## American History and the Secret Life of **Medicinal Plants:**

Archives, Ethnobotany, and Environmental Justice

Guest lecturer: Prof. Dr. Claudia J Ford (SUNY Potsdam)

Medical information, botanical expertise, ecological knowledge, and racialized prejudices evolved rapidly and concurrently in American history, especially in the 18th through 20th centuries. Ethnobotany is the study of plants in relation to their medical and cultural uses - a discipline explored in history, anthropology, environmental studies, and literature. Examining the stories found in ethnobotanical archives is a unique way to understand complex interactions across the racial and cultural borders of a rapidly transforming New World during these centuries of colonial settlement, Indigenous dispossession, and African enslavement. This research has the goal of examining the stories and silences in the ethnobotanical archives and the ways in which these stories and silences impacted and were constructed around marginalized racial identities. This investigation discovered that pursuing the narratives of medicinal plants in this place and this period of time illuminates the multifaceted and fraught ways in which disparate peoples becoming Americanized were both transversing and maintaining the boundaries that separated them.

## About the speaker

Claudia J. Ford is professor and chair of the department of environmental studies at the State University of New York, Potsdam. She teaches ethnobotany, indigenous knowledge, gender studies, environmental justice and environmental literature. Dr. Ford is a visual artist and writer and serves on the boards of directors of organizations that are committed to ending poverty, racism and injustice in food systems. Ford was a fellow of the Panel on Planetary Thinking at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany, in 2022, and was recently named a Distinguished Visiting Scholar for the University of Buffalo's School of Arts and Sciences.



Claudia J Ford, Exhibition, Panel on Planetary Thinking, 2022

## December 3, 2024, 3:30 pm, Hörsaal 7

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