

Speaker 1: ... start. Okay. You're good to go whenever.

Michael Poliako...: Welcome to Higher Ed Now. I'm Michael Poliakoff, the president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. And it is a pleasure and an honor and a privilege to have with us Professor Jeffrey Rosen for the podcast. Jeffrey Rosen is Professor of law at George Washington University, and he's also the president and CEO of the National [00:00:30] Constitution Center. He is a contributing editor at The Atlantic, and he's the author of a number of very important books, one of which we're going to spend quite a bit of time talking about.

Before he published *The Pursuit of Happiness: How Classical Writers on Virtue Inspired the Lives of the Founders and Defined America*, he published an important book on President Taft, and a [00:01:00] really wonderful book on Louis Brandeis. I see his pictures behind you there, Jeffrey, Louis Brandeis the American Prophet and one on the Supreme Court: *The Personalities and Rivalries that Defined America*. His essays have appeared in *The Atlantic*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and he's spoken on National Public Radio. In fact, we were together on the Diane Rehm Show right before the Fisher case went to the [00:01:30] Supreme Court. And he hosts the weekly *We The People* podcast. Welcome, Jeffrey Rosen, to Higher Ed Now.

Jeffrey Rosen: Thank you so much, Michael. It's wonderful to see with you again and really... Sorry. Let me try that again. Thank you so much, Michael. It is wonderful to see you again, and really looking forward to the conversation.

Michael Poliako...: Well, you have given us what I guess should be called a protreptic, since you have really, really [00:02:00] steeped yourself in classical learning. Not a speech, but a book that turns us to a better path. And it's a protreptic in a troubled era. In fact, in a troubled era that is the culmination of several troubled eras, as you talk about in the book. And it's improved your life. Although this is a book that is really in some ways rather austere, [00:02:30] it just goes chapter by chapter on the virtues, you intersperse your own reflections on how it enriched your life. And in the best tradition of a protreptic, you gently turn us to ways that we can improve our lives. So I want to turn that over to you, perhaps to start with how you came to do this important book.

Jeffrey Rosen: Absolutely, and thank you so much for the word [00:03:00] protreptic. I had to look it up, and it's an utterance designed to instruct and persuade. And I suppose the book was that, also inspired by Homer's injunction always to instruct and delight. But it was really to instruct and delight myself more than designed to do that for an audience, because it was an unusual COVID-era reading project that was just presented to me. It was during COVID that I was struck by [00:03:30] the fact that both Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, when asked for their mature definition of the pursuit of happiness, had both cited a book by Cicero that I'd not heard of before, the *Tusculan Disputations*, which defined happiness not as seeking pleasure but seeking virtue. Without virtue,

happiness cannot be, said Cicero in the passage quoted by Franklin. And I was moved to read Cicero, and I was trying to figure out what else I should read.

[00:04:00] And then I came across this remarkable reading list that Thomas Jefferson sent to kids who were going to law school, and people who asked him, when he was old, how to be educated. And I was struck both by the rigor of the reading schedule, Jefferson recommends getting up before sunrise every day and starting with moral philosophy, and working your way to literature by the evening, and also by the fact that I hadn't read nearly all of the books in the moral philosophy section, which Jefferson sometimes called natural religion.

[00:04:30] And it started with Cicero's Tusculan Disputations, and then included stoic and classical moral philosophers like Epictetus and Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, and then enlightenment moral philosophers, not only Locke but also Francis Hutcheson and Lord Bolingbroke and Hume's essays.

And I have had the privilege of a wonderful liberal arts education, and I'm just so grateful to the remarkable teachers in English and American literature and history and philosophy [00:05:00] and law that inspired me in high school and college and grad school and law school, but I just missed these works of moral philosophy. So it was really to fill a gap in my education that I set out during COVID to read the books. And I did follow Jefferson's schedule. I got up before sunrise, I watched the sunrise, I found myself unexpectedly writing sonnets to sum up the wisdom that I'd learned, which was a weird practice until I found out that lots of people, [00:05:30] both in the Founding era and then it turns out during COVID, wrote sonnets, because since the book has come out, lots of people have been writing to me from around the country sending me their own wonderful COVID-era poems and sonnets.

