



From the Executive Director

# James and Huck

I read Percival Everett’s novel *James* for the first time in a single day, finishing it at two o’clock in the morning. I didn’t start with that intention, but—some clichés become clichés for a reason—I couldn’t put it down without finding out what happened next.

I spent years teaching American literature and writing. I can’t say how many times I’ve read Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884); it’s at least 20, which is how many times I’ve read it with students in college and university classrooms.

People often think of *Huckleberry Finn* as a book for young readers, like its predecessor *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Such was Twain’s original vision, in fact. But where Sawyer’s story had been told in the third person, Twain decided early in the drafting that his new book would instead be told from Huckleberry’s point of view.

That decision set the book on a decidedly different path, as Huck—minimally educated, dirt-poor, and socially outcast—navigates an adult world defined by violence, hatred, and treachery, but also by friendship and love, and the risks they eventually demand of us.

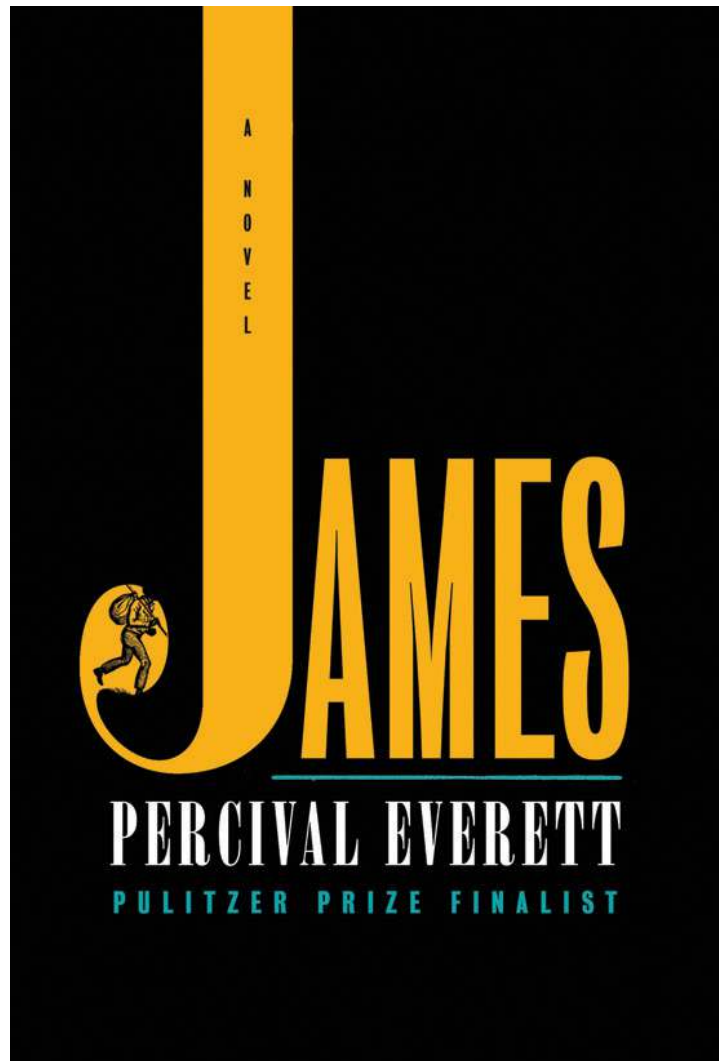
*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—complex and challenging, hilarious and terrifying, and in places, frustrating and messy—traces the mingled flights of Huck and Jim, an enslaved man on the run to avoid being sold down the river to New Orleans. Percival Everett’s *James* has been called a “retelling” of that novel, from Jim’s perspective. It’s less a retelling than a parallel story, sharing time and space with Twain’s novel, though often lighting out for its

own territories and telling a story that Twain, and Twain’s narrator Huck, could not.

I will not spoil *James* for you. But I will say how elated we are to host Percival Everett as our 2024 McCreight Lecturer in the Humanities (see page 2), just when his long literary career (25 novels, as well as poems, short stories, and other publications) is having a much-deserved moment in the spotlight.

We’re pleased to welcome Professor Everett, and I hope to see you there.

—Eric Waggoner



Fall 2024

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## 2024 McCreight Lecture in the Humanities

### Percival Everett

#### The West Virginia Humanities Council

is a nonprofit institution governed by its Board of Directors. The next Board meeting is in Charleston, October 18, 2024, and is open to the public.

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On October 17, the Humanities Council will host renowned novelist and poet Percival Everett for our annual McCreight Lecture in the Humanities. The event, free and open to the public, will be at the Capitol Theater in the heart of downtown Charleston (123 Summers Street) during the city's ArtWalk and FestivFALL.

