

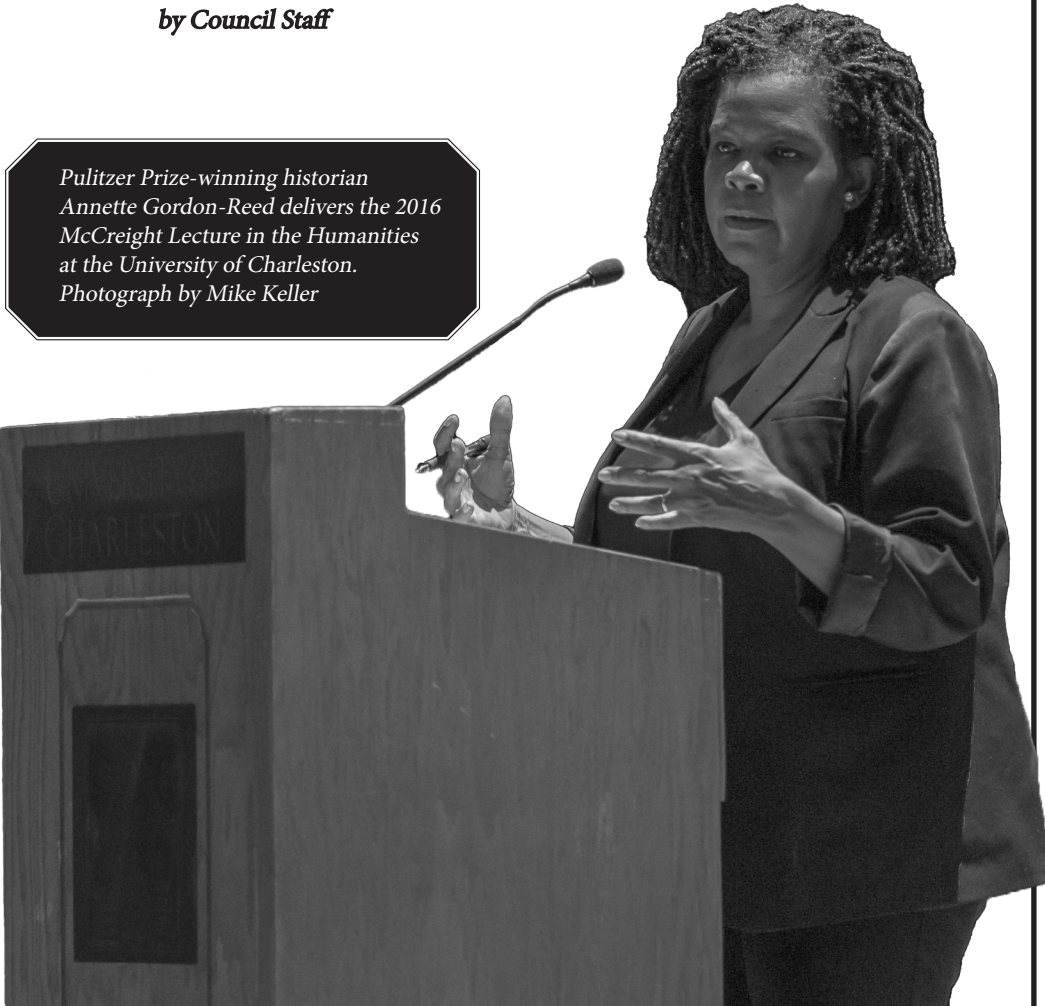
THE BROAD SIDE

A LECTURE FOR ALL SEASONS

BEING IN THE ROOM
FOR EACH OTHER

by Council Staff

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian
Annette Gordon-Reed delivers the 2016
McCreight Lecture in the Humanities
at the University of Charleston.
Photograph by Mike Keller



Summer has given way to fall, and students by now have resumed their seats in the halls of learning. Sheaves of notes are shuffling at the podium, and the lecturing has begun again in earnest. Digital flyers career through cyberspace, hawking the latest erudition coming to Morgantown, Huntington, Glenville, Shepherdstown, Bluefield, and beyond.

