



TRANSCRIPT

Key Conversations with Phi Beta Kappa **“2019 Book Awards Dinner Keynote Roundtable”**

The Phi Beta Kappa book awards are given annually to three outstanding scholarly books published in the United States. 2019’s winners are Imani Perry for *Looking for Lorraine: the Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry*; Adam Frank, for *Light of the Stars: Alien Worlds and the Fate of the Earth*; and Sarah Igo for *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America*. They revealed their thinking behind the works we celebrated and shared stories of unmatched discovery, spoke of love beyond adversity, and fueled our collective imagination with examples of unbound human curiosity.

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.

Musical interlude

Lawrence: Thank you for joining us for 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.

Most of them are Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars who travel the country for us, visiting campuses and presenting free public lectures that we invite you to attend. For the full Visiting Scholar schedule, please visit pbk.org.

Today, we're doing something a little different. This episode was taped live in Washington, D.C. on December 6, 2019 at the Phi Beta Kappa Annual Book Awards Dinner.

Lawrence:

We are clearly feeling the missed presence of my colleague and predecessor, John Churchill, the 9th Secretary. I like to remind people that more people have walked on the moon than have been Secretary of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Now, if you want to know what really makes a Phi Bet, I said that one time at an induction ceremony, that "I'm the 10th Secretary, more people have walked on the moon than been Secretary of Phi Beta Kappa," and a young woman in the front row pulls out an iPhone, starts to fact check me.

So, I caught her eye and I said, "I'm the 10th Secretary. Twelve people have walked on the moon." She smiles at me, she goes back to her iPhone. And then, about 30 seconds later, I get one of these, right? [a thumbs up sign] The thumbs up that says, "Okay, you're all right." All that was missing was for her to say, "Okay, boomer," which I felt coming.

But there's a special bond among 10 of us, and I think we do, Ken Greene—the only other one of the 10 still with us—Ken Greene and I do feel an affinity with the five undergraduates at the College of William and Mary, who gathered in the Raleigh Tavern in the Apollo Room 243 years ago last night, December 5th.

So, if you feel that spirit, you know, we do that sort of thing here at Phi Beta Kappa. And the fact that there they were, at the early days of a revolution that they had no idea how it was going to come out and they had every reason to fear what the results might be, and they had every reason to think that some of them would suffer violence, and they weren't wrong.

About five years after they founded that chapter at William and Mary, the British occupied Williamsburg and burned it to the ground along with all the records of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. So, had they not decided to go up the Boston Post Road and open chapters at Yale, and then at Harvard—yeah, we'd like to remind them Yale, and then Harvard. That's the last Harvard-Yale line of the night, except for the fact that Yale did win in overtime this year. I'm just saying... Double over time, thank you.

Had they not started those two new chapters, we'd all be someplace else tonight. There would be no Phi Beta Kappa Society. It's a remarkable

belief in something bigger than themselves that they had, which connects to where we are tonight, maintaining the highest academic and intellectual standards. That's our work every day, and it explains why when we get together and celebrate, how do we cut loose? We have a book award event.

Musical Interlude

Lawrence: The Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards are given annually to three outstanding scholarly books published in the United States, and we welcome this year's winners in a lively discussion about their works that cover topics from literary criticism, to science, to history. The Christian Gauss Award recognizes outstanding books in the field of literary scholarship or criticism. This year the award went to Imani Perry, the Hughes-Rogers professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, for her book *Looking for Lorraine: the Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry*.

Imani Perry: *What I was trying to do in telling Lorraine's story, as opposed to the cradle-to-grave conventional kind of biographical form, with all of the details, I wanted to capture the essence of her personality, her character, her intellect, her desires, who she was.*

Lawrence: The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science encourages literate and scholarly interpretations of the physical and biological sciences and mathematics. This year's award went to Adam Frank, co-founder of 13.7, the cosmos and culture blog for NPR, and a regular contributor to All Things Considered, The Atlantic, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, to name just a few. His award-winning book is called *Light of the Stars: Alien Worlds and the Fate of the Earth*.

