

September 5, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Republican Leader Boehner:

Last year, the National Archives located a July 7, 1863 letter written by President Abraham Lincoln concerning the Civil War, which was described by the Archives as a “significant find.” The discovery of this short note, written over 150 years ago, occasioned extraordinary interest and excitement.

Modern presidents have generated millions upon millions of documents that are critical to an understanding of our nation’s past. Yet unless Congress takes action to safeguard these materials, many of them may be lost to future generations.

In 1978, Congress reacted to the Watergate scandal by enacting the Presidential Records Act. The PRA requires the president to “take all such steps as may be necessary to assure that the activities, deliberations, decisions, and policies that reflect the performance of his constitutional, statutory, or other official or ceremonial duties are adequately documented and that such records are maintained as Presidential records.”

Unfortunately, while the PRA requires the preservation of presidential records, it fails to provide an effective means of enforcing compliance with that requirement. The consequences of that failure have only recently become clear, with the revelation that millions of White House email messages generated between October 2003 and March 2005 are missing. Little to no effort has been made to recover the missing messages, and many, if not all, may now be permanently lost. That loss will leave an enormous gap in the documentary record of the period, compromising the ability of future historians to understand how and why the Bush administration made critical policy decisions, including the decision to go to war in Iraq.

As historians, we believe it is vital that the PRA be strengthened to ensure that such a devastating loss will never again take place. Effective enforcement measures, including appropriate penalties for noncompliance, are essential to establishing and maintaining sound record keeping practices. In addition, there must be greater oversight of compliance with the PRA, including such measures as annual reviews and inspections by the Archivist. Had such inspections been the norm, the fact that millions of records were missing would have been discovered much earlier and all or most of them might have been recovered.

New technologies have made possible the capture and retention of an enormous volume of executive branch communications. A reinvigorated Presidential Records Act is needed to ensure that this information is preserved and made available for historical study—so that future generations can one day greet the discovery of an email from President Bush with the same excitement that attended the Lincoln letter.

Sincerely,

Allida M. Black
George Washington University

Alan Brinkley
Columbia University

David W. Blight
Yale University

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Biographical Notes

Allida Black is Project Director and Editor of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, where she is also Research Professor of History and International Affairs. Professor Black is the recipient of the Millennium Medal from The George Washington University. Her most recent book is *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers: Volume I, The Human Rights Years, 1945-1948* (2006). She is also the author of *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* (1995); *"What I Want to Leave Behind:" Democracy and the Selected Articles of Eleanor Roosevelt* (1995); *Courage In A Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt* (1999). She is the coauthor of *Democratic Women: An Oral History of the Women's National Democratic Club* (2000).

David W. Blight is Class of 1954 Professor of American History at Yale University and is Director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale. He is the author of *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped to Freedom, Including Their Narratives of Emancipation*, (2007), and *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), which received eight book awards, including the Bancroft Prize, the Abraham Lincoln Prize, and the Frederick Douglass Prize. His other published works include a book of essays, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (2002); and *Frederick Douglass's Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (1989).

Alan Brinkley is the 20th Provost and the Allan Nevins Professor of History at Columbia University in the City of New York. Among his publications are *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (1982), which won the 1983 National Book Award; *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (1995); and *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (1998). He is also the author of two widely-used college American history textbooks: *American History: A Survey*, now in its eleventh edition; and *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, now in its fourth edition.

Douglas Brinkley is the Fellow in History at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy and a Professor of History at Rice University. His most recent publications include *The Reagan Diaries* (2007), which he edited, and the New York Times best-seller *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2006), which was the recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy prize and a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. He also coauthored three books with the late Stephen Ambrose: *The Rise to Globalism* (1998); *Witness to History* (1999); and *The Mississippi and the Making of A Nation* (2002). Dr. Brinkley's *American Heritage History of the United States* won the Benjamin Franklin Award. His epic *Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress* was named *Business Week* book of the year and *Driven Patriot*, his biography of James Forrestal, received the Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Naval History Prize. He is also the author of *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House* (1998) and is coauthor of *Parish Priest* (2006), a biography of Father Michael J. McGivney, the founder of the Knights of Columbus.

Robert A. Caro has twice won the Pulitzer Prize, for *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (1974), and *Master of the Senate* (2002), the third volume of his monumental biography, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. He has twice won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Nonfiction Book of the Year, and has received the National Book Award, the Gold Medal in Biography from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Francis Parkman Prize, awarded by the Society of American Historians to the book that best "exemplifies the union of the historian and the artist."

Clayborne Carson is professor of history at Stanford University and founding director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. His first book, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (1981) won the Organization of American Historians' Frederick Jackson Turner Award. His other books include *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (1991). He is coauthor of *African American Lives: The Struggle for Freedom* (2005). Under Dr. Carson's direction, the King Papers Project, a component of the Institute, has produced six volumes of *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* In addition to these volumes, he has written or coedited numerous other works based on the papers, including *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1998); *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1998), compiled from the King's

autobiographical writings; and *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (2001).

