

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 2017—2018 **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

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18 IRONY, REDUNDANCY, MEDIA

Leif Weatherby, Assistant Professor of German

What do we communicate when we communicate online? The answer to this question requires the perspective of the humanities. Drawing on recent examples from what is glibly called “social media”, this talk will outline the historical conditions for online communication in the movement called “cybernetics” and propose that rhetorical figures like irony are built into the very code of our daily conversations.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 BELIEFS ABOUT BRILLIANCE UNDERMINE DIVERSITY

Andrei Cimpian, Associate Professor of Psychology

Professor Cimpian’s research suggests that women and (some) minorities are under-represented in fields whose members believe that raw intellectual talent is required for success. The environment in these fields may be less welcoming to members of these groups because of the cultural stereotypes that associate intellectual talent—brilliance, genius, etc.—with (white) males. These stereotypes are absorbed early in life and are likely to influence children’s educational trajectories from the moment they enter school. Professor Cimpian will conclude by outlining some things we could all do to promote diversity.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12 NY UNDERGROUND: AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Katie Schneider-Paolantonio, Clinical Associate Professor of Biology

Every day, millions of people walk the streets of New York City. But how many stop to consider the complex network of subterranean resources that lies beneath their feet? Professor Schneider-Paolantonio will uncover environmental aspects of New York’s underground. After exploring the history and significance of the infrastructure, she will discuss sustainability initiatives in the face of increasing urbanization and climate change.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 16 THE “SELF-STIRRED” GENOME: HOW AND WHY?

Alexandra Zidovska, Assistant Professor of Physics

Although the sequence of the human genome has been known for almost two decades and its 3D packing inside cell nucleus studied intensely over the last decade, we are only now finding that DNA undergoes mysterious movements within our cells. Chromatin, the functional form of DNA, exhibits a wide range of active motions during the cell cycle. Professor Zidovska will demonstrate how the mechanisms and functions of chromatin dynamics in live human cells are studied, in other words the “how” and “why” of chromatin motion. Along the way, she will show the techniques needed to understand this problem, and how we might use what we learn to better understand genetic diseases.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1 THE DEAD AT HOME: WHEN HISTORIANS INVESTIGATE THEIR OWN FAMILIES

Stephane Gerson, Professor of French

Recently, a growing number of academic historians have made their own kin their object of study. Though common for novelists or artists, this move is unusual for historians, who usually keep a distance from their object of study. In this talk, Professor Gerson will explain why this new family history is emerging. He will argue that the best family histories mark an important break, opening onto rich modes of knowing, relating to, and writing about the past. Finally, he will grapple with methodological and ethical questions that these new historians must now confront as they move forward.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14 EPIGENETIC REGULATION OF CENTROMERES

Fei Li, Associate Professor of Biology

The centromere, a specialized chromosomal structure, plays a key role in ensuring the equal segregation of chromosomes. In most eukaryotes, propagation of centromere identity is specified epigenetically by CENP-A, a centromere-specific histone H3 variant. CENP-A nucleates the assembly of the kinetochore, a multiprotein complex, which mediates the attachment of the chromosome to the spindle microtubules at the centromere during mitosis. CENP-A malfunction in human cells has a devastating impact on chromosome segregation, resulting in chromosome aneuploidy. Using a combination of approaches, Professor Li will explain that his research findings contribute to a better understanding of how CENP-A is precisely targeted to centromeres and excluded from non-centromeric regions.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30 BASING CRYPTOGRAPHY ON BIOMETRICS AND OTHER NOISY DATA

Yevgeniy Dodis, Professor of Computer Science

Professor Dodis will provide formal definitions and efficient secure techniques for turning biometric information into keys usable for any cryptographic application, and reliably and securely authenticating biometric data. The techniques discussed will apply not just to biometric information but to any keying material that, unlike traditional cryptographic keys, is (1) not reproducible precisely and (2) not distributed uniformly.

MONDAY, JANUARY 29 UNEVEN GROWTH AND SOCIAL CONFLICT: LESSONS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Debraj Ray, Silver Professor of Economics

Economic growth can be extraordinarily rapid in developing countries. But it is often uneven. Such unevenness can serve to both inspire and frustrate, and so lead to social conflict even as overall economic conditions improve. These issues are crucially important in the United States today. Professor Ray’s talk will explore what we can learn about the uneven-growth/conflict nexus from developing countries.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6 A LIFE OF EXTREMES: ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS OF 21ST CENTURY SEAFARING

Sonia Das, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

Modern seafaring is a solitary, knowledge intensive labor practice performed by small groups of unrelated men and a few women who work under unpredictable and even terrifying environmental and social conditions. Drawing on ethnographic and linguistic research conducted aboard commercial cargo ships and at hospitality centers at the ports of Newark and Montreal, Professor Das investigates the neoliberal policies and religious and linguistic practices transforming the face of the global shipping industry. Professor Das will consider infrastructural limits to community formation and experiences of sociability and interaction among a hyper mobile labor force faced with worsening conditions of “extreme” geographic and social isolation, physical and psychological vulnerability, and cultural and linguistic difference.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21 THE PROBLEM WITH TRADITION: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WORDS DISAPPEAR?

