



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

Spring | Summer 2022

Culture | Issues | Ideas



CODE



**CAROLINE LOWERY**

Executive Director  
caroline@okhumanities.org

**PERSPECTIVE**  
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Many of you know we connect Oklahomans in all 77 counties to the humanities through our free programs: the curious reader to our dynamic book club, *Let's Talk About It*; the podcast-preferring undergrad to *BrainBox* episodes exploring current events; the teacher to accessible and engaging content in *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine; and the small-town resident to the Smithsonian through *Museum on Main Street*.

But did you know we are also the nonprofit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)? The NEH is one of two independent agencies created in 1965 when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act into law, affirming the country's investment in the arts and humanities at a time when science dominated American initiative.

In 1971, we joined five other states in an NEH pilot program that established a grassroots network to ensure federal funding reached communities most at need. The pilot was so successful that there are now 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils across the country. More than fifty years later, we continue to shepherd funds from the nation's capital directly to Oklahoma neighborhoods.

Oklahoma Humanities annually awards over a quarter-million dollars in federal grants to cultural organizations at the local level—places like your favorite library, the county historical society, large and small museums, and more—in rural areas as well as urban. Our recent allocation of American Rescue grants (see p. 47 for details) is a great example of the breadth and impact of this work.

We are proud to have this legacy of responsible federal grant management, equitable funding distribution, engaging public programs, and support for humanities scholarship. Our work and success is made possible not only through our partnership with the NEH, but with nonprofits statewide, generous foundations, individual donors, and engaged citizens. Together, we connect Oklahomans to cultural programming, important conversations, and to each other.



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**ON THE COVER:** Maud Stevens Wagner (1877-1961), the first known female tattoo artist in the U.S. Photo by The Plaza Gallery, Los Angeles, c. 1907. Library of Congress.

LEFT: Detail, *Daughter in a Rocker* (1917-1918), Henry Lyman Sayen. Smithsonian American Art Museum [PD] rawpixel.com

Reader Feedback



I wanted to send along a quick note to congratulate you all on the CROSSROADS Fall/Winter 2021 issue of *Oklahoma Humanities*. It was wonderful to see so many luminaries-as-creative-writers in the issue—Joy Harjo, Ken Hada, Michael Wallis—but also such enlightening (and sobering) pieces as John Truden’s article on Lake Thunderbird. Keep up the great work!

—Daniel Simon, Assistant Director & Editor in Chief, *World Literature Today*

The CROSSROADS issue lit my fire. “Misreading Crossroads” by Ken Hada was challenging. Choices are the foundation of what I think it means to be a human being. I appreciated his neutrality in choosing. Then I read “Oklahoma—A Sense of Place” by Michael Wallis. What sensitivity, insight, and storytelling. I share some of his feelings, but I have never read anyone who put it into words so beautifully. Great choices.

—Gary Detrich, Cushing

Your magazine is very interesting to an old Social Studies/History teacher. I enjoy it very much.

—Loren Clayton Simms, Norman

I wanted to say, the magazine is terrific! Good job! I look forward to the next one.

—Rita McGinnis, via email

John Truden’s article on “The Absentee Shawnees and the True Story of Lake Thunderbird” in your CROSSROADS issue is very informative. Our great-grandfather, Hershel Barrett, crossed into Indian Territory in 1873 and found refuge at Big Jim Crossing, known today as Little Axe. In 1927 he was interviewed by OU students and his account affirms John Truden’s story about the Absentee Shawnees.

“I drove out here to Oklahoma and got to Big Jim Crossing,” great-grandfather Barrett stated. “Big Jim was an Indian chief who would not take allotments.” Hershel Barrett made the Oklahoma Land Run and established an 80-acre farm in eastern Pottawatomie County, south of present day Earlsboro. “The people were lined up there just as far as you could see them,” he told the OU student interviewers about the land run. “I had to pick cotton to get money to file my claim.” Great-grandfather Barrett died in 1943 at the age of 91.

Thank you, *Oklahoma Humanities*, and author John Truden for this story. History is very important, and our family history helps define who we are. Maybe we can influence more people to use the great resources of the Western History Collections at OU to learn about ourselves, our state, and nation.

—Jon Barrett, Norman

[Editor’s note: The transcript of Hershel Barrett’s oral interview is held in The Frank Phillips Collection within the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma and is filed as: “Frontier Experiences of Hershel Barrett, recounting Barrett’s participation in the Oklahoma land run of 1889 and subsequent life in Earlsboro, Oklahoma Territory.” *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is delighted that our readers find meaningful connections, like the Barrett family did, through our content.]

Thank you so much for the CROSSROADS magazine issue. I loved the content. It’s so engaging. You do such important and meaningful work for your readers and for all of us by publishing your magazine. Thank you for giving me the chance to be a part of it.

—Artist Natasha Mylius, Round Rock, TX

THANK YOU!

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FORMER OH BOARD MEMBER RECEIVES NEH FELLOWSHIP



STACY TAKACS, PHD, former Oklahoma Humanities Board of Trustees member and Professor of American Studies at Oklahoma State University, has received a \$35,000 Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund her project, *‘We Bring You Home’: The American Forces Network and US Militarism Post-WWII*. The prestigious Fellowship will fund research and writing culminating in a book that expounds on a topic Takacs recently explored in the Fall/Winter CITIZEN 2020 issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine.

With an average applicant success rate of only 16%, NEH grants are highly competitive and applications undergo rigorous review. Each year, more than 200 panels of diverse, outside scholars assess approximately 5,700 projects across 40 grant programs, ultimately advising NEH on their overall quality, scholarship, and potential impact. Fellowships are granted to scholars pursuing projects that embody exceptional research, analysis, and clear writing. When asked about this noteworthy award, Takacs noted:

What an honor—and surprise—it is to receive an NEH fellowship! The grant will provide the time and space I need to complete my book project about the American Forces Network, and it really couldn’t come at a more opportune moment. I’d like to thank editor Carla Walker for giving me the opportunity to write the *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine article that served as my writing sample for the fellowship application.

Takacs has authored two books, *Terrorism TV: Popular Entertainment in Post-9/11 America* (University Press of Kansas, 2012) and *Interrogating Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2014), and is co-editor of *American Militarism on the Small Screen* (Routledge, 2016) and a new series from University Press of Kansas called “War on Screen.”

Read Takacs’ Fellowship-winning article, “Educating the Troops: Shaping Consensus with ‘Democratic Propaganda,’” in the CITIZEN 2020 issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine: okhumanities.org/programs/magazine



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

## THE EDITOR'S DESK

CARLA WALKER  
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Let's establish this up front: I'm way out of my field here. First, about Morse Code—the series of short and long characters devised by Samuel Morse in the 1830s to telegraph messages as far as you could string electric wires. Most of us have seen the characters written as dots and dashes, but they are conventionally *spoken* as dits and dahs.

I know even less about modern radio, where the dits and dahs are translated into language. Somewhere in the ether there are waves and frequencies and regulations to control how and what you communicate, depending on what kind of license you hold.

Someone near and dear to me holds an Amateur Radio (or ham radio) License. And he did it the old-fashioned way, back when you had to know and pass a test on Morse Code to obtain an operator's license from the Federal Communications Commission. Yes, *that* FCC, which still regulates a vast spectrum of communications.

In Morse Code, just to transmit the vowels of the English alphabet one would tap out or say: dit-dah (a), dit (e), dit-dit (i), dah-dah-dah (o), dit-dit-dah (u). Imagine memorizing the other 21 letters, *and* 10 numbers, and the concentration it would take to string them together to form words and sentences!

Although ham radio operators are no longer required to know Morse Code, its music still floats over the airways, generated by folks young and old who learn and practice it. Whether they know Morse or not, ham operators speak in their own

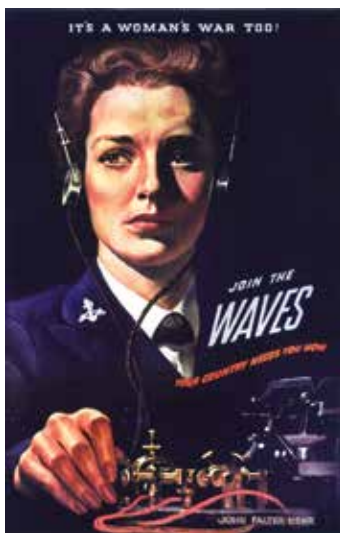
kind of code, with combinations of letters and numbers to identify each other (their individual call signs) or to see if someone wants to chat. They call, "CQ, CQ . . ." which roughly translates to, "Is anyone out there?"

These so-called "amateur" radio enthusiasts thrive on communication *outside* the obvious paths of cell phone, email, and social media. If an earthquake or tsunami or nuclear incident knocks out all other communication systems, ham operators can—and do—connect people and information. With signals that translate to letters and numbers, they can communicate with people around the world. All you have to know is the lingo, the code.

Codes (Morse Code, DNA sequencing, security systems, transmitter signals, computer algorithms) are like languages, keys that lock or *unlock* our connection to information—and to each other: War and peace. Blood and biology. Organization and chaos. Art and graffiti. Imagine all we could know if we studied the code of just those few pathways.

Code = secret = conflict = them, not us.  
Code = education = inclusion = all of us.

Code shapes who we are, where we've come from, and where we're going. *Decoding* can start with the turn of a page. In our take on CODE, you'll find monsters and librarians, tribal art and tattoos, authors and inventors and the architectural code of Main Street. Tap me a line about what you discover. My call sign is: carla@okhumanities.org. CQ, CQ . . . Is anyone out there?



It's a woman's war too! Join the WAVES. Your country needs you now. This woman operates a telegraph key, sending a message from the code room of the Radio School at Madison, Wisconsin. The Navy ran a school for radio personnel beginning in 1942 and used this painting to print 40,000 posters, 71,000 window cards, and 57,000 car cards to recruit women for service during WWII. Art by John Philip Falter, c. 1942. Library of Congress



Bela Lugosi, Dracula, Universal Pictures (doctormacro.com)

# ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN



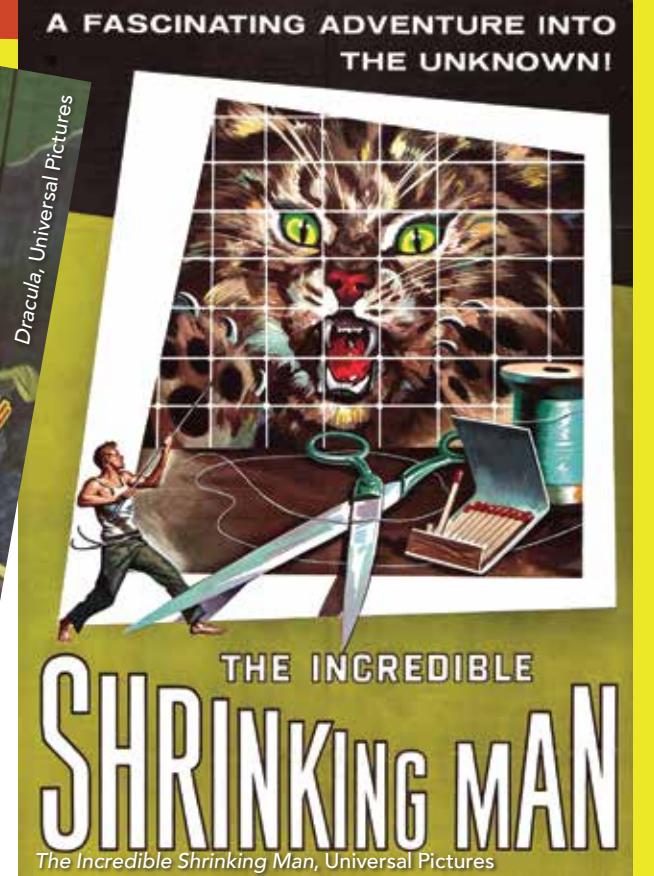
Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman, Allied Artists

## SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES.

A long tradition of mythology and fairytales precede and succeed William Shakespeare's imaginings of witches, madness, and murder. From Marvel Comics to sci-fi films, from video games to the latest pulp fiction, all manner of monsters populate modern pop culture, fascinating us with tales most fiendish and foul.

And there is method to the madness. Monsters are good stand-ins for underlying political issues and social fears that are seemingly too difficult to confront. These imaginary predators help us "put a face on" the scariest of social ills, the problems we cannot solve, and the puzzling human interactions we do not understand. There's so much more there, just below the surface. All you have to do is look.

The great Stephen King was on to something when he argued in "What's Scary: A Forenote to the 2010 Edition" of his commentary *Danse Macabre*: "We take refuge in make-believe terrors so the real ones don't overwhelm us, freezing us in place and making it impossible for us to function in our day-to-day lives." From a psychological perspective, fictional horror is a safe environment for us to work through our fears. It's a money-making formula. In films alone there are over 33,000 horror-genre features listed on the Internet Movie Database, and that number is growing.



### VAMPS AND VAMPIRES: RISKS AND REWARDS OF EXPLORING TABOO

None of us really changes over time;  
we only become more fully what we are.

—Lestat, *The Queen of the Damned* by Anne Rice

The overarching symbolism of vampires is that one group is living off or taking advantage of another. Dracula lives forever so long as he's partaking in living blood. Anne Rice's vampires continue to stay young as they feed on other humans.

The symbolism of vampires is about more than avoiding mirrors and drinking blood. Despite Bram Stoker's insistence to the contrary, vampires can be code for sex. His 1897 novel *Dracula* has been repeatedly studied as symbolism for that taboo topic. Stephen King refers to *Dracula* as a "frankly palpating melodrama" meant to fly under the radar of your average Victorian prude. Alan Ball, creator of the show *True Blood*, opined in a "Fresh Air with Terry Gross" interview that Stoker's tale was about sexual surrender.

In *The Monster Show*, film historian David J. Skal outlines how the image of vampires has changed drastically over time. When Bela Lugosi took up the cape for Broadway, Dracula and vampires became darkly beautiful instead of ghoulish. Tod Browning's 1931 movie, starring Lugosi, forever etched the beautiful but brooding foreigner idea of Dracula into our collective consciousness.

This beautification of vampires has continued as we publicly use the fantasy to deal with changing ideas about sexuality. Author Anne Rice's blockbuster *Vampire Chronicles*, beginning with the novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), were popular during the 1980s and 1990s when American society was coming to grips with homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic. The books and later films had beautiful young men living together in vampire families. As homosexuality became more socially acceptable, the stage was set for *True Blood*, HBO's multiyear drama series about vampires literally "coming out of the coffin." Thanks to the invention of synthetic blood, the



Superman, Columbia Pictures (doctormacro.com)



I Was a Teenage Werewolf, American International Pictures

storyline goes, vampires are no longer confined to night stalking for victims, they are freed to interact with society at large.

The *Twilight* phenomenon, with books and film adaptations released from 2005 through 2012, came directly on the heels of a nationwide switch to abstinence-only sex education. When teenage sexuality became stigmatized, the protagonist vampire Edward was a wish fulfilled as the boy who would love you forever and never push you into premarital sex.

In some monster movies, women cease being victims and take back their power in a male-dominated world. In the mid-nineteenth century, women who kept the American economy afloat by going to work during WWII were finding it harder to feel meaningful when they returned to being homemakers. By the 1950s, the daughters who had watched their mothers blossom while doing war work were questioning what they wanted to do with their lives. While the debate progressed, Jack Arnold directed *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), the story of a man who quite literally shrinks out of existence after exposure to radiation and pesticide. Soon after, Nathan Hertz directed *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* (1958) about a woman who grows to a giant after encountering an alien. Whether they meant to or not, both filmmakers tapped into public consciousness during the early rumblings of the modern feminist movement.

