one is definitely not okay to touch. That kind of idea. We would move around the exhibit because they would have something sharecropper shark idea in one spot, and then at the other end of the exhibit was a Chicago train station, and Eric turns into an Irish cop for that kind of thing. It was a really phenomenal experience. The office where we worked out of had a bunch of Superman props in it just sitting on the shelves, and the big cool thing was the original mash sign.

John Aughenbaugh: Oh, cool.

Eric Johnson: Seven thousand miles away sign was just sitting behind my desk which is not to say that they were not careful. They care but because they're moving things in and out of exhibits so quickly, there's a storage area. That was pretty cool.

Nia Rodgers: You mentioned one of the Smithsonian's, but there's about 474 Smithsonian's, right? It's not one, you see. It's a series because actually you mentioned two because you mentioned a zoo, and natural history, or American history.

Eric Johnson: There are actually 19 official Smithsonian Museums, one zoological park so the National Zoo. Then a series of basically research centers of various kinds. There's a Tropical Research Center in Panama, in the Chesapeake Bay research center that they run as well, which are not due to open to the public the same way. We'll probably get into that more, this balance that the Smithsonian has between being a research institution and being a public-facing display institution of some nature. But again, the 19 is the count of museums. I figured out eight of them are art, or art and design museums. The rest are

a combination of various cultural ones or historical. Some topical ones, natural history, air and space, that kind of thing.

Nia Rodgers: Other than those ones that are outside, most of them are in DC, right?

Eric Johnson: Most are in DC, but not all like the George High Museum, which is part of the National Museum of American Indian, it's in New York, as is the Cooper Hewitt Design Museum. Now, it's called the Design Museum. It's like Smithsonian Design Museum, something like that, Cooper Hewitt, though that's in New York as well. Then they also have a bunch of Smithsonian-affiliate museums. There's more than 200 museums around the country which they have partnered with the Smithsonian in a formal, we're going to formally affiliate with the Smithsonian, so they get to use the Smithsonian logo, and there's exchanges of stuff that they put on exhibit and these exchanges and that kind of thing.

Nia Rodgers: If a listener is listening somewhere outside of DC, they may very well be close to a museum.

John Aughenbaugh: Affiliated with it. Yeah, with the Smithsonian.

Eric Johnson: Exactly. I think there's more than 200 of those in almost all 50 states, also Panama in Puerto Rico.

John Aughenbaugh: Now Eric, was the Smithsonian something that the framers of the US Constitution and the creation of this country, is this something that they had in mind or did it arise later on?

Eric Johnson: Basically, it arose later. It's a way of phrasing it. Did they have this in mind? Because of course, so many of the founders and the next generation so the children of the founders were deeply interested in science, mostly in sciences and the useful arts as they would call it with this idea of technology and development.

John Aughenbaugh: We're talking three, four generations removed from the enlightenment era, right? There's this idea that as you grew in wealth and status in society, you had the time. Quite obviously because you are a smart human being, you have the mental faculties to observe nature, to measure, collect, make innovations, etc. As part of that founding generation, you add individuals like Ben Franklin and others who were of the philosophy if you had status in society, you had a responsibility to study what was going on because again you're a human being. The enlightenment-era thinking was the use of our mental faculties will allow us to observe and eventually control and change our environment.

Nia Rodgers: Jefferson with his agricultural work. I mean, hybridized plants and figuring out crop rotations and all kinds of stuff.

Eric Johnson: Yeah, fundamental idea of a contribution of useful knowledge. You want to help the nation grow and become independent. Of course, there was still this contrast with Europe, with their fancy museums and scientists, and young America ready to rise up and do that.

Nia Rodgers: But we don't have the Smithsonian.

Eric Johnson: Correct. What we do have is in Washington as the seat of government, almost wherever the seat of government was at any given time, there was typically a group of people who was really interested in getting together to talk about science and the useful arts and these kinds of ideas.

Nia Rodgers: Like a Royal Society.

