

Volume 43, Issue 2, Fall 2020

# GRADUATE HUMANITIES

Students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds collaboratively explore interdisciplinary intersections of the arts, historical, cultural, and literary studies within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.

2020 Major Scholar Seminar

## *Everyone has a story*

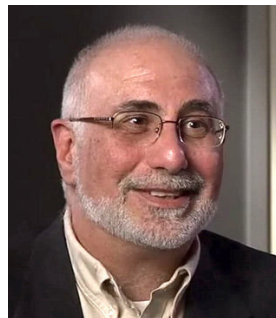
We hope you're all managing this pandemic without too much difficulty. Eric and I were challenged to deliver the hardcopy newsletter with the University's recent budget cuts. So if you've reading this on your computer, you are experiencing our first online newsletter. Not to worry about a loss of content quality in the switch from hard copy to digital. Except, due to COVID-19, I was not able to take action pictures in-person because all the seminars were online—most of our pictures are taken from my computer screen, our archives, or contributed by the authors of the articles.

But most importantly, and cause for celebration, the newsletter remains story-focused and exploring what it means to be human, past, present, and yes, the future. Here's to making the best of the times we live in: stay well, stay in touch, keep learning!

-Trish

## *Mapping* HUMAN DIVERSITY

Genetic Testing, Folk Ideologies of Heredity, and Race with Dr. Jonathan Marks, Genetic/Biological Anthropologist



Interviewed by Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter, Director,  
Graduate Humanities Program

*Dr. Marks is well-known for his critiques on race, the genome project, and of ahistorical science. He is a leading critic in public debates about direct-to-consumer genetic testing and its marketed correlation to heredity.*

*For instance, understanding how and why "I'm 45% Irish" is an invalid scientific claim, not only requires deeper knowledge of science, but of history and culture as well.*

*Marks argues that understanding human problems is best approached through engagement with a liberal arts that combines, rather than silos, the sciences and humanities.*

**LEL: What do you consider to be some of the most important aspects of your writing? What do you want readers to come away with when they read your work?**

JM: Biological anthropology is a hybrid field, and if you know the biology, you only know part of the story of human origins and diversity. Moreover the biology is not the most important part of the story, since science is itself a cultural activity, and has to be understood in large part ethnographically. Consequently, anthropology not only informs how we understand ourselves scientifically, but how we understand our scientific understanding of ourselves.

**LEL: One of the key things that we hope to accomplish in our Major Scholar Seminars is to assess how scholars' ideas change over time, including how these ideas shift in both perspective and approach. How would you say your ideas, perspectives, and approaches have developed over time?**

Marks continues on page 2

## *Recent* GRADUATE

### *Andrew Gooding '20*

Appalachian Studies Certificate  
Title: "The Master Class with  
Jonathan Marks: Eugenics and  
Images of Appalachians"

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## MARKS *from page 1*

JM: I've always felt that the interesting questions lie in the overlaps among intellectual fields. My career started as a post-doc in the Genetics department at UC-Davis. But I socialized with anthropologists too and participated in their seminars. When I arrived at Yale in 1987, it was a great, stodgy old anthropology program, priding itself on being about 20 years behind the curve. When I arrived at Berkeley ten years later, it was an avant-garde program, priding itself on being about 20 years ahead of the curve. That was basically a very quick 40-year intellectual swing! But I had the opportunity to get involved in early "Science Studies" at Berkeley which helped me make sense of the things that I had experienced as a lab scientist up to that point. Now, after 20 years at UNC Charlotte, I teach a class

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on The Anthropology of Science that started as an undergraduate seminar at Yale and now is a big lecture class in our Liberal Studies program at UNCC. When I was younger I thought that facts came with self-evident meanings; now I focus more on how we make meaning. Within biological anthropology, my interest in the relevance of things like racism and colonialism in the field was very threatening to my older colleagues at the start of my career. Now it is normative.

**LEL: Another important aspect of our Major Scholar Seminars is assessing scholarship itself. For you, what are some of the critical components of doing good scholarship? And, as it relates to your writings, doing good science?**

JM: Good science is easy. It has two elements: competence and honesty. Good scholarship is more difficult to characterize because it is broader, more creative, and more integrative. It's like the distinction centuries ago between natural history (the data) and natural philosophy (making sense of the universe).

*There's more to [Professor Marks' interview with Dr. Lassiter](#) and lots of other links to his publications at [Major Scholar Seminars](#). Plus, check out "[Meet Anthropologist Dr. Marks!](#)" on YouTube.*

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## Synopses of Papers from **PROFESSOR MARKS' SEMINAR**

These synopses of much longer papers by graduate students Andrew Gooding ('20) and Kyle Warmack were written especially for this newsletter—Thank you Andrew and Kyle!



