

# RESPONSES AND REVIEWS

## *Damaged Heritage: The Elaine Race Massacre And A Story of Reconciliation*

(May, 2020; Pegasus/Simon & Schuster) by J. Chester Johnson



- [Goodreads](#) includes **Damaged Heritage** on a multi-year, international list (less than 500 books) for Best Nonfiction Books (alongside **The Diary of Anne Frank**, **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas**, **Hiroshima**, **The Gulag Archipelago**, among others).

- Appearances on **Damaged Heritage** at [The Carter Center](#), [Washington National Cathedral](#), [Trinity Church Wall Street](#), and on [National Public Radio](#), among over 80 presentations, including interviews.

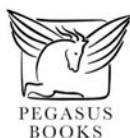
- [Amazon](#) placed **Damaged Heritage** in July, 2020 among the top 3 biographies of social activists sold through Kindle.

- [Harvard Magazine](#) chose **Damaged Heritage** as one of six books to showcase its “Bookshelf” section.

- [History News Network](#) has published a series of four articles, written by J. Chester Johnson, based on **Damaged Heritage**.

- [The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education](#) listed **Damaged Heritage** in June, 2020 as one of six recent books of interest to Black scholars.

- [Nominee for Lillian Smith Award](#): “Selected by a panel of judges, nominated books represent outstanding creative achievements worthy of recognition because of their literary merit, moral vision, and honest representation of the South, its people, problems, and promises.”



published by Pegasus Books; distributed by Simon & Schuster



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# COMMENTARY ON J. Chester Johnson's *Damaged Heritage: The Elaine Race Massacre And A Story of Reconciliation*

"In *Damaged Heritage*, Johnson poignantly reveals the demons he discovered in his own life and family, his ties to one of the worst racial horrors in American history, his personal anguish, and his efforts to make amends and fill a desperate empty place in our hearts. Only a poet can see this clearly, be this honest, and still hope this much."

—Douglas A. Blackmon, author of *Slavery by Another Name*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize

"Johnson is a gifted writer. *Damaged Heritage* is part memoir, part history, and part essay on racism, all tied together by a story of a friendship that transcended the racial gulf that plagues our country. This book is a model for calling on our better selves to foster a national reconciliation."

—American Book Review

"Johnson is making a profound contribution to that sacred healing work. . ."

—Catherine Meeks, co-author, *Passionate for Justice: Ida B. Wells, As Prophet For Our Time*, and Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing



"J. Chester Johnson has done more than tell us a story that must be told – he has laid the healing tools in our hands, and left instructions. This is how it starts."

—Cornelius Eady, co-founder of Cave Canem and finalist for the Pulitzer Prize

"*Damaged Heritage* offers a heartfelt narrative, calling to mind other classic Southern memoirs."

—Arkansas Times

"An important history."

—Library Journal

"Johnson poignantly tells (in *Damaged Heritage*) of a personal family history that stretches from the darkest days of 1919 to a moment of grace nearly a century later, when he met Sheila Walker. A moving and inspiring read."

—Robert Whitaker, author of *On the Laps of Gods*, *The Red Summer of 1919* and *The Struggle For Justice That Remade A Nation*

## Praise for Other Works by J. Chester Johnson

"Undoubtedly, this is a work headed for literary permanence."

—Major Jackson, poet and scholar, on *St. Paul's Chapel & Selected Shorter Poems*

"J. Chester Johnson tells a remarkable and illuminating triple story: the story of the English psalms in the past and present, the story of W.H. Auden's profound engagement with the language of the psalter, and the story of Chester Johnson's engagement with Auden, the psalms, and the church."

—Edward Mendelson, literary executor and principal biographer for W. H. Auden, on *Auden, the Psalms, and Me.*

"The scope of *Now And Then* is epic. It provides its readers with the same amplitude of intelligence, passion and formal achievement as our great American epics – Melville's *Moby Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and Ginsberg's *Fall of America*. It is a book of fierce spiritual and moral witness, energy and power."

