

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

AMERICAN STUDIES

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2024

CHAIRS LETTER

FACULTY NEWS

Senior Thesis

*See whats new
for Fall Semester*

*A year full of
events*

Graduate News

Alumni News

Greetings:

It has been a busy and productive year on the third floor of the Tisch Learning Center, where American Studies students and faculty have been working hard at preparing for classes, participating in robust academic discussions, and completing challenging assignments.

Our fall semester kicked off memorably with a visit from a former adjunct professor of American Studies at Skidmore and now Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Canisius College, Thomas Chambers, who delivered our annual speaker's address. President of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, Niagara Frontier State Park, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Commission, Chambers served on Governor Cuomo's Path Through History Task Force and helped to lead the War of 1812 Bicentennial commemorations in Western New York. His talk was titled "Bridge to Freedom: Harriet Tubman and the Contested History of the Underground Railroad in Niagara Falls" in which he discussed his personal role in the complicated process of developing an Underground Railroad Museum in Niagara Falls, New York. The presentation was well received and had a special appeal to those of our students with an interest in Black Studies, museum studies, and historical memory.

Chambers also made a classroom visit to AM374: Senior Seminar to speak with senior majors who were just beginning their capstone projects and who were seeking advice about how to choose a topic, develop a literature review, conduct research, and begin writing. (For more on the finished products, see the enclosed descriptions of their topics and operational questions.) This impressive group of seniors benefitted greatly from Chambers's advice as evidenced by their final papers collected in the departmental office.

Some of these students went on to pursue other related academic projects, including Cait Matthews, who presented her honors project, "Barbie Unwrapped: A Critical Analysis of Text, Marketing, and Reception," to fellow students and American Studies faculty. Cait describes the project as follows: "Barbie is a complex cultural text that attempts to address various systems and ideologies that are prevalent in American society today. Thus, by examining the portrayal of feminism and postfeminist reactionary

discourses within the film, the various strategies that ensured Barbie was everywhere, and popular and critical reception of the film, I argue Barbie is an anti-consumerist consumerist text that also serves as a surface-level feminist narrative.”

Senior major, Olivia Hahn, received a SEE-Beyond Award that will allow her to pursue an internship opportunity with a local non-profit organization, C.R.E.A.T.E. Community Studios, on their “Erasing Spaces and Faces” project that uses historic analysis, community engagement, and artistic methods of expression to bring awareness to the detrimental erasure and socio-economic harm associated with various federally (and locally) funded urban renewal projects in Saratoga Springs.

American Studies senior minor, Emma Gill, won a Summer Experience Fund award that will allow her to expand on work she produced in class focused on labor-related interviews with individuals located in Saratoga Springs and the greater capital region. A small, volunteer-run radio station, Hudson Mohawk Magazine (HMM), has shown an interest in airing these interviews, and Emma will be producing and editing 10-minute radio segments, making them chronologically sound, as well as recording the narration and information essential to these labor narratives.

Liz Tybush was honored with the American Studies Faculty Award, given to the graduating senior who has demonstrated excellence and growth in the major.

American Studies faculty members have also been busy this year (Our individual stories are included elsewhere in this newsletter.) Sadly, we are saying good-bye to our colleague Aaron Pedinotti, who is moving on from Skidmore to pursue other opportunities. Aaron has been an inspiring teacher and scholar for more than half a decade, and his courses, such as American Horror Fiction, Gaming in American Culture, and The Rise and fall of the New Deal, have been staples of the department for many semesters. We wish him luck in his future endeavors and trust that he will take satisfaction from knowing how many Skidmore American Studies students he has influenced profoundly over the last six years.

The faculty squeaked by with a victory in the annual student-faculty bowling event for seniors at the end of the first term. Questions have been raised about the scorekeeping—something about “funny math”—but departmental faculty members are convinced that their victory this year (as always) will hold up under review.

With appreciation to Sue Matrazzo, our Administrative Assistant who put together this newsletter, the Department hopes you enjoy reading this review of our activities this academic year.

*Greg Pfitzer
Chair, American Studies*

Senior Seminar abstracts

Jack Davis: “Cheating, Vengeful, Neglected: How the Saw Franchise Challenges the Post 9/11 World of Family Values”

This paper explores the ways The Saw movie franchise challenges the dominant cultural narrative that the family is the only place of safety in an unsafe world by considering how, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, families represented sources of stress, terror, and repression.

Olivia Hahn: “Cycles of Decay and Renewal: Native American Ecological Consciousness and the Use of Fungi to Inspire Hope for Future Generations”

Fungi have been widely explored and used throughout history for their nutritional, medicinal, biotechnological, and regarded spiritual properties. Understanding the use of mushrooms and the subsequent ecological consciousness procured by Native American communities is vital to the various functional possibilities of fungi remediation in the twenty-first century. As the United States begins to adopt a more positive attitude towards mushrooms, the sociological and ethical implications of mycology, the study of mushrooms and fungi, are increasingly useful for finding a meaningful template for modern day remediation. To understand the history, it's equally significant to account for environmental injustices that have been and are still currently perpetuated against these populations since the era of settler colonialism. In acknowledgment of the past and with a specific focus on fungi use, this paper argues for the adoption of these beliefs to overcome current obstacles of neoliberal dominance, impacts of global warming, revitalization of the American Rust Belt, and the capabilities of fungi for the resolution of the widespread mental health crisis in the twenty-first century. In addition, this paper references an ethnographic analysis of Collar City Mushrooms, an established urban vertical mushroom farm and community space in Troy, New York. Use of material from interviews with the owner are applied as a case study to determine how these transformations might be achieved.