### Eugenics and Images of Appalachians

by Andrew Gooding ('20)

<Dr. Jonathan Marks has spoken out frequently against those who use scientific authority to shield them from accusations of fraud and racism. He states in his book, *Is Science Racist?* that science has

grappled with racism ever since Linnaeus divided living organisms into species. He has particular disdain for eugenics, which was mainstream science until World War II.

Eugenics set out to show that good traits like robustness and good judgment are passed on by mating with those of equal status and undesirable traits such as below average IQ (represented by the term "feeble-mindedness"), drunkenness, and sexual licentiousness can be introduced by mating with those of lower status. The fear was that the "pure" Anglo-

Saxon bloodline would be tainted by African-Americans, Jews, Asians, and American Indians among others. This led to laws against "race-mixing" and restrictions on immigration. A further fear that "undesirables" would mate at a higher rate than those of good character led to sterilization campaigns.

In his book, *What it Means to be 98% Chimpanzee*, Marks states that "Eugenics was based on ignorance and prejudice rather than fact." He continues by saying that the study of eugenics "represented a major failure on the part of mainstream American science to divorce human history from biology." Marks' idea of "folk knowledge" which he describes as "popular or cultural wisdom" allowed me to see how the idea of eugenics has persisted well after it has been discredited by scientists and can be seen in the present day.

While completing my certificate in Appalachian Studies I became interested in how the language of eugenics has been used to portray the people of Appalachia. Particularly during the period of industrialization when investors and reformers worked together to uplift these "backwards" people leading to

exploitation of their resources and labor. Will Wallace Harney in his seminal 1876 article, "A Strange Land and Peculiar People," stated that "The natives of this region are characterized by marked peculiarities of the anatomical frame." This can be understood as part of the science of "physiognomy" in vogue at the time, which linked facial and physical features to personality characteristics. As Shapiro states in his book, *Appalachia on our Mind*, "It was thus almost inevitable that the language and concepts of social Darwinism and popular genetic theory should be utilized in discussions of the mountaineers."

***While completing my certificate in Appalachian Studies I became interested in how the language of eugenics has been used to portray the people of Appalachia.***

The term "peculiar" was used in the 1920s by those who wished to involuntarily sterilize Carrie Buck, an unmarried mother (due to rape by her guardian's nephew) who was born to another unmarried mother from Appalachian Virginia. She was the subject of the Supreme Court decision *Buck vs Bell* and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes' famous line, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough," that allowed states to sterilize those who were considered of bad stock.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Appalachians were the subject of eugenic studies from the "feeble-minded" in southeastern Ohio, to the so-called "Tribe of Ishmael" from Kentucky, to the "Hollow Folk" evicted from the Shenandoah

National Park, to the "Jukes" and "Nams" who were "hill people" in upstate New York. Geneticist Charles Davenport, one of the most prominent eugenicists of the time, stated that these studies showed that the persistence of these undesirable traits showed a genetic link which continued at great cost to society.

The lawyer Clarence Darrow disagreed with Davenport and argued that all these studies showed was that the effects of poverty could extend through generations. In his book, *Why I Am Not a Scientist*, Marks agrees with Darrow and painstakingly explains how the results of these family studies can be attributed to several factors—from bad science, to sloppy methods, to scientists allowing the theory to bias their gathering of data, and, in some cases, to outright scientific misconduct.

From portrayals of hillbillies as figures of fun, from the cartoon characters of Snuffy Smith and Ella Mae, to TV shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Buck Wild*, to more sinister portrayals in movies like *Deliverance*, Appalachians are still portrayed as degenerate, genetically unfit people. This idea comes from folk knowledge of eugenics and one could argue that this concept has led to blaming the victim for the continued poverty of the region and also for the opioid crisis, which has had a disproportionate effect on the people of Appalachia. The language and ideas of eugenics, even though they were scientifically discredited over 75 years ago, are still with us today.>

*Since 1999, Andrew has been at Marshall as Director of the Regents Bachelors of Arts Program, which is designed for returning adult students. He completed his Appalachian Studies certificate this past spring. He is now enrolled in the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program at Marshall so he can better help returning adult students complete a bachelor's degree.*



## **Don't Call Me Ishmael: Eugenics, Pop Culture, and the Appalachian Quandary**

**by Kyle Warmack**

<Melville Davisson Post, a West Virginia born and educated lawyer who later turned to mystery fiction writing with extraordinary success,

enjoyed his greatest popularity between 1911 and his death in 1930. Post's lighthearted mystery fare made him one of the highest paid authors of his day. His work is not generally remembered for serious allegory or, for that matter, anything more than the pleasure of seeing fictional justice done, but

he stands out within the canon of American mystery fiction writers for creating the character of Uncle Abner. A stern, religiously devout, Abraham Lincoln-esque cattleman living in West Virginia's antebellum Harrison County (when it was still part of Virginia), Abner is Post's most triumphant (and financially successful) literary creation.

