



ISSUE NO. 11

AUGUST 2025

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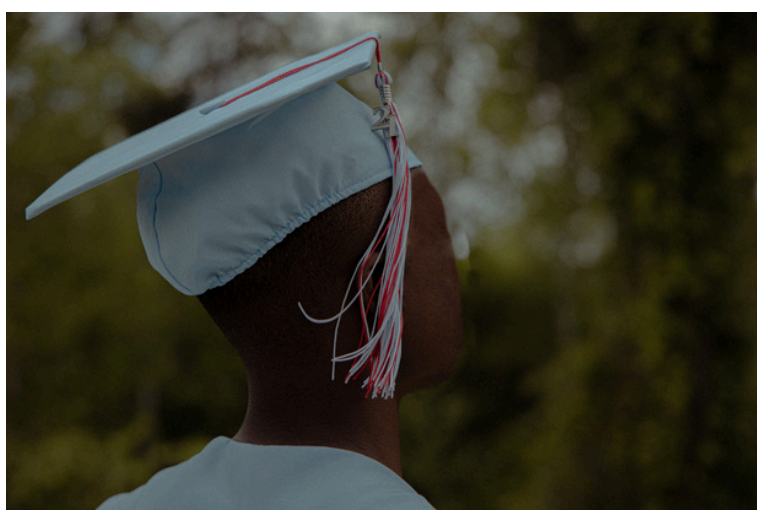


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AN ETHICS OF MEMORY:

CENTERING BIPOC VOICES IN SOUTHERN STUDIES AND BEYOND

Dear ESO Members,

This fall semester arrives amid a tense political climate, when the work of teaching, research, and community-building feels both precarious and essential. Across the South, we are reminded that the rest of the nation is not and never has been divorced from the political struggles that have historically shaped our southern communities. Indeed, for so long, the South has served as the nation's scapegoat, preserving the illusion of a morally superior and colorblind America above the Mason-Dixon line. That is the enduring myth of southern exceptionalism. Yet perhaps now more than ever, we as southern scholars are uniquely positioned to write about what is unfolding before us.

At the heart of this August issue, then, is an ethics of memory. Here remembering is more than passive recollection, it is a political and ethical practice of care. As the late anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose once wrote, "If the purpose of violence is to extinguish a certain kind of people, knowledges, and perspectives, then memory continues to resist that violence." This kind of memory work or, as Toni Morrison would have it, *rememory*, counteracts erasure through its dogged persistence, sustaining communal histories, cultures, and peoples that dominant narratives have sought to consign to the peripheries of society and even scholarly inquiry.

In this issue, we not only center BIPOC voices in southern studies, but celebrate the diverse communities that, though often overlooked, are the South, too. We begin with Mahkia Greene, a visual storyteller from South Carolina, whose photography captures an intimate and tender glimpse into Black southern life, from the everyday to the spiritual and otherworldly. Christina Xan then offers valuable advice for graduate students preparing for comprehensive exams, as well as scholars interested in further decolonizing their syllabi.

In "A Duty to Remember," Yesmina Khedhir recalls Hurricane Katrina two decades later. As Khedhir argues, "In a contemporary US society where racialized violence, political oppression, and gender discrimination still dominate, the act of remembrance becomes itself an act of resistance."

Khedhir's words demonstrate how the legacies of Katrina reverberate today, as well as how memory work serves as a confrontation to enduring structures of oppression.

Afterwards, Khedhir speaks with Black studies scholar Dr. Joanna Davis-McElligat who reflects on her own familial history in Mississippi and Texas. In calling for a future Southern Studies that fully engages with Black studies, Indigenous Studies, Latinx Studies, and other fields like Justice and Environmental Studies, Davis-McElligat encourages us to push the boundaries of "what it means to be Southern, [and] who can or should speak for or in the South." In this way, Davis-McElligat insists on a kind of disciplinary memory work, expanding who counts as southern and whose stories get told. From there, Laura Wilson reviews new works by BIPOC authors for our fall reading lists while Sterling Neill guides us in searching for alternative roles in various activist movements.

Finally, I check in with emerging scholar and Texas native Isaac Salazar. In this interview, Salazar discusses how his work on Chicanx/Xicanx and Latinx writers "complicates and expands traditional Southern narratives which often default to a Black/white racial binary or a rural gothic aesthetic." "My work on the borderlands," Salazar explains, "sets up an immediate framework that has always been part of the South and Southwest but have often been erased from dominant historical and literary accounts." Like Davis-McElligat, Salazar's South is multicultural and multilingual, disrupting disciplinary and regional borders.

As always, we conclude with calls for conference panels and special journal issues, as well as resources for those experiencing difficulties or looking to support other scholars in our present moment.

We hope this issue is both a source of remembrance and celebration, not only of southern histories, but of our collective work as scholars who insist on remembering otherwise.

In Solidarity and Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Savannah DiGregorio". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Savannah" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "DiGregorio".

Savannah DiGregorio
ESO President





Mahkia Greene

MAHKIA GREENE

Mahkia Greene (They/She) is a visual storyteller based in Columbia, South Carolina. With a BA in Media Arts from the University of South Carolina, Mahkia has dedicated nearly a decade to blending education with artistry through media literacy and creation. They served for several years as the Manager of Media Education at The Nickelodeon Theatre, a local independent cinema, and have led a diverse array of in-school, after-school, and field trips programs that explore queerness, rural culture, and race.

Mahkia's expertise extends nationally, with guest facilitation at notable events such as the 2017

Creating Change Conference in Philadelphia, the 2018 Obama Foundation Summit in Chicago, and the Picturing Democracy series at the College of Charleston in 2021.

Their personal creative work as a Black, Queer, Southern artist delves into the intersections of media and identity, producing subversive art that reclaims the means of storytelling and explores the expression of self. Their visual creations have been showcased across the East Coast, gracing venues and festivals including the Indie Grits Film Festival, the Nasher Museum of Art, the Columbia Museum of Art, and the Boston Center for the Arts.





JOIN US IN SEPTEMBER FOR A WORKSHOP WITH DR. MOLLY MCGEHEE!



McGehee is Senior Associate Dean for Teaching, Scholarship, & Strategic Initiatives at Oxford College of Emory University. She is also Professor of English and American Studies (tenured) and was the recipient of the Emory Exemplary Teaching Award in 2024.

Dr. McGehee has served as President of the Southern American Studies Association; as an elected member of the boards of the Society for the Study of Southern Literature and the Southern American Studies Association; and as an elected member of the Regional Chapters Committee of the American Studies Association. In summer 2023, she participated in the HERS: Women in Leadership Institute.

Dr. McGehee's current book project (under contract with LSU Press)--Atlanta Fictions: Women Writers' Urban Imaginaries--focuses on the Atlanta imaginary in modern and contemporary fiction.



GRAD SCHOOL FILES

Can I read 150 Books in a Week? (No.) A Guide to Planning and Pacing Comps

Christina Xan



Comprehensive exams can feel like a gate built to keep certain people out—especially students of color, first-generation scholars, and those doing work that challenges what the academy has historically privileged. And yes, comps are intimidating: long, dense reading; dozens of texts you haven't touched; and written and oral exams designed to test your grasp of it all. But comps aren't just about what you've read.

They're a threshold—a moment to stake your place in the field and show how you're reshaping it. *You're not meant to know everything.* You're meant to show what you've learned, how you think, and where you're going.

Here's some hot girl advice from a comps survivor for how to find, perhaps, a semblance of balance throughout the semester.

1. COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR COMMITTEE (REALLY, THEY WANT YOU TO SUCCEED).

Your director and committee are your collaborators here. You'll work with them to shape your reading list(s), which will usually include major texts in your field—primary works, secondary criticism, and relevant theory. Many of these will be texts you've already read, but expect a good number you haven't. That's okay.

Ask questions. All of them. There's no such thing as a dumb one. Clarify what kinds of texts they expect, how flexible the lists can be, and what

kinds of texts they expect, how flexible the lists can be, and what kinds of questions you'll be asked in your written and oral portions. The more you know up front, the better you can prep. Also, if you have any particularly difficult texts, reach out to members of your committee that specialize in that area; they can help break down complex theory or criticism so you don't have to do it alone.

And trust this: your committee will *not* let you sign up for comps if they don't think you're ready. If you're taking them, you're ready. Full stop.

2. ORGANIZE YOUR LIST LIKE A SYLLABUS, NOT A PUNISHMENT

Don't just look at your list and think "150 books, go." That's a spiral waiting to happen. Instead, break it into meaningful subcategories based on your field and research interests.

You can also write brief paragraphs about why you've chosen the categories you have, reflecting on the connections you see emerging from the texts. Focus on finding the patterns that naturally emerge throughout your texts, which can be particularly helpful for not just you but your committee. And chat about your categories with your director! They can help you locate help themes you may have missed.

For example, I had a list in 20th and 21st century American literature, so I made some personal documents sorted texts by:

- **Decade:** 1920s, 30s, 40s, etc.
- **Movement:** Modernism, Postmodernism, Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Criticism
- **Critical Lens:** Feminism, Marxism, Ecocriticism
- **Theme:** Race, Gender, Class, Region

Then I looked at overlaps: what texts showed up in multiple categories? Those can be your anchor texts.

I also looked for thin categories—where only one or two texts lived—and prioritized filling in those gaps. This structure helped me see not just what to read, but how everything was connecting.

Closer to the exams, I made the same categories again, this time filling them in with what I'd *actually* read. That gave me a clear sense of what was still missing and where to focus, and the categories also helped me basically do a verbal essay form of flashcards.

3. MAKE A SCHEDULE... AND FORGIVE YOURSELF WHEN YOU FALL BEHIND

It's useful to make a reading schedule. It's also almost guaranteed that you won't stick to it. That's okay. Life happens. Teaching happens. Bodies and brains happen.

Be realistic, no matter what anyone says: *you're not going to read every single word of every single book*. Prioritize. Focus on texts that are central to your field, show up often in scholarship, or appear across multiple categories. Learn how to read efficiently—skim some, deep read others, look at intros, conclusions, and key chapters when time is tight. It's not cheating; it's strategic.

Learn how to read efficiently—skim some, deep read others, look at intros, conclusions, and key chapters when time is tight. It's not cheating; it's strategic.

Comps are not a contest of suffering. They're a marathon, not a sprint—and it's okay to walk sometimes.

4. PREP FOR THE WHOLE WEEK, NOT JUST THE TEST

Most written exams are 72-hour to one-week take-homes. You'll usually be given 1–3 prompts and asked to write a few long-form essays, followed by an oral exam that typically takes around an hour.

The writing part requires stamina. Do yourself a favor: plan ahead not just for the test, but for your life during that week.

- **Pre-make meals** or line up takeout that won't demolish your stomach.
- **Set up your workspace** in a way that feels cozy but focused.
- **Warn your friends/family** so they can either leave you alone or hype you up as needed.
- **Build in breaks** as you will not be productive for 72 hours straight.

And *take care of your body*. Get sleep. Drink water. Take a walk. You will know what to write when the time comes, but if your brain is mush, and your body feels gross, writing will be that much harder.

**5. STOP READING 1–2 WEEKS BEFORE YOUR EXAM.
SERIOUSLY.**

It's tempting to cram until the very last second, but there's a point of diminishing returns. Ideally, take the last week or two before your exams to *review, rest, and reset*.

You're not trying to become a machine. You're trying to show what kind of thinker you are. Rest and fun help with that.

Look back at your categories and revisit big-picture ideas. What trends are you seeing? What connects your texts? What kinds of arguments would *you* want to make if given the chance?

6. REACH OUT TO OTHERS DOING COMPS

This is not a journey you have to walk alone. If others in your cohort are taking comps around the same time, form a group chat, reading group, or even a stress vent corner. Swap notes, cheer each other on, and remember: it's a rite of passage, not the Hunger Games; there's not only one winner.

Also, talk to people who've already done them, even if you don't know them that well! Most of us are happy to share what helped, what didn't, and what to expect.

**7. YOU'RE NOT BEING TESTED ON WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.
YOU'RE SHOWING WHAT YOU DO.**

This is the thing no one tells you enough: comps aren't designed to trick you. They're not about finding holes in your knowledge. They're about giving you a space to demonstrate the breadth and depth you *have* built.

You'll probably only write about 10–15 texts total on the exam. In orals, you're far more likely to be asked about movements, major authors, and field-wide trends than about that one book you didn't finish. Don't panic if you didn't read every last text. Focus on what you can speak confidently and thoughtfully about.

8. BALANCE PREP AND TEACHING BY PLANNING SMART —AND BEING HUMAN

Though you'll likely have a summer too, most people prep for comps at least partially (and actually take comps) during the semester—which means you'll be doing all this while teaching. It's a lot. But a little foresight and transparency can go a long way.

Look at your exam timeline and **backward-design your course calendar**. If your written comps are mid-October, maybe that's not the week to assign a major paper due date. Build in lighter grading weeks when you know you'll need time to read or write.

Lean into asynchronous discussion posts, peer review days, short reflective writing, or other low-stakes assignments that still serve your course goals without draining all your energy.

Oh, and it's totally okay to say to student, "I'll be out of office more than usual this week—I'm working on a big exam that's part of my own degree progress." Honestly? Students often love knowing you're a student too. It humanizes you and makes their own struggles more legitimate.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Listen. You will fall behind. You will feel like you're not doing enough. That's normal. But try not to let those voices be the ones that speak loudest. What matters is that you show up, try your best, and take care of yourself along the way.

Comps are hard. But you are capable.

You've been preparing for this longer than you realize.

And no matter how it goes, passing comps is never about perfection. It's about process, perspective, and showing you're ready to move forward.

And just by reading this, you are.

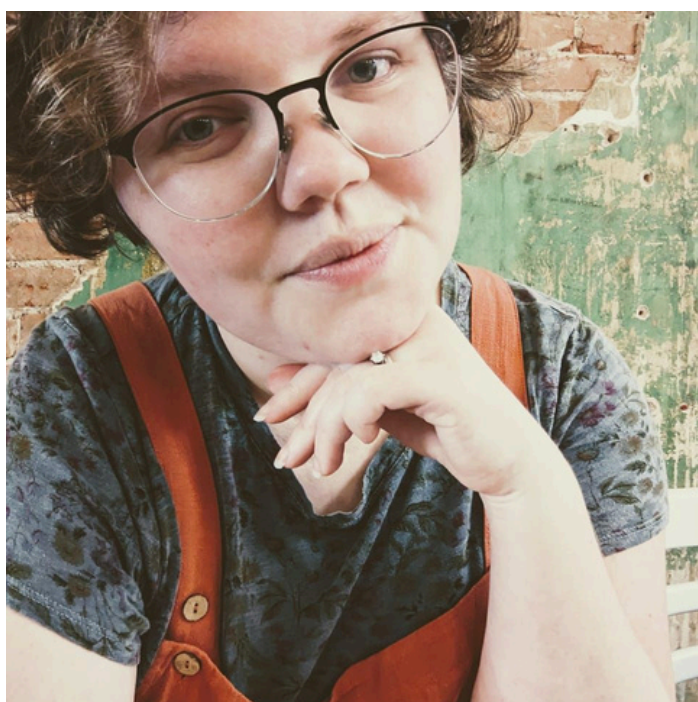


JOIN US IN CONGRATULATING BETHANY WESTON!

In February 2025, Bethany won Best Paper at Texas College English Association's regional conference for her presentation and paper titled "Counter-Composition: Critical Race Theory Counterstory as a Means of Pedagogical Resistance and Escape." Her paper will be published in their upcoming professional journal later this year.

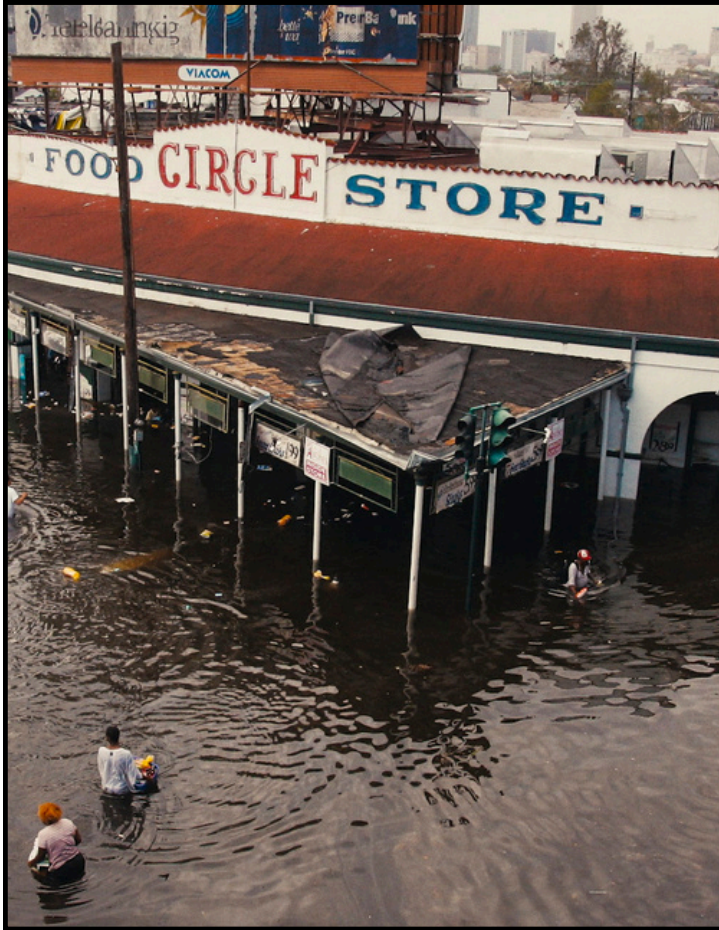
**Congratulations on these huge
achievements!**





Bethany Weston is an independent scholar and adjunct instructor in North Texas. She is also a digitizing volunteer at the Grayson County Frontier Village & Museum, working to preserve historical documents and photographs. She holds a Master's degree in Library Science from Texas Woman's University and has completed additional coursework in English studies at the University of North Texas. She currently teaches First Year Seminar and First Year Composition at Texas Woman's University. Her work has been published in *The Dallas Observer* and is forthcoming in *The Mississippi Quarterly*.





“The Duty to Remember”: An intersectional Approach to Hurricane Katrina at 20

Yesmina Khedhir

“Katrina is the mother we will remember until the next mother with large merciless hands committed to blood comes.”

(Jesmyn Ward, Salvage the Bones)

The year 2025 marks the 20th anniversary of Katrina, the category-five Atlantic hurricane which hit the American South Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, leading to the overflow of the Gulf of Mexico and other major water tributaries, namely Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne in Louisiana, wreaking havoc on the Coast region and its population. In particular, the poor construction and inadequate maintenance of floods control structures along the Southern coastal region caused the levees to break and the pumps to fail to handle storm

surges, resulting in huge material damage and human and non-human loss, especially among elders and poor communities of color, most of them drowned in floodwaters or died in shelters and hospitals in the aftermath of the hurricane. While the exact number of deaths vary across reports (estimated at 1464 fatalities according to the “Institute for Women’s Policy Report”), Katrina displaced more than a million people from the region, flooded 80% of the city of New Orleans, and cost \$135 billion in total damage (Plyer 2014).

Supposedly an event of the past, Katrina is still much alive and fresh in the memory and creative work of so many of its survivors and witnesses until the present day.

Several critical works and cultural narratives have emerged and continue to emerge since the landfall of Katrina and on every year of its anniversary, calling for the duty of remembering and the danger of forgetting, even the most traumatic events. Taking it from the realm of the real to the realm of the symbolic, Ron Eyerman, for instance, defines Katrina in his book *Is This America?* as a “cultural trauma” that “destroyed communities and tore the threads of collective identity” reaching to “the very foundational narratives and myth which grounded the nation itself” (*Is This America?* 6). So, twenty years on, why is it then still important to remember Katrina and its unhealed wounds? In what way does the tragedy of Katrina affect and reflect on the lives of communities in the US South (and nationally) today? What are its ongoing material impacts and haunting psychological effects? And what role do art, literature, and cultural productions in general play in the work of historical representation, revision(ing), and justice, especially in a BIPOC context?

