



## Nomination for the 2015 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize

### Race, Place & Culture



*Humanities Washington sparks conversation and critical thinking using story as a catalyst, nurturing thoughtful and engaged communities across our state.*

Visit our website: <http://www.humanities.org/programs/think-drink/2015-events>

# Race, Place & Culture

*An initiative to reach new and diverse audiences*



Humanities Washington is proud to nominate its *Race, Place & Culture* series for the 2015 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize. *Race, Place & Culture* is a special, two-year initiative focused on exploring and celebrating the diversity of our communities through the (often overlapping) lenses of race and ethnicity, community and place, and the cultures that result due to the intersection of the two. Through a series of conversations delivered through our Think & Drink programs, speakers and audiences explore, discuss and learn about each topic in a way that engenders greater understanding of our complex histories and encourages dialogue around how to move forward in a positive, generative manner.

## **Background**

In 2011, with generous permission from Oregon Humanities, Humanities Washington brought OH's groundbreaking Think & Drink events to Washington. Humanities Washington's goal was to negate the need for people to choose between social time with friends and participation in intellectually engaging programs. By offering thought-provoking programming in places where people, particularly young people, gather socially, we offer our audiences the opportunity to do both. The response has been tremendous.

All Think & Drink programs provide context and history on current events, going beyond the headlines to provide history and a variety of perspectives missing from one-sided media stories and online discussions. Early topics included "Dirty Business: The Politics of Negative Campaigns" during election season and "State of the Unions: a Conversation on the History of Marriage" when Washington voters were contemplating marriage equality legislation. We hoped to reach new and younger audiences, and succeeded in doing both in the first few years of the program.

However, while Think & Drink events aided us in reaching younger audiences, we found that our audiences were still largely Caucasian. A key tenet in Humanities Washington's strategic plan is to serve audiences who, as a whole, mirror the diversity of our state. Furthermore, we sensed a deep need and

desire among audiences to learn more about issues pertaining to race in America. As a result, Program Director Zaki Barak Hamid, with inspiration from trustee Bruce Burgett, decided to mount a two-year initiative to reach a more diverse audience, resulting in our *Race, Place & Culture* Initiative.

### **Program Need and Overview**

Racial equity and race relations are front and center in the media and in our minds. Controversial incidences of police using unreasonable force with people of color, citizen vigilantes intent on using deadly weapons to protect themselves from “threats” to their personal safety, and terrorist attacks on political cartoonists –and by extension, freedom of speech – leave the average American angry but unsure of how to approach issues in a civil, productive fashion. Tension is high and answers on how to move through these challenges in a way that strengthens our communities are few.

*Race, Place & Culture*, a two-year initiative, fosters powerful dialogue and new thinking on some of the most controversial subjects we face as diverse communities today. Humanities Washington seeks to offer people an open and comfortable place to gain new perspectives, talk about issues, share ideas, and debate points of view. First and foremost, *Race, Place & Culture* events are discussions. A skilled moderator opens each event by introducing panelists and encouraging the audience to pose questions and give comments throughout. From the outset the moderator quickly dives into questions and answers with the panelists and often turns to the audience to ask “what do you think?” Events last approximately 90 minutes, and audience members are encouraged to stay after the formal program concludes to “continue the conversation.”

*"It's a good start to [talking about] race in Seattle's community that is predominantly white. We need to talk about race and racism more in this city. Racism exists. I'm glad we are starting to talk. Let's keep it going."*

*-Audience member  
Seattle*

Think & Drink is presented in four cities and five venues across Washington: Seattle (locations in North Seattle and South Seattle), Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima. Depending on the topic and availability of qualified speakers, some events take place in one location, others in multiple cities. By presenting in different cities and neighborhoods, *Race, Place & Culture* audiences range in cultural background, age, race, and perspective. No two events are the same, even when sharing the same format and presenters. Conversations differ from one location to another because they are driven by the unique backgrounds of individuals in the audience. The result is that discussions represent the rich diversity in each community in which they take place.

