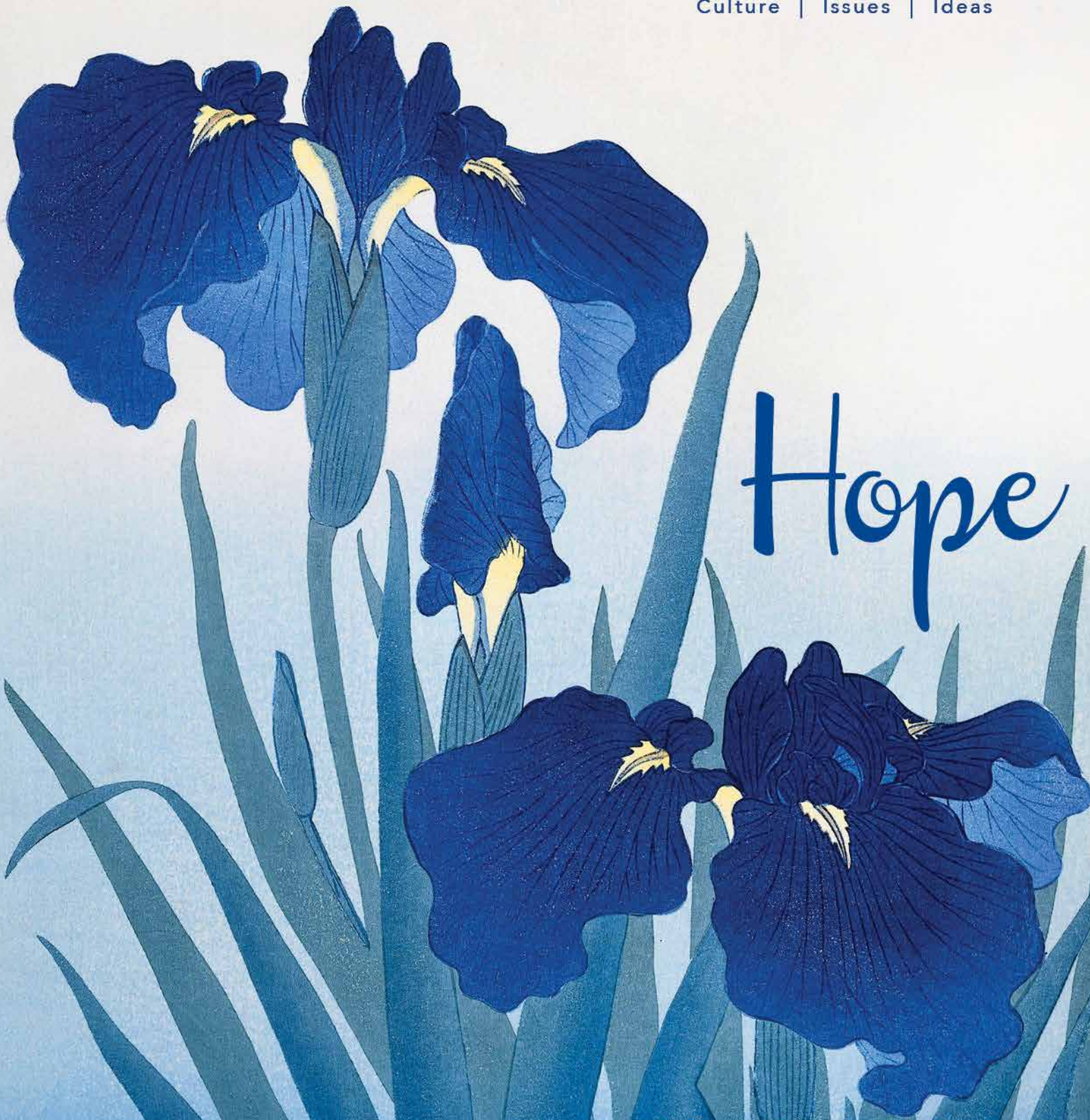




Spring | Summer 2021

# OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Culture | Issues | Ideas



*Hope*

Commemorating the Centennial of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre

## PERSPECTIVE

### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



CAROLINE LOWERY

Executive Director  
[caroline@okhumanities.org](mailto:caroline@okhumanities.org)

As we exit the long winter months and look towards spring, it is beneficial to reflect on the enormity of this past year. Through the global pandemic, domestic civil unrest, and changes in leadership, the humanities have helped Oklahomans try to make sense of it all. Here at Oklahoma Humanities (OH), our physical offices closed while we manage COVID-19 protocols, our in-person programs went virtual, our Board and staff adapted to enormous change, and our grant funding program became an emergency relief response, all while keeping Oklahoma communities at the forefront of our work.

Through this year of change, Oklahoma Humanities has welcomed several new Board members from across the state (Christopher Murphy, Dr. Kalenda Eaton, Dr. Nyla Khan, and Dr. Shawn Holliday), including four Governor appointees (Erin Peters, Marcy Jarrett, Jennie Buchanan, and David Hooten); worked with the United States Poet Laureate (and Oklahoma icon) Joy Harjo; partnered with numerous organizations on Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial programming; and implemented an important oral history project to narrate and archive the past 50 years of our organization's history.

Looking forward, this year embodies the theme of HOPE as we explore new stories, implement impactful new partnerships, and welcome new staff members to the OH family. I encourage you to engage with the resources on our website and upcoming programs near you, including:

- Funding opportunities for your community programs
- *Let's Talk About It* reading and discussion programs in your town or online
- *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, a Smithsonian traveling exhibit (dates and locations, page 5)
- The special Fall/Winter 2021 CROSSROADS issue of *Oklahoma Humanities*, a companion to the Smithsonian tour

Find engaging humanities events on our website calendar and program pages, and access grant applications and guidelines at: [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)



# OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Culture | Issues | Ideas



## CONTENTS

### HOPE

SPRING | SUMMER 2021 | VOL. 14, NO. 1

#### COMMEMORATING THE CENTENNIAL OF THE 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE

- 7 TOWARD "ONE TULSA"**  
Reflections on the centennial of  
the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre  
By Hannibal B. Johnson
- 12 PHOTOGRAPHING  
THE TULSA MASSACRE**  
A conversation with Karlos K. Hill  
By Daniel Simon
- 14 DJELI**  
Memories tell us everything  
and nothing at all  
By Kalenda Eaton
- 18 BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS**  
George McLaurin and the struggle  
to end segregated education  
By David W. Levy
- 24 REFLECTIONS ON  
A BELEAGUERED SYMBOL**  
A cautionary take on  
history, heritage, and hate  
By Tonnia L. Anderson
- 32 HOPE IS THE THING WITH METAPHORS**  
Finding hope through poetry  
By Dorothy Alexander
- 37 MY LIFE IN BIRDS**  
A life list  
By Jennifer Kidney
- 40 HOPE & POETRY**  
A bit of poetic inspiration
- 42 POETRY, HOPE, AND  
THE BEAR IN THE BACKYARD**  
Hope will find us  
By Britton Gildersleeve
- IN EVERY ISSUE**  
2 Perspective from the Executive Director  
4 Post: Mail | Social Media | Messages  
6 The Editor's Desk  
46 HOPE Grants Report  
47 Noteworthy: OH News

ON THE COVER: *Irises*, woodcut by Ohara Koson  
(1877-1945). The blue iris is considered a symbol  
of faith and hope. The Rijksmuseum, rawpixel.com

Reader Feedback



Your genius in anticipating the critical need during this abrasive political season for sane views on the state of humanity, sound citizenship, and unbiased journalism featured in the CITIZEN 2020 edition draws my praise and appreciation. Having spent years as a frontline journalist, then as a political and government official, I believe the current incoherent and dishonest attacks on the great news media and government institutions need the strong articles and forceful statements you published. Your adroit assemblage of features in this edition demonstrated the wondrous value of both the magazine and [Oklahoma] Humanities. Your fine edition proves the value of the mission that includes truthful communications that you achieved.

—Joseph H. Carter Sr., Norman, Former Legislative Assistant to U.S. Rep. Julia Butler Hansen (D-Wash.) and speech writer in the Lyndon B. Johnson White House

I cannot emphasize enough how much I appreciate this sturdy, well-conceived and #free magazine, rich in intellectual nourishment on society and the humanities with #Oklahoma residents in mind. Thank you for putting these together!

—@yakua2003

Congratulations [the CITIZEN 2020 issue] looks terrific. We are so pleased to be a part of it. Thank you.

—Patrick Madden, Exec. Director, National Archives Foundation

Jay Hannah is a friend of mine from Tahlequah days and I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed reading his recent article in *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine. The Editor's Desk note describes him well. Jay is an Oklahoma treasure. His commitment to civic engagement and public service cannot be matched. I will share the article with my friends and please know that I wait at the mailbox for the next issue of *Oklahoma Humanities*.

—Dr. Mark L. Giese, Tahlequah

My wife, Gerry, and I really enjoyed Jay Hannah's article in your CITIZEN 2020 issue. Jay not only has a wealth of family and tribal documents about Cherokee Nation history, he is a gifted storyteller as well. I learned a lot from his work. My mom told me several times before she died that her maternal grandfather was full-blood Cherokee, but we were never able to find any proof, so I envy Jay's precious supply of tribal information. Like Jay, I'm glad to be a part of the history of the Original People.

—Ken Bonds, Oklahoma City

My cousin, Jay Hannah, delivered a well-woven tale of family, duty, history, and issues of the day in his recent article, "In Pursuit of Presidents and Principal Chiefs—The Arc of Dual Citizenship." Jay's wit and wisdom compare to our fellow Cherokee Nation citizen Will Rogers, including homespun genuine humor. Jay embodies the image of both Oklahomans and Cherokees: the old-school talents needed to not just survive difficult situations but thrive. This article highlights why we have a moral obligation to vote, participate in our governments, and make thoughtful decisions for future generations. *GV* (*Wa do*, "thank you" in Cherokee), Cousin Jay and Oklahoma Humanities!

—Cara Cowan Watts, Justus, Cherokee Nation

I have just read Jay Hannah's piece, "In Pursuit of Presidents and Principal Chiefs; The Arc of Dual Citizenship," in the CITIZEN 2020 issue. It has been the highlight of my morning and was quite grounding amidst today's ambiguity. Jay's representation of the duality and conflict experienced specifically at election time by a citizen of both a Native Nation and the United States was equal parts illuminating, inspiring, and convicting.

—Ocean Mannis, Oklahoma City

I wanted to let you know how much we enjoyed reading Jay Hannah's article in the most recent issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine. He is one of our local "favorite sons." We have a previous issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* displayed in our museum area, featuring an article he wrote about going to school in Watts. This issue will be displayed as well. We like to see writings about our local area.

—Donna Clark,

Talbot Library & Museum, Colcord

I finished CITIZEN 2020 yesterday. A masterpiece, but I've about decided your magazines are a lot like Charlie Russell paintings: all masterpieces.

—Bill Woodard, Bartlesville

Partly by luck, I became familiar with your magazine through Stacy Takacs and her article, "Educating the Troops" in the CITIZEN 2020 issue. I am a Vietnam Veteran, having been with American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN). Since 2012, I have been the webmaster for AFVNVETS.NET, a website designed for former AFVN members [and others] interested in military broadcasting. I must admit I learned a few new things, as related to the early days of AFRS, thanks to Ms. Takacs's article. I have added a link to your magazine on our site and hopefully more people will read it.

—Jim White, SGM (Ret'd), USA; 1SG and Admin NCO, AFVN, 1970-71; Professor Emeritus, Tezukayama Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan

CORRECTION

The annual report printed in the Fall/Winter 2020 issue incorrectly acknowledged a memorial gift from Judy Cantrell, given in memory of Janice Owens Hedrick. We sincerely regret the error.



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

Culture | Issues | Ideas

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
Caroline Lowery  
caroline@okhumanities.org

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
& EDITOR  
Carla Walker  
carla@okhumanities.org

SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER  
Kelly Burns  
kelly@okhumanities.org

PROGRAM OFFICER  
Sarah Olzawski  
sarah@okhumanities.org

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT  
& COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
Chelsi LeBarre  
chelsi@okhumanities.org

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES  
MANAGER  
Khylee Forgety  
khylee@okhumanities.org

*Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is published biannually (April and October) by Oklahoma Humanities (OH), 424 Colcord Dr., Suite E, Oklahoma City, OK 73102, (405) 235-0280, ohc@okhumanities.org. See page 47 for information on the OH organization, Board of Trustees, grants, and programs. Our privacy policy is posted on our website.

*Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is an award-winning collection of culture, issues, and ideas—a rich mix of humanities scholarship, insightful narratives, informed opinions, and beautiful images, for a read that is smart, balanced, educational, and entertaining. Subscribe online: okhumanities.org or call (405) 235-0280.

*Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is free of advocacy and advertising, supported by donors (like you). It is distributed as free educational programming via two-year subscriptions rotated annually to serve as many Oklahomans as possible. To continue your print subscription beyond two free years, make a gift of support (use enclosed envelope or visit okhumanities.org/donate) or contact us and request continued free mailings. Back issues of *Oklahoma Humanities* are archived on our website. Reading group and classroom use is encouraged. Other reproduction requires written permission. Contact: ohc@okhumanities.org.

*Oklahoma Humanities* awards include 44 Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists awards, including multiple first place honors for Best Writing, Best Cover, and Best PR Publication; 9 Great Plains Journalism awards, including firsts for Best Magazine Feature Writing and Best Magazine Page Design, and as a finalist for the Great Plains Magazine of the Year; 3 Central Oklahoma IABC Bronze Quill Awards; the State Historic Preservation Officer's Citation of Merit; and an Oklahoma Heritage Distinguished Editorial Award.

Opinions expressed by authors, and any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Oklahoma Humanities, its Board of Trustees, staff, or donors. Copyright 2021 by Oklahoma Humanities. All rights reserved.



# CROSSROADS

CHANGE IN RURAL

## America

Oklahoma Humanities announces tour sites for the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibit  
*Crossroads: Change in Rural America*

Johnston County Library  
Tishomingo  
September 11, 2021 - October 23, 2021

Plains Indians & Pioneers Museum  
Woodward  
February 5, 2022 - March 19, 2022

Fort Gibson Historic Site  
October 30, 2021 - December 11, 2021

Pawnee Bill Ranch, Pawnee  
March 26, 2022 - May 7, 2022

Nowata Historical Society & Museum  
December 18, 2021 - January 29, 2022

Boley Community Center  
May 14, 2022 - June 25, 2022

Americans build their futures where their paths cross. Small towns become centers of commerce, trade, local politics, and culture. How does "rural" affect American identity? How do the ingenuity and determination of rural Oklahomans contribute to our state's success?

Visit the *Crossroads* exhibit at a location near you and watch for local programming that celebrates Oklahoma's rural communities!



Smithsonian  
Institution



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and State Humanities Councils nationwide. *Crossroads* has been made possible in Oklahoma by Oklahoma Humanities. Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress.

## THE EDITOR'S DESK

CARLA WALKER

carla@okhumanities.org

There are buoyant expressions of HOPE by talented authors and poets in this issue of *Oklahoma Humanities*. In this special edition, over one half of the content frames and commemorates the centennial of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Historically, I have used the “Editor’s Desk” to provide context for the diverse perspectives in each themed edition. This time, I’ll share some behind-the-scenes decision-making, in hopes you find something instructive in the care we used to present difficult accounts of pain and prejudice.

The injustice of the Tulsa Race Massacre was epic in scale: losses of homes, livelihoods, and loved ones as Greenwood citizens were cut down, their property burned to cinders. You will read about this horror and the trans-generational legacy it still expresses for people of color, in Tulsa and beyond, whose ancestors have experienced centuries of inequality, intimidation, lynchings, murder, and other unspeakable horrors motivated by racism and hate. The recent work of scholars reveals that, for people of color today, this generational accumulation of aggression feels like death by a thousand cuts.

Reading is *not* knowing.

And knowing is not enough. There must be conversation to bring about change. And there lies the problem: *How?* How do we talk about racism, when it feels like a minefield? We, all of us, fear that we will say the wrong thing—and so we say nothing, we learn nothing.

But the essence of the humanities is to question, to examine painful histories and learn from them. As editor, it is my job to connect scholars and readers, to cultivate meaningful writing, curate an atmosphere of civil discourse that teaches and provokes, enlightens and engages. Putting this issue together has prompted so many questions, and real fear of getting it wrong. How do we facilitate a magazine “conversation” that deals with the harmful constructs of race and the consequences of racism? What are the rules? Are there guardrails by which we provide insight without veering into the contentious or the cliché?