#### SHAPESHIFTERS, WEREWOLVES, AND TEENAGE HORMONES

Lucius didn't believe in werewolves. He said that people were too horrible for any other monsters to exist, which he thought was a shame.—Narrator, *Human Debris* by Rasmenia Massoud

As John Geddes said in *A Familiar Rain*, “We fear monsters because we fear the dark parts of ourselves.” Shapeshifting stories are code for the duality of human existence: struggling for compromise between our good and bad inclinations, or what we show to the world versus what we secretly keep to ourselves. Adolescence is especially tricky as we learn to balance these different sides of our selves. Adolescents are sometimes treated as adults and other times as children with brains and personalities that haven't fully developed. It's no wonder this is a difficult time as young people navigate new roles and responsibilities.

Werewolves are frequently code for teenage angst and flaring hormones. In Gene Fowler Jr.'s film *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), a juvenile delinquent undergoes an experimental therapy that backfires and turns him from moody teen to full-blown werewolf. In Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), our female shapeshifter doesn't grow full-body hair but, instead, goes on a blood-soaked, telekinetic murder spree at prom.

Adults have trying times, too, shapeshifting from model employee to fun-loving friend. Stan Lee created Marvel Comics'

*The Incredible Hulk* with artist Jack Kirby in 1962 because he was tired of writing superheroes. His response to his publisher's request for a new hero: “How about a good monster?” The storyline has shy, intelligent physicist Dr. Bruce Banner change into the powerfully muscular (if not terribly smart) Hulk when he's emotionally stressed. Lee once told *Rolling Stone* magazine that *The Hulk's* appeal was that audiences believed, “This could be me. We all lose our temper, we all get angry, and sometimes you wanna reach out and smash something.” In a DC Comics classic, Bruce Wayne shapeshifts into Batman to foil would-be criminals. It may seem less magical to don a cape, but it's a werewolf-like transformation by the light of the moon nonetheless.

One of the most famous shapeshifting stories of all time is Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The plot follows Jekyll's quest to “indulge his vices” without getting caught. He creates a serum that physically changes him into a different man—Mr. Hyde, who can do whatever he wants—then uses another serum to turn back into Dr. Jekyll before the consequences of Hyde's actions can catch up to him. Jekyll needs more and more serum to affect the transformation until he permanently defaults to Mr. Hyde.

#### ZOMBIES AND ALIENS: CONFRONTING “THE OTHER”

We never see other people anyway, only the monsters we make of them.—Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*

As social institutions undergo rapid change and we realize that what holds society together is fairly tenuous, we become apocalypse obsessed—and the aftermath definitely includes zombies! The website *All That's Interesting* tells us that there are now zombie-proof houses. In 2011, the CDC used zombies in a creative outreach to young people to encourage emergency preparedness. In a U.S. Public Health article, Drs. Marjorie Kruvand and Fred Bryant reported that the CDC's tongue-in-cheek blog post “attracted so many viewers that it crashed one of the agency's web servers, went viral, and generated extensive media coverage.”

Even the U.S. Department of Defense saw the usefulness of planning for zombies with a training exercise named CONPLAN 8888. No, the Pentagon doesn't expect to be overrun by “Evil Magic Zombies.” DOD wonks just found it easier to refer to “zombies” attacking rather than naming countries. The key here is that (much like the word “alien”) references to “zombies” have become synonymous with “The Other.”



Collage image by Dev (unsplash.com). Batman, DC Comics, Spring 1940, no.1 [PD] Wikimedia. | Beware, Trojan Publishing, July 1954, no. 10 [PD] Wikimedia.



Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner, *Star Trek*, NBC Television



Michael Rennie, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Studios (doctormacro.com)



Incredible Hulk sculpture, Mexico City, by Eneas De Troya (CC BY 2.0/Flickr)



A zombie cult following began around 2011, the same year Baby Boomers started to reach age 65, a time when we confront our own mortality. Matthias Hoene's *Cockneys vs Zombies* (2012) intentionally juxtaposes aging adults with slow-moving zombies. It demonstrates our common fear of losing autonomy or literally losing our minds to dementia and old age. Don Coscarelli's underground cult hit *Bubba Ho-Tep* (2002) has Bruce Campbell playing Elvis Presley living in a modern-day nursing home where a zombie-like mummy is feeding on the residents. Maintaining a normal life among the ensuing chaos is a recurring theme in zombie stories. It is no coincidence that the tagline for the long-running AMC television show *The Walking Dead* is "Fight the dead. Fear the living."

Space aliens, too, are code for foreign-ness or other-ness. Where zombies are mindless, aliens are intelligent—and the social prompts for alien outsiders have varied by historical period. The 1950s era was a golden age of sci-fi movies with aliens as expressions of Cold War xenophobia and an obsession with the space race. Fear of nuclear weapons plus rabid McCarthyism created a veritable stew of fear, a ripe atmosphere for creating horror pictures.

Don Siegel denied making a political allegory when he filmed *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), but it was a hit with critics and the larger public because political undertones crept into the story unintentionally. In the film, a doctor has several patients who claim their family members aren't real. Later, we discover that alien pods are duplicating then taking over humans. The movie's portrayal of alien life as emotionless clones sounded like communism to 1950s Americans. When the hero shouts, "They're here already! You're next!" it was widely accepted that "they" was code for communists infiltrating the U.S.

Even in plotlines where aliens are kind, they are met as "the other," a threat to human existence. Robert Wise's 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is told from the alien Klaatu's point of view. His trip to planet Earth is intended to teach humanity how to use nuclear power responsibly, but his efforts are met with violence and distrust. He leaves with a warning: Be careful of nuclear power because your galactic neighbors will view you as a threat to the peace of the solar system. Americans had complex feelings about nuclear power. Yes, the nuclear bomb was credited with ending WWII for the U.S., but when the USSR acquired that power, mutual destruction seemed likely.

Influenced by modern-day multiculturalism, aliens are sometimes commentary on how *similar* we are as global citizens. "They," the others, are just like us, with only trivial differences. Take the multiple reboots of *Superman*. It's a running joke in DC Comics that Batman refers to Superman as the "big blue Boy Scout." Clark Kent is the perfectly assimilated alien

working to protect his new home for the benefit of mankind. Or look at the ground-breaking diversity in Gene Roddenberry's original *Star Trek* cast. It's easy to forget today how rare it was in 1966 television to see Japanese-American George Takei or African-American Nichelle Nichols working on the bridge of the *USS Enterprise*, and without negative stereotypes.

Still, we can't resist the scariest of space monsters just for the sake of being terrified out of our wits. Case in point: The eponymous *Alien* in Ridley Scott's 1979 classic, and heroine Ellen Ripley portrayed by Sigourney Weaver, have been satisfying audiences and mesmerizing scholars for more than four decades. Writing for *The Independent*, critic Ed Cumming deems *Alien* the best of the genre. "Despite many imitators," Cumming said, "the original is still the most gripping sci-fi horror ever made."

### SCIENCE OR HUMANITY? THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

Yeah, yeah, but your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they *could* that they didn't stop to think if they *should*.  
—Dr. Ian Malcolm, portrayed by Jeff Goldblum in *Jurassic Park* (1993)

New technology and scientific advances can make life-changing improvements in our lives; still, we worry about long-term outcomes we cannot foresee. Science itself is on trial in modern American society, as it has been for centuries. Are we playing God when we intervene to save lives? Will technology backfire and one day doom us all? Movies and literature are filled with these anxieties.

Think of all the science-run-amok plotlines where good people with the best intentions tinker with established protocols and then fail to control the consequences: *Jurassic Park*, *Godzilla*, *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*. All these modern blockbusters owe their horror pedigree to a teenage girl: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.

Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), follows young Frankenstein as a medical student who thinks he can create a better human. Using chemistry, Dr. Frankenstein creates a large human-like creature but finds him frightening and runs away. The creature escapes and lashes out when people react badly to his ugliness, then eventually finds and kills Frankenstein. The creature may be out of control, but the underlying message is that the real monster is his creator. Dr. Frankenstein should have known better than to second-guess God/The Universe/The Status Quo in an attempt to improve on humanity. The sin is ultimately one of pride.

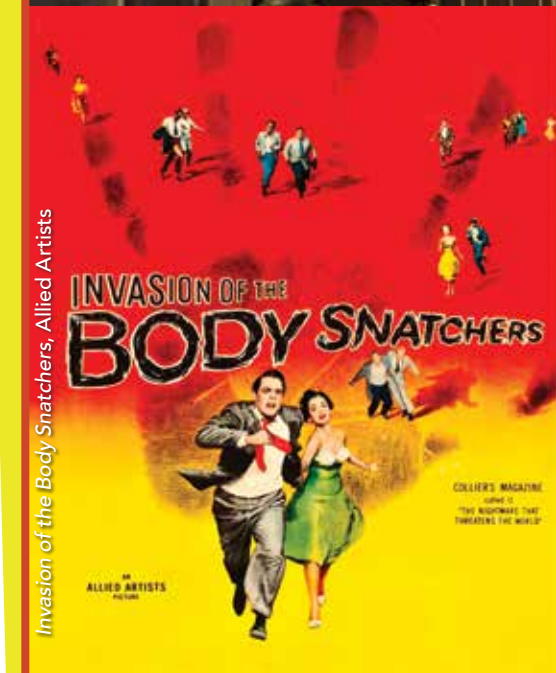
Storylines where humans create something intended to be helpful only to have it take over is code for our fear of technology and science. The form of the science in these stories changes



Frankenstein, Universal Pictures



Godzilla, art by Noger Chen (CC BY 2.0/Flickr)



Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Allied Artists

as society advances. In Shelley's novel, it was chemistry that created the monster. When James Whale updated the story in his film *Frankenstein* (1931), Boris Karloff played the shuffling mute brought to life by electricity. In 1985, John Hughes further updated the premise in the film *Weird Science*, where computers create the monster, this time in the form of a beautiful woman.

Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) and its many sequels (comics, video games, and ironically a theme park) spell doom with genetically cloned dinosaurs. The wealthy character Hammond wants to de-extinct animals and plant life from another epoch; more importantly, he wants to make money by showcasing them in a theme park. Between a disgruntled employee's sabotage and a scientific mistake, the dinosaurs wreak havoc. The hubris is Hammond's for believing his scientists are infallible. Interestingly, since Michael Crichton first wrote the source novel, advances in genetics make the science fiction more plausible. Geneticists and biologists have been talking with conservationists and ethicists about whether de-extinction is possible and, if so, when it would be appropriate.

*Godzilla*, or *Gojira*, the undisputed king of the "big bug" films, was directed in 1954 by Ishirō Honda. The original premise was that nuclear bomb tests around Japan awoke the ancient creature from its sleep under the ocean. Even the film's producer Tomoyuki Tanaka talked about how the film symbolized nuclear warfare: "Mankind had created the bomb, and now nature was going to take revenge on mankind." As Japanese filmmakers, they intentionally gave *Godzilla* atomic-bomb-like destructive powers to reflect the WWII bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Robot films, where an android or human-like robot has to fight for a place in the world, typically ask questions about the nature of humanity. Androids in Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) are so complex and lifelike it is difficult to tell who is a "replicant" and who is a human. Ridley Scott adapted the book for *Blade Runner* (1982) where the film questions: What is it to be human? Should we limit advancing science to maintain control? The main character Deckard, played by Harrison Ford, increasingly questions his own humanity as he tracks down and destroys runaway replicants.

If *Blade Runner* asks how we know we have a soul, *The Matrix* asks how we know if we really exist. In *The Matrix* franchise (including the original 1999 film, two 2003 sequels, a 2021 film, plus comics and video games),

the Wachowski sisters as directors create a world where smart machines and humans once fought a war and humanity lost. To get humans to accept slavery, they are plugged into *The Matrix*, a simulation of life at the end of the twentieth century. As the films progress, a band of humans unplug and try to fight back against the machines. *The Matrix* questions what is real and who controls our reality.

#### EMBRACING OUR MONSTERS: THE POWER OF PERSPECTIVE

Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels.—Francisco de Goya

The stories we experience in literature and film can tell us a lot about how we feel as a society—if we are willing to unmask the fiction and decode its symbolism. Monsters are popular because they speak to our fears, fears that are sometimes learned or involve socially constructed taboos. And they can be instructive if they make us think about the consequences or possibilities of advancing the human race. The lessons can be profound: When we "other" a group, we make them outsiders. Fear and ignorance crowd out understanding, so the problem becomes *us*. If we actively engage with fictional monsters—whether pop culture movies, literature, or television—they just might leave us with new perspectives and less fearful of the unknown.

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#### EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "On the Victorian Science and Prejudices Behind Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," Vidya Krishnan, Feb. 18, 2022, Literary Hub. Krishnan looks at nineteenth-century concerns about the spread of disease and Stoker's references to the emerging science of the time. [lithub.com](https://lithub.com)
- Read the e-book versions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on the Project Gutenberg website. [gutenberg.org](https://www.gutenberg.org)
- *Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic*, Maggie Silver, 2011. Enjoy the CDC.gov zombie-starring comic book about emergency preparedness, including a checklist to make your own emergency kit. [stacks.cdc.gov](https://stacks.cdc.gov)
- Watch Columbia's 1948 *Superman* serial in its entirety on doctormacro.com. [bit.ly/3t36z8s](https://bit.ly/3t36z8s)

Samuel Finley Breese Morse was an artist, inventor, and would-be-politician. While there was much to admire about his legacy and accomplishments, there was also much to condemn and deplore. Reading his biography, one might think (or even wish) that there were actually several different Morses.

One was an inventor who helped bring telegraph technology and the earliest forms of electronic communication into broad usage in the U.S. and eventually abroad. Another was a romantic portraitist who studied abroad and arrived in Greenwich Village to become the first professor of painting in America at New York University, where he lived and painted at 100 Washington Square East. Yet another, more troubling Morse, shared and promoted many of the all-too-common nativist and racist sentiments of his time, seeking to become Mayor of New York on anti-immigrant and anti-Roman Catholic platforms in 1836, and arguing in his writings in the 1850s and 60s for the moral basis for slavery.

But these were all the same Morse, and while he was much less successful in the latter endeavors than he was in the former ones (he earned only 1,496 votes in his Mayoral run), they are all part of the complicated, sometimes-inspiring, and sometimes-repugnant legacy of our one-time neighbor.—Village Preservation, New York, NY. [villagepreservation.org](https://villagepreservation.org)



Sam. F. B. Morse.

*A brilliant artist and inventor with a complicated, troubling history*

*Self-Portrait*, 1812, Samuel F. B. Morse, oil on millboard, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Samuel F. B. Morse signature, Heritage Art Galleries [PD] Wikimedia





## The Would-Be Artistic Ambassador

As president of the National Academy of Design, Morse set out to advocate for artists' rights and, in 1826, lectured at the New York Athenaeum, calling for the cultivation and broad appreciation for art among American society. A three-year tour studying and copying masterworks in European museums inspired Morse to transport an educated sense of culture to his own budding country. The result is this large-scale pictorial reference to the old masters, perhaps the most ambitious work of his artistic career.

Depicted is the Salon Carré, hung with forty-one artworks from the collections of the Louvre, Paris. According to the Terra Foundation, which holds the painting, "The image goes beyond mere documentation of the Louvre's collection to advocate an important role for art museums in a democratic society. In showcasing the importance of learning from the great art of the past, *Gallery of the Louvre* implies that Americans could build on and perhaps surpass those achievements."

