

SKIDMORE COLLEGE AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025



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See what's new
for Fall Semester
A year full of
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Dear Friends of American Studies:

It was an active 2024-2025 in the Department of American Studies at Skidmore College. Here's just a taste of what we undertook this academic year:

In September, we welcomed Brian Rosenberg, former president of Macalester College, to speak to senior majors in AM374 about the joys and frustrations of doing scholarly research. Rosenberg is the author of *Whatever It Is, I'm Against It: Resistance to Change in Higher Education*, published in 2023 by Harvard Education Press, and his articles on higher education appear regularly in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. We paired Rosenberg with Skidmore's own former president, Phil Glotzbach, in a session at the Surrey Williamson Inn titled "Creativity, Change and Preparation for Democracy in Higher Education." Glotzbach, whose *Embrace Your Freedom: Winning Strategies to Succeed in College and in Life* was published recently by Post Hill Press, has been recognized nationally as an important "commentator on and outspoken champion of American higher education." These notable educators shared impressions about how students might maximize the personal benefits of a liberal arts training during their four years in college while identifying public-facing ways to use that training to impact the world beyond college.

In October, American Studies sophomore major Carter Nierle presented a paper on the "Inevitability of Another American Civil War" at the bi-annual Kuroda Seminar along with three other students from the departments of History and Political Science. Every two years these three departments gather to honor Professor Tad Kuroda, a beloved teacher and scholar who passed away in 2010. We invite a guest speaker to give a public talk and to conduct a workshop evaluating papers written by students such as Nierle nominated by their departments. This year's speaker was David Chang, the Chair of the American Indian Studies Department and a Distinguished McKnight University Professor in history at the University of Minnesota. He is a historian of indigenous people, colonialism, borders and migration in Hawaii and North America, and he did a wonderful job of summarizing, critiquing, and praising Carter's paper and those of the other participants as well.

In November and December, nearly a dozen seniors put in the hard work that resulted in an impressive set of capstone seminar projects on topics including American Exploratory Narratives (Cory Derzon-Supplee); Film Criticism in the Internet Era (Juliette Dube); Apocalyptic Lethargy (Benno Greene); the AIDS Epidemic (Catie Hamilton); Marlo Thomas's *Free to Be You and Me*, (Lucy McCulloch) Race and Gender in Marvel Films (Jacob Mejia Levy); The Harlem Renaissance (Kayla Moody); Capitalism-Induced Violence in 1980s Pop Music (Grace O'Keefe); Reforming Higher Education (Anna Paul); Accountability in Journalism (Ezra Shamy); and Black Women and AI (A'Myilah Wright). Once the projects were "hole-punched" into the Senior Seminar notebook in the department office, these students faced off against department faculty in a bowling event that one student described as "almost athletic." The faculty won, of course.

This spring semester the department conducted a successful search for a one-year Visiting Assistant Professor and will welcome Kate Grover (Ph. D. from the American Studies program at the University of Texas, Austin) to teach a variety of courses in the 2025-2026 curriculum. In the fall, she will be offering two sections of AM101W: Rock Music and Culture. The course "examines 20th and 21st century American rock music and culture as a crucial site for ongoing struggles over identity, belonging, and power in the U.S. By examining various interdisciplinary approaches to the field of American Studies, students will consider how race, class, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity have shaped Americans' historical engagements with rock music and culture, as well as what insights these engagements provide about 'the American experience' over time. Students will explore the social, political, and cultural conditions that led to the birth of rock music as a uniquely American art form, analyze the ways Americans have utilized rock culture as a medium of expression and social critique, and debate the stakes of rock history as a portal into the American past."

This spring we also congratulated senior major Juliette Dube, who was recognized at the college's Honors Convocation as the winner of the 2024-2025 American Faculty Prize Award winner. The citation honoring her read as follows: "Rigorous and creative, Juliette Dube is whip smart, critically alert, and writes gracefully, with wit and passion. She is a joy to have in class, where her work not only demonstrates original thinking but also inspires her peers. The kind of person others enjoy being around, Juliette enriches every conversation she has with her characteristic insights

and thoughtful advice. She is also a responsible student leader and natural performer, having co-produced the National College ComFest for three years.” The honor was richly deserved.

This is just a snippet of what engaged us this year on the third floor of the Tisch Learning Center. Please read further for additional details. With appreciation to students, colleagues, and especially to our Administrative Assistant, Sue Matrazzo, who put together this newsletter, We close by wishing you a wonderful summer. We look forward to hearing about your pursuits when we return in the fall.

Best,

Greg Pfitzer
Chair, American Studies

AMERICAN STUDIES

SENIORS

Juliette Dube

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

Abstract: Film criticism is a powerful art form that has been a staple of American culture for over a century. Transforming their opinions into riveting works of writing, critics subtly shape film culture and history with their authority. The scorn or praise of a talented critic can make or break a movie. Additionally, engaging with criticism fosters the ability to think critically, not just about art, but about our lives and our world—a skill that is absolutely crucial to our democracy. It seems only natural that in a society dominated by digital interaction, film criticism has largely shifted to online spaces as opposed to print newspapers and magazines. In the past few years, the loudest voices in film criticism have become those of TikTok influencers, X users, YouTubers, Reddit posters, and the infamous Rotten Tomatoes' Tomatometer. Seldom do moviegoers, even self-proclaimed cinephiles, consult the work of trained, professional critics at traditional publications. This is cause for concern. Social media and the internet promote simplistic, reactionary, and biased movie reviews, which has negatively impacted the artistic production of film criticism, and the way moviegoers interact with it. These trends also reflect our country's broader contemporary culture, which promotes prejudice and ignorance while rejecting intellectualism and expertise.



