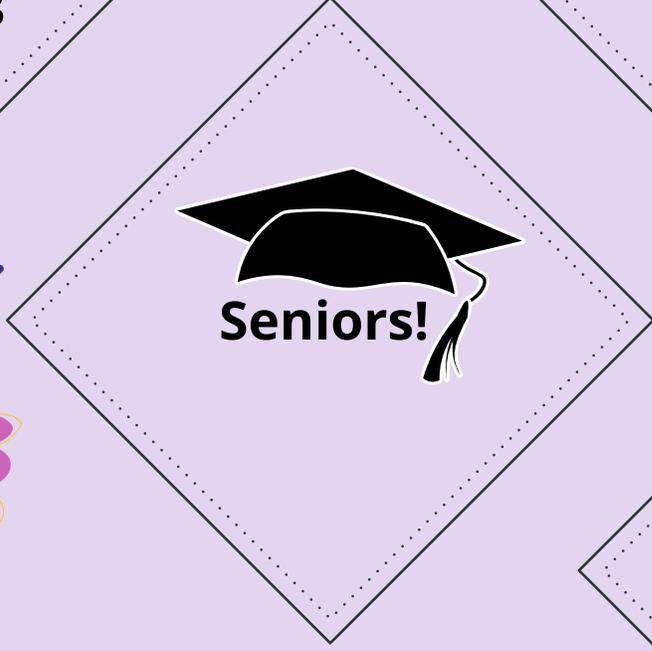
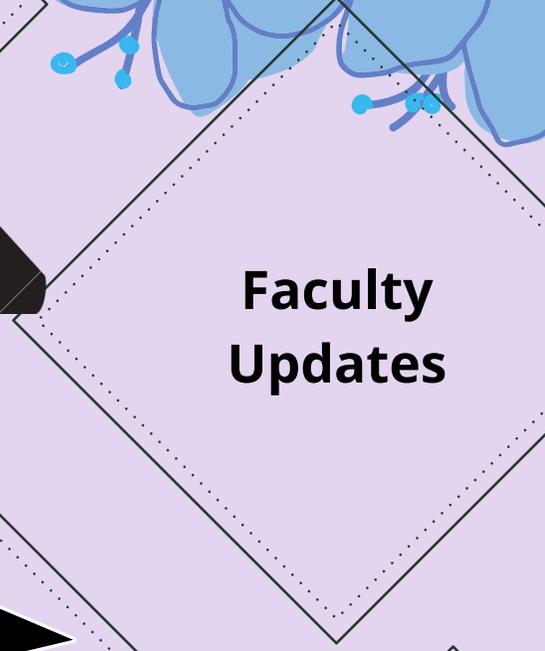
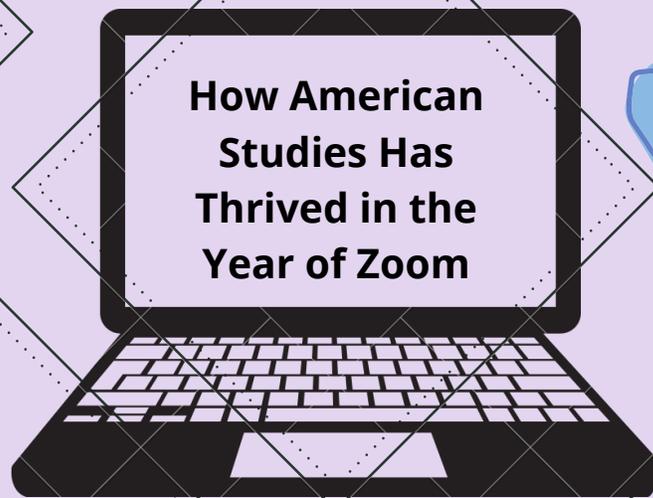
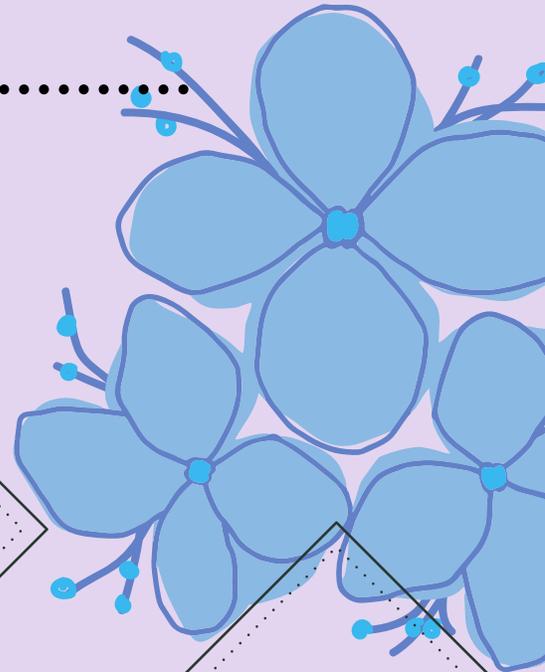


American Studies

All About the Major!

Department Newsletter



This year in American Studies...

Submission by Department Chair, Beck Krefting (2021)

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There was no bowling competition this year between the seniors and faculty. But, had there been, despite the senior class being mighty plucky, we most certainly would have dominated. Due to widespread availability of vaccines, many students and faculty have been successfully inoculated against Covid-19. This is another way of saying: there WILL be cake for graduation. Academic Festival moved to Zoom this year, which mimicked what we did last year, except this time we expected it. Three students—Julia Boral,



Sylas Hebert, and Liam Johansson—completed honors theses in the spring and presented incredible work at the festival. Sylas Hebert managed to secure a trifecta of awards, taking the American Studies Faculty Award, the Beverly Field Award in Gender Studies, and the highly coveted all-college Periclean Award given by the Honors Forum. Kathleen Oakley was one of the recipients of the Student Government Association Senior Leadership Awards. We are incredibly proud of the work of all our seniors who never fail to impress, whether through their academics, theater work, athletic accomplishments, and artistic production. We delight in the well-roundedness of American Studies students and this class was no exception!

