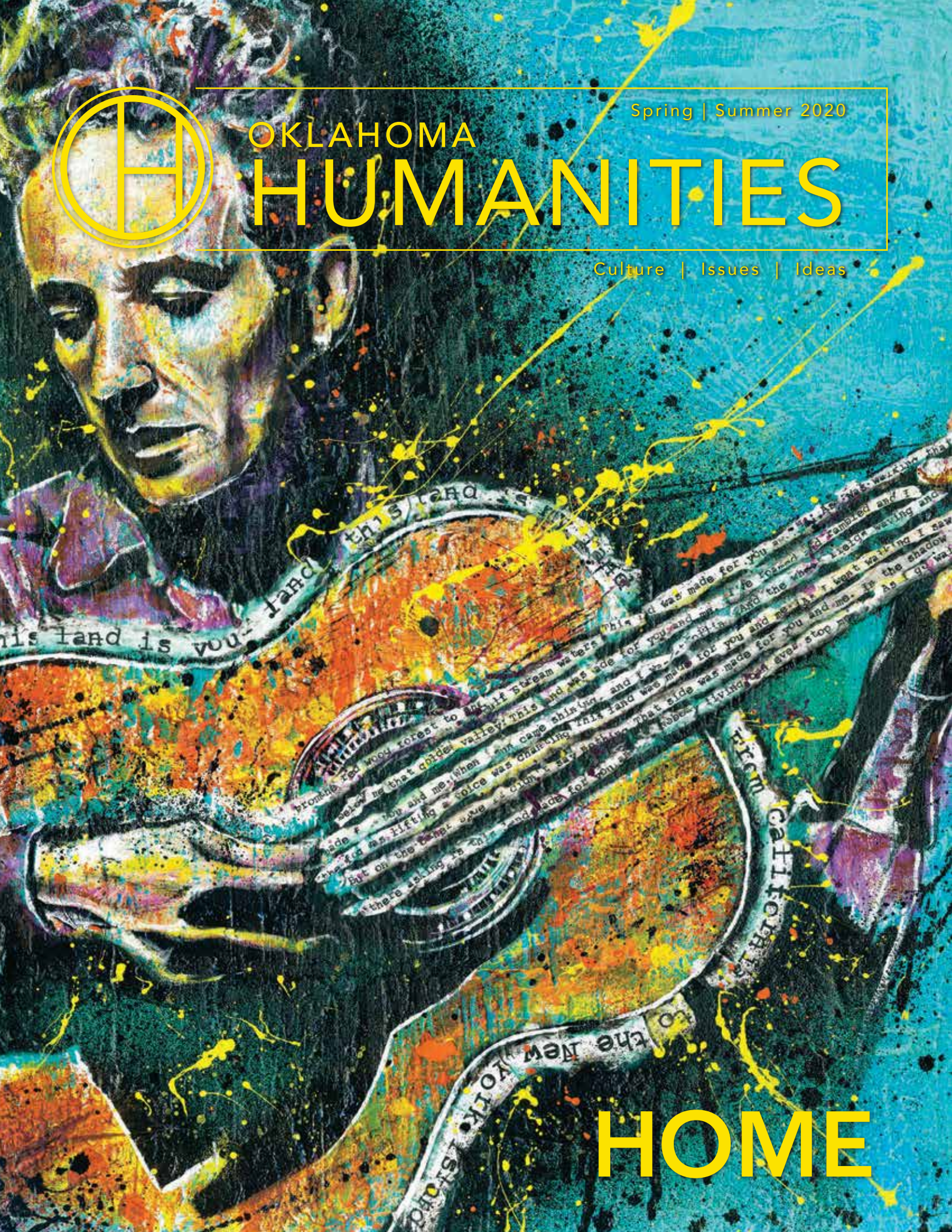




Spring | Summer 2020

# OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Culture | Issues | Ideas



this land is yours

to the New York State  
Call it home

# HOME



## CAROLINE LOWERY

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

ON THE COVER: *This Land is Your Land*, Sara Bowersock. As the owner of Point Blank Art & Design, Sara Bowersock draws on the soul of the subject to produce her distinctive style. Find her work at: [pointblankart.etsy.com](http://pointblankart.etsy.com)

## PERSPECTIVE

### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As spring sparks new growth and transformation, we here at Oklahoma Humanities (OH) are excited to announce our latest mission-building partnerships and community initiatives. These collaborative efforts will enable capacity building in rural organizations and add to the collective impact of the humanities statewide as we partner to foster an informed citizenry. As always, we hope to see you at our numerous events and public programs. Consult our extended events list to find one near you: [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)

#### OKLAHOMA 2020: INFORMED AND ENGAGED

In anticipation of the 2020 presidential election, OH is launching a statewide initiative to connect all Oklahomans to free, accessible, unbiased election coverage. Additional goals include engaging individual citizens in conversations with local media and humanities scholars about the essential role that journalism and the humanities play in creating an informed citizenry.

Activities will serve audiences in all 77 Oklahoma counties with projects that include: an expanded, election-related issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine (Fall/Winter 2020); a special “Oklahoma 2020: Informed and Engaged” series of our OH-produced *BrainBox* podcast; partnership in “Oklahoma Engaged,” a collaborative journalism project supporting nonpartisan election coverage that will live-stream across Oklahoma public-radio stations—a vast collective effort in service of public journalism that includes KGOU at The University of Oklahoma, KOSU at Oklahoma State University, KWGS at The University of Tulsa, KCCU at Cameron University, and StateImpact Oklahoma (a collaboration among NPR member stations to report on public policy issues and the intersection of government and everyday citizens).

Program details and dates will be announced on our website and via our e-newsletter as plans develop. This large, ambitious project is made possible by generous grant funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. A special thanks to Dick Pryor at KGOU for his assistance in planning this vital programming.

#### OH AND OMA CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE

The objective of this partnership is to engage with and build capacity for Oklahoma’s 500+ museums, especially those in rural or isolated areas—the small gems of local communities. The Oklahoma Museums Association (OMA) will help identify specific museums to receive funding provided by Oklahoma Humanities to facilitate professional development, training, and educational resources. For information or to apply for funding, visit the OMA website: [okmuseums.org](http://okmuseums.org). I want to thank Executive Director Brenda Granger and the OMA Board of Directors for partnering with us on this important initiative.



# OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Culture | Issues | Ideas



## CONTENTS

### HOME

SPRING | SUMMER 2020 | VOL. 13, NO. 1

#### 7 HOW FOOD CONNECTS US TO HOME

On the power of family and food.  
By Ayelet Tsabari

#### 10 AT HOME IN THE HEARTLAND

Pop culture, home, and flyover country.  
By Thomas Fox Averill

#### 16 PRESERVING HOME & COUNTRY

Edith Cherry Johnson on women, family, and suffrage.  
By Sunu Kodumthara

#### 22 FROM "HOME SWEET HOME" TO "OVER THERE"

How WWI sheet music defined the American home.  
By Kristin Griffeth

#### 28 HARDSHIP, HOPE, AND HOME

Documenting Oklahoma's Dust Bowl refugees.  
By Kimberly Roblin

#### 35 MAPPING WOODY GUTHRIE

The influence of time and place.  
By Will Kaufman

#### 42 ROADS GO EVER EVER ON

Fantasy literature's quest for home.  
By Joshua Grasso

#### 47 AT HOME IN ELM TREE

The geography of place.  
By Hayden Roberts

#### 51 WHAT HOME IS NOT

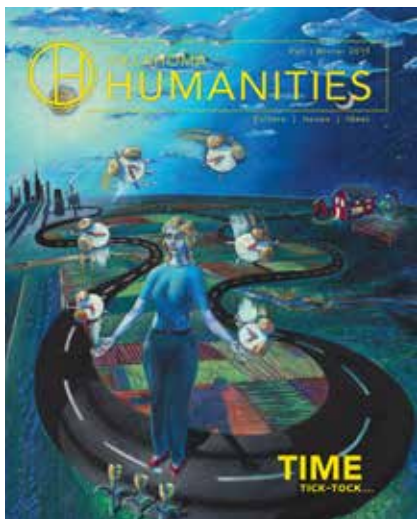
On translation—and transformation.  
By Seungho Lee

#### IN EVERY ISSUE

- 2 Perspective from the Executive Director
- 4 Post: Mail | Social Media | Messages
- 6 The Editor's Desk
- 54 Noteworthy: OH News

LEFT: Sharecropper family near Hazlehurst, Georgia, July 1937, by Dorothea Lange. Library of Congress

Reader Feedback



SEND YOUR IDEAS, opinions, and suggestions. Comment via Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram or email the editor, [carla@okhumanities.org](mailto:carla@okhumanities.org)

My gawd, and wow! Really great poetry in new [TIME] issue. I am truly inspired!

—Bill McCloud, Rogers State University

Enjoying the TIME magazine, especially the poems, so I wrote one and will share it with you [below]. The last article, “Losing Time” by Kimberly Roblin was amazing. The first half was poetic, smooth, and thoughtful. Insight and descriptions were beautiful. After my wife read it, she understood why her parents’ and her interest in ancestry did not start until after 60 years old. You picked a winner.

—G. Leon Detrich, Cushing

MY BOOK

My book is written. I’ve never seen it. Pictures and stories document the beginning, nurtured in love and safety. I’m thankful. Interrupted memories on the way to awareness.

Independence and decisions bring excitement, exploration opens. Troubles begin, pulled by emotions, pushed by pressures. Turbulence arises, direction fades, wreckage inevitable. Reevaluation taken, looking down, back, forward—and, finally, up. New destination, compass reset. It’s still choices, choices, choices, driven forward, never calm. My book remains unseen, but I write it every day. Pages turn slow then fast, no erasure. I’m comfortable with my book now, grateful to have not read the next page.

—G. Leon Detrich

The sidebar with the definition of millennialism in the TIME issue, was excellent and concise. However, there is a fourth view: panmillennialism. For many years I attended a Bible study with a very wise, very unconventional gentleman. He always claimed to be a panmillennialist. He believed everything was going to *pan out* exactly as God wanted.

—William Woodard, Bartlesville



# CROSSROADS

CHANGE IN RURAL AMERICA

## CALLING SMALL-TOWN OKLAHOMA

*Bring the Smithsonian to Your Town!*

Exhibit Touring Oklahoma  
2021-2022

ABOUT CROSSROADS: Rural America is at the heart of our national story, and crossroads are where people connect and work toward common goals.

INFORMATION:  
[okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)  
(click Grants & Programs)

CONTACT:  
Kelly Burns, Program Officer  
[kelly@okhumanities.org](mailto:kelly@okhumanities.org)

Host site applications accepted  
through Sept. 30, 2020



Smithsonian  
Institution



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
Caroline Lowery  
caroline@okhumanities.org

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
& EDITOR  
Carla Walker  
carla@okhumanities.org

PROGRAM OFFICER  
Kelly Burns  
kelly@okhumanities.org

PROGRAM OFFICER  
Christopher Carroll  
chris@okhumanities.org

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

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES  
MANAGER  
Khylee Forgety  
khylee@okhumanities.org

*Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is published biannually (March and September) by Oklahoma Humanities (OH), 424 Colcord Dr., Suite E, Oklahoma City, OK 73102, (405) 235-0280, [ohc@okhumanities.org](mailto:ohc@okhumanities.org). See pages 54-56 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](http://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](http://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](mailto:ohc@okhumanities.org).

*Oklahoma Humanities* awards include thirty-one Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists awards, including multiple first place honors for Best Writing, Best Cover, and Best PR Publication; nine Great Plains Journalism awards, including firsts for Best Magazine Feature Writing and Best Magazine Page Design, and as a finalist for the 2017 Great Plains Magazine of the Year; three 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 2020 by Oklahoma Humanities. All rights reserved.

## OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES AWARDS \$481,100 CARES ACT FUNDING

The recent CARES Act appropriated by the U.S. Congress included emergency funds for cultural organizations impacted by the coronavirus. Funds were distributed through the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to state humanities councils, who are tasked with regranting this federal support to local at-risk organizations.

Oklahoma Humanities (OH) is proud to report that Oklahoma's full \$481,100 appropriation was awarded. OH disseminated a statewide call for grant applications and almost \$700,000 in requests were received in under 48 hours. Grant funds will be used for general operating support and staff retention at historic and cultural sites, libraries, museums, and other humanities institutions across our state, whose survival is critical to the economic and cultural lives of their communities. Zero percent of CARES funding was retained for OH administrative costs.

The need is urgent and great. OH is grateful to provide this vital support to keep Oklahomans employed and to ensure our local agencies remain resilient, robust, and resourced. Watch for a full list of funded organizations and projects in the Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine.



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

## THE EDITOR'S DESK

CARLA WALKER

carla@okhumanities.org



Student reading to two little girls, 1920 home economics catalog. Cornell Univ. Library

Had this issue of our magazine been published and delivered on time (in early March), you would have read it with a vastly different perspective than you will now, given the “novel coronavirus” times in which we live. At this writing, the subject of home has a far different meaning than it did a year ago when we chose it as a topic that would be rich with meaning, one that would evoke emotion and nostalgia. Now, anything that could be said about home—local, national, global—has been hashed and rehashed: in our news feeds, at White House briefings, in the analysis of talking heads (with varying degrees of expertise), who pontificate on the unknowable and debate the statistical implications of the unpredictable. What could we say that isn't cliché?

Home is at once sanctuary and prison; home office and unemployment office; theater and school and restaurant and grand experiment in all things virtual. Not only has our perspective on home changed but also what is “essential” and “nonessential.” If we watch or read or listen to even a minimum of news, we realize that, for we lucky few, home is essential, a job is essential, good health is essential. For the grieving thousands, being at a loved one's side to say a last goodbye is essential. For the great majority of the world, essential is defined as the next meal; clean water; avoiding separation from one's children in a detention camp; shelter against the elements, shrapnel, disease, and mass violence.

This edition on home cannot possibly speak to the enormous need and disparity the COVID-19 pandemic brings into focus. What it *can* do is remind us of what is enduring, prod us to appreciate those things here and now rather than in hindsight: Like the comfort foods we remember and long for, the tastes and smells that connect us to feelings of family and home. Like the stories we tell, both fact and fiction, that are so often centered on home: making it, preserving it, finding our way back to it. Like the artistry of Woody Guthrie's music and Dorothea Lange's photography, work that defined a generation and documented circumstances equally as difficult as these, tangible evidence of human resilience that surely holds lessons for today. Reading this issue, you'll be reminded that there have always been people in authority, from advice columnists to the top brass of the military, people we trust and admire, whose commentary can influence the home front by making it political—but who can also change their firmly-held positions, out of self-interest or for the sake of a nation in need of leadership.

Literature and history, folklore and anthropology; our collective humanities will always give us insight into what came before. They teach us that if we are wise, if we cultivate adaptability and flexibility in worldviews, if we arm ourselves with the tools of critical thinking and civic participation, we have the power to envision a more cooperative evolution of community, a more expansive definition of “home.”



# HOW FOOD CONNECTS US TO HOME

*On the power of family and food*



AYELET TSABARI

## **At 35, I learned how to make Yemeni soup.**

It was winter in Vancouver, dreary and cold, and my naturopathic doctor advised me to eat more soups. I never liked Yemeni soup as a child, hated how turmeric stained my fingers yellow, scowled at the wilted cilantro, despised hilbe, a ground fenugreek paste that clouded the clear soup the way water fogged Arak, the Middle Eastern anise liquor. Hilbe emanated from your pores the following day, a tang Yemenis were often teased for. Whenever Yemeni soup was served at my grandmother's house, I sulked, refused to eat it, and left to play outside.



Yemeni soup was one of the dishes my mother had learned from her mother after she got married. It was a recipe my grandmother had been taught by her aunt who raised her in Yemen, a recipe that made it through the desert and across the sea, surviving for decades, never written down.

When my mother was a child, this soup constituted their weekly serving of meat. My grandmother gave the chicken wings to the girls so they could fly away, marry off, and the legs to the boys, so they could form the foundation of the house.



My mother and I met in Los Angeles for one week in November, where my sister and her family were living at the time. “I’m making Yemeni soup,” my mother said. “I even brought hawayij.”

I opened the brown paper bag and sniffed it, the blend of spices instantly transporting me into her kitchen.

This time I got to watch as she prepared the soup, scribbling the steps on the back of a used envelope. We stood side by side, mother and daughter, shoulders touching, gazing into the pot, waiting for the water to boil. She added chicken drumsticks and

thighs and dished the excess fat out with a spoon. She dropped in a full onion, which would later disintegrate into translucent rings, and chunks of tomato, pepper, potatoes and carrots. She sliced garlic straight into the pot, and finally, threw in an entire bouquet of cilantro. While she poured hawayij into the soup, I stirred the yellow into the water with a wooden spoon.

The aroma of Yemeni soup lingers in my kitchen for days after I cook it. I grew up trying to shake this smell off me. Now it lives in my house, a permanent stamp on my walls, a pungent greeting that welcomes my guests. When the hawayij my mother had given me in Los Angeles was finished I started making my own: grinding cardamom, cumin, turmeric, chilies and coriander in a mortar and pestle, the way my grandmother and great-grandmother had done before me. When I stand by my electric stove and pour hawayij into the pot, I’m a Jewish Yemeni woman making soup. I forget I live in a cold and strange city, ten timezones away from my family. I’m home.