Favorite AMST Class: American Past in Film

Outside of AMST: Media & Film Studies and Sociology double minor. Co-Producer of the National College Comedy Festival. President of The Sketchies comedy group.

Fun Fact: I have been tap dancing since I was 8 years old!

Jacob Mejia Levy

My hometown is Boston, Massachusetts, specifically the neighborhood, Hyde Park.

Favorite American Studies Class: American Past in Film, Senior Seminar, Films That Changed America and Sports Cinema



Thesis Abstract: I completed my thesis in the fall of 2024. It centered on Marvel movies as I am big fan of anything relating to superheroes. Since the early 2000s, superhero movies have had a large presence in the film industry. The MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) has made more money than any other franchise. Not everyone likes Marvel movies, but it can't be denied that these films have a massive cultural impact, especially in terms of diversity. The company has made a lot of mistakes when it comes to diversity, but it has had some successes, too. This thesis includes the history of Marvel Studios since its inception. Through the use of case studies on *Black Panther* (2018), *Captain Marvel* (2019), and *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018), I argue that racial and gender representation in Marvel films matters because the entertainment company (no matter what studio makes the films) has a responsibility to make projects that appeal to and include people besides white men. Marvel needs to be held accountable for this, especially with its popularity and as the highest-grossing franchise of all time. These characters don't have to be only white men. The films' themes, their box office revenue, and critical reviews are just some of the evidence I use to support my thesis. I conclude with how it is incredible that many young girls and boys of color get to see themselves in these superheroes. They get to learn that they should be proud of what makes them different.

Outside of American Studies, I have a minor in Media and Film Studies. At the same time I was working on my senior thesis, I was working on another project for a class called Seminar in Media Studies. Similar to Senior Seminar, we were allowed to choose anything for our project topics. I wrote a paper about video game adaptations. I used the shows *Fallout* (2023) and *The Last of Us* (2022) and juxtaposed them to their source material. It's clear from my favorite American Studies classes and my thesis that I have an admiration for media and film. I think that is a fun and exciting overlap between my major and my minor. What is incredible looking back is that I got to spend the fall 2024 semester writing and talking about my two favorite passions: superheroes and video games. I used to work in the Dining Hall from fall 2021 to spring 2023. Since fall 2023, I have worked as an office assistant for the American Studies and History Departments for the best boss ever, Sue Matrazzo.

Fun Fact: I am the oldest sibling. I have two younger sisters with one in her first year of college and the other in her last year of middle school.

Anna Paul

Hometown: Maplewood, NJ

Thesis abstract: “Critics of higher education often point to the growing transactional and credentialist approach to educational attainment, which prioritizes high grade, degrees and credentials over intellectual growth and critical inquiry. This trend, exacerbated by the rising cost of college, has coincided with a broader cultural shift toward anti-intellectualism. How are people working within higher education to improve these systemic flaws and cultural skepticism? This project reviews literature on critical pedagogy, which serves as a theoretical basis for its argument. Then, it examines how higher education is portrayed in American media through discourse analysis. Finally, the project details existing



pedagogical partnerships, analyzing how these programs encourage intellectual engagement, growth and questioning. By outlining the problems frequently raised about the system of higher education, along with the methods of pedagogical partnership programs, such as Allies in Learning and Teaching (ALT), the project argues that higher education is not broken but in need of meaningful, localized, student-led reform.”

Favorite AMST class: The Rise and Fall of the New Deal taught by Aaron Pedinotti

Favorite all-college class: My Scribner Seminar, Chaos Finds a Voice: The Politics of Identity in the U.S./Mexico Borderlands taught by Diana Barnes.

Fun fact about myself: I love to cook!

Ezra Shamy

Hometown: Georgia, VT

Abstract: In the past twenty years, newspapers across the country have been vanishing, creating “news deserts,” which are vast regions that do not receive any consistent news coverage. The necessity for localized news can only be understood by looking at what happens to a community that does not have access to news of its own. In this thesis, Georgia, Vermont, is used as a case study to observe community members’ response to a local political scandal in a news desert. The town Facebook group, which became a sounding board for all opinions on the issue, reveals much about the quality and abilities of untrained citizens to fill the role of journalists in a town that has none. I define the necessity for journalism through two key arguments: the authority of facts and the authentication of facts, and then analyze the situation in Georgia through the presence (or lack thereof) of these factors. This thesis argues that the scrutinizing role news has over the governments it covers, along with the strong voice of a newspaper’s positionality, has a strong effect on a community’s sense of trust in their elected officials and local government.



Favorite AMST Class: Senior Seminar

Outside AMST: GIS!

Fun Fact: UltiWorld describes me as “Fundamental to the [Skidmore Wombats Ultimate Frisbee team] offense.”

