

Vermont Humanities

SPRING 2020

Our world has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic came to Vermont in March. Throughout this newsletter you will learn about the many ways that we are working to help our neighbors.

Our COVID-19 Response

**New! *The Portable Humanist*
Podcast Series**

**Go Outdoors with
“Words in the Woods”**

Upcoming Digital-Only Events

Vermont Humanities

Newsletter of the
Vermont Humanities Council

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Vermont Humanities

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..... Note from the Executive Director.....

CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN ILSTRUP

Heart, Mind, Body, Voice

In January, I attended Shakespeare scholar Peter Gould's First Wednesdays talk in Montpelier. I've known Peter for many years through his project, "Get Thee to the Funnery," where he has been directing Shakespeare with young Vermonters for almost 25 years.

Many people, even many "humanities" people, are trained to think of Shakespeare as hard, not accessible, or just not relevant to our daily lives. But Peter insists: Shakespeare is for everyone.

It was a wintry night at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library, but an intrepid crowd of 30 folks showed up and soon they were all on their feet. A babel of voices rang out with the words of Macbeth's speech before he trots down the hall to put an end to the unsuspecting Duncan:

"Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?"

The conversation we had with Peter that night was robust, rich with understanding, and deeply meaningful for those in attendance. It was a multigenerational group, and the young people in the audience often led the conversation on the precipitous fall of tyrants, the baffling misunderstandings of young lovers, and the colonial enslavement of indigenous people.

Peter told us his own personal and transformative story: as a young person he struggled with a terrible stutter and would often refuse to speak in public. Later, as a back-to-the-land communitarian in southern Vermont, he was pulled into a mandatory performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and he literally found his voice. The following year he leapt at the chance to play the bewildered and enslaved Caliban in *The Tempest*:

"You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!"

And that launched a 40-year adventure with language that continues to this day. Peter's work that night in Montpelier represented the very best of what the humanities has to offer. As The Funnery teaches, Shakespeare can create genuine connections between people, focused on communicating from the heart, with the mind, through the body, in order to find our own voice. William Shakespeare's masterworks help us to uncover our common humanity in all of its complexity. And scholars and teachers like Peter Gould keep it alive for us today.



Building Community: Vermont Humanities Responds to COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has upended life for Vermonters and people around the world. And while we have postponed all of our public events for the foreseeable future, we remain committed to our mission — engaging all Vermonters in the world of ideas, fostering a culture of thoughtfulness, and inspiring a lifelong love of reading and learning. We believe that this mission is expansive and includes helping our neighbors and our partners weather this pandemic.

During this time of disruption, we are turning our focus to helping those most affected by the pandemic and the related economic downturn. And we're asking for your help in assisting those most in need.

Support for Vermont Cultural Organizations

The \$2.2 trillion CARES Act approved by Congress in late March included \$150 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts to distribute to cultural institutions affected by COVID-19. Vermont Humanities is partnering with the Vermont Arts Council to distribute funds to Vermont cultural organizations impacted by the crisis. We will continue to advocate through our Congressional Delegation for additional support for the cultural sector.

Visit www.vermonthumanities.org/covid-19 to learn more about applying for assistance.

Your Donation Helps Those Affected by the Pandemic

In addition, Vermont Humanities, the Vermont Arts Council, and others have created a new fund for individual donors to help support Vermont's cultural sector and cultural workers.

You can support this fund by making your usual spring donation to Vermont Humanities; half of all donations given to Vermont Humanities before May 31 will be directed to this fund while the remaining half will support our ongoing work. Visit www.vermonthumanities.org/support to contribute.

Don't Miss Our Weekly Digital Events

Finally, our staff is hard at work creating digital events to replace some of the First Wednesdays and Speakers Bureau talks that have been postponed. Such events included an exclusive video of poet Richard Blanco reading his work, created in lieu of his planned visit to Montpelier in early April. On May 6, you can enjoy a special event with Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Blight.

Lois Liggett viewed Blanco's talk online on April 3 and commented, "Up close and personal is one way to describe the unexpected pleasure of taking in Richard's video! Being at home allowed me freedom of emotion, yet his presentation captured me. The poetry was not only in his voice, but in his visual cues, breathing, and gestures. His eyes carried me to the scenarios his poetry described. I shed tears and a few laughs."

