TRANSCRIPT

Key Conversations with Phi Beta Kappa

2023 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

The Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards are presented annually to three outstanding scholarly books published in the United States. The 2023 winners are Dennis Tyler for his book *Disabilities of the Color Line: Redressing Antiblackness from Slavery to the Present*; Jennifer Raff for her book *Origin: A Genetic History of the Americas;* and Deborah Cohen for her book *Last Call at the Hotel Imperial: The Reporters Who Took On a World at War.* This year, the Book Awards Dinner was held in person in Washington, D.C. in November 2023, where the three scholars discussed the impetus behind their books and the motives that keep them sleepless—and engaged—in liberal arts and sciences.

Fred Lawrence: This podcast episode was generously funded by two anonymous donors. If you would like to support the podcast in similar ways, please contact Hadley Kelly at hkelly@pbk.org. Thanks for listening.

Hello and welcome to Key Conversations with Phi Beta Kappa. I'm Fred Lawrence, Secretary and CEO of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. On our podcast, we welcome leading thinkers, visionaries, and artists who shape our collective understanding of some of today's most pressing and consequential matters. Many of them are Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars who travel the country for us, visiting campuses and presenting free lectures that we invite you to attend. For the Visiting Scholar schedule, please visit pbk.org.

This special episode featuring our Phi Beta Kappa Book Award winners was taped at the annual Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards event. I hope you'll enjoy the conversation that we had with our extraordinary book award winners.

Well, this is a great celebratory night for us at Phi Beta Kappa, but I can't deny that we are gathering at a time of great challenge. It is a time of challenge globally, nationally, for many of us personally, but we also gather at a season of thanks. I have found, you may have too, that the best way forward in challenging times is to focus on the things for which we are most grateful. I'm grateful to my colleagues. I'm grateful to the participants in our book award panels. I'm grateful to all of you in attendance tonight: members of the Phi Beta Kappa Senate, our board, our supporters, friends, and special thanks to members of the Secretary Circle. Your generosity and support makes evenings like this possible, and I'm grateful for the mission that has been placed in our hands.

In 1989, one of Peter's predecessors, the celebrated Dr. John Hope Franklin, said the following question that sets out our mission, I think. He said, "How is it possible that an organization with nothing much in the way of a powerbase is able to enjoy considerable respect and a reasonable amount of influence?" Surely one reason is that for more than two centuries, since 1989, we're closing in on our 250th anniversary, next week we'll mark 247 years. So he was saying two centuries, we're thinking two and a half centuries now. Surely one reason is that for more than two centuries, Phi Beta Kappa has stood for the highest academic and intellectual standards. John Hope Franklin was a man who played it straight at all times. He said, "In a country that historically has placed such great stock in material and practical things, its people have always been able to muster some respect, however grudging at times, for things that exalt the mind and exalt the spirit.

The very age of Phi Beta Kappa invites veneration to be sure and in a nation given to symbols, nothing epitomizes excellence more than an honor society born just five months after Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. As we approach our 250th anniversary, ours and the nation's, Franklin calls us to maintain these academic and intellectual standards and employ them in a time when much public debate seems to generate more heat than light and to be motivated more by anger and passion than civility and reason.

When I reread Franklin's words, I was struck by a similar challenge expressed by a favorite artist of mine, a non-Phi Beta Kappa member, I have to say, and it turns out not even a college graduate, although he does have several honorary degrees I understand, and that is the folk singer, Arlo Guthrie. One of his great songs that he performed, but also wrote the music and lyrics called Patriot's Dream, which I commend to your close attention if you haven't heard it, but the opening lyrics are "Living now here, but for fortune placed by faith's mysterious schemes, who'd believe that we are the ones chosen to try to rekindle the Patriot's dreams."

So tonight, let us recommit ourselves to building a world dedicated to the deepest values of the liberal arts and sciences: of free inquiry, of free expression and of

academic freedom. A world based on the three principles articulated at the time of our founding and represented by the three stars on our key: scholarship, integrity and friendship. And yes, a world that celebrates our motto, Φιλοσοφία Βίου Κυβερνήτης, that it is the love of learning that will be the pilot of our lives, regardless of how choppy the waters we find ourselves in. Dr. Franklin taught us the love of learning has been a backbone of American pride and achievement and is essential to freedom of thought and individual liberty. And I think it is fair to say that the relevance of and need for our mission has never been greater.

