Race, Place & Culture

Think & Drink program inspires dialogue and new perspectives.

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THE POWER OF REFLECTION, LISTENING AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Humanities Washington Expands Its Program Reach to Veterans and the Visually Impaired

By Julie Ziegler | Humanities Washington executive director

In 1964, when Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act into law, the United States was facing conflict at home and abroad, and people were captivated by dreams of scientific advancement. LBJ and leaders in Congress recognized that our country was in great need of something to soothe the collective soul, a counterbalance to the intense focus on science and technology. We needed opportunities for constructive dialogue in support of change, action and hope.

Unfortunately, 50 years later we face many of the same issues. Race and social justice movements including #blacklivesmatter and #Ferguson are at the heart of news headlines across the United States. We find ourselves involved in amorphous conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere that seem impossible to win. At the same time an intense focus on STEM threatens to create a generation with limited awareness of the humanities. Clearly, with many current challenges mirroring those of the 1960s, we must strive to learn new ways. As Doris Sommer explains in her book The Work of Art in the World, aesthetic experience can rekindle “love for a world gone gray with habit.” I would argue that humanistic inquiry can also provide this. The opportunities that the humanities provide give me hope.

This issue’s theme serves to highlight Humanities Washington’s 2014 Think & Drink program focus: Race, Place & Culture. Events explored race in music, film and education, as well as the history of civil rights protests in our state. Across
Washington, people gathered and discussed their personal experiences, and learned about other viewpoints — important steps toward moving together more productively as a community. Read more about these events from the perspectives of musician and educator Antonio Davidson-Gómez and Seattle Central College professor Dr. Daudi Abe on pages 4–7.

This year, with a pilot grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we are excited to expand our work to yet another distinct group affected by recent events of the world: our returning veterans. Their need for understanding, hope and reconnection are palpable. In response, Humanities Washington is proud to offer them the opportunity to participate in Talking Service, a reading and discussion program. Read more about this beginning on page 17.

Thanks to the generosity of the Charles and Lenore Hale Family we established the Washington Stories Fund, which made its inaugural grant this year to the Jack Straw Cultural Center. As you’ll read on page 12, Through the Light: Profiles in Blindness will afford visually impaired youth and adults the chance to meet, share their stories and record them for a wider audience.”

As a reminder, the most widespread opportunity to take part in a Humanities Washington program is through our Speakers Bureau. In January, a new roster of speakers began touring the state, sparking conversation on many of the topics I mentioned above. Learn about the Muslim faith, theories behind political polarization, human rights in history and so much more. They are thought-provoking and informative. Check out humanities.org for more information on all speakers and their upcoming appearances.

I hope you’ll join us at a program very soon and experience how the humanities remain as relevant to our world today as they did 50 years ago. Let’s turn a “world gone gray with habit” into one filled with opportunity, inspired by the humanities.

With sincere appreciation,

Julie Ziegler, Executive Director

“...who we are as a people. That is their power — to remind us of what we each have to offer, and what we all have in common. To help us understand our history and imagine our future. To give us hope in the moments of struggle and to bring us together when nothing else will.”

—First Lady Michelle Obama

MORE ONLINE

Sign up for Spark 5, our monthly e-newsletter: humanities.org/signup
Think & Drink programs are conversations about provocative topics held in pubs and tasting rooms around the state. Fall Think & Drink events addressed Race, Place & Culture as a theme in conversations about arts, education and civil rights.

2015-2016 Speakers Bureau presenter, educator and musician Antonio “Tony” Davidson-Gómez spoke at the events “From Al Jolson to Public Enemy: Race in Music” in Seattle and Tacoma (with Daudi Abe, Amanda Wilde, Tonya Mosley and Phyllis Fletcher) and “From Flamenco to Fandango: Race in Music” in Yakima (with Yesenia Hunter and Mike Faulk).

Spark Magazine spoke with Davidson-Gómez about the Race, Place & Culture event series theme, why the theme remains powerful and how Think & Drink conversations varied across the state.
Humanities Washington: Why is Race, Place & Culture so powerful as a theme?

Antonio “Tony” Davidson-Gómez: Race, place and culture are always with us in the ways we interpret and navigate the society around us. At times, the U.S. has relegated issues of “race” to “racial minorities,” to “people of color,” as if each so-called racial group exists in a vacuum apart from others. That time is over.

All Americans own the issues of race and culture. We are a nation that is constant in our ideals of equality and opportunity, yet we have always struggled to live out those aspirations. We are in a time of incredible change and need to set the stage for future generations.

The members of the generation born after 1998 are of the first generation in U.S. history to have no ethnic majority. How do we perceive race? How do we become proficient at code-switching between the various cultural norms we encounter every day? Just asking these questions is how we begin to set the future stage.

We have a tremendous challenge to address these differences in our place and time—a privilege, really. Will national principles of equality and opportunity flourish in the 21st century or will we continue to see the inequities in educational opportunity, housing, law enforcement, incarceration, healthcare access and earning power that have tainted recent history?

As a nation, I doubt we can afford to have our emerging majority face historic roadblocks. We all own that challenge.

HW: How did the Think & Drink events vary?

Davidson-Gómez: Each community brought its own mix of age, ethnicity, experience and culture. Some settings were more formal than others; some people waited until the Q&A to speak up, while in other locations we would get just two sentences in before the pretense of a “panel” broke down into lively discussions.

Yakima had a great participatory vibe which led to a wonderful music-making session following the Think & Drink. Tacoma was very multi-generational, with Millennials, Gen-Xers and Boomers mixing it up.

HW: What was the greatest “A-ha” moment for you in the Fall Think & Drink series, and why?

Davidson-Gómez: The biggest revelation was how important it is to simply set the stage and get out of the way. As a speaker, my job is to evoke issues that people are already thinking about, perhaps introduce some new information, propose a couple ways of connecting the dots, and then it’s up to the community that has gathered to run with it. At every session, we encountered resident experts and eager learners who spoke with eloquence and conviction.

