

2021 Celebration of the Humanities – Virtual Program Transcript

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 0:00

Welcome to the 2021 Celebration of the Humanities. I'm so glad to be here with you tonight. The past year and a half have challenged communities in many ways. I am inspired by how Rhode Islanders have used the humanities to make connections to offer perspective and to build empathy. Our work at the Humanities Council depends on the support of generous donors like you. We are also grateful to our congressional delegation. They are steadfast advocates for robust funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities. Senator Reed, Senator Whitehouse, Congressman Langevin, and Congressman Cicilline. Thank you for your leadership, and your involvement in the humanities in Rhode Island.

Senator Jack Reed (RI) 0:52

I am pleased to join the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities and recognizing the incredible contribution of this year's honorees as we continue this long path toward recovery from the pandemic, this Celebration of the Humanities is an opportunity to reflect on how we honor our shared humanity. Now, let me offer my congratulations to each of tonight's awardees Onésimo Almeida, Mixed Magic Theatre, the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive, and Becci Davis. Your work has enlightened, educated, entertained, and enriched us all. Thank you.

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (RI) 1:33

Hi, I'm so pleased to be able to join the 2021 Celebration of the Humanities, the pandemic that we are slowly emerging out of has kept us apart. But I know the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities will help bring us back together and rebuild our Rhode Island sense of community and history. Thank you for all your great work for organizing this event and for highlighting these immensely talented honorees.

Congressman Jim Langevin (RI – District 2) 2:01

Hi everyone. I'm Congressman Jim Langevin and I'm so honored to be with you as part of this year's Celebration of the Humanities. As we all know, Rhode Island's world class arts and cultural scene is the envy of cities all across the country. And that's a testament to the work of tonight's honorees. 100 years from now, people will know what our lives were like thanks to tonight's honorees, who are some of the greatest most inclusive storytellers of our generation and their writing history. Congratulations Dr. Onésimo T. Almeida, Mixed Magic Theatre, Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive, and Becci Davis on your achievements, your work has strengthened our civic engagement and knitting our communities together, Rhode Island is lucky to have you. Congratulations.

Congressman David Cicilline (RI – District 1) 2:47

I'm delighted to join to Rhode Island Council for the Humanities in recognizing this year Celebration of the Humanities honorees. I thank

you for your extraordinary contributions to Rhode Island, and congratulations on your well deserved honor. As a state and nation this past year has been in a time of incredible challenge. As a community, we experienced an unprecedented public health crisis, we confronted the realities of racial injustice and economic inequality. Now we look ahead to a time when together, we can rebuild a more just and equitable community. Perhaps at no other time in recent history has the role of humanity has been more important. That's why I'm so proud to support the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, and honored to recognize this year's awardees for your tireless efforts preserving and promoting history, culture, civic education and community engagement. I'm deeply grateful. Your work is a true beacon of hope, especially at this moment when we need it most. Again, congratulations.

Unknown Speaker 3:46
Four Questions with Elizabeth Francis

Congressman David Cicilline (RI - District 1) 3:46
Q: What has inspired you about the Rhode Island humanities community this year?

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 3:53
Well, there's been so much loss, and so many restrictions and so many so much difficulty that organizations and people faced. And I think that needs to be said at the outset. But what's inspired me is in dealing with that and confronting it, the realities, that organizations and people committed to the humanities just did not stop. And there was tremendous resilience and adaptation and ingenuity in a lot of ways.

Unknown Speaker 4:32
Q: How has the pandemic affected the Council's work?

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 4:36
In many ways, I mean, it's been a really busy, busy time at the Humanities Council. And the pandemic has offered opportunities for the Council to branch out in some ways. So because of federal recovery funds, we have been able to provide flexible funding general operating support to organizations all over the state, we will have delivered close to \$1 million in flexible funding to state humanities and cultural organizations.

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 4:38
Q: What does the next year hold for the Council?

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the

Humanities 5:04

The humanities are essential to rebuilding civil society. And as we saw on January 6, that is very much at stake. And it's the humanities that have enabled people to inquire into history to make connections, to learn about differences, to have conversations, and to really look at things like how do we memorialize things? How do we tell the stories of American history? Who's included? I'm excited about how we can contribute to a complex and inclusive and diverse understanding of this very important milestone that the nation is coming up to the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. So we will be focusing on that over the next year by doing an index of civic health in the state that will include questions about how Rhode Islanders think about that history and how it matters or doesn't matter to them, and I think that that will be a really important contribution to how we commemorate this in a complex way.

