

Mary Keller

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Mary L. Keller works at the intersection of feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and Indigenous studies theory in order to study the relationship of religious lives to struggles for meaning and power. She focuses on questions of agency and representation. She teaches "Introduction to World Religions"; "African Spirits in the New World"; "African American Religious Culture"; and "Gilgamesh to the Bomb to Climate Change". Keller emphasizes the geographical, historical and social context in which religious lives are embedded and then focuses on questions of personhood within religious traditions. Current research examines the role of sacred land in a world of global capital, money and agency, and theory and method in the study of spirit possession. Her current research project is "The Spirit of Climate Change."

Selected Works

The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power, and Spirit Possession – Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002

"Feminist theory and postcolonial theory share an interest in developing theoretical frameworks for describing and evaluating subjectivity comparatively, especially with regard to non-autonomous models of agency. As a historian of religions, Mary Keller uses the figure of the "possessed woman" to analyze a subject that is spoken-through rather than speaking and whose will is the will of the ancestor, deity or spirit that wields her to engage the question of agency in a culturally and historically comparative study that recognizes the prominent role possessed women play in their respective traditions.

Drawing from the fields of anthropology and comparative psychology, Keller brings the figure of the possessed woman into the heart of contemporary argument as an exemplary model that challenges many Western and feminist assumptions regarding agency. Proposing a new theoretical framework that re-orientes scholarship, Keller argues that the subject who is wielded or played, the hammer or the flute, exercises a paradoxical authority—"instrumental agency"—born of their radical receptivity: their power derives from the communities' assessment that they no longer exist as autonomous agents..."

Re-Cognizing W. E. B. Dubois in the Twenty-First Century: Essays on W. E. B. DuBois – Mercer University Press, 2007

"This volume brings together the most important elements of the genius of W. E. B. Dubois, Harvard's first African-American graduate and arguably the father of American sociology as well as the premier twentieth-century intellectual activist. The range of essays discuss Dubois's breadth of genius as an essayist, novelist, sociologist, philosopher, cultural critic, African historian, historian of African religions, Pan-African activist, and philosopher. Many of the essays offer new research such as links to a college choir that sings the songs from the Souls of Black Folk as a backdrop for considering the role of synaesthesia and transitivity in Souls; fieldwork from Ghana regarding Dubois's early connections with Ghana as well as contemporary political framing of Dubois as a Ghanaian; chronological study of the role of messianic characters in Dubois's several novels; a perspective from the new field of rectificatory ethics regarding where Dubois would stand on the issue today. David Chidester, Robin Law, and Charles Long, internationally recognized experts in their fields, contribute groundbreaking revaluations that will direct further research agendas in Dubois studies. This collection is framed by the problem of religion and echoes Dubois's 1903 claim that the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the color line. In 2006, the claim is that the problem of the twenty-first century will be the problem of the religious color line so that in order to understand our century's problem we need to understand and apply the work of the genius who first understood the analysis of subjectivity and history as a problem."