

# Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies

(formerly Kansas Quarterly)

Volume 54, Number 3

Winter/December 2023

<b>Guest Editors' Introduction: The Arkansisters Issue</b> . . . . .	163
by Brookshield Laurent and Lauri Umansky	
<b>"Arkansisters": Engaging in Self-Help Activism as a Holistic Praxis</b> . . . . .	164
by Cherisse Jones-Branch	
<b>The Slow Massacre: East Phillips and North Desha Counties, Arkansas: Then and Now (edited presentation)</b> . . . . .	168
by Jennifer Hadlock	
<b>Race, Gender, and Hoodoo in the Arkansas Delta: The Case of Caroline Dye</b> . . . . .	173
by Wendy Onek	
<b>Cold Summer (fiction)</b> . . . . .	181
by Ann Robinson	
<b>Gertha Bailey Trice: A Daughter's Reflections on a Mother Who Transformed Arkansas Delta Communities through Self-Help Activism (interview)</b> . . . . .	187
by Swity Sultana Monni	
<b>Self-Help Activism in a Traumatized Community: Womanist Ideals in Grassroots Initiatives (photo essay)</b> . . . . .	197
by Faisal Mohammed	
<b>The Legacy Midwife: A Native Arkansan Vows to Carry on a Heritage of Healing</b> . . . . .	203
by Donna L. Shelton	
<b>Mental Health Awareness for Black Women and Girls in the Delta: An Interview with Clinical Psychologist Dr. Patricia Griffen (interview)</b> . . . . .	211
by Loretta McGregor	
<b>Delta Sources and Resources</b> . . . . .	216
More Than a Brewery: Native Brew Works	

515 South Gee Street  
Jonesboro, Arkansas  
by Shobhithan Kandamasy

**Reviews** ..... 221  
Jones-Branch, *Better Living by Their Own Bootstraps: Black Women’s Activism in Rural Arkansas, 1914-1965*, reviewed by Dawn Herd-Clark  
Nicholas, *The Mama Chronicles: A Memoir*, reviewed by Kristen Ruccio  
de Silva Jayasuriya, Leitão Pereira, and Hansen, eds., *Sustaining Support for Intangible Cultural Heritage*, reviewed by Virginia Siegel  
Kayser, *Marginalized: Southern Women Playwrights Confront Race, Region, and Gender*, reviewed by Cherisse Jones-Branch  
Wippermann, *Joan of Arkansas*, reviewed by Guy Lancaster  
Olivarius, *Necropolis: Disease, Power, and Capitalism in the Cotton Kingdom*, reviewed by Lucy C. Barnhouse  
Miller, *Port of No Return: Enemy Alien Internment in World War II New Orleans*, reviewed by Edward Salo  
Blevins, *Up South in the Ozarks: Dispatches from the Margins*, reviewed by Lauren Adams Willette  
Bokelman and Evans, *Going Up the Country: Adventures in Blues Fieldwork in the 1960s*, reviewed by Gregory Hansen  
Alexander, *Resistance in the Bluegrass: Empowering the Commonwealth*, reviewed by Lisa Perry

**Contributors** ..... 238



# Guest Editors' Introduction: The Arkansisters Issue

by Brookshield Laurent and Lauri Umansky

This issue of *Arkansas Review* is guest-edited by members of the Arkansisters Project: A Delta Initiative for the Heritage, Health, and Human Rights of Women and Girls. The Arkansisters Project represents a collaboration spearheaded by Arkansas State University's Heritage Studies PhD Program and the Delta Population Health Institute of New York Institute of Technology's College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State University.

The Arkansisters Project advocates for the health and well-being of women and girls throughout the Arkansas Delta through education, community engagement, policy development, research, writing, preservation, archival activity, and cultural and artistic expression and programming. Our transdisciplinary approach integrates population health and public policy, as well as the humanities, social sciences, and arts, for the express purpose of challenging and addressing the impediments to health, human rights, and social justice currently and historically experienced by women and girls in this region.

Typically, when people think of health, they refer to care received in clinical and hospital settings. While access to health care is vital in a community, a substantial amount of data shows that the significant drivers of "health outcomes" are the conditions where we live, learn, work, play, and worship, commonly referred to as the social determinants of health. The study of population health underlines the health disparities among multiple populations categorized by race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, geography (rural vs urban), and disability, to name a few examples.

Painfully, the Mississippi Delta region registers the most significant health disparities in the United States. To date, Arkansas has the highest mortality in mothers and infants and is one of the lowest-ranked states in heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and obesity. Our region also has one of the highest con-

centrations of poverty and food-insecure homes. These challenges are not new or accidental but due to centuries of institutionalized, legalized, discriminatory injustices. The cost of lives due to health disparities calls for equity among the social factors that significantly drive health outcomes.

According to the Robert Johnson Foundation, "Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care."

