A message from Executive Director
Brian Boyles &
Chair of the Board of Directors
Tom Putnam

At Mass Humanities, we benefit from a unique vantage point: our commitment to serving every corner of Massachusetts, ideas reach us from around the Commonwealth, generated by residents forging new ways to serve their communities.

This year’s annual report (which you read on page 8) reflects the vibrancy of the humanities in our small towns and diverse cities. In 2019, this work felt urgent, necessary, and impactful.

Our partnerships ranged from grants to grassroots organizations to partnerships with world-renowned universities. Launching start-ups or reinventing major museums, our grantees used the prism of the humanities to envision solutions. Through the generosity of our supporters and well-established institutions embraced this movement, opening their doors to redefine our concepts of culture and place. Rattled by a raucous present, people turned to history for answers and direction. They turned to the humanities when we hear from the faculty and students of the Clemente Course. Twice a week they meet, forging bonds with Plato, Jane Addams, and James Baldwin, but most of all, with each other. Through their dedication, they join the illustrious tradition of humanists in Massachusetts who’ve reshaped their surroundings for the better.

And as the year came to a close, we honored the 2019 Governor’s Awards recipients, including author and ethicist Danielle Allen, who reminded us why we believe in the mission of Mass Humanities: “No one ever regrets accepting the invitation to bring the best of our human capacities to making meaning of common human trials.” Thank you for sharing in this meaningful work. We hope to see you in your corner of Massachusetts in 2020.
Then I was bused to East Boston High. I remember angry people throwing things at the bus as it went by. In each of these schools, students were allowed to do pretty much whatever they wanted, including abusing the teachers. I remember one teacher advising me not to speak up in class.

I was often the target of bullying, and one such incident was bad enough to cause me to drop out just a couple months before graduation. I managed to get my GED at Roxbury Community College a year later, and I went on to graduate from Hickox Secretarial School, in 1986. In the mid-eighties I had two sons and a daughter. I was in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with their father.

We moved to Florida in 1987 and I worked at a few different jobs while attending school to become a medical assistant. I didn’t graduate. In 1992, I fell four stories out of an apartment building, I spent four months in a hospital with many broken bones, and the doctors told my mother that they did not expect me to live, and if I did live, I would not be able to walk. I proved them wrong on both counts, but I suffer to this day from chronic debilitating pain and memory problems that have gotten worse over time. I haven’t been able to work for the past few years because of it. I am grateful that my mother, who is now 84, was able to step in and help raise my kids.

After the incident, I moved back to Boston and eventually was able to start a career in political campaigning, beginning with Mayor Thomas Menino’s campaign in 1993. I worked on campaigns for Shannon O’Brien and Jill Stein for Massachusetts Governor, and President Obama and Senator John Kerry when they each ran for president. The proudest time of my career was working with the late Boston Councilman Chuck Turner at the Boston Redevelopment Authority and with the Boston Workers Alliance to reform the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) system, which Governor Patrick signed into law in 2010. Among other things, the new law makes sure CORI reports are kept confidential and helps to protect the rights of the subject. Before that time, it was virtually impossible to get a job in Massachusetts if you had a criminal record of any kind.

In 1988, my son Paul was born. Like his siblings, Paul was a true blessing for me. He graduated from high school in 2006, and I promised him that if he went to college and got a bachelor’s degree, I would as well. He enrolled at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, majoring in computer science engineering with a minor in marketing.

February is a difficult month for me. Three months before he was due to graduate, on February 22, 2013, Paul was shot and murdered for no good reason outside a nightclub in Charlotte. It is still an unsolved case. The police told me Paul had been seen having a verbal altercation with an unidentified man inside the club. That’s all I know.

I can’t remember anything else that happened in 2013. In 2014, I found the strength to act and started trying to think of ways to get justice for Paul in some form, as I was not able to file for any legal damages. I made videos and had a press conference about his case in North Carolina. I convinced the university to award Paul his degree posthumously.

