

2024 Issue 2 | Free

SPARK

The magazine of Humanities Washington.

Consider the oyster

ALSO INSIDE:

- » *An African philosophy of joy and connection*
- » *The civil rights movement in Washington*



**HUMANITIES
WASHINGTON**



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.

Spark is dedicated to publishing a variety of perspectives. Opinions expressed may not reflect the viewpoints of Humanities Washington's staff, board, funders, or partners.

EDITOR:

David Haldeman

LAYOUT & DESIGN:

Tarsha Rockowitz

COPYEDITOR:

Rachel Jacobson

More stories online at humanities.org/blog

Find a free event at humanities.org

FOLLOW US ONLINE:



Inside

I AM BECAUSE WE ARE

by Michelle Liu 6–8

CONSIDER THE OYSTER

by David George Gordon, Samantha Larson,
and MaryAnn Barron Wagner 10–17

WE ARE ALSO IN BONDAGE HERE

by Ariana Sutherland 18–22

WEDDING POEM

by Cara Stoddard 23

THE GOOD OL' BOYS AND THE BAD PEOPLE

by E.J. Iannelli 24–28

STORY CORE

by Hong Ta 29–31

NEWS

from Humanities Washington 32–33

HUMANITIES WASHINGTON

Staff & Programs 34–35



From our Executive Director

I think the idea of being truly alone is the most deeply ingrained human fear of all. One we all, on some level, share.

It's evolutionary, most likely; something deep inside drives us to seek connection as a leftover biological imperative from a time when isolation meant death.

But alone doesn't necessarily mean physical isolation. *What if I am fundamentally unknowable to my neighbor? What if, even if I expressed myself—my feelings, my experience—it was completely alien to the people around me?* That's alone too.

More than 50% of adults in America report experiencing loneliness. It has been called a crisis of human connection, a loneliness epidemic. And there are significant physical and mental health issues linked with the rise of loneliness. Depression and anxiety certainly, but also strains on the body like diabetes, dementia, stroke, and cardiovascular diseases. So how do we combat something as subjective and abstract as loneliness?

The very word "humanities" might hold the answer. There is a secret message contained within.

Human ties, with an "I" in between.

HUMAN...I...TIES.

It is an apt metaphor for what the humanities are and can do: connect people when there is genuine and heartfelt commitment between individuals.

Healthy minds and societies require places for learning and reflection, to connect face-to-face and grapple with conflict and new ideas. Humanities Washington cultivates a culture of connection with more than 530 free events per year in 94 cities around our state. This amounts to thousands of conversations and connections, strengthening our human ties.

Reading a story to a child. Seeing a new perspective in a documentary film. Delighting in the beauty of another culture's music. These experiences help us to recognize ourselves in the broader human experience, letting us know we aren't alone.

Belonging is a fundamental human need—and one of Humanities Washington's five core values. I hope you connect to one of the articles you read in this edition of *Spark* magazine. I hope you discuss it with a neighbor! I hope you attend one of our events and talk to others in your community. Most of all, I hope you feel seen and understood... and not alone.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie". The script is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "e".

Julie Ziegler
Chief Executive Officer
Humanities Washington





I AM *Because* WE ARE



▲ Photo by Carlos Yi/Unsplash.

Professor Itohan Idumwonyi on how the African philosophy of Ubuntu might be the antidote to a fractured world.

By Michelle Liu

I tohan Idumwonyi was in her first year as a professor of religious studies at Gonzaga University when COVID stopped everything. While 2020 was hard on everybody, it presented particular difficulties for Idumwonyi and her two children, Ik and Duwa. Since they were new to the area, no one, she thought, would come knocking on their door to see if her family was okay. Until someone did.

One of her children's math teachers from Gonzaga Prep, John Tombari, knocked, introducing himself. "I'm here to welcome you and support your son," he said, and he meant it. Though he lived across town, he picked up her son every morning to bring him to school, since driving her son to and from school conflicted with Idumwonyi's teaching.

This teacher—who Idumwonyi calls “the face of humanity”—gave her inspiration during a time when it was sorely needed. In a city far from her birthplace, she found a warmth of human feeling that felt very familiar to her. Mr. Tombari had extended a generosity that made her feel human. Though he would not use the word, he practiced what Idumwonyi calls *Ubuntu*.

Being the recipient of *Ubuntu* from someone who did not know this African practice motivated Idumwonyi. She already brings this practice into her teaching, but the math teacher’s open-heartedness helped her see that outside of the university, people yearn to find a way through an epidemic of loneliness. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy warns that social isolation has the same impacts on health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. But addressing this illness does not require complicated medical intervention; the remedy is to build relationships. *Ubuntu* offers a way how. *Ubuntu* is a rich tradition built on the idea that we are human first before all the other labels—profession, race, gender, citizenship—that we may bear day to day. One act of kindness can change the outlook of another person by serving as a living reminder of this basic fact.

Ubuntu, as Idumwonyi explains it, is more than just one person treating another kindly. It is a “cultural intelligence” that creates a system of care that encourages individuals to not act as isolated units, but as the interconnected people we are. “A little show of kindness can make a turnaround for a person to feel loved, to feel human, to feel accepted, to feel embraced, even though a person is going through the storm of life,” Idumwonyi explains. “So when you come within the space of *Ubuntu*, I tell people you don’t need to connect with everybody in this space. Start with the person next to you. Whatever story you hear from that person may open you up to forming connections beyond that space.” Such listening and exchange of stories builds human flourishing.

Recognizing, creating, and nourishing *Ubuntu* is what has helped Idumwonyi create her own happiness wherever she goes, in whatever situation. “You need other people to make this happiness,” says Idumwonyi, to start your story afresh when life brings you unanticipated twists. In a space of *Ubuntu*, where “I am because we are,” she feels her authentic self. As part of Humanities Washington’s Speakers Bureau, she has delighted in building *Ubuntu* by modeling how human flourishing starts—with the simple act of sharing stories that guide us in knowing how to look out for one another as a remedy to loneliness and alienation.

The following interview was edited for length and clarity.

Humanities Washington: How does the concept of *Ubuntu* help us see our connections to others differently?

Itohan Idumwonyi: You cannot say you are who you are, without looking back at those who have been in your life: your parents, your family, your neighbors. *Ubuntu* asks you to think of all the little and huge ways all these people support you. You’re not going to say, “I became who I am today by myself,” no. Instead: I am because we are. We need each other to survive, and we say “thank you” for giving me your shoulders to lean on.

Ubuntu’s mantra is, “I am because we are, and we are because I am interconnectedness.” It doesn’t matter whether you are American, whether you are Asian, whether you are African. Irrespective of where you are from, there is this essence of humanity that we all go to or come from, that we draw from before you became African, Native, American, Asian. You are human first.

Ubuntu pushes us to move beyond saying “I can’t help this one” because this one is different from me. Moving beyond asks you first to see the human in me. And to listen to the thing inside of you crying out to support this person. This is what *Ubuntu* points to. *Ubuntu* tells you to raise support for another person within your neighborhood, your immediate environment. We need each other to survive and flourish.

And if I’m not in a position to help myself, it will be hard to help others. So the first thing is, I need to be well, to have the energy, to have the strength, to have the grace to stretch my hand to another person. If I am so weak, down and out, it will be hard for me to reach out. Thinking of your own flourishing helps you support another person. You don’t own another person’s problem. You only support them to also *become*.

How does *Ubuntu* help guide people to see our interconnectedness?

When you meet somebody, remember that however they react to you, it’s not because they don’t like your face. They have their demons they are fighting. You start building *Ubuntu* by connecting with the person beside you.

When I’m teaching or doing a Humanities Washington talk, I pose some questions as conversation starters. Whatever story you hear from the other person, it’s a way of opening up to the



▲ Itohan M. Idumwonyi.

person. Just starting a conversation with that one person you meet can make a difference. It nourishes a cultural intelligence that unites through shared humanity.

We need to connect. We are interconnected people, we are social beings. Living in isolation is demoralizing and depressing. It puts us in a space where we don't get help because either we are too ashamed to ask for help or we think we're supposed to have everything put together. But no, we all don't have everything put together. *Ubuntu* allows you to be reached, and allows you to reach other people.

