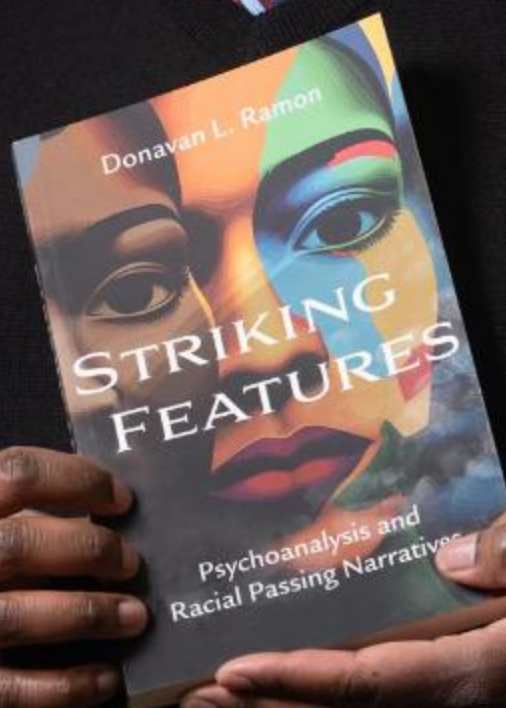
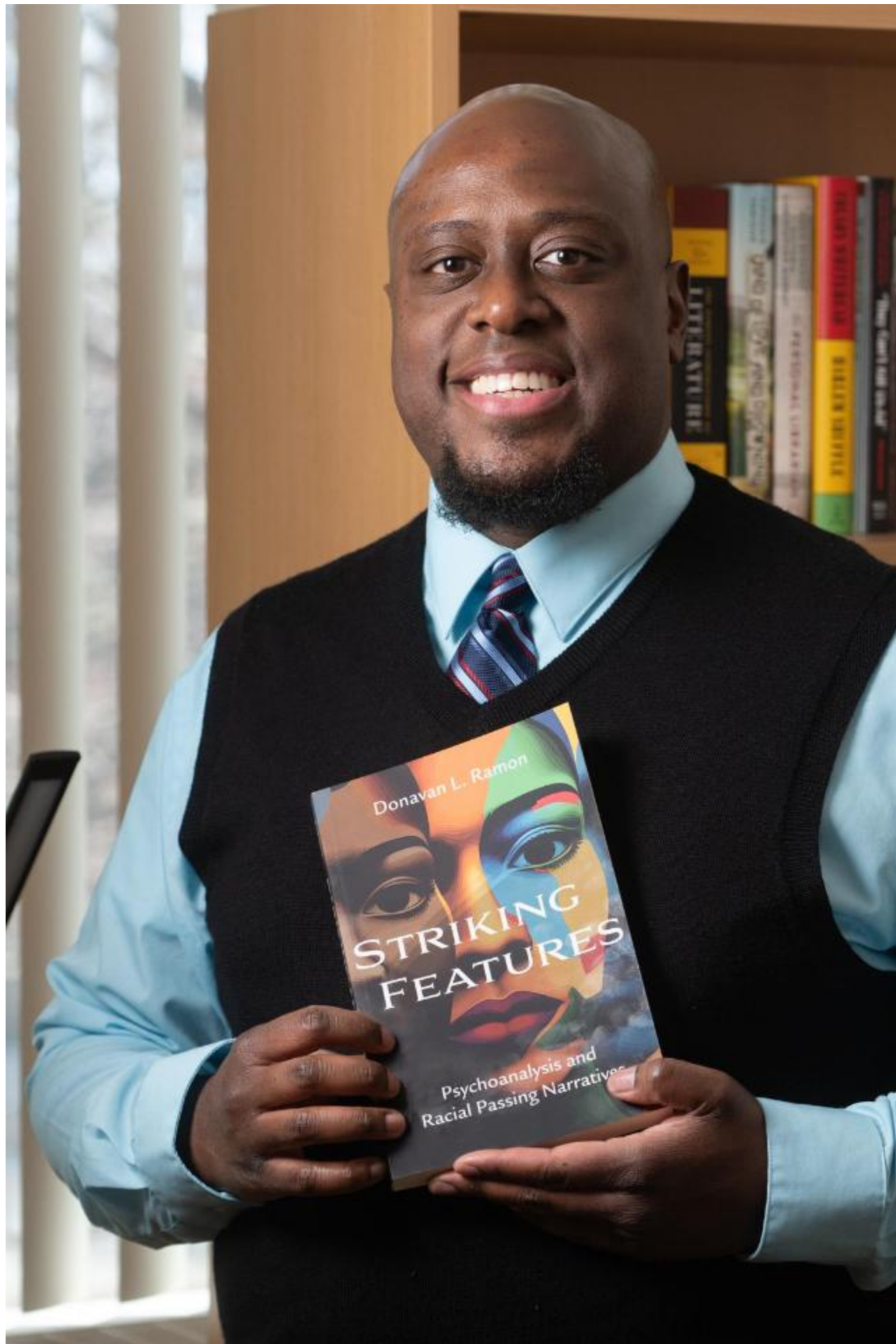


