

Philosophy Department Colloquium

BRNG 1268, 4:30 pm. September 17, 2009

Interpreting a Murder with Addams and Mead

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On March 2, 1908, Chicago Police Chief George Shippy shot and killed Lazarus Averbuch, a recent Russian Jewish immigrant, claiming self-defense. The press and the public responded with anti-anarchist, xenophobic hysteria. In "Chicago Settlements and Social Unrest," Jane Addams defends her actions on behalf of the Russian Jewish immigrant community as fulfilling her professional obligation to interpret immigrants to the city. Scholars of pragmatism are familiar with Charles Sanders Peirce and Josiah Royce's writings on interpretation; this paper explores another genealogy of the term.

First, I identify the dimensions of interpretation that Addams employs in the essay, and raise concerns about them. I then give a genealogical account of how the settlement work community understood interpretation. Finally, I use George Herbert Mead's theory of social transformation as a frame in which to place Addams's use of interpretation and to respond to the concerns raised.