



## The Whiting Foundation Announces \$400,000 in Grants to Support Public Engagement by Humanities Faculty

**A new cohort of Fellows and Seed Grantees showcases  
the myriad ways the humanities enrich our lives and society**

FEBRUARY 26, 2019. We need the humanities – and humanities professors. Faculty who devote their careers to the advanced study and teaching of fields like history, philosophy, and literature are poised to make crucial contributions beyond their publications and their classrooms. Such scholars cultivate rich stores of knowledge, and they hone the invaluable arts of careful inquiry, deep contextual thinking, and nuanced appreciation of distinctions. When they turn these outward to engage communities beyond the university, they can enrich public culture in unique ways.

The [Whiting Public Engagement Program](#) is a distinctive national grant founded to champion this vital role of humanities professors in the world. Today we are proud to award **seven \$50,000 Fellowships** and **five \$10,000 Seed Grants**, empowering a dozen early-career scholars and their collaborators to amplify unheard stories, infuse complexity into public discourse, and circulate essential insights gleaned from immersion in the humanities.

These 2019 grantees represent a vibrant cross-section of the important work being done today by humanists to contribute to communities across the country. They teach in disciplines including history, English, philosophy, African-American studies, anthropology, American studies, art history, classics, and comparative literature. They hail from all parts of the US; half are at public, half at private universities. Most exciting, they employ a wide range of means to engage publics, **from podcasts to community oral history projects to K-12 curricula to digital humanities.**

Examples of this year's Fellowship projects include:

- **Alice Dunbar-Nelson in Wilmington**, a year-long festival of public programs restoring the legacy of an astonishing Black woman of letters who

adopted the city as her home, including adult reading groups, K-12 curriculum workshops, and the creation of a website and public art

- ***Hi-Phi Nation***, a leap forward for a popular philosophy podcast praised by the *Guardian* and *Huffington Post*, with a new season examining the philosophical underpinnings of the US justice system, from criminalization of certain acts by law to ideas of forgiveness expressed in prison design
- **Latinx Murals of Pilsen**, a set of walking tours and digital tools exploring the changing neighborhood at the heart of Chicago's Latinx community through its vibrant historic murals, making information about them available for the first time, in collaboration with the National Museum of Mexican Art
- **Histories of Overburden**, a partnership with the Pine Mountain Settlement School and public schools in Harlan County, Kentucky, to bring high-school students into Pine Mountain's rich archive of environmental and cultural history to study firsthand how the past directly informs the present

Full descriptions of the new [Fellows](#) and [Seed Grantees](#) and their projects are included below. For more information about the program and past winners, visit the [Whiting website](#). Inquiries and questions can be directed to Daniel Reid, Executive Director of the Whiting Foundation, at [dreid@whiting.org](mailto:dreid@whiting.org).

## **The Seven 2019-20 Fellows**

### **Histories of Overburden: Teaching Appalachian Environmental History from the Archive**

Jason Cohen (*Berea College*; English)

The Pine Mountain Settlement School, a National Historic Landmark in Harlan County, Kentucky, is a treasured steward of local environmental and cultural heritage in a region long impacted by the destabilizing forces of resource extraction and industrialization. Founded in 1913 as a boarding school for children in the Kentucky mountains, it operates today as an educational community center focused on place-based learning and Appalachian tradition.

One of the school's richest assets is its archive: a collection of photos, maps, letters, interviews, and newspapers, it reveals local histories of food cultivation, homesteading, and environmental change dating back nearly a century. Jason Cohen will use the Fellowship to partner with public high school teachers in Harlan County and the surrounding region to develop curricula that bring students into the Pine Mountain archives, creating opportunities to engage with primary documents and to research how the past directly informs the present. At an end-of-year symposium, students from each school will broaden the impact of their work with the archives by sharing their findings across projects and subject areas with one another and the local community.

For decades, Appalachia's heritage has been viewed by some as a kind of "overburden," the mining term for land on top of coal deposits that must be removed before extraction can begin. With this Fellowship, Cohen and his collaborators will renew attention and care for Appalachia's neglected natural environment and its traditional ways of life while re-energizing teachers' pedagogical practice and offering rural schools a model for using local archives to develop historical understanding.