Though admired by the elite upon his return to New York in 1832, the grand painting gained no traction among average citizens. He further failed in his attempt to persuade Congress to commission him for a new mural work in the Capitol Rotunda. Morse despaired ever achieving national recognition as an artist and, in 1837, ceased painting altogether. It was then that he embraced an increasing interest in science and technology and spent the last decades of his life as an inventor and entrepreneur.

*Gallery of the Louvre*, 1831–33, Samuel F. B. Morse, oil on canvas, 73 ¾ x 108 in. (187.3 x 274.3 cm), Terra Foundation for American Art, 1992.51. [PD] Wikimedia

Born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1791, the son of a minister, Samuel F. B. Morse would come to typify a certain type of hard-driving, aggressive American of the early nineteenth century. A graduate of Yale who trained as an artist in England, he brought tenacity and determination to everything he attempted, combining hard work with an unquenchable desire to succeed greatly in some field. For the first half of his life, Morse believed his success would be found in producing great art. When circumstances seemed repeatedly to prove him wrong, he was willing to switch gears and try new ventures.

### The Many Sides of Morse: Artist, Photographer, Professor, Politician

Long before his interest turned to telegraphy, Morse intended to be an artist. Although his father had other plans, the young Morse showed enough artistic promise for his father to send him abroad to study painting after he graduated from Yale University in 1810. He proved to be an apt student at the Royal Academy of Arts, receiving critical acclaim for an exhibition of his work at the Academy and winning a gold medal at another British exhibition.

Returning home in 1815, Morse hoped to translate his foreign success into domestic achievement. In this he was disappointed. The problem was not a lack of talent, for Morse showed great promise as a painter, but probably the fact that he offered Americans grand paintings with historical themes when all his paying patrons really wanted were portraits of themselves. Eventually Morse accepted many portrait commissions, but even they did not bring the steady income he needed to support himself and his family.

Although he had already painted such famous individuals as Eli Whitney and the Marquis de Lafayette and had helped found the National Academy of Design, Morse left for Europe once again to study and paint what he loved. In 1834, he formulated an ambitious plan to paint grand historical scenes on the four remaining blank panels in the Rotunda of the national Capitol in Washington. When Congress rejected his plan, he moved to New York and accepted an appointment as professor of Literature of Arts and Design at the newly created University of the City of New York (now New York University). By the end of 1841, he had twice unsuccessfully campaigned for mayor as a representative of an anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic Nativist Party.

FROM TOP: Western Union Telegraph envelope, c. 1861-1865, Library of Congress. | Morse-Vail Telegraph Key: Alfred Vail made this key, believed to be from the first Baltimore-Washington telegraph line, as an improvement on Samuel Morse's original transmitter. National Museum of American History (CC BY-NC 2.0/Flickr). | International Morse Code Chart, Rhey T. Snodgrass & Victor F. Camp, 1922 [PD] Wikimedia.

At the same time, Morse was deeply involved in trying to make a go of his newfound vocation as a daguerreotypist. After meeting the French artist and inventor of photography, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1789-1851), in Paris in 1838, Morse enthusiastically embraced this startling new technology and became one of the first to practice photography in America. He worked as a daguerreotypist for two years but could not achieve financial success. Nevertheless, through his studio in New York, he trained many young men anxious to learn the new art. One was Mathew B. Brady (c.1823-1896), who went on to become one of the best-known American photographers of the nineteenth century.

Ultimately, posterity would not remember Morse as an artist, nor as a politician, professor, or photographer. Despite claiming to have "an artist's heart" and being called by some the father of American photography, Morse achieved his enduring success as the inventor of the practical electrical telegraph.

### An Electric Idea

Long before Morse's experiments, there were signaling systems that enabled people to communicate over distances. Most were visual or "semaphore" systems using flags or lights. In the eighteenth century, such systems used an observer who would decipher a signal from a high tower on a distant hill and then send it on to the next station. The young American republic wanted just such a system along its entire Atlantic coast and offered a prize of



\$30,000 for a workable proposal. The framers of this legislation had no way of knowing that when they used the word "telegraph" to refer to this visual semaphore system, they would be offered an entirely new and revolutionary means of communication—electricity.

The idea of using electricity to communicate over distance is said to have occurred to Morse during a conversation aboard ship when he was returning from Europe in 1832. The work of English physicist and chemist Michael Faraday (1791-1867), who had recently invented the electromagnet, was much discussed by the ship's passengers. When Morse came to understand how it worked, he speculated that it might be possible to send a coded message over a wire.

While a student at Yale College years before, he had written his parents a letter about how interesting he found the lectures on electricity. Despite what he learned at Yale, Morse found when he began to develop his idea that he had little real understanding of the nature of electricity. After sporadic attempts to work with batteries, magnets, and wires, he turned to a colleague at the University of the City of New York, Leonard D. Gale.

Gale was a professor of chemistry and familiar with the electrical

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### MORSE CODE

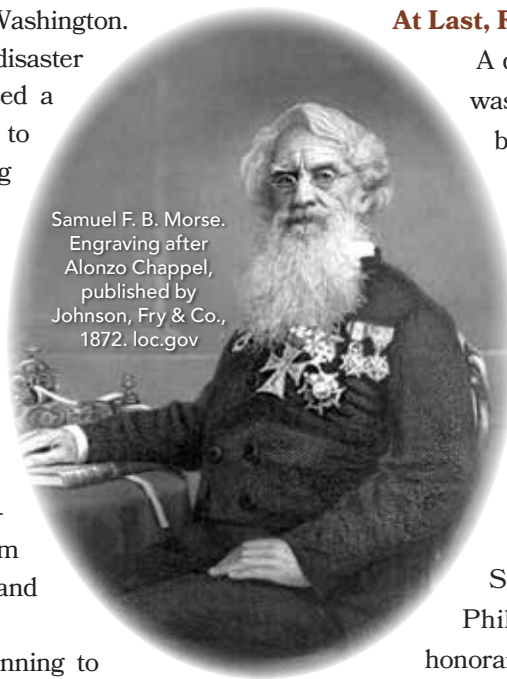
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work of Princeton's Joseph Henry, a true pioneer in the new field. Well before Morse had his shipboard idea about a telegraph, Henry rang a bell at a distance by opening and closing an electric circuit. In 1831, he had published an article, of which Morse was unaware, that contained details suggesting the idea of an electric telegraph. Gale's help and knowledge of this article proved crucial to Morse's telegraph system. Gale not only pointed out flaws in the system but showed Morse how he could boost the strength of a signal and overcome distance problems by using a relay system Henry had invented. Henry's experiments, Gale's assistance, and hiring the young technician Alfred Vail were keys to Morse's success.

### The Diligent Inventor

By December 1837, Morse had enough confidence in his new system to apply for the federal government's appropriation and, during the next year, conducted demonstrations of

his telegraph in New York and Washington. However, when the economic disaster known as the Panic of 1837 caused a long depression, Morse was forced to wait for better times. It was during this period that Morse visited Europe again and tried to secure patent protection and to examine competing telegraph systems in England. After meeting Charles Wheatstone, the inventor of one such electric telegraph system, Morse realized that although his main competitor had built an ingenious mechanism, his own system was far simpler, more efficient, and easier to use.



Samuel F. B. Morse.  
Engraving after  
Alonzo Chappel,  
published by  
Johnson, Fry & Co.,  
1872. loc.gov

By 1843, the country was beginning to recover economically, and Morse again asked Congress for the \$30,000 that would allow him to build a telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore, forty miles away. The House of Representatives passed the bill containing the Morse appropriation, and the Senate approved it in the final hours of that Congress's last session. With President Tyler's signature, Morse received the cash he needed and began to carry out plans for an underground telegraph line.

Morse had hired the ingenious construction engineer Ezra Cornell to lay the pipe carrying the wire. Although Cornell did his job superbly, one of Morse's partners, Congressman F. O. J. Smith, had purchased wire with defective insulation. Too much time had been wasted laying bad wire and, with the project on a rigid deadline, something had to be done quickly. Cornell suggested that the fastest and cheapest way of connecting Washington and Baltimore was to string wires overhead on trees and poles. The desperate Morse gave the go-ahead and the line was completed in time for the dramatic and spectacularly successful link between the Supreme Court chamber of the Capitol building and the railroad station in Baltimore.

Soon, as overhead wires connected cities up and down the Atlantic coast, the dots-and-dashes method that recorded messages on a long moving strip of paper was replaced by the operator's ability to interpret the code in real time (with the addition of two "stop" pins that made different sounds) and transcribe it into English letters as he heard it. Telegraph lines soon extended westward and within Morse's own lifetime connected the continents of Europe and America.

### At Last, Recognition

A decoration from the Sultan of Turkey was the first of numerous accolades bestowed on Morse for his invention of the electromagnetic telegraph. He also received recognition from the sovereigns of France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Prussia, Austria, and Italy. Scientific organizations such as the Academy of Industry in Paris and the National Institute for the Promotion of Science in Washington, D.C., honored him. Both the Archaeological Society of Belgium and the American Philosophical Society granted Morse honorary membership and Yale conferred a degree of Doctor of Laws on him.

Although Morse had written as early as 1843 that a telegraph cable might "be established across the Atlantic," it was not until 1854 that the American financier Cyrus W. Field wrote to the inventor of his idea to link Ireland and Newfoundland by telegraph cable. This prodigiously ambitious project stirred the imagination of millions on both sides of the Atlantic and, despite bitter disappointments and repeated failures, met with final success in 1866.

LEONARD C. BRUNO, retired Science Manuscript Historian for the Library of Congress (LOC), served as project manager to digitize and organize the papers of Samuel F. B. Morse, and wrote contextual narratives for the website from which this article is adapted. Special thanks to LOC Reference Librarian Lewis Wyman who directed us to the archived website and essays authored by Bruno. See the Samuel F. B. Morse collection at loc.gov.

#### EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "Samuel Morse's Other Masterpiece," Megan Gambino, Aug. 16, 2011. *Smithsonian Magazine*. See the Louvre through Morse's paintbrush. smithsonianmag.com
- "Samuel Morse's Reversal of Fortune," David McCullough, Sept. 2011, *Smithsonian Magazine*. Discusses the ups and downs of Morse's achievements. smithsonianmag.com
- "Morse College," *Yale, Slavery & Abolition*, A. Dugdale, J. J. Fueser, J. Celso de Castro Alves, The Amistad Committee, 2001. Contextualizes Morse's xenophobic discourse. yaleslavery.org
- Samuel F. B. Morse Papers at the Library of Congress, 1793 to 1919. Includes portraits of Morse; a timeline of events; his correspondence, diaries, drawings, and patent documents; as well as newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, maps, and other ephemera. loc.gov



## The Coded Messages of Plains Indian Drawings

*Documenting tribal history through art*

CANDACE S. GREENE

Graphic art has been used for centuries by Native American peoples both as a form of creative expression and as a way to convey social information. Pictorial art, as realistic representations of people and things, was produced by many of the Native peoples of North America, and particularly well developed in the Plains region during the nineteenth century. While members of the artist's community were familiar with the meaning behind the various conventions employed, today we may admire the lively drawing style but miss a lot that the pictures convey.

In Plains society, art production was gendered. Women produced abstract geometric designs. Pictorial art was the province of men and the subjects were those important to men. Paintings on buffalo hides are described in early travelers' accounts from the eighteenth century, though most pictorial works that survive are from the middle and later years of the nineteenth century.

Even before the bison herds were destroyed and hides became scarce, Plains artists adopted new media for their art when trade materials became increasingly available. Paper and pencils

Detail, Silver Horn (Kiowa). Calendar, 1909-1911. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, the University of Oklahoma. The Comanche chief Quannah Parker died in the winter of 1910-11, the season marked by a bare tree. The owl perched on his shoulder is a device that the artist Haungooah (Silver Horn) used to indicate a death. Quannah was a leader of the Peyote Religion, and he is depicted here wearing a buckskin shirt trimmed with flicker feathers, prized for their healing powers, at the shoulders. Some later hand has written his name in Western characters.



were readily embraced. Plains pictorial art is often called “ledger art” because so many of the drawings were made on the ruled pages of account ledgers obtained from traders.

The two most common categories of these drawings were pictures recounting men’s personal accomplishments and more general records of tribal history. In some Indigenous languages such as Kiowa and Lakota, the same word was used to refer to drawing or writing; both were meaningful marks. For these people, pictures and words were alternate ways to document information.

### CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

Chronicling men’s accomplishments, primarily their war deeds, was the most common usage of pictorial art and thousands of such pictures survive today, painted on hides or drawn on paper or other media. These are direct depictions of actual events, and they accord closely with Western concepts of history.

A man earned military honors through formally recognized types of deeds that were honored by his community. High among these was striking the enemy with a handheld object, requiring close combat. The French used the word “coup” for such strokes, and over time the term “counting

coup” came to be used in English for any war deed that deserved special recognition—striking an enemy, shooting one from afar, rescuing a comrade, receiving a wound in combat, and other actions.

Men were expected to display insignia of their war honors, much as soldiers in the U.S. Armed Services do today. Some honor marks were displayed on a man’s person on public occasions through special clothing or adornment, while an announcer called out his deeds publicly. Drawings provided a more durable form of recognition, a sort of professional resumé in pictures. Whether a man drew them himself or used a more skilled artist, the message was: “I did this honorable thing.”

These drawings are portraits of specific individuals and contain many elements indicating who was depicted. The portraits did not seek to capture facial features; instead, they included distinctive possessions that would have been well-known within the community, perhaps a notable war horse or the insignia of a warrior society to which the man belonged. It could be a representation of his “medicine,” tangible tokens of the spiritual assistance he could draw upon for protection in warfare. Medicine might be visible as a headdress or a small talisman tied in his hair. The most distinctive and easily recognized medicine objects were

Unknown artist (Cheyenne, Arapaho). Fort Reno Ledger Drawing, 1887. 4526.11.115. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK. Lines of prints down the side of the page tell much of the story of this encounter, in which a Cheyenne on horseback pursued an enemy who was on foot, then dismounted to engage in hand to hand combat. Both have dropped their firearms and the Cheyenne is wielding a knife, perhaps wrested from the enemy who wears a large scabbard. The Cheyenne is identified by his eagle feather headdress and medicine paint on his horse; the enemy’s tailored buckskins suggest that he is a Northern Shoshone, a tribe that provided scouts for the U.S. Army.

shields painted with protective designs, often of a spirit who might be invoked for help. Some drawings included a pictorial representation of a man’s name, called a “name glyph,” but such clarification was seldom necessary, as the other elements in combination were deemed sufficient.

Drawings also tell the nature of the war deed: what the man achieved, how, and against whom. Coups gained in status depending on how the combatants were armed: Was one man using bow and arrow while the other had firearms? Did they exchange fire from a distance or did the warrior ride in close to deliver a stroke with a handheld weapon? Did he dismount from horseback for hand-to-hand fighting? Did the warrior expose himself in a charge on an enemy protected behind a breastwork?

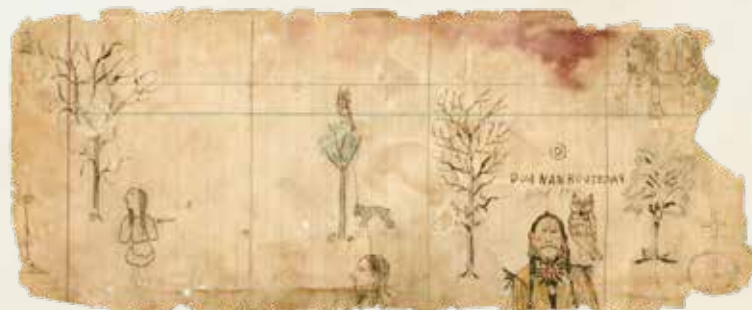
The answer to some of these questions is obvious in the drawings. Other answers require knowledge of the coded shorthand used to encapsulate a lot of information in a small picture. For example, hoof prints show the path a horse followed, while a dashed line shows where a man traveled on foot. Following the line of footprints can show a course of actions; the warrior may appear in the picture only once, though he might leave along his path a series of slain enemies, each showing the weapon he used to strike them down.

