

Focus on the Humanities

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Director's Message: Finding the Humanities in the Mississippi Delta



A few months ago, I got a call from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Division of Challenge Grants was considering some changes to its programs, and they wanted to visit Mississippi and other under-granted states to see what sort of humanities work was being done here and how NEH might better serve them. The challenge grant program, which funds endowment and bricks-and-mortar projects, often benefits large institutions in our country's population centers. While they have supported a few Mississippi projects over the years, including the Margaret Walker Center, the Delta Blues Museum, the Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration, and the Eudora Welty House, there have been no NEH challenge grants given in Mississippi in the last decade.

As a result, Brandon Johnson, a senior program officer in the division, was planning to visit Mississippi for the first time, and wanted our help in convening "listening sessions" with humanities organizations in the state. We quickly agreed that we needed to hold some of these in Jackson, due to the prevalence of museums, universities, and other humanities organizations there. But instead of bringing him to Oxford, Starkville, or Hattiesburg, I decided to take him up to Clarksdale for a second day of meetings. I wanted Brandon to learn about the fine work being done by colleges and other humanities institutions in the Delta – places like the B.B. King Museum in Indianola, which is hoping to expand its facility to cover the last decade of the legendary bluesman's career, the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner and the Till Museum in Glendora, both of which are using one of the darkest chapters in our state's history to bring about racial reconciliation today and inspire a new generation of Delta residents to improve their communities. Quite frankly, I was proud to show off these organizations' fine work to the NEH.

It being the Delta, we got to experience plenty of Mississippi hospitality – from a leisurely lunch on the front porch of our board member Panny Mayfield’s museum-like home, to being a special guest of Mayor Bill Luckett (another MHC board member) at his Ground Zero Blues Club. Jen Waller of the Coahoma County Higher Education Center graciously hosted the meetings at the historic Cutrer Mansion. We were able to give Brandon a true Mississippi experience, and he left vowing to return one day.

In addition to being fun and informative, these two days with Brandon were also important. They offered our humanities institutions a chance to showcase their work, and gave an NEH representative an opportunity to learn

about how these vital organizations are able to serve a population living in the poorest part of the poorest state in the Union. It would be easy for the NEH to overlook a place like the Delta, which is far removed from the ivied walls of elite academic institutions or major metropolitan museums. But at the MHC, we believe that the humanities are for everyone, and our day in Clarksdale showed how important the humanities are to the future development of this culturally rich region. Our hope is that the NEH can play a small part in this progress.

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I came away from these two days of meetings further inspired by the mission of the Mississippi Humanities Council to nurture a cultural and historical legacy as rich as the Delta’s soil.

‘Literary Lawn Party’: Mississippi Book Festival Announced



Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves, left, joins Dr. Stuart Rockoff of the Mississippi Humanities Council, Ellen Ruffin, curator of de Grummond Collection at USM and Mary Margaret White of Visit Mississippi at the launch of the new Mississippi Book Festival.

the country to recognize authors and the books they produce and to celebrate reading and cultural heritage. Mississippi is home to an astounding number of writers and yet has never held a statewide

The Mississippi Humanities Council is very excited to be involved with the launching of the new Mississippi Book Festival, to be held August 22 on the grounds of the Mississippi State Capitol.

The festival will attract book lovers, writers and publishers from around the state and region and will feature author readings and presentations, panel discussions, book signings, cooking demonstrations, live music, local food, Young Adult authors, children’s activities and vendors from across the state. Festival activities will be free to the general public.

According to MHC Executive Director Stuart Rockoff, who serves on the advisory board of the festival, “Book festivals are held around

festival to connect Mississippians with local, regional, and even national authors. The Mississippi Book Festival do just that."

In conjunction with the festival, the Mississippi Library Commission and the Mississippi Center for the Book created Mississippi Reads, a project that invites readers to read a book by a Mississippi author in 2015. This year's book is "Sycamore Row" by John Grisham. The Commission will host online book discussions for book clubs, library groups and classrooms.