Eric Johnson: Exactly. I mean, a mason [inaudible] local version of the Royal Society. In DC, there are a couple of them. One of the big ones was the Colombian Institute. It was formerly the Colombian Institute for the promotion of arts and sciences. That was one of the big leading lights of that was also a leading light of the development of the Smithsonian, Ms. John Quincy Adams. At that point, former president John Quincy Adams, now representative again from Massachusetts.

Nia Rodgers: Which you would never do now, for incidence now we'd never say, "I'll just take a job being a representative in the house." It's a different concept because now we have presidents that do other things instead of, "Oh sure, I'll be local dog catcher. Whatever, it's fine with me. I just want to serve."

John Aughenbaugh: So many of my students when we talk about the founding era, they'll ask questions like, "Well, whatever happened to so and so who participated in the constitutional convention?" I'm like, "Well, they went back home and they were governor" and they were like, "Well, wasn't that like a step down" and I'm like, "No, that's just what you did back then." If you were a member of societal elite and you didn't have to work your fingers to the bone at a farm, it was expected that you would continue to serve. Think about John Quincy Adams, his father was John Adams. He became president, John Quincy did, in one of the most disputed elections in 1824. When he lost his reelection against his opponent Andrew Jackson, he wasn't done with politics. He still thought he had something to give. Well, what position was available? Well, you could run for Congress. But today as Nia points out, was Barack Obama going to go ahead and step down after being president?

Nia Rodgers: Then go back to the Senate.

John Aughenbaugh: Then representing Illinois.

Nia Rodgers: He's not going to do that.

Eric Johnson: I mean, Bush 43 paints.

Nia Rodgers: In fairness, paints pretty well. I'm pretty impressed with some of those portraits. His portrait of Madeleine Albright is actually quite lovely. I know this is a lame question, but I'm going to ask you Eric, and you may not know the answer, but I'm going to ask anyway. Colombian named for Columbus.

Eric Johnson: I assume. I don't actually know that, but that was such a common naming in the era.

John Aughenbaugh: Or the District of Columbia.

Eric Johnson: Columbia, exactly. I mean there's District of Columbia, the Colombian Institute. Father of the Colombian is just because it was the District of Columbia, but more likely it's because that's the embodiment of the spirit of the United States idea of this Colombia was [inaudible] in this era.

Nia Rodgers: Adventurer and explorer. I mean, I was just clarifying. It's not because of the country Colombia with problem. Probably, not that.

Eric Johnson: Clear on that.

Nia Rodgers: That's in the early 1800s or something?

Eric Johnson: Yeah, it was founded 1816. It became chartered by Congress. We recognize this as a real thing. They've got a 20-year charter from Congress in 1818 and a couple of the things they were really pushing for where things like a botanic garden, and a museum of natural objects from the nations United States and North America interested in cultural advent.

Nia Rodgers: All the cool countries had one.

Eric Johnson: Exactly. They were starting to push for that idea.

John Aughenbaugh: Again for listeners, remember, we're talking about the 18 teens and the 1820s. The United States as a country basically existed East of the Mississippi, right? I mean, when you're talking about the natural history of the United States of America, we're not talking about the size and scope of the United States today. This would be a much more limited endeavor.

Nia Rodgers: Modest, this would be a modest endeavor.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah, modest. Thank you.

Eric Johnson: In 15 years after Lewis and Clark. I mean, Lewis and Clark had just gone west so they know there's this vast west out there. Yet they have no idea what's in it, Thomas Jefferson thought there were still mastodons out there. I mean, it's quite an opportunity to learn a lot.

Nia Rodgers: That would have been cool though if there had been mastodons out there.

Eric Johnson: Totally.

John Aughenbaugh: Jumping forward into the 1830s this is where it really gets interesting/strange.

Eric Johnson: Yes, that is a great way to phrase it. Because enter James Smithson into this.

Nia Rodgers: Smithson.

