

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: Hi Aughe.

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

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

John Aughenbaugh: I'm lovely and quite excited because we get to talk about the Smithsonian for another podcast episode.

Nia Rodgers: Yeah.

John Aughenbaugh: With us, is our good friend and colleague, Eric Johnson from the VCU Libraries. As we've discussed previously, Eric and his fine staff, God bless them, have been dealing with Nia and I now for multiple years. They are the fine folks who make sure that our podcast episodes actually get posted and shared with you all. All of our handiwork would not exist without their fine efforts. One, thanks Eric for that work, but also two, thanks for joining us again to share your knowledge and enthusiasm about the Smithsonian, which actually it's not this Smithsonian, it's multiple Smithsonians which we discussed in the previous episode. I believe Nia, where we left off, we just talked about the creation of the Smithsonian, what led to it, and I think we were ready to launch into a discussion of, how did the Smithsonian grow, change and other fun, interesting, controversial stuff that has happened with it.

Nia Rodgers: I want to ask a specific question actually, if it's okay. Eric played along with how Aughe and I usually do this podcast which is, he made notes. He made notes for us to follow, which Aughe usually does the research notes for our podcasts. I know that's weird because I'm the research librarian, but I like leaning on Aughe. In this case, I like leaning on Eric. But there's a note here about the Smithsonian at war time. That's by the way, in case you were wondering, that's all the note says. It's not like these are, I get a preview of what Eric's going to say, which is cool because now I get to hear it firsthand.

John Aughenbaugh: Nia, one of the reasons why I like Eric's notes, because his notes are like my notes, because Nia goes ahead and says she leans on me, but a lot of my notes are four, five words on a bullet point, which are designed to remind me to go ahead and mention something. Nia, God bless her, goes ahead and says, "Aughe, you got in your notes, blah, blah, blah. What's that about?"

Nia Rodgers: Now I'm saying that to Eric. What's that about?

Eric Johnson: You've got this thing and wanted to, of course, embarrassing us.

Nia Rodgers: Reminding people who may not have remembered, the Smithsonian was founded in 1818-ish by the Colombian.

John Aughenbaugh: It was founded in 1846.

Nia Rodgers: Okay. The Columbia Institute before that, then there was money involved and there was pains and sorrows, but 1846 puts us prior to the Civil War.

John Aughenbaugh: Right.

Nia Rodgers: Is the Smithsonian have something to do with the Civil War?

Eric Johnson: Yeah, it's interesting history. Some of the supporters of the original idea of the Smithsonian were in fact Southern senators, representatives, so, of course, they were friends of the founding director, Joseph Henry, Jefferson Davis was one of those who supported their vision for the Smithsonian. As of course, 1850 especially onward, there was shall we say, a lot of national debate around the question of slavery and expansion and all these questions. The Smithsonian was pretty neutral. Understandably, Joseph Henry's idea was, I'm just going to not talk about it either way. We will continue to do the work that we do, we're not going to get into politics. He was just trying to avoid politics like any good civil servant type.

Nia Rodgers: Which side note, Library of Congress also makes a point of doing. The Library of Congress when you do research there makes a point of doing as neutral. When they do research for Congress, they present those papers, which by the way, if you're looking for of them, Congressional Research Service puts those papers out and you can find them from the GPO, Government Publishing Office. But they are intended to be neutral. They're not picking sides because if the Library of Congress picks sides, then you're in trouble when the sides change.

John Aughenbaugh: But that's part of the difficulty, right, Eric? We're going to touch upon this later on in the podcast episode, but we're talking about institutions that can have a huge impact on the public's perception of the country in its history, in its culture, and a lot of people look for those institutions to go ahead and be, "honest, truthful," etc, but in so doing, they end up having to wade into political battles, right?

Eric Johnson: Right.

John Aughenbaugh: You mentioned something that Nia and I've talked about in numerous podcast episodes. Civil servants are supposed to be neutrally competent. But in doing their jobs, almost inevitably they're going to wade into these disputes. That's one of those tensions. The Smithsonian had a laudable purpose, the development and diffusion of knowledge, right?

Eric Johnson: Right.

John Aughenbaugh: On the surface, that doesn't seem to be political. But then when you have something like the Civil War, where some of your biggest proponents in getting a created are now leaving the country.

Nia Rodgers: Secessionists.

John Aughenbaugh: They are secessionist. You're trying to go ahead and be neutral.

Nia Rodgers: Mr. Henry is like, "We are not leaving the country." You know what I mean?

John Aughenbaugh: This is fascinating.

Nia Rodgers: I can see where he would want to stay out of it as much as he could.

