

The **Scholars Lecture Series** is designed to encourage and promote the exchange of ideas among our faculty and students in the College of Arts and Science. The lecture series enhances the intellectual experience and social consciousness of the NYU community.

# COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE 2015–2016 **SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES**



Irving H. Jurow Lecture Hall, Silver Center for Arts and Science  
31 Washington Place All lectures are scheduled from 5:00–6:00 PM

## THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24 **RE-IMAGINING GENDER, PLACE AND RACE IN THE MAKING OF GONE WITH THE WIND**

*Deborah Willis, University Professor and Chair, Photography & Imaging, and Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis*

In this lecture Professor Willis will consider a comparative perspective of the historic film and the role photography and art played in remembering and restaging events from the Civil War and American Slavery before and after Emancipation. This talk also examines the public's memory of Slavery through photographs and how images influenced the making of the film. Professor Willis will weave a narrative on the history of American photography during its early years with iconic moments in the film.

## WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30 **CAN THE WOUNDS OF WAR BE HEALED? EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE ON RECONCILIATION**

*Oeindrila Dube, Assistant Professor of Politics and Economics*

Some of our greatest tragedies are of our own making: a genocide in Rwanda, a brutal dictatorship in Cambodia, and a long civil war in Sierra Leone all left millions dead. These conflicts do not just take lives and destroy physical capital—they sever social bonds between people and destroy social capital. How do we re-stitch the fabric of society in these post-conflict contexts? Professor Dube will describe a large-scale truth and reconciliation designed effort to achieve this goal in Sierra Leone, which has been evaluated through a randomized control trial. The results shed light, but also raise new questions, around how we can heal the wounds of war.

## TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6 **DOES TIME GO BY?**

*David Velleman, Professor of Philosophy and Bioethics and Director of Undergraduate Studies for Philosophy*

We experience time as moving—as passing, or going by. But it's very hard to say what that means. Could it be that time doesn't go by? In this lecture Professor Velleman will explore possible answers to these questions.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 **SURPRISES IN EXPERIMENTAL EVOLUTION**

*Edo Kussell, Associate Professor of Biology and Physics*

Can we watch evolution happen in the lab? Experiments in recent years have pushed evolutionary biology from a descriptive to a predictive science, using microbes as model systems to study evolution. Can we predict the outcome of evolution? Is evolution ever deterministic? What constitutes a surprising result in an evolution experiment? In this lecture Professor Kussell will survey some of the highlights of experimental evolution from the last three decades.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 26 **SWEET SCIENCE: WHAT SYSTEMS APPROACHES CAN TELL US ABOUT COMPLEX SUGARS IN BIOLOGY AND MEDICINE**

*Lara Mahal, Professor of Chemistry*

Cell surface carbohydrates play crucial roles in a diverse array of biological processes from viral pathogenesis to tumor cell metastasis. Applying systems-based analytical and biology approaches, including examining miRNA regulatory networks and lectin microarrays, our laboratory has discovered new cancer therapeutic targets, gained insights into HIV-1 biology and observed associations between the glycome and microbiome. The new technologies are enabling us to decode information encoded in the glycome.

## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12 **CONTINGENT MIGRATIONS: OF BIRDS AND BALLAST IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL**

*Elaine Freedgood, Professor of English*

Colonial novels of the nineteenth century catalogue the genocide and displacement of indigenous people and the migration and settlement of Europeans. They also tell stories of more random migrations of great consequence. In this lecture Professor Freedgood will focus on birds in a Canadian, Indian and Phillipino novel and their subsequent historical fates, and the problem of ballast, and what it transports accidentally, in several maritime fictions and in recent work on recovered slave ships.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2 **THE MIND AS A MEANING MACHINE: UNCOVERING THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF COMBINATORY SEMANTICS IN LANGUAGE PROCESSING**

*Liina Pykkänen, Associate Professor of Linguistics and Psychology and Director of Graduate Studies for Linguistics*

The infinite creative power of language is one of the most impressive feats of the human brain. What is the underlying neurobiology of our ability to understand the meanings of word combinations and how do our brains create such messages when we talk? Importing insights from linguistics into the brain science of semantics, Professor Pykkänen will discuss her research characterizing the rapid unfolding of the brain's combinatory computations.

## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3 **IMAGINING A MODERN IRAN AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES**

*Ali Mirsepassi, Professor of Sociology and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and Director of the Iranian Studies Initiative*

Why have the "human sciences" become the target of a major government crack-down in Iran today? In this lecture Professor Mirsepassi will focus on a specific intellectual shift in contemporary Iran. Today's intellectual environment draws its vision of social change from the *social sciences* rather than *philosophy*, reflecting complex underlying conceptual and practical shifts since the long struggle for modernity and democracy that shaped the twentieth century. The terms of public discourse have shifted from the post-revolutionary worldview grounded in the *Bazghash be khish* (return to roots) and *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) to an open-ended pragmatic politics. Human sciences, in this context, embody ideas of *azadi* (liberty) and *jam'eh-e madani* (civil society).

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23 **ROAD GIRLS AND WILD BOYS IN DEPRESSION-ERA U.S. POPULAR CULTURE**

*Michele Mitchell, Associate Professor of History*

Young Americans faced a notable predicament when the Great Depression hit the United States. Many youth could not remain in school due to closures, insufficient funds and even the lack of proper clothing; young men and women between the ages of 16 and 24 entered the labor market during an economic calamity and then competed with older adults for scarce jobs. As millions of youth were unemployed and approximately half a million hit the road to seek both work and adventure, transiency among youth became a subject of fascination as well as a target of social control. Professor Mitchell's lecture will explore representations of unemployed, transient youth in Depression-era popular culture. She will especially focus on how social problem films such as *Wild Boys of the Road* and sensationalist narratives such as *Sister of the Road* broached sexuality with varying degrees of directness. Professor Mitchell will also discuss how portrayals of wandering youth emerged at a time when the federal government actively created New Deal programs that were meant to channel youthful energy into constructive—and non-sexual—activity. Indeed, at a time when popular depictions of "road girls" and "wild boys" emerged in print and on screen, anxieties about this particular population would powerfully shape New Deal policy.

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2 **"THE PACIFIC SOLUTION": HISTORICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE DETENTION**

*Jini Kim Watson, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Director of Undergraduate Honors for English*

Since 2001, thousands of asylum seekers attempting to reach Australia (from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Sri Lanka) have been incarcerated in offshore camps on the small Pacific nations of Nauru and Papua New Guinea in an arrangement known as "The Pacific solution." While Australia's harsh response to asylum seekers has been much criticized from the standpoint of international law and human rights, this lecture situates "The Pacific Solution" as part of a longer story of postcolonial sovereignty in Oceania. To do so, the lecture examines three key literary texts by Pacific writers—Vincent Eri, Nash G. Sorariba, and Epeli Hau'ofa—for their depictions of colonial and neocolonial relationships in the Pacific. These reveal important shifts in the configurations of sovereignty and territory that, Professor Watson argues, have created the pre-conditions for our contemporary moment in which the body of the asylum-seeker functions as a new form of global currency.

## TUESDAY, MARCH 22 **THE ECONOMICS OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

*Hunt Allcott, Assistant Professor of Economics*

What can we learn about energy efficiency from applying ideas from behavioral economics and combining big data with sophisticated econometrics? Why do we have energy efficiency programs? Are they achieving their goals? How can we make them better? Professor Allcott shares the recent research on this topic.