HW: Several fall Think & Drink events explored Race, Place & Culture in music. Can music force a national dialogue?

Davidson-Gómez: The 1960s saw an explosion of musical expressions of
change. There were songs that pointed out inequities and injustice; songs that called for change; and songs that sustained groups as they marched, rallied and worked to create a more just society.

Today, artists continue to create music that has the potential to shape powerful discussions, but there are fewer major artists taking stands through their music. In the age of digital music, more musicians can share their art, but only a few can break through the noise of the information age to spark wider public dialogue.

When something does break out it’s incredibly exciting. Macklemore’s “Same Love” helped open the issue of marriage equality in a completely new way that no political commentary or news piece could ever do. We’re seeing in real time how artists respond to (race-related protests in) Ferguson and New York.

As long as there have been social issues and change, there have been artists addressing them. As our nation continues to experience growing pains and our changing demographics force us to better align our ideals with our realities, music will play a role. It has the potential to galvanize movements, transcend ideological boundaries, or engender discussion in a unique and humanizing way.

**Davidson-Gómez:** The events in Ferguson and New York brought race, place and culture to the forefront, along with the issues of power and privilege. These events hit communities of color with blunt force, and they will help shape our nation’s future. Equity in opportunity and justice are indicative of the larger questions that will shape our collective future as a multicultural nation. We need every tool in our toolbox to fully address these complex questions—and to express the full range of emotions we are feeling.

“There is a reason that societies from the ancient Greeks to the Golden Age of Islam and the European Renaissance have looked to the unique gathering of disciplines that are the humanities.”

—*Antonio Davidson-Gómez, Speakers Bureau presenter, musician and educator*

There is a reason that societies from the ancient Greeks to the Golden Age of Islam and the European Renaissance have looked to the unique gathering of disciplines that are the humanities. They help us name and analyze issues. They allow us to express our viewpoints, emotions and convictions on these issues — and provide a vocabulary of ideas for us to imagine and codify a more perfect condition.
Rap artists who are not African American, like Macklemore and Iggy Azalea, have drawn recent criticism for appropriating a black art form.

Azalea was called out by Nicki Minaj, who is black, at an awards show. Others criticized Macklemore’s Grammy triumph earlier this year.

It is important to remember that appropriation, which is generally defined as taking something for one’s own use without the owner’s permission, was critical in the birth and subsequent explosive growth of hip-hop.

This type of cultural transition is fluid and it happens all the time.

For example, in a larger historical context, consider the cultural beginnings of the United States. On certain levels, early American culture replicated British culture until U.S. culture matured and stood on its own.

Similarly, white rock ‘n’ roll was born from black rock ‘n’ roll. Eventually, Elvis Presley became known as “The King” of not only the white rock, but of all rock culture.

Hip-hop culture was born from African-American culture in the mid-1970s. Now, more than 40 years in, is Macklemore’s success a signal that white hip-hop has begun to stand on its own? Increasingly, the answer appears to be yes.

There have been four major white acts within mainstream rap music over the last 30 years: the Beastie Boys, Vanilla Ice, Eminem and, now, Macklemore.

In 1986, the Beastie Boys were signed by Russell Simmons to Def Jam, hip-hop’s first great record label, and toured with the likes of Run-DMC. This built-in credibility with African Americans allowed the Beastie Boys to initially push the boundaries of white hip-hop with their style of dress, sound and subject matter.

He has been essentially reduced to a caricature over time, but Vanilla Ice’s significance in the evolution of the white hip-hop is often overlooked.

In 1991, Vanilla Ice became the first white sex-symbol the rap genre had ever seen. Even though he was thoroughly mocked as an artist almost from the beginning, white
women wanted to date him and white guys wanted to be him.

Eminem came with more credibility because his rhyme skill was immediately apparent and because African-American producer Dr. Dre signed him and produced his 1999 debut album The Slim Shady LP. Questions of appropriation surfaced immediately, and Eminem even addressed them in his 2002 song “Without Me”:

“I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley, to do black music so selfishly / And use it to get myself wealthy (Hey) / There’s a concept that works / 20 million other white rappers emerge.”

Macklemore has experienced unprecedented levels of popularity and acceptance by embracing his whiteness in a new way.

Two of the songs that he has ridden to massive prop levels, “Thrift Shop” and “Same Love,” go against two of the most well-established norms within traditional hip-hop culture: bling (flashy jewelry worn to show off wealth) and homophobia.

Being white, no doubt, helped facilitate Macklemore’s success in addressing these topics through the lens of hip-hop. His and Ryan Lewis’s four-trophy night at the Grammy Awards in January was the ultimate symbol of mainstream validation, yet perhaps the real surprise was that he didn’t also win the awards for Song of the Year and Album of the Year.

These kinds of racial dynamics are not just about white kids. In his 2013 song “Nothing Is Stopping You,” rapper Big Sean, who is black, tells the story of giving an impromptu audition to an aspiring young African-American rapper.

In one line the kid describes himself as being “like a young black Eminem,” which reminds us that there are new generations of kids of all colors who experience these types of whiteness in rap music as normal.

This kind of racial identity buffet is hardly new in hip-hop. Widely forgotten are the gimmicky Young Black Teenagers who released their self-titled debut album in 1991.

Backed by Public Enemy, Young Black Teenagers had a song titled “Proud to be Black,” even though all the group members were white.

Recently Iggy Azalea has become a hot topic in the discussion about appropriation within the context of hip-hop. Even though she emigrated from Australia, Azalea has become the first white female rapper to make a serious imprint in the United States.

Again, it’s worth remembering that hip-hop itself developed through young people appropriating what was around them. During hip-hop’s formative years, appropriation could be found in rap songs played by DJs at block parties who sampled records by artists like James Brown and the Tom-Tom Club.