Adam Frank: *The beauty of looking at other worlds, right? There are 10 billion trillion planets in the right place for life to form in the universe. So the idea that we're the first time this has happened, it's like you've got to really think that nature is perversely biased against civilizations. So this story's happened before!*

Lawrence: The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award recognizes studies that contribute significantly to historical, philosophical or religious interpretations of the human condition. This year's award went to Sarah Igo, the Andrew Jackson Professor of History and Director of the Program in American

Studies at Vanderbilt University, for her book, *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America*.

Sarah Igo: *My book came out, I think it was the same week or right around the same moment as Cambridge Analytica broke. And people kept saying, "What a timely book," but it wasn't timely at all; I had been working on the book for nearly a decade, really.*

Lawrence: For a full list of past award winners, please visit pbk.org/awards.

Lawrence: So, I hope everybody has had a nice evening so far. Everybody having fun?

Okay, so those of you who submitted questions, thank you. I will try to get to as many as I can. I've got a few things I want to start us with, and apparently the challenge is to see the common threads among our three books, which seems so obvious to me. I can't imagine what the concern is.

So here's a place to start. To a certain extent, it seems to me that all writing, scholarship very much included, cannot help but be somewhat autobiographical. We reveal a great deal of ourselves in our work. Imani, you obviously in some ways do that most openly in this book, which you describe as "third-person memoir." So, I do want you to share with us a little bit about what a third-person memoir means.

But, Sarah, your interest in privacy does not strike the reader as solely an academic interest; it's coming from a deep place. And goodness knows, Adam, you've been looking for little men in the stars for a long time. So, one could talk about these three books as major academic enterprises, and they are, but I'd like you to share—each of you, if you would—the autobiographical piece that is consciously, or maybe unconsciously, revealed through the work. So, our third-person memoirist seems to me to be the right place to start.

Perry: Okay, well let me say first, a third-person memoir. What I was trying to do in telling Lorraine's story, as opposed to the conventional kind of cradle-to-grave biographical form with all of the details, I wanted to capture the essence of her personality, her character, her intellect, her desires, who she was. And to distill, out of these thousands of pages that I had to recount her life, who she was. And part of what drew me to her were these similarities.

I mean, one is the more self-indulgent piece, which is that she was a voracious reader who was curious about everything and wanted to do everything and I identified with that.

Lawrence: Kind of saw yourself in that?

Perry: Yeah, and it helped me be a little bit more gracious with myself. But also her relationship to the deep South, her relationship to Chicago. I had spent a lot of time being a Black woman who had a very close relationship to... She married a Jewish American man who was a leftist, who was like my adoptive father in many ways. And so, this relationship between roots in the deep South, and the leftist Jewish tradition, and living a life of the mind, and seeing her as a muse but also as someone who was running into a thousand different directions at once, and was self-deprecating and thought that was funny. All of that resonated.

Lawrence: And how much of that did you know that brought you to the project? And how much of that did you discover in the project?

Perry: Oh, that's an interesting question. Some of it I knew. I mean, in terms of her political identity, I knew very well in part because she was one of my father's role models. I did not know the breadth of her intellectual life nor the depth, and that was one of the most exciting things about getting in the archive. And it was really great to see all of these books, and I was like, "Yes, I understand why you read that book," as I was digging through her pages, and her relationship to reading, and her relationship to W.B. DuBois. I didn't have a sense of the depth of that or Paul Robeson, all of these figures. So, it was a lot of discovery.

Lawrence: And we often read the words that people say, or read the words that people wrote, but we need to read the words that people read-

Perry: Read. Absolutely.

Lawrence: ... to really understand who they are. Right? So, what's with this privacy stuff? Were you one of those kids who didn't share? Is that...

Igo: I actually consider myself not to be someone who has been very concerned at a deep personal level with privacy. And actually, I think my interest in privacy was as much intellectual as it was personal, although I'm sure there is something personal behind it, that the intellectual

interest was in just a fascination with how we change our minds about things.