Tonight, we celebrate. It is a high point of the year to present the winners of the 2023 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards. The first of our three prizes is the Christian Gauss Award, which is the oldest of our three Phi Beta Kappa Book awards established by the Phi Beta Kappa Senate in 1950 to recognize outstanding books in the field of literary criticism or literary scholarship.

The award is named for the late Christian Gauss, the distinguished Princeton University scholar, teacher, dean, who served as a senator of Phi Beta Kappa and also one of Peter's predecessors. The winning title of the Christian Gauss Award is Disabilities of the Color Line: Redressing Antiblackness from Slavery to the Present by Dennis Tyler, published by NYU Press. Disabilities of the Color Line draws both on the growing literature of disability studies and the insights of race theory to elucidate both. Dennis Tyler shows us how through both law and custom, the color line has cast Black people as innately disabled and thus unfit for freedom incapable of self-governance and contagious within the national body politic. That is where Tyler begins, but it's not where he leaves us. Instead, he shows us how the Black literary tradition has invented this casting by exposing the disablement of racism without disclaiming disability.

Black authors and activists through the ages have engaged in a politics and an aesthetics of redress. David Walker, Henry Box Brown, William and Ellen Kraft, Charles Chestnut, James Weldon Johnson, Mamie Till Mobley, theirs is a literary project of resistance that in the pursuit of racial and disability justice acknowledges the disabling violence perpetrated by anti-Black regimes in order to conceive or engender dynamic new worlds that account for people of all abilities.

Dennis Tyler is associate professor at Fordham University and has published work on African-American literature and culture and disability studies, performance studies and popular culture. This is his first book and we are delighted to be part of its celebration. It's a great pleasure to present the 2023 Christian Gauss Award to Dr. Dennis Tyler.

Dennis Tyler: Thank you for that wonderful introduction, Fred. Good evening everyone. I'm thrilled to be here. I'm honored to receive the Christian Gauss Award for Literary Studies. New Orleans, I hope I've done you proud. I want to first thank the Phi Beta Kappa Society and its leadership and staff for all the work you've done to organize this event. I joked

to my dad that I would have him come up on stage and make some remarks. He won't be doing that.

My mom was my first educator, teaching me how to read, and I know that my commitment to higher education was inspired by watching her pursue and complete her bachelor's degree in her forties while working a full-time job and being a mother of two. I figured there must be something important about college education and a degree if she's working so hard to get one. My dad has, by example, taught me how to live life with integrity and has given me invaluable lessons about perseverance in the face of struggle.

I was raised within a tradition of tenacity and persistence when rooted in defiance and triumph, and that tradition has been my guiding light while I finished the book. I wrote this book as the saying goes for my people. In particular for those who have been disprized and oppressed, yet still embraced the disabled beauty and abundance of Black life, for those whose lives have been determined not to matter, but managed to find delight and joy in the midst of violence and terror. This book is for the enslaved people who risk life and limb for literacy and for the rebels who gave them a blueprint for Black liberation and survival, for the courageous ones who move into spaces marked for whites only, for who took up more space than law and custom allowed, as well as for the artists and activists who captured their bravery, for the mothers who lost their sons, for the fathers who lost their daughters, for the children who could not breathe, and for all of us who say their names, commemorate their lives and offer care whenever, wherever possible, this book is for you. Thank you.

Fred Lawrence: The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science was established in 1959 to encourage literate and scholarly interpretations of the physical and biological sciences and mathematics. The winning title of the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science for 2023 is Origin, A Genetic History of The Americas by Jennifer Raff, published by Twelve. Many of us learned this story. Roughly 13,000 years ago the inland corridor created by retreating glaciers at the end of the last ice age, served as a land bridge for people from northeast Asia to enter the new world. Jennifer Raff tells us it's not quite as simple as that.

So it turns out it was more like 20,000 years, perhaps more, and the path was coastal rather than inland. At least until we venture out into other worlds this remains the last time our species has populated an entirely new place, and Origins is a masterful retelling of how people reached what we now call the Americas. Drawing on archeological and genetic evidence, Origins is at once a study of past and present. We are engaged in prehistoric journeys and entangled with identity in the way in which a society, any society, our society addresses the question, who exactly is indigenous?