Ethan Johnson-LeComte “Capturing ‘Truth’: An Exploration of Photography in the Iraq War”

This thesis deals with photography in the Iraq War of 2003 and its production of distinct themes, trends, and motifs in relation to humanization and dehumanization. At the outset of the Iraq War, the United States sought to visually dehumanize its Iraqi subjects. However, as the war waged on, atrocities like Abu Ghraib ironically served to humanize Iraqis as they were captured on camera. At the same time, American soldiers were dehumanized as these horrors came to light, amplified by the perception of fighting a controversial and imperial war. Later in the conflict, American soldiers were humanized by the repository of soldier-produced

photographs which depicted the banality and everyday horror of military life in Iraq. These instances in turn worked to amplify the ethical obscurity of the Iraq War and the photography that preserved it. Through this dynamic, photographic intentions and public reactions to their products reveal the complexity of depicting modern warfare, and the issues of interpretation that arise from often-conflicting narratives. By using the Iraq War as a case study, this work demonstrates the constructive and destructive power of access to myriad photographic perspectives, and the ways in which modern visual coverage of conflict comes to bear on how we perceive it.

Taerin Kim: “Godzilla vs. Giant Robot: Asian American Counter-cultural Development in The Nineties”

The Godzilla Network nurtured and maintained a communal web of communications, as well as offered a space for Asian-American artists to collectively voice their perspectives towards civil institutions and amongst themselves. Giant Robot Magazine synthesized two Asian-American individuals’ curated interests in their own culture, and proved its value within a mass market two decades before the concept of curation for the masses became popular as it has in the contemporary zeitgeist. Both groups were prescient landmarks for Asian American cultural development in the nineties. Although the two strategically differed, the fact of their existence at all is worthwhile and important to archive and write about so newer cohorts of Asian Americans, whether immigrants or generational, can look back and acknowledge that Asian American culture not only has roots in this country’s past, but was built by individuals with passionate fervor in unifying our globally spanning diaspora.

Quinn Magnus: “From the Courts to Culture: Intersectionality and the Transformative Legacy of Serena and Venus Williams”

The multidimensional identities of the Black female athlete create a unique experience in American sports culture. I argue that the careers of Black female tennis players, Venus and Serena Williams, in a traditionally white-dominated sport, have directly changed the landscape of tennis for contemporary and future Black female athletes. The successes of their careers, despite experiencing moments of inherent racism and sexism, have allowed young Black female tennis players, such as Coco Gauff, to experience a new and continually changing world of tennis. Gauff’s greater opportunities as a young Black female tennis player become more evident when one compares the treatment of Venus and Serena by the media and public with their treatment of Gauff. This paper documents this shift in public acceptance and aims to answer the question: why has this transformation occurred between 2018 and 2023? Analysis of media such as press conferences, news articles and social media shows that the popularity and influence of Serena and Venus Williams have changed the way that Black female athletes are accepted into tennis culture. Through comparison of the 2018 US Open championship match and Gauff’s 2023 US Open first round match, I reveal the striking change in acceptance towards the reaction to Black female athletes in tennis.

Caitlyn Matthews: “Turning Pink into Green: How Barbie’s Marketing Strategies Contributed to its Success”

Barbie is a complex blockbuster movie that explores various ideologies in modern American culture while maintaining an entertaining narrative. While Barbie critiques these social systems, it also uses them to generate a larger profit. Through extensive marketing strategies that targeted various gender and age demographics, Barbie became a part of American consumerism in a way that was unusually normal. Moreover, it emphasizes Mattel’s role in the production of the film and its ability to recognize trends in American consumerism following periods of economic failure. By examining Mattel’s role in the film, the relationship between Hollywood marketing and trends in consumerism, and the various strategies that ensured Barbie was everywhere, I argue Barbie is an anti-consumerist consumerism text that provides a foundation for films that center around revered mass-produced American goods.

Ryan Tineo: “Peoples Temple, Jim Jones, and the Dystopian Consequences of Utopian Schemes”

I’m sure many of us have heard of the phrase, “Drinking the Kool-Aid.” It’s quite a common one; however, its exact origins represent much more than a quick-witted response or reaction. This phrase signifies immense sorrow, fallen dreams, and a failure at utopian redemption for those whom the phrase references: the deceased members of Peoples Temple. For the purposes of this paper, I centered the narratives of Peoples Temple members to uphold the notion that the Temple was an attractive escape for marginalized communities being intimately impacted by a racially divided and disenfranchised America. Jim Jones and his Temple offered Black Americans a place of solace, an avenue for utopian redemption free from the jurisdictions and constraints of American society. Despite the fact that Temple members followed Jones to their deaths, they were more active agents in their own fatalities than just the hopeless dupes of a controlling cult figure. And even though the story of Peoples Temple remains misrepresented, underdeveloped, and unexplained, their story is one that deserves to be brought into the fold.

