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SPARK

The magazine of Humanities Washington.

*Wealthy Seattleites
are transforming
rural Washington*

ALSO INSIDE:

- » *Should literature humanize the inhuman?*
- » *Overcoming toxic politics*

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Spark is a publication of nonprofit Humanities Washington, our state’s affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Online and at community venues across Washington, we hold hundreds of free events each year where scholars, authors, artists, and activists discuss everything from Washington State history to current social issues.

Published twice per year, *Spark* is a free magazine based on those conversations. It’s available at cultural organizations throughout the state, or you can have *Spark* delivered for free to your door by signing up at humanities.org.

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Cover image by Tarsha Rockowitz.

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There's a phenomenon called petrichor; it's the ethereal, rich scent that fills the air when rain touches dry soil. I was born and raised in Yakima, and as a teenager I would drive through the orchards at night when the sprinklers were running, reveling in the ambience of the scent.

After high school, I moved to Seattle for the reason many in smaller Eastern Washington towns do: the city felt exciting. I traded orchards for city parks, dry heat for soft rain. I also traded a more conservative culture for a more liberal one.

The so-called Cascade Curtain is real, and I've stood on both sides. Yet while there are genuine cultural and political differences, I've seen how easily people flatten each other into a caricature. Assuming people are liberal because they are from Seattle and others are conservative because they are from Central or Eastern Washington sets up a binary that isn't helpful.

Reading this issue of Spark, I was reminded of my own criss-crossing of our state's cultural divide. You'll read about wealthy Seattle residents changing small Eastern Washington towns, some with good intentions but resulting in unintended consequences. You'll read about our political fault lines from people on the front lines: a congressman, a political scientist, and a journalist. We also have articles and a poem about what happens when one group stops listening entirely to the needs of another—an issue that cuts not only across our state, but our nation: when capitalism and industry exploit whole peoples, discarding their history, sovereignty, and humanity for financial gain.

I recently moved to a small island accessible only by ferry. I have been surprised at the extent to which people treat others they've never met with kindness and a willingness to help. In line at the grocery store, I hear a greater variety of viewpoints expressed than I did in Seattle, but there is a feeling of "all being in this together" that weaves throughout peoples' interactions, and a greater spirit of tolerance. Bringing this attitude to our interactions with folks between regions could go a long way.

Call it a kind of social petrichor—the coming together of contrasts to make something greater.



Warmest regards,

Julie Ziegler
Chief Executive Officer
Humanities Washington

“THEY
SENT ME
HERE TO
STOP YOU.”



CAUTION

Half of Americans expect a civil war “in the next few years.” How can we tone down partisan rage and bring more compassion, nuance, and humility to our political lives?

By David Haldeman

“Americans have rarely been as polarized as they are today,” the Pew Research Center found in 2021. They cite many of the usual suspects for its cause: partisan and social media, regional and geographic sorting, and “America’s relatively rigid, two-party electoral system,” that collapses “a wide range of legitimate social and political debates into a singular battle line that can make our differences appear even larger than they may actually be.”

The latter point was reinforced by a 2018 study, which found an “exhausted majority” of Americans who “are ideologically flexible, do not conform to either partisan ideology, and tend to hold more complex and nuanced views on most issues” compared to the more extreme ends of both the left and right. Yet it’s the strong partisans that tend to drive the national conversation.

How can we tone down partisan rage; bring more compassion, nuance, and humility to our political lives; and build bridges with those we disagree with? With one poll from the University of California-Davis Violence Prevention Research Program and the California Violence Research Center finding that fully half of Americans expect a civil war in “the next few years,” the answer might mean the preservation of our democracy.

To answer these questions, Humanities Washington held a discussion this summer with three prominent figures: Congressman Derek Kilmer (WA-6), whose interest in bipartisanship led him to introduce the Building Civic Bridges act, a bill intended to reduce polarization and build relationships across lines of difference; Amanda Ripley, journalist for *The Atlantic* and the author of *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*; and WSU political science professor Cornell Clayton. The event was moderated by Craig Sims, lawyer and former criminal division chief of the Seattle Attorney’s Office.

These are written excerpts, edited for length and clarity, from a much longer discussion available on Humanities Washington’s YouTube channel.

Congressman Derek Kilmer: I still remember my first week in Congress. They had all the freshman members go to the Pentagon, then we took a bus back to the Capitol at seven o’clock at night. I stood up on the bus and said, “Hey, I’m gonna grab a burger if anybody wants to come”—because it’s my first week on the job and I’m gonna try to get to know people, right?

So we had three Democrats and three Republicans go to this burger joint on Pennsylvania Avenue, and we’re sitting there and talking about topics like: What was your race like? How did you get here? About 45 min into the dinner, I said something along the lines of, “It seems like we ought to be able to make some progress on at least some of this stuff!”

The guy sitting across the table from me was a Republican from the Midwest, and he said, “Derek, I like you.” He told me his parents used to live in my district, and he even called them after our freshman orientation and said, “You know, you seem to be represented by a pretty good guy.” But then he told me he won his seat by accusing the Republican incumbent of not being conservative enough. He said the first vote he cast when he got to Congress was a vote against John Boehner for Speaker of the

House, and he followed the vote with a press release stating that he voted against Boehner because he’s too compromising, too willing to work with Democrats. Then he said, “Derek, here’s what you don’t get: my constituents didn’t send me here to work with you. They sent me here to stop you.”

Cornell Clayton: Increasingly, there are two Americas: one that’s urban, cosmopolitan, and secular; and one that is rural, white, and devoutly religious. By almost every measure, the attitudes and values of the former have been winning over the last several decades, and this has created a backlash amongst those on the right who see these trends as an existential threat to their way of life. What’s important to understand, however, is that these issues of race, religion, and geography have always divided Americans.

What is different today, like in a few previous periods in our history, is that our political parties have sorted along these dimensions, so that these issues have become the primary cleavages in our partisan politics. When that happens, and our parties are closely divided, neither one dominates. It changes the logic of our political institutions. The incentive for the parties is no longer to de-escalate these divisions, but to intensify and heighten them. The incentive is not to use civility and moderation to appeal to the median voter. Our campaigns become about base strategies aimed at demonizing the opposition, stoking fear, and emphasizing these red meat issues. And that, I think, is the cycle of polarization and confrontational politics that we find ourselves in today.

Amanda Ripley: I’d been a journalist for about 20 years, when about maybe six years ago, I started to feel like journalism was sort of broken. It just wasn’t working the way it was supposed to work. Half the country didn’t believe that the outlets I wrote for were telling the truth. And political conflict was no longer behaving in a linear fashion, so it just didn’t make sense.

I stopped what I was doing and started following people and communities who’ve been stuck in really ugly conflicts of all kinds, and who’ve shifted into a healthier kind of conflict. Because conflict is important. Conflicts are how we challenge each other and get challenged. So the goal isn’t *no* conflict right? Any great story has conflict. Any strong organization, family, or church, has conflict. The problem is “high conflict,” or what’s sometimes called “intractable conflict,” where it takes on a life of its own. It becomes conflict-for-conflict’s-sake and doesn’t

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behave in ways that we're used to. And everything we do tends to make it worse, even when we're really trying to make it better.

Congressman Derek Kilmer: In December I visited a YMCA in my district, where I thought we were going to talk about the fact that gyms were losing money during the pandemic. But that's not what they wanted to talk about. They wanted to talk about the fact that they literally had fights break out over red or blue political issues. The people showing up to work out at a Y had gotten in arguments and into fisticuffs because they couldn't agree on politics. And in that instance, we saw something good come out of something bad. That community said, *We're not going to ignore this problem.* They hired a consultant firm that's training their staff and board in conflict resolution and fostering civil discourse, so that people listen to each other. And rather than settling disputes through shouting matches and fist fights, I think we need to recognize that we're not going to agree with each other on everything as a country. But we've got to figure out how to peacefully coexist and navigate some really complex issues, and that's something that I've been working on.

