

Oklahoma HUMANITIES

NOVEMBER 2008

**POET JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA
A TRAIL OF TWO TEACHERS**

**SPECIAL FEATURE COMMEMORATING
THE LINCOLN BICENTENNIAL:
OKLAHOMA'S ALL-BLACK TOWNS
HOW POETS HELPED END SLAVERY**

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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

NOVEMBER 2008

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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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Broken Bow River
Broken Bow, Oklahoma
Photo by Mike Klemme





Photo by Mike Klemme

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Special Feature Commemorating the Lincoln Bicentennial

Photo courtesy the Library of Congress, Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana. "We'll Sing to Abe Our Song!": Sheet Music, B.A. Whaples, composer. [LC-DIG-scsm-0200].

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From the Executive Director
ANN THOMPSON

As the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth approaches, many states will host events that feature the life and legacy of our 16th President. One might assume that Oklahoma is not a likely celebrant given that it was not a state until 1907 and Lincoln never stepped foot on its territorial soil, but his legacy persists even today.

During the Civil War, several tribes in Indian Territory fought for the Confederacy when Lincoln's Indian policy ignored their needs. Postwar treaties required freed tribal slaves to be enrolled as members, an issue still at the forefront of tribal, state, and national news. The Homestead Act of 1862 resulted in the Oklahoma land runs; freed slaves looking for safe homes established all-Black towns throughout our state, some of which remain today.

How will OHC be involved in the Lincoln bicentennial? First, don't miss the special feature on pages 18 through 26 of this issue—three essays that reveal important events leading up to abolition, and its aftereffects on freed slaves and their descendants. Our annual Lincoln Essay Contest, open to all K-12 students, will focus on Lincoln's legacy in Oklahoma; Oklahoma Chautauqua for summer 2009 has a Lincoln theme; and we've awarded grants for programs, including the appearance of Lincoln scholar Michael Burlingame.

As our nation faces some of its most daunting challenges in history, I am reminded of the critical importance of an informed, involved citizenry. State humanities councils offer opportunities for thoughtful discussion and deliberation—crucial elements in effective problem solving and moral reasoning. Lincoln's legacy may offer even more parallels to our own times as Americans work together for the shared good of our country. As citizens of the 21st century, we must pause to note and long remember what Lincoln had to say.

LETTERS

How wonderful to get your beautiful new magazine, full of interesting and inspiring words and images from front to back! With its very informative announcements and articles, the magazine certainly lives up to the expectation expressed in the note from Executive Director Ann Thompson to "become *the* source for humanities-based activities throughout the state of Oklahoma." It made me want to jump right on a plane and come join in those activities! And it also complements the efforts of Mike Klemme to show both Oklahomans and the rest of the country "what Oklahoma is about or who we are as a people." This magazine surely must make the residents of your state very proud. For the rest of us it captures and conveys the spirit of a place that, thanks to you, we can now know a little better. Thank you!

Esther Mackintosh
President, Federation of State Humanities Councils

The new *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is a must read! The interview with photographer Mike Klemme and his images commemorating the Oklahoma Centennial illuminate the diversity of culture across our state. I am so excited to see this publication from the Oklahoma Humanities Council that celebrates your mission and work.

Tom A. Taylor, II
Oklahoma City

Northeastern State University has had the privilege for many years to take part in the OHC initiatives that bring the humanities to Oklahoma communities. We, at the NSU Center for Tribal Studies, commend you on the new OHC magazine *Oklahoma Humanities*. It is yet another way to showcase the rich and varied images and stories that reflect our spirit and stimulate our thinking. In format and in style, it is a classy publication and we are glad it is here!

Phyllis Fife
Center for Tribal Studies, Northeastern State University

Congratulations on the first issue of *Oklahoma Humanities*! Your inaugural issue showcases an impressive range of voices both historic and new. It's gratifying to be reminded that Oklahoma enjoys a vibrant literary and cultural tradition. Thank you for bringing Sara Paretsky to Oklahoma, which sets the bar for your annual *Oklahoma Conversation in the Humanities* rather high. It will be rewarding to see that tradition grow.

Emmy Ezzell
University of Oklahoma Press, Norman

What a beautiful new magazine! It will be a great periodical to add to our Oklahoma collection of materials.

Bill Young
Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City

OHC PRIVACY POLICY

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

The magazine is beautiful, lively, well laid out, well written—an accomplishment you should be very proud of.

Tom Averill
Washburn University, Topeka, KS

Congratulations on the premiere issue of *Oklahoma Humanities!* You'll help us better keep in touch with our colleagues across the state as well as introduce us to exciting new opportunities, interesting scholars, and Oklahoma artists. Thank you for a publication that helps enhance the arts and humanities communities of Oklahoma.

Scott Perkins
Price Tower Arts Center, Bartlesville

I wanted to congratulate you on your beautiful new magazine, which is so impressive. It will be making an important contribution to our state.

Teresa Miller
Oklahoma Center for Poets & Writers, Tulsa

Your patience, perseverance, and dreaming has paid off—big time—for everyone associated with the magazine and all of us who will get to enjoy it. The first issue is superlative. Not only is it beautiful to behold, but the writing is superior.

Charlotte Ream Cooper
Former OHC Board Member, Oklahoma City

Congratulations on a very fine magazine. The May issue is the first that I have received and I am very impressed with the articles, the photography, the diversity of topics, and the layout. It is definitely a first-class magazine!

Erma Stewart
Edmond



Editor Carla Walker and OHC Board Chair Ed Barth toast the launch of Oklahoma Humanities magazine.

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

It is my pleasure and honor to assume the chairmanship of the Oklahoma Humanities Council. My service on the Council for the past three years has revealed to me the vital role the Council has in promotion of meaningful public engagement with the humanities.

These words, "meaningful public engagement," are the focus of our mission statement and embody the essence of our work: engaging people in programs that encourage dialogue, promote new perspectives, and cultivate a sense of community. In addition to our own Council-run programs, as the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities we are endowed with the unique responsibility to award grants to other organizations that promote the humanities throughout the state. These grants support grassroots efforts to engage citizens in a myriad of cultural experiences: exhibits, book festivals, historical enactments, lectures, and so much more. These varied and meaningful programs have one thing in common: they are all based in the humanities and help us to better understand the human experience.

The Council is also committed to support excellent instruction in the humanities for students in levels K-12. As our world has become more complex, the stakes could not be higher for our youth. Students are our future citizens and leaders and deserve the insight that the study of the humanities affords. We are pleased to provide resources for teacher institutes and classroom programs that focus on history and literature and cultivate the important skill of critical thinking in our young people.

I look forward to my service as chairman as our Council's work continues to emphasize how essential the humanities are to public life.

2009 OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES AWARDS

Saturday, March 7, 2009—Save The Date!

OHC has expanded its annual award recognition to include six categories that acknowledge the work of individuals, organizations, and projects promoting the humanities in Oklahoma. Mark your calendars now to join us at the Oklahoma History Center for a celebratory dinner with the awardees, followed by a free public event that focuses on how the humanities are critical to our public life.

Expansion of the awards reflects the Council's ongoing effort to support the people and communities that provide cultural humanities programming in their local areas. "Often these programs would be nonexistent were it not for the efforts of a teacher, librarian, or small band of volunteers," says Executive Director Ann Thompson. "We want to recognize the commitment and efforts of people who are contributing to the understanding of the humanities in creative and innovative ways across our state." The new award categories include:



N. Scott Momaday

- Oklahoma Humanities Award: honoring an individual who has contributed significantly to the understanding of the humanities in Oklahoma.
- Public Humanities Award: honoring an individual scholar responsible for outstanding public humanities programming in a library, museum, historical society, or other cultural institution.
- Community Leadership Award: honoring an individual or institution that creates or participates in a community-based program promoting public understanding of ideas and issues related to the humanities.
- Community Support Award: honoring an individual, business, or foundation that has contributed critical financial support to public humanities programming in Oklahoma.
- Humanities in Education Award: honoring a K-12 administrator, instructor, tribal education program, or school district that exhibits or supports excellence in humanities education.
- Outstanding OHC Project: recognizing an outstanding humanities project made possible by an Oklahoma Humanities Council program or grant.

HUMANITIES FORUM

There's nothing like a presidential campaign to get people talking about the issues. OHC has a pilot project on the horizon that we hope will be the new talk of the town. *Humanities Forum* will bring communities together to talk about contemporary issues. The emphasis will be on the public exchange of ideas and perspectives—*public*, as in "everyone is welcome," and *exchange*, as in "you offer your opinion, other people add their ideas, and we all walk away with a better understanding of each other and our world."

Under the Forum model, participants are asked to read a short humanities text, which serves as the springboard for conversation. Discussions are moderated by a scholar to ensure a productive atmosphere where differing ideas are treated with curiosity and mutual respect. The project will begin in Spring 2009 in Oklahoma City.

Rachel Jackson will serve as the scholar facilitator for the pilot project. She has an M.A. in English from the University of Tulsa and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy, with a focus on Oklahoma regional studies, at the University of Oklahoma. In addition to teaching composition at OU, Jackson continues to teach the Kiowa Clemente Course in the Humanities for the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, which explores tribal intellectual tradition and culture alongside Western humanities.



INVESTING IN OKLAHOMA TEACHERS



Courtesy the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

OHC sponsored its first teacher institute in July at The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha. Fifteen teachers from across the state attended the four-day, in-depth study entitled *The Clemente Course Model: Bringing the Native Cultural Perspective into Oklahoma Classrooms*.

Participants interacted with scholars and tribal elders, discussing innovative ways to engage students with Oklahoma's Native American heritage. The Council is soliciting applications for other institutes in 2009 [details at: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org/teacher-institutes]. Here are just a few of the enthusiastic comments from this year's teachers:

- I not only gained a new perspective, I did it with a process that inspires and empowers me. I leave with a stronger understanding of the power of reflection through the great pieces of culture.
—Carmen Clay, Casady School, Oklahoma City
- I had no idea what the Clemente Course Model was or how it would apply to me. Now I see valuable ways I can use it in my classroom.
—Charlotte Wheeler, Mountain View Elementary School
- [This will] expand my students' knowledge of other cultures [and] help them become more sensitive to others.—Terri Gallaway, Chickasha High School
- I have learned the importance of culture and its place in education.—Emma Thadani, University of Pennsylvania
- Listening to the tribal elders was most fruitful.
—Alexander Ravajy, University of Oklahoma

Lawrence Demarchi of Santa Fe Middle School in Oklahoma City made the following powerful response to the question, *How do you plan to use the information presented in the institute?*: "To arouse my students' interest, to help them remove the mantle of victimhood, to help them overcome, to help them set and reach goals." Just imagine how many students will be inspired because we invested in their teachers!

