

# HMU: Dialogues

Harrison Middleton University

11/20/2019

Volume 6, Edition 2

## Letter from the Editor:

Harrison Middleton University is fortunate to have a wonderful community and support system. Thank you to the students, alumni, faculty and staff who enjoyed a warm weekend in Tempe, Arizona. We are grateful for the chance to chat in person, discuss programs of study, better understand new ideas, and eat and drink together. Today's newsletter offers a few photos and words from the event.

And, while it feels as though we just welcomed our 2019 Fellows in Ideas: **Ned Boulberhane**, **Laken Brooks**, and **Jennifer Taylor**, we must wish them well as 2019 comes to a close. Today's newsletter highlights book reviews by Laken Brooks and Jennifer Taylor. Also visit the HMU blog for more Fellow in Ideas posts (past and present). We wish them well in their future endeavors and it has been so much fun to have them in on the conversation.

Finally, thank you to the students and faculty who continue to keep in touch. We are spread about the country and able to inform others in our community about some great events. Feel free to recommend conferences, articles, and ideas that keep you inspired. You can reach me anytime at [asimon@hmu.edu](mailto:asimon@hmu.edu). I look forward to hearing about your newest adventure.

Thank you for your participation!

*Alissa*



## Reviews and More:

The following book review is by Fellowship in Ideas recipient **Laken Brooks**. (Find a second book review by **Jennifer Taylor** on pages 4 and 5.)

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*The Stonewall Reader*  
Edited by the NY Public Library

*The Stonewall Reader*, edited by the New York Public Library, was published by Penguin Classics in 2019. The book brings LGBT archives to life by presenting a graceful and radical chronology of LGBT history in America. Edmund White's foreword establishes a raw, personal insight into the social tensions brewing before and during Stonewall. White's candid, if not irreverent, tone complements the more academic historiography in Jason Bauman's introduction. Together, these first two sections suggest that *The Stonewall Reader* appeals to both a public and an academic audience, combining archival information with engaging personal narrative. A reader may be surprised, like me, to realize that the editors have listed their suggested readings at the start of the book, after the introduction, instead of in the appendix. However, this intentional placement provides a sense of ethos.

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## Student Corner



~ **Bill Maniotis**, a current HMU doctoral student, participated in a seminar and panel discussion entitled, "What do we mean by close reading" at the twenty-fourth annual conference of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, which was held at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. His paper was titled, "Teaching Close Reading to High School Students Using *The Scarlet Letter* in the Era of #MeToo."

~ Congratulations to HMU graduate Dr. **Ellin Iselin**. Her film, *Soul in the Machine*, is an official selection of the 2019 Green Mountain Christian Film Festival.

~ Congratulations to HMU graduate Dr. **Adam R. Hazlett** on his recent promotion to Department Chair of the Department of Humanities at Henry Ford College's School of Liberal Arts. Find an interview with Dr. Hazlett here: [https://www.tctimes.com/living/our\\_town/meet-dr-adam-hazlett/article\\_ccd0b1c6-e14a-11e9-b1ae-c720f1c017ab.html](https://www.tctimes.com/living/our_town/meet-dr-adam-hazlett/article_ccd0b1c6-e14a-11e9-b1ae-c720f1c017ab.html)

~ Dr. **Phillip M. Perry** attended the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference of The Melville Society, held June 17-20, 2019, at New York University in New York City. The conference celebrated the bicentennial of Melville's birth in lower Manhattan in 1819.

## Reviews (continued):

This text draws on work from other writers and activists, and this early reading list conveys a sense of the editors' humility. The list reminds the reader that this book is one of many texts that represent the LGBT community, a diverse group of people instead of a monolith.

The New York Public Library has edited this book with an eye on cohesion. The book itself is a collection of various letters, autobiographies, and other texts from the LGBT community. The book organizes these pieces into three broad categories: Before Stonewall, During Stonewall, and After Stonewall. The first entry in Before Stonewall is a selection from Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. While Lorde describes covert glances between quiet lesbians who pass one another on the street, the book's last piece emphasizes the progress since Stonewall. Chirlane McCray's "I Am a Lesbian" bookends *The Stonewall Reader* by, in its title alone, speaking aloud the identity that many have kept hidden. Lorde's and McCray's texts also excavate the marginalized history of lesbians of color. The reader should not underestimate that *The Stonewall Reader* prioritizes writing from people of color when many media accounts portray white, cisgender, gay men as the primary subjects of America's queer history.

