

Humanities Fair 2014

Presentation Abstracts

1. Conrad Schumaker, Ph.D., English. “Cowboys and Indians”

The cowboy is in many ways a symbol for the American outlook on the world—tough, self-reliant, a rugged individual who displaced the Indian as America expanded “from sea to shining sea.” The “Indian,” on the other hand, is often depicted as the enemy of the cowboy, an obstacle to Western settlement whose way of life was (tragically perhaps) rendered obsolete by “progress.” More recently, American Indians have been portrayed as proto-environmentalists who understood the value of preserving natural resources but were overwhelmed by the tide of American expansion and exploitation. This discussion will consider the ideas and implications behind these two symbols, looking beyond the stereotypes to a more accurate reality and exploring the cultural and environmental implications of the game of “Cowboys and Indians” that America plays.

2. Alison Hall, Ph.D., Anthropology. “The Paradox of Cultural Evolution”

For every one calorie of energy foragers used to find food, they obtained a surplus of 8.5 calories. But every one calorie of corn produced by modern methods takes 9 calories (or BTUs) of fossil fuel for a deficit of 9 calories. Fossil fuel and water are just some of the un-renewable resource we are wasting, along with causing the extinction of species and the warming of the planet. The comparative anthropological study of ways of life over a long time span from ancient to modern peoples can give us insight on the ecological un-sustainability of our way of life. There are many historical examples of small and even large societies that have collapsed because of greedy utilization of resources. Our advantage, that they did not have, is that we have books and can learn from them before it is too late.

3. Michael Yoder, Ph.D., Geography. “The City and its Opposite: Contemporary Trends in Micropolitan Arkansas”

A micropolitan area is comprised of a standalone core city, not part of a metropolitan area, whose population ranges from 10,000 to 50,000, and the county it dominates. Prior to the micropolitan designation by the Census Bureau in the 1990s, such places were regarded as rural. Nationwide there are some 500 micropolitan areas, and Arkansas has fourteen of them. In some ways the physical layouts of micropolitan cities mirror those of larger urban areas, given their distinct downtown, suburban, and industrial zones. As such, their urban planners face infrastructure- and transportation-related challenges of sprawl similar to larger cities, but with much smaller budgets. Economic developers in micropolitan areas face competition with larger cities when trying to attract employment. Some in the state are growing, especially in the Ozarks and the Arkansas River Valley, while others in southern and eastern Arkansas are shrinking. Some thrive because of locations along interstate highways, while others see retail shoppers choose nearby larger cities. This presentation will include images of several

micropolitan cities of Arkansas that illustrate such themes as rapid growth around the edges, the impact of the automobile on their architecture, and the conditions of their downtowns and their retail districts. Furthermore, it will include explanations of the strategies that local and state officials employ to attract investment to these cities. Finally, it will include stories about often contentious annexation efforts as their leaders and citizens attempt to create thriving, competitive small cities.

4. Biling Chen, Ph.D., English. “Food INC.: Eating and Cultural Identities in Asian Literature”

Among many elements that define a culture, dietary customs are the most immediate and essential. Traditional Hindus never consume beef, whereas Orthodox Jews consider pork a taboo. Kimchi is a must in every Korean meal, while no Vietnamese would confuse Fo noodles with spaghetti. Undoubtedly, food and food ways have always been incorporated into varied peoples' ethnicity, religious beliefs, cultural legacies, and sometimes even national identity. For instance, Japan vehemently defends its dolphin hunt against international uproar, so do the Chinese their appetite for whale fins. Before human beings eat up the whole world in the name of cultural diversity, before Monsanto succeeds in monopolizing global food market with their GMO (genetically modified organisms) in the name of feeding the hungry, we need to relearn our ancestors' respectful and sustainable ways of dealing with food. In my presentation I will use a Chinese poem and a Japanese short story as examples. “She Bore the Folk,” a poem from *Classic of Poetry*, is about how Chou people learn from agricultural god, Lord Millet, the lessons of planting, of reaping, of cooking and, most importantly, of offering sacrifices with gratitude to the High God. The Japanese story, “The Bear of Nametoko,” depicts Ainu people's symbiosis with mountain bears—the indigenous folks' totem as well as sources of food, clothing, medicine, and finances.

