Friend—

Thank you for opening the Mass Humanities Annual Report for 2023. The report reflects the work unfolding across Massachusetts as more communities turn to the humanities to build a more equitable future.

In 2023, the staff and board of directors of Mass Humanities traveled to every region of our state to engage with residents supported by our grants, programs, and partnerships. We heard from farmers and dancers, librarians and boatbuilders, each of them finding a way to serve their neighbors and seek their truths. Whether in documentary films or on the steps of town halls, the humanities grew more vibrant in 2023 because of the support of these local champions. We are grateful to share their accomplishments in this report.

Our grant-making reached new milestones, with more than $2.3 million in funding provided to nonprofit organizations. Through the support of Governor Healey, the legislature, and our allies at Mass Cultural Council, we helped to sustain staff and create new positions at grassroots organizations with small budgets and infinite supplies of ingenuity and courage. Major funding from the Barr Foundation enabled us to grow the diverse, intersectional field of storytelling that is reshaping our understanding of Massachusetts and its people. Supporters like you joined us to welcome longtime friends along with many new faces at the Governor’s Awards in the Humanities.

We’ll remember the school children who visited “Crossroads,” the traveling exhibition we produced in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution and six humanities organizations in rural Massachusetts. More than 23,000 residents viewed the exhibition, 57% of them visiting their local library or museum for the first time. For the second straight year, forty communities hosted Reading Frederick Douglass Together events, forging new bonds and new ways to interpret Douglass’s words. Participants in six cities embraced the opportunities offered by the Clemente Course in the Humanities, including a summit at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and a new summer writing initiative.

These accomplishments are possible because people like you understand that the power of culture is to shift power, to make resources and platforms available for people too often left out of the story of Massachusetts. Every day, we commit to bringing more people together to develop ideas and relationships that benefit their neighbors. This is the humanities we strive to sustain.

In 2024, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Mass Humanities. As we look back on a half-century of accomplishments, we are grateful to share this latest chapter in the foundation’s history. Thank you for all that you do to make our story possible.

Best,

Brian Boyles
Executive Director

Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernández
Board Chair

BE HUMAN AND
SHARE YOUR STORY
MAKE A CONNECTION
EMBRACE NEW PERSPECTIVES
FIND YOUR COMMUNITY
EXPLORE OUR HISTORY

How will you join in?

Take a picture of your response and share it with us on social media using #MH50.

On the Cover: Nikki Turpin, Robbins House board president, and Anna Tucker, executive director of the Framingham History Center, enjoy a portrait making activity at Mass Humanities’ “The Future of Storytelling” gathering; Clemente Worcester graduate.

Sponsored by:

Board member Erin Williams and historian Nell Irvin Painter

Sohken Mao and Claudia Levin

Kenneth Eng

Sha-Asia Medina

Board member

Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernández
Board Chair

Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernández
Board Chair
To commemorate five decades of public humanities work in Massachusetts, we set out to write a new chapter in our history, beginning with rolling out a new organizational brand and website in March. As part of this makeover, we debuted a brief yet powerful phrase on our homepage: Be Human.

What might seem obvious at initial glance is actually an invitation to participate in the transformative work of the public humanities. History, literature, philosophy, the arts, communication—they all have at their core a desire to uncover truths about our identities, communities, and lived experiences.

The insert you see here is both an epilogue of the past 50 years and a preamble for the next 50. It’s a touchstone. A clean slate. A living archive. As you review a few highlights from our history, we encourage you to think about how you might participate in the next chapter of our story.

Revisiting the Mass Humanities Archive

Documentary filmmaker Lawrence Hott of Florentine Films recently sat down with us to share some insight into his body of work.

“I’ve really come to love what Mass Humanities does,” says Hott, who, from 1978 to 2013, received funding from the organization for nine of his films. “People are starting to learn that this is where we go to get grants to help us talk to the community about issues that are important to us.”

Hott’s 1981 documentary The Old Quabbin Valley is featured in a forthcoming film produced by Mass Humanities that explores the topic of rural identity in Massachusetts.

Frederick Douglass in Context: Boston to Belfast

Mass Humanities hosted its first shared reading of Frederick Douglass’ address “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” in Massachusetts on the Boston Common in 2009. A group of approximately 100 people gathered in the “free speech zone” at the foot of the monument to the 54th regiment. David Harris, at the time a board member of Mass Humanities, partnered with longtime Executive Director David Tebaldi, as well as Paul Marcus, the executive director of the nonprofit Community Change, to make the idea a reality.

