

Focus on the Humanities

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

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Director's Message: The Humanities Connect Us to Different Worlds



I spent much of the Christmas holiday this year catching up on my reading. One of the books that had been sitting on my nightstand for months was Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*, winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Literature. I knew it was about North Korea, and that's about it. I assumed it would be the reading equivalent of cauliflower – I know it's good for me, and I'm willing to eat it, but I probably won't enjoy it. With all of the recent controversy surrounding Sony Pictures and its movie "The Interview," I decided I should finally tackle the subject of North Korea by reading the acclaimed novel.

Boy was I wrong. The novel is fantastic – a real page-turner with a sweeping, compelling story along with interesting narrative devices, including a sanitized, propaganda version of parts of the story broadcast around North Korea through government loudspeakers. The author based his fictional story on the harsh reality of life in this totalitarian country. While writing the novel, Johnson did lots of research about life in North Korea, even visiting the country – not an easy thing to do. Parts of the book seemed almost like science fiction to me. The world it described seemed so alien to my experience here in America. North Korea may as well be a different world from the one in which I live here in Mississippi.

As Mississippians, we are naturally drawn to stories that mirror our own lives.

I read the book after having conversations with members of the Council staff about how to make the humanities relevant to people in Mississippi. Indeed, many of the programs we sponsor relate to the

experience of being a Mississippian: from examinations of local Civil Rights or Civil War history, to the life and work of our state's great writers. It got me thinking: was the *Orphan Master's Son*, set in a place so different from when I lived, simply a good read, or did it teach me something about my life or the human condition? Or, as we say around the office: did it have humanities content?

The Utah Humanities Council uses a lovely phrase: "the humanities connect small questions to large issues, our neighborhoods to the world, and our own experiences to other times and places." This sentence came to mind as I recently started reading Margaret Walker's epic novel *Jubilee*, about her ancestors' experience of slavery, Civil War, and emancipation. Set in 19th century Georgia and Alabama, half a world and 150 years away from the North Korea of the *Orphan Master's Son*, the novel tells a story with which I am quite familiar as a historian and native southerner. As I read Walker's historically rich work, I kept thinking of the parallels: children taken away from their parents, a world without human rights where people are forced to submit to the whims of a central authority, how violence is used to punish non-conformity. The prison work camps of North Korea have much in common with the antebellum slave plantations of the South.

All of a sudden, the opaque world of contemporary North Korea did not seem so far removed from Mississippi. That is the skill of great writers like Walker and Johnson – they can connect the reader to stories and characters living in a very different world from their own, highlighting the humanity that we all share. This is the power of the humanities.

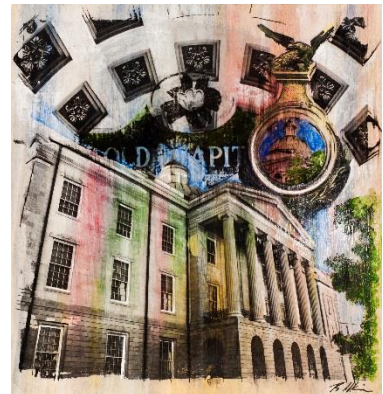
As Mississippians, we are naturally drawn to stories that mirror our own lives. The Mississippi Humanities Council will always work to highlight our state's history and cultural life. But we also hope that we can connect Mississippians to the larger world, even beyond our national borders, to see that we are part of a larger human experience.

Join Us at the 2015 Public Humanities Awards Celebration

The Mississippi Humanities Council will host its annual Public Humanities Awards Celebration Feb. 13 at the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson. This event honors scholars, educators and organizations who have made significant contributions to the public humanities in Mississippi.

This year, Gov. William Winter will bestow the first Cora Norman Award to Dr. Estus Smith for his role as a founder and early leader of the Council. Awards will also go to Dr. Eric Weber of the University of Mississippi, H.T. Holmes, retiring director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and Preserve Marshall County and Holly Springs. Each winner will receive an original work of art by Roy Adkins. In addition, the 2014 Humanities Teacher Award winners will be recognized.

This year's event will be a bit different from previous years. The festivities begin at 5:30 p.m. with a reception featuring gourmet small plates and complementary beer and wine on the ground floor of the museum. At 7 pm, the formal awards presentation will begin upstairs in the House Chamber.



