

April 4, 2025

## **Historians Defend the National Endowment for the Humanities and American Public Culture**

The American Historical Association condemns the evisceration of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

On April 3, 2025, the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), using a nongovernmental microsoft.com email address, notified hundreds of recipients that grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) have been terminated. These grantees include state humanities councils, museums, teachers, researchers, and organizations that serve the public, including the American Historical Association. Later that night, letters were sent from a DOGE microsoft.com email address notifying roughly 75 percent of NEH staff that they have been placed on administrative leave. This frontal attack on the nation's public culture is unpatriotic, anti-American, and unjustified.

The NEH and the grants it administers nourish our democracy through research, education, preservation, institutional capacity building, and public programming in the humanities for the benefit of the American people. These grants support work ranging from professional development workshops for teachers to the preservation of historic sites, research initiatives, and a wide array of programs for politically and demographically diverse audiences. Despite these significant contributions to public culture, DOGE justifies the termination of these programs by declaring their destruction to be "an urgent priority for the administration."

The grant termination notices refer to a reallocation of funds to "a new direction in furtherance of the President's agenda." The specific reallocations remain unknown, but that agenda, as several executive orders have made clear, prioritizes narrow political ideology over historical research, historical accuracy, and the actual historical experiences of Americans.

The NEH was established in 1965 by an act of Congress. The legislation affirmed that "the arts and the humanities belong to all the people of the United States." The AHA recognizes that the chair of the NEH always has been a political appointment made by the president. The overall agency and its grantmaking programs, however, include a wide range of topics, perspectives, and approaches. The agency was never intended to be, nor has it been, focused solely on a single president's narrow—and in this case, deeply ideological—agenda.

Under the guise of "safeguarding" the federal government, DOGE has terminated grants and diminished staffing to a level that renders it impossible for the agency to perform its mission responsibly and with integrity. These actions imperil both the education of the American public and the preservation of our history.