The Council is no exception. On October 20, journalists James and Deborah Fallows will at last come to Charleston for the long-awaited return of the McCreight Lecture in the Humanities. Their talk, “Our Towns: A 100,000 Mile Journey into the Heart of America,” will take place at the University of Charleston.

But what is the value of a lecture? Two years of pandemic-induced educational and social constraints have tested our traditional conceptions of how we learn. What can become “virtual” or “remote” has done just that. From TED Talks to church sermons, our learning opportunities—like our Hollywood movies—have increasingly migrated into the intangible spaces of the internet. We have the option to choose between what is worth seeing live and that which can wait for YouTube.

Sure, we still go out for visceral experiences such as concerts, demolition derbies, or woodchopping championships...but lectures? That’s just somebody talking on a stage.

Based on the *Our Towns* book and subsequent HBO documentary, however, I think the Fallows would be the first to agree there’s something important about showing up. The book’s chapters and the film’s runtime are filled with people who show up for their communities. People like Charleston artist Charly Jupiter Hamilton, who showed up for decades to beautify the public spaces of the city with his art; or Dem 2 Brothers And A Grill owner Adrian Wright, who keeps showing up with his now-famous barbecue and became one of the culinary success stories of Charleston’s West Side; and Mountain Stage’s famed broadcaster and musician Larry Groce, who after decades of showing up to support West Virginia’s musical scene believes that, “in the last ten years there has been a renaissance [in Charleston].” When it comes to what you contribute to the place you live in, just being there counts for a lot.

In the context of attending a lecture in person, showing up says, “I came here to listen.” It demonstrates, in the most tangible possible way, your commitment to the flow of information, the miraculous transmission of human thought from one person to many, in a way that being a mere number on YouTube or Zoom sometimes fails to capture. You want to be in the room with the reactions: the laughter, the gasps, the murmurs. You want the opportunity to discuss interpretations with the new acquaintance next to you; to encounter an unexpected opinion in the refreshments queue; to express your appreciation to the author or artist; or just to see if that artist is as tall as they look in the photos.

This is not to devalue the new spaces people are creating (often virtual ones) for learning and communication. Sometimes we need lectures that can be attended in our bathrobes, or without the hassle of finding babysitters for the kids. For learners of all ages with disabilities or vulnerabilities, these possibilities are a vast new frontier hitherto walled off by barriers of health, wealth, or social stigma. Wherever possible, we should strive to make human knowledge as accessible as our means and determination can achieve. But equality of access is always about expanding options, not closing doors just because new ones have opened.

In 2020 and 2021, we postponed the McCreight Lecture out of an abundance of caution (the Delta variant impacted West Virginia in full force just a few weeks before 2021’s event). Virtual options were available,

(Continued on back)

THE SIGN OF THE FIVE

EXPANDING WEST VIRGINIA’S
SERIAL DETECTIVE ROSTER

by Kyle Warmack, Program Officer

In our April 2022 issue of *The Broad Side*, I adapted some of my prior research into a short article on West Virginia’s serial literary detectives. My discoveries up to that point were limited to only three fictional detectives who ply their crimebusting trade in West Virginia and recur in multiple narratives. I’m happy to say that number has expanded to five.