Graffiti artists appropriated walls and entire sides of subway cars, and break dancers created a new genre by taking elements from others such as tap, jazz and lindy-hopping.

In 1979, Rapper’s Delight, the first internationally distributed rap record, was a prime example of appropriation. Using a sample from the 1979 disco hit “Good Times” by the group Chic, recording executive Sylvia Robinson and three rappers known as The Sugarhill Gang produced Rapper’s Delight. None of the members had any standing or credibility within the early hip-hop culture, which had evolved from the South Bronx beginning in the early 1970s.

An early example of white artists appropriating hip-hop was the 1980 song “Rapture” by the group Blondie.

In the late 1980s, African-American rappers from the West Coast appropriated East Coast hip-hop traditions and used lyrical stories of street life in Los Angeles to create the genre known as gangsta rap.

Macklemore and Azalea are only doing what hip-hop artists have been doing for the past 30 years: using inspiration from others to produce something new. However, this does not invalidate the unease some African Americans feel about what appears to be the emergence of white hip-hop culture.

Perhaps sometime soon we’ll see a rapper of color accused of appropriating white style.

MORE ONLINE

Bring Dr. Daudi Abe to your community: humanities.org/speakers
In January, two men reportedly affiliated with Al Qaeda forced their way into the Paris office of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*—a magazine that often published grotesque caricatures of the prophet Muhammad and other religious figures. As the staff sat down for an editorial meeting, the men entered and gunned down eleven people. The massacre sparked an international conversation about free speech, religion and cultural sensitivities.
In our increasingly digital world, conversations about world-changing events take place more online than with our neighbors. But the need to discuss important events face-to-face and in a physical space remains profoundly important—even primal. So two weeks after the Charlie Hebdo shootings, Humanities Washington hosted Think & Drink events in Spokane and Seattle featuring two of our Speakers Bureau presenters whose expertise aligned strongly with issues surrounding Charlie Hebdo: political cartoonist Milt Priggee and lecturer on Islam David Fenner. To standing-room-only crowds, Priggee and Fenner, with moderation by KUOW’s Ross Reynolds (in Seattle) and author Shann Ray (in Spokane), brought context to an incident that shocked the world.

Priggee’s work has appeared in TIME, Newsweek, The Spokesman-Review, The New York Times, and more. Fenner is former assistant vice provost for international education at the University of Washington and has worked extensively in the middle east. Spark magazine talked with both about their takes on Charlie Hebdo and the experience of tackling such a controversial issue on both sides of the state.

Humanities Washington: Were the victims of the Charlie Hebdo massacre free-speech martyrs, full stop, or were they provocateurs whose mockery of Islam sometimes amounted to xenophobia and racism? Can we support a right to xenophobic or racist speech without condoning xenophobic and racist speech?

David Fenner: I think the answer to the first question is a definite “both.” The cartoonists tragically died because of their commitment to the exercise of completely unfettered free speech. At the same time some observers have suggested that many of their cartoons stooped to a dehumanizing level of bigotry (in essence, hate speech) and that such depictions may not have a place in a civil, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society. As New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote, “these cartoons failed the most basic ‘standard of decency’ test.”

—David Fenner

“Sadly, this atrocity has much more to do with human nature than with religion.” —David Fenner

Milt Priggee: I believe the cartoonists were free-speech “I’d-rather-die-on-my-feet-than-live-on-my-knees” martyrs—period. Unfortunately, I don’t believe the United States can support free speech because the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. There is a strong trend toward anti-intellectualism is this country, and this is one of the reasons why so many in the United States fail to realize that allowing xenophobic or even racist speech isn’t the same as supporting it. The result is a gridlocked debate about the freedom to express one’s thoughts, opinions, or beliefs.

HW: What do you think the difference is between American and European cartoons? Do you think cartoons like the ones published by Charlie Hebdo have an audience in the U.S.? If not, why not?

MP: The difference between American and European cartoons is like night and day. Generally speaking, European cartoons editorialize and are exciting, freewheeling, committed graphics that challenge readers’ thoughts and beliefs. American cartoons are safer and softer, created to simply entertain without challenging or offending. But there is an interesting difference between how both countries express themselves between print and broadcast: Print is the provocative medium in France (think Charlie Hebdo), whereas in America, the broadcast medium is more challenging to the status quo (think South Park).

When it comes to the question about Hebdo cartoons existing in America, it all depends on the definition of the word “audience.” Sure, they could find a small audience—there is a serious percentage of xenophobic people in this country. I do not believe any Charlie Hebdo cartoons could have a wide audience in the U.S. because, as I said, our country values entertainment not editorializing. Plus, the only thing that America values more than entertainment is “political correctness.”
HW: Can you tell us why Muslims find the depictions of the prophet Mohammed offensive? Do other religions forbid the depictions of prophets?

DF: In the 7th Century when the prophet Mohammed received the revelations we know of today as the Qur’an, the new religion of Islam focused on bringing a polytheistic society under the monotheistic (“There is no god but God”) tent. To this end, Mohammed and his fellow Muslims destroyed the images and sculptures depicting other gods. Interestingly, in the Christian bible this same effort was undertaken by Moses when he came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, including “Thou shalt make no graven images of anything in Heaven, on Earth, or in the Waters beneath the Earth” (Exodus 20:4). This Third Commandment may have fallen victim to a very early union of stained glass window artists!

HW: Does this massacre have anything to do with religion? And if so, is Islam a more violent religion than Christianity and Judaism?

DF: Sadly, this atrocity has much more to do with human nature than with religion. While there are passages in the Qur’an sanctioning violence, there are also similar passages in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament. That said, each of these holy texts also has a wealth of completely contradicting passages promoting peace and forgiveness. I believe that what we need to guard against is a blanket condemnation of this or that religion, based solely on the criminal acts of those who purport to act in the name of that religion.

HW: What were some of the differences you noticed between the audiences in Spokane versus Seattle?

