

"No One Helped": Kitty Genovese, New York City, and the Myth of Urban Apathy."

This year the Department of Gender & Sexuality Studies is holding a series of colloquia related to GeoHistorical Critique, a critical modality that reflects upon how specific locations and moments produce ontological and epistemological possibilities for thinking about the co-productions of gender, sexuality, race, class, citizenship, and embodiment. Our first presenter will be Prof. Marcia Gallo (History, UNLV).

Prof. Marcia Gallo will discuss the significance of place and time in the narratives about urban apathy that emerged from Kitty Genovese's murder. The murder took place in the Kew Gardens neighborhood of Queens in the city of New York. Kew Gardens was a nearby yet verdant suburb where crime was relatively nonexistent. The rape/murder in Queens, in the context of growing political tumult (racial, gendered, class-based) in other parts of the City, made it "newsworthy."

The 1964 rape and murder of Kitty Genovese in a middle-class neighborhood of Queens, New York has become one of America's most infamous true-crime stories. It began when a front-page report in the New York Times incorrectly identified thirty-eight witnesses to the crime, fueling fears of apathy and urban decay. Genovese's life, including her lesbian relationship, was erased in media accounts that focused on her uncaring neighbors. More than fifty years later, the story continues to circulate in popular culture. Although now it is known that there were far fewer actual witnesses than was reported in 1964, the moral of the story continues to be urban apathy. The paradox is that the Genovese narrative was created at the very moment that New York — and the nation — was alive with debate, demonstrations, and political engagement. It was anything but apathetic.

The story immediately fueled reforms, such as the 911 emergency notification system, which didn't exist the night Genovese was assaulted, and the development of psychological theories of "bystander syndrome." What is less well-known is that it also helped bring about a revolution in popular understandings of the prevalence of rape as well as intimate partner violence. But the framework used in creating the story of the thirty-eight witnesses foreshadowed the neoliberal political values that have become much more embedded in our culture since then. In "No One Helped" Gallo creates a counter-narrative to the myth of urban apathy while honoring the life of Kitty Genovese.

Marcia Gallo is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas and author of "No One Helped." The book won both the 2015 Lambda Literary Award for LGBT Nonfiction and the 2015 Publishing Triangle Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Nonfiction; it also was a finalist for the 2015 USA Best Book Awards (USA Book News) for Gay & Lesbian Nonfiction. She published her first book, the prizewinning *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movements*, in 2006 (Carroll & Graf).

"NO ONE HELPED"

*Kitty Genovese,
New York City,
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Date: Tuesday,

Oct. 18, 2016

Time: 3:00 – 5:00 pm

**Location: Humanities
Gateway 1010**

Marcia M. Gallo