

# SKIDMORE COLLEGE AMERICAN STUDIES

Spring 2023



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# American Studies Newsletter

## 2022 – 2023 The Chair's Letter, Gregory Pfitzer

Hi all:

We've wrapped up another academic year in the Department of American Studies at Skidmore, and a highly successful one it was. Students who had their college careers interrupted by the pandemic in their second semesters at the College have now completed their course work and will be crossing the finish line in triumph at graduation. American Studies junior majors are returning from study abroad programs, while sophomores and first-year students who have declared the major are submitting their final papers and exams and are packing up to head home for meaningful work over the summer. A case in point is Anna Paul, who won a coveted SEE-Beyond Award and will be working as a grant-writing, fundraising and development intern at Witness to Mass Incarceration. Graduate Callan Daniel hopes to continue work on an Independent Study project she pursued this spring titled: "The National College Comedy Festival at Skidmore," documenting and assessing the thirty-four year history of ComFest, using the Skidmore archives and firsthand accounts.

For the first time in a long time we were at full strength in the department with Professors Nathan, Krefting, Owens, Pedinotti and Pfitzer offering a wide array of courses covering topics as diverse as Representations of the Past in Film, Growing Up in America, and Post-Apocalyptic Literature (more on these courses in the articles that follow). We also welcomed two Mellon Postdoctoral Fellows in Black Studies, Gabriella Friedman and Malik Raymond, who taught courses for us on Black science fiction writer Octavia Butler and on the Long Civil Rights Movement respectively.

Our featured speaker in the fall was Dr. Raúl Pérez, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of La Verne, who delivered a well-attended lecture to the larger Skidmore community on his recent book, *The Souls of White Jokes: How Racist Humor Fuels White Supremacy* (Stanford University Press) Pérez noted that having a "good" sense of humor generally means being able to take a joke without getting offended, since laughter is often seen as a way to ease tension in an overly politicized social world. But he asked, "Do the stakes change when the jokes are racist?" In his lecture, Pérez confronted this unsettling question, arguing that finding answers to it is crucial to understanding the persistence of racism and white supremacy in American

society. Rather than being harmless fun, a thing of the past, or “just a joke,” Pérez illustrated how racist humor plays a central role in reinforcing and mobilizing racist ideology, solidarity, and inequality today.

Pérez also met with American Studies majors during a class session in AM374: Senior Seminar to discuss the joys and challenges of doing scholarship. He provided them with stories about the false starts and triumphs he experienced while at work on *The Souls of White Jokes*, in the process encouraging students to write something every day on their capstone projects and to revise constantly. That proved to be helpful advice for the senior cohort whose impressive final papers are housed in the Senior Seminar notebook in the department office. Three of those projects turned into honors thesis presentations at the Academic Festival in May, including: Aaron Shellow-Lavine’s “Thin Blue Screens: Social Medias and Algorithmic Copaganda,” dealing with the system of language which distances police from their violence and separates criminalized individuals from their humanity; Maelcom Thayer’s “Becoming-vampire in Poppy Z. Brite’s *Lost Souls*,” drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to associate queer relationships with the figure of the vampire in the context of hyperconsumerism and alienation in the 1990s; and Raven Jade Villa’s “Disrupting (White) Space: Counter Stories of (Black) Joy & Resilience at Skidmore College,” unsettling Skidmore’s archive by reclaiming and rearticulating queer and non-White identities through counter-narratives of Black joy & resilience that celebrate Black bodies, especially Black trans women. These three students garnered impressive college-wide honors for their work, Thayer being named as one of only four Periclean scholars, while Shellow-Lavine and Villa received Racial Justice Student Awards for “exemplary work of significant scale that centers social justice.”

The seniors claimed victory this year at our departmental bowling event, held each fall semester at the completion of the AM374 capstone projects. They were nicely outfitted in personally designed T-shirts and adopted catchy team names such as “The Pin Whisperers,” “The Rolling Stones,” and “The Guttersnipes.” There’s nothing quite like throwing a heavy spherical object at defenseless and unstable bowling pins to relieve the stress of finishing a substantial piece of scholarship. While the final scores of American Studies faculty members suggest that we did not acquit ourselves especially well in this year’s event, we couldn’t help but acknowledge how right the Strike Zone staffers were who commented on how “marvelous” we looked in our matching bowling shoes.

With appreciation to students, colleagues, and especially to our Administrative Assistant, Sue Matrazzo, who put together this newsletter, I hope you enjoy reading about the activities of American Studies students and faculty during the 2022-2023 academic year as chronicled in this newsletter.

Greg Pfitzer  
Chair, American Studies

## Professor Tammy Owens

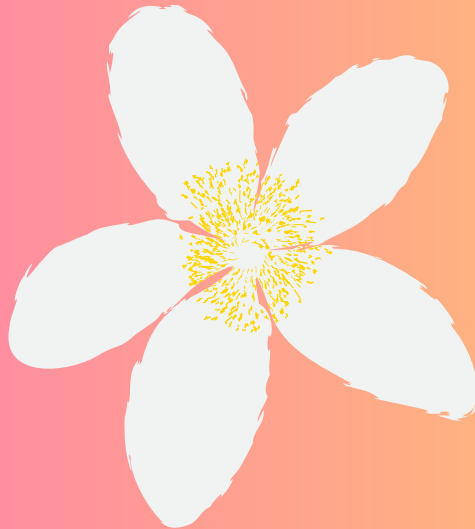
### Leaving it All on the Zoom Room Floor



I have accomplished a lot this year. I will fortunately have an opportunity to list all of these accomplishments on my CV and my end-of-the-year report. But the accomplishment that I will not have an opportunity to discuss in my reports that I'm perhaps most proud of is my sense of gratitude and growth as a scholar and professor alongside the graduating American Studies seniors. Thus, I want to use the space of this year's newsletter for this special moment that does not have a typical place to be documented. To explain further, I have deep gratitude for the American Studies graduating seniors of 2023. The graduating seniors in American Studies make up the last group of students who met me during the "Zoom classroom" year at the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic. For the entire 2020-2021 academic year, my first year as a Skidmore professor, students logged into our American Studies Zoom classroom, and I taught them—the now graduating seniors—with my then two-month-old child in my lap. I have no idea how the students in the graduating class managed to succeed in my courses while hearing my very crabby kid in the background. But they did! I appreciate the graduating American Studies seniors' commitment to succeeding in such difficult times and for their patience and motivation to learn on Zoom in a global pandemic with new professors holding newborns crying in the background!