Speakers and moderators are carefully chosen by Humanities Washington based on their expertise and personal ties to each subject. Humanities Washington aims to connect with local speakers who are active participants in their communities. Professors, researchers, authors, playwrights, and community leaders are among the scholars and speakers who present for *Race, Place & Culture*. Moderators are also chosen based on professional experience. Many times, reporters from public radio are selected to moderate for an event in their region.

From the beginning, *Race, Place & Culture* discussions have drawn large audiences. On average, events draw audiences of 75 people and venues are frequently at capacity. It is not uncommon for people to stand in the back, on sofa armrests, or find seats on the ground. On some occasions, when the main room reaches capacity, latecomers have opted to sit in the adjacent room at the bar to watch the

conversation on closed circuit television. As program organizers, it is a thrill to see audiences captivated by a program, watching the screen with the same attentiveness as they would a major sporting event.

*Race, Place & Culture* is a relatively inexpensive program. Hard costs include modest speaker stipends and minimal advertising. The majority of the expense for the events, however, is in the staff time to research and prep presenters and to promote the events. Due to the relationship that Humanities Washington forms with each partnering bar, venues are always provided for free (though hosts benefit financially from the food and beverage that is sold during the events). There is no charge for people to attend.

*"This [evening] was insightful and a whole new take on topics I thought I knew everything about."*

*-Audience member  
Tacoma*

Careful selection of partnering bars and restaurants has contributed to the program's success. Partner venues provide more than free event space – they help to publicize *Race, Place & Culture* by posting to their social media outlets and using promotional materials designed by Humanities Washington. One proprietor, who does business in a more conservative community, remarked "I will probably lose customers over this, but these conversations need to happen."



Audience outreach is a challenging, yet critical, component of the success of these programs and has given Humanities Washington the opportunity to reach out to new partners. This outreach starts before the first phone call by identifying topics that are relevant and compelling to diverse audiences and recruiting an ethnically diverse panel of scholars. Once we confirm topics and speakers we contact special interest groups from specific college departments, student groups, local non-profits, and social action groups for each *Race, Place & Culture* event.

Speakers also help with outreach, spreading word of their participation in these events through their networks. Our outreach methods have been quite successful, as audiences for *Race, Place & Culture* events represent a wider range of racial and cultural groups than other Humanities Washington programs.

In Spokane we have also established a relationship with the local community college to present an encore of our evening *Race, Place and Culture* events to a student audience. Called "The Morning After," these events are held at the Hagen Foundation Center for the Humanities and enable us to reach a large number of university students. It isn't unusual for 75-100 students to attend, surpassing attendance at the Spokane evening events. Students appreciate the opportunity to engage in honest, direct dialogue with presenters and among themselves. On one occasion a student wearing a hijab approached Program Director Zaki Barak Hamid and thanked him for the program on race and film, noting that there are few positive opportunities for students to learn more about Islam and the Muslim culture.



## Media Partnership



Further extending its reach, Humanities Washington has partnered with KUOW, the local NPR affiliate in Seattle, to record and broadcast select *Race, Place & Culture* events both on-air and online. The recorded events are aired and archived on KUOW's Speakers Forum program. The KUOW partnership enables Humanities Washington to include people in an event who were otherwise unable to attend in person, reaching an audience in the tens of thousands, even outside of Washington State.

Recordings from two recent *Race, Place & Culture* events, "You Mad Bro?" and "Killer Cartoons," can be found on the Speakers Forum page on the KUOW website:

<http://kuow.org/post/you-mad-bro-conversation-about-race-sports>

<http://kuow.org/post/history-and-future-je-suis-charlie>

## Technology

The focus of *Race, Place & Culture* is to get people talking to one another face-to-face about important issues. Many people rely on technology to get their information and news on a daily basis, thus excluding actual conversation from the experience. By attending an event, people have the important opportunity to gain perspective from sources they normally wouldn't come across and to engage in dialogue with new acquaintances.