Red Eagle (Cheyenne, Arapaho). Fort Reno Ledger Drawing, 1887. 4526.11.64. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK. Red Eagle is identified here by an inscription in English, probably added by a literate scout for the benefit of non-Native viewers. He is elegantly attired with silver arm bands, a bone breastplate, face paint, a fancy bowcase and quiver, and a stuffed weasel in his hair. The woman he is greeting is similarly fine in a cloth dress adorned with rows of elk teeth or cowrie shells, a belt and long trailer mounted with German silver plates, a print shawl around her waist, and spots of rouge on her cheeks.

Enemies are not drawn in as much detail as the main subject, although their tribal identity is usually suggested through clothing or hairstyle, an important part of the story. Enemy figures may be partial and abbreviated, perhaps crammed together within a circle to suggest a number of fighters behind the protective bank of a ledge or down in a buffalo wallow. Sometimes enemies are unseen, suggested only by a row of gun barrels with firing blasts along the edge of a page or a warrior riding through a hail of bullets coming from beyond the page.

Plains drawings of war deeds celebrated individual achievements, not group victories. Scenes were about a moment in an encounter, not the overview of a battle, and speak to coups, not outcomes. They use widely understood conventions, or codes, to convey rich detail about who was involved and what happened, providing a wealth of information so that knowledgeable viewers could appreciate the valor of the engagement and the honors due.

In the difficult years of American encroachment and inter-tribal warfare, positions of leadership were based on having a distinguished war record. Ledger art, like hide painting before it, was a place for a man to present his accomplishments for public scrutiny, even challenge. Such scrutiny ensured the legitimacy of the accomplishments claimed.



With the imposition of the reservation system and the end of warfare, young men were left with fewer ways to stand out in competition against each other. Many of the drawings from reservation years are of courtship—boy meets girl. While older men could retell past war deeds, young men could only boast of their record with women, counting up and comparing their successes. Courting pictures are modest by modern standards; a couple often stands wrapped together in a single wearing blanket, which created a small private space for conversation near the family tipi of the young woman. Small details such as a water pail or an axe suggest that a woman was doing chores away from camp, indicating a less closely chaperoned encounter.

### CALENDAR-KEEPING

Pictorial art was also used to create records, using pictures in much the same way that literate societies use writing to keep lists, label maps, or leave a note. Among the most interesting of pictorial records were calendars, or winter counts, which created a temporal account of a period of years by noting one or two events for each year, chosen by a winter count keeper. Years were known by names rather than numbers, and pictures represented the year names. The events for which years were named were distinctive and widely known (though not necessarily the most important). People could place personal events in time by remembering how they fit with an entry in this shared reference system. The keeper, who served as

historian, used these charts to track all the years and keep them in order. Several tribes kept winter counts, but the best known are those from the Kiowa and the Lakota (also known as the Sioux).

Pictures in winter counts were simpler than those in ledger art, serving as mnemonics to bring the associated year name to mind. Often the entry is a single human figure with some element suggestive of his name, such as a headdress or weapon. Glyphs were used extensively in the winter counts, suggesting the names of both people and places. Prominent leaders are often noted, more likely recording their death than their achievements. Winter counts focused on shared knowledge.

Lakota pictorial history came to scholarly attention as early as 1877 when Garrick Mallery, an Army officer and avocational scholar, announced that he had discovered an object that recorded seventy years of Sioux history. A series of simple pictographs painted on a buffalo hide represented one event for each year, from 1800 to 1871. Mallery subsequently learned of several more winter count pictographs and, while studying them, was fortunate to have explanations and input from a number of winter count keepers—Lone Dog, American Horse, Cloud Shield, and others. Several of the winter counts that Mallery examined shared many of the same year names, while others recorded different events. All of them had one entry in common: “the year the stars fell.” This made it possible for Mallery to correlate them with each other and eventually tie them to the Western calendar by identifying

Silver Horn (Kiowa). Calendar, 1867-1868. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, the University of Oklahoma. A bare tree marks the winter of 1867-68, when there was a historic meeting between the Kiowa (and other tribes of the Southern Plains) and U.S. treaty commissioners resulting in the Medicine Lodge Treaty. A pile of trade goods represents annuities that were to be paid to the tribe annually in exchange for their ceding a significant portion of their land to the government, retaining only a portion as a reservation.

Silver Horn (Kiowa). Calendar, 1909-1911. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, the University of Oklahoma. The Comanche chief Quanah Parker died in the winter of 1910-11, the season marked by a bare tree. The owl perched on his shoulder is a device that the artist Haungooah (Silver Horn) used to indicate a death. Quanah was a leader of the Peyote Religion, and he is depicted here wearing a buckskin shirt trimmed with flicker feathers, prized for their healing powers, at the shoulders. Some later hand has written his name in Western characters.

that event as the Leonid meteor storm of November 1833, a remarkable display that was visible throughout much of North America.

Smithsonian anthropologist James Mooney learned of the Kiowa calendars after he began work with the Kiowa in the 1890s. He used their calendar system as the framework to organize and publish a history of the tribe, *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* (1898). Unlike the Lakota, the Kiowa cataloged two events for each year, one for summer and one for winter. Winter events in the drawings were connected to a black bar. Summer events were distinguished by an accompanying picture of the Medicine Lodge where summer ceremonies were held, or merely the forked center pole of the lodge. Rare summers when the ceremony was not held were marked with a leafy tree.

Like the Lakota, the Kiowa used very simple pictures to suggest the name of the associated event. Interviewing many Kiowa people over a period of years, Mooney learned that there was an extensive narrative associated with each of the simple pictures and brief year names. He also found that the Kiowa used the year names regularly when discussing other events, placing them in time by reference to named calendar entries. A man might say that he went on his first war party in “Thunder Boy killed winter” or that he had last hunted in the region of Timber Hill Creek in “Koitsenko initiated summer.” When men met to pass the pipe and discuss triumphs or losses, the calendar keeper was often invited to attend. If any question arose regarding the date or sequencing of events, he could be called upon to resolve it, connecting events to other events, tying them firmly to the temporal graph of the pictorial record.

### KEEPING THE TRADITION

While circumstances have changed greatly for Plains Indians since the nineteenth century when these pictorial arts flourished, modern versions of these forms are still produced and are a source of community pride and artistic inspiration. Ledger art is no longer an important way to acknowledge military service; such honoring has shifted to events at tribal dances where service men and women are called out for recognition. Ledger art has become an artform that honors tribal history more broadly.

During the latter decades of the twentieth century, there was a thoughtful revival of this type of pictorial art with strong figural outline and limited background, telling stories through footprints and shield designs. Referred to as “ledger style,” and often produced on ruled paper as a nod to the past, it has become an important part of the

Native fine arts revival in general, adopted well beyond the Plains region. Both men and women now work in this style of creative expression, informed by family and tribal stories or inspired through studying historic drawings in museums, books, and digital sources.

Calendar keeping has followed much the same trajectory of decline and recovery. As more and more people became literate, written accounts began to take over from pictorial formats, expanding from occasional annotations to more comprehensive historical texts. Picture records were kept by a few old men such as Silver Horn who made calendar entries into the 1920s. Younger artists embraced the idea of winter counts as a distinctive Indigenous artform, copying and expanding upon published images. Oklahoma artist Charles E. Rowell (1909-2004) made many copies of the winter count kept by his ancestor Anko. Rowell knew of the Anko record through Mooney’s publication, and he viewed himself as continuing that family tradition.

Ledger art and winter counts fit comfortably into Western paradigms of visual art today, with broad appreciation of diverse forms of visual expression. Contemporary Native artists think also of the deeper messages encoded in these drawings. They remain cognizant of the systems of rights and authority on which earlier forms were based.

CANDACE S. GREENE (PhD, University of Oklahoma) has a long association with Oklahoma, first working for the Sam Noble Museum and then enrolling in the OU Anthropology graduate program. She has been with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History since 1985, managing collections, developing new forms of access, and, since retirement, continuing as a Research Associate. Her research has been inspired and informed by Native understandings of materials now in museums.

GILCREASE MUSEUM (Tulsa) and SAM NOBLE OKLAHOMA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY (Norman) generously provided images for use in this article. Explore their collections online at: [collections.gilcrease.org](http://collections.gilcrease.org) and [samnoblemuseum.ou.edu](http://samnoblemuseum.ou.edu).

### EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- *Lakota Winter Counts*. See images from the Smithsonian Institution’s collections and watch a short video in which curators Candace Greene and Emil Her Many Horses discuss and examine winter counts. [si.edu](http://si.edu)
- “The Silver Horn Legacy,” Linda Coldwell, *Sooner Magazine*, Spring 2022. Report on the donation and authentication (by the Smithsonian’s Candace Greene) of ledger artworks by Kiowa artist Silver Horn. [digital.libraries.ou.edu/sooner](http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/sooner)
- Plains Indian Ledger Art Project, Department of Ethnic Studies, Univ. of California, San Diego. Browse digitized ledger art books, read about the history of ledger art, and watch videos discussing the traditions and significance of Plains Indian pictographic art. [plainsledgerart.org](http://plainsledgerart.org)

# FUN AND GAMES IT'S ALL ABOUT CODE



## CROSSWORDS

Kin to codes and riddles, puzzles entertain on tabletops and in newspapers. In this game, the Crossword is King and the Kingmaker is Will Shortz, editor of *The New York Times* Crossword since 1993. The only person in the world to hold a degree in enigmatology, this puzzle master has edited more than 10,000 puzzles. In an interview with Deb Amlen (April 7, 2021), Shortz commented on the crossword's enduring appeal: "Actually, I think the Crossword is ideally suited for today's fast-paced world, where people have shorter attention spans and multitask more than ever. The world has adapted to us. Ha! A daily crossword typically has 68-78 answers, each on a different subject. The mind jumps from one clue and answer to the next. When you think about it, the Crossword is really the perfect pastime for our age."



"The Cross Word Craze." Postcards by Raphael Tuck & Sons, c. 1930, London.

## SPY CODE

Do you have the vocabulary for espionage? To go undercover, you must know the lingo. Source: spymuseum.org

- **Bombe:** Polish electro-magnetic device created to help decipher Enigma cipher machine settings; early precursor to the modern computer
- **Cipher:** A system for disguising a message by replacing its letters with other letters or numbers or by shuffling them
- **Code:** A system for disguising a message by replacing its words with groups of letters or numbers
- **Codebook:** A list of plain language words opposite their codeword or codenumber
- **Colossus:** An electronic device that helped solve German cryptograms; the world's first electronic computer
- **Cryptology:** The science of secret writing in all its forms

- **Enigma:** A cipher machine used by the Germans to encode messages during WWII
- **Flaps and Seals:** The tradecraft involved when making surreptitious openings and closings of envelopes, seals, and secure pouches
- **Music Box:** Slang for a clandestine radio
- **Musician:** Slang for a clandestine radio operator
- **One-time Pad:** Strings of random numbers for singular use as a key in enciphering messages; the proper use of a one-time pad renders a message mathematically unbreakable
- **Plaintext:** The original message before encryption
- **Purple:** American name for the Japanese diplomatic cipher machine used from 1939-1945

## MORSE CODE AT THE MOVIES

- **The 39 Steps** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1935). Morse Code is heard when the train comes to an emergency stop, giving a description of the fugitive protagonist, Richard Hannay.
- **A Night to Remember** (Roy Ward Baker, 1958). An accurate recreation of the Morse Code distress signal sent by the doomed Titanic is heard.
- **The Poseidon Adventure** (Ronald Neame, 1972). Morse Code is sent on the hull of the overturned ship to communicate with survivors.
- **Pee-Wee's Big Adventure** (Tim Burton, 1985). Pee-Wee uses a house alarm to trigger a transmitter in a pumpkin to send the letter (c) in Morse Code that in turn makes an antenna send the Morse letters (b-i-k-e) to open the door to his special bicycle.

- **Star Trek V: The Final Frontier** (William Shatner, 1989). Kirk, Spock, and McCoy are imprisoned; they hear "stand back" being tapped in Morse Code before Scotty blows out the wall to rescue them.
- **Executive Decision** (Stuart Baird, 1996). Morse Code is sent on jet taillights to inform Navy pilots in pursuit of an airliner taken over by terrorists that a response team has boarded the plane.
- **Independence Day** (Roland Emmerich, 1996). Morse Code is used to coordinate a worldwide counterattack against the alien invaders.

Source: trainweb.org/telegraphgene



## WAR CODE

- **Culper Spy Ring:** Formed during the American Revolution, the network included civilians and soldiers who passed information ultimately to George Washington through codes—even by laundry hanging on clotheslines. One of the most frequently used codes assigned numbers to specific words, such as: 682 683 529 659 440 625 72 (We will proclaim victory over the British.)
- **Airman in Black:** Country music legend Johnny Cash volunteered for the U.S. Air Force and was an expert Morse Code operator while stationed in Landsberg, Germany, during the Korean War.

- **Lieber Code:** Implemented during the Civil War, the Lieber Code outlined the acceptable rules of conflict for Union soldiers, particularly as it related to civilians and prisoners. During the late nineteenth century, its 157 provisions served as a model for similar codes in the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Spain, Serbia, Portugal, Italy, and the United Kingdom.
- **Code Talkers:** Native American soldiers used Native languages to transmit messages during both World Wars. Representing more than 20 tribal nations, including Cherokees, Choctaws, Navajos, and Comanches, their communication proved highly effective and difficult for enemies to crack.

## RIDDLES

Delight or torment? Try your hand at these different categories of riddles—in pictures and in words—from times gone by.

- **Conundrum:** Why is a thought like the sea?
- **Decapitation:** Whole, I am a weapon; behead, and I am a fruit; behead again and I am part of the human body.
- **Metagram:** I am a word of four letters. Change my first, and I am a beverage; my second, and I am part of a horse; my third, and I am a measure; my fourth, and I am a herb.

ANSWERS:  
 Conundrum: Because it's a notion (an ocean).  
 Decapitation: Spear—pear—ear.  
 Metagram: Mine—wine—mane—mile—mint.  
 Source: *Guess Me*, compiled and arranged by Frederick D'Arros Planché (1879). archive.org

## PICTORIAL PROVERBS



When the cat is away the mice will play.



A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

# Color Boded— The Language of Tattoos

Symbols of maturity,  
spirituality, and  
artistic identity

ERIC D. SINGLETON



Portrait of a Young Maori Woman with Moko, Louis John Steele, 1891. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa/Wikimedia

**T**attoos date from ancient times and are shared around the world—among men, women, and sometimes children. Across cultures and throughout history, these body adornments have been associated with health, medicine, religious practices, maturity rites, and personal aesthetic. Many of the patterns were universally known and accepted and, therefore, a source of identity. At other times, tattoo meanings were kept secret—known by only a few.

## TRIBAL TATTOOS IN THE AMERICAS

Among ancient and historic cultures of the Americas, tattooing dates back thousands of years, something that united nearly every tribal group, regardless of region. Utilizing a variety of techniques, colors, and patterns, these artistic expressions created a person's visual autobiography—who they were, where they belonged, what they believed, and what they had accomplished. The oldest recorded tattoo in the Americas comes from the Chinchorro culture (7000-1500 BCE), a group that lived in present-day Chile. Dating to roughly 2800 BCE, one interred individual appears to have a mustache tattooed on his upper lip.