And it was that that, as you said, changed my life, and gave me a new understanding of the classical definition of happiness, which meant not seeking pleasure, but self-improvement, character improvement, impulse control, being a better person, self-mastery, [00:06:00] mastering your own unreasonable passions and emotions so that you could achieve your potential and serve others. And that changed the way I thought about how to live, it changed the way I thought about the founding and the relation between personal and political self-government, and that is what inspired *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

Michael Poliako...: These are wonderful, wonderful things to pass from one generation to the next. And of course it is rather sad [00:06:30] that so much of it has passed out of that process of transmission. Your book, I hope, will be a vade mecum, come with me, for so many people, and in so many ways.

I want to quote from your chapter on order, because I thought you summed it up so beautifully. "The ancient wisdom fell out of fashion in the 1960s, and in the [00:07:00] me decade that followed, however, when our understanding about the pursuit of happiness was transformed from being good to feeling good." And I thought that summed it up very well, that eudaimonia, happiness,

is not your pleasure. It is the happiness that comes from living rightly and devoting oneself to things that matter. [00:07:30] I thought you phrased that so very well, and you come back to that in the book, how we moved from the culture of me, the narcissism, to the blind love of money. And of course that's a great ancient insight, that it was luxury and avarice, *luxuria et avaritia*, that spelled the doom of the Republic. Talk a little bit more about that. It's such an important [00:08:00] message for us.

Jeffrey Rosen:

Well, I'm so glad that you focused on that crucial moment of the 1960s, where the classical definition gave rise to the idea of greed is good and follow your own bliss and let it all hang out. I don't have a firm account of why precisely that happened in the '60s. Obviously once pop culture embraced the new definition, then the old one [00:08:30] was doomed. I think I noted in the book some blame the... David Brooks blames Freud's substitution of character for personality. George Will blames the Romantic movement. Others attribute it to the rise of post-structuralism and the challenges to liberalism that resulted with those philosophies. I'd be interested in your thoughts about what [00:09:00] it was exactly that converged in the '60s to transform our understanding of happiness. But there's no question that once it happened, then those very qualities that used to be, as you called, cardinal vices, namely avarice and ambition, suddenly became immediate goods to be seized in the moment, sex, drugs, and rock and roll and so forth.

When I was in college in the '80s, that [00:09:30] was the greed is good decade, and I just found myself unsatisfied by the celebration in pop culture of materialism and hedonism. But I was looking for an alternative outside of Puritan theology, which I'd been studying as an English major, and wasn't doing it for me as a path to a good life that required randomly given grace, not even good works, let alone reason and reflection. And what I didn't realize, because this wisdom had fallen [00:10:00] out of the curriculum, is that it was hiding in plain sight, that it was precisely those vices, ambition and avarice, that the classical wisdom told us to resist, so that we could cultivate the classical virtues of temperance, prudence, courage, and justice, and all that went with it. So it's just a fascinating transition in political psychology, in cultural understandings of happiness, [00:10:30] and it's a dramatic inflection point in the history of the West.

Michael Poliako...:

I want to come to the issue of core curriculum, because of course Acton has focused on this as one of the deficits that is really weakening not only educational quality but the quality of life. But first I... What came to my mind was the way we only [00:11:00] got the first half of Calvin Coolidge's statement, America's business is business, and that's often thrown as some kind of insult about Coolidge. But he went on to say that that was for the multiplication of schools, the encouragement of science, the dissemination of intelligence, broadening of outlook, expansion of liberty. And what's sad [00:11:30] is that, at a time when we have reached a level of material progress, that we lost the most important part of what our founders were telling us, what the classical tradition