Granted, I am thankful for all of the students and their commitment to the work. But it is rare in our culture of academia that we express gratitude for the students who are a part of our own growth spurts or difficult times. No matter who you are or how much power you have, COVID-19 impacted us all in some way—be it finding toilet paper in the stores to losing a loved one to the pandemic. Further, students are expected to show up during their difficult times and even notify professors of any pressing issues that might infringe upon their work abilities in our classes. But one of the walls between students and professors crumbled during the 2020-2021 Zoom classroom year. Students and professors had a chance to peak into each other's backgrounds (pun intended) to see the hardships, vulnerabilities, and family duties as well as other obligations that color our worlds and make up the core of who we are beyond the classroom.

Without a global pandemic, students would have never seen me holding a child or my battles with childcare. In fact, I can possibly hide that battle from students entering my classes after the graduating class of 2023. Thus, the American Studies graduating seniors will walk across the stage this May and step into a new chapter, and so will I, metaphorically. Indeed, this chapter still has childcare battles. Yet, like the graduating class, I've grown. My crabby baby has grown! Together, we've all supported each other to reach new heights or levels of resilience that we never knew were possible. We've learned and watched each other figure out how to make it through difficult times. For that, or this new level of humanity in academia, we can all thank COVID-19. But we made it to May 2023, together, right there in that Zoom classroom. So, it seems fitting to pause in this newsletter and share my gratitude for this graduating class in particular—the only class who can say that they spent a significant part of their Skidmore college years on Zoom in a global pandemic. They are also one of the few classes who witnessed my humanity on my job unshielded. They helped to shape my resilience and ability to keep doing my job despite the odds, but to do it humanely. Thank you, American Studies seniors of 2023. It's been so nice to be human with you! I hope we both hold on to this humanity going forth even though we've ended the Zoom for all.



## Professor Dan Nathan

Another year in the books. This one went fast. That seems to be a trend. Maybe it has something to do with being, well, a seasoned Skidmore veteran. This was my twenty-first year at the college, after all.

Looking back, it was a productive year.

Last October, I had the privilege of giving the Edwin M. Moseley Faculty Lectureship, which honors “special achievement in research and/or creative work by members” of the Skidmore faculty and is “the highest honor that the Skidmore faculty can bestow on one of its own.” My lecture was titled “Remembrance of Games Past: Sport, History, and Culture” (and can be streamed on Skidmore’s website). I am not the best judge of this matter, but I thought the lecture went well. At the very least, the poster was excellent. My lecture was in part about my nearly lifelong relationship with baseball and my work on the Negro baseball leagues, specifically the former ballplayer, manager, and scout John “Buck” O’Neil, who was posthumously elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2021. An amazing ambassador for the game who worked tirelessly to ensure that African-American baseball players were respected and remembered, and who became a celebrity due to his wonderful storytelling in Ken Burns’s 1994 baseball documentary, O’Neil is featured on my Moseley poster. In the lecture, I explained who O’Neil was, what he accomplished, and tried to put him in context. I stressed that we should not use O’Neil’s generosity of spirit, his affability, his determined effort not to be embittered to minimize the ways in which segregation affected and diminished his career and life. I argued that Buck O’Neil should be celebrated, appreciated, and remembered. But that thinking critically about him also reminds us that memory, personal and collective, is not innocent and apolitical, but is charged and contested. Not all remembrances of games past should be tinged with nostalgia. When the lecture was over, my wife, departmental colleagues, and I had a lovely dinner with Dean Orr and President Conner, among others, at the Surrey. It was memorable and gratifying.



At the same time, I have been working with two colleagues, Maureen M. Smith of California State University, Sacramento, and Sarah K. Fields of the University of Colorado-Denver, on a book project. It is titled *Capturing the Moment: Sport, Photography, and History* and is under review at the University of Texas Press. It has been a great experience so far and the manuscript we have produced is, in my opinion, terrific. An anthology with twenty-five relatively short chapters, the book examines a wide variety of sports photographs—most of them are famous and iconic, a few of them are relatively obscure—and it carefully considers what they reveal and signify. We are talking about images such as baseball legend Ty Cobb sliding into third base in 1910, the braggadocious Muhammad Ali standing over Sonny Liston during their 1965 rematch in Lewistown, Maine; Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s controversial and inspirational Black power salute at the 1968 Summer Olympics; Secretariat winning the 1973 Belmont Stakes by a remarkable 31 lengths; and a joyous Brandi Chastain after her game-winning goal at the 1999 Women’s World Cup, among many others. For some people, these photos have also worked their way into our collective consciousness.

For these reasons, this book is partly about photography's capacity to narrativize the past, to tell, reveal, and encapsulate meaningful historical stories. Working closely with Maureen, Sarah, and our many talented contributors has been a labor of love, memorable and gratifying (to keep with the letter's theme). We are hopeful the book will be published next year.

Of course, teaching takes up most of my time and energy. One of the pedagogical highlights of the year was teaching a new class on True Crime in America. The subject has been on my mind for years. Why? Well, contemporary America is awash in true crime narratives, that is, accounts about a criminal act or acts based on fact rather than fiction. These nonfiction stories come in myriad forms and mediums—magazine articles, books, TV shows, documentary films, podcasts, among other texts—and have a long history. In *True Crime* (2008), Harold Schechter's anthology, the earliest piece dates from 1651. And obviously the genre continues to flourish. For most of its history, though, true crime was disparaged; for some, it was synonymous with "soft-core porn." Pulp magazines published in the 1930s and 1940s, most infamously *True Detective*, were widely considered pop culture trash. Today, however, true crime is more than just a lucrative (if often lurid) cottage industry. Its best narratives, such as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966), Ann Rule's *The Stranger Beside Me* (1980), and the podcast *Serial* (2014), have earned widespread critical respect. Moreover, true crime can throw into relief particular cultural concerns and values; it can help us understand contemporary American culture and the complex relationships among criminality, deviance, ethics, identity, justice, power, and representation. That is the charge I put to my students: to study American true crime narratives, in the past and the present, "as a means of 'saying something of something' (to invoke a famous Aristotelean tag)." More specifically, we considered: what do true crime narratives tell us about the complicated relationship between power and justice at specific historical moments? Who has wielded (legitimate and illegitimate) power? And when crimes have been committed, what forms has justice taken, and who has administered it? I thought the class went well and so did most of the students in it. I'm looking forward to teaching it again soon.