Like all authors, however, Post did not compose his prose within a void; it naturally reflects conditions of and relationships with the world and circumstances of its writing. All of Post's output occurred in the heyday of the eugenics movement in the United States and Britain, a pseudo-scientific misapplication of Darwinian and Mendelian theories that wielded enormous influence from the 1880s into the early 1930s (and which neither Charles Darwin nor Gregor Mendel espoused).

## Warmack *from page 3*

For half a century, practitioners of eugenics willfully misinterpreted new concepts of natural evolution and heredity to justify systemic racism, the wealth and status of sociopolitical elites, and enacted forced sterilization laws in over thirty American states to stem the “rising tide” of non-white populations and “feeble-minded” people. A person’s worth, in other words, was in their genes, and the eugenicists were here to safeguard society from those deemed less desirable.

***Among white Americans, nowhere would the burden of Social Darwinism fall so heavily as among Appalachians, who had unwittingly and undeservedly inspired the “Ishmaelite” moniker.***

When the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism destroyed the public credibility of these ideas, mainstream science quietly swept its endorsement of these ideas under the rug, when in fact eugenics had been the law of the land for decades. Viewed as such, a quote from one of the Uncle Abner mysteries, *An Act of God*, reveals the degree to which the pseudoscience of eugenics, in the five decades of its greatest influence, held sway over science, popular culture, and religion to such an extent that we continue to feel its ripples over a century later.

Describing the doomed murder victim, the story’s narrator says, “This deaf mute...was profligate and loose. He was a cattle shipper who knew the abominations indexed by the Psalmist. He was an Ishmaelite in more ways than his affliction.” At first glance, a term so pointedly Biblical in origin does not seem much out of place for a religious character like Abner, but to blithely pass the word by risks ignoring its evolution in the three decades leading up to Post’s use of it—and discounts the resurgence of “Ishmaelite” as a new eugenics buzzword at the turn of the century.

Indeed, Post’s casual use of the derogatory term “Ishmaelite” in 1918—referring to a perceived class of genetically deficient paupers and/or criminals who are congenitally doomed to be a perpetual burden on society, demonstrates just how fast and far poorly-vetted scientific ideas can and did infiltrate American cultural fabric in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and of how the nascent field of genetic science at that time, lacking anthropological self-awareness, insinuated its eugenic confirmation bias into popular culture with tragic consequence and remarkable resilience.

Among white Americans, nowhere would the burden of Social Darwinism fall so heavily as among Appalachians, who had unwittingly and undeservedly inspired the “Ishmaelite” moniker. Born out of a story in the Old Testament book of

Genesis, *Ishmaelite* at first referred only to the descendants of Ishmael, first son of the Israelite prophet Abraham.

Through the centuries, Europeans came to use it as an all-encompassing term for the peoples of the Arabian peninsula. In 1888, however, its use was indelibly altered by Indiana pastor Oscar C. McCulloch, who described a family of supposed degenerates called the “Ishmaels” in a speech and subsequent eight-page pamphlet entitled, *The Tribe of Ishmael: A Study in Social Degradation*, at an annual charity conference.

While McCulloch later recanted his unilateral condemnation of the Ishmael family as congenital “murderers” and “prostitutes” whom charity only served to enable, he lived only three years past the publication of his pamphlet. By that time, it had been reprinted multiple times and was well on its way toward cementing itself as rote fact in the minds of eugenics practitioners.

My study details the absorption of McCulloch’s suppositions into mainstream thought, riding a crest of pseudo-scientific Social Darwinist theory well into the 1910s as it was picked up by a new generation of eugenicists flush with funding from Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Mary Harriman. By the time of Post’s use in *Uncle Abner* in 1918, the word Ishmaelite no longer needed to be explained to his audiences, but could instead be used as shorthand for an undesirable underclass of people genetically predisposed to vice and villainy.

