

End-of-Year Report

Submitted to The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

From Dr. Rosamond S. King, Geraldine R. Dodge Postdoctoral Fellow, 2002-2004

My first year as the Geraldine R. Dodge Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience (IECME) has been a productive one. I have contributed to the IECME's programming and pursued my own research, thus fulfilling the goals of the fellowship.

Programming

I am pleased to have assisted with this year's development and growth of the IECME's programs. My greatest contribution to programming was conceiving of the popular "Newark Reads Du Bois" project, which was generously supported by a separate Dodge grant, and which I have detailed in a separate report. I will say here that the Dodge Postdoctoral Fellowship enabled me to realize a large public project – distributing a significant number of free books and having a variety of programs facilitate intellectual discussion related to a book – which I had dreamed of for several years. The implementation of the project taught me a lot about Newark – traveling to the ten branches of the Newark Public Library is itself an education. I am also proud that the "Newark Reads" concept may become a tradition, a legacy I can leave to the city.

I also helped research speakers and topics for the Fall "City Children and Their Cultures" program and provided the greeting for the 2002 Rodrigues Lecture. Attending IECME programs showed me that this academic entity not only "talks the talk," but also "walks the walk" of public scholarship. As part of my orientation to the City of Newark, the IECME's Program Manager arranged for me to meet with a number of civic and artistic leaders, including the staff of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, New Community Corporation, and the Newark Public Library. All were excited about potential collaborations with the IECME, which is a great model of university-civic partnership that I will share with other institutions.

Scholarship

I expected, as the Dodge Fellow, to have an office, a computer, and time to conduct my research. I did not expect to be quickly integrated into a supportive and challenging intellectual community. The scholars affiliated with the IECME are some of the sharpest on Rutgers' campus, and are engaged in some of the most exciting research. They have asked about my own work not to be polite, but to learn about and discuss my ideas.

Most of my research time this year was spent developing ideas about avant-garde literature of the African diaspora. An abstract of this research is attached. I presented some of this work as "Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere: Form, context, and content in avant-garde black writing" during an IECME faculty colloquium, and I received useful feedback from the other scholars who attended. I am presenting a talk on Marlene Nourbese Philip – an experimental poet from Tobago – which arose from my research at this year's Caribbean Studies Association Conference in Belize. Due to lack of resources I was never able to attend this conference before; I am looking forward to networking with colleagues, receiving feedback on my research, and learning from others.

I am also pleased to have been accepted into the National Endowment for the Humanities Faculty Seminar "Caribbean Theatre and Cultural Performance," which will take place this July at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras. There, I will develop a framework for a project on transvestism in Caribbean literature and street performances of Caribbean Carnival, which will involve a scholarly paper and a public event. As you may know, NEH seminars are extremely competitive; I believe the public component of my work, putting into practice an ideal shared by the IECME and Dodge, distinguished my application from others. Again, Dodge research funds are enabling me to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Academia, like most sectors, is experiencing cutbacks and financial difficulties. I was pleased, in such a climate, that Long Island University's English Department not only offered me a tenure-track position teaching African diaspora literature, but also agreed to let me defer my start-date for a year – something they have never done before.

Conclusion

2002-2003 was a busy year for me as the Geraldine R. Dodge Postdoctoral Fellow at the IECME, a year that has been both a privilege and a pleasure. The one danger of this opportunity is that participation in the planning and execution of IECME's exciting events can leave less time for research. Nevertheless, I am optimistic that next year will be as, if not more productive than this year, both for myself and for the Institute.

Many thanks to the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for supporting this important fellowship.