Elizabeth McHenry, Associate Professor of English

Early African American literature has often been dismissed as a small field that is dominated by a single genre (the slave narrative) and rare, exceptional figures (such as Frederick Douglass). But as scholars continue to discover new texts, authors, and literary situations and practices, they are compelled to ask: how do these neglected, dismissed, or forgotten manuscripts challenge and complicate our understanding of African Americans and their literary practices and priorities across the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries? Professor McHenry discusses the resources available to historians of African American literature to facilitate recovery work and addresses the challenges and rewards of rewriting the academic landscape of African American literary history.

MONDAY, MARCH 5 “WE ARE THE CREDITORS”: WHY POOR PEOPLE MOVE TO RICH COUNTRIES

Suketu Mehta, Associate Professor of Journalism

360 million people live today in a country that they weren’t born in. Most of them have moved because of colonialism, climate change, war, or the inequities of global trade. There’s an enormous amount of hypocrisy and sanctimony in the West around the issue of immigration, and attempts to shut out or choose between “good migrants” and “bad migrants”. The lecture is a personal meditation on migration, and a look at what’s to come in the movement of people around the globe and the varying responses to such movement.

THURSDAY, MARCH 22 AN INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHINESE EXCAVATED MANUSCRIPTS

Ethan Harkness, Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies in the College of Arts and Science and of Classical Chinese Studies in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study

In recent decades, hand in hand with China’s rapid economic development, an unprecedented level of archaeological activity has added new perspectives and detail to our understanding of East Asia’s early history. Of particular interest have been numerous discoveries of manuscripts dating from the 4th—1st centuries BCE. Here, Professor Harkness will introduce several of the more prevalent text types in this corpus of excavated manuscripts and show how they can be used to ask (and sometimes answer) new questions about the beliefs and practices of the day. Topics to be explored are as diverse as the histories of science and religion, law, society, and the philosophy of governance that supported the first Chinese Empire.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27 TOWARDS A “MAJORITY-MINORITY” NATION: UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Maureen Craig, Assistant Professor of Psychology

The United States is undergoing extraordinary increases in racial/cultural diversity—a demographic trend towards what has been called a “majority-minority” nation. Professor Craig’s research explores implications of this demographic shift for Americans’ political and social attitudes. She will discuss how members of different racial groups perceive and react to the changing demographics. Circumstances in which members of one minority or stigmatized group may (and may not) perceive other minority groups as potential allies and express coalitional attitudes will also be examined.



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2017–2018

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NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

LECTURERS

LEIF WEATHERBY is Assistant Professor of German at New York University and Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the Technical University Berlin. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. His research interests include German Romanticism and Idealism, cybernetics and the history of technology, and economic theory, especially Marxism and neoliberalism. He is the author of *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ*, (Fordham University Press, 2016) and his writing has appeared in *Substance*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and the *Infernal Machine*, which he co-edits.

ANDREI CIMPIAN is Associate Professor of Psychology. He received his Ph.D. from Stanford University. One of his main areas of expertise is academic achievement and motivation. Among other topics, he has investigated gender stereotypes, people's beliefs about ability and talent, and the influence of praise and criticism on children's achievement. Professor Cimpian also investigates children's cognitive development. In particular, he has studied the development of children's concepts and their ability to formulate explanations to make sense of the world. Professor Cimpian's research has been published in top journals such as *Science* and *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. Media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *The Economist*, and NPR have covered his work.

KATIE SCHNEIDER-PAOLANTONIO is Clinical Associate Professor of Biology. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park. Professor Schneider-Paolantonio's research is focused on community ecology, food web ecology, and subterranean ecosystems (natural and manmade). Her research has been published in *Ecological Research*, the *Journal of Cave and Karst Studies*, *Freshwater Biology* and *The American Naturalist*. After spending nearly a decade studying cave invertebrates, she now teaches a course that involves the subways, water pipes, and gas mains that underlie New York City.