Unfortunately, as survey after spurious survey emerged amidst the tectonic social shifts of the early 20th century, stereotypes arose from and were reinforced by these ill-conceived case studies of families that hailed from Appalachia—much to the detriment of future generations of Appalachians. How much did this contribute to the tragic quandary that has haunted Appalachia through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>: the tragedy of a region’s land and people exploited ad nauseam for its resources and low-wage labor, then condemned by the exploiters for a litany of supposedly congenital failings? Indeed, tracing the ancestry of this single, merciless word, “Ishmaelite,” serves as a case study itself—or perhaps even as a genetic marker—allowing us to trace the impact of pseudo-science on pop culture, enduring stereotypes, and the identity of an entire American region.>

*Kyle is a Program Officer for the West Virginia Humanities Council. He oversees and administers the Humanities Council’s legacy programs, such as the Little Lectures and History Alive! series, and coordinates with the National Endowment for the Humanities and other state and national institutions to design and deliver special programming through the Council. He spent 12 years in the film industry in Los Angeles before moving to West Virginia in 2017 to be a AmeriCorps member serving with the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia and the Clio Foundation. He has also been employed at the South Charleston Interpretive Center, where in 2018 he designed a 4,600 square-foot, indoor/outdoor “pop up” exhibit, “Century Strong: 100 Years at the South Charleston Naval Ordnance Plant,” which unveiled hundreds of never-before-published photographs of this former naval factory along with fresh historical research.*



## Andrew and Kyle's Recommended Reading List

### Jonathan Marks

*Why I Am Not a Scientist: Anthropology and Modern Knowledge*

*What it Means to be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People and their Genes*

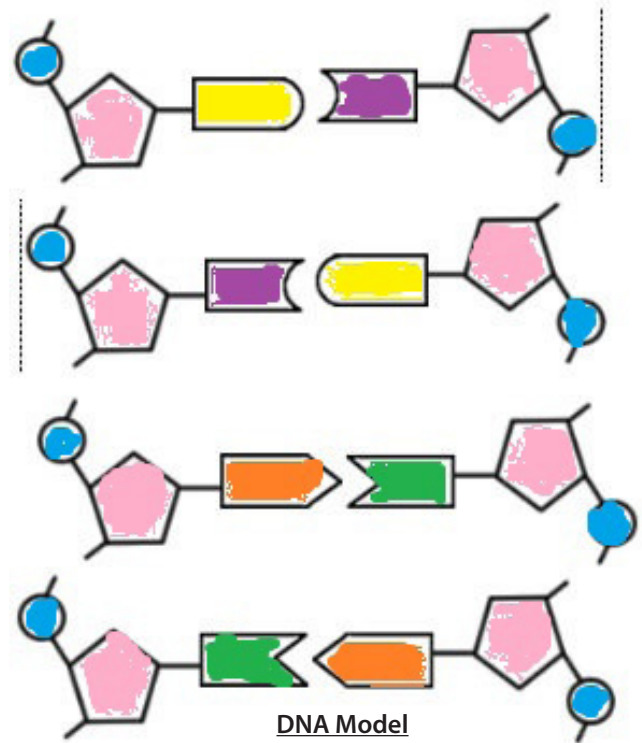
*Is Science Racist?*

### Nathaniel Deutsch

*Inventing America's "Worst" Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael*

### Christine Rosen

*Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement*



## Previous MAJOR SCHOLAR SEMINARS

Fall 2017 **"Storying Climate Change"** with **Dr. Susan Crate**, Professor, Environmental Science and Policy, George Mason University

Spring 2016 **"Native Identities in Contemporary America"** with **Dr. Clyde Ellis**, Professor of History & University Distinguished Scholar, Elon University

Spring 2015 **"Fight the Power – Can Pop Music Foster Change?"** with **Dr. Lauren Onkey**, Music Director for National Public Radio. When Onkey taught this seminar, she was Vice President of Education and Public Programs, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum

Fall 2014 **"Reading American Landscapes"** with **Dr. Arijit Sen**, Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee & Co-coordinator of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and -Milwaukee Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures collaborative doctoral program

For more information see [Major Scholar Seminars](#).

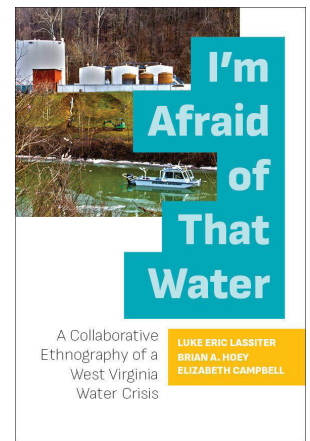
**Co-sponsors** with our program for various seminars include: Glenwood Center for Scholarship in the Humanities; West Virginia Humanities Council; Marshall University Colleges of Liberal Arts and Education and Professional Development; MU Film Studies Program and Departments of Sociology and Anthropology, History, Political Science, and Psychology; West Virginia State University's Cultural Affairs Committee and Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences.