Lizabeth Cohen is the Howard Mumford Jones Professor of American Studies at Harvard University. She is the author of *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (1990), which won the Bancroft Prize and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Her other works include *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2003), and is the coauthor, with Thomas Bailey and David M. Kennedy, of the popular history textbook, *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (Thirteenth Edition 2006).

Robert Dallek is a Professor of History at Boston University. He has won the Bancroft Prize and numerous other awards for scholarship and teaching. His books include his two-volume biography of Lyndon Johnson, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1908-1960* (1992) and *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973* (1999); *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (1979); *Franklin D. Roosevelt as World Leader* (1995); *Hail to the Chief: The Making and Unmaking of American Presidents* (1996); *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (2003); and, most recently, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (2007).

Joseph John Ellis is Ford Foundation Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College. He received the Pulitzer Prize for *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (2000), and the National Book Award for *American Sphinx* (1997), his portrait of Thomas Jefferson. His other books include *His Excellency George Washington* (2004), *Passionate Sage: The Character and legacy of John Adams* (1993), and *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (2007).

Eric Foner is the DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University. He is the author of *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988), which won numerous awards, including the Bancroft Prize, the Parkman Prize, and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. His other works include *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (1970); *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (1976); *Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (1983); *The Reader's Companion to American History* (with John A. Garraty, 1991); *The Story of American Freedom* (1998); *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World* (2002); *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (2005), and *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (2008).

Lee W. Formwalt is Executive Director of the Organization of American Historians. He is the author of *Benjamin Henry Latrobe and the Development of Internal Improvements in the New Republic, 1796-1820* (1979) and *The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe : 1784-1804* (1985).

Gary Gerstle is the James Stahlman Professor of History at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *Working-Class Americanism* (1989) and *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (2001), which won the 2001 Saloutos Prize for the outstanding work in immigration and ethnic history. He coedited *The Rise and Fall of the New Order, 1930-1980* (1989); *Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy* (2005); and *E Pluribus Unum?* (2001).

David A. Hollinger is the Preston Hotchkis Professor of American History at the University of California at Berkeley. His books include *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States* (2006); *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion Since World War Two* (2006); *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Source Book* (2006), which he coedited with Charles Capper; and *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995).

Arnita A. Jones is the Executive Director of the American Historical Association. An active public historian, she served as the first project director for the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History in the late 1970s and was a founding member of both the Society for History in the Federal Government and the National Council on Public History.

Stanley Katz is Lecturer with the Rank of Professor and Director of the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. He is President Emeritus of the American Council of

Learned Societies. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles, and is the editor of the Oliver Wendell Holmes Devise *History of the Supreme Court of the United States* and of the forthcoming *Oxford International Encyclopedia of Legal History* (6 vols., February, 2009).

Michael Kazin is a Professor of History at Georgetown University. He is the author of *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (2006) and *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (1999), with Maurice Isserman; *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (1995); and *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (1987).

David M. Kennedy is the Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History at Stanford University and the Director of the Center for the Study of the North American West. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (1999) and received the Bancroft Prize for his *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger* (1970). His *World War I, Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (1980) was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He is the coauthor, with Lizabeth Cohen and Thomas Bailey, of recent editions of the popular history textbook, *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (13th edition 2006).

Linda K. Kerber is May Brodbeck Professor in Liberal Arts & Sciences at the University of Iowa. She also is Lecturer in the College of Law, where she teaches courses in Gender and Legal History. In 2006 she served as President of the American Historical Association. She is the author of *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (1998) for which she was awarded the Littleton-Griswold Prize for the best book in U.S. legal history and the Joan Kelley Prize for the best book in women's history (both awarded by the American Historical Association). Among her other books are *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (1997), *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1980), and *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (1970). She is coeditor of *U.S. History as Women's History*, and of the widely used anthology, *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (6th edition 2004).

Stanley I. Kutler is Emeritus Professor of Law and Gordon Fox Professor of American Institutions at the University of Wisconsin. He is the author of *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (1998). His other books include *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (1992); *The American Inquisition* (1982), which won the American Bar Association's Silver Gavel Award; *Privilege and Creative Destruction: The Charles River Bridge Case* (1989); and *Judicial Power and Reconstruction Politics* (1968). He is the editor of the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century America* (1996), which won the prize for the best reference work by the Association of Book Publishers, and *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (1995).

David Levering Lewis is Professor of History at New York University and is the immediate past president of the Society of American Historians. He is the author of a two volume biography of W.E.B. Du Bois, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (1994) and *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century 1919-1963* (2001). Both volumes were awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the only time in the history of the prize that it was given to both volumes of a multi-volume biography. He is also a winner of the Bancroft Prize, the Parkman Prize, and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award. His other books include *King: A Biography* (1970), *Prisoners of Honor: The Dreyfus Affair* (1974), *District of Columbia: A Bicentennial History* (1976), *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1981), *The Race to Fashoda: European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa* (1988), and *The Invention of Europe: Islam in the Eighth Century* (2008).