Despite harrowing challenges in the Delta, as we learn from historian Cherisse Jones-Branch in the groundbreaking study, *Better Living by Their Own Bootstraps: Black Women's Activism in Rural Arkansas, 1914-1965*, and in her essay in this issue, courageous women in Arkansas have long exercised their agency and power to educate, innovate, create, build on community assets, and mobilize for justice, equity, health, and wholeness. As Jones-Branch and each of the contributors to this volume insist, the self-help initiatives of so many women in our communities, past and present, are vital to the healing of inter-generational trauma that impacts the health and well-being of Delta communities. Like the women whose life stories of resistance to social injustices fill these pages, we must all embrace our roles as healers in our own communities.

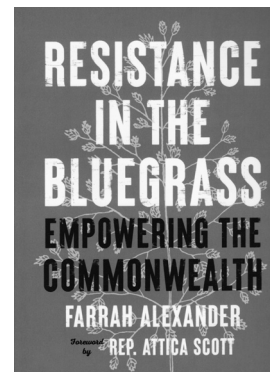
With gratitude to Donna Shelton, as project manager and lead editor, and to the entire team of Heritage Studies doctoral students who helped to bring this issue of *Arkansas Review* into existence (Shobhi Kandasamy, Faisal Mohammed, Swity Sultana Monni, Corrina Neal, and Abigail Wilson), we join you on the all-important journey toward health equity and wholeness for all. ▲▼▲

would be appropriate for young adults, book clubs, and others in the general public. Each chapter ends with tips and advice for those who are inspired to engage in community activism. Each tip connects to individuals and organizations highlighted in the chapter and offers plain-language advice for getting involved and taking action. For example, in the chapter on Racial Justice, the author includes “Help like Breonna. She dedicated her career to helping others in their worst days, saving gunshot victims, and treating medical crises” (p. 166). The death of Breonna Taylor at the hands of police officers is just one of many examples of everyday heroes in service to the commonwealth.

While there is no way to present a comprehensive work of community activists and activist organizations in the state in a single volume, gaps such as the omission of AIDS Volunteers of Lexington, made it feel incomplete. That said, this work is a good lay-person’s introduction to how

average people can make significant changes in their communities by stepping up, taking a chance, and engaging in action to address inequities where they find them.

-Lisa Perry



---

---

## Contributors

---

---

Lucy C. Barnhouse received her PhD from Fordham University in 2017, and has been Assistant Professor of History at Arkansas State University since Fall 2020, having held visiting positions at the College of Wooster and Wartburg College. Her recent work includes *Hospitals in Communities of the Late Medieval Rhineland: Houses of God, Places for the Sick*, and, co-edited with Winston Black, *Beyond Cadfael: Medieval Medicine and Medical Medievalisms*.

Patricia L. Griffen, PhD is founder and CEO of Clinical Psychology Services, Inc. of Little Rock where she maintains a private practice providing clinical services to an adult population. Dr. Griffen is one of the charter members of the Arkansas Association of Black Psychology Professionals and previously served as the

organization’s president.

Jennifer Hadlock, MSW/JD is a community organizer, genealogist, and movement lawyer. She learned about the Elaine Massacre of 1919 as a Board member of the Fund for Reparations Now!! and was subsequently invited by the Elaine Legacy Center to research land ownership and theft in Phillips County, Arkansas, and to document the oral histories of Black descendants of the Elaine Massacre.

Gregory Hansen is Professor of Folklore and English at Arkansas State University, where he also teaches in the Heritage Studies PhD Program. He is the author of *A Florida Fiddler: The Life and Times of Richard Seaman*, and his publications focus on roots music, folk-

lore and language, and public folklore.

Dawn Herd-Clark, PhD, is Assistant Professor of History at Hillsborough Community College, where she teaches African American and United States History. Her research specialty is on rural African American Georgians.

Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch is Dean of the Graduate School and Professor of History at Arkansas State University-Jonesboro. She received her BA and MA from the College of Charleston, and a doctorate in History from The Ohio State University. Dr. Jones-Branch is the author of *Crossing the Line: Women and Interracial Activism in South Carolina during and after World War II* and the co-editor of *Arkansas Women: Their Lives and Times*. A second manuscript, *Better Living By Their Own Bootstraps: Black Women's Activism in Rural Arkansas, 1913–1965*, is now available from the U of Arkansas P. Jones-Branch is currently working on a third book project titled “. . . To Make the Farm Bureau Stronger and Better for All the People”: African Americans and the American Farm Bureau Federation: 1920–1966. She is also the co-editor of the newly created “Rural Black Studies” series for the U of Arkansas P.

Shobhithan Kandasamy is a PhD candidate in Heritage Studies researching heritage tourism, rural studies, women's heritage, and economic development. Originally from Sri Lanka, Shobhithan now lives in Arkansas where he is completing his doctoral studies at Arkansas State University. He works as a Project Specialist for The Oxford American Literary Project. Shobhithan is an original member of the Arkansisters Project.