Eric Johnson: Well, one of the things that's really interesting that I saw related to their time during the Civil War itself, because of course, the lead up is one thing, once war happens, secession happens. That's a whole different level, but they didn't display the American flag at all, which I think is really interesting because he just didn't want that to appear to be this supporting the union, which I was like, that is totally fascinating. Because on the other hand, ultimately, the government came to them for multiple reasons, looking for different support. Joseph Henry was, "I know it's wartime, I really want the science to keep going." We may circle back to the fact that he was definitely the research side, the increase in knowledge, then his assistant secretary, Spencer Baird, was the diffusion of knowledge person. He was all about the collections and displaying stuff and that kind of thing. But Joseph Henry during the civil war is like, the idea that war might shut down this scientific institution was anathema to him. He just felt that, what a terrible outcome that that would be, when what we all need is this continuing increase in knowledge.

Nia Rodgers: I agree with him.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I think that's been the case in a lot of.

Nia Rodgers: What kind of scientist was he?

John Aughenbaugh: He was basically a physicist, we call it now. He was a natural philosopher at the University of New Jersey, which became Princeton University.

Nia Rodgers: Really was his life's work to do science?

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

Nia Rodgers: Okay. Mr. Baird was his jam, "You all should come over and look at what we have because it's totally fabulous and you should feel like you could give us something if you wanted to or money if you wanted to?"

John Aughenbaugh: Well, is his big jam, as he was often called the collector of collectors. He was the one who agreed with collectors across the country that you go out into the field, you collect bugs and butterflies and rocks and bones and send them to us. That is what you'll do.

Eric Johnson: Hoarders of the world unite.

Nia Rodgers: He's a hoarder.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

Nia Rodgers: Okay.

Eric Johnson: Every museum needs to have that person, right?

John Aughenbaugh: Right.

Eric Johnson: That person who can go ahead and see a collection of, for instance bugs and say, "This would be a great display, in this wing of our museum for these reasons."

Nia Rodgers: To be the institution that other institutions check against when they find something. There has to be an authority on bees. Is this a new bee species or is this just a bee with a disease that makes it purple? Or is this suddenly a new purple bee? I'm assuming that part of what those institutions we're trying to do, was to build authority style.

Eric Johnson: Absolutely.

ERIC JOHNSON: A type specimen is what that's typically called a type specimen collection. Whereas it's like we have the definitive version of every species that we can do, for exactly that purpose so that other things could be compared and we can figure out, is this just to say, a new species, or an illness in a past species, or is there a change in atmospheric conditions? Because now we can check the wood that is 400 years old against the wood that was recently cut down, or that kind of thing. Lots and lots of different work, but that was exactly what Spencer Baird was trying to build in essence.

NIA RODGERS: Their purposes worked much pretty well together?

ERIC JOHNSON: They did.

NIA RODGERS: They weren't really at cross purposes too much.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right. Joseph Henry always felt like that stuff wasn't really needed. He liked the idea, I think of the specimen collection, but the display of all that, you don't really need to worry about, he wanted it for research purposes.

NIA RODGERS: He didn't want people traipsing through his lab looking at stuff.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: We're almost engaging in stereotypes listeners. Because for those of us who work with scientist, they frequently are like, "How is this going to go ahead and help us learn more

about x?" How it gets presented or how it might be developed or branded or sold or commercial aspects, that's not our concern.

NIA RODGERS: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: But for the rest of us who might be curious, might be interested, it's those folks that do the second part, who bring us in.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Who go ahead and say, yes, you guys should be interested in our collection of trees from Western force because it highlights this particular phenomenon. You guys should pay attention to Archie Bunkers chair from all in the family, because it was one of the first TV shows who quite clearly dealt with these issues. It was more than just a chair. It's the chair of a character who helped revolutionize American television.

ERIC JOHNSON: This thing is important for us for some reason.

NIA RODGERS: Right. When you go to the Air and Space Museum, then the changes in propeller shape, wing shape, all of that is showing you the more and more we understand science, the better and better we build machines that.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: That have these purposes.

NIA RODGERS: Get us from one place to another. We didn't start off with the conquered, that was not the first plane, that would have been awesome. But the first plane was basically a rickety barn, more or less, that went floppity, floppity, floppity and then immediately went onto the ground, bang.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Boom.

NIA RODGERS: We had been as humans up in the air for the first time of our own power and not throwing ourselves off of something tall, which we've done before. But this was getting off the ground and going, which is pretty awesome. We have Civil War, do we have other? First of all, let me just say the flag that I think I saw was a revolutionary flag and so you're telling me that somebody just folded that up and put it into chest somewhere and said, we'll get back to this in a few years when we've decided.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Then you now [inaudible] for war.

