

Rhodes Wins Radcliffe Fellowship

Jane Rhodes, American studies professor and Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, has been awarded a coveted year-long fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard.



Jane Rhodes at Macalester's Civic Forum

American studies professor Jane Rhodes was curious when her phone rang and the caller ID read “Harvard.” They were calling to say that she had been selected by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard for a highly coveted fellowship. Previous Radcliffe Institute fellows include author Alice Walker, psychologist Carol Gilligan, former Vermont governor and U.S. ambassador Madeleine Kunin, and playwright and actor Anna Deavere Smith.

The fellowship is so competitive—last year there was a six percent acceptance rate—because it is a scholar’s dream come true—a year to focus on a project and research in the company of other dedicated scholars. Rhodes will be researching someone whose life has fascinated her for many years, Marie Battle Singer.

Marie Battle Singer grew up in the Deep South during the Jim Crow era. She attended Boston University and earned an MSW at Smith College, but there were no jobs open to African American social workers.

“Out of frustration, she took off for Germany to join an international refugee organization working with the millions of displaced persons in post-World War II Europe,” says Rhodes. “Enthralled with the psychology of this work, she applied to work with Anna Freud in Britain. There she went on to earn a doctorate at the University of London and became one of the founders of child psychoanalysis.”

Battle Singer had a psychoanalytic practice in London, became a fellow at Cambridge University, and married a younger Scottish poet. She became the rare African American of the time who moved in both elite psychoanalytic and literary circles. Rhodes finds irresistible the insights her life provides into life as a black expatriate, post-World War II Europe, and the flow of ideas between Europe and the U.S. Rhodes and history professor Lynn Hudson collaborated on the early research; now this fellowship will allow Rhodes to immerse herself in the work. Battle Singer is a distant relative of Rhodes, and that trail has taken her not only to London and Cambridge, but to a musty trunk of family correspondence.

“The most exciting aspect of the fellowship is unfettered time to dig into this project,” says Rhodes. “Other than giving one talk and attending colloquia by the other fellows, I am free to devote my time to research—completing critical oral histories and archival research, and writing the beginning chapters of a book-length manuscript.”

Rhodes’ future students will benefit as this research enriches Rhodes’ courses on transnational American Studies and African American Studies. Rhodes, who is also Macalester’s Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, sees this scholarly project as a way to help bring together the college’s ideals of internationalism

and multiculturalism.

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