



# American Studies

## 2015-2016 Chair's Letter

It's May in Saratoga Springs and, finally, spring is in the air. It took awhile. We had more snow in April than any other month this past year. But good things come to those who wait, I suppose.

In terms of the American Studies faculty this year, that old saw is certainly true. As many of you know, two years ago we searched for a new faculty member—to replace the irreplaceable Professor Mary Lynn—and after a laborious process we hired Amber Wiley. We knew at the time that, because she had won the inaugural H. Allen Brooks Travelling Fellowship, she would be unable to join us until the fall of 2015. Well, the fall of 2015 arrived and so did the well-traveled Professor Wiley. She was and remains a welcome addition to the department and the college. I should add that we were not the only people to recognize Amber's many talents. In January, *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* ran a feature on Amber as one of the country's top emerging scholars and featured her on the cover of the magazine. For more on the *Diverse* profile, see <http://diverseeducation.com/?emerging-scholar=professor-of-place>. Needless to say, Amber's presence and good work were certainly among the year's highlights.

Another was the campus lecture given by Professor Alison Kibler that American Studies organized in September. A Professor of American Studies and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Franklin and Marshall College,

Kibler gave a lecture titled "The Long History of Hate Speech: Irish, Jewish, and African American Struggles Against Racial Ridicule 1890-1930." It was partly drawn from her book *Censoring Racial Ridicule* (2015). As is our tradition, we also had Kibler come to Senior Seminar to give students some advice on how to complete a big project. It was a memorable session. Ask the seniors about it.

Kibler's lecture was but one of the ways American Studies participated in the life of the college this year. In September, Professor Beck Krefling participated in the Dunkerley Dialogue with artist Mark Allen and Rachel Seligman of the Tang. Also in the fall, we co-sponsored the Classics Department's Ajax performance and a screening of the film *The Mask You Live In* (2015). We also co-sponsored Nikki A. Greene's lecture "Concerning the Spiritual in Art: The Substance of Abstraction," the documentary *3½ Minutes, 10 Bullets* (2015), and a lecture by scholar/activist Rosa Clemente.

Really, though, our students and alums were the stars of the year. One of our proudest moments occurred in December when Beck Krefling's Disorderly Women (AM 345) students secured a \$7,500 grant from a foundation for Jane's Due Process (<http://janesdueprocess.org>). In addition, the class was featured in a terrific video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RR2HA1cyw0>) that has nearly

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gone viral. Another memorable moment was the Jacquelyn Micieli-Voutsinas-led field trip to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in April. Yet another was the annual radio show that Professor Greg Pfitzer organizes with the students in his 1960s class. They rocked especially hard this year.

The 2016 cohort of AM majors was large, special, and did some great things this year. The following is not a comprehensive list of their accomplishments. Hannah Doban and Nevon Kipperman co-wrote a chapter in my soon-to-be-published book *Baltimore Sports: Stories from Charm City* (2016). Lisa Fierstein, Mollie Welch, and Tessa "Flash" Kalinosky were awarded Joanna Schneider Zangrando Student Opportunity Funds for their respective projects. Tessa was also a NY6 Think Tank Fellow; you can read her work at <http://www.eatyrwords.com>. On behalf of The Green Onion (@greenonionllc), Claire Lindsay won \$6,000 in the Kenneth A. Freirich Business Plan Competition. Dorothea Trufelman won the fourth annual CTM Video Contest for "Moving Pictures," which is about dance and music. She also won an award for her co-curricular contributions to life of the College. Hannah Doban, Sophia Inkeles, Markus Messoro, Dan Plumer, and Mollie Welch all wrote Honors Theses and presented their work at this year's Academic Festival. The room was packed and they were stellar. Dan Plumer was chosen to participate in the John B. Moore Documentary Studies Collaborative (MDOCS) annual summer Storytellers' Institute. At Honors Convocation, Nevon Kipperman was honored with the American Studies Faculty Award and Lisa Fierstein won the Arts Administration Faculty Award. (To read their citations, go to <http://www.skidmore.edu/news/2016/0509-honors-convo-2016.php>.) In addition, Lisa produced a short documentary that has been accepted at the Legacy Film Festival on Aging in San Francisco. You can see her film here: [http://www.skidmore.edu/news/2016/0509\\_murray\\_paintings.php](http://www.skidmore.edu/news/2016/0509_murray_paintings.php). The American Studies faculty could not be more pleased and proud of these accomplishments, in part because we know how much time, energy, hard work, and persistence went into achieving