Eric Johnson: Smithson who unexpectedly gave the United States a bunch of money that we had no idea what to do with. James Smithson, a naturalized British subject he was actually born in France an illegitimate child of a Duke and the cousin of his wife, the Duke's wife. James Smithson, his original last name was Muncie I think as I recall and then eventually changed to Smithson as he entered Oxford or when he was in Oxford. He was raised in France, very much a child of enlightenment Europe in a lot of ways. His family had money. This duke and his mother's family and he really is raised by his mother and her family had money as well. He ended up coming back to the UK because his parents were British and was naturalized there, went to Oxford went to Pembroke College in Oxford and studied chemistry which was the bleeding edge of natural history work of science at the time. When he got through Oxford, he was famous for being a pretty strong mind, pretty interested in this stuff but not like a leading light. I mean, it was just a very solid natural history scientist type. Of course the tradition in the time was to go on the continental tour of Europe, when you were wealthy and he did it a little oddly in that he went to visit lots of scientists. He wasn't there to see royalty or royal spaces or that thing. Excuse me. But yes, so he started a big correspondence with leading scientists that era. Eventually inherited his mother's family's money and interestingly, so in 1826 I guess he wrote his will which also the year Thomas Jefferson died. But his original plan was to leave his money to his nephew. His brother had died, his brother had a son, he was going to leave him the money had made provision for a servant of his own to get some money. Then the rest of this big inheritance was going to go to his nephew. But there was a provision in his will that said, if my nephew dies and has no heir of his own then this money will go to the United States of America to found an institution for the increase in diffusion of knowledge called the Smithsonian Institution.

John Aughenbaugh: Why the US?

Eric Johnson: That's the mystery.

Nia Rodgers: Had he been to the US?

Eric Johnson: He had never been to the US, he owned three books that referenced the United States like others did.

John Aughenbaugh: Guys, there's a movie plot there. I think the three of us should go ahead and write it.

Nia Rodgers: There is got to be an American woman involved in this somehow, don't you think?

Eric Johnson: That would be epic.

Nia Rodgers: There's a Wallis Simpson figure in here somewhere or something where he was America, it's the land of milk and honey or whatever.

Eric Johnson: That's right.

Nia Rodgers: Regardless of having never been here.

Eric Johnson: Apparently, there's two leading theories. One is that because he was illegitimate as they would say, that he was never accepted into British society the way he would have liked or into the establishment the way he wanted. He resented that and therefore left this money to the United States. The other theory is just the broad sense that of course, was starting to percolate through Europe which was that the United States was this bastion of freedom and democracy. He was really interested in the revolutionary France. I mean, move into that direction so it could be either of those things it could be both those things.

Nia Rodgers: He never married?

Eric Johnson: He never married, yes.

Nia Rodgers: It could be an American man.

Eric Johnson: It could be exactly, yes.

Nia Rodgers: That sparked his interest. See I want that movie.

Eric Johnson: See there.

Nia Rodgers: That's even more fabulouser.

Eric Johnson: Yeah, that'd be great.

Nia Rodgers: He says, "This is never going to happen."

Eric Johnson: Because my nephew is young.

Nia Rodgers: This is not going to happen, but in case it does I'm going to take a wild air and say, America, it seems like a good place.

Eric Johnson: That seems to be the extent of it, that's just like the end of his will.

Nia Rodgers: xoxo Smithson.

Eric Johnson: James out.

John Aughenbaugh: There wasn't just huge introduction where he goes ahead and explains, okay, why he would like the United States to receive this chunk of cash.

Eric Johnson: Exactly.

John Aughenbaugh: Today, we have lead ins before we even order a cup of coffee.

Eric Johnson: Let me tell you why I want this coffee.

John Aughenbaugh: He didn't even provide that. How much money are we talking about?

Eric Johnson: Well, that's what's interesting. There was a whole debate about in the first place whether we could even accept that money that happened in Congress, the president. Because there was this whole like, people are just trying to buy influence in the United States that was a whole thing.

Nia Rodgers: They're buying cloud, oh, my gosh back in the day buying cloud.

Eric Johnson: In the end they decided it was possible, we could receive this money.

Nia Rodgers: Like we're not going to take somebody's money come on.

John Aughenbaugh: Because back then, we earned money the old-fashioned way we inherited it come on.

