Dear Students,
Dear Colleagues,
Dear Alumni/ae,

2016 has already been a year of campus-wide conversations about the centrality of race and class in discussions of feminism. We started it with a rousing talk by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Intersectionality: Why We Can’t Wait for a Racial Justice Agenda that Centers Us All.” Student-led initiatives have sustained these energies. Sold-out performances of “Beyond the Vagina Monologues” helped expand our understanding of gender-based violence even as a speak-out of It Happens Here reiterated the urgency with which we must attend to this topic on campus. It is worth taking a moment here to recall that three years ago in March our It Happens Here group was invited to the White House.

We also brought acclaimed writer Edwidge Danticat to engage in a conversation with Julia Alvarez. They talked about the art and power of storytelling, human “w/riting,” and feminism. The Gensler Family Symposium “#IntersectionalTV: Mediating Race, Gender, and Sexuality” will elaborate on how these concerns of intersectionality play out in our contemporary media ecology. Student leadership is bringing feminism to many fronts across campus. Feminist Action at Middlebury has been addressing “taboo subjects” in various storytelling events. Women of Color hosted their annual “Women’s History Dinner” with a wide array of speakers and performers. Sister-to-Sister and Brother-to-Brother have been busy engaging with middle school students about issues of concern in the early teenage years.

We have also completed a search for a tenure-track position in critical sexuality and critical race studies. In the fall we will thus be able to offer a number of stand-alone GSFS courses that will make our curriculum more robust and rigorous.

Warm wishes for spring!

Sujata Moorti & Karin Hanta
On November 11, 2015, Debjani Roy, Deputy Director of the New-York based anti-street harassment group Hollaback! came to speak with Middlebury students about social media activism. A smart phone app that has become international, Hollaback! started on a rooftop in Brooklyn in 2005, when a group of friends realized the extent to which street harassment affects women after a woman named Thao Nguyen had posted a picture of her harasser on a New York subway on Flickr. Today, Hollaback! provides an online platform and mobile app for people to “document, map, and share incidents of harassment,” with the ultimate goal of preventing violence and harassment.

As a woman, Roy had come to fear harassment, and adapted to the problem, without being able to effectively solve it. Hollaback!, however, focuses on finding a solution to this problem. It is imperative to keep in mind that street harassment does not affect all people equally—gender non-conforming individuals, women of color, trans women, LGBTQ individuals, and low-income persons are most at risk. This can lead to health challenges, such as PTSD, being forced to move or change jobs, and restricted mobility overall. Moreover, street harassment can quickly escalate into violence. In 2014, for example, Mary Spears was killed after rejecting a man’s sexual advances. Clearly, this is not just about catcalling, but about the lives of women and gender non-conforming folks all around the world.

Roy mentioned that people often don’t think street harassment is a big problem, yet it is obvious that it affects people everywhere. There is a pressing need to change the culture surrounding the issue—the normalization of street harassment needs to stop. For young people today, Roy said, the solution is technology. Free iOS and Android apps allow people to share stories in real time and create data that can be used to target the problem. This was impossible “only five years ago,” yet now helps many people all over the globe. Hollaback! operates in 84 cities, 34 countries, and 18 different languages. From Istanbul to Vancouver to New York, over 400 volunteers have been trained as leaders. Roy notes that “people with the least access to power are most attracted to Hollaback!”, including many LGBTQ folks, people of color, and disabled individuals.

Hollaback! has also done significant policy and legislative work, especially in New York City. At the global level, Hollaback! opts for a more grassroots method, with a decentralized approach where leaders in different cities decide what is best for their location. Hollaback! also works to educate, support, provide a platform and community, with the objective of changing power relations.

Roy also shared news about a new initiative to address online harassment and cyber-stalking.
On January 15, 2016, on the eve of the grand opening of the Anderson Freeman Resource Center, Middlebury’s new and long campaigned-for intercultural center, Middlebury welcomed Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Distinguished Professor of Law at UCLA, who coined the term “intersectionality.” For this significant occasion during both the weekend of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Alumni of Color Weekend, Mead Chapel was filled with students and alumni. In her lecture, Crenshaw concentrated on the “post-post-racialism” prevailing in our society as well as the “colorblind framing of racial inequality.” Her talk centered on the recent Black Lives Matter movements and social justice movements. She, however, highlighted the ways in which gender shapes their contours.