What's something you enjoy about talking about *Ubuntu* with audiences?

I have been in situations where people do not welcome others until they are introduced as professor of XYZ. But when I do Humanities Washington talks, I like to be introduced as me. I am just Itohan Idumwonyi. I like to be treated as human, not because of whatever I have added. Let us shed all the labels that put us into separate compartments. Compartmentalization breeds division. *Ubuntu* is telling us, hey, look away from all this division. When we do this, we will speak to our authenticity, and our authenticity will foster human flourishing.

“

Irrespective of where you are from, there is this essence of humanity that we all go to or come from, that we draw from before you became African, Native, American, Asian. You are human first.

”

I've been in talks where people tear up. I'm not sure if it's me, if it's the *Ubuntu* conversation, I honestly don't know. But it gives me a sense that the talk is having an impact. You're getting handshakes, you're getting hugs, you're getting thanks for creating conversations that impact people—conversations that help us better interact in loving and accepting ways. Let your hand be the bridge that supports human flourishing—*UBUNTU!* 🌍

Michelle Liu is a professor of English and the associate director of writing programs at the University of Washington. She is a former member of Humanities Washington's Speakers Bureau.

Itohan M. Idumwonyi is currently touring the state as part of Humanities Washington's Speakers Bureau, giving a talk called “*Ubuntu: How an Ancient African Concept Can Help Human Flourishing.*”

Visit humanities.org to find an event near you.



HOW DO WE LOOK?

We've gotten a refresh.

A new logo, a new look, a new way to experience the humanities.

Check out our new website and sign up for emails.

HUMANITIES.ORG





CONSIDER *the* OYSTER

From a vital food for Indigenous cultures to an economic engine, Washington's history is inseparable from a tale of two oysters.

By David George Gordon, Samantha Larson,
and MaryAnn Barron Wagner



The oyster farmer spends the best years of their life in the service of a cold-blooded animal with a calcium shell.

Clad in rubber rain gear and thick-soled boots, oyster growers spend hours on blustery beaches, constructing beds in which young oysters will slumber and the grown-ups will reproduce. They stand watch, night and day, to defend the occupants of those beds from predators. They do everything possible to protect the oysters from pollution, disease, and the occasional oyster pirate—the midnight marauder who helps himself to shellfish in someone else’s beds.

If all goes as planned, an oyster farmer’s beds will thrive, and the oysters in them will grow plump and ripe. In a few years, the oysters will reward the hardworking grower with their meat. The monetary gains from selling oysters are usually modest. But a few fortunes have been made on such dealings. A few more have been lost . . . and won again. That’s the nature of the oyster business.

Making money is just one reason folks in the Pacific Northwest farm oysters. What, then, draws oyster farmers to the water’s edge at dawn or in the dead of night? What makes them work so hard, often in miserable weather, to keep their oysters fat and fit? What makes the rest of us clamor for that small tidbit of flesh, cradled by the smooth inner nacre of an oyster’s thickly sculpted shell? One answer is obvious: the ambrosial tastes of the Northwest oyster, a flavor unsurpassed by any other of the world’s edible shellfish.

The story of this transcendent flavor is largely a tale of two oysters: the native Olympia and the non-native Pacific, and the hardy growers who tend them. But the native, once abundant, now makes up a lowly 2% of the oysters farmed in the Pacific Northwest. The reason for its decline touches on issues of cultural identity, ecological stewardship, and belonging.



From the earliest of times, oysters have been prized by the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. “Before the arrival of European settlers, our tribe was known throughout the Northwest for its highly productive beaches,” says Charlene Krise, executive director of the Squaxin Island Museum Library and Research Center. “Mile for mile, we had the richest shellfish beaches of anywhere around.”



◀ Native American woman harvests shellfish in Mud Bay, WA. Taken in 1905, using a first-generation Kodak camera. Photo courtesy of the Alaska State Archives, Office of the Governor, Judge James Wickersham.

The earliest physical evidence of shellfish mariculture in North America dates back to about 1480 BCE, with evidence from shellfish middens showing the likelihood of shellfish cultivation and sustainable harvest techniques dating as far back as 11,500 years ago. In what are known today as “clam gardens” and “sea gardens,” Indigenous peoples built rock walls in the intertidal zone to foster favorable habitat for shellfish. Krise says her Coast Salish ancestors also constructed oyster dikes made of cedar planks and old canoes. The dikes retained seawater and regulated the flow of nutrients essential to the clams’ and oysters’ reproduction and growth. The oysters, later to be named Olympia oysters, were collected and carried, along with other bivalves, in durable baskets woven of cedar limbs and roots cut into strips. The weave of these receptacles was open, allowing seawater to circulate freely when the baskets were immersed in the tides. This way, the shellfish could be purged of any sand or grit.

The oysters they were collecting were the Olympia (*Ostrea lurida*), and it is the Northwest’s only native oyster species. Its small size (typically less than three inches across) makes this animal easily distinguished from its non-native kin. Naturalist William Cooper, who traversed the Washington Territory with a team of railroad surveyors in the 1850s, found them to “possess the same peculiar coppery flavor remarked in the European mollusk when eaten for the first time.”

Shoalwater Bay in southwest Washington was a natural haven for the Olympia oyster. For many generations the Lower Chinook, Lower Chehalis, and Willapa people sustained themselves on Shoalwater Bay’s bounteous shellfish, salmon, shorebird, seabird, and cedar tree resources.



▲ Northwest shucking houses were hubs of activity in the 1800s. Carved into the back wall of this Oregon facility are the words “Oysterville” and “San Francisco,” plus the initials of shuckers who worked at this place. Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society, Gi7203.

Their lives changed dramatically with the appearance of the first European fur traders and the epidemic diseases they carried. By 1852, when James Gilchrist Swan compiled the notes for his now classic personal chronicle, *Three Years at Shoal-Water Bay*, Swan estimated that there were little over one hundred Chinook people—a tenth of the estimated peak population in precontact times.

At the same time, the Chinook and Chehalis people remained a political force. In 1855, Washington territorial governor Isaac Stevens proposed a treaty in which multiple tribes in the region—including the Chinook and Upper and Lower Chehalis—would

relocate to a reservation in the Quinault Indian Nation’s territory. The Native Americans living at Shoalwater Bay refused. In 1866, descendants of Chinook, Lower Chehalis, and Willapa people formed the Shoalwater Bay Tribe through President Andrew Johnson’s executive order that set aside a 355-acre piece of land for them. (By comparison, through the Homestead Act of 1862, the United States granted a married couple of US citizens the right to claim 320 acres.) “This reservation was set aside with the intent that these last holdouts would have their own reserved land for fishing, shellfish harvesting, and hunting,” the Shoalwater Bay Tribe explains on their website. “This part of Willapa Bay has sustained our ancestors since the

beginning. It continues to sustain our people and enables us to reach out to the greater community.”

The early white settlers were drawn to the unbelievable natural abundance of Shoalwater’s shores. Captain Charles J. W. Russell was among them. In 1850 he built the first European-style house in the region, from which he ran a trading post—an indispensable outlet for his fellow pioneers, most of whom lived in lean-tos of rough-hewn timber roofed with sailcloth. Russell lived near Chief Toke, a leader of the local Chinook and Chehalis people, and began to employ many of his Indigenous neighbors in gathering oysters.

In 1851, Russell traveled to San Francisco, where he introduced the first sacks of Shoalwater’s Olympia oysters to the city’s shellfish merchants. San Francisco had gone from a tiny hamlet to a major metropolis of 30,000 people seemingly overnight thanks to the Gold Rush. The oyster was a symbol of wealth and status in the city, and demand was huge. However, overharvesting and poor management had left the city’s oysters in desperately short supply. Russell was happy to flood the city with Northwest oysters, and in the process, launched one of the more lucrative ventures of the nineteenth-century Northwest.



Russell’s sacks represented the tip of an oyster iceberg. Over the years a virtual flotilla of schooners arrived at Shoalwater Bay, brought aboard bushels of wild-harvested oysters, and then made haste for San Francisco, where jubilant diners awaited. The Pacific Northwest oyster industry exploded. At one point the town of Oysterville on Long Beach peninsula possessed more gold per capita than any other town or city along the Pacific coast, with the sole exception of San Francisco. According to local lore, the nearest bank was in Astoria, Oregon, so much of the gold was either lost in transit or buried in the sand around Oysterville. Despite numerous treasure hunters’ attempts, no such wealth has ever been recovered.