And maybe that's biographical as someone who was raised in a particular way, in college and academic life, and books really changed my mind about some of those things. But, I think I became an intellectual historian because I was curious about how people did change their minds about things that seem essential and eternal and fundamental, like privacy. That, in fact, if you're a historian, you recognize our ideas about those things change and change in really radical ways but in ways that we can't always recognize.

And so, the beauty of a topic like privacy--and it was actually more normality. And my first book was that it was, to so many people, such an important and fundamental concept. And yet you could place it historically and situate it historically. So I realized I'm not really answering your question, but I'm going to take the privilege as a privacy scholar of doing that.

Lawrence: You've told me everything I needed to know about you and privacy. So, Adam, at the age of five were you glancing up at the stars and thinking, "there must be other intelligent beings up there, and I could write about that someday"?

Frank: Well, autobiographically, I grew up in industrial New Jersey and I was the only Jewish kid in the entire town, and it was very Roman Catholic, Irish and Italian, and it was difficult. My stepfather was the first African American state senator, was a civil rights leader. So, there was just a giant target on my back from early on, and the value of other worlds.

So I fell in love with astronomy because my dad had science fiction books. He had all *Amazing Worlds*, Isaac Asimov. And I remember it as a vivid image of when I was five years old looking at the covers of those magazines and the pictures of the astronauts in their missions, entire suits bouncing on the moon, and it was so thrilling and it was an alternative to crappy experiences I was having in grade school.

So, the value of other worlds, right, the value, and I think, the other autobiographical piece is I took a year and a half off between undergraduate and graduate, and I worked in New York City. I was a bouncer at the Rocky Horror Picture Show on Eighth Street.

Igo: Oh, wow.

Frank: Did a lot of weird jobs. But then, I ended up at the Goddard-

Lawrence: We're going to learn something about privacy from you.

Frank: One of our jobs was to sweep the bathrooms. You're like, "Oh, okay, whatever, man, it's good." But the job I finally got was at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, which is this NASA installation on 113th Street above the diner that's in Seinfeld. Like, who knew there was a NASA? And it was, it was the place where the first climate model, some of the first climate models were done.

And I got hired to do basic computer programming. And I remember asking, one day after being there for a month, asking my boss, "What are we doing here?" And she sat me down, this was '85, and explained to me like, "Well, we think the climate is changing. We don't really know yet. We're waiting for the signal," which, for them, was the temperature appearing above the background. And here's what's going to happen.

I remember walking out of there. I'm 22 years old and walking down Riverside Park and just being like, "Oh my God. The world is going to end." So I've been interested in climate science and I watched the reaction to it. And for me, still, the same principle holds up the value of other worlds. We need to understand. For me, there are these two stories of thinking about other civilizations, thinking about what's happening to our civilization right now and realizing we're at a point in our development, our intellectual development, to understand that actually those two stories are the same story, and that it's going to help, right?

Because this is the problem: we have this problem of "How do we deal with this issue?" There's a lot of despair, but recognizing like, "Oh, we're not the first. This has happened before." And so, what can we learn even just by thinking about it if we don't have data yet?

Lawrence: So, Sarah set for me the challenge to see the common themes among your books. So, let me try this one and we'll come back in reverse order this time. I'll start with Adam. I mean, it was good for God to start with Adam, so I figure it's-

Frank: Next.

Perry: That's really good.

Frank: What are you saying? Are you sort of-

Lawrence: I'm just another lawyer asking questions, right? One of the things that is striking about all three books, I think, is that each of you is dealing with an issue of extraordinary immediacy. I mean, climate change certainly is one of the top issues that people are concerned with.

Privacy and the whole nature of "What does it mean to be a person?" "Can we be private in any way? Can we keep ourselves private?" Imani, your book, replete with issues of an early LGBTQ world that barely has the vocabulary for it, but what that means today. And, of course, you end in this extraordinary compelling scene, coming upon Lorraine Hansberry's grave in 2017, right?

