

Plenary Sessions

Wednesday, July 27th, 7:15pm

From There to Here: Immigrant Experiences

Shobha Sharma, an Indian Ph.D. in chemistry, who learned Spanish so she could teach English as a second language to Hispanic immigrants. She works to convince her students that adding a second language to their repertoire does not mean replacing the first; in fact, it extends their intellectual development beyond most Americans who are limited to only one language.

Eddie Patay, a retired singer/entertainer from Yugoslavia, works with elderly immigrants from former Soviet countries who come to the U.S. to be with their children. He calls attention to the fact that it takes a long time for refugees to become immigrants, i.e. to work through the loss of a former way of life that for all its limitations was, at least, familiar, and come to see that their new home can provide openings and opportunities for the very things they loved, but had been limited in, while under a more restrictive government.

Dr. Wamucii Njogu, from Kenya, now Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Northeastern Illinois University, came to the U.S. for graduate school and stayed to teach. She will recount her experiences in maintaining Kenyan social values and how this has made her an effective teacher and administrator.

Glenn Hartman, a third generation American, high school teacher, recounts how his grandparents, a Russian Jew and a German Jew, would never have met, much less talked to each other in Europe despite a shared religious background. That religious/cultural background continues as a strand among Americans long after any other ethnic identification has faded into quaintness or forgetfulness.

Dr. Carlos A. Torre, from Puerto Rico, navigated the American educational system through to three degrees from Harvard University, up to a Doctorate of Education in Human Development and Administration. He is currently Professor of Education at Southern Connecticut State University and a Fellow at Yale University.

Thursday, July 28th, 7:00pm

The Decision of Their Lives: The Great Migration and the American Story

Isabel Wilkerson won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing as Chicago bureau chief of the New York Times. She is the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in journalism and the first African-American to win for individual reporting. She has also won the George Polk Award and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. She's lectured on narrative at the Nieman Foundation at Harvard, served as Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton and as James M. Cox Jr. Professor of Journalism at Emory. She's currently Professor of Journalism and Director of Narrative Nonfiction at Boston University.

Her book *Warmth of Other Suns* is the result of over fifteen years of research and recording the oral history of African-Americans who migrated from areas in the American South to points north, Midwest and west. There have been other studies of the Great Migration giving varying dates and numbers of people. There has also been recognition of the importance of this movement for the development of modern urban America. But mostly those have been academic studies and not widely disseminated. Wilkerson's book has been marketed to a general reading population. She focuses on three individual stories to make the numbers come alive. Her prose is elegant, lyrical and precise.

Wilkerson characterizes the movement of over six million people between 1915 and 1970 as "unrecognized immigration" although no national borders were crossed. However, borders were crossed from a region with a rigid, racial caste system foreign to most of us within the U.S. national borders. Any problems that an immigrant from Italy might have, language, culture, social mores, those problems were the same. They include questions of assimilation vs. holding on to the old culture or even defining, after a while, what the "old culture" might be. Furthermore, a milder form of that racial caste system still exists within our whole country. Consider that the animus of anti-immigration forces is directed primarily at brown-skinned people coming to this country from a southern direction. No one appears to be overly exercised over "illegal" Irishmen or Swedes. So looking at this unrecognized and unaccepted immigration within our borders gets at much of the subtext of attitudes toward external immigration.

Friday, July 29th—7:15pm

A three part conversation on *Telling Our Lives, Conversations on Solidarity and Difference*

Led by:

Frida Kerner Furman, Professor, Religious Studies, DePaul University, Chicago

Elizabeth A. Kelly, Professor, Women's and Gender Studies, DePaul University, Chicago.

Linda Williamson Nelson, Professor of Anthropology and Africana Studies, Richard Stockton College, New Jersey

From the authors:

The book explores how three women find points of commonality and understanding through the process of sharing life narratives. We share a great deal: we are women, scholars and feminists, facing mid-life and we are daughters of Diaspora and working class. In other ways, we differ greatly: two are white, one African-American; two are heterosexual, one lesbian. We have diverse religious backgrounds. Two were born in the United States; one is an immigrant. Two are mothers of now-adult children; one has never parented. Each of us has crossed many borders, transgressed multiple boundaries, in her day.