

**Professor Allen Weinstein, Archivist of the United States  
Remarks at the National Humanities Alliance 2007 Conference  
March 26, 2007 Ronald Reagan Building**

I AM HONORED TO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO SPEAK TO THIS CONFERENCE OF THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE TODAY. AND, IN SEARCHING FOR AN APPROPRIATE TOPIC, DECIDED TO SPARE YOU YET ANOTHER JEREMIAD FROM THE ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES ON THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT RECORDS. NOR AM I GOING TO TAX YOUR PATIENCE OVER LUNCH WITH DISCUSSION OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES' NEW STRATEGIC PLAN, WHICH IS WELL INTO OPERATIONAL REALITY BY NOW.

THIS BEING “HUMANITIES ADVOCACY DAY” AND MANY OF YOU HAVING COME TO WASHINGTON TO LEARN ABOUT FEDERAL HUMANITIES POLICY AND TO SERVE BEFORE CONGRESS AS ADVOCATES FOR FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR THE HUMANITIES, I WANT TO SPEND SOME TIME DISCUSSING THAT GOAL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR VALUES AND BEHAVIOR. SURELY, WE'RE NOT DEFINING THOSE IN THIS ROOM AS “ADVOCATES” WITHOUT CONSTRAINTS—WILLING TO ENGAGE, FOR EXAMPLE, IN ABRAMOFF-STYLE BEHAVIOR ON BEHALF OF THE CLIENT, THAT IS, GREATER FUNDING FOR THE HUMANITIES.

ALL RIGHT, THEN, ALL OF US HAVE STANDARDS OF ADVOCACY AMONG WHICH I WOULD COUNT “TRUTH TELLING” AS A PRIMARY ONE. BUT HONESTY AND CANDOR COMPEL US TO RECOGNIZE THAT OUR CAUSE, YOUR CAUSE, IS ONE OF A NUMBER OF COMPETING

CAUSES, MANY OF EQUAL OR PERHAPS EVEN GREATER MERIT IN SOME SCALE OF VIRTUOUS GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES. AND WITH THIS IN MIND, IN REFLECTING ON WHAT I WOULD SAY TODAY, I WAS LED BACK TO THE FOUNDER OF MY OWN GUILD, SURELY A LIFETIME MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE FROM ITS AND CLIO'S INCEPTION—NAMELY, HISTORY.

WHAT HISTORIAN CAN FORGET THE CRISP OPENING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE IN HERODOTUS'S *THE PERSIAN WARS*? QUOTE:

“THESE ARE THE RESEARCHES OF HERODOTUS OF HALICARNASSUS, WHICH HE PUBLISHES, IN THE HOPE OF THEREBY PRESERVING FROM DECAY THE REMEMBRANCE OF WHAT MEN HAVE DONE, AND OF PREVENTING THE GREAT AND WONDERFUL ACTIONS OF THE GREEKS AND THE BARBARIANS FROM LOSING THEIR DUE MEED OF GLORY; AND WITHAL TO PUT ON RECORD WHAT WERE THEIR GROUNDS OF FEUD.”

AND SO, BRIEFLY DEFINED, WHAT ARE THOSE PURPOSES? FIRST, NARRATION, PUBLISHED “IN THE HOPE OF THEREBY PRESERVING FROM DECAY THE REMEMBRANCE OF WHAT MEN [SIC] HAVE DONE” – NOT ANY OLD NARRATION, BUT HONEST, CANDID, TRUTH-TELLING NARRATION. JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM, TO BE SURE, BUT THE REAL FACTS AND NOT SOME COOKED-UP APOLOGIA OR COMPENDIUM OF HALF-TRUTHS.

SECOND, COMMEMORATION: “PREVENTING THE GREAT AND WONDERFUL ACTIONS OF THE GREEKS AND THE BARBARIANS FROM LOSING THEIR DUE MEED OF GLORY” [FOR BARBARIANS, READ

PERSIANS—BUT YES, RESCUE EVEN THEIR ACTIONS FROM OBLIVION AND ASSIGN THEIR “DUE MEED OF GLORY.”