DF: I was surprised and pleased by the levels of interest and engagement in both cities. It is clear that this tragedy touches on many of our deeply held beliefs about faith, freedom, community, culture, assimilation, tolerance, intolerance and race. That so many people came out to learn more and grapple with these important issues is heartening indeed.

MORE ONLINE

Hear audio of the complete seattleThink & Drink online at KUOW: http://kuow.org/post/history-and-future-je-suis-charlie

David Fenner’s interest in Islam dates back to his experience as a young man when he first traveled to the region to live in the Sultanate of Oman on the Arabian Peninsula for six years. He retired from the University of Washington in 2007 as the Assistant Vice Provost for International Education, following a successful career that included establishing exchange programs with universities in Egypt, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Pakistan. Fenner and his wife returned to the Arabian Peninsula to found an educational center for Arab and Western students that is designed to explore faith, language, natural resources and diplomacy.

Milt Priggee has been drawing political cartoons for local newspapers since 1976 and has worked in twelve different states. He was born in Alaska, grew up in Chicago, graduated from college in Colorado, and was a journalism fellow at the University of Michigan. His nationally syndicated cartoons, caricatures, comic strips and illustrations have appeared in newspapers, magazines, books, and on websites, album covers, shirts and even wine bottles. A past president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists, Priggee’s cartoon commentary has generated hate mail, awards, death threats, libel lawsuits, as well as many heated discussions.

Supporters hold “Je Suis Charlie” (“I am Charlie”) signs and cartoons at a sympathy march in Dublin. | Photo by Dan Fagan.
WASHINGTON STORIES FUND GRANT AWARDED TO JACK STRAW CULTURAL CENTER

Innovative Program to Explore Adult and Youth Profiles in Blindness

By Karen Brandvick Baker | for Humanities Washington

“...We were first drawn to the types of stories that are sure to surface during this project,” said Julie Ziegler, Humanities Washington’s executive director. “Ironically, the sighted community is largely blind to the unique challenges faced by those who cannot see. The fact that 70% of blind adults are unemployed and more socially isolated limits peoples’ chances to come in contact with someone who is disabled in this way. We are excited at the prospects for this project to nurture mutually supportive relationships between youth and adults, and for the greater community to see how it, too, can best ensure that individuals who live with a visual impairment have an opportunity to participate fully in community life.”
saying they seldom had opportunities like this to talk with visually impaired youth.

“Humanities Washington’s support for this project will help us provide more opportunities for visually impaired youth and adults to talk with each other, for adults to share their stories and experiences, and for students to ask questions or express their concerns,” said Joan Rabinowitz, executive director of the Jack Straw Cultural Center. “We hope this project will also dispel some misconceptions about individuals with visual impairments.”

With seed funding from the Lenore and Charles Hale Family Fund (see related story on page 14), Humanities Washington established the Washington Stories Fund in 2014 as a new tool to dismantle barriers and enhance cultural understanding. Funded projects elevate the stories of people who fall outside of the mainstream because of their culture, gender, immigration status, country of origin, age, or other unique characteristics, ultimately enhancing the public’s awareness of new and unique perspectives and cultures. Humanities Washington’s volunteer review committee selected Jack Straw from a pool of five applicants who were invited to submit proposals. In 2015, the Washington Stories Fund will be made available as a general grant opportunity, for which non-profit organizations can apply without special invitation.

Although there are many different types of visual impairment, when thinking of blindness, many people imagine a person wearing sunglasses and carrying a white cane. While this image holds some truth, it is only for a portion of the blind community. Blindness affects all age groups and has a vast range of impairment. Blindness can be isolating, especially for those who live in smaller, more rural communities. A blind child is often the only blind student in a school and also in the town, with no one to talk about the unique challenges he or she faces. Efforts to tell the stories of visually impaired people are rare.

In this project, visually impaired youth will interview visually impaired adults about their professions, the hurdles they faced, and the successes they have achieved. Blind adults, in turn, will talk with youth about issues that concern them, including assumptions about blindness, and the resulting behaviors of blind and sighted people towards each other. Project participants will also have opportunities to interact with the general public through a series of conversations at Seattle Public libraries. Stories will be shared via a webpage with content recorded and produced during the project.

These conversations will offer insight for the general public and for blind youth who have not yet started their professional pursuits. By sharing their stories, blind adults can help the next generation of blind individuals with their journeys toward self-reliance and becoming active members of the community. And, perhaps, sighted and blind youth will see how they share many of the same problems and hopes.
Following the passing of her husband of 56 years in 2008, she enrolled in a writing class perhaps as a way both to pass time and to cope with her grief. The weekly class assignment, which was “to capture memorable moments in time” through words, inspired Lenore to write and publish her own memoir.

Lenore was now legally blind, but circumvented her new disability by hiring a scribe, Helga Veblen. Dictated entirely to Helga, who also served as editor, *Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant* took two years to complete, with Lenore and Helga sometimes working four hours at a time to write and edit content.

The book was published and presented to a joyful gathering of 70 friends and family members at Horizon House in November 2012.

Capturing memories from Lenore’s life, the book also reflected her wisdom, humility, love of family and sharp critical mind, according to her daughter, Betsy.

Following the book’s completion, Lenore, in collaboration with her children, set a new goal: “She was so moved by the stories told by her writing group classmates that she was inspired to start a fund for other story-tellers, one that would tell the little-known stories of marginalized groups in Washington state,” said Betsy.

Betsy had attended Humanities Washington’s literary fundraiser Bedtime Stories with her friend, Humanities Washington Board Chair Cynthia Wells. Betsy believed that Humanities Washington could be instrumental to help her mother realize her new goal, and Lenore contributed seed money for a new Washington Stories Fund.

Lenore died less than a year after the fund was initiated. Thanks to her compassion, social worker’s heart and the love of her family, the Washington Stories Fund will support and enhance the cultural richness and health of our state—through other people’s stories.
WASHINGTON STATE POET LAUREATE ELIZABETH AUSTEN SHARES RECENT TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Austen on the Poets, People and Places She’s Encountered on Her Washington Odyssey.

