



THE FROMM INSTITUTE  
FOR LIFELONG LEARNING  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

# FROMM FOCUS

The Newsletter of the Fromm Institute

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## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: WELCOME BACK

This week, Prof. Lois Spatz answers our questions in her own words. Prof. Spatz taught classics at The Fromm Institute for over a decade. Regrettably, for the Fromm Institute and her loyal students, Prof. Spatz relocated to New York City and, after a short retirement, began a pilot program similar to The Fromm Institute in her co-op. A pandemic hit, and our classes went virtual, and we had the opportunity to invite a favorite Fromm Institute faculty member back via Zoom. For those of you who knew her years ago and for those students just meeting her for the first time, read on to learn more about Prof. Lois Spatz.

*I was lucky to be born into a loving and supportive family. Because I was the only girl, with three brothers, I enjoyed what I used to call 'benign neglect.' No one cared what I studied because no one expected me to go to work. I fell in love with reading and learning, and did very well in school.*

*I stayed home in Baltimore for college, but I was fortunate to have two excellent schools to go to. My undergraduate degree comes from Goucher College, then only for women. There I was encouraged to pursue my academic interests and think in terms of a career. Majoring in Classical Languages and Literature meant I would be a high-school Latin teacher. So I went to the Johns Hopkins University to get a Master of Arts in Teaching. At Hopkins, I took a semester in their renowned graduate classics department and realized I wanted to be a university professor instead.*

*I chose Indiana University because I could study with a professor interested in metrics of classical poetry. There, I met my husband who was also a graduate student. When he completed his degree in English, we moved to his first job at Brooklyn College, where I was an adjunct in the classics department while I worked on my dissertation. When we later moved to the University of Missouri-Kansas City a few years later, we managed two jobs and two children by sharing parenting and supporting each other's careers. And I was able to develop a full interdisciplinary classical and ancient studies major at UMKC with colleagues from history, philosophy, art, and Jewish Studies.*

*Retirement has given me a whole new life. We moved to San Francisco when both sons were sure they would not live in Kansas City. But I continued teaching, first at San Francisco State, and then at Fromm, which was the most enjoyable teaching job I ever had. After eleven years, my husband said he wanted to go home to New York. So here we are, where I started a free school modelled on the Fromm Institute and taught by volunteer professionals and professors from our co-op. And I am still teaching classics here, and now, very happily, in San Francisco again on Zoom.*

### IS THERE A PERSON LIVING OR DEAD THAT HAS HAD A GREAT INFLUENCE ON YOUR LIFE?

Lots of teachers and friends, our sons, and, of course, my husband of 58 years. But I think first of my father because he always loved me as I was and encouraged my interests and best behavior. He was so proud of me and kept up with everything I did. He was also kind and fair to everyone.

Good provider, good husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather, friend, and advisor to others, much missed by those who knew him well. I try to be as open-minded and resilient as he was.

### **WERE YOU EVER INCLINED TO FOLLOW A DIFFERENT CAREER PATH?**

Not really. I liked learning and talking about Greece and Rome too much. But the year I came up for tenure, the dean thought Classics and a Second Professor Spatz were both expendable. Trying to gather support, I discovered I had skills in public relations, advertising, and campaigning. I find myself using those qualities now in my co-op complex in New York.

### **WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST?**

Being a good listener. And waiting long enough before interrupting to hear the other person's answer. It's very hard not to define different persons as 'other' and to prejudge their words or be unwilling to listen. But I keep trying.

### **WHAT DO YOU VALUE LEAST?**

People who are very certain they know the best thing to do in any situation and quickly judge other people by what they are so sure is the only right way to behave.

### **IN A TIME MACHINE TO WHAT PLACE WOULD YOU TRAVEL?**

Although I am fascinated by antiquity, I don't want to go into the distant past. I would love to revisit especially happy times in my own life, like 1994 and 1998 when we lived in London for long stretches, and travelled easily around Europe.

### **WHAT LIES AHEAD IN YOUR FUTURE?**

Trying to stay resilient, whatever happens. That means staying active physically and mentally, finding things I enjoy doing with people I enjoy being with. And travelling to other countries as long as I can.

### **WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO AND/OR TEACHING AT THE FROMM INSTITUTE?**

An easy question. I miss most the good friends I made here and the close relationship we had with our cousins, one of whom also teaches here. I also miss the students and staff of Fromm, from who I learned so much. Believe it or not, I very much miss San Francisco weather too. When we retired from UMKC, I vowed I would never live in a place with high heat and humidity or snow and ice storms again, yet here I am.