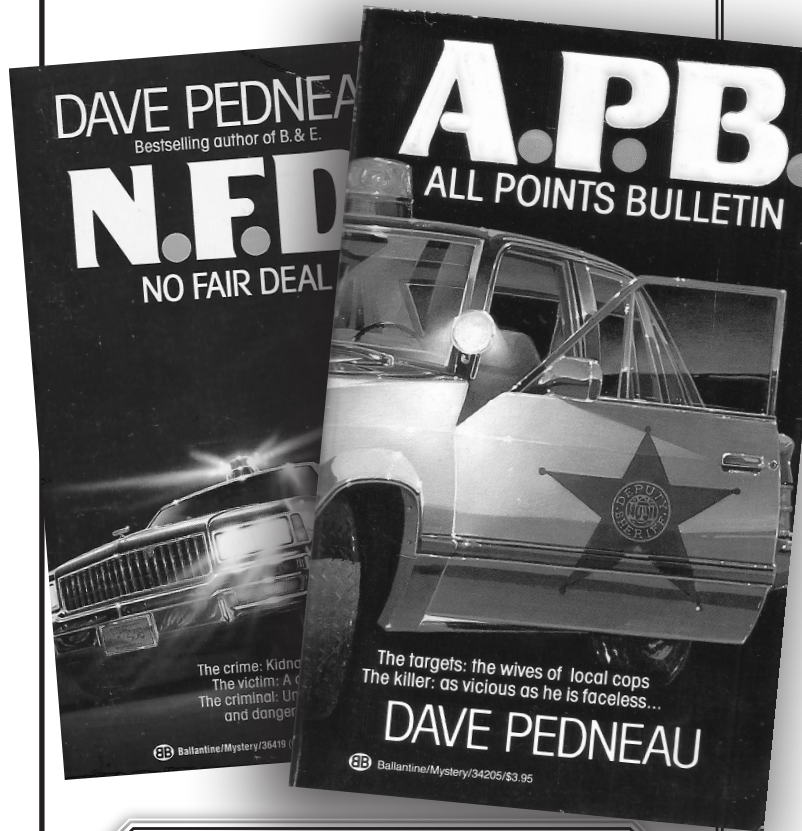
The roster from my prior article, *The Case of the Missing Detectives*, consisted of Melville Davisson Post’s Uncle Abner (written in the 1910s), John F. Suter’s duo of Arlan Boley and Sheriff Warren McKee (1980s-1990s), and contemporary author Julia Keller’s Bell Elkins (2010s-present). Our new additions are also fairly contemporary, stretching from the 1980s to the present.

In the 1980s, Mercer County journalist and magistrate Dave Pedneau wrote six novels about Whit Pynchon, a surly old enforcer who takes nothing from nobody and just wants to retire from his years on the job as the district attorney’s top investigator for fictional Raven County, West Virginia, and move to the beach. All six books are named after police slang acronyms (*A.P.B.*, *D.O.A.*, *N.F.D.*, etc.). These gory, gritty thrillers share more DNA with the slasher genre than the patient clue-seeding of Melville Davisson Post.

Pedneau’s untimely death in 1990 cut short the bestselling success of Whit Pynchon, though two of the books were published posthumously. None other than former Council executive director Ken Sullivan brought the series to my attention after the April article’s release, and readers will be the first to know when I complete all six novels on my nightstand.

Traipsing through more alleys of small-town West Virginia corruption and murder is contemporary author John Billheimer, who doubles as a film historian with considerable teaching experience at Stanford and Santa Clara University. Huntington-born but now living in Portola Valley, California, Billheimer has written six Owen Allison novels, beginning with *Contrary Blues* in 1998. Like many great literary sleuths, Allison isn’t actually a professional detective—he’s a federal transportation investigator and risk analyst, perhaps reminiscent of radio gumshoe “Johnny Dollar” from the 1950s, the insurance investigator with the “action-packed expense account.”

(Continued on back)