Roy Adkins of Light + Glass Studio, Jackson, designed the awards that will be given to this year's winners. They are a series of photo collages featuring images of the Old Capitol Museum, site of the 2015 awards celebration.

Due to the seating available in the House Chamber, tickets are limited and are expected to sell out, so please make your reservations quickly. Tickets may be reserved at www.mshumanities.org or by calling (601) 432-6752.

Interviews Begin for 'The Telling Project' in Mississippi



Max Rayneard, left, of the Telling Project talks with veteran Troy Morgan.

Interviews have begun for production of "Telling: Central Mississippi." Dr. Max Rayneard, director of research and outcomes for the Telling Project, arrived in Jackson Jan. 14 to spend several days interviewing military veterans in the area. He interviewed six veterans, with plans for additional phone interviews with others who were unavailable for in-person interviews during his trip.

Dr. Rayneard also spent time speaking to local and statewide press about the Telling Project, its upcoming Mississippi productions and why it is important for Mississippi veterans to share their stories. "It's a very simple act, but it's also a profoundly powerful act" that can benefit both the veterans and their communities, he told a reporter from the [Clarion-Ledger](#).

Once all of the veteran interviews have been completed and the veterans have determined if they would like to continue with the project, Dr. Rayneard will transcribe interviews and shape them into scripts. Rehearsals will begin in the summer, and the veterans will work together using their scripts to prepare for the performances.

The Telling Project, a nationally-recognized program that allows veterans to share their experiences with their communities, will premiere in Mississippi in August. "Telling: Central Mississippi" will take place in Jackson at New Stage Theatre Aug. 7-9, and again in Meridian at the Little Theatre Aug. 14-16.

Speakers Bureau Provides Vital Programming for Libraries



Mona Vance-Ali

Columbus-Lowndes Public Library Archivist Mona Vance-Ali looks to the Mississippi Humanities Council [Speakers Bureau](#) for informative and thought-provoking programs for its patrons, funded by the Council:

"The Columbus-Lowndes Public Library thoroughly enjoys utilizing the resources available through the Mississippi Humanities Council's Speakers Bureau because of the variety of engaging topics and professionalism of the speakers. In addition, by using the MHC Speakers Bureau, the library is able to offer enriching and engaging programming that it would otherwise not be able to financially support.

"The MHC Speakers Bureau offers an array of speakers covering various subjects relating to everything from history to music to art. This allows organizations such as the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library greater flexibility when searching for educational events to host. The library has incorporated scholars from the Speakers Bureau covering topics such as the Civil War, genealogy, historic

preservation, storytelling, Civil Rights, women's history, Mississippi history and artistic quilts. When looking for a speaker and no matter what the topic, I check the MHC Speakers Bureau site first.

"The speakers who work with the MHC Speakers Bureau are knowledgeable, reliable and professional. They are always willing and eager to work with a host institution on making each event the best that it can be. Also, by using the Speaker's Bureau the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library is able to provide our patrons with access to skills and expertise of scholars who are not local to the northeast region of Mississippi.

"Ultimately, the Library's aim is to aid the citizens of Lowndes County in their pursuit of education, information, recreation, research and culture. Without the MHC Speakers Bureau, the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library would be left without the necessary tools to successfully carry out our mission of involving and educating our local citizens."

Mississippi Humanities Council Sponsors 2015 Natchez Literary & Cinema Celebration



The Mississippi Humanities Council will again sponsor Copiah-Lincoln Community College's Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration. The theme of the 2015 Celebration, now in its 26th year, is "Bigger than Life: Extraordinary Mississippians," examining the lives and contributions of famous Mississippians. The celebration is Feb. 26-28 at the Natchez Convention Center.

"Since the state of Mississippi will celebrate its 200th birthday in 2017, the Celebration's steering committee thought it was time to explore some of the famous people our state has produced," said Carolyn Vance Smith, founder and co-chairman of the NLCC. "Our problem was that there are so many extraordinary Mississippians. We wound up choosing those who have new books written about them."

Programs will be about a variety of famed Mississippians, Smith said. "These include the literary figures William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, Richard Wright, Willie Morris and Margaret Walker. Since 2015 is the centennial of Dr. Walker's birth, we're honoring her with Margaret Walker Day on February 27."