## More excerpts from I'M AFRAID OF THAT WATER

Used with permission from the West Virginia University Press

In the [Spring 2020 Issue of Graduate Humanities](#), we announced the publication of [I'm Afraid of That Water: A Collaborative Ethnography of a West Virginia Water Crisis](#) about the 2014 chemical spill in Charleston, West Virginia. Excerpts from the "Introduction" were included in that issue.

In this issue we're sharing additional excerpts from the chapters written by Jay Thomas ('17), Joshua Mills ('16) with faculty member Cat Pleska, and Emily Mayes ('16). All were members of the West Virginia Water Crisis Project seminar.



### Excerpt from Chapter 5: Blues BBQ

by Jay Thomas ('17)

#### "Keeping My Restaurants Open"

<I came to this project as a student of the graduate humanities program. But it was in a somewhat unusual way. I was first an interviewee, interviewed for the project by Cat Pleska, who wanted to know how my restaurants weathered the spill.

In any case, I dealt with the crisis as best I could, bringing back home from Shepherdstown a few hundred gallons of water to support our home, businesses, friends, and family. After I got home, for the first day or so, I was bewildered about what happened and, to be honest, wasn't sure exactly what we'd do. At first, we weren't getting any solid information; we just knew that something had leaked into the water system. But once I started finding out just what happened, I got more and more angry. You can't run a business, a restaurant (or two, in my case) without depending on clean water in our taps. I was angry about the lack of information but even angrier about the lack of regulation, the almost nonexistence of facility inspection, that MCHM had leaked into the system in the first place.



Getting our restaurants back open was a real challenge. We couldn't use the tap water, of course, so the Health Department called and told us that to reopen we needed to come up with a plan to find and use water that we could cook and clean with. Then they would come and inspect us based on that plan. It took some time for the Health Department to make it around to all the restaurants in the Charleston area. While we waited for the inspection, among other preparations, we brought in bottled water to cook and clean with, set up hand washing sinks with bottled water, and added filters to our ice machine (to be used once the tap water was potable again). We passed inspection and reopened after being closed eight days. We lost a lot of revenue, of course, and it was a difficult time for my family and me, but it was especially hard on our employees.

Running a restaurant is tough business. Something like this makes it even tougher, especially when employees lose wages (which included tips) they depend on. That's their income, and they were out of work for more than a week. Many of us are close friends, and we've worked together for a long time. So I did my best to help support them during that time. Several applied for the help offered by the state government to recoup lost wages, but the state was pretty slow to respond. Though some did get help, they never made up those wages. Even so, our employees were great during this time. They were dealing with this in their own homes, but they did everything they could to ensure we reopened.

Eventually the state deemed the tap water potable again. But I was still very skeptical that the water coming out of our taps was actually safe to drink. We didn't use water from the tap at home or at the restaurants for a very long time. I just didn't trust what we were being told. And I didn't trust our government to tell us the truth about the water we depended on for survival. To be honest, my trust will never be regained completely.

## “Time Has Passed”

After the crisis, many of the people I knew were upset. They said that something needed to be done and made a movement toward getting people together. And I thought it was great. We went down to the Unitarian church for a meeting of concerned citizens, and there were several people from the legislature there, several people from the environmental advocacy groups. You signed on, they got your email, and we communicated, and then they had another meeting. They expected about a hundred

people, and about 250 people showed up. So you could tell that this might be a blessing in disguise is the way I’m looking at it now, to get people activated, to get people away from the idea, “Well, this is just the way it is.” But I started going to local meeting with environmental activists and local business people, folks trying to change the way we live here.

Now, I think people know what’s going on out there, and they want answers. They’re not going to take things for granted anymore. They want clean water and clean air. And I’m still involved, more than ever.

Like this oral history project: I got involved as student of the graduate humanities program as the project developed around two graduate seminars (described in the Introduction). But to me involvement is more than just a graduate seminar. It’s about life here, in Charleston. Regardless of what the outside world or greedy industrialists or apathetic West Virginians think, we matter. And thank God not all environmental science majors drop out. We need them.>

*Jay and Honor left Charleston for Shepherdstown as soon as they sold their two restaurants. Honor now manages a hat/shoe store and Jay manages a mainly vegetarian cafe.*

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## Excerpts from Chapter 6: Citizen Response: On Leaving and Staying

by Cat Pleska ('98) and Joshua Mills ('16)

### “Native West Virginians: On Us”

<I (Cat) am a seventh-generation West Virginian. My people were mostly agrarian until mid-twentieth century, when the men in the family worked in industry, such as the gas company and aluminum manufacturing. I grew up in Hurricane, in Putnam County, with a population around three thousand. Living in a small town also afforded me a feeling of safety, where I knew most everyone and could feel a connection, that I was never truly alone or without support.