In addition to my teaching responsibilities, I have been chipping away at variety of projects. I finished a few. Last May, I presented the John R. Betts Honor Address at the annual North American Society for Sport History conference in Chicago. I also published a brief essay on the strong man Eugen Sandow in the catalog for the Tang Teaching Museum's FLEX exhibition, which was co-curated by Dan Curley and Gregory Spinner.

In addition to this work, I continue to serve as an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Sport History* and as co-editor of the University of Texas Press's Terry and Jan Todd Series on Physical Culture and Sports. Both positions are rewarding and enable me to stay abreast of developments in my field and to help fellow scholars produce first-rate work.

Perhaps the year's best news was that Benjamin Nathan, my lovely son, has become a matriculated Skidmore student, class of 2026. So, I am now a proud Skidmore parent, in addition to being a proud Lehigh University parent: Zoë Nathan is a rising junior and Psychology major.

I hope everyone has a great summer. We will spend part of it in Maine, the Berkshires, and visiting family in Washington, DC. Of course, I plan to catch a few Orioles games, too.

We're going to miss the graduating seniors and wish them all well.

Best,

DN

## Alumni News

**Lauren Roberts '04** is the Saratoga County Historian and often gives lectures on local history: <https://www.nysm.nysed.gov/research-collections/state-history/notes/meet-the-historian/lauren-roberts>

**Josh Lauren '07** is now the Alumni Director at The Park School of Baltimore.

**Emma Newcombe '10** is now the Assistant Director of the Career Design Program at Northeastern University where she works with students to identify and achieve their career goals.

**Claire Solomon Nisen '10** works for DOROT in New York City and gave birth to her second child, Avinoam (“Avi”) Emmet Nisen, in May.

**Mallie Buffum '13** accepted a position as 4th grade teacher in Weimar, Germany at Thuringia International School.

**Matt Schonfeld '14** lives in New York City and manages musicians, produces shows, and has a successful podcast (9 seasons) interviewing hip-hop and R&B artists called Not 97.

**Becca Baruc '15** continues to produce/exhibit her own art and now teaches AP courses in Drawing and Painting at the Chicago High School for the Arts.

**Mollie Welch '16** accepted a new position in Boston with Fidelity Investments as Senior Manager, Employee Content Strategy where she will be developing campaigns for people with Fidelity 401k plans, so they can more easily understand what's available to them and make more informed choices.

**Liala Morgan '18** is doing well and has a website: <https://lailamorgan.com/>

**Liv Fidler '19**, who recently visited Skidmore, works for HISTORY, “the highest ranked factual entertainment television brand.”

**Eve Gertzman '20** accepted a position as project manager and strategist for marketing at Ana Luisa, a sustainable direct-to-consumer jewelry brand that produces all products in-house with recycled materials and ethical manufacturing processes.

**Clara Pysh '20** is living in London and now a certified scuba-instructor and TEFL-certified to teach English as a foreign language. She is looking into graduate school for Zoology.

**Julia Boral '21** was accepted to Brooklyn Law School and will begin that journey in 2024.

**Isaac Markman '22** accepted a position as a teacher at Small World: A Learning Program for One- and Two-Year-Olds.

# American Studies

## Fall 2023 Course Offerings

**AM 101 001 Queering America**  
**Deborah Amory MW 9:10-11:00 credits 4**



Interdisciplinary examinations of critical themes in the development of American culture and American life. Note(s): May be repeated for credit with focus on a different theme.

**AM 101 002 Civil War in American Memory**  
**Gregory Pfitzer WF 10:10-12 pm Credits 4**



This course considers how Americans have remembered and commemorated the Civil War from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Drawing on depictions of the war in fiction, film, popular history, television, music, and re-enactors' conventions among other cultural sources, it focuses on how memory and history interact in the popular imagination to shape the cultural legacy of the conflict.



**AM 234 American Sports/American Culture**  
**Daniel Nathan TR 9:10-11:00 credits 4**

AM 234 American Sports/American Culture  
Daniel Nathan TR 9:10-11:00 credits 4

An examination of how Hollywood filmmakers have represented the American past with special attention to the implications of movies for the construction of American cultural identity. Students will analyze films as historical documents that reflect (and sometimes reproduce) the ethos or cultural politics of the period in which they were made and first viewed. Through the use of popular culture theories, students will consider the ways in which films inform (and sometimes obfuscate and subvert) historical understanding. (Fulfills social sciences requirement.)



**AM 261 001 Prince as Cultural Icon**  
**Adrian Bautista T 6:30-9:10 credits 3**

Few artists have impacted the world of music and pop culture like Prince. Beyond the prolific and tuneful brilliance of his catalog, Prince's death in 2016 continues to spark scholarly thought on such topics as masculinity, spirituality, politics, race, gender, sexuality, and class. This course will explore Prince through critical perspectives related to musical creativity, intersections of faith and music, gender and sexuality, and the geography of the Minneapolis Sound. It will utilize a variety of materials to explore His Royal Badness, including music film and readings.