By Karen Brandvick Baker | for Humanities Washington

Since January 2014, Washington State Poet Laureate Elizabeth Austen has visited 25 counties throughout Washington. The journey has included collaborations with local poets, librarians and teachers. From writing workshops to classroom visits to poetry readings and interviews, events have been free and open to the public, thanks to financial support provided by Humanities Washington, the Washington State Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Humanities Washington spoke with Austen about tour highlights and her ongoing commitment to engage people in poetry.

Humanities Washington: What is your process to engage people in poetry?

Elizabeth Austen: Wherever I go, my goal is to give people an experience of poetry that’s interactive and meaningful. I try to offer writing activities that are fun and relevant to people’s lives, and to share poems that speak powerfully to our common human dilemmas.

HW: Which Washington poet’s work has stood out for you on your most recent tour?

EA: Christopher Howell—I’ve had the good fortune to read with him and interview him for “Washington Poets in Conversation” at Auntie’s Books in Spokane. His poems carry the tangible world and the elusive inner life into language in a way that continually awakens and astonishes me. He teaches at Eastern Washington University, and has published ten poetry collections. He’s also a marvelously generous teacher.

HW: What have been some of the more memorable moments from the tour?

EA: At each of the writing workshops I taught, I witnessed people making connections with each other and discovering something exciting about the writing process, something they could take forward into their lives. Meeting and reading with local poets is a great pleasure. I read with several poets whose work I hadn’t heard before, and enjoyed immensely—Cynthia Neely, Daniel Butterworth and David Kurth.

Though my workshops are primarily aimed at adults, several girls attended the writing workshop I gave at Auntie’s Books. Two of them, ages 9 and 11, told me they produce a program on the local community radio station. After the

Humanities Washington: What is your process to engage people in poetry?

(Humanities Washington)
workshop they interviewed me using an iPhone. They’re the youngest journalists I’ve ever met — and they were incredibly enthusiastic about writing.

A particularly noteworthy highlight has been the changing light as I’ve driven almost 2000 miles throughout the state. For many of my trips, I have been a guest in people’s homes. I was particularly moved by the hospitality of folks in Odessa, Ritzville and Newport, and am grateful for the way they each made me feel so welcome and well cared for; they ensured that I was well fed and appropriately caffeinated for my day.

Austen is the author of the poetry collection, Every Dress a Decision (Blue Begonia Press, 2011), and two chapbooks, The Girl Who Goes Alone (Floating Bridge Press, 2010) and Where Currents Meet (Toadlily Press, 2010). She produces poetry programming for KUOW public radio, a Seattle NPR affiliate, and is a communications specialist and educator at Seattle Children’s Hospital.

Here is some feedback that Elizabeth received after her visit to Colville, where she taught several classes and gave a public reading:

My students gave some fantastic feedback regarding your presentations on Wednesday. One aspect that seemed to resonate well with each of them is your description of the separation between the creative mind and the analytical mind… and the act of entering that creative mental space when you’re writing poetry. They found that concept incredibly interesting, and it generated some valuable large-group discussion about the writing process.

Your reading in the theatre was so enjoyable; I love that you began by introducing the audience to the work of a few other poets. You’re really dedicated to your focus of bringing poetry to the adult world in a relatable way. And the poems you read were meditative, moving, and transcendent of that room. I’ve heard such good things from community members, students and faculty who attended your reading.

Thank you for making poetry accessible to this rural community!

EVENTS

upcoming Washington State Poet Laureate appearances:

March 14
Reading with Diane Raptosh, Idaho Writer-in-Residence
SEATTLE

April 23
Workshop at Maryhill Museum of Art
GOLDENDEALE

May 30
Hike & Write with the Poet Laureate
SNOQUALMIE

September 15–27
Litfuse TIETON – YAKIMA
HUMANITIES WASHINGTON LAUNCHES TALKING SERVICE

Groups Ease Transition for Returning Veterans

By Karen Brandvick Baker | for Humanities Washington

According to the U.S. Department of Defense about 2.5 million members of all armed forces units have been deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq since 2001, with more than a third completing more than one deployment. Beginning in January, Humanities Washington launched a pilot program called Talking Service in Tacoma and Spokane to provide a voice to these vets, buoyed by the humanities.

The program is designed to help veterans reflect on their past experiences, current concerns, and aspirations for the future though reading and discussing powerful literature. The program is rooted in the humanities through the use of an
anthology of works authored by famous writers titled *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian*.

“Talking Service will encourage dialogue for a new generation of veterans as they transition back into civilian life,” said Humanities Washington Executive Director Julie Ziegler.

The journey into military service is different for each soldier, but one fact holds true for all who serve: the experience is like no other. It is an experience that is rarely—if ever—understood by civilians or loved ones who have not answered the call of duty. Depending on the impact of what the soldier faced, it may not be mentioned at all, particularly if they saw combat.

“The transition from military to civilian life is difficult for most veterans,” said Donald Whitfield, editor of *Standing Down* and vice president of the Great Books Foundation. “After several years living in a highly regimented, often dangerous environment, veterans re-entering the workforce, colleges and universities, and their community of family and friends can face immense challenges.”

Reading and discussion are at the heart of Talking Service groups, which was originally created by the Great Books Foundation and implemented in partnership with the New York Council for the Humanities. Now held nationally, the groups give veterans opportunities to explore the ideas of authors who have thought long and hard about the military experience. In turn, the groups give participants a model for thinking and speaking about their own story.

Groups meet for 90 minutes in a series of six to eight meetings for conversations led by specially trained local facilitators. Participants read texts drawn from the *Standing Down* anthology in advance to support the group discussions and overall participation. The anthology features 44 selections, including works of fiction, poetry, essays, memoirs and historical documents by Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, Karl Marlantes and many others. Each selection includes discussion questions and a thematic guide for 15 action-oriented topics (caretaking, combat, confronting the enemy, grieving and homecoming) and five separate conflicts in American history, beginning with the Civil War and concluding with passages about wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The returning warrior needs to heal more than his mind and body. He needs to heal his soul.”