We actually introduced some legislation called the Building Civic Bridges Act that's focusing on addressing conflict and division and supporting efforts—including some of these hyper local efforts, whether it be at the YMCA, or whether it be religious institutions—trying to get people to engage with one another across their lines of difference.

Amanda Ripley: In every high conflict, or intractable conflict, around the world, whether it's a political conflict, gang violence, or even a really toxic divorce conflict, there are always a few things present. One of the most reliable triggers is the presence of conflict entrepreneurs. These are people or platforms who exploit conflict for their own ends. We all can be conflict entrepreneurs, especially in a culture where we've designed a

bunch of our institutions, including politics, journalism, and Twitter, to incentivize and reward conflict entrepreneurship. So this is a problem we have created, we humans. Not all of us, but we are in this system now.



▲ Two people in a heated argument about religion outside Columbia University. | Photo by David Shankbone/Wikimedia Commons.

We could easily design systems, especially social media platforms, that incentivize conflict interrupters. I will say, as a journalist trying to resist this culture of high conflict, it has been very lonely at times, because you are not part of your group. We are wired to want to be in our group, whatever that is, and to want to feel like we are part of something. That someone has our back, especially in times of conflict. If you resist the forces of your group that are turning to contempt, or dehumanization, or demonization, it is lonely.

Cornell Clayton: Back in the 1950s and 1960s, we actually thought that our partisan politics was too cozy. We were *too* bipartisan. In fact, the American Political Science Association came out with a major report entitled “Towards Responsible Party Government,” in which they said the problem we had in our politics was our parties were controlled by people with similar social backgrounds who agreed on almost every major policy issue. That's a problem for democracy, because democracy requires real choices and real alternatives to offer to voters.

So during the 1970s there were a number of reforms that were taken to actually sharpen the divide between our parties. There

were reforms like moving from caucuses to primaries to select candidates, and reforms in the leadership of Congress that removed or emphasized seniority in order to empower younger, less moderate members of Congress. Those reforms have worked relatively well. Today we have real choices between the parties and that's a good thing from a democratic standpoint. You want people to have real choices. The problem is the conflict is also being channeled in some dysfunctional and anti-democratic ways, and that needs to be addressed.

There's really no evidence that Americans have become less civil or less compassionate than in the past, when we were a country that had slavery and a Civil War where we killed two percent of our population. We horribly discriminated against gays, Chinese Americans, and Catholics, and Jews, and all sorts of other people for years. If anything, we're more compassionate and more accepting of diversity in America today as individuals than ever, probably in our history. The problem is our institutions, and they're channeling conflict in dysfunctional ways.

Amanda Ripley: One of my favorite studies trying to understand violence and conflict was in India, and it studied why there was Hindu-Muslim violence in some villages, in some cities, and not in others. The researcher controlled for everything you could think of under the sun, and ultimately the reason he came up with was that the health of civic institutions really matter. So this goes full circle to what Derek was saying. The YMCA that you mentioned in your district that is trying to introduce people to different ways to de-escalate conflict? That really matters. The strength of softball leagues and chambers of commerce and schools and rotary clubs and synagogues and mosques. All these things—they're unusually present in the United States. There are pockets of the country that have become deserts for this and there's a map that can show you where those are, and that's where we need to focus our resources. But those things really matter when it comes to reducing political violence and helping us know each other across racial divides, political divides, and other kinds of divides.

Cornell Clayton: The quickest way to the kind of Manichean thinking that is turning Americans against each other is to embrace declineism. That's the idea that things are getting worse, and that politics is a zero-sum game. That the gains of some can only come at the expense of others. This is a constant battle because I think there's this declinist narrative on both the


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If you resist the forces of your group that are turning to contempt, or dehumanization, or demonization, it is lonely.

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left and the right today, though they have different reasons why they believe things are getting worse and worse.

I find this with my students all the time. I tell them: just think about the progress in my lifetime. When I was born, in a third of the states in this country, you couldn't marry somebody of a different race, let alone somebody of the same sex. When I was born, women in this country couldn't apply for credit in their own name. They couldn't pursue careers in medicine, law, other major professions. Sandra Day O'Connor graduated top of her class from Stanford and had to take a job as a legal secretary because nobody would hire her as a lawyer. In 1960, the average American lifespan was a decade shorter than it is today. The family poverty level was double what it is today. The number of people with a high school degree has doubled in that time. I can go on and on. Our air and water is cleaner. We've saved endangered species.

That's not to say we don't have real challenges. We have significant challenges around race, around climate change. But there's really never been a better time than right now to be an American. More people live longer, happy, safer, more just lives, with more opportunities than any time in our history. And so, without being Pollyannish, without downplaying the real challenges we face today, I think it's important to have that hope, and that perspective that history provides, and to pass that hope onto the next generation, so they see politics as a promise, and not something to despair about. That they see other people as their allies and not their enemies in building a better America, and a better life. 



View the entire event on Humanities Washington's YouTube channel.



▲ Aerial view of the Duwamish Waterway and Kellogg Island, showing the original river bend and straightened canal, with downtown Seattle in the background. Courtesy of Tom Reese.

LOST WATERS

The Duwamish has been a vital waterway for Indigenous peoples for generations. Now it's largely invisible, drastically reshaped, and among the most polluted rivers in the nation. Can it be saved?

By BJ Cummings

A bulldozer was churning up the ground where Cecile Maxwell's ancestral village had once stood.

Maxwell, the great-great grandniece of "Chief Seattle" and the new chairwoman of the Duwamish Tribe, had been visiting the site upriver of the West Seattle Bridge often. In the months leading up to this day in early July 1976, she had frequently talked with the archaeology students sifting through

carefully excavated bores of black dirt specked with shell and bone fragments. She was eager to learn about their finds and how they might affect her tribe's claims to land and fishing rights in the area.

No students were working: their project had been wrapped up, the grids and tools they'd been using in their research removed. The site had been quiet for several weeks, but today a bulldozer



By the time the valley filled with the noisy bustle of commerce and industry, less than two percent of the river's original habitat remained, pushing local salmon runs and wildlife close to extinction. For the rest of the century, the river was used as a waste repository.



was working the area where the students had meticulously documented fragments of bone, stone tools, and myriad seashell deposits. Alarmed, Maxwell hurried back to her office and dialed the number for the Army Corps of Engineers.

The previous fall, Maxwell had received a letter notifying her that the Army Corps had found evidence of a tribal settlement on land owned by the Port of Seattle. The Corps's district archaeologist, David Munsell, had been reviewing an application from the port for a permit to fill a river bend that was left behind when the Duwamish Waterway was constructed more than half a century earlier. The port moved to fill this last remaining river bend with an eye to adding more land along the Duwamish Waterway—land that could be used to build a new marine terminal.

The port's permit application was routine, but a new Washington State law, passed in 1975, declared a state interest in protecting archaeological resources for their historical and scientific value. The Corps of Engineers had never examined any Duwamish River sites for their archaeological value before, but the port's Terminal 107 property, which sat along the remnant stretch of river, was right across the channel from Munsell's office: he could see it from the windows of the Army Corps building.

Munsell drove across the West Seattle Bridge to take a look. He parked his car and walked to a cluster of houses in the process of being demolished. To prepare for developing the property, the port was evicting the occupants of an entire neighborhood of modest homes that stretched along the river bend. Some of the houses had already been removed, their shallow foundation pits exposed. Peering down at the exposed layers of earth in one of the pits, Munsell immediately knew that he would not be

approving the port's application. A swath of exposed shell and bone fragments more than a foot deep cut across the face of the dirt—a classic midden, or disposal ground, of a type commonly associated with prehistoric villages. The Port of Seattle's Terminal 107 had archaeological resources in abundance, lying bare for all to see.

