

Oklahoma HUMANITIES

FALL 2010

IMMIGRATION LAW
RETRO METRO OKC
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
THE IDEAS AND INFLUENCE OF DANA GIOIA
AN INTERVIEW WITH POET NATASHA TRETHERWEY

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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

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The opinions expressed in *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES are those of the authors. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in the magazine do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Oklahoma Humanities Council, its Board of Trustees, or staff.

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ON THE COVER

Photo by Christopher D. Brazee.
Read the story behind the image on page 31.

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Mike Klemme

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From the Executive Director
ANN THOMPSON

In the highest civilization, the book is still the highest delight. He who has once known its satisfactions is provided with a resource against calamity.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Readers who are well acquainted with our organization know that throughout our thirty-nine years of operation we have devoted many resources to encouraging and facilitating the reading and discussion of books. Books are an inexpensive means to access the thoughts, imaginations, insights, humor, research, and conclusions of our contemporaries and our predecessors. What a trove of human experience can be found in books!

New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote about the value of reading books in an opinion piece this summer. In it he addressed the ongoing debate about the role the Internet plays in our ability to be serious thinkers. Balancing the benefits of ready access to information, the Internet can also lead to multidistractions and degrade our ability to engage in deep thought. Brooks states, “The literary world is still better at helping you become cultivated, mastering significant things of lasting import. To learn these sorts of things, you have to defer to greater minds than your own. You have to take the time to immerse yourself in a great writer’s world.”

I can hear the grumblings of the younger set or those who have reconciled themselves to the overall utility of the Internet’s offerings even at the expense of a well-read populace; but here at OHC, we live what we preach. We hold an office book discussion several times a year, choosing books from the vast list in our *Let’s Talk About It, Oklahoma!* program.

Recently we’ve discussed Carl Hiaasen’s *Native Tongue*, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, the children’s classic *The Wind in the Willows*, and Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*. It’s an enjoyable group activity and each time we come away with a better understanding of authors and their message. Even given that I accessed Brooks’ article online and that I recognize that blogs and instant messaging allow for interaction, I’m in agreement with Emerson that books offer us the highest delight in the highest civilization. Check our calendar on page 30 (and our website for the latest listings and venue details) for book discussions in your area—or give us a call to arrange one. We guarantee that you too will enjoy the satisfaction found in books.



THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION

If you’re a K-12 teacher or have students in your household, you’ll want to know about the *Lincoln Essay Contest* and *Poetry Out Loud*. Public, private, and home school students are invited to participate.

The *Lincoln Essay Contest* awards cash prizes to winning students and their teachers in five grade-level categories. This year, students in grades K-3 are asked to draw pictures that illustrate a cause of the Civil War. Students in grades 4-12 should submit an essay that discusses Abraham Lincoln’s personal and political responses to slavery. Winners will be invited to an awards reception at the Oklahoma History Center on April 9th. An official entry form must be attached to all submissions and may be downloaded from our website. The entry postmark deadline is February 11th. Many thanks to BancFirst; Pottawatomie Telephone Company; and Sonic, America’s Drive-In for program support.

Poetry Out Loud (POL), a national arts and humanities education program, encourages high school students to learn about poetry through memorization and recitation. The state winner is awarded an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., to participate in the National Finals in April 2011, where a total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends will be awarded. Curriculum materials are free for participating schools—but teachers must register by December 3rd. We also offer POL workshops for schools, which discuss the value of reading and knowing poetry, the importance of memory, and tips on recitation technique and how to choose the “right” poems. Regional finals will be held in February and the state finals competition will be at Oklahoma City University on March 5th. OHC facilitates the program in partnership with the Oklahoma Arts Council.

For information on participating in these programs, teachers should contact Dr. Jennifer Kidney, OHC Director of Literature Programs: (405) 235-0280 or jennifer@okhumanitiescouncil.org. For general information, visit the “Programs” page of our website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org.



2010 Lincoln Essay Contest awards

OHC PRIVACY POLICY

Protecting your privacy is extremely important to us. For detailed information on our privacy policy, call us at (405) 235-0280 or go to our website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org

GRANT FUNDING AVAILABLE

OHC community grants encourage cultural programming on the local level across the state. We also support humanities-related scholar research and teacher institutes for K-12 educators. Guidelines and forms are posted on our website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org/grants. Contact David Pettyjohn, Assistant Director, to discuss the eligibility of your project: (405) 235-0280 or david@okhumanitiescouncil.org.



Participants of a Teacher Institute sponsored by Oral Roberts University visit the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa.

Community grants support local communities and organizations with funding for a variety of programming: conferences, exhibitions, lectures, discussions, audio/video productions, book festivals, and more. Funding levels range from \$1,000 to \$15,000.

Scholar research grants encourage original humanities research by Oklahoma scholars. Independent scholars as well as those affiliated with Oklahoma colleges and universities are eligible. Grant levels range from \$500 to \$1,000. Deadline: December 1.

Teacher Institutes increase the knowledge and professionalism of K-12 educators. Participants network with peers and engage with distinguished university professors and other humanities professionals in an intensive exploration of curriculum-relevant humanities topics. OHC offers grant funding to implement teacher institutes and is now accepting host site applications. Any nonprofit (in collaboration with an institution of higher learning), college, or university may apply. Draft deadline: November 1.

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

Send your letters and opinions to the Editor at: carla@okhumanitiescouncil.org. Include "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line of your message. We look forward to hearing from you.



From the OHC Board of Trustees
ED BARTH, CHAIR

This issue coincides with the end of my two-year tenure as Chair of the Oklahoma Humanities Council Board of Trustees. My board service commenced in 2005, and I would like to reflect on some of the highlights and accomplishments.

It was my pleasure to work briefly with former Executive Director Anita May, who ably guided the Council for thirty years before she retired. When current Executive Director Ann Thompson joined us, the OHC board and staff launched a year-long effort to develop a strategic plan to lead us into the new century.

That wide-ranging and vital plan generated several new programs, including a partnership with the Smithsonian Institution to bring Museum on Main Street to small towns throughout the state. That program provides rural communities the rare opportunity to host a Smithsonian traveling exhibit, showcase local culture, and generate community pride and volunteerism. I was pleased to participate in the opening of the *Journey Stories* tour in 2008 in Okmulgee. Despite the 104-degree heat that day, the crowd was large and celebratory.

Another highlight has been the creation of the *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* magazine, which has been so enthusiastically received by readers that in 2011 we will increase publication to three issues per year. The Council considers the magazine an important program because it reaches every county in the state and provides rich, educational content from humanities scholars across the country. This is a wonderful example of the expansion of OHC services which has occurred during my time as Chair.

I have also had the pleasure of presiding over two of our annual Oklahoma Humanities Awards events. The awards give us insight into the dedication and hard work of countless individuals and organizations as they come together to tell our state's history, preserve its cultural resources, and share the wisdom found within humanities disciplines to further understanding of ourselves, our communities, and our world.

I have many more warm memories of the last several years, including the opportunity to work with so many able and dedicated board members and our highly talented staff. I am grateful to have had the privilege to serve on the Council and expect to continue my association and see the exciting and valuable impact it has on us all.



Christian K. Keesee

KIRKPATRICK FOUNDATION

Following a distinguished military career, John E. Kirkpatrick, a native of Oklahoma City, founded Kirkpatrick Oil Company in 1950. Married to Eleanor Blake in 1932, they devoted time and resources to the development of numerous Oklahoma charities. In 1955, they established the Kirkpatrick Foundation with a contribution of \$10,000 and, in 1994, a \$10 million gift from the Foundation supported the creation of the Kirkpatrick Family Fund at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation.

John and Eleanor's daughter, Joan Kirkpatrick, continued this philanthropic tradition, serving as President of the Foundation from 1976 until 2009. Interest areas of the foundation expanded under her leadership and that of her son, Christian K. Keesee, current Board Chair. In addition to arts, culture, and education, the Foundation supports animal welfare and conservation.

The Foundation helps organizations such as the Oklahoma Humanities Council (OHC) leverage resources to support systemic change in how these areas are valued in Oklahoma. "Through the various programs of OHC, the Foundation can advance its own mission of building a healthy cultural landscape in Oklahoma," says Keesee. "Partnerships like this make Oklahoma City a vibrant place to live."

Governed by a volunteer board and operated by a small staff, the Kirkpatrick Foundation continues to contribute funds, direction, and encouragement to many organizations with particular emphasis on programs benefiting citizens of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Over the course of its 50-year history, the Foundation has granted over \$50 million for the benefit of arts and culture, education, animal research, and conservation. The significant contributions of the Foundation have made a momentous impact on almost every cultural organization in Oklahoma City.

SHOP! EAT! AND SUPPORT OHC!

Whether you're a bibliophile or gourmet, the month of October offers two great opportunities to support the work of the Oklahoma Humanities Council (OHC). Join us!

Barnes & Noble Bookfair
October 23, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
6100 North May Avenue, OKC

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS

Shop at Barnes & Noble on October 23rd and a portion of your purchase will help support OHC. If you don't live in the north Oklahoma City area, you can lend support by using our Bookfair Event ID number at your local Barnes & Noble or when making purchases online that day. Vouchers with our ID number will be sent to anyone wishing to participate, so check our website where more information will be posted soon.

Panera Event Day
October 29, 6:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
7101 NW Expressway (at Rockwell), OKC



As an Op-Dough partner of Panera Bread, OHC has opportunities to increase awareness of our organization through in-store event days. Stop by the Panera location at NW Expressway & Rockwell on October 29th and mention OHC when making your purchases. Panera will donate 10% of sales to OHC. Our staff will be on hand to greet guests and treat them to the latest issue of *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES magazine.

JOIN OUR E-NEWS LIST!



www.okhumanitiescouncil.org

Want the latest news on OHC events? Join our e-news mailing list and receive information as it happens. Go to our website, look under "News" on the left side of the home page, and click on "Join Our Mailing List." We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with up-to-the-minute news and event information from the humanities community.

October 7

AVATAR

And the Culture of Language

With Dr. Paul Frommer, Creator of the Na'vi Language

Oklahoma CONVERSATION

IN THE HUMANITIES

Presented by: The Oklahoma Humanities Council

Philbrook Museum of Art
2727 S. Rockford Rd., Tulsa
7:00 p.m., Free & Open to the Public
Information: (405) 235-0280
www.okhumanitiescouncil.org

PAUL FROMMER TO DISCUSS THE LANGUAGE OF AVATAR

Dr. Paul Frommer, communications professor and linguist who developed the Na'vi language for James Cameron's film *Avatar*, will be the featured speaker for OHC's third annual *Oklahoma Conversation in the Humanities*.