Eric Johnson: Come on, you didn't get it from a gift.

Nia Rodgers: Let me make sure timeline I understand this, so he makes his will not expecting this to be a thing his nephew dies. Is his death and his nephew's death close in proximity? Could he have changed the will and he just thought, "I'll just leave it the way it is."

Eric Johnson: I think his nephew lived about six years after he did, what I don't really know is whether I mean, did he receive that money in the meantime. I get the sense that he did, but somehow the will still encumbered the money, like James Smithson will won out over. I guess anything his nephew might have said, and maybe he never received, it was still actually in a bank somewhere.

John Aughenbaugh: In trust.

Eric Johnson: Exactly. It was put into a trust that's exactly right.

Nia Rodgers: How much money are we talking about?

Eric Johnson: When we finally said, "Yes, we'll take it." We send somebody over to get it. They collected and of course, as like bags of gold coins from the UK brought it back to the country.

Nia Rodgers: Like you do.

Eric Johnson: Exactly, melted it down.

John Aughenbaugh: As part of a movie plot there would be like a half a dozen different chase scenes groups trying to steal the money.

Nia Rodgers: It's all in carriages, ride through the streets and people having to jump out of the way. Oh my gosh, yes and carriage was bouncing.

John Aughenbaugh: We're talking about gold coins, gold sovereigns.

Eric Johnson: 1004,960 golden sovereigns, which were brought here and because we're, the US immediately melt it down and turned into coins because come on.

Nia Rodgers: How much does that amount to?

Eric Johnson: That was roughly \$500,000 at the time. Which is a really interesting thing to say because you could look at that as being two very different amounts of money, that's an intermediate recalculation with inflation to about \$12 million. As a percentage of GDP, it's \$220 million. It depends on how you look at that amount of money. It's really hard to do a one-to-one comparison to something that far back.

John Aughenbaugh: But it was a princely sum of money in that day.

Eric Johnson: It was a princely sum of money, and another way to look at it is Harvard University, which had been around for 200 years, had an endowment of about \$500,000 at the time that this rolled in as fresh money for a new institute for the increase and diffusion of knowledge, which of course didn't mean anything to anybody. What is that?

Nia Rodgers: Diffusion of knowledge? What?

John Aughenbaugh: Wait a minute. Hold on just a second, Nia. Of all of our early presidents, the fact that the money came to the United States when Andrew Jackson was president. This dawned on me. Andrew Jackson was our first "Populous President". He distrusted elites. He certainly distrusted this idea that there was expert knowledge that could be developed, grown, etc. All of our early presidents, to be running the country to receive this gift with the mandate of growing our knowledge base. Oh, my goodness, I bet Andrew Jackson was like, "What?"

Eric Johnson: "For why?"

John Aughenbaugh: "We want to spend a huge chunk of change about this. I just became president by basically saying that any normal American male can occupy any government position. You don't need to be smart, you don't need to be an expert and you certainly don't need to be wealthy to do a government job."

Nia Rodgers: Which maybe why there was even some debate about whether you wanted to take it or not.

Eric Johnson: Right.

Nia Rodgers: Because I don't want your stupid money with whatever strings come attached to it. Let's for the sake of math, say \$500,000. What I would do is take that \$500,000 and I would invest it into something that would give me a percentage that I could live on. This is my dream if I ever win the lottery. If I ever win the lottery, I would put it into a money market account that makes me X percentage and I will live off of that so that I can do philanthropic things with the rest of the money.

John Aughenbaugh: Eric, you're talking to two people in a podcast who are fiscally conservative.

Nia Rodgers: Right.

Eric Johnson: Reasonable.

John Aughenbaugh: We are very, very conservative fiscally.

Eric Johnson: Right.

John Aughenbaugh: Both Nia and I subscribe to the thought process, if somebody wants to go ahead and give us a huge bag of coins.

Eric Johnson: Gold sovereigns.

John Aughenbaugh: We're going to go ahead and invest it in probably the safest securities and instruments.

Nia Rodgers: Right.

John Aughenbaugh: Just live off the interests.

