

## Senior Seminar Topic Proposals Fall 2012

### **Kali Block-Steele – To Create Balance is to Heal: A Study of Holistic Health Practices and Philosophies in the United States**

For my capstone project I am embarking on a homeopathic healing journey utilizing an ethnographic method. I refer to this as a “journey” because in part it will include a record of my experiences with these healing methods and what they have done for my own personal growth. Homeopathic healing modalities have been gaining momentum in this nation, and I am conducting interviews with different homeopathic healers in order to see how these individuals became a part of this community and the learning that brought them to natural medicine. I refer to natural medicine as traditional because these methods stem directly from native cultures whose members have been practicing some of these modalities for centuries. My focus is on herbology, crystal healing and energetic healing through forms like Reiki and medical intuition, although I am also considering acupuncture and acupressure, aromatherapy, color and sound therapy, meditation and reflexology. I am considering how these different forms contribute to a holistic approach to health that contrasts with our current medical structure that is reactive rather than proactive. My thesis is that holistic medicine and self-healing provide useful ways to promote total healing that go far beyond the symptomatic treatments of current medicine, and I argue that it makes good financial, cultural and personal sense for the medical community to pursue them as practical health strategies. Some questions I am asking include: When did homeopathic medicine emerge in this country and why? What is the common view on homeopathic medicine? Is the popularity of natural medicine a reaction to our current medical system? Through modern medicine are people encouraged to take care of themselves in holistic ways and, if not, why not? What are people's reactions to a holistic view of health, taking care of body, mind and spirit? Do people discount these other healing methods and what they promote? What are their arguments for or against them? What role does mindset play in the effectiveness of these healing methods? This project is interactive in the sense that I am learning firsthand about these three main healing modalities in order to provide a learner's perspective. As I am currently studying more about different healing forms for my own personal growth, I feel this could be a great way to provide an alternative perspective, that of the novice, as I am also presenting the experiences of others who would be considered masters of their form. I feel this study is important because, although these healing methods are not new, there has been a resurgence of natural medicine among many varieties of people yet there is not much information out there about them, especially from an ethnographic standpoint.

## **Evan Krasner - John James Audubon: Debunking the Myth of the Early Conservationist**

My paper topic is John James Audubon, the nineteenth-century American naturalist and ornithologist. Audubon is best known for his work *Birds of America*, which was a series of life-size paintings of North American birds published between the years 1827-1838. At the time, Audubon's paintings of birds were considered to be some of the best in the world (they were first published in London) and to this day Audubon's art (he drew mammals as well) is still regarded as some of the best of its kind, currently selling for millions of dollars. Although Audubon is known primarily for his paintings of fauna, he happened to be an exceptional writer as well. Audubon kept journal entries of the birds he saw in the field, and he wrote letters about his observations to his colleagues (other ornithologists) and family as well. At first glance, Audubon's journal entries ("bird biographies") seem to be merely records of the birds and other wildlife he encountered in his explorations; however, after further analysis of his writing, I discovered that Audubon touches upon themes such as self-reliance, religion, and his spiritual connection with nature. In this sense, his writing is similar that of other nineteenth-century transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau. This connection to these naturalists has caused some to argue that Audubon was an early conservationist given his disdain for Americans (particularly farmers) who killed certain species of birds. My thesis is that despite the fact that Audubon admonished Americans who exploited natural resources (birds in particular), he should not be considered an early conservationist because he was motivated more by his love of birds than by an environmentalist agenda. I attempt to answer the following questions in my paper: Why have scientists and historians neglected Audubon's letters and journals? What does his writing reveal about American culture in the early nineteenth-century? Does Audubon describe watching birds as a recreational activity or as a scientific endeavor? Does Audubon discuss the morality of killing birds for his art? In answering these questions, I will examine both primary and secondary sources. I will use two collections of Audubon's letters and journal entries (one edited by Christoph Irmscher and the other one edited by Richard Rhodes), and I also plan to visit the Houghton Library at Harvard University to consult additional Audubon letters collected there.

## **Mallory Mendelsohn – The Durability of Illusion: (Re)Constructing Racial Stereotypes in Bayview Hunters Point, San Francisco**

I am writing my thesis on how the spatial configuration of urban areas conditions human interactions, American racial discourse, individual, community, and national consciousness, and the relationship between space and privilege. In particular, I am attempting to understand more about Bayview Hunters Point, a notoriously "bad" neighborhood in San Francisco that became a "naval radiological defense laboratory" and toxic dump for nuclear waste after WWII. I begin my paper with a profile of the area, including a list of demographics and statistics about Hunters Point in regards to

race/ethnicity, the crime rate, gang warfare, cancer, incidences of asthma, the infant mortality rate, and various health statistics, etc. I then follow these statistics with a brief history of the land usage in Hunters Point and a vivid description of my own visit to the area. My thesis is that those who live in Hunters Point, especially those who have identified with the region for decades, have been silenced by those outside the community who presume to know what's best for them. This has led to the labeling of the community as "bad" and has contributed to neglect, environmental racism and institutionalized discrimination. I argue that the voices of community members within Hunters Point ought to be at the heart of the dialogue about what to do with this unstable region. I intend to explore the following questions: How are various communities misrepresented and underrepresented in Hunters Point? How are statistics used (and by whom) to represent and misrepresent the neighborhood (either intentionally or unintentionally)? How has the blatant environmental injustice been justified and perpetuated in Hunters Point since WWII and by whom? What does this imply about urban disintegration, urban renewal, urban regeneration, and the urban process in American history? How is space distributed and by whom? How do race relations, racial stereotypes, and common-sense notions of race affect socio-economic status? How does the segregation of a community affect the consciousness of the community and create a double consciousness? What does privilege mean and how does urban segregation maintain the invisibility of privilege? How are space and privilege related? How does the dialectic tension between individual agency and social structures affect the consciousness of Hunters Point inhabitants? Most importantly, I want to consider *whose story is being told and by whom, and how the telling of the history of Hunters Point affects its residents and its future*. How do misunderstandings of the neighborhood affect those living there? And finally I will ask: Who owns the history of Hunters Point?

## **Jared Seigal – From Hobby to Lobby Michael Jordan & The Commercialization of Sports**

I am writing my paper on Michael Jordan and his role as a modern American cultural icon. I am interested particularly in the marketing of Jordan after his basketball career was over. I intend to study the commercialization of this superstar and what his marketing has meant for the sports entertainment industry and for the man himself. It is my thesis that Michael represents a new modern and globalized continuation of the myth and symbol school. From his rise to the designations of greatest basketball player of all time and one of the world's wealthiest entrepreneurs we can pinpoint the machine that drives the social, economic, and political concerns of contemporary culture. We can use Michael Jordan to understand the inner workings and outer by products of celebrity culture, corporate economy, racial and sexual identity, as well as the new global marketplace. I argue that some of this commercialization has had positive effects (such as the elevating of some moral value systems and the residual benefits for the underprivileged) but that much of it has been negative in its consequences. In seeking ways to counteract these negatives, I intend to ask: How do we contextualize Jordan's role as a modern American hero? What does it say about our nation that the new

American hero is famous for his money and success whereas the old symbols of America were based on those defining moral qualities that were considered uniquely American? Does the new globalized commerce and culture that made Jordan a demigod represent a moment of danger for American Studies or a moment of progression? I will use print and media advertisements for my research and I plan to go to the Basketball Hall of Fame to do research as well.