This debate, how to present difficult material, started with the essay by Tonnia Anderson you’ll find on page 24. Interlaced with an origin story of the Confederate flag was a personal history: Tonnia’s childhood memories of her family being hissed at, shouted down by the n-word. Tonnia did not



Queen (2019),  
Robert Peterson

mince words, used no euphemisms for the hateful expression; she spelled out the slur and the force with which it was levied against her and those she loves.

In my narrow experience, this word is taboo, never to be uttered. (Though in recent years, sectors of the Black community have reclaimed the word—for their use alone.) And so we ask: However carefully explained, could this magazine print that word without causing pain? If we use a euphemism, substitute dashes or asterisks in place of the letters, are we “whitewashing” the truth?

Before making these editorial decisions, I decided to call and talk with Tonnia. As an African American scholar specializing in African American history and American Studies (and as director of the Dr. Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Center for Social Justice and Racial Healing at USAO in Chickasha), Tonnia is uniquely equipped to give broad perspective. We talked about how she claims her truth: the slur was directed at her and she has no compunction in naming it.

CONTINUED | p. 45

Robert Peterson specializes in figurative painting with a concentration on portraiture. Currently living and working in southwestern Oklahoma, Peterson is a celebrated emerging artist, exhibiting around the world. He notes that his work “reflects a softer side of Black people, yet still shows their strength and resilience,” something he believes is not seen and exhibited enough in galleries and museums. CalebLee81.com



*History of Black Wall Street,*  
Emery Franklin

# TOWARD “ONE TULSA”

Reflections on hope and the centennial of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre

HANNIBAL B. JOHNSON

*“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”—James Baldwin*

**In** 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma, was a tinderbox. A divided, combustible concoction of community needing only a spark to set it alight. That igniter came—and with it an inferno of vengeance, as an angry white mob laid waste to Tulsa’s Black community. Nothing and no one was left untouched.

On May 31 through June 1, 2021, the eyes of the world will be trained on our city for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Tulsa will be the epicenter for those intent on

healing, salving the wounds of our historical racial trauma.

The commemoration of the massacre, like other planned-for, calendared events, comes as no surprise. What *is* a surprise, what no one could have predicted, is the context in which this momentous occasion will unfold. As a country, we are witnessing a moment which, if sustained, may qualify as a bona fide movement. Calls for social justice continue to mount as more Americans come to grips with the yawning



gulf between American ideals and American experiences, particularly for Black folks. It is, in many quarters, mourning in America again.

#### TULSA, 1921: GREENWOOD RISING

In the early 1900s, Tulsa's Black community gained national renown. Dubbed "Black Wall Street," the neighborhood teemed with entrepreneurial individuals engaged in bustling business activities: There were doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, and dentists. Beauty parlors, barbershops, dance halls, and pool halls. Movie theaters, restaurants, grocery stores, and much more. The "Greenwood District," with Greenwood Avenue as its nerve center, drew favorable comparisons to Beale Street in Memphis and State Street in Chicago.

Greenwood community architects envisioned lives beyond the imagination of many Black citizens of that era. Some possessed distinct economic advantage: land ownership, by virtue of membership in or affiliation with the Five Civilized Tribes. They built a flourishing business and entrepreneurial community against all imaginable odds.

Many of the Greenwood District's early settlers traced their lineage back to enslavement, sharecropping, and

second-class citizenship in the Deep South. Escaping that racial crucible, they found their Promised Land in Indian Territory, only to be formally subjected to mirror-image Jim Crow segregation enshrined in Oklahoma law upon statehood in 1907. In early twentieth-century America, systemic, anti-Black racism ruled the day. "Race riots," typically mob invasions of Black communities, proliferated. In 1919 alone America witnessed more than two dozen such events.

James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP called 1919 "Red Summer," a metaphor for the blood that flowed in the streets of New York, Philadelphia, Memphis, Chicago, Omaha, Washington (D.C.), and so many other cities, towns, and hamlets across the nation. Equally horrifying, lynchings—acts of domestic terrorism designed to effect white supremacy in the face of increasing Black assertiveness—took center stage. These brutal acts targeted and meted out ghastly vigilante violence against individuals, not simply to punish them but also to send a message about the prevailing social order.

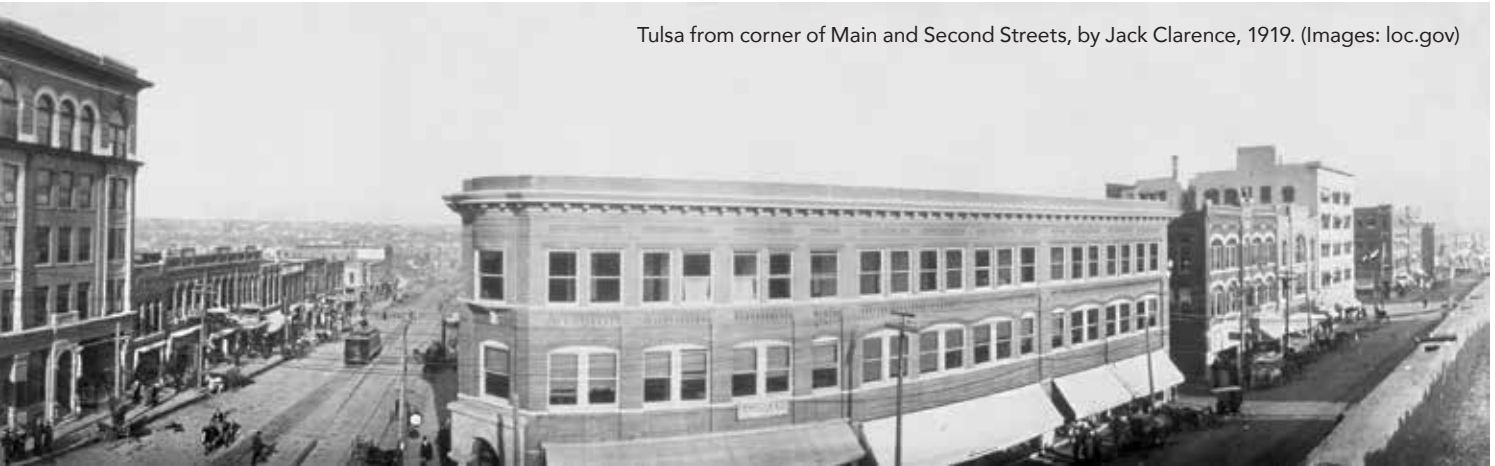
Against this national backdrop, the calamitous 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the worst of the twentieth-century "race riots," temporarily

stilled the Greenwood District. Marauding scofflaws seized upon this segregated enclave, leaving death and destruction in their wake. Gangs of white men invaded the Greenwood District, shooting Black Tulsans on the spot. They set fire to homes and businesses, some inhabited. Black Tulsans burned alive. The rogues that torched and tortured the Greenwood District, some deputized by local law enforcement, prevented firefighters from dousing the brilliant flames that consumed the community. Some sixteen hours of murder and mayhem left the Greenwood District, this thirty-five-square-block Black economic and entrepreneurial mecca, in total ruin.

#### TRAUMA AS INHERITANCE

For generations removed from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Black Tulsans have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, fear, distrust for white authority, and a whole host of psychological aftereffects. This kind of trauma is not momentary or transitory; it extends well beyond triggering events. *Historical racial trauma* is a term that speaks to the ongoing legacy of systemic racism, the effects of which extend over time and through generations.





Persistent disparities in virtually every realm (social, economic, political, educational, and healthcare, among others) offer overwhelming evidence that foundational fissures caused and sustained by intergenerational traumas require repair, require much more investment, by all of us. As in other cities, Tulsa’s people of color experience the consequences of historical racial trauma linked to slavery, peonage, Jim Crow laws, lynching, “race riots,” political oppression, economic exploitation, social isolation, and mass incarceration.

Segregation remains firmly ensconced, even if not *de jure*. The Tulsa Equality Indicators (measurements of wellbeing sorted by race and ethnicity) confirm this. Race-based distrust lingers. The enduring disparities cause breath-taking differences in life outcomes.

#### THE ARC OF OPPRESSION

A few short years ago, the touchstone phrases of what is widely considered to be the modern civil rights crusade (“Black lives matter.” “I can’t breathe.” “Say my name.”) did not resonate. In 2021 America, these phrases define the mission of advocates, activists, and allies aiming to expand social justice, transform law enforcement, and eradicate structural systemic racism.

Tulsa’s historical racial trauma stands not in isolation, but as part of a long arc of oppression that has bedeviled Black Americans since our enslaved African ancestors arrived in the English colonies at Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1619. We can imagine those individuals—precious



Destruction at the intersection of Greenwood and Archer streets



Soldiers and African Americans near Litan Hotel



Entrance to refugee camp on the fairgrounds



Intersection of Greenwood and Archer streets, 2012. Photos: Marc Carlson (CC BY 2.0/Flickr)

cargo on cramped slave ships—crying out in vain: “*Black lives matter.*” “*I can’t breathe.*” “*Say my name.*” Tulsa, 1921, is an arbitrary midpoint on the arc of oppression, somewhere between slavery and Freedom Summer. That long-ago fiery demise of Tulsa’s Black community revealed much about the trajectory of race relations in America. Connect the dots. The volatile ingredients that set Tulsa alight—white supremacy, ignorance, and fear—endure and threaten to ignite a national conflagration. Our cultural competence, individually and collectively, and our capacity to diffuse the landmines that mark our history around race will be our most reliable firewall. Diversity and the related concepts of equity and inclusion rest on the fundamental proposition that our shared humanity matters more than that which might otherwise separate and divide us.

How has Tulsa fared vis-à-vis the nation on matters of racial healing? To what extent have we Americans made commitments in the wake of a litany of killings of unarmed Black citizens at the hands of law enforcement officers? Let us mark their names:

- Oscar Grant (Oakland, California, 2009)
- Aiyana Jones (Detroit, Michigan, 2010)
- Rekia Boyd (Chicago, Illinois, 2012)
- Eric Garner (New York, New York, 2014)
- Michael Brown (Ferguson, Missouri, 2014)
- Tamir Rice (Cleveland, Ohio, 2014)
- Walter Scott (N. Charleston, South Carolina, 2015)
- Freddie Gray (Baltimore, Maryland, 2015)
- Terence Crutcher (Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2016)
- Alton Sterling (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2016)
- Philando Castile (St. Paul, Minnesota, 2016)
- Stephon Clark (Sacramento, California, 2018)
- Breonna Taylor (Louisville, Kentucky, 2020)
- Rayshard Brooks (Atlanta, Georgia, 2020)

These recent, high-profile slayings follow a too-long history of lynching, often effected with the approval, tacit or otherwise, of law enforcement. Let us name but a few:

- Thomas Moss, Will Stewart, and Calvin McDowell (Memphis, Tennessee, 1892)
- Laura Nelson (Okemah, Oklahoma 1911)
- Mary Turner (Lowndes County, Georgia, 1918)
- Jesse Washington (Waco, Texas, 1916)
- George W. and Mae Murray Dorsey, and Roger and Dorothy Malcom (Georgia, 1946)
- Emmett Till (Money, Mississippi, 1955)

On May 25, 2020, almost 100 years after the Tulsa Race Massacre, George Floyd, a Black man stopped by Minneapolis police (ostensibly for passing a counterfeit \$20 bill), succumbed after he was restrained for some eight minutes, despite pleas for mercy, for humanity, from Floyd and bystanders as the line between life and death faded and then disappeared. Derek Chauvin, knee on neck, under color of law, took Floyd’s breath away. In so doing, he took ours, too.

Floyd’s cruel death sparked international outrage. Massive, unrelenting demonstrations against police violence toward Black people, amidst an epic pandemic and economic calamity, spread like wildfire across the world. In the miasma of the moment, that fire still burns, bringing both heat and light to generation-spanning suffering and the cold darkness of systemic oppression. We can neither unsee this moment nor remain silent in its wake. As President Jimmy Carter put it:

Silence can be as deadly as violence. People of power, privilege, and moral conscience must stand up and say “no more” to a racially discriminatory police and justice system, immoral economic disparities between whites and blacks, and

government actions that undermine our unified democracy. We are responsible for creating a world of peace and equality for ourselves and future generations.

While George Floyd’s tragic, premature exit happened a mere year ago, it seems like lifetimes, generations. Why? Because it *has* been lifetimes and generations since we Black folks began wondering whether Black lives matter, whether something as basic as our ability to breathe matters, whether our names matter.

### HOPE FOR A SHARED HUMANITY

What have we done since that fateful day, when Chauvin murdered George Floyd and turned the nation—the world—upside down? Creating a widespread belief in justice depends on our ability to mitigate the effects of historical racial trauma, to help heal the wounds that continue to shorten lives, disable otherwise healthy people, foster addictions, and perpetuate narratives of despair. Recovery from trauma presupposes an end to traumatic events, replacing them with the capacity for resilience, the embrace of security, the installation of protections, and the faith that a different narrative for the future may be adopted and sustained.

When our collective narrative is one of brotherhood and sisterhood, of shared humanity, we will have moved closer to the “One Tulsa” we have so long awaited. As the five-score anniversary of the Tulsa tragedy approaches, let us exhale, breathe freely, oxygenating our efforts toward healing our history, making appreciative inquiry into our past to learn what worked and then building upon it, and committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion. If we do this, we will have honored the memory of one of our darkest days by encircling it with a bright new light.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. captured the profound truth of our interconnectedness, arguing that we must come together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools. A shared future demands that we operationalize abstract concepts of reconciliation and engage on common ground.

Have we made firm commitments to sustainable investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion? When we can answer in the affirmative, we will have found a powerful response to the question, “What has Tulsa done in the interim between 1921 and 2021 to advance race relations and to build a unified, just community?”

We have only just begun, but we *have* begun.

Perhaps this is an inflection point for America—a time in which we begin, again and in earnest, to chip away the wall of racism that surrounds us and periodically collapses in on us. Perhaps this time will be different—serious, substantive, and sustained. Perhaps compassion, empathy, and shared humanity will prevail once and for all.

It has been a long time coming, but maybe, just maybe, change is going to come. Maybe, just maybe, we shall finally overcome. There is always hope.