Nia Rodgers: Exactly.

John Aughenbaugh: Otherwise, the principal alone. Is that what the United States did with this?

Eric Johnson: Well, basically yes, but. They tried to do that. The Treasury did invest this money while Congress is trying to decide what to do. That's where I started to wonder into. They didn't know what this institution was going to look like yet, we'll talk about that in a second. While that wrangling was going on, they invested it in basically state government bonds for the state of Arkansas.

John Aughenbaugh: Why Arkansas?

Eric Johnson: I actually don't know that, I would guess, because it's available.

Nia Rodgers: Why United States? All of this is a crap shoot. Apparently, somebody picked up a set of dice, rolled it and said, "Arkansas looks good."

Eric Johnson: Arkansas is the way to do it.

John Aughenbaugh: I'm not trying to be dismissive of the state of Arkansas.

Nia Rodgers: They're lovely.

John Aughenbaugh: But of all the states at that time.

Nia Rodgers: Why them?

John Aughenbaugh: They would have a robust municipal or state born structure in place. Arkansas doesn't jump out at me.

Nia Rodgers: Right

John Aughenbaugh: New York does.

Nia Rodgers: New York or Pennsylvania.

John Aughenbaugh: Or Massachusetts?

Nia Rodgers: Connecticut.

John Aughenbaugh: But Arkansas?

Eric Johnson: That's a really interesting question. Is it because what they wanted to be able to do was support the development of this young state? But unfortunately, they defaulted on the bonds and that royally pissed off, if I may use that word in this podcast.

Nia Rodgers: Please.

Eric Johnson: John Quincy Adams, who was the protector of this money and the idea of what this money might become. This is when he martial law his political forces ultimately convinced the government to not only replace all that money, but also all the interests that it would have earned as well. All that ended up when the Smithsonian was formally founded. That was part of the founding, there was this agreement that we're going to pull all that money from the US Treasury and give it to this new institution that this money should have gone to in the first place.

Nia Rodgers: Now, we have the institution and we have what I think of must be treated now like an endowment. I'm assuming that the Smithsonian has an ongoing endowment. They don't just spend all their money every year and then they don't have any money. I'm assuming they have what Aughe and I

would call safe investments, they probably bought IBM. You know what I mean? Companies that aren't going to really go high or low, they're not into Bitcoin, probably. Smithsonian's not going to invest in adventurous things.

John Aughenbaugh: No cryptocurrency for the Smithsonian.

Nia Rodgers: Right. They're going to do the Blue-Chip 500, these companies will only go under in the end times, kind of investing. Is that how they maintain their money going forward?

Eric Johnson: Basically it is. They ultimately do fund themselves. I mean, they do invest this and they do run off not dipping into the principal. They just run themselves for a while doing exactly as you described. The problem of course, has always been that has never been enough to run the whole thing. But their first secretary, Joseph Henry, did make that a point, this is an investment, so we will not dip into the principal, we'll just continue to operate. But then they also had to raise money and Congress ended up giving appropriations. Modern Smithsonian is 62 percent of the operating budget is through a Congressional appropriations annually. It's a billion dollars the last go rounds.

Nia Rodgers: Then the rest is made up from their investments and their donors.

Eric Johnson: They're invest, their endowment, and a lot of what they call now Smithsonian enterprises, which is the shops, and the restaurants, and the catalogs.

John Aughenbaugh: The brand. Yes. Well, let me ask you this without getting too far into the budgetary aspect. Is the Smithsonian appropriations from Congress a controversial line item?

Eric Johnson: It's one of those things that is and isn't. It has its defenders in Congress who will support it, I think whole hog and its detractors in Congress, the people who think it's dumb to spend this money on anything that's not a defense department need or that kind of idea. They really don't want to see money going to cultural support. I think at a certain level, every year it's a debate. Also because the Smithsonian is so publicly popular. There are probably never going to really slam it but what does happen is it grows faster than the appropriations can support. It is always running at a deficit basically. That was a big thing through a big chunk of its history. Again, we'll talked about that later, was the deficit mindset that they just always had to use. They basically never had enough money. Curators always had to realize that they had to cut costs where they could and that sort of thing.

