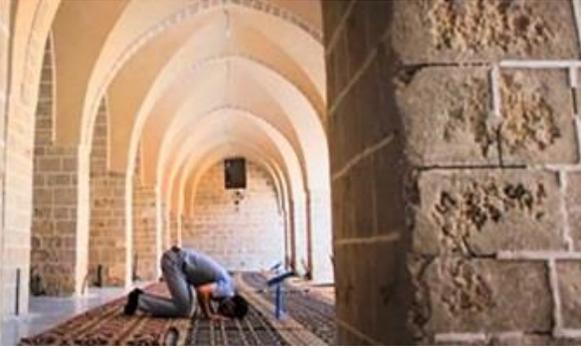


# Focus on the Humanities

## July 2015



(Visit our web site at [www.mshumanities.org](http://www.mshumanities.org) to learn more about us.)

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### Assistant Director's Message: Literature, Writing Course Takes the Humanities Inside Prison Walls

In the ten years I have been assistant director for programs at the Mississippi Humanities Council, I have attended numerous literary events and programs, but this was the first that required security clearance and a search of my car trunk before I could join the other participants. I had heard of Parchman prison, even in rural northern Iowa where I lived before moving to Mississippi. I knew its history and I knew its place in the story of the South. Not your typical setting for a humanities literary event, but the program I attended this particular day was perhaps the most remarkable experience in my time yet with the Council, with perhaps the most earnest participants of any MHC-funded program I have evaluated.



**MHC Assistant Director Carol Andersen, front right, with students of the Mississippi Prison Writes program at Parchman prison, led by instructor Louis Bourgeois, front left.**

The United States legal system regards education for imprisoned Americans a privilege rather than a human right, but for many years the Mississippi Humanities Council has employed an important tagline when we discuss our work: "the humanities are for everyone." That tagline encompasses our prison

population and motivates our support for programs within prison walls, such as the Mississippi Prison Writes literature and writing project.

Louis Bourgeois, a graduate of the University of Mississippi's prestigious MFA Creative Writing program, author of several books of poetry and a writing instructor, created the Mississippi Prison Writes in 2012. The five-month course was first offered at the Marshall County Correctional Facility in Holly Springs. In 2013, Bourgeois was given admittance to Unit 29 at Parchman prison, where inmates charged with particularly severe crimes are housed, to lead similar courses. He has led three courses so far, and there is a waiting list for future courses. With another grant from MHC, Bourgeois will expand the program to the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Pearl, MS, this fall where he will engage female prisoners and juvenile offenders in sessions exploring literature by esteemed writers such as Eudora Welty, Langston Hughes, Samuel Beckett, Malcom X and Ernest Hemingway.

Each 18-week course begins with inmates learning to read classical literature critically. Then they apply their new understanding of good writing to pen their own memoirs, which Bourgeois, through his nonprofit arts organization, VOX Press, compiles and publishes. The first collection, entitled *In Our Own Words: Writing From Parchman Prison*, received high praise. "Riding on the back of a pet pig. Watching a baby being born in a cotton field. Outliving a hurricane before finishing grade school. Greeting mother from the backseat of a police car. These childhood memories will make you marvel not only because of their uniqueness but also because the stories could be yours or mine," says Grace Fisher, communications director for the Mississippi Department of Corrections.

Indeed, after five months of reading and writing, profound stories emerge, stories that are important for the inmates to put on paper and equally important for those outside prison walls to read. Mississippi Prison Writes uses literature to engage a marginalized segment of society and, with its outcomes, encourages broader social understanding of that population. Moreover, the program offers participants wisdom that may lead them back into society with self-awareness and skills to pursue better paths.

"I have been in prison for 24 years and I have a daughter that is 27 years old. She has an 8 year old daughter...This writing class [has given] me the chance to express to my daughter and grandchild how I grew up...This class has given me freedom. Freedom to express to the world that I am human. That I have a heart just like everyone else." This quotation, from a student whose work now appears in the published anthology, beautifully illustrates the effect this program has on these men. Mississippi Prison Writes expands our understanding of how a life can go so wrong, but also how potential exists for a different outcome when opportunity is offered. It is making outstanding use of the humanities to inspire these men's life paths and our cultural understanding of the prison experience.

