

Tom Mould

Welfare, Politics, and Folklore

Friday, March 29th 6:00 PM

Lindley Hall 102

Reception to follow in Classroom Office Building 203

More than forty years after Ronald Reagan introduced the world to “the welfare queen,” stories of welfare fraud continue to shape not only our views of public assistance, poverty, and the poor, but our policies as well. Scholars in fields throughout the social sciences have provided numerous answers to why these legends persist but the explanation remains incomplete. In this talk, Dr. Mould will focus on one type of story—the personal witness narrative—an under-theorized genre that not only sheds new light on why damaging stereotypes about the poor persist in the U.S. today, but provides clear evidence in the debates of two of folklore’s persistent questions about genre and narrative performance. Drawing on research in folklore, psychology, rhetoric, and communications, Dr. Mould will conclude with a discussion of effective strategies for advocating for social justice through storytelling.

Tom Mould is the J. Earl Danielely Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Folklore and Chair of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Elon University. He is the author *Still, the Small Voice: Revelation, Personal Narrative and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (2011) and *Overthrowing the Queen: The Narrative Tradition of Welfare in America* (2020). He is also author of two books on Choctaw narrative and co-editor of *The Individual and Tradition: Folkloristic Perspectives* (2011), and *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies* (2013). His research areas include folklore, oral narrative, sacred narrative, contemporary legend, American Indian studies, Mormon studies, identity, ethnography, and performance theory.



This lecture series is named for Richard M. Dorson, who is credited with establishing folklore studies as an academic discipline in the United States through his many years directing the IU Folklore Institute, beginning in 1956. He later chaired the Folklore Department, until his death in 1981.



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