ERIC JOHNSON: That's it. Well, the flag I meant was just yield standard current American flag on a pole in front of the building.

NIA RODGERS: Okay.

ERIC JOHNSON: Not this type thing or banner, which of course we all now see there the ginormous, that was flown to Baltimore, Fort McHenry, all that kind of stuff. Not that one, just that.

NIA RODGERS: The one L flag, where they are like.

ERIC JOHNSON: They are like regular flag out front, just going to be climbing and what had happened during the Civil War. Of course, it's the government it's like, "What is this happening now, people?" We need space. One of the things that happened was the government officials came to Smithsonian and said, basically, can we have your first floor, because we have to put all these clerks somewhere? They ended up agreeing with that. The first thing the government had wanted was, they wanted to build troops there. They wanted to put troops into there just because we tried to put them places. Joseph Henry said, maybe we could be an infirmary, like a little bit clients related to it. Then what ended up happening was they put in government clerks in there.

NIA RODGERS: Which makes sense because if he had had troops, then there was the potential for warfare within the building.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Ms. Missoni could have become a target of the confederate army.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

NIA RODGERS: Which I'm sure he was like, "No, let's not do that." Are there other wartime activities beyond the Civil War?

ERIC JOHNSON: The other one just think dimensional of the Civil War that they're famous for is that, Joseph Henry did introduce Thaddeus Lowe, who had the lighter than air balloon flown by the Smithsonian, basically introduced him to Lincoln as a military inventor for all intensive purposes. That started this air core idea for the Union Army, where they had balloons where they could float up and see troops who were down below, telegraph down out of the balloon down.

NIA RODGERS: I didn't know they that.

ERIC JOHNSON: That was tailored.

NIA RODGERS: Oh, sorry, my ignorance is shown. But how comes was that?

ERIC JOHNSON: That was not this whole universe making that happen, but it was this introduction that he was famous for. But World War I, it's the same idea, when it rolled in where what they really wanted to do was do war-related science for the government. Whether that's testing fluid mechanics or a trajectory of projectiles, all that kind of stuff. They were doing science for the government, that happened both in World War I and World War II as well. World War I is interesting because the secretary of the Smithsonian at the time, his son was killed as he was flying for a French unit, and was shot down behind German lines in World War I. World War I touched the Smithsonian family in a way that it hadn't previously, I think, which is wild. They realized actually, I think I was talking about the

clerks, and that's really World War I was when clerks rolled into the Smithsonian. Civil War was mostly this infirmity possibility, did a little bit of science for the Union course. Then World War II, again, science, the big thing for the Smithsonian was their expertise at that point in the Pacific and Pacific theater and just because now this was the World War including these areas the Pacific that most Americans didn't know a whole lot about. The Smithsonian had all these experts that could talk, language, culture, strange things like there's the idea. They, of course, weren't allowed to talk about what they helped the government with. Somebody said that there was a knowledge of shrimp, like breathing roots helped submarines figure out how to maneuver between Pacific Islands because the Smithsonian had this knowledge and they can share it out, and that went out to the war effort. What are the other things that always happens with these kinds of things, and has happened through the centuries of war is, the idea of having scientists accompany military units into new places so that they can quick do some science while this unit is in this new place.

NIA RODGERS: Take samples and measure things.

ERIC JOHNSON: Exactly. We will gather what knowledge we can as we go.

NIA RODGERS: I think of it as a museum, but it is equally or more a scientific endeavor. There's constant science being done as Bill and I would say, science, because he always says if it's an exclamation point over Bill and I. But it's almost like being the attic is not afterthought, but not the main purpose.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Mr. Eric, you talked about the assumptions. There was tension there. In a lot of times, tension is not bad. From tension comes some really good stuff, there were some really cool stuff. But have you seen, for instance, that tension hurt the Smithsonian at all?

ERIC JOHNSON: That's an interesting way to think about it.