was telling us, and indeed even Calvin Coolidge was telling us, that we pursue wealth because it can be the engine of things that are much, much more important for living.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:12:00] Absolutely. And Coolidge, of course, in his great address on the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Declaration, emphasized that... He said, no other theory is adequate to explain or comprehend the Declaration. It's the product of the spiritual insight of the people. We live in an age of science and of abounding accumulation of material things. These didn't create our Declaration, our Declaration created them. The things of the spirit come first. It is [00:12:30] urgently important to recognize that, for the Founders, the pursuit of happiness was in the end a spiritual quest. As Louis Brandeis, my great hero, noted in his Whitney opinion, the greatest opinion on free speech of the 20th century, where he says that the Founders understood our spiritual nature, and that the pursuit of happiness was a spiritual quest. So indeed for Coolidge, the Puritan work ethic and self-mastery [00:13:00] and industry and business were not an end in themselves, but part of the spiritual project of self-mastery. And we have lost that side of picture.

Michael Poliako...: Using an [inaudible 00:13:18] statistic, we've noted that only 19% of the more than 1,100 schools with a liberal arts mission that we [00:13:30] survey have a foundational course in American history and government. So there's a real weakening of the [inaudible 00:13:40] vision. We've also known an enormous decline in the number of institutions, indeed liberal arts institutions, that have a requirement for literature. And this seems to be a recipe for the kind of cultural decline that [00:14:00] we have, where books are simply forgotten. The wisdom of the past is not something that's even on the radar screen.

And again, this is why I'm so grateful for your book. You've pulled us back to recognizing that these are things that improve our lives. The other great virtue of the book is that [00:14:30] you recognize where our Founders, great as they are, and I say that in all sincerity, didn't live up to their own expectations. And that's also an important thing to remember, that we have to both study and live. And of course many of them were quite honest, Franklin in particular, in saying that, yeah, I should have done that, but I didn't do it. And that's also reassuring to us, that this is an upward climb [00:15:00] for us.

Jeffrey Rosen: Absolutely. They did indeed fall short of many of their ideals, most notoriously slavery, where many of the enslavers recognized their own hypocrisy, and understood that it was simple avarice or greed, as Patrick Henry put it, that allowed him to both recognize that slavery violated moral and natural law, but not wanted [00:15:30] give up the lifestyle that it made possible. He said, "I can't do with the inconvenience of living without it." So that hypocrisy was central and recognized during moments of self-awareness.

But one virtue that almost all of them kept up from beginning to end was industry and lifelong learning, I guess we'd put it today. And it's so inspiring to

see Adams and Jefferson as old men trading book recommendations and keeping [00:16:00] the youthful schedules of rising before dawn to learn and read and grow. And that tradition of self-improvement through reading books is one that we've very much lost today. In addition to the lack of a common agreement about a core curriculum in high schools, we have an equally serious crisis, [00:16:30] which is that people aren't reading books any more, and that in this age of distraction and screens, browsing rather than reading is really an existential threat to the Founders' vision of the moral self-improvement that can come through deep reading.

For me, the biggest takeaway of this COVID project was simply getting me to read more. And I've tried to keep up my [00:17:00] morning reading with a simple rule, that I'm just not allowed to browse before I've done my reading, an hour or two of actual reading books, and that was the biggest life hack that I've done since college, and just... I'd fallen out of the habit of reading broadly for stuff outside of the immediate deadlines that I had, and it's incredibly stretching. Jefferson said, as I quoted in the book, "I've given up newspapers for Tacitus, and I feel much better," and I now feel the same way.

Michael Poliako...: [00:17:30] I was a little saddened to find that that wonderful line from the movie about C.S. Lewis, *Shadowlands*, actually is not authentic Lewis. "We read books to know that we're not alone." But he did say that if you don't read good books, you'll read bad books. And of course I think we've even gone beyond that, that we're not reading good books, and often we're not even [00:18:00] reading bad books. We're simply not reading. And that seems like such an awful, awful abandonment of things that past generations were striving for. Books, as you point out in your wonderful volume, were a rarity. And even long after the printing press, a book was a valuable item, something to be cherished. And now [00:18:30] it seems as if we're going into a kind of a technological dark age, despite all the wonderful things at our disposal. I wonder what the great scholars of the 19th century would have been able to achieve had they ever had the lexica and the reference books that we do, would that we would just use them to the greatest extent that we can.