Over the course of the year, we were also pleased to hear from a wide range of our alums. Becky Stern '14 and Mack Lacy '14 reported that they met up in Boston and "walked the freedom trail (again)!" Alex Shapiro '07, Miss Claire Solomon '10, Andrew LaSane '10, and Becca Baruc '15 all stopped by the American Studies office at different times. Alex is an Emmy Award-winning associate producer at the MLB Network, Claire is a graduate student at Columbia University, Andrew is on staff at mentalfloss.com, and Becca is happily working and performing comedy in Chicago (<http://www.beccabaruc.com>). We also learned that Emma Newcombe '10 published her first academic article, "Camping, Climbing, and Consumption: The Bean Boot, 1912-1945," and that Allison Dell Otto '12 intends to matriculate to the University of Chicago's Master of Arts Program in the Humanities. Kyle Giard-Chase '14 has accepted a position with AmeriCorps as part of its AIDS United program in New Orleans. He also just completed a seven-week solo bike trip from British Columbia to Mexico. Isaac Forman '14 has just accepted a position as an investigator with the Civilian Complaint Review Board in New York City. And by all accounts Andrew Borden-Chisholm '04 did a great job presenting at the NY6 Think Tank workshop hosted at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in April. I'm pleased to report that we heard from many more of our alums (see [http://www.skidmore.edu/american\\_studies/alumni/index.php](http://www.skidmore.edu/american_studies/alumni/index.php)) and would love to hear from even more.

Finally, as I say every year in this space, there is a bittersweet quality to the end of the academic year. It is of course a time of celebration and excitement for our graduating seniors, in whom we have great confidence. We are also sad to see them fly the American Studies nest. The same is true of our Visiting Assistant Professor Jacquelyn Micieli-Voutsinas. Jacq has been with us for two years and did great work. We will miss her curricular contributions to the department and her collegiality and wish her the best.

Hope everyone has a great summer. Please stay in touch.

Sincerely,

DN

### AM 103 001 1968

**Professor Daniel Nathan TuTh, 12:40-2:00 Credits: 4**

This course introduces students to different forms of history and cultural criticism and examines some recurrent American cultural values and themes, such as the tension and disparity between American ideals and social realities. It also emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, acknowledging diversity, and making connections. Students will analyze and synthesize many kinds of texts in order to better appreciate the complexity of American life and culture. The course employs an interdisciplinary approach that melds history, journalism, autobiography, material culture, music, literature, art, film (feature and documentary), and other forms of knowledge and expression—and uses 1968 as its focal point. Why 1968? There are several reasons. For many people, especially those who experienced it firsthand, 1968 seemed like a historical and cultural pivot or a line of demarcation between the past and the present, a moment when the United States and much of the world changed irrevocably. Some have characterized it as “The Year That Shaped a Generation,” “The Year Everything Went Wrong,” and “The Year the Dream Died.” For our purposes, 1968 is a kind of laboratory that enables us to think critically about American culture in a complex, interdisciplinary manner.

### AM 103W 001 A Humorous (Dis)Course

**Professor Beck Krefting WF, 10:10-12:00 Credits: 4**

In this course we will use comedic cultural forms to think critically about American culture and to explore key moments and transitions in American history. As burgeoning Americanists, we will examine the history of comedy as the history of the United States—that comedy reflects the institutions and ideologies shaping cultural production; the same institutions and ideologies that prompt us to warfare, that determine who has rights and who does not and that influence our consumptive practices. This course will examine the history of cultural production in America, specifically through the cultural forms of minstrelsy, vaudeville, improv, and stand-up comedy and how it has been influenced and shaped by shifts in social consciousness, changing economy, industrial and technological innovations, political events, public/popular discourses and global conflict and relations.

### AM 103W 002 The American City

**Professor Amber Wiley TuTh, 9:40-11:00 Credits: 4**

Introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American culture, past and present. Emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, and acknowledging diversity. Students will analyze and synthesize multiple kinds of primary sources (such as fiction, film, music, art) and disciplinary perspectives (sociology, economics, media criticism) to appreciate better the complexity of American life and culture. **Note(s):** (Fulfills social science requirement.)

### AM 250A 001 Reg Culture: Hudson River

**Professor Gregory Pfitzer MWF, 9:05-10:00 Credits: 4**

An introduction to the history, literature, and art of the Hudson River Valley. The Hudson River is considered as an environmental entity, an economic and political concern, and especially as a cultural symbol. The course considers four centuries of American experience on the Hudson, but focuses on the nineteenth century, when the Hudson had its greatest influence on regional and national culture. **Note(s):** (Fulfills social sciences requirement.)

## **AM 260C 001 African American Experience**

**Professor Amber Wiley MW, 2:30-3:50 Credits: 3**

An exploration of the development of the distinctive culture of the southern region of the United States. The course examines myths and legends of the Old South, including those surrounding the origins of the plantation system, southern womanhood, and the development of the slave and free communities of the region in the antebellum period. Topics include the myths and legends of the New South, the legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the imposition of segregation, modernization of agriculture and industry, and the migration of African-Americans northward. The course culminates in a study of the civil rights movement, and recent demographic, economic, and political changes.