—Lawrence Joseph, poet and scholar, on *Now And Then*

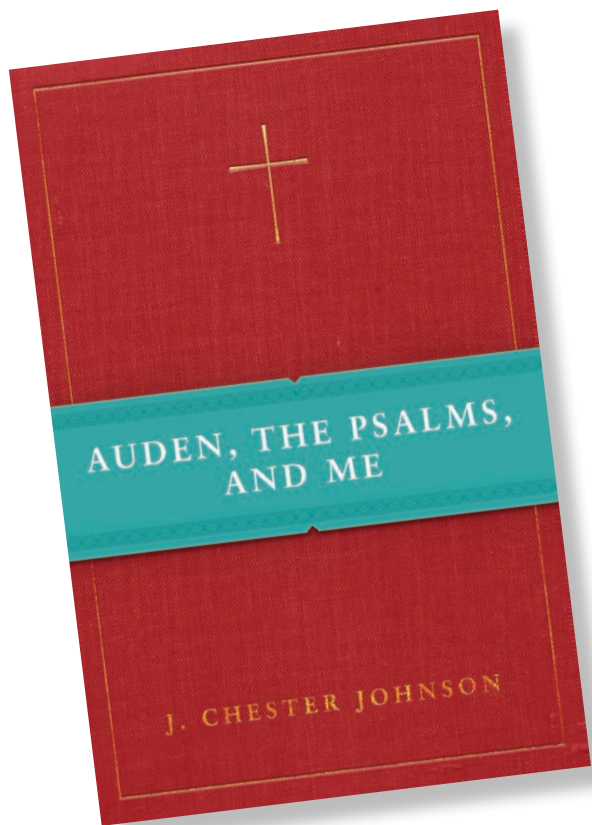


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# Praise for J. Chester Johnson's *Auden, the Psalms, and Me*



“J. Chester Johnson’s account of his long service on the drafting committee for the Episcopal Church’s project almost fifty years ago to retranslate the Psalter is a wonderfully cautious, sensitive and even-handed book. It is bound to fascinate anyone interested in translation, and may go a good way to pacify those casual or accidental partakers in Christian rituals today who find themselves (as Auden certainly was) aghast at what appear to be unnecessary textual modernizations. Johnson is a fine poet himself. He is to be praised for his verbal attentiveness throughout the book, and not least for his orderly and sculpted expository style. He illuminates aspects of Auden’s practiced faith; he confronts the sometimes thorny issues that face a church sensitive to accusations of remoteness from the contemporary; and he modestly explains his own origins and assumptions—as promised in the third category of his fetching title. A delightful book.”

—John Fuller, Fellow Emeritus, Magdalen College, Oxford University; one of England’s best-known and favored poets writing today; also author of *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, one of the most extensive studies on the poetry of W. H. Auden

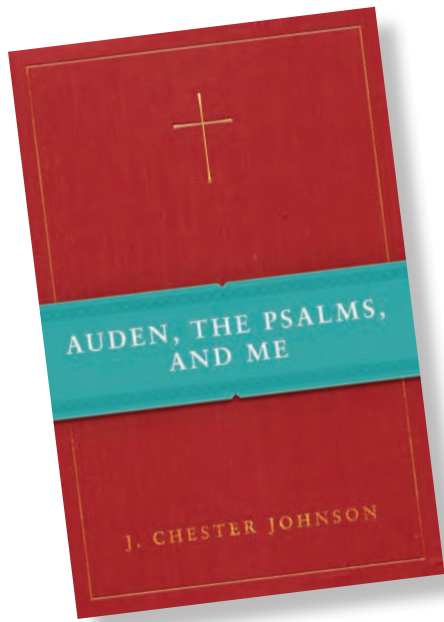
“J. Chester Johnson tells a remarkable and illuminating triple story: the story of the English psalms in the past and present, the story of W. H. Auden’s profound engagement with the language of the psalter, and the story of Chester Johnson’s engagement with Auden, the psalms, and the church. I hope this well-told story will be widely read.”