To work around budget constraints that reduced funds for programming, many departments and programs pooled monies to develop a jaw-dropping and enviable set of events for this year. Dr. Saidiya Hartman’s poetic intellectual musings regaled the hundreds of folks in attendance. American Studies scholar Betsy Esch gave a tremendously informative talk titled: “Race at Work: How American Managers Made White Lives Matter More.” We are also guilty of co-sponsoring a reading of *This Exquisite Corpse* with playwright Mia Chung, Dr. Bettina Love discussing anti-racist pedagogy, and a panel series titled “Narratives Disrupted: Voices and Visions of the Black Atlantic” focusing on Afro-Latin activist intellectuals, the Haitian Revolution, and cultural ecologies of the Francophone Caribbean. Dr. Cornel West stopped by for two speaking engagements as well as being one of this year’s honorary degree recipients. Lucky us.

We spent a great deal of time developing and preparing for implementation of new general education curriculum that went into effect this year. Much of our energies have been devoted to the important work of determining how our existing courses can contribute to general education requirements in expository writing and in content areas related to examinations of power—inequities, access, privilege, etc. All of us have been working hard to reimagine our courses to revise and transform them for the new requirements. This has led to a number of valuable conversations in departmental meetings around pedagogy, course development, and curriculum.

These conversations help us to reflect critically about how we educate in a rapidly changing landscape—something we feel more acutely now than ever before. As part of this process, we finalized the Senior Coda, after conversations about the learning objectives of the thesis capstone work; created continuity among AM 101W sections by following shared guidelines for the course; and created courses fulfilling the bridge experience requirement focused on power and social inequalities.

Our new hire, Tammy Owens, myself and Dan Nathan were chatting in December—yes, sandwiches were involved—and we brainstormed ideas about how to expand content on racial justice in our own and others' courses. This thought experiment ended up becoming a collaboration with the Black Studies Program that we called the Racial Justice Teaching Challenge. Here is an excerpt from the call we issued to faculty across the College just weeks after coming up with the idea: "Black History Month, first launched as Negro History Week in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, marks February as an important month. In spring of 2021, we invite you to participate in the Skidmore Racial Justice Teaching Challenge wherein for the month of February faculty members commit to devoting a significant portion of educational content in their courses to focus on (a) the lives and experiences of Black folks in North America and/or the African diaspora, or (b) substantive engagement with issues of race and racism." We had over sixty faculty participate in delivering over ninety-five courses answering the challenge. Winston and I worked to support those faculty throughout the semester—informally and in formal drop-in sessions held in January. President Marc Connor (our new best friend) generously donated \$2,500 to highlight and award exemplary student work devoted to racial justice. There were five recipients of the President's Racial Justice Award in Honor of Samantha Sasenarine, one from each division in the College. We hope to be able to replicate this work in years to come.

A pandemic year is full of all kinds of challenges. Many folks taught synchronously in an entirely different modality full or part-time. They dealt with having to adapt courses for online learning as well as students' (and their own) Zoom fatigue. For those who taught in-person, there was much that had to be adjusted: weekly testing, safety protocols, battling the elements when teaching outdoors in tents, and having to pack and carry all teaching materials such as chalk, erasers, computer, batteries, etc. I watched my colleagues surmount these challenges with innovation, courage, and humility. No one got it right all the time but I believe we got it right most of the time. Shifting means of instruction necessitates scrutiny of our practices. The faculty voted to keep confidential all student ratings for this academic year, meaning the individual faculty member may learn from the feedback but are not required to make those data available for assessment purposes. This meant we had a unique opportunity to experiment with a new departmental qualitative long form, gleaning student assessment of their learning experience. Together we created a new teaching assessment tool to pilot for this year which we will continue to assess and adapt for the coming years.

I continue to be impressed by and grateful for my departmental colleagues and American Studies students. It has been a pleasure serving as department chair despite the enormous shifts/conflicts around politics, race, and public health. I hope I didn't embarrass the family (too much). Without further ado, back to you, Greg Pfitzer!

SENIORS

Julia Boral (she/her/hers)



From: Cambridge, MA

Favorite AMST Class: Civil War in American Memory; The Funny Thing About History

Outside of AMST:

On campus, I work as Professor Tammy Owens's research assistant. This past year I have been gathering materials and scholarship for her book on Black girlhood and childhood. This experience has strengthened my research skills and I have had a wonderful time building a connection with Professor Owens.

In addition to being an American Studies major, I am a Spanish and Studio Art double minor. Outside of academics, I enjoy cross-country skiing, running, going on walks with my dog, and have recently taken up crocheting as my pandemic hobby. I cannot believe how quickly these past four years have gone by. I am thankful for the friendships and mentorships I have formed through the American Studies department. I look forward to incorporating my critical thinking skills and a dedication to amplifying stories that have often been ignored into future life paths. Thank you to the entire American Studies department for creating a lively, intelligent, supportive, and accepting environment for me and my peers.

Thesis Summary:

In the fall I completed my capstone: "Who is 'America's Best Idea' For? Race, Class, and the Grand Canyon National Park." This paper explored the history of tourism in the Grand Canyon and its impact on local Indigenous communities. I connected this history with how people visit the canyon today and who is not visiting the site and why. This semester, I expanded on my previous research to develop an Honors Thesis. My project: "Hearing Diverse Voices: Making a More Inclusive Outdoors Culture" is a series of interviews with people located across the country from a range of ages, backgrounds, and careers who are making the outdoors accessible and inclusive for BIPOC and historically excluded people and communities. Hosted on a website, these interviews provide personal insights and reflections on making outdoor recreation more just.

Hannah Yurfest



From: Richmond, MA

Favorite AMST Class: Methods; Critical Museum Studies

Outside of AMST:

Along with my American Studies major, I double-majored in Theater. This Spring, I directed a production of *Plano* by Will Arbery as my capstone project. I hope to continue directing in the future and use the tools I learned as an American Studies major to feed my theatrical work. I'm also the president of The Skidmore Sketchies and the producer of The National College Comedy Festival.

