



Professor Jermaine Archer, chair of the American Studies Department, discussing his research on imagery in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Thursday, February 14, in NAB 1100

Frederick Douglass: Legacies

Frederick Douglass “claimed ownership of his own story in his own way *and* on his *own* time,” according to American Studies Associate Professor and department chair, Dr. Jermaine Archer. In his talk entitled “Frederick Douglass: Legacies,” for the *MA in Liberal Studies Public Lecture Series*, on Thursday, February 14, 2019, Archer shared his research on the nation’s most famous abolitionist and early civil rights activist with the Old Westbury community.

Douglass was a significant figure in the nineteenth-century’s visual culture, knowing that representations of African Americans could be used for a variety of purposes – not all benign. “Douglass decided to become the most photographed figure of the 19th century and through the publications of his autobiographies, newspapers, speeches, and novels, asserted his voice as he wished his story to be told truthfully,” Archer explained. “He wanted nothing of the imagined type when it came to his story.” For his talk, Archer drew on research from his first book, *Ante-bellum Slave Narratives: Cultural and political expressions of Africa* (Routledge Press, 2008), as well as new research on representations of African Americans in abolitionist and civil rights literature of the post-Civil War period. Archer described Douglass as “keenly aware of the caricatured imagery of infantile, dimwitted, sambo-like forms of black folk running through the press, theatrical forms, and in literature.” Instead of accepting the stereotype, Douglass sought to tell the truth.

See *Frederick Douglass* (continued on page 4)

Understanding James Baldwin’s Heavenly City

In 2018, English Professor Christopher Hobson published his latest book, *James Baldwin and the Heavenly City: Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Doubt*, which is a re-interpretation of Baldwin’s work across genres, including all six of his novels (published between 1953-1979). In his research, Hobson uncovered the ways in which “Baldwin used Christian imagery, biblical ideas, and the biblical progression from Eden and fall through redemption to the apocalyptic coming of a new world as ways to structure his novels, even though he wasn’t a religious believer in adulthood.”

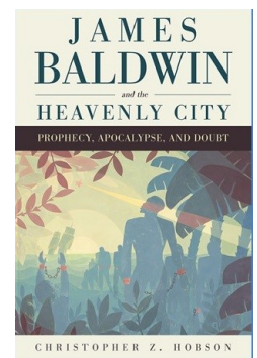
The book’s approach differs from previous interpretations of Baldwin, which have largely ignored religious themes. As Hobson explains, *Baldwin believes in (and practices) a prophetic role for*

art in revealing the truth about ourselves as individuals and a society, often a truth we don’t want to face. Many of his characters are artists and his books exemplify that idea of art. Second, he believes in an apocalypse, or revelation, of the holiness of the body and sexuality, and an apocalypse in society, a transition from an unjust to a just world. Last, he’s in doubt about whether any of this can happen, but believes it is worth trying for.

The book builds on insights Hobson discovered in researching previous monographs, *The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950* (Oxford, 2012), as well as his earlier studies of William Blake (*The Chained*

Boy and Blake and Homosexuality). As in these earlier works, Hobson “had to learn about the Bible and religious traditions as a scholar.” He explored this idea first with Blake: “Prophecy and apocalypse are main ideas in Blake and Blake puts his own presentations of social reformation and sexual (including homo-sexual) holiness in these terms.”

Hobson found similar themes in African American literature, which led to *The Mount of Vision*, a book that explores “prophecy and apocalypse in African American religious tradition,” and



See *James Baldwin* (continued on page 3)

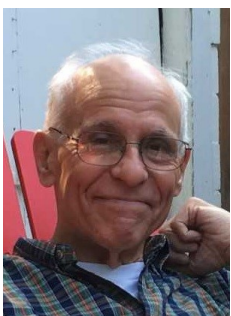
James Baldwin, (continued from page 1)

eventually to his latest book. What drives this research, he says, “is interest in how people who think differently from me and from dominant secularism use biblical ideas and traditions to make sense of the world and project a new one.”

Growing up in a literary household (Hobson’s mother, author Laura Z. Hobson wrote *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 1947, among other novels, and *Consenting Adult*, 1975), shaped his scholarly work.

From childhood on, my mother’s work and her friendships in writing, publishing, and show business stimulated my fascination with words and a sense that reading and writing were normal. Beyond that, my mother’s identities as a woman in male-dominated fields like advertising, as a Jew in a gentile society, and the fact that her own parents, Russian-Jewish immigrants, were socialist writers and editors, all helped form my sense of myself as an outsider to the U.S.’s false assumptions – and as a homosexual outsider, though that was a very difficult issue between us. At any rate, I learned early that to be against the norm was not necessarily wrong – and of course, I learned to love language and live by it.

