

Focus on the Humanities

August 2014



(Visit our web site at www.mshumanities.org to learn more about us.)

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Director's Message: The Humanities Rise above Partisanship



A few weeks ago, I posted the following question on our Facebook [page](#): Which U.S. president in a message to Congress advocated doubling federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities claiming it would "broaden and deepen humanistic research into the basic causes of the divisions between races and generations...improve communication within American society and bring lessons of our history to bear on the problems of our future"?

Surely this must have been Bill Clinton, who during his presidency often spoke about healing America's racial divisions, or perhaps Lyndon Johnson, who signed the law creating the NEH and was forced to confront the nation's growing "generation gap" during the 1960s. Many were surprised to learn it was Richard Nixon, and that a Republican president would support increased federal funding for humanities research into the origins of racial divisions and contemporary social issues. Indeed, some Republicans in Congress today have called for the complete defunding of the NEH. But for the Mississippi Humanities Council, which receives most of its funding from NEH, the humanities are not a partisan issue. The board of the MHC contains both Democrats and Republicans who understand that in an increasingly toxic political culture, the humanities offer an oasis of reflection and reason.

This summer, Mississippi has been wracked by divisive politics – some of this was on display when I attended the Neshoba County Fair a few weeks ago. But whatever our political beliefs, we can all agree that the well-being of our republic relies on an informed and engaged citizenry with a

commitment to the common good. Instead of amplifying our divisions, the humanities can bring people together to discuss our differences and seek a common understanding of our past, and together chart a path forward. Jim Leach, a former

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Republican congressman appointed to head the NEH by Barack Obama, a Democratic president, stressed the need for civil political discourse during his tenure as NEH chair. While we may not always (or even usually) agree, we must listen to each other respectfully and seek to understand other perspectives.

In a state like Mississippi, where our divisions are often deeply rooted in a difficult history, this is particularly important. In my nine months at the MHC, I've seen many examples of the humanities bringing people together. There was the Sons of Confederate Veterans chapter that brought in an MHC-sponsored lecturer on African American history and genealogy; a Muslim Journeys discussion co-led by a Muslim and a Jew which took place in a Methodist Church; and a symposium at the state's medical school to address the history of racial discrimination at the institution and continuing racial disparities in public health in our state. Although it has only a small staff and budget, the Council has made a significant impact on Mississippi.

This appreciation for the benefits of the humanities was on display recently when the Republican chair of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee introduced a special amendment to restore full funding for NEH after earlier proposed cuts. This "full funding" is \$146 million, or just 0.004% of the federal budget, essentially a rounding error, or less than 50 cents for every person in the U.S. – literally pocket change.

What a small price to pay for helping preserve and enrich our nation's cultural life. President Nixon ended his message with the following entreaty: "Too many Americans have been too long denied the inspiration and the uplift of our cultural heritage. Now is the time to enrich the life of the mind and to evoke the splendid qualities of the American spirit." This is just as true now as it was 45 years ago. I encourage you to read President Nixon's special [message](#) to Congress: it still inspires.



Gillespie Joins Humanities Staff as Executive Assistant



The Mississippi Humanities Council welcomes Caroline Gillespie as its new executive assistant. Gillespie is a native of Oxford and studied at the College of Charleston in Charleston, SC, and the Barksdale Honors College at the University of Mississippi. She graduated with high honors, double majoring in history and southern studies and minoring in Spanish, and was tapped for membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Her interest in history and the distinct culture of the South developed from her love of reading and growing up in a town like Oxford. "Even as a child, I recognized and appreciated the wonderfully rich and diverse culture of Mississippi," she said. Preservation of that history and culture became the focus of her studies and interests. "Whenever I would

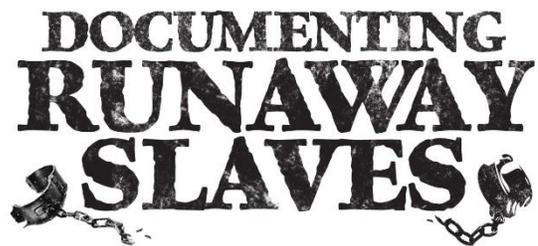
see an old building being torn down to make way for ‘progress,’ I would wonder what else was being lost besides the structure itself.”

After graduating, Gillespie moved to Washington, D.C. for a year, working as a fundraising associate at a political fundraising firm. Although she learned much about politics and fundraising and enjoyed exploring the city, it was a little too far from the work she enjoyed, so she packed her bags and headed south to Jackson.

Since joining the Council’s staff in early August, Gillespie has immersed herself in understanding all of the programs carried out by the Council and its plans for the future. “I am excited to be part of an organization that is doing so much to preserve, promote and celebrate the cultural fabric of Mississippi,” she said. “And I’m looking forward to making my contributions toward those goals in every way I can.”