In South America, the size of the culture seems to determine the extent to which the community is tattooed. In the Amazon region, nearly everyone who lived in small tribal groups had tattoos. The meaning behind these ranged from maturity to protection,

included both men and women, and covered the entire body. Most of the designs were unique to a single community, allowing one tribe to distinguish itself from another. In the mountains of ancient Peru, on the other hand, only about thirty percent of the Chimu people (900-1470 CE) had tattoos. It is possible their tattoos were reserved for the elite or religious hierarchy. They also tattooed objects, including golden human arm effigies, knife handles, textiles, and ceramics.

Before Europeans migrated to North America, nearly every Indigenous community had tattoos. Some of the earliest written accounts and drawings of Native Americans by Spanish, English, Dutch, and French explorers detail extensive tattooing. The most famous of these accounts were copper plate engravings by Flemish-born German Theodor de Bry (1528-1598 CE). Many of the designs seen in his engravings can be matched to the Mississippian Period (800-1650 CE), an era known for extensive trade networks and large-scale mound construction in the eastern half of North America.

Objects from the Mississippian Period show signs of tattooing as well, including ceramic head pots, copper plates, marine shell, and stone statuary. These objects reflect deities in addition to real people. A stone pipe found at Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma, depicting a warrior in armor squatting over the body of a fallen enemy, appears to have tattoos consisting of horizontal straight



Detail, *At the Beginning of a Campaign Outina Consults His Sorcerer*, Theodor de Bry, 1565. Collection of Dr. John Rahhal. The extensively tattooed Timucua man lived in Florida and encountered the French in the sixteenth century.



Human Head Effigy Vessel. Crittenden County, Arkansas, Mississippian Period (1350-1550 CE). Univ. of Arkansas Museum. A head pot with facial markings characteristic of tattoos among historical Indigenous peoples.

*Mistippee (Son of Yoholo Micco)*, Charles Bird King, ca. 1838. Library of Congress. Facial tattoos on this young Muscogee correspond to his social status within the tribe.



lines running down the left arm from shoulder to wrist. Similar designs appear on historic drawings and paintings of Cree warriors living in the Canadian subarctic. Cree tattoos represented battle or war honors.

In North America, the reasons for acquiring (or taking) tattoos essentially fell into nine categories: beauty, maturity, religion, war, rank, wealth, community, slavery, and personal signatures, and the classifications often overlapped. In the Eastern Woodlands, Iroquoian-speaking people utilized facial tattoos to communicate social rank, the number of people they killed, and the quantity of wounds they received in battle. They often applied the same designs to warclubs and, on occasion, left them near the body of a slain enemy. The tattoos copied onto the warclub served as the warrior's signature or calling card, letting the enemy know who the killer was and where they could be found.

In southeastern regions, individuals took tattoos that conveyed their honors and status within society. According to James Adair, who lived with the Chickasaw in the late 1700s, warriors could immediately identify which captured prisoners held the highest military rank by the blue marks tattooed across their chests and arms. Adair noted that the markings were "as legible as our alphabetical characters are to us."

These identifiers were not limited to men. A diary entry dated July 5, 1807, by Christian missionaries John and Anna Rosina Gambold references a Cherokee woman named Chiconehla who was, they wrote, "supposed to have been in a war against an enemy nation and was

wounded numerous times. . . . Her left arm is decorated with some designs, which she said were fashionable during her youth." This reference matches the details of a prominent Cherokee named Nancy Ward, including going to war against the Muscogee in 1755 with her husband, Kingfisher. During this battle, Kingfisher was killed, and Ward rallied Cherokee troops to win the battle. The tattoos on her left arm may have been war honors associated with this or another battle.

Among Native tribes of the North American Great Plains, tattoos demonstrated tribal membership. Most people in the region used sign language to communicate and references to tattoos were part of this language. The Arapaho call themselves *Hinono'ei* or Blue Cloud People, a name connected to the circular tattoos on the men's chests. In Plains sign language, the word for Arapaho was made by tapping the chest, meaning "tattooed-on-the-breast" people. Giving visual testament to their tribal affiliation, Wichita men's eyes were tattooed with circles or triangles which extended back to the temples. For women, a single line ran down the nose with four vertical lines on the chin. In Plains sign language, when referencing the Wichita, the speaker circled their eyes with a finger and pointed back toward the temples. So apparent were their tattoos, the French called the Wichita *pani Piquès* or "Pricked Pawnees."

Tattoos were also a signifier of tribal affiliation for the Caddo and Quapaw. For the Caddo, with references going back to 1687, male tattooing took the form of animals; women's tattoos included lines around the forehead, chin,

and breasts. These forms of expression acted as passports, allowing those with the correct markings to move freely in and out of the territory. In a letter dated November 6, 1751, French Naval Captain Jean-Bernard Bossu related that the markings of the Quapaw conferred honor as well as free passage:

The Arkansas [Quapaw] have just adopted me. A deer was tattooed on my thigh as a sign that I have been made a warrior and a chief. I submitted to this painful operation with good grace. I sat on a wildcat skin while an Indian burned some straw. He put the ashes in water and used the simple mixture to draw the deer. He then traced the drawing with big needles, pricking me until I bled. The blood mixed with the ashes of straw formed a tattoo which can never be removed. After that, I smoked a pipe and walked on white skins which were spread under my feet. They danced for me and shouted with joy. They then told me that if I traveled among the tribes allied to them, all that I had to do to receive a warm welcome was to smoke a peace pipe and show my tattoo.

Tattoos also marked rites of passage. For women, tattoos usually conveyed maturity and often took the form of lines between the woman's lower lip and chin. In many cultures, it was critical that a woman be tattooed—otherwise, it would affect her spirit in the afterlife. According to Edith S. Taylor and William J. Wallace in their 1947 booklet "Mohave Tattooing and Face-Painting," tattoos were necessary for entering the afterlife called

Sil'aid "Land of the Dead." Those not tattooed were cast down to live with the rats.

Tattoos often symbolized strength and reinforced the persons' ability to protect the community, therefore it was important to show no pain during the ritual. An example of this was described by Hairy Coat, who watched a Hidatsa war leader named Road Maker tattoo his nephew Poor Wolf in the mid to late 1800s.

Poor Wolf's neck, chest, and arms were tattooed with motifs that matched Road Maker's, so he would be strong and powerful in battle. The process took nearly a year to complete. While being tattooed, community members sang and drummed. As the pain worsened, the drumming grew faster and faster, yet Poor Wolf never moved. Afterwards, he grew very ill. Post-tattooing illness is described frequently by those who received tattoos. Tattoos are in essence poison—"poison" being any substance introduced or absorbed that is capable of causing the illness or death—and the body needed time to recover from the ordeal.

Another interesting characteristic of tattoos is the role social acceptance played in their being offered and/or taken. In some cultures, tattoos were given by elders; in other cultures, they could be applied by anyone. Regardless, the design had to be socially validated by the group. Bossu, the French Captain mentioned earlier, referenced an incident he witnessed with the Osage at a site he referred to as the Koakias. He recorded that a warrior took a tattoo as a battle honor to impress a girl he was courting. Once seen publicly, the tribe



*Hee-láh-dee (Pure Fountain), Wife of the Smoke*, George Catlin, 1832. Smithsonian American Art Museum. This Ponca woman's tattoos indicate her membership in a society that likely focused on the forces of life and death.

*Hidatsa Chief, Addih-Hiddisch (Road Maker)*, Karl Bodmer, 1834. National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. Road Maker's tattoos symbolized strength and the endurance of pain.





An Indian Inhabiting the Country Northwest of Louisiana in 1741, published by T. Jefferys, 1757-1772. The New York Public Library. Locations of this man's tattoos are historically accurate, but the designs are not, likely reflecting the artist's unfamiliarity with the motifs.

Shé-da-ah (Wild Sage), a Wichita Woman, George Catlin, 1834. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Some Indigenous women today are receiving maturity tattoos similar to those seen in this painting.



conferred and agreed that the tattoo had not been earned and ordered it be removed. Removal usually involved cutting, scraping, or applying a blistering agent, such as the poison secreted by blister beetles. Other examples of young men taking tattoos that were not yet earned, and were subsequently removed, are documented in the Chickasaw community.

Although a significant part of tribal society, tattooing virtually stopped in Indigenous North American communities by the late nineteenth century. The creation of reservations, the elimination of tribal warfare, an increase in Christian missionaries, and the introduction of government-sponsored boarding schools propelled assimilation. With all these factors influencing tribal society, the taking of tattoos diminished and the coded meanings behind so many tattooed images were forever lost.

Today, a resurgence of tattooing is connecting Native peoples with their heritage. Tribal members are once again embracing this art form, creating new traditions and new visual autobiographies.

#### TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Like the Americas, cultures around the world have a long history of tattooing. The oldest known example comes from Europe, a man known as Ötzi who died around 3250 BCE. Found beneath an Alpine glacier near the Austrian-Italian border, his tattoos were possibly medicinal—61 markings that correspond to wrists, back, legs, and torso, perhaps to ease arthritis or bone deterioration. According to tattoo anthropologist Lars Krutak, eighty percent of Ötzi's tattoos

correspond to Chinese acupuncture points used to treat rheumatism.

For those who could interpret them, tattoos contained a power equal to speaking or writing. Tattoos were part of a person's character and an embedded part of historic culture.

#### OCEANIA (POLYNESIA, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA)

You may lose your most valuable property through misfortune in various ways . . . your house, your weaponry, your spouse, and other treasures. You may be robbed of all that you cherish. But of your *moko*, you cannot be deprived, except by death. It will be your ornament and your companion until your final day.—Netana Whakaari, 1921

Tattooing traditions in the South Pacific use distinct, abstract designs. It is here that the word tattoo originates, introduced into the English language by Captain James Cook while in Tahiti, when he heard their word *tatau*, meaning “to mark.” Tattoos in this region of the world often covered the entire body and were unique to each person and island group.

Some of the most recognizable tattoos were from the Māori people of New Zealand. Called *tā moko*, tattooing began at puberty and continued through adulthood, made with a wide chisel tapped into the skin by a mallet. Lacking a writing system, tattoos allowed a person to convey their heritage to the world.

The Māori believed that the head was the most sacred feature of the body, so the focus of elite tattoos was on the face.

These facial markings were an aspect of *tā moko* known as *whakapapa*, “line of ancestors.” Other facial tattoos and their location identified the person's social and military rank.

#### EUROPE

The most well-documented examples of ancient tattooing in Europe come from Greek and Roman writing and artwork. Noteworthy examples reference Thracians, Britons, Gauls, Dacians, and others. As Greek historian Herodotus wrote in the fifth century, “Tattooing among them [Thracians] marks noble birth.” Romans made similar references when they encountered Britons.

In the ancient Greek world, tattoos were given to slaves and soldiers defeated in battle. For example, Athens would tattoo an owl, the symbol of the city, onto the arms of defeated enemies. A similar practice was adopted in ancient Rome, where slaves, gladiators, and prisoners were tattooed to show they were owned by the state. Later Roman sources indicate that soldiers were also tattooed. The practice may have been adopted after Rome expanded and needed to identify people who came from different cultures as being Roman soldiers.

Although prevalent since ancient times, it was not until the 1800s that drawings and newspaper articles describing tattoos in detail appeared in abundance in Europe. Tattooing was mostly among English nobility and mariners traveling the world. One of the most notable examples occurred in 1862, when the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, received a cross tattoo in Jerusalem. His sons were later tattooed in Japan.



Tamati Waka Nene, Gottfried Lindauer, 1890. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Wikimedia. As New Zealand's leading painter of Māori in the 19th century, Lindauer's portraits included tribal leaders and scenes of Māori life.

#### AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Tattooing in Africa has a long history dating back nearly 5,000 years. The most notable examples are found in Egypt, but other regions in Africa, including Niger, Morocco, Cameroon, Sudan, and Algeria are known to have extensive tattoo traditions as well. In these areas, tattoos were used as social, ethnic, and religious identifiers.

They could also be used as medicine or a means of warding off evil. Tattoos can be found on Egyptian mummies and statues dating to 3,000 BCE. More prevalent among women, adornments were connected to status, magical knowledge, and religious cults. Other, often overlooked, examples related to religion include Christian pilgrims who received tattoos in Jerusalem and other sacred sites. These tattoos go back at least 700 years, but most likely have a history as old as the religion itself.

In other areas, tattoos were part of secret society membership. The Poro is a hunting society found in several West African countries including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and The Republic of

Prince of Wales (King Edward VII), Sir John Watson Gordon, ca. 1860, Smithsonian Amer. Art Museum





## THE OLDEST TATTOO ARTIST IN THE WORLD

“Your gold and your clothes will disappear in the afterlife, but the tattoos will still be seen by the ancestral spirits.” Sage words from Whang-Od Oggay (b. 1917). At 105 years old, she is the world’s oldest tattoo artist. A member of the Butbut tribe from the Cordillera Mountain region of Kalinga, Philippines, she has practiced her craft since the age of 15. Tattoos were a way for the Butbut to show courage and strength. For men, tattoos represented bravery and were given to those who killed another in battle. For women, tattoos symbolized maturity, fertility, and beauty. Members without tattoos were considered shameful. Today, people from around the world travel to be tattooed by this legendary artist. Learn more from the video *Whang-Od: The Last True Tattoo Artist* by Scott Sporleder, youtube.com.

Whang-Od Oggay, photo by Lee, Ink Road series (CC BY-2.0/Flickr)



Côte d’Ivoire. The role of this secret society’s body symbols, outwardly, was to create laws and govern the community; inwardly, tattoos functioned as a spiritual organization for divining secret knowledge. The meaning behind these motifs were known only to a few. Even the person receiving the tattoo sometimes did not know its meaning.

In addition to tattooing, many people in Africa used scarification as a means of beautifying the body and expressing identity. Recently, these two practices (tattooing and scarification) have combined to form what is referred to as *Cicatrization*. First, designs are created, usually through cutting. Pigmentation is added and, when the wounds heal, the area becomes a raised dyed scar. Today, African tattooing is being used less as a community identifier and more as a reflection of individuality.

### ASIA

Tattoo traditions in Asia seem to be the most unique and varied, used for protection, punishment, beauty, and as personal identifiers, depending on the country and time period. While countries such as China are almost devoid of tattooing, others utilized the entire body, creating true works of art similar to paintings on canvas. In Japan, tattoos moved between social acceptance and social stigma on a fairly regular basis. In ancient Japan, both people and objects were tattooed with the form of animals that acted as protection.

The designs and style of modern Japanese tattoos rose in the Edo

Period (1600-1867 CE). Laymen used them as protection, while samurai used them to identify bodies on the battlefield. Criminals, particularly the yakuza, used tattoos to forever link an individual with a gang and crime. Trends that came out of this period were mural and myth tattoos that contained a single narrative, sometimes taking up the entire body.

Other countries, such as Thailand, used tattoos almost exclusively for protection. In perhaps the most unique event associated with tattoos, every year in early March, people who have received protection tattoos return to a temple outside Bangkok, Thailand. At exactly 9:39 a.m., the monks begin to chant and individuals who have received these tattoos enter a trance-like state that builds until they begin to scream, yell, and flail, knocking over everything in sight. Many believe this recharges the tattoo and its power.

In modern Buddhist temples in Thailand, monks weave images, text, and prayer together to complete the tattoo. These symbols, like Christian and ancient Egyptian tattoos, are meant to permanently tie the person to their faith and provide a visual display of those beliefs.