Jeffrey Rosen: [00:19:00] Would that we would just use them. That's exactly right. It just is so extraordinary to think of the sacrifices that the Founders and our ancestors and my ancestors made to have access to books. I have behind me on the bookcase my most precious possession, which is a statement that my grandfather, who I never met and died before I was born during the Depression, made. It says, the fountain of wisdom flows through books. And he saw that on the [00:19:30] pedestal of a newly constructed public library in Detroit. And he was a street peddler, he'd escaped from Poland, and he sold dry goods, and he walked to the public library and took those words and carved them out by hand, so that he could share them with my dad to express his values.

And when I think of the sacrifices and struggles that Manus Rosen and his ancestors, many of whom perished in the Holocaust, made for reading, and

think of the sacrifices [00:20:00] that Frederick Douglass made to learn how to read, by having to buy books on the street of Baltimore with bread. One book, which is all that he could afford after he'd paid for his reading lessons in bread, The Columbian Orator while he was enslaved [inaudible 00:20:13] change his life. It just seems like a sin to not use the extraordinary opportunity we have in this world to read.

I note in the book that when I was a kid, I went to the Library of Congress with my mom, and was filled with wonder [00:20:30] at the thought that all the books in the world were in that beautiful Thomas Jefferson building, and now they're on my iPhone. And it just blows my mind that I was able to write that entire book, reading all the wonderful books the Founders did, lying on my couch, because those books are free and online, not only basically free editions of out-of-print texts, but the actual editions the Founders read if I want that.

And all I need, as you said, is the self-discipline to do it. All I need is just the self-restraint not to take this finger, [00:21:00] when I'm looking at the books on my Kindle in the morning, if I choose to read online, to swipe to some browsing rather than actually reading books. And not to get on a soapbox, but when I think about my grandfather Manus Rosen, or Frederick Douglass, the incredible sacrifices that they made, can I not find the self-discipline just to swipe left rather than right, so I can read a book?

Michael Poliako...: I think we had quite similar family heritage. [00:21:30] My mother was the daughter of immigrants, and the family could not afford for her to continue her schooling much beyond the eighth grade, but she read voraciously. And I still have so many of her books, and they're good books, classic works of fiction, Dickens and Hawthorne and Melville, and I cherish that. This [00:22:00] connects me to that past, and it makes me all the more impatient that we seem to have come to some awful cultural point where great books are not just ignored, but they're even scorned. I was looking at my friend Mark Bauerlein's book, The Dumbest Generation Grows Up, and he quotes [00:22:30] a 2001 story in the New York Times that had the title, Much Ado (Yawn) About Great Books. And the author interviews some professors who say that critical skills can be honed just as well through consideration of Sex And The City as Middlemarch.

And it rather [00:23:00] dovetails with what we see on things like the National Survey of Student Engagement, where the average number of hours that students spend outside of class preparing is somewhere between 11 and 15, or less. And that made me think that nobody has the expectation any more that three [00:23:30] hours of work outside of class for every hour in class is a reasonable assumption, that assigning a row of really good books in a one-semester course is a reasonable course. And this of course is going to take a great cultural change in education as well, in higher education, but may it come.

Jeffrey Rosen: May it come indeed. And you're [00:24:00] so right, first of all, to emphasize the importance of good books, and to stress that this glorious cultural inheritance is not some elitist provenance of dead white men. These are the same classics that inspired Phillis Wheatley, the first great Black published poet in America. Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail Adams, Frederick Douglass for goodness' sake, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg's mom on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, who broke her nose [00:24:30] because she was buried in a book, and instilled those great values in RBG. So it's urgently important to have access to the great universal truths of our civilization, and it will take a cultural change, and it's not just among the underprivileged.