HANNIBAL B. JOHNSON, a Harvard Law School graduate, is an attorney, author, consultant, and college professor. He is a member of the Steering Committee for the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission, chairs its Education Committee, and serves as local curator for its world-class history center, Greenwood Rising, opening in Spring 2021. His latest book is *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples with its Historical Racial Trauma* (Eakin Press, 2020). [hannibalbjohnson.com](http://hannibalbjohnson.com)

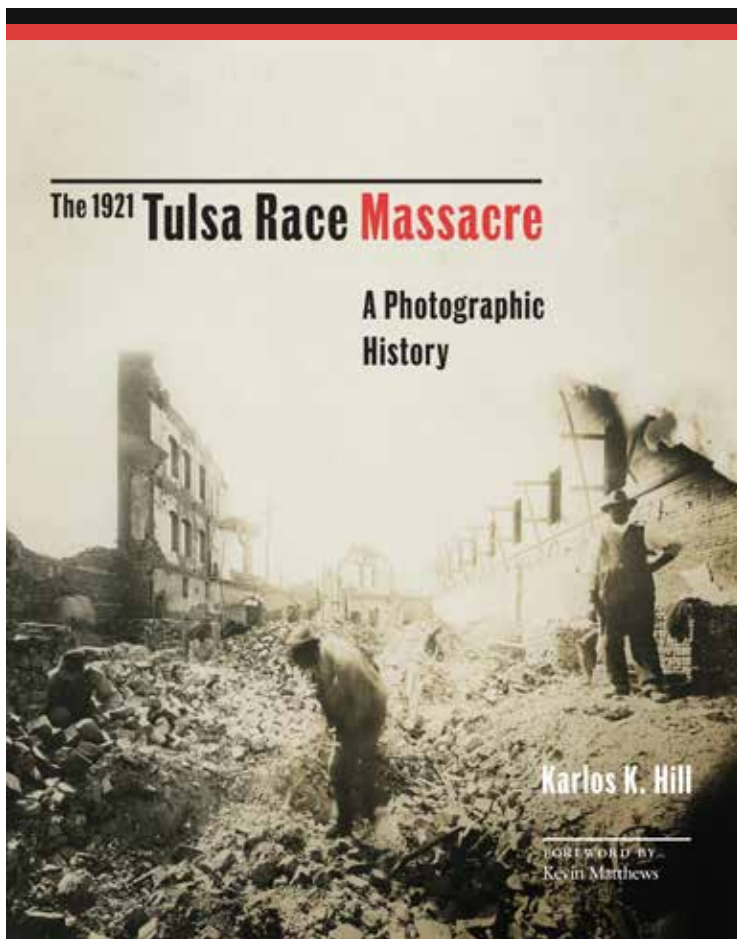
EMERY FRANKLIN’s artwork exemplifies the rich heritage of African American struggles and achievements. His family values are deeply rooted in religion, trust, and honesty. As an artist, Franklin loves depicting people and places that touch the heart. His work has been exhibited in Memphis communities and throughout the United States. He was featured on *Tennessee Crossroads*, PBS. [emeryfranklin.pixels.com](http://emeryfranklin.pixels.com)

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

- “Black Wall Street Remembered.” Hannibal Johnson’s video profiles the rise and resilience of Tulsa’s Greenwood area. [tulsa2021.org/history](http://tulsa2021.org/history)
- “Audio Recordings from Survivors and Contemporaries,” Tulsa Historical Society and Museum. Eyewitness accounts of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. [tulsa2021.org](http://tulsa2021.org)
- “Black History Month 2021,” *Washington Post* Staff, Feb. 12, 2021. Article collection, including “The ‘whitewashing’ of Tulsa’s historic Black Wall Street,” showcases Black excellence and triumph in American culture. [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com)



Black Wall Street Memorial,  
Greenwood Cultural Center



EXCERPT

# Photographing THE TULSA MASSACRE

A Conversation with Karlos K. Hill

DANIEL SIMON

Editor's note: This excerpt is part of a thoughtful partnership between *Oklahoma Humanities* and prestigious literary journal *World Literature Today* to co-publish content in our respective spring issues in commemoration of the centennial of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. In this interview, *WLT* editor in chief Daniel Simon initiates a dialogue with author and historian Karlos K. Hill about his landmark scholarship for *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: A Photographic History* (March 2021, University of Oklahoma Press). Read the full interview at: [worldliteraturetoday.org](http://worldliteraturetoday.org)

**DANIEL SIMON:** You write that “photographing brutal acts of anti-black violence had become an important social ritual in early twentieth-century America.” Coincidentally, photography became widely popular in the 1910s with the advent of affordable 35mm cameras, which were marketed to the general public to coincide with the rise of the tourism industry as a national pastime. Yet as “one of the most photographed episodes . . . of anti-black violence in American history,” the site of the Tulsa Race Massacre remains a century-old crime scene. As a visual historian, how would you like readers in 2021 to view the massacre as a *photographed* event, especially in the context of lynching culture and its prevalence during the Nadir of American race relations (ca. 1877–1923)?

**KARLOS K. HILL:** Without the photos of Greenwood’s destruction, I believe it would be more difficult to convince people now of the scale of violence that took place. While not their intention, white Tulsans who snapped pictures of Greenwood’s destruction made it possible for future generations to bear witness to what occurred. To a degree, visual evidence of Greenwood’s destruction stands in for so many other instances of racial terror that were not visually recorded and subsequently forgotten.

**SIMON:** One of the most horrific aspects of the massacre is that white perpetrators used technologies of war—which had been perfected in the so-called Indian Wars of the late nineteenth century, the Spanish-American War, and World War I—against Black American citizens: machine guns, assault-style military rifles (including bayonets), airplanes dropping incendiary bombs, and trucks that could speed groups of armed mobs into Greenwood. Survivors were also “herded like cattle” into euphemistically named “detention centers” afterward, ostensibly for their own protection.

Yet white spectators casually observed the destruction of Greenwood as if attending a matinee and even brought “shopping bags” with them to carry off stolen property. Was that also an effect of lynching culture’s ability to desensitize onlookers to mass spectacles of anti-Black violence?

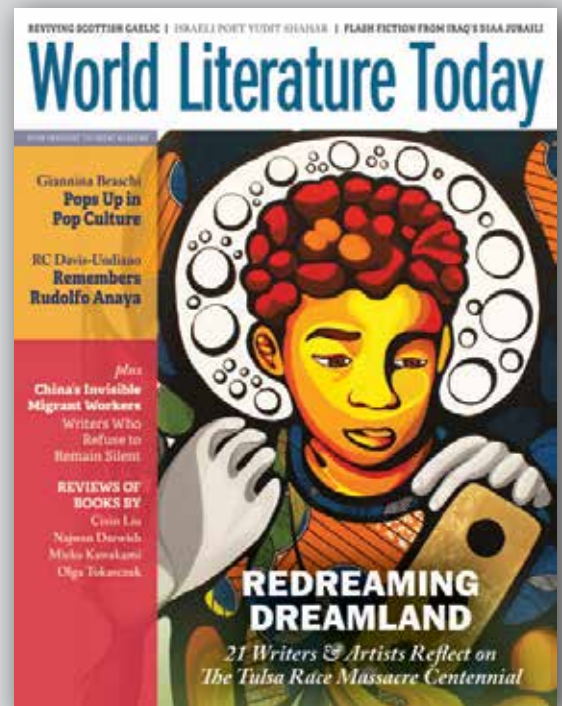
**HILL:** Quite frankly, many white Americans accepted lynching and other forms of anti-Black violence as a “necessary evil.” Lynching culture’s primary function was to rationalize white Americans’ brutal repression of Black people as legitimate, even commonsensical. At the height of lynching during the 1890s, a Black person was lynched every three days on average. Because the lynching of Black people became both routine and uncontroversial for white Americans during the lynching era, even spectacular acts of anti-Black racial violence such as the race massacre were deemed acceptable.

**SIMON:** In September 1955, *Jet* magazine famously published photographs of Emmett Till’s mutilated and mangled body and continued to publish articles about the Montgomery bus boycott and the growing Civil Rights Movement throughout the 1950s and ‘60s. Many of the iconic civil rights photographs of the 1960s went on to be published in magazines and newspapers with largely white readerships. What role do you see photography and cultural magazines playing in the current debates about racial justice?

**HILL:** As I have tried to frame the history of the race massacre through photos, I hope magazines and other cultural outlets will follow suit because race massacre photos (combined with survivor accounts) tell a compelling, even unforgettable story of death, destruction, and rebirth.

KARLOS K. HILL is an associate professor and chair of the Clara Luper Department of African and African American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. His other books include *Beyond the Rope: The Impact of Lynching on Black Culture and Memory* (2016) and *The Murder of Emmett Till* (2020). He also serves on the Steering Committee of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission.

DANIEL SIMON is the assistant director and editor in chief of *World Literature Today*. Along with Dr. Hill and Dr. Kalenda Eaton, he co-chaired the coordinating committee for OU’s yearlong commemorations of the Tulsa Race Massacre. A poet, essayist, and translator, his most recent book is *Dispatches from the Republic of Letters: 50 Years of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature*, which he edited.



The cover of the issue features *Loud Whispers from Greenwood*, a painting by Greenwood Art Project artist Ebony Iman Dallas.

**“Redreaming Dreamland,”** the Spring 2021 issue of *World Literature Today*, commemorates the centennial of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, featuring writers and artists reflecting on the massacre but with equal emphasis on the current state of African American multicultural vitality in the twenty-first century, anchored in Oklahoma but rippling out on a global scale. For more information, visit

[www.worldlit.org](http://www.worldlit.org)

To read more about the University of Oklahoma’s yearlong series of events to commemorate the centennial of the massacre, visit [ou.edu/tulsa1921](http://ou.edu/tulsa1921).


*Funding for the issue of WLT was made possible, in part, by a grant from the University of Oklahoma’s Vice President for Research and Partnerships.*



# Djeli

KALENDA EATON

*A djeli (commonly known as a griot) is a West African storyteller who is the keeper of oral tradition and village history. The following creative essay, based on the author's family history, is written to honor speakers, perspectives, and storytelling traditions carried by Black women.*



*She* was in a talking mood that day. The sun was shining through the side window that was covered with dust no one could ever reach. She was sitting in her large, upholstered rocking chair with her tray table, books on tape, and Bible concordance nearby.

*“People said to go out to Mohawk Landing when the trouble began. There were people hiding out there. And that’s where she went, until it was over.”*

I am known in the family as the historian. The holder of our legacy and secrets in narrative form. This was not a role I knowingly accepted or sought. But it was inevitable as an only child raised by my working mother and retired grandparents, and the youngest grandchild for thirteen years. Outside of school, my playmates were these stories. I would interview my grandparents about their childhoods with a tape recorder. They would play along, mostly in amusement, but also to encourage my “sharp mind.” They would tell me as much as they could remember about their lives in the Deep South and Southwest. Life on the farm, in the fields, in school, or how they were unable to go to school. It all depended on who was speaking at the time. When I would ask about adulthood, they were not as clear on

the details. They didn’t remember certain things. As a child, I trusted their forgetfulness. They were “old,” after all. Sixty-plus years to my eight or nine. And even I knew older people started to lose their memories at some point.

It was only later that I found out they were lying.

*“So, she went out there and waited. When she came back, her house was still there. They didn’t touch it—”*

*“And how long was she out there?”*

*“... Until it was through.”*

Memories tell us everything and nothing at all. Some days they cannot be trusted. I feel like I have known about Tulsa all my life. I remember when Hannibal Johnson’s *Black Wall Street* arrived in our house and the conversation about Tulsa that followed. I have always placed this memory along with others I have of being in elementary school and devouring books when I returned home. Yet when the book came out in 1998, I was not a child. I was a semi-adult living on my own and finishing college five states away.

So maybe, that book was not the first I learned about Tulsa at all. Okay. Then, it must have been when I was flipping through *The Black Book* (1974), edited by

Memories  
tell us  
everything  
and nothing  
at all.

Toni Morrison. This scrapbook chronicling Black life over a hundred years or more included triumph, tragedy, violence, and the destruction of Black communities. In later interviews, Morrison even says that she first had the idea for her novel *Paradise* while editing *The Black Book*. She came across ephemera in the form of broadsides against the South and newspaper clippings encouraging certain types of Black people to move west and build Black towns in Oklahoma, for example. So, of course the “riot” would have to be in there. This coffee-table book has been in my house since before I was born. I remember being a small child looking at the images of lynched and beaten bodies, ads for hair-care products, caricatures, and also copies of newspaper clippings celebrating Black achievement all in one place. Certainly, then, that is where I first learned about Black Tulsa. However, recently, I checked out a copy of the book from the library and began searching for any of the many mentions of the “race riot” existing in the Black newspapers of the time. It seems the editors included nothing. Strange.

Was it the African American history classes I took in college, then? Or maybe a documentary on TV?

*“They say it was the white man who sat on her porch. He must have gotten tired from stirring up all that trouble. He sat down right when the mob passed, and when they saw him they must have thought he owned the house, or he was protecting it for somebody. So they passed it up—”*

*“But how did she know this?”*

*“... The people who were still around saw it and told her when she got back.”*

So, the house was saved by grace or divine providence. When she first told this part of the story, so matter-of-factly, it made me doubt these events. This twist of luck always struck me as mythic and wishful thinking. A bit of magic, or a little “Jesus” inserted into an otherwise bleak narrative. Yet, in 2003, while designing a humanities course entitled “The Black West in History, Literature, and Film,” I included a section on Black Wall Street and the Tulsa Race Riot. While choosing material, I read accounts of employers who stood in front of houses they wanted saved. They protected. Images of a twisted biblical Passover flashed in my mind: the chronic disease, the fire, three days of darkness . . . But, in the absence of lamb’s blood, scores of able-bodied white men flung themselves across the porches and doorways.

What are we to make of these whites in Tulsa who saved their workers’ homes? Those who vouched for Sally or Charles. I assume landlords were a part of this effort as well. Are we supposed to appreciate their efforts to save their investments in human labor and/or residential property? Does that count as benevolence? *Are we* to make of these whites in Tulsa?

Would that count as benevolence?

*“But I had a wonderful childhood and upbringing. I listen to how friends of mine who grew up in Jim Crow talk about all of the problems and how they couldn’t look white people in the eye. We never had to move off the sidewalk when we saw white people coming toward us. We were not bowed down and afraid. At Booker T. Washington [High School], we were always taught*



*our history and to be leaders. You know, one of my classmates, John, turned out to be a great man and well-known professor. Real high up. We have always been very proud of him. He was always so smart. His whole family was. He even skipped a grade—*  
“Wait, who?”

She was a child of Greenwood’s renaissance. At seven years old, she moved to Tulsa with what was left of her nuclear family to live with her mother’s sister. She was her favorite. An entrepreneur who was always running something. In 1922 they were all starting over with more determination than before. In an earlier publication I wrote of how transgenerational trauma produced from “knowledge of past racist violence, coupled with witness of present racist violence,” transfers. Yet, her memories defy me at every turn. She made no room for the dead, only the living. Tulsa transferred excellence, pride, and confidence down through her generations. The “riot” was never buried but also not the way she or her community defined its existence. She lived her life unapologetically because of Tulsa, not in spite of.

What does it mean to commemorate acts of racist violence? We piece the scattered parts back together. We honor those who experienced loss. We grieve. We give space to acknowledge, reflect, repair, and repay. Do we remember those who fought back? Those who refused to be broken? Those who stayed to rebuild, or willingly moved in? Is the exercise the same? Do we celebrate as we also recall?

Some thrive and profit off narratives of Black death and destruction. They can

only bear witness to suffering and pain yet remain blind to Black resilience, tenacity, or self-sufficiency. That’s okay. They need not perceive these truths.

The keepers do not claim you as righteous stewards.

■ A century later, I am the one living in Oklahoma. I stand at the crossroads of epics old and new. I carry the yield—tales of five generations harvested from these plains. Though this land does not belong to us, I dutifully bring our stories home.

During the first months of the coronavirus pandemic, going to the grocery store made me nervous. I would steel myself against the unknown and make a mad dash in and out. I knew exactly what I wanted with an eye on the line queue, while calculating how long it would take for me to get out of there and back to the car. But for some reason, not this day. I was looking through the glass case of meat and fish trying to decide how much to spend.

He worked in the store. He wore a smudgy neck gaiter barely clinging to the crease between his upper and lower lip. Every time he spoke it fell down more and he would quickly pull it up, but not far enough to cover his nose, so this routine kept happening. It was tortuous, but I couldn’t look away. He said, “I wear this ’cause they make me (gesturing to the store), but I don’t believe any of it. It’s not real. It’s all a hoax.” His voice was gravelly and rough. He coughed. “You know what? All my life something has been trying to kill me. But it hasn’t.”

As we looked across the meat case at each other, we had that one thing in common.

Yes, we are still here.

*“They thought they won, but they didn’t.”—Says she.*

KALENDA EATON is an associate professor in the Clara Luper Department of African & African American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Her scholarship focuses on Black women’s narratives, the American West, and historical fiction. Eaton is a Fulbright Scholar and has received funding from the Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Social Science Research Council to support her research. She currently serves as a member of the Oklahoma Humanities Board of Trustees.



DAVID W. LEVY

# BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

George McLaurin and the  
struggle to end segregated education

## On the morning of Wednesday, October 13, 1948,

an elderly African American man named George Washington McLaurin and his wife, Penninah, climbed into their car and drove the twenty miles from their home in the black section of Oklahoma City south to Norman, the site of the state's leading and all-white university. Accompanying the couple were two other passengers: Amos T. Hall, a prominent black attorney from Tulsa, and Roscoe Dunjee, long-time crusading editor of the *Black Dispatch*, the state's most widely read black newspaper, and for many years the mainstay of the Oklahoma State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At a little after 10:30, the four of them arrived at the campus, found a place to park, and walked up the manicured North Oval to Evans Hall, the university's stately administration building. As they neared the arched Gothic doorway, a young lady approached McLaurin. "I'm so happy for you I do not know what to say," she exclaimed. "I have been pulling for you all the time and it is good to know that Oklahoma has finally done the right thing." The University of Oklahoma had been teaching students since 1892, and now, after fifty-six years, George McLaurin was about to become its very first African American student.