COME WITH ME FOR A MOMENT TO WORLD WAR TWO PARIS DURING NAZI OCCUPATION AND TO A GARRET WHERE THE GREAT SOCIAL HISTORIAN, MARC BLOCH, WROTE FURIOUSLY TO FINISH HIS GEM OF A MASTERWORK, *THE HISTORIAN’S CRAFT*, WHILE—AS A RESISTANCE LEADER—ELUDING GESTAPO CAPTURE. RECALL BLOCH ON THE CONCEPT OF A GENERATION: “TO BE EXCITED BY THE SAME DISPUTE, EVEN ON OPPOSING SIDES, IS TO BE ALIKE: THIS COMMON STAMP, DERIVING FROM COMMON AGE, IS WHAT CHARACTERIZES A GENERATION.”

BLOCH WOULD EVENTUALLY PAY FOR THIS MORAL CLARITY WITH HIS LIFE WHEN CAPTURED BY THE GESTAPO; WHICH BRINGS ME TO HERODOTUS’S THIRD FUNCTION FOR HISTORY, ANALYSIS: “WITHAL TO PUT ON RECORD WHAT WERE THEIR GROUNDS OF FEUD.” SELF-EXPLANATORY.

WHAT “LESSONS” DOES HERODOTUS’S “INVENTION” OF HISTORY AND ITS PURPOSES HOLD OUT FOR ALL OF US ON HUMANITIES ADVOCACY DAY 2007? WITHOUT STRAINING, I WOULD POINT TO THE FOLLOWING, BEGINNING WITH NARRATION: STATE THE FACTS PLAINLY AND HONESTLY AS THE BASIS OF YOUR ADVOCACY, EVEN WHEN THOSE FACTS MIGHT APPEAR AT FIRST GLANCE TO BENEFIT YOUR ADVERSARIES; MAKE ROOM FOR THEM.

AS FOR COMMEMORATION, DO NOT FORGET THE “GREAT AND WONDERFUL DEEDS” OF OUR POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL HEROES, WHETHER DEAD OR ALIVE, POLITICALLY ASCENDANT OR NOT. AND AS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF OUR EFFORT, DO NOT DISTORT IT,

WHETHER POTENTIALLY FAVORABLE TO OUR ADVERSARIES' CAUSE OR OUR OWN. SELF-DECEPTION IS ITS OWN REWARD.

IN ITS CLEAREST SENSE, AS WEBSTER REMINDS US, AN "ADVOCATE" IS "ONE WHO PLEADS ANOTHER'S CAUSE...IN SUPPORT OF SOMETHING...TO SPEAK OR WRITE IN SUPPORT." THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE HAS BEEN FORTUNATE IN RECENT YEARS TO HAVE AS ITS CHIEF "ADVOCATES" IN CONGRESS DEMOCRAT DAVID PRICE AND REPUBLICAN JIM LEACH, EACH REPRESENTING YET TRANSCENDING PARTISAN WORLDS ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE'S BROADER BIPARTISAN GOALS. CONGRESSMAN PRICE—HIMSELF A DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR—IS WELL KNOWN TO US IN THIS ROOM, AND I THINK ACROSS PARTY LINES. WE ALL SHARE THE SADNESS THAT JIM LEACH WILL NOT BE CONTINUING HIS ADVOCACY FROM CONGRESS THIS SESSION. MAY I ASK YOU TO JOIN ME IN EXPRESSING APPRECIATION TO BOTH MEN FOR THEIR EFFORTS?

LET US REMAIN WITH OUR GREEK ANCESTORS FOR ONE FINAL MOMENT TODAY, WHILE WE REVIEW THE ORIGINAL ROOT OF THE ENGLISH WORD "IDIOT," FROM THE GREEK "IDIOTUS," MEANING (AS MOST OF YOU KNOW) "PRIVATE PERSON" OR—TO THE GREEKS—AN "IGNORAMUS." I WOULD URGE ON ALL OF YOU THE RECOGNITION TODAY NOT SIMPLY OF A ROLE AS "ADVOCATES" FOR THOSE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE HUMANITIES FOR WHICH ALL OF YOU HAVE LONG STRUGGLED. MANY HAVE LIFE OR DEATH IMPLICATIONS ON INDIVIDUAL BUDGETS AND ON THE ALLOCATION OF LIMITED FEDERAL RESOURCES—BUT CONSIDER THE NEED FOR A HIGHER ADVOCACY OF COHERENT CITIZENSHIP.

