

The Archivist's Reception Speeches

John LeGloahec: Good afternoon and welcome to the joint reception to welcome the tenth archivist of the United States, David Ferriero. My name is John LeGloahec, and I'm the treasurer of the National Archives Assembly, one of the three sponsors of this event. I'd like to first call on Lisha Penn, who is the president of the Afro-American History Society, to say a few words of welcome for Mr. Ferriero.

Lisha Penn: Good afternoon and hello to members and friends of the Afro-American History Society and a special hello to Mr. Ferriero. I'm Lisha Penn, president of the Afro-American History Society, and on behalf of members of the society at the reception and those at Archives I, at the Washington National Records Center and our presidential libraries and regional archives, I'd like to extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to Mr. Ferriero, NARA's newly confirmed tenth archivist of the United States. I also would like to introduce our officers who are present. We have our vice president for Archives II, Deborah Edge, who is here; our secretary is also present, Donna Larker; the treasurer is present, Rutha Beamon; our membership coordinator, Trichita Chestnut, is present also; and our newsletter editor unfortunately is not here with us. But, have I forgotten anyone? Damani Davis is our vice president at Archives I. And Patrice is the archivist historian, I apologize for that.

The Afro-American History Society's focus for the past 29 years has been the promotion, study, dissemination, and collection of information and materials relating to the history and culture of African Americans found among the records at the National Archives and other sources. As a NARA employee organization, we've successfully accomplished this mission with terrific members who have helped us to plan lectures with esteemed historians, such as the late Dr. John Hope Franklin, Dr. Ira Berlin, and book lectures featuring Dr. Mary Frances Berry. Our members also have helped to plan other programs pertaining to the history and culture of African Americans in celebration of Kwanzaa, Dr. Martin Luther King holiday month, black history month, women's history month, and Hispanic heritage month. I also wish to thank the National Archives Assembly and the American Federation of Government employees also for agreeing to cosponsor this event with us. NARA's History Society officers and I are here to assist the new archivist in any manner needed, to promote NARA as the great primary resource for federal records relating to African American history.

On behalf of AAHS officers and members I wish to present you with four NARA publications relating to the history of African Americans found among the records at NARA nationwide. And those publications are: *Federal Records Pertaining to Brown v. Board of Education*, and the author of the publication is here, Trichita Chestnut; *The History of Military Records Relating to African Americans from Post- World War I through the Korean War* that I had the honor of preparing; and also the records that we have here relating to civil rights that I prepared with Dr. Walter B. Hill; and lastly, we have a publication that Reggie Washington prepared on black family research that we would like for you to have. So again on behalf of the members of the Afro-American History Society, I'd like to extend again our thanks for having you come aboard.

David Ferriero: Thank you very much.

Penn: Thank you.

Ferriero: I'm going to speak last, but just because of this publication – I lost a very good friend this year, John Hope Franklin, who was very important in the work of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, and it's a special meaning for me to come here because I know he spent so much time here and thought so highly

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of all of you. John Hope's wife Aurelia was a librarian, and she really trained him in the value of libraries, so this is a very special meaning, a very special meaning for me. Thank you.

LeGloahec: Thank you Lisha. Next to speak will be the president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 2578 and acting president of AFGE Local 260, Vernon Early.

Vernon Early: Being a man of very few words, as you all know, I'm Vernon Early, president of American Federation of Government Employees, and now 2100 bargaining unit employees would like to welcome you to the Archives. There will be a lot of work that you and I have to go through, and we've briefly talked about that. And, to present you with what fortunately and unfortunately, this is the contract that we are all governed by, and we would like to present this to you so you can get off on the right foot.

Ferriero: I've actually started reading this, and I swear, and there are people in the room who can testify to that, and I was particularly picking out sections that as a former shelver in the libraries were very important to me, so I look forward to learning more.

Early: Good

LeGloahec: Thank you Vernon. And finally, the president of the National Archives Assembly, Bill Carpenter.

Bill Carpenter: In welcoming Mr. Ferriero as the tenth archivist of the United States, on behalf of the National Archives Assembly, I'd first like to thank those who made this reception possible: Vernon Early and Ted Hull of the American Federation of Government Employees. And Lisha Penn and Deborah Edge of the Afro-American History Society, for being great co-hosts and planners. And Debra Wall, the Chief of Staff of the Archivist's Office, for her unhesitating support of our idea and her incredible ability to make things happen. And Veronica Ross. Veronica Ross for her help in setting up the event. These kind of things are not possible without people like her. And especially John LeGloahec for his tenacious management of all the details. Thank you John for all of the details of this event. And also thanks to you all for showing up in this holiday season for punch and cake yet again, for welcoming our new boss.