At one point during her interactive lecture, Crenshaw asked us all to stand and sit down when we heard a name we recognized. She proceeded to read a list of names of people who were victims of state-sanctioned violence. She began with names of Black men most people evidently knew, as few members of the audience sat down. However, when she read a few Black women’s names, a majority of the audience sat. Crenshaw made a particularly impactful point when she told us that the women whose names she listed were killed within ten days of the men whose names she had read out.

Crenshaw’s term “intersectionality” refers to the connectedness of different types of oppression—racial, gender related, class, or ability based—and the need to fight all types of oppression together. In this context, Crenshaw spoke about the erasure of women from racial violence. “Racial justice,” she said, “is not a trickle down affair.” Initiatives such as President Obama’s “My Brother’s Keeper” leave girls of color behind. While Middlebury is an educational institution, a community that highly values knowledge, many of us were unaware of the state sanctioned violence women of color face.

Crenshaw offered the audience a taste of her activist project “Black Girls Matter”. This included a video highlighting the power of truth commissions.

Crenshaw spoke about the distancing of racism and civil rights from college campuses as well. This distance, she argued, “makes racism solely about when the baton hits the head.” We left Mead Chapel thinking about how we can use her ideas. “It’s about,” she told us, “putting new ideas in the software of what we do here.”
On Saturday, January 16th, Kimberlé Crenshaw led a workshop on unequal opportunity. Professor Crenshaw talked about the importance of knowing the history of structural and institutionalized inequality. She noted that if you don’t know history or understand why conditions are the way they are, then “you are not doing social justice, you are doing charity.”

To help us visualize the history of unequal opportunity, Crenshaw played a video on YouTube called The Unequal Opportunity Race that portrayed unequal opportunity as a track race. There were four participants, one black woman, one black man, one white woman, and one white man. They all start at from the same position, but the white man and woman run right after the gunshot, while the black man and woman get stopped by a traffic light. As this traffic light flashes red, words like “slavery” and “genocide” and “Trail of Tears” come up, highlighting the reasons why all participants cannot set off from the start line at the same time. Once the clock reaches 1964, the black man and woman are allowed to start.

As the race goes on, the white man is shown as finishing the track and then passing a “baton” to the next white man, who inherits that “baton” with a dollar sign on it that gets bigger and bigger with each new white man, or each new generation. As the black man and woman run the race, unemployment and racial profiling stop them in their tracks. In the end, the black woman reaches a dead end, representing a shortened life-span, while the white woman keeps running towards the finish line and the white man is on a moving walkway with words like “privilege” and “old boy network” popping up. The black man is stuck in a cell, meant to represent incarceration. This video gave us a basic understanding of the depth of unequal opportunity in about four minutes.

Next, we played a board game created by Crenshaw and her team. The purpose of it was to demonstrate unequal opportunity and intersectionality. There were five pieces representing white, Asian American and Pacific Islander, African American, Latino, and Native American groups. Each time we landed on a blank space, we had to pick one of our cards that showed three different generations’ histories. If the card stated something negative that happened to the group of people, like the Trail of Tears, the piece that represented that group of people—in this case Native Americans—had to move back a few spaces. There were cards that indicated the same event for two groups—one group would move forward because they benefitted from that specific thing and the other would move back.
because it harmed them. There was a special “collaboration” spot on the track. If you landed on it, all the groups had to work together to award “tokens” to whomever they felt needed it or deserved it. There also were chance cards, which were events that generally happened and affected all groups. At the end, we discussed the different tables’ boards and who had ended up the farthest ahead and who was the farthest behind.

A majority of the groups had the same results: the white piece went several times around the board and was the most ahead, and then Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, African American, and Native Americans were all behind in varying orders. Most commonly, Native Americans were last.