Apply for an Emergency Relief Grant

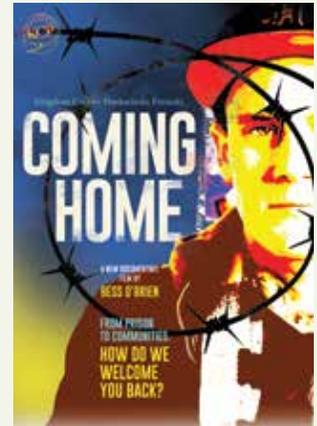
Vermont arts and/or humanities organizations who are experiencing hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic may apply for an Emergency Relief Grant.

Visit www.vermonthumanities.org/c19-grants to learn more.



Jacob Hestler

Richard Blanco video-recorded an exclusive poetry reading for Vermont Humanities to present online in April.



Bess O'Brien screened her film *Coming Home* on the Vermont Humanities Facebook page on April 1.



Liz Cooke

Labor historian Annelise Orleck spoke about the costs of globalization in a *Portable Humanist* podcast episode aired on our digital channels.

Reading and Racism Workshop Supports Vermont Reads Organizers

In early February, 45 people attended a workshop designed to support Vermont Reads 2020: *The Hate U Give* community project organizers. The workshop, sponsored by Vermont Humanities and held at Christ Episcopal Church in Montpelier, was led by Latinx scholar Dr. Laura Jiménez of Boston University, who uses young adult literature to address racism and inequity.



Dr. Laura Jiménez of Boston University led a workshop in Montpelier to help communities prepare for discussions about the issues presented in *The Hate U Give*.

The workshop included small-group discussions about racism and other issues presented in *The Hate U Give*, a young adult novel about the Black Lives Matter movement.

“When we chose *The Hate U Give* for Vermont Reads, we recognized the need to give communities tools for holding difficult conversations about race and implicit bias,” said Director of Community Programs Tess Taylor.

“Racism and all the other forms of repression are bad for all of us,” said Jiménez. “Which means this is not an Indigenous, Black, people of color problem. It is also a white problem.”

She continued, “The only way we break a cycle is to recognize it and work against it. By choosing this book and bringing me here, [Vermont Humanities is] asking you to stand up. They are asking you to change your intentions... Because marginalized people are marginalized by a system that helps you.”

“This was an amazing experience overall,” said an attendee. “I was forced to think and get uncomfortable in all the best ways. Dr. Jiménez was both empathetic and unswerving in her directness.”

Find additional materials about *The Hate U Give* at www.vermonthumanities.org/vermont-reads.

Seeking Community Project Consultants for Vermont Reads

We’re building a cohort of trained and compensated facilitators to support communities that will host Vermont Reads programs around *The Hate U Give*. Please let us know if you are interested in becoming a paid facilitator and consultant for discussions in communities around Vermont by emailing community@vermonthumanities.org. People of color and other members of marginalized communities are especially encouraged to participate in this initiative.

Take Part in Vermont Reads 2020!

Libraries, schools, and other nonprofit organizations may apply; collaboration among town organizations and businesses is strongly encouraged.

- RECEIVE FREE books and programming support for your community.
- HOST readings, discussions, and community events in your schools, libraries, and local businesses.

APPLICATIONS: vreads.org or
Richelle Franzoni at rfranzoni@vermonthumanities.org or
(802) 262-1355

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Douglass Program Expands to Include Contemporary Works



Readings of Frederick Douglass's Independence Day speech have been held outside Burlington City Hall since 2015.

We're offering Vermont communities a chance to open conversations about race and racism through a revamped program that uses the work of Frederick Douglass in concert with that of contemporary authors as starting points for community engagement.

With the assistance of Mass Humanities, Vermont Humanities launched Reading Frederick Douglass in 2014. Since then, the program has grown dramatically in popularity, but some Vermonters felt like we needed to go deeper.

Reading Douglass's speech has inspired Vermonters to think in new ways about our nation's history, raised awareness of the role slavery and race continue to play in our history and national discourse, and afforded opportunities to open conversations about race and citizenship.

But as Community Programs Officer Gina Robinson explains, "It has become clear that Vermonters are eager to take a more active role in shaping conversations about racism in contemporary life." Gina and other Vermont Humanities staffers consulted with people of color living in Vermont on how to strengthen the Reading Frederick Douglass program.

Although communities can still choose to host public readings of Douglass's Independence Day speech, we now strongly encourage these communities to go

"beyond Frederick Douglass" by also engaging with more contemporary writings on race and racism from a variety of sources. We've posted a selection of such readings on our website and will offer financial and program support to communities that want to take the next step.