### UNITED STATES

In the United States, tattoos remained largely taboo until the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s when they gained mainstream acceptance on the arms and bodies of musicians and movie stars. Prior to this, tattooing was isolated to circus and carnival performers and individuals



who embraced a counterculture lifestyle, such as the Hells Angels.

Although the first tattoo parlor opened in New York City sometime in the mid to late 1800s, German immigrant Martin Hildebrandt began tattooing as a sailor in 1846 and later tattooed Civil War soldiers in the 1860s, making him perhaps the first tattoo artist in America. Tattoos were reintroduced on a much larger scale by WWI and WWII military personnel as a way to remember a loved one, show their patriotism, or as a permanent reminder of their wartime service. For private citizens, tattoos remained an artform—sometimes taken for personal aesthetic or to connect a person to a social organization or gang.

Regardless of the country, many people are reconnecting with tattooing traditions, though the

meanings behind many of the designs has shifted and the reason for their creation has changed. People are less bound by traditional social practices and are embracing cultural distinctions from around the world. The interconnectivity prompted by the internet and world travel has contributed to this cultural transformation.

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## TATTOO TECHNIQUES

### SEWING/STITCHING:

Created using a needle and thread made of sinew (animal tendons) or spun wool from North American bighorn sheep. The thread is covered in dye and, when passed through the skin (like sewing a shirt), the pigment remains.

### PRICKING:

Applied by covering the tip of the needle in dye and pricking the skin. Needles typically range between 3 and 4 inches in length, made from bone, ivory, copper, and (after European contact) steel and iron.

### CUTTING:

Primarily found in the North American Southwest, this method involves cutting the skin and rubbing dyes into the incision.

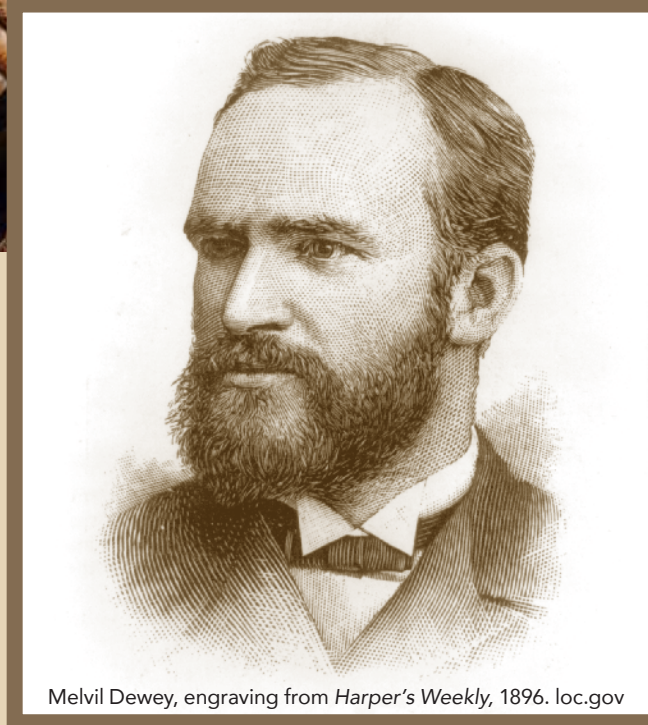


# MELVIL DEWEY

## and the Bias of Code

Limitations of the Dewey Decimal System and how librarians strive toward equity and inclusion

SARAH OLZAWSKI



Melvil Dewey, engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, 1896. loc.gov

*The Library as we know it*—free, open to the public, with books to lend—is a relatively new concept. In centuries past, libraries were open only to the elite and required a subscription fee; in some, books were chained to desks and shelves. As the idea of public access to books and knowledge grew, in part thanks to philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie, systems for organizing that knowledge became necessary.

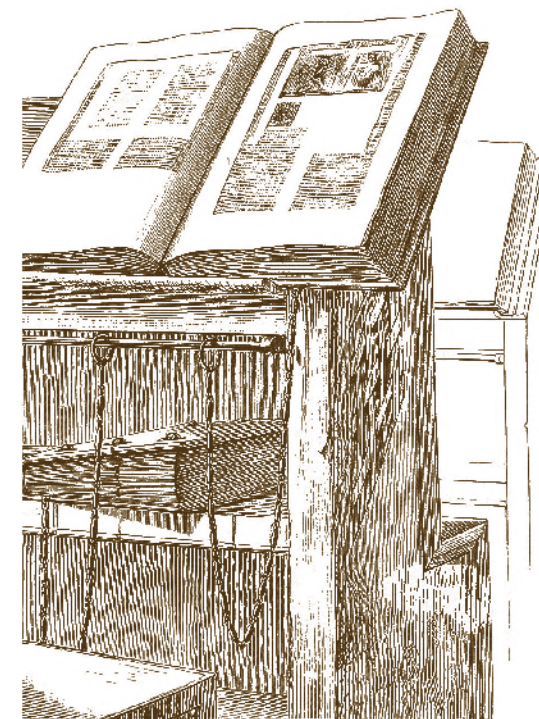
Imagine the public library as a new concept, shelves upon shelves of manuscripts in what Henry David Thoreau called “a wilderness of books.” How would a reader find what she was looking for among the stacks? It must have seemed as daunting then as the internet would be without search engines today.

Public libraries and the organizational “code” we use to access information developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though largely invisible to public library users, classification codes are the hidden architecture that enable the seamless discovery of information. Orderly systems like Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) attempt to identify knowledge and the interrelationships among knowledge for information retrieval.

The DDC, commonly known as the Dewey Decimal System, was published in 1876 by Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey (1851-1931), a central figure in the history of library services. Dewey’s coded organization system was revolutionary and, as a result, he wielded control over the access and dissemination of knowledge available to the public in much the way that Mark Zuckerberg (Chairman and CEO of Meta) does today through the ubiquitous platforms of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Today, the DDC is used in over 138 countries and translated into over 30 languages. The code divides the whole of knowledge into ten *classes* or fields that are assigned a numerical range. Each class has ten *divisions*, which are further subdivided into ten *sections*:

- 000 Computer Science, Information and General Works
- 100 Philosophy and Psychology
- 200 Religion
- 300 Social Sciences
- 400 Language
- 500 Science
- 600 Technology
- 700 Arts and Recreation
- 800 Literature
- 900 History and Geography



Part of a single bookcase in the Library, Cesena, *Libraries in the Medieval and Renaissance Periods*, John Willis Clark (Cambridge, Macmillan and Bowes, 1894). archive.org

For example, you can walk into any public library that uses the DDC and find knitting books at 746.32 (class 700 for Arts and Recreation, call number 746 for Textile Arts).

By nature of their design, classification systems enable serendipity: If you know where one knitting book is, you’re likely to find others nearby on the shelf, and they’re in a section of the library likely to have books on other types of arts and crafts. But codes have limits, and no code is neutral because it inevitably reflects the ideologies and worldviews of its creator. The DDC initially reflected Dewey’s Victorian-era bias and its emphasis on knowledge created and disseminated by European and white cultures.

### DEWEY, THE MAN

Dewey revolutionized the entire field and concept of public libraries around the world. As Joshua Kendall writes in *American Libraries Magazine*, “At age 5, he was already alphabetizing the spices in his mother’s pantry.” Dewey was a perfectionist, Kendall notes, “preoccupied with order, details, rules, and lists.” Obsessed with concise notation, Dewey changed the spelling of his own name to *Melvil* and briefly shortened his last name to *Dui*.

Dewey engineered numerous innovations in library science. In addition to creating the DDC, he standardized the size of cards for library card catalogs and created the first library for the blind, the interlibrary loan program, and the first children’s library. He was a founding member of the American Library Association (ALA), the first editor of *Library Journal* (1876), and director of the New York State Library (1888-1905). Dewey also founded the world’s first library school at Columbia College in 1887. Nevertheless, this master innovator was not without shortcomings.

His School of Library Economy reportedly required photographs from female applicants and he was widely quoted as saying, “You cannot polish a pumpkin.” A century before the #MeToo movement, Dewey developed a reputation among librarians for his unwanted advances towards women. Biographers have noted his offensive behavior towards women, which may have culminated during an American Library Association-sponsored cruise to Alaska in 1905. Four ALA colleagues, all women, reported unwelcome advances from Dewey to ALA officials.

Within a year, Dewey was forced out of the ALA, the very organization he founded, but it was not the last controversy. In 1924, librarian and publisher Tessa Kelso



brewbooks (CC BY-SA 2.0/Wikimedia)

objected to the New York Library Association’s decision to host their annual conference at Dewey’s Lake Placid Club, which he founded in 1895. “For many years,” she said, “women librarians have been the special prey of Mr. Dewey in a series of outrages against decency.” Five years later, the Club was again the center of accusation when Dewey settled a sexual harassment suit brought by a former Club secretary for approximately \$2,000.

#### LIMITATIONS OF DEWEY’S CODE

All classification is subjective and develops from the time and place where it is created, revealing the inherent biases and cultures of its creators. The DDC’s classification of religion reveals how Dewey’s code contains structural biases. Here is how the 200 class breaks down into its ten divisions:

- 200 Religion
- 210 Philosophy and Theory of Religion
- 220 The Bible
- 230 Christianity and Christian Theology
- 240 Christian Practice and Observance
- 250 Christian Pastoral Practice and Religious Orders
- 260 Christian Organization, Social Work and Worship
- 270 History of Christianity
- 280 Christian Denominations
- 290 Other Religions

Notice how much shelf space in the 200 Religion main class is devoted to Christianity. Only one section, 290, is specifically set aside for religions other than Christianity. Judaism and Islam only have one dedicated number each: 296 and 297, respectively. While the numbers 200-209 were revised in 1996 to represent religion in general, the code of the DDC is still heavily weighted towards Christianity.

A 2018 study by Dewey Program Manager Rebecca Green maintained that the notational real estate given to Christianity (65% of the total 200 class) could be viewed

as appropriate, since 64% of the books on religion given DDC numbers were about Christianity. Yet, based on world population, there are almost as many people who identify as Muslim (1.91 billion) as there are people who identify as Christian (2.38 billion). Dewey classification does not reflect that fact. Of the total number of religion books classed by Dewey, 5% are about Islam yet the subject is given only 0.9% of DDC notational real estate.

The bias towards Western cultures similarly exists in the 800 class on literature. Sections 810-889 are devoted to American, English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek literatures. Only 890-899 are set aside for literatures of other languages, including African, Asian, and Indigenous literatures.

#### EVOLUTION OF THE DDC

While the call number (the label you see on a library book spine) represents a complex code that was initially developed over a century ago, the DDC is continuously revised and updated. There have been 23 major editions issued since its creation, with the last revision in 2011. Like languages, codes can evolve over time to better describe their subjects. Since Dewey’s death in 1931, revisions of the code are managed by the Dewey Decimal Classification Editorial Policy Committee, which includes stakeholders from the American Library Association and the Online Computer Library Center, a nonprofit membership organization for libraries.

Following the history of the various call number divisions—for instance, where books about homosexuality have been cataloged—reveals how librarians have adapted the system to correct for its limitations and biases. Homosexuality didn’t even appear in the DDC until 1932, after Dewey’s death. The subject made its first appearance under 132 Mental Derangements (discontinued in 1959) or 159.9 Abnormal Psychology (discontinued in 1989). In 1952, knowledge about homosexuality could also be found under 301.424 Sociology of Sexes and a

Dorothy Porter Wesley. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard Univ., Washington, D.C.

## DOROTHY PORTER WESLEY A Visionary Librarian

SARAH OLZAWSKI & KIMBERLY ROBLIN



Dorothy Porter Wesley, née Burnett (1905-1995), broke barriers as a self-proclaimed simple librarian and laid a foundation for future scholarship—built not of bricks and mortar but of books, ideas, education, opportunity, and exchange.

Born in Virginia and raised in New Jersey, she held degrees from the Miner Normal School and Howard University and was the first African American to earn a BA and MA in Library Science from Columbia University. She was a Ford Foundation Fellow and Charles Frankel Prize recipient, established the national library in Nigeria, and reviewed numerous books including John Hope Franklin’s seminal work *From Slavery to Freedom*. It was at Howard, however, that she transformed how people organized and accessed collections by and about peoples of African descent.

Appointed head librarian in 1930, Dorothy Porter (Wesley, after her second marriage in 1979) managed the acquisition and cataloging of two collections that formed the core of Howard’s library and greatly expanded their resources on Black history and culture by Black authors: a 1914 gift from Reverend Jesse E. Moorland, and a 1946 purchase from Arthur B. Spingarn. When Porter consulted other libraries for guidance on cataloging, she found that nearly all Black works—by Black authors and/or about Black history and community—were restricted to just two classifications: 325 Colonization

and 326 Slavery. The notational real estate within the Dewey Decimal System wasn’t adequate to categorize and catalog the full richness and breadth of Africana. She later recalled that in the white libraries she visited:

Every book, whether it was a book of poems by James Weldon Johnson, who everybody knew was a black poet, went under 325. And that was stupid to me. Why not take the whole Dewey Decimal System and put a book by James Weldon Johnson, the poet, underneath the number for poetry? You see? So that’s what I did.

Porter dismissed the Dewey Decimal paradigm that inherently marginalized and minimized Black experiences by confining them to only two categories and presenting them as *subjects*, never *creators*. Determined to augment the established system, she identified new categories that celebrated and expanded the definition of Black authorship to include hymnals, sermons, newspaper articles, and more. She interfiled works by Black authors into their appropriate subject areas under Dewey, identified new subject areas to highlight the contributions of Black people, and revolutionized Black studies and librarianship in the process.

“All of this—our painters, musicians, athletes—is our back-ground, what they’ve done all goes to make up our history,” she said. “And that’s all I was trying to do: to build a collection that would reflect all our history.” Her re-imagining of Dewey’s antiquated system evolved into a physical historiography of Black thought traceable through diverse aspects of culture and knowledge.

While Porter transformed the classification system, she simultaneously built what would become the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center collection. With no staff and little funds for acquisitions, she scoured estate sales and library basements, leveraged her relationships with prominent book dealers and collectors, networked and nudged until, at the time of her retirement, she had grown the collection of 6,500 items to more than 180,000—one of the largest of its kind. “The only rewarding thing for me,” she said, “is to bring to light information that no one knows. What’s the point of rehashing the same old thing?”

Today, Porter’s work lives on, accessible to students and scholars conducting new scholarship and research made possible through her vision and dedication.

subsequent revision in 1965 placed items about homosexuality under 616.85834 Neurological Disorders. In 1989, 363.49 Social Problems included homosexuality, even though the revision eliminated the topic from 159.9 Abnormal Psychology.

Imagine how the serendipitous LGBTQ reader would feel browsing for information relevant to their life, before and after all these revisions. Items on the shelf nearby would reveal the bias in the code used to organize the subjects. In 1989, books about homosexuality filed under 363.49 Social Problems would have been on a shelf near books about obscenity and pornography. After the most recent revision in 2011, the DDC expanded to include 306.766 Gay Liberation Movement, Gays, Homophobia, under the main class 306 Culture and Institutions, falling between 305 Groups of People and 307 Communities.

New Dewey classification numbers for specific subjects are created only when a certain number of works on the subject (arbitrarily set at 20 by the committee that controls revisions to the DDC) have been published, collected, and cataloged by libraries. The concept that structures the DDC in this way is called *literary warrant*. By utilizing literary warrant to determine the addition of new call numbers, the DDC heavily favors knowledge that has been published, knowledge that has already been purchased by libraries, and knowledge that has been cataloged by libraries. Imagine the amount of information that falls short of meeting these criteria, especially when you consider structural biases that are inherent in the publishing industry, such as how books are marketed and which books make it to press. Even when the DDC is updated and revised, it is not hard to imagine old versions of the code lingering in small or rural libraries, especially if those libraries don't employ a cataloging staff who are tracking changes in the code, re-cataloging books, and shifting collections to allow for new placements.

#### THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIBRARIANS

No code is perfect. Since its development, Dewey's code has been criticized for its classification of several subjects—most notably religion, LGBTQ-related subjects, and race. Still, the DDC remains the

most widely used classification system in the world and, thanks to revisions and adaptations by subsequent librarians, is overcoming some of its initial limitations.

While there can be no doubt that Dewey was a visionary in his time, we must include the measurer when we consider the measurement. His troubling harassment of women and his emphasis on white, Christian, and classical cultures and knowledges enabled the exclusion of entire scopes of knowledges under the code as he initially developed it.

Librarians recognize the deficit Dewey left for them and are attempting to address the inadequacies of the DDC. At the 2019 annual conference, the American Library Association voted to remove Dewey's name from its top professional award, the Melvil Dewey Award. By asserting that Dewey's behavior did not represent the values of the profession regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion, librarians acknowledged that Dewey's legacy remains imperfect, even as the code he left for them continues to evolve.

SARAH OLZAWSKI is Program Officer at Oklahoma Humanities, overseeing the *Let's Talk About It* reading and discussion program. She holds an MLIS from the University of Oklahoma and worked for seven years as a reference librarian at Norman Public Library.

#### EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "Melvil Dewey, Compulsive Innovator," Joshua Kendall, March 24, 2014, *American Libraries Magazine*. Discusses Dewey's obsessive personality, which paradoxically created havoc among his colleagues and generated lasting library science innovations. [americanlibrariesmagazine.org](http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org)
- "We Need to Talk About Melvil Dewey," Pratt Institute Libraries. Introduction to the Dewey Decimal System, Melvil Dewey, and issues in cataloging and organizing books. Includes short video on Dewey's life and misdeeds. [bit.ly/3CwrqoW](https://bit.ly/3CwrqoW)
- Dorothy Porter Wesley interview audio recording, July 1992. Hear Dorothy discuss her association with Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. [archivalrevival.libsyn.com](http://archivalrevival.libsyn.com)
- "Dorothy B. Porter: A Library Hero," Edward O'Reilly, April 8, 2021, *New-York Historical Society*. Read how Porter forged connections and built collections through her correspondence with New-York Historical Society Director R. W. G. Vail. [blog.nyhistory.org](http://blog.nyhistory.org)

# Graffiti

PAMELA CHEW

Like mobile canvases streaking by,  
Train cars wear anonymous art exhibits  
At track level every morning.  
As I drive slowly in rush hour  
Parallel to the rails,  
I am reduced to a child  
Glancing over and learning the alphabet  
Sprayed on the locomotive's sides.  
I sound out a series of plump letters  
Seemingly random  
But purposely and precisely crafted  
By global autodidacts on the ground,  
Street savvy interns,  
Gifted amateurs.  
Brilliant shades of violet and chartreuse  
Lean together like a small, bloated family.  
This swollen huddle outlined in black  
Fills only the far right corner of a passing freight car.  
I think of midnight artists  
Officially interrupted  
By flashlights under a quarter moon.  
A cylindrical car covered in lines  
Exhibits perpendicular streaks,  
Thick and thin movements,  
Like a stroke chart in elementary Chinese  
Hanging on a wall  
Displaying a message.  
These cryptic symbols, signals, and codes  
Are read, interpreted, and acknowledged  
From urban rooftops, blooming poppy fields,  
and the Stazione Termini  
By fellow peeps, aficionados, and gangsters  
Waiting for the next flame encircled message to speed by.



*Liberty, Harry Chew. As a young painter at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1950, my father was described as an Abstract Expressionist. During the day, he could not escape his countless inquiring students and growing family. As a child, I would wake in the middle of the night and sneak downstairs to find my father working on a canvas, like the one above. These late hours were his only chance to find peace enough to paint. The midnight artists whose style we call "graffiti" remind me of the twenty-five years I witnessed the evolution of my father's style, memories like flashes of graffiti as they zip by. Now, I am the guardian of sixty years of his magical images which inspire me as a writer and poet. Who will be the guardians of the symbols, signals, and codes before graffiti artists' work is whitewashed beyond memory?*

PAMELA CHEW retired from Tulsa Community College where she was the founding faculty member of the Italian and ESL Programs. She also taught at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji, and in Honduras and Colombia.



EDGAR ALLAN POE'S

# The Gold-Bug

CURIOSITY AND THE TROUBLE  
WITH CYPHERS



Edgar Allan Poe may be known for his tales of the supernatural, but he had a remarkably analytical, even mathematical mind. He was extremely wary of romantic ideas of literary inspiration, claiming that, in writing “The Raven,” the work “proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.” And he had no love at all for his more romantically minded colleagues. He thought Emerson “over-rated” and once insulted the poets Cornelius Mathews and William Ellery Channing with an algebraic pun: If Mathews was “execrable” [detestable], he said Channing was [“*x-plus-1-ecrable*.”]

Even a story as fanciful as “The Gold-Bug” originated in Poe’s obsession with logic. The plot is far-fetched: William Legrand, who has lost his family fortune, one day notices a golden beetle on the beach at Sullivan’s Island. He has his servant, Jupiter, wrap the bug up in a piece of parchment, on which he later discovers a coded message written in invisible ink, revealing the spot where Captain Kidd buried his treasure two centuries earlier. Once he has decoded this message, Legrand heads out with Jupiter—and their neighbor, who narrates the tale—to unearth the treasure, whose exact location he determines by ordering Jupiter to drop the bug through the left eye socket of a skull nailed to the end of a tree branch.

Edgar Allan Poe, from the frontispiece of *An American Anthology (1787-1900)* by Edmund Clarence Stedman, ed. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900. [PD] Wikimedia

At this point the narrator, like the reader, is bewildered—“dying with impatience for a solution of this most extraordinary riddle.” But Legrand does not waste anyone’s time. He promptly gives a systematic explanation, several pages long, of how he discovered and decoded the secret message.

First, Legrand says, he determined the language of the message (English), before proceeding to ascertain the most and least frequently used characters. Since in English “the letter which most frequently occurs is e,” he substituted the most frequently used character in the coded message (S) with the letter e, then searched for a three-character combination ending in S (S4S), which he guessed to represent “the” (the most common English word), and so on, until he had completely solved the centuries-old riddle—and become rich to boot.

Legrand is very much acting as Poe’s mouthpiece here. In fact, most of Legrand’s explanation is paraphrased from articles on cryptography Poe had published in *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger* a few years earlier. Inviting readers to send him coded messages where, “in place of alphabetical letters, any kind of marks are made use of at random,” Poe pledged to decode every message “forthwith—however unusual or arbitrary may be the characters employed.” This is precisely what Poe proceeded to do. Over the next months, he solved somewhere between thirty-six and one hundred cyphers in the interest of proving his assertion—which Legrand also makes in “The Gold-Bug”—that “human ingenuity cannot concoct a cypher which human ingenuity cannot resolve.”

In doing this, Poe was not trying (merely) to wow people with his genius for solving cyphers; he was also trying to make a case for the primacy of logic. In his essay “A Few Words on Secret

Writing,” published in 1841—after he had become a minor celebrity for his cryptographic prowess—he outlined not only the history of cryptography but also the rational methods by which one could decode almost any text.

Eventually, Poe was—as he wrote the poet John Tomlin—obliged to swear off cyphers:

The reason . . . will be readily understood. Much curiosity was excited throughout the country by my solutions of these cyphers, and a great number of persons felt a desire to test my powers individually—so that I was at one time absolutely overwhelmed; and this placed me in a dilemma; for I had either to devote my whole time to the solutions, or the correspondents would suppose me a mere boaster . . . You will hardly believe me when I tell you that I have lost, in time, which to me is money, more than a thousand dollars, in solving cyphers, with no other object in view than that just mentioned.

Poe left his newspaper readers, in December 1841, with two final cryptographs, which he credited to one Mr. W. B. Tyler. As far as anyone can tell, no one was able to solve these cryptograms until the 1990s, when American literature professor Terence Whalen and Canadian software engineer Gil Broza finally cracked their codes.

Yet one question remains unanswered even today: Who was W. B. Tyler? Poe himself? Or the rare cryptographer who could out-cryptograph Poe? Arguments on either side abound, as seems appropriate. However logical Poe may have preferred to be, he was no stranger to mystery.

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Paseo Arts District,  
photo by Matt Johnson  
(CC BY-SA 3.0/ Wikimedia)

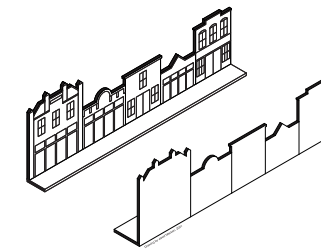
JARED MACKEN

## Cultural cues and collective memory in Oklahoma's downtown spaces

**THE STREET**—a place where strangers, friends, and acquaintances meet—represents a distinctly cosmopolitan life. It is here where interactions and ideas flourish, and, out of this dialogue, artifacts of culture materialize.

We often think of the street, particularly “Main Street,” as a single entity found within a town or city. In actuality, many structures work together to create the cohesive whole of this central thoroughfare. The architect Fumihiko Maki called the structures that comprise the street a “collective form,” a term that is key to understanding this ubiquitous urban condition.

A close examination and analysis of Main Streets in Oklahoma reveals the surprisingly systematic ways that architecture produces culture. Whether constructed as aligned storefronts or orderly courthouse squares, framed by awnings and marquees or niches along artistic plazas, Oklahoma historic Main Streets possess a kind of algorithm for the development of cultural spaces that define the towns and cities of our state today.



### BOLEY

#### Unity in Aligned Flat Fronts

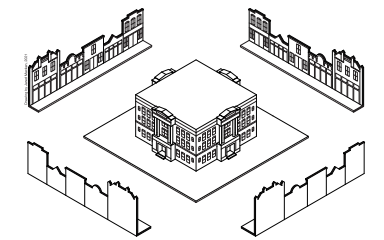
Consider a photograph of Boley's Main Street taken in the early 1900s (opposite page). Buildings and sidewalks line both sides of a dusty unpaved street. As a typical Oklahoma town of the period, it demonstrates a basic—and important—element of organizational code for creating a Main Street: flat building fronts aligned with each other. This simplicity forms a straight wall of storefronts on both sides of the street. What was once a dirt *road* is transformed into a long *space*, a place where the life of the town plays out.

In this aligned arrangement, individual flat fronts appear to repeat and, as a result, form a single wall of buildings, an important characteristic for creating visual coherence along the street. It also allows easy sidewalk access for pedestrians. Each building has a part of the sidewalk in front so people can access the entrance while others pass by.

This strong sense of alignment communicates unification. Still, the parapet walls—the uppermost parts that extend beyond the roof—have slightly different shapes and decorative ornaments that are specific to each building. With these minor changes, individual business owners may stand out and differentiate themselves, even as the repetition and alignment bring all the fronts together as a collective whole.

Boley's early canyon of unified buildings provided the location for the cultural life of the town to flourish, setting the stage for citizens to interact. Alignment brought the individual banks, doctors' offices, barbers, general stores, theater, hotel, and meeting rooms together along a single axis. The simultaneous characteristics of unification and individualism in the physical structures of the street mirrored the goals of the town's citizens.

Boley was founded in 1903 as a refuge for former slaves and Black Americans escaping oppressive laws and living conditions in other states, including Freedmen from the Muscogee and Cherokee Nations. While the lack of laws limiting the freedom of former slaves allowed the town of Boley to be settled, the community was still at risk. The organization of the Main Street and the sense of unity it communicated was a necessary characteristic in realizing the ambition for all its citizens to live a life of freedom as a community, to become full citizens of a larger society. By 1911, at its height, Boley's population had risen to 4,000 citizens, and it was a thriving town with all the amenities it needed to be self-sufficient.



### PERRY

#### Communal Space in Courthouse Square

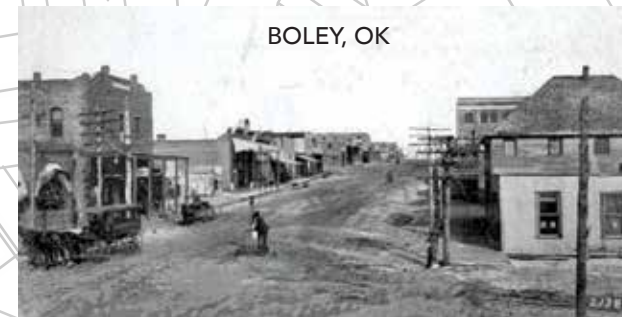
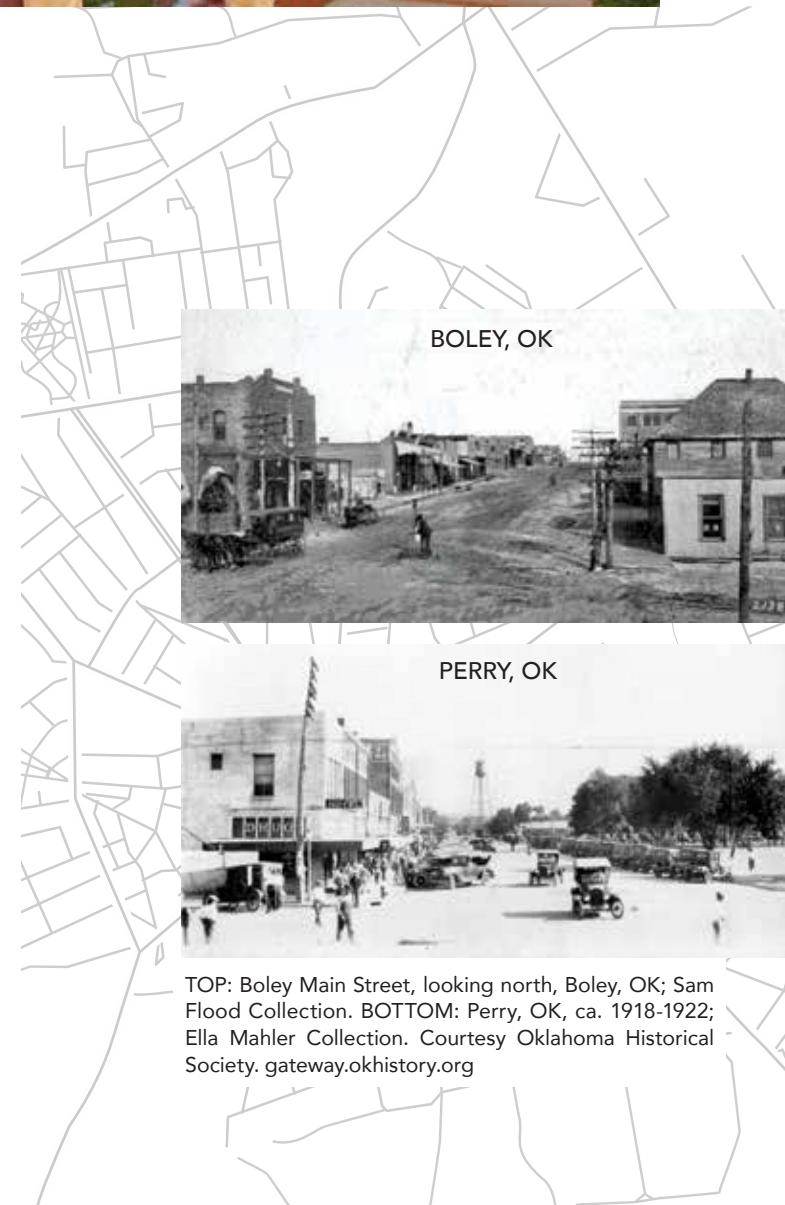
The courthouse square, a Main Street that bends to face the county courthouse at its center, can also make use of flat fronts, but no longer places emphasis on the unified storefronts as a symbol of unity and equitable distribution of space. Instead, Main Street structures emphasize the building at the town's center—the courthouse—as a symbol of law and order.