After discussing the results, we commented on playing the game and how we felt afterwards. We discussed how the results varied from table to table because rolling the dice added an element of chance to the game. The chance cards also affected the outcome of the game. However, we observed, even though chance was present, inequality was still evident. For example, a card for the white group would indicate one good event and have the piece move up 9 spaces, while a card for the African American group would say one good event and have the piece move up 3 spaces. Also, there were more good than bad events for the white group, with varying ratios for the other groups but moving close to more bad events than good.

Some people commented that they were from the Midwest and lived near reservations, but were just learning for the first time of many historical events in indigenous history. Others commented that even though it was a good breakdown of groups, the game did not address colorism within communities—for example, not all Latinx look the same and therefore have different experiences even though they are all Latinx. Everyone could agree that the game was thought-provoking, and taught us historical events that were ignored in our school curricula. Playing the game demonstrated the way unequal opportunity works. Even with countless random factors thrown in, discrimination happens in various forms and affords some people fewer opportunities than others.

Maybelle Chellis Selfie Contest

Participants celebrating the Maybelle Chellis selfie contest at Middlebury Chocolates.

Spencer Wise Watson shows his enthusiasm for Maybelle Chellis
On Saturday, January 17, the Anderson Freeman Resource Center hosted a panel on the History of Student Activism on campus. The panel was moderated by Debanjan Roychoudhury ’16 and included Professor of Spanish and Dean of Diversity Miguel Fernandez; former Vice President and Dean of the College Shirley Collado; and the first Chief Officer of Diversity, Leroy Nesbitt.

Nesbitt emphasized that “student activism is nothing new.” He reminded the audience that it was student activism that created Chellis House; PALANA Intercultural Academic Interest House; and Hillel. It was students who changed the ROTC space into Coltrane Lounge, a room dedicated to African-American culture. Nesbitt clarified that student activism largely is about inclusion.

Shirley Collado continued by giving an administrative perspective on activism and collaboration. Collado initially accepted the position of chief diversity officer at Middlebury. She explained how she helped engage faculty to create the Center for Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE). She mentioned that the name for the center included “race” and “ethnicity” because these were essential identity factors that needed to be addressed.

Collado also noted that under her tutelage, the Admissions Office was starting to admit more first generation students of color that were not Posse scholars. Furthermore, first generation students already at Middlebury created the First Generation Mentor Program.

Miguel Fernandez emphasized that, under Leroy Nesbitt, diversity was a one-man show. Fernandez stated that “it takes a village” for a place to be diverse—not just in numbers but also in minds. “What is activism?” Fernandez asked. “People think of megaphones, protests, and marches.” Instead, people can organize in different ways. Cases in point: In the fall of 2015, Jeremy Stratton-Smith led a series of conversations on inclusivity in the classroom in one of his classes. The year before, several students created the Middlebury Ferguson Group, which has led conversations on police brutality. The group held a die-in in Ross Dining Hall and has had a Facebook presence. Beyond the Green was started by students to give underrepresented voices on campus a platform for their opinions.

Fernandez discussed why the cultural appropriation and racist comments on campus blew up last fall. He answered this by stating that social media serves as evidence for what is being denied. Fernandez added that students wanted to react to racism and prevent cultural appropriation on Halloween night. Students were able to be proactive by making a video on cultural appropriation and displaying posters around campus, and the AFC provided space for students to work and collaborate.
On Tuesday night, JusTalks presented their keynote speaker, transactivist writer and artist Reina Gossett, currently the 2014-2016 Activist-In-Residence at Barnard College’s Center for Research on Women. In the last ten years, Gossett has worked at grassroots organizations where people facing oppression are at the center, such as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project and Queers for Economic Justice.

Gossett has been interested in the aesthetics and the beauty that surrounds people when they come together. She wants bodies to be celebrated in ways that do not align with current beauty standards. Gossett also talked about a film that she and filmmaker Sasha Wortzel have been working on. Happy Birthday, Marsha! documents the hours leading up to the Stonewall Rebellion. The film focuses on the—largely overlooked—lives of Latina trans woman Silvia Rivera and Black trans woman Marsha Johnson. They were one of the first people to physically resist the police during the Stonewall Rebellion. Gossett wanted to make a beautiful film for the trans community to counter Hollywood’s Stonewall production, which erased trans activists. Although trans visibility has increased in recent years, trans violence has also increased. 2015 was marked by the highest rate of homicides against transwomen of color. On the screen behind her, Gossett presented a poster showing Marsha P. Johnson and the words “No Pride for Some of Us without Liberation for All of Us.” This poster demonstrates how it is “not liberation for all of us with gay friendly police while people are still going to prison.”