I found myself tearing up on a Zoom recently. I was interviewing my dear law school mentor and [00:25:00] teacher, Akhil Amar about his great new book, *The Words That Made Us*, and I said, "Why was the standard of constitutional debate so much higher in the 19th century?" And he said, "It's because, Jeff, people don't read any more." He said, "My own students at Yale Law School are not reading books." And I see you're as pained to hear that as I was. And Robby George at Princeton said that he no longer assigns long texts to his Princeton undergrads, because they don't read them. [00:25:30] This is a very serious threat to the future of the Republic, when even the most privileged students are no longer reading.

Michael Poliako...: It is indeed, and a real sadness. One of my favorite books which I try to get my students to read, at least in part, last couple of chapters, is Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*. And there, in this [00:26:00] town occupied by the Nazis, the mayor, who's a frightened little man, refuses to tell the people of the town to stop their acts of resistance. And he's been told that he's going to be shot if he doesn't. And what gives him courage is the memory that in high school he read the *Apology of Socrates*, Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. [00:26:30] And he says to his friend, "I feel a little larger than I really am, as I think about what Socrates told us, that we ought to think not of our lives, but what is virtue, what is honorable."

And I think of Martin Luther King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, he doesn't even have paper and pencil, but what he's got inside his head and his heart is [00:27:00] Plato, the Bible, Martin Buber, all these wonderful texts. And he just poured that out in this wonderful letter. That's the way I would like to see students educated. And of course you've written essentially a book of virtues now for grownups. It's not too late for us. We can reclaim these things.

Jeffrey Rosen: It's [00:27:30] not too late at any age. It's really moving for me to see the book resonating with middle school kids, and some teachers have been assigning bits to their students, and having the kids write sonnets, which is just so wonderful, and engage with the material. And indeed, this material was excerpted in McGuffey's Reader and *The Columbian Orator* for middle school kids for most of history, so there's no reason to wait. But yes, in the end, it's [00:28:00] a appeal to fellow lifelong learners like me to do the one thing we can do, which is to

tend to ourselves, to try to improve our own reading habits, and to make use of this glorious opportunity we have at this moment, to actually read as deeply as possible.

Michael Poliako...: I want to be careful of your time. You're being very generous. I'm sure you're on book tours all the time. Could you talk [00:28:30] a little bit about the way the Founders, you describe it in the book, made themselves their own personal lists of things to do? And I found that so engaging. I'm not sure that I'm quite disciplined enough yet to do it, but I'm very tempted.

Jeffrey Rosen: Absolutely. [inaudible 00:28:51] Sorry. I'll try that again. Absolutely. Well, it comes from the great Pythagoras, who has become such an inspiration [00:29:00] for me as well. And in addition to inventing the triangle and the harmonic system of triads and fifths, he recommended daily self-accounting as a great project for moral self-perfection, reverence thyself, first be good and then a God. So it was from Pythagoras that Franklin got his famous 13 virtues system, where he made a list of 13 virtues and tried to live up to them, by making X marks [00:29:30] next to the virtues he fell short of every night. And tried this for a while and found it depressing, and gave it up but thought he was improved.

I note in the book that I came across the Franklin system through a local rabbi at Adas Israel in Washington, D.C., who recommended that a friend and I try the Franklin system through a Jewish system called Mussar, or character improvement. We didn't know that Franklin had originated it and got it from Mendel Lefin, who translated Franklin's virtues into Hebrew in the 19th century. And we tried it and went [00:30:00] through Franklin's list, and also found it very depressing, because it's very hard to actually live up to, but we felt that we were improved for it. And then Jefferson made a very similar list of 12 virtues for his daughters, and that synchronicity really struck me.