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*The Stonewall Reader* deserves a place on college syllabi. Younger readers, such as those in middle and high school, may have difficulty intuitively connecting the tones and topics in each section because the New York Public Library mostly lets each primary text speak for itself without editorial footnotes or comment. Furthermore, the collection contains graphic examples of police brutality, sexuality, and other content that an educator might need to preface with content warnings. However, the diverse texts can spark rich discourse for older readers. The primary source material, from legal documents to literary memoirs, allows this book to stretch across disciplines. Professors who teach gender studies, American history, civil rights, library science, archival studies, or queer theory could assign this book for their students. While *The Stonewall Reader* is well-curated, one benefit of the book is that professors can thoughtfully scalpel out samples of each section to make new connections or to emphasize certain experiences. Readers interested in queer history may consider the following texts alongside *The Stonewall Reader*: Michael Bronski's *A Queer History of the United States* (2012), Don Romesburg's *The Routledge History of Queer America* (2018), Allida M. Black's *Modern American Queer History* (2001), Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin's *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (2005), John Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (1999), Eric Marcus' *Making Gay History* (2009), and Vicki L. Eaklor's *Queer America: A People's GLBT History of the United States* (2011).

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## Faculty Highlights:

~ **Marcus Conley** spent some of his summer as Academic Director for the Great Books Summer Program at Stanford University, a position previously held by **Joseph Coulson**.

~ **Joseph Coulson**, **Michael Curd**, and **Lauren Guthrie** attended the Distance Education Accrediting Commission's Fall Workshop in Chicago, Illinois from October 6-8, 2019.

~ **Alissa Simon** (pictured, left) and HMU Fellow in Ideas, **Laken Brooks** (right), attended Imagining America's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference in Albuquerque, NM, October 18-20, 2019.



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## Book Review: *Sapiens*, reviewed by Fellow in Ideas Jennifer Taylor

I have often heard that if we choose not to learn from the mistakes of history, we will inevitably end up repeating them. Though it is undeniably very practical advice to be aware of the perils and pitfalls to which we as human beings are susceptible, in spite of my best intentions to be a well-informed member of the species, history has never been a subject that has thrilled me. I took the requisite courses in high school, of course - but names and dates blurred together and important concepts failed to stick with me. More than a decade later, I obtained *Sapiens* by Yuval Harari at the recommendation of a family member.

It took less than two pages to realize that this history book is unique. Beginning approximately 2 million years ago with the plethora of human species that failed to survive past 12,000 BCE and spanning into predictions for the future, Harari's *Sapiens* focuses on broad concepts and questions that have influenced the behaviours and movements of *Homo sapiens* as a species, rather than the individuals who may have made culturally significant impacts on a smaller scale. Harari presents the vast and complex history of our species chronologically, organized largely by the Revolutions that set human beings apart from their non-world-dominating counterparts, extinct and otherwise: Cognitive, Agricultural and Scientific.

The Cognitive Revolution represents the transition of sapiens from one of many human species struggling for survival into the dominant species on the planet - but the explanation for that transition is not as simple as large brains and opposable thumbs. Human species possessed those traits for millions of years and remained in the middle of the food chain. Gaining control of fire and developing language are also not unique to *Homo sapiens*. So how did they, in a relatively short span of time, become the only surviving species of humans? And how did they then develop from bands of 50 citizens cooperating together into cities of millions?

The Agricultural Revolution, which Harari refers to as "history's biggest fraud," describes the progression of modern humans from a population of hunter-gatherers into communities of farmers. How and why did this change take place? And was the domestication of grain the benefit to the species we believe it to be? How do we define evolutionary success and whether or not we, as humans, have been successful?

Beginning about 500 or so years ago, the goals of education transitioned from preservation and validation of existing rules to discovery and acquisition of new ones in a process called the Scientific Revolution. Accepting that modern culture was ignorant, opened the door to scientific discoveries and real progress. This change led to the discovery of medications, the invention of new weapons, and the stimulation of economic resources that led to men on the moon and the invention of the atomic bomb. But do technological advancements necessarily mean that quality of life - rather than lifespan - has improved?

