

2019-20 Pembroke Center Seed Grants for Collaborative Interdisciplinary Research

Spirit Sounds: Religion and Spirituality in Black American Music - A Symposium

This symposium, scheduled to take place over two days in October 2019, will involve Brown and visiting faculty in creating a focused scholarly discussion about the position of religion and spirituality in black American music. While musicians, critics, and listeners have often asserted the centrality of religion and spirituality in black American music, discursive reticence among humanities scholars often limits discussion of the subject beyond this acknowledgement. The symposium will encourage discussion of questions possibly underlying this reticence: Do the humanities have a secular bias that does not sit well with questions of belief or faith? Is religion understood as a personal, private matter with no proper place in public-sphere discussion? Is the lack of substantive discussion an outcome of a drive to preserve, protect, and mark off a sphere of cultural experience and solidarity from the white gaze?

Beyond probing the limits of prior discussions, the symposium will bring together scholars from different disciplines, with specialists in the genres of jazz, gospel, blues, soul, funk, and hip hop, to discuss six topics. Those are: 1) the evolving history of the black church; 2) the rhetoric of “spirituality” vs. “religion” among musicians; 3) double-consciousness and the duality of “public” vs. “church” musical selves; 4) musical practices that originate in church music and can be found across genres; 5) the prime value given to affective transfer and audience participation in black music traditions; and 6) the threshold between secular and sacred in African-American discourses about music.

Project Director: Dana Gooley, Music, Brown University

Co-organizer: Charrise Barron, Religious Studies, Africana Studies, and the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, Brown University

Participants:

Guthrie Ramsey, University of Pennsylvania
Melvin Butler, University of Miami
Tammy Kernodle, Miami University of Ohio
Delbert Collins, Brown University
Tricia Rose, Brown University
Loren Kajikawa, George Washington University
Damien Sneed, Houston Grand Opera

Emmett Price III, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Joseph Winters, Duke University
Fredara Hadley, Oberlin College and Conservatory
Lisa Biggs, Brown University
Ashon T. Crawley, University of Virginia
Monica Miller, Lehigh University

HOME, FOR NOW.: An Indigenous New Play Development and Workshop Performance Project

HOME, FOR NOW., is a yearlong new play development project that will culminate in a public performance. The project takes its title from a play written by Brown undergraduate student Danielle Emerson, who is a member of the Dine tribal nation, and aims to develop a contemporary indigenous play script and performance informed by indigenous knowledge production, Dine practices and aesthetics, and indigenous theatre dramaturgy. Set on the Navajo Reservation, the play begins with an unexpected homecoming and sets into motion conflict over secrets and resentments among four siblings. The story interrogates intergenerational trauma and the cultural tensions between Christianity and traditional beliefs; western individualism and duty to family; colonial assimilation and Dine lifeways.

Over the course of two semesters, collaborators including faculty from Africana Studies, Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, American Studies, a visiting scholar from the University of Central Oklahoma, and student research assistants will engage in research and script development and use the Rites and Reason

Theatre's Research to Performance Method to systematically merge research, table readings, and public readings to prepare for a public presentation of the new work.

Once completed, the HOME, FOR NOW. script will be made available on NewPlayExchange.org, giving it an accessible online presence that will encourage future productions of the play. The larger aim of the project is to launch a permanent and thriving indigenous theatre on campus in partnership with the Rites and Reason Theatre and increasing community-building on campus while supporting the mission of the Native American Indigenous Studies Program at Brown.

Project Director: Sarah dAngelo, Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, Brown University

Collaborators:

Lisa Biggs, Africana Studies/Rites and Reason Theatre, Brown University

Carolyn Dunn, University of Central Oklahoma

Adrienne Keene, American Studies, Brown University

Elmo Terry-Morgan, Africana Studies/Rites and Reason Theatre, Brown University

Patterns and Trajectories of Migrations/People and Objects: A Non-Imperial Approach to Restitution

This project, centered on four collaborative, interdisciplinary workshops, will be a year-long study bringing together two trajectories of migration—of objects and people—which are usually studied separately by scholars from different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Whereas art and objects from the global south and former European colonies migrate to major institutions and are subject to professional care, scrupulous documentation, and generous hospitality in museums, archives, and displays, human migrants who choose to or are forced to leave their homes do not have or cannot obtain the legal documents that would enable them to access most kinds of care and hospitality.

The project aims to examine flows of migrants as one inevitable offshoot of the destruction of colonized worlds and the extraction of its “best pieces” of art. While the millions of objects taken from colonized lands are now handled by museums, archives, and libraries according to modern principles and procedures of classification, migrants are also categorized and classified in ways ranging from “undocumented” to “asylum seekers” to “illegals.” The project recognizes the institutional discourse of salvation and preservation, applied to art and objects, as one of the founding principles of imperialism.

Through four workshops: Plunder, Art Making and Institutions; Gendered Approach to Restitution: Structural Amnesia and Trauma; Using Big Data to Intervene in Museums and Migrations; and Patterns of Restitution and Communities, Brown faculty members and visiting scholars will explore how scholarship can participate in changing the historical and theoretical landscape in which people and objects caught in different patterns of migrations can be perceived adequately. The project also seeks to intervene in the discourse on restitution.

Project Director: Ariella Azoulay, Comparative Literature and Modern Culture and Media, Brown University

Collaborators:

Yannis Hamilakis, Archaeology, Modern Greek Studies, Brown University

Vazira Zamindar, History, Brown University

Achille Mbembe, University of Witwatersrand

Susan Slyomovics, UCLA

Tamara Lanier, plaintiff, Lanier v. Harvard College

Benjamin Crump, civil rights attorney

Felwine Sarr, Universite Gaston Berger, Senegal

Migration Studies Initiative: An Interdisciplinary Conversation on Migration Research in Theory and Practice

This project will bring together interdisciplinary humanities scholars across campus to consider the topic of migration from a person-centered perspective. With the aim of moving beyond the two opposed discursive frameworks that reduce all migrants to a threat, on the one hand, and a symbol of universal right to freedom of movement, on the other, the project will gather faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students for monthly workshops and meetings. It will also hold a year-long speaker series consisting of two fall and two spring lectures for the campus community that highlights the work of scholars external to Brown who conduct narrative and person-centered migration research.

These initial activities would inform a potential University initiative on migration – for example a migration studies initiative – that would convene scholars around this topic over multiple years. The collaborators' proposed activities would aid in developing the infrastructure necessary to do so.

Faculty Co-Directors: Kevin Escudero, American Studies, Brown University; Andrea Flores, Education, Brown University

Collaborators:

Dixa Ramirez, American studies and English, Brown University

Zhenchao Qian, Sociology, Brown University