Our suggested readings can be downloaded at www.vermonthumanities.org/douglass.

Please note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public events such as Reading Frederick Douglass may still be prohibited this summer. Please check www.vermonthumanities.org/douglass for the latest information.

As Gina explains, "We hope that these readings can help place Douglass's words in the larger context of the African American experience, from slavery to the present day."

Vermont Humanities will offer \$200 mini-grants to support communities that plan extension activities, such as screening Ava DuVernay's

documentary film *13th*, about the intersection of race, justice, and mass incarceration; scheduling a Vermont Humanities Reading and Discussion program focused on racism; or leading a writing workshop on privilege and race.

Once a community applies to host Frederick Douglass and Beyond events, we will help them in planning the project, finding materials and facilitators, and promoting the events.

Please contact Gina Robinson at grobinson@vermonthumanities.org or at (802) 262-1361 with questions.

Learn more about Frederick Douglass and Beyond and apply to host a program at www.vermonthumanities.org/douglass.

Listen to Vermont Humanities Talks with our Podcast *The Portable Humanist*

In January, Vermont Humanities launched our second podcast series, *The Portable Humanist*. It joins our *Before Your Time* history podcast, which debuted in November 2017 and is produced with the Vermont Historical Society.

The Portable Humanist allows listeners to enjoy Vermont Humanities talks while on the go. It features lectures recorded at First Wednesdays, Fall Conference, and Speakers Bureau events.



We plan to produce two episodes a month during the “stay at home” order due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One early listener noted that the podcast makes it possible to enjoy talks online when attending them in person is not an option. He wrote, “I’m really excited about this, thank you! I have several kids of different ages, all off and running with their own activities, so even the [live] presentations that are geographically feasible to attend are often difficult to [go to].”

Listen to *The Portable Humanist* episodes at the podcast website, www.portablehumanist.org, or on iTunes, Google Play, Spotify, Podbean, or Stitcher. The website includes full written transcripts of each episode.

We have released the following *Portable Humanist* episodes through the end of April:

Junkie, Sister, Daughter, Mom: A Love Story from the Opioid Epidemic

Award-winning *Seven Days* writer Kate O’Neill shares her family’s experience loving and losing her sister to addiction, the stories of other Vermonters impacted by this disease, and potential solutions to the opioid crisis.

Making Rumble Strip in My Closet

Erica Heilman shares stories from her *Rumble Strip* podcast, which she describes as “extraordinary conversations with ordinary people.”

How the Great Migration Changed American History

In the early 20th century, Black southerners fled racial violence and sharecropping for steady work in northern cities like New York and Chicago. Dr. Harvey Amani Whitfield explores the Great Migration and its great influence on American history.

Daybreak Express:

Duke Ellington’s Train-Inspired Compositions

Jazz scholar Reuben Jackson analyzes some evocative Duke Ellington recordings, and discusses the role trains played in his orchestra’s work in the then-segregated United States.

We Are All Fast-Food Workers Now: A Conversation with Annelise Orleck

Labor historian and Dartmouth professor Annelise Orleck provides a close look at globalization and its costs.

Recent *Before Your Time* episodes

The *Before Your Time* podcast series explores Vermont History, one object at a time. Recent episodes include:

The Long Enough Trail

Stories from those who founded, hiked, and loved Vermont’s Long Trail, including the first women to through-hike the “footpath in the wilderness” in 1927.

Princes and Free Men

Although Vermont is known as one of the whitest states in the Union, three African American Vermonters had a major influence on our state’s and nation’s history.

After the Crossing

Many different groups of people, from many different continents, have helped build our state. This episode includes stories of immigrants that have largely been excluded from the popular image of Vermont.

Listen to all *Before Your Time* episodes at www.beforeyourtime.org.

Welcomes and Farewells to Staff and Board

Two new members of our Board of Directors began their terms in February:



BEVERLY COLSTON of Winooski is the director of the Mosaic Center for Students of Color (MCSC) at the University of Vermont, where she works to enable the success of students of color at UVM. She has also worked at MCSC as a Student Services Advisor and

at St. Michael's College as International Student Activities Coordinator, among other educational roles. She earned a BA in Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and an MA in Education at UVM. Beverly has received several awards, including the Vermont Women in Higher Education 2019 Jackie M. Gibbons Leadership Award and the UVM Common Ground Award in 2016.