One wintry Canadian night I’m stunned by an intense craving for my mother’s cake.



AYELET TSABARI was born in Israel to a large family of Yemeni descent. Her first book, *The Best Place on Earth*, won the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature and the Edward Lewis Wallant Award. This excerpt first appeared on [libhub.com](http://libhub.com) and is from her memoir *The Art of Leaving*. Copyright 2019 by Ayelet Tsabari. Excerpted by permission of Random House. All rights reserved.





Photos: Rawpixel.com

I decide to call my mother for the recipe. I need to make it, this one time. I need to know how.

It's been two years since I last made it to Israel, a year since my mother and I met in Los Angeles. So much has changed: Sean and I moved to Toronto so I could attend an MFA program in creative writing, and, after years of talking around the subject, we started trying for a baby. But Toronto is still not home, and this apartment in up-and-coming Parkdale still doesn't feel like a proper place for a family. In respites between writing, I spend hours toiling away in the kitchen, filling it up with the smells of my childhood in an effort to make the place feel homier, to make me more motherly, the only way I know how.

None of my siblings have ever dared to try making this cake. I always assumed it was too difficult. But today I'm feeling courageous, confident in my skills. I call my mother with the admission that we're more alike than I ever cared to admit. Cleaning gives me a peace of mind; a full fridge makes me feel rich; when I'm in the kitchen I don't like interruption; I cook by intuition, rarely follow a recipe. If anyone can make this cake, I can.

My mother is already in bed but she's delighted that I want to make the cake, eager to pass the recipe on. "Don't get discouraged if it doesn't work the first time," she says. "It takes practice. Keep trying."

Writing down the recipe takes a while. Some

of the ingredients, like a cube of yeast commonly used in Israel, are unavailable in Canada, others come in different packages, different sizes. And when my mother calls for four cups of flour, she doesn't mean universal-size cups. "You know the small glasses we have at home?"

"I think so."

"Your father wouldn't drink coffee in any other cup. You know the ones?"

My father passed away nearly three decades ago.

"What's the secret?" I say. "For the recipe?"

She laughs. "No secret."

I proudly tell her of my new invention, a vegan split-pea soup. She tells me she made a Chinese recipe from TV. "Chinese!" she repeats in awe. I recommend the salmon cakes I found on *Oprah* magazine. "I don't like *salomon*," she says, pronouncing it the way many Israelis do. We don't agree on everything. I find her beef too well-done. I use less oil in my cooking; choose ingredients that are natural, organic. She sneers at my decision to use chicken broth in my Yemeni soup rather than a bouillon cube.

We've been talking for almost an hour. She hasn't asked me about babies once, though I know she wants to.

Then I say, "Next time I'm in Israel I'm going to watch you make jichnoon."

"It would be my pleasure." I can hear her smile.



Judy Garland, *The Wizard of Oz*,  
1939, MGM. doctormacro.com

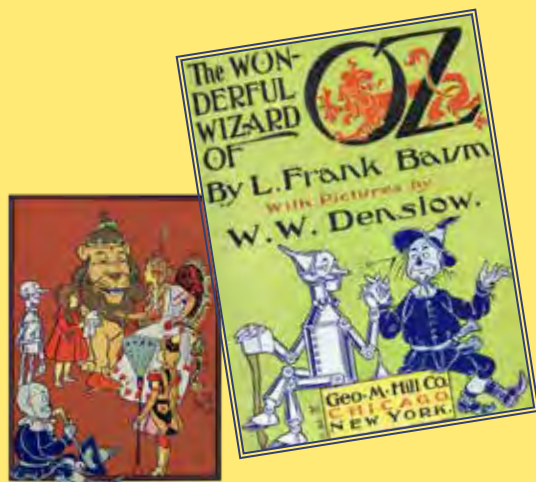


## AT HOME *Heartland* IN THE

THOMAS FOX AVERILL

### POP CULTURE, HOME, AND FLYOVER COUNTRY

**FLYOVER COUNTRY**—the flip shorthand for that great expanse between the coasts that includes the Midwest, the West, and the Great Plains states—is a repository of associations with home. So much so that, to echo an old phrase, “Home is where the *heartland* is.” Since settlers first arrived in this landlocked center of the country, American popular culture has consistently tied this region to notions of heartland and home.



# W. W. Denslow: Illustrating *The Wonderful Wizard of OZ*



L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was the first book in what became a fourteen-volume series. It sold nearly 15,000 copies within a month of its publication in September 1900 and remains the most popular of the Oz books—not least of all because it's the only one illustrated by W. W. Denslow, whose depictions of Dorothy, Toto, and all the other creatures and landscapes of Oz have become so iconic as to be inseparable from Baum's story.

Denslow wasn't simply a hired hand. Before he and Baum collaborated on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, they had already worked together on other projects, including *Father Goose: His Book*, which became the bestselling children's book of 1899. Their insistence on including full-color illustrations in *Father Goose* turned out to be crucial to its success, but it also meant they had to agree to pay all printing costs.

This was the case with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, too, which was even more lavishly illustrated. Denslow worked closely with Baum to create pictures of characters and landscapes not described in the text. He was truly a co-creator. As Denslow said, he had to "work out and invent characters, costumes, and a multitude of other details for which there is no data—and there never can be in original fairy tales."

Looking at Denslow's illustrations today, one can see how essential they were to the cultural legacy of *The Wizard of Oz* on page, stage, and screen. SOURCE: The Public Domain Review (CC BY-SA 3.0), [publicdomain.org](http://publicdomain.org). IMAGES: Library of Congress



## NO PLACE LIKE HOME

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), by L. Frank Baum, expresses a sentimental American truism that—even in Kansas—“There is no place like home.” Dorothy explains this as she and the scarecrow get acquainted:

“Tell me something about yourself and the country you came from,” said the Scarecrow. . . . So she told him all about Kansas, and how gray everything was there, and how the cyclone had carried her to this queer Land of Oz. The Scarecrow listened carefully, and said, “I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas.”

“That is because you have no brains,” answered the girl. “No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home.”


The phrase found real popularity when MGM produced *The Wizard of Oz*, its first theatrical release in 1939, with a re-release ten years later. According to the Library of Congress, it is the most watched film ever, partly because it moved to television in 1956. For years it was an annual viewing ritual for families across the country. That same year, the copyright on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* expired, so the book was released in multiple editions, often re-illustrated or condensed, to reach new audiences.

The TV debut of *Oz* followed the success of another heartland story, *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) by Laura Ingalls Wilder. This children's book, describing the difficult year of 1870 when the Ingalls family pioneered southeastern Kansas, was reissued in 1953 with new illustrations by Garth Williams. The book became a favorite and, with eight other “Little House” books, made its way into school curriculums and libraries, eventually becoming a mainstay of popular culture. So, from *Oz* to *Little House*, almost any Midwestern child of the era had a plate full of Kansas as home.

## OH, GIVE ME A HOME

“Oh, give me a home . . .” is the satisfaction expressed at the beginning of the Kansas State Song, “Home on the Range,” first published as the poem “My Western Home” in the *Smith County Pioneer* in 1873. The poem, authored by Dr. Brewster Higley, praises his comfortable situation on Beaver Creek in the Solomon River Valley near Smith Center, Kansas, where he settled in 1871. “My Western Home” was set to music by Smith Center local Dan Kelly, and then traveled the





country as a ballad soon associated with cowboys and the open range, though the original Higley lines about “home” and “range” are:

I would not exchange  
my home here to range  
Forever in azure so bright.

“Home on the Range” became nationally popularized in the 1930s when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt claimed it as his favorite song. By then, the song was completely in the oral folk tradition, with unstandardized lyrics and versions alluding to Arizona, Colorado, and even Pennsylvania. Several claims of authorship were made until the song was finally traced back to Kansas, where, in 1947, it was adopted with the original, now standardized, lyrics as the Kansas State Song. The poem-State Song version has the original chorus, which emphasizes an idyllic view of home:

A home, a home,  
Where the deer and the antelope play,  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
And the sky is not clouded all day.

#### THE LAND WE BELONG TO

Oklahoma’s iconic reference to home comes in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1943 musical, *Oklahoma!*, based on the 1930 play by Lynn Riggs originally titled *Green Grow the Lilacs*. The title song, with the lines “We know we belong to the land / And the land we belong to is grand!” is a celebration of pre-statehood Oklahoma. Playwright Riggs, born in 1899, grew up on a ranch in what was then called “Indian Territory,” a life built on hard work, music, and a thriving landscape lovingly described by one of his characters, Laurey:

If we ever had to leave this here place, Aunt Eller,  
I’d shore miss it. I like it. I like that thicket down  
by the branch whur the ’possums live, don’t  
you? And the way we set around in the evenings

in thrashin’ time, a-eatin’ mushmelons and  
singin’, and oh! lots of things! Runnin’ to the  
cellar in a storm, and them yellor trumpet  
tomaters even, you make jam out of, and the  
branch and the pond to skate on.

The settings and time periods portrayed in these pop culture classics—from the *Little House* of 1870, to the “Home on the Range” of 1871, to the *Kansas-Oz* of 1900, to *Green Grow the Lilacs* of 1900—make for humble celebrations of home, mirroring the American spirit of pioneering, of homesteading, of literally *making* a home.

#### HOME IS WHERE THE HEARTLAND WAS

Though these positive images of home celebrate the past and are now essential parts of our popular culture, each became part of the popular culture during difficult times. The 1931 debut of *Green Grow the Lilacs* came two years after the stock market crash and at the beginning of the Dust Bowl. Suddenly, heartlanders like Laurey had to *leave* their homes. The Dust Bowl displaced 2.5 million people, “the largest migration in American history” (“Surviving the Dust Bowl,” *American Experience*). “Okies” became poster people for the homeless and displaced. The song “Oklahoma,” given the time, might have been written in past tense: “The land we belonged to was grand,” as the very soil that sustained home was blowing east.

Similarly, “Home on the Range” was popularized by FDR during the Great Depression. Brewster Higley’s “Oh, give me a home” could have been an appeal to higher powers for a place no longer beset by the forces of economics and weather, more accurately stated as: “Oh, give me a home *again!*” The release of *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939, at the end of the Dust Bowl, might change Dorothy’s positive assertion into cold statement: “There was no place like home.”



In fact, population demographics tell us that the nostalgic, pioneered *homestead* was disappearing even before economic and environmental hard times. In 1875, 75% of the U.S. population lived in rural areas. Just 50 years later, by 1925, half of the population lived in urban America. By the 1990s, 75% of Americans were urban dwellers. With the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and the years following World War II, the nation moved away from the heartland. Home went from farm to city and suburb. The gray flannel suit (referencing Sloan Wilson's 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*) replaced denim bib overalls. Since the mid-1970s, demographers have reported that 80% of all Americans live within an hour's drive of a coast.

### LONGING FOR HOME

Poet William Stafford was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, in 1914. A conscientious objector during World War II and a lifelong advocate for peace, he began publishing poetry collections in 1960 with *West of Your City*. That title says much about his attitude, his willingness to celebrate the rural. His plain-spoken, deceptively simple language reinforces his sense of place. Stafford's next book, *Traveling Through the Dark* (1962), won the National Book Award and launched a prolific career that included over 50 books and chapbooks and, in 1970, earned him a stint as U.S. Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (now designated the Poet Laureate of the United States). That same year, he published *Allegiances*, beginning the title poem with an injunction:

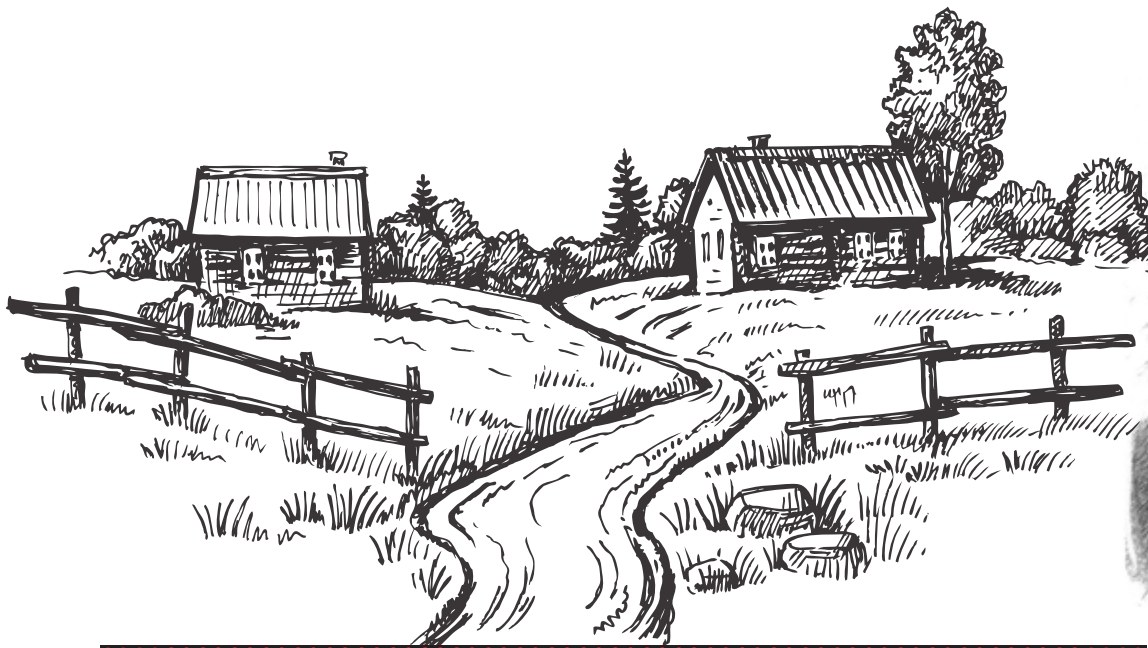
It is time for all the heroes to go home  
if they have any, time for all of us  
common ones  
to locate ourselves by the real things  
we live by.

Stafford invokes home as a place we return to, a compass by which we "locate ourselves." The sentiments are particularly poignant, given the outmigration from rural spaces and the increasing urbanization of our world. We often feel that we live both anywhere and everywhere, rather than being grounded in real things. But after time away, searching for something glittering or enchanted, we eventually feel the nostalgia for home that is so prevalent in popular culture. We may long to live anywhere and everywhere, but, as Stafford admonishes, we might live more simply and safely, and with more integrity, if we can "love where we are / sturdy for common things."

The flip side of anywhere-everywhere is a home, a heartland. Stafford begins his poem "One Home" (1953) with: "Mine was a Midwest home—you can keep your world." His reference to "your world" may point to our modern inclination to put style, glamour, income, and mobility above landscape, rootedness, family ties, and the simplicity celebrated in Stafford's poem:

Kicking cottonwood leaves we ran  
toward storms.  
Wherever we looked the land would  
hold us up.

This is a place where people say "hello," call each other "friend." A place where we are so comfortable, so *at home*, that we feel like the sun shines—especially—on *our town*.



Laura Ingalls Wilder, c. 1885  
[PD] Wikimedia Commons

## HOME AGAIN

Home has always been the comfort of place, of tradition, of acceptance, somewhere that shelters us from the world *out there*. Like Dorothy, we may feel that we're "not in Kansas anymore," torn from home by the exigencies of economy, weather, and opportunity. We may feel lost, trying to find our way back—just like the people who came out of the American experience of pioneering and settlement, and the hard times of the 1920s and 1930s—people who embraced the iconography of home in *Oz* and "Home on the Range" and *Little House and Oklahoma!*

Perhaps it is time to go home, to come home, to resettle. Long ago, people came to the New World seeking home. Our popular culture reveals that we seek it again and again. We *are* home makers. We need a happy ending, a home based on a true present, not a nostalgic past.

At the end of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Aunt Em is watering cabbages when she sees Dorothy running toward her. She asks the child where she's been:

"The Land of Oz," said Dorothy gravely.  
"And here is Toto, too. And oh, Aunt Em! I'm so glad to be home again!"

THOMAS FOX AVERILL is Professor Emeritus of English at Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, where he taught courses in Creative Writing and Kansas Studies for 37 years. An O. Henry Award-winning short story writer, he is the author of 10 books, most recently the novel *Found Documents from the Life of Nell Johnson Doerr*. In 2010 he created the Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection at Washburn's Mabee Library, donating his large collection of Kansas literature and supporting materials.

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

- The American Film Institute Catalog entries on *Oklahoma!* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* include movie synopses, film history, and cast lists. [aficatalog.afi.com](http://aficatalog.afi.com)
- "Oklahoma!" Dianna Everett, *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. History of the stage and film adaptations of Lynn Riggs' original play *Green Grow the Lilacs*, which led to the adoption of the Oklahoma State Song. [okhistory.org](http://okhistory.org)
- "Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder is not the Same When You're a Parent," Amy Lifson, *NEH Humanities Magazine*, July/Aug. 2014. Reconsidering the *Little House* books and separating fact from fiction. [neh.gov/humanities](http://neh.gov/humanities)



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

Want to meet your financial and estate planning goals *and* enrich the cultural life of all Oklahomans? Learn how you can achieve your objectives and leave a legacy of support by making a lifetime or testamentary charitable gift to Oklahoma Humanities. For information, email Executive Director Caroline Lowery: [caroline@okhumanities.org](mailto:caroline@okhumanities.org).