Narratives of Katrina and its aftermath have frequently stressed what Henry Giroux calls “American biopolitics of disposability” (175)—or what could also be described borrowing Achille Mbembe’s term “the necropolitics” of “who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not” (66). Due to the structural failure and quasi-absence of institutional care before, during, and after the hurricane, it was clear that, as Dickel Simon and Evangelica Kindinger contend, while “[t]he disaster, which unfolded, might have been natural in its shape – the wind, the rain, the flooding—at its core it was human-made” (9). Different critical works, like Chester Hartman and Gregory Squire’s edited collection *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (2006), Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright’s *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice After Hurricane Katrina* (2009), Dickel Simon and Evangelica Kindinger’s *After the Storm: the Cultural Politics of Hurricane Katrina* (2015), and Mary Ruth Marotte and Glenn Jellenik’s *Ten Years After Katrina: Critical Perspectives of the Storms Effect on American Culture and Identity* (2015), among many others, have all pointed to the unnaturalness of Katrina and provided significant insights into its various cultural politics and socio-economic dynamics.

While the hurricane affected several social groups and communities, including Whites, Asian (especially Vietnamese) Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Latinos, Michael Eric Dyson in his book *Come Hell or High Water* confirms that “[m]any colors were present in [Katrina’s] multicultural stew of suffering, but the dominant color was black” (2). Similarly, according to Rick Crownshaw “African Americans bore the brunt of the storm’s effects for historical reasons” (163). Katrina has since then been critically placed within a wider African diasporic context and read—literally and figuratively—as an “anti-black” weather event (Sharpe 75), a racialized tragedy with roots in history and the slave past. In particular, Katrina laid bare not only the state’s inefficiency in dealing with a natural disaster but more so its continuing subtle strategies or practices of reinforcing racial disparity, gender discrimination, and social injustice long before the hurricane itself. This is especially evidenced by Katrina evacuation which tragically demonstrated, as Neil Smith argued, that whereas the poor—primarily working-class Black people—had no resources and means to leave before (or even after) the hurricane, “the better off,” i.e., middle-class white people, “had cars to get out, credit cards and bank accounts for emergency hotels and supplies, their immediate families likely had resources to support their evacuation, and the wealthier also had the insurance policies for rebuilding.” An intersectional approach to Katrina, including key interlocking factors of race, class, gender, age, geography, and disability, among others, is therefore needed to unfold its major socio-economic, political, and environmental implications and study its short and long-term repercussions on affected communities and beyond.

The hurricane as a racial and class-induced disaster is strictly tied to structures of environmental racism or othering. The connection between racial and environmental (in)justice goes back to the 1970s where Nathan Hare contends in his article “Black Ecology” (1970) that “the physical and social

nvironments of blacks and whites have increasingly evolved as contrasts” (3) and to Reverend Benjamin Chavis’s later report “Toxic Waste and Race in The United States” (1987), where he explains the link between waste and race and construes environmental injustice as “an insidious form of racism,” indicating that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native American communities are the most exposed to hazardous wastes in the U.S. (ix-x). Robert Bullard, an American environmental sociologist, makes very similar claims in his seminal book *Dumping in Dixie* as he studies how the African American communities in the South “have been routinely targeted for the siting of noxious facilities, locally unwanted land uses, or LULUs, and environmental hazards” (xv). In the context of natural catastrophes and extreme weather events, such as Katrina, infrastructure or the built environment, including “the equipment, facilities, services, and supporting structures needed for a city’s or region’s functioning” (15), as Patricia Yeager defines it, is of crucial importance. Katrina showed the quasi-absence of an efficient infrastructure in the environmentally-vulnerable regions of the Gulf Coast, often inhabited by poor, working-class communities. For instance, based on Jesmyn Ward’s post-Katrina novel, *Salvage the Bones*, Kelly McKisson has argued—using what she calls “The Subsident Gulf”—that the coastal lands on which most of the poor communities of color reside are “sinking” and hence are unfit for living, due not only to climate change but also to a long “history of colonial engineering, extraction, and displacement” (475) imposed by white capitalist system and structures.

While race and class constituted the principal axes of Katrina’s cultural politics and occupied the larger part of its critical scholarship, an interconnected gender-focused approach to the hurricane helps to better understand its cultural dynamics. Indeed, combined together, the pre-established structures of classism, racism, and sexism can be viewed as the first culprit for the disaster and not the hurricane itself. In her article “Racialized Disaster Patriarchy: An Intersectional Model for Understanding Disaster Ten Years After Hurricane Katrina” (2016), Rachel Luft highlights the importance of a “gender- and

race-conscious” reading of the hurricane, arguing that women, especially Black and poor women, had to endure more due to the disaster. She explains that “the way in which the wind and water of Hurricane Katrina became disastrous was a social process that was deeply gendered as well as raced and classed. The storm exacerbated already-existing gendered social structures, identities, social arrangements, and power dynamics, producing highly gendered effects in a heavily racialized, economically stratified context” (9). Similarly, a report by the Institute for Women’s Research Policy shows that while the percentage of women and men killed by the hurricane was practically equal, the overall material and psychological burden caused by Katrina was heavier for women than it was for men. This goes back, according to the same report, to several reasons including higher rates of poverty among women, a greater responsibility for child care, and a higher risk of gender-based violence, making it harder for women than for men to cope with natural disasters and their aftermaths.

Whereas the various critical scholarship of Katrina showed that the hurricane revealed a far deeper social disaster within American identity politics than a mere natural one, it would be reductive to diminish Katrina to its narratives of suffering, pain, and violence. Besides all the harrowing images of destruction, of floating human and animal bodies, flooded lands, demolished houses, and huge amounts of discarded waste, other counternarratives of communal resistance, social solidarity, and human and non-human care emerged in the wake of Katrina as it was relayed in personal testimonies as well as in TV reports and videos. American sociologist Kai Erikson indicates in his “Notes on Trauma and Community” that collective catastrophic experiences can serve as a “source of communality” by helping create a sense of “spiritual kinship” (459) among affected individuals and communities. Such was the case for Katrina as demonstrated by all the moving images and videos of people helping each other

when they have little energy or help to give, tending hands to each other, and trying to rescue the most vulnerable, the elders, women, and children. Better called survivors than victims, the communities displaced by the hurricane insisted on going back and rebuilding their homes. Even those who “chose” to stay due to the lack of means or to an attachment to their land and homes— insensitively labelled by mainstream narratives as irresponsible and passive—do also attest to this spirit of resistance and rootedness that emerged from and despite the very experience of trauma engendered by the disaster.

In a contemporary US society where racialized violence, political oppression, and gender discrimination still dominate, the act of remembrance becomes itself an act of resistance. Art, in all its forms, as a mnemonic device can be seen in this respect as a political tool and a means for social change. While Katrina inspired many artists across several fields of cultural expression including visual art, music, film, and literature, I would like to finish with suggestions of readings that you could add to your TBR list in remembering Katrina at its 20:

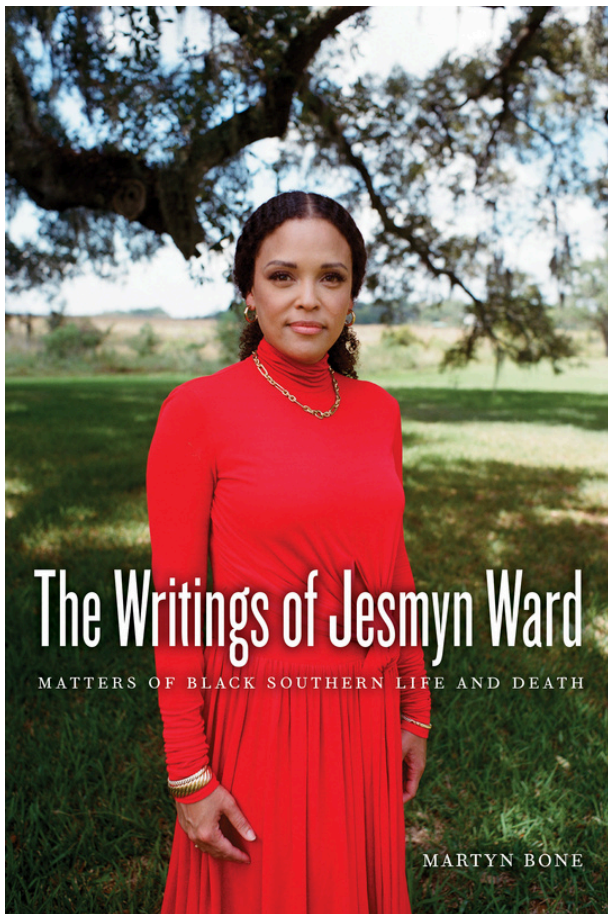
- 2005 — Chris Rose’s *Dead in Attic: Post-Katrina Stories*, Short Stories
- 2008 — Tom Piazza’s *City of Refuge*, Novel
- 2008 — Paul Volponi’s *Hurricane Song*, Young Adult Novel
- 2008 — Patricia Smith’s *Blood Dazzler*, Poetry Collection
- 2009 — Dave Eggers’ *Zeitoun*, Nonfiction
- 2010 — Jewel Parker Rhodes’s *Ninth Ward*, Young Adult Novel
- 2010 — Dan Baum’s *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans*, Nonfiction
- 2011 — Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*, Novel
- 2012 — Natasha Trethewey’s *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*, Poetry Collection
- 2013 — Janet Coleman’s *Eight Dolphins of Katrina: A True Tale of Survival*, Children’s Book
- 2015 — Tamara Ellis Smith’s *Another Kind of Hurricane*, Young Adult Novel
- 2015 — Myron Uhlberg’s *A Storm Called Katrina*, Children’s Book

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JOIN US IN OCTOBER FOR DR. MARTYN BONE'S BOOK LAUNCH + DISCUSSION!



Since the publication of her first novel in 2008, Jesmyn Ward has established herself as arguably the most important U.S. author of the twenty-first century. This book considers the full range of her career thus far, including National Book Award–winning novels *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, as well as Ward’s widely acclaimed memoir, *Men We Reaped*.

Martyn Bone thoughtfully examines key themes running throughout Ward’s writing: Black life in the U.S. South; the legacies of slavery and segregation; neoliberalism as the contemporary form of capitalism; environmental crisis in the Anthropocene; and human-animal relations. Bone also connects Ward’s work to major figures in the U.S. literary canon, with particular focus on William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison.



WE NEED CONTRIBUTING WRITERS!

SEND US YOUR WORK

Are you an emerging scholar with something to say about southern studies or academia? Do you have a compelling think piece or cultural commentary that deserves an audience? The ESO is looking for contributors for our seasonal newsletter to discuss the issues shaping our universities, fields, and communities.

We welcome submissions on topics including (but not limited to):

- Southern history, culture, literature
- The field of southern studies or southern literary studies
- Local and regional cultural commentary
- Environmental issues
- Public scholarship and community engagement
- Reflections on teaching or research
- Experiences as an emerging scholar
- Book reviews

Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis and will undergo peer review. Please submit work of 1,000 words or less and a short bio (150 words) to emergingscholarsorg@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!



READING BETWEEN THE LINES, TEACHING BEYOND THEM

Decolonizing the Syllabus as an Emerging Scholar

Christina Xan

There's a particular kind of syllabus panic that hits many professors this time of year as they plan their courses: "How do I make this class mine without feeling like I'm doing it wrong?" As an emerging scholar and often newer professor, especially one who may come from historically excluded backgrounds, it can feel like you're constantly navigating that tightrope between proving your credibility and staying true to the kind of pedagogy you believe in.



And when it comes to the syllabus—that most public-facing document of your teaching—it can be especially fraught. There's pressure to perform legitimacy: recognizable texts, names your department chair might nod at, selections that don't rock the boat too much...but what if we want to trouble the waters a little? What if part of our job as educators is to ask students why the boat looks the way it does in the first place?

Canonical texts are canon for a reason—many of the texts are genuinely stellar—but solely teaching them leaves out a plethora of creators who did not have the privilege to be canonized. It is not about demonizing the texts that exist but showing a full spectrum of the voices that often end up missing—and the shadow they oft end up writing within.

This piece is for anyone walking that line. You don't have to burn the canon to the ground to teach with intention (though I won't stop you if you do), but you *can* design syllabi that meet expectations while challenging them. The key is in how you frame the course, the questions you ask of your students, and the room you make for voices long left out of the room.

In Comp Classrooms: Academic English as Code, Not Moral Hierarchy

Intro composition-rhetoric courses like English 101 and 102 are often framed as “skills” classes, but let's be honest: we're not just teaching how to write but teaching how to be legible in a particular system—and that system is rooted in colonialist, white supremacist values that have long treated language as a sorting mechanism.

I tell my students early on: “There's actually no such thing as ‘standard English.’ What we're working with under that name is an edited academic English, treated as a standard, and it's just one dialect—powerful, yes, but not superior.” The goal isn't for students to erase their voice to fit a norm. It's to give them access to a particular rhetorical toolbox they can use *when they choose to*, not because they're told it's the only valid one.

The same goes for the texts we teach about writing. If your entire syllabus on rhetoric and composition is Aristotle, Stanley Fish, and Kenneth Burke, you're leaving out a whole world of ways to think about voice, power, and purpose. Bring in Geneva Smitherman's exploration of AAVE/Ebonics, or Gloria

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* to talk about code-switching. Teach literacy narratives from immigrants like Amy Tan that directly reckon with shifting language, and assign Vershawn Ashanti Young's "Should Writers Use They Own English?" to get students involved in the discussion.

A good composition syllabus helps students see that writing is not simply about correctness—it's about context, choice, and clarity of purpose. There is nothing inherently wrong with the way anyone thinks, speaks, or writes. The goal isn't to unlearn their language; it's to learn how to move between languages with intention and prowess.

In Literary Surveys: Who Gets to Be Canon—and Who's Left in the Margins

Literature survey courses might seem more flexible, due to the varied special topics options one can create, but the introductory courses new professors end up teaching, like "Survey of American Lit" or "Intro to British Lit," are more explicitly tied to departmental expectations and limited by anthology selections. And let's be real: those anthologies are often a sea of whiteness, particularly in the early centuries, and overwhelmingly male.

If you're teaching "Intro to Southern Literature," for instance, the beginning of your syllabus might look a lot like this: Agrarians, Wolfe, Faulkner, O'Connor (read: racist white men until you finally get to, gasp, racist white woman—diversity!!). I say this, honestly, with love, as a southernist whose fave novels are tied between *Blood Meridian* and *As I Lay Dying*. These are good works of literature written by talented authors, who unfortunately, also often sucked. My advice is: show the full picture. When you teach the Fugitive Poets, do your share of Davidson and Tate, but emphasize Laura Riding for a feminine lens. Don't just teach *I'll Take My Stand* but Tara McPherson's *Reconstructing Dixie* or Michael Kreyling's *Inventing Southern Literature* to directly challenge these southern myths, and Trudier Harris' *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line* or Imani Perry's *South to America* to emphasize the oft-forgotten racialized experience of the South.

As you get closer to contemporary texts, choose to elevate marginalized voices. If you want to explore GritLit, opt for Dorothy Allison—a queer woman—versus the Larry, Barry, Harry trio. As you turn into the 21st century, instead of going for Ron Rash or Daniel Woodrell, look at Monique Truong to see how

queer men, disabled women, and Vietnamese immigrants locate a southern identity. These authors and texts are just as southern as the rest and just as well define southern literature.

Another option besides starting more traditional and shifting to deviations as you move contemporary is to consider pairings across time. In an “Early British Literature” course, you may be required to teach Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, but that doesn’t mean he has to get the final word. You could pair Milton with a contemporary poet like Danez Smith, whose *Don’t Call Us Dead* grapples with questions of divinity, damnation, and redemption—but from a queer, Black, twenty-first-century vantage point. Let students compare the epic voice of Milton with Smith’s to explore what it means to imagine heaven from the margins alongside questioning what kind of legacy Milton’s reimagining of heaven and hell has had on literature as a whole.

Fear, Framing, and the Politics of Now

In 2025—especially in the American South—there are explicit legislative efforts to curtail academic freedom.

Anti-critical race theory bills, attacks on DEI initiatives, and increasingly hostile oversight of faculty decisions have made the job not only harder but scarier. Books are being banned and challenged regularly, including southern texts many of us find foundational: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Bluest Eye*. For many of us, teaching “controversial” material feels risky. And while it shouldn’t be, it too often is. That doesn’t mean we stop—it means we get strategic. You don’t have to say, “This is a DEI course,” to have a diverse, inclusive syllabus.

An important note, too, is that this work is bigger than English. I write from within literary studies because that’s where I live, but these strategies are not discipline-bound. Art historians can frame exhibitions around colonial violence and resistance. Historians can trouble timelines and national myths. Philosophers can include writers who weren’t preserved because they were barely considered human at the time.

Every field has a canon. Every canon has cracks. And every syllabus is a chance to let something else grow through them.



JOIN US IN CONGRATULATING YESMINA KHEDHIR!

Yesmina will start a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of English and American Studies, The University of Debrecen, Hungary. Besides teaching, she will be working on her manuscript, titled *Narratives of Survival: Memory, trauma, and Healing in Jesmyn Ward's Bois Sauvage Novels*, and on a co-edited collection, titled *Matrilineal Family Saga Beyond Western Modernity*.

**Congratulations on this exciting
achievement and work!**

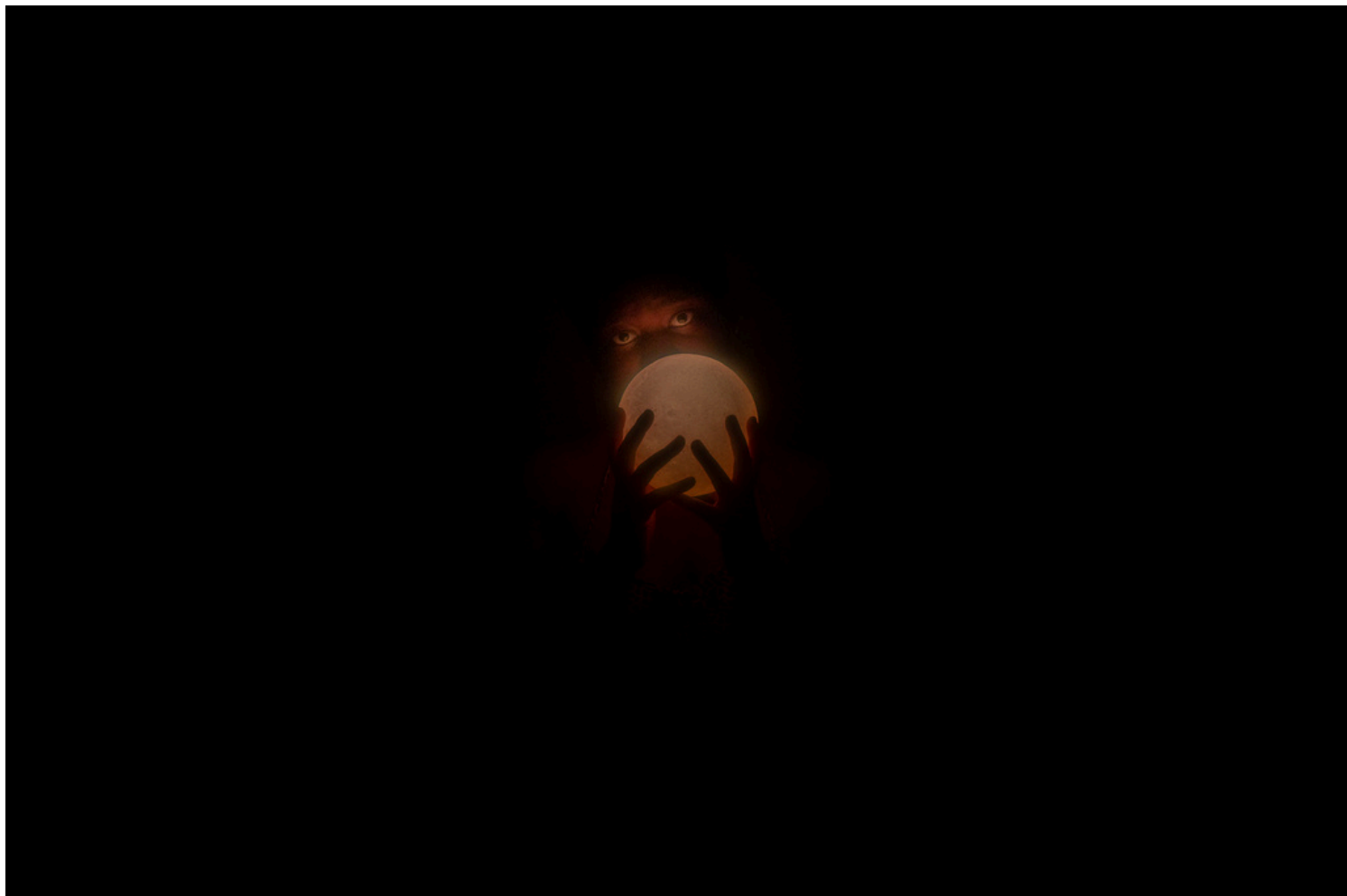




Yesmina Khedhir is a postdoctoral research fellow and part-time lecturer at the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. She holds a PhD in Literary and Cultural Studies from the same university, and a BA and MA in English from the Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Humanities of Manouba, Tunisia. She was also a Fulbright scholar (FLTA) at Stanford University in 2011-2012. As a research fellow, Yesmina is currently working on her first-to-be monograph, titled *Narratives of Survival: Memory, trauma, and Healing in Jesmyn Ward's Bois Sauvage Novels*. She has previously published several articles and book chapters in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, like *Callaloo*, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS), *North Meridian Press*, *Philological Review*, *Cambridge Scholars of Publishing*, and *Demeter Press*. Her areas of interest include African American literature, southern studies, Black feminism/womanism, ecocriticism/ecowomanism, memory and trauma studies, Blue Humanities, and migration studies.