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 6:47

Q: As part of the Rhode Island humanities community what are you most proud of?

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 6:51

So one of the things that we've learned during this time is how connected public health is to a wider sense of the common good. In order to protect ourselves, we had to protect each other. In order to protect our community, we had to think beyond ourselves. And I've been really proud of how the humanities have helped to make that real. And at a time when there was a lot of isolation and alienation and fragmentation and polarization -- the humanities helped to forge that common ground and make it real, make it visible, make it something that was essential to survival.

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 7:01

Thank you to all our sponsors of tonight's event, who you can find listed in the digital program book. We truly appreciate your support, and your partnership in ensuring that the Council can deliver on its mission to seed support and strengthen the public humanities by and for all Rhode Islanders. Now, I'm so excited to offer you a unique glimpse into the work and impact of this year's honorees, each of whom lead through their creativity, dedication, innovation, and scholarship.

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 8:24

I really feel that it's important for us to be honest with ourselves about the past. And you know, the past isn't a static thing. And it's not a single narrative. And I think that that's what we forget when we look at monuments, or when we see and absorb the power of monuments that they're meant to communicate a particular idea, a certain value. So I'm really interested in finding ways to practice active

remembering, in a way that leaves space for, for annotation for reevaluation, for remaining fluid and for allowing these narratives to evolve. I feel like when I make work, I typically have something that I want to communicate, maybe it's research related. So it could be that I uncovered a really interesting sort of nugget that I didn't know and in my research and I want to convey that or communicate that, or, you know, maybe it's a story that I want to tell about my family. So that's kind of the starting point. But I also acknowledge and understand that everyone is going to bring their own experiences, to seeing that art into interpreting that art. So I leave, I try to leave space for that. I try to create pathways not only to communicate a story, but to create a window for a person to examine their own story.

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 10:03
In "My Living Monument," I tried to do two things, to sort of snub my nose at the politics of public commemoration practices. And using humor to do that. But also, other than that very brief little blurb about Burnside, he's largely ignored. The idea is that we take the focus off of him and use his platform to tell the stories of Rhode Island women who were living at the same time as Burnside and doing incredible things. And many of them, most folks don't know their names.

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 10:41
The fight against being honest, and looking at our history with honesty and integrity. That is a very national story right now. But it's also a very local one. And it's one that's touched my family in the school district that my son just graduated from. I think that it's important to us, as folks working in the humanities, that this is a responsibility that we hold, not only to keep these stories, to share them, but to continue to ask ourselves questions about what our values are, and infusing our educational practices with those values.

Kate Wells, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 11:37
Providence Public Library closed, on March 13, we went home, which was I think, a Friday with the plan that, you know, like everybody else in the country, sort of what's going to happen, we weren't sure how long we'd be working from home, how long the library would be closed. But it was clear that this was a very strange event. And so I think, you know, the, probably within a few days of working from home the following week, given my role as curator of Rhode Island collections, started thinking about this historic moment. And what do we do to document that?

Becca Bender, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 12:10
When I first started thinking about this project, it was very much I would say, from an oral history perspective, when Kate and I started talking, and also when I started talking to other colleagues of mine

here at the Historical Society, that was when it's sort of expanded beyond just the idea of oral history. And people really said, well, this is, you know, this is not just about oral history, and potentially video, this is about photographs, this is about writing, this is about artwork. And we expanded the project, so that it would really encompass any digital expression.

Becca Bender, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 12:43

The traditional role of the archivist, you know, is to sort of ascribe meaning to things, interpret things, you know, as sort of, obviously placed some value, right? What do we what do we save? What do we not save? What do we work hard to make accessible? What gets sort of thrown to the back of the queue? Right? And I think very much so archives are, are very rightly looking at that. And looking at the fact that, well, who are we to make those decisions, right? By doing it kind of in real time. You really get to ask your community. Well, what do you think is important?

Kate Wells, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 13:24

One of my early favorite contributions that I've gone back to multiple times myself, just as a user of the site is, there's a set of videos by the artist, Carrie King, they're based around this idea that she she's a tap dancer, is one of the things that she does, and she was trying to figure out, how can I maintain my tap dancing routines while I'm stuck in an apartment and I have neighbors who live below me who may not appreciate tap dancing.

