NOTED

Tulane University
Department of English

SPRING 2018 NEWSLETTER





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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

The middle of the spring semester, when this newsletter goes out, is a time of anxiety, anticipation, and productive excitement. Students are preparing for their exams, their professors are immersed in paper grading, and university departments—that is, the wonderful people, faculty and staff, who run them —are planning for commencement, the culmination of each young Tulanian's academic journey. Spring 2018 is an especially exciting and bittersweet time for me, since it marks the conclusion of my six consecutive years as Chair of the Tulane English Department. It's been, as the saying goes, a good run.

Altogether, I've spent nine years as Chair of English, my first chair-ship occurring between 2000 and 2003. That one had an unexpected moment of chaos due to the tragedy of 9/11. I remember during those terrible days how the power of literature—the strength of the human spirit that it conveys



beyond the moment and into timelessness—held this department and its students together. My mother insists that I pursued a PhD in literature because, as a child, she allowed me to pull my father's books down off the shelves and construct elaborate structures from them, the way some kids assemble Legos. I like to think about her story today, because of my ongoing devotion to the physical book in an age too distracted by technology and my belief in literature not just as an experience but as a place: a place to come to, move out from, and revisit for the refreshment of the spirit.

The English Department has recently celebrated two special accolades, a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and a second National Book Award for one of its creative writing faculty, Jesmyn Ward, in the year in which her superb novel, Sing, Unburied, Sing, has been published by Scribner. Jesmyn's new book, like all her writing, is tied to place, the town of Delisle, Mississippi where she lives. It also connects that place, by her eloquent prose and characters, to those other places where we reside. Like all great writing, hers is timely and timeless.

Jesmyn's work is also a reminder that the community formed by literature embraces everyone's experience and draws strength from the enduring ties between the academy and the world beyond it. One of my special pleasures during three terms as Chair has been my stewardship of the department's annual Josephine Gessner Ferguson Lecture, which has been welcoming to campus for almost thirty years now some of the country's most prestigious literary scholars. This generous endowment, maintained by Charles and Jane Ferguson and Barbara Ferguson Ginsberg and her husband, Howard, brings together each April Tulane faculty, students, and members of the local community for an evening devoted to the vision that literature encourages, inside the classroom and at large in the world. Charlie, Jane, Barbara, and Howard, in memory of Charlie and Barbara's mother, a Newcomb alumna who loved nineteenth-century British writing, are enthusiastic benefactors of literature and those who love it. They transform by their generous gift Tulane University and its English Department—and the ways in which we appreciate the transformative power of books.

It has been my great pleasure over the past six years, and previously between 2000 and 2003, to serve the Tulane English Department as its Chair.



The Ferguson and Ginsberg Families Left to Right: Caroline, Jane, and Charles Ferguson; Mike Kuczynski (chair), Laura Ginsberg (daughter of Barbara and Howard), and Hayes Ferguson

THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT **CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO** THE 29TH ANNUAL JOSEPHINE GESSNER FERGUSON LECTURE

The Ferguson lecture is a cherished annual tradition in the Tulane English department & brings together faculty, graduate & undergraduate students, and members of the community. This year, we are proud to welcome Professor Ted Underwood from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

His lecture "Digital Perspectives on the Long Arc of Literary History" will be presented at the Freeman Auditorium, Thursday, April 12, 2018 at 6:00 PM. This event is free and open to the public. A reception will follow.

The 29th Annual Josephine Gessner Ferguson Lecture

Proudly Presents

Digital Perspectives on the Long Arc of Literary History

A Lecture By:

TED UNDERWOOD UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

6:00 PM, THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 2018 FREEMAN AUDITORIUM WOLDENBERG ART CENTER TULANE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Free & Open to the Public Reception to Follow

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNICE MCFADDEN

By: Mitch Therieau

Bernice McFadden's motto on the homepage of her website is "I write to breathe life back into memory." Over her nine novels, this ethos is wonderfully evident-from The Book of Harlan's blend of family history, the horrors of World War II, and the regenerative power of music, to Gathering of Waters, which is narrated by the town of Money, Mississippi. When Professor McFadden and I sat down to talk about her work, she explained to me that she "didn't start out thinking about" her work as having anything to do with history. Rather, her interest in history came out "holistically" and started to "infuse" her fiction. With The Book of Harlan in particular, which was inspired in part by Firpo Carr's Germany's Black Holocaust, Professor McFadden envisioned a book that would "give those who wouldn't otherwise pick up a history book an entrée into history."