# Preserving Home and Country

SUNU KODUMTHARA

*Edith Cherry Johnson  
on Women, Family, and Suffrage*







In a fifty-year newspaper career, Edith Cherry Johnson became an influential voice upholding the values of domesticity and appropriate roles for men and women. As a social and political conservative, she argued against a woman's right to vote. In her view, the most important work for women was to preserve and protect the very nucleus of civilization: home and family. But as the country entered World War I in 1917 and "woman suffrage" legislation passed in Oklahoma in 1918, a changing American society would challenge her convictions.

Ironically, Edith Johnson's path was different than the one she prescribed for other women. She attended The Ohio State University before her mother's death compelled her to return home to care for younger siblings. Hoping to find employment, Johnson's father moved the family to Oklahoma in 1903. His death forced Johnson to look for work and, in 1908, she was hired as society editor for the state's primary newspaper, *The Daily Oklahoman*.

Though Johnson never married and never had children, her weekly columns administered advice on marriage and the home. Writing for a specific audience of white middleclass Oklahomans, she set clear standards and created a reputation as an authority on family and society. Her columns were so successful that she published a collection in 1920 as the book *Illusions and Disillusions: Touching Upon Topics in Every Day Life*.

#### PLAIN MEN AND GOOD WOMEN

Johnson advocated for traditional gender roles and regularly cautioned women against allowing careers and politics to poison the safety of the home. After all, she reminded readers, "It makes little difference what a big figure you cut in the world, if you cut a poor one at home." Anything that distracted from family issues was a threat. For men, Johnson described the most successful husband as "plain":

Plain men . . . have not suffered from unpopularity and their plainness has not been an appreciable handicap to their success in either business or society.

A man's primary task was to provide for his wife and children. He could be aggressive or greedy, as long as it was for the good of the family.

A woman, on the other hand, was responsible for the happiness of her spouse and family. She must take care of the home, provide a palatable meal, and apply "a practical knowledge of human nature" to understand how tired her husband would be after a long day:

[It is a] woman's business to work with humanity to train her children, to uphold ideals to her husband, to make life and living just as fine and beautiful as she possibly can.

Johnson put far more pressure on women for making a good home and successful marriage. "Marriage is essentially woman's business," she asserted, "just as creating material wealth is man's."

Home was woman's domain. She created the atmosphere that helped or hindered the health of her family. Any failure in her husband or children was a direct reflection of her deficiencies as a wife and mother. Johnson sincerely believed that every woman had the ability to refine, encourage, and inspire a man to be the best version of himself. If a man was selfish and ruined his marriage, the blame fell squarely on his mother, for she taught him that "nothing in the world was good enough for her little tin god of a son." Thus, the tone set by a woman ultimately affected all those around her and for generations to come.

Johnson admonished women to be careful with activities outside of the home. While charity work and club activities were opportunities for women to extend their feminine influence, masculine spaces such as business and politics could potentially harm a woman and, eventually, her family. These spaces, overflowing with greed, competition, and power, were not meant for women. "There are certain separate and distinct feminine attributes," Johnson wrote, "which enter into the making of the womanly woman." A good woman recognized the differences in men and women and respected their appropriate roles.



Library of Congress images: **1.** National Anti-Suffrage Association, c. 1911, Harris & Ewing. **2.** Mrs. Ewing picketing White House, 1917, Harris & Ewing. **3.** Woman Suffrage headquarters, Cleveland, 1912, from League of Women Voters Records. **4.** Suffrage Straw Ride, c. 1910-1915, Bain News Service. **5.** Woman Suffrage demonstration, 1917, Harris & Ewing. **6.** Suffrage Picket Parade, 1917, Harris & Ewing. **7.** Woman Suffrage in political campaign, 1914, Harris & Ewing. Woman at far left holds a copy of the *Suffragist* newspaper.



VOTES FOR WOMEN

Schlesinger Library, Harvard Univ.

VOTES FOR WOMEN

Nevertheless, Johnson understood that some women needed to work to survive—as she did. Businesswomen were not without hope; they understood the importance of budgets, dressed well, and respected others—all characteristics of a good wife. If a woman did well in business, Johnson speculated, “men who come to know her naturally will reach the conclusion that she could also make good in home life.”

### THE DOMESTIC FRONT

By the time Johnson became a columnist in 1908, the suffrage movement was established and enjoyed some success in the American West. The state legislatures of Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah had passed equal suffrage laws. In Oklahoma, suffragists and Socialists had joined together to fight for similar laws. However, conservative Americans believed Socialism was a threat to American identity. This, coupled with the fear that allowing women to vote would destroy the American family, added to the perception that the suffrage movement was radical.

After dispensing advice for almost a decade, change was coming for Edith Johnson and her readers. World War I challenged the peace of home and country, creating demands for work and service on an unprecedented level. “The world must be made safe for democracy,” President Wilson proclaimed, and American men and women were expected to serve and contribute. Johnson encouraged war work, believing it would be of great benefit to American women:

The opportunities for genuine service and broad experience the war is offering or rather thrusting upon women will work to their everlasting good, if they do not lose their heads.

Just as business could help train women to be good wives, war work would allow women to have a positive impact on the country’s war effort. What Johnson would not tolerate, however, was discussion of equal suffrage:

All this feminist talk is extremely baffling and mysterious to the old-fashioned women among us who still cling to the belief that doing one’s simple duty is a real virtue.

That some suffragists asserted their fight for political equality was as important as war work flabbergasted Johnson. Those who fought for the vote while the war raged were un-American:

Would they not be finer and nobler patriots if they were to say among themselves, “Let us for the period of the war put aside our propaganda and throw our whole time, strength and talent into pushing the work of the war”?

Suffrage was the very thing Johnson feared would permanently draw women outside of the home. As she explained, suffrage was not merely the act of voting; it required study and research, forcing women to sacrifice time at home. She and other anti-suffragists contended that women did not have the intellect or interest required for politics, nor did they belong in a sphere dominated by men. Johnson maintained that a woman’s role was clearly within the safety of domesticity:

No matter how popular a woman may be in society, how forceful in club work, philanthropy and politics, her achievements are a negligible quantity if she is not gracious, gentle and lovable in her own circle.

### GOOD MOTHERS, GOOD CITIZENS

The suffrage movement was undeterred by anti-suffragist protests and rhetoric. Across the country, state legislatures passed equal suffrage laws regardless of claims that women did not belong in politics. The tidal wave of change forced anti-suffragists to reexamine their perspectives and consider how traditional women could adapt to the modern world.

Johnson openly admitted her trepidations about suffrage in one of her columns: “I have feared that women would not take more trouble to find out for whom they were voting.” What if women were indifferent and did not participate? What if they were ignorant of political issues and candidates? What if women voted, but social problems grew worse? Within the same editorial Johnson considered how politics and society would *improve* if good women participated:



10



11



8. Suffragettes with flag, c. 1910-1915, Bain News Service, Library of Congress (LOC). 9. "Votes For Women" banner, Schlesinger Library, Harvard Univ. 10. "Votes for Women: International Suffragists' Song," Ed Markel, composer, 1916, LOC. 11. "When Helen Casts Her Ballot," Peter J. Bast, composer, 1916, LOC. 12. Vote for the Woman Suffrage Amendment in November 1915, poster stamp by Caroline Katzenstein; Ann Lewis Women's Suffrage Collection [PD] Wikimedia Commons

If they will now accept the obligation of citizenship . . . in the spirit that they have promised . . . then I will say, let women have a generous part in the administration of government.

Rather than succumb to her fears, Johnson quickly transitioned from anti-suffragist to suffragist by seeing the vote as the meeting place of a woman's calling within the home and the responsibility of citizenship. Such a woman could now elevate families everywhere, creating a society that reflected the safe and stable environment of the American home.

For critics who feared that women would sacrifice their roles as mothers for the responsibility of suffrage, Johnson countered that mothers were essential to the political arena. The American mother, she wrote, "represents one of the sanest and most stable elements in society, [and] the state calls her to fulfill the duties of citizenship." Mothers now had both a public and private duty:

As a member of the commonwealth with the right of suffrage, it becomes her woman's responsibility to assist in the ordering, the maintenance, the defense and the progress of the state.

An intelligent woman with the vote would be of great service to her country. Johnson redefined suffrage as a sacred duty a woman could use to purify politics. A good woman could not be a good wife or mother without



proving to be a good citizen first. In fact, if a woman chose not to vote, she was “not a good citizen or a patriot” and, further, she was “a slacker.” Just as a woman could not shy away from her responsibilities within her home, she could not avoid her obligations as an American: “She must take a lively interest in all public and political questions in order to fulfill duties as a citizen.”

Despite her growing, boisterous support for suffrage, Johnson feared the corruption of politics she witnessed among men. If men were vulnerable, how much more were women? To purify politics as she hoped, Johnson advised women to “take into it a spirit of calm and thoughtful consideration and womanly gentleness.”

Now committed to the cause of suffrage, Johnson urged women to educate themselves on the issues and what would be beneficial to their community. Women should be concerned with developing the nation’s resources and, most important, the physical, moral, and mental health of young people. A responsible woman was concerned about everyone:

The modern woman does not believe that physical motherhood is her whole duty. She realizes the duty of a community motherhood, a spiritual motherhood that takes into account the welfare of the whole group.

This is what it meant to be a good woman citizen.

Although Johnson promoted traditional roles, she grew to accept new responsibilities for women—so long as those responsibilities had a clear link to the values of home and the

preservation of the American family. As the world changed around her, Edith Johnson held fast to the belief that family was the cornerstone of society and a woman, its backbone. Suffrage provided women an opportunity to extend the influence of civilization and stability to the outside world in a way that men could not.

SUNU KODUMTHARA is an Associate Professor of History at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, specializing in the fields of the American West, Women’s History, and U.S. History. She has also proudly served as a board member for Oklahoma Humanities since 2017.

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

- *Votes for Women: A Portrait of Persistence*, National Portrait Gallery. Outlines the 80-year movement by women to gain the vote. [artsandculture.google.com](https://artsandculture.google.com)
- *Illusions and Disillusions: Touching Upon Topics in Every Day Life*, Edith C. Johnson, 1920. Read the book collection of Johnson’s advice columns on Internet Archive. [archive.org](https://archive.org)
- *Shall Not Be Denied: Women Fight for the Vote*, Library of Congress. Exhibit celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. History narrative and images of original manuscripts, speeches, period photos, and ephemera. [loc.gov/exhibitions](https://loc.gov/exhibitions)
- *Blazing a Trail* exhibition, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, opening November 2020. Traces women’s suffrage in the American West. [nationalcowboymuseum.org](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org)



Ida B. Wells, 1891.  
Library of Congress

Teacher-turned-journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) documented lynchings and advocated for civil rights and black women’s suffrage. She was editor and co-owner of the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* and one of only two women who signed the petition for formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Learn more about African American women who championed women’s suffrage in the Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *Oklahoma Humanities*, an expanded, pre-presidential election edition coming in September. For your free print copy, subscribe: [okhumanities.org](https://okhumanities.org)



*From*  
**“HOME SWEET HOME”**  
*to*  
**“OVER THERE”** KRISTIN GRIFFEATH

*How WWI sheet music defined the American home*



As clouds of war darkened the horizon, in 1914, music expressed the nation's fears, hopes, and prayers. The history of World War I is told in more than 35,000 copyrighted musical works. Before the golden age of radio in the 1920s, music performed live, in the family sitting room or in grand concert halls, was a prominent form of entertainment. Sheet music titles, lyrics, and cover art highlight the American experience of the war from both soldier and civilian perspectives. As Americans defined the struggle, a vision of “home”—and American identity—emerged in counterpoint.

#### FRAMING “HOME SWEET HOME”

“Keep The Home Fires Burning” by Welsh composer Ivor Novello was a hit in 1915, sung by Americans at home and abroad. The lyrics address soldiers, families, and sweethearts, advocating a typically British “stiff upper lip”:

Keep the Home-fires burning,  
While your hearts are yearning,  
Though your lads are far away  
They dream of Home;  
There's a silver lining  
Through the dark cloud shining,  
Turn the dark cloud inside out,  
Till the boys come Home.

America stood at a crossroads as the war in Europe intensified: Was it better to maintain peace, as Woodrow Wilson campaigned, or join the Allied fight? Music joined the debate with songs that alternately argued for isolationism or preparedness. Titles like “If They Want To Fight, All Right (But “Neutral” Is My Middle Name)” were common.

The cover for W.R. Williams’ “We Stand For Peace While Others War” (1914) features a somber photograph of President Wilson bordered by illustrated doves. An excerpt of Wilson’s public address, delivered on the war’s outbreak, appears on the inside page: “Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality.” Wilson’s message is reinforced in the song’s chorus:

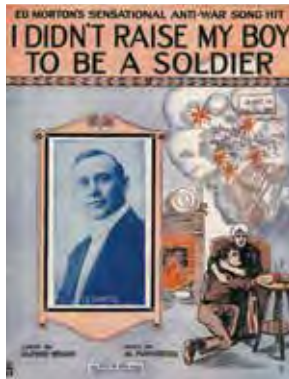
We stand for peace, while others war,  
Tho' war we know is sin,  
But Uncle Sam's a neutral pow'r  
And we must stand by him.  
We can't take sides;  
for all the world will suffer for this wrong.  
And we'll pray that ev'ry nation,  
right their wrongs by arbitration,  
And that “Home Sweet Home”  
will be their National Song.

The concluding lines refer to a nineteenth-century parlor song, “Home, Sweet Home” by British composer Henry R. Bishop. Embraced by soldiers, first in the Civil War and again in The Great War, the song’s ubiquitous popularity established a trope of home—rural, humble, brimming with love and nostalgia:

‘Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,  
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home!  
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,  
Which seek thro' the world is not met with elsewhere:

Home, home,  
sweet, sweet home,  
There's no place like home,  
There's no place like home.

Imagery evoking this spirit of home would be summoned again and again by WWI-era composers.



### TURNING TO PATRIOTISM

Before the U.S. joined the war, American popular music counselled, at most, “preparedness.” Some songs communicated overt pacifism. The popular anti-war song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy To Be A Soldier” by Albert Piantadosi linked sentiment and motherhood:

There’d be no war today,  
If mothers all would say,  
“I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier.”

In the cover art, a son crouches at his mother’s feet, her knitting needles set aside so that her arms wrap protectively around him. A warm fire blazes in the hearth and clouds of war hover ominously above their heads. Home is depicted as simultaneously valuable and vulnerable. Selling over 700,000 copies in just eight weeks, the song was a sensation.

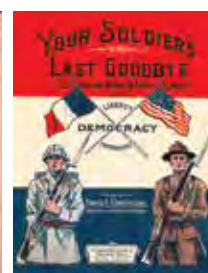
When the United States entered the war in April 1917, music flooded the market, as plentiful as war posters that plastered American cities, urging young men to enlist and families to support the cause. Scores and recordings of the Piantadosi song were quickly pulled. Replacement titles like “I Didn’t Raise My Boy To Be A Slacker” signaled a sea change in public opinion.

Cover art reinforces the pro-war message. The illustration for “America Here’s My Boy” shows mother and son resolute, no longer embracing each other but facing forward, braving what lies ahead. Mother proffers her uniformed son, submitting him for service. Background images of home are replaced with the outline of the United States, supplanting national security over private fears.

As soldiers enlisted and traveled overseas, American musical life transformed. Broadway shows and musical revues adopted war themes with titles like *Over The Top*. American orchestras downplayed or dropped German compositions from programs (the Metropolitan Opera Company completely avoided German operas), opening or closing concerts with performances of “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Music was a creative outlet for citizens, but songs took on a serious role during the war, too. John Philip Sousa, who composed several war-themed works, understood music’s power to move citizens: “Lecture me, write editorials at me, and I may be convinced that preparedness is necessary, but sing me a song that contains your message and I WILL BE won over at once!”





For Americans at home, singing was a way to convey patriotism in private and public settings. Joining voices around the piano at home or singing along to war-themed recordings bolstered spirits and connection to the soldiers so far away. Sing-alongs energized Liberty Bond rallies, classical concerts were peppered with nationalistic tunes, making it nearly impossible to attend a musical event without encountering war music of one kind or another. Music bound the nation together in support, despite the continued sacrifices war would entail.

#### FOR THE BOYS "OVER THERE"

Live music was available to troops thanks to more than 35,000 YMCA volunteers. In addition to plays, lectures, and movies, the YMCA organized performances by musical groups such as the "Y Minstrels," "Just Girls," and the "Scrap Iron Jazz Band." The YMCA officially trained song leaders for the Navy, Army, and Marines, who organized soldier sing-alongs with mini songbooks that included lyrics to some of the most popular songs of the war.

Music played a critical role in helping soldiers deal with the stress of combat and was valued as a military asset in the battle to uphold morale. General John J. Pershing remarked, "Music . . . [is] as essential to the soldiers as food and sleep." Music helped servicemen battle homesickness, exhaustion, and depression. Never had the Army so deliberately involved music in the war effort. Song books were distributed by the Commission on Training Camp Activities, band scores were purchased and practiced, and hundreds of song leaders were strategically placed to facilitate unison singing by thousands of servicemen.

The 1918 hit "K-K-K-Katy" was a comedic favorite, depicting a stuttering soldier's declaration of love. Written by Army song leader Geoffrey O'Hara, "K-K-K-Katy" was a perfect vehicle for alternative lyrics created by the soldiers:

#### *K-K-K-Katy (original)*

K-K-K-Katy, beautiful Katy,  
You're the only g-g-g-girl  
that I adore.  
When the m-m-m-moon shines  
Over the cowshed,  
I'll be waiting at the  
k-k-k-kitchen door.

