

Barbara Ladd

"Beyond the Plantation: Writing at the Edge of the Swamp"

ABSTRACT

Over the past couple of decades, the territorial imaginaries of southern literature and literary histories have proliferated. Tidewater, Deep South, the Piedmont—the geographical (and class) markers of work done in the mid-20th century in southern literary studies—are seldom heard any longer, although they remain salient for historians, political scientists, and demographers; and perhaps they should be of more interest to literary historians as well. What do we hear: Coastal Souths, the Rural South, the Black Belt, Urban Souths, Border Souths, Virtual, and “Reel” Souths, the American South and the U.S. South (different), and (everywhere you turn) the Global South, or, more accurately, the “Global American South,” with its deep (and sometimes unacknowledged) commitment to the idea of the Plantation as the predominant site and trope for discussions of U.S. southern culture. No one would deny that the Plantation is one very significant site for explorations of southern literature and literary history, and one with global relevance, but its narrative of race and class in the South, and in southern literature, is oversimplified and static. In this talk, Professor Ladd will trouble this narrative, exploring some of the complexities of race and class in southern literature.