### **On the Row: The Prison Story Project**

Geffrey Davis (*University of Arkansas*; English)

In 2017, the state of Arkansas executed four people over a period of eight days. They were the first to receive capital punishment in Arkansas in over a decade, and their executions renewed a national debate over the role the death penalty plays in our society.

Two of them had participated in a creative writing and storytelling class led by the [Prison Story Project](#) for men on death row at Varner, a SuperMax Prison in the Arkansas Delta. Their stories are among those that became a scripted performance titled *On the Row*, a powerful exploration of the lives of prisoners before and after their convictions. Initial performances of *On the Row* in and around the prison have created a rare bridge for the accounts of those inside to reach the outside world.

As the Prison Story Project's Educational Advocacy Director and Writer-in-Residence, Geoffrey Davis will use the Fellowship to bring *On the Row* to six Arkansas counties that are home to major prisons or have otherwise been deeply affected by the realities of mass incarceration. At each stop on the tour, the Prison Story Project will stage readings for students during the day and for the general public in the evening. Performances will be followed by rich discussions, giving audiences—many of whom have had their own direct and varied experiences with the prison system—an opportunity to consider difficult questions surrounding incarceration, criminality, and capital punishment. By harnessing the power of storytelling, *On the Row* will bring communities together to consider how the criminal justice system affects individuals and society on a human level.

### **Race in the City of Destiny: Tacoma, Displacement, and Reconciliation**

Andrew Gomez (*University of Puget Sound*; History)

Tacoma, Washington, the final western stop on the Northern Pacific Railroad in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the self-proclaimed “City of Destiny,” has been shaped by a long history of migration. As in many cities in the American West, immigrants and communities of color have left an indelible mark on the city's past and present – even as interactions with the city's white inhabitants have been fraught with periodic conflict and occasional moments of reconciliation. Those tensions, displacements, and achievements have left lasting traces in Tacoma today.

With his Fellowship, Andrew Gomez and a team of collaborators will collect a series of digital oral histories with residents, politicians, and activists that trace three facets of Tacoma's history: Chinese expulsion in 1885, when city leaders expelled the entire Chinese population in an event that became known as the “Tacoma Method,” and the city's efforts to build Chinese Reconciliation Park a century later; redlining in Hilltop, a neighborhood that became central to African Americans' sense of community in part due to residential segregation, and which is now threatened by rapid gentrification; and the Northwest Detention Center, one of the largest immigrant detention centers in the United States, which has become the site of frequent protests against local and national immigration policies.

These oral histories will be contextualized in an online exhibit and tied to a series of public events designed to spur public dialogue on how race and displacement remain central to Tacoma's development, while shining a light on efforts to heal the wounds these histories have left on the city.

### **Alice Dunbar-Nelson: A Vision for Wilmington**

David J. Kim (*University of Delaware*; English)

Alice Dunbar-Nelson was a turn-of-the-century Black woman of letters of astounding versatility and achievement. Poet, critic, newspaper editor, and educator, Dunbar-Nelson was also a vocal champion of the Harlem Renaissance, women's suffrage, and anti-lynching legislation. But while she lived and worked in

Wilmington, Delaware and wrote extensively about the city's cultural and political landscape—and despite her long-established significance for scholarship of the period—her accomplishments remain largely unknown locally.

David J. Kim will use the Fellowship to co-lead a collaborative, year-long community engagement project that celebrates Alice Dunbar-Nelson's prodigious contributions. In partnership with the University of Delaware, which houses her papers, and area nonprofits including the Christina Cultural Arts Center, Creative Vision Factory, and the Delaware Historical Society, Kim will facilitate participatory public programs for Wilmington residents: a series of adult reading groups, K-12 curriculum workshops, the creation of a public mural, and the development of a website featuring archival materials and collaborative media content bringing Dunbar-Nelson to contemporary life.