Speaker 1: I didn't know that hurting it would be the way I might say it. There are definitely times where each approach is a little more ascendant. Then the other through time, but really it has more or less settled into this realization that it is indeed both of these things all along. I think part of the bigger tension in terms of being a negative impact are things like I mentioned earlier, collections growing so quickly that it outstrips their ability to hold onto and preserve it in anything the same museum-grade way. Of course, we talked at the beginning of this about how we dive into the expansion of the Smithsonian and what are the things that, that comes out of is that we have huge growth in various collections. Therefore start to, instead of having one national museum, which had started at the Smithsonian Castle, what we call the castle now, then grew in 1881 to a building next door to what is now the Arts and Industries Building. Part of the Smithsonian, it was just the national museum building that was bigger. We just need more space to have all this stuff, and then beyond that, they had a second national museum building, which is now the Natural History Museum. The collection of the Natural History Museum is by far the largest of any of the Smithsonian museums, like in the hundreds of millions type size. We can run some stats later on of you want, but the point there being that really the growth of the Smithsonian came from new collections rolling in again and again, people wanting to donate art

collections. That was a big thing that started happening in 1920s and onward. Several of the galleries, the galleries of art had of foundation, because people had a collection and wanted to donate or that the Smithsonian wanted to obtain. Same with aeronautics stuff. They had started collecting all this aeronautic equipment, stored it in a concept behind the castle for years until they develop the National Air Museum, which that of course became the National Air and Space Museum in the 60s when space became a bit bigger thing.

Speaker 2: By the way, listeners, particularly for our listeners who live in Central Virginia, Northern Virginia. It's quite accessible. Eric where is it located?

Speaker 3: The two you'd be that air space and x bar has the index, which is out at Dulles Airport, has enormous collection of planes and they did not have to take your part to put it into the museum.

Speaker 4: Can I just note for the record that at this point the Smithsonian is one of those people who they get a storage unit and then they realized they needed another storage unit and then they need a third storage unit because they've got so much stuff that it's just so now you've got this storage unit that's out at Dulles, right? Which is what we need. But let's just say you're building that we can just roll things into so we don't have to take them apart anymore. Let's get one of those.. Let's get one of those. That's fascinating to me that.

Speaker 3: Borders of the world unite.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 4: It's amazing to me how much they have stashed and you said in a previous episode, I believe, that there are 200 affiliate. Probably in part because, hey man, don't you want to take on this butterfly colored.

Speaker 3: Could do. Yeah.

Speaker 4: Yeah. Hold on to that for a couple of years. I mean, that's crazy.

Speaker 3: I did not mention when my first introduction. The other thing that I had formally done at the Smithsonian was I went to learn photogrammetry, which is three-dimensional object creation using a camera at the museum support center, which is the Smithsonian Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland, which really is their storage, all the museums have storage. Udvar-Hazy is air and space museums like annex for both storage and display, but the Museum Sport Center is where they have just shelves. It's 12 miles of shelving. All these difficulties.

Speaker 4: It's warehouse 13.

Speaker 3: Yeah, I mean, it's end of integrators [inaudible] .

Speaker 4: That's what the arc is.

Speaker 3: Yeah, they also have all these really super cool labs where they're doing preservation work of all different kinds and analysis and stuff. That's where also research is happening, but it was cool because I got to go to one of their photography lab in this place. It's football field size, four football fields, and then they can expand it, it's just it's designed with a long central corridor and the storage areas and then if they just need another one, they just can build another one. I don't know how big the property is if at some point that's going to be a problem, but yeah, it's pretty wild.

Speaker 4: They'll have to go out because they won't be able to go out.

Speaker 2: That's fascinating.

Speaker 4: Jimmy, what's some controversial stuff?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 4: There's got to be some.

Speaker 1: Good argues interested in tension stuff. I think really where a lot of tension stuff is coming from is a change in museology and the practice of museums and the Smithsonian and of course for so long was seen as this attempting to be fairly neutral thing. But museum practice in general has come to realize as many fields do, libraries and others too, that there is no such thing as neutrality. You are taking a position on a thing and probably the biggest, most famous controversy in our lives, I would guess it was probably the Enola Gay exhibit decisions. Again, Air and Space Museum, 50 years after the conclusion of World War II, they wanted to display the Enola Gay, which was one of the planes that dropped the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, very famously. The exhibit that they had started to craft for displaying the Enola Gay talked of course, about the development of the atomic bomb, the plan to drop it, the reason for dropping it. But was seen by many people as being way too sympathetic to the "Japanese" who, many of whom were of course, innocent victims of the bomb that hit and paid insufficient attention in the minds of these folks to the idea that what it did do was in the war quickly save American lives, because now we didn't have to go in on the ground in Japan. There was a huge controversy with the American Legion and with other groups. Very upset, what sounded what they would call revisionist history, this idea that what we're trying to do is make America look bad and downplay the badness from other people. That of course, is a tension that has come again and again in lots of public spheres through time, But it was especially prevalent in the 90s and the Smithsonian starting to take some steps in that direction. Ultimately, they played that down. They said, never mind. Just really focus on the plane itself and not worry about the consequences. They decided that we were premature and trying to make this, what is the legacy of the Enola Gay argument at the same time as saying, 50 years later, these boys are heroes.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Which is totally understandable problem, but of course, that decision upset a lot of people because they didn't the idea of public angst about a display affecting what the curators wanted to say. That in it of itself is that's a secondary challenge. There really are some interesting tensions around that.