Jennifer Raff is associate professor of anthropology at the University of Kansas with a dual PhD in anthropology and genetics, and over 14 years of experience in researching ancient and modern human DNA from the Americas. This, again, is her first book and

we are delighted to be honoring it and her. I am delighted to present the 2023 Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science to Dr. Jennifer Raff.

Jennifer Raff: Origin, the book, is really in many ways a celebration of my fields, which for those of you who aren't familiar with what anthropological genetics is, it is a melding of biology and history to understand the history of our species through DNA and the signatures that evolution leaves in our genomes, the record of our history that is inscribed on our DNA, we can access that. And in recent years we've been able to access that in ways that nobody could have envisioned when I was starting out as a graduate student. But the celebration, what we have learned from our genomes, is extraordinary and it's unfolding. My book is probably already out of date, honestly, but it's unfolding as we speak. There are new studies being published that change our understanding of our own history, but it's also a sobering story because we have to understand that this history and this knowledge is built upon the exploitation and abuse of many marginalized communities, indigenous peoples, most particularly the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

And I myself am not indigenous, but I want to thank the indigenous scholars who are both scientists and bioethicists who have been pushing our field to a more ethical place and who have welcomed me and helped me to understand their perspectives and whose stories that I try to amplify in my book, not as a leader in my field because I don't consider myself to be one, but as simply somebody who when I get a platform, try to use it in order to elevate these discussions. And so I'm really, really most grateful to the indigenous scholars and the non-indigenous scholars, both scientists, bioethicists, and community leaders, whose stories I tried to tell and whose lessons I try to convey in this book. And I want to thank those of you who have read it, and especially the selection committee for honoring me in this way. It really is an honor to the work that I am trying to bring to a broader audience, and I am very, very grateful. Thank you.

Fred Lawrence: Thank you. The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award was established in 1960 to recognize studies that contribute significantly to historical, philosophical, or religious interpretations of the human condition. The winner of the 2023 Phi Beta Kappa Ralph Waldo Emerson Award is Last Call at the Hotel Imperial: The Reporters Who Took On A World At War by Deborah Cohen, published by Random House.

“Truth is the first casualty of war”, as numerous people are said to have said for the first time. Perhaps it was Senator Hiram Johnson in the early 20th century. Perhaps it was Dr. Johnson in 1758 when he wrote, "Among the calamities of war may be jointly numbered the diminution of the love of truth by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages." And there are those who say it was Aeschylus. So how would we know? Well, I know who I'd ask. One of the four extraordinary, brilliant, irreverent, gutsy and oh yes, glamorous young reporters who were devoted to making

sure the truth would not be a casualty of war and who lie at the heart of this deeply researched and highly textured book: John Gunther, HR Knickerbocker, Jimmy Sheean and Dorothy Thomas.

Deborah Cohen takes us deep into the work, lives, and world of these reporters and dozens of other figures from Europe between the wars. Hitler and Mussolini, Nehru, Gandhi, these reporters wrote for an audience of millions who hung on their every word but never quite believed it all, or at least not in a way that would've helped them understand what was about to unfold in the conflagration of the Second World War. Told with the immediacy of a conversation overheard, Last Call At The Imperial Hotel captures how the global upheavals of the 20th century felt up close and tells a story that resonates still into our time.

Deborah Cohen is the Richard W. Leopold professor of history at Northwestern University. Her previous books include Household Gods, The War Comes Home and Family Secrets. She writes regularly for the Atlantic on subjects ranging from World War I photography to punk rock. How much time do we have tonight? I'm delighted to present the 2023 Ralph Waldo Emerson Award to Deborah Cohen.

Deborah Cohen: Thank you. It is such a pleasure to be here with you tonight. It's really an honor. I'm tremendously, tremendously grateful. As Fred said, my book is about a group of American reporters whose beat actually was the Emerson beat. That is, the human condition. Their names aren't at all well known today, but in the mid-20th century, John Gunther, Dorothy Thompson, HR Knickerbocker and Vincent Sheean were worldwide celebrities. They were equally famous to their fiction writing counterparts, Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, this group of friends reported from hotspots across the world. They traveled to the Middle East, they traveled to Europe, they traveled to Asia, and they were chasing two main stories or they thought they were chasing two main stories. The first was the rise of anti-colonial nationalist movements that were trying to bring down the great European empires. The second story was the rise of fascism and the coming of the Second World War.