Faculty Update - Beck Krefting

This year I continued working on racial justice initiatives funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, entered the second of a three-year term as director of the Center for Leadership, Teaching, and Learning (CLTL), taught a Scribner Seminar, made progress on the research front, and co-founded the Critical Humor Studies Association with three other comedy/humor studies scholars.

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 two postdoctoral fellows in Black Studies—Malik Raymond and Gabriella Friedman—concluded a two-year teaching stint and successfully secured tenure-track positions at Grand Valley State University and Ohio Wesleyan, respectively. We are beyond excited for their professional futures. Ongoing initiatives involve running the Racial Justice Teaching Challenge, creating learning communities for staff and faculty to expand and apply new knowledges focused on racial justice, supporting the development of new Black Studies courses, and providing funding for research collaborations attending to the same.

Directing the CLTL kept me busy with AI Think Tanks, programming, and supporting a variety of learning communities. This year I focused on creating opportunities to learn, discuss, and implement generative AI as a tool for student learning and professional efficiencies. I partnered with Learning Experience Design and Digital Scholarship Support (LEDS) to develop programming and initiatives to support exploration of generative AI in higher education. CLTL and LEDS facilitated two semester-long AI Think Tanks, each with a cohort of ten faculty and staff (total of twenty across the year). Participants worked with each other and AI Think Tank leaders to explore AI within their respective disciplines/fields/services and use that knowledge to develop programming the following semester focused on best practices for working with AI relative to their scope of practice. This peer-to-peer mentoring model has proven quite successful, helping to expand the reach of this work across divisions and units. In addition, there were pedagogy book club discussions and a variety of panels/workshops focused on writing and securing grants and confronting challenges in the classroom. CLTL web pages were updated with all kinds of resources related to teaching with AI, including a page offering sample AI syllabus statements for faculty to adopt in their classes. 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 Black pedagogies in higher education; Black ecologies; libraries, incarceration, and the humanizing power of information; and reflections on race, culture, and identity. I also organized events for the new faculty learning community and developed a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) consultancy program pairing faculty and staff trained in UDL with faculty interested in applying UDL principles in course development and delivery.

In the fall, I rebooted a course on American foodways for a Scribner Seminar titled *American Tastes*. Students, a course originally created by the late and venerable Mary Lynn. I've revised it considerably to center indigenous foodways and add a civic engagement component that has students working in the garden, collecting compost, and delivering meals through the FeedMore initiative. One of the highlights included cooking a six-course meal for President Connor and his wife in their home. We did break the dishwasher but otherwise the house remains intact. This summer I look forward to revising the course *Critical Whiteness in the US* which will task students with co-curating an exhibit in the Tang Museum based on course themes.

I have four chapters in edited collections and two journal articles (*European Journal of American Studies* and *Cultural Critique*) that are in varying phases of the publication process but should be available for your reading pleasure in the coming two years. I was honored to be asked to write the foreword for the first book-length examination of stand-up comedy in India titled *Politics of Recognition and Representation in Indian Stand-Up* (forthcoming 2024). Last summer I started a new book project titled: *When Comedy Kills: Racialized and Gendered Violence in the Wake of Laughter*. This work was jumpstarted by a summer research collaboration with Aaron Shellow-Levine (Class of 2023). We created an extensive annotated bibliography, conducted archival research at the National Comedy Center, and participated in a roundtable on race and humor at the American Humor Studies Association conference in July 2023.

This spring, myself and three accomplished comedy studies scholars—J Finley, Raúl Pérez, and Viveca Greene—banded together to create a new professional association. The Critical Humor Studies Association (CHSA) aims to be a transnational, interdisciplinary network of scholars, practitioners, critics, and educators committed to the critical examination of the role and power of all forms of humor in the construction of individual, social, cultural, and political formations. Our core mission is to build an institutional structure and intellectual space, to forge an inclusive and stimulating platform for critical discourse and collaboration where Critical Humor Studies serves as a catalyst for social justice and cultural transformation. We actively counter institutional and structural biases by amplifying marginalized voices and engaging with critical theory, antiracist struggles, decolonial thought, and feminist praxis. Our intellectual impetus springs from the deep-seated belief that humor is uniquely positioned as a mode of social engagement and cultural production that can both perpetuate and disrupt dominant ideologies and normative structures. Much remains to be done to get the CHSA stabilized but by this time next year, we will be planning our first symposium, which will be held at Pomona College summer 2025.

I am writing this in Morocco while visiting Fulbright scholar, Mohamed Bassou, who studied with me fall of 2018. He has since acquired his doctorate with a focus on comedy studies and has an incredible career as a comedian. I too have begun performing stand-up comedy again (#secondwind). As I make my way through the country reflecting on all that has happened and all that lies ahead, I am excited and grateful for what the future holds both professionally and personally.