#### *K-K-K-K.P. (alternate)*

K-K-K-K.P. Dirty old K.P.,  
That's the only Army job  
that I abhor.  
When the m-m-m-moon shines  
Over the guardhouse,  
I'll be mopping up the  
k-k-k-kitchen floor.



CENTER: Latham Litho. & Ptg., 1917, Library of Congress. COVERS: Special thanks to the following collections for lending sheet music images: WWI Sheet Music Collection, Library of Congress (loc.gov). Joseph M. Bruccoli Great War Collection, Univ. of South Carolina (digital.library.sc.edu/collections). DeVincent Collection, Indiana Univ. Lilly Library (webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/).



While the overwhelming majority were positive, not all wartime songs were upbeat or funny. Some were sentimental or religious, evoking the values and people back home. Songs like “I Want To Go Home” by Lieutenant Gitz Rice of Canada spoke to a soldier’s fear and fervent desire to return to family. Rice penned his song in 1915 at the infamous Battle of Ypres, and New York publisher Leo Feist produced the sheet music version in 1917. Lyrics suggest a more jaded view of war with firsthand knowledge of combat:

I want to go home, I want to go home;  
 The “Whizz-bangs” and Shrapnel around me do roar,  
 I don’t want this old war any more;  
 Take me far o’er the sea,  
 Where the “Alleman”\* cannot get me, (\*Prussian guard)  
 Oh, my! I don’t want to die,  
 I want to go ‘ome.

From a soldier’s vantage, “home” represented peace and war’s end. Sentimental songs voiced longing for home in a safe, brief manner, allowing soldiers to return to battle with renewed focus.

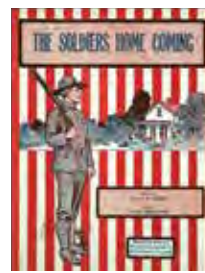
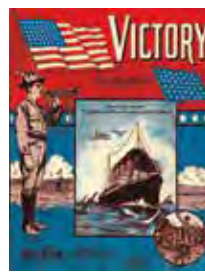
### COMING HOME

Sheet music mirrored the hopes and fears of Americans. Images of home were often directly juxtaposed with those of war. Anxiety expressed in titles like “After The War Is Over (Will There Be Any Home Sweet Home?),” illustrated with vulnerable women at home, contrasted with “When The Boys Come Home” and its stoic soldiers marching in formation with the clouds of war behind them.

Cover artists painted images of home as a backdrop for mothers, wives, sweethearts, and children who patiently waited for “the boys” to return. The practices of letter writing, knitting, and watching hopefully were presented as proper, dignified activities for women at home—though American women were also taking active roles in Europe as nurses, volunteers, and telephone operators. Sheet music portrayed these working women dressed in uniform, actively serving donuts as “Salvation Lassies” or tending to soldiers as “Red Cross Girlies.”

Advertisements for war songs appearing in *The Saturday Evening Post* proclaimed, “A nation that sings can never be beaten—each song is a milestone on the road to victory.” Music-making was as critical to the morale of citizens at home as it was to soldiers abroad. George M. Cohan’s “Over There” captured the spirit of the country with a chorus that admonished:





So prepare, say a pray'r,  
 send the word, send the word to beware.  
 We'll be over, we're coming over,  
 And we won't come back till it's over over there.

The use of words like “we,” “we’ll,” “we’ve,” and “we’re” encouraged Americans to join voices in support of the war. Lyrics referencing “our boys” pulled heartstrings and helped citizens adopt soldiers as national sons, reinforcing the sacrifices of individuals and connection to a national identity.

When the war finally reached its conclusion in 1918, sheet music production shifted to celebrate victory with songs like “Welcome Home, Laddie Boy, Welcome Home!” Cover art paints a patriotic scene as a ship loaded with soldiers returns home to a flag-waving crowd. The exuberant march chorus proclaims:

Here's the way I feel about it,  
 From the roof I want to shout it,  
 Welcome home, Laddie Boy, welcome home!

From the outbreak of war to its dénouement, the sheet music industry's portrayals of home reflected American experience. Ideas about the American home—and the citizens inhabiting it—were forever changed, immutably altered by the nation's debut on an international stage.

KRISTIN GRIFFEATH is Associate Professor of Music at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and Guest Curator for the 2013 exhibition *Harmonies on the Homefront* at the National WWI Museum and Memorial.

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

- “A Sudden Belligerent,” WWI Sheet Music Collection, Library of Congress. How WWI-era songwriters reflected patriotism and pro-war sentiments. loc.gov
- “Over There,” Library of Congress. George M. Cohan’s rousing success and the song President Wilson called “a genuine inspiration to all American manhood.” loc.gov
- “The Story behind WWI’s Greatest Anthem,” Michael Williams, Oct. 8, 2014, *The Conversation*. How “Keep the Home Fires Burning” became a WWI sensation. theconversation.com
- Listen to WWI-era songs (including “It’s A Long Way To Tipperary,” “K-K-K-Katy,” “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” and “Over There”) at Internet Archive. archive.org



# HARDSHIP HOPE AND HOME

**DOROTHEA LANGE:**  
DOCUMENTING  
OKLAHOMA'S  
DUST BOWL  
REFUGEES

KIMBERLY ROBLIN

Dorothea Lange, Resettlement  
Administration photographer, in  
California, Feb. 1936





er name is not as familiar as John Steinbeck or Woody Guthrie, but it should be; they voiced the pulse of a nation, but she took its picture. Dorothea Lange humanized the Dust Bowl and Depression in a way novels and songs could not. Employed by the Farm Security Administration (FSA), she photographed rural poverty and brought it into searing focus. Traveling the country, she documented migrant workers, farmers, and laborers, many of whom were Oklahoma Dust Bowl refugees. No matter the state—Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Oregon—the destination was ultimately the same: the intersection of hardship, hope, and, surprisingly, home.

We see home in Lange's photographs because home is not just a place, it is a perspective. For many of us, it is our earliest and most enduring. We see and interpret the world through this prism; it informs our opinions, decisions, and actions. If we explore Lange's work through this universal lens, a complex and compelling narrative emerges. The connections to home—for Lange, her subjects, the viewing public, and particularly Oklahomans—become clear.

Lange's childhood experience of home generated the deep empathy that ultimately changed the course of her career and became central to its success. Born in 1895, in Hoboken, New Jersey, Lange enjoyed a privileged early life. Her father was a lawyer and active in local politics, while her mother championed the arts. At age seven, young Dorothea contracted polio, a painful and paralyzing disease. Suddenly, home was not always comforting; it was confining. After weeks of isolation indoors, she emerged with a permanent limp—and an ability to recognize the “walking wounded.” Her concept of home shifted again when her parents separated and divorced. Home, she learned, could be taken away—but it could also be created. Home was not something you *had*, it was something you *made*.

#### THE MAKINGS OF A STORYTELLER

As a daring and unconventional young woman in early twentieth-century America, Dorothea studied photography at Columbia University and, at age 23, struck out on a grand tour of the globe. When bad luck stranded her in San Francisco, she decided to stay. After a brief stint at Marsh & Company, a luggage store that also sold cameras and developed photographs, she opened her own studio and quickly became one of the elite photographers in the San Francisco Bay area. Her wealthy and prominent clients paid well and she enjoyed a financial stability somewhat rare in her bohemian arts community.

**DUST STORMS RAGE FROM KANSAS WEST FAR AS CALIFORNIA**

**Two Planes Make Forced Landings As Black Blizzard Hides**

**PRAY FOR MOISTURE**  
Dust-Bowl Community Says  
Flea Was Answered Last



1



2



3



4



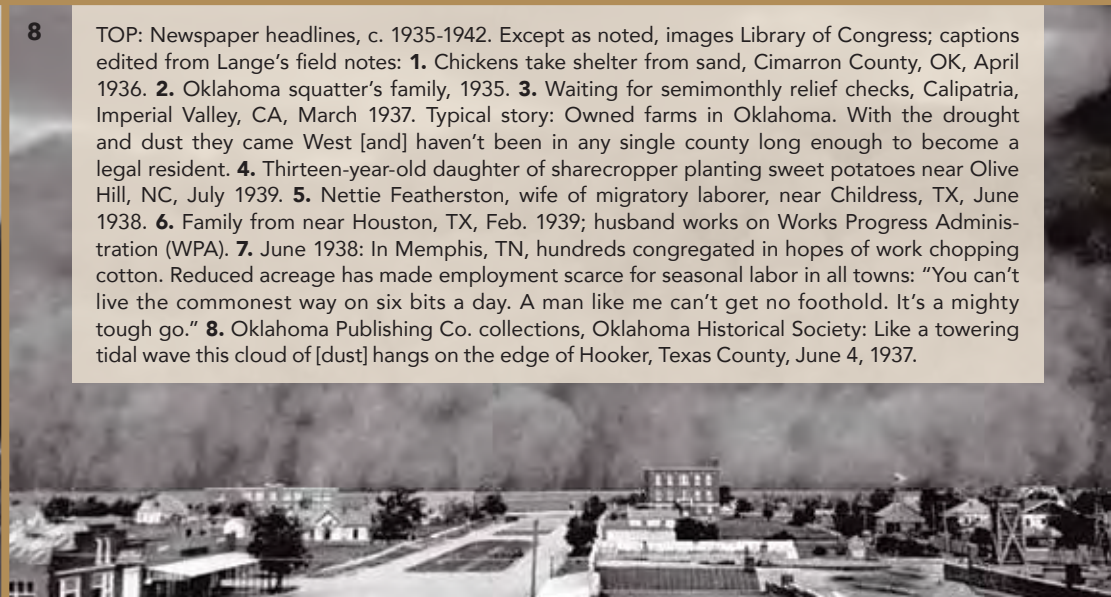
5



6



7



8

TOP: Newspaper headlines, c. 1935-1942. Except as noted, images Library of Congress; captions edited from Lange's field notes: **1.** Chickens take shelter from sand, Cimarron County, OK, April 1936. **2.** Oklahoma squatter's family, 1935. **3.** Waiting for semimonthly relief checks, Calipatria, Imperial Valley, CA, March 1937. Typical story: Owned farms in Oklahoma. With the drought and dust they came West [and] haven't been in any single county long enough to become a legal resident. **4.** Thirteen-year-old daughter of sharecropper planting sweet potatoes near Olive Hill, NC, July 1939. **5.** Nettie Featherston, wife of migratory laborer, near Childress, TX, June 1938. **6.** Family from near Houston, TX, Feb. 1939; husband works on Works Progress Administration (WPA). **7.** June 1938: In Memphis, TN, hundreds congregated in hopes of work chopping cotton. Reduced acreage has made employment scarce for seasonal labor in all towns: "You can't live the commonest way on six bits a day. A man like me can't get no foothold. It's a mighty tough go." **8.** Oklahoma Publishing Co. collections, Oklahoma Historical Society: Like a towering tidal wave this cloud of [dust] hangs on the edge of Hooker, Texas County, June 4, 1937.

When the stock market crashed nearly a decade later, she was still making portraits for nightstands, not newsstands. The Depression “woke” her up. For the nation, it was a crisis; for Lange, a catalyst.

The revelation came through the distinction she maintained between *looking* and *seeing*. To look was passive and transient, required no interest or engagement. To see someone or something was an action, an exercise that established a connection and context. Lange *looked* through her studio windows at the worsening conditions around her city and *saw* a different set of people deserving of attention. Marginalized, underrepresented, and often unseen by the larger society, these faces of hardship would now receive her focus.

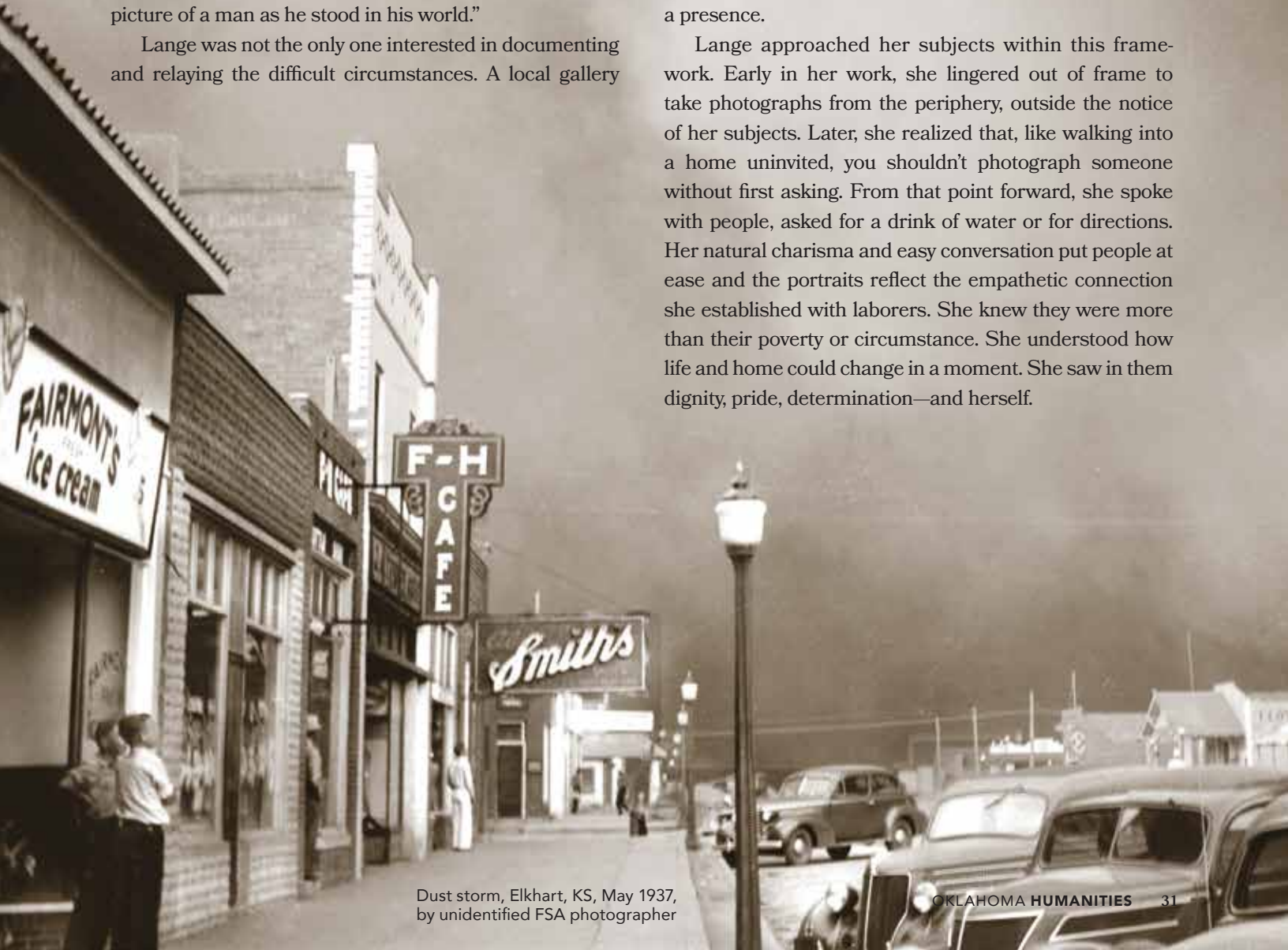
The streets proved far different from her studio. “I wasn’t accustomed to jostling about in groups of tormented, depressed and angry men, with a camera,” she noted. Still, her mission steeled her against the challenge: “Five years earlier, I would have thought it enough to take a picture of a man, no more. But now, I wanted to take a picture of a man as he stood in his world.”

Lange was not the only one interested in documenting and relaying the difficult circumstances. A local gallery

began exhibiting some of her work and a Berkeley economist, Paul Taylor, took notice. He worked for the Resettlement Administration, now known by its later iteration as the Farm Security Administration (FSA). It was a New Deal agency that helped farmers and rural populations in need through relief funds, resettlement, and other assistance. He contacted Lange about using one of her photographs in an article he was writing. She agreed and they soon met, launching a relationship both professional and personal. Taylor hired Lange to work with him on an FSA project and the two married in 1935.

As an FSA photographer, Lange’s assignment was to capture the shocking conditions of poverty, particularly among Depression migrants and Dust Bowl refugees. Comforts were few. People were living in tents, automobiles, lean-tos, railroad cars, barns, and even under bridges. Some were on their way to California; others, on the way to foreclosure. There was no stability and no security—a disparity that strongly evokes the idea of “home.” Sometimes an absence is so profound it becomes a presence.

Lange approached her subjects within this framework. Early in her work, she lingered out of frame to take photographs from the periphery, outside the notice of her subjects. Later, she realized that, like walking into a home uninvited, you shouldn’t photograph someone without first asking. From that point forward, she spoke with people, asked for a drink of water or for directions. Her natural charisma and easy conversation put people at ease and the portraits reflect the empathetic connection she established with laborers. She knew they were more than their poverty or circumstance. She understood how life and home could change in a moment. She saw in them dignity, pride, determination—and herself.