Frommer's opening remarks will address the topic "Avatar and the Culture of Language." He will discuss his work on developing Na'vi, how the language works, and relay anecdotes from working with actors on the movie set. Following those remarks will be a moderated Q&A with the audience.

When asked about making his first visit to Oklahoma, Frommer replied in Na'vi: "*Tsayun oe Tulsane ziva'u fie ayngabu nìvotx teri li'fya leNa'vi pivängkxo a fi'u, oeru prte' lu nìngay.*"—"I'm really delighted to be able to come to Tulsa to speak with you all about the Na'vi language."

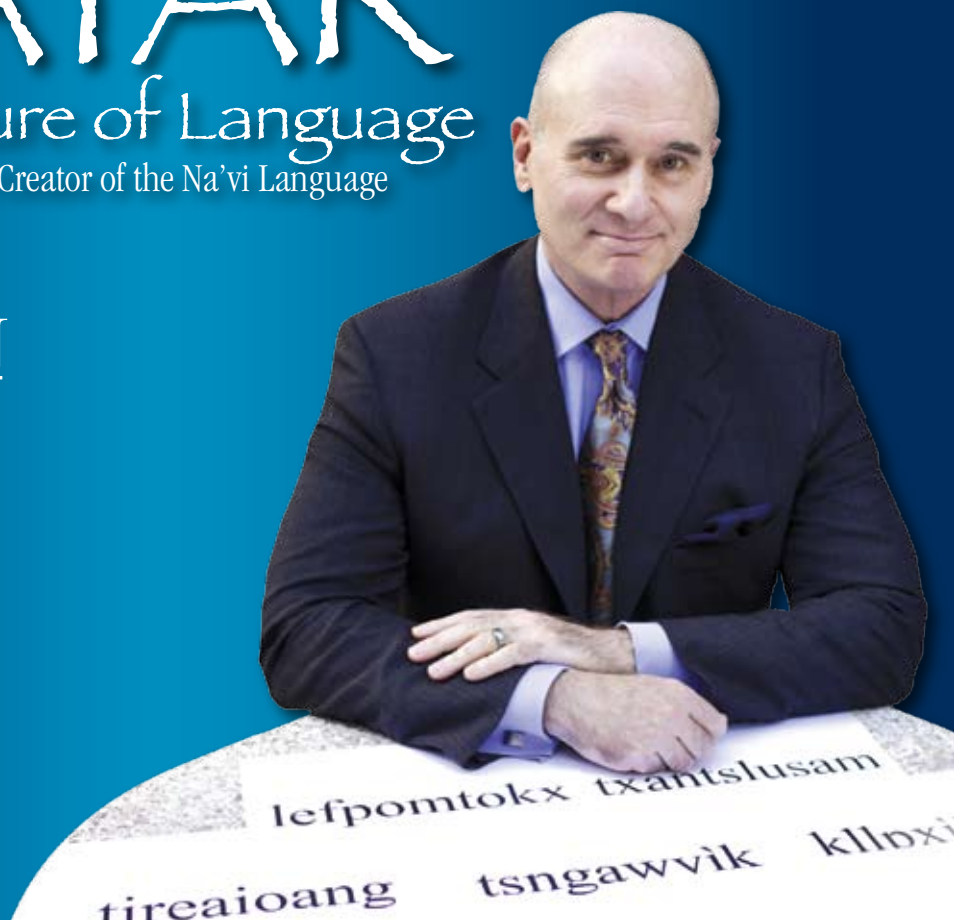
Dr. Benjamin Alpers of the Honors College at the University of Oklahoma will moderate the discussion. Alpers received his Ph.D. in history from Princeton University and is currently a member of the OHC Board of Trustees. Former Conversation speakers have included author Sara Paretsky and film critic David Denby.

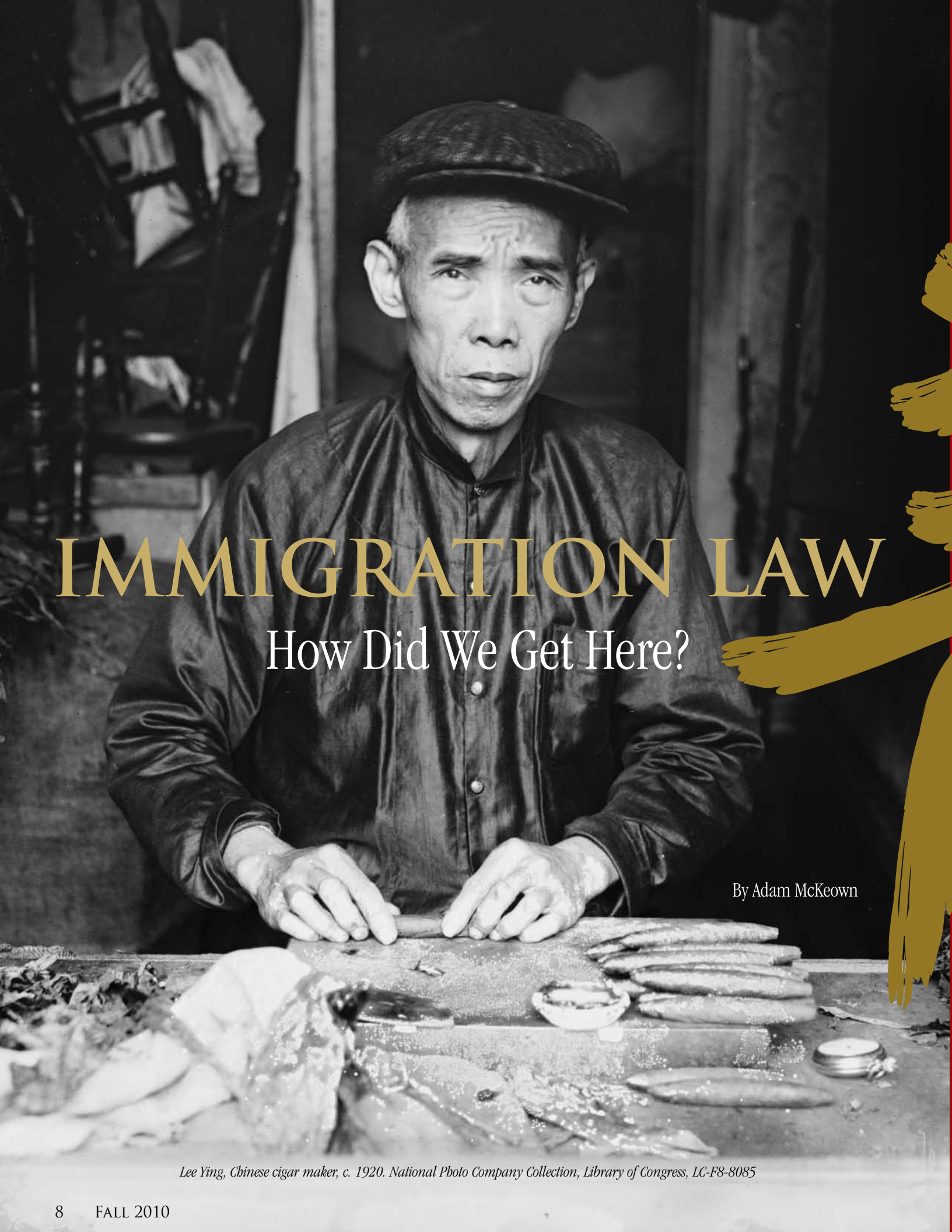
"We enjoy this opportunity to let participants ask questions and talk openly with the authors, scholars, and dignitaries we host," says OHC Executive Director Ann Thompson. "This is our third year for the event in Tulsa. Audiences are enthusiastic and we're developing a following. The early response to Paul Frommer's upcoming visit is exciting. We hope to pack the house."

Paul Frommer is Professor Emeritus of Clinical Management Communication at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California (USC). After receiving his undergraduate degree in mathematics, Frommer taught with the U.S. Peace Corps in Malaysia. He completed his Ph.D. in linguistics at USC, followed by a ten-year stint in corporate business. Returning to USC in the mid-'90s, he joined the faculty and served as Director for what is now the Marshall Center for Management Communication from 2005 to 2008. Frommer is principal co-author, with Edward Finegan, of *Looking at Languages: A Workbook in Elementary Linguistics* (fifth edition scheduled for publication this year).

To hear a bit of the Na'vi spoken language, visit the July 25, 2010 posting on Paul Frommer's blog: <http://naviteri.org>.

Sponsors: National Endowment for the Humanities, Herbert and Roseline Gussman Foundation, and KOSU—The State's Public Radio.
Thanks, also, to our community partners: Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa, Circle Cinema, and Tulsa City-County Library.





IMMIGRATION LAW

How Did We Get Here?

By Adam McKeown

Lee Ying, Chinese cigar maker, c. 1920. National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress, LC-F8-8085

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Debate over U.S. immigration policy is as public and volatile as at any time in our history. Recent wrangling between state legislatures and the federal government has resembled a divisive game of one-upmanship. From the time author Adam McKeown agreed to write this story in May to press time in early August, we updated “the latest developments” for this introduction several times.

Beginning with our own state's recent actions: In November 2007, Oklahoma passed sweeping anti-illegal immigration legislation, House Bill 1804, with provisions to curtail the hiring of undocumented workers and prevent access to tax-supported benefits by illegal aliens. On April 19, 2010, portions of that bill were struck down as unconstitutional and unenforceable by the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Just days later, on April 23, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed legislation, Senate Bill 1070, that gives law enforcement the power to detain suspected illegal aliens. Touted to be the most wide-reaching immigration reform in decades, Arizona's law has prompted national debate.

On July 6, the U.S. Justice Department filed suit against Arizona, citing that S.B. 1070 “unconstitutionally interferes with the federal government's authority to set and enforce immigration policy.” On July 14, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox filed an *amicus brief* (a petition to submit information in hopes of influencing the court's decision) in federal court supporting Arizona's immigration law against the federal lawsuit. Michigan's action was backed by eight other states—Florida, Alabama, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and Virginia—and the U.S. Territory of Northern Mariana Islands. On July 28, just hours before the Arizona law was to take effect, U.S. District Judge Susan Bolton issued a temporary injunction to block portions of the Arizona law that “are likely preempted by federal law.” Arizona immediately appealed the decision the following day, asking for an expedited appeals process to lift the injunction. Ending a month-long flurry of moves and countermoves, the federal appeals court ruled on July 30 to hear the case in early November.