John Aughenbaugh: But though, when was it officially created as an institution?

Eric Johnson: In August 10th, I believe it was 1846, was when the result of all this debate. There was about a decade's worth of Congress saying, "No, we should build a university." There was all this back and forth that kept happening and it would pop up and fade away as people tried to advocate.

John Aughenbaugh: God bless Congress.

Nia Rodgers: No, I'm going to defend Congress in this.

Eric Johnson: For sure.

Nia Rodgers: Which I rarely do. Because usually my approval rating of Congress is usually about of my approval rating of the flu. But in this particular instance, they were given an endowment that said for the diffusion of knowledge.

Eric Johnson: Right

Nia Rodgers: That's saying, I might give you an endowment for space. What does that mean?

John Aughenbaugh: Right.

Nia Rodgers: I appreciate Congress wanting to fight about that because it's not a small amount of money, it is not a small investment. If you are going to do something [inaudible] diffusion of knowledge could be a university that makes sense.

John Aughenbaugh: Well, to your point, Nia, Eric correct me if I'm wrong. In the history of the Smithsonian, there has been a debate about what should be its overarching purpose.

Eric Johnson: Absolutely.

John Aughenbaugh: Because on one hand, for many of us, much like you, as a kid, I did field trips to the Smithsonian. We weren't going there for the diffusion of knowledge. We were looking at the cool artifacts. Is it a museum or is the purpose to go ahead and do worthwhile research, right?

Eric Johnson: Right. That tension actually, it makes sense. The phrase was the increase and diffusion of knowledge. Increase research purpose. The increase of knowledge diffusion is the public facing purpose. That had all really from the very beginning for before they even said it exactly as you said. They were trying to figure out what that means. University was proposed, a national library was proposed, which again made ton of sense, yes, there was a library of Congress, but of course it was seen as the library for Congress. It was not the public -

Nia Rodgers: That is become.

Eric Johnson: - that it has become. One of the great phrases was, I guess there was a university college Professor who wanted a postgraduate university before with this money. John Quincy Adams hated that and said this. I had to look over it to see his critique of the guy with his very breath is pestilential for suggesting this terrible idea of a university. Because there was this whole sense of like, we can't use this money to educate our children, to educate people, either because another idea was more like a teacher preparatory. The idea teach the teachers. Again, it all makes sense. None of it is really utray, but then there was what they ended up with. In 1846 was taking some of these ideas and proposing a combination museum, lecture area, laboratories idea. But even then, once they articulated that in the founding, the Congressional Acts that found it. They still, of course, really know what it's going to look

like. It was really the first secretary, Joseph Henry, who gave it shape in the end as to what exactly this Smithsonian like he rolled out with a plan for you. This is what the Smithsonian's going to end up doing now that we have it.

Nia Rodgers: I think because he had a vision.

Eric Johnson: Yeah. He had a vision. It did not particularly include a building which is part like she didn't want to use this money for buildings this is like all that's going to do is eat up this money. If we have this money, nor did he particularly want a library. I said I may not have mentioned that that was one of the elements, was not the library, but a library like a national library. They had decided that every, as happens with library products. Everything that gets copyrighted in the US, a copy of it shall be deposited at the Smithsonian Library and at the Library of Congress. That was part of this. After the first decade of the Smithsonian's existence, Henry who'd never liked the idea of the library, noted he liked the librarian that was hired. Managed basically to get the librarian fired, and that library got moved to the Library of Congress as the Smithsonian Library at the Library of Congress. He's like, "Best of both worlds, we get the credit, but we don't have to take care of this library anymore." What did happen with this money in part was, of course, the establishment of the institutions and how it's managed through a board of regions and that idea. Money set aside for a building which he didn't particularly want, but he recognized that needed to happen. That building ended up becoming the Smithsonian Castle, which we've talked about a little bit.

Nia Rodgers: Called the castle because of the turd at top, right?

Eric Johnson: Yes.