Speaker 4: I can imagine veterans versus internment camp survivors. Like, you have a whole bunch of issues there of equality and equity. That would be, I mean, even in the 90s when we weren't yet talking about those in those words and those terms. That's part of what you're getting at is this idea of whose story gets told and how it gets told.

Speaker 3: Yeah, you've got the phenomenon and how it should be portrayed, but then as I pointed out, to what extent should public opinion, no matter who expresses that, affect the decisions of professional curators. It's the debate about to what extent should politicians be able to affect what bureaucrats report when we're talking about a pandemic or climate change under the condition of the economy or our relationship with various foreign nations.

Speaker 4: Right. Should they be able to crash those reports?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 4: For the greater good, there's this.

Speaker 3: Yeah, you've got multiple layers of controversy here. It was more than just about the Enola Gay.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Yeah, go ahead Eric.

ERIC JOHNSON: Now part of it is of course, specific to the Smithsonian's role as National Museum because they took the planned parts of some of the exhibit where they had photographs of people from Japan who what happened to them when the atomic bomb hit, ended up taking that off this exhibit and take it to American University and melting an exhibit there that was more about the legacy of the bombing and the response from the American region was, that's fine for American university. That is not the national museum, they can make that argument. Our whole problem was that the Smithsonian was saying this.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Yeah.

ERIC JOHNSON: It is really interesting.

NIA RODGERS: Essentially the national museum.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Yeah.

ERIC JOHNSON: That's the American story.

NIA RODGERS: That brings me to another question which is, I'm not the British Museum. I'm guilty, I love the British Museum. Nothing in the British Museum belongs there because none of it is British. It's all stolen from other countries and Britain would show up with a big boat and some guns and say, "Hi, we'd like your country, please and we're going to take some of your cool stuff and take it back to Britain." Part of that was paternalism. We don't think you can take care of your own stuff. Part of that was, hey, that's really cool and I want to have it in Britain where people can see it where "civilized people" and what we can argue about what civilized means. Hello, soccer thugs or football thugs if you want to call them that. But that's a really hard place for museums to walk that line because in defense of the British Museum, some of the stuff that was taken out of Afghanistan was destroyed by the Taliban because they wanted to be rid of it as historical artifact and British Museum was saying, if you'd let us take it when we had the chance, it would still exist. See we were right, which is complicated.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: It's not an easy set of questions to answer.

NIA RODGERS: Right.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: I share with my students the fact that about 15 years ago, a bunch of us who were teaching at the Walter School went to the Soviet Union, Saint Petersburg, Russia and we went to The Hermitage, and I've had a couple of students who were like, but The Hermitage has a whole bunch of paintings that they stole from people during wartime or from other countries and they were correct. On the other hand, do I ignore the paintings?

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

NIA RODGERS: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: As somebody who likes to view artwork, do I ignore them? Because I've learned so much by going to art museums even though I'm not an art expert. Right?

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Does the museum, for instance, with the Enola Gay Exhibit, doesn't pull its punches because again, as somebody who studies politics, you some of the decision to drop the bomb, was impart political.

NIA RODGERS: Right.

ERIC JOHNSON: Absolutely.

NIA RODGERS: View to the modern lens awful.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

ERIC JOHNSON: Yes.

NIA RODGERS: There's whose lives matter here is the question that's deeply worry about Japanese lives or American lives. I guess what I'm getting at Eric is does the Smithsonian have parts of its collection that really ought to be given back to other people or, do you know what I mean? Like the British? Every so often Greece calls England and says, "Hey, would you mind giving back our statues?" London says, "I'm sorry, we have a bad connection, I can't hear you" and they hang up. Is there anything like that?

