

Media Relations

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One of Greatest Living Historians Presents UNH Dunfey Lecture Oct. 18



Natalie Zemon Davis.

DURHAM, N.H. – Natalie Zemon Davis, who is considered one of the greatest living historians, will present the 2012 Dunfey lecture at the University of New Hampshire Thursday, Oct. 18, 2012, discussing how slaves and masters in 18th century Suriname communicated with each other.

"Dealing with Strangeness: Language and Information Flow in an Early Modern Slave Society" will be held from

5 to 6 p.m. in the Memorial Union Building, Theatre I. The lecture is free and open to the public. According to Jeffry Diefendorf, professor of history at UNH and the Pamela Shulman Professor of European and Holocaust Studies, Davis was the second woman elected as president of the American Historical Association.

"The election of Davis marked both the greater influence of women historians in our profession and the rising interest in micro-history. In addition, not only is her work very widely cited, she has a remarkable ability to engage on an individual basis with a vast number of scholars and graduate students not only in the United States and Canada, but in Europe as well," Diefendorf said.

Davis, a professor of history at the University of Toronto, will discuss the language and practices of translation among slaves and masters in the plantation society of 18th century Suriname. According to Zemon Davis, slaves from different parts of western Africa created a creole language to talk to each other, and two dictionaries were produced of that language through collaboration between free white men and slaves.

The historian will discuss what did each group learned of the other, and whether the flow of information or its silencing facilitated resistance or oppression. The lecture concludes with a discussion about two 19th century figures who used language for cultural affirmation: a former slave who wrote about Yoruba and a pioneering European linguist who studied the Suriname creole.

Davis is a social and cultural historian of early modern times. She has written on peasants and artisans in early modern France; on women in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Quebec; on criminality and storytelling in 16th century France; on forms of gift-giving in early modern times; and on Muslims and Christians in 16th century Europe.

She is the author of eight books, all of them translated into various foreign languages: "Society and Culture in Early Modern France"; "The Return of Martin Guerre"; "Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales in Sixteenth-Century France"; "Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives"; "The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France"; "Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision"; "L'histoire tout

feu tout flame: Entretiens avec Denis Crouzet”; and “Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds.”

She has taught at the University of Toronto, the University of California at Berkeley, and Princeton University, where she was Henry Charles Lea Professor of History and Director of the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies. A former president of the American Historical Association, she is also a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a corresponding fellow of the British Academy, and Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Academique. She is the recipient of various honorary degrees, including from Harvard University, University of Toronto, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Cambridge University, Universite de Lyon, and Oxford University. Emerita from Princeton University, Davis is an adjunct professor of history and professor of medieval studies at the University of Toronto.

The conference is sponsored by the UNH Department of History and made possible with support of the William L. Dunfey Endowment at UNH. For more information on the lecture, visit www.unh.edu/history/dunfey2012.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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