OKLAHOMA CONVERSATION IN THE HUMANITIES

Author Sara Paretsky was the featured speaker in October for the *Oklahoma Conversation in the Humanities*, a new OHC event to be held annually in Tulsa. The Council partnered with Tulsa's downtown Central Library for the public discussion. Paretsky opened with remarks on how libraries made her work accessible to readers.

"It took my agent a year to find a publisher willing to take a chance on a female private eye," said Paretsky. "Libraries played an enormous role in my success. My first book, *Indemnity Only*, sold about 3,500 copies; 2,500 of those were to libraries." Dr. Stacy Takacs, OSU Associate Professor of American Studies, opened the conversation, asking about different aspects of Paretsky's work; then audience members posed their own questions.

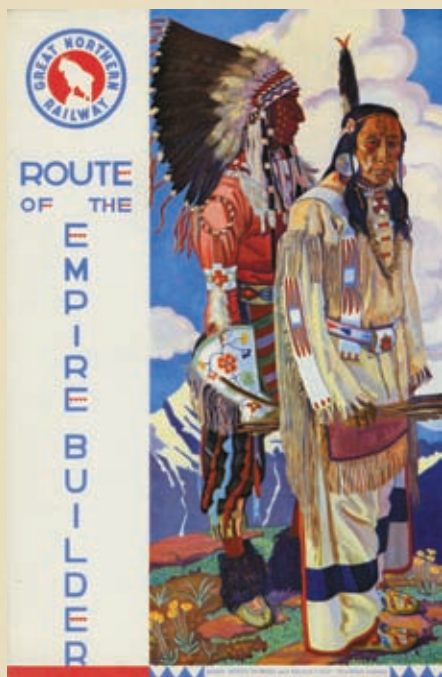
Paretsky was also the guest of honor for a private dinner at the Gilcrease Museum. She greeted guests personally and assured eager fans that the next V.I. Warshawski novel, *Hard Ball*, is near completion.

OHC Board Chair Martin Wing called the inaugural event a delightful celebration. "Sara Paretsky's insightful commentary on civil issues gave us much to reflect on," said Wing. Executive Director Ann Thompson said the Council board and staff were pleased that Tulsa-area residents embraced the conversation format. "We want to get people talking," said Thompson, "to give them a welcoming forum to ask questions and gain new perspectives."

Sponsors for the event included: Apache Corporation; Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation; DoubleTree Hotel Tulsa at Warren Place; Joullian Vineyards; KOSU—The State's Public Radio; UBS Financial Services, Inc.; *Urban Tulsa Weekly*; Tulsa City-County Library; and the *We the People* initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Sara Paretsky



1940 Great Northern Railway menu with cover illustration of Many White Horses and Eagle Calf, Blackfoot Indians, by Winold Reiss. Private collection.

GUARDIANS OF GLACIER PARK: THE BLACKFEET IN ARTISTIC IMAGINATION

*National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City
February 11-May 10*

*Guardians of Glacier Park opens in February at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum and is funded in part by a grant from OHC. The exhibit focuses on the work of photographer Walter McClintock and artists Julius Seyler and Winold Reiss, who worked among the Blackfoot Indians in northwest Montana between 1898 and 1948. During this period, the Great Northern Railway worked to establish Glacier National Park adjacent to its tracks, creating roads, lodges, and other facilities to support tourism. The debut of a new book, *Lanterns on the Prairie: The Blackfoot Photographs of Walter McClintock*, edited by exhibit curator Steven Grafe, will coincide with the exhibit. Following is a short excerpt written by Dr. Grafe.*

Between 1896 and 1912, Walter McClintock took more than 2,000 photographs of the Black-

feet and the area surrounding their reservation. The images were used in publications, as slides to accompany his many public lectures, and to produce prints for exhibition. Nonetheless, few people today have seen examples of McClintock's photographic work.

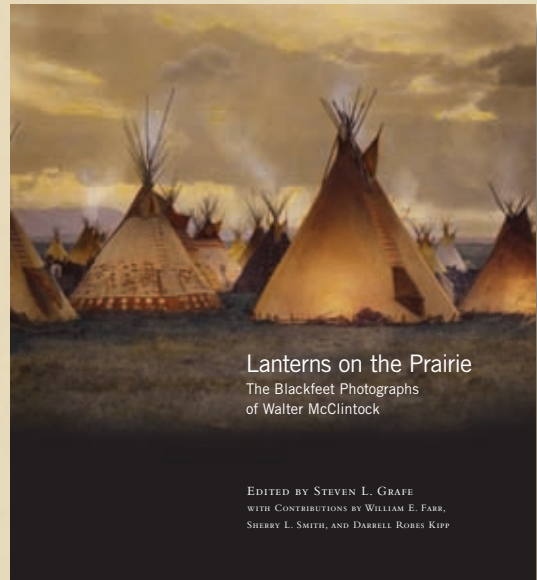
According to his own account, McClintock "was shown every detail of [Blackfoot] life . . . The pictures were not posed, nor were the scenes constructed for the occasion. They are of real life, and they portray the old generation of primitive Blackfoot who have now entirely passed away, representing their ancient culture and their wonderful country as they existed before their devastation by the white race."

Despite the claim that his photos recorded "real life," McClintock's cameras selectively scanned

the Montana landscape to create a window into Blackfoot life as he imagined it to have existed during the nineteenth century. He shows these people as they might have appeared during a romantic heyday, when buffalo were plentiful and young men earned names for themselves while battling tribal enemies.

By 1903, when McClintock's photographic activity began, the Blackfoot had lost much of their land base. The buffalo had been gone from the Plains for two decades and they were subsisting primarily on government food rations. Many reservation residents were living a hardscrabble existence as farmers or ranchers. Some sought refuge in alcohol.

McClintock's repeated presence at summer Sun Dance ceremonials produced a pictorial record



Lanterns on the Prairie
The Blackfeet Photographs
of Walter McClintock

EDITED BY STEVEN L. GRAFE
WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY WILLIAM E. FARR,
SHERRY L. SMITH, AND DARRELL ROBES KIPP

Julius Seyler, *A Stormy Day at Glacier Park*,
undated, oil on paper, 30" x 35-1/2" overall.
Courtesy Sigrid Reisch Collection.

Julius Seyler, *Little Plume
Holding a Medicine
Bundle*, undated, oil
on paper, 39" x 28-1/2"
overall. Courtesy Sigrid
Reisch Collection.



that captured the attire and activities of the most conservative Blackfeet during the few weeks of the year when they actively celebrated their old ways.

From Chapter 5: "The McClintock Photographs: Content and Technique," of Steven L. Grafe, ed., *Lanterns on the Prairie: The Blackfeet Photographs of Walter McClintock* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009)



Walter McClintock with Charlotte Pinkerton Blazer or Annette Karge, *Brave Dogs Parading Around the Camp Circle Holding Aloft Green Willow Branches*, hand-colored 1909 photograph. Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

A TRAIL OF TWO TEACHERS

By Linda Allen



In a time much different from the technology-saturated 21st century, two brothers, Bud and Temple Abernathy, set out on horseback to ride from their home in rural southwest Oklahoma to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Not at all unusual for 1909—except the brothers were only nine and five years old—and they rode alone. This was the first of three remarkable trips that took them from coast to coast, unaccompanied by an adult.

Using the book *Bud & Me: The True Adventures of the Abernathy Boys* as their travel guide, elementary teachers Melody Afill and Donna McChesney of Yale, Oklahoma, spent their summer retracing the trail of Bud and Temple. They had read the book with their students, who easily related to the Abernathy brothers' small-town upbringing and sense of adventure. Afill and McChesney received a grant for their dream project from Fund for Teachers.

"We want to experience our own adventure," Afill stated as the teachers planned the trip. "Following Bud and Temple's footsteps will allow us to see major historical and cultural landmarks across the U.S. we have only read or heard about. Can this adventure, based on a twentieth-century one, inspire our students to seek their own adventures? We hope to find out." A personal goal of the teachers is to empower their students to do big things.

Bud and Temple's wanderlust and daring, modeled from their father—known as "Catch 'em Alive Jack" for his escapades catching over 1,000 live wolves with his bare hands—lured the boys from just reading and hearing about adventures to experiencing their own. Their mother had died, so there was no one to veto Jack's decision to let them travel unchaperoned.

The brothers covered over 2,000 miles on that first, six-week round trip. They survived and returned "better than when they started," accord-

ing to their father. The following year, Bud and Temple headed east to welcome home former President Teddy Roosevelt from an African safari. Along the way, they spent time with Comanche Chief Quannah Parker and met aviator Wilbur Wright, notable politicians, and President Taft. The return trip was by auto—one driven by Jack, and a second by Bud, only ten years old.

The boys' third and final long-distance adventure was a challenge to ride cross-country from Coney Island to Golden Gate Park in 60 days, eating and sleeping outside the entire way for a reward of \$10,000. A group of men offered to help the brothers by giving them and their horses a ride on a train for part of the trip; they promised not to tell the sponsors of the challenge. The boys declined, saying that even if no one else ever found out, they would know. The brothers missed the deadline by only two days, but broke the previous record for cross-country horseback travel by 120 days.

"That's one of the reasons I like the book so much," said Afill. "The boys personify all the things we want our kids to learn: integrity, perseverance, character, and honesty. For each adventure Bud and Temple had, we can ask the question: Why is it important?"

Rules of the Road

Jack Abernathy turned his sons loose to see the world with only four simple rules: He made them

promise to ride no more than 50 miles in one day, except to reach food or shelter for themselves or their horses; not to ride into muddy water unless they could see the bottom or had a guide; to carry no more than five dollars at a time to discourage thieves; and not to travel on Sunday.

Afill and McChesney had to abandon these rules. To keep the schedule of the grant, they divided their travel into two segments. The first leg of the trip, for which the teachers had to learn to ride horseback, was roundtrip from Frederick to Santa Fe, following much the same course as Bud and Temple did in 1909. On May 31, Afill and McChesney departed on horseback to duplicate the boys' initial trip from their temporary home in Guthrie to their family's Crossroads Ranch in Frederick. Jack thought this shakedown ride would discourage his sons from their travel plans. Instead, the boys were even more eager to blaze their way to Santa Fe. Afill and McChesney made the 80-mile journey from Guthrie to Frederick in three days, which was comparable to the boys' ride.

Like Bud and Temple, Afill and McChesney dressed the part, cowboy-style, with hats, boots, shirts, and jeans for the trail ride. Bud and Temple packed light for their trip, each carrying a satchel with one dress outfit and extra shirts, a bedroll, onions, a chunk of raw bacon, a loaf of bread, and oats for their horses. Afill and McChesney packed twenty-first-century travel requirements: a laptop, cell phones, maps, suitcases, and snack foods. Bud and Temple





Chisholm Trail marker east of Kingfisher



Chisholm Kliever from Thomas, Oklahoma



Waving wheat in western Oklahoma



Estelline, the boys'—and our—first stop in Texas



Turkey, Texas, home to the Bob Wills Museum

used telegrams to keep in touch with their dad while traveling. Family, friends, and interested bloggers tracked the teachers' trail online as they crossed the U.S.