This blending of genres, for Professor McFadden, does not just give readers access to material they may not have otherwise encountered-it also gives writers the sense of freedom that they need to feel in order to be able to create. "Especially aspiring writers feel they have to write under a label," she told me. One solution to this problem is to write under a kind of anti-label, a literary category that includes pretty much every other kind of written expression imaginable. For Professor McFadden, one such anti-label is the lyric essay, which has elements of "poetry, memoir, fiction," and even sometimes links to websites and videos. In her Creative Writing courses, the lyric essay has a central place for this reason. Like her writing, Professor McFadden's teaching evinces a commitment to finding new, imaginative ways of getting at the truth, even (or maybe especially) if they involve breaking down prescribed literary categories.

Professor McFadden carefully structures all aspects of her creative writing courses to give students this sense of free play. Workshops in her courses, for example, are not opportunities for "ripping people's work apart." Instead, she encourages students to "come in with an observation" rather than a criticism. This method, in addition to being "more humane and less hostile," centers the conversation on what is actually useful for developing writers.



As Professor McFadden explains: "It took ten years for me to get my first book published. All of my rejection letters were full of opinions. If I had followed every one of them, I wouldn't have been published." Learning to sift through the mass of opinions and find what is really valuable—and developing a sense of agency of a writer-for Professor McFadden are some of the most useful things students of writing can do. "Say to yourself 'I am a writer," she told me. "Once you write, vou are a writer."

Professor McFadden is teaching a Creative Writing course this coming semester. She is currently working on and editing Praise Song for the Butterflies, a novel about religious servitude in West Africa, in addition to a memoir about her mother and a lyric essay on race and social justice. The Book of Harlan was recently nominated for the 2017 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work.



FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Barry Ahearn spoke about "A Brief History of 'Precision'" at the Ezra Pound Conference in Philadelphia in June, 2017.

Thomas Albrecht's article "The Loveliness of Things and the Sorrow of the World: Art and Ethics in Pater and George Eliot" was published in September 2017 in Testing New Opinions and Courting New Impressions: New Perspectives on Walter Pater (Routledge), a collection of essays edited by French Pater scholars Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada, Martine Lambert-Charbonnier, and Charlotte Ribeyrol.

Melissa Bailes's book, Questioning Nature: British Women's Scientific Writing and Literary Originality, 1750–1830 (U Virginia P), was published in May 2017. Her article on botanical clocks was published in the journal, Studies in Romanticism (Summer 2017), and an essay on botany and colonialism has been accepted for publication in the journal, The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation. Her reviews of Norma Clarke's Brothers of the Quill and of Lucinda Cole's Imperfect Creatures appeared in the Fournal of British Studies and Eighteenth-Century Fiction, respectively. Bailes also presented papers at the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (Atlanta, Nov 2016) and at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Minneapolis, April 2017).

Thomas Beller's recent publications include short stories (*The St. Ann's Review* and *Epoch*) and essays (*The Harvard* Design Review, The New Yorker's Culture Desk Blog, Threepenny Review). His essay about Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds was included in the anthology, In Their Lives: Great Writers on Great Beatles Songs, to which Paul McCartney wrote an introduction.

Peter Cooley, in his second year as Louisiana Poet Laureate, organized a fall panel on poetry for the Louisiana Book Festival, gave readings throughout the state and put together a poetry reading at the State Library in Baton Rouge in April 2016. Professor Cooley also interviewed the incoming Louisiana Poet Laureate, Jack Bedell, at the Louisiana Book Festival in October 2017. Professor Cooley gave a reading of his own work at the Great Writers' Conference in London in June 2016 and had poems published in *Commonweal, The Southern Review, Plume, Denver Quarterly, Crazyhorse, The Hampden Sydney Poetry Review, Christian Century, Missouri Review*, and the anthology *Mending for Memory*. Professor Cooley's tenth book of poetry, *World Without Finishing*, will appear in 2017 from Carnegie Mellon Press.