**Note(s):** (Fulfills social sciences requirement.)

## **AM 362 001 American Autobiography**

**Professor Daniel Nathan WF, 12:20-1:40 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 374 001 Senior Seminar**

**Professor Gregory Pfitzer MW, 4:00-5:50 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.

## **AM 376B 001 City in American Culture**

**Professor Amber Wiley TuTh, 2:10-3:30 Credits: 3**

This course is an examination of the growth and impact of urban life on American culture. The course examines the relationship between the perceptions of urban life and the actualities of that experience. By focusing on how varying reactions to the urban experience result from economic, ethnic, or gender differences, the course explores such topics as: the effect of industrialization, the waves of rural migration and overseas immigration, the concentrations of wealth and poverty, the impact of architecture, and the parks and planning movements. The nation's capital, Washington, D.C., will be the lens through which we investigate these issues.

## Professor Daniel Nathan

This was my fourteenth year at Skidmore. Hardly seems possible. Like all of them, #14 went fast.

In the fall, I taught two courses, oldies but goodies: American Past in Film (AM 233) and Global Perspectives of the U.S. (AM 362). I thought the classes went well, but sometimes I'm not the best judge. Also in the fall, I began serving on the MDOCS Advisory Board and as Skidmore's NY6 Think Tank representative. I also published a short essay, "Cultural Studies and Sport History," in the *International Journal of the History of Sport*. Much more important, though, Benjamin E. Nathan's Bar Mitzvah was in the fall. It was a joyous occasion. The kid did great. It was a pleasure to share the occasion with so many of my AM colleagues, past and present.

This spring, I taught American Sport/American Culture (AM 234) and, for the second time, Reading *The Wire* (AM 376X). In the latter class, I was again able to bring *The Wire* writer Rafael Alvarez to class. We also had a "meet and greet" for him at my house, which was a good, lively time.

As the current Past President of the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH), I chaired the NASSH Distinguished Lecturers and Awards Committee, which went smoothly. This year's NASSH conference is being held at Georgia Tech in late May. As always, I'm looking forward to the meeting. This year, I will be giving a paper, moderating a session, and commenting on some papers. I also plan to have some good southern cooking.

This summer, I'm looking forward to the publication of my book *Baltimore Sports: Stories From Charm City* (University of Arkansas Press). It is a wide-ranging, eclectic anthology, which I am proud and pleased to report features an essay co-written by AM majors Hannah Doban '16 and Nevon Kipperman '16.

This summer I'm also going to keep plugging away on my writing projects (one of which I *have* to finish by September), finally watch *Deadwood* and *Veep*, do some traveling with my family (to DC, the Eastern Shore of MD, and the NJ beach), do some yard work, spend some time in the Berkshires, and, as ever, root for the Orioles.

**Meet our Faculty:  
Dan Nathan, Amber Wiley,  
Beck Krefting, Jacque Micieli-  
Voutsinas, and Greg Pfitzer**



**Meet our Seniors plus a few others who took Professor Pfitzer's 1960s class**



**Insight from our Seniors**

**Lisa Fierstein**



Last semester, I wrote my American Studies senior thesis on identity and culture in Ira Glass' *This American Life*. After graduation, I will continue to pursue my interest in radio at an NPR member station

located on the Interlochen Center for the Arts campus in Northern Michigan. There, I will hone my craft by producing stories for air and reporting on the best of local and national arts and culture. I am looking forward to my future endeavors, but I will miss the incredible support of the Skidmore College American Studies faculty. Best of luck to the Am-Stud seniors next year!

**Claire Lindsay**

I will never forget one class I took during my sophomore year: 1968 with Dan Nathan. It was that class that inspired me to switch from my already declared Art History major to join the American Studies Department. As someone with eclectic interests, I appreciated the range of topics and approaches we studied over the next few years and the close community created among a small clan of majors. I wrote my senior thesis last fall about the role of small-scale American organic farmers within the organic industry and will use that knowledge and my experience working on a farm to open my own farmer's market and event center supporting young entrepreneurial farmers of the Hudson Valley.



This was a busy and productive year for me. I taught five courses, preparation for which occupied most of my waking hours (and a few sleeping ones as well). Two of my courses were new. One was a Scribner Seminar, Disney's America, which I offered in the fall. An introduction to the lives and careers of Walt Disney and the Disney Imagineers, this course examined animated and live-action films (*Song of the South*, *Johnny Tremain*, *Pocahontas*) as well as theme park exhibits (Frontierland, The Hall of the Presidents, Tomorrowland) and museums (The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum) with an eye to determining how Disney impacted the historical sensibilities of Americans in the twentieth century. Students 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."

In the spring I offered for the first time AM 260 (I): Pop History. As the title suggests, the course was a topical examination of the creation, dissemination, and consumption of "pop"ular history in American culture. It considered the ways Americans absorb history through vernacular forms of communication, including radio dramatizations (*The Calvalcade of America*); cartoons and comic books (*Classics Illustrated*); television programs (*Time Tunnel* and *Drunk History*); movies (*The New World*); living history demonstrations (Civil War re-enactments); and rap music (Flocabulary's *Hip-Hop History*).