In Frederick, Aufill and McChesney attended the Abernathy family reunion at the Crossroads Ranch. Frederick honors the Abernathy legends with a statue of the boys and a historical marker where Jack caught a wolf while Teddy Roosevelt looked on. At the reunion, Aufill and McChesney met Marilyn Stevens and Lyn Wynn, Temple's daughter and granddaughter, who shared more stories that confirmed the family's adventure-some spirit.

The teachers also got to sit in a replica of the Brush Runabout, the one-cylinder car Bud drove from New York City. Much like a go-cart, its top speed was about 30 miles per hour, easily manageable for Bud to drive. Since Temple's feet didn't reach the pedals, he served as navigator. The boys became enthusiastic participants in this new mode of travel that would transform transportation and lifestyles forever. After the three-day ride to Frederick, Aufill and McChesney traveled via automobile.

The Power of Nature and History

On the second leg of their trip, which combined the boys' second and third itineraries, Aufill and McChesney traveled from Oklahoma to New York City and then across the northern tier of states to San Francisco. For 44 days, through 23 states and 9,489 miles, the teachers charted the course of the boys' trips. Their stops read like a must-see list for all serious travelers: national landmarks including presidential monuments in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian, Niagara Falls, Mount Vernon on the Fourth of July, Mount Rushmore, the Badlands, Great Salt Lake, the Grand Canyon, Lincoln's birthplace, and more. They even camped out in some of the same places the boys

did. The teachers also researched archives of the boys' adventures in libraries and museums for lesson plans and future projects.

Along the way, they distributed copies of *Bud and Me*, provided by the Frederick Chamber of Commerce and Tillman County, to museums and libraries. "The librarians were so surprised and amazed that someone would just walk in off the street with a gift for them," Aufill said.

The teachers plan to use their summer adventure to create lesson plans for students that connect history, math, geography, and literature. "Of course, we'll start by reading the book, *Bud and Me*," said Aufill. "The story resonates with all students. Deep inside each student is a desire to have adventures." Instead of just teaching from a textbook, Aufill and McChesney hope that their "been-there-done-that" experiences will encourage students to dream big and expand their comfort zones.

"I plan to have my kids plan an adventure for themselves," offered McChesney. "The trip awakened in us the desire to share the beauty and history of our country, the native and natural landscapes. Every American needs to find a way to visit these places. Pictures don't do justice; you have to stand in the place and feel the power of nature and history."

A lesson in perseverance the teachers plan to share is the time when the boys were stranded in the desert in Utah. Their horses had wandered off, so Bud went to search for them, leaving Temple alone because he did not feel well. While alone, Temple thought about the Mississippi River, Niagara Falls, and the many other sights and experiences he had shared with Bud. The story had a happy ending with the return of the horses, but Temple later realized that while sitting alone with his thoughts, he had been preparing himself to



Replica of a 1910 BRUSH automobile



Mt. Rushmore

die, a mature experience for a seven-year-old. Aufill and McChesney spent time in the desert to capture a sense of what it must have been like for Temple while waiting for the unknown.

The boys traveled through rugged country and faced dangers from exposure, terrain, animals, and bandits; after their initial three-day ride, Aufill and McChesney traveled by car, in air-conditioned comfort protected from the elements. Computer problems, a lame horse, occasional rain, a raccoon foraging through their camp food, and a detour to avoid the flooding Mississippi River were the teachers' only inconveniences.

On the summer vacation of their dreams, Aufill and McChesney recaptured the independent spirit of early Oklahoma to inspire and motivate their students. What's next for the teachers? "We learned that for every answer, there's another question," commented McChesney.

"I think we've just scratched the surface of what's next," Aufill said. "I believe there is much more for us to do with this story." For these teachers and their lucky students, a new adventure has just begun. ■

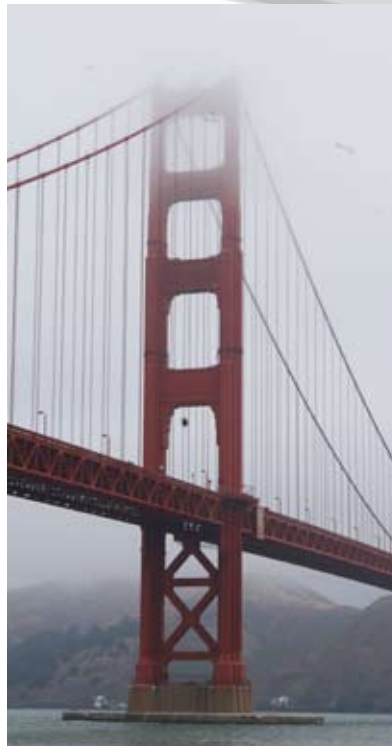
Author Linda Allen is completing her 20th year in secondary education as a Spanish teacher and was recently named the 2008 Teacher of the Year for Yale Public Schools. Aufill and McChesney created a blog and podcast to document their travel. For details, visit: <http://abernathyadventures2008.blogspot.com>.



We exchanged books with former Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating



A super view from Mt. Scott in the Wichita Mountains



The Golden Gate Bridge is majestic, even in the fog



Historical marker honoring the Abernathys



Caprock Canyon State Park

ISLAND OF VOICE

An Interview with Jimmy Santiago Baca

By Dr. Elaine Smokewood, Dr. Harbour Winn, and Ted Stoller

Jimmy Santiago Baca was the featured poet at Oklahoma City University's annual Thatcher Hoffman Smith Distinguished Writer Series in April 2008, supported in part by a grant from OHC. Born in New Mexico of Chicano and Apache descent, Baca became a runaway at age 13. It was after he was sentenced to five years in a maximum-security prison at the age of 21 that Baca began to turn his life around. There he learned to read and write and found his passion for poetry. He is the winner of the Pushcart Prize, the American Book Award, the National Poetry Award, the International Hispanic Heritage Award, and, for his memoir *A Place To Stand*, the prestigious International Award.

Ted Stoller: After mainly writing just poetry, how

did you decide to write your memoir?

Jimmy Santiago Baca: When you're writing, if you're honest with yourself, there is this massive gorilla standing in the way, and most writers don't have the courage to take it on, they go around it. That whole prison experience was one that I had to go through, not around; otherwise, I wouldn't have been a writer, or a decent one, so I faced it full on. Ninety percent of all writers go around whatever it is that they need to go through, and that's why you have so much writing that doesn't pertain to much.

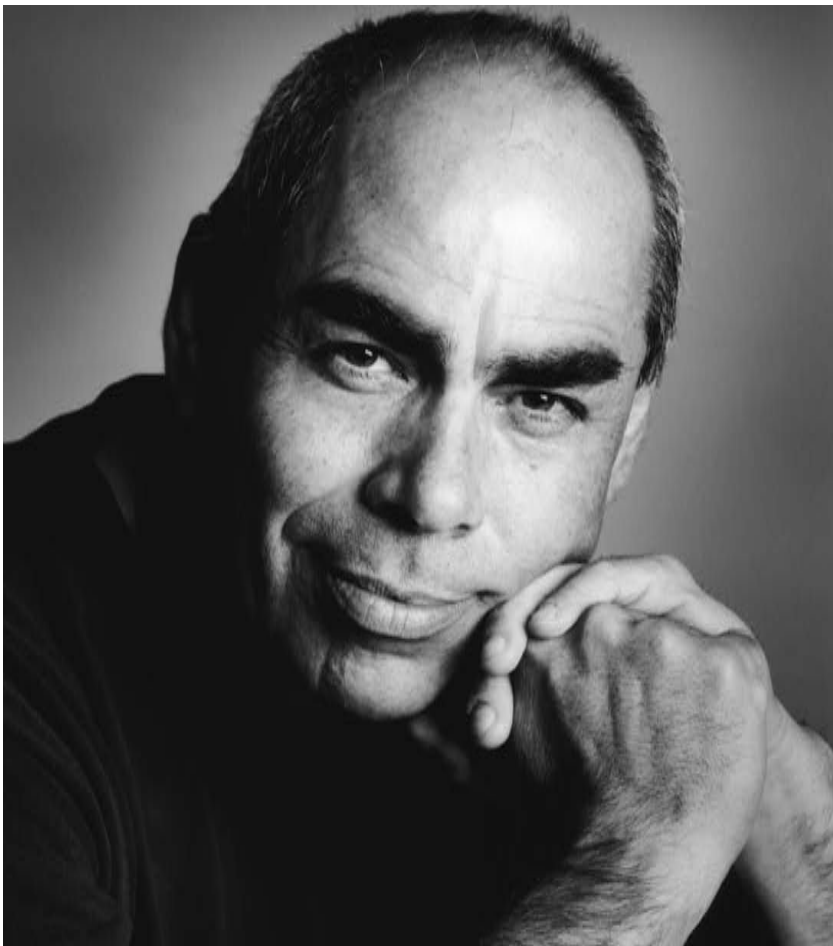
Harbour Winn: How do you assume the voices of different sources or persons or ideas? Is that conscious?

JB: It's easy to write with all those voices. The difficult part is to let them speak for themselves; you just act as a channel, that's the hard part. Toni Morrison, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Levertov, all those people were channels; somehow, somewhere, something just went through them and the voices came out of people. It's amazing. But to get to that place, you have to go through about 15 good revisions to really seek out the voice.

What we love, we have no control over. The interesting thing is that we seem to love [writers] who can control the book. They control the book by going into the place they want to write about and meticulously watching. Say you want to write about somebody on death row, and you get a job as a creative writing teacher in a prison. You go every morning with your notebook and watch the death row guy talk and move and ask him, "What's your crime and how'd you do it?" You meticulously write that down. It's not hard to mimic that on a page, you just have to work hard at it. But to access the soul of a killer and write from that place is a whole different kind of literature.

Few people have touched on it. W.H. Lawrence has in some passages. *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald was able to do that when he went to parties—not mimic the party but channel it through his work—and you know this could never be written by anybody else.

I just finished writing a book. I tried to do that. It took me six years to write and, I'm telling you, the characters speak to you. I thought [the book] was done, but I'm in Nicaragua, in this museum interviewing poets from around the world. While they're getting the lights and camera set up, I start walking down this long corridor of pre-Columbian statues. I have this girl named Carmen in the novel and one of her favorite pastimes is to go to the museum. As I was walking down that corridor, what came out of those statues was what they said to her. I felt them saying goodbye to Carmen.



