

Episode 24 – Bonus Episode! Pacing the Cage

Welcome to Grad-post! You know the rest of the intro ...

This isn't so much of a bonus episode as it is a footnote.

In Episode 23, I used the National Medals as examples of achievement recognition at the highest levels in the [humanities](#), [arts](#), and [science](#). I wrote that episode before the presidential election, so I didn't feel a need to mention at the time what might otherwise be a moot point. But given the outcome of the election, it's important to point out that these awards may now be dead forever.

There were no medals awarded during the first Trump administration, and while President Biden attempted to resuscitate them over the last few years, it is clear that none will be awarded in the Trump 2.0 administration. There's always hope that they will return in four years but the likelihood that they are dead forever is high, along with such venerable organizations as the National Endowment for the Humanities.

You may say "so what?" We have more important things to deal with like the price of eggs. They may just be medals and you may not be all about awards – like me. But in one fell swoop – or two fell swoops in this case – these individuals and the cultural contributions they represent are being relegated to dissident status. And we all know what happens to dissidents in authoritarian regimes.

If you're listening to this podcast then you probably have at least a curiosity about graduate and postgraduate education in the United States. If so, then you should be concerned. These medal winners are advisors and mentors. They lay the groundwork for future generations of artists, humanists and scientist. I haven't counted, but the number of people the previous awardees have advised and mentored must be astounding. They might have even been your mentor and advisor. Maybe this still will be. They'll continue to do their work, but now in the shadows rather than out in the light.

As the great [Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn](#) – a recipient of [Canada's highest honor in the performing arts](#) - wrote:

*Sometimes the road leads through dark places
Sometimes the darkness is your friend
Today these eyes scan bleached-out land
For the coming of the outbound stage
Pacing the cage
Pacing the cage*

We'll see what darkness does for our elite scholars and artists, but the National Medals are likely on an outbound stage. I still firmly believe that every degree counts, but I now find myself pacing the cage.

Links

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Medal_of_Arts

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Humanities_Medal

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Medal_of_Science

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Cockburn

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor_General%27s_Performing_Arts_Award