Mahkia Greene



DR. JOANNA DAVIS- MCELLIGAT

Scholar Spotlight

Photo by Bird Sellergren

Interview conducted by Yesmina Khedhir

For our ESO summer Newsletter, we are highlighting BIPOC voices and celebrating their achievements and work in academia. In this interview we talk to Dr. Joanna Davis-McElligatt, an influential scholar and writer whose work speaks for her strong commitment and unwavering effort to carve a space for Black studies and scholars within academia in the US and beyond.

Could you please introduce yourself and your fields of research to our readers?

I am an Assistant Professor of Black Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of North Texas, where I also work as Affiliate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies and LGBTQ+ Studies. I've been at UNT for six years—before I arrived here, I was a tenured Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where I

worked for nine years. I always say that my primary fields of research and teaching are Africana Studies, Comics Studies, and Southern Studies—when I’m lucky, I can bring all three of them together at once. I just completed my final year of service to The Comics Studies Society, where I served as First Vice President, Second Vice President, President, and Immediate Past President, and I have recently re-joined the executive council of the Society for the Study of Southern Literature.

How does the present and future of southern studies look like to you?

I first began working in Southern Studies as an undergraduate at the University of Kansas, where I was fortunate to meet and study under Doreen Fowler; I took her course on Faulkner on a whim (Pound and Eliot was full), and it changed the trajectory of my life. I was 19, and she was the first person to show me what Southern literature was actually intending to do—how it shed light on not only the region, but also the nation-state, how it centered the historical and ongoing lived experiences of the folks I’d been born to, how it opened up space for thinking through my ancestral legacies, and helped carve pathways forward into a new future. My family

on both sides hails from Mississippi and Texas, but I had always been told that the South was a dangerous, troubled place that they’d been wise to leave behind. My ancestors were enslaved in Mississippi (and more than likely also in Texas, though information is harder to find about my grandpa). My grandparents migrated to Kansas (their siblings to California, Illinois) in the 1950s hoping to evade the pressures and violences of Jim Crow. That wasn’t the case, unfortunately—my grandfather, Theodore Roosevelt Davis, for example, fought in WWII, but was denied GI Bill benefits, and couldn’t join a union in Wichita because they didn’t tolerate integration. Those problems emerged not from a Southern place, but from the federal government and from a so-called “free state.” It became very clear to me that what I’d been taught to think of as Southern problems were in fact global and national problems, that the South wasn’t a region distinct from the rest of the world, but a place that was deeply ingrained, central to, apart of the globe.

To me, the South manifestly matters. When I think about the present and future of Southern Studies, my mind goes first to the power and importance of teaching and studying and thinking of the region as a vital

cultural, literary, and political entity that matters now. Too many people have this terrible misperception that the South is not a modern or postmodern place, that it is somehow frozen in some ceaselessly backward-looking past. That doesn't track with my lived experience at all. I have found boundless energy and creativity, the will to resist and create, the desire to persist in the face of real and deliberate violence here. The South now is shaped by those investments, by the people who have always been here, by the brilliant immigrants who make the region their home, by the people who, like myself, eventually return. We are alive and in the moment, and our stories won't be easily suppressed.

The future of Southern Studies is, in some ways, tied to the future of academia, which isn't so bright. I can't lie about that. I worry about our ongoing ability to maintain the field in the face of adjunctification and the shrinking of the tenure track, the cooling of free speech, the assault on higher education from the administration. Our fates as intellectuals are intimately bound up in the market economy for our ideas, and it's a scary time right now (arguably always—this isn't really new news). We need to make sure that our field is accessible by making no- or

low-cost attendance possible to SSSL, that we champion the work of non-tenure track and emerging scholars, that we throw our backs behind helping folks find employment and find a foothold in the field. One thing I long to see is the continued growth of the field to include folks in adjacent fields—Justice Studies, Environmental Studies, Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, Latinx Studies—who are always writing about the South, but might not think of themselves as “Southern Studies scholars” because they are alienated by the field's historical whiteness. If we want Southern Studies to survive and thrive, we need to grow our boundaries, thinking with other fields rather than at odds with them. And this will mean, I think, continuing to shift the boundaries of our acceptable objects, to constantly rethink what it means to be Southern, who can or should speak for or in the South, what the geographic, social, historical, cultural, and political boundaries of the field might be.

I am co-editing a collection with A.D. Boynton II (University of Kansas) entitled *Afrosouthernfuturism*, and our conception of the South is that it's a place that has and is and will continue to be vital to the future. My ancestors survived unimaginable horrors through the most ingenious,

inventive means—they intended for me to be here, alive today, with my own family in this place. They had hopes, and they turned those hopes into action. Rather than thinking of the South as, again, some lost or backwards place, we argue that Southerners have always been invested in the future, have shaped it and brought it into being, and have done so in ways that are crucial to helping us survive *now*.

What do you think of the current position and place of Black studies in academia in general, and in the field of southern studies in particular?

Black Studies is an incredibly important field, but at the moment it's under direct assault. I have been watching the news with dread as programs are eliminated or consolidated or phased out under the banner of "DEI" retrenchment. Many scholars of Black Studies are, like myself, housed in other departments—Political Science, History, English, or Sociology. So I do have hope that our work can survive in some ways, even as it has never been more clear that we need the knowledge scholars in this field can offer us, now more than ever.

I think Black Studies occupies a central and yet simultaneously

invisibilized place in Southern Studies. No one could deny that Black writers and explorations of Black life—from slavery to Jim Crow to the Civil Rights Movement to Charlottesville—are central to our understanding of the region and its literature and culture. But more often than not Black Studies feels like a footnote. I would love it if more Southern Studies scholars approached and engaged and read literature and culture in light of Black study, to make a concerted effort to engage critical discourses that have historically been marginalized in Southern Studies. I am often dismayed when I go to SSSL that we don't have more Black (or Brown or Indigenous) participants, that the organization hasn't done the necessary work yet to bring Black study to the front of the field. Part of this is the insularity of the field, which I suppose is true of all fields—they all have histories and tendencies. But it has always, always bothered me that we have these pressing gaps in the field when it comes to Black thought. I have to stress again that there are so many scholars who are working on and in the South who do not see themselves as part of the field, and that is work we can do together, to broaden and expand our membership and engagement, to draw in new and emerging and seasoned scholars who care about the work we do. Part of

that is also allowing ourselves to be changed by their engagement.

How do you navigate as a Black writer and teacher current institutional pressure, the threat to freedom of expression and academic integrity, and especially the attempts to control curriculum in US academic institutions today?

It's never easy to be Black in the academy—to be any kind of marginalized scholar. This current moment is frightening, but in that regard it's not exactly new. I would say that I have been unapologetic about pursuing my research agenda—I know it matters, and I insist upon that. This administration would love for us to self-censor, to move on or switch our intellectual pursuits, and that is absolutely the wrong move. Now is *exactly the right time* for us to do this work.

That said, I also have to balance this knowledge that our work matters now against the very real anxieties and pressures that my doctoral students and early-career mentees are facing in this political climate, that I myself am facing as I go through the tenure process again here; there aren't as many grants (if any), and increasing financial and political pressure from institutions will absolutely impact the job market. For that reason, I think

it's critical to have solid community, to be with folks who can help vouch for you, help you shape your work, can help you articulate its value. Mentorship and peership and friendship are so important. I spend a lot of my time working with scholars in writing groups, or swapping work, or sharing syllabi, or joking around on the internet, because our work happens in community. The ESO is one such amazing community, where we can share and grow and learn and be together. So many of my early years in academia were laced through with feelings of inadequacy and loneliness and fear—and I tended to shoulder those burdens alone by self-isolating. One of the things that has been amazing to me is the community of feminist and queer scholars in Southern Studies who have consistently shown up for one another, and demonstrated to me how we can do this work together. I have to give a shout-out to former presidents Gina Caison and Lisa Hinrichsen, and to Kelly Vines and Michael Bibler, to Michał Choiński, Solveig Dunkel, and Frédérique Spill for modeling what these communities might look like going forward.

If there is anything that I do to navigate this pressure it's to turn to folks who can help, or listen, or share stories. In 2019, I published a co-edited collection with Santosh Khadka

(University of California, Northridge) and Keith Dorwick (University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Emeritus) entitled *Narratives of Marginalized Identities in Higher Education: Inside and Outside the Academy* (Routledge)—and I think this book is really helpful (and not just because I co-edited it!) as a guide for folks who are trying to find concrete strategies for getting through it.

I should also say my email is always open! I am happy to read drafts, commiserate, strategize. People are always telling me they think I'm too busy, but I'm never, ever too busy for mentorship or friendship. It's what keeps me afloat.

I know that you always strive to centralize Black authors and their works in your courses. Could you share with us some of the major topics of your past, current, or potential courses for next year?

In the last two years I've had the pleasure of teaching some really cool classes. Last semester I taught a graduate course in Africana Studies entitled "The Door of No Return." We talked about what it means to think of the Black folk in the US South and Caribbean as connected to Africa—how, and in what way? My father and I have tried very hard to find information about our enslaved

ancestors, and have hit a firm wall in 1840s Mississippi. There's just nothing there. Can we ever go home again? How can we understand the relationship between the descendants of the enslaved from Africa and more recent immigrants from the continent—how are we connected and how are we not? We read Saidiya Hartman, Maisy Card, Taiye Selasi, Isidore Okpewho, Christina Sharpe, Yaa Gyasi, Dionne Brand, Marita Golden, Dinaw Mengestu, Andrea Levy, and Hazel Carby.

I also recently taught a graduate seminar entitled "Speculative Southscapes," an exploration of the South in science fiction and fantasy and other speculative media. I taught this course once before while working in Louisiana, and it's always fun to push yourself to see where you can go with a course you're familiar with. I was so surprised that many of my students were hostile to the idea of the South and Southern literature—and it was thrilling to see folks immediately come around to how exciting and vibrant the literature of the moment is, to see how Southern writers are imagining the future in light of the now, in light of the past. I love those moments, when I can show students that Southern Studies is really happening! A dorky pleasure, but a true one. We read Colson

Whitehead, William Faulkner, Jesmyn Ward, Tananarive Due, Chang-Rae Lee, Stephen Graham Jones, Caldwell Turnbull, Lee Mandelo, and Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing*.

This semester I'm teaching my favorite undergraduate course, "An American Demonology," which is a study of healing, magic, and witchcraft in American ethnic literature. We begin with Cotton Mather, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (the film version!), The VVitch (2015, Robert Egger) and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, and from there spiral out to Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning*, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, and Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*—though this year I'm absolutely swapping that out for *Sinners*. It's such a fun class, and also a sneaky way to get students to think about region and nation and globe, and to stretch their thinking of the South to the Southwest and Caribbean.

Congratulations on your upcoming book *Black Aliens: Kinship in the Cosmic Diaspora*! Could you tell us a little bit about it?

I'm very excited that my monograph, *Black Aliens: Kinship in the Cosmic*

Diaspora, is forthcoming from The Ohio State University Press in March 2026. *Black Aliens* offers an exploration of extraterrestrial aliens in Black speculative media and culture as representations of a cosmic diasporic experience and as charged metaphors for Black fugitivity and escape. *Black Aliens* is really a study of extraterrestrial alien entanglements and relationships and friendships with terrestrial being/s that generate new networks of kinship and relation—genealogical, reproductive, transspecial—and make survival possible for Black subjects on Earth and in outer space. I offer a critical study of prose, poetry, and film, record albums, comic books, illustrations and amateur drawings, and art installations and exhibition catalogues, and more specifically trace how Octavia E. Butler, Maisy Card, Dwayne McDuffie and M.D. Bright, and Sun Ra construct Black extraterrestrials who make chosen kin-community with Black Earthlings, extending the Black Atlantic into outer space. I argue that Butler, Card, McDuffie, and Ra intentionally locate the Black alien as a subject whose galactic entanglements are constructed in and as narrative form itself, made manifest at the level of plot, characterization, and narrativization, recasting narrative spacetime itself in order to represent

and reimagine Black entanglements, kinship systems, and histories as a cosmic diaspora. More generally, I situate the cosmic diaspora as an extension of what R. Scott Heath has described as “the planetary South”—each of the texts and beings launches from and/or is sent to the South, shaping and changing and altering our perception of region, nation, globe, and universe.

Finally do you have any message or final word that you would like to say to other scholars or artists in Black studies?

I know that it's very easy to become despairing and overwhelmed by the extreme conditions of our current moment. I have been thinking to myself of the old spiritual—echoed as a refrain during the Civil Rights Movement: “Walk together, children. Don't get weary.”

Don't get weary. Keep it moving. Walk together.

Yesmina: Thank you very much, Dr. Joanna Davis Mc-Elligatt, for opening up your heart and mind to us! It was a great pleasure having you as our spotlight guest!



JOIN US IN CONGRATULATING JOANMARIE BAÑEZ!

Joanmarie graduated from UC San Diego this spring with a PhD in literature and a specialization in critical gender studies.

Her article, "Synaesthetics of Transracial Adoption in Bitter in the Mouth by Monique Truong," is forthcoming in MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S. this fall.

She also will be starting as an Assistant Professor of English at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia, this coming academic year!

**Congratulations on these excellent
achievements!**





Joanmarie Bañez is an incoming assistant professor of English at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia. She completed her BA and MA in English literary studies at Georgia State University and received her PhD in literature with a specialization in critical gender studies at the University of California San Diego in Spring 2025. Broadly, she studies 20th- and 21st-century multiethnic literatures of the United States with a focus on queer kinship and national belonging. Her current project, *Southern Hostilities: Asian American and Pacific Islander Kinship and Belonging in the US South*, argues that how transracial adoptees, war refugees, and migrant domestic workers perform gratitude and indebtedness as conditions for belonging within the family evinces the conditions for belonging as subjects under US empire. In addition to a forthcoming article in *MELUS*, "Synaesthetics of Transracial Adoption in Bitter in the Mouth by Monique Truong," her work can be found in *Southern Cultures*, *The Georgia Review*, and *South Atlantic Review*.



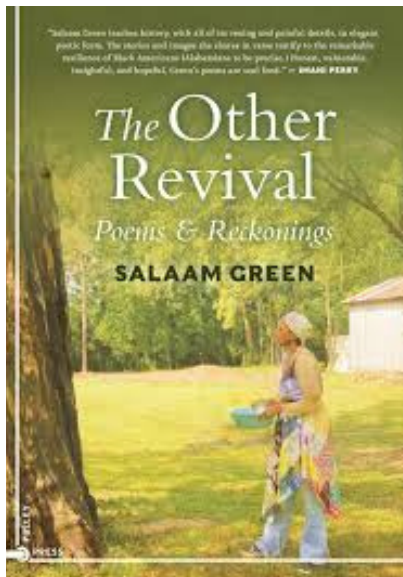


NEW AND RECENT

BY BLACK

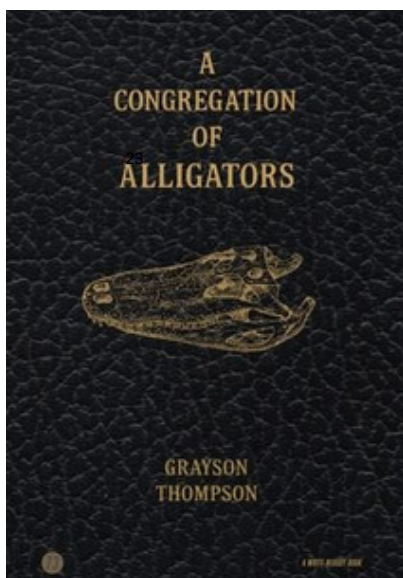
LISTS BY LAURA WILSON

POETRY



SALAAM GREEN **The Other Revival**

Green, the poet laureate of Birmingham, Alabama deliberately released her newest work to coincide with Juneteenth, as *The Other Revival* looks at ideas of history and memory via the experiences of both Black and white descendants of an Alabama plantation.



GRAYSON THOMPSON **A Congregation of Alligators**

Inspired by a superhighway in Florida nicknamed Alligator Alley, Thompson's collection explores varied themes, listed by the author as "falling out of love with your friend, how to become a man after being raised in all the synonyms for girl [...] love poems that don't reference flowers, the ocean, running away [...] homecoming, childhood, fear, grief, family [...] intimacy, and other places our bodies go to try to make sense of hope, pain, and risk."

SOUTHERN LITERATURE

AUTHORS



KEVIN YOUNG

Night Watch

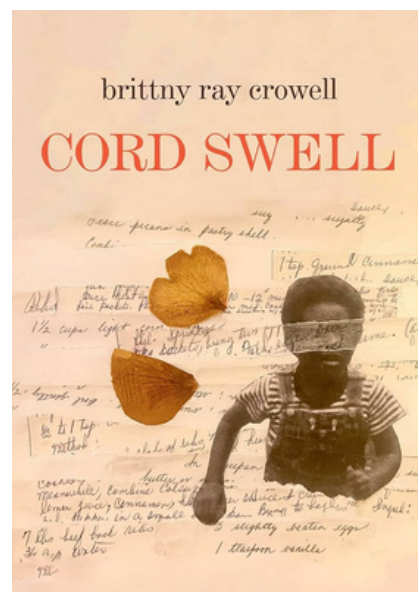
Acclaimed poet Kevin Young returns with another book of poems, written across the course of sixteen years (!), this time exploring legacies of enslavement, grief, and regionality. The text opens in the bayous of Louisiana with a piece telling the story of conjoined African American twins who toured the world.



BRITTNY RAY CROWELL

Cord Swell

crowell combines poetry with mixed media collage to tell the intergenerational tales of Black women in her family history, in Texarkana, Texas. In this, her debut collection, crowell interrogates notions of the archive, what gets remembered, and by whom.





NEW AND RECENT

BY BLACK

POETRY+ FICTION



MAKSHYA TOLBERT **Shade is a Place**

Part of the Penguin Poets Series, Tolbert grapples with the sense of Black space and Black place, homing in on Charlottesville, Virginia by incorporating the genres of travelogue and walking poems.



CARRIE MOORE **Make Your Way Home**

In this highly anticipated short story collection, Moore covers a broad range of Southern topographies, such as Florida and North Carolina. Another debut text, Moore evaluates ideas of home and belonging across eleven tales.