FROM WINTER POEMS ALONG THE RIO GRANDE
By Jimmy Santiago Baca

28.

*I am a precarious fellow, on edge
wandering like the river, the way it
sniffs out banks,
floods over into paths,
making hikers slip,
laying low in the shallows,
or asleep with dreams full of smug mud-carp.
I round a hedge-sage wall of dense brush
and spreading out before me unexpectedly I see a bend in the river,
it stuns me
that one day I may be as sincere with myself,
through the changes of being a human being,
turn to see myself
flowing, gracefully as the river.*

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I went back to the hotel and wrote that in. All these magical things take place beyond language. This novel, it's 1,600 or 1,700 pages and I got it down to 240, but I'll never forget the distinct moment when I realized, *Wow, that's the protagonist talking to me. She's dead and talking from the spirit world.* I had to go back to the novel and start writing from the spirits. Spirits don't use grammar, they don't use punctuation, and they go way out of the metaphorical surrealism.

HW: You had to write all those pages to get to where that could be channeled?

JB: Oh yeah, I really believe in the channel thing. I wrote the whole thing through first, because I needed to get from the beginning to the end, but the story was all wrong; not the storyline, but the story. It's like you create an island and that island has some bridges you [have] to cross that are really weak. It has a bunch of different animals you have to fight that are really strong and it challenges all the fear you have. You have to stay on that island at night by yourself; but after it's said and done, you come across finding the biggest jewel you ever had.

TS: Your memoir seems very accessible to a male audience, more so than other things that try to be more academic and don't talk about male emotions and violence. Do you feel you are a role model in doing that in your literature?

JB: I just try to write. I don't predicate my writing on any fashionable trend in the literary world. [For example], it's very, very cool to be feminist. I don't know if I'm feminist or the farthest thing from it; I don't know where people are drawing the lines these days. All I know is that a woman is a woman and a man is a man. I write from a male perspective and masculine tone because that's just how I write.

Elaine Smokewood: Talk to us about the relationship of suffering and joy, suffering and beauty, suffering and passion.

JB: I think some of us want to make sense of happiness and suffering, that we're not supposed to suffer, and we translate that into literature. It's a type of literature that doesn't startle the reader, doesn't make the reader fear something. I really like literature that makes people very uncomfortable, and there's none of that going on. Great books make you get out of your comfort zone.

HW: What happens to you when you run? In your poems, it seems to mean so much to you. It must put you in connection with the landscape you're always talking about.

JB: It does. You get to be very intimate and familiar with certain things. It's nice to have beautiful experiences that you work hard to get. Once, I was running in the water and I looked down and there was the biggest fish I've ever seen in my life. I reached slowly down and put my hand in the water and it didn't go away. I reached my hand further into the water and put my hand against its back. I thought if I [told] that story to people they wouldn't believe that I stayed there so long that I became one with the water. It's just unbelievable.

TS: In reading your memoir and poetry, you seem to show incredible emotion and vulnerability. You have experienced extreme circumstances, but, from your earliest poetry to your latest work, that vulnerability never seems to fade as it might in some writers.

JB: Well let me tell you why that vulnerability is there. I can put together a book by mimicking every writer who's on the bestseller list. Ezra Pound spoke about that issue with William Carlos Williams, that idea of mimicking someone's work so you become a master of it. It's the writers who don't mimic the great writers who are groping in the dark, trying to see does this work, does that work. That's why the vulnerability stays, because I refuse to mimic even

myself. I want to do something new every time.

Let me read you something, a new thing called documentary poetry. The style is completely different. Check it out: it's about a white boy who does some serious crazy work: photography, welding, installations in exhibits, charcoal sketches. University of Texas in Austin wanted to do a book on his life, so they recruited some of the great writers from around the world, and they asked me. I don't know how to write about this guy's work, so I said, "I'm gonna write about this the way I think and see. I'm gonna document your work." So here's a document poem:

He's a pothole patcher on the road of love, and the holes go to the center of the earth where he, by fire, learns the craft of an artist. Hibernating in his twig sack, hard nestled in magma mother womb, the hole goes all the way to the other side of earth where hummingbird memories burn bright against the dark. Learns to transform them into the memories: the V8 motor, loved by Elvis and James Dean. He shredded veiled mannerisms, tangled his lungs in flames and color and photos that tied them into a knot until he couldn't breathe and had to breathe sucking sage-rubbed chutes. Submerged in war-jungle waters in his early twenties, seeing life from bloody shores below water where objects waver, butchered parts of animals and children float. Blurred, stacks of despairing hippies, corrupt presidents and broken marriages piled on the banks, his charcoal sketches imagine their agony, his welding torch and grinding blade mimic their screeches, paint brushes splattering their red dreams of hope against the windshield canvas. He learned how his hummingbird heart could hold a redwood tree in one claw, stationary in air. He learned how to use his mind to bring back the cars and trucks droning by in muffled bellows of lonely stretches of Oklahoma roads. Their blurred growl shapes his soul, and he sensed how the world was driven by V8 hunger and V8 vengeance, and he knew the world did not turn on an axis but on the rod projected out from a V8 engine as it spun, pecked, and scratched with razor talons at his face and arms and legs and eyes and tongue and nose until the veneer of flesh that contained his soul peeled away, and he drifted into his colors without pretensions. There was only the cheap, Mexican laborers working stockyards, boxing at night in cantinas, rib-stark steers, weedy jackrabbits with the longest ears, scalded prairie cat type, cowboys in chewed up wind trailers planning on going to Alaska between smoking Pall Malls and sipping wine, worse tasting than goat urine. And the hummingbird flew forth, even deeper into the sorrow of life.

I'm detailing his work. I'm saying, "This is his painting, this is how I see it." Those are documents.

I kinda dig that because poets are documenting the war now. We're not putting in our sensibilities, we're documenting the poverty; we're documenting the Iraq war; we're documenting the Afghanistan sham; we're documenting Bush's presidency; we're documenting it all.

We used to say that was not poetry, the Ernesto Cardinal type of poetry documenting the slaughter of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. We said, "That's not poetry, it's almost like a political statement." Now all these poets are writing document poetry—for the record, because there is nothing else that will document it. All the records can be changed so easily. We can manipulate imagery on screens now, we can mess with sound. Poets are the only ones who can document it, just like they did when they first wrote poetry. Isn't that cool? I think it's great. ■

Transcribed by Diana Silver and Ted Stoller, OCU students



devon

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For 37 years, the Oklahoma Humanities Council has been an outstanding organization that provides Oklahomans across the state with opportunities to learn. Their programs are based on humanities disciplines, such as history, language, literature, art, archaeology, jurisprudence, ethics, and philosophy. These studies are the foundation for gaining knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to better impact our future.

Devon is committed to advancing social and economic improvements in the communities where we live, work, and operate; therefore, our support of the Oklahoma Humanities Council is a natural fit. The numerous projects and programs that are funded each year demonstrate the Council's diligent efforts to foster the understanding of our culture and encourage social responsibility.

"We are a proud supporter of the Oklahoma Humanities Council," said Larry Nichols, Devon Energy chairman and chief executive officer. "Through their work, Oklahomans will continue to enjoy a better quality of life, with access to the rich cultural resources we have right here in our state. We're proud to be an Oklahoma-based company and we're grateful for the Council's continued effort to distinguish Oklahoma through its unique history, traditions, values, and culture."

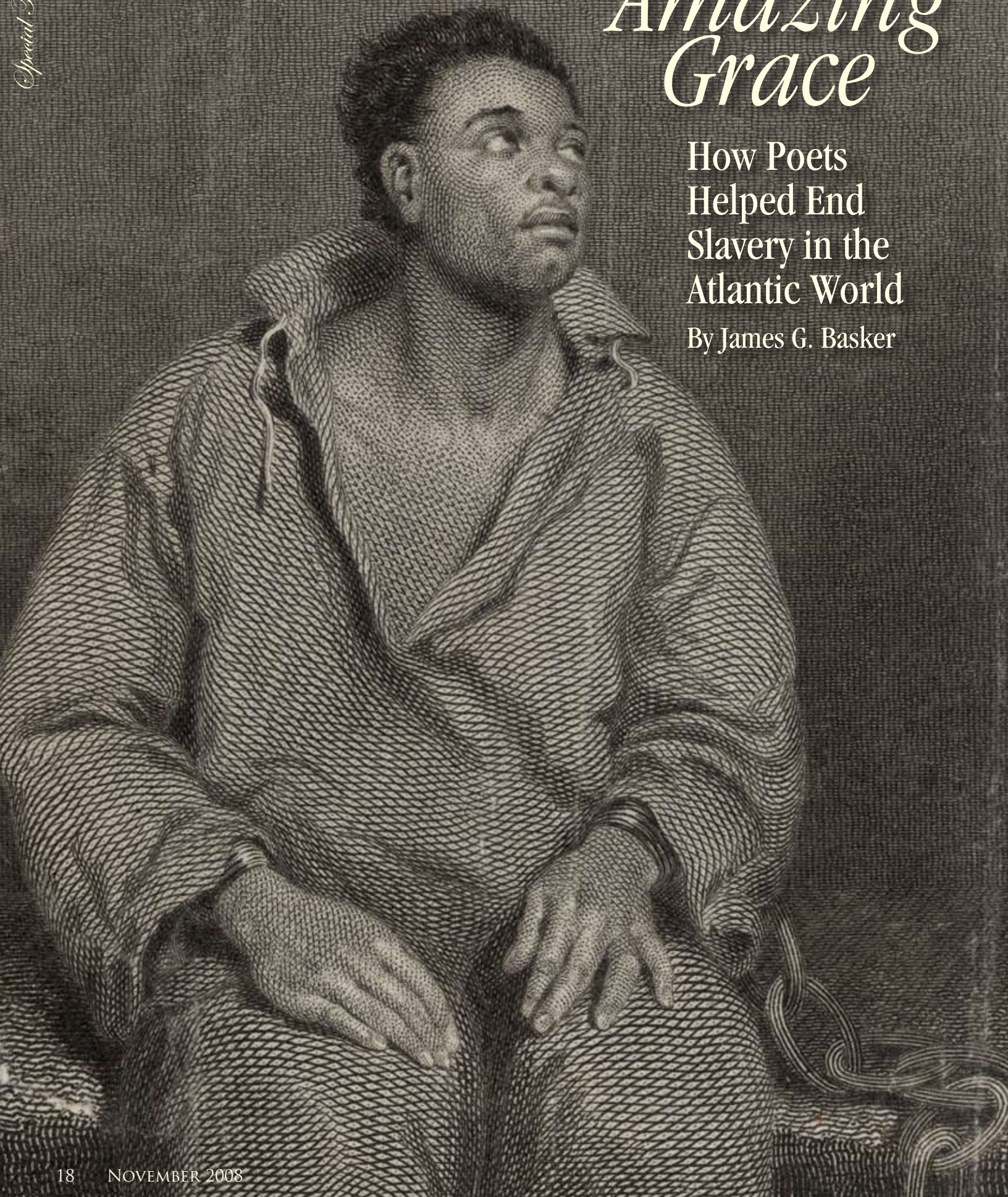


LARRY NICHOLS
CHAIRMAN, DEVON ENERGY

Amazing Grace

How Poets
Helped End
Slavery in the
Atlantic World

By James G. Basker



The year 2007 marked the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. February 2009 will mark the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. As we reflect on this period, James Basker underscores the importance of preserving that history in our collective memory and cultural life. His book, *Amazing Grace*, compiles 15 years of research on the connections between literature and the history of slavery and abolition, research that has deepened his convictions about why literature matters.