Becca Bender, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 13:53

We really wanted to make sure that we were doing very specific outreach to Latin x communities. And we also knew that we, the existing program, team project team, were not the people who were equipped to do that. So we applied to the Humanities Council, they had a special program that came through CARES funding, and we hired a woman by the name of Yuselly Mendoza, and Yuselly, came on board and was able to just reach all of these people that we weren't able to reach, she was able to really widen, widen the kind of contributions that we had and speak on behalf of our project to people that we just weren't reaching otherwise.

Kate Wells, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 14:29

The personal experience of going through something momentous is ultimately what is the humanities right? It is what is the humanity of the moment. It's not just what are the medical statistics? And what's the data that's coming out every day on the governor's site? As important as that is, it doesn't tell you what is it like for somebody who has lost a family member? Or what is it like when somebody is

scared that they you know, can't go back to work and they're income is, you know, really limited? Or what is it like to navigate getting unemployment when the state is also trying to figure out how to provide unemployment to this many people, you know, I think all of those experiences are really what it is to think about the humanities. What is the humanity of this moment? And that's just what is the lived experience.

Bernadet Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 15:27

There's an artist community, you know, that we embrace, of course, because we are part of it, we're passionate about it. But the greater community, you know, is, where you know, a lot of the learning comes. You cannot, you cannot exist without being of and participating in the community, you cannot feel, you know, the, the, you know, the vibes, the, the the things that are important that you know, the ideas, what it takes for change, and all of that. How can you commit to doing change in the community, if you don't know the community? The magic comes. Because you get all of these people who otherwise may not have, you know, had any kind of community or connection with each other. But they come into this situation. And and you, here you are, you're part of the mix.

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 16:29

The "Why It Matters" project was very interesting, in that it all in many ways, it just scratched the surface, about what the real subject matter was. Because I part of it was to do examinations of three Supreme Court cases, that have had an impact on American culture and civil rights in this country. So one of the things that will we try to do at Mixed Magic is say, how do we connect the dots over a long period of time, how do we do a show this show this show, this show and this show, and you're all connected, and so they all have a similar theme, or they they all carry along a part of the story line that needs to be told.

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 17:15

You know, one of the great responsibilities of the theater is, you observe your world, people will tell you things, people will come to you, people, people sometimes don't even know it themselves, but they're depending on you to tell their story. Because either they don't feel that anyone is listening to them, or they don't have the ability to tell the story themselves.

Bernadet Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 17:39

Mix Magic is in the life saving business. And we say that, you know, all the time. So it's a humbling thing, you know, when you're here -- I mean, you can you can speak it, but to see that it actually has that

kind of effect on people. And it actually has the ability to change -- you know, people, the theater and the reality that it's it's a life saving business. I can only say again, it comes back to being just like, very humbling.

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 18:21

When I came to Rhode Island, I was attending, I remember attending a metaphysics class with a famous professor, very well known one of the best known philosophers in the United States, Roderick Chisholm and I used to sometimes leave class, and go to a cafe, in East Providence. And, for me, this was a great experience of the differences in worldview, I was there speaking Portuguese, with immigrants, about issues that had absolutely nothing to do with the language in the world, and the ideas that were that were going on, that I was discussing in class. It was a --- switch, I will just move from in 10 minutes with my bike, I was in East Providence, and I got this because of my immigrant experience, because I felt that I was an immigrant, I felt that I but I felt also that dealing and talking to them and mixing with them, I could sort of broaden the horizons, they come to my office and ask about solutions, all sorts of problems, where to go and all this in the beginning, I acted as sort of a referral, referral center, go here, go there, talk to someone who has. So this very early in my life in in the US, made me realize in very lively, vivid terms, how two worlds two worldviews can co exist, past by live next door to each other, and don't interact at all.

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 19:49

We all have worldviews and we share worldviews with the communities we are part of even though we have our own but we share strong important elements. And those are quite different from the worldviews over the parts of the world. So I became fascinated by this topic. And I started teaching a course called "The shaping of worldviews" at Brown in 1982. In this course, that I teach for seniors at Brown, they come from various departments, and, of course, is about values, what are the values that one should hold? But in order for us to go over this, we try to understand how do values come about in our lives? How do we end up believing what we believe? And there are many theories about this, and we take a look at some of the prevailing theories. The interesting thing that the students realize is, all of them may have a point. But none of them explains it all. So the question is, then what do I do? Then we move from a, a, an exercise of scientific exercise, trying to figure out how things come about, to a different level of question, different kinds of questions. The question is, then what should I do? How should I act? And this is a totally different level of conversation. It is from it is, to what should be.