But along the way they discovered a third story as well about the ways in which geopolitics, international affairs, were invading people's most intimate lives. They saw how a dispute about world politics could finish off a marriage and how a wife might take the Indian freedom movement as a template for her own liberation. When Dorothy Thompson's husband, the novelist Sinclair Lewis, essentially declared if he divorced Dorothy he would name Hitler as the interfering party in their marriage. He was only half-joking. He also said that if Dorothy came out for American involvement in the war, that he would rent Madison Square Gardens and join the America First Party.

So the book is about a moment when American foreign correspondents became the kings of the hill. It's about the work for which they became famous, which was a very personal journalism of warning that broke the rules about objectivity and reporting. It

was about what journalists didn't see, at least at first, what they argued about, what they got wrong. For instance, the nature of modern dictatorship. And it's also about what they came to understand, some of it very eerily prescient in our own moment, including a looming refugee crisis. At a moment when appeasement and isolationism held sway, much of what Americans actually knew about the crackup of the European democracies came from their reporting. As you know, many of the correspondents who are today bringing us the international news are freelancers and reporters from the region. They are likely to be targeted precisely because they're journalists.

Already this year, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 69 reporters and media workers have been killed in the line of duty. Those are almost certainly conservative figures as the CJP painstakingly verifies each casualty report. And they're probably outdated even at this moment. What that means is that more reporters will have died in the year 2023 than died in the entirety of the Second World War. At a time when correspondence work is just desperately dangerous, we also need them more urgently than ever before. Thank you again for the terrific honor of this award and I'm really looking forward to our discussion. I can't imagine how you're going to bring everything together.

Fred Lawrence: All right, well, let's get to work. Donald Murray famously said that all writing is autobiography, and I think that applies to scholarship at least as much as fiction and maybe more so. Let me ask you all to put yourselves in these books that I think to a certain extent you keep yourselves out of.

Dennis, you weaved together insights from disability studies, critical race studies. It's almost so obvious when you weave them together except it wasn't so obvious before you showed us that it was obvious. But I'd love you to share with us what brought you to this and how you found yourself into this project.

Jennifer, you make a studied effort to keep yourself out of the book, but I want to put you back into it. So let's put it this way. What is it about 22,000 year old footprints in New Mexico that was just irresistible to you?

Deborah, halfway through your book, I was reminded of something said of Tolkien that they said that he reached a certain point where he was more comfortable in middle earth than in planet Earth. And I had to wonder whether you had reached a point where you were simply more comfortable in Europe between the wars than in 21st century Chicago. So how did you find your way to Europe between the wars? I told you the through lines were obvious.

Dennis Tyler: I came by it honest, Fred. I mean the idea for the book started in the classroom, the graduate course I was taking on disability studies where Professor Helen Deutsch, where I kept encountering these moments in African-American literature where authors were describing their experiences or their characters' experiences of racism in

terms of disability. And so I was taking that class when I was preparing for my qualifying exams and so the idea formed from there. But really the writing took off in the summer of racial reckoning of 2020. So my book was long overdue. By the time my editor contacted me, I think it was in May or June of 2020, and I thought there's no way he could want that book now when the world is in crisis. But I'm grateful that they pushed me to finish it during that time because it was watching what was going on with the world in terms of the protests for George Floyd and also listening to the rhetoric that was circulating in relationship to the pandemic that made me understand the importance of the work I was doing in this book in so far as I could see how narratives around race and health were on the rise in the middle of both this moment of the pandemic and also protest around Black lives and how they matter.

So it allowed me to push through and connect some of the threads in the book. And so I would say if I was putting an autobiographical spin on things, that living in that moment at that time allowed me to finish the book.

Fred Lawrence: It wasn't just an assignment, it was a calling.

Dennis Tyler: Okay, yes, it was a calling.

Fred Lawrence: I don't believe in that stuff, but I don't exactly not believe in that stuff either. Jennifer?