“We learned something at that first reading,” says Harris. “The speech is the star. There’s anonymity. It’s not about the reader. And I think that that has become one of the strongest points of it.”

Since that time, the Douglass program has blossomed, with 60 readings scheduled to take place in the Commonwealth in 2024. What’s more, Douglass’ legacy is attracting attention on a global scale, too. In March, a cohort of Mass Humanities staff, board, and partners traveled to Belfast, Northern Ireland, to participate in Douglass Week, a weeklong series of public symposia and readings dedicated to better understanding the orator’s life and work. Anne Mattina and Desiree Taylor, two research fellows whose work was funded by Mass Humanities, presented original research on Douglass during a panel discussion.
Linking Community Networks

Relationship building is a hallmark of the nonprofit cultural sector. As such, we set out to host several workshops and community gatherings this year, exploring the theme of “The Future of Storytelling.” Grantees, board and former board members, staff, community partners, and legislators came together to reflect on this question and imagine a more just and equitable Commonwealth for the future.

“We decided as a board, and with Brian’s focus on really embracing all and making a place for belonging, that having these convenings would be very significant,” said Erin Williams, secretary of the board. “Really what it’s about is that active listening, engagement, and learning from each other.”

Logos Through the Years

Visit masshumanities.org for additional stories, interviews, and oral histories exploring 50 years of Mass Humanities.
Our signature grants initiatives support public humanities programs hosted by museums, historic sites, libraries, education providers, and community centers. By funding this vital cultural work, we’re laying the groundwork for achieving a more free and equitable society.

We also take pride in supporting the folks who keep the cultural nonprofit sector running each and every day—in 2023, we awarded $1.2 million in Staffing Recovery Grants to 35 organizations, thanks to the support of Mass Cultural Council.

"We moved into an oral history of community members that connects everything together."
—Erika Slocumb, historian

Slocumb worked with Megan Seiler, director of Wistariahurst Museum, on Reliquary of Blackness: Sustaining the Humanities in Holyoke. The project was funded by a 2023 Sustaining the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan (SHARP) grant. Their goal was to create an oral history of the city that moved beyond perspectives of wealthy mill owners to explore the experiences of Black citizens. Still by Evan Goodchild.

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**EXPAND MASSACHUSETTS STORIES**

Expand Massachusetts Stories (EMS) grants are designed to spotlight narratives from individuals, cultures, and communities that have been historically excluded from public history. Through oral histories, documentary films, museum exhibitions, education programs, and many other formats, our grantees celebrate their lived experiences while also creating safe spaces for others to learn about, engage with, and build solidarity with cultures different than their own.

$750,000+ in funding for EMS grantees

42 cultural organizations supported

EMS Grantees

**CAPE & ISLANDS**

Migrant Communities Project

The Generations Project

Twenty Summers

**CENTRAL**

OurStory Edutainment

The Village Afrocentric Cultural Center

**CT RIVER VALLEY**

American Farmland Trust

Amherst Historical Society

Common Wealth Murals

Doctorbird

Love Art Collective

Michelle Falcon Fontanez

Mount Calvary Baptist Church

Museum of Our Industrial Heritage

Ohketeau Cultural Center

Piti Theatre Company

Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association

Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation

Springfield Dementia Friendly Coalition

Town of Longmeadow Public Schools

Transhealth

**GREATER BOSTON**

Cambridge Black History Project

Chinatown Community Land Trust

Different Threads of the Same Fabric

Massachusetts Historical Society

Northeastern University

Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy

The Boston Home

The Proprietors of the Boston Athenaeum

Voices 21C

**METRO WEST**

The Robbins House

West Medford Community Center

**NORTHEAST**

ActiveVista Media

Angkor Dance Troupe

Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association

Cape Ann Museum

Marblehead Museum

Newburyport Preservation Trust

The Latino Leadership Coalition

United Lynn Pride

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Indigenous Peoples Network

**SOUTHEAST**

New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center

Christle Rawlins-Jackson, Susi Ryan, and IlaSahai Prouty, all members of Sisters in Stitches, joined by the Cloth, work on Vessels of Slavery, an art installation project uncovering the history of slavery in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The installation is on view at Cape Ann Museum in Gloucester.

