

### A word from Daniel A. Nathan, Chair

My second Chair's letter.

Seems like I just wrote my first. I cannot help but think that something or someone is stepping on the cosmic temporal accelerator. Maybe it's just me.

The Department of American Studies had another productive, fun-filled year, with an unexpected and unwelcome twist. More on that in a minute.

As usual, though, the department contributed a great deal to the life of the college. For example, we sponsored or co-sponsored a wide range of lectures, including: Carlo Rotella's "The Rust Belt Canon: Cultural Legacies of the Industrial City" (which we organized), Fran Hawthorne's "The Dilemma of Ethical Consumption," Chris Hedges's "Empire of Illusion," Stewart Burns's "Martin Luther King Jr. and the Vietnam War: The Cost of Discipleship," and Nancy Hogshhead-Makar's "Hurricane Warning Flags for Olympic Sports: What Recent Title IX Litigation Signals to Women's and Men's Olympic Sports." I should add that both Rotella and Hogshhead-Makar (who is an Olympic gold medal-winning swimmer) visited American Studies courses—Senior Seminar and American Sport/American Culture, respectively—to the great benefit of our students. Historian Virginia Scharff, this year's Kuroda Symposium speaker, did likewise, spending time with students in Professor Mary Lynn's Women in American Culture class. Scharff's lecture on the women Thomas Jefferson loved was terrific, well attended, and organized by our History Department colleague, Professor Eric Morser.

American Studies also sponsored or co-sponsored a wide range of artists, such as writer (and Skidmore alum) Neela Vaswani; an evening of poetry with South Asian American poets Pireeni Sundaralingam, Vijay Seshadri, and Skidmore's own Rajagopal Parthasarathy; and the screening of *Split: A Divided America* (2008) followed by a discussion with director Kelly Nyks. As part of Professor Rebecca "Beck" Krefting's creative and exciting (Dis)orderly Voices Festival (which was a service learning project), we helped bring poet/activist/speaker Andrea Gibson to Skidmore, which she rocked. We were also pleased to co-sponsor the Skidmore Pride Alliance annual event and the Hip Hop Culture Week. Speaking of Hip Hop, I need to mention that Skidmore's Hip Hop Alliance brought back one of its founders,

AM major Danny Tejada '09, to give a lecture, which was both informative and inspirational. So, too, was the Intersections series, directed by Professor Winston Grady-Willis, which was designed to interrogate and illuminate our understandings of religion, gender, race, sexuality, nation and class. The program was concluded by a brilliant, rousing lecture in jam-packed Zankel Music Center by Dr. Cornel West, noted Princeton scholar and public intellectual. Grady-Willis gave a poignant introduction and received a heart-felt embrace from West.

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Needless to say, American Studies students participated in a wide range of department-sponsored activities this year. In October, we asked Career Services to do a workshop for AM majors and minors to help them formulate their post-graduate plans. At the end of the Fall semester, we held our annual AM bowling event at the newly renovated Saratoga Strike Zone (formerly Hi Roc Lanes); we do not need to discuss the results of the traditional competition between AM faculty and students. In February, students in Methods and Approaches, led by Professor Greg Pfitzer, weathered a severe snowstorm and visited Hyde Park and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library. Thankfully, they all returned to Skidmore frostbite free. The weather could not have been more different or lovely in May, when we hosted our annual AM cookout to celebrate our senior majors and minors.

The department was also pleased to grant Zangrando Opportunity Fund monies to support Ivana Portes '12, and is proud to announce that this year's American Studies Faculty Award winner is Suzie Finkel, who was one of four AM majors to earn departmental honors. The other three are Elise Fariello, Eliza Straim, and Brooke Williams, all of whom did a terrific job of presenting their Honors Thesis work at Academic Festival.

With Professor Joshua Woodfork on leave, we welcomed Beck Krefting to the department as his one-year replacement. She did a super job, in and out of the classroom. Her courses were big hits and energized many students. She also participated in a wide range of campus and community events. Although Woodfork has not yet decided whether he will return to Skidmore, I'm pleased to report that Krefting has been reappointed for the 2011-12 academic year.

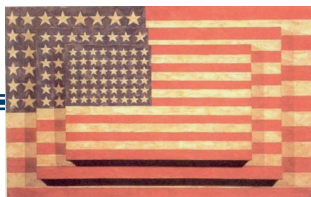
Similarly, our first year with Sue Matrazzo as our departmental secretary (Nancy Osberg-Otrembiak retired last year) could not have gone more smoothly. Sue had (and has) the tough task of juggling multiple responsibilities (she has been the History Department's secretary for ten years now), but does so with aplomb, professionalism, and good cheer. We are fortunate to work with her.