So, we're there with you in the present. And yet, what you all do is you ground that pretty far back.

I mean, obviously with Hansberry you can't ground it that much further back, but it's the '40s and '50s and '60s and the world that she is in. The notion of privacy, Sarah, you take us all the way back to the late 19th century and the beginning of those notions, and Adam, you're talking about the Greeks way back, in terms of notions of other civilizations, other worlds.

So, how do you see your work as that kind of a bridge between those foundational roots that take us back, that you all quite consciously spend a lot of time on, and then, the immediacy that you're also all trying to get us to resonate with and we do in all three books?

Frank: Well, I think for climate change, and one of the things I've seen as a public scientist when I talk with people, is that there's a lot of the denial, or at least the organized denial is able to play on people's difficulty in understanding this idea of the earth as a planet. It's hard to sort of wrap your mind around the idea.

There's a philosopher who calls climate change a hyper object. It's just so large that it's very, you know, people don't have the imaginative tool set to deal with it. And the thing I really wanted to explain to people is that, as I say in the book, not only do I deal with other planets, but I deal with the history of the earth, and that the earth has worn many masks, and that this is not the first time in the history of the earth that life has

through its success, one particular form of life through its success, has utterly changed to the geo-chemical, biological functioning of the planet.

So, the earlier example is the blue green algae. There would be no oxygen in the atmosphere if it wasn't for the fact that 2 billion years ago, life figured out how to use water for photosynthesis. And that is what released all the oxygen into the atmosphere. For 2 billion years, the earth always had an atmosphere, there was life on it, but there was no oxygen. If you landed then and tried to take a breath, you would have died.

So, I was trying to show people that, look, climate change is not that hard to understand. The idea that we did it is not that hard to understand. This has been happening a lot over history. And so, if you can imbibe and digest that idea, maybe it's going to be easier for you to see, "Oh yeah, we did this, we should have expected this to happen." That's the one thing I really wanted people—or one of the things I wanted people to get from the book—because then you're in a much better position to say, "Okay, now we got to be smart and figure out what to do about it."

Igo:

So, one of the things about working on a book for a long time is that the context for the book changed as I wrote it, and I wasn't thinking about Equifax and Cambridge Analytica and data breaches actually when the first kernel of this book came to me. It came from a very different source and I think a different moment in our privacy discussions in public.

My book came out, I think it was the same week or right around the same moment as Cambridge Analytica broke. And people kept saying, "What a timely book," but it wasn't timely at all; I had been working on the book for nearly a decade, really. But the advantage of that was that I think I didn't write the book to explain Cambridge Analytica. I wrote the book to try to get inside much longer trajectories that have, I suppose, set the stage for our current dilemmas around data, around privacy, around exposure, around leaks, and so forth.

So, in a way, my object was not to try to explain this present moment, but it was an affirmation that history can help us get to and comprehend our present moment. And just maybe one example to make that less abstract is, I think many of our current narratives, stories we tell in the news, even in popular books, around privacy, is that it's about bad actors. It's about, take your pick: it's about Google, or Facebook, or the NSA, or some other agency or person.

And what became very clear to me is that is part of the problem, but the larger problem: it's a human problem and it's a societal problem about how much of ourselves we want to give over to those who would know us often for very logical and rational ends. Most of the invasions of privacy that we experience today have a logic to them that many people agreed to and believed in its own domain made sense.

What we, I think, didn't understand was the accumulation of all of these different histories and trajectories that have produced the present that we're now in and can't really get our heads around in a similar way, maybe, to the way that we can't get our heads around climate change and the Anthropocene.

So, I'm very happy that this book seems to speak to the present but I didn't actually quite intend it to speak as pointedly to the present as-

Lawrence: It might even have turned out to be more relevant than you wished.

Igo: I guess that's right. And, in fact, has made me more concerned about privacy in my own life, watching what's happened over the last number of years.