Aside from Happy Birthday, Marsha!, Gossett is also working on a podcast called Making the Way Out of No Way for trans and gender non-conforming people. In the podcast, Gossett talks to Miss Major, a trans woman activist, who talks how trans people “were criminalized by just breathing.” Gossett added that academics in colleges and universities are sometimes the “biggest obstacle in letting people come together and make meaning of issues.”

“Sitting together and hashing out ideas, making meaning of the world together” is important, and Gossett related this to the S.T.A.R. House (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) during the 1970s in New York, which was started by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson. It was a safe living space for trans sex workers, where folks could organize toward liberation. According to Gossett, it is revolutionary just for transwomen to hang out with and take care of each other.
Louisa Stein, Assistant Professor of Film and Media Culture, gathered with students and faculty on January 22, 2016 to deliver a lecture on her work on “Millenial Fandom.” This lecture was a part of the “Life in the Mind” series, in which professors present their research in a casual atmosphere. Stein’s lecture focused on her work on “collective authorship and the culture of feels,” which included a conversation on aspects of millennial media culture such as the celebration of community, conventions, and erasure of divides.

Early in her lecture, Professor Stein identified millennialism as a construct created by advertisers to expand the concept of fandom. She posited that fandom leads to safe, multigenerational mingling, thus creating a space that is feminist, queer inclusive, and empowering. Commercial media, in this light, is really raw material for a culture of the millennials’ design. Professor Stein then showed the audience a post from the social media site Tumblr reading “Reblog if you’re a wizard or witch,” which now has over 14 million notes (i.e. re-posts and “likes”) on the site. Professor Stein led us through many of the additions that have been made to the post such as pictures or gifs from Harry Potter. She also made mention of comments referencing A Very Potter Musical (a parody by the Starkid theatre company), as well as The Last Unicorn and My Little Pony. Professor Stein used this post as an example of the power of fandom: the collective shared passion and celebration of community.

Stein additionally discussed fandom outside of social media. She showed the audience a video from LeakyCon, a Harry Potter convention which has grown to celebrate many other media texts. The video she played was of a performance at the convention including elements from Harry Potter, Doctor Who, The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, Sherlock, Rent, and many more movies, series, and shows. This clip demonstrated the collectiveness of fandom for many types of media. Stein, in her explanation of the “multi-fannish life” seen at LeakyCon, argued that this life merges hopeful and dark millennialism and “revels in it.”
Students began to arrive at the Hepburn Zoo just after 7 p.m on Thursday, November 19th, chattering with anticipation as they waited to get seats for the 7:30 show. Capacity in the Zoo is 90 people, and 91 had accepted the invitation to the Facebook event. The crowd manager was threatening to turn people away, so organizers held their breaths as the doors opened and folks streamed in. Some had seen Una Aya Osato, “ExHOTic Other,” a year before when Anu Biswas brought her to Middlebury to perform in the Château performance space, while others had missed the experience but heard rave reviews following it. Anticipation was high and the crowd erupted into cheers as ExHOTic Other took to the stage, wearing a long bathrobe, sparkling eye shadow, fake eyelashes, and five-inch, bright blue heels. She didn’t have to encourage much when she told us to speak up if we liked what we saw.

ExHOTic Other served as a Master of Ceremonies, inviting other members of the company onstage for various pieces. The first act included a performance by Miss AuroraBoobRealis, wearing golden feathers and a bright mask, to the song “Din Da Da,” and another by Sister Selva to the song “Talk that Talk.” In between, ExHOTic Other would tell stories. The first followed her on a visit to Japan, where she discovered “too sexy” wasn’t a complement; in the second story, she talked about being derailed from creating a piece about global warming by the marriage of her ex-boyfriend. The stories were funny and subversive, and most importantly, decisively unapologetic for their humanity.