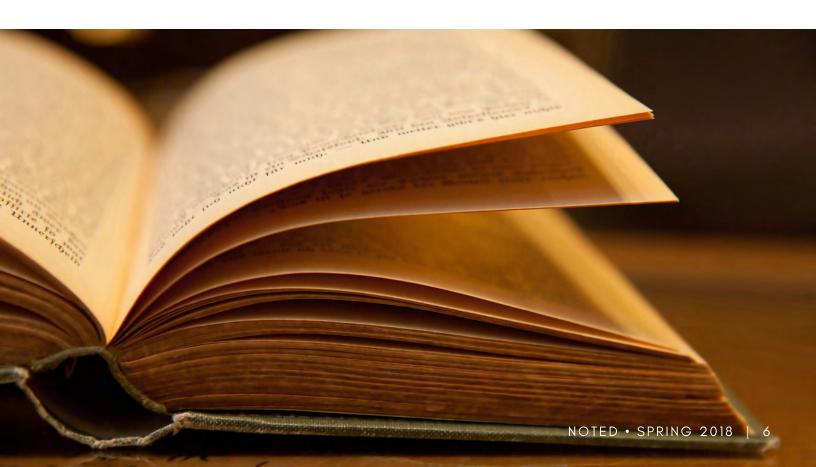
Joel Dinerstein's book *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press, 2017) appeared in print to many positive reviews. His article "American Cool: W.R. Burnett and the Rise of Literary Noir" was printed in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (VQR, Summer 2017, and his article "West Side Story and the Birth of Cool" appears in *Jerome Robbins Foundation Newsletter* (41.1 2017). Professor Dinerstein also made two public lectures, one on "Beat, Cool, Beatific: Kerouac's Transformations" at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, October 12, 2017; and the other on "Jack Kerouac and Lester Young" at the Gloucester Writers Center, Gloucester, Mass., October 13, 2017.

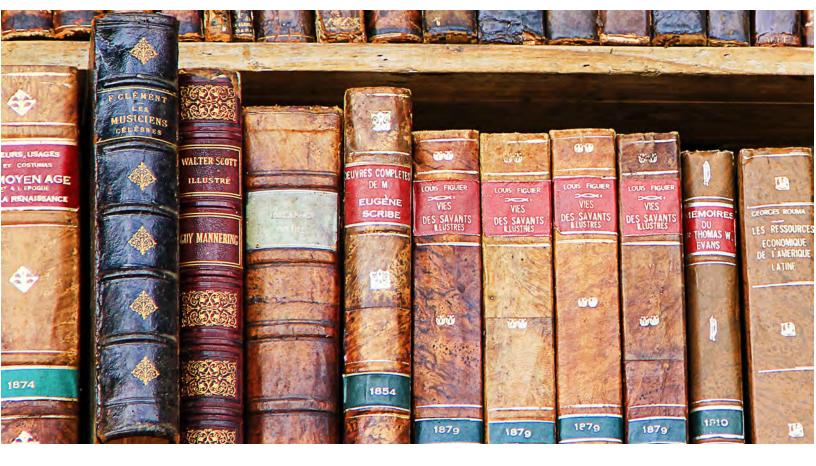
Matthew Griffin's debut novel *HIDE* won the 2017 Crook's Corner Book Prize, and it was named a Stonewall Honor Book by the American Library Association. It was also longlisted for the PEN America/Robert Bingham prize for debut fiction, a semifinalist for the VCU Cabell First Novel Prize, and a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Fiction and the Publishing Triangle's Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction. (Oh, and the paperback's coming out in June.)

Nathan Halverson's work "Resolution: How Very Much I Have Loved You" was part of this year's Enduring Ephemeral exhibit at the Contemporary Art Center of New Orleans. He composed sound for the short film, *Walkalong*, which debuted at the Virginia Film Festival in November and will screen in Paris at the Ethnografilm Festival in April of 2018.

TR Johnson's article "Rhythm and Clarity" is forthcoming in a book on prose-style, *The Writing Event* (ed. by Sheila Ross, Oxford UP 2019).