The little group entered the building, climbed the stairs to the second floor, and found their way to Room 210, the office of J. E. Fellows, dean of Admissions. They were met by Norma Geddes, the Dean's assistant, and then introduced to Dean Fellows, who smiled, greeted them cordially, and said, "We are going to try to make your stay here on the campus both pleasant and profitable." From

there they were escorted down to the first-floor office of the university's president, George Lynn Cross, passing through "a battery of photographers and reporters" waiting in the president's outer office. Cross himself was absent that day, as he was traveling home from New York City, where he had attended Dwight Eisenhower's inauguration as president of Columbia University. The four instead met briefly with acting president Roscoe Cate, Cross's finance officer and trusted adviser and friend. After chatting with Cate, they returned to Dean Fellows, who handed McLaurin the required forms to fill out for enrollment in the College of Education. From there they were directed to the office of the Graduate College, where they were joined by Associate Dean Joseph Pray and Professor John Bender, who was to serve as McLaurin's academic adviser. For the better part of an hour, they planned the new graduate student's schedule and enrolled him in twelve hours of study. In addition to three hours of independent reading, McLaurin signed up for courses in Educational Psychology, Problems of Teaching in the Secondary Schools, and Principles and Practices in Guidance. Then the party was sent down to Room 107 for the payment of fees. "The enrollee presented himself without funds and was handled as a deferrment [*sic*] with the promise of payment of the fees by Monday, October 18." Finally, McLaurin and the others were taken for a talk with H. E. Wrinkle, dean of the College of Education.

Around 2:00 p.m., after the paperwork and visiting were completed, university officials hosted the group for lunch. Since no restaurant

LEFT: George W. McLaurin seated in an alcove, separated from other students, while Dr. Frank Balyeat lectures. Photo: George Tapscott, *Daily Oklahoman*, Oct. 11, 1948. All images courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection. Captions edited.



TOP: Six African American students (McLaurin at far left), who applied for admission to the University of Oklahoma graduate school, stand outside the Administration Building. Photo: Joe Miller, *Daily Oklahoman*, Jan. 28, 1948. BOTTOM: Students George Bassett and Edith Long welcome McLaurin to the OU campus, Oct. 1948.

in Norman would serve them, they were taken to the cafeteria of a nearby dormitory called Wilson Center. McLaurin was effusive. “We were entertained royally,” he told one reporter. “Everything seemed to be natural.” To another he acknowledged that “university officials have been very co-operative. . . . This is a happy day in my life. If things continue the way they have gone today, I think everything is going to be all right.” Dunjee’s *Black Dispatch* quoted McLaurin as saying that he had never “had a more pleasant half day in my life, and I really feel my studies here are going to give me much comfort, happiness, and satisfaction.” On the other hand, he was careful to make it perfectly clear that he would be commuting to his classes from Oklahoma City and not attempting to stay overnight in lily-white Norman, where he would have been decidedly unwelcome and probably subjected to threats of violence. The interurban buses between the two locations ran hourly, and according to university records, 1,996 white students were making the same commute.

On Thursday, October 14, the day after enrolling, McLaurin took the bus down to Norman and made his way to his first class, Educational Psychology, in Room 104 of the old Carnegie Library, now home to the College of Education. He was provided with a chair and a small desk, not in the actual classroom itself, where the white students would be sitting, but in a small, adjoining “anteroom” or “alcove”—his attorney would later describe it (erroneously) as a “broom closet.” He would be able to see the blackboard and the professor at a 45-degree angle, but technically he would be “separated” from the other students in accordance with Oklahoma’s segregation laws.

McLaurin arrived ten minutes before the class was to begin at 2:00 p.m. He found the classroom empty, but the hallway outside the room was crowded with some of the same reporters and photographers who had covered his registration the day before. Curious

students and faculty members peeked into the room for a glimpse of a sight that they knew to be unprecedented and historic. A young man and a young woman walked up to him. The man said: "We want to welcome you here, sir, and let you know that we hope you will find a warm welcome." "I'd like to welcome you too," said the woman. "We are glad to see you." McLaurin smiled and said "thank you." The boy said, "I'm George Bassett, and this is Edith Long." "How do you do," the old man said. "I guess you know that my name is McLaurin." It was a safe enough guess. By the time he walked onto the campus, tens of thousands of Oklahomans, blacks and whites alike, already knew his name.

Meanwhile, thirty-one white students were sitting one floor above, and their professor, Frank Balyeat, was having a quiet talk with them. He told them that their class had been moved down a floor to Room 104 and that they would be gaining another classmate, a black student. "I know all of you will agree with me that we are going to make the necessary adjustments as smoothly as possible." Any of the whites who might have objected to being taught in a mixed-race setting could have simply left the building as Balyeat led his students down the stairs, but, he later recalled, "All filed into the room with no apparent resentment." The reporter from the *Daily Oklahoman* noticed the tension in the air: "As the class led by Balyeat came into the downstairs room where McLaurin waited, students either looked at their Negro classmate full in the face or walked self-consciously past his desk. None of the students—both graduates and underclassmen—spoke to him before the session."

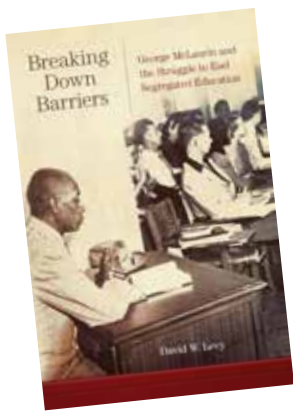
The photographers went into action, taking from various angles their shots of McLaurin seated at his desk. Those pictures! Those incredible pictures! They

were breathtaking, horrifying, devastating, heartbreaking, easily worth the proverbial thousand words. The elderly black man sitting alone, serious and dignified and dressed in suit and tie. The white students looking indifferent or as if they were somehow superior and knew it—as if the old black man was not quite worthy of their notice. As if they were in danger of being somehow tainted by too close contact with a man who had been teaching school since before they were born, a man trying to attend a university that was younger than he was. (The pictures failed to show that before many days had passed many of McLaurin's fellow students would prove to be friendly and sympathetic.) Within a week, the damning photos were appearing in hundreds of places all over the United States and Europe. It would be hard to overestimate their impact, the resulting national outrage at Oklahoma's callous and humiliating treatment of one of its own citizens.

The university's *Sooner Magazine* tried to put the best possible face on it. "Looking through opened double doors," McLaurin

Director of OU Admissions Ruth Arnold, left, accepts McLaurin's enrollment papers. Photo: George Tapscott, *Daily Oklahoman*, Oct. 12, 1948.





DAVID W. LEVY is retired as the Irene and Julian J. Rothbaum Professor of Modern American History and David Ross Boyd Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of *The University of Oklahoma: A History*, Vols. 1 and 2. This essay is adapted from *Breaking Down Barriers: George McLaurin and the Struggle to End Segregated Education* by David W. Levy. © 2020 by David W. Levy. Used with permission of the publisher, The University of Oklahoma Press. News: *Breaking Down Barriers* was recently selected as the Oklahoma Historical Society Outstanding Book of the Year.

had full view of Professor Balyeat. “But for the glare of an occasional flashbulb fired by a photographer . . . the class was not out of the ordinary.” When it ended, Balyeat “stopped by McLaurin’s desk to inquire if he were able to hear and see well. McLaurin assured him that he could.” Then McLaurin left the classroom, caught the bus, and returned home to Oklahoma City. George McLaurin’s battle to break down segregation at the University of Oklahoma was a long and complicated one, undertaken in the face of bitter official and popular hostility to the mixing of the races. And it would not end with his admission or attending his first class. In fact, it had just begun. But before it was all over, he and his attorneys and his many supporters would have been instrumental in bringing the beginnings of change to the university and the state, to the racial practices of southern higher education in general, to the legal strategies of the leaders of the civil rights movement, to the racial experiences and perceptions of countless white college students, and to the lives and opportunities of thousands of southern African American men and women who were to follow his lead.

By 1948, when George McLaurin took his seat in that alcove off Room 104, segregation of the races was as solidly established among Oklahoma’s white citizenry as Christianity or the Democratic Party. One might find, of course, a handful of white opponents of segregation, just as one might occasionally stumble upon an atheist or run across, here and there, a smattering of lonely Republicans. But with the exception of a few obstreperous and vocal dissenters, these outcasts tended to keep their heresies to

themselves at neighborhood barbeques or get-togethers at the Rotary Club or meetings of the city council. The idea that black people and white people must be kept rigorously separated was a deeply ingrained article of faith among the great majority of white Oklahomans, an unquestioned principle endorsed by long tradition and sustained by certain readings of Holy Scripture and by certain beliefs about the importance of “racial purity.” Not surprisingly, segregation was also frequently accompanied by fervent declarations of white supremacy and acts of discrimination. Segregation tended to be so universally upheld by whites that support of it might very often go unspoken. But whenever the black community challenged—or even *appeared* to challenge—some aspect of the practice, as the black community frequently did, the white response was likely to be swift, vehement, and very often violent.

It must be apparent that any person, white or black, who had the temerity to challenge Oklahoma’s tradition of segregation and white supremacy, was enlisting in a battle where the risks were high and the chances for success dubious. Embedded in a history that stretched back before statehood, back even before the invasion of whites and the creation of Oklahoma Territory, the separation of the races and the assignment of the lowest rank to the black race was an unquestioned fact of life. Segregation was established by custom, and sanctified by tribal, territorial, state, and municipal law. It was supported by the judicial system, the state’s newspapers, and most of the state’s white churches. It was sanctified by custom and enforced by social and economic coercion.

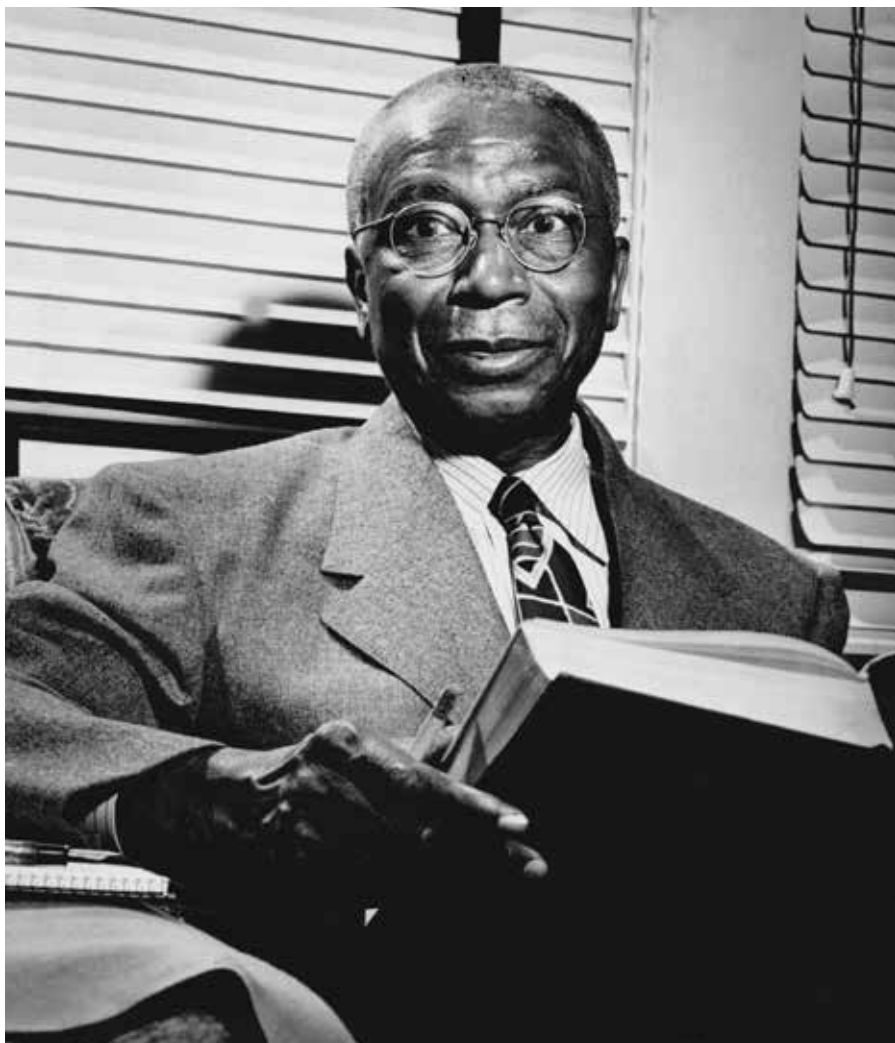
And it was sustained, when it was thought necessary, by physical intimidation and unrestrained violence. And yet, somehow, from the very beginning courageous black men and women resisted segregation by whatever means they could.

George McLaurin surely understood what the odds were when he and five other African Americans came to Norman, a town notorious for its bigotry, and applied for admission to the University of Oklahoma. We cannot admire too much the courage such an act required. They must have known the risks, and yet they went ahead.

**EXTRA!** READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "Separate and Unequal," Emma Keith, Asst. News Managing Editor, *OU Daily*. News story, timeline, and video on civil rights pioneers George McLaurin, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, Prentice Gautt, and others in their quest to end segregation in education and sports at the University of Oklahoma. [projects.oudaily.com/mclaurin](http://projects.oudaily.com/mclaurin)
- "McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents," *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*. Summary of NAACP efforts to mount Supreme Court cases to challenge "separate but equal" accommodations, including those of George McLaurin at the University of Oklahoma. [plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia](http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia)
- *Separate is Not Equal: Brown v. Board of Education*, Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Online exhibit traces the fight to bring the injustice of segregated schools before the United States Supreme Court. [americanhistory.si.edu/brown](http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown)
- "Separate and Unequal," documentary produced by Mary Robertson, 2014, *Frontline*. Probes the legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the segregation that still exists in today's schools. [pbs.org/show/frontline](http://pbs.org/show/frontline)

TOP: George W. McLaurin, first African American to be admitted to OU. Photo: Ronald Pyer, *Daily Oklahoman*, Feb. 16, 1949. BOTTOM: McLaurin's separated desk in the OU Library. In 1948, the *Daily Oklahoman* reported McLaurin would lose the use of the desk if a Federal Court ruled the university's segregation policy unconstitutional.





*Editor's Note:  
This essay contains  
a euphemism for a  
racial slur.*

**N**estled among a sepia-colored photograph of Douglass High School's graduating class of 1930, a photograph of my grandfather in his WWII army uniform, and the only image of Phoebe Woodard, my great-great-great-grandmother (a stately Choctaw woman who was stolen as a child by slave catchers and sold into slavery), rests a neatly folded Confederate flag that I have owned for over forty years. Few people know that I have the flag; those that do know ask the same question: "Why on earth would *you* have such a thing?" My response is a quote from Spanish philosopher George Santayana from his book *The Life of Reason* (1905): "Those who cannot remember the

past are condemned to repeat it." Among the images of my ancestors, the flag serves as a personal reminder of the racism they endured as people of color, and of the faith they maintained in a nation that had little faith in them.

Missing from this small array of faces is a tintype, now lost, of my maternal great-great-grandfather, Isaac Childs, who served with the 111<sup>th</sup> Regiment, United States Colored Infantry, Tennessee, during the Civil War. Undoubtedly, his decision to take up arms against the Confederacy was based on *freedom* and his desire to ensure that his children and their children could live with simple human dignity and make their own way in the world unmolested. For a





Among photos of Tonnia Anderson's ancestors is a vintage Confederate flag.

# REFLECTIONS ON A BELEAGUERED SYMBOL

A CAUTIONARY TAKE ON HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND HATE

TONNIA L. ANDERSON

while, that simple desire seemed possible. His son, Clayborn Isaac Brown Childs (1867-1932), opened a dry goods store in Waxahachie, Texas, in the 1880s. For over twenty years the business thrived. Then, suddenly, Clayborn was forced to abandon his business because it encroached on a white competitor. He was warned to leave town—or die there. He packed up his family and fled to Oklahoma Territory to join his father and other relatives who had left the South to procure homesteads during the Land Run of 1889.

Seventy years later, I witnessed something eerily reminiscent to the circumstances that brought my great-grandfather C.I.B. Childs to settle his family in Oklahoma. In

the 1970s, as old farmsteads in our sparsely inhabited area in southern Logan County were increasingly developed by housing additions or cut up into trailer lots, white newcomers, many from the Deep South, seemed offended by our presence, in spite of the fact that my grandparents had lived there since the end of WWII. My parents bought an adjoining farm, creating an unbroken half-mile section of land where they raised cattle, horses, and buffalo. During my childhood, my parents despaired over having fences repeatedly cut, livestock shot, and farm equipment vandalized. Nasty phone calls, many that I mistakenly answered, threatened to “run us off” or “burn us out” because we didn’t know our place.