SOUTHERN LITERATURE

AUTHORS



MARKUS REDMOND

Blood Slaves

Redmond's debut novel plays with the genre of the vampire origin story to probe more deeply into trauma enacted upon plantations, considering ideas of revenge and justice in a fresh new way.



JASON MOTT

People Like Us

Carrying on the story of Soot, who readers met in *Hell of a Book* (2021), Mott returns with another meta-novel that offers shrewd commentary on identity and authoring the self.





NEW AND RECENT

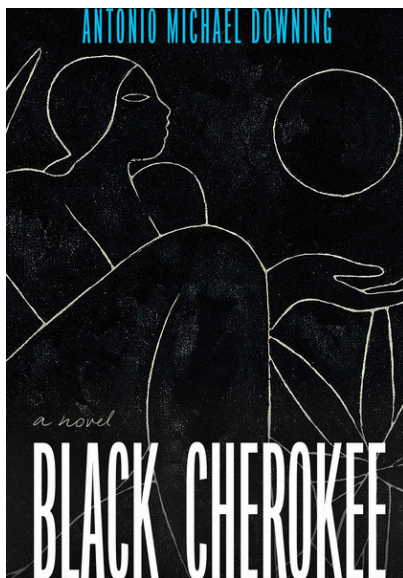
BY BLACK

FICTION + NONFICTION



ADDIE CITCHENS **Dominion**

Set in Mississippi, this family drama, told from the perspective of women in the small town of Dominion, examines themes of patriarchy and control. It's already been dubbed a must read by literary magazines, and longlisted for a First Novel Prize.



ANTONIO MICHAEL DOWNING **Black Cherokee**

Black Cherokee tells the story of Ophelia Blue Rivers, a mixed-race Black girl desperate for her South Carolinian Cherokee community to accept her. Critics are comparing this one to Betty by Tiffany McDaniel (2020) and Queenie by Candace Carty Williams (2019).

SOUTHERN LITERATURE

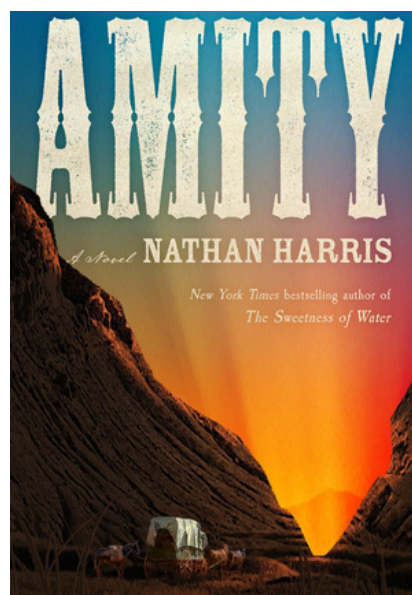
AUTHORS



NATHAN HARRIS

Amity

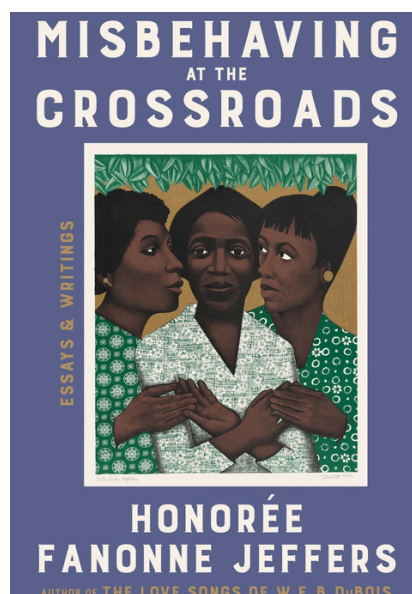
From the author of *The Sweetness of Water*, *Amity* is another Civil War inflected novel from Nathan Harris. Here, the formerly enslaved Coleman tries desperately to find his sister June, as they traverse the US frontier and come to terms with the limits of their newfound freedom.



HONORÉE FANONNE JEFFERS

Misbehaving at the Crossroads: Essays and Writings

Not to be hemmed in by genre, following her novel *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois* (2021) and poetry collection *The Age of Phillis* (2020), Jeffers returns with this collection of essays and other writings which explores the theme of journeys made by Black women throughout history.

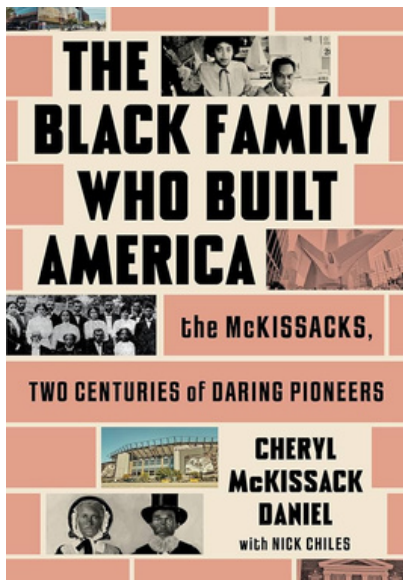




NEW AND RECENT

BY BLACK

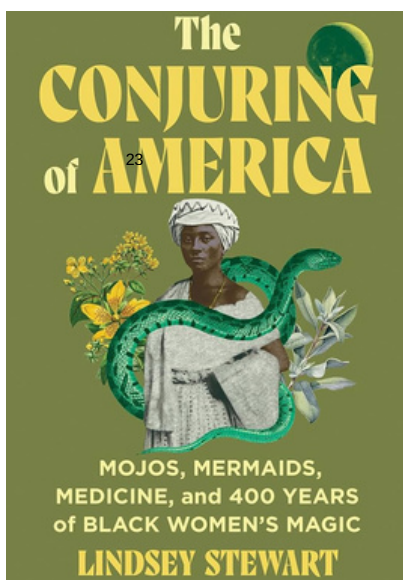
NONFICTION



CHERYL MCKISSACK DANIEL AND NICK CHILES

**The Black Family who Built America:
The McKissacks, Two Centuries of
Daring Pioneers**

If you've been to Tennessee, chances are you've seen a number of McKissack buildings, as the familial architects designed many famous locations there. This biography delves into the long and rich history of this Black business told by Cheryl McKissack Daniel, family member and current CEO of the company.



LINDSEY STEWART

**The Conjuring of America: Mojos,
Mermaids, Medicine, and 400 Years of
Black Women's Magic**

Deeply researched and sensitively written, Lindsey Stewart offers a valuable history of conjure in the United States, arguing that the practice "informs our lives in ways remarkable and ordinary-from traditional medicines that informed the creation of Vicks VapoRub and the rise of Aunt Jemima's Pancake Mix, to the original magic of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (2023), and the true origins of the all-American classic blue jean."

SOUTHERN LITERATURE

AUTHORS



ALEXIS OKEOWO

Blessings and Disasters: A Story of Alabama

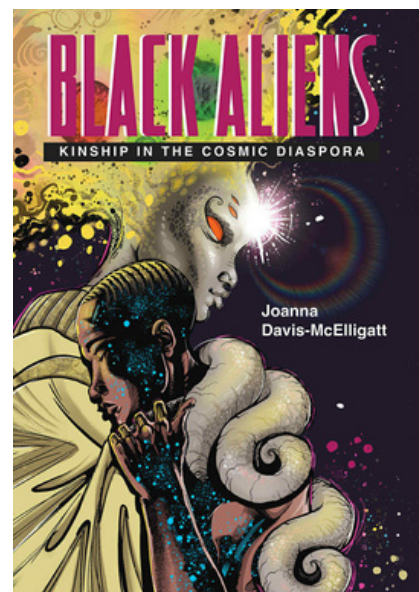
Okeowo, a writer for the New York Times, offers a powerful meditation on Montgomery, Alabama, where she grew up, the child of Nigerian immigrants. Combining memoir with journalism, *Blessings and Disasters* explores the state in an unflinching warts-and-all manner, demonstrating the deeply complicated combination of love and shame one can feel toward home.



JOANNA DAVIS-MCELLIGATT

Black Aliens: Kinship in the Cosmic Diaspora

Black Aliens examines extraterrestrial and interdimensional aliens who emerge in Black speculative media and culture as figural representations of a cosmic diasporic experience and as charged metaphors for Black fugitivities and escape.





Pedagogies of Care

Savannah DiGregorio

“When we center care for our BIPOC students... we challenge the structures that demand their resilience while denying their humanity.”

What does it mean to care for Black lives? When my students read Richard Wright’s short story, “Down by the Riverside,” for instance, they are most often struck not by the severity of the 1927 Mississippi Flood, but rather the grotesque indifference with which Wright’s protagonist, Mann, and his laboring pregnant wife, Lulu, are treated by white people. Not

only do members of the American Red Cross and the National Guard—organizations meant to protect American citizens—continually refuse Lulu aid, but once they reach the hospital, Lulu is quickly pronounced dead without any effort to resuscitate her or to save the couple’s baby. This kind of casual indifference appears again when we read Patricia Smith’s poem,

“34,” through the monologues of thirty-four nursing home patients who drowned after being abandoned during Hurricane Katrina. In Jesmyn Ward’s novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, students once more find an African American teenager shot and carelessly left for dead in the woods of the Mississippi Delta. With each new example, I bring the class back to Mann’s thoughts at the beginning of Wright’s story: “Surely,” Mann thinks, “they would not let a woman die just because she was black.”

I ask students how a statement like this relates to our world today, prompting them to consider the similarities between contemporary politics and the Jim Crow South, between our own communities and the literature they read in my class. This question leads to lively discussions on a range of topics: the disparities in healthcare, especially for African American women, reproductive rights, police brutality, and environmental racism—subjects that all correlate to a lack of care. Indeed, Kanye West’s now famous response to the (mis)handling of Hurricane Katrina—“George Bush doesn’t care about Black people”—attests to the ways that issues of social justice are bound up with the ethics of care.

In an era of ongoing racial injustice, environmental degradation, and polarizing politics, then, how can we empower our students to recognize that the skills they cultivate in our courses are more than exercises in academic literacy, that they are meaningful expressions of care and social justice?

While it is important to model practices of care and empathy in our classrooms, it is vital that we teach today’s students how to care for themselves as well. In this sense, we might think of teaching not just as imparting information but as nurturing a collective well-being and healing from systems of oppression. Teaching is thus also a radical act of care through which we foster relationships with and between our students. Professor Altheria L. Caldera’s autobiographical essay, “Challenging Capitalistic Exploitation: A Black Feminist/Womanist Commentary on Work and Self-Care,” offers an excellent opening exercise for introducing students to the concept of self-care, especially in courses that foreground issues of race, gender, and class.

As Caldera reminds us, self-care is a praxis drawn from Black feminist theory.

It is “Alice Walker’s definition of a womanist:

‘She loves herself. Regardless.’”

It is “Black feminist June Jordan:

‘I must undertake to love myself and to respect myself as though my very life depends upon self-love and self-respect.’”

And it is “Jameta Barlow, [who] warned that for Black women, a lack of love for ourselves is ‘the real silent killer.’”

“Self-care, then,” Caldera concludes, is

an observable, purposeful demonstration of love for our bodies, minds, and spirits.”

Caldera recalls her first experience with self-care: an essay prompt assigned to her by womanist scholar Melanie Harris in graduate school. “Harris was aware,” Caldera explains, that “the psychological toll of being a Black woman . . . can never be underestimated. There is very low value placed upon Black women’s psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist.” “Harris [urged] me,” she concludes, to “take care of the self even when others fail to do so.”

Harris’s assignment can easily be adapted to undergraduate classrooms. For example, students might first read Caldera’s essay and then design their own self-care plan, outlining their emotional needs, learning goals, and strategies for maintaining wellness throughout the semester. For a more creative approach, students can include excerpts from Black feminist writing that they find significant or inspiring. Building on their self-care plans, have students discuss why care is important when engaging with materials that are often both personal and political, as well as the ways they might balance self-care with producing their own meaningful work. This activity not only lays the foundation for a healthy and respectful learning environment but encourages students to get to know each other and to build peer-support networks in class. At the same time, it models a different relationship to learning, one that prioritizes tenderness and reflection over burnout and self-sacrifice.

When we center care for our BIPOC students, moreover, we challenge the structures that demand their resilience while denying their humanity. This kind of teaching moves beyond superficial institutional metrics like grades, attendance, and other standardized benchmarks. It asks us instead to lead with empathy, to build relationships grounded in mutual respect, and to create classrooms where care, concern, and reflection are not peripheral, but fundamental to the learning process.

The Joy of Hands-On Assignments

Prioritizing care in our classrooms also offers opportunities for joy and, even better, play. In recent years, I have started including more hands-on class activities and assignments as alternatives to traditional lectures and essays. These “get on your feet / get up and make it happen” moments, as educator Constance Borab would say, reinforce student learning through doing. After studying African American and Diasporic foodways in my “Black South(s)” course, for instance, I had students recreate one of the recipes, such as formerly enslaved chef James Hemmings’s macaroni and cheese, and reflect on their cooking process. In their “cookbooks,” students interwove photographs of their meals with close readings of cultural histories, recipes, and ingredients, as well as reflections on cooking as an embodied method of analysis, storytelling, and preservation. With this project, students discovered that inquiry can also be a form of nourishment as they recognized and reclaimed popular American recipes 54

typically not credited to their African American creators. Importantly, students had fun and were excited to share their experiences when they returned to class.

Similarly, in my “Environmental Humanities” course, after teaching students about local and indigenous plants, as well as flora from Latin America and the Black Atlantic, I had students visit the university’s Ethnobotanical Garden. There they interacted with plant species from around the world, taking into account our lessons on subjectivity and the communal relationships of nonhuman beings. Students recorded their findings, reflections, and cultural analyses in “Botanical Books.”

As you can see, these kinds of “applied humanities” assignments are easily adapted to fit a variety of course topics and themes. They additionally allow educators to move, if ever so slightly, away from Eurocentric forms of knowledge, which often privilege sight (writing/reading text), toward more embodied ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling—that which takes root in the gut and the body.

Other options for applied and/or hands-on learning include having students write and perform spoken word, design board games, make zines, produce podcasts, film short documentaries or films, document and analyze local infrastructure or technology, document oral histories, write fan fiction, create maps or multimedia archives, conduct

science experiments, care for a plant at home, or participate in Living History Museums.

Communities of Care

We can empower students to imagine better-worlds-to-come by cultivating relationships between our classrooms and our local and global communities. In another class, for instance, I invited a well-known Mississippi author to speak with my students. After discussing his book, he encouraged many of my students to take pride in their Black southern heritage, reminding them that the South is their South, too. Students in that course also spoke with a local hip hop artist, as well as a vegan chef who gave a talk about how her early exposure to Black Rights—her father was a member of the Black Panther Party—led her to practice veganism as a form of social justice. At other times, I have invited filmmakers to speak with my classes, such as a Brazilian director who discussed his work on the deforestation of the Amazon. By bringing the community inside of our classrooms, we make space for students to hear from different people who share their cultural roots while exposing others to perspectives they may not otherwise encounter. Moreover, by facilitating these relationships, we further encourage students to form connections with their local communities and the wider world, between the university and the public. Finally, when we as scholars and educators reach out and connect with those responsible for crafting what

we study and teach, the more our worlds, too, become bigger, brighter, and filled with possibilities. Or, as Audre Lorde put it:

“There is something to be learned from the sharing of true feeling between two or more people; co-communicating is teaching—touching—really touching another human being is teaching—writing real poems is teaching—digging good ditches is teaching—living is teaching.”



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Emerging *Scholar Spotlight:* Issac Salazar



Interview by
Savannah DiGregorio

Could you please introduce yourself and your fields of research to our readers?

I'm Isaac Salazar, and I am a third-year graduate student in the Department of English at Rice University in Houston, Texas. My research interests are broadly at the intersection(s) of Latinx literature and the environmental humanities. More specifically, I am interested in Mexican American and Chicanx literature and the cultural practices they enact for, within, and against the Anthropocene, whether that be at the level of literary form, affect, and/or multimedia aesthetics.

At the current moment, I am interested in desert- and riverscapes as (queer) kinds of atmospheric events.

Can you talk about the creative work you do and how that work informs your academic scholarship? How might engaging in creative writing change the way we approach academic writing (or vice versa)?

I'm a part-time poet! My creative work emerged from a rather belated exposure to creative writing during the final years of my undergraduate career at Cornell University. At that time, I was able to learn the



MFA students there, as well as from the poets Valzhyna Mort and Ishion Hutchinson, who became my first poetry mentors and helped emphasize the revolving interest I had in writing about heritage, queerness, masculinity, and the natural world. I still pursue those same topics when they come to me, mostly because I grew up around them and, after leaving for several years of school, confronted moments of processing. I come from a family that lived in the suburbs but still held community with their previous identities as corn harvesters, farmers, and vaqueros from Michoacán. I choose to immerse myself in my culture both creatively and scholarly, though, because I want to recognize the reciprocal relationship of care to the environment that's been long-standing in my community and its siblings.

It's silly to think that there was a period, the time in which I was applying to graduate programs (both MFA and PhD programs), that I intentionally separated the two poles that represented my creative work and my scholarly work; I didn't think they could coalesce or should coalesce. Perhaps I still hold that belief to a degree, but I acknowledge now that, at the level of content and voice, they often speak to one another whether I intend them to or not.

When I think about putting the two—creative writing and academic writing

—in conversation with one another, I think a lot about and return to the Mojave poet Natalie Diaz, especially one of her poems in her poetry collection *Postcolonial Love Poem* (2020) titled “The First Water Is the Body.” This poem models a way of blending genres that I feel is both intimate and instructive of a strategy we in the humanities can use to bridge the creative and critical. Her use of statistics, research, and lived experience allows her poetry to inhabit the space of evidence without abandoning lyricism. I find that blend deeply inspiring, particularly when I'm writing within the field of Mexican American and Chicanx literatures that are defined by migration, labor, land dispossession, etc. What creative writing teaches us to prioritize specificity, feeling, and the embodied stakes of language. Academic writing, in turn, demands that we sustain a rigorous inquiry. Together, they ask different but compatible questions about what knowledge is and how it is felt or carried. I feel like we often compartmentalize academic and creative writing into separate genres, but genres have never been fixed, but rather are made to overlap one another. Engaging in creative work has reminded me that scholarship can be a place for voice, imagination, and poetic risk, just as poetry can be a vessel for research, citation, and intellectual rigor. Both forms are means of seeing, and I'm very much interested in seeing where else they blur.



As an Austin native and now Houston based scholar, how has Texas or the Southwest shaped your scholarly interests? How might your work (or you as a scholar) challenge traditional southern narratives?

Texas has been a grounding force. I knew I wanted to do research in a place that is centrally connected to the actual literature I'm reading and thinking with. I'm also from Texas, so being able to come back to communities I know and/or am familiar with was another motivating factor, especially after years of being away. My work is somewhat invested in regional specificity, and Texas offers a layered geography where multiple temporalities, cultures, and ecologies are constantly intersecting. As an Austin native and now Houston-based scholar, I've come to see the Southwest not just as a backdrop but as a living archive, one still shaped by histories of migration, extraction vis-à-vis Elon Musk, militarization, and resilience.

As I am in the reading stage of my program in preparation for preliminary exams, I'm beginning to understand my interest(s) in how Chicanx and Latinx writers engage with this state's environmental and cultural entanglements. This perspective already complicates and expands traditional Southern narratives, which often default to a Black/white racial binary or rural gothic aesthetic. My work on the borderlands sets up an immediate

framework that has always been part of the South and Southwest but have often been erased from dominant historical and literary accounts. Texas is not just a setting but a method that demands attention to contradiction and rootedness. It's where I first learned about care through land, family, and cultural inheritance. That's what I try to bring into my scholarship: a sense that place matters, and that stories told from here can unsettle national myths in powerful ways.

What do you feel is important about studying Chicanx/Xicanx and Latinx literature today, especially given our current political climate?

The communities that Chicanx/Xicanx and Latinx literatures represent are under attack. The mass deportations happening across the country, and the legislative efforts that often accompany them, reveal a blatant racism directed at brown peoples, the majority of whom are of Hispanic or Latin American descent. These policies not only dehumanize individuals but also legitimize systemic disregard for due process, family unity, and basic human dignity.

