

IHRC 2020 PUBLIC HUMANITIES SYMPOSIUM
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“If I Had Known”: Education, Performance, Activism. A symposium in honor of the life and legacy of Alice Dunbar-Nelson

November 6, 2020
11:00AM – 3:00PM

PAPER PRESENTATIONS, Monet Timmons, moderator

11:15AM-12:15PM

Eve Dunbar, Associate Professor of English at Vassar College

Finding Inspiration in Black Women Writing Satisfaction

In this talk, Prof. Dunbar will discuss how mid-20th century African American women writers re-imagined satisfaction and care beyond normative constructions of work and family. Expanding on 19th-century notions of domestic and political activism of Black womanhood, Dunbar explores how writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Dorothy West, and Gwendolyn Brooks continue the literary push in imagining Black women's homes, heroisms, and interpersonal relationships as productive sites for radical work.

Sandra “Sandy” Zagerell, Donald R. Longman, Professor of English at Oberlin College and Conservatory

Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s Political Artistry: What the Archive Tells Us”

Scholars recognize that much of Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar-Nelson’s best-known fiction engages race, racial identity and racial ascription, sometimes indirectly, sometimes directly. While few scholars have seen expressions of her commitment to Black suffrage in her published *belles lettristic* writing, material in her papers reveals that some of her early fiction addressed precisely that issue. I will put several of her as-yet unpublished tales into conversation with fiction she published in the early 1900s to shed light on the artistry with which she took up the issue of how men of color voted. The tales are “The Pearl in the Oyster,” which appeared in the *Southern Workman* in 1900, and “The Mayoralty Race” and “The Delegate from Adamsboro,” which are in the archive. All three tales make the assumption, audacious for the era, that men of color were actually able to vote. Each is concerned with one particular way in which its man of color protagonist resists or surrenders to the individualistic allure of party politics, which the tales expose as raced white. Taken together, the tales also exemplify Dunbar-Nelson’s tonal and stylistic range and her interest in exploring important issues from several angles.

GUEST PERFORMANCES Jesse Erickson, moderator

12:30PM-1:30PM

Yolanda Wisher, Curator of Spoken Word at Philadelphia Contemporary

Constance Strickland, Creative Director of Theatre Roscius

Poetry recitation and theatrical performance create a performance-based homage to the legacy of Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Yolanda Wisher's poetry reading will pair samples of Alice Dunbar-Nelson's poetry with her own work and Constance Strickland will be showcasing experimental video in a piece devoted to Dunbar-Nelson's recovery. The performances will be followed by a moderated Q&A session.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

1:30PM-2:30PM

Nazera Sadiq Wright, Associate Professor of English at the University of Kentucky

DIGITAL GI(RL)S: Mapping Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century

The goal of Dr. Nazera Sadiq Wright's DIGITAL GI(RL)S: Mapping Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century project is to make histories of black girlhood visible and accessible. Digital GI(RL)S uses GIS mapping technologies and archival sources to trace the movement, lifestyles and cultural activities of black girls living in the Northeast during the 1870's and 1880's. By transcribing signatures and inscriptions in black girls' autograph albums, translating their diaries, and mining program announcements from classical music concerts and performances, Dr. Wright reveals how black girls found freedom through network-building and ephemeral communication practices post-Emancipation.

PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Rosenbach Museum & Library, [online exhibition](#), "I Am an American!" The Authorship and Activism of Alice Dunbar-Nelson

BIOS:

CONSTANCE STRICKLAND is the Creative Director of Theatre Roscius, an experimental theatre club that focuses on creating pieces reflecting past/present social issues facing women. Strickland was in Dara Friedman's RITE & Play presented at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York, Migros Museum in Switzerland, the Hammer Museum and the Kayne Griffin Corcoran Gallery in Los Angeles. Her original Theatre Roscius works *HerSheMe & Chitlin Blues: Dancing in the Grey* premiered at the Hollywood Fringe Festival 2013/2014. Constance's film projects include producing and starring in the short films *Black Like Her & Dear Nina* in collaboration with Sunday Kinfolk.

EVE DUNBAR is an associate professor of English at Vassar College (NY) and author of *Black Regions of the Imagination: African American Writers between the Nation and the World* (2012). Dunbar is also the co-editor of *African American Literature in Transition: 1930-1940* (forthcoming Cambridge University Press). Her research has appeared in academic journals such as *American Literature*, *African American Review*, the *A-Line: A Journal of Progressive Thought*, *American Literary History*, *Callaloo*, and various edited volumes; and in more public-facing outlets like TheNation.com, PBS.com, Jezebel.com, and colorlines.com.

DR. NAZERA SADIQ WRIGHT is Associate Professor of English and African American and Africana Studies at the University of Kentucky. She is the author of *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), which won the 2018 Children's Literature Association's Honor Book Award for Outstanding Book of Literary Criticism. Her Digital Humanities project, *DIGITAL GI(RL)S: Mapping Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* documents the cultural activities of black girls living in Philadelphia in the nineteenth century. In 2019, she was elected to the American Antiquarian Society. Fellowships through the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Bibliographical Society of America funded archival research for her second book, *Early African American Women Writers and Their Libraries*.

SANDRA A. ZAGARELL, Donald R. Longman Professor of English Emerita and Visiting Professor of English at Oberlin College, is currently President of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers. She has published widely on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American writing and is a senior editor of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. With Kate Adams and Caroline Gebhard she edited the *Legacy* special Issue *Recovering Alice Dunbar-Nelson for the Twenty-First Century* (2016). The essay "Recovering Alice Dunbar-Nelson for the Twenty-First Century" by Kate Adams and Sandra Zagarell, with Caroline Gebhard, appears in that issue.

YOLANDA WISHER, Philadelphia-based poet, singer, educator and curator is the author of *Monk Eats an Afro* (Hanging Loose Press, 2014) and the co-editor of *Peace is a Haiku Song* (Philadelphia Mural Arts, 2013). Wisher was named the inaugural Poet Laureate of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania in 1999 and the third Poet Laureate of Philadelphia in 2016. A Pew and Cave Canem Fellow, she has been a Writer in Residence at Hedgebrook and Aspen Words. Wisher taught high school English for a decade, served as Director of Art Education for Philadelphia Mural Arts, and founded and directed the Germantown Poetry and Outbound Poetry Festivals. She performs a unique blend of poetry and song with her band *The Afroeaters* and has led workshops and curated events in partnership with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Free Library of Philadelphia, and the U.S. Department of Arts & Culture. Wisher was the 2017-2018 CPCW Fellow in Poetics and Poetic Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently the Curator of Spoken Word at Philadelphia Contemporary and was part of the first cohort of artists with studios at the Cherry Street Pier on the Delaware River Waterfront.