In Fall 2019 Hobson will be teaching **EL 6510 Foundations of U.S. Literature**. The course “emphasizes commonalities and divisions over power, morality, and social possibilities in U.S. society, as imagined by major and less-known authors.” Open to



Prof. Christopher Hobson,
English Department

MALS students, Hobson has designed the course to encourage “new understanding of the depth and beauty of U.S. literature and of literature’s way of exploring social questions and challenging a country’s assumptions about itself — what Baldwin, actually, was doing in his conception of a prophetic art.”



Laura Chipley, *Appalachian Mountain Patrol* (video still)

Creating Environmental Change

In 2015, American Studies multi-media artist and Assistant Professor Laura Chipley, won the prestigious “Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art” from *A Blade of Grass*, an organization whose mission is to support “creative changemakers.” The award allowed Chipley to launch a multimedia project called the *Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol* (AMP). Chipley worked with local community activists in West Virginia, teaching them to use drones and video cameras to document “mountaintop removal” – a process used by coal companies to blast off the tops of mountains to extract hard-to-reach pockets of coal. The AMP project is helping local community members document the impact of this destructive process on people’s lives, land, wildlife, and waterways.

Drone technology empowered residents to gather video documentation as evidence of mine site violations, typically hidden from public view, that cause health and safety hazards. “As violations can result in large fines from the Department of Environmental Protection,” Chipley explains, “community drone and surveillance monitoring can have a direct impact on making mountaintop removal operations less profitable.” In coming months, the footage will be converted into an ‘interactive documentary;’ additional drone surveillance projects are planned for the future. Chipley credits the fellowship from *A Blade of Grass* for making this work possible: “I was able to take the time I needed to build trust and strong working relationships with people living in a region that has often been misrepresented by outside media makers,” she explains, “as well as learn and experiment with emerging documentary storytelling tools, such as environmental sensors and drones.”

Despite growing challenges facing environmental journalists, Chipley remains optimistic about the power of media. “I think it’s an exciting time for emerging media makers who want to create positive social change,” she writes:

The discourse around documentary practice is increasingly focused on collaboration, ethical engagement, conveying a more diverse point-of-view, and using documentary media to not just raise awareness, but to also have a direct impact on important issues. This, paired with the fact that production technology is increasingly affordable, means that aspiring media makers have more access to tools and opportunities to make important, non-commercial work. My advice for people wanting to enact change through media is to reach out to other makers, share knowledge, use the technology you already have access to and become part of a creative community.

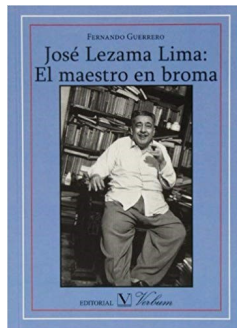
See *Creating Environmental Change* (continued on page 3)

CUBA'S 'MASTER IN JEST'

"José Lezama Lima is somehow considered the James Joyce of Literature in Spanish," explains Associate Professor Fernando Guerrero of the Modern Languages Department. Guerrero's book, *José Lezama Lima: El Maestro en bromo* (*José Lezama Lima: the master in jest*) (2013) concerns the humor, hybridity, and performative disguises of the Cuban experimental poet, novelist, and essayist Lezama Lima.

"Gaining an understanding of his work, getting familiarized with the universal cultural traditions he writes upon, as well as the understanding of his position in the literary Cuban history, took me years of study and research," Guerrero says. "I was ready to abandon this project, completely overwhelmed by Lezama Lima's complexity, until his disguised sense of humor came to the rescue."

The book's title takes its inspiration from a famous quote from Lezama Lima: "I would rather prefer to be called Master in jest, as a joke, than Professor seriously." For Guerrero, this became the key to understanding his work. "I realized that, partially due to his homosexual identity, and the 'camp' humor that Lezama Lima deployed in his work, the latter could be read as a colossal performance whose intentions were to subvert hetero-



patriarcal normativity, the mere concept of 'identity', modern literature, and modernity itself as a whole." As he puts it, "I wrote the book as a comprehensive guide to his work."

Guerrero is currently at work writing a novel, which he describes as "a secret:"

But there is nothing more tempting than telling a secret. By far, it is the most difficult task I have ever undertaken.

The novel tells the story of a disadvantaged boy in the Spain of the eighties. The boy gets invited to a birthday party in a middle-class household, and everything unravels from there. Through the writing of this novel, I have learnt that academic and fiction writing are mutually exclusive, if not openly enemies, which has taught me to compartmentalize, or forced me to live a double life. Then you realize that everybody has a double life (if not multiple); we either want to be someone else or pretend to be what we are not, and perhaps that is what this novel – or every novel – is all about.

Guerrero teaches **ML 6530 Cervantes and the Golden Age** every spring, and every other fall **he teaches ML 6810 Topics: The Spain of Benito Pérez Galdós.**



Professor Fernando Guerrero
Modern Languages Department

Both courses are taught in Spanish, available to MALS students pursuing the Spanish concentration, or competent in Spanish language. The courses focus, respectively, on two classic works of Spanish literature: *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, and *Fortunata y Jacinta*."