The *amicus brief* filed by Michigan acts as a point of information for the court. Granted, these documents are meant to sway verdicts, but the concept—“here's a bit of relevant information to consider before you make a decision”—is inherent in study of the humanities. History, ethics, jurisprudence, philosophy are all disciplines that reveal human experience and shed light on the current events and complex issues—like immigration—that bombard us every day.

The power struggle between states' rights and federal authority to regulate immigration has a long history in our country. As Adam McKeown demonstrates, there is much to learn by examining that history and reflecting on how attitudes have changed—and how the arguments, pro and con, are very much the same.



How have we come to believe that immigration

control is a fundamental duty of national governments? Why do we even think that human travel can and should be controlled at national borders? How does this belief coexist with the equally common Western ideal that restricting departure from and movement within a nation are basic infringements on human freedom? In a society that prides itself on opportunity and equal treatment under law, why does our government impose quotas and restrict who can and cannot enter our country based on wealth, education, skills, family connections, or country of origin? A look at the history of immigration law can provide insight on these issues.

Current Immigrant Rights Vary

In the United States, the only rights the constitution explicitly reserves for citizens are to hold federal elected office and freedom from voting discrimination. The constitution grants certain basic rights to all “persons” within U.S. borders, such as due process of law and protection from unreasonable searches.

Currently, the rights of immigrants vary according to legal status. *Lawful permanent residents* (green card holders) enjoy most of the same rights and benefits as citizens, but there are exceptions: they generally cannot vote, except in a few local elections, and they may be deported if they commit a crime.

Temporary aliens (holders of valid nonimmigrant visas) can be barred from particular rights: to work, attend school, obtain medical insurance, or receive public benefits. Permission to engage in these activities varies depending on the kind of visa issued to an alien.

Unauthorized aliens (those who enter illegally or who overstay or break conditions of their visas) enjoy only the rights granted to “persons” in the Constitution: they are protected from unreasonable searches and seizures, from being “deprived of life, liberty and property without due process of law,” and they have equal protection of law as guaranteed in the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court has interpreted these protections as a guarantee that illegal aliens have a right to core labor standards, free emergency care in publicly-funded hospitals, and free public education for children.

Many states have passed laws that bar aliens from accessing public benefits,

holding particular jobs, or obtaining particular licenses. Most of these laws have been struck down by federal courts, except for those pertaining to voting, government employment, or national security. Attitudes towards illegal immigration vary greatly from state to state. Eleven states allow illegal aliens to obtain driver’s licenses; some states allow illegal aliens to pay in-state tuition for public college; and several cities have laws forbidding police to ask questions about immigration status.

While denied certain rights and privileges of citizenship, immigrants, regardless of status, bear many of the obligations of U.S. residents. All legal immigrants pay income, sales, and property taxes. Illegal aliens pay sales and property taxes and over half of them file income tax returns. Many also pay Social Security (an estimated \$7 billion a year), Medicare, and unemployment insurance taxes without prospect of earning returns because they are using stolen or false identification.



Editorial cartoon: White & Bauer, c. 1860-1869. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-22399

The Ideal of Free Movement

During much of the nineteenth century, prevailing opinion insisted free movement—travel within and across national borders—was one of the basic rights of man and was considered indispensable to economic and political progress. By the 1860s, nations around the world had repealed laws that limited emigration, immigration, and domestic movement as relics of an unenlightened age. Governments such as those of Russia, China, and Japan that restricted movement were considered despotic

and uncivilized, outside the accepted norms of international society.

In many ways, we still live with that nineteenth-century embrace of free movement. We criticize countries that control the departure or domestic movement of its citizens as infringing on human liberties. Despite those criticisms, we also assume that immigration control is the duty of national governments. By contrast, in the early 1800s most immigration controls were enacted by local governments. The repeal of immigration controls in the mid-1800s began a jurisdictional battle that would ultimately uphold the power of national over local governments.

The Rise of Restrictions

Immigration laws that emerged in the 1880s were originally enforced to divide the West from the rest of the world. These laws, especially those of the United States, were critical in establishing basic principles: that immigration was controlled at national borders; that immigration was a domestic rather

than international issue; that immigrants had no necessary rights other than those the receiving country chose to grant them. These controls were conceived as “extraordinary measures” that were necessary to contain unique racial and health threats and to protect “civilized peoples” from “barbarians.”

The white settler communities of California, British Columbia, and Australia were pioneers in new immigration law. In many ways these were the most self-consciously egalitarian and progressive societies of the world, firmly committed to ideals of self-government and democracy with broad suffrage. One of the foundations of popular self-government was the power of the people to determine who “the people” would be. Chinese immigrants traveled to these frontier regions for much the same reasons as Europeans and Americans—to engage in mining, agriculture, small business, and railway construction. But white settlers believed that the Chinese could not understand republican virtues, that their servile attitudes perpetuated low wages—and they were taking jobs. Frontier communities quickly decided that Chinese immigrants were not part of “the people.” Anti-Chinese sentiments in the U.S. were well established by the late 1850s.

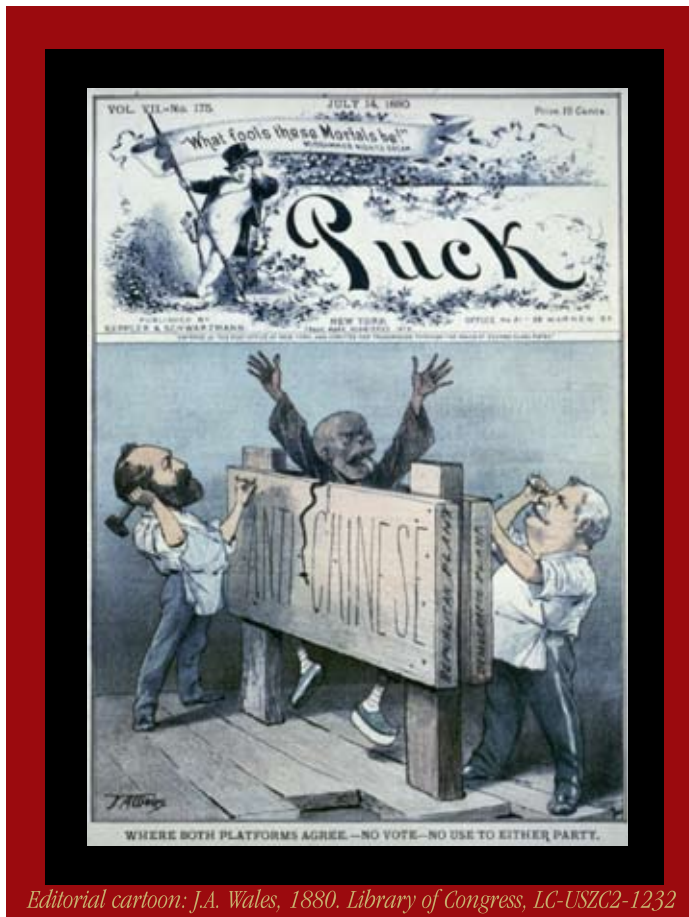
The first attempts to discriminate against the Chinese in California were enacted at the municipal and state level and were repeatedly overturned by federal courts—an example of a much broader struggle between the federal and state governments. In 1824, when states enforced migration controls such as quarantines and bonds, the Supreme Court took an early step to assert federal power by ruling against a shipping monopoly, citing infringement on the federal jurisdiction over interstate commerce granted by the Constitution (Article I, Section 8, Clause 3: [The Congress shall have power] to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.). Over the next half century, the assertion of federal power was subjected to several challenges from the perspective of states’ rights, which favored local jurisdiction over commerce laws and decried the moral ambiguities of framing transport of free persons as “commerce” in an age of slavery.

Northern victory in the Civil War and the subsequent Fourteenth Amendment that guaranteed civil rights to *all* citizens of the United States—not just whites—put an end to these debates. The Supreme Court unceremoniously overturned state immigration laws that came to its attention in 1876. The Court objected to local laws that interfered with international relations and

treaties that guaranteed free migration. The decision was framed in terms of promoting commerce and mobility and left no doubt that further attempts at migration control would take place at the national level.

Ramifications of Chinese Exclusion

It may surprise Americans today to learn that anti-Chinese sentiment was the central issue that took immigration politics to Washington—and to the world—generating the controversy, complications, and judgments that would shape immigration law over the coming century. Anti-Chinese politicians initiated new federal immigration laws with the 1875 Page Act that prohibited the immigration of felons, prostitutes, and contract Asian labor. The most significant of these new laws, however, was the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that barred all Chinese laborers from entering the country.



Editorial cartoon: J.A. Wales, 1880. Library of Congress, LC-USZC2-1232

Understanding immigration in the light of both national and international interests was not always easy, as when Congress passed legislation in 1878 that limited Chinese immigration to fifteen passengers per vessel. President Rutherford B. Hayes vetoed the bill, arguing that it undermined international commitments. President Chester A. Arthur vetoed the next exclusion bill in 1882 that prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the country, arguing that its twenty-year moratorium and mandatory registration of all Chinese residents were “undemocratic and hostile to our institutions.” The Chinese Exclusion Act, a new bill that reduced the moratorium to ten years, passed a month later. At the time, the law was viewed as a temporary measure, driven by the unique threat of the Chinese to livelihoods in the West.

The State Department grew convinced of the wisdom of unilateral border control in the wake of the 1885 Rock

Springs Massacre in Wyoming. Tensions snapped at mines operated by the Union Pacific Railroad when Chinese strikebreakers were hired during a labor dispute. Angry mobs raided Chinatown, murdering workers, burning homes, and destroying property. The Chinese government demanded reparations, reminding the U.S. government of the multiple indemnities it paid when foreigners were injured in the interior of China. The U.S. refused to pay, arguing that China did not practice equality before law, had an unreliable legal system, and restricted movement in its interior—thus, the Chinese government was both able and bound to protect the interests of foreigners who got into trouble. The government further argued that in the U.S., aliens were allowed free movement and equal access to the same democratic institutions and trial by jury as citizens, so no special provisions were necessary. State Department officials admitted that the trial of the massacre perpetrators was a farce because the jury was packed with anti-



A Chinese family. Detroit Photographic Co., c. 1898-1905. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-17886

Chinese sympathizers; but they stood firm in refusing to pay reparations, arguing that such payments would grant more rights to aliens than to American citizens because the latter had to accept a jury verdict without the prospect of appeal to a foreign government. American officials were acutely embarrassed by the entire fiasco and concluded that similar incidents could only be avoided by stopping entry into the United States.