MEG OSTRUM of Montpelier received her BA from Washington University in St. Louis and was a National Endowment for the Humanities fellow in the art history/museology graduate program at the University of Minnesota. From 1978-86, she served as Museum and Visual Arts Coordinator

at the (then) Vermont Council on the Arts; she has also held positions at the Vermont Folklife Center (Associate Director, 1990-2003) and CERF+ The Artists Safety Net (Director of Special Projects, 2014-2018). Over the last 33 years, she has also been a consultant working with cultural organizations, public agencies, and artists throughout the country.

Staff:

Vermont Humanities welcomed **ELIZABETH MALONE** as its new Operations Manager in February. Elizabeth has been working with mission-driven organizations since 2010, most recently as the Executive Director of Northwest Access TV, a community media center



in Saint Albans. She has also been active in the leadership of the Vermont Access Network, an organization that advocates for government transparency, technical education opportunities, and access to media for all Vermonters. Elizabeth is pursuing a Master's in Public Administration from Norwich University. She will manage the organization's finances, human resources, facilities, and IT.

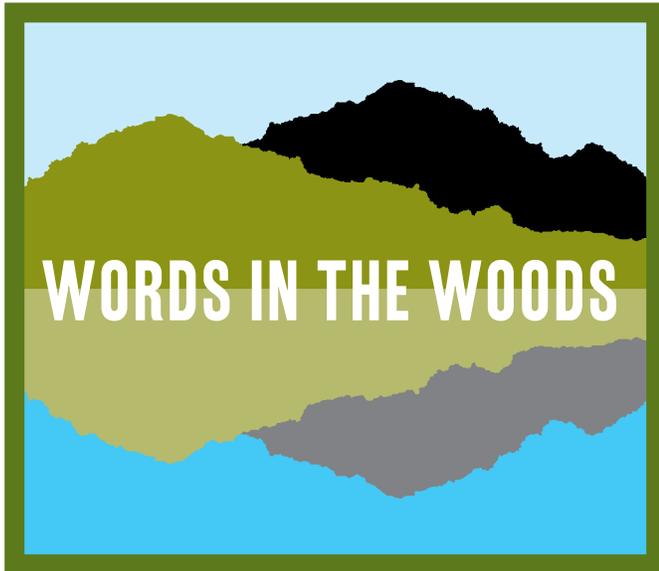
Farewells:

Vermont Humanities thanks **Alison Palmer** for her contributions as Director of Literacy Programs over the last three years. Ali brought great energy to her role and worked hard to expand the reach and variety of offerings in our Literacy programs, especially the Never Too Early program. We wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

We bid farewell to board member **Randall Balmer**, who has with sadness chosen to not serve another term due to family commitments. Randall joined the board in January 2017 and served a three-year term. His board service included three years on the Program Committee (with one year as chair) and three years on the Swenson Award Committee (serving two years as chair).

We also say farewell to **Elizabeth Fenton**, who joined the Vermont Humanities board in May 2018 and resigned in March 2020. During her time on the Board, Liz served on the Grants, Program, and Membership and Governance committees.

Our sincere thanks to Elizabeth and Randall for their dedication to our mission.



Go Outdoors with “Words in the Woods”

Please note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public events such as Words in the Woods may still be prohibited this summer. Please check www.vermonthumanities.org/words-in-the-woods for the latest information.

Just in time for summer, our new “Words in the Woods” program will allow Vermonters and visitors to enjoy our state’s natural beauty while engaging with some of Vermont’s best writers.

We’re pleased to launch the new program with Vermont State Parks. Together we have scheduled four sessions in state parks with four different poets during the summer of 2020. Each event is free, but since space is limited, be sure to reserve your place in advance at www.vermonthumanities.org/words-in-the-woods.

Saturday, June 27, 7:00 pm Lake Bomoseen State Park (Castleton)

Join writer Geof Hewitt in a fast-paced writing workshop where we’ll scribble in short bursts to capture our surroundings. No experience necessary, and all ages are welcome. Geof is Vermont’s reigning poetry slam champion, and regularly hosts slams throughout the state. He is the author of four books of poems and three books for teachers.

More about Lake Bomoseen State Park:
<https://vtstateparks.com/bomoseen.html>.