American Studies Department

Fall 2024 Course Offerings

AM 101 001 Queering American Culture

Deb Amory MW 4:00-5:50 Credits: 3

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 101W: The Wizard of OZ as American Myth

Gregory Pfitzer Tues/Thursday 9:10-11:00 (4 credits)

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, including MGM's 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, the African American musical *The Wiz*, the novel *Wicked*, and the SyFy Channel miniseries *Tin Man*. Students will study the original novel and its sequels, reflecting on the social, economic, and political contexts of each. They will also consider how revised and reinvented versions of the Baum narrative reflect and shape cultural anxieties as they intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, spirituality, and consumerism as categories of analysis. A variety of methods and approaches will be employed, especially myth/symbol theory, feminism, queer theory, and performance studies.

AM 241: Mark Twain's America

Greg Pfitzer WF 8:40-10:00 M 9:05-10:00credits: 4

This course considers American culture from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century through the life and works of Mark Twain. Using Twain's essays, letters, short stories, and novels as points of reference for discussions of major themes for the period of Twain's life (1835-1910), the course focuses on issues of regionalism, class, race relations, technology, humor and imperialism.

Fall 2024 Course Offerings con't.

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 261 002 Public History

Lauren Roberts MW 6:30-8:20 pm Credits 3

Public history can be considered a “boots on the ground” approach to preserving the past. This course explores the methods by which public historians collect, engage and make relevant those historical narratives. Topics including historic preservation, cultural resource management, living history and public commemoration will be covered. Students will research selected local sites and assess their historical significance. Practical application of skills such as determining eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places and applying for a New York State Historic Marker will supply students with real world experience in documenting community history. Emerging forms of public history such as augmented reality, podcasting and 3D modeling will also be explored.

AM 264 Themes In American Culture

African-American Experience

Tammy Owens TR 11:10-12:30 Credits: 3

An investigation of the role African Americans have played in the history of the nation, including African-American contributions to, and exclusions from, various aspects of a “democratic” American society. Students will examine the critical issues and periods relevant to the African-American struggle toward freedom and equality. Topics include slavery, emancipation, and Reconstruction; the woman's era; the age of Jim Crow and the new Negro; the civil rights movement; and the post-reform period. Primary and secondary sources include narratives, documents, photographs, and films. Note(s): (Designated a Cultural Diversity course; fulfills social sciences requirement.)

Fall 2024 Course Offerings

AM 331 - Critical Whiteness In The U.S.

Beck Krefting W/F 10:10-12:00 Credits: 4

An interdisciplinary examination of whiteness in U.S. culture and history. Explores the racial construction of whiteness, focusing on its changing legal, political, aesthetic, and cultural definitions over four centuries of American experience, with special emphasis on the concept of whiteness in contemporary ethnographic studies, memoirs, and essays. Students will examine the relationship between whiteness and other components of identity. The nature of white privilege and the conditions of access to whiteness will be investigated.

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

AM 346 001 True Crime in America

Daniel Nathan WF 12:20-2:10 credits 4

A critical examination of contemporary American true crime narratives, that is, accounts about a criminal act or acts based on fact rather than fiction. The course argues that true crime narratives throw into relief particular cultural concerns and values and help us understand American culture and the complex relationships among criminality, deviance, ethics, identity, justice, power, and representation. Students will consider questions such as 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?

Note(s): Fulfills social sciences requirement; fulfills bridge experience.

Fall 2024 Course Offerings

AM 374 Senior Seminar

Daniel Nathan TR 3:40 -5:30 pm Credits: 4

American Studies 374 (Senior Seminar) is the culminating or "capstone" experience in the American Studies major. It builds on the concepts and strategies learned in American Studies 221: Methods and Approaches as well as on many of the theoretical and practical elements of other courses in the American Studies curriculum. The seminar is designed to help students find academic meaning and focus in the work they have already completed at Skidmore and to provide a bridge to the world beyond college by requiring them to confront squarely those two nagging questions: 1) "What is the purpose and meaning of what I have learned in college to date?" and 2) "What will I do with my American Studies degree when I graduate?" Answers to these questions will be sought primarily through the writing of a major research paper whose topic and scope will be determined by the prior academic preparation and future personal objectives of the students enrolled in the seminar.

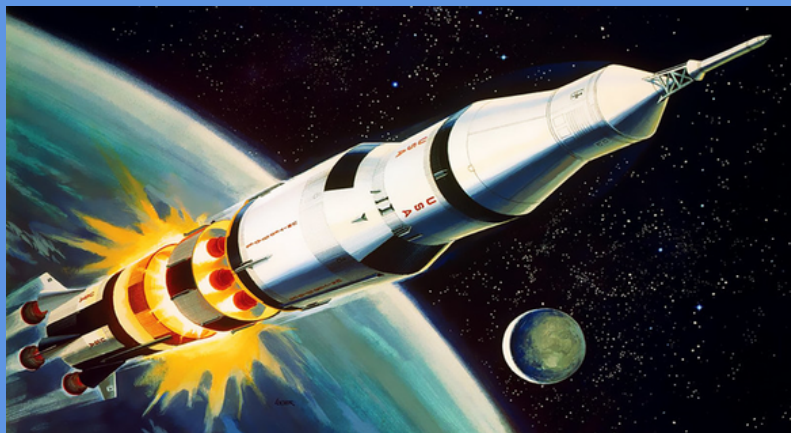
Note(s): 300-level courses in American Studies are not ordinarily open to first-year students except by permission of the instructor.