The Supreme Court added further legal force with the 1889 case of *Chae Chan Ping*, a Chinese laborer who left California and was later barred from reentry by the Chinese Exclusion Act. *Chae Chan Ping* challenged that barring his reentry violated existing treaties. In a decision that upheld Congressional immigration decisions and denied the right of appeal to federal courts, the justices condoned the enforcement of immigration laws, even when they abrogated treaties, stating that immigrant rights were granted solely at the pleasure of the government. Subsequent decisions over the next twenty years expanded the denial of federal court appeals to include immigrants caught within one mile of the border, people attempting to establish citizenship without documentation, and many deportation cases.

The “Status Quota”

As feared by dissenting judges, these decisions expanded beyond Chinese exclusion and were incorporated into new legislation. The Immigration Act of 1924 set quotas for immigrants from different countries in proportion to the existing ethnic composition of the nation. Proponents argued that the law was devoid of discrimination because it applied a single principle to all nations and peoples. Subsequent generations criticized it as racist in concept, but the principles written into this law were soon taken for granted as the basic fabric of immigration law.

Unilateral federal immigration control became unchallenged fact in the

U.S., but the rights of immigrants once inside U.S. borders were still up for grabs. The Geary Act of 1892 allowed Chinese aliens to be deported if found without their papers. The Supreme Court upheld the legislation in the 1893 case of *Fong Yue Ting*. In a dissenting opinion, Justice Stephen Field stated that immigrants had been admitted by consent of the government and to deprive them of the rights and privileges of free institutions was to act as an “arbitrary and tyrannical power” and that legislation such as the Geary Act was “a blow against constitutional liberty.” Still, Justice Field agreed with the broad support of border control as a necessary condition for the protection of rights within borders.

By the 1900s, the federal government asserted control of immigration law as a domestic issue grounded in national security concerns. Today, exclusive federal jurisdiction over immigration is based on the Supremacy Clause of the U. S. Constitution, which asserts that federal law preempts state law—not because of any clear statement that Congress can and must guard our borders against immigrants.

Principles once designed for “extraordinary circumstances,” racial control, or economic progress became the global norm, but many of those original justifications have been forgotten. Today, it is generally accepted that the federal government is accountable only to itself in regulating visas and categorizing immigrants as legal or illegal. But as a nation, we’re still divided on how non-residents should be treated once they have entered our country. Where do federal powers end and states’ rights begin? The debate continues. ■

Adam McKeown is an associate professor of history at Columbia University. This article is adapted from his book, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*.

Can Poetry Still Matter?

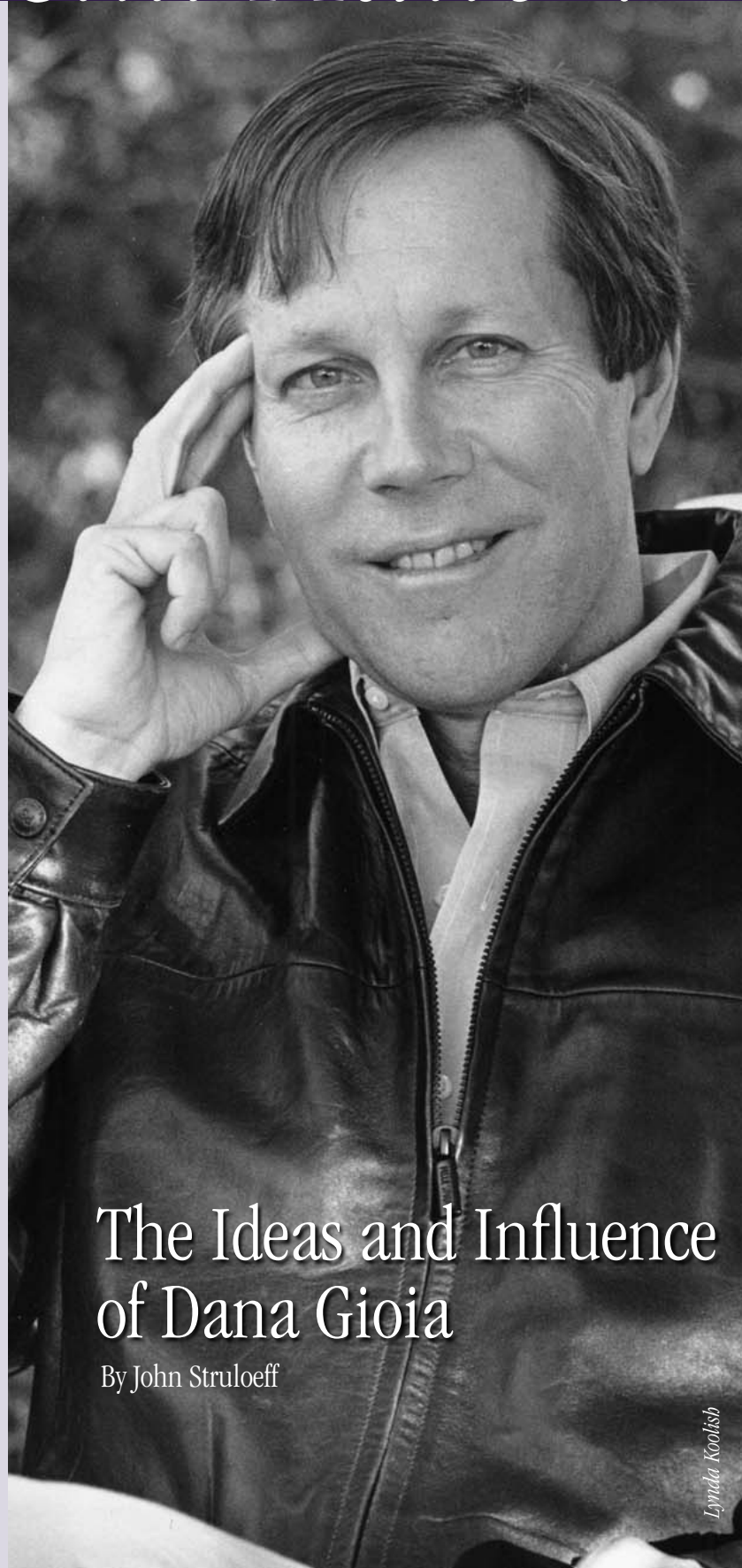
When preparing for a recent conference discussion on the work and influence of Dana Gioia, I had occasion to re-read many of his poems and essays—an extensive body of work. I was reminded of the noteworthy anthologies and books he has edited or co-edited, including the best-selling college textbook *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*, which I used as a student and assign as a professor in my literature courses. I read many of his reviews (he's written on dozens of authors) and his translations of Latin, Italian, German, and Romanian poets. I examined his work on the two national literary conferences he founded and his service as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a position he held for six years. As a critic, few contemporaries have been read as widely as Dana Gioia.

Steeped in all these things Gioia, I began to suspect that I wouldn't find a living individual who has been *more* influential on American literature and poetry than Dana Gioia.

In a 1991 *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled "Can Poetry Matter?" Gioia laid bare the increasingly ignored and fragile heart of poetry in American society. He opened with the following:

American poetry now belongs to a subculture. No longer part of the mainstream of artistic and intellectual life, it has become the specialized occupation of a relatively small and isolated group. Little of the frenetic activity it generates ever reaches outside that closed group. As a class, poets are not without cultural status. Like priests in a town of agnostics, they still command a certain residual prestige. But as individual artists they are almost invisible.

In part, Gioia was stating the obvious, the cold truth that many—especially poets and academics—didn't want to admit. Perhaps more importantly, he threw down the gauntlet, challenging society, and in particular the poetry world, to prove him wrong, to show that poetry had a stronger life and broader appeal than what it seemed. From America's heartland and coast to coast, this essay was debated and discussed, sometimes defensively, sometimes with complete sympathy for Gioia's concerns. It caused a storm from which we still hear rumbles. It caused change.



The Ideas and Influence of Dana Gioia

By John Struloeff

The demise of poetry has been a long-standing topic among poets and academics, but “Is poetry dead?” and “Can poetry matter?” are two very different questions. The denial of poetry’s death is evidenced by a host of facts: the number of new poetry titles published each year, the increase in university students studying poetry writing, the myriad of poetry readings across the country. Poetry *is* present in our society. But asking if it matters strikes the heart in a deeper way; it questions the worth of the entire enterprise. Should poetry just go away? And if it did, would we miss it? Fortunately, Gioia’s 1991 article moved our society to respond that poetry is very much alive and does indeed matter.

In the title essay of his 2004 collection *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*, Gioia acknowledges many of the changes he’s seen since the publication of “Can Poetry Matter?”, most significantly the rise in oral poetry and the online, electronic dissemination of poems. From my own observations, there are additional tangible changes:

- Poetry is not simply a genre, it’s an event—from coffee shop “open mic” nights to national poetry slams. Poetry institutes and summer writing festivals garner sold-out-crowd-capacity as often as the local concert arena.
- Poetry is taking back its presence in school curriculum. Under Gioia’s chairmanship, the NEA initiated *Poetry Out Loud*, a national recitation competition for high school students [*which is facilitated in Oklahoma by the Oklahoma Humanities Council in cooperation with the Oklahoma Arts Council*]. The NEA website (www.nea.gov) has audio recordings of some of these student performances, which are really wonderful. Schools across the country have also embraced former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins’s “Poetry 180” program, which encourages schools and students to read a poem aloud every day of the school year—all 180 days.
- There is growing recognition and acclaim for poets who are considered ‘regional’ or academic outsiders. Gioia wrote about two of these unacknowledged writers who subsequently became multi-term U.S. Poets Laureate: Ted Kooser and recent Poet Laureate Kay Ryan. As a graduate student, I saw this as one of the leading influences of my generation of poets.
- Poetry is mainstream news! Ted Kooser continues to write the free weekly newspaper column he began as Poet Laureate, “American Life in Poetry,” which recently published its 280th column and reaches more than three million readers.