Catie Hamilton

I am from New York City

My favorite American Studies class is the 1960s with Professor Pfitzer.

My favorite non-American Studies class was Religion and Popular Culture with Religious Studies professor Chelsea Taylor.

A fun fact about me is that I studied abroad in Amsterdam!

Thesis:

The HIV-AIDS epidemic erupted in the United States in the early 1980s, devastating gay communities in places like New York and California. Initially, the American public panicked while the United States government stayed mostly silent in response to the mounting crisis, contributing to intense stigma surrounding the virus. Early on, AIDS activist groups publicly mobilized, conducting public demonstrations with a focus on ending the epidemic through scientific research and the discovery of new medications. Today, HIV overwhelmingly infects gay Black and Latino men in the Southeastern United States. This is due to social inequalities such as America's flawed healthcare system, institutionalized racism, and poverty. In this paper, I argue that we must look to the past and examine our present society to understand why gay men of color in the Southeastern United States continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV while other populations are not.



Grace O'Keefe

Hometown: Branford, Connecticut

Thesis abstract: I wrote about how popular musical critiques of American violence are actually criticizing the capitalistic system that is ingrained into American society. I chose to examine songs from the 1980s, as this was an age of cultural excess and simultaneously saw the emergence of global charity rock.



Favorite AMST class(es): Reflections of the American Past through Film with Professor Nathan, and Civil War in American Memory with Professor Pfitzer

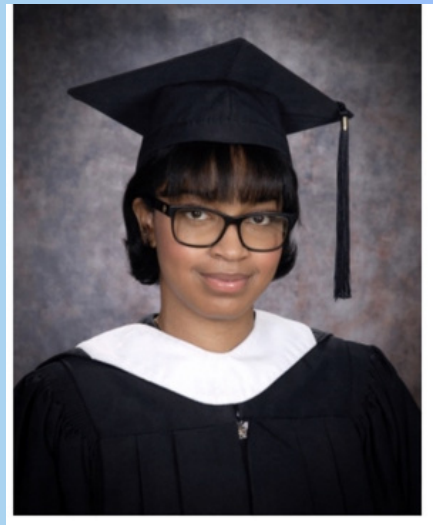
Outside AMST: I am also an Environmental Studies major, and love to swim, play ultimate frisbee, and listen to music

Fun fact: I have been to the Junior Olympics three times for Synchronized Swimming

A'Myilah Wright

A'Myilah Wright is from Dayton, Ohio, majoring in American Studies.

Her thesis, titled “Black Women’s User Experience of Artificial Intelligence,” explores how algorithmic systems, especially in areas like online dating, facial recognition, and predictive policing, negatively impact Black women due to embedded biases and systemic discrimination in AI design and data. A'Myilah investigates how these technologies reproduce structural inequalities and calls for more inclusive AI development. Her favorite American Studies course has been Black Feminist Thought, which deeply shaped her critical lens. Outside of class, she has contributed to the Black Panther archives in the Black Studies Program.



Cory Derzon-Supplee

Hometown: Bainbridge Island, WA

Thesis abstract: The legacy of exploration narratives in America is the demonstration of how wilderness travel can push people to develop leadership and analytical skills, an appreciation of nature, humility, adaptability, perseverance, and the ability to form meaningful relationships.

Your favorite AMST class: AM 356 Sports Cinema

Outside AMST: Beginner Racquetball

Fun fact: When I was a kid, my pet snake got loose in our house, and I found it under my bed.

Kayla Moody

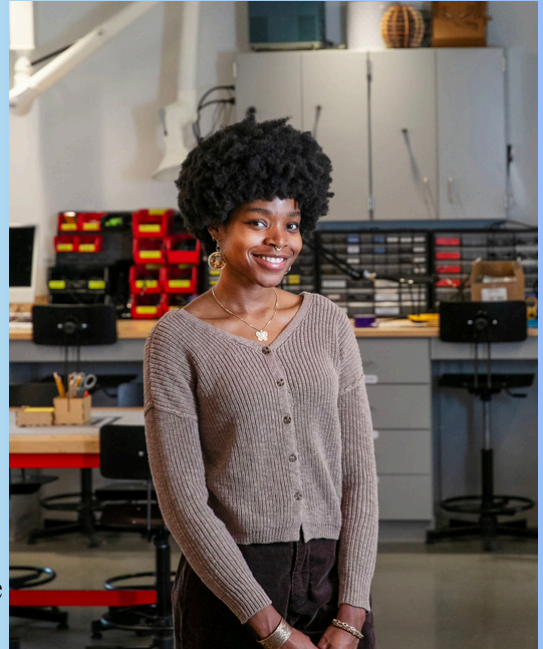
My hometown is New York City, hailing from both Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn and Lower East Side, Manhattan.

My favorite American Studies Class was Black Girlhood Studies with Professor Owens.

Thesis abstract:

The Harlem Renaissance (1918-1937) was and remains a beacon of creative liberation for Black people in America. This period demonstrates the importance of artistic creation and curation as liberatory practices during the Black community's plight in the Jim Crow Era. Its successes and eventual end inform the importance of reviving collective creativity within the African American community today. Through an analysis of the New Negro Movement and two exhibitions on visual culture of the Harlem Renaissance, Black creative expression is revealed to combat racial injustice, and present-day practices of exclusion within art museums.