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Kathleen Oakley (she/her)

From: Vienna, VA

Favorite AMST Class: The Wizard of Oz; The 1960s



Thesis Summary:

My thesis explores how dance was politicized and weaponized during the Cold War and beyond. Specifically, I examined the State Department's funding and promotion of goodwill tours by two African American modern dance companies, the Katherine Dunham and Company and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. These companies were sent to combat anti-American Soviet propaganda, but they utilized their international platforms to empower and unify a global community by incorporating African vernacular and choreographic portrayals of racial oppression into their work. While the United States government provided a performative solution to the systemic racism ingrained in American society, Dunham and Ailey advanced global understandings of African American experiences and culture.

Clara Pysh



From: Sleepy Hollow, NY
Favorite AMST Class: 1960s

Thesis Summary:

My thesis explored the underground rock and roll music scene of the 1960s in the United States and in the United Kingdom through two bands, the Velvet Underground and the Sex Pistols. Analyzing these bands I spoke about the emerging punk and psychedelic music scenes, specifically in New York and London. I expanded on how these subcultures grew within society through fashion, aesthetics, and lifestyle. While exploring how the underground and these alternative subcultures became a prominent way of life for many people.

Outside of AMST:

Outside of American Studies, I minored in Media and Film, where I was able to explore my love of photography. I took documentary classes where I created projects that integrated my passion for collecting stories and learning about the diverse lives of people.



Liam Johansson



From: Belmont, MA
Favorite AMST Class: Gaming in U.S. Culture

Thesis Summary:

This fall, I completed my senior thesis paper titled Existential Psychology and Star Wars, in which I interpreted these quintessential American films from an existential perspective, paying close attention to the role of death, isolation, faith, freedom, and myth. In the fall, I completed an honors thesis titled "Do Androids Dream of Dasein? Existentialism and Posthumanism in Blade Runner and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" I analyzed these two seminal works of American science fiction using a spectrum of philosophy which extended from existentialism to speculative posthumanism. My paper was primarily concerned with freedom, agency, and choice, and on what it means to be human.

Outside of AMST:

Outside of the American Studies department, I am also a Psychology major. I have found this double major to be exceptionally rewarding. The knowledge I've gained in American culture has fostered a greater understanding of human psychology and vice versa. I am currently applying to graduate programs in clinical psychology and mental health counseling, to explore becoming a psychotherapist.

Sylas Hebert



From: Oakland, CA

Favorite AMST Class: Critical Museum Studies; The Funny Thing about History

Fun fact: My closest brush to fame was in high school when Billie Joe Armstrong of Green Day came to my band's concert

Thesis Summary:

Titled "Tangible Utopia: Proposing the Museum of Transgender Storytelling," my senior thesis designed a hypothetical museum by, for, and about transgender people. I explored practices and philosophies of museums across the country and imagined new ones. I also analyzed America's only existing trans museum, the Museum of Transgender History and Art. Realizing the transformative potential of this work and following through with my argument that a trans museum must be a utopian reimagination of museums and, simultaneously, it must directly meet the tangible needs of trans people, my spring Honors Thesis brought my hypothetical trans museum to life. I designed and moderated a virtual dialogue series among six trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming folks from Skidmore and the broader NY trans community. Together, we imagined our own trans museum and filled our first exhibition with our own art and personal objects. These dialogues were deeply moving and community-building endeavors that I plan to continue wherever I end up next. And speaking of next steps, I'm sticking around Saratoga this summer as a Curatorial Intern for the Tang. I hope to continue museum work elsewhere this fall after I move to NYC.

Skylar Perera



From: Scarsdale, NY

Favorite AMST Class: 1960s

Thesis Summary:

My Senior Thesis, "Across the Pond: British Perspectives of Americans as Seen Through James Bond Cinema" covers three depictions of Americans throughout James Bond's many iterations, and how these depictions reflect general British thoughts regarding the U.S. during their respective releases. It was the ultimate test for thinking about the broader implications of what would otherwise be a simple action hero series and deconstructs the work into how Britain and the U.S. have changed in their relationship as two powerful nations. I am proud of the end product and thank everyone who helped me achieve it.

Outside of AMST:

Skidmore College was a vast departure from the suburbs of Scarsdale, where I am from. In my four years here, the college taught me so much about independence, the value of time management and flexibility, all of which I am so grateful for. However, what truly allowed me to learn critical skills useful outside of college were the American Studies classes that I took during this time. This ranged from testing my critical thinking skills in Methods and Approaches with Beck to analyzing the core values and identities in American Past in Film with Professor Nathan. The class that I resonated with the most was The 1960s with Professor Pfitzer. While the semester I took the class was cut short, the impact, enjoyment and content in the class stuck with me the most while taking the class and reflecting on it after. The fact that we were able to think deeper than recounting history during one of the most tumultuous times in American history was both enjoyable to learn and great to practice the aforementioned skills I had learned in the classes before. American Studies has impacted me in a manner that is difficult to describe in a short paragraph, but if I had to describe how, it lies with the idea to critically think of historical events, culture and politics in a manner that relates to greater implications in regards to race, gender and other ideas that are core to American identity. Always interested in history, this department allowed me to recall American history in a way that made it interesting and fun. Whether in the American Studies classes I took or the other classes in Media/Film or Spanish, I was always able to apply the critical thinking skills core to American Studies in every work that I made during my tenure at Skidmore, and I thank the department greatly for such an opportunity and ability to teach me such an important skill.

FACULTY

Professor Gregory Pfitzer

I was on sabbatical for the entire 2020-2021 academic year. I know it was a challenging year for many of you because of the pandemic. No one should feel sorry for me, as I was able to avoid most of the ZOOM and endless mask-wearing sessions you had to endure, but I did find it difficult not to be able to interact with students, colleagues, and staff. Having followed so many of you seniors along the way, it was hard for me not to get to see you cross the finish line, but I tried to keep up with your progress where I could.