Much of Gioia’s work, especially at the NEA, broadened the circulation and presence of poetry in our culture. Gioia is a proponent of “enlightened populism” in poetry. He believes that all art should be accessible to the intelligent, curious public as a whole, not just to academia or the elite. In “The Anonymity of the Regional Poet,” Gioia observes that the work of

a “popular poet,” one who appeals to a nonliterary public, is often rooted in everyday-world specifics that give it a regional identity. Its plain-spoken style is overlooked or ignored by critics, but Gioia finds value in the often shunned regional writer:

Regionalism is ultimately a political term, a dismissive label applied to literature produced in and concerned with areas outside the dominant cultural and economic centers of society. Classifying a work as ‘regional’ implies that it cannot be judged by ‘national’ standards. . . .

. . . One would think that after Yeats and Faulkner, Joyce and Svevo, Verga and Cather, Cavafy and Hardy, regional writing would no longer be perceived as a second-class artistry practiced by those incapable of presenting the world at large.

In that essay, Gioia points to Ted Kooser as an example of the popular, regional poet. A decade after the essay appeared, Kooser was finally recognized with a Pulitzer Prize in poetry and two terms as U.S. Poet Laureate. Kooser believes that writing with commonplace language, if done well, does not make you a simple-minded writer but simply a writer with greater potential appeal. One of the reasons he began his newspaper project was an effort to remedy the sad world that Gioia describes in “Can Poetry Matter?”.

Another motif in Gioia’s work, both in his critical writings and in his own poetry, is the New Formalism—a movement that challenges the open form of free verse to explore the traditions of rhyme and meter in formal poetry, to play with forms and complicate them in interesting ways. While he respects the formal tradition, Gioia does not advocate that we revert wholly to formal poetry; his work is an enthusiastic mix of fixed and open forms, with each providing what he calls “an illuminating perspective on the other.” Thanks to the work of Gioia and other noted writers, I don’t know a single poet who does not read and write both free verse and formal verse and who does not delight in another poet masterfully playing with form.

Gioia recognizes and embraces poetry’s complexity—and he seems to like starting or joining controversial discussions, which makes his writing that much more engaging and, ultimately, important.

“Controversial discussions” is an apt description for Gioia’s introduction as NEA Chairman in 2003. He began work in a political climate of suspicion for the organization and its past support of “inflammatory art,” after which Congress cut NEA funding by nearly half in 1996. Armed with a Stanford MBA, business experience at General Foods, and over a decade as a full-time writer, Gioia was ready to meet the challenge. Author Cynthia Haven described him as “a born consensus builder, a moderate who has a way of being able to get along with just about everyone” (*Commonweal*, 2003).

SUMMER STORM

We stood on the rented patio
While the party went on inside.
You knew the groom from college.
I was a friend of the bride.

We hugged the brownstone wall behind us
To keep our dress clothes dry
And watched the sudden summer storm
Floodlit against the sky.

The rain was like a waterfall
Of brilliant beaded light,
Cool and silent as the stars
The storm hid from the night.

To my surprise, you took my arm –
A gesture you didn't explain –
And we spoke in whispers, as if we two
Might imitate the rain.

Then suddenly the storm receded
As swiftly as it came.
The doors behind us opened up.
The hostess called your name.

I watched you merge into the group,
Aloof and yet polite.
We didn't speak another word
Except to say good-night.

Why does that evening's memory
Return with this night's storm –
A party twenty years ago,
Its disappointments warm?

There are so many *might-have-beens*,
What-ifs that won't stay buried,
Other cities, other jobs,
Strangers we might have married.

And memory insists on pining
For places it never went,
As if life would be happier
Just by being different.

By Dana Gioia. From *Interrogations at Noon* (Graywolf Press, 2001), used by permission of the author.

ROUGH COUNTRY

Give me a landscape made of obstacles,
of steep hills and jutting glacial rock,
where the low-running streams are quick to flood
the grassy fields and bottomlands.

A place
no engineers can master — where the roads
must twist like tendrils up the mountainside
on narrow cliffs where boulders block the way.

Where tall black trunks of lightning-scalded pine
push through the tangled woods to make a roost
for hawks and swarming crows.

And sharp inclines
where twisting through the thorn-thick underbrush,
scratched and exhausted, one turns suddenly

to find an unexpected waterfall,
not half a mile from the nearest road,
a spot so hard to reach that no one comes —

a hiding place, a shrine for dragonflies
and nesting jays, a sign that there is still
one piece of property that won't be owned.

By Dana Gioia. From *The Gods of Winter* (Graywolf Press, third printing; 1991), used by permission of the author.



Gioia fought for—and got—bipartisan support for increased NEA funding, allowing the large-scale initiatives that still impact our country in profound ways. Soon after he arrived, the NEA conducted and released findings of a study (*Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*) that showed reading in America was in a steep decline. Gioia's response was to launch *The Big Read*, a program that encourages community-wide reading of a single book. More than 800 grants to host Big Reads have been awarded since 2007. Communities around the nation are reading and studying books, from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to *A Lesson Before Dying* to *The Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, as a result of Gioia's visionary leadership.

In 2004, he also began *Operation Homecoming*, a writing program that has benefitted thousands of Marines, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and their families with workshops led by authors such as Tom Clancy, Tobias Wolff, and Marilyn Nelson. As the son of a Marine infantryman who served on the front lines during the Korean War, I understand the benefits of this kind of writing experience—not only the catharsis, but the communication it opens—among families, among communities.

There were other major initiatives. At the very least, Gioia's time at the NEA was a tremendous success and he has had an undeniable influence on our

culture. It's a difficult task to try to ascribe large-scale, often invisible social changes to a single individual, but if Gioia wasn't the instigator of changes in the past two decades, then he was certainly part of a select group of individuals who brought important artistic discussions to the forefront, who helped make hidden aspects of our literary culture more visible, and who brought about real change in the cultivation and consumption of poetry.

Perhaps another way to consider Gioia's influence is to contemplate the literary landscape in absence of his efforts: What if he hadn't become involved? What if he hadn't become NEA Chairman and disseminated that important study showing the marked decline in U.S. readership (which has been referenced again and again in media reports, journal articles, and discussion boards), then used those findings to catapult far-reaching programs like *The Big Read*, *Poetry Out Loud*, and *Operation Homecoming*? What if he hadn't challenged us to embrace poets who aren't part of the academic elite? What if he hadn't asked us to reconsider poetry's place in our society? What if he hadn't inspired people to push against the idea that poetry doesn't really matter anymore? ■

John Struloeff is Assistant Professor and Director of Creative Writing at Pepperdine University.



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Gioia is the former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). His latest book, *Interrogations at Noon*, won the 2002 American Book Award.



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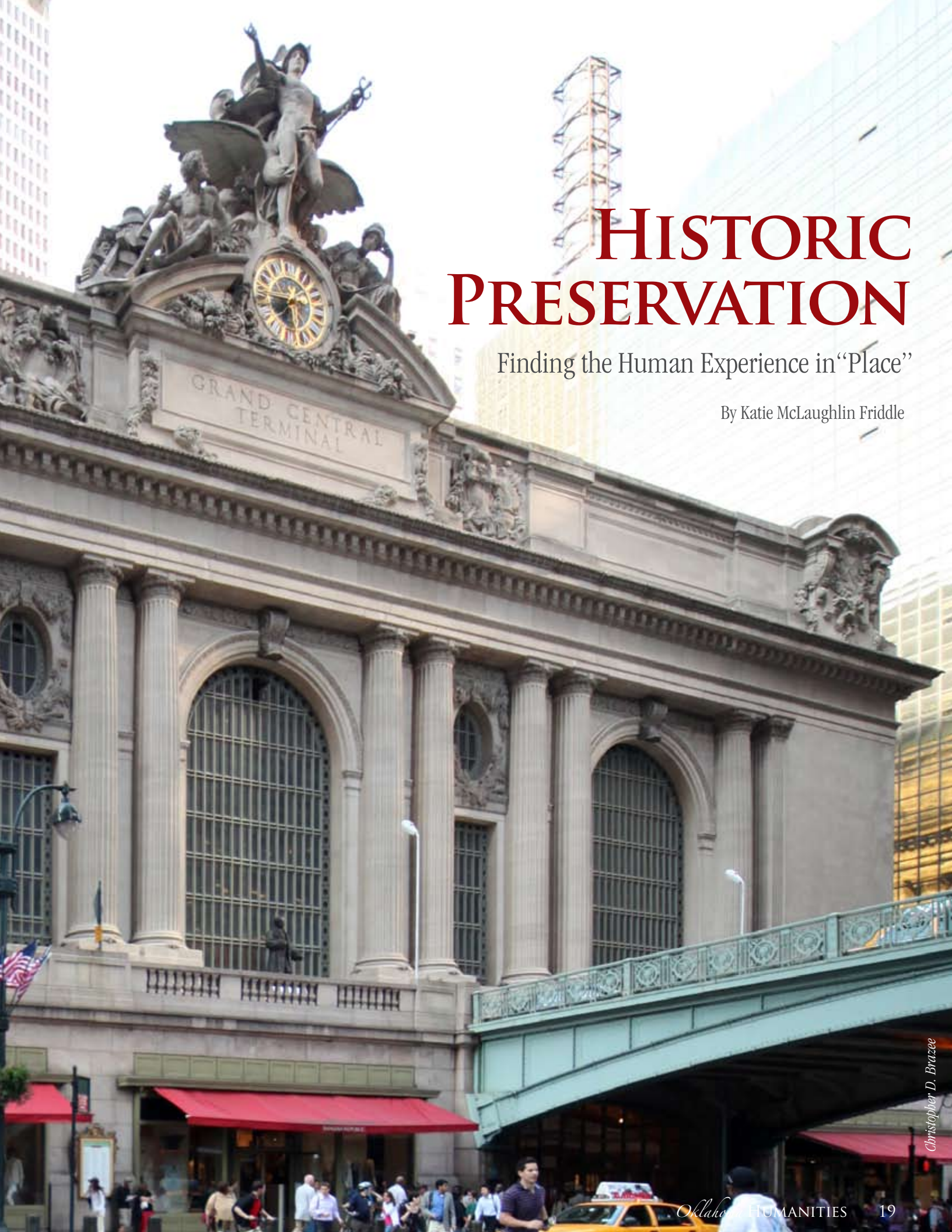
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Finding the Human Experience in “Place”

By Katie McLaughlin Friddle

Christopher D. Brazee

In decades past, “progress” meant the demolition of aging architecture. All too often, and too late, people realized those losses went beyond brick and mortar. Today, developers, architects, and preservationists are increasingly united in revitalizing historic places. What is it that drives these fields in a common goal? What is the value of “place”?