Though the focus is on direct dialogue between participants, Humanities Washington also live tweets during events and provides the hashtag #ThinkDrink so any interested tweeters can either follow along or share during the discussion.

View an example of Humanities Washington's live tweets from Seattle's "You Mad Bro?":

<https://storify.com/HumanitiesWA/you-mad-bro-a-think-drink-on-race-in-sports>

## Program Highlights

Humanities Washington finds inspiration for its *Race, Place & Culture* initiative in the latest headlines and public discussions sweeping the globe. Recent stories of racial divide and inequality have been the driving force for the majority of the series' discussions. On the following pages are summaries of the discussions and audience reactions from two recent events, "You Mad, Bro?" and "Killer Cartoons," as well as a list of all *Race, Place & Culture* topics.



High-profile stories continue to surface concerning race in sports. Despite its cultural significance to most Americans, the sports world is rarely analyzed through a social lens. "You Mad Bro? Race and Diversity in Sports" addressed racial injustices that Americans see every day, but don't always stop to question.

In Seattle, Donald Watts, a former collegiate basketball star and active member in the Seattle basketball community, was joined by Eric Davis, a sociology professor who specializes in race and sports, to form the Seattle panel. Reporter Tonya Mosley moderated.

Sociologist Robert Bartlett led the event in Spokane with the help of moderator Shann Ray, reporter and past collegiate basketball athlete.

Speakers and audience members exchanged thoughtful dialogue and addressed questions that most sports fans don't take the time to consider, such as the treatment of and attitudes toward young athletes of color, and the obligation of fans to play a part in combating institutional racism. Below is a summary of dialogue and feedback from the Seattle event:

**On the treatment and attitude toward young athletes of color:**

Both speakers described the glorification of professional sports in communities of color and the learned mentality that sports can serve as a “way out” of a life of poverty or disadvantage, making it easy for young athletes to be manipulated and mistreated by the industry. Watts, as a former collegiate basketball player, shared experiences from his time as a young star, claiming that the “student athlete” is a lie. He explained that athletes are a product used for profit, and often universities don’t value them aside from the contributions they are able to make on the field or court. Along the same vein, Davis explained that since education isn’t prioritized, many minority players don’t finish their college education and don’t receive diplomas to use for a career path outside of sports. Without a system holding players accountable for their academics, many young athletes of color face major challenges once they graduate.

**On the social responsibility of fans to combat institutionalized racism in sports:**

Though a central theme throughout the discussion was how to hold athletic institutions such as the NCAA, NBA, and NFL accountable for the exploitation of minority athletes, the speakers also asked how fans and consumers should take responsibility for systematic racism in sports. Davis explained that it is the social responsibility of fans to stand up for the rights of minority athletes and to stop feeding the structure economically.

*“This was illuminating, thought-provoking, and disturbing in a way that inspires all of us to do better to change”*

*-Audience member  
“You Mad Bro” event*

**On racial violence and its connection to sports:**

Speakers and audience members shared their thoughts on the violence seen within the league, such as the domestic abuse cases seen from the NFL’s Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson. Event participants asked whether fans are partially to blame for this violence, since sports viewers encourage athletes to be aggressive and violent when they compete. Additionally, the same qualities we want in our athletes are seen in many stories of police violence against African American males. Regarding this connection, Davis stated: “I don’t think a lot of us are making the connection; big, strong, black man on TV, ‘he’s a beast’...Big, black man on the street, not a good look.”



## KILLER CARTOONS: Is the Pen Mightier Than the Sword?

While the majority of our *Race Place and Culture* events are planned months in advance, we added an impromptu event in response to the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015. Within 10 days of the tragedy, we held an event in Seattle and, eight days later, two events in Spokane titled “Killer Cartoons: Is the Pen Mightier than the Sword?” In the midst of such a tragic event, it was important for Washingtonians to come together and discuss these issues face-to-face

Milt Priggee, a political cartoonist, and David Fenner, a specialist in Islam, served as panelists and focused on discussing and better understanding issues surrounding the events in Paris, including freedom of expression, cultural sensitivity, and religious extremism.