Faculty Update

Professor Greg Pfitzer

*I am now into my fifth decade of teaching at the college level, having offered my first course (a seminar on the Gilded Age) at my alma mater, Colby College, in 1982. I have developed dozens of courses over the years, and I update them periodically to stay current with the times. This fall I revised my AM101: Civil War in American Memory by centering the course around several deliberately provocative questions, including: Is the United States on the verge of a second Civil War? If yes, then will it be an “irrepressible conflict” as some described the civil struggle of the 1860s? And, if no, then what lessons can we draw from the first Civil War to help us avoid its catastrophic effects as we approach a second? How can memories of its horrors be used to stave off the divisive elements that threaten to disunify Americans once again? We considered the rather frightening answers posed to these questions by Stephen Marche in *The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future*. We then studied in considerable detail the numerous causes, events, personalities, and impacts of the American Civil War with an eye toward evaluating the ways in which the conflict between 1861 and 1865 influenced subsequent political, social, economic and cultural development. Throughout the term we discussed how the history of the Civil War has been contested and mediated through a multiplicity of popular sources, including film, visual culture, commemorative sites, music, television programs and re-enactors’ demonstrations, all the while attempting to expand the definition of what constitutes history to include interdisciplinary sources and intersectional perspectives.*

In the fall term I also offered AM374: Senior Seminar to a group of hardworking American Studies senior majors who were tasked with producing a substantial research paper on topics of their choosing. For more details on the impressive projects they completed, see the “Senior Thesis” section of this newsletter.

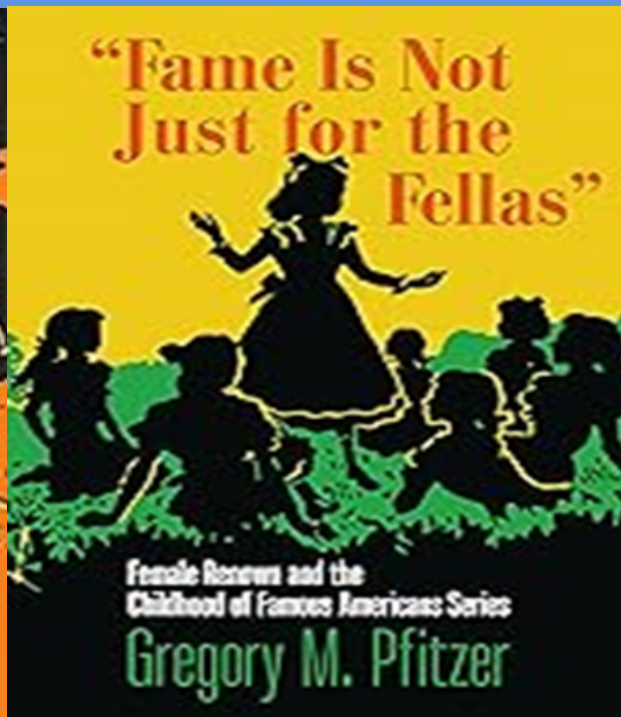
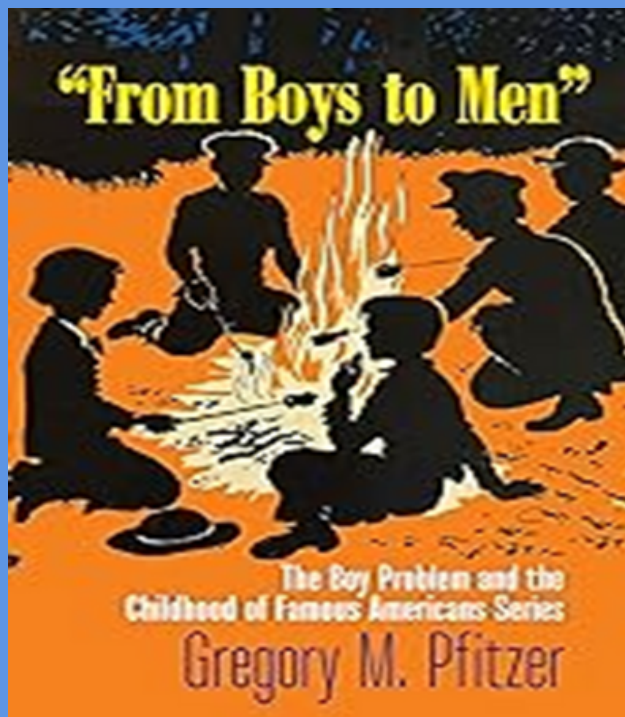