Michelle Kohler's article "Ancient Brooch and Loaded Gun: Dickinson's Lively Objects" is forthcoming in *ESQ* 63.2 (2017). Her essay "Women, Transcendentalism, and The Dial: Poetry and Poetics" appeared in *A Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry* (Cambridge UP, 2017), and her review essay "Dickinson and Whitman," co-written with Amanda Gailey, appeared in *American Literary Scholarship* 2015 (Duke UP).





Zachary Lazar's introductory creative writing class with service learning at Lafayette Correctional Center was filmed in November as part of a feature-length documentary produced by Blink Films, based in London. The film will show in theaters and then TV. Also, His fourth novel, *Vengeance*, has just been published by Catapult press.

Laura Helen Marks's article, "Resexualizing Scrooge: Gender, Spectatorship, and the Subversion of Genre in Shaun Costello's The Passions of Carol" appeared in the edited collection, Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s, eds. Whitney Strub and Carolyn Bronstein (U of Massachusetts P, 2016): 53-82. Her article, "Gilead: An Antiporn Utopia," co-authored with Lucy Neville, appeared in Nursing Clio May 15, 2017. Her article, "The Deuce: Porn, Nostalgia, and Late Capitalism," co-authored with Rebecca Sullivan, appeared on *The Conversation*, Sept. 18, 2017. In August 2017, she joined adult film archivist Joe Rubin for an audio interview with adult film director Charles DeSantos, featured on the Vinegar Syndrome release of three DeSantos films, The Sinful Pleasures of Reverend Star, Kinky *Tricks*, and *China Lust*.

Bernice L. Mcfadden's novel, *The Book of Harlan*, was awarded the 2017 American Book Award as well as the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work. Mark Tonderai acquired the film right to *The Book of Harlan* and will adapt and direct the feature film with McFadden providing help as a producer.

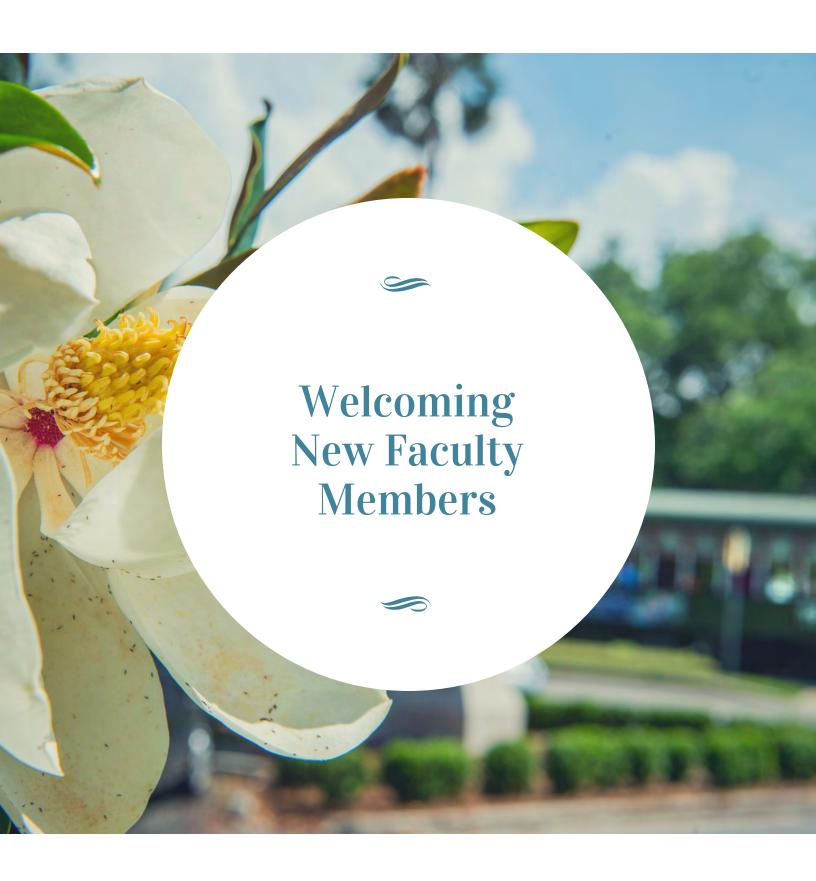
Cheryl Narumi Naruse's article "Singapore as Strategic Location: Setting and Positionality in Goh Poh Seng's If We Dream Too Long and Lydia Kwa's Pulse" appeared in the edited collection Current Directions in Singapore Literature and Culture: Local and Global Contexts (Routledge, 2016). She also presented a paper at the American Studies Association conference in Denver, CO. In 2017, Cheryl presented papers at the Asian Studies Association conference in Toronto, Canada; the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in Chicago, IL; and the Global Asias 4 conference at State College, PA. She was also invited to give a paper at the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English in Toronto. Cheryl was recently nominated as the 2018-19 chair of the MLA Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee as well as the founding chair of the recently established MLA Southeast Asian and Southeast Asian Diasporic Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies Forum.