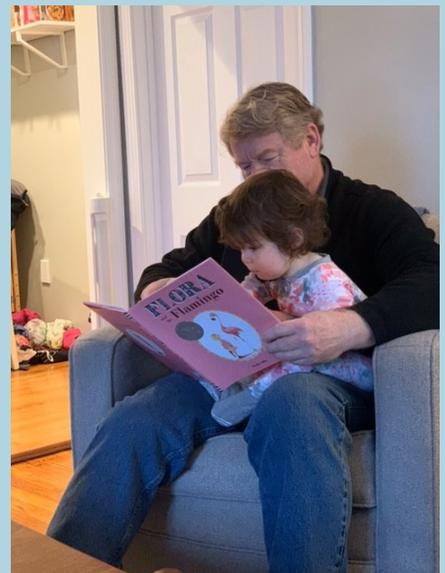
I spent most of my time away from campus working on two related book manuscripts that are now under review: *"Fame is Not Just for the Fellas": Female Renown and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series* and *Boys to Men: The "Boy Problem" and the Childhood of Famous Americans Series*. The two books examine roughly 100 volumes of fictionalized biographies of the girlhoods and boyhoods of "famous" Americans published by Bobbs-Merrill Company of Indianapolis between 1932 and 1958. The works in the series purported to tell the stories of the boyhoods and girlhoods of famous Americans before such figures became prominent. They were not "biographical histories" in the conventional sense of the term; that is, they were not purely authentic accounts of the childhoods of famous people based on known facts alone; instead, they were fictional accounts of what the childhoods of famous Americans might have been like in the absence of verifiable details to the contrary. This editorial strategy was adopted by series editors for two reasons: 1) because so little historical evidence existed regarding the early years of some of the figures chronicled in the series, and 2) because it proved convenient for shaping the past in ways the editors presumed most useful for young readers aspiring to meet the demands of the so-called feminine and masculine mystiques that were popular in the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, the authors of volumes in the *Childhood of Famous Americans* series relied heavily on invented dialogue and imaginary episodes to convey historical impressions, intentions, and meanings. I chronicle what inspired the series, who nurtured it, what challenges its promoters encountered in advancing works on the childhoods of famous Americans in the literary marketplace, and what impact the volumes had and continues to have on young readers' impressions of what girlhood and boyhood could and should be.

I have also been preparing to teach a new bridge experience course next fall: Americans in Outer Space. It is an examination of the cultural, political and economic contours of the debate about the exploration of deep space, with special attention to NASA's "Artemis" proposal to return astronauts to the moon by 2024. The course will focus on the power and justice dynamics associated with efforts to find answers to lingering and unresolved questions associated with the original lunar landings, including: Who has access to space? What groups have the authority to control the use of space? Who should be responsible for funding exploration? and How do the lenses of identity, ethnicity, gender, nationality, socio-economic class and race inform these decisions?

When I wasn't working on my books or courses, I was spending time with my granddaughter, Halia Pfitzer, who is now 20 months old. I am known affectionately to her as "Pa," as she has not yet mastered the more complicated "Grandpa." She is interested in books, stuffed animals, and Elmo. She is already pre-enrolled in the Skidmore class of 2041.

Good luck to all of you in the months and years ahead. I'm looking forward to a "return to normalcy," to quote Warren G. Harding, who is otherwise unquotable.

Professor Pfitzer



Professor Tammy Owens



This academic year was one for the history books and the fancy leather journals. Everything that I knew about myself as a person, mother, scholar, and especially a professor was tested by the pandemic. Prior to this year, I was obsessed with the idea that scholar-professors must have silence, solitude, and high-tech classrooms to produce research and deliver quality content or classroom experiences for students. Turns out, when a pandemic occurs, the daycares close and so do the K-12 schools, and the human-mother-scholar-professor must and can adapt. The pandemic pushed me to be brave, shameless, and flexible. In this past academic year, I unveiled a level of flexibility that I never imagined was possible. I discussed arrangements for my family's move to Saratoga Springs in a hospital room (with a mask on) a few hours before I gave birth. I completed writing in a dark room with only my computer light to meet an academic journal deadline with my then sleeping one-month old baby (Victor-Charlie) in my arms. I taught classes with Victor-Charlie singing along with the cartoon *Blue's Clues and Friends* in the background. And, most importantly, I somehow was able to develop connections with students without so much as a classroom or a door. We met on Zoom for every single class meeting. Together, the students and I adapted. We were flexible. We theorized and debated injustice while also saying the names of so many valuable lives lost, one Zoom class at a time. In the Fall and Spring semesters, students in AM 101W: Introduction to American Studies: Growing Up in America courses developed compelling TED talk videos that explored subjects ranging from the power of youth politics in the classroom to medical disparities among children of color. I was blown away by the students' level of transparency in the TED talks. They were intellectually fearless and deeply invested in revealing the injustices that children and youth, including themselves, experience daily. Students told of their own experiences with trauma, death, and racism. Their stories were painfully honest and beautiful. The students' TED talks inspired me to be honest and transparent in my own work. I put this energy and motivation from the students into a blog I published this spring for *Youth Circulations*. I told the world of my own fear-filled journey of being pregnant as a black woman and giving birth to a child of color in a world that has inflicted so much pain and trauma upon youth.



The students in my African American Experience course embarked upon their own social justice journeys that focused on our institution. The students completed an archival assignment that required them to identify and tell the stories of the black students who attended Skidmore College prior to 2020. The students diligently searched the institution's records in hopes of hearing the voices of Skidmore's black students. However, they found several dead ends and the unfortunate truth that has brought so many scholars of color to battle overwhelming feelings of hopelessness in the archive—the records for marginalized communities tend to be the least accessible and the most fragmentary.