Jennifer Raff: So I'm going to push back a little bit. I am in the book quite a bit. I feel like I am, but in a controlled way in a couple of different ways. So in some ways the book, the progression of my book and the understanding of how the Americas were peopled, at least how we think we understand it, which is probably wrong, and also how we have come to that understanding. Those are the inter-weaved themes in the book that mirrors my own education in my own field. So I started out as a kid, and I understand not all of us loved archeology, but many of us as children wanted to be archeologists. I never grew out of that. I also wanted to be an astronaut, but that didn't work out. I never grew out of my love of archeology of human history, but I also developed a love of biology as I watched my mother develop her career as a neuroscientist, and I could not choose between them, and I'm sorry you've already heard this, but I couldn't choose between the fields and my education.

And then Jurassic Park came out, it tells you how old I am, and so I realized one could apply biology to solving questions in anthropology, in archeology specifically. And so I continued on that trajectory, and I never wanted to study Native American DNA, because my understanding as an undergraduate was that Native Americans were not interested in having their genome sequenced and having their DNA studied. And I was very wrong about that. As I matured as a scientist, I learned that there are tribes who want to use genetics as a tool for understanding their histories, but are reluctant to put it mildly because of this abusive history that colonial scientists have had in imposing, I'll say our because I'm one of them, our research agendas on these tribes. And I really

firmly believe that there is a path forward to do this work ethically, or I wouldn't be doing it honestly. But it has to be done with scientists as at minimum the partner, the equal partner, and ideally really more as a backseat driver, not driver, but as a passenger.

I consider myself in my own research, my scholarly work, to be working for tribes, to be working with them, not to be imposing my research agenda on them. That's not always been the case. I'm not going to say that I'm the most ethical scientist here. I have learned, I've grown as a scientist and learned this, and the book reflects that learning and it also reflects a number of other themes, me becoming a parent and realizing that all the genomes, many of the genomes that we have that tell our histories are from children. And that was very, very difficult to tell those stories as a mother of a young child having to deal with these ancient children who had died very young. Anyway, so I am in the book in various ways, but I suppose I'm a bit subtle. So I hope that answered your question.

Fred Lawrence: It does, it does.

Deborah Cohen: I think for me, you're right. So ridiculously enough, I spent the early 21st century buried in the 1930s, and the idea that the 1930s would ever be a refuge, as you know, is a ridiculous proposition. And only maybe the early 21st century is a place where you can see the 1930s as a refuge. I think where I'm in the book probably most vividly is that as a historian, you know that you are always explaining something that could have gone in a different way. But when you work in journalist records, reporters' records, what you realize is all the things, all those moments of contingency actually acted out and thought through by people who do think that they might go a different way or who assume that the path that we know is the path that everyone traveled was just impossible to think through. The book most significantly was an attempt to try to show readers what I felt so powerfully in those archives, which was the contingency, the possibilities that things could have been different, and the experience of people who really felt the world crashing in around them in a way that wrecked their lives. I guess the last thing I would say is that many historians are journalists (inaudible) They're the people who want to ask questions of the archive rather than of other people. So there's that too.

Fred Lawrence: There was a review of Arthur Schlesinger's famous The Age of Jackson, which it was said was a book about events in the 19th century, and on every page it endorsed Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And I don't want to be too reductionist about any of your works because they certainly stand on their own and in their own subject, but it seems to me there's an imminence to each of them as well. And Dennis, you've already reflected on some of this, although the summer of 2020 is already behind us, and we've moved on from that in many ways. And yet the questions you ask about

othering, how we treat others, the notion of different abilities being a way in which we relate to others in the society seems to be very, very much of the moment.

Jennifer, we talked about in my introduction of you that the whole question, what does it mean to be an indigenous people? And who gets to say that? And what does that mean is a question spectacularly of the moment, painfully of the moment.

And Deborah, you said yourself in your introduction, the price that reporters are paying right now in 2023 is painful beyond words. So your work stands on its own, but I wonder how you think of each of your works as a moment of imminence of a 2023 moment as we read them right now.