The day Cecile Maxwell came upon the bulldozer desecrating the remains of her ancestors' village, the archaeologists—mostly brought in from the University of Washington—had just submitted their findings to the Port of Seattle. The shell midden that David Munsell had spotted on his visit had been confirmed as part of a site with great archaeological significance, and the university team called for further study before any development of the area. The report recommended that the site “be actively protected from any further disturbance.” Nevertheless, a few weeks later the port ordered the demolition of several condemned houses on the property, right in the middle of the study area. The incident destroyed much of the documented village site before Maxwell's frantic call to the Army Corps could stop it.

According to Tom Lorenz, the university's lead archaeologist at the site, the remains had been destroyed. “I'm sort of overcome by how much is gone,” he told the *Seattle Times*. “This area has been so disturbed that there is very, very little left that's of use.” The port insisted the demolition was accidental, but an irate letter from Washington State's historic preservation officer, Art Skolnick, accused the port of having “willfully altered this significant archaeological site” and said the bulldozers had “irrevocably destroyed a prime source of scientific data.” The digging and compaction destroyed 80 to 90 percent of the known archaeological remains.

* * *

The story of the Duwamish River and the experiences of its people—Native, immigrant, and industrialist—is largely missing from the popular history of Seattle. The river’s original watershed extended from Mount Rainier’s Emmons Glacier to the north King County suburb of Woodinville and included the White, Green, Black, and Cedar Rivers, Lakes Washington and Sammamish, and a spiderweb of interconnected creeks and lakes, from north Seattle’s Green Lake to Roaring Rock Creek in southwest King County. The entire watershed drained through the Duwamish River to the Puget Sound embayment we call Elliott Bay, on downtown Seattle’s waterfront. It was the land of the Dkhw’Duw’Absh or Doo-Ahbsh (“people of the inside”) and the closely related Hah-chu-Ahbsh (“lake people”), today collectively known as the Duwamish Tribe.

The changes to the watershed did not begin with the arrival of the Denny Party, commonly believed to be the city’s first settlers, but with the very first white immigrants to the area now known as Seattle: Jacob and Samuel Maple, Henry van Asselt, and the Collins family. After a foray into California gold mining, Luther Collins abandoned his farm on the Nisqually River, near the British-owned Hudson Bay Company’s trading post. He joined a trio of other travelers to scout out a new destination a full day’s paddle north of the company post. Collins, who had visited this “unsettled” river before, stoked his new companions’ ambitions with descriptions of the fertile Duwamish Valley as an ideal homeland with friendly natives.

The settlers of the 1850s named their new city Seattle, for the tribal leader who welcomed and supported them when they arrived. Since this pioneering party first settled on the Duwamish River, alliances and conflicts between and among Native peoples, immigrant residents, and local and global industrialists have transformed the watershed’s natural resources, its economy, and all of its communities. The City of Seattle grew from the rich resources of the river’s tide flats, from the monumental feats of its early industrial barons, and from the persistence of generations of Native and immigrant residents. But this growth came at a high cost.

Only seventy years after the first colonists settled on the Duwamish River, its watershed had been reduced to less than one-quarter of its original size of more than two thousand square miles, and only the waters of the Green River still

flowed to the Duwamish. The White, Black, and Cedar Rivers had been diverted to bypass the Duwamish or had dried up entirely. The waters of the freshwater lakes that these rivers fed and drained were forced through newly engineered routes. The Native people who lived by the changed rivers had been similarly “diverted” to reservations, relegated to shantytowns, integrated into settler society through marriage, or eliminated through disease and warfare.

As an engineering feat, the transformation was remarkable. The dramatic alterations to the Duwamish watershed, and to the river itself, allowed for the birth of a thriving industrial city. Business boomed. Immigrants flocked to the growing metropolis from all corners of the world. From the banks of the Duwamish, a city was born.

Today the Duwamish River is polluted, its neighborhoods in poor health, and its industrial base struggling. At the start of the twentieth century, the city’s boosters filled the mudflats at the mouth of the river to create one of the world’s largest artificial islands. In 1913, dredgers began to straighten the river’s bends and deepen its draft for easy access by ships. The land bordering this new channel was leveled and filled as a site for factories in an effort to create a modern industrial city. By the time the valley filled with the noisy bustle of commerce and industry, less than two percent of the river’s original habitat remained, pushing local salmon runs and wildlife close to extinction. For the rest of the century, the river was used as a waste repository.

* * *

But in the closing decades of the 20th century, a growing effort to clean up the Duwamish began to form, led in part by an unlikely environmental champion.

South Park’s John Beal was a hard-drinking chain smoker with Coke-bottle glasses and yellowed teeth, and could often be found smoking a cigarette on a streamside rock while local schoolchildren planted saplings nearby or released juvenile salmon into the bubbling waters of Hamm Creek.

But that was after the children had adopted Beal as their grandfatherly eco-savior and inspirational hero, after they had surrounded Beal while he told them about the regenerative power of nature and of their own power to heal the world around them.



▲ Tribal canoes paddle up the industrialized Duwamish River during the Spirit Returns Paddle in 2002, signifying the Duwamish Tribe's return to their ancestral land. A Port of Seattle shipping terminal is in the background. Courtesy of Paul Joseph Brown.

"This right here," Beal would say, using a stick to draw a circle in the dirt around their feet, "this is the environment. This is your environment. And what happens to it is up to you."

John Beal moved to South Park in 1976 with his wife and three young children. Born in Montana in 1950 and raised in Spokane, he never knew his father, who died of a heart attack a month after John was born. A learning disability and an inherently acerbic nature set Beal up for difficult teenage years. In 1967 he was expelled from high school, and according to his family, a local magistrate gave him the choice of going to jail or enlisting in the military. Despite his extreme near-sightedness and dyslexia, he shipped out to Vietnam as a marine rifleman to push back against the Tet Offensive in early 1968.

After months of direct combat and multiple battlefield injuries, Beal wrote a letter home to his wife, Lana, a high school sweetheart whom he had married just before shipping out: "The doc seems to feel that I might need some mental care," he confided. "When I was hit, we were under mortar attack. He

seems to think it might have done a little something to my mind." After recovering from his physical injuries, Beal was sent back

into the field, joining a regiment with orders to level a jungle island with bombs and Agent Orange. There he earned the nickname of Johnny the Terror for his hand-to-hand combat, until he was captured, beaten, and locked in a cage as a prisoner of war. With the help of a local woman, he escaped after thirteen days in captivity and was sent back home eight months after being shipped out. He suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder for the rest of his life. By age twenty-nine, he had suffered three heart attacks that may, ironically, have saved his life.

In 1976, Beal's doctors diagnosed him with terminal heart disease, warning that he was likely to suffer another, potentially fatal, heart attack within months. "Get a hobby," they advised, hoping to channel his anxieties and prolong his life by a few months. Beal turned for solace to a deep ravine behind his house—a murky tributary stream that flowed through



▲ Volunteers plant native shrubs along the Duwamish River in South Park during a “Duwamish Alive!” work party—a habitat-restoration event held at multiple sites along the river each spring and fall. Courtesy of Paul Joseph Brown.

discarded trash and blackberry brambles on its way to the Duwamish River. Thinking about the Vietnamese island of Go Noi where he had fought and denuded the riverbanks of their thick forest cover, Beal resolved to clean up the little pocket of creek in the time that remained to him.

Beal began to drag washing machines, abandoned cars, construction waste, and everyday trash out of the stream. Digging out the blackberry choking the slopes at the bottom of the ravine, Beal read up on what kinds of plants he could bring in to replace the invasive bushes. He planted watercress, duckweed, and other native plants. Slowly, his private refuge became a rare pocket of native plant and wildlife habitat along the south end stream. He next turned his attention to the oily water that continued to flow through his hard-earned ecotopia.

After a series of hit-and-miss efforts to filter out the oil, Beal dragged a hay bale down the hill and laid it across the narrow channel of water flowing between the saplings he had planted on the stream banks. It worked. In the following days, Beal

visited Hamm Creek and watched as water with an oily sheen flowed along the creek upstream of the half-submerged hay bale and clear water flowed away from it. Beal continued reading, refined his hay-bale water filter with an oil-absorbing boom of his own invention, and began reaching out to scientists and government employees who might be able to help him restore his creek.