WHAT, SPECIFICALLY, AM I SUGGESTING? FOR OPENERS, A TRADE-OFF. THOSE LIKE MYSELF INSIDE GOVERNMENT (ALL THREE BRANCHES) OWE YOU, AS CITIZENS, ABSOLUTE CANDOR AND CONTINUED EFFORTS TO REBUILD TRUST BASED ON THAT CANDOR AND OPENNESS. YOU, IN TURN, AS “ADVOCATES” OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT, HAVE THE OBLIGATION AT LEAST OF CIVILITY IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT—A TRADE-OFF REQUIRED IMMEDIATELY AND URGENTLY. “CIVILITY” AT FIRST GLANCE MIGHT APPEAR SIMPLE, BUT NOT SO. WEBSTER DEFINES IT INITIALLY AS COURTESY OR POLITENESS, BUT DIG DEEPER INTO THE ENTRY, AND WE ENCOUNTER THESE “ARCHAIC” BUT CRUCIAL DEFINITIONS: “CIVILIZATION, CULTURE, GOOD BREEDING.”

AT THIS DEEPER LEVEL, I WOULD ARGUE THAT WE HAVE HARDLY SEEN ENOUGH “CIVILITY” IN AMERICAN GOVERNANCE FOR SOME TIME NOW. AND THE MATTER IS BASICALLY IN OUR HANDS—NOT THEIRS BUT OURS. NOR HAVE WE ENCOUNTERED A MASSIVE AMOUNT OF “BIPARTISANSHIP” IN THIS GOVERNING VILLAGE OF OURS IN RECENT YEARS. WHETHER ON IRAQ, OR THE WAR ON TERRORISM WORLDWIDE, OR OTHER CONFRONTATIONS, DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN, BIPARTISANSHIP IS NOW IN SHORT SUPPLY IN THIS TOWN, YET URGENTLY NEEDED. THERE ARE SOME SIGNS OF A POSSIBLE “WASHINGTON SPRING,” HOWEVER—A COMING TOGETHER OF DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ON ISSUES RELATED TO ACCESS TO INFORMATION. TAKE THE VOTES ON THE SO-CALLED “WAXMAN BILLS” SEVERAL WEEKS AGO:

- H.R. 985 (PASSED 331-95) -- WOULD EXPAND PROTECTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT WHISTLE BLOWERS;

- H.R. 1254 (PASSED 390-34) -- WOULD REQUIRE DONORS OF PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES TO BE PUBLICLY IDENTIFIED;
- H.R. 1255 (PASSED 333-93) -- WOULD REVOKE THE 2001 BUSH EXECUTIVE ORDER; AND
- H.R. 1309 (PASSED 308-117) -- WOULD COMPEL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE FOIA REQUESTS FILED EACH YEAR.

NOTE THE 3-1 OR 4-1 BIPARTISAN MAJORITIES IN ALL FOUR CASES.

TURNING TO YOUR IMPORTANT WORK IN THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE, I HAVE BEEN STRUCK OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS AS ARCHIVIST WITH THE CLOSE INTER-CONNECTEDNESS OF EFFORTS RELATED TO SUPPORTING MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES, AND ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT. ONE EXAMPLE: IN THE POST-KATRINA ASSISTANCE EFFORTS, THOSE OF US WHO TRAVELED THROUGH THE GULF STATES LINKED OUR EFFORTS DEPENDING ON THE RECOVERY NEEDS. WE WORKED TO RESCUE ANY AND ALL CATEGORIES OF MATERIAL—ARTIFACTS, DOCUMENTS, BOOKS, AND OTHER MATERIALS—DEPENDING ON THE IMMEDIATE NEED. THAT MEASURE OF COOPERATION HAS CONTINUED—AND WILL CONTINUE—THROUGH THIS ALLIANCE’S EFFORTS AND MANY OTHERS, INCLUDING THOSE EMANATING FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES.

BREAKING DOWN THOSE INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS HAS PROVED SIMPLE COMPARED TO CURRENT EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE AND POTENTIAL AGREEMENT INVOLVING THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN CONGRESS, DEMOCRATIC, AND THE WHITE HOUSE,

REPUBLICAN, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE SUBJECT TURNS TO IRAQ POLICY. WOODROW WILSON CENTER HEAD, LEE HAMILTON, WRITING IN YESTERDAY'S *WASHINGTON POST*, WHILE CONCEDED THE PROFOUND DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED, URGED UPON ALL CONCERNED "AN OBLIGATION TO COME TOGETHER...[TO] FIND A BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS AND RALLY PUBLIC OPINION BEHIND IT." OUR MODEST CONTRIBUTION AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES TO THIS PIVOTAL EFFORT IS MAINTAINING A PUBLIC PROGRAM SERIES INVOLVING MAJOR FIGURES ON A RANGE OF ISSUES UNDER DEBATE. THIS WILL CONTINUE.