Deborah Cohen: I think for me, that moment of imminence is actually about reporting and about journalism and what does it mean, what will happen if we are in a world where there are no sources of news for even middle-sized cities. The so-called news deserts as they're now called are expanding rapidly, desertification of the media landscape and recognizing as well with some kind of nostalgia. And here it is, the 1930s again, but with some kind of nostalgia that the people who I write about were really, really famous. There were bars named after John Gunther in Baghdad, Dorothy Thompson was on the page of... These are people who are on the front pages completely recognizable and paid vast amounts of money. They all became really rich and did what was recognized to be not uncontroversial, but socially valuable work. So I think it is the sense of trying to recapture that moment and imagining as a friend of mine said, "Well, what would Dorothy Thompson say if she came and joined us here?" And I think what we are seeing now would be in a way kind of unimaginable to her because though she recognized the precarious nature of democracy as it was being experienced in the Weimar Republic in Germany, she still had a basic faith that as Sinclair Lewis writes, "It can't happen here." But she actually did think it couldn't happen here at some fundamental level.

Jennifer Raff: I could talk about this for an hour. I will try to be short. So as you brought up earlier, 23,000 year old footprints in New Mexico, how does that relate to the present day? And it actually really, really does. The unique history of the peoples of the Americas, the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the first peoples of the Americas, means that they were genetically isolated from all other populations of the earth for a prolonged period of time, many, many thousands of years. As a result of this, they evolved unique genetic variants that are seen in no other populations. Biologically this is fascinating, but also highly relevant to them, to their descendants. People who have inherited these variants are understudied in the massive genomic studies that are being undertaken right now. Studies of complete genomes for precision genomic medicine, these populations are underserved because the history of research of these populations is so horrific by my field. I mean, we need to understand that it is my

people who have done this, that they are reluctant to participate in this precision genomic medicine initiative and this research and for good reason, very good reason.

So they're not reaping the benefits of genomic research as a result of that. And this is an extremely complicated, extremely thorny topic, especially when you add in the fact that lots of white folks have histories, family histories, oral traditions of having native ancestors and claim native identity. So every time I fly and somebody wants to talk to me, they want to know what I do, and then I tell them, and then they tell me about their Cherokee princess ancestor. It's really hard to have to tell them, "Probably not." This is a whole thing. The entanglement of ancestry, identity, and genetics is complex and very, very relevant, and so we're right in the middle of that. My field, we are right in the middle of that. And what I was hoping, one of the things I was hoping to do with my book is to educate my colleagues who are specialists, but maybe not anthropologists or maybe don't get out and talk to native communities as much to educate them on why Native Americans are often reluctant to participate in their research.

It's not because native folks are anti-science, quite the opposite, but they have a very legitimate reason for not doing this. There are native scientists who are working to conduct this research on their own terms in culturally appropriate ways. And I really want to support them because I think that is where this field needs to go. But it's going to be a very long path. And I hope that answers your questions, but it is highly relevant. It is very, very relevant for genomic research in general and in the Americas in particular.

Dennis Tyler: One of the things I was trying to do in my project is expand the way that folks think about the concept of disability. Because of the Americans with Disabilities Act, many folks tend to think about disability only in terms of individual impairment. And one of the things that I'm trying to highlight in the book is that that was only one operational use of that term. It's also a way of thinking about legal restrictions that prevent certain bodies from moving into certain spaces or impairs mobility in other ways. And so I think regarding your question about the imminence factor, I think living through a pandemic where we not only thought about what makes certain bodies vulnerable to a disease, but also how there are structures in place that also make certain bodies more vulnerable to a disease as well. In so far as not everybody had access to the same kind of care that folks who are wealthy did. And that informed the work in some way, even though my project was looking both at the disablement as discourse and as experience experienced in Black literature and culture, I think looking at the project through the lens of what I saw unfolding during the pandemic allowed me to think about how that rhetoric, about who gets included in the national body politic and who does not, who gets excluded, allowed for the project to be a lot more richer.

Fred Lawrence: When I do Phi Beta Kappa induction ceremonies, one of the things I say to the inductees is that even though I haven't had a chance to meet them or know them individually, that I know three things about them collectively, due to the fact that they are about to be inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. One is that they got themselves into one of only 290 or so colleges or universities that have chapters for which they should be very proud. The second is that they achieved at the highest level, took a broad program and achieved at the highest level for which they should be very proud. Third, they can't be proud about. Third, they can just be grateful for, and that is somebody at some point said the right word, gave the right encouragement, turned the key that turned the lock. When I say that, it never fails. I read the room with my eyes while I'm saying it, and I can see there are people who are thinking of it. And I usually say, "Some of you are thinking of that person right now," and you get a lot of this from people. So who's that person? Who turned the key that opened the lock? Who said the right word? Who sent you in a direction that might have been otherwise? But it wasn't. It was this direction.