As the creek began to thrive, Beal followed its flows upstream and down, removing trash and planting saplings as he went. He could only go so far, though: Hamm Creek traveled underground for much of its length, having been channeled into pipes and stormwater drains designed to keep the creek out of the way of businesses, streets, and homes as the Duwamish Valley transitioned from farmland to urban and industrial use.

In the 1980s, John Beal approached the Duwamish Tribe to ask for help restoring salmon runs in the Duwamish River and its tributary stream in South Park. James Rasmussen, a tribal council member, was particularly impressed with Beal’s work

and his passion for the river. Rasmussen and Beal worked to focus attention on the river that had sustained Rasmussen's family for generations and the creek that Beal credited with saving his life. They organized a broad constituency of public and private interests to support the restoration of Hamm Creek and the larger Duwamish watershed. In 1990, in partnership with the City of Seattle and King County, they created the Green-Duwamish Watershed Alliance.

With the tribe and local governments now providing assistance, Beal redoubled his efforts to save the creek. In 1995, King County agreed to purchase a reach of the creek where Beal had spent years working to remove trash and debris. The project included a series of restored wetland ponds connected by fish ladders winding up the ravine where Beal had first discovered the creek. The project, named Point Rediscovery, was completed in 1998.

Shortly afterward, the federal government declared the entirety of the Duwamish River a Superfund site—one of the nation's most hazardous waste sites—and ordered a cleanup. News of this directive was published in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* on September 14, 2001—150 years to the day after the first settlers arrived.

The studies that followed the cleanup order revealed a legacy of water, land, and air pollution with tragic health consequences for local residents and fishermen. Land and business values stagnated as more contamination was discovered, and the full cost of cleanup—and liability—skyrocketed.

* * *

In just seven generations the changes brought by Euro-American explorers and colonists in the Northwest have transformed the Duwamish River and its communities nearly beyond recognition. Yet some of the river's Native people and their kin in the natural world hang on. The salmon, the cedar, and the great blue heron can still be found in and near the river if you know where to look. And Duwamish tribal members today frequently echo their chairwoman's mantra when they remind us, "We are still here."

In 2019, the Duwamish Tribe celebrated the tenth anniversary of their longhouse and cultural center, built on the waterway's sole surviving river bend. Erected more than a century after

their last ancestral longhouse was burned down, the center serves as a reminder that Native places and people survive in Seattle. The Muckleshoot Tribe, which absorbed many of the Duwamish people, also remind us of this each fall when they lay their nets out on the river, catching salmon for the tribe and for trading, as they have always done, in the commercial market. Despite all the changes, the Duwamish River, its people, and its salmon are inextricably linked.

Recently, government, industry, and community representatives working to clean up the Duwamish River are struggling to find common ground, overcome past divisions, and build trust as they move forward together to address the river's challenges. None of this work is easy, and its success is not guaranteed. But most consider the rewards of creating a new model of collaboration to be well worth the trouble. Ridding the city of the stigma of having one of the nation's most contaminated rivers is a powerful incentive to succeed. For this to happen, everyone will need to be at the table—listening, problem-solving, and lifting their share of the burden—in order to provide for the needs of the city's diverse Native and immigrant communities in the complex urban and industrial waterscape of Seattle's only river.

The Duwamish story is one case study in the national effort to express our values in the way we treat our rivers and their people. The Standing Rock battle cry—"Mni wiconi," or "Water is life"—captures the threat many communities perceive in sacrificing our rivers for national "progress" and financial gain. As we begin to restore riverbank habitat and to scrub decades of chemical waste from our river bottoms, we have the opportunity to act in accordance with our values. If we do enough to create a result pleasing to the eye, but insufficient to protect the health of our river-dependent communities, that decision will speak volumes about the classism and racism that underpin it. And if we demand a pristine restoration of a romanticized past, we may disenfranchise exactly those people from whom our rivers were appropriated in the first place.

Collaboration, respect, and justice are core values that we may or may not choose to guide our efforts at environmental restitution, but they are most certainly the only path forward if we want to ensure that our actions make the Duwamish into a river that serves all the people who live, work, fish, play, and pray in and along its waters.



▲ Cecile Hansen, chairwoman of the Duwamish Tribe, wearing a traditional basketry hat in 2010. The Duwamish River is in the background. Courtesy of Steve Shay.


* * *

After David Munsell’s refusal to approve the application to build a new terminal at the site of Cecile Maxwell’s ancestral village, the Port of Seattle was not pleased. Munsell and Art Skolnick became so concerned about the port’s actions and the political pressure it might exert to get its permits approved that they took the highly unusual step of alerting the news media about their findings. Public support for preserving the site erupted.

The Army Corps demanded a new study to examine the rest of the port property in order to determine whether any more artifacts remained outside the disturbed area. The new study revealed that while the demolition had destroyed the half acre that made up the original research area, an additional two and a half acres of archaeologically important resources were found dating back 1,400 years. They included shell, bone, and stone

tool fragments, along with the remains of an “aboriginal house structure”—possibly one of the Duwamish Tribe’s ancestral longhouses or perhaps a fish-drying shelter used during the winter salmon runs. The new study recommended that the site be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places and that immediate steps be taken to ensure its protection.

By the end of the 1980s, the port had cut its losses and laid a layer of protective soil over the historic village to preserve its contents, opening up the river-bend property to public recreational access. The Duwamish Tribe’s village would not be erased to make way for a new shipping terminal.

Today, public art installations and interpretive history signs dot a pedestrian walking trail along the riverbank where the Duwamish Tribe’s longhouse stood at the center of the village called Yuliquwad—Lushootseed for “basketry hat,” a traditional cedar headpiece. Adjoining the site is a city park, Herring’s House, named after another tribal village once located about a mile away, on the shore of Elliott Bay. Today, everything up- and downriver of the historic village has been altered by the construction of the Duwamish Waterway, but the river bend itself—the last remnant of the original river within the Seattle city limits—remains the same. 

BJ Cummings is the author of *The River That Made Seattle: A Human and Natural History of the Duwamish*, from which this article was adapted by permission of UW Press. She founded the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition and manages community engagement for the University of Washington’s Superfund Research Program.



Cummings is presenting her free Humanities Washington talk, *The River That Made Seattle*, around the state.

▶ *Check out our calendar at humanities.org to find an upcoming presentation.*

SHOULD LITERATURE HUMANIZE *the* INHUMAN?



▲ Photo by Brandi Redd/Unsplash.

Books can get us to empathize with monstrous people. Professor Richard Middleton-Kaplan believes that's not only a good thing, but a vital part of human rights work.

By Hong Ta

How do we extend humanity to people who commit inhumane acts? In professor Richard Middleton-Kaplan's Speakers Bureau talk *Humanity in Print: Literature and Human Rights*, he explores the merits of using works of literature as a way to connect with figures in historical events who we do not fully see as human. He emphasizes that we can extend these ideas, and use empathy, to prevent the next atrocities from occurring.

Richard is the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Walla Walla Community College and has a background in teaching literature.

The following interview was edited for length and clarity.

Humanities Washington: How did you come up with the idea for this talk?

Richard Middleton-Kaplan: In 2011, I did a sabbatical as a visiting scholar at the Center for Applied Human Rights at the University of New York. I contacted the director and asked him if there would be a way to help them develop a course through their curriculum. And he said yes, and that's what I eventually did.

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If people who do these things are just monsters, then we don't have to really try to understand them in human terms. But they are human, and another such human will come along, and we need to learn from that and understand them.

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The idea of their Applied Human Rights program was to train their faculty not to sit behind desks. To be not only publishing scholars, but activists in the field of human rights. So I started to think about what the value of literature could be to somebody who was working as a human rights defender.