Amazing Grace is an anthology that spans 150 years and includes poems from every kind of source across the English-speaking world—England, Scotland, Ireland, America, the Caribbean—in some cases poems written aboard ship on the Atlantic Ocean. The collection traces how African slavery in the New World became visible in and through English poetry. It is a mammoth collection of more than 410 poems and excerpts, by at least 250 different poets, written and published between 1660, when the English presence in the Atlantic slave-holding world really took off, and 1810, when the abolition of the British and American slave trade (though not of slavery itself) had just taken effect.

The result is something like a vast archeological dig. Poetry fills the interstices of our culture, and this material maps the emergence of a collective awareness of a subject charged with powerful aesthetic and moral qualities, and the spread of this awareness through the collective imagination of the English-speaking world during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The material challenges many of our widely held preconceptions. The poem from which the volume takes its title, “Amazing Grace,” presents one such example. Seen by many people as a Negro spiritual, it was originally composed in the 1770s by the white English clergyman and abolitionist John Newton. As a young man, Newton had been an active slave trader, eventually serving as captain of a slave ship. The famous lyrics that are so widely heard as the slave's yearning for deliverance from the sufferings of this world—Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound) / That sav'd a wretch like me!—are in fact the words of a former slave trader giving thanks for his deliverance from the sinfulness of slave trading.

One of the biggest surprises that emerged as I researched this book was how early some writers were denouncing slavery. In 1702, almost 20 years before he wrote his famous novel *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe was criticizing English traders who trafficked in Africa:

There in insufferable Heats *they fry*,
And run vast Risques to see the Gold, *and die*:
The harmless Natives basely they trepan,
And barter Baubles for the *Souls of Men*:
The Wretches they to Christian Climes bring o'er,
To serve worse Heathens than they did before.

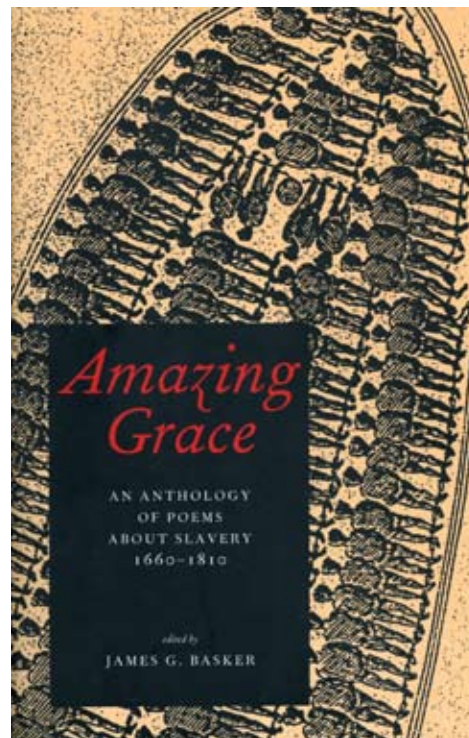
Note here his ironic emphasis on “Christian climes” and slaves serving “worse Heathens than they did before”—the beginnings of what would become a widespread practice of attacking slavery for its violation of Christian ethics.

More than 50 years before William Wilberforce was to introduce the first abolition bill in the British Parliament, the London poet Richard Savage was fiercely attacking slavery in his verse satire “Of Public Spirit.” Another early British poet, James Thomson, wrote against the slave trade in his widely popular masterpiece *The Seasons*:

Increasing still the terrors of these storms,
His jaws horrific armed with threefold fate,
Here dwells the direful shark. Lured by the scent
Of steaming crowds, of rank disease, and death,
Behold he rushing cuts the briny flood
Swift as the gale can bear the ship along,
And from the partners of that cruel trade
Which spoils unhappy Guinea of her sons
Demands his share of prey, demands themselves.
The stormy fates descend: one death involves
Tyrants and slaves; when straight, their mangled limbs
Crashing at once, he dyes the purple seas
With gore, and riots in the vengeful meal. (1744)

Taking Defoe, Savage, and Thomson together, it is important to place them in historical perspective: all three denounced the slave trade in these writings *years* before the colony of Georgia, which we would later think of as the heart of the slaveholding South, had even begun to admit slaves.

One of Robert Southey's poems is an example of a poet's strategic choices to move readers psychologically and emotionally against the evils of slavery. “The Sailor, who Had Served in the Slave-Trade” is based on a true story that first appeared in a newspaper in Bristol England, of a sailor who was found in a cow barn, ranting and raving, devastated by his experiences onboard a slave ship. Southey wrote the sailor's story in verse.





“I have done a cursed thing!” he cried:
“It haunts me night and day;
And I have sought this lonely place
Here undisturb’d to pray.

Aboard I have no place for prayer,
So I came here alone,
That I might freely kneel and pray,
And call on Christ, and groan.

If to the main-mast head I go,
The Wicked One is there;
From place to place, from rope to rope,
He follows every where. . . .

“O cursed, cursed is the deed!”
The wretched man replies,
“And night and day and every where
‘Tis still before my eyes.

I sail’d on board a Guinea-man,
And to the slave-coast went; . . .
Would that the sea had swallow’d me
When I was innocent!

And we took in our cargo there,
Three hundred negro slaves,
And we sail’d homeward merrily
Over the ocean-waves.

But some were sulky of the slaves,
And would not touch their meat,
So therefore we were forced by threats
And blows to make them eat.

One woman, sulkier than the rest,
Would still refuse her food, . . .
O Jesus God! I hear her cries!
I see her in her blood!

The captain made me tie her up,
And flog while he stood by;
And then he cursed me if I staid
My hand to hear her cry.

She shriek’d, she groan’d, . . . I could not spare,
For the Captain he stood by; . . .
Dear God! that I might rest one night
From that poor creature’s cry!

What woman’s child a sight like that
Could bear to look upon!
And still the Captain would not spare . . .
But made me still flog on.

She could not be more glad than I
When she was taken down:
A blessed minute! . . . ‘twas the last
That I have ever known!

I did not close my eyes all night,
Thinking what I had done;
I heard her groans, and they grew faint
Towards the rising sun.

She groan’d and moan’d, but her voice grew
Fainter at morning tide;
Fainter and fainter still it came
Until at noon she died.

They flung her overboard; poor wretch
She rested from her pain,
But when . . . O Christ! O blessed God!
Shall I have rest again!

I saw the sea close over her
Yet she is still in sight;
I see her twisting every where;
I hear her day and night.

Go where I will, do what I can,
The Wicked One I see:
Dear Christ, have mercy on my soul!
O God, deliver me! (1798)

By putting the poem in the voice of the sailor rather than the poor slave woman or another captive, Southey dramatized the psychological collapse of a hardened white man.

Of course, not all major writers were opposed to slavery. Biographer James Boswell paused from finishing the *Life of Johnson* in 1791 to publish his verse attack on Wilberforce and the abolitionists entitled “No Abolition of Slavery: or, the Universal Empire of Love.” A few lines will give a taste of it:

Slavery, subjection, what you will,
Has ever been, and will be still:
Trust me, that in this world of woe
Mankind must different burthens know;
Each bear his own, th’Apostle spoke;
And chiefly they who bear the yoke. . . .

Lo then, in yonder fragrant isle
Where Nature ever seems to smile,
The cheerful *gang!*--the negroes see
Perform the task of industry:
Ev’n at their labour hear them sing,
While time flies quick on downy wing;
Finish’d the bus’ness of the day,

No human beings are more gay:
Of food, clothes, cleanly lodging sure,
Each has his property secure;
Their wives and children are protected,
In sickness they are not neglected;
And when old age brings a release,
Their grateful days they end in peace.

And they that walk therein, Psalm. i.1,2.
Shall reap the joys that never cease, Prov[erbs]. iii,7.
And Christ shall be their king.
4.
God's tender mercy brought thee here,
Tost o'er the raging main; Psalm. ciii,1,3,4.
In Christian faith thou hast a share,
Worth all the gold of Spain.

In Boswell's poem, we hear early versions of the rationales that would become staples of the defense of slavery in the 19th century. Despite the repulsiveness of the sentiments he expresses, Boswell's poetic defense of slavery testifies to the centrality of the issue in the early 1790s.

Significantly, many of the most vocal abolitionist poets turn out to be women. There are at least 40 women poets represented in the collection. Among them is Frances Seymour (the Countess of Hertford, later Duchess of Somerset), the first writer to take up in verse form a tale of interracial love and betrayal from the 1600s. In it, Yarico (a woman of color, sometimes described as an American Indian, sometimes as a "Negro") is sold into slavery by her greedy, treacherous lover, the Englishman Inkle. Seymour's poem led the way to at least six other poetic versions of the story—including an opera—written between the 1720s and 1800. Such retellings, decades in advance of any formal political movement, fostered widespread sympathy for the victims of slavery and loathing for the social and economic norms of the institution.

In an era when almost all blacks were denied even a rudimentary education, it is remarkable that at least 20 of the poets represented in *Amazing Grace* are black. Phillis Wheatley is powerfully present in the anthology, both in terms of quantity (with ten poems, she has more than any other poet, white or black) and of subtler influence. One sees that influence in the number of later poets who mention feeling inspired by her example, often framing their own poems as responses to reading her works. I want to mention Jupiter Hammon, the enslaved African, devout Christian, and ingeniously productive writer. In one of his poems there is a breakthrough moment in American history:

AN ADDRESS to Miss PHILLIS WHEATLY, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age, and soon became acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Miss WHEATLY; pray give leave to express as follows:

1.
O Come you pious youth! Adore
The wisdom of thy God, Eccles[iastes]. xii.
In bringing thee from distant shore,
To learn his holy word.
2.
Thou mightst been left behind,
Amidst a dark abode; Psal[ms]. cxxxv,2,3.
God's tender mercy still combin'd,
Thou hast the holy word.
3.
Fair wisdom's ways are paths of peace,

This poem of 1778 marks a crucial moment in African American literary history: the first time that one black writer publicly engaged with another black writer in a conscious act of affiliation and celebration. It marks the birth of a self-consciously distinctive African American literary tradition.