**AM 261 003 Gaming in American Society and Culture**  
**Aaron Pedinotti W 6-9:40 pm Credits 4**

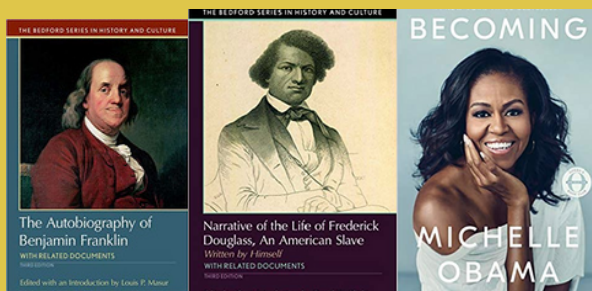
This course explores the multivalent significance of video gaming to American society and examines the many ways in which the diverse forms of gameric praxes have been represented in American culture. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, it examines gaming as a set of socio-cultural practices with profound resonances and effects in American life. Culturally oriented portions of the course focus on representations of gaming in films, television shows, genre fiction, and in games themselves. Other portions focus on the intertwining of gaming with broader social, political, and economic issues. These include questions of ethnic, racial, and gender representation and diversity in games; the relationship of game industries and online worlds to America's place in the global economy; the historical roles of gameric practices in US military planning and technological development; the increasing influence of online game communities and fan cultures in mainstream society; debates and moral panics over violence in games; and the potential role of games as educational, journalistic and persuasive technologies. Game genres studied in the course include console and pc-based videogames, war and strategy games, tabletop and massive multiplayer online RPGs, and virtual reality games. Readings include theoretical texts, game studies literature, historical accounts of video gaming's emergence and development, and cultural and ethnographic studies of American gaming. Evaluation is based on reading responses, participation, and papers. Some experiential engagement with gaming is also a part of the curriculum.



**AM 351 001 American Horror Fiction in Multi Media**  
**Aaron Pedinotti R 6:00-9:00 Credits 3**

This course explores the subgenres and modalities of American horror fiction in multiple media, including print, film, television, videogames, graphic novels and virtual reality. Its goals are four in number: 1) to introduce students to the formal characteristics of various horror subgenres, including American Gothic, ghost stories, pulp horror, weird fiction, sci-fi horror, body horror, post-apocalyptic horror, slasher films, splatterpunk, and the horror of the anthropocene; 2) to investigate the ways in which the texts of horror are refracted and inflected by the specific mediums in which they are presented; 3) to explore theoretical takes on how the classic aesthetic motifs of horror fiction—including the terror/ horror schism, Gothic sublimity, and cosmic pessimism—are refracted through specifically American texts and contexts; and 4) to relate the genres and texts that are studied in the course to major issues in American history and society, including racial and gendered oppression, economic exploitation, settler colonialism, genocide, imperialism, militarism and other forms of social violence. Specific authors studied in the course will include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Shirley Jackson, Richard Matheson, Stephen King, Kathe Koje, Octavia Butler, Scott Snyder and Jeff VanderMeer. (Some of the works by latter authors will be full novels, but several will be short stories.) Films and television screenings will include Rod Sterling's *The Twilight Zone*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, David Cronenberg's *Rabid*, Matt Reeves' *Let Me In*, David Mitchell's *It Follows*, Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, Alex Garland's *Annihilation*, Season 2 of SYFY's *Channel Zero*, and Jen and Sylvia Soska's remake of David Cronenberg's *Rabid*. Some experiential engagement with horror-themed videogames and VR experiences will also be a part of the curriculum. Some accommodations will be made for anxiety responses, but students are advised that this course is not for the squeamish or faint of heart...

**AM 362 001 American Autobiography**  
**Daniel Nathan WF 10:10 am – 11:30 am credits 3**



An examination of American culture through the lives of specific people as recorded in their autobiographies. The course explores autobiography both as an act of self-creation and as a reflection of culture. Various autobiographies are examined for their revelations about choices, crises, values, and experiences of representative people in particular periods of the American past. Note(s): 300-level courses in American Studies are not ordinarily open to first-year students except by permission of the instructor.



**AM 374 Senior Seminar**  
**Gregory Pfitzer TR 3:50-5:30 credits 4**

Exploration of primary and secondary sources in the interdisciplinary examination of a particular topic in American culture. Students will pursue a major research project or prepare an honors thesis proposal. Required of all senior majors. Open to majors only; normally taken in fall semester of senior year.

Note(s): 300-level courses in American Studies are not ordinarily open to first-year students except by permission of the instructor.



# 1960's Revival Show

Check us out on Spotify

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1pkUYJS5RrRaXDAAuikUpz?si=32e4a513c9c94861&nd=1>



Playlist

## Sixties Revival Show

kimfragola • 1 like • 19 songs, 1 hr 10 min



#	Title	Album	Date added	
1	 <b>Blackbird - Remastered 2009</b> The Beatles	The Beatles (Remastered)	Apr 10, 2023	2:18
2	 <b>San Franciscan Nights</b> Gábor Szabó, The California Dreamers	Wind, Sky And Diamonds	Apr 11, 2023	3:23
3	 <b>Chelsea Girls</b> Nico	Chelsea Girl	Apr 10, 2023	7:22
4	 <b>Stoned Love - Single Version</b> The Supremes	Gold	Apr 10, 2023	2:57
5	 <b>Tighten Up</b> Archie Bell & The Drells	Atlantic Top 60: Sweat-Soaked Soul Classics	Apr 10, 2023	3:11
6	 <b>Respect</b> Aretha Franklin	I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You	Apr 10, 2023	2:27
7	 <b>Good Vibrations</b>	50 Big Ones: Greatest Hits	Apr 10, 2023	3:35
8	 <b>Time of the Season</b> The Zombies	Time of the Season	Apr 10, 2023	3:34
9	 <b>She's A Rainbow</b> The Rolling Stones	She's A Rainbow / Dandelion / We Love You	Apr 10, 2023	4:13
10	 <b>Child Of The Moon</b> The Rolling Stones	Jumplin' Jack Flash / Child Of The Moon	Apr 10, 2023	3:09
11	 <b>Let's Live For Today - Uncensored Version</b> The Grass Roots	Let's Live For Today	Apr 10, 2023	2:47
12	 <b>Foxy Lady</b> <b>Too Late To Turn Back Now</b>	Are You Experienced	Apr 11, 2023	3:18
▶	 <b>Too Late To Turn Back Now</b> Cornelius Brothers & Sister Rose	The Story Of Cornelius Brothers & Sister Rose	Apr 10, 2023	3:18
14	 <b>(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman</b> Aretha Franklin	Soul Queen	Apr 10, 2023	2:39
15	 <b>Grandma's Hands</b> Bill Withers	Just As I Am	Apr 10, 2023	2:01
16	 <b>Chameleon</b> Herbie Hancock	The Best Of Herbie Hancock	Apr 11, 2023	7:39
17	 <b>Inspiration Information</b> Shuggie Otis	Inspiration Information/ Wings Of Love	Apr 11, 2023	4:12
18	 <b>Fortunate Son</b> Creedence Clearwater Revival	Willy And The Poor Boys (Expanded Edition)	Apr 10, 2023	2:20
19	 <b>A Day In The Life - Remastered 2009</b> The Beatles	Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Remastered)	Apr 10, 2023	5:37



