

# Focus on the Humanities September 2015

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

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## Director's Message: The Humanities and Donald Trump



I quickly learned after becoming executive director that the Mississippi Humanities Council must be apolitical. That doesn't mean we ignore political issues, but rather we try to create forums in which divisive issues can be discussed in a historically informed, civil manner. We work with partners from all across the political spectrum and endeavor to show the value of the humanities to all our elected officials, be they Democrats or Republicans. Thus, I'm a little hesitant to address the issue of politics in my message, but it's been much on my mind of late. I have been a political junkie since I was in high school, and I have been following our ridiculously early 2016 presidential race quite closely. On the Republican side at least, it's been pretty entertaining.

The current front runner is Donald Trump, a celebrity tycoon whose behavior, in speeches, interviews, and over social media, has violated every piece of conventional wisdom of how someone is supposed to run for president. He has taken up all the oxygen in the room, or all the time on the nation's news programs, warping the race with his outlandish statements and his star power. Candidates much lower in the polls have desperately sought to attract press attention by attacking Trump, often in personal ways, hoping that The Donald responds in kind during one of his late night twitter storms. He usually does,

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*The world is a complicated place, and the challenges we face as a society have no simple solutions, especially in a polarized political climate. Anyone claiming that they can easily solve such issues as immigration and the Middle East is not telling us the truth. An informed and engaged citizenry would see through such claims.*

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which becomes yet another titillating press story. So far, the race is more like a pro wrestling or reality TV show than a serious debate about the crucial issues we face as a country.

We can blame the media if we like, but doing so overlooks an uncomfortable truth: the press is simply following the audience. Trump's shenanigans are a ratings bonanza. In a free market system, we get the news that we deserve. I'm not pointing the finger at others—I love to follow the circus as much as anyone. (And if you're reading this because of our headline, perhaps you do, too.) But I have been thinking about how the race reflects the decay of our civic life. Our culture's fascination with celebrity often crowds out more substantive voices, and the health of our democracy suffers. A populace well-schooled on the issues and history would not be drawn in by the simplistic, vague ideas presented by the front runner. The world is a complicated place, and the challenges we face as a society have no simple solutions, especially in a polarized political climate. Anyone claiming they can easily solve such issues as immigration and the Middle East is not telling us the truth. An informed and engaged citizenry would see through such claims.

There has also been decay in our political discourse. One need only follow the Twitter feeds of some of the candidates to see this. Most of us can agree that attacking the physical appearance of one's opponent or calling them a "loser" is not civil. A healthy democratic republic requires civil discourse, in which political opponents listen to and respect their opponents' views. They don't have to agree, but they have to accept the legitimacy of the other side and be willing to compromise. This is often a real challenge for people on both sides of the political spectrum.

We at the Mississippi Humanities Council feel strongly that this weakening of our civic life is a crucial matter for all of us. Promoting a greater understanding of our history and encouraging civil discourse are central pillars of our mission and guide the sorts of programs we develop and fund. No matter the politics, we are committed to being a beacon of reason, critical thought, and civility in a culture that is too often anything but. The Mississippi Humanities Council has an important role to play on this issue, and I encourage you to support us in this work.

*Stuart Rockoff*  
*Executive Director*

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## Humanities Teacher Awardees Present Lectures Throughout Mississippi



**Ebony Lumumba, 2014 Tougaloo College Humanities Teacher Award recipient, lectures on racial ventriloquism in modern literature.**

Each year during the months of October (National Arts and Humanities Month) and November, the Mississippi Humanities Council recognizes the contributions of humanities educators at each of the state's colleges and universities through its Humanities Teacher Award program. Each nominee receives a cash prize and is asked to prepare and deliver a public lecture on a humanities subject during the month of October or November. These programs—totaling more than 30 in all—take place throughout the state and offer Mississippians a unique experience to hear free lectures on a wide range of humanities subjects. Check our [website](#) soon for a full list of program titles and dates.

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## Inaugural Mississippi Book Festival a Big Hit

Last month, book lovers gathered at the State Capitol en masse to celebrate the first Mississippi Book Festival. The event was a tremendous success, with most every seat in each panel filled. The keynote conversation between *Clarion-Ledger* reporter Jerry Mitchell, former NEH Chairman William Ferris, and John Grisham drew 800 people to Galloway Church's main sanctuary. Next year, festival organizers promise to expand the number of panels and rooms to meet this overwhelming demand.