The festival combined with Mississippi Reads to encourage more people to read books written by fellow Mississippians, said Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves, an early supporter of the event, "The Mississippi Book Festival is an opportunity to celebrate homegrown authors and encourage reading. It will be an exciting event at our beautiful state Capitol to showcase our strong literary heritage."

Malcolm White, Director of Tourism for the Mississippi Development Authority, long an ardent proponent of a book festival, said, "Mississippi's literary legacy is well known to scholars and students of creative writing, but like our unparalleled contribution to America's music, it is time for us to claim our place in the pantheon of great American wordsmiths and experiences," White said, "Visitors and especially cultural tourists, arriving from all corners of the globe, deserve a well-organized and hospitable welcome to one of the most prolific outposts of American literature in our country. As we laud our state's tourism assets, what better way to put our very best welcome forward, than to promote our independent book stores, prepare our Literary Trail and celebrate this precious resource."

According to Board member Ellen Ruffin, Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves, Speaker Philip Gunn, and the state Legislature have joined with a dozen other public agencies, the states independent book sellers, and a private group of volunteers to launch the festival. "It is a true public-private partnership that we believe will flourish year after year as we recognize our great wealth of talented writers," remarked Ruffin. For an ongoing listing of authors and events, the website will be updated frequently.

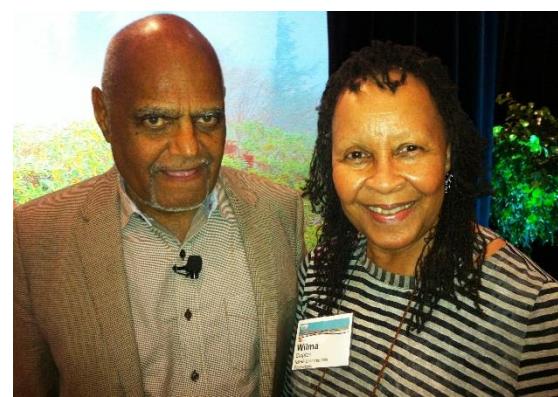
www.msbookfestival.com. For information on Mississippi Reads, visit www.MississippiReads.org.

MHC Board Member Attends 2015 America Healing Conference

By Wilma E. Mosley Clopton, Ph.D., MHC treasurer

Representing the Mississippi Humanities Council, I joined 600 other people from around the United States to attend the "2015 America Healing Conference: All Children Must Thrive" presented by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The event included compelling keynotes, informative breakouts and racial healing sessions; more importantly, it also yielded opportunities for those dedicated to change, to share ideas which are working, to get renewed, and to know that they are not in isolation as they continue to battle the leviathan known as racism.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation was founded in 1930. It is an independent, private foundation conceived by breakfast cereal pioneer Will Keith Kellogg. It is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United



Bob Moses and Wilma Mosley Clopton taking a moment to talk about the fate of Southern Christian Institute, now Bonner-Campbell College, which is listed on the 10 Most Endangered Historic Sites in Mississippi.

States. Based on his pioneering generosity, the goal of the foundation was the overarching purpose of the conference: "We believe that racial healing and racial equity are essential if we are going to accomplish our mission to support children, families and communities in creating and strengthening the conditions in which vulnerable children succeed. We actively support efforts to dismantle racial and structural inequities that limit opportunities and hold some children back."

In workshops, conference attendees had the opportunity to examine the latest concepts focused on healing relationships between law enforcement and communities of color to social psychometric analyses for the basis of group based anxiety and belonging. The general sessions showcased on stage conversations among diverse peoples of color. They shared their childhood stories of pain. These remembrances allowed us to visit America's painful and ongoing struggle with racism and the impact of persecution on a child's life.

Hearing all the stories of pain against which so many have struggled did indeed give me a moment for pause. I once again had to wrestle with the unfathomable incongruence of our purported religions' virtuosity and reality. I think I also heard a faint Rodney King lament deep within my mind.