## TUESDAY, MARCH 29 **REVOLUTIONARY DISSENT: THE FOUNDING GENERATION AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

*Stephen D. Solomon, Associate Professor of Journalism and Associate Director, Carter Journalism Institute*

Americans today enjoy an expansive First Amendment freedom to express themselves free of restrictions imposed by government. But this freedom was not easily won. During the founding period, Americans flaunted laws that made it a crime to criticize public officials as they protested against British authority and then ratified the Constitution. Their freewheeling debate—through articles, letters, poems, pamphlets, petitions, songs, sermons, effigies, cartoons, toasts, broadsides, liberty trees and more—expanded the public sphere of political speech. Ultimately, their uninhibited expression gave meaning to the First Amendment and helped establish the vigorous political dialogue we have today. Utilizing research from his upcoming book, *Revolutionary Dissent*, Professor Solomon will explore the origins of America's strong commitment to freedom of speech and press.



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# 2015–2016

## COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

# SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES

## NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

### LECTURERS

**DEBORAH WILLIS** is University Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts and has an affiliated appointment with the College of Arts and Science, Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, Africana Studies. She received her Ph.D. at George Mason University. She teaches courses on photography and imaging, iconicity, and cultural histories visualizing the black body, women, and gender. Her research examines photography's multifaceted histories, visual culture, the photographic history of slavery and emancipation, contemporary women photographers and beauty. She received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship and was a Richard D. Cohen Fellow in African and African American Art, Hutchins Center, Harvard University, and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow. Professor Willis received the NAACP Image Award in 2014 for her co-authored book (with Barbara Krauthamer) *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Temple University, 2012).

**OEINDRILA DUBE** is Assistant Professor of Politics and Economics and an affiliate of the Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development (BREAD). She received her Ph.D. in Public Policy at Harvard University and an M.Phil in Economics at Oxford University. Her research focuses on understanding the causes and consequences of conflict in the developing world. Her articles have appeared in leading journals in political science and economics, including the *American Political Science Review* and *The Review of Economics Studies*. She was also the recipient of the Rhodes Scholarship in 2002.

**DAVID VELLEMAN** is Professor of Philosophy and Bioethics, and currently serves as Director of Undergraduate Studies for Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. at Princeton and taught for many years at the University of Michigan. His most recent book is *Konrad Morgen: The Conscience of a Nazi Judge* (Palgrave, 2015). He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation, and he serves (with Stephen Darwall) as founding co-editor of *Philosophers' Imprint*.

**EDO KUSSELL** is Associate Professor of Biology and Physics. He received his Ph.D. in Biophysics at Harvard University. He performed postdoctoral research at The Rockefeller University, where he worked at the Center for Studies in Physics and Biology on bacterial adaptations to fluctuating environments. His research focuses on connections between statistical mechanics and population biology, notably the description of adapting populations as ensembles of individual histories using path integral methods. His lab at NYU's Center for Genomics and Systems Biology uses live cell microscopy and microfluidics to measure at the single cell level the dynamics of bacterial populations adapting to changing environments. He was awarded the Burroughs Wellcome Fund's Career Award at the Scientific Interface, and the James S. McDonnell Foundation's Research Award in Studying Complex Systems.

**LARA MAHAL** is Professor of Chemistry. She received her Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley. She was a Jane Coffin Childs Postdoctoral Fellow from 2000–2003 at Sloan-Kettering Institute before starting her first independent position at the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Mahal's research has focused on the study of glycosylation using systems-based approaches and creating tools for such studies, including the lectin microarray technology for which her laboratory is known. For her work she has received numerous awards including a Beckman Foundation Fellowship (2004), NSF CAREER Award (2007), Sloan Foundation Fellowship (2008) and an NIH Director's New Innovator Award (2008).

**ELAINE FREEDGOOD** is Professor of English. She received her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. She has been teaching English at NYU since 2001. She is the author of two books, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (University of Chicago, 2006) and *Victorian Writing about Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World* (Cambridge, 2000); and she is the editor of a third book, *Factory Production in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2003). Professor Freedgood is currently working on the strangeness of the putatively stable and staid nineteenth-century novel.