*Carol Andersen*  
*Assistant Director*

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## **MHC to Lead Grant-Writing Workshop in Waveland July 31**

The Hancock County Chamber of Commerce and the Hancock Community Development Foundation will host a Mississippi Humanities Council grant-writing workshop Friday, July 31, in the Leo W. Seal Jr. Community Center at Hancock Bank, 529 Highway 90, Waveland. The workshop begins at 9 a.m. and will conclude by 12 noon. Assistant Director of the Mississippi Humanities Council Carol Andersen, will lead the workshop, discussing the Council's mission and how our grants help achieve our mission. The workshop will cover the types of grants offered, deadlines and eligibility requirements, as well as

recordkeeping and reporting requirements after a grant is awarded. Andersen will share examples of successful grant applications, as well as unsuccessful applications, and will be available to discuss proposal ideas individually with workshop participants. To register for this free workshop, please contact the Hancock Chamber of Commerce by email: [sally@hancockchamber.org](mailto:sally@hancockchamber.org).

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## Greg Iles, John Grisham among Authors Participating in Mississippi Book Festival

The plans for the inaugural Mississippi Book Festival are well underway, and organizers were pleased to announce a final schedule that includes such notable authors as John Grisham, Greg Iles, former NEH-chair Bill Ferris, and Ellen Gilchrist among the more than 70 authors participating.



Holly Lange, Executive Director of the Mississippi Book Festival, shares, “We are thrilled that John Grisham will be joining a great group of Mississippi authors in Mississippi’s inaugural Book Festival. He has taken an active interest in the success of this event and plans on appearing at the festival throughout the day. Because Mississippi is so rich with writers, we have assembled authors from a wide range of subjects that will appeal to every Mississippian.”

The Book Festival line-up includes authors signing their books and covering topics such as history, short stories, poetry, civil rights, romance, sports & outdoors, children’s stories, biography, literary fiction, southern popular fiction, comics, and the civil war.

The festival will conclude with a panel that includes Greg Iles, an early supporter of the event. Iles’ new book, *The Bone Tree*, has received national critical acclaim.

John Evans, owner of Lemuria Books in Jackson, has been a guiding hand in the planning process. Says Evans, “Mississippi’s literary contributions have enhanced our state and national culture. Our great writers are household names; many of their stories are our stories. But before great writers put pen to paper, they were first great readers.”

The event will also celebrate the state’s independent booksellers. All of the state’s independent booksellers have been invited to participate as exhibitors, selling books and merchandise throughout the day. Additionally, self-published authors have the opportunity to participate as well.

The Mississippi Humanities Council is pleased to be a major sponsor of the event. A full listing of panels and authors can be found on the website. [www.msbookfestival.com](http://www.msbookfestival.com).

For more information, visit [www.msbookfestival.com](http://www.msbookfestival.com) or email [info@msbookfest.com](mailto:info@msbookfest.com).

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## Governor Appoints Two to Mississippi Humanities Council Board



The Mississippi Humanities Council is governed by twenty-two Mississippians who serve four-year terms as volunteers. Five are appointed by the governor and the others elected by the Council. Amile Wilson and Dr. Brian Pugh were recently appointed by Gov. Phillip Bryant to fill two open positions on the Council.

**Amile Wilson** is a Jackson native who grew up in the Belhaven and Fondren neighborhoods attending Jackson Public Schools. He graduated top of his class at Murrah High School before attending Belhaven University where he earned bachelor's degrees in philosophy and theatre. He completed additional studies in political economics at The Fund for American Studies at Georgetown University and in theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.

After college Wilson continued to work as a creative media consultant for politicians, cultural organizations and corporations, as well as managing venture capital investment projects in the entertainment industry. In 2010, he founded Hapax Creative, a media design and development firm whose clients span from Los Angeles, to New York and Washington, D.C. and include the National Bloggers Club, Siemens Electric, The Outlets Of Mississippi and many political leaders and organizations and companies. In 2013 he founded the Mississippi Aesthetic Magazine and also operates The Mississippi Attorney At Law Magazine.

His community involvement includes memberships in the Metro Jackson Chamber of Commerce and the Hinds County Republican Executive Committee. Wilson has worked with several international missions in India, Japan and Europe. He continues to regularly fill pulpits at small churches throughout rural Mississippi. He is a past board member for the Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education, Jackson Arts Collective and TALK Dance Company and continues to sit on the editorial board of the SouthEastern Theatre Conference.



**Dr. Brian Pugh** is an experienced fiscal analyst whose career has focused on public budgeting and public finance administration. Since February 2014, he has served as fiscal policy advisor for Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant, advising on all matters of fiscal policy, developing the governor's annual executive budget recommendation for Mississippi's \$6 billion general fund, working as a liaison with the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration, and consulting with the directors of state executive agencies on fiscal and budgetary matters.