And then the Adamses are just such list makers and self-improvers, and I love the fact that John and Abigail decided to make lists of virtues as [00:30:30] part of their courtship. It was a risky dating technique, but they each made a list of each other's faults. And Abigail said to John... She was kind of generous, she said, "People find you intimidating because you're so brilliant." And he said, "Well, you should practice the piano and read more, and plus you're pigeon-toed." And she said, "Well, a gentleman shouldn't comment on a lady's posture."

And then there's the great [inaudible 00:30:56] who I just think embodies the [00:31:00] purpose-driven life more and [inaudible 00:31:03] than perhaps all of them, who was constantly writing in his glorious diary, the most revealing of any American president, of his effort, of his goals, and his falling short of them. And his lists took the form of letters to his son, George Washington Adams, about how to live a virtuous and Christian life. That pressure proved so great that his son killed himself, an unbelievable, shattering tragedy that almost [00:31:30]



broke Adams, but he fortified himself by reading more Cicero and committing himself to a life of virtue, and became the greatest abolitionist of his age, and fought slavery and the gag rule more inspiringly, according to Frederick Douglass, than any other white American of his generation.

So list-making in the Pythagorean spirit imposes great pressure. The injunction be perfect, which of course comes from Jesus [00:32:00] to the disciples, is a high bar indeed. And being as perfect as Jesus or Socrates, as Franklin put it, is a goal that will be achieved by none of us in our lifetime, but it's the pursuit, the effort, that ensures our constant self-improvement.

Michael Poliako...: Certainly words to live by. We just had our Passover Seders, and [00:32:30] I was thinking once again of what liberation means. And we have a tendency to stop with let my people go, and to forget what follows, that they may serve me. In other words, it's liberation from the corrupt bondage of slavery to another human being, to [00:33:00] the service of God and the observance of His laws. And that rather resonates, that our Founders knew the difference between liberty, which will give people the opportunity, the framework for self-improvement, and license, which will corrupt them. And I saw that theme surfacing throughout your book as well, a very, very important [00:33:30] observation.

Jeffrey Rosen: That's a crucial distinction between liberty and license. As you say, the Founders knew it well. At our service this year, I was moved both to read from Deuteronomy, the injunctions to hear, O Israel, the Lord God is one, and also, and you shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might. And then I read from an incredible passage I came across recently. John Quincy Adams, [00:34:00] the Jubilee of the Constitution, 1839, says that America will be cursed or saved based on our adherence to the principles of the Declaration and the Constitution. And then he quotes Deuteronomy, and I'm going to share this, because it's such a powerful passage.

He says that... He talks about the principles of the Declaration and the Constitution, and says, "Lay up these principles then in your hearts and in your souls. Bind them for signs [00:34:30] upon your hands, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. Teach them to your children, speaking of them when sitting in your houses, when walking up by the way, when lying down and when rising up. Write them upon the doorposts of your houses and upon your gates. Cling to them as the issues of life. Adhere to them as to the cords of your eternal salvation." It's just remarkable in the urgency of his charge, which is that the spiritual obligation of self-mastery and [00:35:00] keeping the Commandments is tied up with that of teaching the principles of the Declaration and the Constitution, reminds us of the difference between liberty and license more powerfully than I can imagine.

Michael Poliako...: Thank you for sharing that one. That is a lovely, lovely window into John Adams and all his complexity. I thought you captured very well his many failings, he

wrestled with his anger and his grandiosity, [00:35:30] but seemed always capable of pulling himself back too. And of course the ability, the humility to be able to say, "I was wrong," is one of the virtues.

Jeffrey Rosen: Yes. It really does make John Adams, the father, the most relatable Founder, I guess is the word we'd use, he was the most famously vain and self-regarding man of his age, and yet he knew it. And he lost his [00:36:00] temper, but then he recovered it. And he reconciled, as you said, with Mercy Otis Warren, with Thomas Jefferson. It was the kind of mindfulness of the quest and struggle, the fact that ever since he was a kid, he... "I'm obnoxious and disliked, that cannot be denied," as the musical 1776 has him sing. So memorably, he was vain, but he knew it. And in the end, in the incredibly moving reconciliation with Thomas Jefferson, he found the humility that he'd always sought.