After the collapse of their oyster industry, California needed a way to compete with the Northwest’s abundant beds. They found it in the Eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*), which they began importing from the East Coast. After a rocky start, the industry grew exponentially. The popularity of the Eastern oyster caused the price of Northwest oysters—now called “Olympias”—to collapse, and Washington’s oyster farm owners



At one point the town of Oysterville on Long Beach peninsula possessed more gold per capita than any other town or city along the Pacific coast, with the sole exception of San Francisco.



found themselves in dire financial straits. By the mid-1870s the price of “Olys” had dipped to a mere four dollars a sack. Ten years later, the same sack fetched \$2.50—about half the price paid for the esteemed Easterns. The once-lucrative Olympia oyster industry was now as lifeless as a sun-bleached oyster shell.



To save itself, Washington’s oyster industry looked east as well. After years of waiting for the transcontinental railroad to allow Eastern oysters to be imported to the Northwest (San Francisco had the advantage of connecting to the railroad decades before), the first batches of Eastern oysters arrived in the Northwest in the late 1800s.

Rearing Eastern oysters in Washington turned out to be a cinch—or so it seemed. One only needed to buy baby oysters from afar, plant them, and wait for the comestibles to come of age. Within a decade, the Washington business in Eastern oysters had burgeoned into an enterprise valued at around \$1 million and employing several hundred individuals. Production

figures steadily climbed from about four thousand gallons of meat in 1902 to twenty thousand gallons in 1908.

Along with Eastern oyster culture came an existence inspired in large part by life on the Atlantic coast. The shift from a purely extractive industry, one where Olympia oysters were simply plucked from their natural habitats, to one of planting and harvesting from well-tended beds, required oyster workers to keep in closer proximity to their intertidal and subtidal holdings. Growers built one- and two-story homes on pilings, clustering what were known as “station houses” near the most productive beds. As many as five or six workmen lived in a station at one time.

▲ Vintage “Famous Olympia Oysters” can, circa late 1940s to mid-1950s, courtesy of the Olympia Oyster Company. Photo by MaryAnn Barron Wagner, photo editing by Robyn Ricks, Washington Sea Grant.



▲ Olympia Oyster. Photo by Craig Harrold Photography.

Some station house residents spent weeks, months, and, in the case of oysterman Richard Murakami, entire years in these outposts. “I was born there [in 1914],” Murakami told an interviewer from the Washington State Oral History Program. “We didn’t move to land ’til I was about five years old.”



But in 1919, just a couple decades later, the Northwest’s new venture into farmed oysters suffered a collapse. For some reason, quite possibly related to tides and water temperatures, the expense of harvesting oysters, or a combination of all three, the Northwest’s stocks of Eastern oysters were not reproducing. Harvest and recruitment rates had been nowhere near commensurate.

When a more cost-effective alternative presented itself, Northwest growers leapt at the chance to abandon the Eastern oyster trade altogether. In northern Puget Sound they were hard at work, readying their beds for another imported shellfish, the Pacific oyster (*Crassostrea gigas*). Hale and hearty, this species had been successfully cultured under similar oceanic and weather conditions for several centuries in Japan. Still, there was reason to believe this foreign marvel might not thrive and multiply in North American seas.

Two entrepreneurs stood ready to accept the challenge. J. Emi Tsukimoto and Joe Miyagi were residents of Olympia, Washington, yet had family ties that extended across the Pacific to the suppliers of Japan’s superior oyster stocks. Both men possessed experience in the shellfish industry, having worked in the shucking house and shellfish beds of the J. J. Brenner Oyster Company.

Tsukimoto and Miyagi had staked out six hundred acres of tideland on Samish Bay, south of Bellingham. With its remaining money, their company—Pearl Oyster Company—bought four hundred cases of Pacific oysters, grown in the Miyagi Prefecture and shipped in early April 1919 from the port of Yokohama in northern Japan. These fine specimens were loaded onto the deck of an American steamship, the *President McKinley*, covered with a protective layer of Japanese matting and given frequent showers of seawater to keep them fresh throughout the voyage. The well-tended cargo—approximately eight hundred bushels of high-quality shellfish stock—arrived in Seattle eighteen days later. But Pearl Oyster’s people were

in for a shock. Many of the larger oysters were dead on arrival. The rest were hastily transplanted to the company's beds, in the off chance of resuscitation. Any hopes of salvation were soon dashed, however, as these sole survivors slowly perished.

As it turned out, however, the experience was not a total loss for Pearl Oyster. Attached to the shells of the recently expired were hundreds of fingernail-sized spat—juvenile oysters that had apparently settled on their parents' calcareous crags in Japan. Like the mythological phoenix rising from the ashes, these youngsters would eventually grow to adulthood and become the first cash crop of Pacific oysters ever cultivated in the New World.

After two years in the plankton-rich waters of northern Puget Sound, Washington's Japanese transplants had grown from near-microscopic spat to adult specimens with shells over six inches in length. By one calculation at the time, it would take only 120 of these mega-mollusks to yield a gallon of shucked meat—a twenty-fifth of the Olympia oysters required to produce the same quantity.

The state's production of oyster meat nearly quintupled in just two years—from 6,500 gallons in 1929 to 31,000 gallons in 1931. But not everyone in the Northwest was as appreciative of the new oyster species as the growers would've liked. Pacific oyster grower E. N. Steele found some consumers were reluctant to try something new. As he made the rounds of Seattle-area restaurants and fish markets, he found that each owner had initial objections and, as he put it, "had to be shown that their business would be increased by making the change" from imported Easterns to locally grown Pacific oysters.

Some buyers felt the Pacific oyster's characteristically dark-rimmed flesh made it appear unappetizing. Steele overcame this prejudice with a snappy advertising campaign. "Look for the oysters with the velvet rim," his printed advertisements proclaimed. "It assures you that it is grown in the pure waters of Puget Sound."

Others were unaccustomed to the new oyster's large size. Steele won over these skeptics with cooking demonstrations, staged by his brother and sister-in-law with a three-burner electric hot plate. Shoppers were offered fried oysters and shown how to make what Steele called a cracker sandwich. "Many of those who liked the sample would purchase a can of oysters, and were assured that this market would keep a supply for future use," he wrote.

Steele's persuasive presentations and promotional materials worked remarkably well. In one day, workers at the Portland Fish Market sold eighty dollars' worth of Pacific oysters, at thirty-five cents for a half-pint and sixty-five cents for a pint. Buoyed with optimism, Steele bought a small Dodge truck, fitted it with sleeping quarters for his sales staff, and packed it with advertising materials and painted oyster shells. This oysters-on-wheels operation spread the word about Pacific oysters as far south as San Bernardino, California, and as far east as Salt Lake City.

Other oyster growers followed, literally, in Steele's salesmen's footsteps. With massive quantities of Pacific oysters to sell, Willapa's growers soon dominated the market, unintentionally driving down oyster prices with their surpluses. Although smaller-scale operations such as Steele's suffered, there was enough business in oysters for everyone to benefit to a degree.



▲ Employees of Taylor Shellfish Farms sorting oysters. Photo courtesy of Taylor Shellfish Farms.



▲ Betsy Peabody, director of Puget Sound Restoration Fund, surveys a restoration site for native Olympia oysters, 2019. Photo by Benjamin Drummond for Puget Sound Restoration Fund.

No longer viewed with suspicion, the immigrant oyster was now regarded as a “naturalized” citizen of Northwest shores, one with a solid reputation for conferring wealth on its cultivators. Output skyrocketed over the next ten years, reaching a record 1,131,100 gallons in 1941.

Roughly five times the size of its distant cousin, the Eastern oyster, the Pacific oyster is the giant of Northwest shellfish beds. Just like a runaway zucchini in a vegetable patch, overlooked Pacifics can grow to lengths of ten inches or more over a period of about ten to fifteen years. These biggies are known as “tennis-shoe” oysters in the trade, because of their resemblance to flat-soled footwear.