Dust storm, Elkhart, KS, May 1937, by unidentified FSA photographer

...ooditie  
 "dust f  
 Grec  
**SEEDS IN DAMAGE**  
**FARMERS FIGHT**  
**TO STOP LOSSES**

Storm Brings  
 fering to Hard-  
 Section  
 an and Beast Forced  
 Refuge in Build

**Black Blizzard**  
**of New Mexico**  
**Sweeping East**

**SURVIVES ALMOST 20 HOURS IN**  
**RAGING DUST STORM**  
**LAD WALKS INTO**  
**FROM HIS**



Captions edited from Lange's field notes: **1.** Family walking from Idabel, bound for Krebs, OK, June 1938. **2.** Oklahoma grandmother and her pieced quilt, Kern County, CA, Feb. 1936. **3.** Peach picker, Muscella, GA, July 1936. **4.** Oklahoma drought refugee, California, March 1937. "This is a hard way to serve the Lord." **5.** Cow Hollow farmer from Oklahoma, Malheur County, OR, Oct. 1939. Received FSA loan; wife co-signs with an "X." **6.** Oklahoma potato pickers, Kern County, CA, March 1937. "The Great Reaping Day," hymn singing. **7.** Power farming displaces tenants in dry cotton area, Childress County, TX, June 1938. **8.** Family from South Dakota, now on the road in Siskiyou County, CA, Sept. 1939. OPPOSITE: Migrant agricultural worker's family, March 1936. Seven hungry children. These people had just sold their tent to buy food. Of the 2500 people in this camp, most were destitute. In *Popular Photography*, 1960, Lange recalled the circumstances of taking the photo: "She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. . . . There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was an equality about it."



## COUNTERING CONTROVERSY

Not everyone shared Lange's compassion. As migrants and Dust Bowl refugees pushed west, some Californians grew increasingly concerned. Rhetoric circulated about "Okies" and the perceived dangers they presented. Scholars and FSA employees, including Paul Taylor, spoke at symposia and Rotary Club meetings in attempts to quell the unease. Contemporaneous newspaper articles reveal the competing narratives:

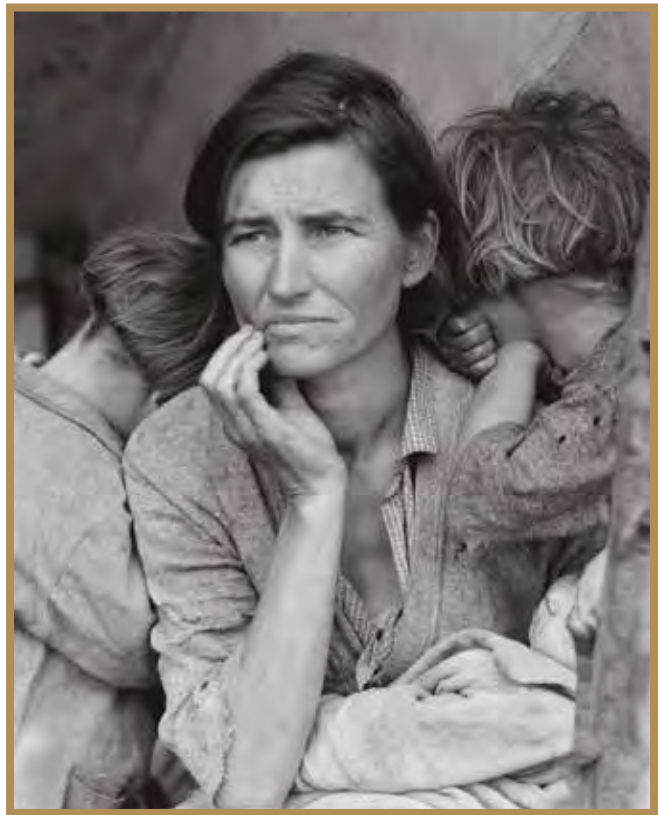
What should a community do when 300,000 penniless, starving strangers fling themselves upon it, burdening the tax rolls, spreading disease and crime, under-bidding the labor market, threatening by sheer weight of numbers and human misery to impose a social revolution on a half bankrupt agricultural economy? (*The San Bernardino County Sun*, May 13, 1939)

The so-called "Okies" and "Arkies" are not riffraff. . . . They are a rather wholesome lot whose chief desire is to get a small farm of their own on which they can make a living. (John Henderson, FSA, presentation to Rotarians, as reported by *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, May 27, 1939)

Many citizens believed the migratory workers were dangerous, that "Okies" threatened the stability and security of their communities, property, and families—in short, their homes. Others were sympathetic but didn't want them in their towns.

Lange countered these stereotypes with celluloid. The faces in her photographs were not fiction. They were not generalizations. They were not scary degenerates. They were husbands and fathers, mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters. According to Lange, these were the people who built homes "out of nothing." They were Thomas Derryberry, who *The Santa Rosa Republican* described as "once an Oklahoma farmer and now one of the thousands of harvest hands who follow the seasons." At a congressional hearing in 1940, he spoke plainly about the situation:

Our people would rather stay at home and work than keep jumping around this way. . . . We didn't want to leave Oklahoma, but the drought and tractors drove us out, my wife and our four children. We just started out from home, and stopped whenever we came to cotton. All we wanted was a chance to work. (*The Santa Rosa Republican*, September 25, 1940)



For many refugees and migrant workers, the pursuit and preservation of home defined their experience during the Dust Bowl and Depression. As the drought increased so did the desperation. Many made the difficult choice to leave their property and extended families in a large-scale migration that Lange and Taylor called the American Exodus. Dorothea captured Oklahomans in many stages of exodus: those still in Oklahoma and living in extreme poverty; those literally on the road and on their way to a new life; and those who had arrived to eke out existence in migratory camps, picking crops wherever work was available.

If we see these photographs instead of simply *looking*, the making of home begins to surface: in the quilt made by an Oklahoma grandmother living in a California camp; in the revivalist Sunday hymns sung under a tent; in an illiterate woman's signature on an FSA farm loan, where "X" marked her name and a new life; and in the resolute face of Florence Thompson, the 32-year-old widow who came to be known through Lange's photographs as the Migrant Mother.

## PICTURING HOME—AND HISTORY

Born in Oklahoma, Florence had moved to California with her husband in search of work. When he died, she

provided for her small children by finding and following work. The family moved constantly and one of the daughters later estimated that she'd attended 50 schools by the eighth grade.

A chance encounter produced the iconic photograph. Lange was on her way home after weeks of work and initially drove past the pea-pickers camp. Experience and instinct urged her to turn around. She found Florence and her children sitting in a small tent, stranded by car trouble, and took several photographs.

Uncharacteristically, Lange never asked the young mother's name. Perhaps she was occupied with thoughts of home. Perhaps she was exhausted and could see Florence was as well. The conversation was spartan; the composition was not.

Life was clearly difficult for Florence. She was worried. Where would she find the next job? Where would they sleep? Her children turned away from the camera and leaned into their mother. She was their support, their security and stability, their home. Years later, two of her daughters described her strength of character:

My mom would talk to the farmers and make the arrangements for us to all go work. She was a very strong lady, and we really relied on that. We knew that when we got up in the morning there was going to be work or there was going to be food and the reason was that my mom was going to see to it that we survived that day. (Norma Rydlewski, infant daughter in the famous photograph)

If she could have gave us all these material things, maybe she would have, but that I don't think it would have replaced what she did give us. She gives us all a

sense of worth that nobody owes us anything. We have pride you wouldn't believe. (Ruby Sprague, Florence's oldest daughter)

Time has not diminished the photograph's relevance, nor any others taken by Lange. Refugees and homelessness remain part of the national and international dialogue.

Though originally it was just a location (what the *Oakland Tribune* described as "the midwestern 'dust bowl'"), for Oklahomans the Dust Bowl is far more. We've heard stories from grandparents and parents: the powdered-sugar-grade silt that crept into closed cabinets and dirtied glasses; the short-lived, enterprising fun of playhouses built from tumbleweeds. We look at Lange's images and see fellow Oklahomans and what they endured. We see their struggle, but also their resilience and determination.

Despite the 80 years that separate us, the photographs are still personal: historical faces, dirt roads, and farmhouses, familiar as the red earth all around us. Oklahomans innately understand that the Dust Bowl was not always an event or an era. It was a place. In the beginning, the Dust Bowl was home.

KIMBERLY ROBLIN is Director of the Dickinson Research Center and Curator of Archives at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. Her work has been featured in *The Journal of Gilcrease Museum*, *True West*, *STATE*, *Oklahoma Humanities*, *History Scotland*, and several books, including *Thomas Gilcrease*, the 2009 Oklahoma Book of the Year for non-fiction.

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

- *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures*, exhibit, MoMA. Podcast and narrative on the making of "Migrant Mother." [moma.org/exhibitions](https://moma.org/exhibitions)
- "Dorothea Lange, American, 1895-1965," MoMA. Bio and over 100 Lange photographs. [moma.org/artists/3373](https://moma.org/artists/3373)
- "Dorothea Lange: Under the Trees," *American Masters*, PBS. [pbs.org/americanmasters](https://pbs.org/americanmasters)



## DOROTHEA LANGE: POLITICS OF SEEING

National Cowboy & Western  
Heritage Museum  
Oklahoma City, OK  
Through July 5, 2020



*Dorothea Lange: Politics of Seeing*, organized by the Oakland Museum of California, features more than 80 photographs taken by Lange, who thought of images as ideas. Her moving work demonstrates the power of photography as a form of social activism. The exhibition is supported in part by Oklahoma Humanities, The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Oakland Museum Women's Board, and the Henry Luce Foundation. Info: [nationalcowboymuseum.org](https://nationalcowboymuseum.org). IMAGE: Migratory labor workers, Brawly, Imperial Valley, CA, Feb. 1939.

Ain't Got No Home,  
Sara Bowersock

# Mapping Woody Guthrie

THE INFLUENCE OF TIME AND PLACE

WILL KAUFMAN  
ART BY SARA BOWERSOCK

THIS MACHINE  
KILLS FASCISTS



## EINSTEIN'S LIGHT RAYS

Why not begin with Einstein? Woody Guthrie idolized “his fellow humanist socialist,” and Guthrie family lore even has it that he once made a pilgrimage to Princeton to visit the professor in his laboratory. This was roughly forty-five years after Einstein had established the interdependence of time and space (a theory further refined by his teacher, Hermann Minkowski, who concluded that “space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality”). Thus, any study of Guthrie’s relation to place will have to take into account his relation to time, the “when” being as important as the “where.”

Einstein had proved—in Guthrie’s words—that after a light ray “hits the old trail called time” it eventually “comes back, a little bit bent up maybe, but better bent than to just not have no light ray at all.” This might be a good analogy for Guthrie on his own wanderings, criss-crossing America and the high seas, with the inevitable wear and tear on his body compounded by the increasing depredations of Huntington’s disease, and with the American body politic itself buffeted by economic depression, war, Jim Crow racism, and political upheavals of all kinds. Who or what could sustain that kind of weathering without coming out of it “a little bit bent up”?

In history, the confluence of time and space (or place) *does* matter. Consider the implications of David King Dunaway’s observation about one particular day in one particular place: March 3, 1940, in New York City, when (and where) Guthrie met Pete Seeger and Lead Belly. “By themselves, these three could not have moved American musical history,” Dunaway writes. “But their tastes coincided with the New Deal’s radical patriotism and folklore activities. . . . This was a movement, the All-American Left-Wing Folk Song Revival Movement” (*How Can I Keep from Singing? The Ballad of Pete Seeger*, Villard, 2008). Were it not for the fortuitous meeting of time and place, there would have been no equally fortuitous meeting between these three giants of American folk music history, who themselves had been born at just the right time to make such an impact.

Even before that fateful meeting in New York City, time and place had been visibly controlling forces in the

making of Woody Guthrie as an individual and as an artist. He was born, he said, “in the hungriest/richest of states”—Oklahoma—in 1912, with the abundant oil beneath the surface still “a whisper in the dark, a rumor, a gamble.” Politically, something important was happening in Oklahoma in 1912. It was where and when “the socialist tide was rising,” as Milton Cantor wrote, placing Guthrie’s Oklahoma at the heart of the agrarian radicalism through which labor activist Eugene Debs had become “the hero and symbol of socialism in America . . . [opposing] capitalism since it was ‘inherently unjust, inhuman, unintelligent’”—a homegrown brand of radicalism embodying “the unity of populist, Marxist, militant trade union, and Judeo-Christian traditions” (*The Divided Left: American Radicalism, 1900-1975*; Hill and Wang, 1978). In the year of Guthrie’s birth, the greatest electoral gains for Debs’s Socialist Party—of anywhere in America—were to be had in Oklahoma. So socialism was in the air of Woody Guthrie’s home state.

One of Guthrie’s early songs, written in 1935 when he was all of twenty-three—long after the oil had dried up and the socialist tide had crested—reflects the experience of that formative time and place and the hold it still had on his imagination. The song, “If I Was Everything on Earth,” carries the embryonic hallmarks of the socialism that had somehow worked its way into his consciousness while he was still a small child: he would “turn out all the prisoners / And put in all the rich”; or “make the groceries free” and “pass out suits of clothing / At least three times a week.”

Then, in the wake of the socialist whirlwind and the oil busts in Oklahoma and Texas, came the dust storms, turning out a wandering tribe of American refugees numbering close to half a million, transforming the nation’s demographic and cultural landscapes as comprehensively as its natural one. In the mix was Woody Guthrie, making his way westward toward California’s Eden, gathering on the road and the rails the store of knowledge underpinning a body of writing that would catapult him to international renown. As Guthrie implied during a live concert, it was the coincidence of time and place that had presented him with such a unique creative possibility: “I just happened to be *in* the Dust Bowl. I mean, it wasn’t something that I particularly wanted or craved, but since I was there and the dust was there, I thought, well, I’ll write a little song



about it.” Of course, he wrote more than just “a little song.” In his *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940), Guthrie did for the Dust Bowl migrants what John Steinbeck did for them in literature—in *The Grapes of Wrath*—and what photographers like Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein did for them through the still image. He dignified them, fought for them, gave them a story and a voice. Some would argue that in so doing, he became the father of the modern American protest song. Nearly sixty years after the album’s release, in the notes to one of several reissues, Dave Marsh nailed down the importance of Guthrie and his *Dust Bowl Ballads*:

He set a standard to which many of today’s best songwriters still aspire. Like Dylan, Springsteen and KRS-One (who stands in the line of great talking bluesmen), he gave his listeners stories and characters that help them better understand themselves. So these songs are not only historical, they are history itself, history being that which links present to future. That is why, sixty years after they were recorded, Woody Guthrie’s *Dust Bowl Ballads* still deserve their place among the greatest American stories and songs.

After his experiences in the Dust Bowl and on the road—and, it must be said, with his first wife and three children largely marginalized—Guthrie was ripe for more formative input once in California. Again, the coincidences of time and place had their impact. Guthrie had hoped simply to become a country music singer on the radio, but meeting the socialist activist Ed Robbin on the Los Angeles radio station KFVD brought Guthrie into a whole new political milieu peopled by the likes of J. Frank Burke, Will Geer, Al Richmond, and John Steinbeck, who became to varying degrees his patrons and mentors. Through his KFVD position, Guthrie was commissioned to report on the conditions in the Californian migrant camps, as well as in jails and on picket lines, where the outlines of his political activism began to take shape.

In the backdrop of everything local was the confluence of national and international crises. The Depression, the Dust Bowl, the New Deal, the growth of European fascism and Nazism, the Spanish Civil War, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the onset of the Second World War, and Guthrie’s own sojourn in California all took place during one of the most tempestuous decades in American political and cultural history, what



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **1.** Burl Ives in a Library of Congress recording studio, 1950, Washington, DC. **2.** Alan Lomax on stage at Mountain Music Festival, c. 1938-1950, Asheville, NC. **3.** Pete Seeger, 1955, by Fred Palumbo, *NY World-Telegram & Sun*. **4.** Leadbelly with Bunk Johnson band, Stuyvesant Casino, June 1946, New York, NY; by William P. Gottlieb. Images: Library of Congress



**OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES**

*Let's Talk About It,*  
Oklahoma, OH's statewide  
book club, serves 3,200  
readers per year—and 84%  
report having a deeper  
appreciation of the human  
experience through these  
meaningful community  
discussions. Read great  
books, make new friends, and  
join the conversation! Find a  
program near you:  
[okhumanities.org/events](http://okhumanities.org/events)



historian Michael Denning has called the “age of the CIO” (Congress of Industrial Organizations), the period that “marked the first time in the history of the United States that the left—the tradition of radical democratic movements for social transformation—had a central, indeed shaping, impact on American culture.” Of all these movements for social and political “transformation,” the one in which Guthrie was the most deeply immersed in his California years was the Popular Front, “the insurgent social movement forged from the labor militancy of the fledgling CIO, the anti-fascist solidarity with Spain, Ethiopia, China, and the refugees from Hitler, and the political struggles on the left wing of the New Deal. . . . [C]oinciding with the Communist Party’s period of greatest influence in U.S. society, the Popular Front became a radical historical bloc uniting industrial unionists, Communists, independent socialists, community activists, and emigre anti-fascists” (*The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*; Verso, 1998).