Following her second story, ExHOTic Other performed the first overtly political burlesque piece. She embodied a polar bear who was too hot and too hungry due to climate change; as she stripped, the audience cheered to see more skin but while simultaneously shuddered at the implications of a polar bear tearing away its own fur.

Before a brief intermission, Sister Selva invited audience members to the stage to learn a dance piece to the song “Flawless” by Beyoncé, sung to lyrics written by brASS that included lines such as “the police are lawless/the system’s worthless” and “we can’t live like this/we won’t live like this.” The audience joined in with enthusiasm. Following intermission, AuroraBoobRealis led a “dance-off.” Jasmine Ross won, securing a pair of fake eyelashes and a selfie with the troupe.

The second half included more explicitly political pieces. AuroraBoobRealis performed to “Strange Fruit,” evoking the lyrics deliberately with red strips of cloth she would pull from her neckline and sleeve. After pulling her black dress over her head, she disappeared backstage for a moment and emerged carrying a “Black Lives Matter” sign.

Sister Selva performed a gender-bending
piece to “Primetime” on her front, she presented as a femme, only to turn and present a classically masculine person on her back. The couple stripped together. As they pulled their shared pants off, her buttocks presented the vulva of the classically masculine person on her back while the tie presented the penis of the femme on her front, which shot glitter into the audience. Following this piece, AuroraBoobRealis presented Una’s Drag King character, Norm, who came onstage wearing a button-up white shirt tucked into dress pants and a snapback and proceeded to drink throughout the course of the song “Can’t Hold Us” until he passed out.

After the show, brASS opened the floor for a short question and answer session. Responding to questions from the audience, they explained that the purpose of their art is to move people internally, whether in a comfortable or uncomfortable way; they expressed that their queerness is central to every piece of their art; and they explained that their bodies are the most articulate and subtle ways for them to express themselves. Following the Q&A, students hovered, asking specific questions (such as “how do you do your hair?” to AuroraBoobRealis) or merely thanking the troupe for coming to us here at Middlebury College. Later, while eating dinner, brASS expressed the desire to come back again; maybe to teach a J-term workshop!

Chellis House is very happy to announce that we are beginning a check-out system for books from the Alison Fraker Library. Books in our library can be found on the Chellis House goodreads site. Books can be searched on Goodreads by book title, author name, or genre. To check out a book from Alison Fraker Library, students, staff, and faculty can access a google spreadsheet which will allow them to enter their name, email, year, book title, author name, and date of check out. Readers are asked to return book within two weeks of checkout. The links to both the Goodreads page and google spreadsheet can be found on the Chellis House website. Happy reading!
In Science We Trust-Or Not?

by Maddie Orcutt

On January 13, Dr. Heidi Grasswick, the George Nye and Anne Walker Boardman Professor of Mental and Moral Science, gave an inaugural lecture in the Franklin Environmental Center at Hillcrest. Entitled “In Science We Trust-Or Not?”, Dr. Grasswick’s talk broadly explored the role that trust plays in science, where members of the public need to depend on scientists to provide specialized knowledge. Dr. Grasswick’s lecture began with an examination of instances of distrust in science, including within the anti-vaccine movement, discourses on climate change, and the Tuskegee syphilis study. Noting the gap between experts and laypersons, Dr. Grasswick posited that this problem is not merely one of differentials in scientific literacy, but is also a question of trust.

Based on research funded by a National Science Foundation grant, Dr. Grasswick noted the ways in which laypersons trust researchers to filter information, not only in terms of a study’s quality but also in terms of communicating its most significant results. Thus, the job of a researcher is not only to generate and produce knowledge, but also to communicate it to relevant audiences. To Dr. Grasswick, these insights prompted the following question: To whom do scientists hold themselves accountable?

In this vein, Dr. Grasswick’s analysis drew on feminist theories of the situatedness of knowledge, and discussed the ways in which the experiences of marginalized subjects may contribute to a warranted distrust of scientists. She offered the example of genetic research among the Havasupai, whereby researchers from Arizona State University used blood samples from research on diabetes for other purposes, especially for inquiries that contradicted Havasupai belief systems regarding their cultural origins. Dr. Grasswick noted that the Havasupai case demonstrates the dangers of trust-traveling, such as when multiple instances of trust betrayals or failures between the researcher and the researched might constitute a broader distrust of scientific inquiry.