—Karl Marlantes, author of *Matterhorn* and “What It Is Like to Go to War” from *Standing Down*
groups in Tacoma and Spokane at three college campuses serving a high number of returning veterans: Pierce College, Spokane Community College and Spokane Falls Community College. Talking Service discussions will focus on creating community and will be delivered in partnership with veterans centers at each campus.

From his experience as a group leader in other states, Whitfield has seen understanding and compassion among veterans in the groups, which typically include veterans of all ages. In his opinion, participation within the group plays an even bigger role.

“Talking Service is important both for the answers it yields and the questions it raises,” Whitfield said. “A good question is never put to rest. It’s something that becomes an impetus to a questioning way of life, and that’s exactly what we do with Talking Service—help instill the habits of mind that serve veterans well as they make their way in the world.”

The Talking Service peer-to-peer group model gives vets the opportunity to connect and socialize with each other while mirroring and building strong sustaining bonds. When vets leave the groups, they feel heard after they have had a chance to share.

“Our vision for this initial pilot is to increase stability and to ease the transition process for veterans,” said Julie Ziegler.

“Talking Service holds both promise and opportunity to understand the veteran perspective and the values that sustain them through combat, and to reflect on our own values.”

“It is understood that warriors released from service have been ordered to stand down for the rest of their lives, but they cannot begin again as civilians as if just waking from a sleep. It is difficult for some of us veterans to remember what we were like before the wars. Our stories from the front echo in who we have become.”

—from the forward to Standing Down by Benjamin Busch.

TALKING SERVICE PROGRAM GOALS

- Provide a forum for veterans to share wartime experiences, reflect on their service and examine how these experiences affect their civilian lives.
- Expand participants’ appreciation for the role literature can play and their ability to use literature to analyze past experiences to help them move forward productively.
- Build community by bringing veterans together, ultimately enhancing their connections to civilian life.
- Increase veterans’ comfort in reading, reflecting upon and critically discussing written text.
- Connect veterans to other community resources to aid in their transition to civilian life.

MORE ONLINE

For more details about Humanities Washington’s Talking Service program, visit humanities.org
BURN: TURNING STORIES INTO HEALING

By K.C. Mehaffey | guest commentary

TWISP – They gathered to acknowledge the wildfires that ravaged homes and destroyed histories. They gathered to share their experiences. They gathered to bond through sharing and to begin the healing process.

The Carlton Complex Fire in July 2014 was the largest wildfire in Washington state history, blackening over 256,000 acres and incinerating more than 300 homes in sparsely-populated Okanogan County. Four months later, audience members packed the Merc Playhouse in Twisp to watch a Humanities Washington-sponsored play based on real-life stories of Methow Valley residents who had fled the wildfire.

Burn: Stories of the Fire featured a post-play discussion with Humanities Washington trustee and scholar John Roth, who asked audience members why they came, what the fire significantly changed for them and how the community can move forward. A Methow Valley resident himself, Roth went through many of the same survivor experiences portrayed in the play: the nine-day power outage, closed highways, constant smoke and life-changing fear.

“Everybody was affected in one way or another, even though you weren’t maybe literally fighting fire on your doorstep,” he said after the performance.

To develop the script, director Rose Weagant Olcott wove together stories from people who had experienced the fire in assorted voices and formats. Scenes in the play jumped from one person to another, inter-spliced with news clips, fire reports and narration. Sitting in chairs on a stage without any background scenery or built sets, ten people read stories they had written, moving the play chronologically through the days of wildfire for themselves and the audience.

Shelley Block spoke of her efforts to lead her three horses Doc, Handsome and Quincy to safety. She suppressed her own fear in order to ride one horse and lead the other two along a county road amidst traffic, evacuation chaos and smoke.

“I thought about all of the wildlife and all of the trees,” said Block. “I thought of my grandmother, and how she had lived through the Peshtigo fire in Wisconsin.”

“As we continued our journey, I heard the echoing of my horses’ feet striking the pavement. We hit a heat wave when Doc suddenly let go of Handsome’s lead. He clambered past us, but the rope was in my hand. Handsome bolted wildly, cutting me and Quincy off, and leading to a sudden collision. Quincy reared from fear when the rope fell down near his feet. When he stepped on it, twisted and jerked, off I fell.”

The experience was also told through the eyes of Christine Kendall, who evacuated with her husband Jack and their dog Cooper. She recalled not only the fear and confusion, but the generosity of neighbors, including some she hadn’t known very well before.

“I checked to see if there was any room for us and our dog at two nearby hotels, but they were both full. I went back to the scene playing out in our neighborhood where
Nicole told me the power was going to be affected,” she said.

“Nicole told me that Mary Lou and Ron McCollum wanted Jack and me to stay with them, and that Cooper was welcome too. I really didn’t know them, except by sight. I didn’t feel right about imposing on them, but when Nicole said, ‘No, this is what we do in the Valley, we help each other out,’ she convinced us to stay.”

It was told through days of text messages by members of an entire family—Nicole Ringgold, her parents Alan and Marcia Ringgold, her husband Derek and their daughter Cymone Van Marter, who lives in Boston. In the early days of the fire, Nicole sent this series of texts:

Hey Mom and Dad. Lost power. Derek filled our bathtub with water. Grilling dinner then going to a public meeting about fire response.

Four miles of power line are burning. We’ll be out for a while. The fires have grown in scale in a huge way. Our side of the Valley is OK.

Audience members were riveted as they listened to a series of texts that Nicole Ringgold sent the moment the fire reached their part of the Valley.

Nicole: No one can see.

(pause)

They created a fire line below our house.