While there are many courthouse squares across the state of Oklahoma, one of the earliest is found in Perry. The town was founded in 1893 after a land office was established, ushering in a land rush that would displace Native Americans who had been forcibly moved to the territory from other parts of the country. A courthouse was soon constructed, establishing not only a symbol of law and order, but a literal location for enforcing it.

Settlements with courthouse squares continued a tradition of colonial town plans with central squares dedicated to the rule of law. Central and South America, for example, are dotted with Spanish colonial towns that have this very organization. In the first few years that Perry was the county seat, county officers met in the second-story offices in surrounding main street buildings until a timber-framed courthouse was constructed according to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's directive for county seats. Perry's town square was initially left open, planted only with white elm trees that transformed the patch of dusty earth into a park-like center.

While the courthouse sits on the central block of Perry, what makes it distinct today is the presence of the public library that shares the town square with the courthouse and remnants of that initial elm grove. This companion to law and order at the center of the town is a building that represents freely accessible public information and knowledge for all its citizens. Between the courthouse and library, sidewalks crisscross green spaces punctuated by a gazebo and benches, providing public space for pedestrians throughout the centralized block.

In Perry, the aligned flat fronts work together to emphasize the centralized block as a symbol of law and order balanced by public access to information and knowledge, resulting in a communal space where citizens may congregate, gather, and organize.



BOLEY, OK

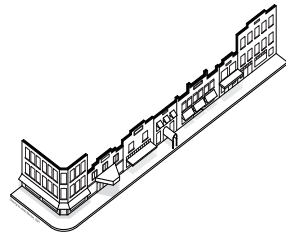


PERRY, OK

TOP: Boley Main Street, looking north, Boley, OK; Sam Flood Collection. BOTTOM: Perry, OK, ca. 1918-1922; Ella Mahler Collection. Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society. [gateway.okhistory.org](http://gateway.okhistory.org)

## DEEP DEUCE, OKLAHOMA CITY

Cultural Space of  
Awnings and Marquees



In larger cities, Main Streets are scattered across the urban landscape and coexist with each other. Deep Deuce, first known as the Deep Second or Second Street in central Oklahoma City, is one such area. It once shared many of the characteristics of Boley—flat fronts with individual features repeated to facilitate community interaction. Novel additions characterized Deep Second in the form of little roofs and shelters that protruded from the unified building fronts. These awnings provided shade for the large inviting storefront windows, signage for businesses, and shelter for pedestrians on the sidewalk.

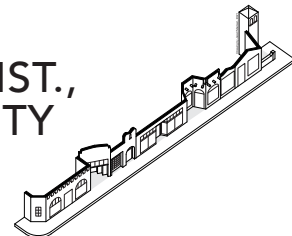
The grand marquee for the famous Aldridge Theatre, a cultural mainstay hosting famous jazz and blues acts, facilitated all these activities. It functioned as a kind of billboard, a public proclamation of the most up-to-date cultural information. It also provided sidewalk shelter and a place to gather while drawing people into the theatre.

The awnings along Second Street served the needs of stores they were attached to and created open-air collective meeting space for seeing friends and strangers. These moments of transition, from the hustle and bustle of the street to the interior cultural and retail spaces run and frequented by inhabitants of the neighborhood, added another dimension to the code of the street. Together, these characteristics declared that this was not a road to somewhere else, it was a cultural destination.

The Deep Second was a dynamic cultural haven for African Americans who moved to take lucrative jobs in the adjacent Brickyard District. By day the street was home to businesses, barbers, doctors' offices, restaurants, and cafés. Parades and fashion shows often occurred in the middle of the street. At night the atmosphere was alive with jazz and blues clubs. It is easy to imagine the protruding awnings and marquee as a primary gathering space—a public front porch along the sidewalk.

## PASEO ARTS DIST., OKLAHOMA CITY

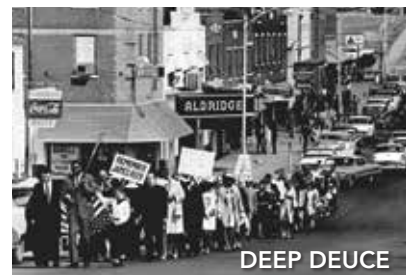
Artistic Identity in  
Niches and Plazas



Just a few miles northeast of the Deep Second is the small diagonal aberration in the grid of Oklahoma City: Paseo Street. Pulling onto the slightly curving street is like turning into a city within the city. While linear, Paseo lies at an angle to the city's orthogonal grid.

Paseo was built in the late 1920s by dentist-turned-developer G.A. Nichols. Originally called the Spanish Village, its adobe-like building facades differentiated themselves from more traditionally aligned brick fronts. In the 1970s, the street was adopted by underground youth culture as the location for meetings and events regularly advertised in counter-culture newspapers. The arched entryways and niches provided perfect spaces for hanging out, creating a kind of mystique, a narrative that helped propel the street into the 1980s when it became known for its art festivals. The idiosyncratic, stylized fronts and niches of the physical structures projected the neighborhood's artistic identity, setting it apart from other city districts.

Here, the building fronts connect to each other but are slightly misaligned, sometimes pulling back away from the street to create a series of niches along the sidewalk, accentuating entrances and drawing pedestrians into the cafés, boutiques, and galleries that this area is known for today. The niches also function as miniature plazas, gathering places where citizens can meet for coffee, open-air shopping, or to peruse art exhibits nestled in the carved-out spaces of the buildings. This varied design imbues the street with character, contributing to the lasting quality of Paseo as an arts district.



DEEP DEUCE



PASEO ARTS DIST.

LEFT: Demonstration in Deep Deuce; photo by Austin Traverse, March 27, 1956, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection. RIGHT: Artists and artisans set up their wares in booths along Paseo; photo by Joe Miller, May 27, 1980, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection. Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society. gateway.okhistory.org. OPPOSITE: Paseo Arts District, photo by MARELBUR, July 11, 2014. (CC BY 3.0/Wikimedia)

## MAIN STREET

Code, Culture, and  
Collective Memory



The “code” of Main Street is written through the individual structures that comprise it and through their uses. The collection of cultural spaces (theaters, music halls, art museums), structural symbols of law and order (courthouses and county sheriff buildings), and community gathering places (libraries, community centers, schoolhouses, churches)—and the direct adjacencies these structures have with each other, the connections they create—initiate the unifying qualities a Main Street needs to become a cohesive whole. Through visual and symbolic imagery, they make a city or town a *place*.

Equally important are the human interactions these spaces initiate. The architect Aldo Rossi identified this relationship between the physical aspects of the street and its human interactions as the location of the city's *collective memory*—the unified experience of community that is enhanced by the localized, specific shape architectural elements take. The structures, spaces, and connections along Main Street generate collective memory, which in turn produces the cultural artifacts of the city.

When Booker T. Washington visited Boley in 1905, he described the community as being unified around a common goal of creating a home and community, where residents could experience the most basic human right: freedom. The aligned flat fronts unified Boley's linear Main Street architecturally, mirroring the human condition described by Washington. Likewise, the central square of Perry provided public space for the cultural buildings and storefronts that faced it. The awnings of the Deep Second announced the doorways to stores while providing shelter and gathering space on the street. The niches and misalignments of Paseo's fronts formed spaces for experiencing an artistic collective.

The architecture of Main Street, no matter its location, demonstrates and communicates the grand gesture of its public's intent—the ordering of space that facilitates social interaction, the connection and culture that arise from those gatherings, and a central space that becomes its symbolic identity.

JARED MACKEN is an architectural designer and theorist who researches the intersection between architectural form, the city, and cultural production. He received his Doctor of Science in Architecture from ETH-Zürich in 2018. He is the author of the award-winning book *The Western Town: A Theory of Aggregation* (Hatje Cantz, 2013). He teaches courses on architectural design and the history and theory of the city at Oklahoma State University. Black-and-white axonometric drawings by Jared Macken. jaredmacken.com



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# NOTEWORTHY



**FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**Suzette V. Chang,**  
Chair

It's an honor to be a member of the Oklahoma Humanities (OH) landscape. My experiences of the organization are informed by service as a member of the OH Board of Trustees and by interactions with OH programming and grants. One such program, *Let's Talk About It* (LTAI), fosters meaningful book discussions facilitated by scholars. The program is near-and-dear to me as it is a staple at the Guthrie Public Library where I am employed. Our customers love LTAI! I've also had the amazing opportunity to serve as an OH grant reviewer, witnessing how organizations and small communities with limited resources are transformed as grant recipients.

I've learned so much as an OH Board member. One insight I've gained is that our Board is skilled, rooted in humanity, and invested in Oklahoma. My anthropology background drives my goals as the incoming OH Board Chair: to reach and earn the trust of Oklahoma's diverse and historically underestimated communities, while maintaining relationships with our longtime allies and partners. I share a bittersweet yet abundant thank you to departing Chair Valorie Walters. Valorie has been and continues to be a pillar of expertise for our organization and me, helping to make this transition smooth and effortless. Again, Valorie, thank you!

I invite you to take a deeper dive into the enriching experiences of the humanities by visiting our calendar of events. Virtual LTAI is an option. And let me tell you about our award-winning *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine. This amazing and qualitative program unpacks the diverse layers and meanings of Oklahoma, Oklahomans, and the human experience. The magazine was decorated with 15 awards during 2021 and generates engagement and feedback throughout the United States.

I encourage you to walk this humanities road with us and to be tantalized by all that Oklahoma Humanities has to offer.

## OH ADDS NEW STAFF MEMBER



Executive Director Caroline Lowery announced the addition of Shana Keith-Ward to the Oklahoma Humanities staff. As the new Administrative Assistant, Shana brings more than 25 years of experience in the non-profit and for-profit fields, including curatorial assistance, volunteer coordination, administrative assistance, and project and program administration.

"Shana is a passionate humanities professional," Lowery notes. "We welcome her expertise as she works to maximize our office organization and efficiency." Shana holds a BA in Fine Arts and Business Administration from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. Most recently, she worked at the Oklahoma Museums Association.

## MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Oklahoma Humanities is governed by a 24-member Board of Trustees, comprising private citizens, industry leaders, academic scholars, and governor's appointees—an expert team with a passion for ensuring educational and cultural opportunities for all Oklahomans. "I'm honored to welcome two new members to our dedicated and engaged Board of Trustees," Executive Director Caroline Lowery stated. "We're grateful for the experience and leadership they bring."



**LAUREN DUNLAP** currently serves as First Lady Sarah Stitt's Chief of Staff and is the Executive Director of the Sarah Stitt Hope Foundation, a partner of the OU Hope Research Center. She is a graduate of Oral Roberts University, with a bachelor's degree in English Literature and French. Prior to her current position, she taught at One Hope, a nonprofit that provides reading and literacy programs to children in low-income neighborhoods.



**DR. ANNE HOLT** received her PhD in Theatre from Columbia University where she also taught. During her time in New York City, she was co-founder and artistic director of Morningside Opera, praised for "bold imagination and musical diligence" by *The New York Times*. Her book, *Modernizing Costume Design, 1820-1920*, was published by Routledge in fall 2020. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Humanities at the University of Central Oklahoma.

## ABOUT OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Oklahoma Humanities (OH) strengthens communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. As the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, OH provides and supports programming for the general public that uses humanities disciplines (such as history, literature, ethics, and philosophy) to deeply explore what it means to be human. OH accepts grant applications from nonprofits across the state for programs that may take the form of museum exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, oral history projects, or other formats that best serve local communities. OH also administers programs that provide free access to cultural humanities content, including: *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine; *Let's Talk About It*, a reading and discussion series; the *BrainBox* podcast; and *Museum on Main Street*, a collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution to provide traveling exhibits to small rural communities. Visit our website to find an event near you, read magazine archives, listen to the *BrainBox* podcast, or explore OH programs and grant opportunities. We look forward to hearing from you. (405) 235-0280 | okhumanities.org | ohc@okhumanities.org

## OH AWARDS AMERICAN RESCUE GRANTS

Oklahoma Humanities (OH) is proud to report that we have distributed almost \$700,000 in American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funding to 51 cultural and educational organizations statewide. Grants funded general operating expenses at museums, archives, historic sites, and other nonprofits recovering from the pandemic.

Funding for these grants was supported by \$135 million in supplemental funding allocated to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Oklahoma Humanities was responsible for the distribution of federal funding allocated to the state of Oklahoma via the NEH Office of Federal/State Partnership.

"The pandemic's economic ramifications for our cultural institutions and their employees have been severe," said OH Executive Director Caroline Lowery. "Museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites across Oklahoma have experienced layoffs, extended closures, and revenue losses. The Oklahoma Humanities Staff and Board have diligently worked to distribute this much-needed American Rescue Plan relief funding efficiently and equitably across Oklahoma."

**\$699,824**  
Distributed to Oklahoma cultural organizations

**236**  
Jobs saved representing every congressional district

**124**  
Jobs created across four congressional districts

Image courtesy of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**ORGANIZATIONS AWARDED FUNDING:** American Banjo Museum; Asian District Cultural Association; Bristow Historical Society; Broken Arrow Historical Society Museum; Cherokees for Black Indian History Preservation Foundation; Chisholm Trail Heritage Center; Chisholm Trail Museum; City of Anadarko; City of Ponca City; Claremore Museum of History; Coleman Theatre; Delaware Nation; Drumright Historical Society Museum; Five Civilized Tribes Museum; Friends of Fort Gibson Foundation; Friends of the Murrell Home; Friends of the Pawnee Bill Ranch Association; Friends of Rentiesville Blues Inc.; Har-Ber Village Museum; Historical Society of the United States District Court of the Western District of Oklahoma; Jacobson Foundation; Jim Thorpe Association and Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame; Lincoln Enrichment Center; National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum; Norman Cultural Connection Inc.; Oklahoma City Community College; Oklahoma City Museum of Art; Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation; Oklahoma City Zoological Trust; Oklahoma Council for History Education; Oklahoma Genealogical Society; Oklahoma Hall of Fame; Oklahoma Museums Association; Oklahoma Route 66 Association; Oklahoma State University; Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma; Philbrook Museum of Art; P'Light Society Jazz Inc.; Preservation Oklahoma; Route 66 Alliance; Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry; Seminole Nation Historical Society; Seminole Nation of Oklahoma; Thick Descriptions; Three Rivers Museum of Muskogee; Tulsa Air and Space Museum; Tulsa Chautauqua; Tulsa Debate League; Tulsa Historical Society & Museum; University of Oklahoma; William Fremont Harn Gardens Inc.



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

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- FALL: Mandatory Draft, Aug. 1 | Final, Sept. 1
- Opportunity Grant applications accepted year-round
- Scholar Research Grants: To be determined
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**NEXT UP: ETC. | FALL/WINTER 2022**

What if *etc.* didn't signal the end of a thought, but the beginning? In the next issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* we'll consider the details—all the rest—that *etc.* implies: The quirky and miscellaneous. The intriguing and elusive. Creative articles that inform, enlighten, surprise, and inspire. And you know us ... the humanities are the limit!