

Howard Ramsby II (English Languages & Literature)

2010-2014

“Mixed Media Exhibits & Blog Posts Concerning African Americans & Urban Spaces: Black Consciousness and City Space



"Black Consciousness and City Space" involved SIUE Black Studies participants in the production of mixed media exhibits and a series of collective blog posts concerning the challenges and opportunities confronting African Americans in cities. The project is specifically designed to raise awareness about how studying and producing documentary and artistic compositions about black American engagements with urban spaces during the contemporary era might enhance cultural knowledge, creative abilities, and analytical skills. The exhibits were produced in the fall of 2010.

ESLARP Coordinator Assignment:

Summer 2013, Spring 2014, Fall 2014

Winner: 2014-15 Meridian Award (\$1,000) “ESLARP History Preservation & Digitization Project”



Howard Ramsby II (English L&L) “Mixed Media Exhibits & Blog Posts Concerning African Americans & Urban Spaces: Black Consciousness and City Space”

GRANT APPLICATION SUBMITTED: Proposal Information: Submitted to State Farm YAB – July 2014

Program Title: East St. Louis Mixed Media Exhibit Series

Summary:

The “East St. Louis Mixed Media Exhibit Series” (the East St. Louis Series) is a yearlong sequence of exhibits focusing on African American literature, artistic culture, and history. The series of exhibits were displayed for students at the SIUE/East St. Louis Charter School. The exhibits exposed high school students to a broad range of information concerning African American artists, artifacts, and artistic compositions. The exhibits utilized audio digital devices that allowed participants to listen to recordings of poems and commentary about materials in the exhibits. Overall, the project encompassed diverse auditory, visual, and reading experiences. Curated by Howard Ramsby, a college professor, specialist in African American literary studies, and Coordinator of the East St. Louis Action Research Project, the project also involved additional literature scholars and college students in the initial design of the exhibits. During the course of the project, the high school students became more active participants in the production of each of the exhibits, providing assistance with the selection of materials and with the commentary. The organizers coordinated questionnaires and interest survey forms before and after each exhibit that targeted concerns, inquiries, and interests of the students. In order to stimulate local pride and knowledge, select panels in the exhibit highlighted aspects of East St. Louis, the hometown of the target participants. The panels showcased maps, historic buildings and photographs, and creative writings related to the city. Given the paucity of educational and artistic compositions featuring East St. Louis, this aspect of the exhibit was particularly important. The project provides college student exhibit contributors with an important service-learning opportunity that allows them to assist in the production of a useful educational project for high school students. Intended Outcomes The East St. Louis Series concentrates on building awareness of African American literary, visual, and verbal arts among high school students and provides them with opportunities to experience artistic materials in an exhibit or gallery-style format. The students at the SIUE/East St. Louis Charter School

have almost no access to up-to-date, mixed media arts and humanities projects that showcase African American literature, culture, and East St. Louis. Thus, the East St. Louis Series presents the students with a unique and notable sequence of humanities learning experiences. The project is designed to make high school students more aware of the educational and intellectual benefits of examining artistic compositions, especially compositions associated with African American literature and visual art. Students also became aware of the possibilities of envisioning aspects of their city in artistic terms as some selections in the series of exhibits showcased East St. Louis. The project is also designed to prompt interest in studying the humanities and attending college as the high school students were made aware that college students collaborated on the production the commentary for the series of exhibits. The East St. Louis Series intends to provide college students with a remarkable service-learning experience. Few, if any, service-learning projects at the university allow students to participate in the production of humanities projects, especially projects focusing on African American literary art and East St. Louis. Consequently, this project empowered college students to serve high school students by providing commentary on artistic compositions and the history and culture of a distinct city with limited resources. By analyzing and producing exhibits based on the high school student surveys, the college students also participated in useful learning experiences about the community that they are serving.

East St. Louis Action Network

Public programs and activities related to East St. Louis Action Network are coordinated by the IUR's Urban Research Scholar and ESLARP Coordinator, Dr. Howard Rambsy. For information, contact Dr. Rambsy at hrambsy@siue.edu.

About ESLARP

The East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) began in 1987 and was led by student, faculty, and staff from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. ESLARP facilitated service projects that sought to improve neighborhoods and communities in East St. Louis, Alorton, Brooklyn, Centerville, and Washington Park, Illinois. Faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign affiliated with ESLARP offered courses pertaining to East St. Louis, and students participated in outreach weekends, which gave students opportunities to work with organizers and local residents in East St. Louis and the region on service projects.

Over the last few years, responsibilities for the project transferred to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Institute for Urban Research. So far, we have worked on service projects and have begun reaching out to community organizations to coordinate service programs in the community.

In 2013-2014, our most involved service project was with the Katherine Dunham Museum in East St. Louis. On different occasions during the academic year, faculty and student volunteers assisted in retrieving and sorting materials from Dunham's prior residential homes, and we transferred the materials to the basement of the Dunham museum. Later, we constructed shelves for additional storage at the museum and re-organized boxes and other materials in the basement of the museum.

In 2014-2015, we will pursue two major projects.

The Lessie Bates Neighborhood House Preservation Project – we will participate in an extensive technological and preservation project related to the Lessie Bates Neighborhood House, a comprehensive social services organization based in East St. Louis. Through a grant that we were awarded from the Meridian Society, we will scan, organize, and digitally store over 1,000 photographs from the Neighborhood House's special collection. The photographs were taken between the 1910s and late 1990s.

East St. Louis Humanities Project – we will produce a series of arts and humanities materials and coordinate a series of activities related to important sites and historical buildings in East St. Louis. For one, we will

produce weekly blog entries related to the city. We will also coordinate informational sessions and small exhibits concerning East St. Louis for groups of SIUE students and students at the SIUE/East St. Louis Charter High School. The materials and activities are designed to raise awareness about the history of East St. Louis and the possibilities of using arts and humanities to enhance views of a city.

For additional information, email the Project Coordinator Dr. Howard Ramsby II at hrambsy@siue.edu.

EUGENE REDMOND COLLECTION

Howard was instrumental in establishing the University's collection of materials from Eugene Redmond; photographs, manuscripts, and letters currently transferred and archived.

Howard arranged the first ever exhibition of Eugene Redmond's photography, which included a dramatic picture of Toni Morrison and Sonia Sanchez.