Scott Oldenburg's article "The Petition on the Early English Stage" appears in the spring 2017 issue of Studies in English Literature. His essay "Multiculturalism in Early Modern Drama" appears in A New Companion to English Renaissance Drama (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017). Professor Oldenburg also led a seminar entitled "Migrant, Immigrants, Exiles, and Refugees" as part of the 2017 annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in Atlanta, GA, and ran a children's workshop for the New Orleans Shakespeare Festival at Tulane.

Molly Rothenberg's article "The Zombie Perverse: Pontypool, Shame, and the Defense Against Symbolic Decomposition" appears in Essays on the Undead: A Critical Review; and her article "Twisting 'Flat' Ontology: Graham Harman's 'Allure' and Lacan's Extimate Cause" is forthcoming in *Subject Lessons* (Columbia UP, forthcoming spring 2018). Professor Rothenberg also gave the keynote address ("Enjoyment and the Social Tie") for the LACK conference, Politics, Colorado College, October 2017.

Karen Zumhagen-Yekple co-edited Wittgenstein and Modernism (University of Chicago Press, 2017). In addition to coauthoring the introduction, the volume also includes her essay, "The World as Bloom found it: 'Ithaca,' the Tractatusand the solution of difficult problems in imaginary or real life." Her article "The Proper Stuff of Fiction: Objects and Woolf's Method, from the early stories to Jacob's Room" is forthcoming in The Oxford Handbook of Virginia Woolf (Oxford University Press, 2018). She also organized a conference in May 2017 at the Stanford Humanities Center on Ten Years in the Interdisciplinary Humanities, and presented a talk there, entitled "What Kind of Transformative Change Can We Produce Within the Academy?" Professor Zumhagen-Yekple also gave an invited talk on grace and disgrace in Toni Morrison's Beloved at the University of Edinburgh in October, 2017, another on Coetzee's recent fiction at Johns Hopkins Humanities Center, as well as a seminar on the Coen Brothers' film, A Serious Man, also at Hopkins, in September, 2016. The recipient of an ATLAS grant for the 2016-2017 academic year, Professor Zumhagen-Yekple also presented papers at the ACLA annual meeting in Utrecht, the 2017 meeting of the MLA in Philadelphia, and numerous other conferences.







Dr. Z'étoile Imma

Assistant Professor of English

Zétoile Imma earned her Ph.D. in English from the University of Virginia in 2012. Her work examines the politics of sexuality, gender, and the erotic in contemporary Africa through a study of Anglophone African discursive and visual cultures. Through her teaching and research, Professor Imma seeks to contribute to African gender analysis, Black feminisms, postcolonial queer studies, and the larger project of decolonizing knowledge production. She has published in or has forthcoming essays in Research in African Literature, Callaloo, and Journal of Lesbian Studies, along with chapters in edited volumes on gender in Africa. Her research has been supported by the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies PreDoctoral Fellowship, Mellow Mays Fellowship, and most recently the Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship. Alongside her scholarly work, she continues to feed a life-long passion for creative writing and is happy to announce that several of her poems will be translated and published in French for a collection of feminist poetry entitled Sorcières.