The unexpected twist is that our highly respected colleague Winston Grady-Willis, the college's Director of Intercultural Studies, is taking a one-year leave of absence and has accepted a position at Metropolitan State College of Denver. Obviously we wish Winston and his family the best; at the same time, his departure is a huge loss to the department, the college, and, most of all, to our students. In countless ways, he has enriched this school and community. So I remain hopeful that perhaps he will return to Skidmore. As he himself has said, stranger things have happened.

As ever, we look forward to hearing from our alums. Just this week, I learned that Emma Newcombe '10 has decided to enroll in Boston University's American and New England Studies Ph.D. program, that Carrie von Glahn '08 will be attending Boston College's Graduate School of Social Work, that Claire Solomon '10 has had a paper accepted for the 2011 Midwest Popular Culture Association conference, and that Alex Shapiro '07 has won an Emmy for his work on the MLB Network's *MLB Tonight* show.

At this time year, of course, we are focused on our soon-to-be graduates, all of whom we wish the best. Know that we're proud of and are rooting for you.

Chair, American Studies Department



## Study Abroad Experiences



### Eliza Straim

I went on IHP's Health and Community track which took me to South Africa, Vietnam, and Brazil.

While in each country I studied globalization, public health, conducted case studies, and went on site visits to hospitals, health

clinics, and culturally significant locations. By having an urban and rural home-stay in each country, I received multiple perspectives on my families health practices. My experiences abroad impacted me so deeply that I was inspired to write my America Studies honor's thesis on sexual assault in the U.S. and at Skidmore.

## Field Trip to Hyde Park



Professor Pfitzer accompanied his AM 221 Methods class to Hyde Park for a field trip on the cold and blistery day in February. We char-

tered a large bus and away they went to visit the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. I was told everyone had an enjoyable trip despite the undesirable weather.

## Winston Grady-Willis



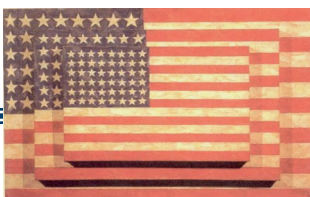
Once again, this academic year was a rewarding one in the classroom. During the fall, students in Black Feminist Thoughts (AM 342) did an even better job of linking theoretical work with lived experience, not only in understanding the lives of Black women historically, but also, in coming to terms with their own

contemporarily. During the spring, Civil Rights: Twentieth Century U.S. (AM 260A) provided students with an opportunity to study African American, Chicano/a and Native American human rights struggles. Thankfully, we made significant progress incorporating a more substantive discussion of LGBTQ activism, with a growing number of students focusing their attention on such struggles to challenge heterosexism. Thanks to the generosity of the Department, I also had a chance to team-teach Racial Identity: Theory and Praxis with Professor of English Sarah Goodwin (ID 351) during the fall. "Racial ID" is a component of the Inter-group Relations (IGR) program that prepares students who will facilitate dialogues

the next semester. The Racial ID experience was amazing, in no small measure because of the contributions of three of our majors: **Kali Block-Steele**, **Allison Dell Otto**, and **Jacob Wolf**.

Outside the classroom, a definite highlight was helping to organize the year-long **Intersections** panel series, a true collaborative effort involving CIGU, the Bias Response Group and CoDA. Designed to spark invigorating and substantive dialogue about several often contested topics that help to inform, even frame, our world—religion, gender, race, sexuality, nation and class—**Intersections** was a big success. In April, Princeton scholar **Cornel West** provided the capstone lecture

for the series to a packed house in the Arthur Zankel Music Center, an event made possible with support from the President's Office. Yet again, the Department was well represented in the series by **Visiting Assistant Professor Beck Krefting** (Sexuality panel), student **Allison Dell Otto** (Race panel), and someone long affiliated with AM: **Professor of English Janet Casey** (Race panel).



## The Seniors

### Lavere Foster, (Major)

What are your future plans? I hope to work as a college recruiter in admissions at a liberal arts institution similar to Skidmore. What are your hobbies? I listen to music a lot – maybe 3 to 4 hours a day. I like to play a lot of different sports, such as basketball, racquetball, volleyball, softball, dodge ball, and tennis.