The records, even the occasional unnamed or undated photo, only offer bits and pieces of who the students were or what they meant to the institution. Many of the students wrote about their disappointment and desire to do more to piece together the social history of Skidmore's black student population. In fact, one of the students took advantage of an opportunity to work with Wendy Anthony (head of Skidmore College Special Collections) in the library. Wendy came to our class to talk with the students about the archives. So many of the students were inspired by Wendy. Wendy's impact was obvious in the work they submitted. Wendy offered to work individually with each student in the course to support their archival work. The students and I were so impressed by Wendy's commitment to the work of making black students' voices speak louder in the institutional record. The work that Wendy and the students completed motivated me to continue this work. I published an essay on the importance of using creative archival sources when studying black childhood. The essay was published in an edited collection this spring.

Like the students in my other classes throughout the academic year, my Black Feminist Thought course added to the social justice momentum by organizing a Black Feminist Thought symposium on Zoom for the general public. The students nominated their keynote speaker, American Studies major Raven Jade Villa. Raven's keynote was brilliant. Raven set the tone for the symposium and ensured that the audience celebrated black women's lives and said their names. Each student delivered a presentation on some aspect of black women's lives using Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical lens. The students presented original research on topics ranging from the power of black women's digital-kink communities to employing Black Feminism in curatorial practices in museums. The symposium was well-attended. The students received so much support from the American Studies Department, other professors on campus, and their peers. The work that the students did throughout the course and especially the symposium has inspired me to apply for funding to organize another Black Feminist Thought symposium in Spring 2022.

Since the end of the semester, I have found myself saying these three words rather frequently—"We made it!" At times, I'm saying my new slogan in pure disbelief that we have all survived the past academic year. To move through the disbelief (and have a plan should we ever be faced with a pandemic in the future), I have been trying to identify and plainly state how I made it through this academic year, which happened to be both my first year as a professor at Skidmore College and my first time doing one of the hardest and most underpaid jobs—full-time mom to a newborn baby. Things were intense! But, in all of my reflections on how I made it through the year, the one thing that remained true throughout the journey was that the Skidmore students were always supportive and ready to engage any of the tasks I assigned, no matter the level of difficulty or discomfort. Despite never meeting me in person because I taught every single course on Zoom this year, the students made sure that I felt appreciated for my time and effort in class meetings. At times, Victor-Charlie (the newborn) would literally look into the camera and laugh, make silly baby noises or the occasional burp during class, but the students never once complained. They leaned in to listen harder or even stayed after class to ask for clarity. But they did not give up. They stayed in the awkwardness of it all. And, together, we made it!

Professor Aaron Pedinotti



For me, this academic year was full of challenges and rewards. The bulk of my energies were taken up with adapting my teaching style to the online classroom, the space in which I taught all my courses this year. In the fall semester, I taught two sections of Introduction to Media and Film Studies and one section of American Horror Fiction. Although these were both courses that I had taught in the past, I made numerous changes to the readings and lessons for each, which made them feel quite new. In both cases, I designed class sessions that were meant to encourage a high level of student engagement and participation despite the limitations of the online setting. I also made an effort to incorporate readings and conversation topics that were responsive current events, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the public acts of police violence that galvanized the nation this past summer, and the tumultuous election season of fall 2020. While addressing these difficult topics, I sought to create a space in which empathy, understanding, and sensitivity to the feelings of others prevailed; and I was deeply impressed by the many ways in which my students collectively contributed to this goal. Although they involved some on-the-ground adaptation and a learning curve, I was ultimately very happy with how these courses went, and surprised by how authentic, engaging, and resonant conversations that were held in a virtual classroom could be.

In the Spring of 2020, I taught one course that I have taught many times before, and one that was brand new. The former was Gaming in American Society and Culture, an annual staple of my course offerings at Skidmore. It examines this deep, formative relationship of videogames' emergence with major events in American history, such as World War II and the Cold War, as well as their contemporary refraction of major American social and cultural tendencies, including systemic inequities of access and representation along racial, gendered, and socioeconomic axes. It was my first time teaching this discussion-heavy course online. I was impressed by how responsive and participation-oriented my students were throughout the semester, and by how insightfully they related course content to the analysis of their own gaming experiences.

My new course of the Spring semester is titled AM 101W: Rise and Fall of the New Deal, a topic-focused version of Introduction to American Studies. As its title implies, this course focused on the New Deal era of the 1930s, but it also examined significant swaths of American history that preceded and followed it. The course opens with a unit on the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era, the fraught legacy of which significantly impacted the national political dynamics that prevailed during the New Deal, particularly affecting the racial inequities of its implementation. It then examines the roots and consequences of the 1929 stock market crash, the onset and worsening state of the Great Depression, the Hoover Administration's ineffectual response to the crisis, Franklin Roosevelt's ascent to the presidency, and the nature and effects of his Administration's intervention into the American economy throughout the 1930s.

Later units of the course examine the gradual decline of the New Deal order in the decades that followed it, the complex relationship of the New Deal to the subsequent Civil Rights Movement, and the rise of the neoliberal economic paradigm that became dominant in the Reagan Era. The final unit focuses on contemporary calls for a Green New Deal and a Third Reconstruction, examining the ways in which these two ideas could comprise a dual-pronged strategy for simultaneously enacting racial, environmental, and economic justice in the United States. Because so much of the course resonates with extremely contemporary issues—including an utterly incompetent presidential response to a massive crisis followed by an extremely consequential shift in administrations, and the deep-seated influence of systemic racism in American society—the level of student engagement was extremely high, and it often felt to me as if we were having conversations in an actual classroom.

Throughout the course, I was continuously impressed with my students' curiosity and insightful comparative analyses of history and contemporary society. As with my other courses throughout this year, it taught me that it is possible to engage students in a virtual setting, given the right set of topics and approaches.