## Faculty Update: Professor Greg Pfitzer

I had a very fulfilling year teaching a variety of courses to students inside and outside the major. In the fall term I offered my “Disney’s America” Scribner Seminar for first year students. American Studies senior major, Alex Weinreb, served as my intrepid peer mentor. The course provided an introduction to the lives and careers of Walt Disney and the Disney Imagineers with special attention to their influence on the historical sensibilities of Americans. Examining animated and live-action films (Song of the South, Johnny Tremain, Davy Crockett, Pocahontas) as well as theme park exhibits (Frontierland, The Hall of the Presidents, Tomorrowland) and museums (The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum), we sought answers to questions about the legitimacy and cultural impact of the historical narratives produced by Disney and his storytellers. How accurate have Disney’s historical presentations been with respect to portrayals of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality in American history? Have Disney productions encouraged Americans to be “nostalgic for a fabricated past,” and, if so, what are the costs of such “imagined” histories? The course culminated with a study of “Disney’s America,” a proposed 3,000-acre historical theme park in Virginia advertised by promoters as “serious fun” but disparaged by detractors as an example of “Mickey Mouse history.” Among other projects, students curated an exhibit of Disney Memorabilia that included books, records, figurines, and stuffed animals from their own Disney collections.



In the fall I also taught AM101: The Wizard of Oz as American Myth, an examination of the cultural impact of L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) and its various twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations. Students considered how revised and reinvented versions of the Baum narrative reflected and shaped cultural anxieties as they intersected with gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, spirituality, and consumerism as categories of analysis. We paid special attention to MGM's 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, the African American musical *The Wiz*, the novel *Wicked*, and the SyFy Channel miniseries *Tin Man*. A variety of methods and approaches were employed, especially myth/symbol theory, feminism, queer theory, and performance studies. On the evening of Halloween, we had a special Oz gathering and watched the entirety of the MGM movie with running commentary from those in character (and costume).



In the spring term I taught AM368: The Sixties, a course that focuses on one of the most intriguing and controversial of American decades. In a short ten years, America experienced the dream of a New Frontier, the Cuban Missile Crisis, a presidential assassination, a devastating armed conflict in southeast Asia, a Civil Rights revolution, a transformation of sexual attitudes, a reconsideration of gender relations, a countercultural movement, a feminist crusade, a man on the moon, and much more. Research on the 1960s is still "recent" in the historical sense of the word. Events are still fresh, participants are still alive, and documents are still available. That said, critical distance has not been achieved, participants are too attached to events to be objective, and materials are too numerous and scattered to evaluate completely. In order to deal thoroughly with these diverse methodological conditions, students in American Studies 368 were exposed to a wide variety of sources--magazines, television programs, oral histories, records, documentaries, newspapers, photographs, movies, government archives, etc.--and were asked to consider these sources as both would-be participants and detached critics. The course was structured as a seminar to facilitate this process, and students took part in participatory activities related to the topic for the week, ranging from mock trials to conducting surveys to producing a live Sixties-revival radio program.

In terms of scholarship, I published a book in November titled *Fame Is Not Just for the Fells: Female Renown and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series* (University of Massachusetts Press). It deals with a series of books written between 1932 and 1958 and read by thousands of children (including me) in the mid-twentieth century. With colorful cover art and compelling—and often highly fictionalized—narrative storylines, these biographies celebrated the national virtues and achievements of famous women like Betsy Ross, Louisa May Alcott, and Amelia Earhart. My book examines the editorial and production choices of the publisher and considers the influence of the series on readers and American culture more broadly.

In telling the story of how female subjects were chosen and what went into writing these histories for young female readers of the time, I illustrate how these books shaped children's thinking and historical imaginations around girlhood using tales from the past. Utilizing documented conversations and disagreements among authors, editors, readers, reviewers, and sales agents at Bobbs-Merrill, "*Fame Is Not Just for the Fells*" places the series in the context of national debates around fame, gender, historical memory, and portrayals of children and childhood for a young reading public—charged debates that continue to this day.



On a final personal note, I became a grandpa for the third time as my daughter, Sally and her partner, Charley, had a baby on April 12. Welcome to the world, James Gordon Gibney, Skidmore Class of 2041. He, along with my other two grandchildren, son Michael's kids, Halia Pfitzer and son Arlo Pfitzer, are the joys of my life. I'm back to changing diapers and giving bottles, skills I thought I had lost over the decades but which, like swimming, come back quickly when you need them. Have a great summer everyone. Be sure to write with updates about your summer activities and/or post-Skidmore lives.

**welcome  
little one!**



# ACADEMIC FESTIVAL

**Faculty Sponsor:** Greg Pfitzer, American Studies

**Presenters:** Callan Daniel '23, Aaron Shellow-Lavine '23, Maelcom Thayer '23, Raven Jade Villa '23

This session will involve four senior projects treating a variety of topics related to the American experience, including:

**Callan Daniel:** “The National College Comedy Festival at Skidmore,” documenting and assessing the thirty-four year history of ComFest, using the Skidmore archives and firsthand accounts.

**Aaron Shellow-Lavine:** “Thin Blue Screens: Social Medias and Algorithmic Copaganda,” dealing with the system of language which distances police from their violence and separates criminalized individuals from their humanity.

**Maelcom Thayer:** “Becoming-vampire in Poppy Z. Brite’s Lost Souls,” drawing on the philosophy of Gille Deleuze and Felix Guattari to associate queer relationships with the figure of the vampire in the context of hyperconsumerism and alienation in the 1990s.