### **IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WERE ESPECIALLY EXCITED ABOUT OR NERVOUS ABOUT WHEN YOU SET UP A PROGRAM SIMILAR TO THE FROMM INSTITUTE, IN YOUR CO-OP, AFTER YOU MOVED TO NEW YORK CITY?**

I wanted to volunteer in some way in NYC and thought I might join my new community by creating one in my eight-building co-op. I began by just putting up signs to invite interested people to a free 6-week class on the Iliad in my building playroom. I happily did three new semesters this way, attracting too many students for our

little room. But I only got nervous when other resident professors asked if they could also offer a course and urged me to expand the program.

I wrote to Robert Fordham for advice. He made valuable suggestions and assured me we would find enough interested residents. He was right. A few retired professors worked to solicit classes, get free spaces, and find more volunteers to help plan, schedule, advertise, and present several courses a month.

As we grew, I grew more anxious; I was holding most of it together as manager. After the Covid shut-in, we moved to Zoom and Eventbrite. And needed more technical help. Since then, I have been nervous all the time. To prepare this course, I needed a leave of absence and set up a team to replace me. Now that they have succeeded, I feel very relieved. Managing volunteers is a challenge and I like the classroom so much better!

## EXPRESS YOURSELF



**Robert Moon** has written a two part essay on the work of African American composer William Grant Still. This week, we publish part one with part two following next week. Submissions to **Express Yourself** are accepted on a rolling basis and can be articles, opinion pieces or notes, written by you, the students or others in the Fromm Institute family, who want to share something with the larger community. Email your submissions to **Scott Moules** in the Fromm Institute office ([moules@usfca.edu](mailto:moules@usfca.edu) or [fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)).

## Musicians of Color: William Grant Still

*By Robert Moon*

*The Dean of African-American Classical Composers*

*William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions by Catherine Parsons Smith, University of California Press, 2000.*

It would be easy to write the story of composer William Grant Still (1895-1978) in terms of his historical achievements—the first African-American to have a symphony performed by a major symphony orchestra (Afro-American Symphony in 1930); the first to conduct a major American symphony orchestra (Los Angeles Philharmonic in the Hollywood Bowl 1936) and the first to have his opera performed (Troubled Island in 1949 by the New York City Opera). These facts and many other awards and achievements have earned him the title of the Dean of African-American classical composers.

But the more interesting and relevant story is to frame his life in the context of his struggle to balance his identity as a black composer of concert music and opera with his “commercial music career, his black music heritage, the Harlem Renaissance, musical modernism and American music nationalism.” And underlying all these identities is the systemic racism that pervaded America during his lifetime. He was born in Mississippi into an educated middle class family (teachers and musicians), and despite his father’s death at an early age, was able to attend the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he was held in such high esteem that the faculty created a scholarship for him.



**William Grant Still, known as “The Dean of African-American music.”**

When he graduated the only avenue available to him as a black composer was to perform and arrange music for integrated orchestras (violin, cello and oboe). He arranged music and worked with W.C. Handy (‘father of the blues’), Paul Whiteman, Artie Shaw and others. He conducted and arranged for the Deep River hour for CBS and WOR radio. More significantly, he played oboe for the Shuffle Along Orchestra (1921) a Vaudeville product of the Harlem Renaissance cultural boom that “initiated a new era of black musicals in the 1920’s.” It raised the sophistication of minstrel shows and garnered

more respect for Afro-American music, especially from white audiences. Still’s contribution to the Harlem renaissance as a performer, arranger and conductor contributed immensely as a “quintessential element of our diverse American culture.”

But Still never wavered in his mission to become a black classical composer: he produced symphonies, operas and ballets throughout his life. He received scholarships to study with American composer George Chadwick and famed European modernist Edgar Varese. Yet, he also knew that the modern idiom of atonality would never be accepted by white or black audiences and that he could not deny his African-American musical heritage. Instead he decided to merge that heritage with the modern and Classical symphonic language to create a fusion of diverse musical cultures that would result in an American style of music.

Still put it this way, “I feel that it is best for me to confine myself to composition of a racial nature. The music of my people is the music I understand best. It offers the medium through which I can express myself with greater clarity and ease. Then too, I am convinced that the time has arrived when the Negro composer must turn from the recording of Spirituals to the development of the contributions of his race, and to the work of elevating them to higher artistic planes.”

It’s what Dvorak had discovered in his journey to the United States in the late 1800’s: that black and Indian American folk music could be the basis of a new American style of music. It’s what Janacek and Bartok and many other composers did when they combined indigenous folk music with classical techniques to create a new national and international musical language.

Robert Moon is author of [Copland, Gershwin & Bernstein: Celebrating American Diversity](#) and can be reached at [moon2780@comcast.net](mailto:moon2780@comcast.net).

FOR NEWS FROM YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION PLEASE VISIT <https://www.frommfisa.org/>

## FROM THE FROMM INSTITUTE STUDENT ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY TASK FORCE

### MAY IS ASIAN PACIFIC HERITAGE MONTH

The Fromm Institute Student Association Diversity Task Force would like to share with you these events which celebrate Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month throughout San Francisco this May. Below is the link to the online portal of events, performances, exhibits and lectures.