5. Steve O'Connell, Ph.D., Geography. “Historical Representations of Nature in the Development of the National Park Idea”

In 2016, the National Park Service will mark its 100th year and Yellowstone, the world's first National Park, will reach its 144th. Today, we celebrate places like Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, and Crater Lake as natural wonders and destinations worthy of protection. Tourists flock to see these sights, often competing with each other for the best photograph of the next geyser, sunset, wild animal, or mountain view. Just as modern tourists focus on specific features, the earliest depictions of these places did not always present an accurate or complete picture of the parks. Publicly accessible images were highly scripted and framed to emphasize contemporary American views on nature and the human species' role in it. This presentation will examine the evolution of nature representation in national park promotion and development. A focus will be on how the images from different eras reflect the views of society as a whole regarding the role and importance of natural parks. The images will provide a context for discussion about how Americans' perception of nature has evolved over the last century and a half.

6. Julia Winden Fey, Ph.D., Religious Studies. “God-Ecology”

Human perspectives about our relationship with the world around us are often reflected in our religious imagery and language about God. Theologies that image the Holy as Supreme Ruler,

Creator and Lord have the potential for casting the earth and its resources in the role of something to be used, subjugated and even exploited by this Creator's ultimate creation, humankind. This presentation will explore religious symbols, language and theologies from alternative religious traditions--both within and outside of the Jewish and Christian traditions--that seek to raise ecological awareness and recast the human-world relationship as one of mutuality and conservation.

7. Raymond-Jean Frontain, Ph.D., English. "Hopkins, van Gogh, and the World Charged with the Grandeur of God"

Devastated by the havoc that the Industrial Revolution had wreaked on the English countryside, poet and Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) experimented with poetic diction and meter to alter the reader's way of looking at the natural world and make him or her aware of the pervasive presence of the divine in all creation. Informed by the central image from the Book of Genesis of the spirit brooding over the waters at the moment of creation, Hopkins's poems explore the animating energy of the divine that pulsates through every aspect of the physical cosmos, and challenge their reader to repair the damage done by humankind's sinful blindness to the presence of God in his creation. Across the channel painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-90) was similarly troubled that the majority of his contemporaries had grown blind to the existence of "something noble, something great" in the created universe, and worried that, like the Foolish Virgins of the biblical parable, they "have fallen asleep" in the presence of God in nature. Van Gogh experimented with color and brush strokes to "rouse" them.

In this session we will compare select poems by Hopkins with images by van Gogh to determine how each hoped to use his art to make contemporaries understand that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." As time allows, we will consider why each, feeling that his efforts had failed, succumbed to a deep depression in his last years of life and closed his canon with a series of poems or images that are terrifying in their darkness.

8. Katelyn Knox, Ph.D., World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. "Aquatic Specters of Empire: Environment and Anticolonialism in Senghor's *Chants d'Ombre* and Socé's *Mirages de Paris*"

In this presentation, I examine two works from Francophone sub-Saharan African literature: Léopold Sédar Senghor's poetry collection *Chants d'Ombre* [*Songs of Shadows*] (1945) and Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris* [*Mirages of Paris*] (1937). In both works set during French colonial rule, the narrator travels to France, only to suffer alienation from his home community and racism abroad. What is more, both works' anticolonial message is couched in environmental terms: when each narrator gazes into Paris's Seine river, the waters reflect his African community back to him. These spectral images, I argue, serve two key purposes. First, by uniting African and French waterways, the texts suggest that the history of colonization—often excluded from official French historical discourse—flows directly into the heart of France, residing just below the surface. Second, by couching their message of anticolonial struggle through environmental consciousness, the texts foreground how colonization subjugated both peoples and their environments. My analysis of the texts' twin commitment to anticolonial and

environmental engagement is guided by two interrelated questions: What role do the texts' depictions of local, African landscapes play in their anticolonial message? What is the relationship between water, history, and memory in the texts? In the end, turning to such texts opens up larger discussions about possible ways of imagining and engaging with our environment and the histories of violence (both slow and not) that continue to affect it.