**Raven Jade Villa:** “Disrupting (White) Space: Counter Stories of (Black) Joy & Resilience at Skidmore College,” unsettling Skidmore's archive by reclaiming and re-articulating queer and non-White identities through counter-narratives of Black joy & resilience that celebrate Black bodies, especially Black trans women.



## **Faculty update**

### **Professor Beck Krefting**

American Studies Newsletter Submission (2023)

I returned from my year-long sabbatical and continued working on racial justice initiatives funded by a significant grant from the Mellon Foundation, began my three-year term as director of the Center for Leadership, Teaching, and Learning, re-entered the classroom, and resumed traveling for academic presentations after a three-year hiatus attributable to that rascal COVID-19.

In January 2022, Professor and Program Director of Black Studies Winston Grady-Willis and myself obtained a successful multi-year, multi-pronged \$1,185,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation, titled: “Africana Studies and the Humanities at Skidmore: Transnational Explorations in Social Justice.” The granting period runs from 2022-2024 and includes hiring two postdoctoral fellows in Black Studies—welcome Malik Raymond and Gabriella Friedman—who have offered some fabulous courses in our department. It also involves running the Racial Justice Teaching Challenge, creating learning communities for staff and faculty to expand and apply new knowledges focused on racial justice, and providing funding for research collaborations attending to the same. Professor Grady-Willis and I are sharing the administration of the grant along with a stellar steering committee comprised of five committed faculty/staff members.

My inaugural year as director for the Center for Leadership, Teaching, and Learning kept me busy with programming, infrastructural elements, and supporting/developing a variety of learning communities. This year I focused on creating opportunities to learn, discuss, and implement inclusive teaching practices. External experts like Jim Lang (former director of the D’Amour Center for Teaching Excellence at Assumption University) and Susan Pliner (Associate Provost, Hobart and William Smith Colleges) delivered workshops on the value of high structure classrooms and the benefits of utilizing universal design learning strategies in the classroom. There were pedagogy book club discussions and a variety of panels/workshops focused on academic publishing, confronting challenges in the classroom, serving students with mental health needs, and how to contend with the rise of AI, specifically ChatGPT. CLTL web pages got a makeover (though more work remains), the Weller Room is cleaned out and stocked with supplies, and there is now a borrowing library with books on pedagogy and working in higher education for faculty and staff. Working in tandem with initiatives supported by the Mellon Foundation for “Africana Studies and the Humanities at Skidmore...”, the CLTL supported four learning communities focused on racial justice including racism in higher education and in the fine arts, applying Black feminist pedagogies to our professional work, and centering inter-group dialogue to explore racial identity. I also organized events for the new faculty learning community, a mentoring program for tenure-track faculty, and partnered with IdeaLab to offer the Academy of Course Innovation and Design, a semester-long think tank on radical approaches to course design. I’ve learned so much and am excited to apply those lessons to future CLTL cycles.

This year I had the great pleasure of shepherding students through senior seminar, ten of them in-person and one remotely. Thesis topics ranged from respectability politics in hip-hop to a discourse analysis of representations of US female soccer players during world championships over the course of three decades to an examination of the controversies and technological futures of outdoor advertising. Three talented students pursued an honors thesis: Raven Jade Villa, Maelcum Thayer, and Aaron Shellow-Lavine, and Thayer went on to earn a coveted Periclean award for this senior thesis. In the spring I revived one of my favorite courses focusing on post-apocalyptic film and literature. This time, as a Bridge Experience course, it drew folks from across disciplines and majors, making for some rich connections and conversations. This summer I look forward to dusting off and revising a Scribner Seminar syllabus focused on the history of American foodways—yum.

A co-authored project with Mohamed Bassou—a talented comedian and humor studies scholar from Morocco who traveled to Skidmore College on a Fulbright to study with me fall of 2018—came to fruition with the publication of a chapter, titled “The History of Moroccan Stand-Up Comedy: From Storytelling to Charged Humor,” in *Punching Up: Stand-Up Comedy Speaking Truth to Power*. We will celebrate our publication and successful defense of his dissertation when I travel to Morocco in January 2024. I have four other publications, three chapters in edited collections and one article in the *European Journal of American Studies* that are in varying phases of the publication process but should be available for your reading pleasure in the coming two years. I also continue to work on my book which is tentatively titled: *The Economy of Stand-Up Comedy: Tribalism, Racial Politics, and Emotional Capital*.

Last summer I delivered talks for two invited lectures in Germany, one at the University of Leipzig and the other a symposium on disparagement humor held at Dresden University of Technology. The latter resulted in an invitation to submit that paper for publication. The cool part is that someone will translate into German my chapter, titled “The Dangerous Ambivalence of Comedic Disparagement in Stand-Up Comedy.” I was also invited as a guest speaker to present at the University of Szeged, Hungary in November. The talk was virtual, so I missed out on visiting the country, but it was edifying to talk about things like cancel culture and the gendered politics of comedy across national boundaries. In the spring, I presented a talk titled: “A Crazy Funny History” at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado that examines the discourse coupling comedians with mental illness/addiction across 130 years of print media to understand our ongoing collective investment in marrying creativity with madness.

This year I began the first year of a two-year stint as President of the American Humor Studies Association, a national scholarly organ advancing the field of humor studies via conferences and its attendant journal for which I also serve on the editorial board: *Studies in American Humor*. This year I co-organized a national conference for the association which will take place right here at Skidmore College July 10-12. Plans for that are currently underway along with preparation for working with Aaron Shellow-Lavine ('23) this summer on research related to my book project. Thanks to my students and colleagues for another wonderful year!



# SENIOR THESIS

## Senior Thesis Abstracts Fall 2022

### **Callan Daniels**

This thesis will investigate two theatrical adaptations, *Oedipus El Rey* by Luis Alfaro, and *A Tempest* by Aimé Césaire. Specifically, looking at how both plays use a four-prong approach of use of language, shifts in the characters identities, incorporation of folkloric or cultural reference, and shift to the plot and/or ending to functionally change the impact and messaging of the play, as well as how it interacts with the specific cultures it grounds itself in. The plays will be analyzed for their use of this approach, and along a symptomatic, genre, and reception analysis. By analyzing the success of these plays, it will theorize this four-pronged approach as a method or guide for adaptations of canonical theatrical text which attempt to ground themselves in different locations, cultures, or hemispheres.