Lawrence: Imani?

Perry: So, I'll actually take the issue of Lorraine's sexuality as a way to enter into this point. So, what I was thinking about actually as you were speaking is that had she not had a private arena to think about questions around gender and sexuality and race—and the way that they intersected in her life and actually enriched her political analysis—had she not had the space privately to do that, not only would it never have been done for her, but also she likely would not have had a career.

Because this is a period in which gay and lesbian clubs are still being raided and names are being published in newspapers, and it is a career-destroying thing to come out. And what's extraordinary about her is that there's been this sort of ongoing question. I kind of evaded the question, but in some ways it's whether or not to out Hansberry. That's what the conversation was.

But when you look at her personal archive, there's a folder with the pseudonym she used for same-gender loving fiction, Emily Jones, that is maintained in pristine fashion. So, it's very clear that there was an effort

to save this in a private arena for a time when it could be public and actually do the work that it was supposed to do.

Lawrence: It would have been very easy to destroy it if she wanted to destroy it and obviously chose not to do that.

Perry: Very easy. Preserved, yes. And some of the pieces actually, so she does-- she's written... I keep thinking of her in the present, but works that go back to the classical Greek period and talk about issues of race and gender and sexuality then, right? Among the work that she did that is unpublished, Native American-themed fiction or speculative fiction.

So, she's moving across time and place. So her attention to both history and thinking about the questions, these big questions, in very particular contexts, I think is actually sort of instructive for what we're talking about. That there is a way that, one, you learn from history, but also you can learn across history that there are big human questions that manifest themselves in particular ways at a moment in time.

So, she resented when people would call *A Raisin in the Sun* a universal play. She said, "No, this is a Chicago play, and it's a Black Chicago play." But the questions that it raises about home, about aspiration, about the relationship between the desire for wealth and desire for a meaningful life, and what it means to be ghettoized and what it means to transplant. All those things have a life far beyond the south side of Chicago, but they're relevant in the terms of the south side of Chicago, in particular.

So, I wanted to replicate that in some ways, right? So, how do I take her life, the particulars of her life, and say, "Well, what do these questions raise for us today?"

Lawrence: Let me take a couple of questions now from the floor.

Imani, you'll like the fact that this one ends with thank you and congratulations.

Perry: Yeah. That's great. Thanks.

Lawrence: So, that's a nice question. The rest of it gets harder, not that much harder. You mentioned that writing *Looking for Lorraine* changed your life. How so, and what was the most poignant moment during your research and writing?

Perry: Oh, wow. I have always wanted to be a writer. Becoming an academic was in some ways a way to still get to write and not have to engage in the full riskiness of becoming a writer. It was a practical decision for me and it opened me up to the ability to see myself as someone who could write in a way that connects emotionally and not just intellectually to the reader.

And so, wanting writing that can get there. So, that is the way it changed my life. And it actually opened me to new audiences of readers because it's the first time that I've been able to talk to people who just love books and ideas and not just in the... I love academics, but it just is a much broader world.

So, it changed my life and it made me feel as though I could be a writer in a much fuller way. But it was in speaking about the book that I had what was the most profound moment, which is: I gave a talk at a very small library in New York and it turned out that her best friend from elementary school was in the audience.

Igo: Oh, wow.

Perry: And she is-

Lawrence: Totally unbeknownst to you?

Perry: Unbeknownst to me. In her nineties, and sharp, and brilliant, and gorgeous, and exactly what you would imagine Lorraine Hansberry's best friend to be like. The affirmation that she gave me in saying, "You captured her" was unbelief. But a similar moment with her cousin who lives in D.C. where we both burst into tears. It was the connection with the people who knew her very well. That was, yeah.

Lawrence: Wow. Sarah, a little more pointed one for you. Did your research lead you to raise questions about companies like ancestry.com and 23andMe and the ramifications of DNA gathering?