Using a local humanities approach to advocate for the city's creativity and community action, "Alice Dunbar-Nelson: A Vision for Wilmington" will develop a forum for deep intellectual engagement, nurture Wilmingtonians' sense of place and connection to one another, and elevate the legacy of a singular and significant writer and activist.

#### **Hi-Phi Nation Season 4: Philosophical Foundation of Crime and Punishment**

Barry Lam (*Vassar College*; Philosophy)

Every aspect of the American criminal justice system reflects deep philosophical underpinnings, implicit answers to questions we often take for granted: How do we classify some acts as criminal? Is the purpose of incarceration to punish or reform, and how are these ideas reflected in the design of prisons? Are crimes committed out of free will, or are social conditions and biology ever to blame? What is the meaning of forgiveness?

In a new season of his successful philosophy podcast, [Hi-Phi Nation](#), Barry Lam will take a narrative voyage through the justice system from beginning to end, exploring the philosophical foundations of crime and punishment. *Hi-Phi Nation*, distributed by *Slate*, has garnered extensive praise for combining compelling narratives and interviews with philosophers to probe subjects ranging from the philosophy of statistics to just war theory. Now, Lam will use the Fellowship to bring the podcast to a new technical and editorial level, partnering with veteran podcast editor Julia Barton (Malcom Gladwell's *Revisionist History*, *Empire on Blood*) to focus an entire season on the myriad philosophical issues surrounding a single American institution.

This will continue to advance *Hi-Phi Nation's* core mission: to give listeners an entrée into philosophical inquiry, making big ideas accessible through nonfiction storytelling and promoting philosophical literacy through deep thinking about values that underpin our lives.

## **Latinx Murals of Pilsen: A Digital Toolkit for Scholarship, Teaching, and Discovery**

Jason Ruiz (*University of Notre Dame; American Studies*)

Pilsen, a neighborhood on the lower west side of Chicago, has long been a home for immigrant communities. Czech immigrants began settling in the late nineteenth century, followed by other Eastern Europeans. In the 1960s, in part due to the neighborhood's reputation for being a gateway for immigrants, Mexicans began settling in Pilsen as well. Following the subsequent "white flight," when assimilated European immigrants moved in droves to the suburbs, Pilsen and surrounding neighborhoods became some of the most densely populated Mexican immigrant communities in the nation. Today, six decades after the first big wave of Mexican migration, Pilsen remains the heart of Latino Chicago.

Pilsen is also home to the city's greatest concentration of public art depicting Latino identity, its streets making up an outdoor gallery of dozens of murals that draw on an assortment of visual styles, from the language of early-twentieth-century Mexican muralists to contemporary street art aesthetics. The murals not only beautify the neighborhood; they depict and comment on the concerns of Pilsen residents over time, such as immigration, gentrification, faith, and violence. Visitors seek out these uniquely local artistic expressions but, at the moment, they also cannot satisfy their curiosity about the murals' origins and meaning.

In 2010, Jason Ruiz, a scholar of Latinx Studies who has long been fascinated by the murals but frustrated by the lack of publicly available information about them, developed walking tours of the neighborhood for his students. Since then, colleagues and nonprofit groups have called on him to lead the tour dozens of times, leading him to deepen his understanding of the murals, their creators, and the community they represent.

In partnership with the National Museum of Mexican Art, Notre Dame's Historic Urban Environment Lab, and a range of local artists and residents, Ruiz will use the Fellowship to translate his expertise into a digital toolkit including an interactive walking tour, interviews with artists and scholars, and animated timelines. At a moment when these historic murals have become especially vulnerable to the threats of displacement and gentrification, Ruiz's project will not only give residents and visitors in-depth access to them, it will also preserve their stories for future generations.

## **Gay Rodeo Oral History Project**

Rebecca Scofield (*University of Idaho; History*)

The International Gay Rodeo Association was founded in 1985 and has flourished for decades. Against a backdrop of Reagan-era conservatism and at a time when the AIDS crisis was devastating gay communities, IGRA became a haven for gay cowboys and cowgirls united by a love of country-western culture and community fundraising, not to mention exciting rodeo events such as wild drag racing and goat

dressing. Today, as a nonprofit, IGRA continues to welcome participants and spectators of all genders, sexualities, and identities.