In a profession that walks a fine line between science and art, policy and creativity, preservationists marshal a multitude of sources to quantify those questions. We explain that it is good for the economy to revitalize our communities and environmentally friendly to “recycle” old buildings. We point to the number of jobs created and businesses supported through the rehabilitation of historic places. Exhaustive research into county assessors’ records and insurance maps provides facts that herald the “-st-ness” of a building or place: the first, the last, the oldest, the best of a type or architect.

Each of these arguments for preservation is valid, valuable, and compelling. One need only spend an evening in Oklahoma City’s Bricktown or Tulsa’s Brady Arts District to see the economic vitality of a rehabilitated historic neighborhood; or feel cool breezes through windows in an old farmhouse to experience historic energy efficiency; or visit a place like Blake House (c. 1661), the oldest house in Boston, to appreciate the power of “-st-ness.”

Though ethereal and unquantifiable, one of the most compelling reasons for preservation is this: historic places reflect the human experience. That is what captivates the true preservationist. We can always write the history of a place, and it is not impossible to recreate great architecture, however much a purist might frown upon such a thing. What can never be fully retold or accurately recreated, though, is the passage of time in a place and the lasting mark of human interaction throughout that passage of time.

A good example of this is one of my favorite buildings, Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan. This building is an integral part of my personal journey to the field of historic preservation; it was on the top of my list of places to see on my first trip to New York City as a high school student, and its majesty did not disappoint. It is an architectural masterpiece, a love story to the railroad, to New York City, and to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, its tireless benefactor during the trying times that preceded Grand Central’s restoration. It is a testament to how restoration can reinvigorate an entire neighborhood; but Grand Central also represents a turning point in the



Blake House, the oldest home in Boston. Courtesy Dorchester Historical Society

establishment of the field of historic preservation, as it is the building at question in the 1978 Supreme Court decision that made local preservation ordinances possible across the country.

Grand Central is an impressive building truly worthy of landmark status and of being preserved for future generations; but the things I am excited to point out each time I bring a new visitor to this place are not the reinvigorated shops in a restored concourse or the ornate architectural details crafted by artists nearly a century ago. My favorite things in Grand Central Terminal are footprints in the floor. If you stand at one end of the ticket counters (which largely go unused in the world of online purchases) and bend down to catch the light, you can see a long column of two-by-two indentations where, decade upon decade, New Yorker and tourist, businessman and army soldier, stood on the polished marble floor at the counter to purchase their ticket to get back home. My Oklahoma grandfather, shipped across the country in World War II, met up with my Long Island grandmother in this station and always claimed he could smell her perfume before he saw her. I can imagine them standing together in those footprints. Imagining the generations of people experiencing this place—marveling at its grandeur and modernity when it opened in 1913, packing waiting rooms on the way home after serving overseas in the 1940s, sleeping on benches as the terminal declined in the 1970s, and once again gasping at the beauty when it was brought back to life in the relatively recent past—makes Grand Central an almost overwhelming encounter.



Carpentry class at Chilocco Indian School. Courtesy Research Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Human experience is reflected in the small details of buildings: sometimes it is the erosion and evolution of a building as constant use makes its mark, such as the footprints in Grand Central; other times, it is the intentional design of an exterior railing that includes a place to scrape muddy boots or to hitch a horse that reminds us of another world. Human experience is also reflected in the big picture of an expansive mansion designed to impress, of a dark and linear workhouse meant to intimidate and contain, or of an entire neighborhood developed to reflect the culture of the era and its residents. The architecture, the historic significance, the economic



and environmental contributions of these places cannot be ignored; but it is the human touch, the impression of human experience upon their evolution that makes one who is returning remember and makes a new visitor take a closer look.

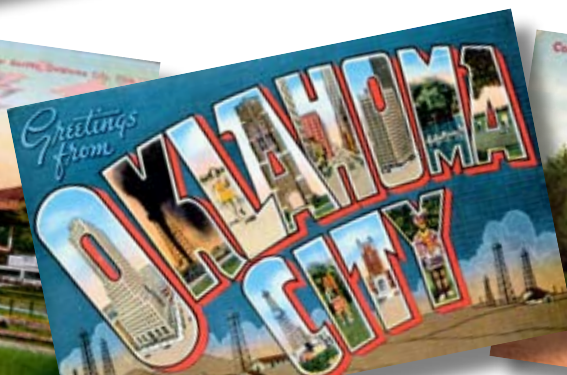
The human experience of a place has also forced the field of historic preservation to deal with controversial or “negative” history. Places like prisoner-of-war camps typically are not architectural gems. Battlegrounds, other than the most famous tourist destinations, usually do not bring economic revitalization. But these are places that connect us to some of the most powerful human experiences—experiences that must not be forgotten.

One such controversial site in Oklahoma is Chilocco Indian School, founded in 1884 as a boarding school for children from Plains Tribes relocated to western Oklahoma. Government policy for the assimilation of Indian tribes at that time was famously cruel and unforgiving of cultural differences, and the educational policies of Chilocco were no different. By the mid-20th century, federal policy began to shift and schools like Chilocco followed, easing the strict discipline to include sports, education in vocational trades, and college preparation. The school closed its doors in the 1980s. The expansive campus in Kay County sits largely vacant and has spent many years on Preservation Oklahoma, Inc.’s Oklahoma’s Most Endangered Historic Places list.

Nationally recognized for its historic significance, the campus is an architecturally impressive collection of turn-of-the-century styles, but its isolation and disrepair make economic revitalization seem unattainable. Why should such a place, once associated with unhappiness and mistreatment, be recognized as endangered? Preservationists would argue that it is the history of this place as remembered by the people who experienced it that makes it such an invaluable resource to all Oklahomans. Alumni of this school continue to fight for its existence, both physically and in the collective memory. A 2007 resolution by the National Congress of American Indians stated that “if there was ever a place in America where so many tribes and nations could call common ground, Chilocco was that place.” The oversized, massive stone structures that likely intimidated young students—the grounds and classrooms where boys learned to be laborers and girls learned proper domestic skills—all contribute to our understanding of a specific experience in the truly unique annals of our state as Indian Territory.

Zoning a downtown to enforce a standard building height or setback from the street is simple. Making sure new and old architectural detail match is effortless for the professional. Comprehending the impact of change while protecting the human experience of an historic place is a formidable and never-ending challenge. It is ironic that the thing which makes preservation so deeply important to those who believe in it is also its least measurable, least objective, least enforceable quality. To protect the intangible elements of “place” for future generations, historic preservation must go beyond facts and figures and continue to advocate for what the humanities teach us: the value of interpretation, education, and preservation. ■

Katie McLaughlin Friddle is Executive Director of Preservation Oklahoma, Inc., a statewide nonprofit organization that promotes preservation through educational outreach, advocacy, and technical assistance, and through partnerships with local, state, and national preservation organizations.



Someone needs to be looking after Oklahoma City's history. That was the gist of conversations and email among local writers and history buffs who saw a need and joined forces to fill it. The result is Retro Metro OKC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to “collecting, preserving, and interpreting materials reflecting the heritage of Oklahoma City.”

Connections are really what Retro Metro OKC is all about. Founding members comprised a varied assembly of disparate vocations—reporter, city planner, librarian, developer, graduate student, blogger—whose work often required the use of photographs, maps, and other historical documents. More often than not, they were frustrated in the search for source materials and an informal network developed as they increasingly relied on each other to locate and share contacts in the quest for documentary gold.

Preserving Oklahoma

Banded together as Retro Metro OKC, membership ranks swelled to a collective of creative people—city officials, executives, preservationists, new media professionals, historians, authors, urban planners, attorneys, real estate professionals, videographers, designers, and filmmakers—representing a spectrum of experience from high school students to retirees, who share an enthusiasm for Oklahoma City's history and lend time and expertise to educating others.

Retro Metro's part-time historians uncovered small private collections whose owners were willing to share information with the public, but didn't want to relinquish custody of their material to an institution. To launch efforts, member Marc Weinmeister purchased scanning equipment and teams were formed to go on location and harvest historical materials from donor collections.



The group's mission is to provide free and open access to local history in its purest form by encouraging individuals and organizations to openly share collections (within the limitations of copyright laws and other agreements). Retro Metro OKC supplies equipment, structure, and expertise to the person or organization in possession of a collection, then copies and distributes the material to the public through its website. This enables

the owner to continue enjoying his collection while sharing it with others and ensuring the material against loss by widely distributing the information.

Justin Tyler Moore designed the group's website (www.retrometrookc.org), its initial public effort. The site provides primary source material for teachers, researchers, students, and individuals who have a passion for the city and its history. Other Retro Metro projects on the website include:

- Rare photos from the walls of the Boulevard Cafeteria
- Archives of the First National Building, featuring hundreds

METRO OKLAHOMA CITY

Oklahoma City Heritage

By Larry Johnson

of photos, some documenting the initial excavation of the building site, and corporate documents revealing tidbits of history such as the original tenant list and rental rates

- Videographer Jon Spence's collection of local commercials from the 1960s to the 1990s
- The Hightower Collection of photographs and documents, a rare glimpse into the personal and professional lives of the city's pioneer banking family

Reflecting the energy and excitement of scanning sessions, donor Johnson Hightower said the scene in his conference room looked like "the war room." The largest collection captured so far is the Robert Allison postcard collection. Allison is a member of the group and generously offered his collection of over 1,000 postcard views of Oklahoma City from the early 1900s to the 1960s.

Images courtesy Robert Allison Collection, Retro Metro OKC



Certainly there are organizations and institutions that preserve pieces of the region's history, but few have the mission or means to focus exclusively on Oklahoma City. Retro Metro OKC members extend an open hand to work with and assist, rather than compete with, other organizations promoting Oklahoma City history. The group seeks ways to partner with these institutions, offering them agility and flexibility to accomplish special projects that their long-range plans or budgets wouldn't otherwise allow.

Last fall, Retro Metro OKC sent a team to record the final days of railroad underpasses slated for demolition as part of the I-40 relocation project. The underpasses at Walker and Robinson Avenues contained rare heralds (logos and slogans used by railroad companies on their equipment) from the Frisco and Rock Island railroads. Railfan and Retro Metro member Dean Schirf lamented their passing and expressed a desire to see the heralds placed at the Oklahoma Railway Museum. Another member, assistant city planner Paul Ryckbost, made contact with the demolition contractor and smoothed the way for the heralds to be cut from the underpasses. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation had money set aside for just such a contingency and arranged for the delivery of the heralds to the museum. As if that were not a happy enough ending, when museum officials inspected the underpasses they discovered rails and power guideways for the city's long-vanished streetcar system, still intact, and those too were salvaged for the museum. As a result of this successful partnership, the Oklahoma Railway Museum and Retro Metro OKC are now collaborating to preserve the museum's large collection of rare photographs, blueprints, and maps.