Nia Rodgers: The crenulated top. What is in the castle?

Eric Johnson: It is formally, I think the Smithsonian Institution Building. But nicknamed the castle because it is Norman in its design. What's funny is the founding legislation talks about a building made of plain materials without much ornamentation. This sense, and that was n ended up at the castle of being, it's not a complicated castle. It's not very ornate, but it's still castle. Which was a totally impractical for Joseph Henry's purposes and in practical space. He did have living quarters there, his family life, he lived in the castle. What basically ended up happening was in all these towers of the castle, which weren't good for labs or researcher display, lectures, anything like that. They did health scientists. There were people who were living in the castle. Joseph Henry had his family's wing idea. Then they would just health scientists all around the castle, which led in the mid 19th century. It's like my favorite group that's been something that people, but we can talk about that later on. The mega Syria club.

Nia Rodgers: Which I want to be a member of cassettes, because that's an awesome name.

Eric Johnson: The great name.

Nia Rodgers: What's in the castle? The castle now is that the administration part; isn't it?

Eric Johnson: The big thing that's there now, there is administrative offices, but also now the visitor's center finally, it is now relatively recently become coming here first, learn about all the Smithsonian Museums. Figure out what you want to do. They have exhibits from all the museums, little teaser exhibits in there to let people know.

Nia Rodgers: One ruby slipper. I'm kidding.

Eric Johnson: You find the other one.

Nia Rodgers: Sorry. That's the memories that I have of the Smithsonian. A lot of the television stuff, Archie Bunkers chair and then the movie stuff. A few years ago, the American flag.

Eric Johnson: Oh, sure.

Nia Rodgers: Which is stunning and it's not refurbished. That's the wrong word.

Eric Johnson: Renovated is too strong a word, too.

Nia Rodgers: I don't know exactly. Is being preserved, and it's amazing. It's an amazing, breathtaking. You step in, and you go, whoa, that's really cool. Which is what happens with a lot of the exhibits at the Smithsonian. Listeners, if you've never been to the first lady's downs exhibit, it's really interesting, it's just an interesting walk-through history of this is what these women had to wear in order to be the public face of the wife of the government, basically.

John Aughenbaugh: The First Lady of the government. That's how they're often times described. But again, those materials, don't age well unless they are preserved and protected.

Nia Rodgers: Right.

John Aughenbaugh: In part that's the diffusion of knowledge, right, Eric? You have these displays in part that go ahead. Again, it's our discussion with the Kristi or Trello about art. One of the values or purposes of art is to go ahead and show how things have changed. What was important in a particular period of time. Why did they start viewing things this way and depict them this way? When you go to the Smithsonian and you see that display, you're just like, wow, they forced women to wear this. They were supposed to go ahead and look.

Nia Rodgers: Smile.

John Aughenbaugh: Smile.

Nia Rodgers: They were supposed to smile while wearing that.

Eric Johnson: Yeah.

Nia Rodgers: It's one thing to make me wear it. It's another thing to make me enjoy it. Or Julia child's kitchen. That is enormous touchstone thing for women taking on an entirely different cooking. Then you follow you on them with that exhibit, and you realize she's also a spy. It's this whole empowerment thing that's very different. There's a lot of things that are like that to my mind in the Smithsonian, which are, they start off as one thing, but then as you explore more, you find the layers in the depths and all of a sudden you're like, whoa, this is crazy. But I hate to stop us here, but we need to stop here for a minute and come back if we can for another episode to finish up [inaudible] okay.

John Aughenbaugh: I think Eric, we would like for you to come back and discuss how the Smithsonian expanded and grew its value when purposes perhaps have changed, maybe some of the controversies because as many of us who follow this Smithsonian can note, there have been some controversies about some of the displays that.

Eric Johnson: Yeah. That'll be great.

John Aughenbaugh: Are you willing to come back for a second episode?

Eric Johnson: Happy to.

Nia Rodgers: Fabulous. Thanks so much, guys.

Eric Johnson: Thank you Nia.

John Aughenbaugh: Thank you.

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