In addition to my teaching, I also served as an adviser on several student projects this year. One of these was an Honors Thesis by American Studies student Liam Johansson. It applied existential and posthuman philosophy to the analysis of two seminal and interrelated works of American science fiction: Phillip K. Dick's 1963 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and Ridley Scott's classic 1982 film, *Blade Runner*. Incorporating works by an array of thinkers from the 1920s to today, it situates the fictional texts along a spectrum of philosophical positions that variably challenge the notion that human beings have an underlying essence that can be shielded from the effects of technological modification. It is a rigorous and insightful work of literary, filmic, and philosophical scholarship, and one which I greatly enjoyed serving as adviser. I also served as the MFS capstone project faculty mentor on a short film directed by Classics Major Katie Graubart, entitled "Medusa," for which American Studies senior Micaela Gerson served as assistant director. The film, which updates the myth of Medusa to a contemporary campus setting in order to address themes of gendered oppression and sexual assault, fuses elements of slow cinema, psychedelic cinema, horror, and classical myth in an extremely powerful and creative manner. It was the recipient of a grant from the Tom and Jill Lewis Endowment Fund for Media Studies and was screened at this year's Academic Festival. Another capstone project for which I served as mentor was the recording, release, and distribution of a hip-hop album by senior business major and MFS minor Jalen McField. Throughout an independent study in which he read books about the business of online music self-promotion and implemented the advice they contained, Jalen built a website for his album, got it released on multiple streaming platforms, developed methods for anonymously soliciting feedback from his listeners, and applied much of the advice he received to the reworking of his creative output. All of this resulted in an excellent album, and it has helped to get Jalen's music career off to a good start. Lastly, I served as the MFS faculty supervisor to a year-long project in which several students—including Suzanne O'Hara, CJ Delino, Zoe Roganski, Harry Wyckoff, and senior American Studies major Skylar Perera—

produced, recorded, edited, released, and promoted twelve episodes of an actual play Dungeons and Dragons podcast titled "Phantasmal Forest" (viewable here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXiXTmTt-Qgin-TOAYfbqbg>) which a fictional fantasy world and narrative to address sophisticated real-world themes of overdevelopment, exploitation of natural resources, and ecology. In more than one way, this podcast was an epic undertaking, and I am proud of what its creators accomplished. In all, this was an extremely work-intensive year in which I spent perhaps a bit too much time in front of screens, but it was also immeasurably rewarding. Along with the students whose engagement and enthusiasm was so inspiring to me, I would also like thank my American Studies colleagues, Beck, Tammy, Dan, and Greg, whose encouragement, advice, and friendship were invaluable supports throughout the year. As we transition into what is hopefully the beginning of the post-pandemic era, I wish you all a peaceful and restful summer.



Professor Daniel Nathan



The 2021-2022 academic year was certainly unique, for obvious reasons. COVID-19 touched everything and presented myriad challenges for everyone. Better than most institutions, Skidmore met them. I did my best to do the same.

As expected, much of my time and energy this year was devoted to teaching. In the fall, I taught Introduction to American Studies. I was fortunate that the class had a relatively small enrollment (15 students), so we were able to meet in person in a classroom, rather than in a tent outdoors. I also taught the American Studies Senior Seminar. It's a challenging course under normal circumstances, because it entails supervising projects generated by the students on a wide range of subjects. Last fall, students wrote about tourism and the Grand Canyon, the creation of a hypothetical transgender museum, how Americans are represented in James Bond films, *The Dark Knight* (2008) and post-9/11 superhero cinema, Mt. Rushmore, and the politics of kindergarten pedagogy, among eight other disparate subjects. It's a labor-intensive, rewarding course, but in this instance it was offered in hybrid format (half of the time we met via Zoom). The good news is that everyone got their work done. Some of the projects turned out super terrific.

In the spring, I taught an old standby and a class that I delivered for only the second time. The class I have taught many times is American Autobiography. It is in some ways an old-school course. We read good books and talked about them; and the students of course wrote about them. This past semester we read classics like *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, and Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, as well as some more contemporary books, such as Michelle Obama's *Becoming*, which was a hit.

The other class is The Holocaust and American Culture. A hybrid class, we met in person once a week, at the west end of the Scribner Library in a makeshift "classroom," and we Zoomed once a week. The first third of the class focused on what Americans knew about the Nazis' genocidal policies in the 1930s and 1940s, how and when they knew it, and why the U.S. government and Jewish leaders were mostly ineffective in halting or mitigating the murder of millions of European Jews (among others). It also considers the initial American reactions to learning about the Nazi death camps in 1945. The remaining two-thirds of the course employed an interdisciplinary approach to critique and put in context a variety of texts—graphic non-fiction, museums, and films—created by and for Americans that have represented the Shoah ("the catastrophe"). The guest speakers who came to class were great. They included Skidmore historian Matthew Hockenos, Rabbi Linda Motzkin, and the author of one of the books we read, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (1995), historian Edward T. Linenthal. All of these people enriched our understanding of this important and sadly still relevant subject.

I also made progress on some writing projects. I published a creative nonfiction essay about baseball fandom in *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*. I completed a (relatively lengthy) film review of *The Last Dance*, a ten-episode docuseries aired on ESPN in April and May 2020, which is forthcoming in the *Journal of American History*. And I finished an article about Lawrence S. Ritter's acclaimed baseball oral history *The Glory of Their Times* (1966), which is under review at the *Sport History Review*. And I kept plugging away on some other projects, one of which is about the Palio di Siena and another is about a nearly mythic Skidmore incident in the early 1980s involving a faculty member, four students, and an exciting, um, adventure at the Alhambra.

In March, I was awarded the 2021-2022 Edwin M. Moseley Faculty Lectureship by the Faculty Development Committee. Thank you for nominating me, GP and Beck. It's my pleasure to share this honor with you and the AM department.

All in all, 2020-2021 was a success. And I'm pleased to close the book on it.