Still, Putnam County, where I still live, was not among this struggling with the aftermath of the chemical spill and resulting water crisis. This escape from disaster didn't seem unusual to me on one level. Much of the state's history has experienced disaster after disaster because of extractive industrial accidents (mining and timbering, mostly), and Putnam County has

emerged largely unscathed as it has remained mostly agrarian and then residential. It turns out, however, disasters were close by—either covered up or not discovered for decades—that did affect us in this quiet county. Kanawha Valley, near where I live, is known as Chemical Valley. The chemical companies polluted our rivers and air. I once received a class action lawsuit letter because I had lived most of my life in the airflow path of a dioxin contamination.

... As the hours passed after the first announcement about the spill, information was sketchy at best and continued to be so for days (a non-uncommon reaction from our political leaders). Eventually, friends who had no access to water for bathing accepted my invitation to shower and wash clothes at my house. When they showed up, disheveled, with towel and soap in hand, it felt surreal for them and for me. While their bodies were cleansed, the hearts and minds were not, as everyone wondered when the ordeal would end.

I (Joshua) grew up in West Virginia, too. I've spent much time around and in water, and I am certain I will always have



some amount of West Virginia's water soaked into my bones. I have spent countless hours catching crawdads in Mountain Mama's creeks, fishing in her rivers, swimming in her lakes, and enjoying the coolness brought on by a summertime rain.

I grew up in Wayne, a small rural town, and though it is not the place it once was to me, I still hold the fondest memories of my childhood. . . . My childhood home was surrounded by several hundred acres of woodlands my grandparents owned. When my brother and I were not hunting or playing the woods, we'd find our way to the baseball or football field. We seemed to be always playing, even in the pew at our small church. I had everything I needed and wanted as a child.

Next page



Along with childhood play, another common thread running through my childhood memories was coal. I loved trains as a boy, and lucky for me, a coal train ran twice a day right through the heart of Wayne. And it also ran just a few feet from the dugout at our ball field. . . . Many hours of my life I spent watching coal trains go by, stopped at crossings, listening to the screech of the wheels and reading the graffiti on the side of the cars. Even at my high school, some of the rooms were so close to the tracks we could feel the room shake as the train passed, whistle blowing and drowning out our teachers' instruction.

I never really considered how complex, and at times difficult, the relationship between my hometown and coal could be. The coal train was like the water: it was just something that was there,

always had been, always would be. And like water, I took it for granted. That is, until the last train ran through our town in 2015 after the mine shut down.

### **“To Leave or Not To Leave”**

For many, the water crisis was the final straw in what they saw as the long history of problems in our state. In fact, many natives have left the state in an exodus that has occurred, actually, over many decades. They've left for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the dearth of employment. Add to this how large industrial corporations have driven many rural and urban residents alike away from their homes with similar environmental contaminations. Indeed, many connected the spill to other industry-related disasters that have occurred throughout West Virginia's story

and blamed the political leadership for not protecting residents from negligent corporate industries. Many are all too aware, sadly, that our politicians here have a tradition of favoring big industry—which operate in many counties as absentee corporations—to the detriment of our health and well-being. Political leaders cite employment and tax revenue as the basis for their decisions. We need both here, to be sure. But as is also well known, a more equitable balance between outside and inside interests is still a distant dream for most West Virginians.>

*Cat is teaching Expository Writing for Research for the Graduate Humanities Program and teaches full time in Marshall's English department. She's currently working on a book of travel essays. Josh is currently working as a land surveyor in Maryland. He still sails frequently on the Chesapeake Bay on his new boat, "Lovebird."*

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## **Excerpts from Chapter 7: In and Out of Appalachia**

**By Emily Mayes ('16)**

<When I wrote an early version of this chapter as part of a 2016 graduate seminar, I was a student in Marshall University's graduate humanities program. In January of 2014, though, I was a recent college graduate living and working in the metropolitan D.C. area. I spent my days in the fast-paced city, paying my dues (and parking tickets)



and looking forward to what I was sure, in five to ten years, would be an extraordinarily bright future. My past was in West Virginia, but now I was in the nation's capital, in the heart of the city, and nothing was more intoxicating than the pulsing energy that surrounded me at every turn. I relished the sounds of car horns and clinking glasses and most of

all the feeling of life unfolding around me, vivacious and colorful. Truly, at that time, no place could have been further from my mind than Charleston, West Virginia.

On January 10 I had spent a long day at the office, shuffling papers and making coffee, and I was looking forward to an evening out with friends. A metro and a cab later, we were sitting in a shabby dive downtown, sipping our drinks and discussing the day, when news of the Charleston water crisis flashed on the television screen just across the room.