Igo: Yes. I actually am currently working on a grant with colleagues at Vanderbilt University on just these questions. So it certainly propelled me into some of those questions around not just a genetic material as part of our conceptions--ever-shifting conceptions around privacy--but also about the many ways in which, like other forms of data or information about us, this stuff is being collected, housed, shared, warehoused, sold in ways that are very murky to the person that they started with, making

me think a lot actually about our ideas about ownership, whether we own ourselves, and our data, and our stories.

I mean, many of you will know the story of the Golden State Killer from a couple of years back. The cold case that was cracked, not by discovering that man's own genetic material, but the material that connected him to other people in commercial ancestry sites. And what you may not know is that many, many cases have already been cracked in the same way in the wake of that case, and we're hearing much less publicity about them.

So yes, it's made me think a lot about the responsibility that those companies might have and why it is that they don't actually have a lot of responsibility to maintain that information in very secure fashion, and about, of course, the porousness between law enforcement and commercial outfits, and voluntary data-giving and not-so-voluntary data-giving in American society right now.

Lawrence: Adam, this will prove to you this is a Phi Beta Kappa audience. This is from a plant. Somebody who actually knows this stuff and therefore is dangerous. Questioner wants to know: how do you solve the Fermi Paradox? If there are advanced civilizations out there, how come we have no sign of them?

Frank: Well, you know, I just wrote a paper on this. This is a great question. One of the things I'm trying to do in the book is tell the story of how we started thinking seriously about other intelligences. I go all the way back to the 1700s, but it's not until the late 1950s, really, that the first steps to think scientifically about the possibility of other civilizations occurs.

And it occurs in two ways: one is with what's called the Drake equation, which I won't go into, but then the other one was the Fermi paradox. And the Fermi Paradox came from Enrico Fermi. This a story of Enrico Fermi and his friends—he was a great physicist—talking about UFOs, and they're joking around about it, and then, later on at lunch he suddenly stops and goes, "Well, where are they?"

What he really meant is, why aren't they here now? So the Fermi paradox is this idea, well, you've got all these stars and there's all these places, and if civilizations were common then why, literally, why aren't they here? Why haven't they already gotten here? And then, of course, there's the idea that like, well we've been looking right? We've been doing all this SETI, why haven't we found them?

So, there's really, in this paper we did two things. We first of all distinguish between this version of "listening" Fermi Paradox versus why aren't they here now? And it turns out the listening part is not even a paradox—we have barely started to look. People have this idea that scientists are always out there with their radio telescopes looking for intelligent life, and there's no money for it, there's no funding for it.

So, if the space of radio dials of radio stations that we had to look for, if the parameter space as we call it is like the ocean, the amount that we've actually searched for right now is a hot tub. So, if you looked in a hot tub and didn't find any dolphins, would you say, "Well that's it. There's no dolphins in the ocean"? So, that first part is just there's no—we haven't looked, we haven't even begun to look.

The second part actually turns out to be a lot more difficult to understand about "Why aren't they here?" It's hard to break the logic of that. It's a short timescale for them to get across. So in this paper, what we did is we actually modeled, we made simulations of a civilization jumping from one star system to the other and we found out like, "Oh, wow. It is really hard." The wave of expansion, or of settlement, crosses the galaxy pretty quickly.

But there are a couple of caveats which actually make things interesting. One of which is, well, you don't know when they visited. If there was a civilization that visited 3 billion years ago, would we know? And they lasted a million years, there'd be no evidence. The entire surface of the earth has been turned over many times in a billion years.

And then also what we found was that there was actually a reasonable part of parameter space and thinking about, like, one thing is we have this idea of like, "Oh, they'll just leave their civilization and land wherever." They could just come to earth and land and be like, "Hey, we'll set up shop here." But what if they need to breathe nitrogen? They need a nitrogen breathing atmosphere. Or the microbes that we have, they can't tolerate.