At the end of Dr. Grasswick’s lecture, she was clear that she did not have any definitive answers to the problem that she presented. She did, however, offer some potential implications of her research. Dr. Grasswick stated that scientific literacy is not a simple solution for gaps between the scientific community and laypeople, particularly given the ways in which trust mediates the relationships between these groups. In this way, Dr. Grasswick noted that the scientific community needs to see itself not only as representatives of individual nodes of research, but also as representatives of larger institutions, histories, and practices. Indeed, she called for
researchers to both attend to legacies of injustice within science and to ensure that such failures of trust are not replicated in the future.

At the end of Dr. Grasswick’s lecture, she opened the room up for a question and answer session. President Laurie Patton noted the ways in which Dr. Grasswick’s research has influenced her desire to create a more robust sense of trust and community at Middlebury College. In addition to her interests in environmental philosophy and issues related to science and society, Dr. Grasswick regularly contributes to the Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies curriculum at Middlebury, particularly through her Feminist Epistemologies and Philosophy & Feminism courses. Dr. Grasswick’s lecture drew an interdisciplinary audience interested in scientific inquiry, philosophy, and/or feminist studies. Her lecture left the room reflecting upon scientists’ responsibilities beyond their own departments and institutions, particularly responsibilities located at the intersection of scientific expertise, testimony, and epistemic trust.

The 2015 Sister-to-Sister Summit

Middle school girls gather for the Sister-to-Sister Summit in November 2015.

An engineering activity using straws sparked imaginative projects.

Friendships are being formed and developed at the summit.

A trust fall activity encourages friendships among the girls.
On Friday, February 5th, GSFS major **Krystal Melendez** gave a presentation about her thesis, “The Roles of Women in Cherokee Creation Myths” at Chellis House. Krystal started off by grounding her work in Feminist Standpoint Theory, which views knowledge as socially situated and multifaceted and emphasizes the inclusion of the viewpoint of the marginalized. Krystal also defined Cherokee creation myths as contact zones, where two cultures meet to have a dialogue, but which are characterized by an imbalanced power dynamic.

First, Krystal talked about the Cherokee creation story, “Turtle Island.” She contrasted the versions of 18th century ethnographer James Mooney and 20th century author Wilma Mankiller, the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation. In James Mooney’s version, the woman was slapped with a fish by the brother and reproduced every 7 days and eventually stopped when the Earth was sufficiently populated. In Mankiller’s version, the first sister was touched by the fish. Krystal noted how Mooney’s version showed more violence towards women.

The second story was “The Origin of Strawberries.” Krystal contrasted contemporary writer Barbara Duncan’s version with James Mooney’s version. In Duncan’s version, a man and a woman get into a fight and the woman leaves. The man follows her by following white flowers. After they make up and leave, strawberries pop up behind them. Krystal discussed how Mooney’s version includes more aggression towards the woman, but how in both stories, the man and the woman have agency. However, Krystal also stated that it was a form of gender oppression that the woman was displaced from her home since in Cherokee culture the home is the woman’s domain.

The third story Krystal addressed was “Selu,” about a woman who produces corn with her body and ends up dying in Mooney’s and Cherokee writers Marilou Awiatka’s and Robert Francis’ versions. In Mooney’s version, Selu has a husband and son, and a boy named Wild Boy joins the family. Wild Boy and Little Boy cause mischief, and spy on Selu producing corn. They kill her because they think she is a witch. Selu tells them to drag her body seven times in a circle for corn to grow forever, but they don’t follow her instructions. As a result, human beings have had to cultivate corn, according to Cherokee myth. In Awiatka’s and Francis’ version, Selu is a grandmother with two grandsons, who secretly watch her produce grits from her body and feel disgust. This concerns her, and she eventually dies. Both Mooney’s and the Cherokee writers’ versions define a woman’s identity by what her body is able to do. James Mooney’s version, however, also has Selu killed.
On January 21, Dr. Octavian Robinson, Assistant Professor at the College of the Holy Cross College, came to Middlebury to give a talk about the history of the American deaf cultural community. He focused in particular on the phenomenon of deaf peddling and the deaf cultural community’s struggle for citizenship. One of the main points of this talk was to remind the audience how important it is to include deaf people in social justice concerns.