Panelists gave important background information on the history of Islam, the political cartooning tradition in the United States and in Europe, and the issue of freedom of speech. Below is a summary of dialogue and feedback from the event:

### **On the history of Islam in France and the country’s relationship with the religion:**

Fenner began with an overview of Islam and France’s relationship with the religion. Though there has been an established Muslim community in France, a resistance remains between the two groups, making assimilation a difficult process for French Muslims. Due to France’s unwillingness to accept Muslims into French society, Islamophobia is a prevalent problem in the country.

### **On the question of whether the Charlie Hebdo cartoons were acceptable examples of freedom of speech:**

The speakers questioned the intentions the cartoonists had behind publishing their negative depictions of the Prophet Muhammed. Dialogue, at times heated, was exchanged between speakers and audience members debating whether Charlie Hebdo was acting with free speech as any major publication would, or if the cartoons by Hebdo were hateful and islamophobic in nature. Even though Hebdo was a self-declared “equal opportunity racial offender,” did that justify the mockery



of the Prophet Muhammed? Ultimately, many people seemed to agree that though it was within the magazine's right to print the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed, the cartoons were insensitive towards the Muslim population. Priggee explained from his professional experience that a cartoonist's role is to raise awareness about current issues in order to spark conversation and positive change, but cartoons published simply to mock a group don't lead to any form of progress. Fenner noted that "just because you *can* do something, doesn't mean you *should*."

**On the public's perceptions of Islam:**

Along with discussing the cartoonists' decisions, the shooters' actions were also called into question and how they relate to Islam. On that topic Fenner stated: "I would caution all of us to try to hold in our minds that the Ku Klux Klan are not Christianity, that Al Qaeda and the [self-proclaimed] Islamic State are not Islam. Otherwise we are going to fall victim to a tremendous injustice."

*"I was surprised and pleased by the levels of interest and engagement in both cities. It is clear that this tragedy touches on many of our deeply held beliefs about faith, freedom, community, culture, assimilation, tolerance, intolerance and race. That so many people came out to learn more and grapple with these important issues is heartening indeed."*

*- Panelist David Fenner on audience participation.*

## **Race, Place & Culture Programs 2014 & 2015 (Completed)**

### **“A History of Protest: Civil Rights Movements in Seattle from the 1960s to 1980s”**

Location: Seattle

An exploration of Seattle’s role in national and international civil rights movements from the 1960s-1980s, including the anti-apartheid movement, the NAACP and the Black Panther Party in the area.

### **“On Different Tracks: Race, Class and Education”**

Locations: Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima

How do race and socioeconomic status affect educational access and achievement? What are the challenges of teaching a changing student population? And how do these issues play out across various communities in our state?

### **“From Al Jolson to Public Enemy: Race in Music”**

Locations: Seattle and Tacoma

An investigation of the racial history of music, from the minstrel tradition to the expanding urban, global, and political influence of hip-hop.

### **“From Smoke Signals to Aladdin: Race in Film”**

Locations: Seattle, Spokane, and Yakima

A look at the history and portrayal of ethnic minorities in film, including how myths and stereotypes about cultural groups are often perpetuated by Hollywood, and how different communities have responded to cinematic representations of their cultures.

### **“Loud and Proud: Washington State's Asian American Civil Rights Movement”**

Location: Seattle

A highlight of stories about Asian Americans who have stood up for social justice in Washington State. From Japanese American resistance to the incarceration during WWII, to the student sit-ins in the 70s, these events will challenge the “quiet” stereotype of Asian Americans in our state.