What I started to realize was that in many works of literature, there's an encounter with extremity, and then an author working with their creative imagination to find meaning in their experience. And sometimes finding a *lack* of meaning in their experience of mass atrocity or extremity, but even that could be consoling if I'd been through something and it seemed meaningless to me. I would at least see, *There's another writer who's worked through that—I'm not alone*, and it might help me, and it also might help me understand the incomprehensible.

So if we're looking at something like what took place in Rwanda, or Cambodia, or Bosnia Herzegovina, or the Nazi holocaust, there are things people did that we talked about as being incomprehensible, unimaginable, inhuman. But they're not really inhuman, because they're done by humans. So if through literature we can understand that, we can find meaning or even consolation in that connection. Or at least a sense of feeling less alone. That, for me, was a powerful recognition.

What are some pieces of literature that have personally moved you?

One is a play by Arthur Miller from 1947 called *All My Sons*. A person who has done something really horrible makes the plea, “see it human.” Meaning, *please try to understand what*

I did in human terms. And that line really stays with me, because we're thinking about human rights defenders in the field and the kinds of acts that they may see committed. Can we see it as human, when we're faced with something that was just incomprehensible?

There's a play called *Master Harold and the Boys* written in the 1980s. It's about a privileged young white boy and two Black South Africans who have essentially raised him because his own father had been a violent, absent alcoholic. That young boy can't admit to how cruel his father had been to him, so he takes it out on these two black South African men who've done nothing but love him and try to be surrogate fathers to him.

One more is a work by Linda Ellia called *Notre Combat*, “Our Struggle” in French. “My Struggle” was the name of Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. And she changed it to *Our Struggle*. And the reason she did that was that she grew up Jewish in Tunisia, and her family left there because of the rise of antisemitism. Her daughter picked up a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* that she had found at her friend's house. Ellia did this project where she took 600 pages of *Mein Kampf* and first started trying to imaginatively transform the page, and decorate it in different ways. She sent them out to people from all over the world. And the results, which I saw at an art exhibit, are absolutely remarkable. So that's really affecting to me, because it shows me the power of the creative imagination, to take atrocity, to take hatred, and not to erase it, but to instill empathy in people who we might not have thought to extend that to. And to do that without denying the horror.

That's what I think literature in the creative imagination does. And isn't that the goal of human rights? To lead us to justice, to better human conduct? Those are just three little examples. Big examples, of course.

What would you say to folks about the merits of learning about literature from the perspective of perpetrators of violence?

I'd say a couple of things. One is that we all have our own trauma. If we can see how others who've experienced those things have come to a better understanding, to healing, to a more humane path, then we're less alone. We can begin to heal by the example of others.

As far as being exposed to the perspective of perpetrators, I'd say a couple of things. One is if we write them off as monsters, aberrations, inhuman, then we're not going to be able to be prepared for the next one, right? Because if people who do these things are just monsters, then we don't have to really try to understand them in human terms. But they are human, and another such human will come along, and we need to learn from that and understand them. And we can determine for ourselves through exposure how somebody might have become that way, or fought that way, through literature, which can give us insights that we might never have gotten otherwise.

This is what literature does—it expands the optical field of human behavior, the morality of humanity, the feeling and connection and empathy. That won't go away if we pretend they're not there.

What would you want listeners to take away from your talk?

I would want them to take away that literature has a direct relevance to human rights work and can open up experiences of understanding the behaviors of perpetrators. So literature can provide us with insight and access to the psyche, the hearts, and the souls of people whom we can't understand at the surface.

And it can help us come to terms with our own trauma and can then aid in the work of human rights. Part of the goal is for people to see what's in these works of literature, how those writers dealt with what was local to them, and how people who attend the talk can then apply that to their own communities.



Hong Ta is a Seattle-born journalist from the University of Puget Sound, studying politics and government, as well as Spanish literature, language, and culture.



Richard Middleton-Kaplan is giving his free Humanities Washington Speakers Bureau talk "Humanity in Print: Literature and Human Rights" around the state.

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Image by Tarsha Rockowitz.

WEALTHY SEATTLEITES ARE TRANSFORMING RURAL WASHINGTON

A new strategy to revive struggling small towns is seeing success—but also giving rise to cultural and class conflicts.

By E.J. Iannelli

In 2014, sociologist Jennifer Sherman moved to Paradise Valley, a (pseudonymous) area spanning roughly 60 rural miles in Washington State. Unlike a growing number of new residents in the area, she wasn't relocating to this idyllic spot on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains for its natural beauty or its proximity to outdoor recreation. She was there to study the effects that a recent influx of people—mostly wealthy urbanites from nearby Seattle—was having on Paradise Valley's communities.

Paradise Valley was a very deliberate choice on Sherman's part. About a decade earlier, she had studied an area in California—dubbed Golden Valley—and documented the findings in her 2009 book, *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*. In many ways, Golden Valley offered a stark counterpoint to Paradise Valley. Whereas Golden Valley had never fully recovered from the loss of its logging and ranching industries, the forces of neoliberal globalization, and the Great Recession of the early 2000s, Paradise Valley, which had faced similar setbacks, appeared to be thriving. Their very different outcomes largely came down to the role of something called “amenity-based tourism.”

Amenity development, like its name suggests, turns natural resources such as rivers, lakes, mountains, and forests into commodifiable features. In the amenity economy, the mountain that might have been clear-cut or strip-mined a century ago by extractive industries instead becomes a climbing spot, a hiking destination, or a wildlife refuge that exists in a semi-preserved state. Those amenities draw out-of-towners, who in turn bring ancillary demands—and, crucially, disposable income—for food, entertainment, lodging, and other creature comforts. This, or so the theory goes, then gives rise to a vibrant service economy that can replace the now-defunct manufacturing or industrial economy, with the added benefit of having a much smaller environmental footprint.

The allure of a smooth, win-win solution to an entrenched, systemic problem is why the amenity economy is often touted as the solution to challenges that have arisen from the combination of rural deindustrialization, population loss, and geographic isolation. Yet during her research, Sherman quickly realized that the outward success of Paradise Valley glossed over far more serious rifts and struggles between two groups that she classifies as “old-timers” and “newcomers.” As she writes

in her 2021 book *Dividing Paradise: Rural Inequality and the Diminishing American Dream*, “Among the documented potential downsides of amenity development are issues including gentrification, social and cultural clash, and reorganization of local power structures in favor of better resourced in-migrants—all of which are visible in Paradise Valley.”

Sherman has distilled these revealing case studies and her nearly two decades of research into a talk for Humanities Washington titled “Diamonds in the Rough: The Gentrification of Rural Washington.” Presented in partnership with the Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service, this talk traces the complex history of modern rural communities, outlines the unintended consequences of amenity development, and presents some possible positive paths forward.

Humanities Washington spoke with Sherman about her research and how it informs her talk. The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Humanities Washington: What was it about Paradise Valley that intrigued you?

Jennifer Sherman: I had actually visited Paradise Valley as a tourist to take part in outdoor sports activities, and I was really struck by it. In some ways it reminded me so much of Golden Valley in California, where I spent a year of my life. It looked very similar and had a lot of similar amenities. But it was also really, really different in the sense that it was thriving, whereas that other community had been kind of dying at the time. So that made me interested in investigating the impact of amenity tourism. What are its effects on the population that had lived there for a long time? Were they still there? Were they still doing those same types of jobs? How was this set of changes in economic development affecting them?

What sort of impacts did you see?

There are a number of different impacts, some of which I would characterize as changing land use, and some of which are a little bit more pernicious in the sense that they create social inequalities or economic inequalities or both.

In terms of land use, amenity tourism is often connected to in-migration, such as second-home ownership or retirement migration. As a result, land goes from being seen as kind of public good that everybody shares in common, or as an

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Land goes from being seen as kind of public good that everybody shares in common, or as an economic resource that can be used for agricultural or industrial purposes, to being something that is supposed to be privately held or kept in a pristine state.