Around that time, woman pastor told me, “whatever good God is doing for you, you should go out and do for others.” My mother encouraged me to make a retreat, and take some time for myself. So, I visited my childhood home in Jamaica for three months. I went to the rivers and beaches, enjoyed the fresh fruits and vegetables, and felt rejuvenated.

There I found the inspiration to establish the HERO Nurturing Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to Paul. HERO stands for Healing Empathy Redemption Oasis. We built the Hope Garden, which my neighbors and I now use to grow our own fruits and vegetables right in the middle of Dorchester. We had lots of help from hard-working volunteers, my local state Representative Liz Miranda, and organizations like the Farmer Collaborative, Speak for the Trees, Farmers Food Forest Coalition, and American Forest. A video about the project in which I am featured can be found on YouTube (search “Community ReLeaf – Making Boston Vibrant”).

With the encouragement of my friend, community activist Kevin Peterson, in July 2018, I attended the Reading Frederick Douglass event on the Boston Common. It’s an amazing event that I want to organize here in Dorchester this year. There I met Rose Sackey-Milligan, a Mass Humanities program officer who is now retired, and she told me about the Clemente Course in the Humanities.

A light went on in my head. I thought, “This is how I can honor my promise to Paul and get my degree.” I am currently enrolled in the program. It is incredibly convenient, with classes right at Codman Square Health Center two evenings a week, and the professors are incredible. It’s also a way to get to know neighbors who have similar interests. Over the years, I’ve taken courses on and off at RCC, and I have earned about 36 credits. The six I receive through the Clemente Course will take me further along, and I plan to enroll again and work toward my bachelor’s degree in art history.

Why art history? Because it takes me back to my childhood. In my house and neighborhood growing up, we had musical instruments of all kinds – banjos, slide whistles, drums – all carved out of the trees that surrounded us. I want to explore and reveal for others that art, history, and culture. I’ll be using the skills, network, and confidence I’m finding in the Clemente Course to do for others the good that God is doing for me.
BEING ASKED TO DANCE

Since 2009, Mass Humanities has supported annual shared public readings of Frederick Douglass’s 1852 speech known as “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” on or around Independence Day, in towns across Massachusetts. Members of the public take turns reading sections of the speech in order, usually from a podium in a town common or public square, to the end. The events take about an hour, but the conversations they spark often continue long after. Participants comment on how relevant these words are today and feel the same urgency to act as Douglass called for 168 years ago. The message is about inclusion: who ought to be included among “all men” described in the Declaration of Independence, what does it mean for us all when those who ought to be included are not, and how do we go about ensuring that inclusion?

Professor of African and African-American history, principal, and public school teacher, Willie Wilson Jr., along with former president of the association, Lynn Smith, have been instrumental in presenting the Reading Frederick Douglass Together program in Brockton since 2012. Working with their colleagues at the Frederick Douglass Neighborhood Association, they bring people together annually at the site where once stood the Liberty Tree, where Douglass orated when he visited Brockton, and where the Association has established Frederick Douglass Neighborhood Park. Mass Humanities Director of Grants Katherine Stevens caught up with Willie on Valentine’s Day, which is the day we celebrate as Douglass’s birthday. (His actual date of birth is unknown.)

Katherine Stevens: You say you first read about Frederick Douglass as a fifth-grader, and that Douglass was that age when he first learned to read. The book that changed his life was the Columbian Orator, a guide to public speaking. Is it important for you that young people participate in the readings?

Willie Wilson, Jr.: Yes, it’s amazing when you consider books were not easy to come by, especially for a slave. Douglass started reading at what we would consider a late age these days, and he ended up being extremely well read. The kids who come to our events are often reluctant to read. Many of the words in the speech are hard for them, and public speaking is not easy for anybody. But if you can get one or two to do it, they all get the courage and end up taking turns at the podium. It’s wonderful to see.

KS: Among the Douglass events around the state, the one in Brockton is known for the number of languages included among the readers. This is a speech not only for people of all ages, but also for people of different backgrounds, and actually for people around the world. How many languages are represented at your readings?