So, it may be the good planets are very hard to find. And when we put that in the models, what we found is that you could actually have big pockets of the galaxy be uninhabited, even though there would be other civilizations. They were even swapping spit, so to speak, different star systems, that you could have large bubbles where there were no

civilizations. And so, we could just live in one of those bubbles. So, I don't actually think the Fermi Paradox is much of a paradox when you take that into account.

Lawrence: Cool. Last question of the night and it's another common thread through all of your books, surprisingly enough. Truth to tell, on some level, you all wrote about just terrible and terrifying things, right? A brilliant, young, in some ways misunderstood woman whose talents will never fully plumb because she dies at the age of 34, right?

Privacy disappearing even as we think about it, and our whole notion of personhood evaporating in front of our eyes. And climate change in the world as we know it, disappearing with floods and tornadoes and fires and all sorts of terrible things.

And yet, each of you, it seems to me, has written a hopeful book. So, last question of the night. Do you think you've written hopeful books? And I don't mean only hopeful. I mean, they're troubling, perplexing, important works in many ways. But is there a hopeful strand there?

Perry: Yes, certainly. I think one of the things that I wanted to push against was the idea that because Hansberry just lived 34 years that her life was just tragedy. Right? In those 34 years, she accomplished an extraordinary amount. She left a great deal and she had just an unbelievable journey and a beautiful life in many ways. And I guess I wanted to give voice to that.

We tend to, particularly as Americans--we fear death, we are afraid of tragedy, but tragedy is commonplace, and so, how do I look at this story of her life in a way that allows us, actually, to make peace with the fact of tragedy and also the beauty that exists, persists, nevertheless? It is a hopeful book, and I also was hopeful that she would be re-engaged and re-embraced, and that would be good for all of us.

Igo: I found in writing about privacy, actually pretty early on, that there were certain kinds of stories out there about privacy. And I'm sure many of you know them and maybe even have said them, that privacy is over, that kids today don't care about it, that if we ever had it, it's gone or it's about to be extinct.

And that didn't seem right to me either from a daily interactions or from the sheer volume of privacy talk in evidence everywhere. And it gave me the idea that what was important to track was not maybe whether

privacy, if you even could track this, was increasing or decreasing, but the thing to pay attention to was when and where privacy was being talked about and how that came about across a fairly long period of time.

Not billions of years, but a pretty long hot time for a historian. And what became clear to me was that there has been, in this process of shape-shifting around what privacy means, a deep investment, a kind of humanistic investment, in what privacy is and can be. So, yeah, I think the story of privacy is not at all over despite the claims.

Frank:

It's interesting. There's a way in which the story we tell about climate change is, and I talk about this a lot, this idea of, "Oh, human beings suck. We're a virus, the planet can't wait to get rid of us." And that story really is just very narrow in its interpretation, and if you look at the history of the planet, you see life doing these amazing things and sometimes it's gone awry. But, like I said, wow, we changed the chemistry of an entire atmosphere, planetary atmosphere--not bad for a bunch of hairless monkeys.

The beauty of looking at other worlds, right? There are 10 billion trillion planets in the right place for life to form in the universe. So, the idea that we're the first time this has happened, it's like you've got to really think that nature is perversely biased against civilizations. So, this story's happened before. Who knows what our story is going to be?

And, yeah, climate change is an absolute existential threat, but that's really what thinking about other worlds is for, is to realize that somebody has made it through. There's ways through this. There's great hope in this story, because climate change shows how powerful we've become, and if we can marshal ourselves and evolve new behaviors, there's literally millions of years in front of us, and who knows what we could do?

Lawrence:

Well, I have to ask you to join me in expressing our appreciation for our wonderful award winners. Thank you all for coming. Have safe trips home. We'll look forward to seeing you next year for the 2020 Book Awards Dinner. Good night.

Musical interlude

Lawrence:

This podcast is produced by Lantigua Williams & Co. Paola Mardo is our sound designer. The field producer on this episode was Ronald Young Jr. Hadley Kelly is the PBK producer on the show. Emma Forbes is our assistant producer, and 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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