Pacifics are also one of the fastest-growing species, reaching sexual maturity in a year. In addition, it is better adapted than either of its distant relatives to enduring cold spells and other caprices of coastal weather. For all these reasons, the Pacific is one of the most intensively farmed oyster species in the world.



The modern-day Northwest oyster has landed in a curious position: 98 percent of them are Pacifics—a species that believers in pristine wilderness could rightly argue doesn’t belong in Northwest waters due to its non-native status.

And yet many environmental advocates have often pointed to the Pacific oysters’ beneficial presence in the region. After all, oysters are heralded for their ability to filter our water, make habitat for other species, and provide one of the least environmentally impactful sources of protein that humans produce. Given that access to native Olympia oysters is now limited, Pacifics offer an alternative to an economically and culturally important food. By now, generations of shellfish growers have staked out both their livelihoods and their lifestyles through cultivating Pacifics. Through these generations, shellfish growers have been pivotal players in many efforts that have helped maintain or improve the local water.

After decades of neglect, though, Olympia oysters are again drawing the attention of shellfishers in the Pacific Northwest. Most of this interest, though, is not food-related. Instead, it's focused on the little oysters' big role as what is known as a keystone species—an organism on which many other species depend. The nooks and crannies created by the smaller, more densely packed clusters of Olympia oyster shells provide safe havens and sites of attachment for tiny, niche-dwelling marine fish, invertebrates, and plants. Studies suggest that Olympia oysters support richer and more diverse underwater communities than do similar-sized clusters of farmed Pacific oysters. Members of these communities often include the prey of larger marine animals—from hefty Pacific salmon to gargantuan humpback whales.

Looking ahead, restoring Olympia oysters could also foster greater ecological resilience: research led by George Waldbusser of Oregon State University suggests that native Olympia oyster larvae may be less vulnerable to acidified seawater than their cousins originally from Japan. “It’s good to have some hope and optimism around marine organisms, because there’s so much bad news,” says Waldbusser.

Add cultural significance to the list of reasons for favoring native Olympia oysters over non-native Pacifics. Tribes in California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska harvested Olympia oysters for thousands of years before other species were introduced to the Northwest.

Returning Olympia oysters to their historical habitats is “a very powerful thing to do,” according to Genny Rogers of the Skokomish Indian Tribe, the original inhabitants of Hood Canal, Washington. “It’s part of our identity, our world,” she says.

Around the turn of the millennium, workers with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife joined forces with the nonprofit Puget Sound Restoration Fund, the for-profit Taylor Shellfish Farms, and the Skokomish, Squaxin Island, and Suquamish Indian Tribes to put Olympia oysters on the very same beaches where these small wonders once abounded. Many other tribes, growers, and other partners have joined the effort since. In 2010 these groups rallied around the ambitious goal of restoring 100 acres of Olympia oyster beds in Puget Sound over the next decade. At the time there were fewer than 150 acres of natural Olympia oyster aggregations.

The groups identified more than a dozen distinct sites where they would carry out their efforts, and had a lot of success. The team’s restoration work in Dogfish Bay, for example, grew the population from a few hundred to more than six million.

“The thing no one could possibly have anticipated, not even myself, was the devotion that so many people felt to this oyster,” Peabody says. “Olympia oysters are woven into the history and ecology of this place in many ways. They have been, since the beginning, a gift that keeps on giving—as a First Food, as the oyster that launched our state’s shellfish industry, and as an ecological superstar. They belong in these waters still. I think it was this shared love of Olympia oysters that floated the recovery effort, as we each sought to tether ourselves to something good and meaningful and resilient in the watery world around us.” 

DAVID GEORGE GORDON is the author of twenty-two books on topics ranging from slugs and snails to sharks and gray whales. He served as Washington Sea Grant’s science writer from 1998 to 2012.

SAMANTHA LARSON has been the science writer at Washington Sea Grant since 2017. Her writing and reporting on science, the environment, and adventure has also appeared in dozens of publications, including *National Geographic*, *Grist*, and *High Country News*.

MARYANN BARRON WAGNER has worked in communications since 2000 and served as assistant director for communications at Washington Sea Grant since 2014. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she has an appreciation for all bivalves, great and small.

David George Gordon is currently touring the state as part of Humanities Washington’s Speakers Bureau, giving a talk called “Heaven on the Half Shell: Washington State’s Oyster Odyssey.”
Find an event near you at humanities.org.



▲ African American NACWC convention delegates gathering at King Street Station, 1948 . Photo courtesy of the Museum of History & Industry.

We Are Also in Bondage Here

How Seattle bowed out of the civil rights conversation, and why Quin’Nita Cobbins–Modica is dragging it back in.

By Ariana Sutherland

History favors giants. This is, in part, human nature—to remember the darkest atrocities, the noblest martyrs, the underdogs faced with the direst odds. But the reality of the past is often more nuanced, and from this nuance springs the kind of conversations Quin’Nita Cobbins-Modica wants to have.

The scholar and historian focuses on African American women’s history in the United States, looking particularly at civil rights history, leadership, and politics. Cobbins-Modica’s analysis of Black activism exists in the intersection of gender and race, past and present, national and local. In the shadow of civil rights moments like Selma, Alabama’s “Bloody Sunday,” or the March on Washington, African Americans in the American West fought against a quieter violence—which sprang from the same insidious root.

Doubly overlooked in this Southern-focused narrative are the Black Washington women whose activism played a pivotal role in civil rights efforts both within the state and on a national scale. In nationally recognized groups, through small local grassroots campaigns, and as individuals, they fought to combat Seattle’s racist and segregationist practices that lurked beneath a veneer of perfunctory equality. Cobbins-Modica, who is currently in the midst of writing a century-long history of Black women’s activism in Seattle, focuses on the particular “political ferment” of 1960s Seattle in a talk for Humanities Washington, “We Are Also in Bondage Here: Black Women in the Washington Civil Rights Movement.”

Where does Washington fit into the larger civil rights narrative? What—and who—has been overlooked? And what might the profound achievements owed to Black women in this period teach us about addressing the issues that define today?

The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Humanities Washington: Why is Washington State seen as an “exception” rather than a microcosm of U.S. society?

Quin’Nita Cobbins-Modica: Washington State, in the popular imagination, is seen as this racially progressive—and subsequently exceptional—place. What I mean by that is that it’s seen as being more racially tolerant, without much of the racial issues that other cities may have experienced. This is due, in part, to its early civil rights laws that were on the books in the late nineteenth century: collectively, Black men and women, especially by 1910, could vote unencumbered. For Black people,

there were not really any legalized forms of segregation or profound instances of racial violence—to a degree.

At the same time, there did exist, of course, laws and legal barriers for Indigenous groups and Asian American groups, especially the Chinese—both of whom experienced varying forms of racial violence and vitriol. Even in the absence of legal barriers for Black residents, there has always been a color line, or Jim Crowism that existed in the state. In that sense, it doesn’t make Washington State that different from other parts of the U.S.

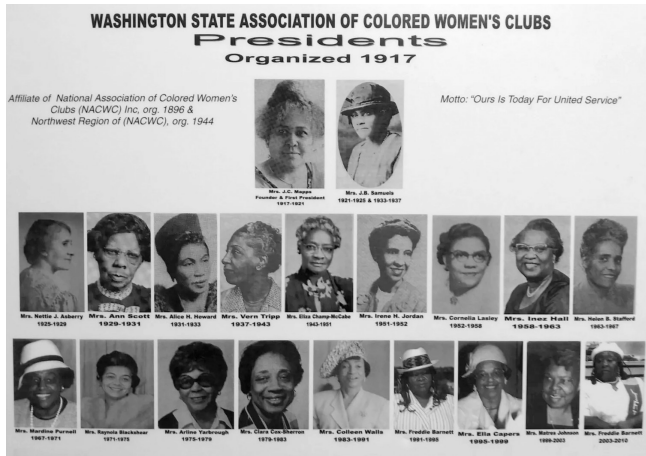
I complicate this idea, or myth, of Washington being exceptional through the examination of Black women’s activism, and to understand the ways they consistently fought against what we call *de facto* racial segregation. *De facto* segregation is discrimination by custom and practice. It’s not necessarily something that’s legalized. Whereas *de jure* is legalized, which is what you would find in the American South.