—Edward Mendelson, well-known critic and commentator on English and American literature; Lionel Trilling Professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University; literary executor and principal biographer for W. H. Auden; author of the standard for biographies on W. H. Auden – *Early Auden* and *Later Auden* (two books)

“Both as a deft poet and committed heart and hand for the civil rights struggle, Chester’s life has been one of liturgy — one of public service — one of common prayer. *The New York Times* got it right when covering Chester and Freda working in New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. Chester observed the ‘Eucharist as a mode of reconciling...Chester surmised that the audience came out for the Auden, though if you asked, I think most would have said they came out for Chester....Both poets, Auden and Chester Johnson, challenge us... extending the public and political role of the poet writing in his day and writing to the eternal struggle of man.”

—Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, *Literary Matters*, review of Johnson’s presentation at Culture Center of New York

# More Praise for J. Chester Johnson's *Auden, the Psalms, and Me*



## Praise for Other Works by J. Chester Johnson

“Undoubtedly, this is a work headed for literary permanence.”

—Well-known poet Major Jackson on *St. Paul's Chapel & Selected Shorter Poems*

“Johnson's ‘St. Paul's Chapel’ is one of the most widely distributed, lauded, and translated poems of the current century.”

—*American Book Review*

“The scope of *Now And Then* is epic. It provides its readers with the same amplitude of intelligence, passion and formal achievement as our great American epics – Melville's *Moby Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and Ginsberg's *Fall of America*. It is a book of fierce spiritual and moral witness, energy and power.”

—Acclaimed poet and scholar Lawrence Joseph on *Now and Then*

“Self-described as ‘bubbly and slightly mercurial’ in his 20's, Chester Johnson still charms and fascinates when he discusses his experience on the drafting committee for the 1979 retranslation of the Psalms contained in the current edition of the Book of Common Prayer. If you have ever wondered why the psalms in our prayer book today are slightly different, more accurate and sometimes more lyrical than the ones in the bibles you read, Chester's book *Auden, the Psalms, and Me* is a must read... this delightful book tells the story of a humbly bright and clever young poet who unabashedly offered his services to a more senior and experienced group of scholars, only for them to discover he was the perfect person for the job... Chester Johnson is clever and humble and thoroughly delightful, just like his book.”

—The Episcopal Diocese of Florida

“In these pages, Johnson awakens our interest in the power of language and liturgy—and that's true whatever our religious tradition may be! He charts for us a circular pilgrimage toward the mysterious intersection between human language and the sacred. Along the way, his chapters are packed with rest stops where we encounter a host of remarkable figures who similarly struggled with this mystery.”

—Read the Spirit

“Impressively informative and exceptionally well organized and presented....”

—Midwest Book Review

“This book should prove interesting to Auden fans, to all those who love and revere the Psalms, and to readers interested in the 1970s revision process in the Episcopal church. Johnson, known as a poet and translator and for his poem ‘St. Paul's Chapel’ which memorializes the New York church's role in 9/11 and its aftermath, writes engagingly for a general, nonspecialist (either literary or theological) audience.”

—Englewood Review of Books

# What's being said about J. Chester Johnson's *Now And Then: Selected Longer Poems*



The journey through *Now And Then* begins with an interracial murder in Arkansas along the Mississippi River Delta at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and ends in a martyrdom of the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, at the Flossenburg concentration camp near the end of World War II. In between, a long dead and fabled father reappears for a delayed conversation with the poet, and a paean resurrects the transformational prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr.; a New York City riot of the 1960s impels the poet into the authenticity of the lower Eastside, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Lazarus and Jonathan Daniels chant their way into history; home and exile surprisingly have much more in common than a reader would normally believe.

ISBN 978-1937943318 • 278 PAGES • \$24.95



Order from Amazon.com, your local bookstore, or directly from St. Johann Press.

“The scope of *Now And Then* is epic. It provides its readers with the same amplitude of intelligence, passion and formal achievement as our great American epics—Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, and Ginsberg’s *Fall of America*. It is a book of fierce spiritual and moral witness, energy and power.”

—LAWRENCE JOSEPH, POET AND SCHOLAR

“J. Chester Johnson is one of our country’s literary gems. From his work on the *Book of Common Prayer* with Auden to his chronicling and advocating for civil rights in the American South of his boyhood, Johnson offers rare glimpses into what William Carlos Williams called ‘news that stays news’. Elegant, truthful, heartfelt, spiritual, beautiful. This is a book to savor and admire. Highly recommend this impressive book.”