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economic resource that can be used for agricultural or industrial purposes, to being something that is supposed to be privately held or kept in a pristine state. You end up with debates over where people can and can't go, or fences going up where there never were fences before. Old and new come into conflict. A lot of what I've heard about over my time was the changing nature of a hunting license. What does it cost? Who can get it? Is hunting something everybody can access or is it something that becomes accessible only to those with enough resources to do it?

And that brings me to this larger question of inequality. For starters, an amenity-driven economy doesn't create living-wage jobs; it creates a lot of service-sector jobs that don't pay a living wage. So you have this impoverished workforce for whom hard work is just not going to pay off.

On top of that, successful amenity development is almost always accompanied by gentrification, which generally means the in-movement of groups of people who have more resources than the people who were originally there. In the case of Paradise Valley, more than half the homes in the area are now owned by people who don't inhabit them full-time. That drives up housing values and pushes local populations out. You also see different interests. When an urban neighborhood gentrifies, one group often displaces the other. That's not just reflected in housing access but also in the nature of services—the stores, the bars, the restaurants. All of that's going to start to look more like the new population that it does the old population. That process ends up marginalizing the more working-class population that had been living there.

Isn't displacement—newcomers moving in on old-timers' territory—just an inevitable natural phenomenon?

This is the story of so much of human history: one group of people displacing another. The tough part is when the displacement occurs because of access to different types of resources. It isn't simply that one group of people moves in and we've got two different styles. What's happening in this community and many others like it is that the two groups of people have such different access to various resources that it's not really a level playing field. It becomes really easy for this group of newcomers—a term that's reductive, honestly, because it makes it sound like it's all about who got there when—with all the resources to very quickly wrest power away from the folks who were there longer rather than kind of merging their interests. You can think of this as a form of cultural imperialism. There's an assumption that everybody is going to want what we want. But, in fact, different groups of people have different cultural norms, different desires, and different things that appeal to them.

And you concluded that this inadvertent cultural imperialism comes down to something called *class blindness*. What is that exactly?

I basically define *class blindness* as the tendency for those with social-class privilege to be unaware of it and not recognize it as a form of privilege or advantage. It's sort of the social class corollary to colorblind racism, which is the idea that if you don't recognize race, it must mean you're not racist, whereas what it actually means is that you're doing nothing to challenge a racist set of social structures or that you're just contributing to them and benefiting from them without doing anything to challenge them. And class blindness works in much the same way. People who are class blind tend to be unwilling to admit that those types of resources give them a big advantage and put other people at a disadvantage. That makes it a lot harder for us to see those disadvantaged individuals in a sympathetic light, to see them as being worthy of help.

Isn't class blindness at odds with the more progressive, left-leaning political views the newcomers claimed to hold?

A lot of people who were actively or maybe unconsciously practicing this form of class blindness were also people who consciously cared about things like poverty or inequality. They

really did care about those issues on a more general or ideological level, but then they couldn't connect that ideological concern to actual individuals who were experiencing the problem. It's not that people were trying to be discriminatory. It's just that when you don't know people very well, it's easy to look at them and imagine that they have the same opportunities that you have, and a failure to achieve what you've achieved must be due to a failure to make use of those opportunities. But the real problem is that those opportunities are not equally distributed to all people in your society.

So the newcomers' actions led to a sense of hostility and disenfranchisement among the old timers. Did the old timers play a role in exacerbating this dynamic?

Through my career, I've looked at stigma and judgment around things like poverty, unemployment, and economic need. We've done such an effective job at stigmatizing this type of struggle that people have a hard time seeing themselves as any kind of larger group. So there's a tendency among those who are facing struggle to say, "Well, I'm different from those others, who are morally flawed." And that's part of the same larger understanding of America as the Land of Opportunity, that everyone should be able to achieve the American Dream, and anyone who doesn't is personally flawed. So, even though you may be struggling yourself, you're not immune to that very individualized way of understanding economic struggles as being an individual's fault—as opposed to the result of society's structures. That really undermines cohesion among the old timers for sure.

And beyond that, there are rural cultural norms built around things like being independent and hard-working. The desire to prove that makes it hard for people to ask for help, even when they really need it. That sort of ends up undermining the whole social services structure. The newcomers who come to this place with really good intentions put a lot of energy into creating these services where people can go to get help if they need it. But they don't really recognize that those services are antithetical to the cultural norms of the same people that they think they're helping.

Is a place like Paradise Valley simply fighting an ineluctable global trend toward extreme socioeconomic disparity?

In my book, I repeatedly tried to make the point that Paradise Valley is really just a microcosm of American inequality, which

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of course is a microcosm of international inequality. But we wouldn't see anything like this kind of inequality occurring if we just didn't have such vastly different levels of access to wealth and opportunities and life chances.

The loss of blue-collar work that paid a living wage and its replacement with these disposable jobs that are part-time, poorly paid, that have no benefits, that are hire-and-fire at will and give people no security, that's an American trend, and it's really behind so much of the polarization of our nation on a larger scale. We've seen a loss of access to those basic tenets of the American Dream—that idea that if you work hard, you should be able to have a basic, comfortable life. So we have a vast section of the population that can no longer achieve it and a much smaller number of people who have way too much and don't know what to do with it. The fact that you have such a large class of people who can afford a second home and such a large class of people who can't afford a first home or even a rental home, that alone is a travesty, and it's certainly not an isolated problem in Paradise Valley. It's really a national epidemic at this point.

The scale and scope of the problem seems colossal. What are some practical corrective steps we can take?

Especially in these Humanities Washington talks, I like to end on some sort of hopeful note. There are multiple levels at which we can address these kinds of issues, and it would probably take




◀ Image by Tarsha Rockowitz.

efforts on all of them to reverse the trajectory we're on now. But I don't think it's impossible.

As I tell my students all the time, you can't solve social problems on an individual basis. A social problem calls for a social response. And the most important, of course, is at the national or state policy level. There are ways in which we could design our society that would be more equal and give everybody more equal chances. We either need to figure out how to make work pay or we need to think about the types of support our working-class population might need to achieve a basic standard of living—a combination of subsidized access to housing, healthcare, childcare and daycare, and sick-leave policies or maternity policies.

Within our own communities, we need to find ways to provide social services that humanize the experience rather than re-create stigma and judgement. When we're thinking about how to help those in need, it's important for us to recognize that they're human beings, that they're part of our community. Take that opportunity to get to know them, to build bridges, to make people feel welcomed and appreciated as they ask for help. That not only strengthens community ties but also strengthens people's ability to ask for help.

And, finally, at the individual level we should recognize that as humans, particularly in a highly unequal society, we have a tendency toward what sociologists refer to as *homophily*, which is the tendency to associate or be drawn to other people who

are the most like you. I try to encourage people to think about making that extra effort to get to know the people who are least like them. Talk to them a little bit. That way, we can start to understand each other's motivations a little bit better, to understand where people are coming from. Once you get to know that people are facing something that you've never thought of or have never experienced, it undermines that ability to be class blind. It's a way to overcome the tendency to assume that anybody who's not like you must have something wrong with them. 

E.J. Iannelli is a freelance writer, editor, and translator based in Spokane. He's a regular contributor to regional newspapers and magazines as well as the *Times Literary Supplement*.



Jennifer Sherman is giving her free Humanities Washington Speakers Bureau talk, "Diamonds in the Rough: The Gentrification of Rural Washington," around the state.

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"Literature is news that stays news."

—Ezra Pound

FOUND POEM

*Bellingham Herald, July 25 1919**

By **Rena Priest**, Washington State Poet Laureate



**This is the date that this found poem appeared as an article in the local newspaper, celebrating the destruction of an ancient Lhaq'temish cemetery.*

Deadman's Point,
ancient Indian burial ground,
is now but a memory.

It has been washed and dumped into the sea.

The last shovelful of earth from the point
was scooped up by the Great Northern's
steam shovel Wednesday,
thus completing a demolition
that started about 1890,
when a cut was made
at the point for Harris Avenue.

