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**NICHOLAS B. DIRKS**

*President and Chief Executive Officer of The New York Academy of Sciences*

Watch Nick Dirks' speaker's reel [here](#).



**NICHOLAS B. DIRKS** is the President and Chief Executive Officer of The New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS), one of the oldest and most esteemed scientific organizations in the United States. He is a Professor of History and Anthropology at University of California, Berkeley and an award-winning author of eight books, including the book [City of Intellect: The Uses and Abuses of the University](#) (Cambridge University Press; February 2024). Read *The Wall Street Journal's* review of *City of Intellect* [here](#).

As President and CEO of NYAS, Nick oversees a global community of more than 20,000 members, comprised of top-echelon leaders in science, industry, academia, government, and public policy. Nick is committed to using science for the public good, connecting experts across sectors, disciplines, and national boundaries to advance scientific progress and tackle the greatest challenges of our time. Nick's expertise lies at the intersection of science and culture, specifically in relation to artificial intelligence, international collaboration, and scientific denialism. Nick regularly writes for

public audiences in publications like the [New York Times](#), [TIME](#), [The Hill](#), [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), [Times Higher Education](#), [Undark Magazine](#), and [Inside Higher Ed](#).

Prior to joining NYAS in 2020, Nick served as the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, where he launched major initiatives in data science, neuroscience, genomics, and undergraduate education and fostered collaboration among universities locally and globally. Before Berkeley, Nick served as the Executive VP and Dean of the Faculty for Arts and Sciences at Columbia University, where he was the Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology and History.

Nick is the recipient of several scholarly honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur Foundation residential fellowship, and the Lionel Trilling Award for his book, *Castes of Mind*. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Affairs, and a member of numerous national and international bodies. Nick received his B.A. from Wesleyan University, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.



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Nick has spoken at the Science Summit of the United Nations, the Science and Technology Forum, the Aspen Ideas Festival, the Milken Institute, the World Economic Forum, Techonomy 23, and panels organized by *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. You can learn more about Nick on his website [here](#) as well as view clips of Nick speaking [here](#).

*“I take up my role at the Academy at a critical time in history. We need to do more than study and understand our world. We need to solve big problems. Global warming. Environmental pollution. Famine and drought. Economic, racial, and social inequality. And, yes, pandemics.”*

*–Nicholas B. Dirks*

#### **THEMES AND IDEAS THAT NICHOLAS B. DIRKS CAN DISCUSS AND COMMENT ON:**

- The intersection of science and culture and how we can bridge science with humanities
- Policy, regulation, and societal impacts of artificial intelligence
- Denialism and declining public trust in science and higher education
- International collaboration, transnational science, and science without borders
- The contested future of higher education and the challenges of modern-day educators

#### **A FEW QUESTIONS FOR NICHOLAS B. DIRKS**

*Q: You once said that there is no issue or challenge that can be solved without science. What do you think is the greatest challenge facing the scientific community today?*

*A: Science and technology are moving forward faster than our capacity to think through issues of impact and the capacity of society to absorb these changes (another Oppenheimer moment, as it were). This is true especially in domains such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing on the one hand and structural biology and gene editing on the other.*

*Q: You joined NYAS in June 2020, a very inauspicious time for our country and our world. What is the biggest lesson you learned as the President and CEO of NYAS during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

*A: While the pandemic seemed to make clear to so many of us the manifest importance of science, and scientists, it also made clear that the politics around science have become even more contested and fraught. Despite the huge contribution represented by the development of mRNA vaccines, issues around trust – in science and expertise more broadly – are more salient than ever.*

*Q: Over the past few years, we’ve witnessed a rise in vaccine hesitancy, conspiracy theories, and attacks on public intellectuals. How can we rebuild the public’s trust in science and institutions?*



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*A:* As long as there are demagogues interested in spinning conspiracy theories and exploiting political divisions, we will face some measure of challenge in this domain. However, the onus is on us – the community of scientists, experts, intellectuals, etc. – to work together to attempt to earn greater trust from the public, in the reliability as well as the honesty and transparency of science on the one hand, and in the integrity and public spiritedness of the institutions where education and research are conducted.

*Q: What are you most proud of from your long career of leadership in higher education?*

*A:* I've worked hard to break down disciplinary and institutional barriers to greater openness and collaboration in the academy, whether inside the great universities I've had the privilege to work or between those institutions and the world outside. And I've also worked to diversify faculties and student bodies, aware that this is of great importance not just to universities themselves but to the nature of the scientific and intellectual work they do.

*Q: How might non-scientists get involved with NYAS?*

*A:* NYAS has a long history of public and interdisciplinary inquiry, both in the “basic sciences” and in applied fields as well as across the social sciences and humanities. Non-scientists interested in the impact and importance of developments in science are as welcome to get involved as scientists themselves!

*Q: What new initiative or program at NYAS are you most excited about?*

*A:* We are commencing new initiatives in neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and climate related threats to the world; these are among the most pressing scientific challenges that also have implications for all of us, scientists and non-scientists and all members of the public alike.

**TO BE IN TOUCH WITH NICHOLAS B. DIRKS:**

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