We focused on how "a usable past" functions in the United States and on how nostalgia informs popular history making in the culture at large. Students wrote essays and gave presentations on how changing technologies have influenced channels of popular memory with respect to the past and focused on how the "past we choose to remember" operates within contemporary and mediated public spaces.

I also taught some old standards, including my seminar on the 1960s (always fun to teach with plenty of discussions about the counterculture and the influence of the "Holy Trinity"--sex, drugs and rock n' roll) and my 100-level course on Myth and Symbol in American Studies. This latter course is an introduction to the ways myths and symbols function in American culture. We considered how myths develop initially as mirrors for reflecting and testing cultural experience; how they gradually change over time to accommodate altering cultural conditions; and how they eventually outlive their usefulness. This year the course focused on the pervasive mythology of the American frontier, paying special attention to how, once the physical frontier disappeared in the late nineteenth century, Americans transferred their ambitions for the West to imperial outposts in the Caribbean and the Pacific in the early twentieth century, and then to outer space in the late twentieth century, where astronauts replaced cowboys as the archetypal American heroes and where the successes and failures of Western frontier development were recapitulated in space exploration and development.

I'm most proud of the work that our fourteen senior majors did in AM374: Senior Seminar, which I taught in the fall. They each developed and executed a major research project in a topic area of their choice, presenting their findings in three workshop sessions which involved peer critiquing and redrafting exercises. One can find the abstracts for these projects on the American Studies website. (Click on the "Student Information" link on the American Studies homepage and choose "Fall 2015 Seminar Topics.") They are well worth consulting.

## Study Abroad Experience

Gabriela Perez



Fellow American Studies majors:

If you have been given the opportunity to study abroad — anywhere, really — do it. As American Studies majors, a good bit of your academic career centers on understanding the American identity and culture. It may seem counterintuitive to suggest the best way to examine “Americanness” is to leave the U.S. But as a cross-section of different identities (woman, woman of color, Latinx, Latinx woman of color, etc.), I think the best semester I have had as an American studies major came without taking a single American studies course. And this is not a knock on our outstanding department. The fact of the matter is, there are some things that can not be taught in classrooms and books. Professor Daniel Nathan’s class on Global Perspectives of the United States truly came to life for me the past four months. It is true: in order to confront your unique identities you have to have the courage and willingness to put yourself under the microscope for a change. When you are abroad you become a living and breathing artifact of America, and you can not escape it.

My semester abroad in Madrid as part of the Skidmore in Spain program has been the most rewarding and challenging of my life. Was it scary, leaving the country I’ve lived in for 20 years? Yes. Granted, I spoke the same native tongue as my Spanish nationals, but I faced cultural and racial challenges that I have not experienced here in the United States. I took notice of our liberties, our traditions, and our individualistic culture in comparison to the more collective-orientated Spanish community. That being said, nearly every cafe I walked into in Europe, whether in Madrid, Lisbon, Paris, or Rome, had American music playing. The Spanish youth would sing American top hits at the top on their lungs in the late night metro en route to American-themed *discotecas*. I would sit quietly while the Spanish would intelligently discuss Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and the disgusting rise of Donald Trump while many of my classmates and I had just learned about the Spanish political system. America seeps into the corners of European culture, while its politics is on the front page of newspapers because of the old adage, something along the lines of when America sneezes others catch a cold. Meanwhile, most Americans remain more ignorant of world affairs.

It was not until I was in Spain that American had become the forefront of my identity. Whereas in the United States I can somewhat easily be classified as Latina, in Spain I was often told that I spoke Spanish very well for an American until they were told of my Dominican heritage. Whereas in the United States (luckily due to where I have grown up and become local, perhaps) there is a certain degree of political correctness and racial tact that prevents strangers from petting my curly hair, no such social taboo exists in Spain where there has been little interaction with diverse individuals, unlike in the U.S.

In my program classes I took a course at the world-famous Museo del Prado, *Is Spain Different?* a course examining the current socio-political climate in Spain during an interesting transition to democracy, a Heritage Speakers Spanish grammar class, and juggled an internship as a Political and Sociological Research Assistant for Professor Lobera from the *Is Spain Different?* course. Throughout my four months I have traveled extensively to other countries such as France, Italy, Portugal, and the Netherlands. To sum it up, I have learned a lot about what it means to be American, because your identity is not just how you personally identify yourself, but how others see you. It is dynamic and constructed by many different perceptions.

Sometimes it easiest to begin this task of “remembering” by consulting previous newsletter contributions; while doing so, I stumbled across a quick reference to something that has become a focal point for me in the past year. Two years ago, I wrote this: “On the service front, I was honored and flattered to be a part of the committee working to establish the new Media and Film Studies minor, which was a successful undertaking...” Fast forward a year and imagine me accepting the offer to be the Director of the Media and Film Studies Program without a clue about what I was saying yes to. Jump ahead another year...well, the shortest story is: I’m alive. The longer story involves some missteps, an ability to recite the requirements for the minor forwards and backwards in under sixty seconds, and a renewed appreciation for the administrative work done by ANYBODY. Seriously, it’s been rewarding (like when students gush about the value of their capstone or an amazing course) and challenging (I’ll refrain from expounding on this since the wounds are still fresh but suffice it to say that I hate bureaucracy).