To start, Dr. Robinson began by offering a basic context of the deaf cultural community. It was clarified that the deaf community is made up of people who identify as culturally deaf—they attend deaf schools, use ASL as their primary language, and have their own cultural values, histories, folklore, literature, among other defining factors. Dr. Robinson also said that the community is tight knit, noting that everyone knows someone, or knows of someone.

Dr. Robinson then gave a historical overview of the promotion of oralism, the Eugenics Movement, and the lack of economic opportunities for the deaf cultural community from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. At the time, deaf cultural leaders understood that oralism—teaching lip-reading and oral speech—directly discouraged the use of ASL and undermined deaf cultural community ties. The Eugenics Movement sought to eliminate populations with “undesirable” traits, deaf people, among others. It significantly concerned deaf community members because it especially stigmatized them, making them more vulnerable to violent interventions, such as forced sterilizations, marriage bans, and employment discrimination. It threatened their already vulnerable status as citizens.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were also many forces undermining deaf people’s employment opportunities. These included technological changes (such as the telephone), industrialization, the influx of many people—including immigrants originally from outside the US—into urban areas, the rise of oralism, and the rise of eugenics. At this point, Dr. Robinson noted that elite deaf people raised this question: if we are not productive citizens, where do we stand in society?

To combat these issues, elite deaf people advocated for community uplift and self-help. In the 19th century, it was believed that the problems the deaf community was facing were not systemic, rather issues within the community. There was an expectation that the community should help and take care of its own—mainstream communities should not have that burden.

In this framework, deaf peddlers posed a real challenge to the advancement of the deaf community. They represented objects of pity and played on the sympathy of nondeaf people. The general public perceived deaf people as peddlers rather than working people. The deaf cultural community therefore had a harder time fighting...
these stigmas. Deaf leaders thought that peddlers also marked their deaf community as disabled, which meant “unable to work.”

From the 1880’s to 1910, the deaf cultural community took it upon itself to develop anti-peddling strategies. The rhetoric used was: “It’s okay for disabled people to peddle, but we, the deaf, do not beg, we are not disabled.” Deaf peddlers were shunned from schools, clubs, and other institutions for the deaf. Some deaf leaders started to notice that some peddlers were just pretending to be deaf or “disabled and deaf.” As a result, these leaders took up action on a local and state level. After 1910, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Imposter Bureau encouraged states to ban peddling. The deaf cultural community also started to prosecute those who peddled. They asked for badges to arrest people and interviewed the peddlers to tell if they were imposters or not. Federal legislation was put on hold due to the start of World War I.

Between the 1920’s and 1930’s, the deaf cultural community started to go after peddlers even more. However, due to the Great Depression progress stalled. 40% of deaf jobs were lost and those who once opposed peddlers began to peddle themselves. Still, the community did not want to be considered disabled. Once the war ended, beggar kings—leaders of criminal gangs who exploited deaf peddlers—began to rise, and the peddlers remained in poverty, since the “kings” kept the money.

At the end of the talk, implications of the research were discussed, such as intersectionality and disability.

International Women’s Day at Chellis House

On March 8th, 2016, Professor Tom Beyer’s class on 19th century Russian literature met at Chellis House to discuss female characters in Russian literature. They celebrated with roses and chocolate.
Peggy Nelson Retires!

After more than four decades of service to the college, Peggy Nelson, A. Barton Hepburn Professor of Sociology and for many years a core faculty member of GSFS, retired last December. We wish her all the best for her future and are looking forward to further scholarly work.

A hug among decade-long friends: Peggy Nelson and Burke Rochford.

Sujata Moorti talks about Peggy's pivotal role in our program.

Many faculty and staff colleagues came out to honor Peggy Nelson.

A retirement does not mean a farewell: Peggy Nelson will continue to work on her scholarship.

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