In recent years, as aging members and beloved founders have begun to pass away, the association has recognized an urgent need to document its own history. Inspired by members' deep commitment to each other and a dearth of narratives that explore queer western identity, Rebecca Scofield began the Gay Rodeo Oral History Project in 2016. To date, she has collected over thirty interviews, ranging from recitations of cowboy poetry to life histories, recorded on top of bales of hay, next to horse trailers, and in hotel lobbies.

Scofield will use the Fellowship to expand this collection of oral histories, and will work in partnership with IGRA to design an online exhibit, with the primary goal of making the association's history available and accessible to its own members. As the project grows, Scofield and IGRA hope that more and more gay rodeoers will be moved to share their stories, contributing to a larger understanding of the rich history of gay rodeo and the evolving future of queer rural spaces.

## **The Five 2019-20 Seed Grantees**

### **The Public Face of Emotions: Greek Classics and the Role of Emotions in our Lives**

*Emily Allen-Hornblower* (Classics; Rutgers University) is moderating a series of public conversations with formerly incarcerated men and women concerning ancient Greek philosophy and literature. Each session is centered on a single emotion, such as shame, fear, or anger. The events will begin with a brief reading from Aristotle and a short performance of an excerpt from Greek tragedy to ground the moderated discussion to follow, about the role the emotions can or should play in our lives. These communal conversations will give the formerly incarcerated speakers, the actors, and the audience an opportunity to engage in a dialogue regarding the interconnectedness between all of us that storytelling and literature bring to light.

### **Multilingual Mainers: World Languages and Cultures in K-2**

*Margaret Boyle* (Romance Languages and Literatures; Bowdoin College) is partnering with Coffin Elementary School in Brunswick, Maine, to pilot an early-elementary school humanities curriculum that will build intercultural understanding of literature, history, and art through sustained engagement with world languages and cultures. The curriculum will promote critical-thinking skills and provide age-appropriate tools and experiences to encourage curiosity, compassion and understanding across difference.

### **Archive Actions: Cambodians and Cambodian Americans Producing Ethnographic Histories**

In collaboration with Cambodians and Cambodian Americans in the Seattle area, *Jenna Grant* (Anthropology; University of Washington) is designing public events and a digital exhibit to activate the Becker Archive at the University of Washington, a unique collection of texts and images from the latter part of the Khmer Rouge's rule. Collected by US photojournalist Elizabeth Becker, one of only two journalists from mainstream Western media to visit the country during their regime, the archives include materials from a trip in 1978, just days before the Vietnamese invasion that ousted them. The project design will prioritize the perspectives of Cambodians who lived under or fled the Khmer Rouge, modeling a process for the University to be accountable to relevant communities in the production and interpretation of historical archives.

### **The Vision and Justice Project: A Docu-Series**

*Sarah Lewis* (History of Art and Architecture & African and African American Studies; Harvard University) is collaborating with an award-winning team to create a series of short documentary films about the historic and contemporary relationship between images, racial equity, and national belonging. Building on an award-winning issue of *Aperture* guest-edited by Lewis and a course she has taught at Harvard and for the public in venues such as the Brooklyn Public Library, the new



films will incorporate insights from leading scholars and thinkers to illuminate the transformative power of pictures to create a new vision for the nation, and will bring these insights to communities within the classroom and beyond.

**African-American Oral History in Athens, Georgia**

*Christian Lopez* (University Libraries & Digital Humanities, University of Georgia) is working with the African-American community in Athens, Georgia, to identify and record oral histories of local and national significance from business owners, educators, politicians, musicians, and others. Lopez will use the Seed Grant to equip and professionalize community collaborators as oral history practitioners to co-lead the project. Once collected, the oral histories will be woven into an online exhibit and shared publicly – including at the annual Hot Corner Celebration & Soul Food Festival in Athens’ historic African-American business district.