

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Center for Gender in Global Context

presents the Spring 2018

COLLOQUIA SERIES

NEW RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND GENDER

GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

FRIDAY, February 16

1:30-3:00PM

303 INTERNATIONAL CENTER

LaShawn Harris

Department of History

Black Women & Police Brutality during the 1980s

On October 29, 1984, New York Police Department (NYPD) brutally shot and killed sixty-six-year-old grandmother Eleanor Gray Bumpurs in her public housing apartment. Her death, symbolizing a powerful parable about systematic police violence against African Americans and Hispanics, was and continues to be one New York City's most recognized yet understudied police brutality cases of the 1980s. This presentation recovers the personal life of Bumpurs from historical obscurity, moving beyond her tragic death and departing from historical and disability and legal studies that primarily focus on her killing and 1987 trial of the police officer accused of shooting her. Snapshots of Bumpurs' less familiar life as an urban migrant reveal her socioeconomic struggles and vulnerabilities, her encounters with carceral institutions, her visions for herself and family, her pleasure politics, and her familial relationships. Moreover, Bumpurs' less familiar narrative serves as an entry point into the understudied socioeconomic and private lives of late twentieth century working poor black women, and different way in which varying socioeconomic and political structures and institutions, those deeply rooted in race, gender, and class oppression, worked to deny African American women citizenship rights, protection, and human dignity.

LaShawn Harris is an Associate Professor of History at Michigan State University. She is the author of *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy* (University of Illinois Press, 2016). In 2017, *Sex Workers, Psychics, & Numbers Runners* was awarded two book prizes: The Organization of American Historians (OAH) Darlene Clark Hine Award for the best book in African American women's and gender history, and the Labor and Working-Class History (LAWCHA) and Cornell IRL School's Philip Taft Labor Prize for the best book on working-class history. Her articles have appeared in the *Journal of African American History*, *Journal of Social History*, *Journal of Urban History*, and *African American History Intellectual Society's (AAHIS) online blog Black Perspectives*. Her current research focuses on police brutality in New York City during the 1980s.

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