A fun fact about me is that I love reading books and hope to publish some of my own one day!



Faculty Update - Beck Krefting

This year proved to be exceptionally dynamic, interesting, and fun, filled with innovative teaching, a slew of publications, and the exciting debut of a new academic association. In fall 2024, students enrolled in my course, Critical Whiteness in the U.S., collaborated with me to curate an exhibit at the Tang Museum titled *Everforward/Neverback*. The exhibit interrogated the ongoing legacies and intersections of race, whiteness, and privilege in America, creatively employing historical artifacts and art works spanning over a century to invite critical dialogue. Some of the artists showcased included: Kara Walker, Alison Saar, Kerry James Marshall, Dawoud Bey, Stephen Shames, Gordon Parks, Renee Cox, and Saratoga Springs local artist Daesha Devón Harris. Students played a central role in the curation process, thoughtfully engaging with challenging themes, from institutional racism to cultural appropriation, and emerging with impressive analytical skills and refined curatorial sensibilities. It was a true highlight to see our collective efforts showcased so powerfully in the gallery space in spring 2025.

On the scholarly front, many pieces I had been working on for over a year made their way into print. I published a chapter (in German!!) titled “Die gefährliche Ambivalenz humoristischer Invektivität in der Stand-Up Comedy” in *An den Grenzen der Invektivität* (Frankfurt University Press, 2024) exploring the ambivalence inherent in comedic disparagement. I also penned the foreword for *Politics of Recognition and Representation in Indian Stand-Up* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), the first comprehensive study of stand-up comedy in India. Additionally, I co-authored an article titled “Racial Humor: Context, Community, and Conversations,” published in *Cultural Critique Online* (January 2025), and contributed “Hannah Gadsby: Emotional Capital and Affective Economies in Stand-Up,” for a special issue of the *European Journal of American Studies* focused on women in comedy (fall 2024). This summer I will continue working on my latest monograph project: *When Comedy Kills: Racialized and Gendered Violence in the Wake of Laughter*.

Spring marked a particularly exciting development with the inaugural conference of the Critical Humor Studies Association (CHSA), held at Pomona College. As co-founder alongside esteemed colleagues J Finley, Raúl Pérez, and Viveca Greene, I contributed to establishing this vital transnational and interdisciplinary network, specifically by developing a website, spearheading elections for officers, and creating a fall symposium: Critical Humor Studies in Unfunny Times. Our first conference, which I helped organize, Critical Humor Studies in Times of Crisis, drew an impressive international audience, featuring over fifty presenters who explored humor’s role in social justice, politics, and cultural transformation. To date, we have members from dozens of countries across six continents. The event highlighted the association’s commitment to critically engaging with humor as a powerful site of both resistance and reflection amid global political crises. It was a moment of pride and profound intellectual exchange, laying the groundwork for the continued growth of critical humor studies.

In my third year directing the Center for Leadership, Teaching, and Learning (CLTL), I spearheaded various initiatives to enhance faculty development through interdisciplinary programming, peer mentorship, and innovative pedagogical practices. Highlights included the AI Learning Clusters, engaging 16 faculty mentees and 8 mentors in integrating AI into teaching and administration. Additionally, Professor Winston Grady-Willis (Black Studies) and I facilitated the Mellon-funded Racial Justice Learning Communities, promoting inclusive, culturally responsive teaching methods and fostering dialogues around Indigenous and Black worldviews and systemic inequities. The CLTL also hosted scholarly book clubs, research salons, and specialized training sessions such as the year-long Skill2Build AI Institute and Winter AI Academy, equipping faculty to critically and creatively incorporate AI into their professional roles. Central to our mission were inclusive teaching strategies, exemplified by programs on neurodiversity and student-faculty partnership initiatives designed to create equitable, supportive educational environments.

Reflecting on these endeavors, I remain deeply grateful for the vibrant intellectual community at Skidmore and beyond. The year ahead promises continued exploration and collaboration, energized by both past successes and future possibilities. Be sure to follow me on Instagram @beckkrefting to catch me performing stand-up comedy in the Capital region!



Critical Humor Studies Association inaugural conference, Pomona College



**Student co-curators of Tang exhibit
Everforward, Neverback:
Allie Serapilio, Kayla Moody, Aimee
Ayala (L - R)**

American Studies Department

Fall 2025 Course Offerings

AM 101W 001 – Rock Music and Culture

Kate Grover MW 10:10 am - 12pm Credits: 4

An examination of 20th and 21st century American rock music and culture as a crucial site for ongoing struggles over identity, belonging, and power in the U.S. By considering various interdisciplinary approaches to the field of American Studies, we will consider how race, class, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity have shaped Americans' historical engagements with rock music and culture, as well as what insights these engagements provide about "the American experience" over time. Students will study the social, political, and cultural conditions that led to the birth of rock music as a uniquely American art form, analyze the ways Americans have utilized rock culture as a medium of expression and social critique, and debate the stakes of rock history as a portal into the American past.

