

Call for Papers: Pasts/Presents/Futures – An Interdisciplinary Symposium
Center for Humanities Research, George Mason University, April 7-8, 2022



**Center for
Humanities
Research**

Keynote Speaker: Kara Keeling

(Professor, Department of Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago)

The Center for Humanities Research at George Mason University invites paper proposals from scholars in all humanities-related disciplines on the topic of “pasts/presents/futures.”

The experience of the pandemic brought with it a heightened awareness to the complexity of time. For some, it was an experience of what political theorist Elizabeth Povinelli might call the “durative present,” as normalcy, the way things were, the past, felt irretrievably lost, and a post-pandemic future unimaginable. And yet paradoxically, we’ve been confronted with the ways in which what we had assumed to be past, over and done with, in fact lives on in the present: the impassioned and world-wide Black Lives Matter protests made publicly visible the ways in which “past” racial violence infuses the present, what Saidiya Hartman has named the “afterlives of slavery.” The tenacity of the durative present also raises the question of how we begin to imagine a different future. Taken together these experiences remind us that time is neither natural nor fixed. Furthermore, conceptions of time have, historically, delimited what we are able—and unable—to see, lending certain events, peoples, and subjectivities visibility while pushing others into obscurity, affording some individuals and groups rights, privilege and social space, while depriving others of the same. Temporal formations can constrain, do violence, or create possibilities; they can be mobilized in ways that normalize, or as strategies of resistance. Temporality permeates humanistic studies across periods, disciplines, genres and geopolitical regions.

The Center for Humanities Research **invites paper proposals from faculty and advanced PhD candidates whose research takes up temporality or temporal encounters between pasts, presents, and futures in the broadest possible sense.** Papers might consider:

- In what ways have competing ideas about the past, present, or future been the source of political conflict (in any geographical context or historical period)? Might/have alternative notions of time offer(ed) resolutions to these conflicts?
- How does environmental justice advocacy invoke the past? the future?
- Do societies, religions, states, individuals have an “obligation” to the past? Is this obligation political? How do notions of futurity get invoked by societies, religions, states, individuals, and towards what ends?
- Is there an ethics of remembering? For whom? What forms does it take?
- What is the temporality of social change? How do movements for social justice engage notions of time?
- What has queer temporality enabled, and in what ways?
- To what extent are models of performativity predicated on notions of time?
- What is the time, or dominant temporality, of neoliberalism? How might/have temporal interventions undermine(d) its logics?
- What is the role of narrative in recuperating or resignifying the past or imagining the future?

Please submit a brief paper proposal/abstract (no more than 500 words), along with a brief CV, as a single file pdf by December 1, 2021. Also, **please indicate in the file you submit whether you would be able to attend 1. in person, 2. virtually only, or 3. either.** Please email the single pdf to chr@gmu.edu.

Conference format (virtual or hybrid) to be determined.

About our Keynote Speaker: *Professor Keeling’s research has focused on African American film, representations of race, sexuality, and gender in cinema, critical theory, and cultural studies. Keeling is the author of Queer Times, Black Futures (NYU UP, 2019) and The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense (Duke UP, 2007).*