I explore how Black women exposed and challenged this color and gender line on multiple fronts: particularly in housing, education, and employment. Essentially, by the 1960s, they understood that their perceived relative freedoms in the state (and what I mean by “relative freedom” is the absence of the legal barriers, with the exception of racial covenants) were precarious. They had to be vigilant in advancing Black freedom and expanding women’s rights against the forces that sought to undermine their humanity and citizenship.

“

Many people often associate the civil rights movement as a Southern phenomenon and are unaware that a movement existed here in Washington State. It was indeed a nationwide movement.

”



▲ Poster displays presidents of the Washington State Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Photo courtesy of the Tacoma City Association of Colored Women's Clubs.

In a letter written to Dr. King, one of the women I highlight drove home this point. She drew a connection between Black struggles here and Black struggles in the South. She argued against the notion that Black people have an exceptional life in Washington. They encountered covert forms of oppression and, quite frankly, were not free at all, because she recognized that Black freedom in the PNW was tied up with the freedom—or unfreedom—of those in the Jim Crow South. They did not deal with racial violence, per se, but they dealt with high unemployment rates, residential segregation, school segregation, and other societal barriers throughout the state. She contended that Black Pacific Northwesterners, collectively, were feeling the weight of oppression and white supremacy that was having the same impact on Black life here.

What did the activism of Black women look like in the height of the civil rights movement?

We can start with the 1940s when we began to see a surge in Black activism due to wartime migration. Black women were involved in concerted efforts and campaigns to challenge racial discrimination and segregation here in Washington State—one of them being employment discrimination. You have groups of women representing different organizations, such as the Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters [a labor union founded to improve the working conditions of those employed by the Pullman Company]; also, women in the NAACP [Women in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]; the Washington State Federation of



▲ Civil rights activist Bettylou Valentine was one of the leaders of the Seattle chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of the Museum of History & Industry.

Colored Women's Clubs, and to a certain degree women in the Urban League. They all fought to secure a fair employment practices law [the Washington State Law Against Employment Discrimination], which was one of the first in the nation to ban racial discrimination in employment. That occurred in 1949.

A law is only effective if it's enforced. Even though the Fair Employment Practices law banned racial discrimination in employment and had a provision that established a state board against discrimination, it was somewhat ineffective. Black women had to continue to fight for the enforcement of these laws in the 1950s. By the time we get to the 1960s, many joined new organizations such as CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], where they engaged in non-violent direct action campaigns and strategies borrowed from the Southern movement. Many women went out to stores to fight head-on with those businesses that wouldn't hire Black folks. They worked through negotiation, boycotting, and picketing in order to force private businesses—like Nordstrom, the Bon Marche, and Safeway—to hire African American workers. Over two dozen Black employees, for example, were hired because of that direct action campaign (this was in 1962), but that was just a small victory in changing that social policy.

Another example is women organizing, again through CORE, the NAACP, and the Urban League to eradicate housing and residential discrimination. For instance, they fought to get an open and fair housing policy passed through the Seattle City Council. Vivian Caver set up human rights councils in a



▲ A signing ceremony and reception attended by Freddie Mae Gautier (on the right) officially recognizing Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a City holiday. Photo courtesy of the Seattle Municipal Archives.

number of white neighborhoods in King County to try to win white support for fair housing legislation. She would go on to head the Seattle Human Rights Department in 1975. Women's efforts in helping to drive those campaigns led the Seattle City Council in 1968 to pass a housing ordinance that prohibited unfair and discriminatory housing practices. This also came at the same time Congress passed a federal act to ban housing discrimination across the nation.

Another profound area of activism was education. Again, Black women—through the NAACP, CORE, and other organizations—banded under the leadership of E. June Smith, president of the Seattle NAACP between 1963 and 1968. She helped lead a two-day boycott of the Seattle Public Schools in 1966 because of the school board's inaction to integrate the public schools. Due to the ongoing education demands, by 1978, the Seattle School Board instituted a voluntary desegregation plan without a court order—which remains controversial. Many community members, especially Black mothers and parents, didn't particularly like the fact that their children were being bussed to white schools, nor did they support the closure of their neighborhood schools, which exacerbated the internal conflicts within the community on the direction of the civil rights agenda. For the most part, though, Black residents were very much committed to desegregating the school system, eradicating racial inequities, supporting the hiring of Black educators and administrators, and ensuring that their children received a quality education.



▲ Roberta Byrd Barr (left) on television stage, 1965. Photo courtesy of the University of Washington Special Collections.

Was your focus more on groups of women activists or did you look at individuals?

I'm looking at both individual and collective efforts by Black women. Women helped to devise strategies, disseminated information, gave speeches, wrote correspondence, picketed, boycotted, facilitated meetings, and provided leadership and resources to the many organizations. They often held multiple memberships. So, I'm interested in women who worked through organizations and also those who worked independent of them as well. They did not all necessarily agree on strategy, method, or even what issues to prioritize.

Like the woman who wrote the letter to Dr. King. What was her name?

Yes, that's where I begin the talk to frame the discussion. Her name is Freddie Mae Gautier. She was a Seattleite and, at that time, a clerk in the King County Sheriff's Office. She was also a very respected community organizer and helped co-found the Western chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by King and a cohort of Black ministers in the South. She was also a founder of the Benefit Guild, which emerged in the aftermath of the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed the four little girls. They raised money for the families.

In her letter, she urges King to come to Seattle, to the Pacific Northwest. She clearly outlines the conditions and the specific grievances that Black people are facing here: she says, essentially,

“We’re having some of the same problems that exist in the South, but a lot of people can be complacent here. We need you to come.” She was very much concerned with Black women who were on the front lines in the South—because, she said, we are also ready to act, and we’re going to be on the front lines as well of this movement for justice.

She’s just one of the individual women I mention. I focus on others: Vivian Caver, who worked with the Urban League and held workshops to teach and encourage white residents about the importance of supporting open housing legislation; and E. June Smith, who was arguably one of the most visible Black women leaders at the forefront of the movement.

Another person I highlight is Roberta Byrd Barr, who was an educator in the Seattle Public Schools. She also ran a television program called *Face to Face* to address the racial issues Black people were experiencing in this city and in the state. In the height of the [Seattle Public Schools] boycott, she invited members of the school board to engage in a public discussion around school integration. She also traveled the state advocating for Black history and designing culturally responsive curricula for teachers to implement in their classrooms. She believed there needed to be intensive training for educators in relating to students of color and Black students—as the school districts underwent significant changes to address school integration and the push for bussing.

Those are just four of the six or seven women I highlight in the talk. Of course, there are more!

Is the talk mostly expository, for the purpose of highlighting these women and these organizations that haven’t really been highlighted, or is there a way that this history maps onto today that you hope audiences take away?

My purpose is never just to highlight, to just say “Black women were there.” Instead, it is critical to understand the significance of their experiences and involvement. One of the main takeaways is to show that by centering Black women’s leadership and activism within a local context, we allow for a more nuanced understanding of the unique circumstances of the Black freedom struggle in this region that necessitated both similar and different protest strategies to combat racial discrimination and *de facto* segregation. Many people often associate the Civil Rights Movement as a Southern phenomenon and are unaware

that a movement existed here in Washington State. It was indeed a nationwide movement.

Another major takeaway is the various ways that Black women have been on the front lines for social justice and change. As I mentioned before, many of them spearheaded multiple campaigns but are rendered invisible and marginalized in PNW and civil rights history.

A third takeaway are the lessons we can draw from women about the strategies they employed in the past to address some of those same issues we are facing today. Engagement in social justice work requires education. Black women activists educated themselves about the issues and their roles as citizens. They also educated others. They organized, strategized, and built coalitions—like Vivian Caver and women in CORE, for example. With such a small Black population, they needed people power, and to work with other groups to challenge these institutional barriers. It was, therefore, important to engage in coalitional politics for large-scale change to occur.

The ways that Black women conceptualized freedom can help us to (re)think what freedom means today, and it provides a lens for us to understand our contemporary moment and women’s place within it. I discuss the newer generation of Black women—some who have taken up the mantle and are continuing the work of the Black freedom struggle on the grassroots level, using some of the same direct action strategies and tactics of the past; and there are others who are using their government and leadership positions to create policies through the legislative process to address systemic racial, gender, and economic issues. There are still the same struggles around poverty, fair wages, housing insecurity, healthcare, and education—therefore, the freedom movement continues.