Racism is taught.  
It is not a  
natural reaction  
to difference.

The most audacious event happened at my grandmother's house when I was twelve. One summer night, sometime after midnight, the sound of shattering glass and the thud of a large rock startled us out of our beds. From the north side of the house that paralleled the road, a loud nasal voice shouted, "You up now, n—?" Men dressed in Klan-like attire drove five cars into her yard, crushing the grass and flowers underneath. The leader of the group said that it was time for her to get going because the people moving in didn't want to live by "no n—."

Perhaps they targeted her, as opposed to my parents, because she was elderly and a widow, easier to intimidate. But those men did not know my grandmother. She whispered to me to get her rifle. She recognized the man's voice; he had talked to her about selling her property. She called him out by name and told him she wasn't going anywhere. From her second-story window, she had a clear view of the group illuminated by the light pole near the road. She fired a warning shot so close to the leader's foot that dirt covered his shoe. The men scrambled to their cars and did not bother my grandmother again.

Still, for me, the experience was traumatic. This singular event brought to life the many stories told by my grandmother and other family elders, stories passed down through generations about the experiences of slavery, the humiliations of segregation and white supremacy which explained why some of my ancestors sought to leave the United States prior to World War I, and why others remained and fought the indignities of racism on their own terms. The terror of that night prompted me to get the Confederate flag. I wanted to learn about the history of the thirteen Southern states that dissolved their obligations to uphold the Constitution of the United States and galvanized under a banner of rebellion and war to protect slavery. I wanted to learn about the origins of the racist values, beliefs,

and practices of white supremacy symbolized by the Confederate flag, and why these ideas that my ancestor fought to subdue during the Civil War are woven within the very cultural fabric of this country.

■ For nearly thirty of the forty years that I have owned the flag, I have shared my life with Jami D. Hackney, a woman whose ancestors, she acknowledges, "made their wealth off the backs of slaves" for more than two centuries. When the institution of slavery came under siege, they helped to form the Confederate States of America to defend it.

Jami and I met in Oklahoma City in the summer of 1992. It was an auspicious time for me. I had just completed my M.A. in African American Studies at Yale University and had been accepted into the Ph.D. program in American Studies with a prestigious fellowship. I was working on an exhibition that examined early twentieth-century African American life in Seward, Oklahoma. It was the main reason I was in Oklahoma. Falling in love was not on the agenda, but it happened.

When Jami came to terms with her feelings for me, she cried because she knew that the bonds with her family would be severed—not because I am a woman, but because of my race. As we packed up her things to leave for Connecticut, her mother and stepfather came from Duncan to her apartment in Edmond to pick up furniture and other heirlooms given to Jami. I remember how her mother looked at me like I was the most hideous creature she had ever seen and then dismissed me with a glance, like I was not there. She stated that Jami should realize she would have to support me because of course I wouldn't work. Over and over again, she asked Jami how she could debase herself, think so little of herself, and forsake her *heritage*—a codified term used through generations of American history to obfuscate its real meaning: white supremacy.

Fighting back rage and tears, Jami walked over to me, whispered an apology, and asked if I would leave the room. I left in shock—angry, disgusted, embarrassed, and perplexed at how a woman could treat her 32-year-old daughter with such disdain and how she could make baseless, stereotypical assumptions about me, a person she did not know. After we were alone, Jami shared that she knew such an encounter would happen. While in the eighth grade, she was beaten and taken out of school, sent to live with her aunt in another town simply because she had African American friends. She was threatened with different punishments in high school when spotted in “the black side of town” with some of her African American teammates in track. She had violated the taboo of racial segregation, a component of white nationalism. According to Dictionary.com, white nationalism advocates “the belief, theory, or doctrine that white people are inherently superior to people from all other racial and ethnic groups, and that in order to preserve their white, European, and Christian cultural identities, they need or deserve a segregated geographical area, preferential treatment, and special legal protections.” Legally, racial segregation had ended in the state of Oklahoma, but not at Jami’s house.

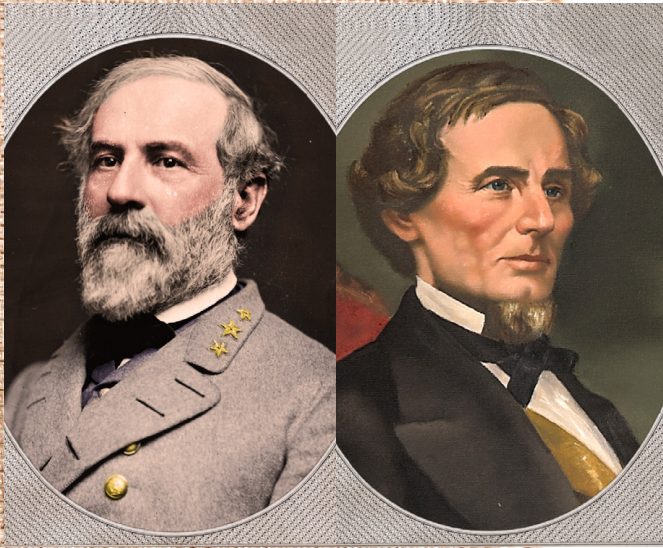
Without ever articulating it, white nationalism was something Jami was expected to embrace by the associations she formed, the attitudes she held, and the boundaries she maintained with those who were not like her. To do otherwise broke the unspoken “moral” code of being loyal to her race. In the mind of Jami’s mother, being friends with African Americans, much less loving an African American, shattered the “natural order” of race relations, ruining her reputation and chances for material success. Rather than hateful or bigoted, her mother reasoned, it was simply a reflection of how things had always been and would always be.



■ These “genteel” notions about race and supremacy had been carried forward as a banner of morality for generations. Jami’s maternal lineage goes back to the founding of America and the First Families of Virginia; namely, the Taylors from Carlisle, England. According to family stories and published accounts, James Taylor I (son of John Taylor) was descended from the Earls of Hare and came to the British colony to make his fortune where other family members had emigrated as early as 1610. Many of the surnames associated with Virginia’s most prominent families (such as Jefferson, Washington, Lee, and Harrison) are infused within the Taylor family tree. Two U.S. presidents, James Madison and Zachary Taylor, are directly descended from James Taylor I. Two other presidents (William Henry Harrison and Benjamin Harrison) also shared Taylor ancestry. Sarah Knox Taylor, daughter of President Zachary Taylor, was the first wife of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America.

Virginia became a hub for sons of the English gentry. Denied inheritance and titles due to primogeniture, a practice whereby

Jami’s distant ancestors go back to the First Families of colonial Virginia and include these U.S. Presidents. LEFT TO RIGHT: William H. Harrison, 9<sup>th</sup> President of the United States; Peter S. Duval, lithographer, c. 1846. Zachary Taylor, 12<sup>th</sup> President of the United States; Albert Newsam, lithographer, 1849. James Madison, 4<sup>th</sup> President of the United States; Peter S. Duval, lithographer, c. 1846. Images: Library of Congress



LEFT: Portrait of Gen. Robert E. Lee, Confederate Army, by Julian Vannerson, March 1864, Library of Congress (CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia). RIGHT: Painting of Jefferson Davis presented by the Georgia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1959 (CC0 Wikimedia).

the eldest son inherited the family's entire estate, subsequent sons typically entered the military, clergy, or went to British colonies where they could procure land grants. Taylor, like other "disfavored sons" of English gentry, became part of Virginia's elite who married within their own social class, strengthening the political and economic connections between powerful families. The familial connections the Taylors shared with other wealthy families signified more than pedigree. These connections, reinforced over generations, created an oligarchy that controlled ownership of the best land and protected the burgeoning slave economy upon which their wealth rested.

During his lifetime, James Taylor I served as a lawyer, public officer, plantation owner, and slaveholder. By the time Taylor died in 1698, his estate totaled 13,925 acres. As the colony transformed from a British possession to a state within the United States of America, the Taylor family continued to exercise influence, moving west as the fledgling nation grew. Over time, descendants of James Taylor I owned

plantations in Kentucky, the Carolinas, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, and Louisiana.

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, states aligned economies and philosophies as "free states" and "slave states." Any obstacle to the slave economy was viewed not only as a direct threat to the wealth and prestige of the planter elite but also to a way of life that had been forged over two centuries—a way of life that was upheld to non-slaveholding classes as the main route to upward social mobility. Political crises around slavery signified that, sooner or later, the federal government would default on its obligations to protect chattel slavery, thereby eroding the concepts of private property and states' rights. Slaveholders and the Christian clerics that supported them viewed this neglect as a deterioration of republican democracy and evidence of a pervasive moral decline, seen most acutely within the industrial North.

The tenacious belief that Southern society represented God's ideal of civilized life justified Southern secession and war. The Taylors sent many sons to fight, just as they had during the Revolutionary War—and for similar reasons: to rebel against perceived tyrannies and to create a new nation that protected them from outside interference. Of the many Taylor relatives who served in defense of the Confederacy, none carried more notoriety than fellow kinsman Robert E. Lee, Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Historian Gary Gallagher attributes the rise of white nationalism in the South, during and after the Civil War, directly to Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, whose battle flag is now popularly (and mistakenly) referred to as the Confederate flag. Lee's stunning victories against Union forces created hope that the Confederacy would win the war. When the original flag of the Confederate States of America, "The Stars and Bars," was replaced by

“The Stainless Banner” in 1863, it carried the emblem of the Army of Northern Virginia as its canton. This transition in the flag not only reflected how the Confederacy saw itself and its cause—preservation of the Southern plantation economy built on slavery—as righteous and just, but also indicated the importance placed upon Lee and his army. Approximately a month before Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, “The Stainless Banner” was replaced by “The Blood-Stained Banner.” It, too, carried the canton of the Army of Northern Virginia.

The evolution of the Confederate flag reflects the Confederacy’s attempt to both achieve and define its nationhood—not through political leaders, but through its *military* efforts. Seen within this context, the Confederate flag is a *soldier’s* flag, a flag of distant battles won and lost, a memorial to the dead, an emblem of a nation that unsuccessfully fought for independence.

While the battle flag for the Army of Northern Virginia never became the official national flag of the Confederacy, it emerged to symbolically represent the Confederacy and its ideals of white nationalism. As a symbol, the flag always signified more than its practical battlefield function. It evolved to embody a way of life—a social, political, economic, and cultural order that defined Southern history and distinguished it from the North.

The most enduring element from the Confederacy is the vision of white identity and its “inherent” superiority to all other groups. Although the Confederacy lost the Civil War, it won ideologically by inscribing its beliefs about race and race relations into the national culture and consciousness for subsequent generations, multiplying like a cancer into *our* generation. These old ideologies about race extend deep into American society and are signified through Confederate symbols, regardless of whether they are described as emblems of race, pride, heritage, or rebellion.

The cancerous potential of Confederate symbols litter American history. Most recently this was seen on January 6, 2021, when one of the insurrectionists carried the Confederate flag through the halls of the U.S. Capitol—an act that had never happened, not even during the Civil War. Rev. Robert W. Lee IV, a descendant of Robert E. Lee and a distant relative to Jami, was quoted describing the act as “a desecration.”

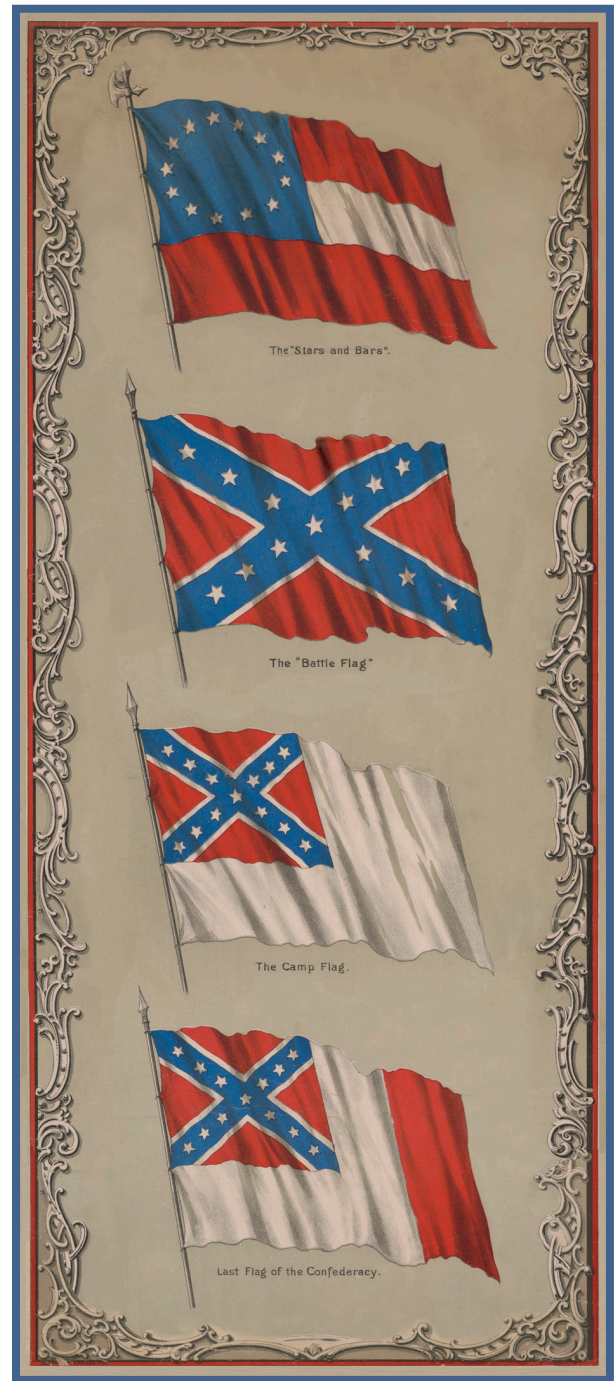


Image: Library of Congress. Vintage card shows the evolution of flags for the Confederate States of America: “The Stars and Bars” (1861-1863), “The Battle Flag” (1861), “The Stainless Banner” (1863-1865), and “The Blood-Stained Banner” (1865). Scholar Thomas Clemens notes that the flag we consider today as the Confederate Flag was “adopted by the Confederate army, which needed a banner that was easily distinguishable from the United States flag” on the battlefield. As General Robert E. Lee led the Army of Northern Virginia to important victories, the battle flag became a national symbol and was incorporated as the canton of subsequent Confederate national flags. Source: *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities (Feb. 5, 2021)



TOP: Phoebe Woodard, great-great-great-grandmother. With several other Choctaw children, Phoebe and her brother were stolen and sold into slavery. BOTTOM LEFT: Mary Carter, great-great-grandmother, daughter of Phoebe Woodard. Mary was born into slavery and died shortly after her two sons returned from WWI. BOTTOM RIGHT: Tan Glover, grandfather.

When I saw images of the Confederate flag in the Capitol Building, I immediately thought about Phoebe, my Choctaw ancestor, stolen and sold into slavery with her brother, a mere boy whose name has been lost to time. He simply wanted to go home and attempted to run away from the plantation. Phoebe's last recollection of her brother was the sound of dogs turned loose to find him and the gunfire that finally silenced his screams.

The Confederate flag occupies a place in American history, just like the symbols of Nazi Germany occupy a place in Germany's history—a *dark* place in which dehumanization, violence, subjugation, and death were normalized as patriotic and good. I wondered whether the insurrectionist carrying the Confederate flag (perhaps as a noble "patriotic" act) realized that he was celebrating centuries of inhumane cruelty, that the associated ideologies perpetuate a poison within our society, or whether he even cared about these things. Americans, regardless of race, should see and understand the Confederate flag within its historic context. This point is particularly true for African Americans, who object to its unmitigated public display—not simply because it conjures painful associations of racial subjugation, but because it seeks to undermine the very hope and promise of an American democracy shared equally by all citizens.

■ For me, stories like those of my ancestors, who endured despite racism, are beacons of hope. They demonstrate that ordinary people can make a profound difference by standing up for what they believe. Given my own experiences and those of my ancestors, it would have been easy for me to hate white people, to see them through a stereotypical lens, but I was not raised that way. Conversely, Jami could have capitulated to the pressures of her mother or allowed herself to be stunted by the flawed concept of white guilt, but she didn't.

Jami is proud of her family history, as I am of mine. Her family's genealogy fascinates her. At the same time, she is keenly aware of the systemic oppression against people of color her ancestors not only participated in but helped to create. "It is impossible to go back in time to correct grievous wrongs," she says, "but it is possible and necessary to learn about those wrongs

and to stand up for justice and the human dignity of all people—not just abstractly or when convenient, but in everyday life, so the wrongs of the past are not allowed to determine our future.”