This summer, well, like last summer, who knows? My family and I are going to go to DC and Michigan to visit family. And in August we will drive Zoë to Lehigh University, where she will be a first-year student. We may make some short trips and will certainly spend time in the Berkshires. And, COVID willing, I'm going to spend some time with sweet Victor-Charlie and his mother Tammy Owens.

Do your best to have a great summer, everyone, but especially our graduating seniors. We wish you the best and will miss you.



Professor Beck Krefting



This is my third and final year serving as Department Chair. That position will be held in the coming years by the inimitable Greg Pfitzer. For a more robust accounting of all things related to chairing the department, please see the Chair's address.

I never really took a break from pedagogical pursuits this year. The pandemic meant a sea-change in how we executed our jobs, from how we conduct meetings to how we instruct students. For me, the summer was a non-stop whirlwind of scholarly output and course preparation for the fall that sought to anticipate changes to instruction. I attended a dozen or more seminars and workshops focused on best practices for online education that considered matters such as diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the academic year prior, I participated in the Mellon-funded Teaching Resource Network which pairs faculty across disciplines for a semester to discuss all things pedagogical. Over the summer, myself and Jay Meeks—a faculty colleague in Education Studies—expanded our collaboration and invited faculty across the College to join us in guided discussions of *Geeky Pedagogy: A Guide for Intellectuals, Introverts, and Nerds* by Jessamyn Neuhaus. We had two dozen faculty join us to converse and confabulate.

Part of this pedagogical work resulted in the creation of a new course that I trotted out in the spring: AM 351: The Funny Thing About History... This course examines the historiography of stand-up comedy while focusing on developing research and technological literacies to write performer biographies or venue histories on Wikipedia. After extensive archival research, students added dozens of pages of content to the platform that expanded the histories of minority performers whose stories were inchoate or entirely lacking from public online records. I also took students on walking tours focused on local history and racial geographies in Saratoga Springs, LARPed in the North Woods as if we were in a post-apocalyptic moment (we didn't have to pretend hard), collaborated with the Tang to bring visual art into the classroom, and played a rowdy game of Jeopingo with American Studies seniors and students enrolled in AM 221: Methods and Approaches.

This wasn't exactly a banner year for conferences, which were all cancelled or pivoted to congregating virtually. That said, I was invited to participate in two international symposia which I was able to do virtually. The first focused on cringe humor and was held in a castle in Hannover, Germany, and the second focused on feminist comedy studies and was held in Munich, Germany, the beginning of May. I was honored (along with Bambi Haggins) to be the keynote speaker at the latter conference, delivering an address titled "Rage Against the (Funny) Machine: Hannah Gadsby's Affective Resistance." I was also invited as speaker to Heidelberg University located in Tiffin, Ohio, rather than, as you might suspect, in Heidelberg, Germany.

This year I served the first year of a two-year stint as Vice-President of the American Humor Studies Association, a national scholarly organization advancing the field of humor studies via conferences and its attendant journal for which I also serve on the editorial board: *Studies in American Humor*. This year I helped to pilot a new mentoring program and developed another program called the First Book Workshop that will begin June 2021. The mentoring program pairs graduate students or junior scholars seeking to develop and place journal articles for publication focused on American humor. Fifteen folks applied and we paired each with a senior scholar with similar research interests. I worked with Luise Noe, a graduate student enrolled at Texas State University, who is finalizing an article offering a feminist critique and formal analysis of the alternative comedy movement in the US in the late 1990s. She plans to submit the piece to *Studies in American Humor* in June. The First Book Workshop has fourteen scholars participating in the coming year; hearty numbers signal the growth and strengthening of this discipline in the 21st century. Working with this esteemed assemblage of scholars will be a highlight for me in the coming years.

I continue to maintain a robust research agenda, keeping up with a number of different projects. In the past year, I published a chapter titled, "Minority Report: Joking About the Other" in an edited collection: *Ethics in Comedy: Essays on Crossing the Line* (McFarland, 2020). This chapter examines the rhetorical strategies invoked by comedians to make bigotry palatable to audiences, be that bigotry aimed at sexual, racial, or gender minorities. I also published a journal article titled "Comedy's Ideological Kerfuffles: From #MeToo to Black Lives Matter" in a special issue on humor, laughter, and irony in the *Contemporary Political Theory Journal* (spring 2021). I don't do this often enough but I did make time to publish a creative non-fiction piece titled "Her Gifts" in *Fast Funny Women* (2021), a collection of humorous stories, edited by Gina Barreca. I was joined by other humorist notables such as Marge Piercy, Jane Smiley, and Roz Chast.

Sabbatical is around the corner for me and I plan to take the full year to work on building programming for the American Humor Studies Association, adapting courses for general education requirements such as the bridge experience (focused on power and difference), and devoting most of my time to research. I intend to make considerable progress on my book project tentatively titled: *The Economy of Stand-up Comedy: Tribalism, Identity Politics, and Emotional Capital*. Furthermore, I have other research projects underway that I'll be wrapping up such as a history of stand-up comedy in the US due to Cambridge University Press in December and a co-authored journal article with stand-up comedian and scholar Mohamed Bassou which explores the history of and cultural antecedents to stand-up comedy in Morocco. I suspect I will have much more to say about all these projects in next year's newsletter. Until then: keep laughing. I know I will.