Volunteers Needed for MHC-Supported Runaway Slave Project

The Documenting Runaway Slaves Project (DRS) was begun at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2012 with support from the National Park Service’s Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative and the Mississippi Humanities Council. Since then, DRS historians have collected thousands of runaway slave advertisements from Mississippi, Arkansas and the Caribbean. This fall, USM will launch a massive electronic archive that will be searchable using key terms, subject headings and geographic regions. To complete this important work, the DRS team is looking for volunteers to assist in its research. All you need is a microfilm reader and a library with access to pre-Civil War newspapers. Volunteer researchers will track which newspapers they have examined and capture images of these documents using anything from digital scanners and printers to cell phone cameras. The DRS historians will then transcribe the documents, flag them with metadata and subject headings, and add them to our collection. Whether you want to look at one issue of a newspaper or hundreds of papers from your home town (or any place you are interested in examining), your contribution will be greatly appreciated. Researchers from any walk of life will be welcomed — high school and university students, genealogists, interns and volunteers at historical sites, and the general public can all help make this project a success. If interested, please contact Dr. Max Grivno, Department of History, the University of Southern Mississippi (max.grivno@usm.edu).



‘Hometown Teams’ Theme of Next Traveling Smithsonian Exhibit

After a successful tour at six sites across the state including Meridian, Indianola, New Albany, Decatur, and Wesson, the MHC-sponsored exhibit “The Way We Worked” completed its final showing at the Tunica Museum in Tunica in mid-July and has now returned to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. for refurbishing and redistribution. A call for proposals will go out in the spring/summer 2015 for our next Museums on Main Street exhibit: “Hometown Teams” which will tour Mississippi between March 2016 and early 2017. Another exhibit, tentatively named “The Water Project” is also on tap for 2018/19. These products,



designed and developed by the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit Service, have proven to be one of the MHC's most successful programs and provide a unique opportunity for bringing Smithsonian caliber exhibits to small towns across our state and nation.

Southern Literary Trail Celebrates Classic Southern Literature

The Southern Literary Trail is America's only tri-state literary trail connecting mythic places that influenced great novelists and playwrights of the 20th century. The Mississippi Humanities Council has been involved in the trail project since it was launched and encourages Mississippians to explore the historic homes and environs of the writers whose work defines the Southern Literature genre. The Trail [website](#) lists homes and relevant sites for dozens of southern writers, as well as a continually updated calendar of festivals and events celebrating the writers and their works.



Hattiesburg Library Explores the Life of Theodore Roosevelt



The Library of Hattiesburg, Petal and Forrest County will host a three-month program of events focusing on the life and times of America's 26th president, Theodore "T.R." Roosevelt Jr., supported by an MHC grant. Events will include book club discussions, scholarly lectures, the retelling of Roosevelt's bear hunt near Onward, MS, and presentation by Roosevelt re-enactor Joe Wiegand. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, visit the Hattiesburg library's [website](#). Visit the Mississippi Humanities Council calendar page on our website, where new events are added weekly - all free and open to the public. Click this [link](#) to find details about these and other humanities programs occurring in your community.

Family Literacy Project Expands with Louisiana Partnership



The Mississippi Humanities Council has recently joined forces with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities in presenting Prime Time, Inc., the LEH-developed family reading program upon which the MHC's Family Reading Bonds program was modeled. With funding assistance from Shell Oil, the MHC will be overseeing two Prime Time programs on the coast this fall, one at the Lynn Meadows Discover Center in Gulfport and a second at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center in Ocean Springs, assisted by the Walter Anderson Museum and

Jackson County Civic Action Committee. Two additional Prime Time programs will be scheduled for the winter/spring of 2015. The MHC's bilingual Luciérnagas Family Reading Program will take place for a fifth consecutive year at the M.R. Dye Public Library in Horn Lake beginning this September, as will a Family Reading Bonds program at the Itta Bena Public Library.

Council Funds Eight Programs in July Minigrant Round

Delta State University

Civil War Sesquicentennial Lecture Series

\$1,800

Four-part lecture series on various themes related to the Civil War, aimed at both academic and public audiences.

Mary C O'Keefe Cultural Center for the Arts and Education

The Mary C Civil Rights Semester

\$2,000

Multidisciplinary Civil Rights program using exhibitions, gallery talks, public presentations, film screenings and culinary café classes to revisit the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi and the South, focusing on the Movement's quest for equal access to education and cultural resources.