Jami’s crossing of racial divides is not unique, but it is not necessarily talked about openly or shared. Nevertheless, America’s history is filled with those who defied racial taboos in the name of justice, freedom, and equality. Unfortunately, such stories, especially of white Americans, are often marginalized because they go against the status quo.

For Jami and me, our ancestral legacies couldn’t be more opposite; but *together* they contribute to a more holistic understanding of America’s history. In learning about each other’s history, we forge deeper connections through how we deal with those histories in the present. Together, our stories demonstrate how people from very different backgrounds can learn from each other’s past but do not have to be defined by it.

Racism is taught. It is not a natural reaction to difference. As we saw throughout 2020, in march after march and protests that spread around the world, men and women, young and old, black and brown and white came together to declare that Black Lives Matter—because racism cannot be dismantled by people of color alone; they did not create the structures of oppression that allow racism to thrive. White Americans must play a central role in racism’s destruction, and that role begins by standing up for justice, regardless of cost and at the expense of shedding the privileges of whiteness.

“Heritage” is no excuse for clinging to symbols like the Confederate flag that are charged with anachronistic ideologies that divide us. To move forward as human beings and as a society, Confederate relics, which propagate a message of racism, belong to the pages of history. They do not and should not define twenty-first-century America.



Tonnia L. Anderson and Jami D. Hackney “jumped the broom” in 1992.

TONNIA L. ANDERSON holds three degrees from Yale University: an M.A. in African American Studies, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in American Studies. She is an Associate Professor of History and American Studies and serves as the director of the Dr. Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Center for Social Justice and Racial Healing at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha. Her experience includes work at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (Atlanta).

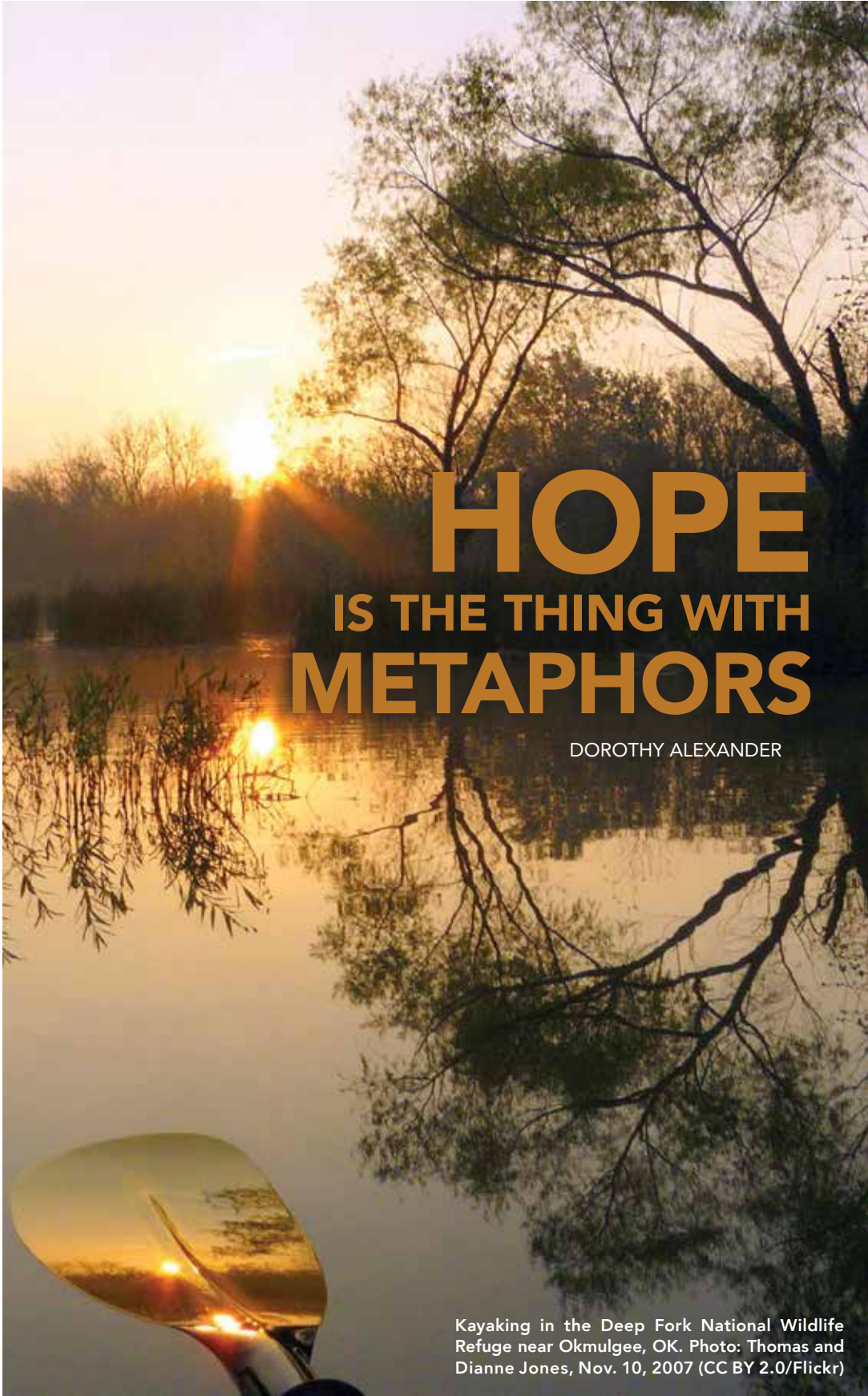
**EXTRA!** READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “Confederate Battle Flag an Unnerving Sight in Capitol,” Maria Cramer, Jan. 9, 2021, *The New York Times*. Reactions on seeing the flag during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)
- “The Confederate battle flag, which rioters flew inside the U.S. Capitol, has long been a symbol of white insurrection,” Jordan Brasher, Jan. 14, 2021, *The Conversation*. “It should come as no surprise . . . that today’s white insurrectionists . . . identify with the Confederate battle flag.” [theconversation.com](https://theconversation.com)
- “Myths & Misunderstandings: The Confederate Flag,” The American Civil War Museum, Jan. 9, 2018. A look at the evolution of uses and perceptions of the flag through 150 years of history. [acwm.org](https://acwm.org)



**OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES**

Oklahoma Humanities brings you trusted, engaging content through our award-winning magazine, public events, and online discussions. Help us keep these statewide programs free and open to all. Use the enclosed envelope or make a gift online: [okhumanities.org](https://okhumanities.org). Thank you!



# HOPE IS THE THING WITH METAPHORS

DOROTHY ALEXANDER

Kayaking in the Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge near Okmulgee, OK. Photo: Thomas and Dianne Jones, Nov. 10, 2007 (CC BY 2.0/Flickr)



*There's a morning where presence comes over you, and you sing like a rooster in your earth-colored shape. Your heart hears and, no longer frantic, begins to dance.—Rumi*

**O**n a frigid December night more than thirty years ago, the streets slick with ice, snow in dirty piles on the sidewalks, an AIDS epidemic raging through the land, my only child, my beloved son, died. It was a parent's worst nightmare watching my child perish in agony, helpless to give any comfort or ease.

The darkest hour of my life.

For months the sadness dominated my days and a deep darkness occupied my nights. Everyone assured me this was a "normal" reaction, but the dark sadness became a deep despair that kept me from my work, from meaningful interaction with fellow humans. I felt like I was smothering.

During this period I had a vivid dream where my son told me that his suffering was at an end, that he was in a "good place," that I need not worry about him, that I needed to find another way to live. It was such a strange experience that I began to research the phenomenon to determine if it was common or if I was on the verge of a mental breakdown. As British author William Nicholson said, "We read to know we're not alone."

My reading led me to Oxford don and theologian C.S. Lewis and his book *A Grief Observed* that chronicles his emotions following the death of his wife. Lewis' words became a lifeline, a strand that led me to the words of others who suffered great sorrows. To my great good fortune, the edition included an "Afterword" by Chad Walsh on Lewis' life and writing and its relation to the great literary classics, including the great poets. It became a river, a torrent of encouraging words and comfort. As I delved further into what others had to say, my grief began to thaw. I began to see the beauty and wisdom in poetry and poetic prose.

As I continued to read accounts of fact and imagination, I found my spirits steadily rising. Only in retrospect did I come to call this emotion "hope." I intuited the connection between poetry and hope, how they create and feed each other. Humans are meaning-making beings and imagination is a key

player in our ability to make meaning out of our experiences. The link between hope and poetry is imagination. It gives us strength to believe that we can change our future for the better. It is also the key to expressing that belief, making it a concrete thing.

Sometimes we misplace the key and need a clear-sighted person to help find it. Often that person is a child. Or a poet. A poet like Emily Dickinson, mother of poetic metaphor, whose famous poem likens hope to a creature of flight:

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -  
And sore must be the storm -  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -  
And on the strangest Sea -  
Yet, never, in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb - of me.  
- Emily Dickinson

Months after the death of my son, and about the same time I dreamed of what I call his "visitation," I began to peruse his handwritten journals, commentary on his work (physics and mathematics), music (he played the violin from childhood as a member of the Oklahoma City Junior Symphony) and his favorite literary works. There I found a notation, dated only a few days before he died in mid-December 1989, quoting the words of the English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson in *The Foresters*, his play about Robin Hood and Maid Marian. I couldn't help but take these words as a "message" to me from my dying son:

Hope  
Smiles from the threshold of the year to come  
Whispering 'It will be happier;' . . .  
- Alfred Lord Tennyson

I “found” William Ernest Henley and his poem “Invictus” shortly after my first bout of intense grief at age twelve, when my ten-year-old brother, Cecil, died. Because of its passion, defiance, and powerful lines, the poem became one of the first that I called a “favorite.” I memorized it for extra class credit at every opportunity. Although I now recognize the faint scent of naiveté, I am still inspired and encouraged by it all these decades since.

#### INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

From my desperate need to recover from the black pit of grief and to find the new life my son urged upon me, I delved deeper into the world of poetry, even the practice of poetry, longing to find words and meaning and put them to paper. This, in turn, led me to seek out those of like mind—contemporary poets. With them I found much of what I sought: people of great compassion, understanding, kindness, and, most of all, a world of seekers. They became my road to salvation, and to hope in the future.

If not for the constraints of time and space here, I could name and quote dozens, even hundreds of kind souls, the poets who make my life better. Here are a few samples of the work by those contemporary citizen poets to whom I look for inspiration, encouragement, and hope!



Looking northwest, Mt. Marcy and Bushman Mountain.  
Jonathan C. Wheeler, June 3, 2009 (CC BY-SA 3.0/Wikimedia)

#### THE POET

Listen to the hands  
cradling the lullaby  
securing the world

She sits at kitchen table with paper  
pen, coffee, admires begonia borders  
salvia’s red flare, chinaberries’ gold  
Sunlight warms her face  
reminds her of carefree days

lemonade stands, coins clinking  
jump rope, hopscotch  
all on the sidewalk in bare feet  
until the sun turns the concrete  
into a game of hot potato

She moves to a time before her time  
hears Shakespeare reciting and agrees  
*Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines*  
Like a sonnet, she needs rhythm  
a pattern to get started

a solution to finish  
Order takes her hand  
She holds her pen like a gavel  
taps her paper, declares  
*Writing is in session*

Lets the blank page carry her  
Line by line words gain power  
chill like the bone cold truth  
sear like a branding iron  
caress like even breathing

As she writes, she smooths lotion  
on the soul, bemoans a sandy heart  
unlocks wild places, avoids  
the exit sign, prays for more time  
to sit at the table

– Vivian Finley Nida,  
*From Circus Town, USA: Poems*  
(Village Books Press, 2019)

## I NEED POEMS

these days i need poems  
between my fingers  
bulking my pillows  
spinning off the ceiling fan

i need poems to sweet the oatmeal,  
to cream the morning coffee

i need cupboards so full of poems you  
couldn't squeeze in another can of soup

i need a poem to lock my door,  
to start my car  
i need poems to  
bubble up through the storm drains  
on my way to more poems,  
an office full of poems  
i need poems to populate my screens  
to ring my phone

i need poems to jump into the headlines  
in Arial Black 200 point type, push out  
all that is not poem

i need a world of poems—  
a 7-billion-voice poem  
speaking through 14 billion eyes

i need trillions of poems  
twinkling at me across light years

i need poemspoemspoemspoems  
a universe of nothing but—  
just to keep the light on  
just to keep my head  
in a world gone madmadmad

— Mary Oishi, *Rock Paper Scissors*  
(Swimming With Elephants Pub., 2018)

## CHICKORY IN THE DITCHES

When first light calms blue-swept night  
and cool dawn erases  
yesterday's heat.

Morning reminds us that night  
is a fragment, and summer  
swelter is brief.

Blue flowers color the day  
in dew-filled grass. We find  
ourselves in song.

We are made for the morning.  
Starting over is something  
we should get right.

— Ken Hada, *Sunlight & Cedar*  
(Strawberry Hedgehog Press, 2020)

## THRUM

When you're slack like the tide  
neither ebbing nor flowing

or in a deep boggy place  
the Slough of Despond

may you waken  
to some little happiness

a tiny voice that wants to be heard in the world  
dripping from the canale down to a stone

the cat snapping with her paw and teeth—*ping!*  
*thrum*, on the rubberband tightly squeezing a box

jewel light from a raindrop on a stem  
All around you, little buoyancies

saying, *You are loved*  
*Welcome back*

— Jane Lipman

## MEADOWLARKS

... were trying to tell  
something better about to happen.  
—William Stafford, "Vocation"

Suddenly, a yellow-splashed fence post  
and I am reminded how long it's been  
since I drove country roads for no reason  
except the breath of the day

Dirt newly-tilled by unknown farmers  
who will seed fields in wheat or barley,  
maybe corn in tidy rows, even though  
last year brought another drought

That's faith. To expect a harvest  
over expenses, drive machinery all day,  
a hopeful eye for clouds—now and then  
the flash of wing, one friendly whistle.

— Sandra Soli  
(First appeared in *Oklahoma Today*)

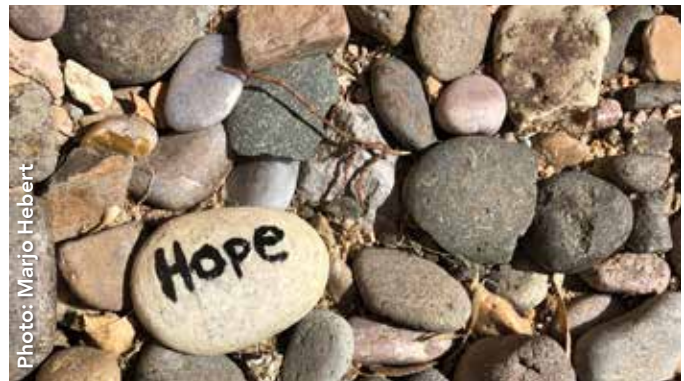


Photo: Maijo Hebert

DOUBLE FERRIS WHEEL (*Excerpt*)

Some days stay with you forever –  
sugary smell of cotton candy spinning  
soft denim of grandfather's shirt.  
I can still pick a good horse.  
That day my first solo ride  
on the double Ferris wheel,  
I risk rocking the seat to look down  
at miniature Mother waiting below.  
With each turn of the wheel skyward,  
I can see out across the fairgrounds,  
all the way to the livestock barns,  
the racetrack and far beyond  
the north gate – my whole life,  
spread out – waiting.

– Linda Whittenberg, *Dying Can Wait*  
(*Pudding House Chapbook Series*, 2009)

COMING TO TERMS

I'm not much for making money;  
my assets are persistence  
and words.

I could be a con, but  
it would hurt my heart.

Preacher?  
Believe too much.  
Don't believe enough.

Salesperson?  
People don't need more stuff.

Politician?  
Can't beg for money.

Nothing's left for me  
but poetry.

– Sharon Martin, *Not a Prodigal*  
(*Village Books Press*, 2018)

The imaginative functions of our minds help us make sense of the reality around us. Our thoughts are constantly creating stories about what we see, hear, feel, sense, and experience. We use those stories to tell us how we must direct out future actions if we are to attain desired goals. Those stories and the sentiments connected to them drive the direction of the lives and work of all great writers in the poetry pantheon—as well as those of wise and courageous leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Barack Obama, Robert and John Kennedy—along with myriad others who have used poetry to inspire

and engender hope in themselves and in those who depend on their leadership.