Senior Honors Thesis

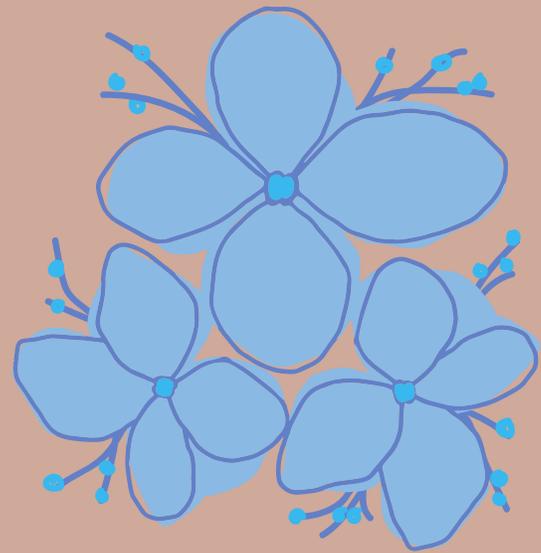
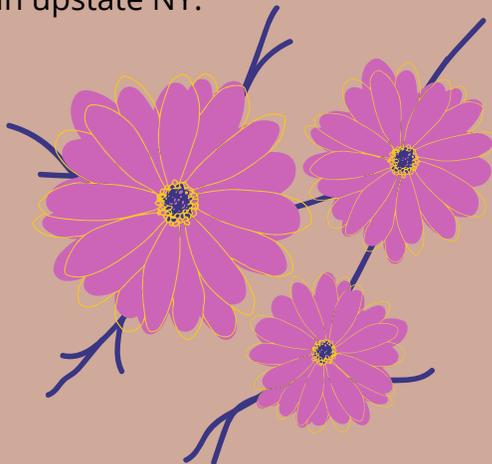
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Julia Boral - Hearing Diverse Voices: Making a More Inclusive Outdoors Culture

Everyone, especially young people, should have the ability to experience nature. Public lands should be accessible to all people, yet are not. Why? What is currently being done to make nature more accessible to people? Through a series of interviews with people across the country from a range of ages, backgrounds, and careers, I explore different approaches to making the outdoors accessible and inclusive. These public interviews provide strategies for making outdoor recreation more socially just.

Sylas Hebert - The Museum of Trans Storytelling: Capital Region, NY

My thesis proposes a hypothetical museum—the Museum of Trans Storytelling—and argues that museum by, for, and about transgender people must reimagine what it means to be a museum while also tangibly meeting the needs of trans people. For my honors thesis, I hosted a dialogue series among trans people in the Capital Region. Together, we built community ties and imagined our own museum that serves our needs as trans people in upstate NY.



Liam Johansson - Do Androids Dream of Dasein? Exploring Existentialism and Posthumanism in *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*

Unlike many science fiction texts, Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) and Ridley Scott's film interpretation, *Blade Runner* (1982), offer its audiences no affirmation of the value of humanity or inherent meaning to life. I identify and explore the posthuman elements of these texts and investigate their existential aspects, specifically focusing on themes of freedom and intersubjectivity, existence and essence, and the complex, evolving relationship between technology and humanity.

STUDY ABROAD

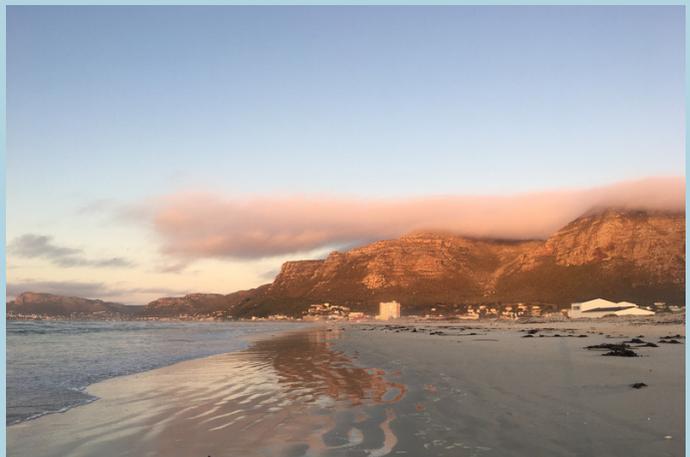
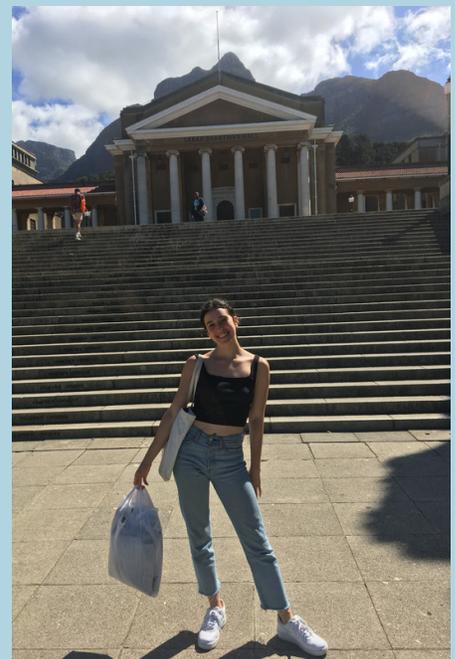
Spring, 2020

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Maya Gmach

Cape Town, South Africa

In the Spring semester of 2020, I attended the CIEE program at the University of Cape Town. The campus is incredibly beautiful and sits at the bottom of Table Mountain. While I was there, I studied African Art, Gender Studies, and Resistance and Postcolonialism of Cape Town. As an AMST major, it was intriguing to study these topics from a South African perspective. I was also able to travel to many different sites including, gorgeous beaches, Table Mountain, safaris and wine tours. I tried surfing for the first time, joined the UCT gymnastics club, and ate so much amazing food. Unfortunately, my time was cut short by the pandemic, but I am super grateful for the time I spent there and the extraordinarily welcoming people I met!



In Loving Memory of Mary Constance Lynn

1943-2021



In late February, our widely respected and beloved American Studies colleague Mary Constance Lynn died. She was 77 and had struggled with frontotemporal lobar degeneration for a number of years. She joined the College in 1969 and retired in 2013.

Mary's death was bittersweet. In many ways, she had been gone for several years. And for people who knew her when she had all her faculties, back when her memory was chock full with all kinds of amazing knowledge and wisdom, it was deeply sad.

Generous, feisty when she needed to be, and a superb teacher, Mary knew more about Skidmore's history than anyone. Losing her, as we did years ago, is a loss for everyone. She was a little woman, but she was a Skidmore giant. We count ourselves fortunate to have had her as a colleague and a friend.