Ariana Sutherland is a freelance writer based in Seattle.

Quin’Nita Cobbins-Modica is currently touring the state as part of Humanities Washington’s Speakers Bureau, giving a free public talk called “We Are Also in Bondage Here: Black Women in the Washington Civil Rights Movement.”
Find an event near you at humanities.org.



Wedding Poem

By **Cara Stoddard**

Cara Stoddard is a queer creative nonfiction writer living in Seattle. Their poetry and essays have appeared in Fourth Genre, Ninth Letter, The Gettysburg Review, Flyway, and Terrain.org among others. Their first book, Spirography: A Memoir is forthcoming from Wayne State University Press in Spring 2025.

This poem will appear in an upcoming digital anthology of queer poetry from Washington State, a project from Washington State Poet Laureate Arianne True, launching in 2025. Learn more at humanities.org.

To grow up without a map
is to bury your own treasure
in the hope chest of your future lover

to learn by braille
the topography of jawline
of hangnail, of corduroys
and pearlsnap denim

homesick for her at some roadside reststop
the switchback of her shoulderblade
the holy hollow of her flank
the shape of her hands
in the curvature of her baseball cap's brim.

It's hard to go back and unbend all the years
spent hiding from the malegaze
to cross over the cattleguard of your own heart
and live with your aperture all the way open.

It took me a long time to unlearn that
to belong to one another doesn't come from
from some brokeback longing
to climb out of the box canyon of self-sufficiency
and stand prone on the cliffband rimrock of compromise

Instead it is to build a home
of reciprocity in each others arms
the way mountain stonecrop blooms
in each sunsoaked cleft of basalt
the way licorice fern grows
out of the trunks of big leaf maples.
To become for each other
erosionproof
a root cellar of sweetness.



HISTORY



The Good Ol' Boys and the Bad People

Since 2000, the incarceration rate for rural Americans has skyrocketed past that of their urban counterparts. Why?

By E.J. Iannelli

Since the latter part of the 20th century, the United States has tended to rank among the countries with the highest incarceration rates globally. The most recent national data from 2021 counts 531 incarcerated individuals per 100,000 population, a rate that puts the US sixth in the world — lower than countries like Cuba (794 per 100,000), Rwanda (621) and Turkmenistan (576) but higher than countries such as Russia (300) and Iran (228).

That sixth-place ranking is actually an improvement from 2018, when an incarceration rate of 642 per 100,000 put the US at the very top of that global list.

But that's not to suggest that the numbers in the US are seeing positive trends across the board. There is actually a glaring—and growing—disparity between the incarceration rates in smaller towns versus those in cities, and that disparity isn't tilted in the direction that you might assume.

According to studies by the Vera Institute of Justice, the jail rates for urban and rural counties were roughly equal at the start of the century. Thirteen years later, the rates of incarceration were 40% higher in rural counties than in urban metro areas. Between 2013 and 2019, jail populations dropped 18 percent in urban areas but increased 26 percent in rural areas.

Those statistics are hardly the only contrasts in urban and rural incarceration. Nationally, the number of individuals who are being held in jail while awaiting trial has increased by 223% since 1970. In rural counties, however, that increase is almost double (436%), a stark rise that is disproportionately impacted by rural regions in the South and the West.

What explains these very different pictures for rural and urban incarceration rates?

Jennifer Sherman, who specializes in rural sociology, was interested in answering that question. Between 2020 and 2024, she conducted two rounds of in-depth voice interviews with individuals who had experience with incarceration in at least one of six county jails in Central and Eastern Washington. The accounts she collected were designed to augment and, ideally, help put a real-world narrative to the data gathered by her research project partner Jen Schwartz, a criminologist and fellow professor of sociology at Washington State University.

Their mixed-method research found that criminal offenses weren't driving the higher rural jail rates as much as small misdemeanors — things like failure to appear in court or driving with a suspended license. And when the researchers looked at the context around those misdemeanors, they found that they were often part of a vicious circle that arose from challenges in navigating the law enforcement system.

Take, for instance, someone who's had their license suspended as a result of driving while impaired. Without a license, they're no longer legally able to drive to work or treatment services or court appearances. But in rural communities, where public transportation networks are slight or even nonexistent, personal cars might be the only option to get from point A to B. It's not hard to see the Catch-22 that arises from this predicament, and it only leads to further ones down the road.

At the same time, Sherman heard contrasting accounts. Some individuals she spoke with enjoyed certain perks that enabled them to navigate the system more effectively. They might get a crucial insider tip or a waiver that helped them meet court-ordered criteria and avoid further jail time.

The key factor in these divergent experiences was often—but not exclusively—social class. Another kind of wealth played a role, too. Sherman calls this moral capital, which can be measured by an individual's standing in their community. Those with more moral capital tended to experience a smoother restorative path after jail.

For a new Humanities Washington talk, which draws on her recent research on rural incarceration, Sherman looks at how jail rates might be a byproduct of rural intra-community dynamics. Titled “Bad People and Good Ol’ Boys: The Criminalization of Rural Disadvantage,” the talk considers how an individual's social standing can affect their ability to recover after a brush with the law — or whether they will find themselves in a punitive cycle from which it's difficult to escape.

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: How did this talk originate?

Jennifer Sherman: This talk is based on research that I began in 2020 with a colleague of mine at WSU, Jen Schwartz, who

“

Small towns are really good at publicizing the misdeeds of their community members in ways that cities are not.

”

is a criminologist. It began when I saw this call for proposals from the Vera Institute for Justice. They were looking for teams to study the rise in rural jail incarceration across the nation. Basically, they had this sort of uncomfortable finding, which was that rates of incarceration in rural jails had been rising for several decades nationally while they were falling in urban and suburban areas. And they wanted teams to look at what was going on. We were one of two proposals that were chosen for that grant.

And what shape did that research ultimately take?

We put this project together where we partnered with sheriff's departments in six different rural counties in Eastern and Central Washington. And we did a combination of research. Jen was looking at booking and release data — that is, actually getting directly from them all of the data for who entered and left their jails. And then, because this was 2020 [during COVID], I was doing phone interviews with people who had spent time in the jails. There were two rounds of those interviews, which means I've now interviewed 71 people who have spent time in one or more of those six jails. So we've got these two really different datasets that speak to each other in different ways.

What were some of your findings?

We learned a ton about what is bringing people to jail in rural Washington and what's perpetuating this problem in rural communities.

You see, when we asked the sheriff what was driving jail admission, they would tell us, “Drugs. It's all drugs.” Well,

drugs are a piece of this puzzle. But one of the most interesting findings early on was when Jen came to me and said, “A lot of what's bringing people to jail are really small misdemeanors. They're not really criminal offenses.”

She kind of put them all together in one category that she was calling system navigation problems. It was really little stuff like failure to appear in court, failure to pay fines or to complete court required activities, such as community service or that sort of thing. And she said, “When you put all these things together, they account for more than one-third of all the jail stays.”

She asked me, “Can you help me understand why this is driving so much jail admission?” And I was able to find in my data that the rural communities have some structural lacks that make it really hard to navigate the system once you get in it. For example, if they take your license away in a rural community, you've got a really tough choice now: Do you drive to work and risk getting picked up for driving with a suspended license? Or do you not go to work, which means you can't pay your fines and fees?

So we heard a lot [from interviewees] about job loss and housing loss after an arrest and things like that, all of which contributes to people's lives kind of spiraling out of control and then ending back up in jail. And, of course, the more times you end up in jail, the more likely you are to lose your job or your housing. It all kind of feeds on itself.

How else does the rural incarceration experience differ from, say, the urban experience?

Part of this story is also whether you receive support from your community or if you are further ostracized. Does the experience of being in a small town further help you or hurt you in that regard?

I look at a couple of different ways in which it can hurt, including exacerbating the stigma. People often felt a lot of shame around their arrests and their crimes. But when you're in a really tight-knit community, it can be worse because everybody knows. They heard about it on the scanners. Or they saw it on the Facebook page. And word travels fast. Small towns are really good at publicizing the misdeeds of their community members in ways that cities are not.