Here are my own words, prompted by the current viral pandemic engulfing our world, a call to hope for all those filled with sorrow.

LET MORNING COME

Let the universe do what the universe does.  
Let her make the changes she deems prudent.  
Allow nature to work her mothering through us.

Trust evolution on her inescapable path.  
Let her teach us the way to be,  
the way to do.

Let the night come with its holy darkness  
for therein lie the mysteries, the secrets  
which lead to knowing.

Let the morning come and shine the light  
of knowledge on us. Then, as the poet says,  
*Let the whole thundering world come home.*

Let us learn to patiently trust our heaviness.  
Let everything happen to us, beauty and terror.  
Let us hear rumblings beneath the surface.

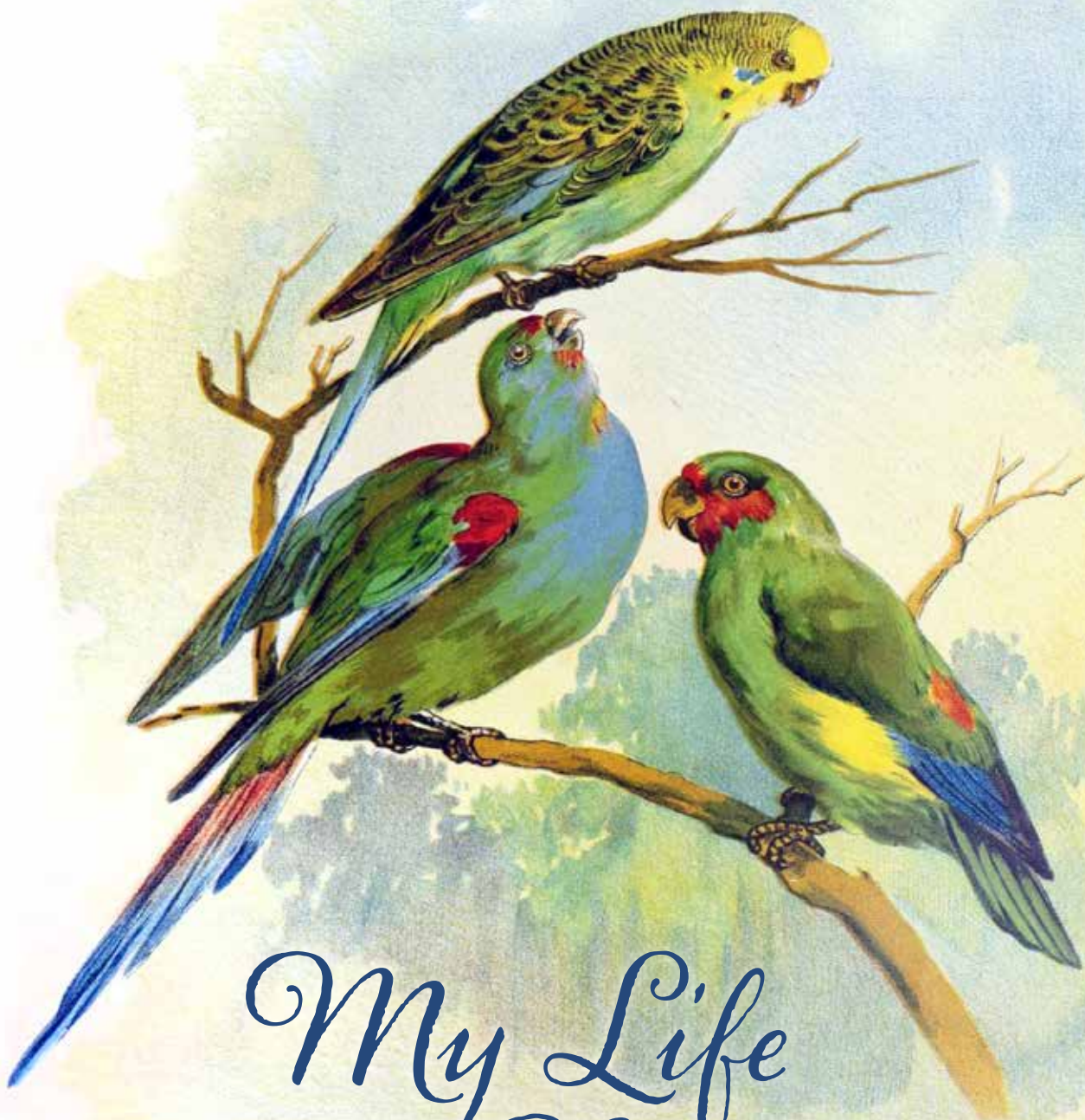
Let poetry find us. Let music find us.  
Let us make images of visions from our heart.  
Let songs of home and hearth find us.

Let us keep going.  
And may the wild god of hope  
allay our fears.

– Dorothy Alexander

The gift of poetry, both my own creation of it and my enjoyment of that created by others, has not fully vanquished my grief, which is, in itself, a gift. I do not wish to forget completely the feeling of sorrow, nor the pain of loss, because without those I might close my heart to the sorrow and grief of my fellow beings. I might forget that we are all in this together. I might fail to look for and foster the hope needed for each of us to get through our one wild and precious life.

DOROTHY ALEXANDER is the author of five poetry collections, two multi-genre memoirs, two volumes of oral history, a founder and curator of poetry for the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival in Okemah, Oklahoma, as well as a retired lawyer and municipal judge. She was the 2013 recipient of the Carlile Award for Distinguished Service to the Oklahoma Literary Community from the Oklahoma Center for the Book. [villagebookspress@yahoo.com](mailto:villagebookspress@yahoo.com)



# My Life in Birds

JENNIFER KIDNEY

*I believe  
in birds.*

Those feathered wonders help me tell the time and seasons, brighten my days, entertain and enlighten me constantly. To me, they are magic embodied. Physiologically they are the descendants of dinosaurs, centuries of evolution from reptilian lumbering to flight.



*Ruby-throated Humming Bird.* Images: *Birds of America* (1827) by John James Audubon, etched by William Home Lizars. Original from University of Pittsburg, digitally enhanced by rawpixel.com

One of my earliest memories is of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird feasting on the honeysuckle that tumbled over our backyard fence. I was less than four years old and thought at first I was seeing a fairy. Mother told me I was seeing a bird, but that didn't diminish the wondrous vision. She knew the proper names of most of the birds that came to our yard—Baltimore Oriole, Gray Catbird, Dark-eyed Junco, Carolina Chickadee—and had a lifelong fascination with the Northern Mockingbird whose evolving songs she'd stay up late to record on her portable tape player. (Although she persisted in calling the Yellow Warblers that descended on the vacant wooded lot at the end of our street in spring “wild canaries.”)

When I was seven, I thought that aliens had invaded the neighborhood when I heard an Eastern Screech Owl hunting one night. I had already seen one—a kittenish-looking creature barely eight inches tall—and was amazed that the eerie trilling I heard was his call.

The only indoor pet I was allowed to have as a child was a parakeet. I pored over Herbert Spencer Zim's book about parakeets, cared meticulously for my bird, and patiently taught Jackie to say: “I love you.” “Happy birthday.” “Pretty bird.” While I was in graduate school I had parakeets named Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth, all of whom I taught to recite poetry. I marveled at the shell-like pattern of their plumage and reveled in their antics, their mixing of phrases and poetry: “Hail to thee, pretty bird.” “I love you, blithe spirit.”

My relationship to birds expanded when I took a break from graduate school and found a job as secretary for the director of ornithology at the Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut. My desk was across from the “skin room”—drawer after drawer of taxidermized birds with plumage intact. When I wasn't transcribing and typing letters to egg collectors around the world, I'd pull out a random drawer to gaze upon Bower Birds or Blue-footed Boobies or Painted Buntings. The ornithologists who worked there told me of spring migration and Christmas bird counts and where to find “the good birds” in urban New Haven. With their advice, I bought my first pair of

binoculars and began keeping a life list of dates and locations where I spotted each species. When I left the job to finish my dissertation, they presented me with *The Herring Gull's World* by Niko Tinbergen, a wonderful study of bird behavior.

Before moving to Oklahoma, I spent part of the summer in Guatemala where I saw in the wild many of the birds I'd viewed in the skin room—Scarlet Macaw, Keel-billed Toucan, Vermilion Flycatcher, Blue-gray Tanager—adding an exotic flavor to my life list. When I arrived in Stillwater, Oklahoma, my first impulse was to tell my employer that I'd changed my mind. In 1974, that little town had more in common with a third-world country than with my familiar East Coast. Advertisements for rental homes indicated whether the properties were located on paved roads (or not). And the grocery store lacked all the gourmet items I believed I required. But—

Oklahoma lies directly in the migratory path of a large number of North American species and is the summer home of many birds I only dreamed of seeing. Walking my dog, I encountered Greater Roadrunners in barren landscapes and Yellow-billed Cuckoos in the woods around the lake. The creek behind my house attracted the Green Heron and many native sparrows. But it was the Painted Buntings perching on the power lines behind my yard that made me want to stay and—after I moved away—drew me back to Oklahoma.

Emily Dickinson described “Hope” as a bird that comes unbidden. For me, the metaphor is literal. The annual autumnal arrival of the Dark-eyed Junco and the vernal return of the Brown Thrasher reassure me, give me hope for the future. Yes, I worry about Whooping Cranes making perilous migrations through wind farms, the oil spills threatening shorebirds. I am able only to keep my yard birds fed and watered and safe from cats, a small price for a gift of endless joy and serenades at dawn and dusk each day.

JENNIFER KIDNEY is an adjunct assistant professor for the College of Professional and Continuing Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Her seventh volume of poetry, *The Road to the River* (WJB Publishing, 2020), is available at amazon.com and features many poems about birds and other wildlife.



Painted Finch  
(Painted Bunting)



## OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Did you know? It costs only \$1.50 per copy to produce *Oklahoma Humanities*. Our magazine is award-winning, 100% ad-free, and distributed for free statewide to serve Oklahoma families, schools, public libraries, veterans centers, and underserved communities. Please show your support. Use the enclosed envelope or make a gift online: [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)

# Hope & Poetry



## HOPE

The purple petals of my tall iris  
have fisted up against the cold,  
but for two days now they have each  
unfurled their velvety flags  
to the afternoon sun. I somehow believe  
they might well open again today.

 – Carol Hamilton

## GROUNDWORK

*The end of art is peace*  
—Seamus Heaney

If you must turn ground  
by hand, then so be it,

that is what you must do.  
This is what you can give

and some will receive it,  
plant seeds in furrows


you make and wait  
for full fruition,

a harvest that comes  
incrementally,

one new hand at a time.  
While cynics scoff


of idealism and warn  
of recurring pain

what choice do we have  
but to plow and plant?

 – Ken Hada, *Spare Parts*  
(Mongrel Empire Press, 2010)

## “UNDER THE FLYWAY OF DREAMS” – for Ted Kooser

Landlocked in Nebraska,  
a poet daydreams  
about an alternate life  
lived along a rocky coast  
as a painter of conventional seascapes.  
But then he resigns himself  
to his current state  
“right under the flyway of dreams.”  
I know just what he means.  
I, too, dwell beneath the Central Flyway  
where during migrations  
I might hear the purring of cranes  
or see an eagle coasting an updraft  
above the river, stirring my imagination  
to create something as surprising  
as a painted bunting, perhaps,  
from this deceptively drab landscape.

 – Jennifer Kidney  
(Previously published in *Conclave*, Spring 2017)

## ARISTOTLE AND HIS ACORN

He was wrong  
about some things  
but he was right  
about this:

Even in our urbanized  
concretized  
technological  
mazes,  
acorns abound  
and oaks remain  
possible.

 – Ken Hada, *Spare Parts*  
(Mongrel Empire Press, 2010)


## MORNING

Our morning toast is crisp  
and grainy and sweet  
with honey and butter  
while to the east the same  
redundant glory hurls a ball  
of fire right over the rim  
and we, waiting, watching  
arise from our chairs  
once again.

 – Carol Hamilton







MONARCH BUTTERFLY

When you migrate north, what is left behind  
Creak of hinged door on screened porch  
breeze carrying scent of cedar to sunlit pasture

big bluestem grass sprinkled with  
Indian paintbrush, coreopsis, coneflowers  
and milkweed where your life began

Do you miss the bank of willows  
at lake's edge, yellow kayak  
where you hitched rides and watched

the almost silent oar dip first one side  
then the other before a dragonfly  
came aboard and you flitted away

leaving a place, leaving a person  
leaving alone as your brief season  
waned like the orange ball of fire

disappearing beneath the horizon  
leaving truth to mingle with hope  
in the freedom of darkness

 – Vivian Nida

LIFE JACKET

– After an art installation by Ai Weiwei

This is how sour starts,  
when you string life jacket to life

jacket, colorful and torn like paper lanterns,  
reel them around the Greco-Roman columns

at the Minneapolis Institute of Art like spun sugar,  
to say that home doesn't let you stay,

and that at home, you fear seeing the sun  
because missiles always strike on days

with clear skies, and this is how floating starts.  
In Oklahoma City, your father and I bought you


a life jacket, even though you are only  
a few months old and not a refugee like

your parents. You don't know water yet,  
except for the safety of womb and sleep,

you don't know too much sun  
or skin burn or heart ache,

and we celebrate your wriggling and twisting,  
because they affirm all that journey

to getting to you was worth it and worthy  
of an art exhibit.

 – Roxana Cazan  
(First appeared at [flashesofbrilliance.org](http://flashesofbrilliance.org))

PANDEMIC SPRING MIRACLES

Eggplant sprouts seedlings after five weeks silence,  
Gold finch eat camouflaged locust tree blossoms,  
No one in my family has died this year.  
I still have work,  
Out of work, my son loves full time parenting.  
My dog's nose compensates for diminished eyesight.  
Denial and courage surround,  
In tranquility I hold opposing beliefs.  
At sunset, wren counts her fledglings  
As she trills them back to nest.  
Since March 17th, I've driven 70 miles.  
No one in my family has died this year.  
I still have work.

 – Debbi Brody



# Poetry, Hope, *and the* Bear in the Backyard

BRITTON GILDERSLEEVE

*It started simply enough:* an adult education class for folks who think they don't like poetry. I honestly thought I'd get folks who didn't like poetry. Instead, I got closet poetry lovers. Retired teachers, a historian, musicians, a few friends, a couple of university scholars. And hope. Hope I wouldn't recognize (or understand) until I needed it most, much later. Now. Hope that comes from friendship, from art, from trust. From sharing all of these.



*It took a move east to resurrect  
my southern roots. To remind me  
of the Kentucky in my bloodline.*

In that first class we read poetry anthologies, using these common texts to familiarize ourselves with the vocabulary of poetry: *Meter, rhythm, rhyme. Sonnet, haiku, sestina.* And each week a few of us brought in poems we loved, to share with the class.

There were poems from and of childhood. Poems about music, doggerel, equality; classical odes and other forms from long ago and far away. Poems on music and composers from the cellist. Poems on birds from the birders (and Billy Collins' bird anthology). Poems on gardens from we who love to tend and turn the earth. Poems about race and gender and love and all the things our lives are made of—we read and talked about them all. It was such a success we signed up for another round.

Not quite a year after that first tentative class, we formed the *official* Poetry Book Club and began to meet monthly. We set up an email list to decide things like where the next meeting would be, at whose house, and if there was a theme: Father's Day, for instance. Who knew so many famous poets had written about their fathers? Mostly, however, we brought in what we liked or what had caught our eye in the past weeks. Each of us read our poem and then we talked. And remembered and shared and told stories and sometimes were quiet as we grew closer.

*Here among the spruce and fir, hawthorns  
berry after dogwood. Tulip poplars reach out  
above the rooflines of the old houses beneath.*

During the months the Poetry Book Club met, much of what we shared was *just* conversation about poems. But poems are never *just* anything: they are distilled emotion, captured flight, gravid grief, beauty and terror and loss and life and death and birth and ... more. A poem is a doorway

into a place you've never been. We moved, together, through many doorways.

*A man in Roanoke writes stories of nooses  
and the men and women who hung from them.  
Time is a river that erodes the shores of memory.*

This being the South, race is always a door into reflection. Family is through another door still. Our various families—Jewish, Chinese, Black, Native, Latinx—are messily complicated: multicultural, multiracial, variously spiritual/religious/agnostic/atheist. We talked of children and grandchildren and ourselves—what we thought of all of it—for an hour here, an hour there, surrounded each week by the books, art, chairs, tea sets, and memorabilia of well-lived, literate lives.

