

The Bill and Carol Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry Emory University



2023-2024 Georgia Seminar

Private pain, public memory: Mental health in the shadow of Milledgeville

Moderated by Dr. Kylie Smith
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October 3, 10, 17, & 24, 2023 • 6:30pm-8pm



Central State Hospital, or Milledgeville Asylum, looms large in the public life and memory of Georgia. It symbolizes more than just a “mental hospital” – it is a town, a community, and the stuff of legend. Much has been written about the connections between Milledgeville and other aspects of Georgia’s cultural and social life, and the remains of Central State Hospital are now a site of contested memory. Building on my own work as part of my monograph “Jim Crow in the Asylum: Psychiatry and Civil Rights in the American South”, this seminar will tease out some of the ways that the legacy of Milledgeville continues to raise both private and public ethical issues for the history and present of mental health services in Georgia today.

This Georgia Seminar will meet at The Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry @ Emory University from on the following **Tuesday evenings during the 2023 fall semester: October 3, 10, 17, & 24, from 6:30pm-8pm.** Participants are expected to attend all four sessions. For further information and to reserve a spot on a “first-come basis,” email the Fox Center at foxcenter@emory.edu. Everyone from the Atlanta community is welcome and invited to join us for this free seminar.

Proposed Sessions:

1. Exposing Milledgeville. Using the Jack Nelson collection from the Rose library and AJC archives we will look at the effect of public exposes on the large state hospital in Milledgeville and explore the impact of other legislation like the Civil Rights Act and Community Mental Health on the “deinstitutionalization” process in Georgia. What have been the consequences of deinstitutionalization and what are some of its limitations?
2. Lost Children in the Archive: The legacy of *JL, JR v Parham*. In 1976 the ACLU and Southern Center for Human Rights bought a major class action against Milledgeville hospital in order to get more than 400 children released from the hospital. It was a complicated case that went all the way to SCOTUS. The formal court records, including 100 case files of children represented, are housed at the NARA Southeast Office here in Atlanta. Along with a social worker and the lawyer who argued the SCOTUS case, we will look at some of the material from the case and think through the ethics of writing about (and dealing with) children in the history of psychiatry.
3. Race and Policing. Here we will pair up with two important Black mental health professionals, one from Grady Hospital and the other a private psychotherapist, to consider the impact of deinstitutionalization on Black people in Atlanta, the historical link to redlining, and the impact of the new House Bill 1013 which reinforces the role of police in mental health crisis situations. Will new measures be enough to counter the internal racism of psychiatry, and what does Atlanta really need to deal with the mental health crisis?
4. Historical therapeutics and the ethics of memory: Milledgeville is a site of contested memory. Many people consider it a site of morbid tourism, while others are desperate to find missing family records. Where are those records, and how do people get them? What should be done with the old asylum, and what do we owe the people who lived and died there?

We are grateful to Georgia Humanities for its support of this program. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in these seminars do not necessarily reflect those of Georgia Humanities.