In the spring term I taught AM237: Americans in Outer Space, a Bridge Experience course that focused on the public policy question of whether the benefits of the Artemis Program (designed to return astronauts to the surface of the moon) outweigh the costs. We began with an in-depth discussion of the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing, which sparked intense debates among Americans about the value and future of the U.S. space program. Some found the mission inspirational, fulfilling the centuries-long desire of voyagers to “slip the surly bonds of Earth” and to explore the universe beyond. Others protested against the spending of 35 billion dollars on a project that they deemed of little value to ordinary citizens, ridiculing the Apollo project as a calculated effort “to fleece the taxpayer” by funding “vicarious adventures instead of hospital beds.” We studied the cultural, political and economic contours of the debate about the future of lunar landings, with special attention to the power and justice dynamics associated with efforts to find answers to lingering and unresolved questions associated with it, such as: Who has access to space? What groups have the authority to control its use? Who should be responsible for funding its exploration? And how do the lenses of identity, ethnicity, gender, nationality, socio-economic class and race inform these decisions? We ended the semester with a refereed, public debate in which the “Con” side of the debate on the benefits and costs of Artemis won a narrow victory over the “Pro” side.

Finally, this spring I reprised my AM368: The 1960s, a course that I have taught every year of my 35 years at Skidmore. When I first began offering the course in 1989, nearly all of the students enrolled in it had been born in the Sixties. Now, I’m studying the decade with students whose parents (by and large) were born after the decade and whose grandparents are therefore the only suitable subjects for the required oral history assignment. I’m suddenly feeling a bit old.



*Additionally I have a book coming out in a few weeks: a companion volume to my earlier volume **Fame Is Not Just for the Fellas: Female Renown and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series**. The new book is titled **From Boys to Men: The Boy Problem and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series** and deals with how the writers and editors at Bobbs-Merrill, the publisher of the **Childhood of Famous Americans** book series published between 1932 and 1958, thought carefully about how their books would influence the development of their male readers. These books emphasized inspiring tales over historical accuracy and were written in simple language, with characters, dialogue, and stories that were intended to teach boys how to be successful men. But this was a specific image of American manhood. Published in an era when sociologists, psychologists, and other experts worried about male delinquency, the men envisioned in these books were steeped in Cold War racial and gender stereotypes, and questions about citizenship and responsibility. Based on deep archival research into the publication history of the series, “From Boys to Men” sheds light on current controversies on children’s books and presentations of gender diversity.*



I have gotten to spend quite a bit of time this year with my three grandchildren--Halia, age 4; Arlo, age 2; and James, age 1--who are the joys of my life. I wish you all a happy and productive summer and look forward to hearing about what you are up to in the months and years ahead.



Faculty Update Daniel Nathan

Twenty-two. It's a good number. It's my son's age and Caitlin Clark's jersey number. And now, my Skidmore year #22 is in the books. Looking back, it was productive. Went fast, which seems to be a pattern. That's what happens when you're peddling hard and having fun.

At Skidmore, teaching comes first. In the fall, I taught two of my favorite courses: American Sport/American Culture (AM-234) and American Art (AM-362). They were both stimulating,

*with some terrific, engaged students. In AM-234, we were fortunate to have Jessica Luther and Kavitha A. Davidson, the co-authors of one of our books, *Loving Sports When They Don't Love You Back: Dilemmas of the Modern Fan* (2020), Zoom into class with us. That was fun and productive. We also went to the Tang Teaching Museum (see the picture) to look at some sports-related art—prints and photographs—and did some *Visual Thinking Strategies* exercises. At the end of the semester, we had a special treat: the father of senior AM major Quinn Magnus, Burke Magnus, Zoomed into class. He's kind of a big deal in the sports media world. Mr. Magnus is the President of Content at ESPN. According to ESPN, he "has oversight of studio shows, live events, newsgathering, investigative journalism, original content/ESPN Films, the Talent Office, audio, digital, and social media." He was gracious and informative during our hour-long conversation and answered a host of good, tough questions. Thanks again, Quinn, for helping to make that happen.*



*One of the highlights of AM-362 was when filmmaker Jeanne Jordan joined us, again via Zoom, for a discussion about her wonderful, poignant documentary *Troublesome Creek* (1995). She was charming and insightful. I hope we can bring her to campus one day. Also in *American Autobiography*, as per tradition, the students chose the last book of the semester. They chose Alison Bechdal's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), which is a graphic memoir; it was an unexpected and excellent choice. The students did so, I should add, because Jean Cockcroft, a repeat auditor and "super senior," nominated the book. A wise, brilliant choice. Thank you, Jean. We loved having you in the class.*