AM 101W 002 – Rock Music and Culture

Kate Grover TR 3:40 pm - 5:30 pm Credits: 4

An examination of 20th and 21st century American rock music and culture as a crucial site for ongoing struggles over identity, belonging, and power in the U.S. By considering various interdisciplinary approaches to the field of American Studies, we will consider how race, class, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity have shaped Americans' historical engagements with rock music and culture, as well as what insights these engagements provide about "the American experience" over time. Students will study the social, political, and cultural conditions that led to the birth of rock music as a uniquely American art form, analyze the ways Americans have utilized rock culture as a medium of expression and social critique, and debate the stakes of rock history as a portal into the American past.

AM 233 – Representations of the American Past in History

Daniel Nathan WF 12:20 pm - 1:40 pm and T 6:00 pm

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

Fall 2025 Course Offerings con't.

AM 252 – The Hudson River

Gregory Pfitzer MWF 9:05 am - 10 am Credits: 4

This course is designed to introduce students to the culture of the Hudson River Valley. It deals with the Hudson River as an environmental entity, an economic and political concern, and especially as a cultural symbol. The focus will be local and national. Students will be asked to consider how popular and official attitudes toward the Hudson have reflected changing cultural priorities for residents of the valley and for the nation at large. The course begins with indigenous cultures and extends to the present, but the focus will be on the nineteenth-century experience, since it was in that century that the Hudson had its greatest influence on regional and national history. In the early nineteenth century the Hudson was projected as the center of American commerce, a vital link between the mercantile East and the agrarian old Northwest. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was an economic backwater of sorts, a loser in the competition with the railroad for new and more diverse markets. One of the goals of this course will be to account for these historical changes.

AM 264 – African-American Experiences Since the Civil War

Tammy Owens TR 9:10 am – 11 am Credits: 4

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.)

AM 351 001 – Black Boyhood Studies

Tammy Owens TR 11:10 am – 12:30 pm Credits: 3

An interdisciplinary investigation of Black masculinities in American culture from the nineteenth-century to the present moment. It investigates the intersections of race, youth, and masculinity, focusing on how young Black men and boys articulate their experiences within these constructs. Key topics include American ideal of boyhood, the transition to manhood, and the socio-cultural implications of identity on perceptions of masculinity during defining moments in U.S. history. Through critical social theories such as Queer of Color critique, Critical Race theory, and Feminist theories, students will analyze popular culture, literature, film, music, sports and social media. Class discussions and projects encourage students to critically engage with scholarly texts and cultural artifacts, fostering a deeper understanding of the lived realities of black boys and men in American culture.

Fall 2025 Course Offerings

AM 374 – Senior Seminar

Gregory Pfitzer MW 4:00 pm – 5:50 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 Daniel Nathan

For 23 years, my Skidmore phone extension has been -5023. It's a good number. It's Michael Jordan's jersey number and LeBron James's, too. And now, my Skidmore year #23 is in the books. Looking back, it was productive. It went fast, which seems to be a pattern.

At Skidmore, teaching comes first. In the fall, I taught Senior Seminar (AM-374) and True Crime in America (AM-346). They were both stimulating, with some terrific, engaged students. For me, Senior Seminar was a treat. It was exciting to be in class again with some students I have known from the very beginning—that is, my Scribner Seminar alums—and to get to know some relatively new AM majors. The seniors had some creative, interesting projects and had wonderful esprit de corps. One of the semester's highlights was a late-night foray to a secret sandwich shop on campus, in the Northwoods apartments. Glad my wife Sue Taylor and former student Martita Baenziger '25 could join us. It was also terrific that Professors Pfitzer and Krefting came to class to offer some valuable counsel regarding creating context for the students' subjects and how to craft a useful literature review. In the end, everyone produced what was surely the most extensive and thorough projects of their Skidmore careers. Everyone met the challenge and did so with good cheer.



Last fall was the second time I taught the True Crime in America class, which is fascinating (and not too macabre, by design). One of its highlights was a public-facing event the students organized. It was titled “Attica Prison Uprising: A Struggle for Rights and Reform” and was presented in the Wyckoff Center. They did a great job. Many of us in the audience were impressed. They worked hard on the project and it showed.

This spring, I taught a new class: Films That Changed America (AM-261), and an old version of Introduction to American Studies (AM-101W), the one that uses basketball to model

interdisciplinarity and examine American culture. Both classes went well and were invigorating, especially the former. In *Films That Changed America*, which was partly inspired by conversations with AM majors Juliette Dube '25 and Ezra Shamy '25, we studied and critiqued a wide range of films, including *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Godfather* (1972), *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Black Panther* (2018), among others. We also continued the tradition of bringing local talent into the classroom to enhance our understanding of the films we discussed. We welcomed Professor Greg Pfitzer to talk about *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and Aaron Pedinotti to discuss *The Exorcist* (1973). They both taught us a lot.

In my basketball version of AM-101W, we Zoomed with two authors of books we read: Michael Powell of *The Atlantic*, the author of *Canyon Dreams: A Basketball Season on the Navajo Nation* (2019); and Tulane professor and *The New Yorker* contributor Thomas Beller, who wrote *Lost in the Game: A Book About Basketball* (2022). Additionally, Alexander Wolff, formerly of *Sports Illustrated*, who



lives in Vermont, and is the author of *Big Game, Small World: A Basketball Adventure* (2022), came class, live and in person. They were all generous, insightful, and welcomed the chance to talk with my students. Another highlight of the semester was taking a field trip to the Tang Teaching Museum, where we did Visual Thinking Strategies exercises with some amazing Walter Iooss photographs and a LeRoy Neiman print.