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 21:22

In my case, many because I don't have I cannot see the impact. But I may have, I can tell you stories. The stories are I was in the Azores for instance, and one guy, I was at a restaurant and a guy came to me and said, "You helped me a lot. And it transformed my life." And I said, "How?" He said, "I was at college, and you were at Brown, I told I was told that you helped people. And I went and asked you what, what I should do because I want to study mathematics, etc. But I could not afford a better schooling. And you told me what to do." And and I remember right away, he had gotten a Master's in Mathematics from URI. And he went to the Azores, and he taught high school in the Azores his whole life. So these are, these are not quantifiable. You can simply mention stories or if you have a good collection of them, it means that somehow you did not waste your time or your life.

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 22:30

Welcome to everyone watching at home and to our inspiring honorees. We are gathered here for a vital conversation about the role of the humanities in public life. But first, on behalf of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, I congratulate Onésimo Almeida on receiving the Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities, Mixed Magic Theatre recipient of the Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities, the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive, a partnership project of the Rhode Island Historical Society, and the Providence Public Library, which received the Innovation in the Humanities Award. And Becci Davis, this year's recipient of the Public Humanities Scholar Award. We are excited to recognize your outstanding work and the impact that it has on the cultural lives of Rhode Islanders. As humanities thought leaders, you bring diverse expertise and experience to this conversation and I'm grateful to be here with you today.

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 23:44

So a note about where we are, we are at the dazzling Wedding Cake House on the West Side of Providence. This historic home was built in 1867 and is an impressive example of the Victorian Italianate style. The building has been restored under the direction of the Dirt Palace, a feminist art collective, which has not only saved this storied building, but has made the property accessible as a bed and breakfast as an artist residency space, and an ever changing gallery.

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 24:22

Now, it's my honor to introduce the moderator of our discussion, Joe Wilson, Jr. A scholar, an actor, an activist, and a true friend of the Humanities Council. Joe is a resident actor at Trinity Repertory Company, the founder and producer of America Too and assistant professor and artists in residence at Wheaton College. He's also the 2019, recipient of the Humanities Council's Public Humanities Scholar

Award. Thank you, Joe.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 25:02

Thank you. Oh, thank. Y'all doing okay? Well, thank you so much for being here. And welcome to all of you who are watching, it's so great to be engaged in this conversation with you today. You know, it's so great to be with you all. And I think that when we think about the humanities, we automatically think about the study of languages, we think about the arts, we think about history, we think about philosophy. But what brings you all together, and what makes you also special for our community is you use those modes, those mediums, and you put those into practice and into action, to commemorate to celebrate, to teach, and to serve as activists. So a really, it's really, really great work. And I think that we all as a collective been in this place of trying to deconstruct a level of mythology around who we are, and hopefully getting us to a place that we want to be. So I want to all of you, and this is let's this is a conversation, so no more going down. But like, I want to talk about, you know, talking about narrative, and what have you found has been the thing that what needs to be unwrapped unraveled, in the narratives that that create conditions within the communities you work that are unfavorable to folk? And what are the new narratives, the narratives that that we should be interjecting into the public sphere? So deconstructing myth? And what are those narratives that we need to hear more about and celebrate? And maybe it's what you've discovered in your work, because the the, the, the sort of not reflexive, but the in the moment of idea of creating this thing to be in response to so I'm just going to talk about narrative and talk about myth, mythology and talk about what you do in your work to what kinds of stories that you're trying to, to put back into the public space. Another way, I'll put it, what are those truths that need to be told?

Kate Wells, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 27:01

I think Becca talked a little bit about the idea of the sort of myths around whose histories matter, and how long, how long, how much time has to pass before it becomes history. Right. I think that's one of the things we've talked a lot about our, our project has sort of brought up for, at least for me, which is that history happens right now. Right? Like this conversation in five minutes is history. And that who's telling that story is we could all tell that story and our version of it may alter, there may be things in common, and that for people looking in the future back to this moment, what is this conversation tell future folks? It's more robust, the more voices you have in the mix, right? There is, there is multiple truths to what that story can tell you. But you can only get at it when you have multiple voices telling the story. And so for I think, for the COVID Archive project, that idea of it being non curated as curators, right, that's our job is to ultimately, usually, is to curate what a collection is. And for us to throw that door wide open. And say it's

what anybody wants to contribute, makes, ultimately, our goal was for the future, for people to look back on this moment, to have lots of different experiences to tell a story.