Some highlights from MFS: This year the program focused on developing several key areas including: clarifying, streamlining and building the structured field experience (SFE); curriculum development and consistency; and outreach and visibility. Aided by my trusty and talented student administrative assistants including: Octavia Ewart (Class of 2016), Wilson Espinal (Class of 2017), and Alyssa Morales (Class of 2018), we created an online, searchable database of media-focused job and internship opportunities suitable for satisfying their capstone for the minor. We sponsored and co-sponsored a variety of campus programming bringing an array of talented thinkers, practitioners, and scholars to campus, including: cartoonist Scott McCloud, television critic for *The New Yorker* Emily Nussbaum, foremost Beyoncé scholar Janelle Hobson, documentarian of queer comedy David Pavlosky, and visual scholar Brian Murphy. Among many other things, we worked with the John B. Moore Documentary Studies Collaborative (MDOCS) to create what will become our biannual Ethics Bowl, an evening devoted to learning the legal and ethical intricacies of working with human subjects for media projects. We also hosted a networking night at the Saratoga Arts Forum where students mingled and sought internships and employment from local business owners, practitioners in the visual and performing arts, and non-profit directors. What I enjoy most about Media and Film Studies are the natural synergies with American Studies, indeed, they overlap and intersect all the time, especially when it comes to our curriculum. Some of the most exciting cross-listed courses include: Reading *The Wire*, Postwar Hollywood and Postwar America, Graphic Novels and Comic Books, Film Noir!, Post-Apocalyptic Film and Literature and History of Media and Communications.

Remember that research Rebecca Baruc (Class of 2015) and I conducted during the 2014 Summer Faculty/Student Research Program? Of course you do. Publishing can take a long time, but finally our efforts yielded a journal article titled: “A New Economy of Jokes?: #Socialmedia #Comedy,” which was published in Routledge’s *Comedy Studies Journal* last fall (2015). Working with facile and creative minds is one of the many highlights of having this job. Now, in addition to ongoing monograph projects, I’m currently working on a chapter focusing on Maria Bamford as case study for a forthcoming edited collection titled: *Taking a Stand: American Stand-up Comedians as Public Intellectuals*. I’m also doing some other cool stuff on the research front. For instance, I visited and conducted field work at an ad hoc enclave of preppers in central Tennessee over winter break. Their preps for energy, water, fuel, food, safety and security were impressive and I learned a lot from them.

## Professor Beck Krefting cont.d

Last June, I traveled to New York City where I stayed in NYU dorms for a week while attending a seminar led by Spelman College Professor Cynthia Spence Neal titled: “Achieving Gender Justice through Service Learning.” Conversations, readings, and projects developed during this seminar directly informed revisions to AM 345H: Disorderly Women, which I taught in the fall. For this iteration of the course, I wanted to teach students the practical skills of grant writing in real time and with real outcomes. We partnered with Jane’s Due Process (JDP), a Texas-based non-profit that assists young women in navigating the legal system to obtain judicial bypass from parental involvement laws. Students worked closely with Skidmore alumna and AMST minor Emily Rooke-Ley (Class of 2014) to research funding agencies, write letters of inquiry to the foundations, and research and write three grant applications, all for separate funders. While two of the funding agencies were unable to support JDP this year, the funders have requested to meet with them, adding JDP to the list of agencies invited to apply for grant funding in coming years. From the third foundation, grant funding was given in the amount of \$7,500. Needless to say, we were thrilled, JDP most of all. This amount of money could pay for an entire year of sonograms for Texas girls in need.

I like to keep things exciting, so this time when teaching AM 103W: A Humorous (Dis)Course, I decided to add a module on improvisational humor. Working with staff at the Tang Museum, we partnered with Machine Project, a West coast non-profit performance collaborative that brings artists together. Students learned the history of and techniques for improv performance and then were asked to put them into practice with visiting performance artist Dawn Kasper. Kasper, who has a rich history of performance art that is playful, rhythmic and endlessly creative, worked with students to create an original performance for the Tang. To round things out, this spring I taught AM 221: Methods and Approaches. This course incorporates some kind of theme, introducing students to the intellectual history of the discipline and the key research methods useful for American Studies. Dan Nathan focuses on methods and approaches to the study of community, while Greg Pfitzer has students study methods and approaches scholars have applied to 1930s history and culture. I did something similar to Pfitzer, but focused on the 1980s, you know: AIDS Crisis, yuppies, jelly shoes, trickle-down economics, Alf—the furry creature from the planet Melmac, thawing of the Cold War, Reagan *ignoring* the AIDS Crisis, rise in nuclear reactor plants, *Dirty Dancing*, and big bangs. It was more fun than I should be allowed to have at work or in the parlance of the times: “It was tubular, dude....most excellent.” It’s a pretty accurate description of our department as well. I hope you can say the same.