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 spend some time with colleagues I have known since my first year at Skidmore, Erica Bastress-Dukehart (History) and William Lewis (Philosophy).

In addition to this work, I have been the Editor of the *Journal of Sport History* since January 2024, which has kept me busy. 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.

As some of you know, for the last few years I worked with two friends and 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 was published in late 2024. It's on Amazon.com. I have to say, the University of Texas Press did a great job producing it. It is beautiful. 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 all proud of it.

Also on the scholarship front, I had an article accepted for publication in *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* and I have short chapter in the forthcoming book *The Intentional Life: Crafting Your Legacy One Day at a Time*.

As usual, I'll be attending the annual North American Society for Sport History conference, which is in Gatineau, Quebec, this year. I organized a session on Sport Historical Fiction and will be giving a paper about the NCAA and athletes' rights. Going to NASSH is 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.

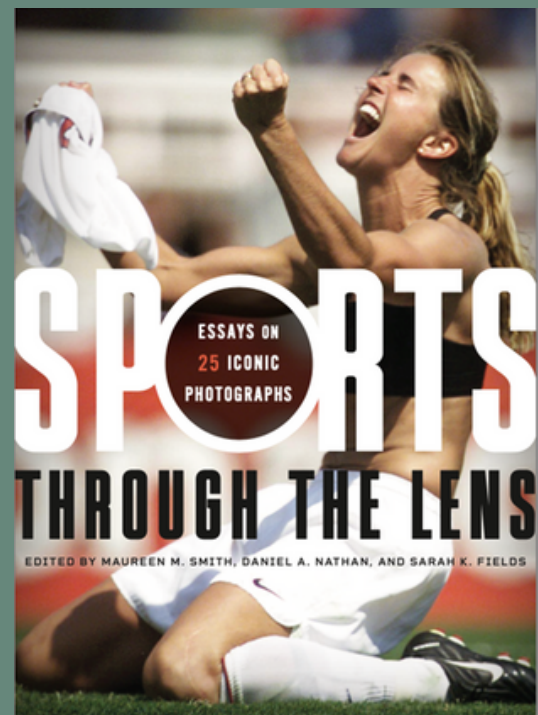
Once summer begins, well, I'll be working in the yard (well, trimming the hedges) and on some writing projects, editing the *Journal of Sport History*, visiting my family in DC, heading to the Berkshires when I can, and enthusiastically following the Orioles, who have regressed, which is vexing.

Finally, as is always true, we're going to miss the graduating seniors and wish them well. I have to say, the class of 2025 was special. I have had a high opinion of many of them from their first day of their college careers—in our Scribner Seminar—and it has been a joy to teach, mentor, and get to see them grow in many ways. They are terrific young people, and I hope to stay in touch with them. It will be exciting to track their post-Skidmore journeys.

If any of you are around this summer, please drop me a line. I'd be pleased to visit with you.

Best,

DN



Faculty Update

Professor Greg Pfitzer

This has been a very enjoyable academic year, filled with wonderful classroom experiences. In the fall term, I taught AM 241: Mark Twain's America.

AM 241, a course that charts the complex relationship between Samuel Clemens and his literary persona Mark Twain as well the connections between the literary characters Clemens created and the American audiences for whom he wrote. We examined Twain as a representative figure of an age he helped to define, and we discovered that a study of his life and works can tell us much about a nation undergoing profound and rapid change in terms of class struggle, agrarian retreat, industrialization and imperialism. Students came to understand the role Twain played in constructing his own reputation and recognized how Twain was both cause and effect of the climate of the times in which he worked.

During the study break day in October, a group of us visited the Mark Twain Home and Museum in Hartford, Connecticut, where we toured the lavish home that Twain built at the height of his success as a writer. The domicile embodies many of the most garish characteristics of the "gilded age," a term Twain invented in the title of one of his only co-authored novel.



In the fall semester I also taught AM 101W: The Wizard of Oz as Cultural Myth, an examination of the cultural impact of L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful 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 studied the original novel and its sequels, reflecting on the social, economic, and political contexts of each. They also considered how revised

and reinvented versions of the Baum narrative reflect and shape changing cultural priorities in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, spirituality, and consumerism as categories of analysis. In late October, we had a screening of the 1939 MGM film, “The Wizard of Oz.” It was shown just a day before Halloween, so I asked students to come dressed as their favorite Wizard of Oz characters. The picture below suggests how seriously they took the suggestion.



The winner of the costume contest was Emilio Villajuan-Gil, whose version of Baum’s Tin-man was inspired.