Jennifer. I didn't tell you in advance I was going to start with you.

Jennifer Raff: Okay, yes, I'm going first. Okay, so many people, many people, I thanked a number of them, but I'm going to talk about one person I haven't thanked yet who is my late ex-father-in-law, which is a complicated relationship.

Dennis Tyler: Well, we have time. It's...

Jennifer Raff: And my very much living ex-mother-in-law. When I was a high school student, I started dating a guy, eventually married him, didn't work out, sad, but his parents were professors at Indiana University, which is where I ended up going to undergraduate and graduate school because of this guy. And they were both professors of biology, and I still carry their last name. My husband teases me about it incessantly. My now husband teases me about it incessantly. But Rudolph Raff was one of the founders of the field of evo-devo.

Audience Member:Rudy.

Jennifer Raff: Rudy, you know Rudy? He was an extraordinary person and I mean, I kind of realized that. But he was also this wonderful man who I knew as a second father and when I was applying for graduate school... So he got me into, he encouraged my scientific education, he gave me books constantly, pop science books, might've had an influence on me. And he's just so gentle and kind and encouraged me in the lab and in my research.

I remember distinctly applying for graduate school at Indiana University, and I had gone to talk to the graduate director and I told him, "I want to apply for graduate school." And he said, "What's your GPA?" And I said, "3.7." He's like, "You're not going to get in." I was so sad. I was so crushed. And he gave me this whole long spiel about

how I wasn't cut out for graduate school. I went home and cried. And then I went to Rudy and I told him about this. And both he and Beth, his wife, my ex-mother-in-law said, "No, just apply. You're fine." They encouraged me and I went to graduate school because of them. And I think that was one of those inflection points in your life. And there were many that they gave me, but that was one of them.

Fred Lawrence: It could have gone another way.

Jennifer Raff: It could have gone another way.

Fred Lawrence: It's only in retrospect that it's inevitable.

Deborah Cohen: I also feel like I have so many, it's almost hard to choose between them. I guess I should first of all say my mother, if she were here, she would've sold you every one of you a copy of the book. And really, I do want her to hear that on the podcast. She has given the entire marketing and publicity section at Random House a run for their money. They wonder why so many books have been sold in Louisville, Kentucky and that is the reason why.

And just to say probably minus a person who, as he would've said himself, joined the majority, my father who gave me copies of all of the books from the people who I wrote about when I was very young, and they were somewhat off cycle because they were published from the thirties to the fifties, more or less, but he had an interest in beliefs. He was a Louisville Kentucky lawyer, but he really, really loved to read. So yeah, that person.

Dennis Tyler: I also have many people to thank, I mean, I've already thanked my parents, so I've covered that. It isn't so much a person who turned the key, but I would say it's an organization. The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship that I received when I was a sophomore at Stanford basically put me on this track to pursue a career in academia and become a professor. Mellon Mays is designed to encourage students of color to pursue the PhD and enter the academy. And I am almost certain now, had I not gotten that fellowship, I would not be where I am today. I would not be a professor, certainly. I'm not sure I'd be on this stage talking about my book and winning an award for my book with Phi Beta Kappa, because it's through that community of scholars. Other graduate students who were trying to figure out how to do this work, teach in the classroom or do Black studies, but also more senior scholars who were there to advise me and counsel me on all aspects of the job that I think saw me through graduating with my PhD, but also landing my first job at Fordham and getting tenure eventually.

I credit that organization a lot with my career path because they've encouraged so many students of color to pursue the PhD. Most of us probably were thinking about law school or in my case performance, but because I have access to research money, but also a set of advisors who could guide me through the process, I'm really happy that I applied for that fellowship, got it, and pursued this career.

Fred Lawrence: The Mays of Mellon Mays is the legendary Dr. Mays, president of Morehouse, who was instrumental to getting Morehouse's Phi Beta Kappa chapter almost as an act of personal will. And they did have a chapter near the very end of his presidency, and I know from one of our five Beta Kappa Senate members, the inestimable Michael Lomax, who was part of that first class who was inducted, Dr. Mays left nothing to chance and called all of the young men, it being an all men school, and said, you're going to do this, and you're going to do this, and you're going to be in Phi Beta Kappa. And I think that spirit animates very much the Mellon Mays program.