## Insight from our Seniors cont.d

### Tessa Kalinosky

I remember that I was trying to find one more class to fill out my schedule and happened upon Introduction to American Studies: Wizard of Oz. I quickly realized that American Studies was the major for me. In my final year I was able to focus on food and drink through my senior seminar paper on craft beer and an independent study with Beck Krefting on food writing called “Eat Your Words!”. I’m forever grateful for my time within the department, the ways I have been challenged, and the incredible people (both fellow students and professors) that I have learned from. The list goes on, but I should probably stop right there before I get carried away.





### Mollie Welch

When people ask me what American Studies is, I usually tell them that it's an amalgamation of every cool elective in the Master Schedule. American Studies is more than that, though. It is a discipline so inclusive that it necessitates a dynamic and intersectional approach. Yesterday, I presented my Honors Thesis—Ladies, Women, Bikers, People: Stories from Female Motorcyclists—at Academic Festival. Using an American Studies methodological framework, I examined gender, class, and identity in the transnational biker community through the medium of creative non-fiction. Name another major in which that project would have not only been viable but also successful. I chose American Studies because, in this major, creative thought really matters.

### Sophia Inkeles

Before coming to Skidmore, I had never heard of American Studies, much less thought about choosing it as a major. During the first semester of my sophomore year, I decided to take Introduction to American Studies on a whim—the subject of the course, 1968, sounded cool, so I thought I'd give it a try. Three years and many American Studies courses later, I cannot reiterate enough just how glad I am to have made that decision way back when. Over the course of my Skidmore career, I have learned some of the most invaluable lessons from my American Studies courses and have formed great relationships with my fellow American Studies majors and the American Studies faculty. After I graduate, I will spend the summer interning within the curatorial department at the Jewish Museum in New York City, and in the future I hope to pursue a career in a museum.

Hello, all! My first year at Skidmore was jam-packed and rich. I have enjoyed getting to learn more about the institution, my colleagues, the department, and of course my students. The 2015-2016 academic year was a return from research and travel, as I had spent my 2014-2015 academic year as the H. Allen Brooks Traveling Fellow with the Society of Architectural Historians. I was invited to serve as a jury member on the committee for the 2015 Brooks Fellow, which was an incredibly rewarding experience.

It was a great feeling to be back in the classroom. In the fall of 2015 I taught two classes – AM103 The American City and AM260C The African American Experience. The American City was an introduction into the scope and methods of American Studies using the American city as the framework through which we examined American culture, from pre-colonial native settlements to present day megalopolises. The African American Experience examined African-American contributions to, and exclusions from, various aspects of a “democratic” American society, and was centered on the theme of migration. Bernice Johnson Reagon and Toshi Reagon paid a visit to that class as the 2015 McCormack Artist-Scholar Residents.

I had the pleasure of speaking at the first Black in Design conference organized by the African American Student Union of the Harvard Graduate School of Design in October. The conference was “dedicated to the pursuit of just and equitable spaces at all scales,” and I addressed the matter of design pedagogy on a panel of scholars whose work included landscape, planning, urban design, and community development. That discussion, along with other topics such as campus climate and diversity, were revisited in an interview I did for *Constructs*, a publication of the Yale School of Architecture in the spring.

Two extremely exciting events happened in December – Temple University Press published the book *Walking in Cities: Quotidian Mobility as Urban Theory, Method, and Practice*. My chapter, “Geography, Planning, and Performing Mobility in New Orleans,” looks at walking and the parading tradition of New Orleans as a way to understand and guide infrastructure development in the city. Additionally, I was named a 2016 Emerging Scholar by *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education* magazine. The profile was published in its January 28, 2016 issue.

In the spring of 2016 I taught AM103W American Cultural Geographies and AM260J Diversity in the United States. American Cultural Geographies was a geographic approach to understanding American cultural practices, while Diversity in the United States examined the ways in which people in the United States try to reconcile the realities of cultural difference with preconceived notions of a unified American identity. Students in the Diversity class wrote a timely paper that considered the role that social identities and categories of difference play in political issues and discourses. The paper helped students think about how politicians try to respond to the needs, desires, and ideologies of various voting blocs. The essays and class discussion were both exhilarating and highly troubling, as they documented the extreme nature of the 2016 presidential election cycle. Both classes took advantage of the “Borrowed Light” exhibit at the Tang Teaching Museum to investigate how photography can address many of the themes we discussed in lectures and coursework.