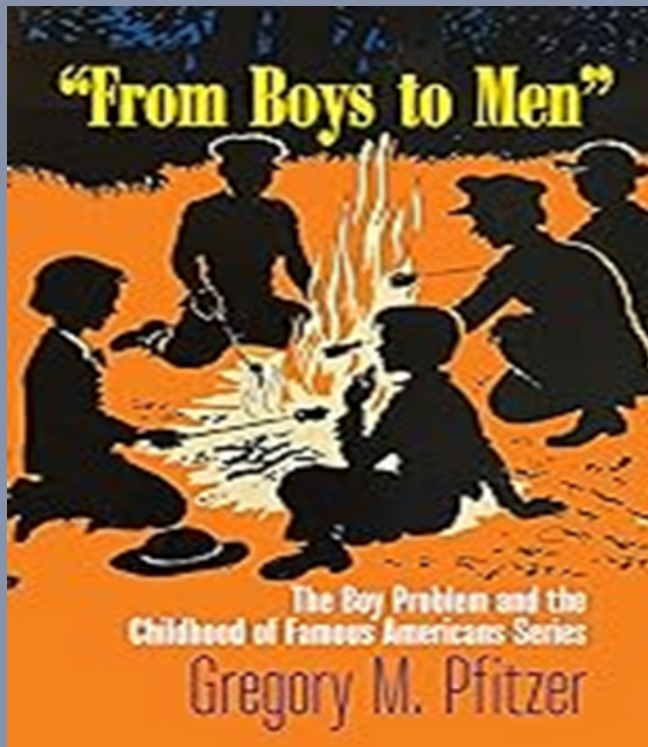
Unfortunately, Emilio had to remain standing for the entire movie, as, like the original Tin-man of the novel, he could not bend easily. And none of those who came to the screening thought to bring an oil-can.

In the spring term, I taught AM237: Americans in Outer Space. We focused on the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing and the way in which it sparked intense debates among Americans about the value and future of the U.S. space program. We noted that some Americans in the late Sixties 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, however, ridiculing the Apollo project as a calculated effort “to fleece the taxpayer” by funding “vicarious

adventures instead of hospital beds.” We considered the cultural, political and economic contours of this debate about the lunar landing, 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 concluded the course with a public debate on the future of space exploration and colonization, the private ownership of space, and the militarization of space as related to the Artemis Program.

Finally, in the spring term I taught AM368: The 1960s. We considered topics such as the New Frontier, the Cuban Missile Crisis, JFK’s assassination, the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, the countercultural movement, the feminist crusade, a man on the moon, and much more. We discovered that some of these events appealed to patriotic sensibilities and gave renewed hope to American exceptionalists for national eminence and world dominance--hopes born of the nationalism of the post-World War II period. Others created severe psychological doubts and awakened Americans to the need to redefine national and international priorities. We sought to: 1) to chronicle and examine what happened during those climactic years, 2) to document how such events affected subsequent American development from the 1970s to the present, and 3) to suggest from a historiographic perspective how perceptions and historical memory about the 1960s have changed over time in accordance with these subsequent developments. Once a week students took part in participatory activities, ranging from mock trials to conducting surveys to producing a live radio program. We closed out the semester with a “Be-in” at the Pfitzer household with everyone dressed in period-appropriate outfits.

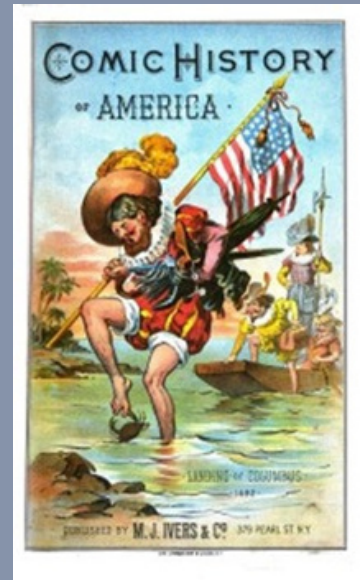




In terms of scholarship, I published a book in 2024 titled *“From Boys to Men”: The Boy Problem and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series*, a companion to my 2022 volume, *“Fame is Not Just for the Fellas:” Female Renown and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series*. In this newest work, I consider how the writers and editors affiliated with the Bobbs-Merrill series thought deliberately about how their portraits of the childhoods of Americans who later became famous as adults might influence the masculine development of young male readers. These were works of historical fiction emphasizing inspiring tales over historical accuracy and were written in simple language,

with characters, dialogue, and stories designed 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. I wrote the book to shed light on current controversies on children’s books and presentations of gender diversity as well. This summer I will be working on a new book project tentatively titled *Parodying the Past: Burlesque Histories of the United States*. I will focus on a series of popular books from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by historians who satirized the works of conventional historians as a way of emphasizing the spurious nature of the past. Acutely aware of the limitations of history as a discipline to adequately convey an objective sense of what really happened in the past, these historians mocked the attempt, using biting sarcasm both for comedic effect and as camouflage for serious analysis. Such parodies include Washington Irving’s *Diedrich Knickerbocker’s History of New York*, *Bricktop’s Comic History of America*, *Bill Nye’s Comic History of the United States*, and *Jon Stewart’s America*.

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The year filled out for me with various administrative tasks, including chairing the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS). Reviewing the American Studies department at Siena College, and keeping an eye on things here in the department.

My biggest news of the year is that I became a grandpa again. On March 25, Iris Mia Gibney was born in Boston to my daughter and her partner. I now have four grandchildren under the age of six, one short of a basketball team, although none of them yet knows how to dribble. (Here I'm discounting the tendencies of the very youngest of them to do what infants do.) Those among the grandchildren who are old enough to speak, call me "Pa." Have a great summer everyone. Be sure to keep us up-to-date as to your summer activities and/or your post-Skidmore lives.