When I first began studying this literature, I was focused primarily on questions of identity and form. But over time, my approach has become more politically urgent. I'm now deeply invested in how literature functions as a record of both past and present racial and environmental violence and how it equips us to read



the present moment with greater depth. The current political climate has shifted the stakes of my work, compelling me to examine how contemporary injustices echo longer histories of dispossession, extraction, and surveillance across Texas, the Southwest, and beyond.

What literary genealogy can offer is a sense of continuity. It reveals how patterns of violence, racial profiling, and border enforcement have been sustained over time, even when the rhetoric around them changes. Literature allows us to trace these patterns not just through policy, but through story and voice. Studying Xicanx and Latinx literature today is not just about representation but about resistance, archive, and survival. It's about understanding how communities have narrated, resisted, and reimagined the structures that seek to erase them.

Can you talk a bit about your teaching? How do you approach your classroom and students? (this could be a particular kind of pedagogical practice or even an activity you enjoy doing or reading). Do you have a dream syllabus?

I haven't yet had the opportunity to teach my own class (talk to me again next year), though I've served as a Teaching Assistant for several professors and have led single class sessions and one-on-one meetings with students. So while I wouldn't claim to have a fully developed teaching philosophy just yet, I've begun to shape my approach around

the idea that the classroom should be a space for play, experimentation, and collective curiosity.

One activity I particularly enjoy (whether or not students always love it) is guided close reading. I'll often project a poem on the screen and walk through it with students, asking them first to notice image, form, and lineation before diving into meaning or content. I've done this with Joy Harjo's work, a range of Puerto Rican poets, and even Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X*. I've found that many students come in with apprehension or even antagonism toward poetry, so it's always rewarding to see their reactions shift when they realize they already have the tools to make sense of it. I want to break down the myth that poetry isn't "for" some people; I truly believe it can be for everyone.

I definitely have a dream syllabus, and it already exists! I was able to construct it for a pedagogy class I was required to take here at Rice. The course I designed is a Multiethnic Futurisms and Environmentalisms course, and it explores how multiethnic U.S. literatures and cultural productions from the late 20th century to the present engage with ecological and environmental concerns through the lens of speculative fiction and science fiction. If I can teach it in the near future, I would love to focus on writers, artists, and thinkers from Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, and diasporic communities, and investigate how environmental thought emerges



emerges from and responds to intersecting histories of colonialism, racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and forced migration.

What I particularly loved about constructing this syllabus was thinking through the types of assignments, one of which I have titled “Ekphrasis Sites” and would be moments throughout the semester where students would be able to experiment with form and expression. These sites might take the shape of a collage, visual artwork, poem, short story or film, architectural design, or other creative form. Each submission would be accompanied by a brief reflective statement that explains the student’s process and how the piece engages with course texts or themes. These Ekphrasis Sites would be paired with specific days that spotlight interdisciplinary or visual/media materials and would serve as a way to invite students into deeper, more personal engagement with the material.

I have another dream syllabus for a course on Latinx popular culture, and I’m excited to continue offering pedagogy that allows for creativity and representation.

What is the first piece of scholarship you read that got you interested in your current field(s) and what is the last thing you read that you found fascinating?

The first piece of scholarship that comes to mind is Priscilla Ybarra

Solis’ book *Writing the Goodlife* (2017). It wasn’t difficult to find this scholarship, because it was (and still remains) the only monograph that deeply engages in the work of reading Mexican American literature as ever-present environmental literature. Reading the ideas and sentiments that I’ve felt since sophomore year at my undergraduate institution—when I was taught environmental writing was just a bunch of white dudes on mountaintops writing about the natural world—was more than affirming but motivating to pursue the study of literature with a heuristic lens.

And there is never a last thing I’ve read! The most recent thing I’ve read is Jill Osier’s poetry collection *The Solace Is Not the Lullaby*. It was one of the nicest leisure reads I’ve had because of its subtle rural poetics. The way she’s able to imply new meaning to everyday images and meditative thought is impressive and makes me aspire to continue reading, writing, and orienting myself within the present and present-ness.

Do you have any advice for other emerging scholars?

We are a requisite to this world. That’s not an overstatement but, rather, it’s a reminder. Scholarship in the humanities is under attack by those who fear what critical thinking, historical accountability, and even imaginative world-building can do. The rise of anti-intellectualism in this



country is not just cultural but institutional and political. We're seeing universities abandon commitments to justice and truth, often cowering in the face of national- and state-level censorship and pressure from wealthier entities. It's embarrassing and dangerous.

Right now, the suppression of academic freedom and divestment from veracity are especially visible in the silencing of Palestinian voices and the policing of those who speak out in solidarity. We're watching institutions punish scholars and students for calling attention to genocide. At the same time, the current presidential administration has largely failed to take a principled stance. This is not only a crisis in the Middle East but also a test of whether the academy can still be a place of moral clarity and collective resistance.

To my peers and future peers: Your work matters, and your presence in the university is already a challenge to the structures that were never designed for us.

Use and protect your voice. Don't let institutions make you feel grateful just to be here. And remember that scholarship is just as much about care as it is about generating ideas and information.

Any exciting opportunities coming up (papers, publications, fellowships/awards, courses, archival work, etc.) that you would like to share with readers?

There are many conferences coming up that everyone should be on the lookout for. I'm thinking of the conferences I will be attending, like the Western Literature Association in Oklahoma, ASAP/16 in Houston, MELUS in Austin, as well as the Latino/a Studies Association.

I recently did an archival trip to read The Gloria Anzaldúa Papers at the University of Texas at Austin. The Benson Center is amazing, resourceful, and the staff is excellent. I recommend any and every emerging or curious Anzaldúan readers and scholars to take advantage of this continuing opportunity to read her unpublished and drafted works.

What does the future of southern studies look like to you? (I know you may not necessarily consider yourself a "southern scholar," but here the South is broadly conceived, including Souths beyond the US).

I don't really identify myself as a "southern scholar," at least not in the traditional sense. To my mind, that label has carried a narrow conception of the U.S. South and centered on a Black and white binary or cultural tropes tied to nostalgia and loss. My work is grounded more in the Southwest, which does complicate and expand the boundaries of what the South can mean. There's value in broadening southern studies to account for Souths that have always existed at the margins of dominant historical narratives.



What happens in the borderlands of the U.S. and Mexico, for example, is and should be just as important to southern studies as any other regional formation because it reveals the South as a site of ongoing colonial violence, migration, and ecological degradation. Looking at the South as a kind of borderlands with entangled relations (across borders, ecologies, and temporalities) rather than as a fixed region has been productive. I may not always wear the title “southern scholar,” but I’m deeply invested in reshaping what that title can mean and who it can include.

Thank you for this lovely interview,
Isaac!





Mahkia Greene



NOT ALL ACTIVISTS CARRY SIGNS:

Finding Your Role in the Movement

Sterling Neill

Every July 4th, flags proudly wave and fireworks dance across the sky. As Americans we supposedly celebrate our freedom, independence, and the long-lasting idea that America is a land for liberty, justice, and equality for all. However, for many these celebrations are reminders of the bitter truth that not everyone is free in the same way. There are still voices that are left unheard, fights that still rage on, and hope that continues to grow.

Empowering BIPOC voices throughout history have pointed out and continue to call attention to the limits of liberty. Frederick Douglass, for example, stated “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine, You may rejoice, I must mourn” to further underscore that the independence that is celebrated on this nationally sanctioned holiday is for white individuals, excluding BIPOC individuals from experiencing the freedoms set forth by the Declaration of Independence.

Ironically, a country built upon rebellion against oppression, often neglects the non-white, non-male other.

Therefore, those of us who are activists and still practice patriotism are less concerned about parades and anthems and more focused on believing in a country enough to help make it a better place. One of the most common ways to demonstrate patriotism and activism is through marching. Whether that be to support the protests of ICE raids with a focus on border policies and the treatment of immigrants or social justice movements that center Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+, or women's rights, economic and political concerns can be addressed in a multitude of ways outside of traditional marching and protests. While traditional marches and protests can be effective, such as in MLK's marches or the global protests that occurred after the death of George Floyd, it is crucial to understand that not everyone feels comfortable participating in advocacy. Activism is not a one-size-fits-all.

Extenuating circumstances can cause barriers to activism. For instance, international students may have the fear of being deported, while others may face significant financial burdens if arrested, making participation an unavoidable risk. However, there are several ways

you can be an activist without marching in the streets. One way to demonstrate your advocacy is to become familiar with the cause. Focus on educating yourself and others. Read books, follow movement leaders, listen to podcasts, and watch videos to critically engage with multiple perspectives. Some personal favorites include the book, *Hood Feminism* by Mikki Kendall and the podcast *Intersectionality Matters!* hosted by Kimberlé Crenshaw, coiner of the term "intersectionality". The knowledge about your cause will not only sharpen your voice but better equip you to combat misinformation. Activism is not simply about being loud and using your voice but rather about being informed and willing to share your ideas with others.

Another way to engage with activism is monetary. If you have financial means, donating money to trusted organizations that focus on providing support and mutual aid can have an immense impact. Not all donations need to be financial. You can also donate or volunteer your time. Supporting local communities by joining boards, attending meetings, and voting can help you build relationships with leaders and community members.

Additionally, by supporting locally you can demonstrate your values and uplift other voices to

strategically strengthen your activism network. By maintaining your everyday values: your treatment of others, where and how you choose to spend your time and money, uplifting marginalized voices on social media or other platforms will actively challenge injustice on an everyday basis. Social media offers a unique platform, enabling exploration and collaboration in real time while simultaneously bypassing traditional modes of gatekeeping. Real time access to audiences allows for information to be shared, recorded, and amplified through videos, content, and first hand testimonials. Social media not only serves as an instantaneous mode of communication but also offers a space for dispersing knowledge, providing aid coordination, and highlighting counter-narratives to controlled or biased media. By utilizing viral storytelling, advocates can humanize complicated issues, allowing them to be more palatable and readily accessible to wider audiences.

Clearly, there is not one way to be an activist. Not physically marching or protesting does not make your support or engagement any less real. Different educational, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds each cultivate a unique set of burdens. Black women, for example, often navigate double discrimination, racism and sexism, leaving Black women to shoulder emotional labor, while

while simultaneously contending with social scrutiny, misogynoir, and personal safety. What matters is supporting – persistently, thoughtfully, and with heart—in the ways that are obtainable and authentic to you.



JOIN US IN CONGRATULATING TORI BUSH!

Tori has accepted a new position at Tulane University. She will be a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Tulane Global Humanities Center.

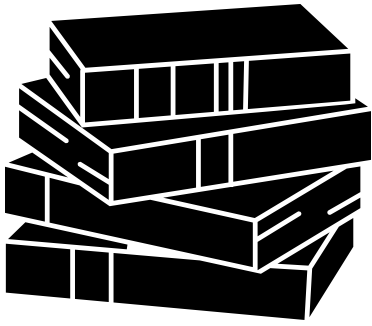
**Congratulations on this
fantastic achievement!**





Tori is the co-editor of *The Gulf South: An Anthology of Environmental Writing* (2021) and is currently at work on a monograph called, *Genre Flows: Settler Colonial Rhetorics in Environmental Writing*.





Conference CFP's

Society for the Study of Southern Literature Biennial Conference **Save the Date!**

The Society for the Study of Southern Literature is pleased to confirm that the 2026 Biennial Conference will take place from 28-31st March 2026, at Fisk University, Nashville - the first time the conference will have been held on an HBCU campus since the Society's inception in 1968.

A Call for Papers will be released in the next few weeks.

Fourteenth Biennial MESEA Conference **Deadline: November 15**

June 11-13, 2026

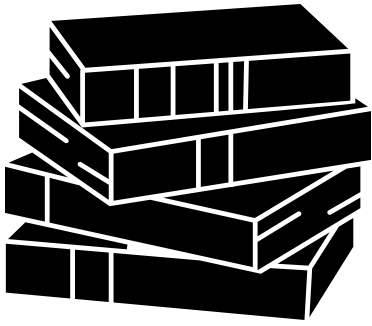
Ionian University

Zakynthos Island Campus, Greece

Keynote speakers TBC

The MESEA 2026 conference invites contributions that address the interconnections of Earth's five spheres – geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and cryosphere – from the perspectives of ethnicity, culture, and corporeality. As a response to the current global crises and related historical conditions, the conference brings together and creates a dialogue between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives and approaches in multiethnic cultural environments. This includes interdisciplinary discussions of topics such as cultural representation, oceanic/island studies, space and affect, mobilities and borders, bodies and knowledge, patterns of racialization, extractivism, non-human agency, (de)materializations, ecomedia narratives, environmental politics, and many more.

The 2026 MESEA Conference seeks to explore the diversity of cultural environments in the nexus of nature and spatiality, ethnicity, history, and geopolitics. Potential paper and panel submissions can address but are not limited to topics such as the following:



Conference CFP's

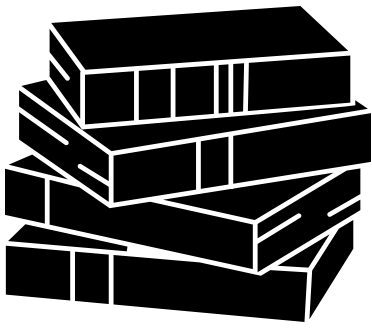
- In what ways does the materiality of Earth create cultural representations in the context of the five spheres? Similarly, how does non-material, digital technology represent nature?
- What kinds of imaginaries and dreamscapes result from the contacts between culture and the natural environment? What kinds of emergent and/or alternative cultural practices are involved in such encounters?
- What is the role of preservation and restoration of culture in diverse spatial environments? How do the tangible and the intangible interlace in the construction of cultural identity?
- How are narratives of culture and the physical cosmos formed and articulated historically in the Anthropocene?
- How does non-human agency figure in cultural narratives?
- What is the role of (trans)corporeality and the material in the making of the new cultural environments?
- How are ethnicity and 'race' represented in the culture/environment nexus? How do they challenge dominant notions of identity and belonging?
- How do labor histories and narratives of mobility generate new cultural environments?
- In what ways are individual and collective memories of cultural environments (re)framed in ethnic narratives?
- How is ecojustice vocalized and performed in Indigenous and ethnic narratives?
- How do geopolitical changes, crises, and conflicts affect cultural environments?

Abstracts should be submitted via our website between August 15 and November 15, 2025. Submitters will receive notification of acceptance by January 10, 2026.

Preference will be given to complete panel proposals with an inter/transdisciplinary and/or transnational focus. Panels may not include more than 2 participants from the same institution. Presenters are expected to be members of the association in 2026. MELUS members can also present their papers at the conference. Previous MESEA Conferences have led to high quality publications. As in previous years, this MESEA Conference will generate publications in respected publication venues.

Individual Proposal Submission

Panel Proposal Submission



Conference CFP's

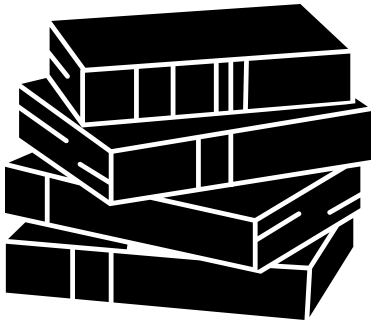
Honoring its commitment to the furthering of early-career scholars, MESEA will again award at least one Young Scholars Excellence Award.

The conference will be arranged as an onsite conference at Ionian University, Department of Environment, Zakynthos Island Campus, Greece. Located off the west coast of the Peloponnese and south of King Odysseus's legendary Ithaca, Zakynthos (also called Zante) is the third-largest of the Ionian islands. With a distinct triangular shape, the island offers visitors the chance to see diverse landscapes: the mountainous north, the fertile plain in the central area with olive groves and vineyards, and the south-east region with sandy beaches and nesting grounds for the loggerhead sea turtle. Celebrated by Homer in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Zakynthos has a complex geopolitical history with the most significant cultural and architectural influence being the Venetian rule (1484-1797), during which the island was called "Fiore di Levante" ("Flower of the East"). The disastrous earthquake of 1953 almost erased the original beauty of "Chora" (central town) while the only areas that escaped destruction are the villages on the northern side. As a popular and budget-friendly travel destination, Zakynthos can be reached by plane and intercity buses from Athens or by ferry from the port of Kyllini in the Peloponnese. In June, there are numerous daily connections (low-cost flights) with major European airports. For further information on Zakynthos Island, please visit [this web page](#).

What They Know: African American Cultural Productions as Resistance Deadline: August 20

SAMLA Conference November 6th-8th Atlanta, GA

As Toni Morrison notes in *Playing in the Dark*, the construction of Africanist ideologies that misread and/or misrepresent Black identities is as American as apple pie. The white gaze has historically and contemporaneously controlled what is known and unknown about African Americans, just as the ingestion of Africanist ideologies has shaped how many people of the African diaspora see themselves. However, the cultural productions of African American people have frequently not only asserted the heterogeneity of African American communities, contesting Africanist collectivization, but have also



Conference CFP's

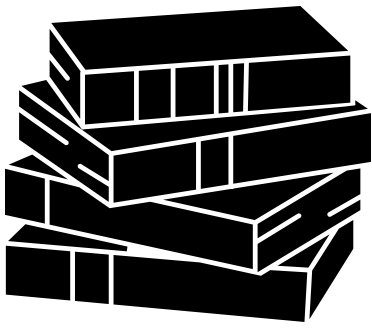
ways of knowing beyond the cultural and systemic erasure of Black personhood and agency. From African American literature that challenges propagandistic and limiting portrayals of Black personhood, to Black music that illuminates the intersection of economic, racial, and cultural oppression, to social media (especially Black Twitter) which powerfully dissects popular culture and political realities, African Americans have created and challenged cultural productions as a means of resistance. This interdisciplinary panel invites papers that acknowledge and explore how African American authors, artists, creators, and commentators confront the ways in which Black cultural productions are policed and delegitimized and create cultural productions that demonstrate knowledge that transcends Africanism and the racial caste system.

Please submit 200–300-word abstracts and 50–100-word bios to LaRonda Sanders-Senu at laronda.sanderssenu@mga.edu by August 20, 2025. Please include SAMLA 2025 in the subject line. SAMLA will take place in Wyndham Atlanta Buckhead Hotel & Conference Center, November 6-8, 2025.

Narratives of Confinement: Literature, Media, and the Rise of the Prison State **Deadline: September 1**

SAMLA Conference **November 6th-8th** **Atlanta, GA**

This panel examines the ways contemporary US American literature, film, and television texts engage with mass incarceration and even anticipate recent expansions of the US prison-industrial complex, including the rapid proliferation of ICE detention centers and the resurgence of historical carceral symbols, such as the proposed reopening of Alcatraz. As the US continues to grapple with mass incarceration, militarized policing, and the criminalization of migration, writers and creators have responded with powerful cultural texts that illuminate the racialized, gendered, and profit-driven machineries of confinement. Significantly, these texts often refuse to treat today's carceral regime as new or exceptional. Instead, they trace these practices back through centuries of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, slavery, war, and empire.



Conference CFP's

We invite papers exploring how writers and creators use storytelling to expose continuities between past and present forms of confinement, to interrogate the logics and machinery of mass incarceration, and to reveal how the carceral state permeates everyday life, citizenship, and identity in the 21st century.

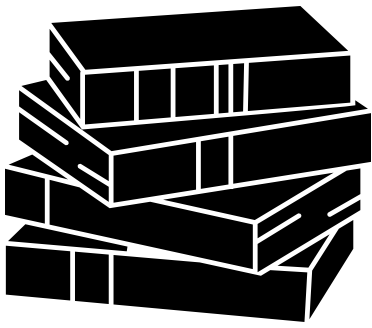
Email questions to valerie.surrett@ung.edu and submit abstracts here by September 1, 2025: ways of knowing beyond the cultural and systemic erasure of Black personhood and agency. From African American literature that challenges propagandistic and limiting portrayals of Black personhood, to Black music that illuminates the intersection of economic, racial, and cultural oppression, to social media (especially Black Twitter) which powerfully dissects popular culture and political realities, African Americans have created and challenged cultural productions as a means of resistance. This interdisciplinary panel invites papers that acknowledge and explore how African American authors, artists, creators, and commentators confront the ways in which Black cultural productions are policed and delegitimized and create cultural productions that demonstrate knowledge that transcends Africanism and the racial caste system.