#### [Asian Pacific American Heritage Month - San Francisco](#)

San Francisco Celebrates Asian Pacific American Heritage Month now - May 2021.

The Fromm Institute Diversity Taskforce invites Frommies and friends to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month through the wide range of wonderful programs offered by many organizations including the SF Public Library, Asian Art Museum and other major civic organizations.

Please check out the celebration website at [www.apasf.org](http://www.apasf.org)

FISA Diversity Taskforce Resources see our You Tube playlist at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/5cey97sn>



# CONVERSATORY ON RACISM WITH PROF. MARA KOLESAS

Friday, May 21, 2021 at 2pm

Perpetual Foreigner - Anti-Asian Hate and What We Can Do About It  
Karen Umemoto in Conversation with Mara Kolesas



Karen Umemoto is the Helen and Morgan Chu Endowed Director's Chair of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. She received her Master's degree in Asian American Studies from UCLA and her Ph.D. in Urban Studies from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She worked as a professor at the University of Hawaii for 22 years before returning to her alma mater with a joint position in Asian American Studies and Urban Planning. Her research centers on issues of democracy and social justice in multicultural societies with a focus on US cities. She also examines and pursues planning processes that include a diverse array of voices, acknowledges different ways of knowing, and allows for meaningful deliberations. She is equally concerned about the structural, procedural and relational obstacles to attaining a just and democratic society. Her research and practice thus takes a broad view of planning in the context of social inclusion, participatory democracy and political transformation.

[REGISTER HERE](#) (Free and Open to the Public)

[REGISTER HERE](#) for the Discussion Group at 3:45 pm

## UNMUTED: THE 22ND THACHER ART + ARCHITECTURE ANNUAL

May 7 – July 30, 2021

*Online exhibition and programs, Thacher Gallery, University of San Francisco*

Following a year during which our collective interactions have primarily occurred virtually, the 22nd Thacher Annual playfully responds to the now ubiquitous phrase, "You're on mute!" While the impacts of the pandemic have left many feeling disconnected and stifled, Unmuted provides a platform for University of San Francisco student artists to speak out, express themselves, and let their creative voices be heard.

The exhibition presents 64 works by junior and senior majors and minors from USF's Department of Art + Architecture. With themes ranging from isolation to our dependence on the natural environment, the featured works represent an honest vocalization of emotions, experiences, and discoveries made during the silence of the pandemic. Through these artworks, viewers are invited to reflect on their own experiences during the past year.

[View the Virtual Exhibition](#)

[Enter the Unmuted 3D exhibition and choose between a self-guided or guided tour.](#)

## POETRY FOR A PANDEMIC

This week we feature a poem by Fromm Institute member **Bree Brown**. If you would like to share your poetry which you've written during this COVID pandemic please submit your work to **Scott Moules** either at [moules@usfca.edu](mailto:moules@usfca.edu) or [fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu).

### ADVICE TO A YOUNG PERSON WHO IS FEELING ALONE RIGHT NOW DURING THE PANDEMIC

First I'll say I'm sorry that you are hurting right now. For me when I feel alone it makes me feel disconnected, confused, and scared.

God knows lots of us have been feeling like this during this so very difficult time with the Pandemic which slammed into our lives at lightning speed with little warning and no understanding of who we would be in this new, strange *Land-of-COVID*.

But this is about me offering you some words of support and kindness.

I guess what I really hope is that you can believe me when I tell you that you are wonderful, important, and needed.

How do I know this without actually knowing you?

Because you are connected to this big feeling of aloneness – such a human feeling for any of us at any time let alone during this extraordinarily hard time. That you are in touch with how you feel right now and willing to feel what can bring so much sadness and despair – such hard feelings to sit with and be with tells me you are connected deeply to yourself.

My advice to you is this:

Do what for YOU would be the most compassionate thing you could possibly do right now to comfort yourself and to take care of yourself.

In Buddhist practice it's sometimes said this way:

*What is the most compassionate thing I can do for this person who is feeling alone right*

## POETRY FOR A PANDEMIC

now? And *this person* is **you**.

And then — **Do that**.

No judgments allowed.

No believing the mind-telling you things like: “You can’t do that because...” or

“No, that won’t help” or

“No, that’s silly, that won’t make a difference.”

Don’t listen to those negative voices – they’re lies. They aren’t helpful and they don’t care about you – not one bit. All they do is make you feel terrible about yourself – just a big bully trying to beat you down when what you need most now is to feel loved, and appreciated, and heard.

So let yourself be heard.

And do what you told yourself to do when you asked the question:

*What is the most compassionate thing I can do to comfort myself and take care of myself right now in this very moment?*

Do that.

And then call me.

And we’ll talk about how you’re feeling then and see if you’re still feeling alone.

And remember.

I’m with you all the way.

bree brown, may 5, 2021