—ELIZABETH POWELL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,  
*GREEN MOUNTAINS REVIEW*

“In his latest volume, *Now And Then: Selected Longer Poems*, Chester Johnson has pushed beyond the boundaries of his shorter work and yet, happily, none of the qualities that make a Chester Johnson poem so distinctive and memorable—their plain speak and verbal music, their erudition and common sense—have been lost in the transition. Here, we encounter a poet as comfortable with narrative as he is with lyric, a poet working at the height of his powers, a poet challenging himself—and us—with poems that are not afraid to engage with the politics and the issues and the events of our time.”

—DAVIS MCCOMBS, DIRECTOR, PROGRAM IN CREATIVE WRITING AND TRANSLATION, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS; FORMER WINNER, YALE SERIES OF YOUNGER POETS

J. CHESTER JOHNSON is a poet, essayist, and translator. His writings have been published domestically and abroad and translated into several languages. He has authored numerous volumes of poetry, including *St. Paul’s Chapel & Selected Shorter Poems*. Johnson and W. H. Auden served as the two poets on the drafting committee for the retranslation of the Psalms, which is the version contained in the current edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church. In September, 2017, Church Publishing, the publishing arm of the Episcopal Church, will publish Johnson’s *Auden, The Psalms, and Me*, the story of this Episcopal retranslation of the Psalms. He has read his work at Harvard University, The National Cathedral and on the BBC.

# ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL



&  
SELECTED SHORTER  
POEMS

J. CHESTER JOHNSON  
Introduction by Edward Mendelson

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Also available at Borders and Barnes & Noble bookstores

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www.brunswickbooks.com

“My favorites among these poems remind us that ‘flesh is still the thing,’ that, no matter how much the body changes, its frail beauty is eternal. And not just our physical bodies, either, but the world we live in: thus poems as different as ‘The School on Rue des Rosiers,’ which recalls the Holocaust, and ‘St. Paul’s Chapel,’ written in the wake of 9/11, remind the reader that after cruelty and death come music, dancing, the rebuilding of lives. ‘I’ve now lived long enough/ to hold that both good and bad/ have their places in the world,’ writes Johnson, and from the mingled cries of the drowned and the saved he makes a haunting, unforgettable poetry.”

—David Kirby

“J. Chester Johnson’s poems possess an energy and a zest for the made thing, that, as he wittily states, tames, yes, the rage but also the roving, ravishing intellect of the mind’s hunger. I am even more convinced of his sensuous ability to compose lines that delight even as they articulate the well-spring of joy and pain from which all life issues, when I hear such lines on volunteering at Ground Zero, NYC: ‘hands as stars, hands as stripes, hands as a flag.’ Undoubtedly, this is a work headed for literary permanence in our collective ear.”

—Major Jackson

“What an accomplishment it is.”

—Molly Peacock

“These poems, like all authentic ones, bear witness to a truth.”

—Edward Mendelson

“It’s a pleasure to read the work of a poet who knows what a poem is. What my memory treasures most after a good reading of this collection are the wise and often playful quatrains plus one of the most penetrating observations in poetry and poetics; early in the book, closing the poem, ‘Irony at the Armchair,’ we are told that ‘irony is fantasy under control.’ Yes.”

—Miller Williams

“With J. Chester Johnson, objectivity and passion coexist naturally. And language, rather than abstracting experience, breathes a direct connection to our tragedies, pettiness, bones and sweat and exaltation.”

—Jean Mellichamp Milliken, *The Lyric*

“There is a world of verbal wit and lyric intensity in J. Chester Johnson’s *St. Paul’s Chapel & Selected Shorter Poems*. Nothing under the sun is alien to Johnson’s sharp eye for the telling detail and ear finely tuned to the necessary music of true poetry. His poem for the church used as a shrine to the victims of the September 11th attacks, ‘St. Paul’s Chapel,’ is one of the finest, most poignant, and faith affirming on this terrible subject that I’ve ever read.”