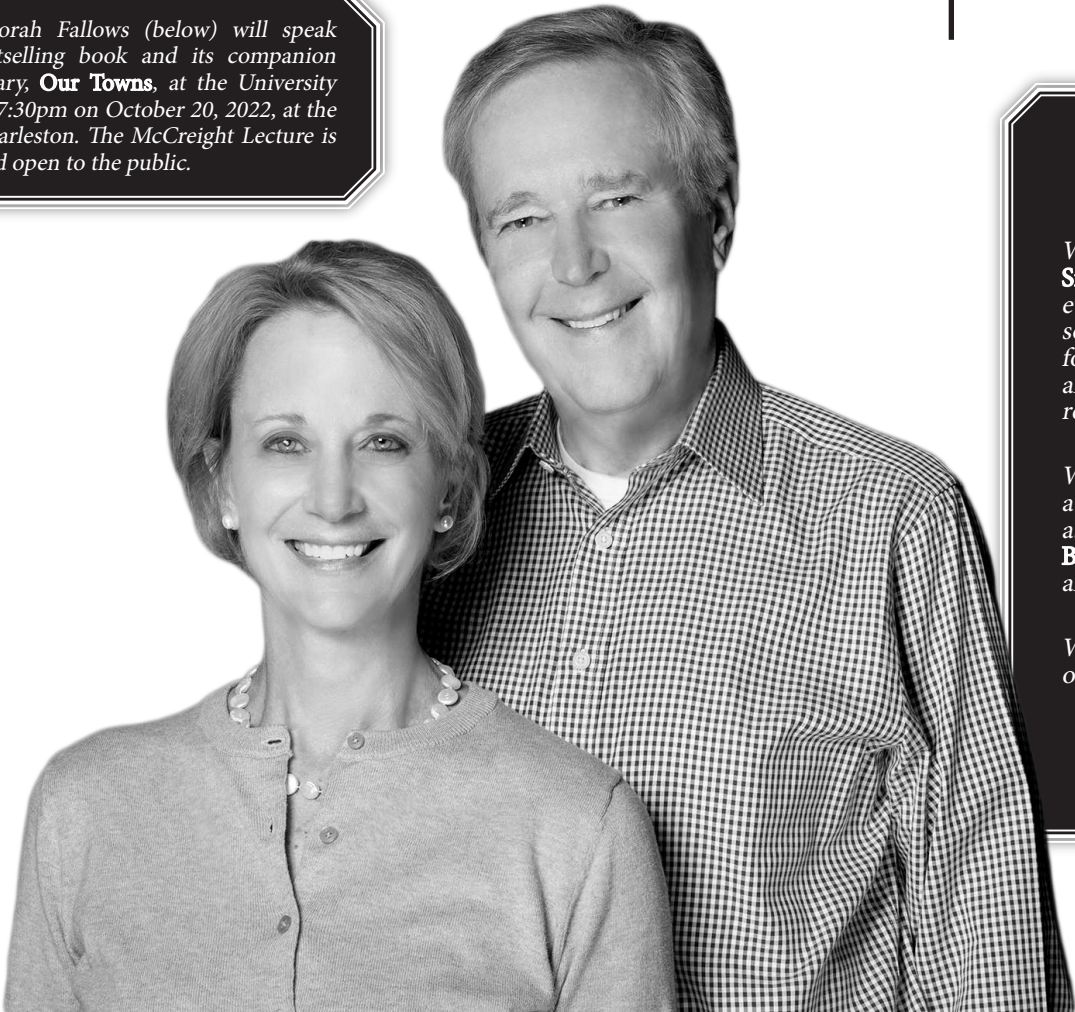
The original Ballantine paperback editions
of Dave Pedneau’s Whit Pynchon mysteries
evoked the pulp aesthetic of the late 1980s
and early 1990s. Ballantine Books

A LECTURE FOR ALL SEASONS
(Continued from front)

but we watched as multimillion dollar events like the Oscars and the Grammys sputtered and came up short without an audience in the room. No matter what form our return to McCreight was ultimately going to take, the Council did feel strongly about one thing: The humanities as a discipline are all about being “in the room.”

This doesn’t always mean a room in the physical sense. But humanities programming, at its most essential, must capture a feeling of common existence. The humanities must congregate, not alienate, even when we’re analyzing the things that make us different. By grappling with what it means to be individuals and groups within overlapping spheres of cultural experience, the humanities invite us to explore—together, and in a spirit of mutual respect and consent—ourselves and each other. That takes a certain degree of intimacy. Of trust. And it takes showing up.