I was invited to speak at Tulane School of Architecture and the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) Annual Conference in March and April, respectively. My lecture at Tulane, entitled “The Monumental, Mundane, and the Moments In Between,” covered my experiences as the inaugural Brooks Traveling Fellow. At the SAH conference I participated in “Beyond the Lecture: Teaching Innovations Roundtable,” presenting on student work at Tulane and Skidmore that was heavily engaged in media analysis and the digital humanities. As the semester wraps up I look forward to participating in the New York Statewide Historic Preservation Conference where I will be chairing the panel “New Voices in Preservation: The Next Fifty Years.”

Over the summer I have plans to make several road trips – I have my eyes on Montreal, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Additionally, I’ll be working on my manuscript *Concrete Solutions: Brutalist School Design in the Nation’s Capital* and waiting for the release of my book chapters “A Modern-Day WPA,” in *Bending the Future: Fifty Ideas for the Next Fifty Years of Historic Preservation in the United States*, edited by Max Page and Marla R. Miller (University of Massachusetts Press, July 2016) and “Model Cities/Model Schools: Educational Facilities as Monuments to Planning Reform,” in *Designing Schools: Space, Place and Pedagogy*, edited by Julie Willis and Kate Darian-Smith (Routledge, September 2016).

## Professor Gregory Pfitzer cont.

This summer I will be continuing my work on a new book, tentatively titled *The Negotiated Past: The Making of the Bobbs-Merrill "Childhood of Famous Americans Series."* The project examines the roughly 200 volumes of fictionalized biographies for children distributed by Bobbs-Merrill Company of Indianapolis between 1932 and 1972 as well as various revisions and republications of the series over the last twenty years by publishers such as Aladdin Books and Patria Press. Written primarily by female authors with affiliations to the Midwest, these works were characterized by their colorful cover art, their compelling fictional narratives about inspiring young boys and girls, and their unmistakable moral messages. I argue that these volumes are significant for three reasons: 1) the "COFA" series reveals important things about the climate of intellectual life in America as it pertains to the study of history by children in the mid-twentieth century and suggests how the forces of patriotism and anticommunism guided editors and authors in their efforts to educate and sometimes indoctrinate young readers during the Cold War; 2) the Bobbs-Merrill books contribute to an active and

ongoing debate about the ways in which children absorb history and their capacities for distinguishing between historical fiction and fictional biography; and 3) the volumes disclose in their complicated production histories the "negotiated" quality of the past in a genre in which "historical truth" meant something more than the mere presentation of verifiable facts.

I did the best I could do this year to help the faculty bowling team compete against some pretty impressive student bowlers. In need of surgery on my left shoulder, which I had in January, I bowled both with my left and right hands with equally uninspired results. I vow to be back next year, however, stronger than ever and with a chip on my shoulder (well, actually, without that chip, which I had removed surgically).

Congratulations to our graduating seniors, and I wish everyone a healthy and enjoyable summer.

-Greg Pfitzer

## Insight from our Seniors cont.d

### Hannah Doban

Choosing American Studies as my major was hands-down one of the best decisions I made at Skidmore. The major enabled me to think critically about topics I am passionate about, and sparked my interest in way too many eclectic subjects to list. From learning about culture and sports, to learning about the 1960s and global perspectives of the U.S., I am a better writer, thinker, and student because of the American Studies department. I will miss the always funny and intelligent faculty dearly. Post-graduation, I am planning on moving back to New York City and pursuing a career in the television industry. Dream job? To create the next *Mad Men* or *Sopranos*, and thank the AmStud department in my Emmy acceptance speech. No matter where I go, though, I will always hold a special place in my heart for Third Floor Tisch.



### Dorothea Trufelman

I chose American Studies as my major after taking the introductory course 1968 with Professor Dan Nathan my sophomore year. I'd never taken an American Studies course prior to it—or even heard of the major before coming to college—but I was immediately taken with the interdisciplinary aspect of examining history through a cultural and critical lens. I was particularly drawn to the frequent use of film as a way of studying U.S. culture, since I'm hoping to work in the independent film industry some day (doing what exactly, I'm still not sure). I've loved my time with the American Studies department and couldn't have picked a more fitting major.



### Dan Plumer

Like many of this year's seniors, I decided to major in American Studies after taking Professor Nathan's course on the year 1968. That course was one of the most creative courses I've taken at Skidmore, and remains one of my favorites. I've enjoyed working with students and faculty in my American Studies courses who want to push the boundaries of how they see the world, and to have fun doing it. I'm currently exploring careers in radio journalism and podcasting.

### Regina Bonsu

I enjoyed being an American studies major and my favorite course was Gregory Pfitzer's 1960s.



### Nevon Kipperman

If I could go back and re-do college, I would have declared my American Studies major earlier. American Studies was the perfect major for someone who could not decide on a major. From jazz music to sports films to 1960s history, my American Studies course subjects have allowed me to study diverse and distinct facets of American culture. While I do not currently have plans to pursue my education in American Studies, I am confident that I will continue to utilize the critical thinking skills that I developed in the major.