—Robert Cooperman

“Chester Johnson’s stunning book of poems, *St. Paul’s Chapel and Selected Shorter Poems*, is a powerful collection. Johnson writes with such elegance and honesty that his poems are riveting, hard to put down. I recommend this book wholeheartedly.

—Elizabeth Powell

“Chester Johnson’s verse will be remembered, if for no other reason than the final lines of the poem, ‘The School on Rue des Rosiers’: . . . And the greatest fall always dances near the greatest dancer.”

—Red Hawk

**“Chester Johnson has crafted these poems—over years and miles—with a precision and economy one might not expect in poems that also sing so beautifully. They have a jewel-like spiritual depth: facets and illuminations revealing themselves as one gazes, new ones appearing upon re-reading.”**

—Barbara Crafton, Episcopal priest and author

**“Poet Johnson, author of ten chapbooks, has now published a collection of poems—some old, some new, but all riveting—for those who appreciate the poetic rhythm of our language. The poems are about people, places, and ideas. And readers of the poetry of today will find *St. Paul’s Chapel & Selected Shorter Poems* a thoroughly enjoyable read that they can pick up and read again and again.”**

—Art Bounds, editor *The Pegasus Review*

**“These delightful poems are self-contained, succinct and declarative, admirable for their shapeliness and humor, their aptness and originality.”**

—John E. Smelcer, poetry editor *Rosebud*

**“Chester Johnson’s short poems might be rehearsals for the intelligent person’s conversation with God. By turns playful, questioning, earthy, fearful, and often wry, they dwell on the paradox, as he puts it, of ‘why we choose to be beyond what we understand.’”**

—Pamela McCorduck

**“As I read through it slowly, I find myself engrossed in the poetry of it all. It’s a wonderful, well-done book of poetry.”**

—Ray Foreman, editor *Clark Street Review*

**“The selection of poems was a delight. The verse contains crystalline moments for the reader. Still life or heroic verse, both are equally captivating.”**

—Ellen Shull, editor *Palo Alto Review*

**“Gifted. A fine talent for the phrase.”**

—Allen Tate

**“My reaction to (Johnson’s) work, wholehearted as it was, did not come near to envisioning the scope and quality, the prodigality of (Johnson’s) accelerating career.”**

—William Stafford

**“The collection will please the many people who enjoy twists of language, clever phrases and rhymes, and wily punch lines. Lively, entertaining; and with courage in its lightness.”**

—Constance Hunting, poet, editor *The Puckerbrush Review*

**“Wherever my gaze fell I read good lines.”**

—Isaac B. Singer, Nobel Prize Winner for Literature

**“Truly a master of the difficult art of compression.”**

—Albert J. Guerard

**When the staff editors and I at Hawai’i Pacific Review decided to publish J. Chester Johnson’s poem, ‘Fear of Flying,’ we were impressed with his ability to bring nature into the scenario of the 9/11 catastrophe with his reference to birds in the first stanza, which was rather unexpected. We were also impressed with his ability to conjure up images of flight and tie them to the unfortunate victims of 9/11 who chose to jump from the building rather than endure the holocaust inside. And amidst all this, a sudden, fleeting fascination with ‘A swatch of cellophane (swelling) heavenward, higher still,’ followed by the poignant question, ‘How does it happen some things/ Rise air-tucked without ties,/Staves, or other fast catch-mes?’ Then, the final question that we all fear to ask: ‘Flying is good for business, we’re told,/But is it good for us?’ brings together a fascinatingly composed poem, not unlike many of his others. Johnson’s poems demonstrate his very canny ability to turn an unexpected phrase, his wry sense of humor, and his penchant for getting at the heart of problematic situations that we all would do well to ponder.”**

—Patrice M. Wilson, editor *Hawai’i Pacific Review*

**“J. Chester Johnson’s succinct, direct style is a bracing tonic for those whose sensibilities and sensitivities have been battered by the obfuscations of the modern vernacular. His work is full of spirit, heart, and a sly humor based in delight. Seldom does plain sense seem so uncommon. The reader is better and wiser for the experience. One hopes the wide cultural world will discover and embrace this new found land of enchantment.”**

—Phil Wagner, *ICONOCLAST Magazine*