This spring, I taught Books That Changed America (AM-261C), for the second time, and a new version of Introduction to American Studies (AM-101W). Both classes went well and were invigorating. In AM-261C, we continued the tradition of bringing local talent into the classroom to enhance our understanding of the books we read and discussed. So, on the second day of class, we welcomed Professors Barbara Black (English), Beck Krefting (American Studies, obvi), and Sheldon Solomon (Psychology) to talk about how to read a book. It was a great, energetic session. Over the course of the semester, Jamie Parra (English), Greg Pfitzer (American Studies, again, obvi), Emmanuel Balogun (Political Science), A.J. Schneller (Environmental Science), and Natalie Taylor (Political Science) all came to talk about books that are in their bailiwick of expertise. It was super terrific awesome to listen to and talk with them about Walden, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Souls of Black Folk, Silent Spring, and The Feminine Mystique. Let me add that we were extremely fortunate to get a curator's tour of Isaac Julien's video installation Lessons of the Hour at the Tang. It's about Frederick Douglass and we visited it when we were reading Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself. Ian Berry and Rachel Seligman were extremely informative and helped us unpack Julien's work, which I hope many of you got to experience.

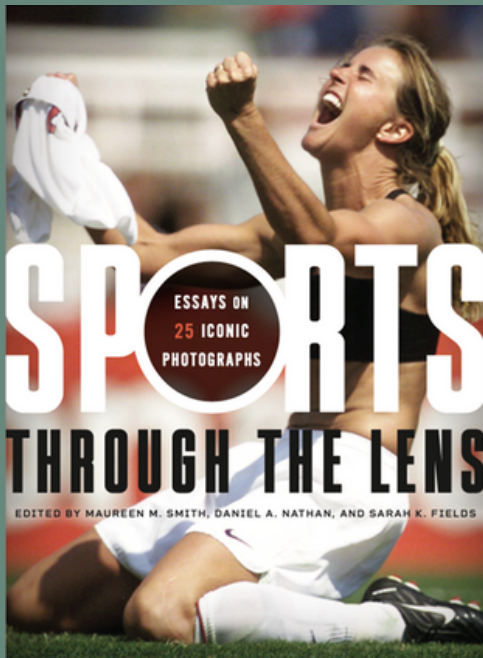
The new iteration of AM-101W was titled The Godfather and American Culture. It was an experiment, a successful one, I think. The idea was to use The Godfather franchise (the 1969 bestselling novel and epic film trilogy) to critique and put in context American cultural values and to model historically minded interdisciplinarity. Why The Godfather? Well, references and allusions to The Godfather abound in many aspects of American culture. It has become a cultural touchstone, much like Gone with the Wind, The Wizard of Oz, and Star Wars. And so the class critiqued and contextualized The Godfather franchise using an American Studies sensibility and approach, drawing on history, literary studies, film studies, and cultural studies. We examined myriad issues and subjects: the production and consumption of popular culture, of course; but also ethnicity, immigration, and assimilation; organized crime, power, and justice. I think most of the students were into it, learned a lot, and it was amazing to see their Godfather literacy develop over the semester.

Teaching kept me busy, of course, but I also served on the college's Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR). It's interesting, confidential (but mostly not fun) work and a good opportunity to get to know some of my Skidmore colleagues better, such as CAFR's chair A.J. Schneller (Environmental Science) and David Cohen (Management and Business).

In addition to this work, in January I was appointed Editor of the Journal of Sport History. And I'm still a 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.



One of the highlights of the year was in March. Over spring break, my wife Susan Taylor and son Benjamin Nathan, a Skidmore student and Environmental Studies major, visited our daughter (that is, Ben's sister) Zoë Nathan, who is a junior Psychology major at Lehigh University, in Madrid, where she studied for the semester. We had never been to Spain before and it was a great, if short, trip. After touring hard in Madrid and hanging out with Z, who is having the time of her life, Sue, Ben, and I went to Barcelona for a few days before heading home. It was a fun, educational whirlwind of a trip (though we missed Sam the Wonder Dog). I definitely recommend visiting Spain and would go back. So much to explore.



As some of you know, I've 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 about sport, photography, and history. It's an anthology and close to being done. It's already listed on Amazon.com. I have to say, the University of Texas Press art department created a cool cover. Check it out. The book features 25 sports photographs and essays about them. Most of the photos are famous; a few are not. The essays are by talented scholars, from around the country and world, from different disciplines. We're looking forward for the book to be in print.

Also on the scholarship front, I was invited to give the annual Birrell/Parratt lecture by the University of Iowa's Iowa Colloquium on Sport and Culture. My lecture was in April and was titled "The Negro League Baseball Renaissance: Prelude to a Conversation." I'm giving a similar version of it in June at the Society of American Baseball's annual Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference, which is held in Cooperstown this year. But before that, I'll be attending the annual North American Society for Sport History conference, which is in Denver this year. It's a great opportunity to learn about new work, some of which will hopefully be submitted to the Journal of Sport History, to reconnect with old friends, and to meet some new people in the discipline.

Once summer begins, well, I'll be working in the yard and on some writing projects, editing the Journal of Sport History, visiting my family in DC, celebrating my mother's 80th birthday, heading to the Berkshires when I can, and dutifully and enthusiastically following the Orioles.

Finally, as is always true, we're going to miss the graduating seniors and wish them all well. If any of you are around this summer, please drop me a line. I'd be pleased to visit or get a drink.