The doors open at 7:00 p.m., and the lecture begins at 7:30 p.m., with first-come, first-served seating. Downtown parking is abundant, including free spaces after 5:00 p.m. in the nearby Summers Street municipal parking garage. The lecture will be followed by light refreshments and a book signing. Select Percival Everett titles will be available for sale at the event, courtesy of Taylor Books.

A Pulitzer Prize finalist for his 2020 book *Telephone*, Everett's latest novel, *James*, was released this year to much acclaim. *James* has been optioned by Steven Spielberg for a film adaptation, and former President Obama included it on his "summer reading list."

Earlier this year, *American Fiction*, based on Everett's 2001 novel *Erasure*, won the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. Known for his dark humor and complex themes, Everett's remarkable literary career spans four decades and multiple genres, ranging from thrillers (*Watershed*, *The Trees*) and westerns (*God's Country*) to romance (*Wounded*) and absurdist satire (*Erasure*, *Dr. No*).

*The McCreight Lecture has been an annual event since 1981. It's featured the likes of filmmaker Ken Burns, novelist Joyce Carol Oates, historians James McPherson and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and more. The Council started the series to honor Betsy Keadle McCreight, who died in 1985. She was a founding board member and served the Council as treasurer, vice president, and president. She believed the humanities were at the heart of a democratic*



Michael Avedon

**The West Virginia Humanities Council welcomes nominations for its Board of Directors.** Board members are chosen from all parts of West Virginia and serve without compensation, although expenses are reimbursed. We also welcome nominations for **Program Committee** citizen members, who are elected from the general public. The Program Committee recommends funding and program decisions to the Council's Board of Directors. Please send recommendations with brief biographical information to [stringer@wvhumanities.org](mailto:stringer@wvhumanities.org). Deadline for nominations is December 15, 2024.

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## More Upcoming Events

### The 2024 West Virginia Book Festival

This year's festival will be held Saturday, October 19, at the Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center. Since 2001, the festival has celebrated reading and books for people of all ages. It includes presentations from bestselling national, local, and regional authors; writing workshops; family activities; a marketplace for booksellers, including opportunities for book signings; and, perhaps the most popular event, a colossal used book sale.

The featured speakers this year are **Joy Callaway**, a bestselling author of six works of fiction, including some set in West Virginia; **Gregg Hurwitz**, who's written 24 thrillers, including the Orphan X series; **Sadeqa Johnson**, another bestselling author whose 2023 book *The House of Eve* was nominated for an NAACP Image Award; **Mia Manansala**, an award-winning author of the Tita Rosie's Kitchen Mystery series; and **Gene Luen Yang**, an acclaimed writer known particularly for graphic novels such as *American Born Chinese*, a National Book Award finalist. Authors Mark Hendricks and Erika Howsare will host a panel discussion on "Appalachian Creatures: The Human-Wildlife Connection."

The West Virginia Humanities Council is a charter and ongoing sponsor of the Book Festival. Visit [wvbookfestival.org](http://wvbookfestival.org) for more information and a schedule.



Book Festival presenter Joy Callaway

### Born of Rebellion

This year, the Council's new flagship traveling exhibit about West Virginia statehood and the Civil War passed the one-year mark on its statewide debut tour. *Born of Rebellion (BOR)* has visited Buckhannon, Morgantown, Wheeling, Clarksburg, Huntington, Beckley, Charleston, the Roane-Jackson Technical Center in Leroy, and Shepherdstown.

This fall, October 3 through November 11 (coinciding with the November 6 Battle of Droop Mountain anniversary), *BOR* will be installed in a unique configuration split

across all five Pocahontas County public libraries ([pocahontaslibrary.org](http://pocahontaslibrary.org)). Visitors can experience the fall foliage as they journey from library to library in pursuit of history.

From November 13 through December 16, the exhibit will be on display at the Greenbrier Historical Society's museum in Lewisburg, within easy walking distance of many Civil War sites ([greenbrierhistorical.org](http://greenbrierhistorical.org)). Finally, *BOR* will help ring in the new year at the Bluefield Arts Center from December 17 throughout January in the Paine Gallery ([barcww.org/paine-gallery](http://barcww.org/paine-gallery)). Please

contact your preferred venue for visiting hours and information.



The exhibit in the State Capitol Rotunda, June 2024

Kyle Warmack



Michael Keller

### Holiday Open House

We wrap up our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year with our annual Holiday Open House at the MacFarland-Hubbard House in Charleston on Friday, December 6, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Please come experience our historic 1836 headquarters decked out in its full holiday splendor, enjoy some refreshments, and catch up with old friends and colleagues.