Please submit 200–300-word abstracts and 50–100-word bios to LaRonda Sanders-Senu at laronda.sanderssenu@mga.edu by August 20, 2025. Please include SAMLA 2025 in the subject line. SAMLA will take place in Wyndham Atlanta Buckhead Hotel & Conference Center, November 6-8, 2025.

Email questions to valerie.surrett@ung.edu and submit abstracts here by September 1, 2025: <https://samla.ballastacademic.com/Home/S/19442>.

Entering the Zoraverse: People, Places, and Spaces
Deadline: September 5th

37th Annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival™ of the Arts and Humanities (ZORA!™ Festival)
Historic Eatonville, Florida
January 29-30, 2026



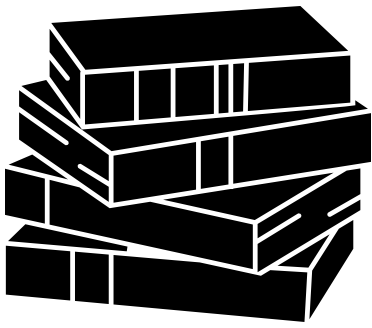
Conference CFP's

For nearly 100 years, Zora Neale Hurston's writings have influenced and changed the fabric of American literary culture. Texts like *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) expanded readers' and scholars' view of Black characters and Black life in American fiction. Texts like *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938) contributed to our understanding of what counted as cultural research and debunked flawed anthropological accounts of Black people, Black life, and Black language. *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), as well as the many critical essays published during and after Hurston's lifetime, demonstrate her unabashed willingness to share commentary on herself, her people, and their lived experiences. Her short fiction brought discovery and acclaim in her early career and led to funded opportunities for research, playwriting, and theatrical performances. Zora Neale Hurston's work is multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and cross-disciplinary. It reaches deep, far, and wide, and even beyond her lifespan, as scholars have continued to posthumously resurrect her work. George Houston Bass and Henry Louis Gates edited and published the infamous play, co-written with Langston Hughes, *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life* (2008). Recently, Deborah G. Plant edited and published two lost Hurston manuscripts, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* (2018) and *The Life of Herod the Great: A Novel* (2025).

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS:

Each year, at the end of January, the Zora Neale Hurston Festival for the Arts and Humanities attracts thousands of people to Eatonville, Florida, Hurston's hometown — the place that gave birth to her words, the spaces in which she molded her first characters. For this reason, the 2026 conference will focus on the theme of Hurston's work as it relates to, is connected to, or makes meaning of communal spaces and places. What is the essence of the continued appeal of Hurston's work? Why are Hurston's texts still so popular with readers? In what ways is Eatonville an embodiment of an African American Dream? What qualities from Eatonville help to define African American culture? What epistemological connections can be forged between Hurston's work and geographic places and/or physical spaces? Are there ways in which Hurston's work illuminates contemporary conversations about place and space?

We invite all kinds of scholarly endeavors and initiatives. We welcome not only individual presentations but also workshops, roundtables, panels, working groups, think tanks, storytelling, posters, and more. Those interested should submit an abstract of no more than 250 words for individuals, 500 words for full-panel submissions, using the portal provided here:



Conference CFP's

We invite all kinds of scholarly endeavors and initiatives. We welcome not only individual presentations but also workshops, roundtables, panels, working groups, think tanks, storytelling, posters, and more. Those interested should submit an abstract of no more than 250 words for individuals, 500 words for full-panel submissions, using the portal provided here: <https://zorafestival.org/call-for-submissions>.

Deadline for submissions is Friday, Sept. 5. Applicants will be notified by the end of September.

Please note: The full two-day ZORA! Festival Academic Conference program is scheduled for Jan. 29-30, 2026, in Historic Eatonville, Florida. Concurrent 75-minute sessions will be held on Friday, Jan. 30, in historic St. Lawrence AME Church. All presenters are expected to attend in person. Wi-Fi is limited; therefore, we expect presenters to have all supplementary materials/media with them on site and not rely on internet access.

Contact Information

Scot French, Ph.D., Chair, ZORA! Festival Academics Committee

<https://zorafestival.org/our-academics-committee/>

Contact Email zorafestivalacademics@gmail.com

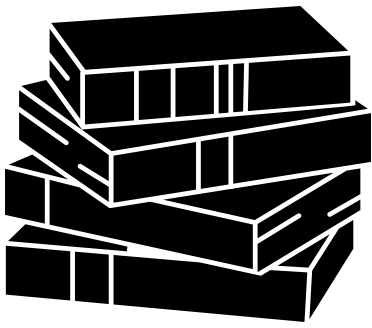
Labor in America: Perspectives on the African American Contribution Deadline: August 30th

The 8th Annual Benjamin A. Quarles Conference, Morgan State University October 24th

The Benjamin A. Quarles Conference invites scholars, researchers, and students to submit papers or panel proposals for its 8th annual gathering. This year's theme focuses on the vital contributions of African Americans and African and the rest of the Diaspora to the growth and development of the United States and the world across diverse fields of labor and creativity.

Call for Proposals

You are invited to submit paper/panel proposals for the 8th Annual Quarles Conference scheduled for October 24, 2025 at Morgan State University. The deadline to submit proposals is August 30, 2025 by 5:00 P.M. EDT . We invite all disciplines in the humanities to submit proposals.



Conference CFP's

We welcome submissions that address the following topics:

- Slavery and Enslaved Labor
- Military Service in U.S. Wars
- Migration and Immigration
- Arts and Entertainment
- African Americans in Sports
- Political Engagement, Activism, and Leadership
- Economic Development and Industry
- Black Women, Family, and Community
- Trade Unions and the Labor Movement
- The Workplace and Technology in the 21st Century
- The Criminal Justice System

Presentations are not limited to these topics since the aim is to capture the breadth and depth of the contributions of African American labor and reflect on the venues and creative spaces where these efforts have transformed the national and global landscape.

Submission Guidelines

- Individual Paper Submissions

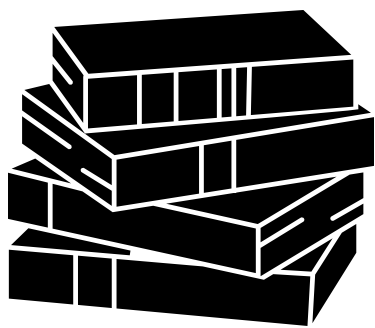
Please include a 250-300 word abstract, paper title, and your institutional affiliation and a short biography (200 words).

- Panel Proposals

Panels should include a maximum of three presenters. Proposal must include:

- A panel title.
- Titles and abstracts (250-300 words each) for all papers.
- Institutional affiliations for all presenters.

Kindly submit all questions and materials to benjaminquarlesconference@gmail.com by August 30, 2025. We look forward to engaging discussions that honor and expand our understanding of the African American legacy in labor and creativity.



Conference CFP's

(Re)generative Storytelling: Embodied Narratives for Resilience and Social Renewal Deadline: September 30th

(A Creative Panel Session of 57th NeMLA Annual Convention | March 5-8, 2025 | Pittsburgh PA), Virtual Only

In the spirit of (Re)generation, this session invites explorations into how storytelling and performance act as forces of cultural renewal, social resilience, and imaginative transformation. Performance-based storytelling, particularly from marginalized and historically silenced communities, allows us to envision futures rooted in justice, equity, and collective empowerment. Social renewal, at its core, is about healing, evolving, and reimagining society to better reflect our shared humanity and collective needs.

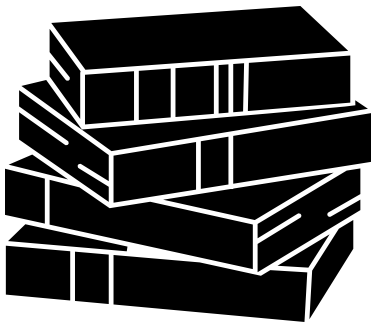
Rather than simply returning to old narratives, we seek proposals that cultivate creative new pathways: performance practices that reimagine identity, interrogate inherited histories, and reclaim voice through the body and voice. In this regenerative framework, storytelling becomes a tool not only of resistance but of restoration.

Drawing inspiration from autoethnographic and archival methods such as newspapers, journals, personal archives, reflective writing, and self-interviews, this session highlights artistic expression as a regenerative act. It becomes an evolving conversation with the self, the community, and the world. As noted in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, the embodiment of personal narrative “is an act of reclaiming and expressing oneself through the body and voice... giving voice and body to certain identities” (Langellier, 1998, p. 207).

We welcome proposals that demonstrate how narrative-based performance can serve as a catalyst for social renewal, civic engagement, environmental awareness, cultural sustainability, and human rights. Presenters may perform or screen selections from their work and are encouraged to share creative processes that reflect a regenerative approach to storytelling and scholarship.

Please note: this is a VIRTUAL only panel [no in-person or hybrid options]

Questions regarding the panel may be addressed to Brittney S. Harris, Virginia Tech (b1harris@vt.edu).⁸²



Conference CFP's

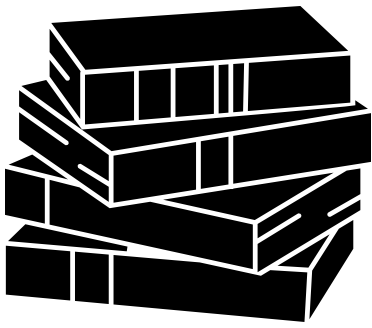
Teaching Baldwin / Baldwin as Teacher Deadline: December 1st

American Literature Association Chicago, 2026

At a time when teaching is threatened and learning itself is perceived and portrayed by some as threatening, James Baldwin Review (JBR) seeks papers for companion panels on “Teaching Baldwin, Baldwin as Teacher.” In Baldwin’s terms, “to become educated (as all tyrants have always known) is to become inaccessibly independent, it is to acquire a dangerous way of assessing danger, and it is to hold in one’s hands a means of changing reality.” We are especially interested in papers from a range of international perspectives and from contexts within and outside academic institutions. Topics might include but are not limited to the following:

- Specific approaches to teaching Baldwin or particular Baldwin texts or genres
- Baldwin in high school, undergraduate, graduate, or non-traditional classrooms
- Teaching Baldwin’s understudied work and/or collaborations
- Baldwin in interdisciplinary contexts
- Baldwin’s own work as a teacher at colleges and universities in the US in the 70s and 80s
- Baldwin’s less formal teaching as a mentor and as a prominent public figure and rights activist
- “Good, Bad, & Ugly”—approaches, tips, and horror stories from teaching Baldwin
- Baldwin’s sense of “education with a small e” (education one receives from life) and “Education with a large E” (education dictated by institutions)
- Teaching Baldwin alongside other writers, artists, and activists
- Lessons from Baldwin when teaching and learning in dangerous times.

Please send submission to Justin Joyce (j.a.joyce@wustl.edu) and Prentiss Clark (Prentiss.Clark@usd.edu). Submissions received before December 1st, 2025 will receive fullest consideration. Accepted panelists will be invited to expand their essays for possible inclusion in a special issue of James Baldwin Review.



Conference CFP's

Baldwin After BLM Deadline: September 15

American Comparative Literature Association Feb. 26-Mar. 1, 2026 Montreal, CN

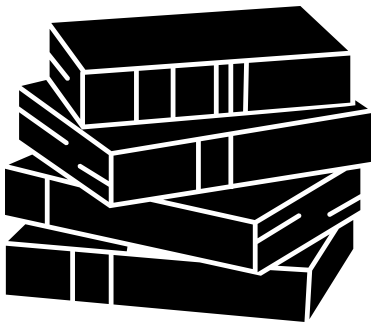
If James Baldwin maintained a “ubiquity in the imagination of Black Lives Matter,” as William J. Maxwell and others have observed, then what are we to make of his words and image in a moment that Cedric Johnson and others have argued must be understood as “After Black Lives Matter”?

The failure or defeat of this particular form of politics has led to calls for its critical examination, suggesting the need for a similar critical reflection on the aesthetics that were attendant on this movement. Queries that we may usefully explore together include:

- Was the turn to Baldwin part of an attempt to reimagine forgotten conflicts, or simply a form of revivalism overburdened by nostalgia?
- Did the movement betray its proverbial father, or was its faith in such a de-contextualized avatar ultimately misplaced?
- Do we perhaps need to break free of (some version of) Baldwin in addition to breaking free of those politics that keep us bound to society's exploitations?
- How might we best contextualize this recent, continuing history and its political and aesthetic forms?
- What unexplored methods of comparison might be most useful to this problem and its moment?
- What kind of relationship to the literature and struggle, the art and politics of the past is necessary for those of the present?

We welcome a variety of critical approaches to this nexus of problems. Baldwin and his work should play a significant role in, but need not be central to, the argument presented.

Please send abstracts of 250 words to Kyle Proehl at kylep@wustl.edu. The deadline for abstract submissions is July 25, 2025. All contributions will be considered for publication in James Baldwin Review.



Conference CFP's

Regenerating Resistance: Comparative Modalities of Marginal Voices Across Borders **Deadline: September 30th**

57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA

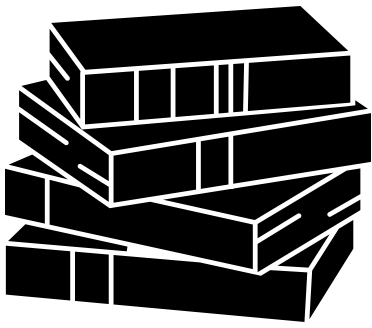
This roundtable explores how literature and allied forms of cultural expression regenerate acts of resistance across generations and geopolitical contexts. Centering on comparative studies of marginalized communities including Dalit, Black, Indigenous, and diasporic voices, this session interrogates how storytelling practices evolve to challenge hegemonic narratives and recover erased or silenced histories. Participants are invited to reflect on how forms such as autofiction, digital narratives, performance art, eco-poetics, or oral testimony function as regenerative tools that produce continuity between past traumas and present struggles. By foregrounding voices that operate outside dominant canons, this session seeks to chart how subaltern epistemologies revitalize political agency, spiritual memory, and aesthetic innovation.

Contact: canvesh@mil.du.ac.in

Regenerating Resistance: Regenerative Blackness—Skin, Flesh, and the Future of Being **Deadline: September 30th**

57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA

In her essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers articulates the enduring violence of racial enslavement through the concept of the “hieroglyphics of the flesh” (67). This term marks how the captive body, stripped of legal and social personhood, became inscribed with meaning through the violence of racial differentiation.



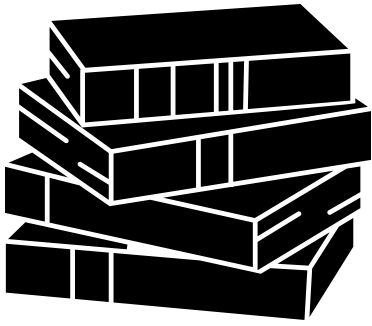
Conference CFP's

This transformation rendered the Black body not only a surface upon which terror was written but also a metaphysical site from which alternative modes of being might be imagined. In attending to the duality of skin and flesh, Spillers distinguishes between Black skin as legible and social, and Black flesh as ungendered, unsovereign, and open—both wounded and full of radical potential.

As such, this NeMLA 2026 Panel invites papers under the theme of “Regenerative Blackness” to explore the ongoing implications of Spillers’ provocation: How do we think of regeneration from the site of skin and/or flesh, and what does it mean to insist on Blackness as regenerative in a world that continues to demand its exhaustion? This panel is particularly interested in submissions that engage Blackness across two interrelated dimensions of skin and flesh. As a locus of visibility, surveillance, beauty, resistance, commodification, and medicalization, Black skin is not only a surface but also a contested geography of identity. How do cultural, artistic, and political practices re-signify Black skin as a regenerative surface—one that resists being merely a sign of suffering or death, and instead points toward healing, futurity, and joy? Beyond the visible body, we turn to the flesh as Spillers theorized it—a space prior to subjectivity, to gender, and to normative legibility. How might we understand Black flesh as a site of metaphysical endurance and creative possibility? What practices, rituals, or theoretical frameworks (from Afropessimism to Black mysticism to decolonial healing traditions) engage with flesh not merely as violated but as a source of regenerative power? This panel seeks interdisciplinary approaches from scholars working in Black studies, philosophy, gender and sexuality studies, performance, literature, visual culture, theology, and beyond. This panel welcomes work that examines how regeneration might be theorized not as a return to normativity but as a radical reorientation: toward fugitivity, refusal, or even disorder.

This panel will take place at the Northeast Modern Languages Association (NeMLA) conference in Pittsburgh, PA from March 5-8, 2026.

To submit an abstract for this panel, please go to the following link:
<https://cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/21606>



Conference CFP's

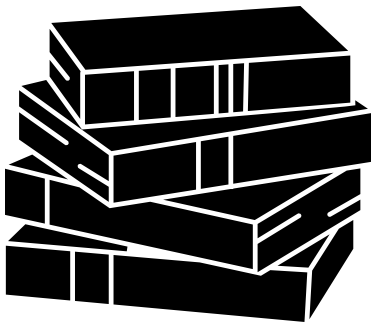
Cropping Back Up: Vegetal Regeneration and Revolt in Environmental Literature Deadline: September 30th

**57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA**

Submit a 300 word abstract for the panel below only through the portal at <https://www.nemla.org/> by Sep 30, 2025. Please refer to the NeMLA website for conference details and schedule (forthcoming).

This panel seeks papers that engage with responses and alternatives to plantation economy, monoculture, industrial agriculture, genetic modification, “lawn culture” (as in, the obsession of lawn aesthetics signaling a class status), among other paradigms that seek to control the vegetal world in ways that lead to unsustainability, exploitation, and injustice. The papers in this panel draw attention to plants, crops, vegetation, wilderness, weeds, forests, moss, community gardens etc. in environmental literature that riot, revolt, and resist capitalist, colonial or imperialist control. In an age of unchecked capitalist “growth,” climate change, and extinction, what can vegetation teach us about regeneration and regrowth?

Writing about Sylvia Wynter’s generative essay, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” Katherine McKittrick explains: “Secretive histories can be found in the plots: the plot or the central narrative of the plantation novel that contextualizes its economic superstructure while developing a creative space to challenge this system; and the plots of land that were given to some slaves so that they could grow food to nourish themselves and thus maximize profits—plots of land that also became the focus of resistance to the overriding system of the plantation economy.” In a similar vein, the aim of this panel is to draw attention to vegetal narratives that threaten to destabilize systems of oppression and exploitation.



Conference CFP's

Reading as a Political Act: Exploring the Confluence of Literacy and Politics **Deadline: September 30th**

57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA

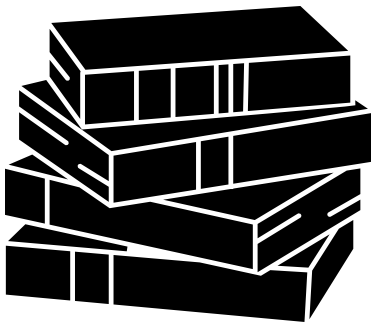
From book bans to executive orders, the question of academic freedom and the freedom to read has become increasingly urgent. In the wake of the 2024 election, debates around “parental rights” and ideological control have intensified, fueling challenges to literacy and intellectual freedom. According to preliminary data from the American Library Association, 1,128 unique titles were challenged between January 1 and August 31, 2024 (“American Library Association reveals preliminary data on 2024 book challenges,” September 23, 2024).

This roundtable explores the political dimensions of reading, asking how contemporary censorship—through policy, rhetoric, or legal action—shapes access to knowledge and the development of critical literacy. Framing reading as a political act, we invite presentations that examine this tension, whether through specific case studies of banned or challenged texts or broader analysis of legislative efforts aimed at regulating curricula and access to ideas. **This roundtable will accept submissions from those who will be in-person only.**

Ultimately, the roundtable aims to engage with the dangers posed by this climate—not only to education and literacy but to democratic participation itself. We seek to interrogate the cultural stakes of “daring to read” and to consider how academic freedom and the right to literacy must be defended in the current political moment.

