SPRING 2013

The Diversion

Walter Greason, Monmouth University | Thomas P. Johnson Visiting Scholar

From Stagolee and John Henry to the Huxtables and Murder, Inc., the images of African Americans have received serious scholarly attention as metaphors for the evolution of the Black Freedom Movement throughout the twentieth century. Juxtaposing these analyses with the evolution of white Americans' representations in the media from Walt Whitman and Woody Guthrie to the Simpsons and the High School Musical series reveals deeply entrenched patterns of Protestantism, heteronormativity, and global capital accumulation. Walter Greason documents the ways these forces affected metropolitan development around the world and the fragmentation of the historical project in the Western tradition.

The Getaway

In a Mirror Darkly: The Black Superhero and the Struggle for Justice in Marvel Comics, 1970-1985
Julian C. Chambliss, Rollins College

In 1968 Larry Neal proclaimed the Black Arts Movement the "aesthetic and spiritual sister to the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America." With such assertions driving a new awareness of African-American desire for affirmation, depictions of blackness in U.S. popular culture were forced to negotiate changing social realities while reconciling conflicting expectations. Superhero comic books highlight this complexity. At times as much distortion as affirmation, the depiction of black superheroes in Marvel Comics demonstrates the aspirations and frustrations that defined race relations after 1970.

The Robbery

"Lifting the Community or Lifting from It: The Ethics of Doing Research at the Margins"
Dan Kerr, American University | Thomas P. Johnson Visiting Scholar

Reflecting on his own research with the Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project, Dr. Dan Kerr will address how and why he developed an oral history methodology that could go beyond gathering source materials to answer his research questions. His approach allowed the project participants to analyze their own surroundings, answer their own questions, and define and meet their own ends.

The Dry Run

“Constrained Status: The Roman Dining Room as a Space for Exploring Identity among Roman Freedmen”
Robert Vander Poppen, Rollins College

Roman slavery was different in many ways from its modern counterparts tied to narratives of colonialism and racial exploitation. The chances for manumission were high in ancient Rome, and a significant number of former slaves managed to acquire wealth and prominence within their local communities. Nevertheless, freedmen faced legal limitations on their participation in politics and their public adoption of symbols of elite status. Such legal constraints were largely absent from the private sphere, where freedmen were free to perform dry-runs of their identity within the company of a friendly audience of invited guests. Perhaps the most famous of these freedmen was the boisterous and overbearing Trimalchio depicted in Petronius' Satyricon. This talk will immerse participants into the world of the Roman banquet, and explore the self-representation of Trimalchio and his historical counterparts within the context of the Roman villa.
Dividing the Loot
Discovering the Past: Collaboration, Community, and the Creation of Identity
S. Ashley Kistler, Rollins College

Recent studies explore the relationship between ethnography and service learning. This talk explored how recent trends in ethnography assist scholars of many academic disciplines in conceptualizing, designing, and implementing community-based research. Kistler argues that the principles of engaged ethnography allows scholars to better satisfy the needs of the communities they serve and enhance learning beyond the classroom. In particular, the emerging sub-discipline of collaborative ethnography provides an ideal model for service learning. Collaborative ethnography strives to overcome the power imbalance inherent in classic ethnography by including local communities in the research process. This paper uses three case studies to examine how the dynamics of engaged ethnography can inform more culturally relevant community-based research. I use my collaborative ethnographic research among the Q’eqchi’ of San Juan Chamelco, Guatemala, as a case study to explore how the principles of engaged anthropology empower community members involved in the research process. The comparison of two service-learning projects conducted by Rollins College anthropology students at senior care facilities highlights the impact of collaborative ethnographic methods on service-learning. By involving community partners in the planning and implementation of community-based learning, scholars create transformative learning experiences. Collaborative ethnography and service-learning transcend the borders of traditional learning to engage both students and local communities in the production of knowledge and the process of social change.

The Housekeeper of Homelessness: The Democratic Ethos of Marilynne Robinson’s Novels and Essays: A Lecture by Thomas P. Johnson visiting scholar
Dr. Shannon Mariotti
Associate Professor of Political Science
Southwestern University

This paper explores how Marilynne Robinson’s novels and essays productively intervene in contemporary debates regarding the ideological space of home and the ethos of homelessness. Her writings illuminate a democratic value in the paradoxical position of the housekeeper of homelessness: in different ways her writings argue for the political value of taking on an air of homelessness while never fully leaving the familiar places and spaces of home. She values the attunement to wonder and mystery and openness to possibility that can come from the small, near, local, and mundane acts of housekeeping, understood literally and figuratively. As she notes in her most recent book of essays titled When I Was a Child, I Read Books, “To identify sacred mystery with every individual experience, every life, giving the word its largest sense, is to arrive at democracy as an ideal, and to accept the difficult obligation to honor others and oneself with something wholly approaching due reverence.” As I will show, her three works of fiction and three volumes of essays work in different ways and in different registers to articulate and demonstrate the democratic value found in the paradoxical position of acting as a housekeeper of homelessness.