Becca Bender, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 28:22

I think so much of breaking down those myths, is also just sometimes making the material accessible to the new storytellers, right, and to make sure that the story is kind of continually being reevaluated and retold in light of what we're learning today, or what we did learn about something in the past, or just the idea of, of making sure that the the number of storytellers and the people who get to tell their stories is continually growing and and is as wide an array of voices, you know, as possible,

Joe Wilson, Jr. 28:55

And not being afraid of what those voices have to say, what they say about us. Yeah, right. You know, it This actually, I want to keep going on this idea, but what we choose to memorialize and how we commemorate what are the mistakes that we've made in terms of how we as a country have approached that? I mean, I know it's one way that we've spoken about that is just by not providing space for different voices to be heard. But are there other -- Can you speak to the dangers of how we memorialize how we commemorate or the or the power of memorialization and commemoration when used for good?

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 29:30

Yeah, I feel like we have this practice of not only commemorating a certain type of person, a person of a particular sets of a particular race of a particular economic status, right. And not only do we center their stories, but we tend to ignore all of the uncomfortable parts of those people that don't fit the narrative that you This pristine narrative that we construct around them. So I think, in addition, and that's what's so great about this Archive, it's the fact that you're giving the power back to the people to tell their own stories. And sort of decentering these education systems where we, we center, you know, the, for lack of a better word, the amateur, you know, we've, in the past, we've been able to, will believe anything as long as the right person is telling it to us, right. So I think it's important for us to recognize those practices, and point to them and call them out when we see them and to make space for, for people outside of those systems to also share their stories and for us to believe them, and to value their narratives value, what they have to say,

Joe Wilson, Jr. 30:57

And taking responsibility for, you know, some of the narratives that we can tell, they don't paint a picture of us always being at our best. And it's taking responsibility for that. And I think especially a time like now, when we're focusing so much on anti blackness and grappling with white supremacy, which all my speaking a little bit

too, you know, I struggle a lot of times, because my experience of growing up in New Orleans, my experience of being this complexion versus your complexion, my experience of maybe my hair's a little bit stiff..., in my experience of having the opportunity to go to college, my experience of going to private high school, my parents were, you know, we're, we're poor, but they had the chance because of their experiences to work and be able to go back to school, you guys. So our experience is so different in the African American community, the African community, and especially here in Providence, which we have a large, remote African and African American community, can you speak to that and help people understand, when you talk about we're not a monolith that that within our community too we're grappling with divergent stories, points of view narratives perspective, would you all mind speaking to that a little bit.

Bernadet Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 32:01

I think that, that that's something that should become an automatic way of engaging the community that you acknowledge that it's not a monolith. But there's an assumption that because you're black, I mean, like you understand what's happening in Africa, or Haiti, or any other person of color. And that is just so, not true. Because the experience, you know, and coming up is just so vastly different. The culture that that come, you're coming up, and it's so vastly different. Now, where speaks to real time now is that sometimes organizations will hire one person of color, one or two, maybe Latino, and now it's African, Latino, and African. And they assume that those two communities know something about the African American community, and they do not. And that does come into play when you come into the table. You know, you're making decisions about things. It's like, how can you make a decision about this experience? My experience, when know nothing about it. I have not represented here. So how do you go about doing that, and move forward. And it's so difficult, especially, you know, let's say foundations and organizations, when you're going for a grant or something, and you have you know, that one person that's of color, they have no idea who you are, what you do, where you come from, what your culture is, and there's an assumption that because there are they understand your community, not true. Absolutely not true. That's something that needs to be changed now, in real time. The representation needs to come from the communities, you know, you know, that you're from,

Joe Wilson, Jr. 33:55

And provides the spaces for those additional resources,

Bernadet Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 34:00

especially for resources, especially in the arts.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 34:04

resources the bill is and how we spend our money is a direct reflection of what we valued. Becci do you want to jump in on this?