67% of supported projects were led by people of color

65% of organizations had annual operating budgets of less than $300,000

15 organizations received Advancing Equity Track grants, which support first-time grantees with projects led by people from historically excluded communities

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(Opposite) A small sample of EMS projects taking place around the state. Illustration by Jessica Beasley.
Frederick Douglass was renowned during his lifetime for his public speech making and oration. His famous 1852 address, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?, is a prime example of classical rhetoric at work. He draws in his listeners gradually, praising the American Revolution and acknowledging the sea change taking place in the United States. Then, he systematically exposes the injustices that lay at the heart of American democracy, citizenship, and human rights. Notably, however, Douglass ends his address on a note of hope.

"The effect of that is, in a way, to force you to think about doing better," says former board member and chair David Harris, who helped co-found the Douglass program in 2009. "The psychology of it is just brilliant."

Mass Humanities hosted its first formal shared reading Douglass’s speech in 2009 within the "free speech zone" of the Boston Common, at the foot of the Robert Gould Shaw and Massachusetts 54th Regiment Memorial, which extols one of the first Black regiments of the American Civil War.
Clemente Course in the Humanities

The Clemente Course in the Humanities champions opportunities for Massachusetts residents from historically and systemically excluded communities to engage with, discuss and author stories and ideas about our democracy. In addition to earning college credits from Bard College and local universities, Clemente participants draw upon their lived experiences to spark new ideas about historical texts; connect with neighbors about relevant civic issues ranging from LGBTQ rights to voting accessibility; author powerful anthologies; and take on leadership roles in their communities.

Our first ever collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution concluded in 2023, with the completion of the Museum on Main Street traveling exhibition tour. “Crossroads: Change in Rural America” was an installation designed to catalyze community conversations in rural towns about what rural life and identity looks like in the 21st century. All told, the exhibition sparked increases in visitors, volunteer hours, and community and school engagement in each of the six host sites. To sustain their work in 2024, host sites will receive additional funding from Mass Humanities to create more public programming about “crossroads” in rural America.

Community Partners

- Brockton: Brockton Public Library
- Dorchester (Boston): Codman Square Health Center
- Holyoke: The Care Center
- New Bedford: PACE, Inc.
- Springfield: Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services
- Worcester: Worcester Art Museum, Worcester County Poetry Association, and Trinity Lutheran Church

Host Sites

IN 2022
- The Hull Lifesaving Museum, Hull Oct. 30–Dec. 10
- Rutland Free Public Library, Rutland Dec. 18–Jan. 28

IN 2023
- Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls Feb. 5–Mar. 18
- Bushnell-Sage Library, Sheffield Mar. 26–May 5
- Athol Public Library, Athol May 14–Jun. 24

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Elizabeth Bacon, coordinator for Clemente Worcester, with a 2023 graduate.

“Word got out that it was the last day of the exhibit, and we had over 300 people come that day. It was just spectacular…setting attendance records…I still feel like that buzz has been growing at our center, too.”

— Janel Knockleby, Visitor Services Supervisor, Great Falls Discovery Center
Each year, Mass Humanities recognizes individuals whose public actions enhance civic life in the Commonwealth through a deep appreciation of the humanities. On September 28, 2023, more than 200 friends and supporters of Mass Humanities came together at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston to celebrate the 2023 Governor’s Awards in the Humanities honorees: Elizabeth Bacon, Margaret Burnham, Vanessa Calderón-Rosado, and Kumble Subbaswamy.

“It’s taken me, today, to questions of redress and reparation, how we talk about, appreciate, and recover the past. Law alone will not get you there, you need the humanities to answer the large questions about how we deal with our past. You need philosophy, you need religion, you need art, you need music, you need drama, you need it all.”

—Margaret Burnham, 2023 Governor’s Award recipient
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Brian Boyles
Executive Director
Latoya Bosworth
Program Officer
Jill Brevik
Director of Development
Sarah Carroll
Grant Writer
Alex Creighton
Director of Operations and Financial Administration
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Photographer Iaritza Menjivar examines a family portrait at the Somerville Museum’s “Padres Latinos,” an exhibit funded by Mass Humanities.