



## THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

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### Conference at Newark Public Library to Explore Impact of a Famous 1962 Literary Event with Philip Roth, Ralph Ellison and Pietro di Donato

**Newark, NJ. October 7, 2021** – An important conference, *Conflicts Depicting Race Ethnicity in Fiction, 1962 and 2021: Philip Roth, Ralph Ellison, and Pietro di Donato*, will be held Tuesday, November 16 from 4 to 8 p.m. at Newark Public Library’s Centennial Hall. Sponsors are the [Philip Roth Personal Library](#) at the [Newark Public Library](#) (NPL) and [Seton Hall University](#). The topic is inspired by a 1962 symposium at [Yeshiva University](#) entitled [A Study in Artistic Conscience: Conflict of Loyalties in Minority Writers of Fiction](#). The authors selected to address the subject of their responsibilities to the ethnic community about which they wrote were [Ralph Ellison](#), [Philip Roth](#) and [Pietro di Donato](#): one at the peak of his career; one just starting after an impressive debut with [Goodbye, Columbus](#); and one whose major novel was published nearly 20 years earlier. The NPL event, which is free, will also be live streamed. **Registration is required.**

What makes this NPL conference even more significant is that audio of the 1962 event was discovered in Yeshiva University’s [Special Collections](#). [William J. Connell](#), professor of history, holder of the Joseph and Geraldine La Motta Chair in Italian Studies at Seton Hall University and an Andrew [Carnegie Fellow](#), is organizer and moderator of the conference. He has edited the contents of the two-hour audiotape to roughly 40 minutes and will present video segments of each author’s opening remarks and Q&A responses, providing conference participants with a sense of the tone and language used by each author. Connell, who gained permission for its use from the authors’ literary estates, has also transcribed the audiotape.

The authors themselves, and what they said at that time, will be discussed by a panel consisting of two distinguished scholars speaking about each of the three writers. For Roth, it will be [Elaine Showalter](#) (Princeton University Professor Emerita of English) and [Steven Zipperstein](#) (Stanford University, now writing a Roth biography); Ellison, [John Callahan](#) (Ellison’s literary executor and retired Professor of Humanities at Lewis and Clark College) and [Sterling L. Bland](#) (Rutgers University-Newark); Di Donato, [Mary Jo Bona](#) (Stony Brook University) and [Fred Gardaphé](#) (Distinguished Professor of English and Italian American Studies, Queens College, CUNY). [Simone A. James Alexander](#) (Seton Hall University) will moderate the Q&A session.

The event remains legendary because Roth defined it as a pivotal moment in his career. “Roth stated that the fierce interrogation of his work at the Yeshiva University event was what made his bones as an author, confirming him in his attitudes toward religion and ethnicity,” said Connell.

The Philip Roth Personal Library, which opened in June 2021, is proud to present this conference under the auspices of the Philip Roth Endowment. It is the third event in the series

*Keeping It Real: Conversations about Race, Gender and Class.* Joslyn Bowling Dixon, director of NPL, said, “This conference represents the Roth endowment at work. It is providing a thoughtful, timely program that informs and inspires scholars, curious readers and Newarkers interested in learning more about a famous native son and two other influential authors.”

Rosemary Steinbaum, chairman of the Newark Public Library Foundation, played a significant role in ushering Roth’s gifts to the library. She said, “The 1962 symposium at Yeshiva University truly shaped Roth as a writer, even if he wasn’t satisfied with the event at the time.” Steinbaum added, “It is remarkable that we are able to revisit this seminal Roth experience while also touching on issues that are so relevant today – thanks to his generous gift to the library.”

This program is sponsored by NPL’s Philip Roth Endowment, Seton Hall University Italian Studies Program, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Verizon and the Community Foundation of New Jersey. Generous donations have been provided by the Seton Hall University Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and the Friends of the Jewish Historical Society.

Please visit [www.npl.org](http://www.npl.org) for updated Covid precautions, additional information about this event and to register (required.) The conference will also be live streamed on Facebook Live and Zoom.

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[Newark Public Library](#), home of the [Philip Roth Personal Library](#), is located at 5 Washington Street in downtown Newark, NJ, with six branches throughout the city. Built in 1899 with a design inspired by a 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence palazzo, the library also includes an interactive art gallery and a large-scale event space. The library’s major departments include its [Reference Center](#); [Special Collections](#) which includes graphic and visual arts; the [Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center](#); the [New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center](#) and the [James Brown African American Room](#), noted for their collections of books and archives; and the [LGBTQ Resource Center](#).

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