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# Poetry at the White House

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Last month, the Poetry in America team headed to Washington DC for one of our most exciting conversations yet: a discussion with Vice President Joe Biden on Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays."

Read "Those Winter Sundays" here via the Poetry Foundation.

Robert Hayden, a Detroit poet, wrote poetry that often contemplated the black working-class experience in the Rust Belt of mid-century America. We were eager to hear the Vice President's reflections on the father/son relationship in Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays," and the commentary on labor and love latent in its lines.

We arrived at the White House lugging tons of equipment through the security checkpoint, and met our collaborators for this shoot: David Grubin Productions and The Atlantic.

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After managing to alienate the Secret Service and various other White House security personnel- (note to self: "about the shape of a bow and arrow case" is not a good way to describe the size of audio equipment unless you're Catniss Everdeen, and even then, not if you're trying to gain access to the Vice President and the Eisenhower Executive Office Building)- we made it into the Vice President's Ceremonial Office. Among other vice presidential ephemera, we explored the desk at which Vice Presidents since the early 20th century have sat, signed their names in the top drawer, and even, it's rumored, where Nixon hid the infamous Watergate tapes. Pretty cool.

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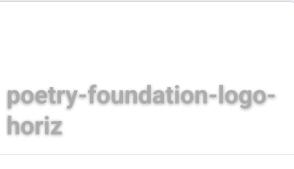
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We can't wait to share the conversation with you on our many platforms: first on *The Atlantic* (our special partners for this segment), then on TV, and eventually in Poetry of the City, our online professional development course for teachers offered through Harvard's Division of Continuing Education.

But meanwhile: what do you think about Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays"? What questions would you have asked the Vice President about this poem? We'd love to hear from you in the comments section below.

-Leah

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8 years ago



The warmth of fathers precedes all other daily things. How we are protected by the fire of our fathers' love! Even now, though my father lies cold in his grave, he warms my heart and puts fire in my soul.

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**Joseph Harris**

8 years ago edited



Emancipation

Emancipate me from destruction and wars  
 Emancipate me from drunkenness of fools  
 Emancipate me from the drugs of the lazy  
 Emancipate me from the signs of ill gotten wisdom  
 Emancipate me from a trouble soul  
 Emancipate me from the destruction of old  
 Emancipate me from the abuse of the forgotten  
 Emancipate me from the abuse of tomorrow  
 Emancipate me from the riches of a thief  
 Emancipate me from the spoil that impairs me  
 Emancipate me from the corruption of greed  
 Emancipate me from the foolishness of needs  
 Emancipate me from not knowing my Lord  
 Emancipate me from not giving to the poor  
 Emancipate me from an everlasting pain  
 Emancipate me from the one that started with rain  
 Emancipate me from the glory of foes  
 Emancipate me from the glee of pose  
 Emancipate so that I would finally be free  
 Free to sleep in the likeness of eternity

QUEST THE JOURNEY WITHIN BY JOE M HARRIS

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## More from the blog



### True Grit: On Poetry and Character with the UNC Women's Soccer Team

UNC Soccer has an incredible history of winning-- 22 NCAA championships over the last 36 years. While filming practice last month, we got to witness first-hand the speed, strength, and grit of these champions, followed by a discussion of Coleman Barks' "Glad" with the team, its legendary coach Anson Dorrance, and Macarthur Genius Angela Duckworth. How would a championship team respond to a poem in which the speaker's team loses ten-zip?



### The Production Design of Modernism

When we began filming the core segments for our Modernism course, the production team knew that we wanted to move beyond the one-note

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**Poetry in America' — Online Poetry Course**

essor of English at Harvard, with specialities in modern poetry. Earlier this month she launched an online course in poetry, featuring works of Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and



## The Atlantic + Poetry in America on Small Towns

On Monday, Atlantic columnist and Poetry in America guest James Fallows covered our most recent project for Notes, the blog section of The Atlantic. Poetry in America: Modernism launched on April 6, and will run live through June. Registration is open and free.

## About Poetry In America

Poetry in America is a multiplatform initiative that brings poetry into literature classrooms and living rooms around the world. Created by Elisa New, Poetry in America draws students of all ages into conversations about poetry.

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