I listened carefully to the perfectly coiffed newscaster and was suddenly jolted with concern for my family and many questions about the chemical that had somehow managed to poison the water of some three hundred thousand residents. What I remember most, though, were the reactions of those around me.

Almost immediately, there was a simultaneous myriad of heavy sighs, eye rolls, and blustery comments about the need for hillbillies to acquire a little common sense. One man in a plaid peacoat sitting just a table over from us exclaimed: "Those damn idiots! Whaddya think was going to happen living around a bunch of damn chemical plants? They ought to pick up and move, every one of them!" But for most of the people in the room, the news hardly struck a chord. Many could not even be bothered to look up from their half empty glasses because there, in the center of a thriving metropolis, it hardly mattered what was happening to faceless people in a place as far removed as southern West Virginia.

Still, as enchanted with my current surroundings as I was, what happened in Charleston mattered to me. My family was there, as were my memories, and I couldn't imagine that in a time of crisis, people would be so callous and unconcerned. In those moments, it was readily apparent that even if I cared



about the people of Charleston, even if it was a place big in my heart though small on the map, no one else much cared. Not outside of Appalachia. So I spoke with my family, and as days without water turned to weeks, I sent money and hoped for the best. But I have never forgotten how the water crisis was received in Washington. Everyone seemed content to shrug it off, to think of it as an isolated incident involving people who should have known better than to reside in a place called Chemical Valley. The general consensus was that it had happened to “them,” not “us,” leaving me to feel divided and unhinged. My life in Washington and my memories in West Virginia couldn’t quite successfully coexist, it seemed . . . I was deeply uncomfortable.

The truth is that West Virginia has been known for its struggles for years, and it continues to struggle today for various social and economic reasons. . . . Though the state may not look like much to some, it is home to me. And whatever challenges exist within the state boundaries, they are authentic to the land and the people. They are the legacy of a past that continues to define the present. The water crisis isn’t an isolated incident, but it is one particular event that illuminates realities of the Appalachian experience, realities not often considered by critical outsiders.

After the water crisis, my life changed dramatically. I left D.C. and relocated to Charleston for two years while completing my MA in the humanities. During those years, while reconnecting

with family, local water became more central to my life in ways I never expected. Not only did I wash clothes and bathe in it; I fished in the rivers and, if this chapter is any indication, spent a great deal of time thinking about how water can impact lives. Each time I took a drink of water in Charleston, like many residents, I couldn’t help but think that perhaps the water wasn’t entirely safe, and each time I sat on the bank of the Kanawha River casting my line out, I imagined that I must be exposing myself to all kinds of potentially dangerous chemicals. Still, Charleston was and is my home, the land of my family. It’s a part of who I am. So I took the risk.>

*Emily has moved to North Carolina and intends to teach in secondary education. She hopes to incorporate Appalachian literature in her classroom curriculum.*

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## 🌀 Renate Pore: Remembering Ginsburg before she was ‘RBG’ 🌀

Renate has a deep appreciation for how the humanities and public policy work together in a democracy. This became apparent in her interview, “Humanities Puts a Human Face,” published in the [Spring 2016 Graduate Humanities](#). Renate also served as the board of directors’ president of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy at the time of the water crisis and encouraged us to collect oral histories as a project with the center. Here are excerpts from her [op-ed about Justice Ginsberg](#) in the Charleston Gazette-Mail, September 22, 2020. (Reprinted with permission.)

< . . . I met Ginsburg in September 1978, in Morgantown, when a group of West Virginia University faculty and students organized a women’s festival. . . . Many distinguished thinkers and doers came to discuss women’s roles in the arts, the professions and society.

One of the most distinguished was Ruth Bader Ginsburg. . . . By 1978, she was a professor of law at the Columbia University Law School and had argued four successful cases on gender discrimination before the U.S. Supreme Court, helping to establish a constitutional basis for equality between the sexes.

The Mountainlair Ballroom was packed as the petite speaker stepped up to the microphone. Speaking modestly and carefully, she enthralled the audience on the Constitution and gender equality, and gave the young women in attendance the hope that their professional lives would not be subjected to the kind of sexual discrimination she had experienced as a young lawyer. Her talk at WVU is documented in a book of essays, *Toward the Second Decade, The Impact of the Women’s Movement on American Institutions* (1981), edited by myself and Betty Justice—who, at the time of the Women’s Festival, was an instructor in labor law at WVU.



. . . I admired Ginsburg for her courage, daunting intellect and expansive reading of the Constitution, particularly in achieving gender equality for men and women. I loved her for her humor and low-key demeanor, and the twinkle in her eye. I envied her that she found a supportive man as her life partner, the late Marty Ginsburg. And I was thrilled when President Bill Clinton nominated her for the Supreme Court. I recently learned that she was a lover of opera, which speaks to the emotional and spiritual mind as much as legal arguments speak to the rational mind.