ERIC JOHNSON: There is the biggest analogy I would say is actually with native American goods and remains. What are the things that happened in the 80 's at the Smithsonian was a touring group of data broken dignitaries they were getting behind the scenes tour. At some point in the course of the tour, they saw a big storage area and said, "Oh my gosh! There must be so many materials in this area" and they said, oh, those are the indigenous people's bones that we have still like 30,000, 35,000 skeletons, 40,000 which were North American Indian and they were taken aback by this realization. Of course, people knew that collectors had collected all these things, but just the scale of that Smithsonian had, of those, of funerary goods that came out of graves. All that kind of thing sparked a big controversy in the late 80 's, again with the Smithsonian. As the idea of the National Museum of American, Indian was also starting to come to formation. Actually what you find in the act that established the National Museum of American Indian was a requirement that the Smithsonian take a look at all of these funerary goods of the human remains, of related cultural artifacts of great significance, and work to repatriate them back to either descendant tribes or culturally descendant tribe, families if they can identify because of where some things are identified under an individual, even still. Just trying to work on that as part of the act that established the National Museum and American Indian, Smithsonian is required to do it. Then a year later, NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection, and Repatriation Act was established for any museum or cultural institution that's receiving federal funding is required to go through this review process, reviewing what they have, who it might get returned to? Whether a claim against your collection they have to judge, it's legitimacy, but they have some criteria for that sort of thing. Primarily at the Smithsonian that was the National Museum of American Indian, the Natural History Museum, because they have so many artifacts that were related to this, in this collection of human remains and skulls and all this thing were of their collection. They have a real target for that and the American History Museum. Those three have the main work to do that thing but it's exactly the same phenomenon that happened with recent British Museum. It's like you all showed up, did not ask permission, basically, dug up graves rated these places, took our artwork, and of course, the Smithsonian made the same arguments in Congress was, we can care of it, protecting it has such research value. It's so important, science keeps changing so we can do things like comparisons between genetic markers then and modern Native American health conditions like lots of argument. But in the end, the cultural, the moral weight.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: Yeah.

ERIC JOHNSON: Here we'd need to look further, I think.

NIA RODGERS: But it's an ongoing question in archaeology is, who has a right to, and who can preserve things better, and should that carry the day? In the case of remains, I would think no, except that there's a part of me that's like yes, but I just went to an exhibit with Egyptian remains.

ERIC JOHNSON: Right.

NIA RODGERS: To argue his point, do you not go because you don't want to support, you know what I mean? You don't want to support the institution but by the same token.

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: How do I learn?

NIA RODGERS: How do I learn right and they [inaudible].

JOHN AUGHENBAUGH: How do I possibly become sympathetic and understanding, without this exposure?

John Aughenbaugh: One of the things that museums have, of course, started to do more and more is to involve the cultures that they are interpreting. We have a National Museum of American Indians, which was basically formed after many conversations with tribes and peoples across the country, and they're being hired to be the staff to run the place, the National Museum of African American History and Culture same idea and a lot of historic sites are doing things where they talk to descendant communities of enslaved people at that site to help bring those voices in. Again, it is a challenge because you're still want to tell the story of the thing or the place or the history, but not for somebody else and [inaudible] somebody else.

Eric Johnson: Yeah.

Nia Rodgers: Right. Empowering those individuals to tell their own stories. I know there's a group and I want you to say the name on this podcast because isn't this a group of Royal Society kind of guys?

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah, so yes, you're talking the megatherium club. A megatherium was an extinct ground sloth, fouds, whatever early 19th century claws were found in the skeleton was found and that sort of thing. It was, yeah. Got a circle back to them because they are so my favorite people in the Smithsonian. Basically when I mentioned that Spencer Fullerton bared the second secretary. The assistant secretary under Joseph Henry, the first Secretary of the Smithsonian, he was the collector of collectors. This is a group of his collectors. Like they were basically a bunch of young guys who lived in the Smithsonian Castle primarily. Occasionally, one of them had a house right near the Smithsonian that he rented and had parties there. But it was like a turtle society almost of scientists where what makes you cool is not being cool, what looks cool is being a good scientist. What they would typically do is they went out to the field, out west to other places, did their collections in temperate weather, and then in winter, they would all come back to the Smithsonian and do all the cataloging and work. Some of them were pretty much only field folks, and some of them were pretty much only living at the Smithsonian. But they named themselves the megatherium club and came up with the theoretical call of the

megatheria or megatherium, so they would yell it down the halls of the Smithsonian. It's always written as, how, how, so some kind of howing sounds is how they wrote it down. They would engage in what they called conduction, which was basically conversation and drinks. They would write to each other and be like, Kennecott is coming back, great conduction underway. These conversations drinking oysters, and then they ended up like many of them became really leading like in natural history circles, especially in the sort of Civil War, post-Civil War era. This is like 1857, 1866 was when they're there. They, of course, drove Joseph Henry crazy, I mean, his family lived at the castle. They were doing sack races down the hallways in the Smithsonian because they were young men, mostly, not all of them, some of them were actually had a crotchety over. They had built this society of people that just love this kind of stuff. Then, unfortunately, several of them met tragic ends because that was often the case when you are out in the field doing stuff. Robert Kennecott was one of them who was helping explore Russia and Alaska and ended up basically dying on the Yukon River. He was succeeded as the head of the Chicago Academy of Sciences by another member of the megatherium who was there when the Great Chicago Fire hit and all the papers were burned in this way. It was not a happy ending, but as bright light, especially during the Civil War and especially driving Joseph Henry crazy. They would woo his daughters, and it was pretty funny, They, I think would make a great movie or book.