Altogether...
about 200,000 cubic yards of earth
have been removed from the point.
The last excavation, made
by the Great Northern to get material
for filling in its trestles,
removed about 40,000 yards.

The second attack on Deadman's Point
was made in 1901 by the Great Northern
when it put through its right of way.

Subsequently, onslaughts were made
by the Pacific American Fisheries,
the Bellingham Canning Company,
and the Fairhaven Land Company.

The latter concern washed a big portion
into the sea to make room for
George Hackett's Cold Storage plant,
since acquired by the Pacific American Fisheries
and converted to other uses.

From time to time during the excavations
Indian skulls and skeletons were unearthed.
Early this week an Indian skull
that was almost flat from the forehead back
was found. The Great Northern still lacks
earth to fill in all its trestles in this vicinity
and it will now remove 20,000 yards
from a point south of McKenzie Avenue.

BLACK LABOR, WHITE WEALTH

*On the troubling
foundations of
American prosperity.*

By Asia Lara



▲ A woman cleans the home of a government official, Washington DC, 1941. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

“**I** didn’t see eye to eye with my dad about a lot of things.”

In his memoir *Think Black*, Clyde Ford explored his and his father’s relationship through America’s tumultuous Civil Rights era. From his father’s first day at IBM, to his own first day at the same company, Ford traced the history of how technology has been used, and continues to be used, as a force of oppression.

“My dad, to his credit, was of the Greatest Generation. He and his brother fought in World War II. They really were of a generation which felt that America could do no wrong, even though they were in the midst of being wronged in so many ways by America as Black men.”

Ford is now back with another book, *Of Blood and Sweat: Black Lives and the Making of White Power and Wealth*, which reveals “how Black labor helped to create and sustain the wealth of the white one percent throughout American history,” he explains.

“Coming up in the generation after him,” he continued, “the Civil Rights generation and the Black struggle for freedom, I didn’t feel the way [my father] did. I felt that we should be holding America to the highest standards of what the country proclaimed in its great founding documents, and of liberty and equality and justice for all, regardless of color.”

Ford is currently giving a talk for Humanities Washington called, “Biased Code: Technology and Human Rights.” We sat down with Ford to discuss both books, as well as issues surrounding reparations and critical race theory.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Humanities Washington: Can you give us a peek into what your new book is about? What are the connections between *Think Black* and *Of Blood and Sweat*?

The idea for *Of Blood and Sweat* really emerged, in part, out of the work I did in the historical aspects of *Think Black*, when I looked back and considered the relationship between technology and the history of racism in the United States, as well as in Europe. The premise for *Think Black* is that all of the major institutions of power and wealth in Europe and America have at their core this idea that people of color, people of African descent, either helped to build those institutions or that those institutions were built to control people of color, people of African descent. In either case, some folks benefit from those institutions by accumulating power and wealth. But the people who helped build them, particularly the enslaved individuals, people of African descent, never got anything for their efforts.

In *Of Blood and Sweat*, I started in West Africa with the Portuguese in the middle to late 1500s, because I thought there was more of a story there that I wanted to know about. Instead of writing a dry history of events and facts and dates, I wanted to find individuals who had lived that history—if records had survived. In an almost amazing way, I was able to find the stories of individuals who lived in pre-colonial Africa and to learn what their experience was like—Africans who were enslaved and came over to this country, like a man and a woman named Anthony and Isabel, who were on that first ship of Africans that docked in 1619 off of Point Comfort in Virginia, who later got married and had the first African American child in 1625. I took all of the major epics in American history, from 1619 through the end of the Civil War, and tried to identify several

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From beginning to end, the technology we use—in concept, in design, and in manifestation—is exploitive of both human and natural resources. It has always been that way.

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individuals who might represent the essence of what was taking place during that time and then tell the story through their eyes, often through their words—if I could find those words.

For example, I tell the story of the slaveholding South through the words, actions, and deeds of men like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. I don’t have to put words in their mouth. They wrote them, they said them. Jefferson wrote a mortgage out to his creditors in England and Amsterdam in which he said, “Look, I know I owe you thousands of dollars. What I want to do is, I’m going to pay you back, but I want to give you as collateral the slaves that I have enslaved on my plantation.” Human beings used as collateral for debt. That began a process in which the banks in this country and the farmers, the white farmers in the South, saw an incredible way to get funds to expand their business to make money. They simply said to banks, “Look, I want money, and I don’t have anything but my slaves.” And the bank said, “Fine, that’s great. We’ll take your slaves as collateral for your debt.” That became a whole way of debt financing and mortgage financing, which wound up generating wealth not only for banks, but for Wall Street as well. They packaged all these slave-backed mortgages. People around the world bought parcels of them or portions of the slave-backed mortgages. Now you’ve got this system, which is ultimately tied to a human life, that forms the basis for a lot of the financial system that we know today.

Your memoir *Think Black* contests this general opinion that technology is inherently value free. If it’s not inherently value free, what are those values that are being put into it? Is it dependent on the creator or the user of that technology?

“ Without slavery, there would not have been the ideas of freedom we have in this country. ”

The notion that technology is not value free is really an idea that goes back to Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher in the post-World War II 1950s, who many people discard because of his relationship with the Third Reich. Certainly, that is a stain on any person to have a relationship with such a heinous organization at that time in Germany. But Heidegger—and I certainly would recommend his essays on technology to anyone—said that one of the great misunderstandings of modern life is that technology is value free. I'm paraphrasing him here, but Heidegger would say technology is inherently exploitive of natural resources, to which I would also add it's exploitive of human resources as well. Heidegger really would look at any piece of technology and say, you're taking all these various resources, some of them extractive. We certainly see that with high tech. You're extracting precious metals and other material from the ground in order to make these objects that we then use.

In terms of modern technology, just think of where your cell phone is being made, by whom that cell phone is being made, and what happens to that cell phone after you dispose of it. There are huge piles of used technology, literally, in corners of the world. I can tell you: those corners of the world are not the corners of the world populated by wealthy, Western, mostly white nations. They are in Africa; they are in Asia. From beginning to end, the technology we use—in concept, in design, and in manifestation—is exploitive of both human and natural resources. It has always been that way. That was quite a revelation for me.

It seems that a core underlying thread to your work is an analysis of critical race theory. How would you define critical race theory? What is your perspective on it?

That's a really important question, because critical race theory has become a cudgel by which the far-right attempts to beat down and quell any discussion of race, racism, and anti-racism in the schools and in the country. What I think is really important but lost on those who don't think in a discriminating way, is the difference between theory and historical facts. Theory is a way

you attempt to make sense of historical facts, but theory is not the same as historical facts. That has been so terribly confused by those who are opposed to something they can't even define, which is critical race theory.

Critical race theory is an idea that started at Harvard in the late 70s by Derrick Bell and other lawyers who were trying to develop a theory that would explain why the legal system was so stacked against people of African descent. Remember, a theory is an attempt to understand facts. The facts are not in dispute— although a lot would like to think they are— the fact that African Americans are incarcerated more than white Americans, the fact that African Americans are stopped for minor crimes more than white Americans. How do you explain those? That's what critical race theory attempted to do.

My book is really a book about historical truths and not about critical race theory. That's a distinction with a huge difference that our friends on the far right who are so diametrically opposed to critical race theory don't have a clue about. No one teaches this level of theory to a young child in elementary school. This kind of theory is best taught and is taught in graduate school. So no, my book is not about critical race theory. Critical race theory is part of the current conversation. Now, does my book unearth historical truths that support the ideas of critical race theory? Absolutely. But there are a lot of other theories that I like to think I've incorporated in the book and that there are historical bases for as well.