### **Kimberly Fragola**

Eminem's three facades; Marshall Mathers, Slim Shady, and Eminem, each work through the fundamental pillars of respectability politics to avoid responsibility for their reckless cultural ignorance. self-presentations of respectability culminate through tools of self-censorship/self-editing, and cultural assimilation vs. cultural appropriation. These acceptances/denials of respectability politics dictate who can perform which identities, when and where. White cis men are drastically more prepared to succeed in our capitalist racist patriarchy, especially with the conservative atmosphere surrounding the turn of the twenty first millennium.

While other demographics certainly do culturally appropriate or offend, they all have some social arena where they must adhere to certain respectability politics. Cis straight white men don't have the same moral obligation. In the Last twenty-five years of American history, Eminem's lyrics have narrated the uptick in middle-American young white men claiming 'reverse-discrimination' while blaming minoritized communities for their misfortune. This is why it's crucial to study which normalized political and social beliefs are encouraged and understood, especially through an artist that mirrors the most powerful group in American society.

Respectability Politics is intrinsically intertwined with gangster rap and hip-hop cultures. Because of its imposing nature on the black community, along with other minoritized groups, the active defiance of these politics of respectability establish a credibility of hardness and lack of conformity that aligns with those subcultures' growing refusal to be ostracized by the normative white cis patriarchy. The co-opting of this defiance by white rappers like Eminem is inherently problematic most importantly because of the lack of imposition respectability politics has had on their identities, both historically and currently. While he constantly claims discrimination in both the subculture of gangster rap and American society as a whole, Mathers does not have the same.

### **Paul Heffernan**

As traditional advertising channels such as TV and radio are sharply declining, outdoor advertising has surprisingly enjoyed steady growth in recent years. Outdoor advertising, also called out-of-home advertising (OOH), is defined as any form of advertising consumed outside of the home. Billboard revenues increased by double digits in 2022, followed by street furniture, made up of bus shelters, buses, train stations, public toilets, kiosks, and even trashcans. Transit and place-based advertising also

# SENIOR THESIS

expanded as cities recovered from the pandemic. Outdoor advertising dominates urban areas, where eighty-nine percent of the U.S. population is projected to live by 2050. Therefore, more attention should be given to outdoor advertising as a representation of our past, present, and future culture. Outdoor advertising inherently creates controversy as well, regarding issues like free speech, political debates, and income disparity, issues that are not going away in the future. My work seeks to analyze billboards as a technology that is changing what it means for us to interact with the built environment. I employ a symptomatic analysis to fully understand contemporary controversies in outdoor advertising, as well as a production analysis of current and future marketing techniques being integrated into OOH media and what this can tell us about American culture.

## **Ethan McNamara**

American exceptionalism is the ideology that believes America is essentially different from every other country. It enforces the incorrect presumption that the United States is inherently different from every other country through its culture and politics. This differentiation is based on ideals of White male superiority, as America is directly linked to White masculinity through this definition. One method of maintaining this exceptionalist rhetoric is through its production of literature. The ‘Great American Novel’ (GAN) centers primarily around White masculinity, particularly in the K-12 school system. These novels often include themes that depict White men as the universally relatable protagonist, reinforcing White masculinity as the literary and cultural standard. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a contender for the GAN while uprooting these conventions by telling a Black woman’s story of slavery, violence, grief, and loss. Despite its place on the list of ‘great American novels’, the novel is widely contested and banned in the American school system. This paper is based on specific research questions, which are the following: How is the selection of ‘great American novels’ shaped by American exceptionalism? How does American exceptionalism inform the production of literature reinforcing racial and gendered biases? And how does Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* challenge American exceptionalist notions around race, class, and gender?

## **Sydney Muller**

From the swimsuit clad fashionista of the 1960s to the working woman of the 1980s and 2000s, Barbie has pervaded American culture by rooting herself into our early years of development. Throughout history, Barbie has symbolized much to many by reflecting changing cultural values and beliefs, especially with the rise of feminism. Along the way, she has amassed a number of fans and critics who follow different discourses about Barbie’s impact as a representative of American culture. How have these shifts over time affected the American people? This study analyzes Barbie dolls from 1959, 1980, 1985, 1992, and 2016, noting how they function as major phases in Barbie’s evolution. With a combination of discourse, symptomatic, and production analyses, I illuminate the ways Barbie dolls and the choices behind their designs have reflected our changing culture—and how polarizing reactions to her establish her ambiguity. The goal of this paper is to reveal Barbie, not as simply a positive or negative influence, but as a pervasive example of American culture that reveals the ways in which notions of feminism and progressivism have changed over time.

# SENIOR THESIS

## **Aaron Shellow-Lavine**

America is stuck in a feedback loop of media and political rhetoric which misconstrues the drivers of crime, promotes false interpretations of criminality, and strengthens the ever-growing incarceration-focused police state. Activists refer to this system of language colloquially as copaganda\* but the phrase has largely gone un-explored in academic settings. For many marginalized communities, being subject to such race-class coded rhetoric has become a way of life, as popular television programs and news outlets have adopted countless terms and phrases which are nefariously pro-police and anti-human. The language of copaganda shifts what Americans think of as indicators of safety away from reality and distracts from the root causes of crime, instead proposing that over-policing and mass incarcerations are the only ways to keep our neighborhoods safe. This paper explores one historical moment which saw the development of key terms and ideas which are commonplace in contemporary examples of copaganda. From the 1994 Crime Bill through Cops, the laws of the land and popular media have driven Americans to see those struggling to survive as nothing more than criminals worthy of punishment. This research utilizes a multimodal approach, using a critical discourse analysis to identify and track the impact of neoliberalism in several spheres of U.S. culture, and a dual symptomatic-reception analysis of various TV shows and media coverage of current events, interrogating who is represented as criminal and for what reasons.