Where is your home town? I am from the Bronx, New York. Why did you chose American Studies as your Major or Minor? I had a hard time deciding what major I should choose. When I was looking over my degree audit, I realized that I had (unintentionally) taken a ton of American Studies courses. Once I saw that, I knew this was the major for me. How was your experience at Skidmore? I have had a wonderful experience here at Skidmore. Through the classes and interactions I've encountered, I learned to participate at a higher academic and social level. I feel that Skidmore has prepared me for the real world, and now I am capable of leaving the "nest" and enter into adulthood.

What did you chose as your senior theses? I chose to write my senior thesis on a topic that is similar to the field that I want to get into. My senior seminar paper looks at students at Skidmore College who had trouble adjusting to campus life in their first year, and how those difficulties related to their race, gender, and the neighborhoods from which they came. I went into this research believing that transition problems, from home to college campuses, varied across students' specific social identities and background locations. In order to confirm my hypothesis, I surveyed Skidmore students via Survey Monkey. I found out that it is primarily those from "unprivileged identities" who have

the most trouble transitioning to college, and my paper explores why.

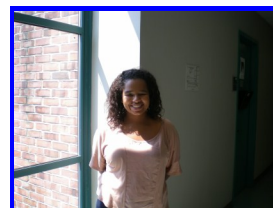
### Mary Ann Weiss, (Major)

What are your future plans? My future plans are unknown at the moment. Hopefully I'll be doing something crazy, exciting, meaningful and fulfilling. What are your hobbies? My hobbies include snowboarding, yoga, hiking, baking, going on adventures. Where is your home town? Manhattan, NY Why did you chose American Studies as your Major or Minor?

I chose to major in American Studies because I'm fascinated by how bizarre, influential and cool our culture is. I love to study how the historical events and figures shape our culture to make us behave, feel and act the way we do. How was your experience at Skidmore? It's been a blast. What did you chose as your senior theses? My senior seminar paper: *The Underground Soundtrack*, explored how New York City subway music functions as a performance art as well as a democratic social movement

### Elise Fariello, (Major)

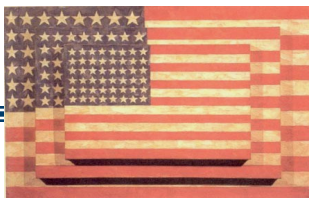
Hello! I'm Elise Fariello from Smithtown, New York on Long Island. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here at Skidmore as a part of the American Studies community and will be sad to leave! I feel like all my professors and peers in the department have such a wonderful job making American Studies a home for me. Until my arrival at Skidmore I did not even realize I could major in American Studies but I am so grateful I could because it turned out to be a perfect fit for me! Skidmore has provided me with so many wonderful opportunities, including going abroad to London last spring and taking excellent classes in things I would never have otherwise learned (Ecology of Food was particularly delicious!). I want to thank everyone in the American Studies Department for making my time at Skidmore so special—I will miss you dearly!



### Courtney Spiller, (Major)

I am very happy to be leaving Skidmore with an a degree in American Studies. Coming from New York City, I have grown up in a diverse environment and American Studies, as a discipline, has helped me understand different aspects of identity that exist throughout the United States and beyond. I originally chose American Studies as a major because of a class I took with Professor Grady-Willis which looked at Civil Rights throughout the Twentieth Century. This course was interesting because it taught me that civil rights and movements revolving around civil rights issues were not limited to the Civil Rights movement. From this class and the notion of looking at different aspects of American cultural identities, I decided that this major was a perfect fit for me! My senior seminar topic was an examination of gay Black men in television. I looked at why those images are not very prevalent and speculated as to why that was. This project was very rewarding and reflects my interests in different Ameri-





## Seniors



can identities. Soon, I'll be moving to Chicago

to pursue a brief stint of unemployment before I get a job in a field related to my course of study.