Dennis Tyler: It's an incredible program.

Fred Lawrence: Okay, one last question before we call it a night. I teach at Georgetown Law School. I teach courses in higher education law, free speech on campus, but also criminal procedure from my own misspent earlier life as an assistant US attorney. I tell my students that sleeping well at night is an overrated virtue. The most important thing is to make sure you're up at night for the right reasons. You don't want to be up at night for trivial reasons. You want the things that keep you up at night to be the things that are important, that occupy us. So friends, back to the original order. What keeps you up at night?

Dennis Tyler: Well, I have to disagree with you. Sleep is very important.

Fred Lawrence: Well, I'm glad we're comfortable with one another here.

Dennis Tyler: I prioritize my sleep every night, I have a whole ritual. My parents can attest to that.

Fred Lawrence: Hey, hey, hey. I ask the questions here.

Dennis Tyler: I know. So I'm sleeping fine. No. What keeps me up at night? This is a charged question. Everything. The world is a mess right now. I would just say what keeps me going, right? It's sort of like-

Fred Lawrence: Okay, what keeps you up at night or what gets you going in the morning? I'll take either of those.

Dennis Tyler: What gets you going? I mean, one of the things that I'm encouraged by as a professor who teaches young students in the classroom is how well-adjusted and clear they are about their boundaries when it comes to mental health stuff. And so what keeps me going, what energizes me is being in the classroom space with them and being able to teach them specific topics around African American literature, culture, and Black studies, and have them receive that message from me on a daily basis. The stuff that keeps me up at night, though, I'm concerned about the wars that are currently at work. I'm concerned about the ongoing health crisis. We claim the pandemic, it's over, but it's really ongoing in various ways. Yeah, I mean, I would've to think more about that, Fred, I'm not sure. It's a lot that keeps me up, but I prioritize my sleep so much that I think-

Fred Lawrence: Well, I'm going to have to take a page out of that book.

Dennis Tyler: Melatonin helps.

Fred Lawrence: I'm not sure I'll be able to pull it off.

Jennifer Raff: I'm very jealous of your ability to sleep. I am a very light sleeper. The thing that wakes me up at night is my 120 pound German Shepherd-Rottweiler mix who moves around a lot. She's very noisy and she wakes me up all the time. The thing that keeps me up is geopolitics and this growing sense of dread and all the things, worrying about the world that my son is going to be living in as an adult, and also my students, my graduate students. I hope they're not going to see this either. My graduate students, I worry about them and the kind of careers that are going to be available to them. My field is very specialized and there are not many jobs in it. And so how do I serve them and help them find a career that's meaningful to them and just all the things. Anyway.

Deborah Cohen: I'm just going to answer the what gets me up in the morning because I'm looking out at a group of people who teach and administer and make it possible for other people to learn and young people and our duty to them to try to be optimistic and point the way forward. So thank you all for all the work that you're doing to make that happen and to Phi Beta Kappa as an organization for doing that as well.

Fred Lawrence: My thanks to all of you. Congratulations to all of you. What I said in my most recent secretary's column, the Key Reporter, is that one could think of as continuing education. We talk about lifelong learning in Phi Beta Kappa and lifelong learning in the liberal arts. Our book awards are a curriculum of a liberal arts education to engage in each of these three works, different works to be sure. Common threads, I think you'll agree that are there. People who sleep well or not, worry or not, but commit themselves to the life of the mind and to not keeping it inside, but to writing. And we partially write because we write. It's what it means to be a scholar, but we partially write to engage with others. Others who we know and others we'll never know. It's an act of trust really, isn't it? To write. And so to have produced what you've produced and to have given us our 2023 curriculum in the liberal arts and sciences for Phi Beta Kappa is a gift you've given to us. Thank you all and congratulations.

This podcast is produced by Phantom Center Media & Entertainment. Kojin Tashiro is lead producer and mixed this episode. Michelle Baker is the editor. Hadley Kelly is the Phi Beta Kappa producer on our show. Our theme song is Back to Back by Yan Perchuk. To learn more about the work of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and our Visiting Scholar program, please visit pbk.org.

Thanks for listening. I'm Fred Lawrence. Until next time.

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