



J. Chester Johnson

The Elaine Race Massacre

Thursday, August 25, 2022, 7:30 p.m.

Via Zoom:

<https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/92224433676>

Presented by the Commission on Racial Justice and Reconciliation of the Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast

J. Chester Johnson is a poet and nonfiction writer, who grew up one county removed from the Elaine Race Massacre site in southeastern Arkansas along the Mississippi River delta. He has written extensively on race and civil rights.

He composed the Litany for the Day of Repentance (October 4, 2008), when the Episcopal Church formally apologized for its role in slavery and related evils. He and W. H. Auden were the poets on the drafting committee for the retranslation of the Psalms for the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*.

Mr. Johnson's most recent book, *Damaged Heritage: The Elaine Race Massacre and A Story of Reconciliation*, released in May 2020, is an Amazon Bestseller. It appeared on Goodreads' list of Best Nonfiction Books of Horrifying Events (alongside, among others, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Hiroshima*, and *The Gulag Archipelago*). Johnson served as co-chair of the Elaine Massacre Memorial Committee, which arranged for the funding and construction of a permanent memorial of the massacre in Phillips County, Arkansas, site of the conflagration.

Other books by Johnson include *St. Paul's Chapel & Selected Shorter Poems* (2010), *Now And Then: Selected Longer Poems* (2017), and *Auden, the Psalms, and Me* (2017).

His poem about the iconic St. Paul's Chapel, relief center for the recovery workers at Ground Zero, has been the Chapel's memento card since soon after the 9/11 terrorists' attacks (1.5 million cards have been distributed). American Book Review said of the poem in 2017: "[It] is one of the most widely distributed, lauded, and translated poems of the current century."

Several of his writings are part of the Civil Rights Archives at Queens College, the alma mater of Andrew Goodman, one of three martyrs murdered by white supremacists in Mississippi during Freedom Summer.

Mr. Johnson was educated at Harvard College and the University of Arkansas.



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*Martin, you wouldn't let the dead stay dead;
for they had a purpose: to show an array of reasons the past should pass away.
And yet, so, we will learn once again:
whoever kills the past it must also kill.*

– from "Martin"