Nia Rodgers: Yeah, that sounds like that could be the Ocean's Eleven of its day. All-star cast doing cool things together.

John Aughenbaugh: If you think like Robert Downey Junior, that's the vibe that you get. Actually, one of them looks a lot like him, so I keep thinking that every time I see it.

Nia Rodgers: Before we go, we have to do actual business.

John Aughenbaugh: Sure, absolutely.

Nia Rodgers: Which is how much does it cost to get into the Smithsonian's?

John Aughenbaugh: It costs, well, it costs nothing. It is free of course, because we have all paid our taxes, and we are supporting this thing. But that is one of those things that those of us who grew up in Northern Virginia, I think they are in the DC area, always get confused when we go visit other museums because they aren't free. Going to the Smithsonian is free to get into any of the museums when they're open. We'll talk about in a second because they're starting to open now. There are occasionally charges for special exhibits. If there's some special thing, they may do some charging for that, but the entrance fee is free.

Nia Rodgers: Okay. You get to them, they're downtown Washington, most of them, not all of them but a lot of them. You probably want to take the metro in or kids parking, she is evil along the mall. Unless you arrive at 4:00 AM and just sleep in your car until something opens.

John Aughenbaugh: I have been tempted to do that. I actually keep talking about getting like a 15 passenger van and saying, anybody who wants to come to the Smithsonian, jump in the van we'll drive up from Richmond. But yes, the mall is where most of the museums are, but not all of them. There are

some scattered elsewhere in DC and then also outside of DC. But the Smithsonian Castle, some of the big hitters like the Air and Space Museum of Natural History Museum, The Museum of African-American History and Culture, the American Indian Museum. Those are right on the mall as are several of the art galleries. Those are easily accessible through a couple of different Metro stops, which is the subway system in BC for people who may not be familiar with the area. But of course, it is possible to drive downtown and find a parking lot somewhere that you pay for all day the parking.

Nia Rodgers: Their hours are posted on their websites because they're different depending on each building?

John Aughenbaugh: That is correct. If you go to si.edu, which is the Smithsonian's website and just click on the visit area. One of the things that you'll find is the current listing of what's open, and you'll also see the fact that through June, July, and August, they are rolling more of the museums open. They shut down totally for a big chunk of 2020 because of COVID. Some reopened for a while and then closed again, and then now eight or nine are currently open. Again, there are 19 total museums, 20 including the zoo, and so several are open. One of the other things to know now is that currently all of the Smithsonian museums require a time ticket access, so you do have to jump and get it. Don't just show up currently and hope that you're going to get into a museum. You have to go online or probably have a phone number to call to, to get a timed entry pass to a museum. I would not be shocked given just the fact that COVID restrictions are lifting left and right. That may change soon, but I guess the best advice I would recommend is go to the website, see how to visit the museum of your choice, currently.

Eric Johnson: Yeah.

John Aughenbaugh: There are, you know.

Nia Rodgers: That's just a matter of crowd control, that's just because they're trying not to have 5,000 people [inaudible] into an elevator all at once or over-breathing on each other. I would like to note for the record, by the way, that their web address is si.edu, not si.com or si.org. They're considered an educational institution, and as we know, ICANN is pretty serious about you using the proper domain. They will shut you down if you don't use the proper domain. That's pretty cool.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

Eric Johnson: I do believe si.com is Sports Illustrated.

Nia Rodgers: It's good to know and just one last thing. Aren't they all ADA compliant now?

Eric Johnson: As far as I know. I shouldn't say that definitively because I know some of them are in old buildings, some of the museum buildings are. I know they've done a lot of retrofitting to try to make them so, but without checking, I would not say definitively that is the case. I'm quite sure that is their intent. Even if they haven't gotten there with every building out there.

Nia Rodgers: Again, something people might need to check on if they have compliance needs?

Eric Johnson: Right, absolutely.

Nia Rodgers: There are cafes. There are cafes and stalls and stuff?