**Brooke Williams, (Major)** I'm from the very small town of Eagle, Wisconsin. My hobbies are many, but include baking, reading, cooking, knitting, eating, sewing and going to farmers' markets. My senior thesis is about the role of food in American cultural history and identity, which means that I spent most of this past semester cooking, or at least thinking about food. (That's kind of why I picked the topic.) This summer, I'm working at the Lucy Scribner Library and living in downtown Saratoga, and next year I'll be doing a year of service through AmeriCorps. My ultimate plan is to become a librarian--the cool kind, like Beverley Cleary or Nancy Pearl. I studied in London last spring, and this is a picture of me with my mom at Trafalgar Square. I'm from the very small town of Eagle, Wisconsin. My hobbies are many, but include baking, reading, cooking, knitting, eating, sewing and going to farmers' markets. My senior thesis is about the role of food in American cultural history and identity, which means that I spent most of this past semester cooking, or at least thinking about food. (That's kind of why I picked the topic.) This summer, I'm working at the Lucy Scribner Library and living in downtown Saratoga, and next year I'll be doing a year of service through AmeriCorps. My ultimate plan is to become a librarian--the cool kind, like



Beverley Cleary or Nancy Pearl. I studied in London last spring, and this is a picture of me with my mom at Trafalgar Square.

### **Karen Granados, (Minor)**

I chose the American Studies minor as my Education Studies concentration. I felt that it would be complementary for me to understand the ways how America's history can be studied in order to enhance my teaching. After Skidmore, I hope to obtain a job as an elementary school teacher back home in Queens, New York City. My hobbies involve: exercising, listening to music, spending time with family and friends, and reading books. Within my family, my experience at Skidmore is a special one. My story is one of the first stories that serve as an example that graduating from college is possible for my immediate and extended family. My three brothers and I have completed college as a first generation family, born in New York City with parents from Guatemala. I did not know what to expect in college. Therefore, my experience at Skidmore was like being thrown into the sea with only a life jacket. Even though I did have support from some departments and professors, I was still on my own. I had to deal with the struggles of managing academic work, reaching out to classmates, seeking true friendships, and maintaining a positive and a healthy lifestyle. I leave Skidmore with a wider perspective of cultures and a greater understanding of self.

### **Suzanne Finkel, (Major)**

In terms of the immediate future, I will be spending the summer in Saratoga Springs assisting Professor Kristie Ford conduct research for the Intergroup Relations program. I will then be moving back home to NYC, where I hope to get a job with a public interest organization, perhaps in legal or consulting field. I eventually want to go to graduate school, BUT in the meantime I need to narrow down some of my interests through work experience. As for hobbies I love being outside (when it's warm and sunny) and I enjoy running and biking. When it's cold, though, my favorite hobbies are cooking and baking.

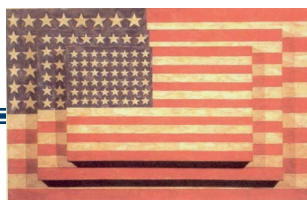
My hometown: New York City

### **Why AM studies:**

I came to Skidmore with no plans for my course of study, and soon found a home in the AM studies department. I quickly found the discipline to be the perfect fuse of historical and contemporary study, varied perspectives, critical analysis, and multi-medium learning. I was particularly attracted to the major because of its interdisciplinary focus-- I have been fortunate to have "multiple majors" in one. AM studies courses and faculty have allowed me to bridge my cross-disciplinary interests of social identity, systems of power and privilege, and social justice in interesting and challenging ways. I feel fortunate to have simultaneously been able to study these topics in my immediate environment/community, as well as on larger scale (across the nation, and in the world).

### **Senior Thesis:**

I wrote my senior seminar paper in the fall on the dominant discourse of "diversity" in the corporate sector. I then went on to complete an Honors Thesis this spring, on the discourse of "diversity" in higher education, with a particular focus on Skidmore College.



## Seniors cont.d



**Brian Connor, Major** is a golf enthusiast and Senior American Studies major from Brooklyn, NY. He arrived at the Skidmore College four years ago brandishing a thirst for knowledge but handicapped by an inability to

determine an academic path. After a protracted bout of pussyfooting, his mind was made up while taking an introductory course with Professor Pfitzer in the Spring of his first year. Originally thinking himself an English or History student, Connor was thrilled to find that he could apply his love of writing to subjects and topics that overlap and fall outside the boundaries of traditional disciplines. He could not be more pleased with the academic path he took, or with the culmination of that effort, his Senior Seminar

paper on the Symbolism of Cocktails in American Culture. Connor intends to draw from his experiences with the American Studies department at Skidmore, and from his extensive work as an editor and columnist on the Skidmore News, to continue blazing intellectual trails well into the future.