These African Americans were not without their white allies. One of the most striking things to emerge in this collection was a generation of American poets writing in the years of the American Revolution and the Founding Era—Philip Freneau, Joel Barlow, David Humphreys, Timothy Dwight, Sarah Wentworth Apthorp Morton—who saw the future of America as *absolutely* dependent on the elimination of slavery and the enfranchisement of black people. As early as 1778, Joel Barlow wrote a poem about the future of an independent America called "The Prospect of Peace." In it, he prophesied that with American independence, "Afric's unhappy children, now no more / Shall feel the cruel chains they felt before" but instead, he hoped, will "join the common cause, / Protect our freedom and enjoy our laws." What a prophecy to make, in 1778, with the Revolutionary War still in its early stages and its outcome completely uncertain! Taken together, these poets pose a challenge to those who think of slavery as universally accepted during the founding era and early republic.

My attempt to summarize the contents and significance of these literary materials could go on forever, so let me close with what was to me the most important surprise to emerge from compiling this book: In an era when many of us assume that the majority of people either approved of slavery or at least acquiesced in it, a full 75 percent of the poets in this volume treated slavery as ugly, evil, immoral, intolerable. A few years ago, many academics had taken to saying that "culture was complicitous in empire," including its worst features such as slaughter and enslavement. To me the historical evidence suggests otherwise, that poets were spreading the vision and inculcating the sensibilities that would eventually lead to political action and reform. I believe, as Percy Bysshe Shelley said at the end of his still-powerful essay, *A Defence of Poetry*, "Poets are the *unacknowledged* legislators of the world."

I hope the material I have assembled in *Amazing Grace* will help in some small way to clarify our understanding of the past, and perhaps humble us a bit in our confident pronouncements about those who have gone before us, while also reinvigorating our sense of why not only poetry but all literature matter so deeply in shaping the moral awareness and ethical priorities of society today. ■

James Basker is President of the Gilder Lehman Institute of American History, and the Richard Gilder Professor of Literary History at Barnard College, Columbia University.



ALL-BLACK TOWNS IN OKLAHOMA

Pride, Prejudice, and Perseverance on the Western Plains

By Hannibal B. Johnson

The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.

—Nelson Henderson

Black presence in our state dates back to the mid-sixteenth century. Africans accompanied Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado on his sojourn to the uncharted western outpost we now call Oklahoma. In the ensuing centuries, Black influence would become significant in America's 46th state.

The infamous "Trail of Tears," the brutal forced migration of the Five Civilized Tribes to Indian Territory, heralded a second coming to Oklahoma for African-Americans. Blacks lived and worked among the displaced tribes, some as slaves, others as free persons living among tribal clans. They, too, marched, suffered, and died en route to new lives in strange lands.

The third-wave migration of African-Americans to Oklahoma crested in the late 19th century. Legions of Blacks fled the Deep South. Going westward, they left behind a Southern maelstrom of oppression and intimidation spawned by the collapse of post-Civil War Reconstruction. Black seekers jettisoned the political powerlessness, numbing poverty, and social isolation of Southern living. Unmoored from their ancestral homelands, the "Exodusters" homed in on the political, economic, and social opportunity widely thought to be available in the Midwest. These travel-weary Southern migrants formed largely

self-sustaining frontier communities. Prominently in Kansas, then principally in Oklahoma, all-Black towns mushroomed.

The all-Black towns offered hope: the prospect of full citizenship; the opportunity to be self-governing; and the chance to participate fully, through land ownership, in the American economic dream. Oklahoma seemed fleetingly to embody the American ideal. She was, it seemed, *El Dorado*, [the golden city of Spanish legend].

Oklahoma—The Promised Land

African-Americans would be among the "Sooners" marching into Oklahoma during the land run of 1889. They joined fellow Blacks with Native American ties who had previously "discovered" Oklahoma. Frequently, red blood ran through Black veins. Indeed, many African-Americans received property pursuant to the Indian land allotments. Some pooled their allotments, creating all-Black enclaves. "Natives" (mixed-blood African-Americans with Native American blood) often competed with "Watchina" or "State Negroes" (African-American immigrants from the Deep South). Natives derided Watchina as too servile, too likely to kowtow to Whites.

Despite this intermittent squabbling, boosters and bulletins continued to tout Oklahoma as a beacon of hope and an oasis of opportunity. One Oklahoma booster stands out. Edward P. McCabe, an African-American sophisticate, emerged as the father of Oklahoma's all-Black town movement.

He crafted a luminous portrait of Oklahoma, a characterization irresistible to increasing numbers of beleaguered Black Southerners. McCabe, once the highest-ranking Black elected state official in Kansas, served as Kansas State Auditor from 1882 to 1886. He lived for a time in Nicodemus, a seminal all-Black town in Kansas. A shrewd and popular Republican politician, McCabe gained national notoriety.

McCabe founded Langston, Oklahoma, and its newspaper, the *Langston City Herald*. Seeking to create an all-Black state within Oklahoma, McCabe visited President Benjamin Harrison in 1890. McCabe envisioned himself as the governor of his hoped-for, all-Black province which, he argued, would present an opportunity for African-American uplift. Some Whites cottoned to the idea of an all-Black state, seeing it as a solution to America's perceived "Negro problem." African-Americans could be more readily controlled, they thought, when corralled in a single location. Though an all-Black state never materialized, McCabe continued to turn African-American eyes toward Oklahoma. They came in droves to see the Promised Land for themselves.

The Promise Unravels

Black, White, and Indian threads woven into the Oklahoma fabric fashioned a unique social, political, and economic tapestry. Insecurities and conflicts threatened to unravel this masterwork. The primary threat to African-American ascendancy arose in the halls of political power. Out of



the Constitutional Convention in Guthrie in 1906 evolved a race-tinged governance blueprint that drew the color line in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Constitution defined “Colored” and “Negro” as a person bearing any African descent—the “one drop” rule (a.k.a., the rule of hypodescent). All others, including Native Americans, qualified as “White.”

Having African ancestry became a marked disability. For example, the Constitution required the Oklahoma Legislature to provide separate schools for Black and White children—separate, but not equal. As Oklahoma achieved statehood in 1907, its inaugural legislature ensconced rigid “Jim Crow” mandates. Senate Bill Number One, the first measure to pass the newly minted body, segregated rail cars and facilities. The institutionalization of racism sent a clear and chilling message. Oklahoma refused to recognize the full humanity of her African-Americans residents. The consequences of that decision were swift and severe.

Lynching, a form of domestic terrorism largely targeting African-Americans, swept the country. Typically, White mobs targeted African-Americans for some supposed crime or social slight. These mobs meted out summary “justice,” whipping, hanging, burning, stabbing, and/or mutilating their victims. Between 1907 and 1915, Whites lynched at least 15 African-Americans in Oklahoma. Local law enforcement sometimes participated in these carnival-like public orgies of violence and mayhem. More often, they simply turned a blind eye. Lynchings sent a clear and chilling “know your place” message.

Oklahoma began to mirror the Southern crucible from which so many African-Americans had recently leapt. Pressure for civil rights swelled. E.P. McCabe called Oklahoma to task. He sued the state over its enactment of laws decreeing racial separation. Unsuccessful, he left Oklahoma and died a pauper in Chicago on February 23, 1920. The all-Black towns that would become the talk of the nation—these are his legacy.

Enterprising All-Black Towns

Oklahoma spawned dozens of all-Black towns, more than any other state in the nation: Boley, Clearview, IXL, Langston, Redbird, Rentiesville, Taft, Tatum, Tullahassee, just to name a few. Historically, a community qualified as “all-Black” if Blacks: (i) established the town; (ii) dominated the town’s governance structure; (iii) constituted all or an overwhelming majority of the town’s officials; and (iv) served as federally appointed Black postmasters—positions of federal recognition.

African-American statesman Booker T. Washington visited Boley, Oklahoma’s premiere all-Black town, in 1908. He labeled Boley “[t]he most enterprising, and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the U.S.” Boley boasted the



first Black-owned telephone company, electric company, and bank in America. Moviemakers even set a 1920s-era “all Colored” feature film in Boley. Promoters billed *The Crimson Skull* as a “baffling western mystery photo-play” featuring “big fights, fast action . . . [and] thrilling love scenes.”

In addition to its storied history of entrepreneurship and enterprise, Boley gained national exposure for more sinister pursuits. In 1932, Boley townspeople mortally wounded two members of the “Pretty Boy” Floyd gang and captured a third after the villains robbed Farmers and Merchants Bank and gunned down bank president and Boley mayor David Johnson Turner.

Not all of Oklahoma’s all-Black towns boast such colorful histories. Nonetheless, many of them offer insights into the African-American experience. Taft, for example, derives its name from William Howard Taft, U.S. Secretary of War and Governor of Cuba in the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt. Taft succeeded Roosevelt in 1908. Taft townsfolk elected their own maverick leader in 1973. Lelia Foley-Davis became the first elected African-American female mayor in America. Ms. Davis’ inspiring climb from “the welfare dole to the mayoral role” made headlines nationally.

Clearview emerged as the site of a vibrant “back-to-Africa” movement led by an African Pied Piper known as “Chief Sam” in 1913. Chief Sam connived hundreds of African-Americans into investing in his Akim Trading Company. Company shares earned the bearer safe passage to Africa. Chief Sam promised a milk-and-honey African paradise for his gullible investors. Enthusiasts waited for months in ill-equipped encampments. Some made it to the point of embarkation, Galveston, Texas; only a few dozen secured spots aboard Chief Sam’s rickety, sea-worn vessel for the long and treacherous voyage to the African Gold Coast. Chief Sam’s ravaged passengers arrived in present-day Ghana, only to be astonished by the harsh, forbidding living conditions. Many returned to America disillusioned, dismayed, and destitute.

Despite characters like Chief Sam, Oklahoma’s all-Black towns produced a bevy of celebrated individuals. The tiny town of Rentiesville yielded famed historian Dr. John Hope Franklin and the late blues guitarist D. C. Minner.

Tulsa’s Greenwood District— From Ashes to Renewal

In the early 1900s, remarkable entrepreneurial spirit brought Tulsa’s historic African-American community, known as the “Greenwood District,” national renown. The enclave—an all-Black town within a town—rested on the once firm foundation of segregation. Greenwood thrived as African-Americans traded with one another and

dollars circulated within the Black community. This “Black Wall Street” teemed with business activity. Greenwood Avenue, the vibrant hub of the area, drew favorable comparisons to Memphis’ Beale Street and Chicago’s State Street.