Copiah-Lincoln Junior College Foundation

The Power of Place: The Natchez Impact on Five Extraordinary Authors

\$900

Five reading-and-discussion seminars on Mississippi authors, leading up to the 26th Annual Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration in February 2015, with the theme "Bigger Than Life: Extraordinary Mississippians."

University of Southern Mississippi

Critical Readings: New Conversations about Literature

\$1,610

Two-part speaker series intended to encourage critical reading and discussion of respected literature.

Clinton Visitor Center

Settlers Day at Milepost 89

\$1,000

Interactive public programs to illustrate the historical significance of the Natchez Trace Parkway and encourage understanding of the people and events that shaped history along the Trace. The long-term goal is to create an annual event.

Delta State University

The British & American Constitutions: Uncommon Notions, Common Ties

\$2,000

Public lecture-and-discussion series on constitutionalism and a reader's theater presentation. Lectures will be led by a member of the British parliament, Mr. David Lammy, who will illuminate contrasts in the two nations' constitutions, as well as shared concepts of constitutionalism.

New Stage Theatre

America at the Turning Point: Community Conversations on All The Way

\$2,000

Scholar-led panel discussions to complement a theatre production of the *All The Way*, depicting President Lyndon B. Johnson's efforts to maneuver members of the 88th United States Congress to enact, and civil

rights leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr. to support, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Panelists will include civil rights workers, historians, artists, politicians and activists, who will address various themes related to the play, including the legacy of the Civil Rights Act, the importance and impact of Freedom Summer, and arts and culture in times of struggle.

University of Southern Mississippi

The Culinary Communities of Mississippi: Farm, Table and Campus

\$1,589

Year-long speaker series for the general public about food traditions, healthy eating, sustainable gardening and food policy.

Next MHC Grant Deadline Sept. 15, 2014

Sept. 15, 2014, is the deadline for MHC regular grant proposals for amounts between \$2,000 and \$7,500. Application guidelines and forms are available on the MHC website. Regular grant deadlines are May 1 and Sept. 15 each year. Proposals must be delivered to the MHC offices by 5:00 p.m. on these dates. Programs and expenditures may not occur fewer than ten weeks after the deadline date you selected.

Please note that several updates have been made to the Mississippi Humanities Council Grant Guidelines and to the grant application forms. It is essential that applicants use current forms, available on the MHC website.

Oct. 15, 2014, is the next deadline for MHC mini grant proposals for amounts up to \$2,000. Proposals must be delivered to the MHC offices by 5:00 p.m. on these dates. Programs and expenditures may not occur fewer than eight weeks after the deadline date you selected.

Changes Announced in MHC Grants Programs, Forms

The Mississippi Humanities Council's [grants program](#) has undergone several changes. While the types of projects the Council funds remains unchanged, new forms and application requirements are being introduced. Key changes include:

- Proposals may now be submitted via email as PDF files.
- Proposals must be emailed or delivered to the MHC office (in person or via the mail) by 5 p.m. on deadline dates. The Council will no longer accept applications postmarked by the published deadline dates.
- Deadlines for Regular Grants will now be May 1 and Sept. 15 (formerly, the deadlines were April 15 and Sept. 15).
- Applicants must consult with MHC's executive director or assistant director regarding project viability before submitting an application.

Applications should always be made on forms downloaded from the [MHC website](#), since the forms are updated periodically.

The MHC grants program seek to fund projects that stimulate meaningful community dialogue, attract diverse audiences, are participatory and engaging and apply the humanities to our everyday lives. Grants may be used to support public humanities programs, exhibits, the planning of larger projects, and the

development of original productions in film, television, radio or online resources. The MHC also offers special grants to support oral history projects around the state.

MHC Welcomes Your Support

Mississippi Humanities Council programs are engaging, inspiring and free of charge. Your gift makes a big difference to our mission of cultivating an understanding of our history and culture throughout the state. You help us enrich peoples' lives through programs incorporating history, literature, music, politics, philosophy and other humanities-based disciplines that illuminate the human condition. Thanks to your support, we are able to serve all Mississippians: all ages, all geographic areas of the state, all walks of life.

A small gift of \$25 will purchase two books for children participating in the Mississippi Humanities Council's [Family Reading Bonds](#) program.

A larger gift of \$250 will fund a lecture in a school classroom, local library or civic club, by a member of the Mississippi Humanities Council [Speakers Bureau](#).

A \$2,500 contribution will underwrite a six-week [Family Reading Bonds](#) series, part of the Mississippi Humanities Council's literacy program.

A gift of any amount can support any one of our ongoing programs:

- [Oral History Projects](#)
- [Smithsonian Exhibits](#)
- [Public Humanities Awards](#)

To donate online, visit our [website](#). Or call 601-432-6752.



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