

Call for Proposals: The Society for the Study of Southern Literature Biennial Conference
April 2-5, 2020
Fayetteville, AR @ The Graduate Hotel

BEYOND BORDERS, BARS, AND BINARIES: Rethinking “South” in an Age of Crisis

At a moment of heightened xenophobia and pronounced political fixation on walls and borders, we invite scholars, activists, and students of southern literature, media, and culture to discuss the ways that the region answers back to national discourses on space, place, and power. In contemplating the ways that southern cultures voice ambivalent experiences of nation, boundaries, and belonging, our conference will create sustained engagement on the themes of borders, bars, and binaries in ways that move us beyond traditional disciplinary frameworks and toward a vision of research, teaching, and activism as mutually informing and intersecting activities.

The 2020 conference will have three key features aimed at providing an environment of collegiality, academic engagement, and lively intellectual exchange. Five opening-day seminars—“Ecological Souths,” “Southern Horrors: Afrosouthernfuturism and the Black Speculative Arts,” “Inside Voices: Power and Pedagogy in Prison Classrooms,” “Trans 101,” and “Among, Apart, Between: Multiethnic Souths”—will explicitly speak to the binaries that structure our senses of space, place, embodiment, and citizenship, while pointing us “beyond” fantasies of American exceptionalism. Keynote speakers on prison literatures, histories, pedagogies, and activism will investigate our current carceral state, placing it in relationship to regional histories and national interests, including commerce, labor, law, social stigmatization, and surveillance. Finally, in conjunction with our Emerging Scholars Organization, we will host workshops and panels on alt-ac paths so as to broaden the vision of post-doctoral life.

We welcome proposals for individual papers (300 words) and panels and roundtables (500 words). We also welcome proposals for more experimental “panel” formats, such as: guided discussions, “lightning” presentations, poster or art displays, writing workshops, sessions that combine scholarly and non-scholarly stakeholders, or other alternative formats (500 words). Panels and roundtables must have an open call for participants on the SSSL website and Facebook page, and the program committee—Lisa Hinrichsen, Casey Kayser, Julie Armstrong, Joanna Davis-McElligatt, Bob Jackson, Elizabeth Gardner, Kristin Teston, Amber Hodge, and Amy Clukey—urges organizers to be inclusive and diverse as they select participants. All proposals should include 100-word biographies for each participant. We are especially interested in having scholars join us who may not identify primarily as “southernists,” and we actively encourage the work of younger scholars, who can take advantage of SSSL’s robust Emerging Scholars Organization and travel grant program.

While all approaches are welcome, we particularly invite papers that:

- explore literatures and cultures of incarceration, plantation-to-prison interconnections, prison farms, and prisons-for-profit in southern spaces;
- the impacts of the U.S. carceral, punishment, and surveillance regimes on everyday life, culture, politics, and scholarship in and beyond the Americas;

- digital and/or intermedial explorations of borders;
- texts and media by or about diasporas and/or border subjects;
- representations of indigenous and Native experiences and cultures in the South;
- new articulations of core and periphery;
- literary and cultural representations of privatization, virtualization, revanchism, and militarization;
- explorations of transgender and queer southern literature, media, and culture;
- evolving notions of race, gender, sexuality, and/or the body, including issues of disability and ableism;
- analyses of historical, social, cultural, or political tensions within and/or about “the South”;
- constructions and deployments of southern cultures through “non-literary” forms of film, music, visual art, new media, popular culture, and performance;
- considerations of how these issues pertain to southern studies institutions, programs, publishing venues, and communities.

As a transitional zone between north and south, east and west, Northwest Arkansas provides a rich, even contradictory, locale for exploring questions of borders, bars, and binaries. Marked by migration routes that include the Trail of Tears, the largest community of Marshallese in the U.S., and the settlement of dreamers and migrant citizens brought by the flows of capital from Walmart, Tyson, J.B. Hunt, and other Fortune 500 companies with roots in the area, Northwest Arkansas is a place to view the intersection of diverse people, new technologies, and globalized capitalist economies, as well as a place from which to see the production and exacerbation of inequalities. The area is home to lesbian separatist communities, queer travel, and Crystal Bridges, a world-renowned museum of American art. It is also a part of a state foundational to the growth of for-profit prisons, neoliberal income inequality, and environmental degradation. As such, SSSL 2020 offers us a provocative ground from which to consider how borders, binaries, and bars operate in lived experience as well as intellectual practice.

The deadline for all proposals is October 15, 2019. Additional information about the conference and Society is available on our website: www.southernlit.org. Please direct all questions, and paper and panel proposals to sssl2020conference@gmail.com.