The calamitous 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, the worst twentieth-century “race riot” in American history, temporarily stilled Greenwood. Marauding White rioters seized upon prosperous Greenwood, leaving destruction and death in their wake. Despite their best efforts, those responsible for the pogrom failed to destroy the human spirit embedded deep within Tulsa’s Black citizens. Like the legendary phoenix, Greenwood rose from the ashes with renewed vitality.

Over the next few decades, social and economic conditions changed. That sparked a prodigious downward spiral from what had been a remarkable resurrection. Grassroots advocates assailed the skid of the Greenwood District from chic to shambles. The demolition of historic buildings, coupled with general neglect in the African-American community, led to a groundswell of support for cultural preservation in the early 1970s. As a result, the Greenwood Cultural Center emerged in the late 1980s as a monument to the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of a risen community.

Despite an auspicious beginning, the all-Black town movement crested between 1890 and 1910. The American economic shift from agricultural to industrial heralded the decline of these largely rural communities. Subsequent decades of socioeconomic and political instability further weakened them. Many of the few that remain struggle mightily. No Oklahoma all-Black town has matched Tulsa’s Greenwood District in terms of preserving history for posterity. The historical and cultural reservoirs of most Oklahoma all-Black towns remain largely untapped.

Acres of Aspiration

What does the future hold for Oklahoma’s all-Black towns? Their continued survival depends on several factors:

- *Spearheading curriculum revision* that leads to a more inclusive, accurate history is crucial. The all-Black towns are an important part of both Oklahoma and American history. Keeping this history alive is part and parcel of keeping the towns themselves alive.
- *Maintaining local schools* promotes community pride, cohesion, and unity. The loss of a school can be the proverbial “kiss of death” in a small, moribund all-Black town. Efforts to keep these schools open and vigorous, where feasible, should be intensified.
- *Keeping local post office facilities open* offers a visible, vital symbol of federal government recognition.
- *Promoting heritage tourism* is key to all-Black towns’ survival. Heritage tourists seek tangible history—things to do and see. The all-Black towns need to develop attractions for this burgeoning group and create opportunities for them to invest in the communities they visit (e.g., by purchasing goods/services and making donations).
- *Securing government investment in infrastructure*, such as roads, bridges, water, waste systems, direct ties to major roads, and better signage is crucial. Capturing a fair share of federal and state infrastructure dollars should become a priority.
- *Developing economic opportunities* is essential to attracting and retaining young

people. That means creating jobs. Alternatively it may mean linking with jobs in larger cities. (Some of the all-Black towns may need to consider positioning themselves as desirable bedroom communities.)

Oklahoma’s pioneering forefathers and foremothers—our ancestors—planted the trees under whose shade we now sit. They created for themselves and for us acres of aspiration. The value of their legacy—the likes of all-Black towns such as Boley, Clearview, Langston, Red Bird, Rentiesville, Taft, and their urban cousin, Tulsa’s historic Greenwood District—can neither be ignored nor underestimated. As an important part of the African-American struggle for freedom, justice, and equality, this rich history is ours to reclaim, relish, and retell. ■

Hannibal B. Johnson, a graduate of Harvard Law School, is an author, attorney, and consultant. He has taught at The University of Tulsa College of Law, Oklahoma State University, and The University of Oklahoma. Two of his books, *Black Wall Street, Up From The Ashes* and *Acres of Aspiration*, chronicle the African-American experience in Oklahoma and its impact on American history. His latest book, *IncogNegro—Poetic Reflections on Race & Diversity in America*, opens a dialogue on the issue of difference and on our “shared humanity.”

Images courtesy the Oklahoma Historical Society. Page 22: Boley, Oklahoma. “Farmers and Merchants Bank.” David J. Turner on steps. 1860s. [3377-B-2]. Page 23: Boley, Oklahoma. “Members of the Town Council.” 1860s. [3377-D-1]. Page 24: Chickasaw freedmen filing on allotments, Tishomingo, OK, I.T. 1899-1928. W.P. Campbell Collection. [3759]. Page 25: Tulsa Race Riot. Rubble and brick walls after the fires had subsided. 1921.[15583.A].





WHAT AMERICA MEANS TO ME

By Manuel Hogan, 5th Grader, Cleveland Bailey Elementary School, Midwest City

*I*t was a dark night and Jess Copeland lay looking at the stars. He was only a kid, but he had big dreams. He dreamt that one day he could read and write, that one day his belly would be full, but most of all he dreamt that one day he would be free.

Soon Jess Copeland became a man with a family. He worked pulling cotton from sun up to sun down. When others would get tired and quit, Jess Copeland would find work and earn extra money. He saved change. He had a plan. One day, he would buy his freedom.

One day, he got his things together to go to the overseer to buy his freedom. He was so happy as he came to the big house. But, what he saw changed his life forever. He saw a man beat to death. The whips snapped, Ka Pow! This man had also come to buy his freedom, but instead he got a mean death.

Jess ran home scared. He knew he needed a new

plan, so he prayed. The next night, Jess and his family ran away. He followed the same stars that he saw as a kid.

Jess never learned to read or write, but he worked as hard as a free man as he did as a slave. He sent his kids to school and taught them how important learning and freedom were. He taught them to be proud Americans. His grandsons even fought in WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

I believe being an American means knowing where you come from and being proud of who you are. My name is Manuel Hogan and I'm the great-great-grandson of Jess Copeland, a runaway slave. I can read, write, and my belly is full. Most of all, I am FREE! ■

Manuel Hogan was one of two winners of the 2008 Colonial Day at the Capitol Literature Contest sponsored earlier this year by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. Colonial Day at the

Capitol is an annual event for fifth-graders and is funded in part by a grant from OHC.

Manuel read his award-winning essay in the House Chambers during Colonial Day activities and received a standing ovation. Looking on, in the photo above, is Richard Schumann of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation who portrayed American patriot Patrick Henry as part of the day's events.

Approximately 1,000 students—most dressed in colonial attire—attend Colonial Day each year. Students interact with colonial period characters, recite the Bill of Rights, participate in a debate between American patriots and British loyalists, and engage in hands-on activities such as colonial games and crafts.

Manuel is the son of Ted and Fatina Hogan of Oklahoma City. He is straight-A student and member of the Mid-Del School's ACE Academy for gifted and talented students.

OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES MAGAZINE TRAVELS TO THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

Oklahoma Humanities magazine traveled to the Democratic National Convention in Denver a few months ago at the request of Oklahoma delegates forming the Will Rogers Caucus. Copies of the May 2008 issue, which included a feature on Will Rogers, were distributed to delegates and the media as part of caucus activities. Dr. Tim Mauldin, caucus co-chair, was kind enough to talk to Editor Carla Walker, before and after the convention, about the caucus and its efforts to inspire civility through the words of Will Rogers.

Carla Walker: [A few days before the convention]: Tell me about the caucus and how it came to be.

Tim Mauldin: We are a group of Clinton and Obama delegates, united in our admiration of Will Rogers, one of our best-known and most-revered Oklahomans. We realized that 2008 is the 80th anniversary of Will's first campaign for president and thought it would be great to commemorate the occasion at the Democratic National Convention. We took several of Will's timeless quotes and produced the "Will Rogers Platform for America," juxtaposed alongside contemporary political issues. It shows how he used humor in pursuit of serious social concerns such as poverty, unemployment, and human rights.

CW: What activities do you have planned? How will you incorporate the platform during the convention?

TM: Today, as a matter of fact, I obtained our official proclamation from Governor Brad Henry designating August 25, 2008 as "Will Rogers for President Day" in Oklahoma. We will present the platform, proclamation, and other materials to inform delegates, both in our own delegation and on the floor, of the wit and wisdom of Will Rogers.

CW: Tell us about Will's political legacy. Why do his ideas still resonate so strongly?

TM: It would be difficult to name any celebrities today that are on a par with Will Rogers' influence. In 1930, there were approximately 123 mil-

lion Americans; over 40 million listened to and read the comments of Will Rogers. That's a tremendous audience share, as we would say today.

Between 1928 and 1932, the country went through some tremendous economic experiences. Will Rogers was advocating for the poor. He was hearing from them on his programs, he was hearing from people who responded to his columns. He was from Oklahoma, a state that was greatly affected by the Dust Bowl and the depression. I think his circumstances made him very sensitive to those concerns. In 1932, he was, we might say



Delegates Linda Edmondson and Dr. Joe Carter

today, a "player" in the Democratic Convention. I don't think a lot of Oklahomans know that.

One of the things he did was bring Americans' attention to national conventions. He was reporting them on the radio and writing columns about something that might have been remote to most Americans. He is arguably one of our preeminent, if not the first, broadcast commentators about conventions. He helped people understand that the process in selecting a president is something that concerned them and something that they might be able to do something about. This was, for many Americans, quite a remarkable awareness.

Our understanding of Will Rogers sees a side that is so carefully crafted with humor that often times you don't get the broader message. For example, in 1924, Congress had a passed law to settle the question of whether American Indians were citizens. Will Rogers was proud of his Cherokee heritage, but in 1928 he is being questioned: Are Native Americans citizens? Are people of mixed ancestry proper candidates for president? Here's what Rogers said: "My ancestors didn't come over on the Mayflower, but they met the boat when it landed." That ended the discussion. What people heard first was Rogers' jokes; later on, they realized there were some really profound messages there.

CW: What do you hope to accomplish with the Will Rogers Caucus?

TM: It will be an occasion to look at Will Rogers as we address issues of the day, and some can be quite contentious. He shows us ways to have dialogue and disagree without being disagreeable. Civility has not been a part of our political discourse in the 21st century; there are a lot of people who talk past each other. It's hard to find common ground and it's hard to find respect for disagreement. Will Rogers was a master of that. He could talk to all manner of people.

CW [Upon Dr. Mauldin's return from the convention]: How did our magazine fit into your activities?


Everyone loved it! Delegates and guests really enjoyed reading the article about Will's presidential campaign, especially while attending the National Convention. Copies of the magazine were provided in our media kits, as well as to delegates from other states who heard about our caucus. Remembering Will Rogers' wit and wisdom at a political convention reminded people that politics can be civil. ■

Tim Mauldin is a professor at Oklahoma City University. He was one of Oklahoma's 40 delegates to the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver, his fourth national convention.

LAWTON FOURTH-GRADERS TO MEET MATTIE BEAL

During the spring 2009 semester, Lawton fourth grade students and approximately 75 teachers will experience history in a unique way through classroom activities and a field trip to the historic Mattie Beal Home and the Museum of the Great Plains, funded in part by a grant from OHC. Curriculum materials will include lesson plans, references, and an activities trunk that will travel to each school to prepare students for the trip.