(pause)

On the phone with Sarah and Hans. They’ve sent us photos.

(pause)

Sounds like we lost our deck, so far.

(pause)

It’s down.

(pause)

Oh my God, it’s down!

Nicole: Our home is gone.

Mom: We love you.

Nicole: How are we going to tell Cymone?

“This use of theater to convey the real stories while they were still raw, and follow it with a discussion that could delve deeper into the issues, fits well with Humanities Washington’s mission,” Roth said.

It’s very significant that Humanities Washington was willing to support an activity in such a small place—one that had experienced tragedy—in an effort to help the community remember it and preserve it,”

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K. C. Mehaffey lives in Twisp, Washington and writes about Methow Valley and North Central Washington issues and events. A journalist since 1984, she has been as a freelance writer, a reporter for the Methow Valley News, and a staff writer for The Wenatchee World for the past 16 years.

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Using the words of those who experienced the fire made for a powerful post-play discussion. Audience members lauded the courage of the actors who shared their stories, and the skill of the director, who so successfully merged the experience into a flowing performance. They spoke of celebrating the survival of the community, of a new realization of the impermanence of things and of a greater awareness of other people’s hardships. They spoke of moving forward and healing.

Roth shared one moment that stuck with him that had occurred in the post-play discussion. Twisp resident Jim Kistner told of when he mentioned the play to people he knew and what it was about, they said:

“That’s just like the Methow—taking this fire and turning it into art,” Kistner said.

The crowd laughed.

“It was an attempt to not minimize the pain and hurt and loss that people had, but to try to put it in a different context—perhaps that made the story something that would last in the collective memory of the Valley,” he said.

“It’s not easy to turn really painful and devastating experiences into art,” said Roth. The play and the discussion effectively portrayed the pain of the experience with the caring and compassionate response that came out of the fire. It didn’t attempt to bring premature closure to the wildfire, but instead helped to make it part of the Valley’s history. ☀
JOIN US!

A Selection of Upcoming Humanities Washington Events

MARCH 13–19
SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS OUTREACH SERIES

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND – In conjunction with Book-It Repertory Theater’s production of Snow Falling on Cedars, Bainbridge Performing Arts will present a series of outreach events and resources to both educate and engage audiences in the theatrical production and to provide the community with opportunities to actively discuss the important historical, ethical, racial and social justice issues raised by the play.

March 25–28
SEVEN TONGUES OF FLAME: IRELAND’S EASTER REBELLION OF 1916

ROSALIA, PALOUSE, ST. JOHN, COLFAX, OAKESDALE – Musician, historian and educator Hank Cramer leads an inspirational presentation about how poets, singers and writers led the effort to symbolically liberate Dublin that ultimately resulted in Ireland achieving independence in 1921.

APRIL 23
POETRY WORKSHOPS WITH POET LAUREATE ELIZABETH AUSTEN

GOLDEDALE – Austen leads two hands-on poetry workshops designed to engage participants’ imaginations, life histories and sense of empathy through language. The class includes close reading of a few contemporary poems, then using one as a model for writing a first draft. No writing experience needed, and all are welcome.

MAY 19
WOMEN AS POLITICAL CHANGE AGENTS: FROM THE LATE 1800s TO THE PRESENT

REDMOND – Dr. Jeanne Kohl-Welles leads a thought-provoking presentation about the Washington state women in the 19th and 20th centuries who bucked societal norms and laws to pursue political leadership roles.

JUNE 20, 27
USING THEIR POWERS FOR GOOD

LANGLEY AND BREMERTON – GeekGirlCon Co-Founder Jennifer K. Stuller explores how individuals and organizations are using community-building, crowdsourcing, media criticism and performance to raise awareness, subvert gender norms and ensure their beloved culture is progressive, representative and inclusive.

ANNUAL BEDTIME STORIES EVENTS

OCTOBER 2 – SEATTLE
The Fairmont Olympic Hotel’s Spanish Ballroom, 411 University Street

OCTOBER 23 – SPOKANE
Spokane Club, 1002 W. Riverside Avenue

MORE ONLINE

More information about these events, along with a complete calendar of Humanities Washington activities (sortable by region): humanities.org/calendar
Welcome New Staff Member: David Haldeman

Humanities Washington has hired a new communications manager to fill the post vacated in July by Abby Rhinehart. David Haldeman joined our team on January 12 after relocating back to the Seattle area from Philadelphia. David is a writer and communications professional who holds a BA degree in journalism from the University of Washington. He has worked for several museums and nonprofits, including the Pacific Science Center, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Chemical Heritage Foundation, a history of science museum in Philadelphia. Welcome, David!

MORE ONLINE
Visit humanities.org/about/staff

Humanities Washington Receives $300,000 Satterberg Foundation Grant

Humanities Washington has received a three-year, $300,000 grant from the Satterberg Foundation—the largest grant award in Humanities Washington’s history—to expand its programs to the areas of greatest need. Based in Seattle, the Satterberg Foundation’s mission is to strengthen communities by promoting a just society and a sustainable environment.

“We are deeply grateful to the Satterberg Foundation and its trustees for this vote of confidence,” said Julie Ziegler, Humanities Washington executive director. “This sustained, significant support will enable us to reach new audiences with existing programs, as well as experiment with new and creative ways to engage a broad range of people in the humanities.”

Humanities Washington will use the funds to enhance and expand its Speakers Bureau, Think & Drink and the Prime Time Family Reading programs in 2015, and hopes to introduce new programming in 2016 and 2017.

“A key goal of Humanities Washington is to reach the broadest, most diverse audience possible with thought-provoking programs that engage communities in conversation,” said Ziegler. “The size and multi-year nature of this grant will enable us to look creatively into the future while bolstering already popular programs.”