I grieve her passing and feel a surge of energy to continue the good fight as she continued to fight for all of us through her years of cancer treatment. She died 100 years after women won the right to vote. . . . I call on all of us in West Virginia who believe in equality, fairness and justice for all to follow her lead and work toward a better world.

. . . Ruth Bader Ginsburg told the Supreme Court in a quote from Sarah Moore Grimke (1792-1873), an abolitionist and champion for women’s suffrage, “I ask no favor for my sex. All I ask of my brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.”>

## Jonathan Marks

*Thinking Culturally about the Science of Genetic Ancestry Tests*

A PUBLIC LECTURE OF THE MARSHALL UNIVERSITY GRADUATE HUMANITIES PROGRAM MAJOR SCHOLAR SEMINAR

Sponsored by the MU Graduate Humanities Program and the Glenwood Center for Scholarship in the Humanities, a Glenwood Foundation, Marshall University, and West Virginia State University Partnership



April 10, 2020  
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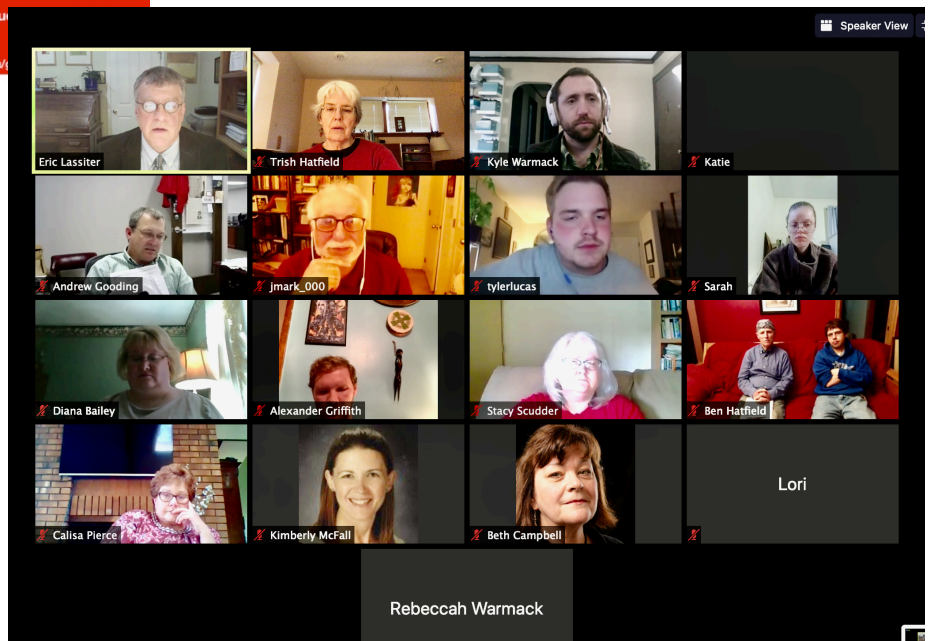
These pictures of students Diana Bailey, using her computer, and Alex Griffith, using his cell phone, are examples of how folks "attended" the online talk by Dr. Jonathan Marks.



## Thinking Culturally about the Science of Genetic Ancestry Tests

"Zoom Talk" by Jonathan Marks

Our plans for a public lecture on the Huntington campus to be given by Dr. Jonathan Marks were waylaid by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Not to be deterred, Dr. Lassiter and Dr. Marks rescheduled a "Zoom" talk on April 9, 2020. If you haven't seen a "Zoom" talk before, below is a "gallery" view on the computer screen of the folks attending the talk.



Rebecca Warmack, whose name (without an image) shows up in a black box at the bottom of the screen, was invited by her brother Kyle, a student in our program. He wanted her to hear Dr. Marks' talk on ethics and the humanities in science so they could discuss them afterwards. Rebecca is a graduate of the biochemistry program at UCLA (PhD, '19) and now a research fellow at the California Institute of Technology.

## Spring 2021 Schedule

See website for [seminar](#) details

CULS 600 SelTp / *Appalachian Studies Research* / Arranged, Lassiter

HUMN 605 / *Western Traditions and Contemporary Cultures* / T, 7-9:50 PM, Lassiter

HUMN 650 / *Selected Topics (Independent Studies)* / Arranged, Lassiter

HUMN 680 / *Independent Research Symposium* / Arranged, Lassiter

LITS 600 SelTp / *Growing Up in Appalachia* / W, 7-9:50 PM, Green