## American Studies Honors Theses

Faculty Sponsor: Daniel Nathan

Presenters: Hannah Doban '16, Sophia Inkeles '16, Markus Messoré '16, Dan Plumer '16, Mollie Welch '16

“The Anti-Hero: How the Mobsters, Drug Dealers, and Narcissists Saved American Television”

Hannah Doban '16

Television used to be a maligned medium. Recently, though, TV has undergone a revolution. This is partly due to the emergence of compelling anti-heroes, whose proliferation is rooted in contemporary cultural shifts that have created a disjointed, broken society. This paper explores three noted TV anti-heros: Tony Soprano from *The Sopranos*, Walter White from *Breaking Bad*, and Don Draper from *Mad Men*. Additionally, it explores the lack of a notable anti-heroine and race via *The Wire*;s Omar Little



“The Holocaust and Jewish American Identity in Film”

Sophia Inkeles '16

Being Jewish in America means different things to different people. What is clear, however, is that Jewish identity is influenced by the past with the Holocaust occupying a central role in the collective memory of the Jewish people. This was not always the case. American awareness and attachment to the Holocaust developed over time. This paper explores the ways that Holocaust films have reflected and reproduced differing notions of Jewish American identity.

“What Mauled the Mall? The Rise and Fall of American Shopping Malls”

Markus Messoré '16

The shopping mall has long been held as a quintessential landmark of the American suburban culture. In recent years, however, the institution of the mall has begun to falter. This paper examines some of the cultural factors that led to the rise and the decline of the American shopping mall. It also explores the future of malls in America and its cultural legacy domestically and abroad.



“Intersectional Thinking, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Leadership of the 1963 Children’s Crusade”

Dan Plumer ’16

Collective memory of the Civil Rights Movement often casts Martin Luther King, Jr. as its sole architect. In reality, there were many leaders who contributed to the civil rights successes of the 1950s and 1960s. This thesis and accompanying audio documentary explore the Birmingham, Alabama Children’s Crusade of the 1963

from alternative viewpoints to the challenge traditional narratives of the Civil Rights Movement and to unearth issues of race and class that fueled the movement.



“Ladies, Women, Bikers, People: Stories from Female Motorcyclists”

Mollie Welch ’16

There is a significant gap in motorcycle literature regarding women. Many books and journal articles on the subject include thin chapters or sections on motorcycle club gender dynamics, but few offer substantive information on the lives of women motorcyclists. To help close this gap, I have written a series of creative nonfiction stories from the perspective of women motorcyclists,

drawn from interview, ethnographic sociology, and other qualitative research techniques.



I joined the Department of American Studies as a Visiting Assistant Professor in Fall 2014. Over these past two years, I have contributed several new courses to the American Studies curriculum, including: Queering the City: LGBT Identity in the Urban Landscape; Museums in American Culture; America Post-9/11; Introduction to American Studies: American Cultural Geographies; and Popular Culture: American Orientalism. My classes reflect my scholarly interests in Transnational American Studies, Public History and Museum Studies, Cultural Geography, Critical Geopolitics, and Feminist and Queer theories of knowing. I prioritize student-centered learning environments in my classrooms with the goal of fostering individual connections to course concepts and emphasizing relationally to others, locally and globally.

Having engaged in several interdisciplinary collaborations, last spring I had the opportunity to co-teach a section of America Post-9/11 with History professor David Kieran (who is now at Washington and Jefferson College), and, more recently, engaging my students in applied learning opportunities at the Tang Teaching Museum, New York State Military Museum, and the National September 11th Memorial Museum (NS11MM). For instance, three of my classes—Introduction to American Studies; Museums in American Culture, and America Post-9/11—have traveled to the World Trade Center to visit the NS11MM. This extraordinary opportunity enabled students to apply course concepts and theories to real-world experiences of place and space, further enhancing classroom learning and generating creative course assignments related to exhibition design and museum criticism and interpretation.

In addition to teaching, I am actively pursuing scholarship as well. This year I published works in *Geohumanities: Space, Place, and the Humanities* and am co-editing a special issue of *Emotion, Space and Society* on Geographies of Trauma, forthcoming 2016. I am also the author of two essays—a co-authored introductory essay on the spatialization of trauma, and a single-authored essay on traumatic affect at the 9/11 Memorial Museum. A book manuscript based on my research on the National September 11th Memorial and Museum is under review with the Routledge series: *Interventions*.

The 2015-2016 academic year was also a year of firsts for me: it was my first time presenting at the American Studies Association Annual Conference, and my first time supervising an Honors Thesis project, “Malling America: the Rise and Fall of an American Cultural Landscape” (Markus Messore ’16). I also served as a Discussant for a lunch-box conversation series, “Security and Surveillance in the Digital Age,” as part of the Tang Art Museum’s *No Place to Hide* exhibition.

I plan to spend this summer resting, writing, and enjoying time with my beautiful family. A special thank you to all of my wonderful colleagues and students for another fantastic year!