Mattie Beal holds a prominent place in Lawton history. Her name was the second to be drawn in the 1901 Oklahoma land lottery. She chose her 160-acre allotment south of the Lawton township and led the effort to create a civilized society, a society with gentility and culture. Mattie donated land for two parks and a church and sold lots at reduced prices to establish a community. Beal was also instrumental in the establishment of cultural organizations, such as the Shakespeare Club and the Schubert Club, as well as civic organizations.

Guides at the Beal Home will be in period dress and the tour will include a scavenger hunt to draw students' attention to artifacts and their use in the early 1900s. Representatives from the Lawton Heritage Association and Lawton Public Schools will select a pool of individuals who will dress in period costume and portray Mattie Beal during each tour.  Funded by the Oklahoma Humanities Council

MARK TWAIN VISITS OOLOGAH

On February 12th, 7 p.m., Richard Garey will bring the words of Mark Twain to life in a one-man performance of the words and works of the great American author, funded in part by a grant from OHC. Hosted by Oologah Public Schools, the evening's program will follow a day of interaction with students.

Using selections from novels, such as *Roughing It* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and passages from Twain's speeches and letters, Garey will take the audience through the pre-Civil War and Reconstruction eras, addressing issues Twain saw as important: slavery, racism, child abuse, and inhumanity. Garey will embody the characters portrayed by Twain, using verbal dialect, much as Twain used written dialect. The project endeavors to encourage the reading of works of timeless appeal and to create a connection between the school and community. Information: 918/443-6000.

 Funded by the Oklahoma Humanities Council

CENTENNIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN ENID

Images by Mike Klemme, official photographer of the Oklahoma Centennial, are featured in an exhibit at the Jane Champlin Gallery in Enid. Exhibit images are selections from the book *Celebrating Oklahoma! The Oklahoma Centennial Photographic Survey*, which he compiled as an official centennial project. Klemme logged almost two years and 80,000 driving miles to photograph and document the people, landscapes, and culture of our state.


"The idea for *Celebrating Oklahoma!* was about telling a story," says Klemme. "I really have such strong feelings about where we live. I wanted to sell our state, what a great place we live in, to show people things they may not have seen, to surprise and shock them."

Mike is a loyal friend to the Oklahoma Humanities Council and regularly contributes his photography for our benefit. You can see examples of his work throughout this issue, including the stunning cover image. The exhibit runs through January 1st and is sponsored by the Greater Enid Arts and Humanities Council. For information, call: 580/237-9646.

CALENDAR

Events



37th Annual Symposium 
On the American Indian
Northeastern State Univ., Tahlequah
April 15-18
Information: 918/444-4350

The 37th Annual Symposium on the American Indian will celebrate the centennial of Northeastern State University (NSU). The theme, “Legacy 1909-2009,” will reflect on NSU’s history as an Indian education institution. Events will include panel discussions on the evolution of Indian education; exhibits; a workshop on films by Native filmmakers; and outdoor cultural activities.



Rural Heritage Festival
Cherokee Strip Museum, Perry
April 25, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Information: 580/336-2405

The annual Rural Heritage Festival is family-friendly, and educational. Activities include living-history interpretations and demonstrations of skills and lifestyles associated with rural communities. Rose Hill School will be in session, so visitors can “cross the time bridge” and experience school circa 1910. Admission is free.

Exhibits



Oklahoma: Tierra de mi Familia
Oklahoma History Center, OKC
Through December 2009
Information: 405/522-5248


Oklahoma: Tierra De Mi Familia [Oklahoma: Land of My Family] will present the personal stories of Latino immigration to Oklahoma. Added to the museum’s collections will be artifacts that individuals brought with them to Oklahoma, such as food preparation tools, musical instruments, and traditional clothing.



The Kiowa Five
Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, Shawnee
December 19-January 25
Information: 405/878-5622


The artwork of the Kiowa Five is well known for its ceremonial and social scenes of Kiowa life that also express the purity and color of their native landscape. The Kiowa Five developed a distinctive cultural style that is still emulated today. The Mabee-Gerrer exhibit reflects fine examples of these artists’ skill with paint, pottery and dance.



The African-American Experience 
in Territorial Oklahoma
Oklahoma Territorial Museum, Guthrie
February 2009-January 2010
Information: 405/282-1889

The exhibit will examine African-American immigration to Oklahoma Territory, including the rise of Black businesses and community leaders; the Black press; the creation of all-Black towns; civil rights movements; and participation in the statehood movement. It is the first of the Museum’s exterior exhibits, which will change annually.



Harlem Renaissance 
Oklahoma City Museum of Art, OKC
February 5-April 19
Information: 405/236-3100

Paintings, prints, sculptures, photographs, books, and film will be featured in this exhibit that illustrates the Harlem Renaissance through the 1920s and 1930s. A lecture on March 25th will focus on African-American artists living and working in Paris at that time and their influence on Harlem.

 Funded by the Oklahoma Humanities Council



Centuries of Progress:
American World's Fairs, 1853-1982

Price Tower Arts Center, Bartlesville
 May 8-July 19
 Information: 918/336-4949

Price Tower Arts Center will be the first venue for a four-year national tour of the exhibit *Centuries of Progress: American World's Fairs, 1853-1982*, which studies the historical impact of the 17 fairs that occurred in our country. These fairs served as marketplaces of innovation and shaped society's worldview. Exhibit themes—progress, consumerism, art, architecture, and music—reveal the influence of international expositions on American culture.



Arts of the Amazon
 Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, Shawnee
 February 6-March 29
 Information: 405/878-5622

This collection is on loan from the Museum of the Red River in Idabel, which has one of the largest Amazon collections in the United States. Featherwork is a highly complex and expressive art form shared by the indigenous groups of the Amazon River Basin.

Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma! Reading & Discussion Programs

Piecing the Quilt, Stirring the Stew

Ten Oaks Retirement Center, Lawton, 2 p.m.
 Information: Lawton Public Library
 580/581-3450

- December 8, *A Leak in the Heart*
 Presented by Lynn Musslewhite
- January 12, *Blanche on the Lam*
 Presented by Viki Craig
- February 9, *Arabian Jazz*
 Presented by Robert Greenstreet

The Worst Hard Time Revisited

Stillwater Public Library, 6:30 p.m.
 Information: 405/372-3633

- January 6, *The Worst Hard Time*
 Presented by Kenny Brown
- January 27, *Letters from the Dust Bowl*
 Presented by Alvin Turner
- February 17, *Now in November*
 Presented by Jennifer Paustenbaugh
- March 10, *Whose Names Are Unknown*
 Presented by Jennifer Kidney
- March 24, *Out of the Dust*
 Presented by Harbour Winn

Get Your Reading Kicks on Route 66

Hobart Public Library, 7 p.m.
 Information: 580/726-2535

- January 15, *Route 66: The Mother Road*
 Presented by Lynn Musslewhite
- January 29, *Mother Road*
 Presented by Harbour Winn
- February 12, *Route 66 Remembered*
 Presented by Jerry Nye
- February 26, *West on 66: A Mystery*
 Presented by Viki Craig

**The Oklahoma Experience:
 From Wilderness to Metropolis**

Okeene Public Library, 3 p.m.
 Information: 580/822-3306

- February 8, *A Tour on the Prairies*
 Presented by Jerry Nye
- February 22, *Sand in My Eyes*
 Presented by Roger Bromert
- March 8, *Catalogue*
 Presented by Larry Edwards
- March 22, *Briarpatch*
 Presented by Sara Richter

Sovereign Worlds

Ranger West Rm., NWOSU, Woodward, 7 p.m.
 Information: Woodward Public Library
 580/254-8544

- February 26, *Custer Died for Your Sins*
 Presented by Sara Richter
- March 12, *After Columbus*
 Presented by Eric Schmaltz
- March 26, *Indian Givers*
 Presented by Karen Ansley
- April 9, *Love Medicine*
 Presented by Joyce Bender
- April 23, *The Indian Lawyer*
 Presented by Jerry Nye

Calendar Image Credits

In order of appearance

Dr. Terri Baker (Choctaw) and scholar Robert Conley (United Keetoowah Band Cherokee), participants in the 2008 Symposium on the American Indian at Northeastern State University.

Visitors enjoy living-history demonstrations at the Rural Heritage Festival in Perry.

From the exhibit *Oklahoma: Tierra De Mi Familia* opening in November at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City.

Kiowa Dancer painting by artist Stephen Mopope (1898-1974). From the *Kiowa Five* exhibit opening in December at the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art in Shawnee.

From the exhibit *African-American Experience in Territorial Oklahoma* opening in February at the Oklahoma Territorial Museum in Guthrie.

Romare Bearden (American, 1911-1988). *Black Manhattan*, 1969. Collage, 25 3/8 x 21 in. (64.45 x 53.34 cm). Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. From the *Harlem Renaissance* exhibit opening in February at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.

Transportation Map, 1933-1934 Century of Progress, Chicago, 13 3/4 x 14 3/4. Courtesy Hagley Museum and Library. From the exhibit *Centuries of Progress: American World's Fairs* opening in May at the Price Tower Arts Center in Bartlesville.

Featherwork headdress featured in the *Arts of the Amazon* exhibit opening in February at the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art in Shawnee.

A close-up photograph of a spider on its web, with numerous dew drops on the surrounding grass blades. The scene is lit with a soft, golden light, creating a bokeh effect with the dew drops.

End Notes From the Editor

Carla Walker

Two days after the presidential election, a few OHC board and staff members were in Washington, D.C., for the national conference of state humanities councils. It is the one time each year that we meet with colleagues from across the country to learn from each other and hear about the exciting programs happening in other states.

Our featured lecturer was poet Naomi Shihab Nye, whose writing reveals her love of world travel, people, cultures, and literature. She read some of her poetry and spoke about her experiences with young people and how the humanities have the power to change lives.

The poem I remember most vividly is one she titled “Kindness.” It begins with these words: “Before you know what kindness really is / you must lose things, / feel the future dissolve in a moment / like salt in a weakened broth.” Stop and read that line again. Even if you’re not fond of poetry, there is something about those words that resonate, that reflect hard-won wisdom and experience.

How is it that you and your neighbor and my cousin and I can read those same words and each be convinced that they reflect *our own* experience, *our own* loss? If we talk about what we each “read” into Naomi’s words, we would likely be surprised that someone else understands them another way. We would likely have an expanded interpretation of the meaning behind the words and a greater sense of ourselves and those we talked with. That’s the power of the humanities! They are the glistening web of ideas, ideals, and human experience that tie us together—each strand as important as the other, each documenting our story as people, as nations, and as the world.

Watch our website for news about our new program, *Humanities Forum*, coming next spring—think small, public conversations about contemporary issues. In the meantime, salt someone’s day by kindly passing on something you learned from our magazine.



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