History Department Announces February 21 “Disrupting White Supremacy” Teach-In

Faculty, students work together to plan educational event to provide historical context, origins, and trajectories of white supremacy

Ann Arbor, February 9, 2018—On February 21 the University of Michigan Department of History will hold “Disrupting White Supremacy: Global Histories and Local Struggles,” a teach-in dedicated to better understanding the global history of race. The event is free and open to the public and will take place 5-9 pm at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre on the U-M campus.

“As historians, we have been deeply concerned by the paucity of historical context in most public discussion of the resurgence of white nationalism and the rise of the alt-right,” said Professor Matthew Countryman, a member of the teach-in planning committee. “The teach-in will examine white supremacy not simply as a distortion of the nation’s democratic values, but as a global historical project that has been a driving force in structuring the modern world,” said Countryman.

The teach-in will consist of a series of lively ten-minute, historical vignettes. These topical presentations will address the role of white supremacy as a global force in modern history, the use and misuses of history by white supremacists, and why this history matters now. The goal is to provide intellectual tools that will enable students and citizens to better understand the historical claims and blind spots of the white supremacist movement.

Professor Anne Berg, a member of the teach-in planning committee, stressed the role of students in inspiring and planning the teach-in.

“There’s been lot of tension on campus in the past two years. In addition to everyday exclusions and micro aggressions, our community had to deal with racist flyers, defacements of dorm rooms, even physical and verbal attacks on minority students,” said Berg. “Despite their justified frustrations, students have been doing most of the productive disrupting so far. They’ve led us here.”

“Rooting our collective struggle for true humanism in knowledge, rather than solely in moral outrage, is critical to our success,” said Professor Rudolph “Butch” Ware, a member of the planning committee. “Finding an effective remedy to contemporary white supremacy begins with an accurate diagnosis of the origins and evolution of this spiritual and social sickness.”

A number of faculty and students are confirmed to present, including: Maryam Aziz, Anne Berg, Stephen Berrey, Matthew Countryman, Geoff Eley, Katherine French, Allan Lumba, Austin McCoy, Hoai An Pham, Rebecca Scott, Taylor Sims, Matthew Spooner, Alexandra Minna Stern, and Rudolph “Butch” Ware. Topics range from “White Supremacists’ Medieval Fantasies” to “Freedom in a World of Slavery, from Columbus to Charlottesville.” There will be opportunity for audience dialog and moderated questions.

The teach-in will be livestreamed for those unable to attend in person. For additional information and for a full program of speakers, topics, educational resources, and media tools, visit bit.ly/um-disrupting (note: the event program is still being finalized; the website will be updated accordingly).

“Disrupting White Supremacy” is sponsored by the Department of History (lsa.umich.edu/history), LSA Democracy in Action Fund (myumi.ch/lsademocracy), and a growing list of other University of Michigan departments and units.

The University of Michigan Department of History is a global, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary program that combines state-of-the-art research with innovative teaching and a commitment to embrace all the diversity of the past.

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