*It took the familiarity of mountains  
I had never seen their hazy blue ridges  
to heal my wounds. Allow me grief.  
Worn tops softened by water, these  
are the mountains my grandmother  
who would not watch a black newscaster  
crossed to Oklahoma. They are my bones.*

We talked about the changes our group of elders has lived to see: grandparents raising grandchildren, gay marriage and trans nephews, widowhood and equal rights and the inequity of privilege—ours as well as others'. A kind of Socratic dialogue developed: What is love? Why do some people deny the right to others? What is justice and how did it become so badly skewed for so many?

*I have fed from the bloody hands of "good people."  
I have noted the excuses for their hatreds, all  
in the name of gods. Perhaps the god  
of my grandmother, but not her children's  
children's children. It took a move east  
for me to remember this. That blood is more than heat.*



We grieved large and small: beloved partners, assorted dogs, a bird we tried to save, politics we abhorred, leaders that were not leaders, a judicial system that has failed the neediest of Americans. There were poems that spoke to all of this: Edward Lear and Robert Louis Stevenson and the poems we learned by heart as children, now shared with a new generation. Shakespeare and Denise Levertov and Mark Doty. Newer and lesser-known poets, like Paisley Rekdal and Jericho Brown, Claribel Alegria and Jack Gilbert. We read poets obscure to many American readers: Rabindranath Tagore, Tomas Tranströmer, Wisława Szymborska.

All over cups of tea, the occasional glass of wine or cider. The former executive sent out the recipe for her relish. The cellist made us cookies. The lawyer-turned-teacher made herbal tea. I made scones. The Shakespearean scholar served us on his family's best antique china, while the avid birder took us out on her deck to watch the birds flit through trees at eye level. There were Asian American grandchildren and Latinx grandchildren. There were blond grandchildren and mixed-race cousins and . . .

*And now the children of her children's  
children's children mingle black brown white  
like the soft silt beneath the resurrection fern.  
They paint the landscape with their laughter  
in the braided languages of love.*

And then came the time of plague. March 2020's meeting never materialized. But poems did—in semi-regular, sometimes frequent email exchanges. The historian joked that there were always tomes of poetry when the T.P. ran out. The Shakespeare scholar kicked off the virtual club with a poem by W.D. Snodgrass. By late March, Ted Kooser's "Full Moon, March 2020" was a shoe-in. Auden showed up to visit and of course Mary Oliver, asking (as always) what our lives are for. Spring surprised us by returning (talk about hope!) and we began to fold bouquets into our poetry talks: pictures of gardens, dandelions, even the moon came with poems.

Eventually it was June, then July, then August, and so on. Throughout this chaos, with its bloody thread of defiant racism and persistent resistance, was the golden warp and weft of poetry. And us, the Poetry Book Club. Fittingly, pictures of a bear appeared, ambling through a backyard. It seemed appropriate to see this easygoing ursid making forays into our daily lives, as if we could somehow tame the fears we shared.

This has been my hopeful window into what a lifetime of reading and questioning brings to troubled times. It has made this new place, so far from all I knew before, home. As a friend notes, despair can be both local and endemic. But hope? Hope is a bear comfortable in an urban yard. It is a bouquet of flowers shared between friends, even virtually. It is a poem that triggers sincere and honest inquiry. Hope is present, daily, even in these dark times. We may not always see it, but hope will find us. Just like a bear strolls in from surrounding woods. Just like poetry stirs memory, and memory can indeed take us home.

*Something more than blood lives within these hills.  
Something resurrected not from the bones of hate  
but from the ashes of forgiveness that warmed  
the coloured mud we grew from. Like the grief I hold  
within me, grief I cannot give a name to.  
Like the nameless Southern hills neither black  
nor white. Like the soft blue mountains  
that have seen it all before. Like memory  
returning home.*

Hope is humanity. Among the pages of poems, the screens of poetry-filled emails, were the humanities: the words of scholars and scientists and teachers and artists and naturalists and representatives of all the various fields that comprise human endeavors. Is it any wonder that the Poetry Book Club gives me hope?

BRITTON GILDERSLEEVE retired from OSU, where she directed a federal nonprofit. She serves on two literary editorial boards and continues to teach through the Oklahoma State and Virginia Tech Lifelong Learning Institutes. Her award-winning writing has appeared in national journals, and she has three chapbooks. She formerly served on the Oklahoma Humanities Board of Trustees. teaandbreath.com



We also discussed the fact that, in many schools and universities, the slur is banned from use, even in studying historical texts with informed context. Tonnia left it to me to decide whether to print the word in full. (We didn't.)

I wish that I had space to print the scores of email exchanges since that first phone call. They are the making of friendship. When you read Tonnia's essay, you'll understand why we had extended conversations, including the pros and cons of publishing an image of the Confederate flag. Recent events made clear that display of the flag inflicts harm, so *Oklahoma Humanities* chose to use only a historical drawing of the flag, not contemporary photos.

Illustration for other articles posed more questions. Looking through images documenting the Tulsa Race Massacre, deciding which ones to publish alongside our content, was devastating: Should we lay bare the record and show the broken bodies—or stop with the shells of burned-out businesses and homes? (Ashes are enough.) Should we retain the racially sensitive captions written by journalists of the period? (No, captions are edited.) Difficult choices were made throughout our issue. They are the product of critical conversations among fellow staff and friends, and from reading, reading, reading—and thinking.

You can find good sources and thoughtful writing on these subjects online. When “used for good,” the internet is a powerful tool. The trick is to look beyond the first few entries

of any search. If we did the same in everyday life, if we consulted a variety of sources—pals and professionals, historical accounts and informed predictions—we would come to these challenging conversations with attitudes that are softer, more objective, more open to change.

Ultimately, I'm a reader like you. As editor I make decisions and selections (with the help of very smart people) to facilitate my own understanding and, hopefully, yours too. You may disagree with how this sensitive material is presented, and your feedback is welcome. There is space for many views here, it's all part of the conversation—the first step toward justice, toward understanding each other's perspectives. Conversation is also an act of hope. In the wise words of my friend, Tonnia:

Hope stems from the willingness to learn, grow, and share despite our fears and vulnerabilities. We don't have to be afraid of our history or be mindlessly (and often unwittingly) dominated by it when we understand its realities and the lessons it can teach for progress and growth, for education and empathy, and for healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

There will be other difficult decisions in issues to come, and I'll continue to be hesitant about them. But I'll push past the fear to make room for knowledge, for wider perspective—and hope. And that's all I ask of you.



## THE PAINTERS OF POMPEII:

Roman Frescoes from the  
National Archaeological Museum,  
Naples

OKLAHOMA CITY  
MUSEUM OF ART

June 26 - October 17, 2021



The eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D. and the destruction of the towns around the Bay of Naples preserved extensive, richly colored frescoes on the walls of houses and villas that were only rediscovered in the 1700s. *Painters of Pompeii*, organized by the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and Mondo Mostre, brings to Oklahoma more than sixty rarely seen examples of ancient Roman fresco paintings from Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other sites buried in the disaster.

In addition to showcasing these spectacularly preserved paintings, the exhibition explores the painters of ancient Rome, how they organized and ran their businesses, how they related with their clients, and their artistic process and techniques.

The exhibition is supported in part by Oklahoma Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Info: [okcmoa.com](http://okcmoa.com)

# HOPE GRANTS REPORT

## Helping Oklahoma Organizations in Need

Oklahoma Humanities (OH) is proud to report that it administered nearly half a million dollars in emergency grant funding, distributed to cultural organizations statewide as part of COVID-19 relief efforts. Humanities Organizations Pandemic Emergency (HOPE) Grants were awarded to support general operations and staff retention in Oklahoma cultural sectors. This emergency funding supported at-risk humanities jobs and projects at museums, libraries, historic sites, and other cultural nonprofits financially impacted by COVID-19.

Funding for the grants was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act approved by Congress in 2020. Oklahoma Humanities was responsible for the redistribution of federal funding allocated to the state of Oklahoma via the NEH Office of Federal/State Partnership.

Zero percent of CARES funding was retained or used by OH for internal administrative costs. All funds were dispersed to institutions whose survival is critical to the economic and cultural lives of their communities. Organizations located in every congressional district were funded and over 150 jobs were retained.

Oklahoma Humanities Executive Director Caroline Lowery noted that OH was entrusted with disbursing CARES Act funding because of its close connections with local organizations, experience with awarding grants, and ongoing work in the public humanities throughout Oklahoma. "We were honored to provide this vital support to ensure local agencies remain resilient, robust, and resourced," Lowery stated. "This emergency funding kept Oklahomans employed and cultural organizations afloat."

**ORGANIZATIONS AWARDED FUNDING:** Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry; Oklahoma Museums Association; First Americans Museum; Opry Heritage Foundation of Oklahoma; Mustang Public Library; Stillwater Public Library; American Banjo Museum; Thick Descriptions; Arcadia Historical and Preservation Society; Price Tower Arts Center; Claremore Museum of History; Tulsa Historical Society; Choregus Productions; Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation; Cherokee National Historical Society; Ardmore Main Street Authority; City of Yukon/Mabel C. Fry Public Library; Chisolm Trail Heritage Center; National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum; Norman Cultural Connection; Historic Fort Reno; Oklahoma City Museum of Art; Tulsa Literary Coalition; Friends of Rentiesville Blues; Preservation Oklahoma; Route 66 Association; City of Ponca City (Historic Mansion and Public Library); Tulsa Chautauqua; Seminole Nation Historical Society; Oklahoma City Repertory Theatre; Her Flag; Barnsdall Public Library; Coleman Theatre; Oklahoma City Community College; Tulsa Air & Space Museum; William Fremont Harn Gardens (Harn Homestead); Tom Mix Museum.



**150**

JOBS SAVED REPRESENTING EVERY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT



**\$489,567.00**

DISTRIBUTED TO OKLAHOMA CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

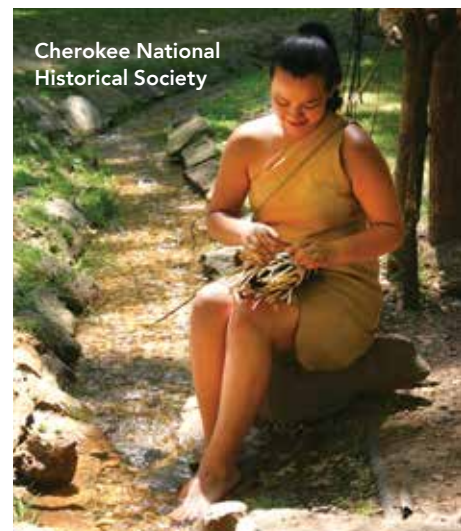


**14.5 MILLION**

OKLAHOMANS SERVED

**0%**

RETAINED FOR INTERNAL ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS



# NOTEWORTHY



## FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES Valorie Walters, Chair

The Oklahoma Humanities (OH) mission is to strengthen communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. Oklahoma Humanities is dedicated to serving all Oklahomans through sharing the vast histories, experiences, and cultures of our state and our people. As incoming Board Chair, I look forward to working with the OH staff and Board of Trustees as we continue serving Oklahomans through programming opportunities.

Thank you to the outgoing Board Chair, Scott LaMascus, for guiding us through a tumultuous time. As we enter 2021, we celebrate the joining of new Board members: Christopher Murphy, Dr. Kalenda Eaton, Dr. Nyla Khan, Dr. Shawn Holliday, Erin Peters, Jennie Buchanan, and Marcy Jarrett.

On behalf of the Oklahoma Humanities staff and Board, we welcome those who are new

readers of this publication. During the difficult time of 2020, the OH staff forged on to produce CITIZEN 2020, a 100-page double-issue that reached twice our regular audience. It was a significant endeavor. OH knew how important it was for our readers to receive this familiar magazine in an unfamiliar time.

We're proud that the CITIZEN 2020 issue illuminated topics on voting, civility, and journalism's role in a democracy, and that it opened partnerships with local public television and public radio stations to expand free subscriptions to new audiences. We also provided free class sets of magazines to 150 teachers, at a time when school resources were scarce and parents and students struggled to cope with distance learning.

This is an example of the impact and outreach Oklahoma Humanities will strive to maintain as we continue our mission to bring the best of the humanities to all Oklahomans.

## KELLY BURNS NAMED SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER

Executive Director Caroline Lowery is honored to announce that Kelly Burns has been promoted to Senior Program Officer. Kelly is in her 15<sup>th</sup> year of service with Oklahoma Humanities and has, most recently, managed our reading and discussion program and our partnership with the Smithsonian Institution to tour traveling exhibits in rural communities. In her new role, Kelly will manage our grants programs, which ensure funding for public programs across our state. Congratulations, Kelly! We are fortunate to have your dedication and commitment to the humanities in Oklahoma.



## ABOUT OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Oklahoma Humanities (OH) strengthens communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. As the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, OH provides and supports programming for the general public that uses humanities disciplines (such as history, literature, ethics, and philosophy) to deeply explore what it means to be human.

OH accepts grant applications from non-profits across the state for programs that may take the form of museum exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, oral history projects, or other

formats that best serve local communities. OH also administers programs that provide free access to cultural humanities content, including: *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine; *Let's Talk About It*, a reading and discussion series; the *BrainBox* podcast; and *Museum on Main Street*, a collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution to provide traveling exhibits in small rural communities.

Visit our website to find an event near you, read magazine archives, listen to the *BrainBox* podcast, or explore OH programs and grant opportunities. We look forward to hearing from you. (405) 235-0280 | okhumanities.org  
ohc@okhumanities.org



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Valorie Walters, Chair  
Ada

Suzette Chang,  
Vice-Chair/Secretary  
Oklahoma City

Cynthia Friedemann,  
Treasurer  
Oklahoma City

Dr. Benjamin Alpers  
University of Oklahoma

Dr. Elizabeth Bass  
Norman

Jennie Buchanan  
Altus

Dr. Dewayne Dickens  
Tulsa Community College

Dr. Kalenda Eaton  
University of Oklahoma

Erick W. Harris  
The Village

Dr. Thomas Harrison  
Oklahoma City  
Community College

Don G. Holladay  
Norman

Dr. Shawn Holliday  
Northwestern Oklahoma  
State University

David B. Hooten  
Nichols Hills

Marcy Jarrett  
Enid

Dr. Nyla Khan  
Rose State College

Dr. Thomas A. Kirk  
Norman

Dr. Sunu Kodumthara  
Southwestern Oklahoma  
State University

Dr. Scott LaMascus  
Oklahoma Christian  
University

Sarah Milligan  
Oklahoma State University

Christopher Murphy  
Northeastern State  
University

Erin Peters  
Tulsa

Alba N. Weaver  
Oklahoma City



**OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES**

424 Colcord Dr., Suite E  
Oklahoma City, OK 73102

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Oklahoma City, OK  
Permit No. 863



Brought to you by Oklahoma Humanities  
Subscribe for free: [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)

**DEADLINES** | [okhumanities.org/grants](http://okhumanities.org/grants)

- Major and Challenge Grant applications are considered twice per year
- **SPRING:** Mandatory Draft, Mar. 1 | Final, April 1
- **FALL:** Mandatory Draft, Aug. 1 | Final, Sept. 1
- Opportunity Grant applications accepted year-round
- Scholar Research Grants: Deadline, Feb. 1
- Guidelines posted on our website

**MAGAZINE** | [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)

- Free two-year subscription—register online
- Stay on our mailing list with a gift of support or contact us and request continued mailings (405) 235-0280 | [ohc@okhumanities.org](mailto:ohc@okhumanities.org)
- Join the Editor's Circle: \$500 annual gift provides free copies to Oklahoma schools, libraries, and veterans centers

**CONNECT WITH US** | [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)

- Check our calendar for upcoming events
- Sign up for e-news
- Give feedback on OH programs
- Click **DONATE** to support our work
- Explore OH magazine archives

FOLLOW US



**NEXT UP: CROSSROADS | FALL/WINTER 2021**

"Being at a crossroads" is at once a coming together and an opportunity to diverge. As a state of mind, coming to a crossroads conjures imagination, decision, action. As a sense of place, the meeting creates community and fuels the future. Oklahoma sits at the crossroads of the continental United States, a state that is urban and rural, thriving with industry and agriculture. Meet us at the crossroads and we'll contemplate the layers of meaning when roads cross and we find each other.