

Gloria Tyson  
District Manager Chicago CS District  
United States Postal Service  
Richard Wright Commemorative Stamp FDOI  
25<sup>th</sup> in Literary Arts Series  
Chicago Post Office  
433 W Harrison Street  
Chicago, IL 60699-9992  
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Thank you, Ciff Kelley for your introduction. I am pleased to be with all of you today.

(Pause)

This nation experienced a historical event in our most recent presidential election – an event Richard Wright helped to bring about with his often controversial writings;

writings of a world-view on humanity and politics that were far too forward-thinking for his own generation;

writings full of anger, frustration, and indignation stemming from his early life experiences being poor and black in America;

writings that appealed to - and appalled - both whites and blacks;

writings that eventually helped to direct a change in how America addressed and discussed race relations.

While still a presidential candidate, Barack Obama visited Berlin and said to a crowd of over 200,000 people,

“...tonight, I speak to you not as a candidate for president, but as a citizen – a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world,”

In the mid twentieth century, Richard Wright might also have called himself a citizen of the world.

And - it is only with a view from the present - that the rest of us can glimpse what Wright may have desired for the future.

As the grandchild of slaves, it would have been hard to imagine Richard Wright having the political influence that he did, but the promise of Wright as a significant literary influence came at the age of 15 when his first story “The Voodoo of Hell’s Half Acre” was published in the *Southern Register* in Jackson, Mississippi.

When Wright came here to Chicago in 1927, he got a job with the Postal Service as a Post Office clerk. However, after only four years, The Great Depression resulted in him losing his job, and – fortunately for the rest of us – he turned to writing to make a living.

His revolutionary poetry, expressing his views on politics and civil rights, was published throughout the 30's. With this collection, he earned the Guggenheim Fellowship making it possible for him to move to New York where he wrote his first novel and his best-known work, *Native Son*.

He later wrote his fictionalized autobiography, *Black Boy*. By the way, the literary world still can't decide who wrote the first novel based on a true story, but it is certain that by using this style Richard Wright proved himself to be ahead of his time.

In his autobiography he says:

“At the age of twelve, before I had had one full year of formal schooling, I had a conception of life that no experience would ever erase,

a predilection for what was real that  
no argument could ever gainsay,

a sense of the world that was mine  
and mine alone,

a notion as to what life meant that  
no education could ever alter,

a conviction that the meaning of  
living came only when one was  
struggling to wring a meaning out of  
meaningless suffering.”

Powerful words by a powerful man who viewed  
himself as a citizen of the world, but only the United  
States can claim him as a “native son”.

(Pause)

Before I ask the others to join me for the unveiling, I would like to say a few words about the artist selected to portray Richard Wright.

Kadir Nelson was developing as an artist before he could even read or write and was supported in that pursuit of art by his uncle. Richard Wright did not have much formal education, but his passion for learning and ability to communicate was surely encouraged by his school-teacher mother. And just as the Guggenheim Fellowship allowed Wright to pursue his career, Nelson received a scholarship to study at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. And just as Wright was a world traveler and a citizen representing all humanity, Nelson's work has been displayed in museums across America from Los Angeles to Harlem, as well as across the world in Mexico, England and Japan.

Now I would ask, author Carlos Brossard;  
Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti (Mad who boo tea);  
Professor Jacquelyn Goldsby;  
Kadir Nelson; and Cliff Kelley  
to join me as we have the privilege and honor to  
dedicate the 25<sup>th</sup> stamp in the Literary Arts Series  
from the United States Postal Service, the 2009  
Richard Wright commemorative stamp.

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