Another recent, highly visible group project involved restoration and display of the historic I.M. Pei architectural model. As part of an urban renewal

campaign in 1964, international architect I.M. Pei was commissioned to render a futuristic, 1989-era model of what downtown Oklahoma City would look like upon completion of the project—but the plan was never realized. The partnership to bring the model back to public viewing included the Oklahoma City-County Historical Society, the Oklahoma Historical Society, the City of Oklahoma City, and Retro Metro OKC which connected architects and city officials to the project and created a website (www.impeiokc.com) showcasing photos, videos, and documents related to the Pei Plan.

There is plenty of work yet to be done. In the near future Retro Metro OKC will use 60 years of aerial photography to create a map of the city, revealing how landforms and buildings have changed over time. At least a dozen previously unseen photograph collections are slated for preservation. A

computer-generated, three-dimensional model of the city as it appeared in 1910 and a documentary film are in the works. And members are helping create a year-long exhibit in the Municipal Building celebrating the city's 120th anniversary.

Retro Metro OKC is actively seeking new partnerships and new collections, and the membership recently approved an initiative to designate one weekend

day a month for service projects. This resourceful, energetic group is dedicated to making history fun and accessible to all. Efforts like theirs will ensure that Oklahoma City's past is as bright as its future. ■

Larry Johnson is Reference Librarian for the Metropolitan Library System and manages the Downtown Library's Oklahoma Room special collections. He is vice president of Retro Metro OKC. Images are postcards from the Robert Allison Collection. You can view the details of these and hundreds of other Oklahoma City-related postcards on the Retro Metro OKC website: www.retrometrookc.org.



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Natasha Trethewey was the featured poet at Oklahoma City University's annual Thatcher Hoffman Smith Distinguished Writer Series, supported in part by a grant from OHC. Trethewey's poems explore cultural memory and ethnic identity, which reflect her own experience as the child of a black mother and white father and her fascination with lost histories. She won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for poetry for *Native Guard* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2nd edition; 2006), a collection of poems about the Louisiana Native Guard, the Union army's first all-black regiment in the Civil War. Trethewey's other poetry collections include *Domestic Work* (Graywolf Press, 2000) and *Bellocq's Ophelia* (Graywolf Press, 2002) based on E.J. Bellocq's twentieth-century photographs of prostitutes in the Storyville District of New Orleans.

By Dr. Regina Bennett, Dr. Harbour Winn, and English Major Zoe Miles, Oklahoma City University

OUTSIDE THE FRAME

An Interview with
Natasha Trethewey

Matt Valentine

Regina Bennett: Tell us about your relationship to the discipline of history.

Natasha Trethewey: When I was a freshman at the University of Georgia, Charlie Wine, a wonderful professor, came in the first day of class and had us write our names and hometowns on a note card; I wrote Gulfport, Mississippi. This was in the days before Internet research. The next day, he introduced us to each other by talking about some aspect of history from our hometown. I was stunned. He connected me to a place and its history. This is what I would later do in *Native Guard*, talking about the idea of geography as fate, of Henry James's words: "Be tethered to native pastures even if it reduces you to a backyard in New York." I couldn't have known it then, but I think Dr. Wine planted a seed for where I was headed in that engagement with history and place.

Harbour Winn: I am wondering about your sense of the value of arts integration. You use photography in *Domestic Work*—

NT: —and there's photography in *Native Guard*. *Bellocq's Ophelia* begins with what is both a photograph and a painting, and a play in the backdrop.

HW: How do you understand arts integration as a professor, as a poet? How do you use it?

NT: I'm a very visual person and I like the engagement of a given image. With photography, it was about imagining what was cropped out of the frame as you make a choice about the subject of the photograph—which of course was leading me to that idea of historical erasure, the things that get cropped out. [In *Bellocq's Ophelia*] I was interested in what might be behind an image, and Storyville was a great metaphor for that because there was a glittering façade of glamour and excess and music and champagne at the same time that there were silverfish crawling behind the walls. It's what's just beneath the surface, beneath the flocked velvet wallpaper, behind the hedges that separated backyards from alleyways. I was always interested in what had been pushed aside and left out of my view. That's why I approach photographs; that's what they do for me.

Paintings are another way to access history. I'm particularly interested right now in religious paintings of the Renaissance, the Mexican *casta* paintings that are, in many ways, ethnographic. It's as if these paintings have a documentary edge because of what they show us about the particular moment, the circumstances and the people in them. Using them as material culture allows me to investigate the past through the given image. In writing a poem you're always in conversation with the poems that come before you. I think we're also in conversation with all these other art forms and those relationships get pushed against each other.

RB: I don't know if you've seen this news yet, but the *Washington Post* was reporting that Virginia's governor has reinstated April as Confederate History Month. You write a lot about historical markers of the Confederacy. Any comments about this governor's actions?

NT: I think that the problem is a kind of exclusive history. There are people who want to say, "Heritage, not hate," that it's just celebrating a kind of culture. That "moonlight magnolia" culture forgets how many white people

ended up going into the Civil War because they were paid by the sons of wealthy plantation owners to go. I don't think that's necessarily included in this notion of Confederate history—nor are the other citizens of the United States, many of them slaves. Confederate culture was built around keeping those slaves. I think it's a willful forgetting or a kind of willed blindness to ignore that part, to say that we can celebrate this without also recognizing what was terrible about it. Growing up in the Deep South was, for me, the root of this sense of psychological exile that I have.

HW: You've used the phrase "mixed race" to describe yourself. I think this is more than semantics. Why not "mixed ethnicity"? Aren't we just one race?

NT: I have also used "mixed-blood." I think what you're asking about, ideas about race and biology and racial formation, is the thing that I'm interested in. Yes, I'm aware of the recent science and the not-so-recent science.

HW: The person that might match my DNA most closely could be in Cambodia.

NT: Right. We certainly need to change the language that we use at some point, but until our perceptions and policies and our treatment of people catch up to the science, we still live in a very racialized society, and it's not going to change just because we stop saying that someone is mixed race or that people are of a different race. I'm a pragmatist when it comes to that. I live in a racialized world. I'm constantly being reminded of that by the world I live in.

Zoe Miles: Your father's a poet. Do you see your wordsmith abilities as innate or as something that you caught on to as you grew up?

NT: My father would probably want to claim responsibility for my wordsmithing abilities, and I certainly would give him some credit because he was one of my earliest teachers; but the other people that I spent a good deal of my life with were amazing at idiom and metaphor and the cadences of language and the richness of sound and figurative imagery. I had that at my grandmother's house when I listened to women from her church talking about the Bible, chanting hymns and psalms. I was surrounded by the lovely cadences of different human voices. So, while much might come from a natural talent that passed to me from my father, a great deal passed to me from my mother as well.

HW: The emphasis in gender criticism is that the dutiful daughter must defy the father, the patriarchal controller of language, to become self-defined. It's interesting because you mentioned you were going to be writing poems about your father.

NT: My father is very, very precise about grammar and I love that about him, and I've loved learning the language from him. But at the same time I have to remember moments when, if I spoke something in a very colloquial way that was rooted not just in Southern-ness but also in some of the syntax of black English, he would constantly correct me. I think he wanted to push it out of me. Even as a child, I knew I didn't want to get rid of it; I wanted to be able to code switch, to have access to that other language. There are other syntactical Englishes that are rich and really useful for poetry.

FLOUNDER

*Here, she said, put this on your head.
She handed me a hat.
You 'bout as white as your dad,
and you gone stay like that.*

Aunt Sugar rolled her nylons down
around each bony ankle,
and I rolled down my white knee socks
letting my thin legs dangle,

circling them just above water
and silver backs of minnows
flitting here then there between
the sun spots and the shadows.

*This is how you hold the pole
to cast the line out straight.
Now put that worm on your hook,
throw it out and wait.*

She sat spitting tobacco juice
into a coffee cup.
Hunkered down when she felt the bite,
jerked the pole straight up

reeling and tugging hard at the fish
that wriggled and tried to fight back.
*A flounder, she said, and you can tell
'cause one of its sides is black.*

The other side is white, she said.
It landed with a thump.
I stood there watching that fish flip-flop,
switch sides with every jump.

By Natasha Trethewey. From *Domestic Work*
(Graywolf Press, 2000), used by permission of the author.



I remember when I first went to graduate school I would say something like, “I’m gonna run in ‘right quick’ and check my mailbox.” The other graduate students would correct me and say, “Don’t you mean ‘quickly?’” and I said, “No, I mean ‘right quick!’” They didn’t understand that there was a difference between how I write and what I might say when I’m feeling comfortable and in a space of colloquial speech.

You asked this a few minutes ago, Harbour, and it’s made me think of a poem I’d like to read “right quick,” because I think it can answer a couple of these questions that we’re talking about. My father has a lovely poem called “Her Swing” that he must have written when I was three years old. When my father and I give readings, we stand beside each other and “Her Swing” is one of the poems that he will read. Every time he would read it, I’d be standing there and I started to feel really strange and didn’t know why. It wasn’t until recently, when I wrote this poem, that I figured out what the problem had been for me. It’s a problem of language and knowledge, ways of knowing, and how we use language to suggest that knowing:

Knowledge

—after a chalk drawing by J.H. Hasselborst, 1864

Whoever she was, she comes to us like this:

lips parted, long hair spilling from the table

like water from a pitcher, nipples drawn out
for inspection. Perhaps to foreshadow

the object she’ll become: a skeleton on a pedestal,
a row of skulls on a shelf. To make a study

of the ideal female body, four men gather around her.
She is young and beautiful and drowned—

a Venus de’ Medici, risen from the sea, sleeping.
As if we couldn’t mistake this work for sacrilege,

the artist entombs her body in a pyramid
of light, a temple of science over which

the anatomist presides. In the service of beauty—
to know it—he lifts a flap of skin

beneath her breast as one might draw back a sheet.
We will not see his step-by-step parsing,

a translation: *Mary or Catherine or Elizabeth*
to corpus, areola, vulva. In his hands,

instruments of the empirical—scalpel, pincers—
cold as the room must be cold: all the men

in coats, trimmed in velvet or fur—soft as the down
of her pubis. Here, one man is smoking, another

tilts his head to get a better look. Yet another,
at the head of the table, peers down as if

enthralled, his fists on a stack of books.
In the drawing, this is only the first cut,

a delicate wounding; and yet how easily
the anatomist’s blade opens a place in me,

like a curtain drawn upon a room in which
each learned man is my father

and I hear, again, his words—I study
my crossbreed child—a misnomer,

the language of zoology, natural philosophy.
In this scene, he is the preoccupied man—

an artist, collector of experience; the skeptic angling
his head, his thoughts tilting toward

what I cannot know; the marshaller of knowledge,
knuckling down a stack of books; even

the dissector—his scalpel in hand like a pen
poised above me, aimed straight for my heart.