## Grant Categories

The Humanities Council welcomes applications in the following grant categories.

**Major Grants** support humanities events such as symposiums, conferences, exhibits and lectures. Maximum award: \$20,000 Due: Feb. 1, Sept. 1

**Minigrants** have a budget of \$2,000 or less and support small projects, single events, or planning/consultation. Due: Feb. 1, April 1, June 1, Oct. 1

**Fellowships** of \$3,000 support research and writing projects for humanities faculty and independent scholars. Due: Feb. 1

**Media Grants** support the production of electronic or film materials, or a newspaper series. Maximum award: \$20,000 Due: Sept. 1

**Publication Grants** are available to recognized nonprofit and academic presses and support only the production phase of a completed manuscript. Maximum award: \$20,000 Due: Sept. 1

**Teacher Institute Grants** are available to colleges and universities and the state Department of Education, and support summer seminars for secondary and elementary teachers. Maximum award: \$20,000 Due: Sept. 1

For more information, applications, and guidelines visit [wvhumanities.org](http://wvhumanities.org), email [riebe@wvhumanities.org](mailto:riebe@wvhumanities.org), or call 304-346-8500.

## Grantee Spotlight

### Researching the Enslaved Community at a Washington Family Home

**M**ore of George Washington's relatives are buried in Jefferson County, West Virginia, than anywhere in the United States; although, it was technically part of Frederick or Berkeley counties (Virginia) when many first arrived.

While George Washington began acquiring property in present Jefferson County in 1750, he never lived here personally, but many of his kin did, including his youngest full brother, Charles (1738-1799), who laid out the future county seat and named it for himself. In the 1780s, Charles started building his grand home, Happy Retreat, although he likely did none of the construction himself because he had a sizeable enslaved population to do it for him.

That community is the subject of a recently completed project led by historical researcher Jane Ailes, supported by a 2022 West Virginia Humanities Council grant to the nonprofit Friends of Happy Retreat—a group of dedicated, unpaid volunteers—which acquired the house in 2015.



*Old slave quarters and kitchen at Happy Retreat, part of the property's ongoing restoration*

Researching enslaved communities can be difficult, unless you know where to look, and sometimes strike a bit of good luck. Ailes found important details in courthouses but was able to dig deeper due to personal family records kept as business documents. “We are lucky in this project,” Ailes notes, “because descendants of these slaveholding families saved and donated . . . old family Bibles, memorandum books, ledgers, correspondence,” and other material to the Handley Regional Library in Winchester, Virginia.

The information Ailes gleaned from those papers provided essential access to information not normally found in courthouses. This helped her trace one enslaved family back for five generations.

Her research revealed other names and information about the lives of the enslaved people who lived and toiled at Happy Retreat. Their labor and expertise provided the day-to-day support to run the house, surrounding grounds, and farm, which produced income for Washington and his descendants. They saw to every need of Happy Retreat's residents and guests, maintained the buildings, and performed virtually every other type of activity needed on a plantation on the American frontier's western edge.

Walter Washington, the fifth great-grandson of Samuel Washington, George and Charles' brother, has played an active role with the Friends of Happy Retreat. "The goal," he says, "has always been to preserve the house and embrace all aspects of the culture, which included the slave community."

By the Civil War, Jefferson County's African American population was nearly 4,500 (3,960 enslaved and 511 free)—about one-fifth of all people of color in all the counties that would become West Virginia in 1863.

This grant builds upon similar research on the subject dating back to 1747; Washington says the next phase of study will cover 1837 through emancipation. As the restoration and research continue, Washington wants to partner with the county's current African American community to determine how best to convey this vital part of Happy Retreat's story. Thanks to Ailes' work, he also believes they may be able to "establish genealogical connections with local descendants in the area."

*For more information about this ongoing research and events at the house, please visit [happyretreat.org](http://happyretreat.org).*

## Grants Awarded: April – August 2024

**Artworks Around Town**, *The Eye of an Artist*, art display and discussions

**Augusta Heritage Center**, *Humanities at Augusta: Celebrating the Artists Behind American Folkways*, lectures and discussions

**Capon Bridge Ruritan Club**, *Focus on History, Capon Bridge Founders Day Festival*, presentations

**Contemporary American Theater Festival**, *2024 Humanities at the Festival*, lectures and discussions

**Fairmont State University**, *Sand and Fire: 200 Years of West Virginia Glass*, exhibit

**FestivALL Charleston**, *FestivALL Author's Roundtable*

**Friends of Blackwater**, *Early Mining Voices—The Stealey Tapes*, oral history

**Greenbrier Historical Society**, *Logan's Lament and Indigenous Peoples—Settler Relations in Lord Dunmore's War*, lecture