Michael Poliako...: [00:36:30] Jeffrey, what else should we cover? This has been really enlightening. Are there other parts of the book that you'd particularly like to share with the audience and discuss?

Jeffrey Rosen: No, this has been a great conversation where we've talked about the highlights, and I would just share the wonderfully [00:37:00] stretching and empowering practice of deep reading, and deep reading in the moral philosophy, if people are moved to do it. I do include Jefferson's top 10 list in the appendix, which is the moral philosophy section that I read. But I guess I would recommend the entire reading list to listeners who are moved to stretch themselves, and he has glorious recommendations on literature [00:37:30] and history, ancient and modern, and political philosophy, and natural science. The breadth of his reading is inspiring, and if people want great worlds to be opened up, check out Jefferson's reading list.

Michael Poliako...: Thank you. [inaudible 00:37:51] you're kind of provoking me to a rather [00:38:00] perhaps anachronistic idea, that there was a time when colleges had comprehensive exams at the end of the four years, so that a student didn't simply think that just by doing the assignments it would be enough. And I would love to get to that idea again, that we're [00:38:30] engaged in a process that will never end, and that to be a wise person, to be a good person, means to be thirsty and hungry for deep reading and deep understanding. I doubt any school is going to revive that anytime soon, but perhaps there are ways that we can inch ourselves back to these core readings that help us [00:39:00] to understand our commonalities and our common search.

Jeffrey Rosen: Absolutely. I did have comprehensive exams in college. I have to say, I kind of faked my way through them. I was an English major and was weak on 19th century America, and a friend said, "Well, if they mention Walt Whitman, just murmur something about his proverbial [inaudible 00:39:24]." And I did that without knowing what the [inaudible 00:39:27] were and I got through. However, I do think [00:39:30] that it's just those habits of deep reading that I got in high school, and that was able to draw on for this great project, and also a

feeling that the humanities are meaningful, that they can be put to use, as Samuel Johnson said, that they teach us how to live. And Jefferson says that in the preface to his letter, he says the reason to read literature is by getting examples of [00:40:00] moral excellence and also moral failings throughout history and literature, in ways even more vivid than can be provided in life. It will teach us how to live.

In the end, it can't be legislated or coerced. It has to be voluntarily sought, and we have to inspire people, starting at a young age, to discover the radically empowering practice of deep reading. We are [00:40:30] doing that at the National Constitution Center, I'll just put in a brief plug for the extraordinary free online resources, all hosted on our interactive Constitution, which has now gotten 70 million hits. It's among the most googled Constitutions in the world. And there you can find a full Constitution 101 course, with the basic principles of the Declaration and the Constitution, links to primary source documents and a Founders' library, of the kind that we've been discussing, and questions for [00:41:00] students and lifelong learners. It's just such a privilege to be part of this great organization that offers up this nonpartisan curriculum, as well as podcasts and programs for adults, in such a rigorous way. And it's another reminder of the fact that all the resources that we need for self-improvement and learning are free and online, if we're just inspired to seek them out.

Michael Poliako...: Thank you for that, [00:41:30] and thank you for that gift to the nation and to the world. This is really a wonderful treasure, and as you say, we just need the will to take advantage of it, to use it. Professor Rosen, thank you. This has been a wonderful conversation, inspiring conversation, and I may just change my habits having now read your book and spoken with you.

Jeffrey Rosen: It was a wonderful conversation, Michael. Thank you so much, [00:42:00] and happy reading.

Michael Poliako...: Thank you.

Speaker 1: Thank you so much for that. Wonderful. John Adams is actually my favorite president, just throwing that out there, so I really appreciated that. Big, big fan for a lot of reasons, but...

Jeffrey Rosen: That's great. He's a great favorite to have. Totally inspiring. Wonderful.