SIUE's Dr. Donovan Ramon Delves into Racial Passing in his New Book

by Patricia Merritt

February 25 2024 7:35 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – It’s a “line” that not everyone can cross. But for those who are able and willing, what causes them to do so? Is it the belief someone can leave behind adversity and bias to walk into a life of comfort and opportunities? Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Donovan L. Ramon, PhD, explores these questions and looks at various analyses and more in his book, [“Striking Features: Psychoanalysis and Racial Passing Narratives.”](#)

Ramon, assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences’ Department of English, Language and Literature, is one of three authors who will be part of “African American Literature at SIUE,” a panel and book discussion, at 4 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 28 in the Redmond Learning Center (LB 2020) of the Lovejoy Library. Also on the program will be CAS faculty: Associate Dean and Associate Professor Tisha Brooks, PhD, author of ["Spirit Deep: Recovering the Sacred in Black Women’s Travel"](#) and Distinguished Research Professor Howard Rambsy II, PhD, author of ["Bad Men: Creative Touchstones of Black Writers."](#) Brooks and [Rambsy](#) are in the Department of English, Language and Literature.

Visit here to [RSVP for the African American Literature at SIUE Panel](#). Free copies of all three books will be available to attendees on a first-come, first-served basis.

“I was inspired to write this book due to my own family history,” said Ramon. “I suspect that my mother's family has Garifuna ancestry – meaning they descended from Nigerian slaves shipwrecked in the Caribbean. If this is true, then my family has a history of passing that is more personal and compelling than anything one would read in fiction. My matriline has claimed a strictly Honduran background without acknowledging their African roots.”

“It's important to tell the story of passing to understand why some people create new identities for themselves and obscure their biological ones,” he explained.

“Psychoanalysis helps me to determine some of the internal motivations to pass as something else.”

Does psychoanalysis animate racial passing or does racial passing inspire psychoanalysis? Ramon contends that they have a mutual effect on each other. “Despite long-held beliefs that the two have nothing in common, I assert that psychoanalysis is relevant for understanding why some people pass as white,” he said. “Beginning with the premise that Sigmund Freud created psychoanalysis to contend with his own anxieties about race, I explore canonical and non-canonical passing narratives using psychoanalytic perspectives.”

“By closely reading 20th century narratives on racial passing, I make several claims about the intersections of racial passing and psychoanalysis,” the author continues. “Chief among them are the youthful trauma and psychological consequences of racial passing. For instance, I believe that Freud’s notion of the death drive—the human desire for death and destruction—motivates fictional racial passers to hasten their own deaths, while those who pass in real life often seek their own immortality through print despite hiding their Blackness.”

In his new book, Ramon shows that psychoanalysis is not strictly a "white" theory, as scholars have assumed for decades. He points out that it can be applied to light skinned African Americans who pass as white as well. He also demonstrates all the nuances of passing for white, which is still considered a taboo subject.

“Striking Features: Psychoanalysis and Racial Passing Narratives” is Ramon’s first book and was published this month by Mercer University Press.

“So far the response has been positive!” he noted. “Some of the comments have shown appreciation for my application of psychoanalysis in the process.”

Immediately following SIUE’s panel, Ramon will be featured on a free virtual book discussion from 6-7 p.m. CST Wednesday, Feb. 28 by Rutgers University. Pre-registration is required by clicking the [zoom link](#).

Central to SIUE’s exceptional and comprehensive education, the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) offers degree programs in the natural sciences, humanities, arts, social sciences, and communications. The College touches the lives of all SIUE students helping them explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.