Students with a solid grounding in Spanish, and a willingness to do close reading, are welcome, even without a background in art or literature, Guerrero says. The course takes a "historical/political and cultural approach" to analysis. Apart from reading, analyzing, and understanding the two works, Guerrero says "my goal is to make students understand and appreciate that absolutely nothing that ever happened in the past expires, ends, or fades away. Everything survives, sometimes as a remain that still affects us, sometimes as a ghost, benign or frightening, both always invisible and untimely present."

Creating Environmental Change (continued from page 2)



Professor Laura Chipley,
American Studies Department

Prior to working at Old Westbury, Chipley worked at multimedia program *Democracy NOW!*, an experience that introduced her to the practice of "large-scale collaboration that amplified voices and stories often ignored by the mainstream media." As a result of this work, she shifted the focus of her creative work – "toward collaboration, activism, and social practice."

In the Fall of 2019, Chipley will be teaching **AS6350 Ethnographic Media**, a course she designed with MALS students in mind. The course will allow students to "delve into the critical issues of and various approaches to documenting culture, the 'other' and the 'self.' We will also look at the ways in which ethnographic media can proliferate or challenge cultural values and power structures." The course consists of screenings, discussions, field work exercises, presentations, and critiques of student work. Students will gain "a better understanding the evolving role of ethnographic media-making in intercultural dialogue, and ... develop strategies for ethical engagement and collaboration in communities."



MALS Students with Professor Jermaine Archer after his lecture. From left, Jennifer Suazo, Ian Abraham, Professor Archer, Imani Newman, Dawn Attard, Jessica Osorio, and Teaghan Altamore

Frederick Douglass: Legacies (continued from page 1)

A case in point was Douglass's struggle over illustrations published as part of his third autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881), which he published to preserve his legacy, at the age of 63. When Douglass saw an early version of the book that contained illustrations, he fought to have them removed. As Archer told the story:

He wrote to the editor of Park Publishing House before the book appeared, "I ask and insist, as I have a right to do, that an edition of the book shall be published without illustrations, for Northern circulation...the contract does not permit you to load the book with all manner of coarse and shocking woodcuts, such as may be found in the newspapers of the day...I have

no pleasure whatever in the book and shall not have while engravings remain." Douglass threatened to take legal action to prevent its publication before reaching an agreement under which some copies were released without illustration.

Students, faculty, and community members lingered after Prof. Archer's lecture to ask numerous questions about Douglass and his impact on 19th-century representation.

"It was Douglass who in many ways laid the foundation for biographical and communal narratives of black folks to be told 'like it is,'" Archer concluded. "All after him who tell it like it is are standing on the broad, strong, magnificent shoulders of Douglass."

To learn more about Old Westbury's MA in Liberal Studies degree, contact the Graduate Director, Professor Amanda Frisken, by phone at 516.876.4853, or by email at friskena@oldwestbury.edu.

Courses for MALS Students – Fall 2019

AS6350.G01 ETHNOGRAPHIC MEDIA (12339), T 04:45 - 07:00 PM, CHIPLEY

EL6510.G01 FOUNDATIONS OF US LITERATURE (11637), T 04:45-07:00 PM, HOBSON

EL6520.GBL FOUNDATIONS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE (11638), W 04:45-07:00 PM, CAMARASANA

HI6510.G01 TOPICS IN US HISTORY (11565), W 04:45-07:00 PM, QUIRKE

HI6530.G01 ECONOMICS: THEORIES, TOOLS, & DEBATES (11652), M 04:45-07:00 PM DELGIUDICE

HI6565.G01 TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF INDIA (11566), M 04:45-07:00 PM, WALSH

HI7500.G01 QUESTIONING GLOBAL HISTORY (11651), W 04:45-07:00 PM, MARECHAUX

LI6000.G01 INTRO TO INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY (12180), R 04:45-07:00 PM, FRISKEN

LI6300, INTERNSHIP / FIELD PLACEMENT (BY ARRANGEMENT WITH GRADUATE DIRECTOR)

LI7990, INDEPENDENT STUDY (BY ARRANGEMENT WITH GRADUATE DIRECTOR AND FACULTY MENTOR)

ML6510.G01 STRUCTURE OF SPANISH (11549), M 04:45-07:00 PM, O'CONNOR-BATER (IN SPANISH)

ML6520.GNE MASTERPIECES OF HISPANIC LITERATURE (11550), TBA, GONZALEZ (IN SPANISH)

ML6810.G01 TOPICS: PENINSULAR & LATIN AMERICAN ART (11586), W 04:45-07:00 PM, ASSA (IN SPANISH)

Note: COURSES IN BOLD, above, were developed specifically for interdisciplinary students in the MALS program.

The remaining courses are open to MALS students on a space-available basis. Some require pre-requisites and/or instructor permission.

*R designates Thursday classes