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 34:12
Oh, yes, I'm sorry to interrupt you Bernadet, I was just going to say that, one of my favorite artists, once said, reality is prismatic, Arthur Jafa. He's a video artist. And I wanted to offer that here because when we think about a prism, and rainbows, we understand that the richness of life comes from having a multiplicity of perspectives. I think where we get into trouble is that sometimes we think of truth as being singular. That there's a singular truth, but there's not. There's a prism there's a spectrum of truth. Each one of us here comes with our own truths. So honoring that and having holding space for acceptance of someone else's truth as also true, I think is key. And absolutely what you're saying resources are also key. Having multiple perspectives with things like when we're offering resources is also key

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 35:18
There's a music group that was called Three Truths, there's three truths, your truth, my truth and the truth. And the issue is that we'll never get to the truth, 'Truth with capital' but we should look for it because we miss a lot we will be totally divided if we simply narrate our truthd the way we want them. It, it's important that we have our point of view there. But I think that we should look at because this is the only way to correct facts to correct to correct actions is if we know exactly what happened and what went wrong. So we should not give up the idea of trying to find out what actually was. So we should be very careful moving systems on Oh, that's all multiple truths, multiple truths. When looking forward, we should first get moving, moving to move forward, we must look back and... This is why it is important to try to get at what really happened. It is important even though we will never be able to that's a goal we will say otherwise we're going to just going to be talking past each other.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 36:24
Could I quickly just just wrap up to give us a chance to and this is often very positive someone said yeah, I feel I feel invigorated when it comes to

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 36:33
I was not writing this, I was writing notes about your progression. I am an academic, I take notes ... I have to say this because they'll think... this guy is so rude. I know you're white male, I'm rude and all yeah.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 36:54
I so appreciate that! <Laughter>

Joe Wilson, Jr. 37:03

So, in ending, I just wanted to give us a chance to say you know, I like to think about my life right now as an artist, but more importantly as an educator and reflecting back on the first question I asked in going into this period now almost two years ago, actually for me, my downward spiral happened about six years ago. But you know, once I got past my despair, I found a lot of opportunity. I found a lot to be grateful for you know, with that beat through I complained about Zoom I complained about all the platforms my university, I complained about the technology I complained about it all the way I realized that actually that technology has been a really positive tool for me, it's really allowed me to stay a little bit more organized. I've also witnessed the power of technology in terms of the kind of work that we're creating now the variety of work that we're creating, but more importantly who can have exposure to that work. And so for me while COVID has been a time of great loss, I'm actually, I found hope and optimism and so I'm asking you, what are you hopeful about now what are you hopeful for now?

Bernadet Pitts-Wiley, Mixed Magic Theatre, 2021 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities 38:08

I am hopeful that the time that you know COVID has given us to kind of sit back and reflect because sometimes we didn't have any choice to do anything but... but I'm hoping that, you know this whole focus on the injustices and you know what's the bad things happening in our world, gave us a chance to kind of look out the window and see things and say oh my god, that could have been me. And so it's galvanized people you know, like from all over the world. And I'm hoping especially in this country, I'm hoping that the the positive things that we have made towards injustice and race relations will continue. Oh, this is a lot of ugly stuff that's still going on. But the doors have been opened in a way that you can't say, I don't know, anymore. So I hope that that continues. I hope that the whole, you know, the wage disparity you know that we've experienced in this country -- it's never made sense to me that we thought \$7 an hour or \$10 an hour was enough for someone to live and have you know a comfortable life -- so those two things for me.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 39:36

Okay, what else are we hopeful for, and I also want to add in here too, is how much this how much this time is forcing me to change my pedagogy change how I approach my work with my students my own artistry. So I'm just want to throw it out. What are we hopeful for in light of where we've been and where we are?

Becci Davis, 2021 Public Humanities Scholar Award recipient 39:49

For me, I'm hopeful about creating space for care. Thinking about our neighbors thinking about one another, opening up pathways to understand that everyone has something that they're struggling with,

or that they may be dealing with, and to be mindful of that. Also, much like you were saying it, it created a galvanized people and gave people shared purpose. So many organizations and groups sprang up to fight anti racism in their communities and school districts. And that gives me strength that gives me hope. And hope, also the hope that that those are sustained, those efforts are sustained.