James and Deborah Fallows (below) will speak about their bestselling book and its companion HBO documentary, **Our Towns**, at the University of Charleston at 7:30pm on October 20, 2022, at the University of Charleston. The McCreight Lecture is free of charge and open to the public.



THE SIGN OF THE FIVE
(Continued from front)

While a long break followed the fifth novel, *Stonewall Jackson’s Elbow*, released in 2006, Owen Allison returned in 2019’s *Primary Target*. If you’re familiar with John Billheimer’s work, you may wish to visit him at the upcoming West Virginia Book Festival on October 21-22, for which he’ll be returning to his native soil.

A more full-featured article will explore these worthy West Virginia detectives in the near future.



WE’RE LISTENING!

We’ve been enjoying your responses to **The Broad Side** readers’ poll, and would like to hear from even more of you! Since your answers have been so informative, we’re going to keep the online form open through the next two issues—October and December—to give more readers a chance to respond.

We want to know what you think! We’ve prepared a 10-question reader’s poll so you can tell us more about what you’d like to see in future issues of **The Broad Side**. Type the link below into your browser and share your opinion before December 31, 2022!

We’ll share the results of the poll in our first issue of 2023.

<http://bit.ly/tbspoll>

EVENTS OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2022

Oct 1	Bessie Smith - History Alive! Kanawha County Public Library, Charleston. 1pm	Oct 15	Liberation and Homeward Bound - Readings from Bataan Death March POW diaries and other works. Brooke County Library, Wellsburg. 1pm	Nov 1	Hate: Why We Should Resist It With Free Speech, Not Censorship - Amicus Curiae Lecture by Nadine Strossen. Brad D. Smith Foundation Hall, Marshall University, Huntington. 7pm
Oct 4	Election Integrity in the Mountain State - Seminar and discussion. Glenville State - Molloyhan Campus Community Center ballroom, Glenville. 6-8pm	Oct 20	Our Towns: A 100,000 Mile Journey into the Heart of America - 2022 McCreight Lecture in the Humanities by authors James and Deborah Fallows. University of Charleston. 7:30pm	Nov 7	Charles Schulz - History Alive! Robert F. Kidd Library, Glenville State University. 5pm
Oct 5-12	American Blood Feud - Hatfields & McCoy's traveling exhibit. Larry Joe Harless Community Center, Gilbert. 7am-9pm M-F, 12pm-9pm Sa-Su	Oct 21-22	WV Book Festival - Coliseum & Convention Center, Charleston. 10am-7pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat	Nov 14	Indigenous Appalachia - Exhibit launch event with Joe Stahlman (Seneca-Iroquois National Museum) and graphic designer Maryam Zafar. WVU Downtown Library, Morgantown. 7pm
Oct 6	Harriet Tubman - History Alive! Gilmer County High School, Glenville. 1pm	Oct 22	My Life as an American - Readings from Bataan Death March POW diaries and other works. Brooke County Library, Wellsburg. 1pm	Nov 21	Col. Ruby Bradley - History Alive! Woman's Club of Shinnston, Harrison County. 1pm
Oct 7	Mark Twain - History Alive! Bolivar-Harpers Ferry Public Library, Harpers Ferry. 6pm	Oct 24 - Nov 28	American Blood Feud - Hatfields & McCoy's traveling exhibit. Craik-Patton House, Charleston. 10am-12pm and 1pm-4pm Mon-Fri	Always check with the venue or hosting organization of an event before attending. Schedules may change without the knowledge of the Council.	

The West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Council is supported by the NEH, the State of West Virginia, and contributions from the private sector. The purposes of the West Virginia Humanities Council are educational, and its mission is to support a vigorous program in the humanities statewide in West Virginia. The Broad Side is ©2021 by the West Virginia Humanities Council. All rights reserved.

Copyright of individual articles is retained by their respective authors.

Images used with permission. Additional graphics and line art obtained from Vecteezy.com.