

Atlantic World Literacies: Before and After Contact
An International, Interdisciplinary Conference
Sponsored by the Atlantic World Research Network
<http://www.uncg.edu/eng/awrn/>

October 7-9, 2010

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Elliott University Center

Featured Speakers: **Laurent DuBois**, Professor of French and History, Duke University
Susan Manning, Professor of English, University of Edinburgh
Peter Mark, Professor of Art History and African-American Studies,
Wesleyan University
Julio Ortega, Professor of Hispanic Studies, Brown University

When Christopher Columbus departed from Palos in 1492 and set sail into the Ocean Sea, probably the most powerful substance that he carried—besides gunpowder and European bacteria—was ink. In sailing west to the East, Columbus was following what was written—in royal contracts and decrees, in codes of law, in the Bible. Yet he was going beyond what was written—off the map, outside the limits of Ptolemaic geography, over the uncharted sea. In the centuries before and after transatlantic contact, how did literacy spread and change? How did overseas travel help to transform the rare and elite skill of the scribe into a common condition of citizenship, and a marker of social, economic, and political advantage? How did Europeans, Africans, and Americans read each others' cultures, societies, and religions? How did they compose new cultural and economic forms within the emerging crucible of circumatlantic power relations?

Our conference will explore how different kinds of literacy, broadly defined, developed all around the Atlantic Rim before the Columbian era; consider the roles of writing, communication, and sign systems in the era of discovery, colonization, and conquest; and examine how transatlantic encounters and collisions birthed new literacies and literatures, and transformed existing ones. We will consider aural and visual communication, along with varied metaphorical, cultural, and technological “literacies.” How have oral traditions and “orature” interacted with written history and literature? How did unlettered peoples invent, adopt, expand, and sometimes resist or refuse literacy? How has literacy created and defined something called “illiteracy,” and even stirred critiques of “graphocentrism”? And how are new worlds—continents, races, classes, cultures, deities, sexes, sciences, technologies, even individual bodies—inscribed and read, seen and spoken?

[Four famed Atlantic World scholars](#) whose research covers the breadth of the Atlantic experience have accepted our invitation to join us as plenary speakers:

--**Laurent DuBois**, Professor of French and History at Duke University, expert on Caribbean creolization, Atlantic Enlightenments, and the Black Atlantic;

--**Susan Manning**, Professor of English at the University of Edinburgh, expert on the transatlantic Enlightenment and co-founder of STAR, Scotland's Transatlantic Relations;

--**Peter Mark**, Professor of Art History and African-American Studies at Wesleyan University, expert in African art and historian of Luso-African identity and cross-cultural literacy;

--**Julio Ortega**, Professor of Hispanic Studies at Brown University, Director of the Transatlantic Project at Brown dedicated to exploring the cultural history of exchange and hybridity between Spain and Latin American culture and literature.

--Atlantic World Literacies will be presented by the Atlantic World Research Network and sponsored by **University Provost David Perrin** and by **Tim Johnston, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences**.

--The conference will meet in the Elliott University Center, a state-of-the-art facility on the UNCG campus in the heart of Greensboro, an historic city which has witnessed the Revolutionary Battle of Guilford Courthouse in 1781, the collapse of the Confederate cabinet in 1865, and the birth of the Sit-In Movement in 1960.

--Blocks of rooms have been reserved at the **Proximity**, America's leading green hotel, and at the **Marriott Downtown Hotel**, both near the UNCG campus.

For registration details, check back at this site beginning at the end of April 2010.