USF Historian David K. Johnson wins highly competitive National Humanities Center Residential Fellowship

Associate Professor David K. Johnson of the University of South Florida Department of History has been named a Fellow at the National Humanities Center for the next academic year (2014-2015). This year-long, $50,000 fellowship will provide Johnson with the time and resources to complete his on-going study of the historic relationship between consumer commodities and subcultural identity politics.

Located in the Research Triangle of North Carolina, The National Humanities Center is one of the nation’s foremost centers of independent scholarship in the humanities. Receiving approximately 400 applications from around the country and from a wide variety of disciplines each year, the Center awards only 30 fellowships. Fellows work on their individual research projects and have the opportunity to share ideas through seminars, lectures, and conferences at the Center.

Johnson’s book project chronicles the rise of a gay commercial network in the 1950s and 1960s. Contesting the notion that a gay market developed only recently, in the wake of gay activism, Johnson complicates our understanding of the relationship between consumer culture and political resistance. Combining the approaches of the history of sexuality and business history, he demonstrates how a small group of mail-order entrepreneurs encouraged the rise of a national gay market and thereby promoted the formation of a self-conscious minority group.

By encouraging scholarly excellence and interdisciplinary collaboration, the National Humanities Center seeks “to insure the continuing strength of the liberal arts and to affirm the importance of the humanities in American life.” Founded in 1978 under the auspices of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, the NHC is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Duke University, the University of North Carolina, North Carolina State University, and other private and philanthropic institutions. Over the past thirty-five years, NHC fellowships have resulted in the publication of more than 1,400 books in all fields of humanistic study.

The NHC fellowship is one of a small number of humanities awards which the Association of American Universities (AAU) counts among the most prestigious faculty honors. USF aspires to join the AAU, an association of 62 leading public and private research universities.