NOR DO I MEAN TO SUGGEST A NEED TO RESTRAIN OR DIMINISH IN THE SLIGHTEST THE EXTRAORDINARY CUT AND THRUST OF AMERICAN POLITICAL DEBATE, ESPECIALLY AS THAT DRAMA (FOR EXAMPLE) CONCERNS RESOURCES FOR GROUPS REPRESENTED IN THIS ROOM. FAR FROM IT. YOU ALL HAVE A JOB TO DO—AS I DO—IN ENCOURAGING LARGER BUDGETS. WHAT I AM SUGGESTING, HOWEVER, IS A CLOSER SCRUTINY ON ALL OUR PARTS OF THAT VITAL COMMENT MADE BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD ABOUT A CIVILIZED INTELLIGENCE HAVING THE ABILITY TO KEEP TWO OPPOSED IDEAS IN THE MIND SIMULTANEOUSLY WHILE RETAINING THE CAPACITY TO FUNCTION.

FIRST IDEA: AS ADVOCATES, HELP TO MAXIMIZE OUR FUNDING RESOURCES WITH ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT. SECOND IDEA: RECOGNIZE THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF BRINGING THIS COUNTRY TOGETHER AROUND ITS CORE VALUES IN WAYS THAT MAXIMIZE POLITICAL CIVILITY AND EVEN (WHERE POSSIBLE) BIPARTISANSHIP. NAÏVE? PERHAPS, BUT NECESSARY.

IN THE PROCESS, WE MIGHT WISH TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT MANY MORE OF OUR PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS, WHETHER IN THE EXECUTIVE OR LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES, WHETHER DEMOCRAT OR REPUBLICAN, RESEMBLE THE JIM LEACH/DAVID PRICE ROLE MODELS, AND NOT THE ABRAMOFF ONE.

SIX YEARS AGO, ONLY WEEKS AFTER THE 9/11 TRAGEDY, I CONCLUDED A NEW HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES WITH THESE WORDS: “THE UNITED STATES REMAINS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD ECONOMICALLY DOMINANT, POLITICALLY STABLE, MILITARILY UNCHALLENGED, TECHNOLOGICALLY INNOVATIVE, AND CULTURALLY PERVASIVE...THESE ARE REALITIES WITH WHICH ANY FOE...MUST CONTEND.” I COULD NOT REPEAT TODAY SEVERAL OF THESE ASSERTIONS WITH AS MUCH CONFIDENCE AS THEN. NOR COULD I PREDICT AS CONFIDENTLY TODAY A FUTURE DEVOID OF DEEP ANGUISH AND TRAGEDY, WHETHER DUE TO FRESH TERRORIST ONSLAUGHTS OR TO OUR OWN INADEQUACIES. “HISTORY,” THE LATE ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR. HAS WRITTEN, “IS NOT A REDEEMER PROMISING TO SOLVE ALL PROBLEMS IN TIME.”

AMERICANS ARE NOW DEEPLY ENTERED INTO A NEW TESTING TIME, COMPARABLE TO EARLIER MOMENTS IN OUR HISTORY IDENTIFIED BY PIVOTAL YEARS (1776, 1861, 1941, AND 1962 COME TO MIND)—THE OUTCOME OF WHICH REMAINS UNCERTAIN AND LINKED TO EVENTS YET TO TRANSPIRE AND OFTEN BEYOND OUR CONTROL. FORTUNATELY, UNLIKE MANY OTHER PEOPLES, AMERICANS HAVE TRADITIONALLY WELCOMED THE UNEXPECTED AND HANDLED ITS NUANCES EFFECTIVELY.

“AMERICA,” HISTORIAN SAMUEL ELIOT MORRISON WROTE DECADES AGO, “WAS DISCOVERED ACCIDENTALLY, BY A GREAT SEAMAN WHO WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE. WHEN DISCOVERED, IT WAS NOT WANTED, AND MOST OF THE EXPLORATION FOR THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS WAS DONE IN THE HOPE OF GETTING [EITHER] THROUGH OR AROUND IT. AMERICA WAS NAMED AFTER A MAN WHO DISCOVERED NO PART OF THE NEW WORLD. [BUT] HISTORY IS LIKE THAT... VERY CHANCY.” STAY TUNED...