For some people, that was a huge issue. And then for a few lucky others who had a lot of support and where the community had



sort of already decided that they're a "good guy," they got all sorts of support that you wouldn't have expected — things like tips from the inside, where the court bailiffs would give them hints about how to navigate the system better. Or they would be offered opportunities, such as alcohol monitoring devices for their cars that would allow them to still get to work and still navigate some of these problems that other folks could not.

Hence the name of your talk, where we see this subjective distinction between the "bad people" and the "good guys."

Exactly. It's like the population's broken down into roughly two sets of folks. There are the ones that are just kind of assumed to be bad people. In fact, I have quotes from our sheriff talking about all the bad people that they have to protect their communities from. And then there's those kind of good ol' boys about whom they'll say, "They're not bad people. They just made a mistake." And for them, the stigma doesn't stick because they already have this protective bubble—that supportive community—around them.

And does socioeconomic status come into play here, whereby the good ol' boys tend to be more affluent and the bad people tend to be less affluent?

Absolutely. I would say it's not only social class but also, of course, race. There were definitely people who felt like they had been racially targeted or that their race mattered in their interactions. Some really felt like they were targeted in certain ways for being Indigenous or for being Latinx.

But I think what was most interesting to me was that class mattered more in this sample than race. And social standing in the community or social integration mattered more than either. Most of the people who had really positive [post-incarceration] experiences were more likely to be middle class, or at least comfortable. And yet if somebody was poor but had really

strong social ties to the community, or was from a family that was well regarded, they still had an easier time. People that had what I call *moral capital* in their communities—which is basically just being known as good citizens, hard workers, or from good, strong families—did tend to have better outcomes, even if they were from a low-income background.

Did any other interesting findings emerge from this project?

One of the really interesting wrinkles to the research project is that there were two rounds of interview data. One was in 2020–21 and the other was in 2023–24.

In between those two rounds of data collection was the *Blake* decision. That was the state-level decision that decriminalized the personal use amount of drugs in 2021. They've since been reclassified as a misdemeanor, but it really changed the way we handle use amount of drugs in Washington State.

What I discovered in the research was that, along with *Blake*, there was some money that went into things like rehabilitative services — things like system navigation programs that actually help folks recover. And some of our communities have really run with that money and taken advantage of the opportunity to expand the services that they make available to people who come in and out of the jails who clearly have substance abuse problems.

In the communities that have made use of those opportunities, I heard really interesting stories where people talk about these shame spirals that made it so that they couldn't recover from their addictions. And once they were provided with the right combination of often wraparound services that would include sober housing and drug and alcohol treatment, usually intensive outpatient treatment, drug court, all these kinds of things, a lot of these folks had really different experiences where they no longer felt ashamed of themselves. They now felt like they were

being reintegrated into their communities and that people were proud of them. People didn't judge them in the same way. And that was often one of the major factors that not only let them get their lives back together, but help them stay clean and sober and move on with their lives.

Aside from the *Blake* ruling, did COVID impact some of the trends you were seeing?

COVID definitely changed everything. The original design for the interviews was actually to be in-person in the two jails that were closest to me. And COVID threw a wrench in that. So we pivoted at that point to phone interviews, which turned out to be a real blessing for multiple reasons.

One was that it allowed me to cast a wider net and interview people across all six counties instead of just the two that I could easily commute to. Second, and we hadn't really anticipated this part, but jail stays can be really short. So opening it up to people who were no longer currently incarcerated meant that I got a much broader sense of who goes in and out of a jail. It meant I was also speaking with people who only spent a night there for a DUI.

And doing the two rounds really helped us to see things like the impact of COVID as well as the impact of *Blake* — you know, different ways in which historical events had impacted people's lives and outcomes. And without really meaning to, it allowed us to trace the explosion of fentanyl in Washington State and see that evolve through people's stories. It's an interesting snapshot of a moment in time.

Even if it is a snapshot, are there some potential solutions that we can draw from your findings?

One of the more effective supports that we've heard about are these recovery navigator programs. There are these folks—usually people with lived experience, meaning that they've also been through the system themselves and often struggled with

addiction in one way or another—who are just an aide that helps people navigate the post-arrest experience. A lot of what they do is just literally provide rides. They'll get you to court if you need to go to court. They will get you to your intensive outpatient program if you need to get to that. They'll get you to treatment. They'll help you move around these spaces where there's no transportation. What they do is just provide for those lacks in the system.

And, finally, do attendees come away from the talk questioning this “good vs. bad” binary?

When I have presented the talk to non-incarcerated populations, there's a lot of chuckling. Everybody sees somebody they know in the talk, or I describe an experience that they've heard of. A lot of the quotes that I read in the talk are from people who are really just decent humans who made a mistake or got caught up in something that they didn't know how to get out of easily. They have multiple types of vulnerabilities sometimes.

But a lot of what they're saying is, “Just because I did something wrong doesn't mean I am a bad person.” To me, that's the important takeaway. Beyond all of the details of the rural dynamics, these are often people that are struggling with all sorts of different issues that are outside of their control.

I think we're improving our understanding of things like addiction, but we still have a long way to go, particularly in rural communities, to understanding how and why people end up on the wrong side of the law. And it's not actually helpful to stigmatize 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 traveling the state giving a free public talk, “Bad People and Good Ol' Boys: The Criminalization of Rural Disadvantage” as part of Humanities Washington's Speakers Bureau. [Find an upcoming talk at humanities.org](https://humanities.org).

This talk is presented in partnership with The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service, which educates citizens across the state about democratic institutions and public affairs, and is based at Washington State University. For more information, visit The Foley Institute's website.



▲ Photo by Tom Swinnen/Pexels.

Story Core

**It wasn't just the orchards.
How innovative advertising and
transportation methods made
Washington the Apple State.**

By Hong Ta

Amanda L. Van Lanen grew up in Saipan, an island north of Guam, where Red Delicious apples were available at her local grocery store year-round. Despite disliking how they tasted, the fact that these apples were accessible to an island in the Pacific Ocean amazed her. This curiosity would lead to her academic career, where she earned a Ph.D in history at Washington State University and wrote her dissertation on the industrialization of the apple.

Van Lanen currently teaches history at Lewis-Clark State College. Her dissertation-turned-book, *The Washington Apple: Orchards and the Development of Industrial Agriculture*, examines how economic factors, promotional strategies, and infrastructure development transformed Washington into a major apple-producing region.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Humanities Washington: Can you briefly tell us about how apples became so popularized in Washington?

Amanda L. Van Lanen: Part of it has to do with the railroads. When they were building them across the West,



▲ Washington apples in a market in Peneng, Malaysia . Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock.

they were looking for the best economic use of the land. When they were looking at parts of Washington, especially parts that needed to be irrigated, [they had] to have a crop that would be profitable enough to support the cost of irrigation. Apples were the one thing that could be sold for a profit and also be stored long enough to be shipped all over the country without spoiling. That's partly why they chose them.

But on top of that, there were some crop failures back East that put Washington growers in the market. Washington also very early on had to advertise their apples with giveaways, cookbooks, billboards, posters, and even films. Silent film stars in the 1920s made promotional films for the Washington apple industry. I haven't been able to track down the originals; I don't know if they still exist. But I've seen still shots from them. [That publicity caused consumers] to associate Washington with apples.

What has been the most surprising thing you've learned through your research on how apples became so industrialized?

When I've given this talk, especially when I went outside of Washington, the thing that surprises people the most is that the place where we grow apples is a desert. It doesn't make a lot of logical sense, because the primary [apple] growing regions in Washington get less than 10 inches of rain a year. Everything has to be irrigated, and that really runs counter to people's mental image of lush apple orchards and everything being green and pastoral.

The thing that I found most surprising, as I was starting to research, is how much the railroads were involved. Because the railroads were really instrumental in not only providing transportation, but they were friends with all of the major players in the apple industry. They helped in various ways by financing irrigation, canals, and other infrastructure that the apple industry needed.

How exactly did you get started writing your book, and what motivated or inspired you?

It was actually my PhD dissertation, so that's kind of the core of it. But then, I just really was motivated to tell this story. It's such



◀ Wenatchee Apple Crate Label. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of American History.

an interesting story, going all the way back to the first apple tree in Washington State and all the way to the present.