**Mississippi author John Grisham opens the first Mississippi Book Festival on the Capitol steps.**

The Mississippi Humanities Council sponsored five different sessions, including ones on the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, History & Biography, the writers Eudora Welty and Margaret Walker Alexander, and fiction that crosses literary borders. Three of these were broadcast live on CSPAN, as part of their "Book TV" series. MHC staff also took part in the "literary lawn party," hosting an informational table outside the Capitol alongside other cultural organizations.

The MHC was proud to be a sponsor of the 2015 Mississippi Book Festival, and looks forward to next year's event, which will be August 20th.

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## Nominations Invited for 2016 Humanities Awards

The Mississippi Humanities Council invites nominations for its 2016 Public Humanities Achievement Awards, which honor outstanding contributions in the arena of public humanities. Nominations will be accepted for Humanities Scholar Award, Humanities Partner Award, Humanities Educator Award, and Preserver of Mississippi Culture.

The Council began giving Achievement Awards in 1993 to recognize people and organizations who have supported the Council's work through public programs across the state or who have made a significant contribution to the public humanities in Mississippi. All Mississippians are invited to make nominations for these awards.

All winners will be recognized at the annual Public Humanities Awards event to be held Friday, Feb. 12, 2016, at the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson. Nomination forms for Public Humanities Achievement Awards are available on the Mississippi Humanities Council [website](#). For more information call 601-432-6752.

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## Preparations Under Way for Arrival of Smithsonian Exhibit in Mississippi



Coming to Mississippi in 2016: Hometown Teams, a traveling Smithsonian Exhibit examining how sports have reflect the trials and triumphs of the American experience and have helped shape our national character. (Rendering courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Exhibits)

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## MHC Small Grants Explore War, School Integration, the Blues and More

So far this year, the Mississippi Humanities Council has awarded 20 small grants (up to \$2,000) to organizations throughout the state for public programming exploring war, religious culture, school integration, race and health, sports history and more. Small grants awarded so far in 2016 include:

- The Art of War (*Mississippi Museum of Art*)
- Porter Fortune Jr. Symposium on Southern Religious Culture and History (*University of Mississippi*)
- Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Integration of Schools in Drew, MS (*Jackson State University*)
- Carthage Boys and Girls Club Music Informances (*Oprah Winfrey Boys & Girls Club of Kosciusko/Attala County*)
- 13th Annual Petal Southern Miss Powwow (*University of Southern Mississippi*)
- Mississippi World War II Veterans Oral History Project (*Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9573*)
- 2015 Sammy O. Cranford Memorial History Lecture (*Delta State University*)
- Yazoo Revisited: A Film Screening at Crossroads Film Festival (*Crossroads Film Festival*)
- 45th Recollection and Commemoration of Gibbs–Green (*Jackson State University*)
- The Second Marston Symposium on Race and Health (*University of Mississippi Medical Center*)
- Tougaloo Art Colony 2015: The Meeting of Modern and Post Modern Styles (*Tougaloo College*)
- Sports in American History "Sports Talk" (*Carnegie Public Library of Clarksdale*)
- Mississippi Blues Trail Teacher Workshop (*Delta Blues Museum*)

- 14th Annual Tennessee Williams Tribute & Tour of Victorian Homes: Table Talk and Scholars Panel (*Tennessee Williams Tribute*)
- Hispanic Heritage Series (*University of Mississippi*)
- Community Forum: "A Shaky Truce"—Civil Rights Struggles in Starkville, Mississippi, 1960–1980 (*Mississippi State University*)
- Philosophical Fridays (*University of Southern Mississippi*)
- The Photographer as Participant Observer (*University of Southern Mississippi*)
- Race and Moral Leadership in the U.S. Judicial System (*University of Mississippi*)

Applications for small grants to support free, public humanities programs that examine the human experience are accepted year-round by the Mississippi Humanities Council. Applications must be received a minimum of eight weeks before a funded event takes place. For application guidelines and forms, please visit the Mississippi Humanities Council [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.



### Disclaimer

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