One of the theories that I mentioned quite regularly throughout the book is this notion that without bondage there could be no freedom. Without slavery, there would not have been the ideas of freedom we have in this country. Now, that's a really contradictory theory that a lot of people first hear and say, “Oh, man, I don't get that.” It's not my theory; it's a theory of a famous historian by the name of Edmund S. Morgan. When I got to the chapter in which I featured Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, I had a real opportunity to test if historically, whether this idea of “without slavery or without bondage there is no freedom,” and here's what I found: To grow tobacco—and

I went into the actual details of how long and what it took to grow tobacco—is a time consuming, back-breaking process. If Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and George Washington didn't have enslaved people to grow their tobacco crops, they would have been in the fields working those so long each day that they would never have had the freedom or time to pontificate about the great ideas of liberty, eternity, and equality that found their ways into the founding documents of this country.


Another pressing topic that you address in your book, and which has been at the forefront of some recent news, is on reparations. I think that the topic of reparations is especially salient given the recent California Task Force on Reparations vote, which said that reparations should only be given to genealogical descendants of enslaved Africans. They rejected the proposal to include all Black people, regardless of lineage. Is that correct?

Yeah, the California Task Force said it should be genealogical descendants of enslaved people, and not just include anybody of dark skin color, even if they had been discriminated against in this culture. Personally, I think it's the right decision. It was hotly contested and argued among the Task Force, but that's the kind of argument that *should* take place. We can disagree, we don't have to be disagreeable, and we need to have a forum within which to discuss that. I recently submitted an op-ed to *The Seattle Times* about reparations for slavery, and how I think something like what's going on in California should also happen here in Washington State. I think Washington State should have a commission like California, a task force on reparations.

Reparations were actually tried in this country. In 1865, right after the North won the Civil War, there was a major bill and institution, the Freedmen's Bureau, which had the approval of President Abraham Lincoln, for land in the South to be taken from white slave owners and redistributed to African Americans. That order was called Special Field Order No. 15. It was created by General Sherman. A lot of people know it by its more popular name, "40 Acres and a Mule," because the idea was that there were going to be a certain number of acres given to enslaved individuals who were now free, and along with that, the implements in order to farm that land. Once Lincoln was assassinated and President Andrew Johnson stepped into the

White House, one of the first acts that Johnson did was to strip away every aspect of that reparations idea.

Taking California's Task Force on Reparations as an example, do you see that as the beginning of larger federal change? Looking forward, are you feeling hopeful? Are you feeling uneasy? Are you feeling cynical?

Well, I'm not feeling cynical. I'm a big believer in truth and reconciliation. Now, South Africa is not a perfect society by any means, but the late Desmond Tutu headed their Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Basically, the TRC was a way of bringing together some of the worst actors of Apartheid with the victims of those acts, of those actions, and finding a way to move forward. The Canadian government—again, not perfect in terms of their approach to First Nations individuals—but they also have a TRC which tries to find a way forward based on some of the horrible things that were done to First Nations in Canada. So, I'm a really big believer that reconciliation should be the goal. I mean, it's the kind of thing which Martin Luther King spoke to in almost every one of his great speeches, which was about the need and the goal and his aspiration for reconciliation. But it is called truth and reconciliation for a reason—you don't get through the reconciliation until you get to the truth. Those of us who are authors and others who are really talking about these issues, we're laying the groundwork for that truth, to make sure that the truth is out there, so we can get to the reconciliation. That's what my books are about, that's what's important to me, and that's why I'm hopeful for the future because I believe that as we confront the truth of the past, we can move forward to the reconciliation of the future. 

Asia Lara is a contributing writer to Humanities Washington, and the former manager of its Speakers Bureau program.



Check out Ford's free Speakers Bureau talk, "Biased Code: Technology and Human Rights," online and in-person around the state.

▶ *Check out our calendar at humanities.org to find an upcoming presentation.*

NEWS

from Humanities Washington

Washington State Poet Laureate Rena Priest wins prestigious fellowship

Rena Priest, Washington State Poet Laureate, was awarded a \$50,000 Poets Laureate Fellowship from the Academy of American Poets. The awards are “given to honor poets of literary merit” so they can “undertake meaningful, impactful, and innovative projects.” As part of the fellowship, she’ll publish an anthology about salmon to be released in 2023. The Poet Laureate program is presented by Humanities Washington and ArtsWA.



▲ Washington State Poet Laureate Rena Priest. Photo by Erika Schultz / *The Seattle Times*

New staff

Welcome to new staff who have joined Humanities Washington this summer: Thomas Grant Richardson, director of the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions; Sarah Faulkner, program manager of Speakers Bureau and live events; and Jera Lego, project manager for Prime Time Family Reading.

Announcing the 2022-2023 Heritage Arts Apprenticeship pairs

From Taiko drumming and Mariachi music to bead weaving, ancient food preservation, Yakama nation cradleboard making, and much more, The Center for Washington Cultural Traditions is excited to announce selections for the 2022-2023 Washington State Heritage Arts Apprenticeship Program.

Created to encourage people to learn a traditional trade, craft, or skill, the Heritage Arts Apprenticeship Program conserves and helps carry on cultural traditions important to Washington’s communities. Program participants may teach or study music, visual art, occupational arts, dance, culinary traditions, storytelling and other verbal arts, and much more. The program is a partnership between Humanities Washington and ArtsWA.

Prime Time Family Reading expansion

In response to pandemic learning loss, Humanities Washington is expanding Prime Time Family Reading, an innovative reading and discussion program. For libraries, schools, museums, and other eligible organizations, this means financial support to hold Prime Time Family Reading series in their communities. Support of \$25,000 and more is available to hold programs proven to boost reading scores and build excitement around reading, by going deeper into the questions posed by children’s literature. This expansion was made possible thanks to support from the Washington State Legislature. More information at humanities.org.

Stay up to date at humanities.org



On October 11, TAKE the HUMANITIES CHALLENGE

We at Humanities Washington would like to become better humans, but we know how hard that can be. So we decided to make a game out of it.

To participate, sign up for our email list at humanities.org or follow us on social media. If you're already signed up or following us, then you're all set! You can also download printable gameboards, as well as instructions in Spanish, at humanities.org/challenge.

Playing is simple:

- Cut out the above game board.
- Once per week beginning October 11, you'll receive a fun challenge in your email based in the humanities—from engaging with your local history museum to discussing a big question with someone close to you, and much more.
- As you complete each challenge, use a highlighter to fill in that week's corresponding moon phase (except for the first week—the "new moon" phase).
- At the end of seven weeks, post a picture of your completed moon board to social media, tag @HumanitiesWA, include the hashtag #humanitieschallenge, and we'll give you the gift of a Moon Rocks truffle bar from Seattle Chocolate (while supplies last). You can also simply email a picture of your completed board to challenge@humanities.org. Submit your completed challenge by December 15.

Join us! You might just win a more open mind.

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OUR MISSION

Humanities Washington opens minds and bridges divides by creating spaces to explore different perspectives.

OUR PROGRAMS



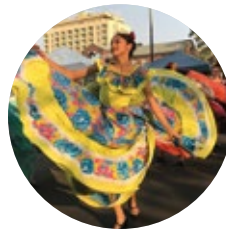
FAMILY READING uses storytelling and discussion to explore cultural and ethical themes in children's literature and emphasizes the importance of families reading together.



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. Presented in partnership with ArtsWA.



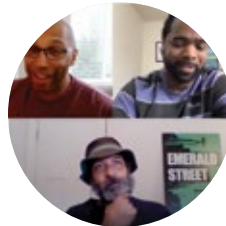
GRANTS assist local organizations in creating opportunities for their community to come together to discuss important issues using the humanities.



CENTER FOR WASHINGTON CULTURAL TRADITIONS is a new effort to amplify our state's rich, diverse living cultural treasures through research and special programming. Presented in partnership with ArtsWA.



SPEAKERS BUREAU draws from a pool of leading cultural experts and scholars to provide free conversational lectures in communities throughout the state.



MEDIA PROJECTS brings online content such as live and recorded panel discussions and conversations, radio shows, and other accessible deep dives into important current topics to viewers on our YouTube channel.



THINK & DRINK brings hosted conversations on provocative topics and new ideas to pubs and tasting rooms in Bellingham, Spokane, Seattle, Tacoma, and Yakima.

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