So you asked me about saying “mixed race.” In this poem, I point out a line from my father’s poem in which he uses the word “crossbreed.” Now even if you want to forgive him and say that forty years ago that’s the only language he had access to—which I still wouldn’t agree with because we call animals crossbreed because they are different species—he’s had a long time to change that. For me, there is this master language and then I have to constantly re-write or revise some of that master language. That’s why I like using his own words to dissect, as the poem does, what is happening both with the body and with the language. That woman on the table is very much the woman for inspection, the child that I was, being studied. To even use that language, “my crossbreed child,” you have to ask the question, *If I’m a crossbreed, what’s my mother, what species is she?* It’s a really painful thing for me. It’s one thing to be “othered” in your own country, in your own state, but when it happens at home . . . It’s about imperialism and the colonial body. I think it does go back to that gender theory that you were asking about.

RB: I can’t believe you can read it with such emotion and come back to Harbour’s question as if it was nothing.

NT: It’s a poem I really like, but it’s also one I worry about how my father will feel about it. I don’t think he’s seen it—or he’s pretended not to. If you read his poem, it’s really loving, it’s sweet. There’s still an edge and a blindness.

ZM: I have a lot of hesitancy as a young poet. I feel that once my poems are out, they are no longer mine. How do you deal with that?

NT: I have gotten to a point where I trust my poems and I am willing to follow them where they lead me. It’s as if I have been waiting my whole life to write those poems. I thought when I was writing *Native Guard* that my whole life had been going up to the moment when I would say the things about cultural memory, historical erasure, and amnesia, that my life was almost a metaphor. I’ve talked about *Native Guard* and how it led me to the poems I really needed to write about my mother. This book has started, at least the process has started, in the same way for me. I got

interested in those Mexican *casta* paintings because they showed the mixed blood unions in the colony and the children of those unions as if you were mixing paint: if you put this and this together, you got this. They tended to make them in sets of sixteen and they always began with the white father and degraded from there with the different blood mixtures, everything else is a little bit less than that.

RB: So it does become a conversation with your dad.

NT: It started with those *casta* paintings. I didn't know that looking at that image and looking at all those paintings was about the father. They are also about, not my mother separately, but the ways those interracial unions are portrayed, the imagery of them even in colonial Mexico.

HW: When you write a poem, can you enter into the "otherness" of age or race or gender—that which is "other" from you?

NT: I think any of us can do that as long as we have a strong sense of empathy. Where do you find your connections to people who are very different? The first time it happened to me was when I read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. It was not hard for me to connect my own experience growing up in Mississippi and Georgia with that little girl in the attic writing her heart out in a diary. I think that we can do that, and we should, because it exercises the muscle of empathy.

RB: What's it like to be the Phillis Wheatley Distinguished Chair in Poetry at Emory, to live with that kind of legacy?

NT: It's a lovely title, but even when they created it for me, it was not without irony. Phillis Wheatley did require the signatures of all those learned white men to say that indeed she had written the poems. I take on that mantle with a good sense of irony about what it means. ■

Trethewey's poem "Knowledge" appeared in the *New England Review*, Vol. 30, #4; used by permission of the author. Interview recording and transcription by Lance Gill and Arin Warren.



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES AWARDS



Chief Wilma Mankiller, 2007



N. Scott Momaday, 2008



Charles Banks Wilson, 2009



H.E. "Gene" Rainbolt, 2010

SAVE THE DATE!

2011 Oklahoma Humanities Awards
February 24th, 6:30 p.m., Tickets \$75
Reservation Deadline: February 11th
Information: Call OHC at (405) 235-0280
Event Location: Oklahoma History Center, OKC

Wonderful opportunities for cultural education and conversation are taking place across the state. The Oklahoma Humanities Awards recognize that important work. The 2011 awardees will be announced soon and include individuals, organizations, and projects that have contributed to the understanding of the humanities in Oklahoma.

CALENDAR

Don't miss these outstanding events supported by OHC grants. You can find hundreds of cultural activities and free public events on our website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org/calendar.

PUBLIC FORUM

Alternative Energy Forum: Promoting & Realizing the New Energy Frontier

October 21, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Cameron Univ., CETES Conference Center
2800 W. Gore Blvd, Lawton
Information: 580/581-2200



Cameron University will host a public forum to discuss Oklahoma's energy past and future. Presentations and a moderated panel discussion will address questions such as: How does our cultural history influence energy industry decisions? How can past energy-issue debates inform future solutions? Does the prospect of green energy pose a threat to the cultural identity of Southwest Oklahomans? The forum will feature humanities scholars, public policy leaders, and energy industry professionals.

CONFERENCE

Five Tribes Story Conference

September 24, 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
September 25, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Historic Bacone College
2299 Old Bacone Rd., Muskogee
Information: 918/683-1701
www.fivetribes.org/index.html



The Gift, Donald Vann. Courtesy Five Civilized Tribes Museum.

The Five Tribes Story Conference will explore the interpretation of folklore, oral tradition, scholarship, and literature of the Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Cherokee, and Chickasaw tribes.

The conference will bring together tribal participants in the fields of history, ethnology, performance, and literature to discuss how each discipline informs the other. Sessions will engage participants in an open and interactive format. Award-winning authors and speakers include: Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Diane Glancy (Cherokee), Tim Tingle (Choctaw), and many more.

EXHIBIT

La Serenissima: Eighteenth-Century Venetian Art From North American Collections

September 9–January 2
Oklahoma City Museum of Art
415 Couch Dr., OKC
Information: 405/236-3100
www.okcmoa.com



Family of Darius Before Alexander, 1750. Francesco Salvator Fontebasso (Italian, 1709-1769). Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Colonel C. Michael Paul.

The Italian coastal state of *La Serenissima* (the Most Serene Republic of Venice) served as a thriving sea trade center for centuries; but the architecture and canals of Venice also inspired great creativity among artists. The exhibition *La Serenissima: Eighteenth-Century Venetian Art From North American Collections* features 65 works from more than 25 collections, highlighting mythological, biblical, and historical themes. Artists include Antonio Canaletto, Bernardo Bellotto, Luca Carlevarijs, Francesco Guardi, and others.

EXHIBIT



Breaking the Glass: Wedding Traditions in Oklahoma

October 15-January 31
Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art
2021 E. 71st St., Tulsa
Information: 918/492-1818
www.jewishmuseum.net

Weddings are often an intersection of cultural, religious, and social obligations. While the concept of marriage is recognized across the globe, the ways of solemnizing it differ. Customs and rituals—including garments, food, music, and dance—reveal the rich heritage of individual cultures. *Breaking the Glass: Wedding Traditions in Oklahoma* explores nuptial traditions that have found their way to America's Heartland. A companion exhibit, *Bridal Jewelry: Circles of Love*, focuses on symbolic jewelry for the bride and groom, from tiaras to wedding rings. [Image: Jewish *ketuba*, Persian, c. 1926]

End Notes From the Editor

~ Carla Walker

Quick! What does our cover photo bring to mind? An Alfred Hitchcock movie, perhaps? The real story behind the image rivals any thriller, and after chasing it I have new respect for historians and private investigators. I'd never make it as a detective. I just wouldn't know when to quit—when to stop following the leads, that is.

My search for images of Grand Central Terminal (story page 18) led me to Chris Brazee and what he calls his “free-time” photography of stellar New York sites. Chris works for the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. You can view his professional images online among countless Preservation documents (www.nyc.gov).

I spotted our cover image and emailed Chris immediately to ask—*what is this?* He told me it's the renovated staircase inside a luxury apartment community on Manhattan's Roosevelt Island. He directed me to the developer's website (www.octagonnyc.com/bldgHistory.asp) for background on the building. I found a wonderful historical photo and the name of the original architect, Alexander Jackson Davis. The Octagon Tower's five-story circular staircase was the focal point of a building that opened in 1839—as the New York Lunatic Asylum. *Alfred Hitchcock, indeed.* A little more Internet research and the story came together like a Hollywood screenplay.

The City of New York bought the property known as Blackwell's Island in 1828, choosing the site as a pleasant place for patients to convalesce. The first building constructed on the island, however, was a penitentiary. The Asylum was designed as a state-of-the-art model for treatment of mental illness. Costs narrowed both the scope of the building and its treatment practices. Convicts from the island's penitentiary were brought in as attendants for patients.

The infamous reputation of the institution drew widespread attention. Charles Dickens visited and wrote about the Asylum in his *American Notes for General Circulation*, a detailed commentary on his six-month tour of America in 1842. He remarked on the building's “elegant staircase,” but found conditions in the patient wards deplorable:

The terrible crowd with which these halls and galleries were filled, so shocked me, that I abridged my stay within the shortest



limits, and declined to see that portion of the building in which the refractory and violent were under closer restraint.

Newspaper and magazine reports of abuse and overcrowding continued for decades. Journalist Elizabeth Cochrane Seamen, aka Nellie Bly, faked insanity to gain entrance to the Asylum in 1887. She wrote a series of articles on her experiences for the *New York World* (owned by Joseph Pulitzer) and published the account in her book *Ten Days in a Mad-House*. Professor Brooke Kroeger, New York University, describes Bly's sensational rise to notoriety as a female journalist's daring attempt

to escape work on the society pages. According to Kroeger, the asylum series launched a “new, wild-side genre of ‘stunt’ or ‘detective’ reporting with which Bly's name would fast become synonymous” (*Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist*; Crown Publishing Group, 1995. Excerpt posted on New York Correction History Society website: www.correctionhistory.org).

So, where does our story end? I leave it to you, ace detectives, to keep chasing those leads. As for me, the editor says it's time to put this one to bed. *Print it!*



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