This roundtable will take place at the Northeast Modern Languages Association (NeMLA) in Pittsburgh, PA from March 5-8, 2026. We welcome papers that cut across genre, interests, and regionality to construct additional meanings and considerations, including pedagogy.

For a complete description of the proposed roundtable, please go to the following link:
<https://cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/21565>



Conference CFP's

Adventures in Ecocriticism **Deadline: September 1st**

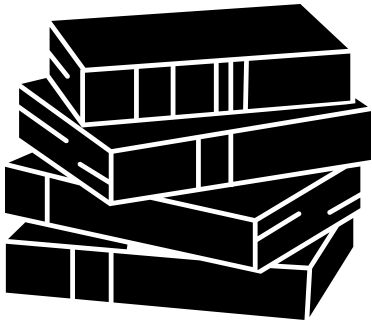
SAMLA
November 6th - 8th
Atlanta, GA

Adventure is intrinsic to the dominant mode of narrative; the implied “lighting out” of adventure stories is the break with stasis in the conventional narrative arc. Adventure, though, often gets compartmentalized and designated as a specific genre—one often seen as fit only for children’s stories or Hollywood blockbusters. The foundational place of adventure, though, renders the genre a mere container of the foundational problems of the culture that produces and consumes it. Obvious imperialist critiques arise in assessing the role of “adventure” in literature, film, and culture. As Joel Kovel writes in *In Nicaragua*, “Ever since Western colonialism gained a world and lost its soul in the doing, there have been those who have gone to find that soul in the South, in the dark, in the ones who have been oppressed . . . Taking their guilt and pride with them, they looked for themselves as they looked for the Other. They came to seek a history and ended by making it, sometimes well, sometimes destructively” (63). That is to say, adventure stories frequently feature a movement from a privileged position to spaces that are—and are inhabited by—the Other as a means for the self-actualization of the individual adventurer. We invite proposals that address these issues and their tangents.

Some question to consider:

- Given the entanglement of both ecological destruction and its supposed antidote of environmentalism with white supremacy and patriarchy, how can assessing the role of adventure stories through an ecological lens further complicate/illuminate forms of power?
- How can reading adventure stories ecologically enhance our understanding of the cultural mindset(s) exacerbating the climate crisis?
- Where is the structure of adventure found outside the genre? How do these unsuspecting adventure stories complicate the genre and its tropes?
- How does environment shape the adventure narrative and/or the adventurer?

In keeping with SAMLA’s theme of Knowledge, presentations may address the modes of knowledge implied by adventure stories through any of the following, or other related topics:



Conference CFP's

Frontier studies/myths of American individualism

Travel writing/tourism

Adventure in southern studies

Reliance on/role of modes of transportation in storytelling

The role of adventure in children's literature/film

Gender in adventure narrative and/or gendered adventure narrative

Adventure in film

Video game narrative, esp. as related to single player perspective

"Road" narratives

Adventure in animal studies

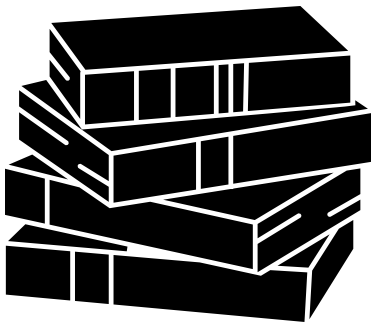
"Academic adventure" (adventure/exploration legitimized by academic or institutional interests, such as archaeology, research pursuits, etc.)

Adventure spurred by natural disaster

Note on Publishing Opportunity:

We have been encouraged by the general editor of the Bloomsbury Ecocritical Theory and Practice series, Douglas Vakoch, to submit a proposal for an edited collection based upon this CFP. If you're interested in submitting your conference presentation as a proposed book chapter, please let us know in your submission. Bloomsbury requests chapters of at least 6000 words with at least one author with a PhD. More information on the series may be found here: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/series/ecocritical-theory-and-practice/>

By September 1, 2025, please send proposals of 300 words or fewer, a brief bio, and any A/V presentation requests to Will Underland (wtunderl@go.olemiss.edu) and Jency Wilson (jwilson17@una.edu) or submit an abstract here: <https://samla.ballastacademic.com/Home/S/19424>



Conference CFP's

Knowledge in the Wild: Ecological Consciousness and the Evolution of American Nature Writing Deadline: September 1st

**SAMLA
November 6th - 8th
Atlanta, GA**

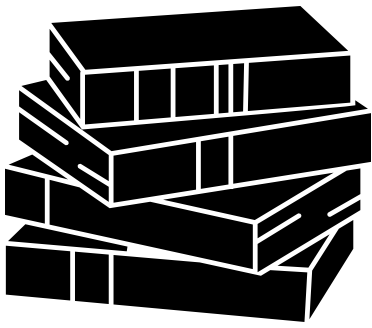
This panel seeks papers that explore how American literature has shaped--and been shaped by--knowledge of the natural world, from the transcendental reflections of the 19th century to contemporary ecofeminist and ecocritical perspectives. How have authors translated environmental observation and ecological awareness into literary forms of knowledge? How does nature writing reflect evolving understandings of identity, power, science, and stewardship.

Description

Papers might examine foundational works such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature," and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, alongside the contemporary works of writers like Annie Dillard, Terry Tempest Williams, Janisse Ray, Barry Lopez, Wendell Berry, and Barbara Kingsolver. Proposals are especially welcome that explore the shift from anthropocentric to ecocentric worldviews, the role of feminism in environmental thought, and the relationship between ecological knowledge and American identity.

Possible topics include:

- Transcendentalism as ecological philosophy
- Environmental knowledge as resistance or activism
- Ecofeminism and the gendering of nature
- Place, belonging, and regional identity in ecological writing
- Scientific vs. intuitive knowledge in environmental texts
- Literature's role in environmental justice and policy discourse



Conference CFP's

This session encourages interdisciplinary approaches and welcomes proposals from scholars in literature, environmental humanities, ecocriticism, gender studies, and American studies.

Please submit a 250-word abstract and a brief bio (100 words) to Deborah Hall at dehall@valdosta.edu by September 1, 2025.

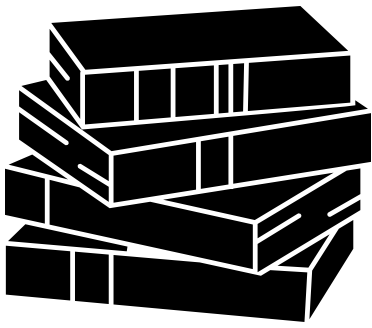
Literature and Geography Deadline: September 1st

**SAMLA
November 6th - 8th
Atlanta, GA**

Edouard Glissant and Michael Wiedorn call us to “think” with or like a geography. Evolving out of cultural studies, island and archipelagic studies have spurred a conversation regarding the connection between geography and culture. While Glissant and Wiedorn were particularly preoccupied with thinking (like) an archipelago, it is possible yet to conceive of other modes of geographical thought. Transatlantic, island, and even aquatic matrices of culture and geography have been well documented and studied. This panel welcomes submissions in the field of archipelagic and island studies and is particularly interested in papers exploring methods of geographical thought, the relationship between geography and culture, in the US South. This region, whose geography is varied and whose history is complex, remains to be critically considered. The most recent and perhaps a seminal text of contemporary geographical thought, *Borderwaters* (Roberts 2021) mentions only casually the value of applying the theories to this region, oftentimes consumed by its relationship to water, if not by water itself. Despite what may be considered a call to action by Roberts, the US South and its cultural products broadly remain to be examined through this lens. Evolving out of cultural and postcolonial studies, island and archipelagic studies have spurred a conversation regarding the connection between geography and culture. This panel welcomes submissions in the field of archipelagic and island studies and is particularly interested in papers exploring methods of geographical thought, the relationship between geography and culture, in the US South. Comparative papers are especially welcomed.

Please submit abstracts of approximately 250 words through the Ballast portal.

<https://samla.ballastacademic.com/Home/S/19457>



Conference CFP's

37th Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference Deadline: October 15th

**DeLand, Florida
April 17-18, 2026**

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, an organization of over 200 members worldwide, invites paper proposals on topics related to Rawlings's life and works.

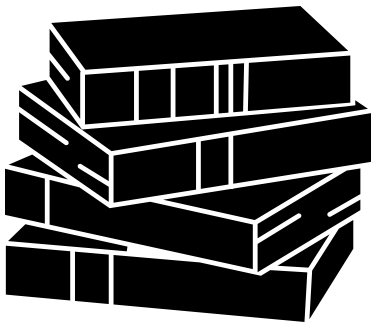
Topics might include the following:

- Rawlings and Modernism
- Rawlings and other authors – and her place in American literature
- Landscape and character in Rawlings's fiction and/or non-fiction
- The production of food in Rawlings's *Cross Creek*, *The Yearling*, or *Cross Creek Cookery*
- *The Yearling* as bildungsroman
- Rawlings and film
- Rawlings and fine art
- Rawlings's Florida friends, such as Idella Parker and Dessie Smith Prescott
- Rawlings and Maxwell Perkins and/or the Scribners
- Sex and gender roles in Rawlings's fiction
- Rawlings's political attitudes
- Rawlings and race
- Rawlings and Florida
- Rawlings and Southern literature
- Rawlings and the literature of place
- Ecocritical themes in Rawlings's literature
- Rawlings's friendships with other authors, like Hurston, Fitzgerald, Stoneman-Douglas, Glasgow, and Mitchell
-

Please send 1- to 2-page abstracts for 20-minute papers to:

Dr. Ashley Lear

ashley.lear@erau.edu



Conference CFP's

You Are What You (Don't) Read: Vegetarian and Vegan Characters in Literature **Deadline: September 1st**

SAMLA
November 6th - 8th
Atlanta, GA

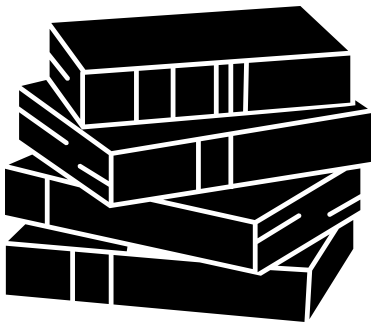
What kinds of vegetarian/vegan knowledges do we need now? Following the work begun by scholar-activists such as Carol J. Adams (1990) and Laura Wright (2015) and expanded in recent works such as--and pardon the abbreviated list!--Quinn's *Reading Veganism*, Savvas' *Vegetarianism and Veganism in Literature from the Ancients to the Twenty-First Century*, and Bulleid's *Vegetarianism and Science Fiction*, this panel aims to add to the ever-growing body of texts that include vegetarian/vegan characters or conversations about meat-free diets and philosophies. This panel eagerly accepts works (novels, short stories, essays, poems, memoir, etc.) from any time period and any geographic region.

Please submit a 250-word abstract via the following link <https://samla.ballastacademic.com/Home/S/19407>. Notifications will be administered through the Ballast system. Abstracts will be considered until **September 1**.

(Re)Generating Keywords for EcoLatinx Studies and Praxis **Deadline: September 30th**

57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA

This panel offers a creative feminist space to explore the ecological and intersectional commitments of Latinx studies and praxis that have unduly become secondary to its political and institutional uses. This tendency has obscured the liberatory possibilities Latinx encapsulates as a response to the limitations of historical categories and binaries like Hispanic/Non-Hispanic, Latino/Latina, men/women, American/migrant, citizen/undocumented, and conservative/liberal. Latinx rescinds the ordering of the human and human lives to speak back to power in its act of naming. Unfortunately, the term today has



Conference CFP's

been hyped up as being forcefully applied onto the public while imposing leftist woke politics and so-called gender ideology. To think beyond these discourses, this panel aims to return to thinking alongside the relational and natural connections by seeking collaboration on a speculative keyword guide about the diversity of what I dub “ecolatinx” studies and praxis. Through a sample compilation of keywords of animals, plants, foods, drinks, remains, elements, weather, minerals, and/or rocks, this panel acts as a small guide of critical terms and concepts of ecolatinx studies and praxis. If your work thinks alongside fauna, flora, rivers, tea, wind, rice, snakes, or other such things, to discuss gender, race, power, coloniality, environmental justice, or social justice, I invite you to submit an abstract for a paper on a single term to help trace the contours and debates of a particular topic of Latinx studies. Consider how María Lugones discussed mayonnaise to critique logics of purity that forget emulsion, an element that is necessary for coalition across differences. To introduce the Capitalocene, Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore highlight *madiera* (wood) in the history of Portuguese sugar production that precedes the transatlantic slave trade. As the title suggests, this session aims to generate and regenerate terms, thus papers may revisit or historicize already used keywords and concepts.

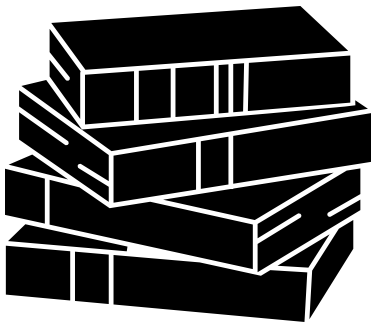
Other ideas include writing about the coqui as cultural symbol of Puerto Rico. Or the marketization of the llama and alpaca as a way to think about contemporary modes of colonialism, capitalism, and erasure of indigenous sovereignty.

Deadline for abstract submissions on the NeMLA platform is 9/30/2025. You may email me draft proposal before submitting to official platform.

Each abstract submission must include:

- A title of no more than 80 characters
- An abstract of 200 to 300 words
- A brief bio
-

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at jennifer.vilchez@rutgers.edu.



Conference CFP's

Media and Aesthetics of Environmental Decay in the “Global South”

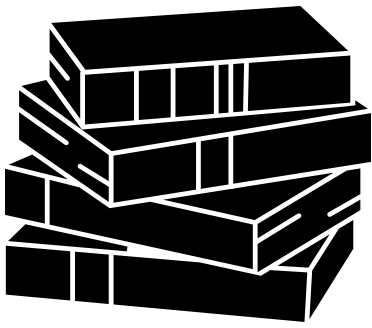
Deadline: September 30th

**57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA**

This panel welcomes both critical analyses and practice-based contributions from artists, scholars, filmmakers, photographers and theorists that explore how cultural production from the Global South is engaging with the media and aesthetics of environmental transformation and decay. In the context of intensifying ecological crises, we ask: how are histories of damaged, disappearing, or radically altered habitats narrated in the 21st century? What forms of storytelling, visualization, and design emerge from places long entangled with extractivism, colonialism, and climate precarity? We seek to discuss, from an interdisciplinary and multimedia perspective, how the past twenty-five years have witnessed a proliferation of cultural production that not only documents but actively reimagines environmental history. While much scholarship and art on this topic has centered Euro-American contexts and production, this panel turns its attention to the diverse, situated, and speculative responses arising from Latin America, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and other regions marked by colonial violence and ecological degradation. We are especially eager to include work that blurs disciplinary boundaries, reclaims indigenous or subaltern epistemes, and foregrounds aesthetic strategies emerging from and responsive to specific environmental contexts.

Please send 200-300 words abstracts, or description of your creative project with a link to a sample of your work (for creative projects only), and a short bio (100 words or less) to the submissions website: <https://cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/21800>

Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions at : everosorio@pitt.edu



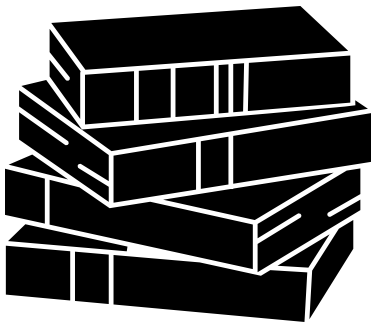
Conference CFP's

Ecocritical Approaches to the Work of Cherrie Moraga Deadline: September 30th

57th NeMLA Annual Convention March 5-8, 2026 Pittsburgh PA

In honor of the 45th anniversary of the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*, this panel seeks to explore the many ways in which ecocritical theory has expressed itself in the critical writings, poetry, prose, memoirs, and plays of Cherrie Moraga. In a time of extreme climate change denialism and the continued increase in global temperatures, directly leading to such climate disasters as the January 2025 wildfires in Southern California and the flooding caused by Hurricane Helene in the southern Appalachias in September 2024, Moraga's work will be read for approaches to climate resistance and positive change. Moraga has long held an interest in environmental issues, as seen in her 1992 play *Heroes and Saints*, about birth defects and cancer clusters caused by the use of insecticides in the San Joaquin Valley in the 1970s and 1980s and the protest response to their disproportionate effect on Hispanic communities by the United Farm Workers. To Moraga, the environmental struggle is part and parcel of the larger feminist struggle, and the political and the personal are unbreakable in their conjoined ties. This panel seeks papers focused on specific ecocritical works and strains of thought in Moraga, as well as comparative papers that bring in other authors and works to be read alongside Moraga, especially those that incorporate the work of Moraga's fellow activist and comadre, Gloria Anzaldua. If agreed upon by the accepted panelists, the papers presented at the session will be submitted for publication as a collected volume.

The submission form can be found at <https://cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/21985> or on the NEMLA website.



Conference CFP's

The (Re)generation of the Nonhuman: Nature and Text in Dialogue

Deadline: September 30th

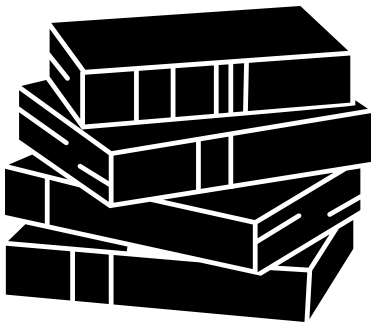
57th NeMLA Annual Convention

March 5-8, 2026

Pittsburgh PA

The last decade has seen a surge in scholarly interdisciplinarity, exploring the nonhuman in a broad range of critical perspectives. Whether through Glenworth et al (2024)'s conservationist prism which contextualises 'Rewilding' as a way of restoring 'non-human autonomy'; or perhaps, through Bram Büscher (2021)'s capitalist reflections on nature's alienation and entanglement, both of which are recent approaches that seek to champion the cause of 'decentering the human in favor of a concern for the nonhuman' (Grusin, 2015: 1), we see a growing pace of intersectionality within which nature and literature are brazenly intertwined. Often suggested as a repressed generation of ecological beings, either of subaltern considerations or anthropomorphic (de)constructions, the nonhuman, whether it be plants, animals, or ecosystems, has continued to fit the bill for a contemporary kind of critical and textual narrative that urgently needs to undergo transformation through a process of generation, regeneration or autogeneration, after decades of being consistently synonymous with the image of depletive degeneration which David Abram (1996:22-23) sharply condemns as a biosphere of 'nonregenerative' decline, which in his views, has resulted in a variation of problems for humans: epidemics (including immune diseases and cancers) or perhaps, pandemics like the 2019 COVID which postdates Abram's study; or mental disorders. In the face of today's climate change and biodiversity loss, this session proposes a constructive way of exploring literature's capacity to both reflect (on) the devastation of the natural world and, more importantly, provide imaginative models for its regeneration. Drawing on ecocritical theory, environmental humanities, posthumanism, and new materialism, this session invites papers that trace how literary texts can challenge anthropocentric templates, (re)framing a textual world in which the nonhuman is seen as an active element with agency, forging a reciprocal connection with the human world.