By the time of Guthrie’s arrival in New York in 1940, all the groundwork had been done for the city’s unrivaled claim to proprietorship of the American folk music renaissance that would begin with his first encounter with Pete Seeger and Lead Belly. Gradually, as the Americanizing mission of the Popular Front began to take hold, the leading cultural arbiters both within and outside the communist movement began to pay more attention to folk music in the service of labor activism and the proletarianization of American culture. Even the members of the Composers’ Collective, having previously derided folk music as an apolitical or reactionary art form, climbed on board, working more and more American folk sources into their compositions. By 1939 the Communist Party’s Writers’ Congress would have on its panels the likes of Aunt Molly Jackson, the folklorist Benjamin A. Botkin, the composer Earl Robinson, and—perhaps the most important single individual in the developing folk music renaissance—Alan Lomax, in charge of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: **1.** Four men riding on large pipe suspended by cable during construction of the Grand Coulee Dam, Washington, c. 1936-1946. **2.** CIO picketers jeering at workers, Greensboro, GA, May 1941, by Jack Delano. **3.** Demonstration in front of city hall, San Francisco, CA, organized by The Worker’s Alliance, Works Progress Administration (WPA) in response to cut in relief appropriation by U.S. Congress, Feb. 1939, by Dorothea Lange. **4.** Picket line at the King Farm strike near Morrisville, PA, Aug. 1938, by John Vachon. Images: Library of Congress



In Washington, DC, with the Roosevelt administration sponsoring a number of folk preservation projects under the Works Progress Administration, Charles Seeger (father of Pete)—now thoroughly committed to the propagation of folk music presided, with Benjamin Botkin, over a sweeping program of fieldwork and recording, relying upon the efforts of such folk song collectors as John and Alan Lomax, Stetson Kennedy, Mary E. Barnacle, and Margaret Valiant, among many others.

Of all these folk song collectors and activists, it was Alan Lomax who would be the most instrumental in driving Woody Guthrie into the public consciousness. He had many friends in high places, whether it was the Roosevelt administration, the broadcasting industry, or the recording industry. Folk music historian Richard Reuss argues that “it is not inappropriate to call the ardent activist folk singers of the Popular Front era the ‘Lomax singers’”—such was Lomax’s influence in establishing and furthering the musical careers of Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Lead Belly, Josh White, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Burl Ives, Jelly Roll Morton, the Golden Gate Quartet, and others. It was Lomax who (along with Will Geer) introduced Guthrie to Seeger and Lead Belly; it was Lomax who first recorded Guthrie for the Library of Congress; and it was Lomax who secured Guthrie’s first commercial recording contract with RCA Victor, out of which came *Dust Bowl Ballads*. Moreover, when officials at the Bonneville Power Administration in the Pacific Northwest wanted a folksinger to write and sing the praises of the Grand Coulee Dam for the public boosting of the New Deal’s rural electrification projects, it was Lomax who sent them Woody Guthrie.

There is no telling for sure whether Guthrie would have seen California if it weren’t for the Dust Bowl, whether he would have gone to New York were it not for losing his job on KFVD, whether he would have seen the Pacific Northwest were it not for a bureaucrat’s phone call to Alan Lomax, or whether he would ever have gone to sea by enlisting in the U.S. Merchant Marine were it not for the threat of wartime army induction. But because of these events at these times and in their association with certain places (or spaces), we have the enormous body of Guthrie’s songs, prose, poems, and artwork to enrich us.

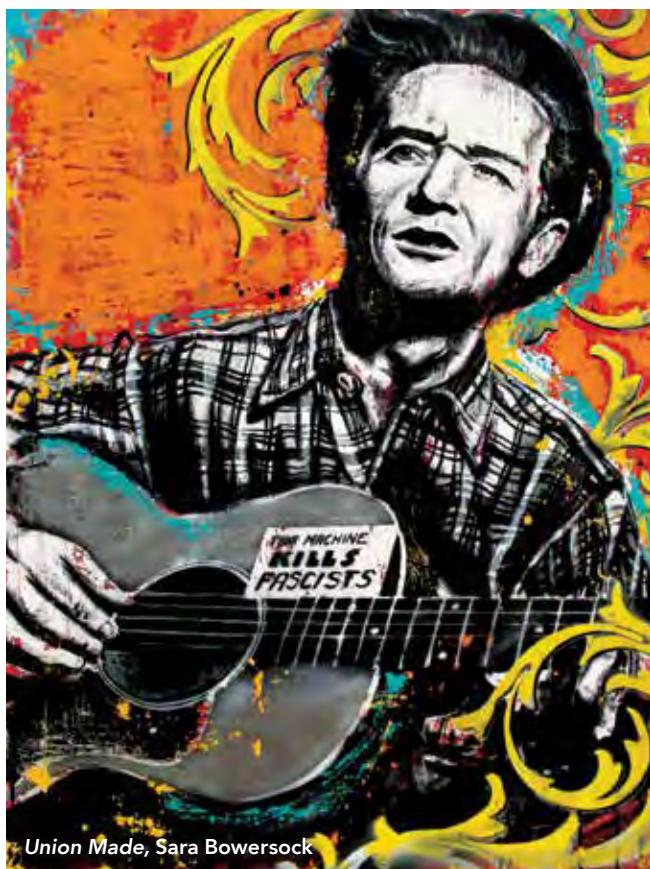
### I AIN’T GOT NO HOME

“They didn’t know what to do,” Guthrie told Lomax when asked about the evicted farmers and other unemployed workers of the Dust Bowl region in the wake of the black blizzards:

They didn’t know just exactly what to do. Couldn’t pay their debts—they owed the bankers thirty-five hundred, four thousand dollars on a combine harvester, eleven hundred dollars on a tractor. They owed ‘em a year’s fuel bill—that’s always amounted to several hundred dollars. They owed the grocery bill for a year. They owed all kinds of bills—seed bills, and everything else. When they couldn’t pay ‘em, well, naturally they come down with the mortgage and took their land. These people didn’t have but one thing to do, and that was to get out in the middle of the road.

Thus began what historians have often termed the “Okie exodus,” the mass migration westward of up to five hundred thousand people, sparking not only a sociological and political but also a cultural phenomenon. The huge textual output spawned by the Dust Bowl migration is, in Michael Denning’s words, one of the most powerful examples of “depression-era populism, embodying the ‘documentary impulse’ of representing ‘the people.’” William Stott’s groundbreaking study *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* covers the momentous outpouring that characterized this “impulse” to represent the migrant crisis, from the text-and-photo productions of Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White (*You Have Seen Their Faces*, 1937), Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor (*An American Exodus*, 1939), and James Agee and Walker Evans (*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 1941), to the documentary films of Pare Lorentz (*The Plow That Broke the Plains*, 1936; *The River*, 1938) and the “Living Newspaper” stagings of the Federal Theatre Project (1936–1939). Curiously, Guthrie is relegated to a brief footnote in Stott’s study, although, as we shall see, the “documentary impulse” surely fires both his songwriting and his prose.

Given its many elisions, if not outright fabrications, Guthrie’s *Bound for Glory* should be approached less as a straightforward autobiography and more as the “autobiographical novel” that most critics have described.



With such caution in mind, we can perhaps view much of Guthrie's first-person writing, as well as the assertions of such image-makers as Lomax, in the light of Jeff Allred's description of documentary texts as "plausible fictions of the real." Consider the autobiographical essay that Guthrie wrote to accompany the debut release of *Dust Bowl Ballads*, "Woody, 'The Dustiest of the Dust Bowlers' (The Tale of His Travels) (The Making of His Songs)." Of the eleven songs offered on the first pressing, Guthrie writes,

They are "Oakie" songs, "Dust Bowl" songs, "Migratious" songs, about my folks and my relatives, about a jillion of 'em, that got hit by the drouth, the dust, the wind, the banker and the landlord and the police, all at the same time . . . and it was these things all added up that caused us to pack our wife and kids into our little rattletrap jalopies, and light out down the Highway—in every direction, mostly west to California.

Readers will notice the first-person inclusion—"our wife," "our kids," "our little rattletrap jalopies." In fact, Guthrie traveled to California on his own, through a mixture of hitchhiking, walking, and freight-hopping; his wife and children followed him afterward. Guthrie actually hopped few freight trains in his life, yet the image of the freight-hopping hobo has dominated much of his received iconography. As he wrote to his second wife, Marjorie, in 1945, the vista he had seen on the road to California differed strikingly from the overwhelming agricultural-proletarian imagery of *The Grapes of Wrath* and the FSA photographs, as well as the hobo imagery of many of his own songs: "There are traveling salesmen, artists, musicians, show-folks, crop chasers, gang workers, road, dam, bridge, railway, and house builders. There are lots more. And there was me there in the run with my guitar in one hand and my brushes in the other." Guthrie was not only a prolific visual artist, but his first profession—and the means by which he survived on the journey to California—was sign-painting. His description for Marjorie of his daily work paints a decidedly modest picture, quite at odds with the strenuous grandeur of his "Talking Hard Work," "Hard Travelin'," and other proletarian songs that dwell on his supposedly hard life of manual labor: "You do special price tags and banners for drug stores and markets. You do Holiday Post cards on big plate glass windows. A Turkey. Santa Clause [sic]. A firecracker. Ice cream dishes all fancied up. You make icicle letters and sweaty ones, wood ones, hot and dry sand and leather ones. You hit every man with a new style alphabet to suit his name, birthday, personality, business and location."

Guthrie's personal experience of the migrant camps was limited to reportage. As a budding correspondent for a progressive newspaper in Los Angeles, *The Light*, he was sent into the camps to report on their conditions. As he later told Lomax,

I seen things out there that I wouldn't believe. If people had set and telled me that there was hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and thousands of families and people living around under railroad bridges, down along the river bottoms in their old cardboard





houses, and old rusty beat-up houses that they'd made out of tow sacks and old, dirty rags and corrugated iron that they'd got out of the dumps, and old tin cans flattened out, and old orange crates that they'd been able to tear up and get boards out of, I wouldn't believe it.

But perhaps the apotheosis of Guthrie's transformative magic was his reworking (surely with the angel of songwriter Joe Hill on his shoulder) of a Baptist hymn turned into a country standard by the Carter Family, "Can't Feel at Home in This World Anymore." As far as Guthrie was concerned, it was another song about "pie in the sky" in the "sweet by and by":

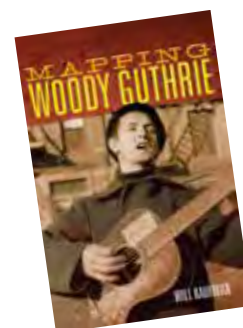
This world is not my home, I'm just passing through;  
My treasures and my hopes are all beyond the blue,  
Where many, many friends and kindred have gone on before,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

As Guthrie told Lomax, he had this song in mind as he "rambled around over the country and kept looking at all these people, seeing how they lived outside like coyotes, around in the trees and timber and under the bridges and along all the railroad tracks and . . . it just struck me to write this song called 'I Ain't Got No Home in the World Anymore.'" In Guthrie's version, however, homelessness is not a voluntary renunciation of earthly trappings or a bid for otherworldly salvation, as in the hymn; rather, it is the consequence of both a natural and an economic calamity—indeed, even a moral one:

My brothers and my sisters are stranded on this road,  
A hot and dusty road that a million feet have trod.  
Rich man took my home and drove me from my door,  
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

It was the moral calamity that increasingly affected Guthrie's perceptions, his philosophy, and his artistry—and it was the road that put it into perspective for him.

Guthrie's education in "the art and science of Migratin'" did not end after he himself had found a home in Los Angeles. He still had much more to learn about the class struggle, and in California much of that knowledge came through his contacts with those who, less fortunate than he, had yet to find themselves a home in the midst of the promised land, having made their epic journey—as Guthrie wrote—"from the Dust Bowl to the peach bowl." Once again, the twin forces of time and place were to have a transformative impact on the increasingly agitated and socially aroused bard. ■



WILL KAUFMAN is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Central Lancashire, England, and author of *American Culture in the 1970s*; *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*; and *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues*. This article is adapted from *Mapping Woody Guthrie* by Will Kaufman, published by The Univ. of Oklahoma Press. Used here with permission. © 2019 Will Kaufman.

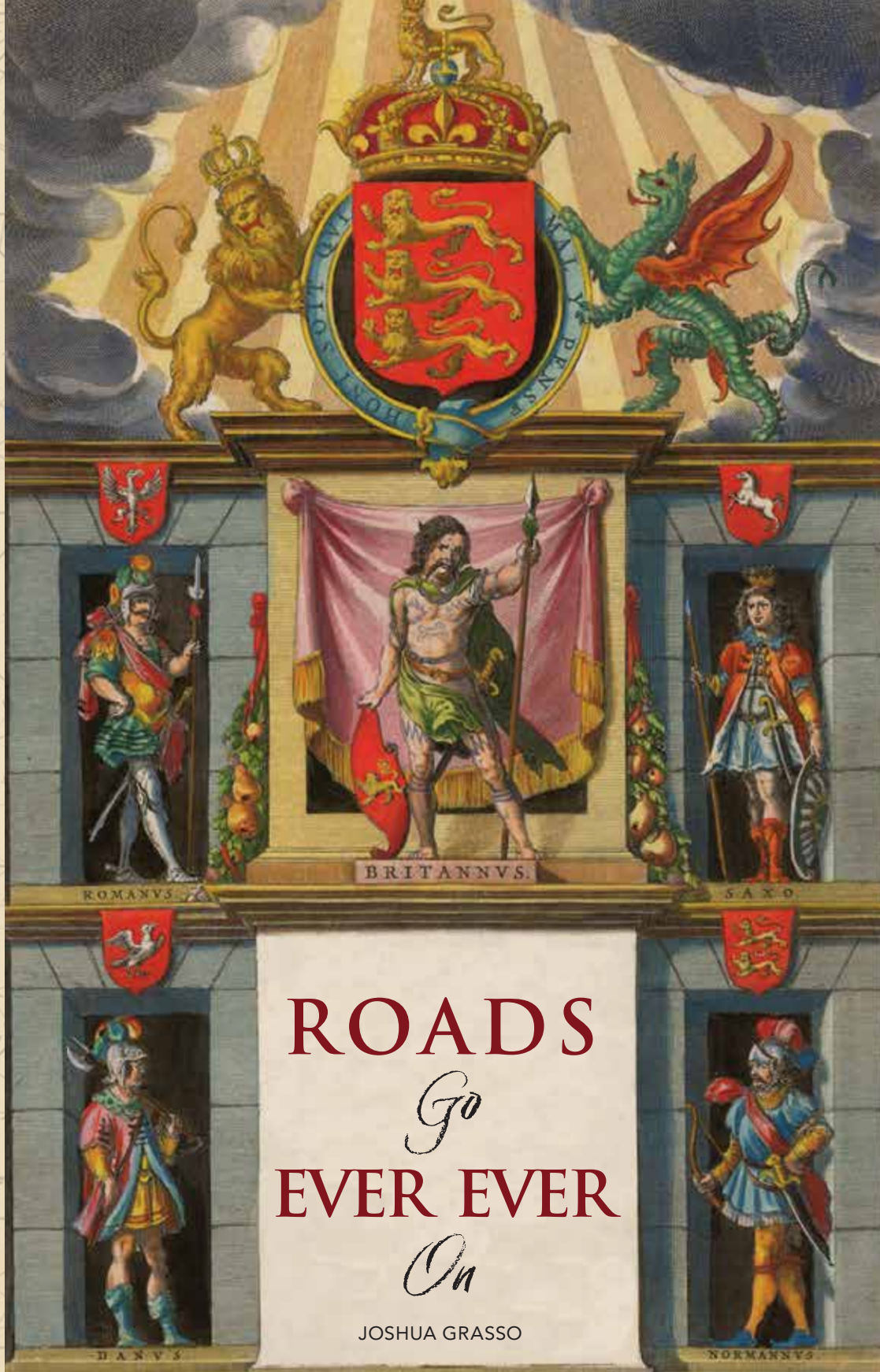


### SHAKESPEARE IN OVERALLS

Why should we listen to Woody Guthrie over 50



years after his death? A recent episode of *BrainBox* features scholars and musicians keeping Guthrie's legacy alive through the annual Woody Guthrie Folk Festival in Okemah, OK. Our guests discuss Guthrie's Oklahoma childhood, the influences on his work, his life of wandering and musical activism, and his continuing impact on American culture. Find the podcast episode, "Woody Guthrie: A Shakespeare in Overalls," at [okhumanities.org/brainbox](http://okhumanities.org/brainbox) or your favorite podcast library. Image: Woody Guthrie, Smithsonian Folkways



ROADS  
*Go*  
EVER EVER  
*On*

JOSHUA GRASSO



*Fantasy literature's  
quest for home*



**M**aps are part and parcel of fantasy literature. In virtually every tale of strange worlds and fabulous quests, it's all about finding your way home. It's hard to imagine a fantasy novel without a drawing of imaginary landscapes; indeed, for J.R.R. Tolkien, the maps and people who lived in Middle-earth inspired the story itself. Before meeting the book's protagonist, being introduced to the countries, mountains, and oceans of a mythical world is a strangely satisfying—if mystifying—experience. The implication is that these worlds actually *do* exist and that, apart from the story, the map has its own tale to tell: a tale of lost and found that predates the written word.

For a genre all about “once upon a time,” it's amazing how much fantasy orbits the familiar landscape of home. Take, for example, Tolkien's expansive three-volume work *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), which tells the epic story of simple hobbits who are recruited to destroy the “one ring” of the evil Sauron and restore the rightful king to the land. But the final volume doesn't end with the destruction of the ring or the crowning of Aragorn as the new king. Instead, the steadfast hobbit Samwise Gamgee returns to his family, announcing, “Well, I'm back.” Tolkien is careful to point out landmarks at each stage of the journey, so the reader shares in Sam's sense of relief and homecoming.