*Best,
DN*

Professor Pfitzer's 60's class presented the annual revival show



Click on the link below to hear more.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4dgvLKsVJlgYenoVwBYlad?si=793033b0d4ae4c6d&nd=1&dlsi=5f6e299d8ac447c9>

Graduate News

Hometown: Amesbury, Massachusetts

Favorite AMST Class: Books that Changed America

Thesis Summary: My thesis dealt with photography in the Iraq War of 2003 and its production of distinct themes, trends, and motifs in relation to humanization and dehumanization. Varied instances of humanization and dehumanization within the conflict worked to amplify the ethical obscurity of the Iraq War and the photography that preserved it. Through this dynamic, photographic intentions and public reactions to their products reveal the complexity of depicting modern warfare and the issues of interpretation that arise from often-conflicting narratives. By using the Iraq War as a case study, my work demonstrated the constructive and destructive power of access to myriad photographic perspectives and the ways in which modern visual coverage of conflict comes to bear on how we perceive it.

Outside AMST: In addition to my American Studies major, I also have a Studio Art Minor. Being able to incorporate my interest in photography into my work in American Studies and vice versa has been an incredibly rewarding experience.

Fun Fact: I have the best job on campus working in the Art Department's Equipment Cage.

Best,
Ethan Johnson-LeComte

My name is Emma Gill, I recently graduated from Skidmore College with a minor in American Studies.

I declared the American Studies minor at the end of my second junior semester, not being entirely sure if I would be able to complete the minor within my senior year. Looking back, I am incredibly grateful to my junior year self for making that somewhat impulsive decision. It would prove to be one of my best academic choices at Skidmore. The classes I have taken in the American Studies department and the conversations I have had with both professors and students alike were deeply meaningful to me and enriched my time at Skidmore immensely. I was provided with many great opportunities that have significantly contributed to and shaped my academic career thanks to the department and its amazing faculty. For example, Professor Nathan's Holocaust class made me want to pursue a career in audio documentary work, Beck's Post Apocalyptic class expanded my conception of what a learning environment could look like, and my independent study with Professor Pfitzer was one of the most intellectually stimulating experiences I have been provided with during my academic career. What I came to understand this past year is that American Studies – probably more so than any other department – is the embodiment of “liberal arts” due to its interdisciplinary nature. It is precisely for this reason that it was such a perfect addition to my Political Science major and Media and Film Studies minor. In short, I am grateful to have been part of one of the most welcoming, creative, and supportive departments at Skidmore College and, while I am sad to leave, I am also confident that my time with the American Studies department has given me a critical foundation which will influence and inform my post-Skidmore life and possible future academic endeavors.

est,

Emma Gill

Liz Tybush

I've had a hard time writing this blurb. Perhaps it's because linear time and I don't get along well, or maybe it's just a natural thing that happens at the end of an exceptionally long journey. I'm a non-traditional student, and for over a decade I've had to juggle the demands of existing-while-adult in a boot-straps-focused society with my desire to enrich my mind and earn a degree. Graduation doesn't feel real, and yet, as of this writing, it's something I'm doing tomorrow and have built into my morning schedule.



Yet the gratitude I feel toward this department is immense, and very real. When I transferred to Skidmore, I knew that I wanted to connect history, culture, and various -ologies together, but I never knew that such a discipline existed, and so I reached out to various departments I might've been interested in, but nothing felt right. On the advice of staff from Academic Advising, I got in touch with Professor Beck Krefting. That meeting altered my perception and I stopped my search for a home, because I'd found it. I went on to take courses with Professors Krefting, Greg Pfitzer, and Dan Nathan. Courses I took within my Media and Film Studies minor still felt within the major, like Professor Mao Chen's course on Chinese Cinema and various courses from Professor John Anzalone on topics like film noir, monster movies, and Cold War cinema. Few things felt like chores, or like jobs, and I understood what it was like to do the kind of work you love doing.

I'm proud of the things I've done at Skidmore. From becoming a Storyteller's Fellow, to releasing two novels with an indie publisher, to being honored by the department — it has been such a joy. I plan to keep embedding American Studies into my creative works as I move forward. And this summer, I hope to re-release my second novel for free on my website and get moving on my next work, perhaps revisiting a sci-fi manuscript I'd paused on years ago. That writer's block could be cured by folding in all that I learned in my final American Studies course at Skidmore, *Americans in Outer Space* with Professor Pfitzer.

To the staff and faculty of the American Studies Department: Thank you so much. All of you have created a tight-knit community of scholars and you maintain such a welcoming and thoughtful space for students to meld their interests with academics. It has been a pleasure!

Image Caption: Live long and prosper! My spouse Frank and I had the opportunity to attend a talk with William Shatner last summer. Here we are beside a replica of the shuttle from the original Star Trek series. I am on the right.

Alumni News

James White '08 writing you from Granada, Nicaragua. I'm watching a pitching duel between Cole and Rodriguez and it got me to wondering if I have any friends who are Orioles fans.

The little man on my shoulders is my son Francisco.