Papers can engage with, but are not limited to, the following themes:



Conference CFP's

Ecocriticism (this includes a combination of ecocritical theories with other theories with the use of the prefix 'eco', e.g., ecofeminism, ecophenomenology, ecopoetique, ecoqueer, etc)

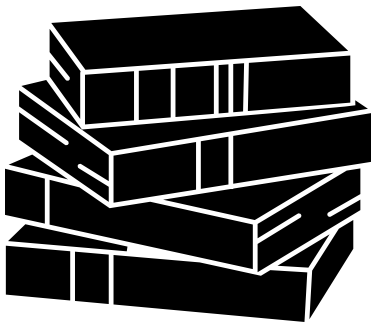
2. Environmental Humanities
3. Geocriticism
4. Green Negritude Studies
5. Green Cultural Studies
6. Deep Ecology
7. Dark Ecology
8. Collapsology/Spiralism
9. Speciesism

This session proposes an 'auto-presentation' format only, where presenters are expected to prepare, in advance, a 10 to 15-minute pre-recorded video and/or audio version of their papers; and then play these to their audience at the conference, followed by a live Q&A session. The creative and innovative part of this session lies in the deviation from live oral presentation of papers by presenters, laying emphasis on the use of pre-recorded materials (videos/audios) in combination with powerpoint slides while the presenter will be on standby to answer questions at the end of their automatic presentation. This format is therefore Q&A-focussed, as this will help to increase the number of questions asked to presenters at conferences. This innovation will also help young and first-time conference panellists (particularly (post)graduate students) to build confidence in oral presentations rather than shying away altogether from paper presentations at conferences.

Abstracts and presentations are accepted only in English please. (Including language of pre-recorded materials).

contact email:

OXE847@student.bham.ac.uk



Conference CFP's

THE ITALIAN SOUTH AND SOUTHERN (RE)GENERATION **Deadline: September 30th**

57th NeMLA Annual Convention
March 5-8, 2026
Pittsburgh PA

Long perceived through the lens of economic disparity, the Italian South has been historically measured against the industrialized North, a comparison rooted in the post-unification Southern Question. Traditionally tied to agrarian concerns, this framework reinforced the notion of a necessary alliance between Southern peasants and Northern workers to bridge the industrial divide. However, contemporary Meridian Thought challenges this narrative, advocating for a recognition of the South beyond economic inferiority. Instead of striving for industrial homogenization, this perspective embraces *lentezza*, regional diversity, and a multiplicity of lived experiences, rejecting the pressure to conform to Northern models of development.

The proposed panel examines the Southern (R)evolution across Italian literature, media, music, television, social media, and art, exploring how these cultural forms reshape Southern identity through:

Transformation: evolving narratives of Southern identity in response to socio-political and cultural shifts.

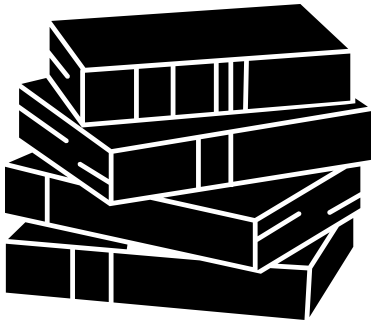
Adaptation: the South's engagement with and resistance to globalization

Migration and Immigration: movement within and beyond Italy, including new waves of migration towards the South

Environment and Agriculture: distinct ecological and agrarian practices shaping local sustainability models

Minority Communities: the diverse ethnic and cultural identities within Southern Italy

Subalternity: amplifying the voices of marginalized communities



Conference CFP's

Cultural Segregation: interrogating structures of exclusion and regional disparities

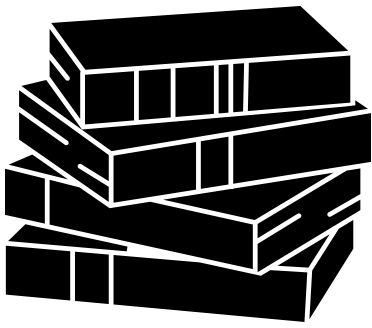
Music and Television: pop culture's role in reshaping Southern identity, from folk traditions to contemporary music genres, and from regional TV productions to mainstream portrayals

Social Media: the digital platforms fostering new representations of Southern Italy, breaking stereotypes and creating new cultural movements

Art and Visual Culture: contemporary artistic expressions redefining the aesthetics of the South, from street art and digital media to photography and cinema

Building on last year's discussion, this panel seeks to further broaden and enrich our understanding of the Italian South. Through the lens of literature, media, music, television, social media, and art, we critically explore how Southern Italy is reclaiming its narrative, not as a peripheral counterpart to the North, but as a vibrant, autonomous cultural entity.

Please submit an abstract of 300 words max to the NeMLA portal via this link: <https://cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/21761>.



Conference CFP's

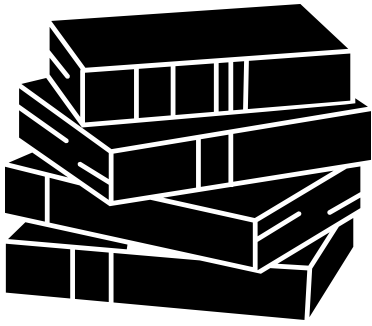
Ryan Coogler's "Sinners" **Deadline: September 1st**

SAMLA
November 6th - 8th
Atlanta, GA

Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* (2025) was released by the director's production company, Proximity Media, to massive fanfare. According to The Tennessee Tribune, *Sinners* is the first horror film in thirty-five years to earn a grade of 'A' on CinemaScore exit polls and boasts "nearly unanimous rave reviews" (April 24-30, 2025). A massive box office success, *Sinners* raked in a stunning \$45.6 million during its debut weekend. This figure, as well as other factors, have invited comparisons to Jordan Peele's *Us* (2019), the current record holder for biggest debut of an original film (\$71 million). Long time publishers of Coogler's works, even distribution and production partner Warner Brothers, seems to have made early cognition of the film's significance: Coogler successfully negotiated eventual ownership of the film's rights. As the Tribune Staff writers observe, not even Spielberg has been given such a "sweetheart deal." Moreover, with the HBO streaming release of *Sinners*, popular discussion of the film still rages online. Yet the film was not only immensely popular but innovative in terms of production techniques: Coogler and crew invented a new, omni-directional camera mount and facial mapping technology to create the intense fight scenes between the Moore twins, Smoke and Stack (both portrayed by frequent Coogler collaborator Michael B. Jordan). Engaging one of the most significant films of the 2025 season, this panel aims to include *Sinners* in the critical discussion of broader trends in horror, Black speculative fiction, Black horror, and period films.

Please make submissions through the Ballast portal.

<https://samla.ballastacademic.com/Home/S/19432>



Conference CFP's

How to Teach in Game Studies: a "just-in-time" roundtable for MLA

Deadline: September 12th

SAMLA

November 6th - 8th

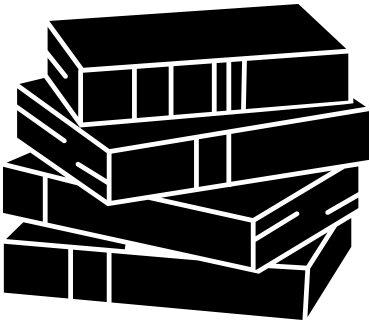
Atlanta, GA

With the increasing popularity of game studies, academic departments are striving to accommodate potential students. This panel is designed for participants to share their approaches to teaching game studies, either at the undergraduate or graduate level. This will be in roundtable format, and participants are encouraged to bring materials (syllabi, course packets, other media). A multiplicity of approaches is welcome, whether participants teach in game design, critical studies, or pedagogy/rhetoric.

To participate, submit a syllabus for a course you have taught recently or are about to teach in academic year 2025-2026. Also, note that this proposed panel needs to be approved in October by the Program Committee.

contact email:

marmintor@unt.edu



Special Issue

CFP's

Langston Hughes's *The Weary Blues* at 100

The Langston Hughes Review

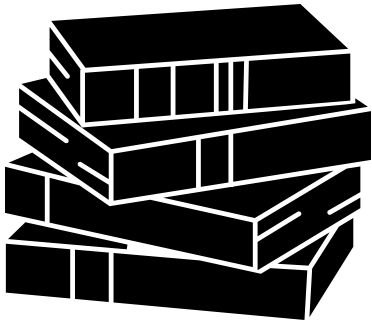
Deadline: August 31st

2026 will mark a century since Langston Hughes's landmark debut volume, *The Weary Blues*, was published. The book announced Hughes as a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance and a powerful voice in modern American poetry. It also marked the beginning of a long publishing relationship with Alfred and Blanche Knopf. Although he coolly dismissed much of Hughes's collection in his review in *Opportunity*, Countee Cullen opined that "dull books cause no schisms, raise no dissensions, create no parties. Much will be said of *The Weary Blues* because it is a definite achievement." Indeed, much has been said of Hughes's work in the intervening one hundred years, regarding both its innovative form and adventurous content.

For this special issue, *The Langston Hughes Review* welcomes proposals that demonstrate the immediate influence and long legacies of *The Weary Blues*. Essays that address the collection's influence on other artists, whether contemporaries or inheritors of Hughes, are encouraged.

Topics may include, but are not limited to the following:

- The *Weary Blues* and its relationship to modernism's vast aesthetic experimentation.
- Hughes's poetry as the inauguration of a jazz poetics, and its influence on the relationship between Black writing and music in other contexts, including (but not limited to) soul, rhythm and blues, funk, and hip hop.
- The political possibility Hughes located in Black vernacular expression, including influences on his work and its legacy in later Black writing.
- The geographies of *The Weary Blues* (including Harlem, the American South, and the volume's global locations).
- Hughes's theorization of Blackness and Black subjectivity through culture, place, and history.
- The matrix of small magazines supporting Hughes and other Black writers.
- The representation of Hughes's poems in other contexts, such as museums and libraries.
- Adaptations of *The Weary Blues* by musical and visual artists, including Hughes's own collaborations with other artists.



Special Issue CFP's

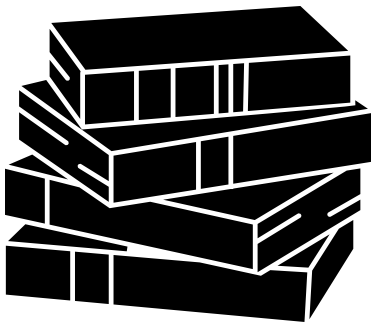
- Hughes's relationships with his contemporaries.
- Publication and editorial histories.
- Digital Humanities projects and *The Weary Blues*.
- Hughes's attention to and flaunting of tradition, both expressive and political.

Interested contributors should send a 500-word abstract and a 2-page CV to Michael Borshuk (michael.borshuk@ttu.edu) by August 31, 2025. Those invited to participate in the issue will be asked to submit complete essays for editing and peer review by December 1, 2025, with final revisions due by October 2026.

Black Camera Close-Up on Sinners (2025): Critical Approaches to Ryan Coogler's Groundbreaking Black Vampiric Horror Film **Black Camera** **Deadline: May 16th 2026**

On April 18, 2025, acclaimed director Ryan Coogler released his fifth feature film, *Sinners*. Set to the backdrop of 1932 Clarksdale, Mississippi in the height of the Jim Crow era, Coogler blends elements of vampire horror, period films, and musicals to construct a narrative steeped in the histories of American Blackness and to critique various structures of power including anti-Black racism, colonialism, and imperialism. *Sinners* follows emerging bluesman Sammie, also known as "Preacher Boy" (played by Miles Caton and blues singer Buddy Guy), who helps his twin gangster cousins Smoke and Stack (both played by Michael B. Jordan) open a juke joint. The evening of its opening, Irish vampire Remmick (played by Jack O'Connell), and the recently transformed KKK member Bert (played by Peter Dreimanis) and his wife Joan (played by Lola Kirke), arrive to terrorize the club's patrons.

Sinners is rich with meaning. Coogler was inspired by his own personal history, including his family's participation in the Great Migration[1] and his late uncle James, a native Mississippian, who loved blues music. In this way—and similar to its Black horror predecessors—*Sinners* uses popular genres and a connection to lived experiences to engage discourse and form critical commentary on issues related to race, class, gender, sexuality, and spirituality. Though released only recently, popular and academic audiences are already resonating with the conversations Coogler opens through his genre-blending project.



Special Issue

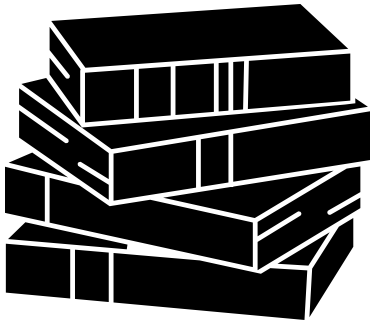
CFP's

The context of the film's production and release are also worth noting. In its opening weekend, *Sinners* impressively amassed over \$60 million internationally, which makes it the highest grossing original movie since Jordan Peele's 2019 Black horror film *Us*.^[2] *Sinners* also marks the first time that a female Director of Photography has been hired to shoot a Hollywood feature film in IMAX format. Furthermore, since the movie's release in April 2025, popular conversations, TikTok trends, and fan creations related to *Sinners* have spread across social media. For this reason, contextual analyses of the film are also necessary.

Some questions to consider regarding textual and contextual readings of *Sinners* are: What are the theoretical implications of Coogler's take on the Black horror genre? More pointedly, how does the vampire narrative in *Sinners* provide a vehicle for discourse on the impact of anti-Black racism, as well as colonialism and imperialism, in historical and contemporary contexts? What tensions, contradictions, and complexities arise from the film's engagement with issues related to religion and spirituality? How are various forms of racialized, gendered, sexual, and class violence portrayed in the film, and what are the implications of such portrayals? Given the central role of sound in the horror film genre, how does Coogler incorporate blues music in a way that speaks to the horror of anti-Blackness? Furthermore, how are the production and distribution of the film, specifically in reference to IMAX and IMAX-ready theaters, related to broader issues of race, class, gender, and access? And, what are the social implications of the film's box office success in the current political milieu?

Potential essay topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Genre (Black horror, vampire, action, musical, period, Southern gothic)
- Forms of anti-Black violence and White supremacy as horror (lynching, Jim Crow segregation, KKK, etc.)
- Religion and spirituality (African cosmologies, Voodooism, Hoodooism, Christianity)
- Racial capitalism (U.S. chattel slavery, sharecropping)
- Mass incarceration
- Gender (Black masculinities, Black Feminism, etc.)
- Sexuality (interracial relationships, queer love/desire, fluidity, etc.)
- Music (blues, Gospel, Negro spirituals, etc.)
- Performance



Special Issue CFP's

- Passing and Whiteness
- Afrofuturism and/or Afro-pessimism
- Colonialism and imperialism
- (Im)migration, mobility, and travel
- Blackness and Indigeneity
- Coalition politics
- Production and distribution (IMAX 70mm, cinematography, editing, special effects)
- Reception studies (circulation of reactions on social media such as TikTok, Instagram, Threads, BlueSky, etc., popular culture commentary)

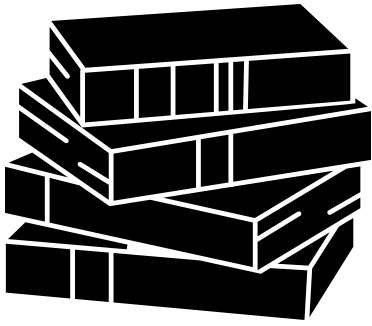
For your submission, please include completed essay, a 150-word abstract, and a 50–100 word biography by the **deadline, May 16, 2026**. Submissions should conform to The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition. See journal guidelines for submission policy details.

<https://blackcam.sitehost.iu.edu/call/>. Direct all questions, correspondence, and submissions to the guest editors at SinnersBlackCamera@gmail.com.

Edited Collection: Haunted by Hydrocarbons: Petrogothic and Petrohorror in the Contemporary Imagination **Deadline: August 31st**

For this edited collection, we invite proposals for essays that focus on and engage with petrogothic and petrohorror, emerging fields that examine the textual artifacts of hydrocarbon cultures through the lens of gothic and horror studies.

Petrogothic and petrohorror scholarship serves to address the anxiety, terror, and disquiet surrounding “petromodernity,” a term coined by scholar Stephanie LeMenager to describe the role of oil in constructing the material and social culture of contemporary globalized society. While the extraction, production, and combustion of hydrocarbons—primarily coal, oil, and natural gas—has enabled a luxurious standard of living in the Global North, it has also caused widespread destruction on almost every scale. Our premise for this collection is that humanities scholars need to examine the ingrained presence of petrocultures in contemporary cultural artifacts—including those invoke anxiety,



Special Issue

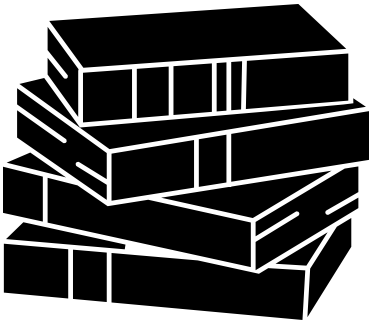
CFP's

fear, revulsion, horror, and terror—in order to counter the continued use of polluting fossil fuels and understand the corrosive influences of contemporary energy regimes. We recognize that over the last several years, some scholars have criticized petrogothic and petrohorror texts for their so-called invocations of “gloom and doom.” However, in this collection, we wish to add nuance to this discussion. Rather than treating these texts as monolithic, we propose to examine their intricacies and complexities so as to learn more about what they have to say about contemporary oil cultures. In so doing, we seek to gain greater insight into the feelings, constructions, and structures of fear (as well as other connected affects) that pervade human interactions with hydrocarbons and manifest themselves in collective and individual petrogothic and petrohorrific expressions.

To better address the manifestations of petrohorror and petrogothic in the contemporary imagination, we invite proposals for essays that engage with literature, film, graphic novels, comics, theatre, music, art, or any other oily texts. We are particularly interested in proposals for essays that center marginalized perspectives and address environmental justice issues.

Chapters might examine (but are not limited to) any of the following themes as a means of approaching petrohorror and the petrogothic:

- Temporality
- Geology and Fossils
- Extinction
- Monstrosity
- Spectrality
- Apocalypse
- Petromaterialisms
- Infrastructure and Technology
- Vehicular Cultures
- Plastics and Petrochemicals
- Pollution and Toxicity
- Waste Streams
- Illness and Disease
- Climate Change
- Environmental Justice



Special Issue CFP's

- Indigenous Epistemologies
- Necropolitics
- Capitalism and Colonialism
- Global and Regional Concerns
- More-Than-Human Perspectives

Please send a 300-word abstract and a 100-word bio to editors Madalynn Madigar (mmadigar@uoregon.edu) and Jennifer Schell (jschell5@alaska.edu) by August 31, 2025. Full essays of 6,000 to 7,000 words will be tentatively due by June 30, 2026.



JOIN US IN CONGRATULATING SAVANNAH DIGREGORIO!

Savannah has accepted a tenure track, Assistant Professor position at Arizona State University in Animal Studies. She will join the Integrative Sciences and Arts department.

**Congratulations on this huge
achievement!**

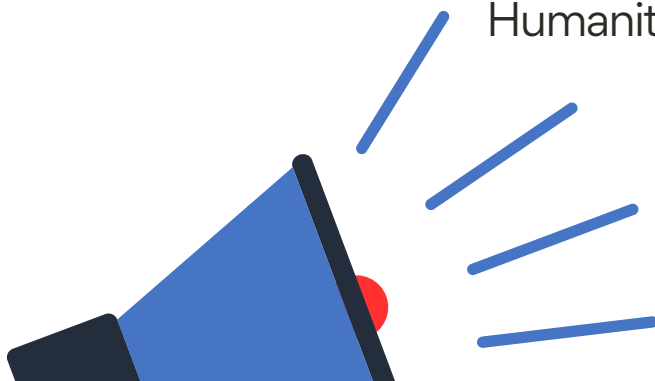




Savannah's research explores the lived relationship between race and species, particularly interspecies displays of legal and extralegal violence, tenderness, and community-building. Savannah's work also argues for an applied humanities approach to the race-animal question, returning us to ways of knowing that are rooted in the body and its senses. In her current book project, she combines literary analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and legal studies to uncover more-than-human rituals of race-making in the US South and beyond.



Savannah's critical and creative work has appeared in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *Épistémocritique: Revue de littérature et savoirs*, *The Offing*, *HAD*, and elsewhere. Areas of interest include African American/Diasporic Literature and Culture, Critical Animal Studies, Critical Race Studies, Black Ecologies, and the Environmental Humanities.



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Mahkia Greene