Eric Johnson: Yeah, and actually some of the museums have quite famous cafe, they're not just a horrible hot dog burstiness. There are some that are really quite good. Actually, National Museum of American Indian is one of the ones that I've been to most recently where all of the dining options are basically different native cuisines and it's all really delicious and well prepared. Of course also still trying to move crowds quickly, which is a weird balance, I think for every museum cafe.

Nia Rodgers: Yeah, enjoy that.

Eric Johnson: We want you to enjoy this artistic food, go fast. But yeah, not every museum, but many museums have cafes, have gift shops and that's of course an increasing part of the Smithsonian. We were talking budget earlier, a chunk of their budget comes from that, from, Smithsonian magazine, from Smithsonian Channel on TVs and stuff like that.

John Aughenbaugh: I'm glad you mentioned the magazine because I'm a faithful reader of the Smithsonian magazine.

Eric Johnson: As am I.

John Aughenbaugh: They have some really good articles. They're usually longer pieces, so you can really go ahead if you get interested in a particular subject, you can really sink your teeth into it. I highly recommend the magazine, the Smithsonian Magazine. Good stuff.

Eric Johnson: I agree.

Nia Rodgers: The Government Publishing Office actually publishes many of the Smithsonian's reports because of the way they're funded. They're funded and it comes through the Government Publishing Office. If you live someplace other than the Virginia DC area, you should ask at your local library if they have the Smithsonian documents because most of your depository libraries will.

Eric Johnson: On that note too [inaudible] fast that, all of the museums have very robust websites. So if you're not in the DC area or not able to visit one of the museums in person that you're interested in, go to the website and many of them have information about exhibits that are there in person, also online exhibits and also ways to look at the collection, just see objects and information about objects and stuff like that. That varies of course, as to what that means. National Postal Museum is going to look very different than the Freer Gallery or that kind of thing.

Nia Rodgers: As a last plug, as a librarian, there is a book called Murder at the Smithsonian, and I cannot remember the author. The author's name is escaping me now. Oh my goodness. Eric, are you looking it up?

Eric Johnson: That's what I'm doing right now? Because I feel for the librarian.

Nia Rodgers: Thank you, and it's fantastic. It has actually some really interesting descriptions of an exhibit. It's not a real exhibit it's a Smithsonian, but it is an interesting book. The Smithsonian is a plot point in the book.

Eric Johnson: It's Margaret Truman.

Nia Rodgers: Margaret Truman. Thank you. She did a whole series of; murder at the Supreme Court, murder at various places.

John Aughenbaugh: Yes, she did. Yes.

Nia Rodgers: In DC, and one of them is the Smithsonian. I would suggest to you that might be able to get a beach reading for you there. They're not particularly gory, they're not particularly gross.

John Aughenbaugh: Well, I mean it in that series of books, listeners, for those of you who like to get quick bites of history or fascinating aspects of the history of various well-known institutions, her books do that because let's face it the three of us will go ahead and geek out on the Smithsonian for instance, or the Library of Congress, or in my case, the Supreme Court building. But for most folks, they would rather have it be served as perhaps like an appetizer to something else that they can consume and those books are not a bad, appetizer.

Nia Rodgers: Well, and Margaret Truman was the daughter of President Truman. So she has intimate knowledge of Washington and its environs. Eric, thank you so much. This has been fun and like always, we've learned a lot.

John Aughenbaugh: Yeah, Eric. Thank you very much for entertaining Nia in my digressions because as you talk, okay, all of a sudden, listeners, you can't see our faces, but all of a sudden Eric will be saying something and I'm about ready to launch through the computer array while Nia just gets this huge, big grin on her face okay, and she starts doing this with her fingers.

Nia Rodgers: Yes. Rubbing my fingers together.

John Aughenbaugh: Like a modified steeple.

Nia Rodgers: You [inaudible] several times I had no idea that there were that many remains in the Native America. That's insane, I can see where those controversial things come from, but also just the desire of the museum to do the right thing and to be as neutral as it can be while doing the right thing, which you can't always balance those perfectly either. Thank you so much.

Eric Johnson: Well, thank you all really seriously for those, been a joy so I really appreciate the invite.

Nia Rodgers: If you're a VCU student and you want to know more, you could always find Eric in the workshop. He will be happy to talk to you about all the equipment in the workshop and then about national parks and the Smithsonian and anything else that comes up.

Eric Johnson: One stop shop.

Nia Rodgers: They are an interesting crowd down in the workshop and they know all kinds of cool stuff.

John Aughenbaugh: Yes, they do.

Nia Rodgers: Thank you.

John Aughenbaugh: Thank you, Eric

Eric Johnson: Thank you both so much.

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