9. Taine Duncan, Ph.D., Philosophy. "Post-human Animals"

Posthumanist feminists argue that as an aspirational figure, "universal man" reinforces social norms and practices that privilege the already dominant figures in society. In contrast, posthumanist models reinforce ideals of innovation, differentiation, and transformation. Our minds, bodies, and interactions with the world are ripe with possibilities and fraught with new ethical challenges. Posthumanism focuses on liberation and transformation for a future, but a future that imagines a world in which humans will not be the center. Posthumanism engages the idea that a globalized world is a planetary model. Our environment and social relationships are no longer exclusively dependent on our interactions with other *people*, but on our interactions with animals, technology, and even the environment itself. Pets, computers, and global climate change have forever altered the way that we interact with the world, and have tended towards greater interdependence and interaction between human and non-human.

The emphasis on interdependence and transformation at the root of posthumanist theory is expressed in the plot of Dahl's *The Witches*. The boy learns that the world is a place that is quite difficult to navigate, with the possibilities of tragedy on every horizon. His parents' deaths, his grandmother's illness, and the threat of the witches themselves could reasonably cause despair. In fact, since he will never be a fully-realized rational man, it is reasonable he would want to die. However, the boy imaginatively learns to renegotiate the world. He develops a deep and meaningful relationship of trust and mutuality with his grandmother, he adapts to his bodily transformation into a mouse, and he aspires to a future (albeit short-lived) in which he can make the world a better place for others.

10. Ben Rider, Ph.D., Philosophy. "Environmental Ethics: Is Ecological Awareness a Universal Human Virtue?"

Today, we face a serious question: How do we change the trajectory of our development before it's too late to prevent catastrophic human and ecological consequences? Top-down solutions, relying on government action, treaties, and corporate responsibility, have so far failed. Real change cannot happen unless the people themselves *want* it to happen.

I discuss *ecological awareness* as a universal human virtue, the development of which any culture must ensure in its people in order to secure its long-term future. First, I present Martha Nussbaum's theory of non-relative virtues. According to Nussbaum, all humans face certain shared "grounding experiences"—facing death, managing bodily appetites, maintaining good interpersonal relationships. Thus, in order for its people to flourish both individually and communally, all cultures need to inculcate certain *virtues* in their people, which enable those people to respond well to these shared experiences. Every culture needs to teach some form of

courage, moderation, politeness, and so on. The particular expressions of the virtues will differ, but the similarity of human experiences means there is a shared core of human virtue. Like courage or moderation, ecological awareness is a universal human virtue, responding to universal human experiences. All humans are embedded in an environment, on which we depend for our lives and flourishing. In the long run, communities that fail to encourage environmental awareness in their people eventually collapse and disappear. We need to ask ourselves, how do we create this environmental awareness today?

11. Jim Dietrick, Ph.D, Religious Studies. “Buddhism and Ecology”

As Duncan Ryuken Williams observes in his introduction to *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Harvard U. Press, 1997), it is not uncommon for environmental philosophers in the world today to look to Buddhism as offering “a conceptual resource for a new ecological ethics.” This presentation considers Buddhism as such a resource, asking what it might offer us in the world today as we seek to solve contemporary environmental problems and live responsibly, not only in relation to other humans, but in relation to animals and the environments they and we inhabit together.

12. Dustin Knepp, Ph.D., World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. “Agriculture and Immigration: Understanding the Latino Connection”

During this lecture, we will critically examine the historical and current role of Latino immigrants in the U.S. agricultural sector and the subsequent impacts on the foods that end up on the table. The controversy surrounding illegal immigration and the perception of job loss to undocumented workers has caused some states to pass legislation that effectively chases undocumented immigrants from the state. We will explore the consequences of these actions and discuss how Latinos form a central part of the U.S. food industry.