## **Bobby Stratts**

In the modern day, sports are currently ruled by men. Names like LeBron James, Lionel Messi, Steph Curry, and Tom Brady ring true to most American ears. But when the names Brandi Chastain, Brianna Scurry, Julie Foudy, and Megan Rapinoe, most would say they know none of the names or only know the last one if any. Yet, they're some of the most influence female athletes of not only their generation, but of their entire sport of women's soccer. Women's sports, although common today was not prevalent almost fifty years ago. In fact, it was only in 1971 that females were granted the same right to athletic facilities and sporting events that men did. Teams started to form, and from there a cultural shift would take place over the entire course of women's sports. One of the team that was founded was the United States Women's National Soccer Team (known commonly as the USWNT). In their beginning, they were nothing more than a group of college girls trying to elevate the program and themselves to the next level. Little did they know that the group of them who were chosen to be the first players for the program would go on to be a part of one of the most successful national teams in the world, men or women. With four Olympic gold medals and four Women's World Cup titles, they are without a doubt successful. However, they were not treated as the champions they proved to be on the field. Programs like the United States Soccer Federation and multiple news media corporations and publishers like ESPN, SportsCenter, and Sports Illustrated would slight the female athletes for simply not being men and focusing more on their appearances and looks rather than how they would perform. On top of this, the USSF didn't establish the same contract for the women's team as their male counterparts. This robbed them of millions of dollars they could have earned from their wins. If this was and still is the standard for women's sports and female athletes, what is it going to take to change? Which team will be the first to take a step in the right direction and show that the spotlight belongs to them?

# SENIOR THESIS

## **Maelcom Thayer**

Beginning from their establishment in Gothic literature, vampires have always represented the Other: people of color, Jews, sex workers, and queers have always inhabited the illegibility of the vampire. By taking on this label through identifying with representations of the vampire in film, there's a potential for the transformation of a subject that allows for retooling kinship, embracing non-normative forms of being, and existing beyond thresholds of static identity. Employing the philosophy of becoming posited by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I argue that analyzing the figure of the queer vampire through its transformative, 'becoming' potential both problematizes and reinforces its function as a discursive figure in media. This reading of queer vampire media (particularly lesbian vampire exploitation films and their antecedents) reveal the political potential for identity and community formation of becoming-vampire in a posthuman framework, and allows for the phenomenon of Real Vampires that emerges from Goth subcultures and the advent of queer/vampire/Goth subjectivities.

## **Liz Tybush**

Tools used to mitigate transmission of COVID in spaces like higher education ended up creating additional access gains for people with various disabilities. Furthermore, the increased use of these tools appeared to be increasing awareness of accessibility. However, with a societal push to "return to normal" despite the ongoing threat that COVID places, these access gains are under threat as many of these tools are seeing a decline in use or going un-used entirely. Scholars and experts examining COVID and its mode of transmission argue for the continued use of tools that provide adequate filtration of virosoles—virus-laden aerosols—in the air, in combination with other mitigation strategies, to create environments that are safe for work, study, and more. Furthermore, surveys and research of students across educational tiers shows that inadequate remote and tech-supportive policy and tech resources are the main barrier toward creating a remote environment that is satisfactory and equitable. In this paper, I argue for the continued use of three tools specifically—the Corsi-Rosenthal Box (or CR Box, a DIY air filter), remote options (policies to support work and study, whether supporting the remote modality or the acquisition of resources to make remote satisfactory and productive), and cloud collaboration tech (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams). These tools, used in an exo-pandemic way, can keep some of these access gains and allow disabled individuals continued access to work spaces and classrooms. To do this, I use a production analysis, a close reading of texts, and a reception analysis. I also look at work from disability scholarship, as well as examine contemporary disabled voices reacting to the "return to normal" push. I do most of this work within the micro-community of education. I conclude that CR Boxes and remote option support via policies and tech are not just satisfactory mitigation measures for preventing the spread of COVID, but are curb-cuts that can lead to an overall increase in the well-being and health of all individuals. The use of these tools is also a demonstration of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) by creating spaces and modalities that support all people, including disabled people, who span the gamut of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, faith, and more.

# SENIOR THESIS

## **Raven Jade Villa**

In American history and culture, as transgender politics and transgender women became more visible, the violence and backlash they experienced increased tenfold. As conversations and discourses around transgender issues and transgender women circulated society, a conservative form of religion and politics worked to undermine the progress toward transgender recognition in the social, political, and legal landscape. A deep dive into LGBTQ history, especially as it pertains to transgender people/women, demonstrates that the gendered paradigms of America have inhibited transgender women from taking part and exist in the American social fabric. The confluence of religious, legal, social, and political forces is working to subjugate transgender women in modern day. However, when this history is compounded with the histories of anti-Blackness and Black women, it reveals how the interlocking oppressions of race, gender, class, and queerness relegate Black transgender women to a different experience in America. Black feminist thought served as the theoretical framework to engage with transgender, especially Black transgender women's, history and experiences. At heart, this research centered transgender women, especially Black trans narratives, through Tracey "Africa" Norman and Laverne Cox. By shedding light on their (her)stories, it showed how they have re-articulated and self-defined the transgender identity and transgender women back on the cultural map of the American history and culture.

## **Alex Weinreb**

In contemporary baseball, it is difficult to avoid seeing some semblance of a bat flip or home run celebration. The phenomenon of a bat flip occurs immediately following a batter's feat of hitting the ball so far over the outfield wall that they have no doubt it will be a home run, hence its common referral as a "no-doubt home run." New waves and demographics of fans and players have embraced this display of emotion and passion on the field, but historically this has not always been the case, as proper social norms were established early on in the sport's history guised under the term "unwritten rules," preventing players from acting in ways that deviated from these norms. In this paper, I highlight multiple case studies that display this trend, including the public praise and adoration that Babe Ruth received as the face of the sport while representing the embodiment of the "new primitive male," as well as the hate and dismissal that Hank Aaron's received for being a Black man trying to break their white hero's home run record. These trends and the sentiment that unwritten rules are essential to the sport is challenged in contemporary Major League Baseball, with players like Fernando Tatis Jr. pushing unwritten rules that sought to control players behavior. His willingness to bat flip and act in ways that deviate from the social norms within the game represents a broader development in American culture where people of all different races, classes, and genders feel more comfortable being themselves unapologetically. What may seem like just a five second moment provides meaningful and important insight into American culture at any given period.

# CONGRAULATIONS!

# SENIORS

