

2019-2020 Humanities Center Brown Bag Series

Gardening, Memory, and Wellbeing in Later Life: Comparative Insights from Ethnographic Research in Poland and Detroit

In this talk, I explore new directions for understanding memory and wellbeing among older adults living in postindustrial urban contexts. Two distinct ethnographic studies—one on memory and personhood among older allotment gardeners in Poland, and the other on gardening and wellbeing among older African Americans in Detroit—show that the collective past shapes possibilities for wellbeing in the present. In Poland, practices of gardening involve collective memories that intertwine home and nation, thus sustaining personhood (Robbins-Ruszkowski 2017). In Detroit, gardening fosters connections with the past, as gardeners are reminded of deceased loved ones through practices and the plants themselves. These intimate connections and everyday activities are situated in racialized histories of migration, disinvestment, and “revitalization,” even as they provide the means to cultivate life in the present (Robbins and Seibel 2019). This talk works to develop comparative insights on aging, memory, and wellbeing that include person-plant relations, embodied memory, and the moral imagination.

FREE AND OPEN
TO THE PUBLIC

WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY



Wednesday, February 12, 2020

12:30PM—1:30PM

Rm. 2339

Faculty Administration Building



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Dr. Jessica C. Robbins is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Gerontology and Department of Anthropology at Wayne State University. Her research explores aging, memory, kinship, and personhood in historical political-economic perspective, in both postsocialist Poland and postindustrial Michigan.

Photo credit: Walking at allotment gardens in Wrocław (Photo by Jessica Robbins)

Photo credit: Cultivating annuals in Detroit (Photo by Kimberly Seibel)