13. Jayme Stone, Ph.D., History. “Deforestation in Rwanda and the The Gusangira Project”

The *Gusangira* Project began in 2012 as a service-learning study abroad opportunity for University of Central Arkansas students. With its focus on science and society in Rwanda, the project works closely with the people of Kanembwe.

Kanembwe is in a remote region of the western province of Rwanda in the Rubavu district. The village was established by the Rwandan government in September 2009 to relocate people [mostly Twa (Pygmies)] who had been living in the Gishwati forest as hunters and gatherers for millennia. The people of Kanembwe are now, of necessity, subsistence farmers — regardless of the ways in which they provided for their families before relocation. The government has provided basic wood-frame houses and 50-m² plots of land to each family. Water is provided through several stations spread throughout the village, with each family responsible for transporting water from the stations to their homes. Additionally, Kanembwe has no electricity and the roads in the area are, at best, rudimentary. Poverty in the village is endemic — the opportunity to earn money is largely limited to dancing for paying tourists.

The Gusangira Project is working with the people by utilizing rocket stove technology as a means of both reducing firewood usage and reducing hunger during the rains through long-term food preservation.

14. Clay Arnold, Ph.D., Political Science. “The Political Ecology of Climate Change: Global Warming v. Frozen Politics”

I propose a 2014 Humanities Fair presentation on the politics of climate change in the United States. The challenge of global climate change illustrates the nature of our social, economic, and political relationship to the environment especially well. As found in the United States, that relationship is unsettling and paradoxical. As two highly-regarded political scientists recently put it, the more people know about global warming, the less they seem to care (Guber & Bosso 2013). Alternatively, the prospects for meaningful and timely climate change legislation have all but vanished despite the scientific community’s ever growing certainty on the human factors related to precipitous global warming. My presentation will examine the reasons for our political inability to respond to the challenge of climate change with legislation. Drawing on the defeat of the 2009 Waxman-Markey bill, the most promising piece of climate change legislation ever brought before Congress, I will explain why passing climate change legislation is so difficult. The greatest obstacle lies in the political dynamics created by a political system defined by checks and balances, bi-annual elections, a bicameral legislature that includes the power to filibuster, divided government, and ideological polarization.

15. Kim Little, Ph.D. History. “From Environmental Racism to Environmental Justice: Church and Community in Action, 1982-2007.”

In 1982, state officials in North Carolina selected Warren County, a poor and predominantly African-American community, for the site of a toxic waste landfill. The state was cleaning up PCB that people had dumped illegally in fourteen other counties. The people of Warren County feared for their health and safety. Enter the United Church of Christ (UCC), a protestant denomination that has been dedicated to racial justice. The UCC worked with the people of Warren County to develop a plan to keep the PCBs out of not only Warren County but other poor counties as well. The experience spurred the UCC to initiate a study about toxic waste and race, which clearly demonstrated the connection between placement of toxic waste sites and race in the United States. Their groundbreaking report, "Toxic Waste and Race . . .," inspired academic researchers and politicians to consider racial justice and environmental issues, creating the new terms of "environmental justice" and "environmental racism."

16. Gary Thiher, Ph.D., Philosophy. “Humanities and Ecological Awareness”

In this lecture, I will discuss how the humanities can contribute to a an enriched understanding of persons in relation to their environments I will demonstrate how the humanities, in particular the discipline of philosophy, presents a normative complement to the descriptive account of the environment provided by the science of ecology. Along these lines, . I will introduce the basic tenets of major competing schools of environmental ethics and relate this contemporary anthropogenic ecological problems confronting today’s society.

17. Chad Terrell, M.A., English. "October in the Railroad Earth: Beat literature and environmentalism"

This lecture will examine the cultural legacy of the group of writers known as Beats and the literature they created which ran counter to the prevailing culture of postwar America. By examining selections from novels and poetry, we will see the impact of these writers in shifting focus from consumption to conservation.