In welcoming Mr. Ferriero, we also must recognize the accomplishment of Adrienne Thomas who, backed by a reserve of experience nearly unmatched in the National Archives, stepped into what I can only imagine to be a particularly difficult job and who performed that role with skill through the change of a presidential administration and other significant challenges.

Now each archivist of the United States has been an exceptional person. In my own comparatively short time here at NARA since 2001, I've come to appreciate the political and managerial skill of Mr. Carlin, and the deep insight into the relationship between political culture and records of Professor Weinstein. But it's been a long time since NARA was led by an information professional with experience managing complex programs and most importantly lots of people. Mr. Ferriero, your experience managing the vast New York Public Library System and your experience at Duke and MIT will serve you well here.

Much of what we do will be familiar to you. Others, like the activity of the Information Security Oversight Office and the continued development of the Electronic Records Archives system may take some time for you to internalize. We are sure however that you can and will make sense of it all. We the members of the National Archives Assembly look forward to working with you for years to come as

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we work together to strengthen the National Archives from the top down and the bottom up. So thank you. Oh, we have a book: *The National Archives Assembly: Worthy of its Staff, 1980-2005*.

Ferriero: Super, thank you very much.

Carpenter: And a pin!

Ferriero: How's that? So thanks to all of you for being among the first to celebrate my arrival, I really appreciate it. And I feel a certain kinship with you because back in my early days at MIT and the libraries at MIT, I was the president of the Library Staff Association, so I spent a lot of time trying to convince the MIT administration to pay attention to the needs of the staff. So I'm looking forward in my time here to creating opportunities for me to listen to you, and for those of you who were in the audience or were watching yesterday when I made my first State of the Archives Address, my remarks about the importance of the staff were genuine. It's impossible for me to think about our ability to accomplish the work that's ahead of us if we don't have a staff who's valued and recognized, and as I said in my remarks, I take job satisfaction and morale surveys very seriously and I'm really committed, with your help, to making this among the very best agencies in the government in which to work. This is a huge task and I'm asking for your help in making that happen.

I also outlined a series of challenges which I see as the top priorities after we've solved the job satisfaction issue. The Electronic Records Archives is huge, it's massive, it is complex. It is more complex I think than most of our stakeholders realize, and it needs to be done right because there are lots of people who are depending upon us to get this right. So that's a huge one. We have enormous backlogs that we need to deal with, and for those of you who have been around here for a while, just to put things in perspective, this backlog problem is not a NARA alone problem. This is a problem that exists in every large research collection in the country. At the New York Public Library, one of the first things I inherited when I got there in 2004 was evaluating the magnitude of the backlog, and it's huge and enormous, and I can't tell you exactly how many, but it's in the millions of items that are unprocessed. It is the focus of a lot of work by the Association of Research Libraries at the moment. It's called the hidden collection problem – hidden from our users, because since the collections aren't processed no one knows that they're available. So it is not only our problem, it is a problem of large research institutions, and what we need to do is to figure out ways of expediting the processing of that.

We have new assignments from the administration, the National Declassification Center. The executive order is about to be signed, so we'll be taking on new responsibilities. And new responsibilities mean new staff and new space needs and everything associated with that. And budget. So that's something that we have to look forward to in the days ahead. So there's a lot on the agenda. I know that as you heard from the comments, I know a lot about what you do here, I know even less about a lot of what you do here, so I'm going to be spending a lot of my time learning, and my learning style is pretty obvious. It is listening to people, reading everything I can get my hands on, but most importantly, it's wandering around and talking to people. So I have been authorized to go just about everywhere that this lets me get to, so don't be surprised if, and this was something the folks at New York had trouble getting used to, if I wander into your space and ask what you're doing and how you do it and start talking about you, because that's actually how I learn best, is observing and talking to the folks who are doing the work. So, I look forward to encountering you in your workspace and spending some time with you this afternoon, and as I said, figuring out ways – there are three organizations here – figuring out ways that I can more formally listen to you and talk to you about what you need to get your work done. So, let's cut some cakes, and enjoy each other's company. Thanks.