Prior to joining the Governor's staff, Pugh served as a budget analyst for the Legislative Budget Office of the Mississippi Legislature for five years and was responsible for overseeing the budgets of the State of Mississippi's economic development and public safety state agencies. He has also worked with program budgets for the Stennis Center for Public Service and has conducted graduate research for the Stennis Institute of Government.

He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public policy and administration, both from Mississippi State University. In 2014, he earned his Ph. D. in public policy and administration

from Jackson State University. His doctoral dissertation explored the impact of spending stabilization rules on public budget stability and the delivery of public services. Pugh is active in the community and serves as president of the board for the Mississippi Heritage Trust and serves on the advisory board for the Mississippi State University Masters of Public Policy and Administration graduate degree program. He and his wife Dominique have a three-year old daughter, Robin.

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## MHC Announces “Hometown Teams” Host Sites

Local host sites have recently been selected for “Hometown Teams,” the next MHC-sponsored Smithsonian traveling exhibit. Congratulations are in order to The Crossroads Museum in Corinth, the Amory Regional Museum, the DSU Capps Archives and Museum in Cleveland, the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Museum in Jackson, the Historic Natchez Foundation, and the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Gulfport. The exhibit will tour the state from mid-March through the end of December of 2016. Specific times and dates will be announced this fall.



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## Prime Time Trainees to New Orleans

Five new Prime Time trainees, along with state program director David Morgan, headed to New Orleans for a one-day instructional workshop Saturday, July 11, at the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities headquarters and facilitated by LEH personnel and Prime Time veterans. The Mississippi contingency consists of storytellers, discussion leaders and local site coordinators who will be working this fall in Prime Time programs in Hattiesburg and Jackson at sites overseen by the Springboard to Opportunities, a statewide non-profit organization focusing on helping socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and families improve their quality of life.

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## Civil Rights Photo Tour Continues, With Stops in Hattiesburg, Greenwood and Jackson

“Photographs of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi (1964–1968),” a traveling exhibit of photographs taken by Jim Lucas, continues to tour the state. It is currently on exhibit at the Library of Hattiesburg, followed by appearances at the Museum of the Mississippi Delta in Greenwood beginning in late August and Millsaps College in Jackson starting in mid-October. Financial support to assist in exhibit rental and programming expenses are available through the MHC. For more information contact exhibit curator Jane Hearn at [jhearnjax513@gmail.com](mailto:jhearnjax513@gmail.com) or the Mississippi Humanities Council at 601-432-6752.



**Jim Lucas' photos are on exhibit at the Library of Hattiesburg through Aug. 18 before moving on to Greenwood. Photo by Adam Singletary.**

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## 'Capture the Spirit of Ramadan' Brings Cultural Awareness for Islam

The Mississippi Humanities Council awarded a grant to the International Museum of Muslim Cultures, located in Jackson, to bring a modern collection of beautiful photographs of Islamic art, architecture, spirituality and cultural diversity from over 60 countries to Mississippi. Entitled *Capture the Spirit of Ramadan*, the exhibition was named a top photography exhibition in 2014 after showcasing in Kuala Lumpur and London.



*Capture the Spirit of Ramadan* is a special initiative which visually captures the fusion of the Islamic world with the rest of the world aims to educate and enlighten millions of viewers around the world through the art of photography. It is an international platform for photographers to share their art while spreading a positive image of Islam. The initiative has been

recognized and praised by the White House, UNESCO, British Museum, Aga Khan Foundation, British Council and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia among others for “bridging cultures and inspiring creativity.”

Begun in 2011 by Dr. Basel Almisshal, an award-winning artist, architect and United Nations Photographic Councilman, *Capture the Spirit of Ramadan*, accepts entries from photographers around the world, from which a prestigious jury panel selects photos for the exhibit in a competition known as the International Ramadan Photography Competition. The collection has been published in the world's first and only photography book and magazine on Ramadan by StudioBasel, founder and legal custodian of the initiative, an international creative arts studio dedicated to “the development of contemporary art and design in the Arab and Muslim world by reviving and incorporating Arabic and Islamic design influences and creative elements in modern environments.”

The exhibit will be on view at the International Museum of Muslim Cultures in Jackson, 201 East Pascagoula Street, through July 31.

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

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## 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](#).

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## 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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