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## Winter Film Series

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### The Theban Trilogy: A – not too pleasant – Family Affair

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We will read and discuss Sophocles' scripts, and screen film and video productions. Julie Taymor directs Stravinsky's one-act opera in a stunning multicultural production of *Oedipus the King*. We will take a second look at *Oedipus* with Pier Paolo Pasolini's remarkable 1967 film version. In 1944, Jean Anouilh's rewrite of *Antigone* – part of the French Resistance to the Nazi occupation – brings a timely emphasis to the original. And the African American musical, *The Gospel at Colonus*, is a radical retelling of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Join us for a visit to the House of Cadmus to meet the Oedipus clan. It's worth thinking about! Discussions will be held on **December 5th**, **January 9th**, **February 13th**, and **March 12th** at 5:00 pm PST/6:00 pm MST/7:00 pm CST/8:00 pm EST.

To register, please contact [rfisher@hmu.edu](mailto:rfisher@hmu.edu). Once registered, additional information on the texts, films, and call-in information will be provided.

## Book Review continued:

Is capitalism the key to progress, or a cult that holds the hardest-working members of its population back? What will continued technological advancements mean for the future of *Homo sapiens*, who are, biologically, little different than we were 200,000 years ago?

Enormous questions such as these have no simple answers, but Harari tackles them with a level of knowledge and insight that allows him to lay out the myriad facets of each topic with eloquence and clarity. *Sapiens* is written in language accessible to laypeople with a degree of humour, but uses it to set forth complex concepts and theories about the history of human beings. And as promised, that history is repeating itself. According to Harari, *Homo sapiens* are no stranger to causing mass extinction on a global scale. Nor is the current post-truth climate the first time our species has been willing to justify behaviour based on common myths. Even being ensnared in the "luxury trap," an endless cycle of working harder in pursuit of luxuries we aren't able to enjoy, is part of the history of humankind. Though understanding our history may not allow us to accurately predict the future, it does allow us to "widen our horizons, to understand that our present situation is neither natural or inevitable, and that we consequently have many more possibilities before us than we imagine."

Harari, Yuval N. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Toronto: Signal, 2014.

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## Dr. Deacon Retires



Dr. Deborah Deacon, extraordinary Dean and academic mentor, retired this summer after eleven years of distinguished service at Harrison Middleton University.

Accolades from students and colleagues speak to Dr. Deacon's commitment, professionalism, academic rigor, and good humor. Indeed, HMU students often express their deep appreciation for the empathetic and persistent support they received from Dr. Deacon while completing their degree requirements. We speak for everyone in our community when we say that we'll miss her energy, compassion, and problem-solving acumen.

Please join us in expressing to Dr. Deacon both our deepest gratitude and a hearty congratulations on a job well done!

*"As you enter positions of trust and power, dream a little before you think."*

~ Toni Morrison

## HMU Community Weekend

Harrison Middleton University's first community event was a success! A warm Arizona evening greeted new friends and old. Pictured, left to right: Peter Ponzio (HMU Tutor and alumnus); Dave Seng (HMU alumnus); Alissa Simon (HMU Tutor); and Gary Schoepfel (HMU Tutor).



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During the first HMU Community Weekend, participants shared an intimate weekend in the warm desert landscape. We spent a few hours of discussion followed by food and drinks and ended the weekend with a morning at the Desert Botanical Garden. Thank you to those who attended the conference, and also to those who participated in the discussion via phone. We enjoyed the weekend and are grateful for such a diverse and interesting community! Though distance education affords us the opportunity to continue the conversation anywhere, it is always nice to put a face with a name! Thank you for all you do to make Harrison Middleton University successful, to make dialogue successful! We have a truly stellar community!



Left: Joseph Coulson prepares to open the HMU Community Weekend with some comments about the ways that literature communicates culture and identity.)



Below Left:  
As our final farewell, a handful of us visited the Desert Botanical Gardens. From left, Lauren Guthrie, Minette Bryant, Joseph Coulson, Alissa Simon, David Curd, Rebecca Fisher, Peter Ponzio, Gary Schoepfel.

Harrison Middle ton University is a gre at ideas, gre at works, great conversations, distance learning university that offers graduate education in the humanities with concentrations in imaginative lite rature, natural science, philosophy and religion, and social science. Harrison Middle ton University promotes student-faculty scholarship through research, discussion, and the development of collaborative publications.