Dr. Cheryl Naruse

Assistant Professor of English

Cheryl Narumi Naruse's research and teaching interests include contemporary Anglophone literatures and cultures (particularly those from Asia and the Pacific), Asian American literature, postcolonial and cultural theory, transnationalism and diaspora, cultures of capitalism, and genre studies. She is currently completing her book manuscript, tentatively titled Incorporating Singapore: Postcolonial Capitalism and Transnational Mobility in the Twenty-First Century. Using a multimedia archive, the project studies the implications of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, when a new socio-economic order emerged as the Singaporean state responded to the demands of the global economy by valorizing transnational mobility as a cultural asset. The book seeks to contribute new conceptual paradigms for comprehending the postcolonial present and neoliberal past through the historical form of the nation. Other works in progress include two editorial projects: a special issue of ARIEL on "Literature and Postcolonial Capitalism" as well as a "Periscope" feature on the critical aesthetics and alternative globalities of "Global Asia" for Social Text. Naruse's publications include articles in biography, Genre, Interventions, and Verge: Studies in Global Asias and a chapter in Singapore Literature and Culture: Current Directions in Local and Global Contexts (Routledge).

Naruse earned her Ph.D. and M.A. degrees in English from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, with a certificate in International Cultural Studies from the East-West Center. Her research has been supported by a postdoctoral fellowship at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.



AN INTERVIEW WITH TR JOHNSON

By: Mitch Therieau

T.R. Johnson's premise, as he explains in A Rhetoric of Pleasure: Prose Style & Today's Composition Classroom (2003), is simple but powerful: to teach writing, instructors need to teach students how to play. By encouraging students to "play with prose in deliberate ways," as Professor Johnson told me when we met to discuss his work, instructors can "create conscious choices that give students a sense of agency, fun, and creativity." Now more than ever, instilling a sense of agency in burgeoning writers is one of the university's most important tasks. In The Other Side of Pedagogy (2014), Professor Johnson cites a litany of studies on students' and professors' feelings of dissatisfaction and helplessness in the academy. To combat these feelings and give students a sense of empowerment, he realized that we need a "developmental model true to the complexity of the issues" today's writing classroom faces. This model, which draws on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, gives instructors a powerful set of tools not only for being as useful as possible in the classroom, but also, on a more fundamental level, for better understanding their students.

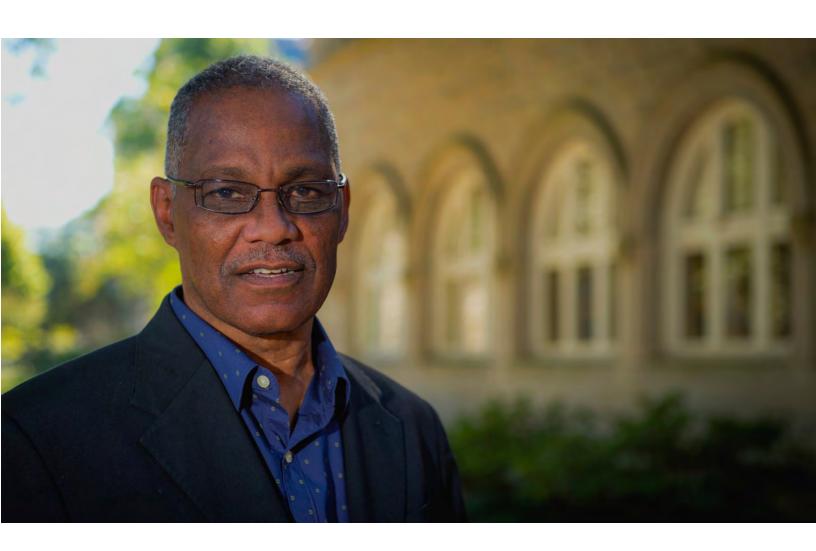
What happens when students and instructors engage in the ways Professor Johnson outlines? One of the many outcomes is literacy-a concept that for him turns out to have more layers than it might initially seem. On the one hand, literacy is our ability to communicate effectively, but more properly understood, as Professor Johnson explained to me, it is "the ability to work shoulder to shoulder with people in very different circumstances" from us. In other words, literacy is the "opposite of provincialism," or the faculty of "ameliorating divisiveness" by having "balanced exchanges in the interest of social justice." For Professor Johnson, literacy, in the first sense of "writing skill," is one of the most valuable ways we can get at the second, even more significant sense of literacy, or that of ethical, informed citizenship.