Kate Wells, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 40:42

I think personally, and also, I think what I saw thematically through people's contributions to the archive, is that disruption can be very energizing thing, right? And it can be really scary. And that sort of question mark, that it leaves you was like, Where does your action take you? And I think it was rooted in what are the values like, you have that moment of stillness to say, you know, gosh, how important are my connections with people, literally family members, who not seeing in person or friends... I mean, Becca and I knew each other, but not well, and literally, she was my lifeline multiple days a week through Zoom, right? And so like, the way that you can build relationships that might look different, but that that interconnectivity is ultimately at the heart of I think, what is valued by almost, I mean, it doesn't matter where you are in the political spectrum, like your connection to another person, are what ultimately matters. And that, I think, for me the value of having to stop my day to day and sort of totally create something new to fill my time, whether that was workwise, or personal life. I think I'm hoping to build that in I think, in a regular way. Yeah.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 42:08
Anyone else?

Becca Bender, Co-director, RI Covid-19 Archive, 2021 Innovation in the Humanities Award recipient 42:09

I mean, I know, I mean, you know, what you were saying about the technology to me has been pretty revelatory. I think in this moment, I mean, I think about like, the programs that we do at the Historical Society, where it's like, okay, at 7pm on a Thursday, like, who could come to one of our buildings? Not somebody who had like a kid at home, not somebody who didn't live nearby, you know, all of these, they're, you know, there's so many opportunities, I think, now to just get these educational programs, cultural programs, whatever it is, we're doing... I mean, even, you know, my annual conference that I go to, for moving image archivists, like, you had to work somewhere that could pay to send you to that conference that was last year supposed to be in El Paso, Texas, and it was canceled. You know, now, it's like, we can go to virtual conferences, there's a lot missing from virtual conferences, and I hope that we land on some sort of a hybrid model in the future. We've learned a lot there that I hope we hold on to.

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 43:15

Something bad about the hybrid model right now is teaching students with a face cover and I can't memorize their face. I sent them an email I said, Please help an old man, send me a picture. I'm going to print, and write notes when you talk and all this stuff otherwise, right? I just can't get it. I was talking to one student this morning, sent me an email saying, I do the same. I asked, I'm going around taking pictures of people, of classmates, so I memorize the their faces... anyway.

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 43:47

So but in answering your question about hope I'll say something first about hope. Some time ago I was interviewed by a newspaper and one thing they picked up, the sentence that I said, totally unimportant, but they made a headline out of it... and it was this... "without hope we are doomed." And why it is important? It's important that hope provides us a light ahead of us and this light should be high, higher than we can reach. Okay, but should not be utopian, some people like utopian, like in the 60s, but we should have feet on the ground and see how far, what can we do, and how far can we go. But we should aim at higher than we can, because if we aim this high, we reach here, if we aim this low, we don't even get there. So so we have to be balanced with all, but it is important. This provides us a direction in the belief that hope is not only the hope that it engages us, it should engage us is this I hope that this happens, but I'm going to do my job to make it happen. That's very important. And what things are, should we hope for? I teach a course at Brown about modernity - values of modernity - and it has a bad rap. The values of modernity are still the ones that we should hold on to freedom, justice, equality, democracy, education, progress. These are the things we want them for everybody, not just for a few. So we should hope that these values that are as old as mankind, okay, but still galvanize us and make us move in that direction and thinking that we should not be thinking in terms of just one group, but making sure that we sit down and find a way of making them available to everyone. So that's my, hope.

Joe Wilson, Jr. 45:38

My colleagues in humanities, I can't say how incredible, how incredibly honored, I was to be able to have this conversation with you. I love Providence. I love this community. And you are the epitome of why we all love it so much, that it's not just about hoping but it's about doing. It's taking the humanity from the space as an intellectual exercise...

Onésimo T. Almeida, PhD, 2021 Honorary Chairs' Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities 46:01

I live off Hope... <Laughter>

Joe Wilson, Jr. 46:05

There's some great restaurants on Hope too! <Laughter>

Joe Wilson, Jr. 46:08

Thank you all so much. And once again, congratulations. Congratulations. And thank you all so much for tuning in and being here with us. And we hope that we can celebrate with you in person next year. Thank you so much. Thank you. <Applause>

Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities 46:31

Thank you for spending this evening with us. If you've been inspired by these stories, we hope you'll share this program with those in your circles. And don't forget to check out the online auction. Bidding remains open for another week. Your support and your partnership are vital. Thank you to the co-chairs of tonight's event, Becca Bertrand and Elaine Fain. Thank you also to our tireless event committee volunteers and to the Council's dedicated board and staff. We are so grateful for the opportunity to serve Rhode Island's diverse humanities community and to celebrate the important work of this year's honorees. Thanks for joining us.

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