A new musical based on Walker's poetry will premier during the Celebration Feb. 27, written by pianist Randy Klein of New York and performed by Randy and Aurelia Williams of New York, with help from the Jackson State University Chorale.

Historical and political figures on the agenda are John Roy Lynch and L.Q.C. Lamar of the 19th century and Charles Evers and others of the 20th century. Musical icons to be discussed are blues giants Robert Johnson and B. B. King, rock 'n' roll king Elvis Presley and country music star Jimmie Rodgers. Entertainment, food and sports in Mississippi will be represented by programs about Muppets creator Jim Henson, culinary guru Craig Claiborne, football legend Archie Manning and others.

The conference is free except for three tickets, which must be purchased in advance. They are the Margaret Walker concert (\$10), a luncheon based on Craig Claiborne's favorite foods (\$25) and the NLCC's only fundraiser, a reception and dinner at King's Tavern (\$145, with \$100 tax-deductible). A reception at

the African-American Museum is \$10 at the door. Tickets, the agenda and other information are available at <http://www.colin.edu/nlcc>; NLCC@colin.edu; and 866-296-NLCC.

Gulf Coast Youth Productions Feature *Remembrance, Into the Woods, Winnie the Pooh*

With grant support from the Mississippi Humanities Council, the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Gulfport presented a series of touring performances based on well-known literature, including *Remembrance*, an original play developed by students of the Center using the poetry, letters and music of World War I; *Into the Woods*, about a witch who tasks a childless baker and his wife with procuring magical items from classic fairy tales to reverse the curse put on their family tree; and *Winnie the Pooh - A Christmas Tale*, a play inspired by the original stories by A.A. Milne about a very special Christmas Eve in the Hundred Acre Wood.

In addition to the performances, the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center staff conducted workshops in Gulf Coast schools related to the books and classic works and developed teacher packets for classroom work preceding the performances.



Madde Ridge and Joseph Jones as Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in *Into the Woods*.

“We did five different workshop sessions in the schools,” said Tonya Hayes, director of the Center’s WINGS Performing Arts program. “One workshop focused on oral traditions and how stories are passed down and changed. We talked about how the original versions of fairy tales are very different from what we may see in a Disney or film version.”

Students also created a radio show based on interviews with Cinderella’s father, stepsister, fairy godmother and the prince. The radio show created in that workshop served as a pre-show for the one of the performances of *Into the Woods*.

Mississippi Humanities Council Facebook ‘Likes’ Grew 63% in National Challenge



Thanks to all who helped us during our Facebook Fans Challenge! In a national competition among all of the state humanities councils to see who could increase their Facebook fans the most, Mississippi came in second place overall! With an increase of 63%, we narrowly missed beating Vermont, which had an increase of 64%. We hope that our newly enlarged Facebook community will allow us to reach an even wider audience with relevant and thought-provoking humanities content. Thanks for all your support!

Humanities Calendar Offers Impressive Array of Public Programs

The Mississippi Humanities Council website [calendar](#) showcases an impressive array of public humanities programs taking place throughout the state this fall. Highlights include:

- **Let’s Celebrate Margaret Walker** – Jan. 22, Eudora Welty Library, 300 North State Street, Jackson – 6 p.m.

- **The African Diva Project: Paintings by Margaret Rose Vendryes** – on exhibit through March 7, Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art, 386 Beach Boulevard, Biloxi
- **Philosophical Fridays: Dr. Justin Barrett** – Jan. 27, Thad Cochran Ballroom 1, University of Southern Mississippi Campus, Hattiesburg, 6:30 p.m.
- **The Power of Place: William Johnson** – Feb. 7, Judge George W. Armstrong Public Library, 220 South Commerce Street, Natchez, 2 p.m.
- **Let's Celebrate Margaret Walker: Dr. Jean Chamberlain** – Feb. 26, Fannie Lou Hamer Library, 3450 Albermarle Rd, Jackson, 3 p.m.
- **26th Annual Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration** – Feb. 27–28, various venues and times, Natchez



For more events and details, please visit our website [calendar](#).

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 Literacy Project](#).

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 reading and discussion series in the Mississippi Humanities Council's [Family Literacy Project](#).

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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