This theme of educational dialog and ethical praxis intertwining carries over throughout Professor Johnson's work, from his research to his teaching to his leadership of the department's Freshman Writing Program.



For the last thirteen years, Professor Johnson has shaped the set of what he calls "shared expectations" among all the department's Writing instructors, while at the same time encouraging postdoctoral fellows to adopt teaching focuses they are passionate about—and that, in turn, kindle in students a passion for rhetoric and composition. With this shared commitment, the Freshman Writing Program under Professor Johnson's direction has inspired students to use rhetoric to engage with today's most pressing issues, from global terrorism to cybernetics to prison reform and beyond.

Next semester, Professor Johnson will be teaching a graduate seminar on pedagogy. He is currently working on a book project on the psychoanalytic process of transference, both in the classroom and in politics and culture writ large. This year he is celebrating his fifteenth anniversary as a DJ on WWOZ, where he spins an eclectic mix of contemporary jazz. You can catch his show every Tuesday 4-7PM.



BEST WISHES FOR FELIPE SMITH

By Thomas Beller Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano

Felipe Smith, a member of Tulane's English Dept since 1989, retired from Tulane last Spring. A party honoring him was held at the Alumni House on October 27th, 2017, where he made some impromptu remarks in the presence of his family and colleagues from the English Department and elsewhere at Tulane, including President Mike Fitts and Provost Robin Forman.

"I had no intention to speak at all," he said later. "I had planned a short and heartfelt, 'thank you.' For whatever reason, the train jumped the track."

The venue of the event played a role both literal and metaphoric. "When I get into an environment which has the degree of air conditioning of that place, it disorients me," he said. "I somehow began to blurt this stuff out. It's not what I usually do. I don't just have visions and entertain people with them. It was something that was building as I arrived with my immediate family and was interacting with people there and thinking of the randomness of it all."

Below is a transcript of his remarks:

"My first time seeing Tulane University was in the back seat of a cab. At the time I was maybe five, maybe six years old. I saw the university because my cousin was working at 2 Audubon Place as a house cleaner. It was within that context of

understanding her journey to the United States, the transitions that it required, and the kinds of sacrifices that she had to make, understanding her intent to move on, move up, and try to develop something better for the next generation.

"It was a place I could never access except for the accident of my cousin working there. Its exclusivity was part of the fabric of social relations into which I was born. Its inaccessibility was what I stumbled onto-that there was another reality out there that was conditioning my life in ways that I hadn't perceived before. The sight of it imprinted upon me as a kind of a goal, an opportunity, something to think about as a way of doing my own part, making my own contribution to my familial journey not only geographically but also in terms of a sense of self.

I was part of a family in which half of the children were born in Central America and the other half were born here (in New Orleans). I was the second to last child and I was privileged to spend much of the time with my mother who worked cleaning houses in Metairie for as little as 2 or 3 dollars a day. She had to pay a cab to be able to get to work on time and so very little was left of the money she earned when she was done.

The randomness of it - that could you be on Audubon Place or in a bungalow in Metairie - was something I was sensitized to at an early age. And having a sense very early on of how that experience was shaping me and also protecting me from the kinds of things that people find themselves doing. I felt this moment was a kind of anomaly. I was placed in a situation where I could see there was another reality that was shaping me in ways that I wasn't completely conscious of but I knew it was significant. I was taken out of my own reality. It was the thing that kicked me into a different orbit or trajectory.

To cut to the chase, when I found myself at Tulane University as a member of the faculty, it was for me the closing of a circle. I realized that this sort of childhood anticipation of the possibility of moving beyond the kind of lives that my family had endured on several continents was a significant event in our family history.

I simply want to thank all of you who made this a journey worth taking, the encouragement that I got from you, and to tell you that I am still very connected to Tulane. I will still be here, I'll be available. And for me, again, it represents a fulfillment of generations of promise in my family. Thank you."



Photo Courtesy of Sanda Spicmiler-Lewis