### **“From Flamenco to Fandango: Cultural Identity and the Latin Music Tradition”**

Location: Yakima

How is music used to challenge social norms, build community, establish our own identities and connect us with the past? What role does Latin music play in the soundscape of our community?

### **“Race, Politics, and Drama: A Conversation with Robert Schenkkan”**

Location: Seattle

With award-winning playwright Robert Schenkkan, we examine President Lyndon B. Johnson’s two greatest political legacies, the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act. Schenkkan’s Tony Award winning play, *All the Way*, is about Lyndon B. Johnson’s fight for American civil rights.

### **“Killer Cartoons: Is The Pen Mightier Than The Sword?”**

Locations: Seattle and Spokane

In light of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, this event discusses the historical context behind the massacre; explores the intent of both the cartoons and the attackers; and debates the possible impact the murders will have on immigration, culture, religion, and freedom of expression.

### **“You Mad Bro?: Race and Diversity in Sports”**

Locations: Seattle and Spokane

With issues of race in sports rising to the surface of our national conversation, we address racial issues in sports as fans, players, organizations, and as a society. What’s it like to be a black college athlete? Do modern American sports exploit minority athletes, or do they provide a path to personal empowerment?

### **“Writing in the Margins: Race in Literature”**

Location: Spokane

An examination of topics ranging from popular notions of race and masculinity to how individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds are portrayed in modern literature. The event also delves into the compelling ways literature enables us to connect with different voices and serves as a gateway for understanding history.

### **“Last Rights: The Ethics of the Death Penalty”**

Location: Seattle

When it comes to the death penalty, deep philosophical questions linger that aren’t often addressed in the usual arguments for and against—and that can’t be solely answered with data. This event delves into the philosophical and cultural underpinnings of capital punishment.

### **“Unveiled: Feminism, Orientalism, and Perceptions of the Middle East”**

Location: Seattle

The lens through which the West views Middle Eastern women is often focused on their oppression—either real or perceived. How accurate is this lens? Where do our views of the Middle East come from? And what does modern Middle Eastern feminism look like?

## Upcoming Race, Place & Culture Programs: Autumn 2015

### **“Islam 101”**

Location: Yakima

What does it mean to be a Muslim in America today? What if much of what we believe about Islam is incomplete or simply wrong? This event will encourage an open and honest conversation on many issues related to Islam, including the Prophet Muhammad, Sharia law, women’s veils, and more.

### **“The Collective Memory of the Confederate Flag”**

Location: Yakima

The confederate flag debate is as much about forgetting aspects of the Civil War as it is about the civil rights movement. This event will explore how the public memories of the confederate flag and its associated history are constructed, and the collective role we play in its construction.

### **“Mass Incarceration”**

Location: Seattle

Mass incarceration is one of the biggest problems facing our country today, with President Obama, members of Congress, and even the Koch brothers urging action on this issue. This event will address the history behind the mass incarceration epidemic, the drug war, racial disparities, and the private prison system.

### **“Policing and Community Relationships”**

Location: Seattle

In the wake of tragedies that happened in Ferguson, NYC, and Baltimore, this event will spark a conversation about the alarming frequency with which such tragedies happen, the sociological reasons behind them, and what effective policing and community relationships should look like.

## Conclusion

The success of *Race, Place & Culture* highlights how much people value authentic, intelligent conversation about the events that shape their society. By focusing on topics that impact the daily lives of Washingtonians, this program encourages more people to not only join in on the conversation, but to continue their own dialogue after each event. In 2015 and 2016, thousands of people in Washington will have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about 16 distinct topics/issues and engage in meaningful conversation with people with whom they would not normally socialize. *Race, Place & Culture* creates powerful, compassionate communities who are willing to tackle today's toughest topics, and forge a path to a more accepting, courageous world.

*"The spirit of civil, reasoned  
discussion is realized at  
these meetings of minds,  
where the best emotional  
thinking meets the best  
rational thought."*

*-Audience member  
Spokane*