What can novels from the 1950s and 60s tell us about the Black Lives Matter movement? What do narratives of gentrification and Harlem’s object world reveal about the longer history of structural racism in the U.S.? In this talk, Prof. Wasserman tracks two major efforts to represent mid-century Harlem by two very different authors. Though seldom read together, Ralph Ellison and Chester Himes lead readers down, around, and underneath the same streets of Harlem in their novels. Their literary maps challenge the conventional understanding of gentrification by addressing both what changes and what remains as the urban environment is transformed.

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