The story echoes any number of fantastic tales, where surprisingly earthbound heroes face implausible monsters on impossible quests. We call those works “classic” literature; but, in a sense, the ancient poets were also writing fantasy—or what we call “historical fiction” today. The events of *The Iliad* were written hundreds of years after the semi-legendary events chronicled in the poem, and *Beowulf's* pagan adventures are presented in an anachronistic Christian light (as Beowulf knew nothing of Christ).

### FIRST COMES EXILE

The ancient poets understood what Tolkien rediscovered: that enduring myths and legends are written from the perspective of exile. Indeed, the most recurring theme in Anglo-Saxon poetry (which directly inspired Tolkien) is exile, as poems such as “The Wanderer” and “The Seafarer” illustrate. As “The Wanderer” laments:

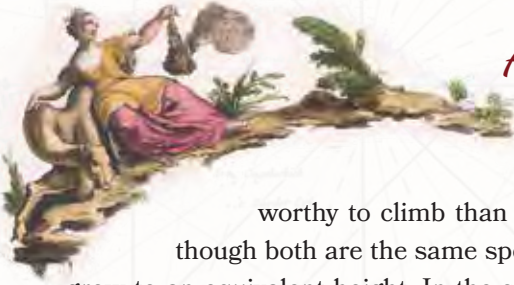
He knows [sorrow] who is forced to forgo  
his lord's,  
His friend's counsels, to lack them for long:  
Oft sorrow and sleep, banded together,  
Come to bind the lone outcast; . . .  
(Michael Alexander, trans.)

For people united in small clans against a dark and forbidding world, the most frightening prospect is being an outcast, losing the “counsels” of friends back home. The poets took legendary men and women and set them adrift in the most terrifying world of all—the past. And the past, from the hindsight of their present, was a landscape of monsters and witchcraft which only heroes could conquer.

Most travelers face homesickness at one time or another, and fantasy, by its very nature, allows us to see home with fresh eyes. As Alain de Botton writes in *The Art of Travel* (2004), “It seems we may best be able to inhabit a place when we are not faced with the additional challenge of having to be there.” Familiarity is at odds with fantasy, which is understood to be rare or exotic. Trees growing on islands at the edge of the world seem more



LEFT: *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Atlas novus* by Willem Janszoon Blaeu, 1635. BACKGROUND: *Magnum Mare del Zur cum Insula California* by Frederick De Wit, 1675. ABOVE: Compass Rose, *Ventorum Index* by Matthias Quad, 1600. Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc. raremaps.com



## *Adventure changes the landscape of home; things look different upon return.*

worthy to climb than our own, though both are the same species and grow to an equivalent height. In the same way, fantasy abstracts the experience of home into a narrative that is at once exotic (the journey) and familiar (the return).

### THE RELUCTANT HERO

Just as readers have to adjust to a fantasy author's new world and new rules, so, too, must our literary heroes learn to act the part. In a sense, this takes us back to the map printed at the beginning of most fantasy novels, particularly the detailed, time-worn illustrations that grace Tolkien's books. The map connects widely disparate towns and lands in a grand geographic narrative. However, without looking at the map, it's easy to assume that these lands don't exist at all—or that *our* world is the sum total of the Earth's existence. Most fantasy stories start with someone of exactly this mindset: a homebody left behind because they aren't fit for grand adventures, only the tedious, workaday world the rest of us inhabit. Few are born heroic: the lowly squire is promoted to king/wizard of the realm (King Arthur, Harry Potter); the youngest—and often least loved—child outperforms siblings (Grimms' "The Water of Life" and "Cinderella"); the modest tradesman uses guile and misdirection to frighten giants and gain fortune (Grimms' "The Brave Little Tailor," *The Hobbit*).

Not surprisingly, one of the greatest fantasy stories of our age, *The Lord of the Rings*, centers on a group of homebound heroes, the hobbits. From Bilbo Baggins ("the clever tailor") to Peregrin "Pippin" Took ("the youngest son"), each is content never to leave home—yet they

bring home with them (through their pipes, customs, and songs) as they venture into a world of challenges that dwarf their modest abilities.

We see this most clearly at the beginning of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (the prologue-novel to the more expansive *Lord of the Rings* trilogy), when we are introduced to Bilbo Baggins, the pipe-smoking, tea-drinking, cake-eating hero. When asked by the great wizard Gandalf if he would like to undertake a "very amusing" adventure, Bilbo quickly rejects the idea:

Sorry! I don't want any adventures, thank you. Not today. Good morning! But please come to tea—any time you like! Why not tomorrow? Come tomorrow! Good bye!

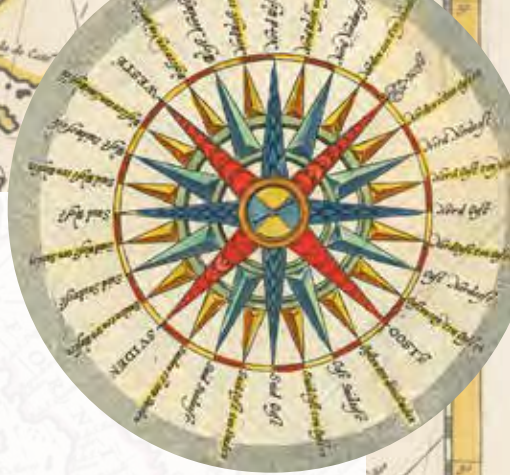
Bilbo has no use for adventures. "Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things," he thinks, "Make you late for dinner!" He wants nothing more than an after-breakfast snack and the comforts of reading by the fire—with the door firmly shut against all manner of solicitors and wizards.

### THE MERITS OF CHEER AND SONG

Why would Tolkien choose such a humdrum protagonist around which to create his fantasy epic? The dwarves ask the same question in *The Hobbit*, when Gandalf insists that this wooly-toed hobbit, Bilbo, is actually a Burglar (an "Expert Treasure-hunter") of legend:

I have chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself. You may (possibly) all live to thank me yet.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Pages 44-46, *Il Mappomondo o sia Descrizione Generale Del Globo* by Antonio Zatta, 1774. Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc. raremaps.com



The idea of the reluctant, unexpected hero has germinated in the writers of fairytales and legends for centuries. The best person to save the kingdom is never the person who stands to inherit it. Not a king who's lived his life in solitude and splendor, nor a warrior who consorts with maidens and mead halls. These "expected" heroes fall sway to temptation. It is inevitably the modest farmer or tailor who *depends* on the world he's expected to save, who stands to lose the very home to which he longs to return. Only the youngest brother, who is too "simple" to know he could steal gold or should avoid beggars, is the one who completes the quest and solves the riddle.

The same is true of Bilbo, who keeps his head among a company of greedy, proud, vengeful dwarves. At the end of the novel, when Bilbo is awarded his "fourteenth share" of gold from the dragon's hoard, he refuses all but the smallest amount:

How on earth should I have got all that treasure home without war and murder all along the way, I don't know. And I don't know what I should have done with it when I got home.

Compare this to the dragon, Smaug, who nests on untold riches from a thousand kingdoms, wealth he has no earthly use for, except to say he owns it. For Bilbo, true riches are found at home, in the simple delights of a pipe or the comforting caress of a book. This is the very reason that Gandalf sends him into the perils of Middle-earth: because Bilbo is sure to *return*. The lesson is not lost on Thorin, leader of the dwarves, who admits, "If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world."

### YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN—OR CAN YOU?

Adventure changes the landscape of home; things look different upon return. One of the earliest fantasy epics, Homer's *The Odyssey*, establishes this prototype as Odysseus spends years trying to reach his home in Ithaca after the Trojan War. Though more heroic than Bilbo, he is equally clever and just as attached to the simple life: As Athena remarks to the gods, "Odysseus . . . would give anything for the mere sight of the smoke rising up from his own land" (E.V. Rieu, trans.). Unfortunately, during his time away, Suitors have descended on his household to woo his presumably-widowed wife while also plotting the murder of his son, Telemachus.

When Odysseus returns, all seems unfamiliar: "Whose country have I come to now? Are they some brutal tribe of lawless savages?" The home he has carried in his dreams as a utopia now strikes him as uncivilized. The old adage goes, "You can't go home again." Odysseus experiences this, but with a twist: You *can* go home again, but it will never again be the counterweight to everything wrong with the world; it is now a part of the world. Odysseus' heroic response is to arm himself for war. With the help of his son, he slaughters the Suitors (and the servants who assisted them) until his entire household is awash in blood. It's an extreme reaction to seeing home as a distressingly real place rather than the idyllic haven of youth.

Similarly, Bilbo returns home and finds his own hoard in disarray. His idyllic compound, Bag End, is being auctioned off to the highest bidder. Assorted relatives are carrying off chairs and spoons, for Bilbo is:



“Presumed Dead,” and not everybody that said so was sorry to find the presumption wrong.

Like Odysseus, Bilbo is forced into battle to convince everyone he is in fact the Bilbo Baggins of record. The narrator tells us: “The legal bother, indeed, lasted for years. It was quite a long time before Mr. Baggins was in fact admitted to be alive again.”

The tragedy of *The Hobbit* and of most fantasy literature is the knowledge that evil, initially seen to be *out there*, is always *right here*, waiting for our return. Though Bilbo restores his home, his neighbors mostly look at him askance. Even his family, the Sackville-Bagginses, “were not on friendly terms with Bilbo ever after.” He regains his house and most of his goods, but at the expense of his reputation, which has slipped from a respectable “Baggins” (his father’s family name) to a more disreputable “Took” (his mother’s family name). One cannot ignore the pun of the word “took”—taken, stolen, etc.—since Bilbo, not his looting family, is deemed *persona non grata*.

### ROADS GO EVER EVER ON

Bilbo will enjoy the pipes and sunsets of home, but without his former comfort in being at home. He will continue to long for the Elves’ paradise of Rivendell and the haunting pathways of the Misty Mountains. Home is, after all, less a destination than a voyage. In the wisdom of Greek poet C.P. Cavafy, our idyllic Ithaca—the idea of home—is dearer for the search:

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.  
To arrive there is your final destination.  
But do not rush the voyage in the least.  
Better it last for many years; . . .

Ithaca gave you the wondrous voyage:  
without her you’d never have set out.  
(*Ithaca*, 1911, Evangelos Sachperoglou, trans.)

Stories are meant to be shared, told over and over again, read in books in many languages over time. The same is true of home: It’s not built for us alone, but for future generations in an unbroken line of towns, households, and families. Fantasy literature reminds us that the journey begins anew with each life, mapped from the hearth fire of home with loved ones crowding around, marveling over the strange landscapes and distant seas waiting to be explored.

Place matters in literature, if only to remind us that every exotic destination is a place someone calls home. Fantasy allows us to imagine ourselves as part of a legendary map, where the only way forward is through telling the story, which leads us, like an ancient GPS, back to our collective, ancestral home. As Bilbo expresses at the end of his greatest adventure:

Roads go ever ever on  
Under cloud and under star,  
Yet feet that wandering have gone  
Turn at last to home afar.

JOSHUA GRASSO has a Ph.D. from Miami University, OH, and is Professor of English at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, where he teaches courses in British and World Literature. As a lifelong lover of fantasy and science fiction, his stories have appeared in speculative journals such as *Broadswords and Blasters*, *Red Planet Magazine*, *Apparition Lit*, and the anthology *Magissa*. Learn more at his Amazon author page.

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

- “Why We’ve Always Needed Fantastic Maps,” Lev Grossman, Oct. 22, 2018, Literary Hub. On fantasy literature, fictional maps, and the magnetism of imaginary places. [lithub.com](http://lithub.com)
- “What is a Fantasy Map?” Tom Harper, British Library. Twentieth-century literary maps reveal how people felt about the real world. [bl.uk/maps/articles](http://bl.uk/maps/articles)
- Internet Archive website. Read online texts of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and prequel novel *The Hobbit*. [archive.org](http://archive.org)





# At Home in Elm Tree

*The geography of place*

HAYDEN ROBERTS



ABOVE: Unidentified relatives sitting on the porch of Granddad's family home in Elm Tree, 1906. Granddad and I share a name, Hayden Roberts. That's him, above, at age 16.

**W**hen people talk about *home*, discussions often focus on landscape or the human environment as a whole, rather than the specifics of a house or built structures. This was true for my grandfather, who spent most of his life building a career and raising a family in Duncan, Oklahoma. In his memoir, though, one sees Granddad's life stretching out from his childhood home of Elm Tree, Tennessee. Nowhere else in his memoir does he devote as many pages to lengthy description than in the section on Elm Tree. He confirms the power of that place as something that profoundly influenced him. By calling attention to the details of Elm Tree, my grandfather elevates the setting for childhood memories to a place that means home.



As people order and describe landscapes, settings and spaces become personalized places. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, in his 1979 article “Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective,” discusses how places are less about physical location and more about our attempts to “humanize” a relationship to landscape and location—what geographers call a *sense of place*. What people remember and how they dwell on those memories reinforces personal attachments to place, which, for many, is synonymous with home.

In my grandfather’s memoir, he describes the layout of Williams Mill—a lumber mill, gristmill, farm, and country store—that his father operated around the turn of the twentieth century in Elm Tree, Weakley County, Tennessee. Williams Mill no longer exists, except in Granddad’s memoir and the photographs he took. His layered descriptions give a detailed layout of the space—and how he fit into it.

In the description of Elm Tree, my grandfather maps the area in two ways. On one level, he presents a clear description of the space as he remembers it; on a second level, Granddad adds his interpretations and feelings about the area, conveying a sense of place:

*My First Day at Elm Tree: I woke up at six o’clock and heard a bell ringing. Father was ringing the bell. It had been a tradition for many years for the “boss” at the big house to ring the bell. It woke up the mill and farm hands who lived in houses along the millrace.*

*I hurried to get dressed and eat breakfast. There was so much to see and learn about the sawmill. . . . I heard the loud, high pitched whining sound of the whirling circular saw. I smelled the pungent, fragrant odor of the new-sawed lumber and the fresh, wet sawdust. I stood wide-eyed as the carriage, carrying the log, whizzed past the whirling saw.*

*Lumber Mill: A millrace was dug to direct the water flow to the mill site. Two water wheels . . . provided the power to operate a sawmill, planing mill, and gristmill. The mill house was built on a slope. The sawmill and gristmill were on the first level and planing mill on the second.*

*General Merchandise Store: Sold clothing, farming supplies, and food used by farm folk. The trade area covered a radius of about ten miles.*





Folklorist Michael Ann Williams, like other cultural scholars, found that a bond to place helps people define their sense of self or identity. For her book *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (2004), Williams interviewed residents about how the ancestral arrangement of their houses and farms reflected the needs of family. She learned that the stories people tell about home reveal more about identity than anthropological artifacts or buildings. This place-identity happens in the exchange of ideas and emotions between individuals and groups, through which they develop meaning and a sense of distinctiveness associated with place.



The term *place* has been essential to geography since the 1970s, and the study of place has taken researchers in many directions. The research of geographers Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan made distinctions between the *sense of place* (a positive awareness about a place) and *rootedness* (a sense of being home). The concepts that researchers use in relation to place (sense of place, place attachment, place-identity, place dependence) are difficult to separate and have overlapping meanings. The phrase *sense of place*

holds meaning even outside academia, as it draws attention to the power and importance of location and landscape in studying culture. The term also emphasizes the ever-changing perspective of place as a process, experienced by a particular individual or group, and between groups who have differing perspectives on the same place.

As a graduate student in folklore and cultural geography, I thought about cultural identity as a process of place-making, not as finite location. Place-making allows researchers to study both form and function, regardless of whether one follows the other, as nineteenth-century architect Louis H. Sullivan theorized. The form of a landscape and the function of a landscape work in unison when it comes to defining a place as home. The relationship between form and function speaks to an individual's involvement in the process, the individual's attachment to place, as well as the reasons those attachments are important.

Despite the musings of academics, it can be hard to quantify the value of home to individuals. For my grandfather, it may not be enough to read his accounts of Elm Tree or gaze at the pictures he made at the time to understand this place as home to him. As part of an oral history

Granddad got a Kodak Brownie camera for his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday that he used to shoot all the photos here, except the class picture. No commercial processors existed in his area, so he developed and printed his own negatives in the well house by the river. He bought photo emulsion and painted it on the paper. PHOTOS: **1.** The abandoned merchandise store, c. 1975. **2.** Wagon with cut lumber. **3.** Granddad's maternal grandfather and grandmother, Alman and Mary Jane Beale (far right), with aunts Betty (far left) and Cappie in Murray, KY, c. 1910. **4.** Unidentified individuals on the bridge over Obion River near Elm Tree. **5.** School class picture, spring 1911, with Granddad, age 16, front row second from left. **6.** Granddad's father, Sidney Roberts, at Elm Tree sawmill. **7.** Granddad's mother, Lois Roberts (left), with her sister Mary. All photos dated spring 1906, except as noted.



8. Granddad's classmates near the Elm Tree schoolhouse. 9. Another view of the family home. 10. Elm Tree sawmill with wood planks in foreground.



project in 1998, I collected brief stories of Granddad's childhood, many of which form descriptive landscapes that reflect my family's collective heritage. Interviews with relatives who interacted with Granddad in this place, or people who remember the emotions behind the stories he told about growing up in Elm Tree, help encapsulate the value of Granddad's home-place.