**LIINA PYLKKÄNEN** is Associate Professor of Linguistics and Psychology and currently serves as Director of Graduate Studies for Linguistics. She received her Ph.D. in Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and conducted her post-doctoral work at New York University. Her research addresses the brain bases of language processing, with a focus on semantic cognition. She is one of the leading researchers in the use of magnetoencephalography (MEG) to study the brain mechanisms of language

processing and has published extensively on the neuromagnetism of both word and sentence comprehension, with more recent work extending to language production. Professor Pylkkänen is the Director of the NYU Neurolinguistics Laboratory and a co-director of two MEG facilities at NYU, one in NYC and the other in Abu Dhabi.

**ALI MIRSEPASSI** is Professor of Sociology and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and Director of the Iranian Studies Initiative at NYU. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology at American University. He is the author of *Islam, Democracy, and Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge University, 2014), *Political Islam, Iran and Enlightenment* (Cambridge University, 2011), *Democracy in Modern Iran* (New York University, 2010), *Intellectual Discourses and Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge University, 2000), and *Truth or Democracy* (published in Iran); coeditor of *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World* (Syracuse University, 2002); and guest editor of *Beyond the Boundaries of the Old Geographies: Natives, Citizens, Exiles, and Cosmopolitans* in Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (CSSAAME), spring 2005.

**MICHELE MITCHELL** is Associate Professor of History. She received her Ph.D. at Northwestern University. She has served as the North American editor of *Gender & History* and as an elected member of the National Council of the American Studies Association (2009–2012). Professor Mitchell was also an elected member of the Executive Board of the Organization of American Historians from 2011–2014. From 2001–2002 she was the Schomburg Center & National Endowment for the Humanities Scholar-in-Residence at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York Public Library). In addition to her book *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina, 2004), she has co-edited two collections of essays: *Dialogues of Dispersal: Gender, Sexuality, and African Diasporas*, co-edited with Sandra Gunning and Tera W. Hunter (Blackwell, 2004); and *Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges*, co-edited with Naoko Shibusawa and Stephan F. Miescher (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015). She is now writing a book that is tentatively entitled *Idle Anxieties: Youth, Race, and Sexuality during the Great Depression*.

**JINI KIM WATSON** is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature and currently serves as Director of Undergraduate Honors for English. She received her Ph.D. in Literature at Duke University. She regularly teaches classes on postcolonial literature and theory in the English Department, as well as the Texts & Ideas course "On Liberation" for the Core Curriculum. Her research focuses on Asia/Pacific literature, urbanism and post-colonialism. She is the author of *The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form* (University of Minnesota, 2011) and is working on a new book tentatively titled, *Ruling Like A Foreigner: On Postcolonial Authoritarianism*.

**HUNT ALLCOTT** is Assistant Professor of Economics. He received his Ph.D. at Harvard University. Before coming to NYU, he was the Energy and Society Fellow in the MIT Economics Department and the MIT Energy Initiative. He is currently a Faculty Research Fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research. He is a Scientific Director of ideas42, a think tank that applies insights from psychology and economics to business and policy design problems; an Affiliate of Poverty Action Lab, a network of researchers exploring policy questions in the fight against poverty; and a Faculty Affiliate of E2e, a group of economists, engineers, and behavioral scientists focused on evaluating and improving energy efficiency policy. He is also a contributing author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report. According to a recent article in the *American Economic Journal*, Professor Allcott is one of the top five most-cited economists who have completed a Ph.D. after 2005.

**STEPHEN D. SOLOMON** is Associate Professor of Journalism and Associate Director, Carter Journalism Institute. He received a J.D. at Georgetown University Law Center. His research focuses on First Amendment history. His latest book, *Revolutionary Dissent: How the Founding Generation Created the Freedom of Speech*, will be published by St. Martin's Press in April 2016. It explores how Americans ignored criminal restrictions on speech during the founding period and expanded the public sphere of political expression, giving meaning to the First Amendment freedom of expression. His last book, *Ellery's Protest* (University of Michigan, 2007), explored the freedom of religion through the issue of prayer and Bible-reading in public schools. He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, and other publications.