**Marshall University Research Corp.**, *Amicus Curiae Lecture Series on Constitutional Democracy*

**Marshall University Research Corp.**, *Roosevelt Montás and the Herd Humanities*, lecture

**Preservation Alliance of West Virginia**, *West Virginia Cemetery Preservation Project*

**Shepherd University Foundation**, *Poetry All Around Us: The Writing of West Virginia Poet Laureate Marc Harshman*, *Appalachian Heritage Writer's Award*, *Writer-in-Residence*, and *WV Common Read Program*

**Tamarack Foundation**, *2025 Creative Writers Discussion and Presentation Series*, planning project

**West Virginia Mine Wars Museum**, *A Marker of Solidarity: Building a New Display for a 1921 Red Bandana*

**West Virginia Mine Wars Museum**, *Mine Wars Book Talkback Series*

**West Virginia University Research Corp.**, *Our Votes—Our Values*, discussions and lectures

## Celebrating the Humanities and West Virginia

Throughout our golden anniversary year, the Council's staff has been traveling around the state to personally thank our donors, grant recipients, and others who have supported the humanities for 50 years. Following our first two receptions in Wheeling and Huntington, we hosted receptions in Beckley and Shepherdstown over the spring and summer. It never feels like we can say thank you enough, but truly, *thank you* for the great turnouts and many kind words! We really couldn't do what we do without you.



Jennie Williams



Tricia Stringer

The Council celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with receptions in (left-right) Beckley in April and Shepherdstown in July.

**West Virginia Day 2024** turned into "West Virginia Weekend." Here are a few highlights from our whirlwind celebration of our state's 161<sup>st</sup> birthday and the Council's 50<sup>th</sup> in June:



Meish Claus

The Flatwoods Monster and Mothman (not pictured) mysteriously appeared at our headquarters. Musicians Bobby Taylor and Kim Johnson regaled with music, and Doug Wood portrayed History Alive! character Thomas Ingles. Also, Jennie Williams discussed Appalachian instrument making at Charleston's Taylor Books with Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth. Photos by Michael Keller unless noted.

**W**e believe in the strength of West Virginia’s people, culture, and future—and we know you do, too. As we celebrate our milestone anniversary, we invite you to join us in our “Give \$50 for 50 Years” campaign.

Your support is vital to our mission of preserving and sharing West Virginia’s rich story. With your contribution, we can continue funding statewide projects, reaching new audiences, and ensuring that the humanities thrive for generations at our public headquarters, the historic MacFarland-Hubbard House in Charleston.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our loyal community of donors—this important work would not be possible without you. To honor our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a donation, please go to our website ([wvhumanities.org](http://wvhumanities.org)) to give online; call our Development Director Katie Morris at 304-346-8500; or mail a check to West Virginia Humanities Council, 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston WV 25301. Feel free to use the donor envelope provided with this issue of *People & Mountains*.



### Donations April 1 - July 31, 2024

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## An Archival and Ethnographic Survey of the Mountain Weavers Guild

West Virginia Folklife received a Folk and Traditional Arts Experiences grant from Mid Atlantic Arts' Central Appalachia Living Traditions program (CALT) to work collaboratively with the Mountain Weavers Guild in Elkins.

The guild began in the 1960s as an informal gathering of fiber artists, weavers, and basket makers dedicated to craft traditions in the Potomac Highlands. These days, it meets on the third Saturday of each month in the basement of Elkins' Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. This project will help document the guild's library of fiber arts and weaving resources and how its working studio of looms and tools (*see right*) allows members to practice and learn together. Over the years, some members have been production weavers. Many others are interested in learning traditional fiber crafts, including weaving, spinning, natural dyeing of fibers, and more. The guild welcomes beginners to join.

State Folklorist Jennie Williams has been working closely with guild member Brittany Hicks and other fiber artists in Elkins to conduct archival research

Jennie Williams



of the guild's collections and record oral history interviews. Williams hosted an oral history workshop in the summer to garner interest in the project. This research will result in a final report exploring the history of the guild within the context of the region's fiber arts movement. The interviews will be archived in the West Virginia Folklife Collection at the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

*People & Mountains* is published three times a year by the West Virginia Humanities Council. The Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit institution, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. We welcome letters, comments, and financial contributions. Please address correspondence to the West Virginia Humanities Council, 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston WV 25301 or email [wvhuman@wvhumanities.org](mailto:wvhuman@wvhumanities.org).