What I do know is that, at the end of the conference, each of us walked away with renewed hope, new ideas and new friends with whom we can share this journey. When it was all said and done, it was refreshing to be reminded that we have more than a shared pain, we also have a shared hope; our similarities rather than our differences are what bind us.

Second Marston Symposium to Again Explore Race and Medicine



From left, Dr. Walter Lear, Dr. Robert Smith and Dr. J. S. "Mike" Holloman picket the American Medical Association meeting in Atlantic City, N.J., in 1963. (Photo courtesy of the Journal of the Mississippi State Medical Association)

The University of Mississippi Medical Center, with grant support from the Mississippi Humanities Council, will host a Second Robert Q. Marston Symposium on Race and Medicine June 6 in the UMMC Conference Center at the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center.

The first conference, in 2014, grew from a paper written by UMMC's Dr. Richard deShazo, Dr. Robert Smith and Leigh Skipworth, program administrator in the School of Medicine, detailing the stories of nine African-American physicians who helped mend Mississippi's ruptured society. Their article, "Black Physicians and the Struggle for Civil Rights: Lessons from the Mississippi Experience," appeared in the *American Journal of Medicine* and may be viewed [here](#). The goal of the conference is to explore ways to resolve the state's health disparities.

The 2014 session, the first of its kind in Mississippi, drew more than 150 UMMC faculty and community physicians, state health officials, medical students and community members. It explored the relationship between UMMC and the state's civil rights movement, the history of Mississippi's black physicians and health disparities between races. Attendance at last year's conference is not a prerequisite, said organizer

Dr. Rick deShazo, Billy S. Guyton Distinguished Professor and professor of medicine and pediatrics. "But we do hope to build on what we learned from that meeting," he said.

The symposium is free for UMMC physicians not seeking AMA credit, \$10 for non-UMMC physicians or \$45 for physicians seeking AMA credit. The symposium is scheduled for 8 a.m.–3 p.m. Friday June 5 in the UMMC Conference Center. Hosted by the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, the symposium will include a light breakfast and lunch. Registration is open at www.umc.edu/marston. For more information, contact Lynn Conerly at lmconerly@umc.edu.

The Family Literacy Project Marches On

After recently completing a Luciérnagas Family Reading program for the Hispanic community at St. Peter's Catholic Church and the Public Library in Oxford, another program is slated for the St. James Catholic Church in Tupelo beginning in early summer. "Since we held a successful Luciérnagas program there in 2010, we are very excited to return to St. James," said David Morgan, coordinator of the MHC's Family Literacy Programs. Partnering with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities on the Prime Time Family Reading program, the MHC is now pleased to offer a second follow-up curriculum that sites can use to continue engaging families who loved the first series of books. A follow-up Prime Time program will also begin at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center in Ocean Springs. In this case, many of the same participants from last fall's program will return to a different set of books and a curriculum focusing on Global Citizenship including sessions on Connecting across Borders, Contributing to the Greater Good, and Preserving Our Planet.



Former MHC Board Chair Receives Fulbright Scholarship



Dr. Gemma Beckley, chair and professor of social work at Rust College, has been awarded a Fulbright Scholar grant to do research in India during the 2015–2016 academic year. Beckley is the first Fulbright scholar in Rust College's history.

Beckley served on the Mississippi Humanities Council board for several years between 1994 and 2002, including terms leading the Council's long-range planning and program committees, vice chair and finally chair.

Beckley has established herself as an authority in the field of social work having worked nationally and internationally to help women and children in rural and underserved communities. This will not be her first trip to India. The National Association of Social Work NASW Pioneer Award recipient has traveled to the country several times lecturing and conducting research. She has taught at Fordham University, Grambling State University, the University of Mississippi and Wiley College and has served as senior program associate at the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C.

Approximately 1,100 U.S. faculty and professionals travelled abroad through the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program in 2014–2015. The Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program is administered by the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, a division of the Institute of International Education. The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government and is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

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](#).

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](#).

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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