ALEXANDRA ZIDOVSKA is Assistant Professor of Physics at NYU's Center for Soft Matter Research. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She pursued her postdoctoral studies at Harvard University. Professor Zidovska held the prestigious Damon Runyon Cancer Research Fellowship (2010–12), was named Whitehead Fellow (2016), and is a recipient of the National Institutes of Health Pathway to Independence Award and National Science Foundation CAREER Award. Her current research uses approaches from soft matter and polymer physics to study chromatin, the functional form of DNA in cells, particularly its organization and dynamics in eukaryotic cell nuclei.

STEPHANE GERSON is Professor of French and French Studies and Director of the Institute of French Studies. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. Professor Gerson is a cultural historian of modern France, with interests in questions of place and memory, territorial identifications, and cultural responses to upheaval and traumatic change. He also studies the ways in which historians write about the past. His undergraduate teaching has included courses on French history, the 2017 election, the Nostradamus phenomenon across the centuries, and cultural theory.

FEI LI is Associate Professor of Biology. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Li's research focuses on epigenetics, epigenomics, and chromatin. He has published extensively in numerous scientific journals in the field. His awards and honors include the Pew Scholarship in the Biomedical Sciences (2013–2017) and the NYU Global Research Initiative fellowship (2017). He has also received funding for his research from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

YEVGENIY DODIS is Professor of Computer Science. He received his Ph.D. from MIT. Professor Dodis' research is in cryptography and network security. In particular, he works in a variety of areas including random number generation, cryptography with biometrics, hash function and block cipher design, protocol composition, and information-theoretic cryptography. Professor Dodis has more than 100 scientific publications, was the Program co-Chair for the 2015 Theory of Cryptography Conference, and the editor of the *Journal of Cryptology*. He is the recipient of National Science Foundation CAREER Award; Faculty Awards from IBM, Google, and VMware; and Best Paper Award at the 2005 Public Key Cryptography Conference.

DEBRAJ RAY is Julius Silver Professor of Economics. He received his Ph.D. from Cornell University. He teaches and works in the areas of development economics and microeconomic theory. Professor Ray is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Fellow of the Econometric Society, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a Fellow of the Society for Advancement in Economic Theory. He received the Dean's Award for Distinguished Teaching at Stanford, the Gittner Award for Teaching Excellence at Boston University, and a Golden Dozen Teaching award at NYU. He holds an honorary degree from the University of Oslo and is a co-editor of the *American Economic Review*.

SONIA DAS is Assistant Professor of Anthropology. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. She was a Visiting Professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 2015. She has published in English and French on topics pertaining to linguistic anthropology, diaspora and migration, and South Asian and Canadian studies. She is the author of *Linguistic Rivalries: Tamil Migrants and Anglo-Franco Conflicts* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

ELIZABETH MCHENRY is Associate Professor of English. She received her Ph.D. from Stanford University. Her research focuses on African-American literature, culture, and intellectual history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a literary historian, her work is committed to using archival materials to map those invisible or overlooked aspects of African American print culture and intellectual history. She is currently completing a book length manuscript entitled *Making Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship, 1895–1910*, a project that seeks to make visible how literature was envisioned and practiced in the transitional years between two centuries.

SUKETU MEHTA is Associate Professor of Journalism. He is a graduate of New York University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Professor Mehta is the author of *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), which won the Kiriyaama Prize and the Hutch Crossword Award and was a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize, the Lettre Ulysses Prize, the BBC4 Samuel Johnson Prize, and the Guardian First Book Award. Professor Mehta's work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *National Geographic*, *Granta*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, and has been featured on NPR's "Fresh Air" and "All Things Considered". He is currently working on a nonfiction book about immigrants in contemporary New York, for which he was awarded a 2007 Guggenheim fellowship.

ETHAN HARKNESS is Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies in the College of Arts and Science and of Classical Chinese Studies in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. His teaching and research interests focus on early Chinese cultural history and technical traditions (e.g. agriculture, medicine, calendrical science, divination); history of science; pre-Buddhist history of religion; Chinese paleography and excavated manuscripts. His most recent work, *Good Days and Bad Days: Echoes of the 3rd Century BCE Qin Conquest in Early Chinese Hemerology*, is forthcoming in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. He is the recipient of numerous fellowships and grants including a Fulbright-Hays DDRA Fellowship for Research in Taiwan and an Andrew Mellow Fellowship in Humanistic Studies.

MAUREEN CRAIG is Assistant Professor of Psychology. She received her Ph.D. from Northwestern University. Prior to joining NYU, she was a postdoctoral fellow in the Psychology Department at The Ohio State University. Her primary research interests are in understanding how increasing diversity and stigma shape individuals' attitudes and relations with people from different social groups, basic social cognitive processes, and political attitudes. Her work has been published in leading journals in the field.