A lot of the records I worked with were from the Minnesota Historical Society, which were the railroad records. The fabulous thing about those is they have both sides of the correspondence. You can really see the conversations people were having, what they were thinking, and how they were communicating with each other. This is not always the case with historical research, you don't always get both sides of the conversation. So it was a lot of fun.

Bigger than just apples, what do you hope Washingtonians walk away with after your talk?

Food systems are complicated. One of the things in recent conversation is climate change and how that affects our food systems. We know the pandemic-affected distribution systems, and questions of equity when we're thinking about things like healthy food and organic food and which communities have access to those things and which don't.

I hope that's something that will open up the conversation because on the one hand, apples are an industrial product. There are a lot of inputs that go into them. They use a lot of pesticides and things that aren't always great for the environment. On the other hand, it enables people to have access to fresh fruit at a very low cost. So that's a complicated thing that we have to wrestle with. I would like people to just think about that complexity and those tensions. There's not always an easy answer. But hopefully, understanding how we got to this point can help us think about how we move forward.

Now for the fun questions, what is your favorite apple?

I buy them from my local orchard, and he grows Galas and Fujis. So that's what I tend to get the most, two miles from my house.

They're fresh. They're amazing.

What are your go-to foods to cook with apples?

Apple pie of course. My family really likes pie. Or apple crisp. I make a lot of apple crisps because it's faster than a pie.

Can you help settle the apple pie debate: Which apple is the best to make pie with?

I don't think there's many grocery store apples actually that make great pies. In my opinion, they're all too sweet. So when I make apple pie, I usually put in some cider vinegar and lemon juice because they're all too sweet for me.

Texturally, some of them turn to applesauce when you bake with them. Historically, they grew apples that were good for cooking and apples that were good for eating. Predominantly now, the commercial ones we produce are the eating type. We tried a taste test this winter where I made five different varieties. We concluded that Fuji made the best.

Do you have any apple recommendations for readers to try?

If you do have a chance, at a farmers market, try any of the old heirloom varieties. There are some orchards that are experimenting with those older varieties that have been lost commercially. There are thousands of varieties of apples that people used to grow that we've kind of lost. There's one called Wolf River. They grow Winter Bananas at the research farm at WSU and different kinds of Jonathans and Macintoshes.

And just be adventurous and try whatever your grocery store offers, because it seems like every time I go, there's something new. 🍏

Hong Ta is a freelance multimedia journalist based in Seattle. She specializes in food and culture reporting.

Amanda VanLanen is traveling the state giving a free public talk, "Big Apples, Big Business: How Washington Became the Apple State," as part of Humanities Washington's Speakers Bureau. Find an upcoming talk at humanities.org.

NEWS

from **Humanities Washington**

We're getting bolder. Literally.

You may have noticed our new logo in the pages of this magazine, and it's just a small part of a huge new look we're excited to introduce, one that will reflect the vibrant, exciting, colorful world of the humanities. In late October, as part of the new look, we'll launch a new website featuring a more dynamic homepage, an improved events calendar, a better online version of Spark, translation into more than 100 languages, and much more. Through this new look, we're hoping to show how the humanities is accessible, exciting, and bold. Thank you to the many community members who helped shape our new branding. *Sign up for emails at humanities.org to stay in the loop.*

Welcome Mariana Imaz

We're excited to welcome Mariana Imaz, Ph.D, as manager of our Speakers Bureau program. She is a great fit for the program, having taught the humanities at many levels from gradeschoolers to college students to postgraduates, and is passionate about creating spaces for people to explore philosophical questions and engage in meaningful dialogue. She has a BA in history, an MA in literature, and a Ph.D in philosophy from UC Santa Cruz. Her research focuses on historical narratives, philosophy of fiction, and Latin American philosophy.

We hang out with some cool people

We're excited to say that former Washington State Poet Laureate Rena Priest has won the Washington State Book Award. She was awarded our state's most prestigious literary prize for a project she created while serving as the laureate, an anthology called *I Sing the Salmon Home*, a collection of poetry about our state's iconic fish. The Poet Laureate program is managed by Humanities Washington and ArtsWA.

In addition, two current members of our Speakers Bureau were nominated for Washington State Book Awards: Josh Tuininga for his graphic novel *We Are Not Strangers*, and Peter Blecha for his book, *Stomp and Shout: R&B and the Origins of Northwest Rock and Roll*.



Visit humanities.org for news and event updates.



▲ Authors Sharma Shields and Simeon Mills after reading at Bedtime Stories 2023.

Goodnight, Bedtime Stories!

For 25 years, Humanities Washington's Bedtime Stories Fundraiser brought people together to celebrate the power of the written word and raise important funds for our programs.

Now it's time for a new chapter. We have decided to put Bedtime Stories to bed, pursuing other avenues to raise funds for our statewide programs. Thank you to the authors who gave so generously of their time and talent to make Bedtime Stories so memorable!

We hope you will support our work to encourage reading, writing, and deeper thinking across the state. *You can visit humanities.org to donate or return the enclosed envelope with a contribution. Thank you!*

Announcing the 2024–2024 Public Humanities Fellows

Using home movies to document Asian American histories. Bringing to light the contribution of immigrants to the city of Edmonds. Sharing the voice of Latinx/e communities in Walla Walla and southeastern Washington. These are the dynamic projects led by the new group of 2024–2025 Public Humanities Fellows: Sarah Choi, Polly Hana Yorioka, Camilo E. Lund-Montañó, and Mariana Ruiz-Gonzalez. The Public Humanities Fellows program funds and supports opportunities for early-career humanists with innovative projects, delivering original programs and events to underserved communities in Washington. Their projects will be planned and presented from October to June. *Check out humanities.org for more details.*



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Shandy Abrahamson
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Deepti Agrawal
Deepti Designs Inc

Todd Arkley
Arkley Accounting Group

Julieta Altamirano-Crosby
WAGRO Foundation

René Baca
Wenatchee Valley College

Ryan Booth
Washington State University

María Bullón-Fernández
Seattle University

Annmarie Caño
Gonzaga University

Andrew Chanse
Spokane Public Library

Peter Danelo
Heller Ehrman (retired)

Eric Davis
Bellevue College

Mike Faulk
Office of Governor Jay Inslee

Geoff Froh
Densho

Betsy Godlewski
Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture (retired)

DeAnne Hamilton
KBTC Public TV

Richard Hart
Independent historian

Joshua Heim
Western Arts Alliance

Brianna Hoffman
Washington State Library

Douglas Levy
Outcomes by Levy (retired)

Freya Liggett
Larson Gallery

Mark Miyake (chair)
Western Washington University

Bradley Richardson
Clark County Historical Museum

Joe Ross
Gates Archive

Colleen Rozillis
Moss Adams



STAFF

George Abeyta
Senior Program Manager

Stone Addington
Director of Programs and Deputy Executive Director

Tom Beasley
Evaluation Manager

David Haldeman
Director of Communications and Content

Mariana Imaz
Program Manager

Rachel Jacobson
Development and Communications Coordinator

Jera Lego
Program Manager

Tori Lopez
Program Coordinator

Violeta Martin
Director of New Audience Engagement and Folklife Specialist

Thomas Grant Richardson
Director, Center for Washington Cultural Traditions

Eric Sanders, CPA
Chief Financial Officer

Julie Ziegler
Chief Executive Officer

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.



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



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



THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES FELLOWS program offers support to early-career humanists based in Washington, and funding for them to create an innovative public humanities program that reaches underserved communities around the state.



WASHINGTON STATE POET LAUREATE builds awareness and appreciation of poetry – including the state's legacy of poetry – through public readings, workshops, lectures, and presentations throughout the state. Presented in partnership with ArtsWA.



CENTER FOR WASHINGTON CULTURAL TRADITIONS amplifies our state's rich, diverse living cultural treasures through research and special programming. Presented in partnership with ArtsWA.



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.



130 Nickerson Street, Suite 304
Seattle, WA 98109

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 2389

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Changes? Please make the corrections on your address label, check the appropriate box below, and return to Humanities Washington.

- ☐ Name misspelled
- ☐ Contact person changed
- ☐ Address wrong
- ☐ Duplicate mailing
- ☐ Remove from mailing list

Or send changes via email to info@humanities.org