WW: Our goal is to add a language every year. We are up to twelve, including Mandarin Chinese, Greek, Spanish, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Italian, and French.

KS: How does that work? What’s it like to hear?

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A COMMONWEALTH OF IDEAS.

Our grants strengthen the presence of the humanities in public life. In every corner of Massachusetts, we help people celebrate their stories, reflect on issues in their neighborhoods, and imagine the future for themselves and their families.

Mass Humanities made 78 grants totaling $522,283 in 2019, directly reaching 43 towns and cities across the Commonwealth. We funded oral histories, museum exhibits, community discussions, workshops, documentary films and more.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

The Clemente Course in the Humanities is a free, yearlong, college-level introduction to the humanities for low-income adults that takes place at human service agencies. Highly qualified faculty members provide students the opportunity to learn, reflect, and gain the insights and skills unique to the humanities.

NEW GRADUATES

48

48

2019 CLEMENTE GRADUATION

Worcester
Each year Mass Humanities supports public readings of Frederick Douglass’s speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” in communities across the state both large and small. The speech challenges us to think about our nation’s history, opening up discourse between community members about race, citizenship, and our responsibilities to our past and to each other.

On October 26, following a successful forum at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute on the changing role of historians in American society, Danielle Allen of Cambridge, Lee Blake of New Bedford, Nancy Donahue of Lowell, and Jeffrey Musman of Nahant were recognized with the 2019 Massachusetts Governor’s Awards in the Humanities. The annual benefit dinner celebrates those whose public actions, grounded in an appreciation of the humanities, have enhanced civic life in the Commonwealth.

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Individually and families who support Mass Humanities through annual contributions of $1,000 or more receive insider news, discounts, and invitations to special events. Details can be found at masshumanities.org.

Inaugural Members
Anonymous
Glynda Benham
Brian Boyles
Anne C. Bruner
John Burgess and Nancy Adams
James and Laura Burke
John J. Carroll
John and Marie Dacev
Alice DeLana
Nancy Donahue, Lifetime Member
Frederick and Eva Fierst
William M. Fowler, Jr.
Al and Sally Griggs
Bruce and Judy Grinnell
Bruce Herring
Darcy Immerman
Brian Konish
Caroline Levine
Thomas P. McCarthy
Jeffrey Musman and Lynne Spencer
Nancy Netzer and Robert Silverman
Michael Pappone and Diane Savitzky
Lia and William Poorvu, Lifetime Members
Tom J. Putnam
Ron and Nancy Slate
Robert Strassler
Jill and Scott Sullivan
David Tebaldi
Emma Teng
David Weinstein
John F. Sullivan
Glen Weisberg
Edward E. Zuker

Thanks to you – our amazing donors and volunteers – we raised just under $400,000 from 343 individuals and organizations, including $169k to honor the Governor’s Awards recipients.
## ASSETS

**Current Assets**
- Cash: $1,393,192
- Certificates of deposit: $523,546
- Grants receivable: $233,031
- Prepaid expenses: $17,408
- Pledges receivable: $32,650

Total Current Assets: $2,199,827

**Capital Assets**
- Leasehold improvements: $32,032
- Equipment: $11,430
- Computer equipment and software: $15,210

Less – accumulated depreciation: ($52,589)

Total Capital Assets: $6,083

**Other Assets**
- Investments: $2,114,920
- Due to operating fund: ——

Total Other Assets: $2,114,920

**Total Assets**

$4,320,830

## LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

**Current Liabilities**
- Regrants payable: $215,015
- Accounts payable and accrued expenses: $78,837

Total Current Liabilities & Total Liabilities: $293,852

**Net Assets**
- Without donor restrictions: $1,319,770
- Board designated endowment funds: $118,860

Total without donor restrictions: $1,319,770

- With donor restrictions
  - Purpose or time restricted: $942,425
  - In perpetuity: $1,764,783

Total Net Assets: $4,026,978

**Total Liabilities & Net Assets**

$4,320,830

## CHANGES IN UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS

**Revenue:** $2,253,013

**Expenses:** $2,032,300