“One Good Step”

Tammy C. Owens, *Assistant Professor of American Studies*

“You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.”—Maya Angelou

As I close out one of the busiest academic years of my career—a year that ended with a full three-course teaching load—I’ve found myself reflecting on what it means to keep showing up with intention, even when stretched thin. This year has taught me the discipline of doing one thing at a time, and doing that one thing well, even when the rest of the list looms large. And in doing so, I’ve seen how even small, focused steps forward can shape a meaningful path.

In my courses this year—from *Black Feminist Thoughts* to *Growing Up in America* to *African American Experiences*—I revised syllabi to offer more expansive space for students to bring their full selves into the room. I invited them to be bold, to reflect, to theorize from experience, and to imagine new ways of knowing. I encouraged them to ask: Who planted the seeds of the knowledge we now tend? Who are we cultivating our scholarship for? In *Black Feminist Thoughts*, students produced op-eds and public-facing research—writing that was celebrated, literally, over cake and community.

Outside the classroom, I continued working steadily on my book manuscript. My book research directly informed my MLK Saratoga keynote at the start of the year, where I reflected on the emotional weight of Black childhood and the radical possibilities of gathering in hope—even in darkness.

I also leaned more deeply into service and leadership this year, preparing to take on new roles within Gender Studies and across the college. These responsibilities are not departures from my scholarship—they are extensions of it. They offer me the opportunity to live out what I teach: that community care *is* intellectual labor, and that our ideas grow deeper, more accountable, and more transformative when shaped in conversation with others.

To my students, I say: If it feels like you’re juggling more than you can carry, try this—put your energy into just one thing, and give it your best. That one step forward, taken with care and conviction, has the power to move mountains. I believe this because I lived it this year. Exhausted and grateful, I close this academic chapter with renewed hope for what we can grow together when we give each seed our full attention.

We are still planting. We are still blooming.

Alumni News

Charlee Bianchini '09 stopped by the American Studies department in September. She was in town for the Farm Aid concert. She has earned a MSW and is living in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where she is a Clinical Social Worker/Therapist.

Callan Daniel '23 is a lecturer and technical advisor to Co-Curricular Theater at Georgetown University.

Liv Fidler '19 works at the HISTORY Channel where she has become the Co-Executive Producers on the podcast, *HISTORY This Week*. She has also become a micro-influencer for rooftop bars in Williamsburg, NY.

Lisa Fierstein '16 visited the American Studies offices in late August. She's doing well, living in Brooklyn and beginning a new job with Audible.

Micaela Gerson '21 will be heading to CalArts in the fall to pursue an MFA in creative writing.

Chris Isaacson '19 stopped by Skidmore in February. He is living in Brooklyn and is pursuing his comedy dream. He runs a standup comedy show in bodegas which was featured by The Gothamist: <https://gothamist.com/news/standup-in-the-snack-aisle-nyc-comics-turn-bodegas-into-late-night-stages>.

Larry Jackson '99, the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Director of the Center for the Core Curriculum at Columbia College, visited us in February and had lunch with Professors Pfitzer and Joanna Zangrando.

Evan Krasner '13 is doing well. After earning his M.A. in American Studies at the University of Iowa and at teaching Bard College, he is now teaching social studies and government at United Charter High School in the Bronx. He got married in 2022.



Julie Mandel-Folly '14 continues to write for television (most recently *Minx*, *Welcome to Flatch*, and *Night Court*) and screenplays in Los Angeles, and recently submitted a new screenplay to Sundance labs for next year.

Marcy Messoré '16 is currently writing her memoir, writing and performing with her band all around Troy, NY. Be on the lookout for her forthcoming album!

Emma Newcombe '10 works at Northeastern University and was promoted in 2024. She writes, "I am now working as the associate director of PhD programs for the College of Science. I run career and professional development workshops for PhD students across all seven PhD programs in the college. So far, it's been a great role." In February, Emma came to Skidmore as the inaugural Golden Fellow to discuss career paths for English majors. It was great having a meal with her at TriDi.

In November, Claire Solomon Nisen '10 gave a Zoom presentation to the Skidmore retired employees group titled "Aging Alone Together." Claire earned MSW and MPH degrees from Columbia University after graduating from Skidmore and is a recipient of the Porter Young Alumni Service Award. She works for DOROT, a social service agency based in New York City and Westchester, and is the mother of two lovely children.

Lauren Roberts '04, the Saratoga County Historian, taught an American Studies class in the fall about public history. It was great having her on campus again. In November, Professors Pfitzer Nathan had lunch with Lauren and Adam Becker '12, who visiting Saratoga Springs.



Malcum Thayer '23 is part of an artist collective in Syracuse, NY and is co-authoring an article with a scholar at Syracuse University.

After working at the University of Kansas for many years, Megan Williams '04 accepted a position leading the Women's Center & LGBTQ+ Services at Ramapo College of New Jersey.

Isaac Weiss-Meyer '20 will be heading to the UK in the fall to begin a master's program in creative and cultural entrepreneurship (focused on music) at Goldsmiths University of London.

Congratulations Graduating Class 2025



**CONGRATULATIONS
GRADUATES**