Guy Lancaster currently is the editor of the online *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, a project of the Central Arkansas Library System (CALs) and the author of a number of books on race and violence, including *American Atrocity: The Types of Violence in Lynching* (U of Arkansas P, 2021).

Brookshield Laurent, DO is an osteopathic family medicine physician. She is a fellow of the American

Osteopathic Association Health Policy Fellowship. She is the founding chairwoman for the Department of Clinical Medicine at NYITCOM at Arkansas State University and the founding executive director for the Delta Population Health Institute, the community engagement arm of NYITCOM at A-State. Dr. Laurent is a leader in driving health equity in population health, and leads in innovation and advancement in medical education, professional development, and integrative multi-sector community engagement.

Loretta McGregor is Professor of Psychology at Arkansas State University. Dr. McGregor has written numerous articles and book chapters. She is also one of the foremost scholars on the life and works of Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark.

Faisal Mohammed (he/him) is a doctoral student in Heritage Studies at Arkansas State University. Originating from Ghana, he received his master's degree in Cultural Heritage Studies from Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, as well as a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from four consortium universities: the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, the University of Szeged in Hungary, the University of Auvergne in France, and the Roehampton University in the United Kingdom. His field of interest integrates Cultural Anthropology, Performance, and Heritage Studies to interrogate approaches for fostering community resilience and sustainable heritage promotion in rural and underserved communities. Faisal is an original member of the Arkansisters Project.

Swity Sultana Monni, a native of Bangladesh, is a PhD candidate in the Heritage Studies program at Arkansas State University. Monni's research examines women's health and human rights, with a focus on self-help activism, especially as it relates to women in rural areas aiming to improve economic opportunities. Swity is an original member of the Arkansisters Project.

Wendy Onek earned a BA in History from Arkansas State University, where she currently is a student in the Heritage Studies PhD Program. A native of Bos-

ton, she has lived in Jonesboro, Arkansas, for most of the past decade.

Lisa Perry is Executive Director of Research Solutions Inc. and adjunct faculty at Southern New Hampshire University. She is author of *Reimagining Camelot: Wheelwright, Kentucky in Memory and Folklore, Images of America: Floyd County*, and numerous articles and book chapters related to labor history and African American history. She holds undergraduate degrees in Mining Engineering Technology and Management, MA degrees in History and Heritage Studies, and a PhD in Heritage Studies from Arkansas State University.

Ann Robinson has published in *Atlanta Review, American Literary Review, Connecticut Review, Interim, Jellybucket, Nimrod, Tampa Review, and Zone 3*, among others. She studied under Miller Williams in the University of Arkansas MFA program. Retired from the Marin Superior Courts, she owns a small farming operation with her sister in Arkansas, her native state. She travels between California and Arkansas several times a year.

Kristen Ruccio is Director of First Year Writing and Assistant Professor of English at Arkansas State University. In her very limited spare time, she loves crocheting and cooking vegan food.

Edward Salo is Associate Professor of History and Associate Director of the Arkansas State University Heritage Studies PhD Program. His research centers on military history, historic preservation, and the cultural history of comic books. Before coming to A-State, Dr. Salo spent fourteen years as a historian supporting cultural resources management projects around the world.

Virginia Siegel, Professor of Practice, directs Arkansas Folk and Traditional Arts, a statewide program of the University of Arkansas Special Collections Division. She holds an MA in Folk Studies from Western Kentucky University and a BFA in Historic Preservation from Savannah College of Art and Design.

Donna L. Shelton is currently pursuing a PhD in Heritage Studies at Arkansas State University. Her areas of interest are the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta, the American South, and the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras especially in regard to underrepresented populations. Her current research focus is on the all-African American community of her ancestors, Garrett Grove, Arkansas, and women's activism in the Arkansas Delta. She holds a Master of Arts in Public History and a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Donna is a member of the Arkansisters Project.

Essie Trice-Hewett is a retired educator, case manager, and service coordinator. She was instrumental in recognition of her mother by Lee County in 2022 when they renamed the road by their homestead "Gertha Bailey Trice Road" in honor of her community activism. Hewett and her siblings set up a scholarship at Lee Senior High School in honor of their mother. The scholarships are awarded to deserving students annually to attend their alma mater, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). She holds a bachelor's degree from UAPB.

Lauri Umansky is Professor of History and Director of the Heritage Studies PhD Program at Arkansas State University. Her books include *Motherhood Reconciled: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties*, *Naked Is the Best Disguise* (pseud. Lauri Lewin), "Bad" Mothers: *The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s*, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, and others. Her latest book, *Águila: The Vision, Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Two-Spirit Shaman in the Ozark Mountains*, co-authored with María Cristina Moroles, will be published by U of Arkansas P in February 2024.

Lauren Adams Willette is the Folk Arts Survey Coordinator at Arkansas Folk and Traditional Arts, a statewide public folklore program of the University of Arkansas Libraries. Willette is a Heritage Studies PhD candidate at Arkansas State University.