More about Geof Hewitt:
<https://www.creativeground.org/profile/geof-hewitt-0>

Saturday, July 25, 2pm Groton Nature Center

Parents or guardians can enjoy this event with poet and translator Jody Gladding while children take part in a simultaneous program led by a park interpreter. Jody has published four full-length collections of poetry, and two letterpress edition chapbooks. Her work has appeared in *Orion*, *Ecopoetics*, *Best American Experimental Writing*, and *Northern Woodlands*.

More about Stillwater State Park:
<https://vtstateparks.com/stillwater.html>

More about Jody Gladding:
<http://www.jodygladding.org/>

Saturday, August 29, 2pm Jamaica State Park

This stroll with author James Crews will take place on the two-mile West River Trail, which is universally accessible to those with mobility issues. James’s work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Raleigh Review*, *Crab Orchard Review* and *The New Republic*, as well as in Ted Kooser’s “American Life in Poetry” newspaper column. He is also co-editor of several anthologies of poetry, including *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kinship and Connection*.

More about Jamaica State Park:
<https://vtstateparks.com/jamaica.html>

More about James Crews:
<http://jamescrews.net/>

Saturday, September 12, 7pm Elmore State Park

This program with poet Judith Chalmer will take place around the campfire. Judith is the author of two collections of poems and is co-translator of two books of haiku and tanka. In 2010 her poems set to original choreography were performed as part of the Flynn Center’s LGBTQ Stonewall Celebration.

More about Elmore State Park:
<https://vtstateparks.com/elmore.html>

More about Judith Chalmer:
<https://www.leapingclear.org/judith-chalmer-poetry>

Spring 2020 Event Highlights

Digital Events

Due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, Vermont Humanities has postponed all **in-person public events for the foreseeable future**. This listing shows some of the events that will be hosted on our digital channels through the end of May; visit www.vermonthumanities.org/digital-events for a full listing. Most of the presentations will be archived at www.vermonthumanities.org/digital if you missed them.

Please note: you do not need to have a Facebook account in order to view videos on the Vermont Humanities Facebook page at www.facebook.com/VermontHumanities.



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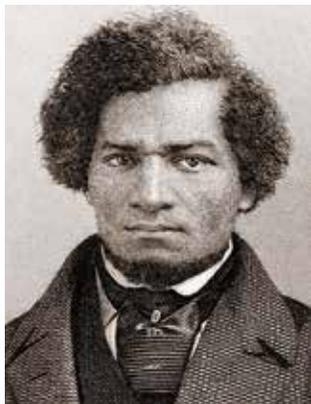
APRIL 29 ~ Edward Gorey's Morbid Nonsense

Critics never knew quite what to make of Edward Gorey (1925-2000), the author and illustrator whose picture books full of murder, mayhem, and discreet depravity influenced Tim Burton, Lemony Snicket, and Guillermo Del Toro. In this illustrated lecture, cultural critic Mark Dery reveals the surprisingly serious themes woven through Gorey's whimsically sinister work.

Facebook Watch Party at www.facebook.com/VermontHumanities and on the **Vermont Humanities website** at www.vermonthumanities.org/digital, 7:00 PM.

MAY 6 ~ Frederick Douglass and the National Crisis of the Civil War

Yale historian David Blight, winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in History for his biography *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, tells Douglass's story: an escaped slave who became one of the leading abolitionists, orators, and writers of his era. Blight will shape his talk to reflect on our nation's current crisis.



Facebook Watch Party at www.facebook.com/VermontHumanities and on the **Vermont Humanities website** at www.vermonthumanities.org/digital, 7:00 PM.

MAY 13 ~ The Salt of the Earth: The Rhetoric of White Supremacy

In 2014 in Grand Saline, Texas, a 79-year-old white Methodist minister named Charles Moore set himself on fire as a final protest against the community's racism. Drawing from his documentary film *Man on Fire*, Middlebury professor James Sanchez discusses the rhetoric of white supremacy and suggests ways communities might address bigotry.

Facebook Watch Party at www.facebook.com/VermontHumanities and on the **Vermont Humanities website** at www.vermonthumanities.org/digital, 7:00 PM.



Actor Ron Blanton in *Man on Fire*, by Caleb Kunz



MAY 20 ~ Writing Workshop with Melanie Finn

The author of the acclaimed novels *The Underneath* and *The Gloom* leads an interactive writing workshop, limited to 15 participants. Pre-registration required; sign up for the workshop at www.vermonthumanities.org/melanie-finn.

Zoom workshop, 7:00 PM.



Author and builder Kevin Gardner discussed the history of stone walls while building a miniature wall at the Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro in January.



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