A home video of Mina Waters (Granddad's sister), shot by her grandson, Browning Waters, echoes Granddad's sentiments as she relates several vignettes about the inner workings of her parents' farm and how growing up in that setting made her a more resilient adult. Family stories support a collective sense of place reflected in the narratives Granddad composed. Both his memoir and the oral histories I collected reference what Granddad and his siblings believed important about family heritage.

The most compelling stories I collected came from my mother and brother. Mom (daughter-in-law to my grandfather) spent many early-married evenings at my grandfather's house in Duncan when my father was away on business. She said Granddad talked at length about his fondest memories from childhood, and his stories always circled around to what he learned growing up in Elm Tree. Mom credits Granddad with teaching her how to be self-sufficient, skills she did not learn from her own parents. As he taught her to cook,

clean house, iron, or balance a checkbook, he talked about what his parents taught him and how it was vital to succeeding in Elm Tree.

Decades later, my brother told me about going to visit the remains of Elm Tree with my father and grandfather. By the 1970s, it was an abandoned community. For my brother, Granddad's stories described some distant past in an enchanted land; visiting Tennessee was a journey to a foreign place. As they pulled off the county road and drove down the narrow gravel trail, my brother recalls Granddad's stories becoming more vivid, reflecting the reality that once existed in the forgotten community of Elm Tree. The home he held so high in his mind took on a tangibility Granddad had not experienced since leaving the place as a young adult. Connecting his memories to a physical place was a reminder that home is both emotional and physical.

Though changed, the geographic reference points of Elm Tree still hold worth as the backdrop to Granddad's memories and to the enduring connection to family and home.

HAYDEN ROBERTS is the Assistant Dean for the School of Arts, Sciences, and Health at Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology. He holds a Ph.D. in geography and an M.A. in folk studies. His research interests include family folklore, cultural geography in rural America, and the value of festivals and fairs to community identity.



## OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Did you know? *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine is 100% ad-free and funded solely by donors. Your gift helps pay for this award-winning publication, and we multiply your impact by distributing free copies to libraries, veterans centers, and underserved communities across the state. Show your support. Use the enclosed envelope or make a gift online: [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)

# — WHAT — HOME is *Not*

On translation—and transformation

SEUNGHO LEE



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “AT HOME”?

Is home the place where you grew up, the space that contains your memories and possessions? Is the language you speak “the house of being,” as philosopher Martin Heidegger put it? Is it the people you love—your family and friends?

The elasticity of what it means to be at home baffles me. My experience in Tulsa as a foreign student from Korea is filled with moments when I *don't* feel at home. Maybe thinking about what home is *not* can help me more clearly define—and feel—what home can be.

**ARRIVAL** Underlying the sense of home is an assumption of continuity. Arrival is a moment of rupture, a break in continuity. You find yourself a nobody in the middle of nowhere: strange people, strange landscape, strange language. *You* may be the one who is perceived as strange. Arrival is hardly a moment when one feels at home.

When I first arrived in Tulsa, everything appeared far. The city was there behind the huge glass window of the airport. I didn't know how to connect myself with this brownish, bluish city. To my unaccustomed eyes, it seemed simply a place of land and sky. I found people friendly. But being friendly didn't mean they were friends—at least not yet.

It felt surreal when I put my feet on the apartment parking lot. A place I'd never seen before would be a home for me and my family. I felt empty, despite being with my family and six giant bags—the outward sign of us trying to bring literally everything from back home; but also a reminder that we couldn't bring home itself. On the first night, every one of my family cried. We face-talked to our parents, as if we were stranded on a desert island, desperately sending an SOS.

That feeling of arrival dragged on for a while. Our bodies had arrived, but many parts of us were left behind. I tried to be at home with this ironic continuity of arrival. Arrival eventually became everyday life. We got used to it, we no longer SOS-ed. But that didn't mean we were at home. An enigmatic longing, a hole remained in us.

Home is *not* arrival.



**THINGS** Empty space hardly serves as home. Home means not only the place itself (a house) but also the things in it, things that you see, feel, and use routinely. Things can be an anchor that gives a feeling of home. Comfort blankets can feel like home for kids. Favorite books can create a sense of home for adults. Household things like your desk, chair, bed, and TV can become your landscape, your picture of home. We build our history among things, memories that in turn house us.

Things and people become accustomed to and respond to each other. Your chair gets to know your weight, your slightly tilted spine, your penchant to sit at the edge. You get to know its weak front leg, the chips and cracks on the right arm. Things and people get used to each other in the way that people build relationships.

In that first year, we didn't have things to anchor ourselves. We had seen a photo on The University of Tulsa website, where American college students appeared to be having a good time together in a furnished apartment. We were none of those things in the photo: We were *non-American, not-together, un-furnished*.

My family and I spent the first five months in a virtually empty house, wanting things to fill the void between the roof and the floor. The lack of things made us improvise. The gigantic toilet paper pack we bought at Costco was very useful. It served as a chair, a table when we needed a place to put something. But it was disposable. The relation was temporary.

When we finally bought a car, the first thing we did was drive all the way to Dallas to meet our friends and to shop at Ikea. This trip, looking back, had interrelated purposes: to *feel* at home with friends, and to *make* home by buying things. Our apartment filled gradually, first with two desks, then a chair, bookcases, a TV, a sofa, a table. My point is not about consumption, but rather that "feeling at home"

is, in a modest sense, often about furnishing, filling it. Fill your place and someday it will fill you.

You feel empty, deprived when you move to a strange place. Things, memories, people, everything that you had accumulated vanishes, is left behind. You must then rebuild things in a new place. What makes it harder is not simply a lack of things, but the connections associated with those things.

Home is *not* in things. Home is connection.

**LANGUAGE** Since coming to Tulsa, I've realized that the deepest-rooted human organ is the tongue. With it we form language and taste foods that construct our basic sense of home. Bilingualism is good; it expands horizons. But being bilingual doesn't necessarily mean that you find home in two different languages and places. Straddling continents is precarious, often requiring acrobatic twists between cultural and linguistic identities—especially when your second language becomes a primary means of survival. It's nerve-wracking.

I first learned English in middle school at age 13. But I didn't actually learn how to use it as an everyday tool until I was 23. Though my English is much better now, it remains foreign. "It's pretty late," is what you'd say to a basketball player who aspires to the NBA when they haven't learned the game until age 16 or 17.

The language barrier was tougher than expected. Everyday life became a battleground to prove myself more competent than I really was. My strongest wish was, and is, to speak better English. But I was reluctant to study it. Maybe because I was already worn out, having to use it in the workplace. I wanted to keep my private time and space free of the foreign. I became defensive about my inept second language and my subconscious choice not to practice it, rolling like a hedgehog, hiding deep inside myself. I felt a brief relief,

but distress about my cowardice eventually crept in. My “self” was no longer a safe haven. I felt empty, like a house without furniture.

Human connection *is* possible without verbal communication—through letters, text messages, sign language, photographs. I would also add: In this country, language is like a car; without it, it’s hard to travel to the places where connection between people can happen. Without a common language, connection is slow and often breaks down. We need something that bridges us, a common ground created by shared work, culture, or language.

I’ve been invited into others’ homes more than a few times and formed good friendships. Still, I have often given up reaching out because my vehicle, my language, is too slow or broken down. Home’s precondition is connecting, relating with someone or something. Your second language seldom accommodates this.

**RETURN** Home is not a return, either. On returning, you notice two things: what’s remained and what’s changed. Often, the latter outweighs the former, making you feel estranged from once-familiar places and people. Eventually you realize that it’s *you* that’s changed.

These transformations lead to other changes. On a visit back home, I was surprised to feel uncomfortable in the crowded public transportation that I used to take every day to college. I’d spend 2-3 hours in a bus and subway packed with people. Tulsa makes me move from one interior to another, from one private space to another. Now I’ve become a contradiction, complaining about a lack of public transportation in Tulsa, yet simultaneously feeling far less comfortable at home in Korea.

After time away, the relationship with your mother tongue changes too. While your discomfort with the second language lessens to a degree, the once-natural relationship with your mother tongue becomes different. Now, some thoughts and ideas first occur to me in English. I then have to translate them to my native language. The process is uneven, unsmooth. I sometimes memorize things in Korean, though they happen in English, then forget the original version of things. When I explain them in English, I have to retranslate them back from Korean. Through this translation and retranslation, recounting events becomes far removed from how they actually occurred.

Return is no longer the homecoming you dreamt of; it is a fantasy that only exists in your dreams. That’s why

so many immigrants are both excited and anxious about returning. In her memoir *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand writes about the fear that “one is unwanted back home, perhaps hated, perhaps even forgotten.” As the book title suggests, transformations of self and homeland make it impossible to return to one’s original world. Those who have left home carry within themselves this fear of “no return.”

**ROOTS** Some might tell me that I should (have) work(ed) harder to make myself feel more at home here in Tulsa, Oklahoma: learn the language, learn the culture, go out and meet people, know the place. I don’t deny that, it works for some people. Still, I see a transition as the rooting and growing of a tree. It does take time. Experiencing all four seasons in the same place makes a difference in your perception, in your sense of connection and belonging. We can’t force the seasons to come faster than they do. Likewise, I can’t force my feeling of home to come faster. It builds slowly, gradually, surely.

The simple act of taking a walk can begin the process of rooting to one’s surroundings. Small beauties of a place reveal themselves one by one as time passes. After a couple of years in Tulsa, I’ve come to notice the peculiar pattern of tree leaves in front of my apartment, the peach-colored sunset in the evening, the light touch of an autumn breeze. I’ve come to appreciate the cultural customs, as when people hold doors open for each other.

I’ve come to know its ugliness, too: its history of massacres and evictions; the segregation that contradicts the open-the-door-for-you culture; roads that don’t accommodate road-crossing squirrels, much less walkability, relatability. Seeing both sides—all its beauty and ugliness—helps me fully embrace this place.

I believe in the slow-growing feeling that I am becoming more at home in this once-strange place. I can’t predict whether it will be a lasting connection between myself and Tulsa. This T-Town, though more familiar, still feels like an enigma. One thing I can say for sure is that I’ll feel more at home tomorrow than today, and more so the day after tomorrow. And it will happen slowly, naturally, subconsciously.

Home, or more accurately “homing,” is more verb than noun, a magical process of becoming a new person in a new place in unexpected, indescribable ways.

SEUNGHO LEE is a Ph.D. student of English Literature at The University of Tulsa. He studies twentieth-century Anglophone/British literature with special interest in an ecology of everyday practice, such as walking. IMAGE, p. 51: Seungho Lee with his son, Junwoo Lee, at Tulsa Rose Garden, Fall 2019



## FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Scott LaMascus, Chair

This award-winning, nationally recognized magazine strives to pursue the Oklahoma Humanities (OH) mission: to help Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. How apt it is that this issue is all about HOME.

From the Wichita Mountains to Grand Lake, from our Panhandle to the woodlands of the Southeast, Oklahoma is better because hometown organizations are linking OH programs and grants with education and cultural opportunities that make our state, our *home*, an amazing place for all. That partnership measures the impact of Oklahoma Humanities.

What an honor and pleasure it has been for me to serve this organization for several years as a Board member and now as Board Chair, and to witness the efforts of its amazing staff, generous donors, talented grantees, and resourceful community partners.

The Portuguese language has a word for “missing home”—*saudages*. Now that I enter the final months of my role on the OH Board, I borrow that Portuguese term for the mixed feelings I have at the end of a very meaningful experience, a departure from a beloved place. Serving as Board Chair has become the capstone of my career as a humanities professor, public humanities sponsor, and community leader. *Saudages* is the perfect word for that moment. Like American blues music, *saudages* evokes longing, pleasure, and regret in a cocktail worth savoring.

What a pleasure it has been to attend OH-funded events like the opening of a Smithsonian exhibit, or a Wild West re-enactment, or a Native American symposium—activities that help us consider Oklahoma cultures and landscapes which shape and are shaped by our people. What a delight to see our organization maximizing good efforts by supporting Oklahoma’s cultural organizations with grants and programming, and by linking them to the resources of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a truly historic and impactful organization funded by our federal tax dollars.

I am grateful for the efforts of OH Board members who serve across the state—educators, bank presidents, tribal leaders, museum curators, and community activists. What a privilege to be among these who serve generously with their time, treasure, talent, and reputation.

What a joy to work with the talented and dedicated people who give meaning and reality to our OH mission—Executive Director Caroline Lowery, who, in her few months’ tenure, already has proven she will build on our excellent foundation, and the exemplary staff who create and facilitate our great work: Carla Walker, Kelly Burns, Chris Carroll, Chelsi LeBarre, and Khylee Forgety.

And, not least, what an honor to steward your generous donations, without which we could not begin to accomplish all that we do to serve so many Oklahomans.

*Saudages* of you, Oklahoma Humanities friends, as the Portuguese might say. Thank you for all the wonderful things you do. I remain your loyal ally, donor, partner, and friend.

## NOTEWORTHY



### OUR NEW LOOK ONLINE

OH has just launched a sleek new website, featuring an uncluttered, visually dynamic place to find “all things Oklahoma Humanities.” Our aim is that constituents (that means you!) have an accessible connection to our mission, programming, funding opportunities, and the impact of our work. The site is your resource for secure online donations; event notices and reservations; a statewide calendar of humanities events; funding announcements and applications; and direct access to our downloadable magazine and podcast programs. Please take a few minutes to explore our new site and let us know what you think! [okhumanities.org](http://okhumanities.org)



*BrainBox* is a podcast for your noggin! Produced and brought to you by Oklahoma Humanities. This free monthly program features conversations with fascinating humanities scholars. Recent topics include the 20th century’s worst pandemic; orphan trains across America; slavery in Indian Territory; and monuments, memorials, and their meanings. Listen to *BrainBox* on your favorite podcasting library or on our website: [okhumanities.org/brainbox](http://okhumanities.org/brainbox)



### JAVA WITH JAMES

Oklahoma Humanities Board and staff met with national elected officials in March to discuss the importance of the humanities in Oklahoma and the nation. We are grateful for the support of all of our U.S. senators and representatives. Federal funding appropriated by Congress enables us to provide resources to rural and urban communities in all 77 Oklahoma counties. PHOTO: During his weekly *Java with James* forum with Oklahomans traveling to Washington, D.C., Senator James Lankford (center) met with (left to right) Oklahoma Humanities staff members Khylee Forgety and Executive Director Caroline Lowery, and OH Board members Suzette Chang and Scott LaMascus.



### CARLA WALKER NAMED ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Caroline Lowery is honored to announce that Carla Walker has been named Associate Director of Oklahoma Humanities. Carla is currently in her 20<sup>th</sup> year of service to our organization. She launched *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine in 2008 and has served as its editor and driving force since its inception. She will continue her role as editor while taking on additional responsibilities to assist in making OH a strong, vital organization. We are so thankful for her dedication and commitment to the humanities in Oklahoma. Check your mailboxes in the coming months for a special opportunity to join us as we celebrate Carla's 20 years of outstanding service in the year 2020. Congratulations, Carla!



### SUPPORTING THE HUMANITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The Oklahoma Humanities grants program catalyzes cultural experiences at the local level by providing funding for humanities-based public programs across the state. For cultural festivals, museum exhibits, film screenings, and more, Oklahoma Humanities is here to support your community programs. Visit our new website for a calendar of OH-funded events and guidelines on our grant opportunities. [okhumanities.org/grants](http://okhumanities.org/grants)

### 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, Oklahoma*, 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](http://okhumanities.org) | [ohc@okhumanities.org](mailto:ohc@okhumanities.org)



OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dr. Scott LaMascus, Chair  
*Oklahoma Christian University*

Valorie Walters,  
Vice Chair/Secretary  
*Ada*

Cynthia Friedemann,  
Treasurer  
*Oklahoma City*

Dr. Benjamin Alpers  
*University of Oklahoma*

Elizabeth Bass  
*Norman*

Dr. Ben Bates  
*Langston University*

Philip Busey, Jr.  
*Oklahoma City*

David "Chip" Carter, Jr.  
*Oklahoma City*

Suzette Chang  
*Oklahoma City*

Dr. Dewayne Dickens  
*Tulsa Community College*

Ken Ferguson  
*Altus*

Erick W. Harris  
*Oklahoma City*

Dr. Thomas Harrison  
*Oklahoma City Community College*

Edna Mae Holden  
*Kremlin*

Don G. Holladay  
*Norman*

David B. Hooten  
*Nichols Hills*

Dr. Thomas A. Kirk  
*Norman*

Dr. Sunu Kodumthara  
*Southwestern Oklahoma State University*

Dr. Susan McCarthy  
*Oklahoma City*

Sarah Milligan  
*Oklahoma State University*

Dr. Andrew Vassar  
*Northeastern State University*

Alba N. Weaver  
*Oklahoma City*



**OKLAHOMA  
HUMANITIES**

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

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)

**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

**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

**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
- Guidelines posted on our website

**FOLLOW US**



**FALL/WINTER 2020 | CITIZEN 2020**

Just ahead of the 2020 presidential election we'll look at the joys and foibles of participating in civic life. What is civility and does it serve democracy? How does tribal membership influence engagement in national issues? What are the role and ethics of journalism in shaping public opinion? Add to this a short history of campaign dirty tricks and the political commentary of fictional TV and film for out-of-the ordinary perspectives on American elections.