David McCullough has twice won the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Francis Parkman Prize. His most recent book, *1776*, published in 2005, is a number one *New York Times* national bestseller in both hardcover and paperback. His previous work, *John Adams* (2001), remains one of the most critically acclaimed and widely read American biographies of all time. His other books include *The Johnstown Flood* (1968), *The Great Bridge* (1972), *The Path between the Seas* (1977), *Mornings on Horseback* (1981), *Brave Companions* (1992), and *Truman* (1992). His current project is a book about Americans in Paris from the 1830's to the 1930's. A recipient of the National Book Foundation's Award for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters and the National Humanities Medal, he has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as the American Academy of Arts and Letters and has received more than forty honorary degrees. In December 2006 he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award.

James M. McPherson is the George Henry Davis 1886 Professor Emeritus of American History at Princeton University. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (1988), which has sold more than six hundred thousand copies. His other works include *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (1964), *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (1975), *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (1982), *Lincoln and the Strategy of Unconditional Surrender* (1984), *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (1990), *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (1998), which won the Lincoln Prize; *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam* (2002), *Hallowed Ground: A Walk at Gettysburg* (2003), and *This Mighty Scourge* (2007).

William Lee Miller is Scholar in Ethics and Institutions at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia. His notable books include *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (2002); *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Debate in the United States Congress* (1996); *The Business of May Next: James Madison and the Founding* (1992); *The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic* (1986); *Yankee from Georgia: The Emergence of Jimmy Carter* (1978); *Of Thee, Nevertheless I Sing: An Essay on American Political Values* (1975); and *The Fifteenth Ward and the Great Society* (1966).

Anna Kasten Nelson is Distinguished Historian in Residence at American University. She has been a member of the State Department Historical Advisory Committee and received a presidential appointment to the John F. Kennedy Records Review Board. She is the author of *Secret Agents: Polk and the Pursuit of Peace with Mexico* (1988) and is the editor of *The Records of Federal Officials: A Selection of Materials from the National Study Commission on Records and Documents of Federal Officials* (1979), and the three-volume *State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1947-1949* (1983). Her new book, *The Real Policy Makers: Shaping American Foreign Policy from 1947 to the Present*, will appear in 2008.

Jack N. Rakove is the William Robertson Coe Professor of History and American Studies at Stanford University. He is the author of four books, including *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (1996), which won the Pulitzer Prize. He is also the author of *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (1979), *James Madison and the Creation of the American Republic* (2001), and *Declaring Rights: A Brief History with Documents* (1997).

Bruce J. Schulman is the William E. Huntington Professor of History at Boston University. He is the author of *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (1991); *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism* (1995); and *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (2001).

Martin J. Sherwin is University Professor of History at George Mason University. His book, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (with Kai Bird) won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award for biography as well as the English Speaking Union Book Award. His book, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance* (1975) won the Bernath Prize awarded by the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations. In addition the book received the American History Book Prize and was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

Gabrielle Spiegel is Krieger-Eisenhower University Professor of History at Johns Hopkins University. She is the current president of the American Historical Association. Her books include *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (1978), *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (1993) and *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (1997).

Lee White is Executive Director of the National Coalition for History, a consortium of over 60 organizations which advocates on federal legislative and regulatory issues affecting historians, archivists, teachers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Sean Wilentz is Sidney and Ruth Lapidus Professor of History and the director of the Program in American Studies at Princeton University. His book *Chants Democratic* (1984) won several national prizes, including the Albert J. Beveridge Award of the American Historical Association. His other books include *In The Kingdom of Matthias* (1994), with Paul Johnson; *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (2005) and *The Age of Reagan: A*

History, 1974-2008 (2008). He is also the coauthor and coeditor of *The Key of Liberty* (1993) the editor of several other books, including *Major Problems in the Early Republic* (1992), and the coeditor of *The Rose and the Briar* (2004). He is also a contributing editor to the New Republic.

Roger Wilkins is Clarence J. Robinson Professor of History and American Culture at George Mason University. He is past chairman of the Pulitzer Prize Board and served as assistant attorney general in the Johnson administration. He has written for both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, was associate editor of *The Washington Star*, and is the publisher of the NAACP's journal, *Crisis*. While on the editorial page staff of *The Washington Post*, he shared a Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for Watergate coverage with Woodward, Bernstein and Herblock. He is the author of an acclaimed autobiography, *A Man's Life* (1982), and coeditor with Fred Harris of *Quiet Riots* (1988). His book *Jefferson's Pillow: The Founding Fathers and the Dilemma of Black Patriotism* (2001) won the 2002 NAIBA Book Award for Adult Non-Fiction.

Garry Wills is an adjunct professor of history at Northwestern University. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his book *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (1992), and won the National Medal for the Humanities in 1998. He is also a recipient of the National Book Critics Circle Award. His other books include: *Chesterton: Man and Mask* (1961); *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-made Man* (1970); *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (1982); *A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government* (1999); *James Madison* (2002); *Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power* (2003); *Henry Adams and the Making of America* (2005); *What Jesus Meant* (2006); *Head and Heart: American Christianities* (2007); and *What the Gospels Meant* (2008). He also is a frequent contributor to the New York Review of Books.