MORE ONLINE
For more information about the Satterberg Foundation visit www.satterberg.org

Prime Time Family Reading Program to Expand Further in 2015

Humanities Washington grew its Prime Time Family Reading Program from four to 14 locations in 2014. Events were delivered in partnership with educators and libraries in Port Townsend, Spokane, the Tri-Cities, Monroe, Mukilteo and Walla Walla.

The program curriculum combines reading, storytelling and discussion to explore the cultural and ethical themes presented in children’s literature. Prime Time emphasizes the importance of families reading together and creates long-term library users. Since 1996, Humanities Washington has distributed more than 118,000 books to children, parent and teachers and positively impacted the lives more than 110,000 children and family members.

Beginning in mid-April, Humanities Washington will begin accepting RFPs for new partners to allow for further expansion of the program.

MORE ONLINE
For more on Humanities Washington’s grants program, visit humanities.org/grants.
Washington state is a wonderful and beautiful place to live—a state full of engaged and inquisitive communities. However, I think we can agree that like other states, we also face socio-economic challenges. I am proud to work with Humanities Washington, an organization committed to using the humanities as a tool to address these issues. Our programs enable reflection and build connections through constructive dialogue. Together we are building a Washington that is a great place for all to live.

We are particularly proud of the following 2014 accomplishments:

• Dramatic expansion of Prime Time Family Reading.
• Launch of Washington Stories Fund, sharing little-known stories of the people of our state.
• A year-long focus on Race, Place & Culture for Think & Drink.

We could not have accomplished these milestones without you. We are deeply grateful for your support, involvement and advocacy of the humanities in your community.

Cynthia Wells
Board Chair

Humanities Washington is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in Washington state.
2014 TOTAL EXPENSES: $1,098,720

2014 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- Administrative: $111,922 (10%)
- Fundraising: $183,001 (17%)
- Programs: $803,797 (73%)

REACH

- 113 cities served across the state
- 36 counties served of 39

READINGS AND CONVERSATIONS

- 3,174 Children and families reached through the Prime Time Family Reading Program; more than twice the number of 2013
- 4,927 Attendees at events held by Poet Laureate Elizabeth Austen
- 782 Participants at Think & Drinks
- 7,110 Attendees at Speakers Bureau presentations

GRANTMAKING AND FUNDRAISING

- 401 Bedtime Stories attendees in Seattle and Spokane
- 47 Grants funded in 2014; up from 35 in 2013

EXHIBITS & MEDIA

- 719,041 Travelers reached by Hope in Hard Times exhibit at SeaTac airport
- 3090 Followers on social media, up 25% from 2013
**YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN: THANK YOU TO OUR 2014 SUPPORTERS!**

Our friends and supporters help Humanities Washington nurture thoughtful and engaged communities by ensuring we can continue to provide free or very low-cost programming in all corners of the state.

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If you don’t think culture, history, and literacy matter, try watching an episode of The Jersey Shore. Thank you, Humanities Washington!”
—JAMIE FORD

“If this was insightful and a whole new take on topics I thought I knew everything about.”
—Think & Drink participant

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“I value the high quality humanities programs that are offered for kids and adults in my rural community and across the state.”

—MEREDITH WAGNER

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“I wanted you to know that I greatly enjoyed your class and found you a wonderful teacher. Thank you so much for sharing your poetry, your knowledge and yourself. I had an enjoyable and inspirational experience.”

—Poet Laureate program participant Pat Rogers to Elizabeth Austen
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For a complete list of our partners, visit humanities.org/about/annual-reports/partners2014

Stories have power. Transformative power.

I’ve believed this since I was very young, when a visit to my grandma’s book room opened my eyes to history and sparked a passion for lifelong learning.

Stories have been central to my adult life, too: As a longtime journalist throughout our state, I’ve seen stories bring communities together, prompt dialogue and inspire positive change.

And I’ve regularly seen the power of story in action through the work of Humanities Washington: Speakers engaging people of all ages and backgrounds in discussion, Think & Drink events inspiring conversation and community, a reading program that brings children and parents closer with a shared joy for books. In myriad ways, Humanities Washington uses story to enrich our communities and make our state a better place to live.

With this in mind, I was honored to become a Spark Society member. This new monthly giving club allows me to easily support the essential work Humanities Washington does from Seattle to Spokane. The amount I give each month adds up—especially when joined with the support of others who share my belief in the power of story.

Perhaps that’s you? If so, I hope you’ll join me in the Spark Society!

— T. Andrew Wahl
ABOUT HUMANITIES WASHINGTON

As the state’s flagship nonprofit for the humanities, our work brings people together to learn about their unique pasts and shared present, promotes respect for other perspectives, encourages community dialogue and nurtures relationships that enable us to move toward a more prosperous future.

By acting as a catalyst and facilitator, we support and partner with a wide network of communities, organizations and individuals across the state. Together, we provide low- or no-cost, high-quality cultural and educational programs that engage audiences in conversation, civil discourse and critical thinking.

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OUR MISSION

*Humanities Washington sparks conversation and critical thinking using story as a catalyst, nurturing thoughtful and engaged communities across our state.*

OUR PROGRAMS

**BEDTIME STORIES** celebrates critically acclaimed Northwest writers, who unveil new short stories created specifically for annual dinner galas in Seattle and Spokane.

**FAMILY READING** uses storytelling and discussion to explore cultural and ethical themes in children’s literature and emphasizes the importance of families reading together.

**GRANTS** assist local organizations in creating opportunities for their community to come together to discuss important issues using the humanities.

**SPEAKERS BUREAU** draws from a pool of leading cultural experts and scholars to provide free conversational lecture events for community partners to offer local audiences throughout the state.

**THINK & DRINK** brings hosted conversations on provocative topics and new ideas to pubs and tasting rooms around the state.

**WASHINGTON STATE POET LAUREATE** builds awareness and appreciation of poetry — including the state’s legacy of poetry — through public readings, workshops, lectures and presentations throughout the state. (In partnership with ArtsWA.)

MORE ONLINE

Additional information about any of our programs: humanities.org/programs
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