## Gregory Pfitzer



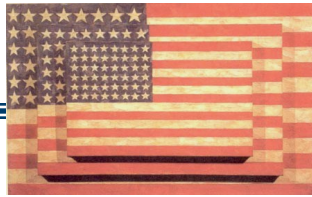
It has been an enjoyable 2010-2011 academic year for me as I taught a

full roster of classes, including AM 103: Myth and Symbol in American Culture; AM 201L: American Identities; AM 221: Methods and Approaches; AM 360C: The Sixties; and AM 374: Senior Seminar. That latter course, AM 374, was particularly fulfilling as I was able to help sixteen senior majors through the challenging process of producing a 35-40 page scholarly paper on individual topics of their choosing. Throughout the semester, students in AM 374 develop or sharpen various skills, including: how to locate primary and secondary sources; how to generate reliable and useful bibliographies; how to evaluate historical evi-

weeks of the course are given over to group exercises in selecting appropriate research topics and locating relevant historical materials. In each of the remaining weeks selected students present their findings in written formats to the seminar at least three times--once in the form of a prospectus; a second time in a more detailed rough draft format; and a third time in a formalized short draft. These "works-in-progress" reports are then evaluated by classmates using a peer critiquing system. Small study groups are created at the beginning of the term, and evaluation teams are assigned for the purposes of critiquing the formal presentations. Needless to say, there is a good deal of bonding that occurs among seniors in this course. The quality of work in the papers in the white "Senior Seminar Notebook" in the American Studies office attests to the seriousness with which students approached these tasks. At the end of the year AM 374 students invited rising seniors to join them for pizza and conversation about the challenges ahead. They passed on valuable

knowledge about how to prepare for the considerable writing and conceptual tasks at hand in the seminar.

Students in the Senior Seminar motivated throughout the fall term as I prepared to make my own presentation of scholarly work at the American Historical Association annual meeting in Boston. My paper, "History Repeating Itself: The Republication Phenomenon and Josephine Pollard's Monosyllabic Histories for Children," treated the phenomenon of republishing nineteenth century popular histories for use in the twenty-first century. In particular I focused on the works of Josephine Pollard, a prolific author, poet, and hymn writer of the 1870s and 1880s whose popular histories "told in easy words of one syllable" have been widely circulated among Christian home-schooler's. The paper asked two related questions: 1) what kinds of books were these monosyllabic histories? and 2) what are the pedagogical and historical implications of reusing them today as the



## Pfitzer cont.d

centerpieces of history curricula? To answer these questions, I analyzed Pollard's popular histories in three ways: as cultural artifacts, as pedagogical devices, and as historical agents. In terms of cultural artifacts, the paper focused on the pictorial and literary appeal of these popular books designed to encourage in young readers a love of God and country. I traced the rich production and manufacturing histories of these works and charted the relationships between Pollard and her publishers and readers. In terms of pedagogy, I considered the implications for historical learning of Pollard's "sight-word method" of reading in the mid-nineteenth century as opposed to the more popular "phonetic" approach. And in terms of historical agency, I detailed how Pollard's volumes contributed to the

dominant "master narrative" of history for children, establishing the putative facts and received traditions of the past that children were expected to study, absorb and act upon at the appropriate times. I argued that the impulse to republish Pollard's works for a twenty-first century Christian home school market reveals misplaced intentions to "repeal the twentieth century" on the part of those who wish to ignore the advances of professional scholarship. Such re-publication efforts reflect a psychological aversion to change and a resistance to the idea of a contested and revisionist past.

A highlight of the spring term was a field trip to Hyde Park, New York with students in AM 221 to visit the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. We left campus on a Friday in Febru-

ary during a blizzard--classes were eventually canceled that day but not before we had headed out into the fray--but we made it on one piece and had a wonderful time touring FDR's boyhood home and doing archival work in the Presidential library (see picture below). A lowlight of the year was my poor performance in the annual Holiday bowling competition with students at Hi-Roc lanes. After having bragged for weeks in advance of the event about our skills, the faculty was humbled by a gritty student contingent. We compensated for our poor performance on the bowling lanes by out-dueling students in various gastronomic contests, primarily eating more pizza and cake than was advisable.

*I wish everyone a profitable and relaxing summer and congratulate heartily the graduating American Studies senior majors and minors. Good luck in your future endeavors.*

## Mary C. Lynn

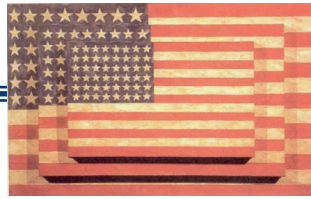


### The Salem Witch Trials

As I began to catch up with the projects postponed by finals, graduation, and finishing the academic year I also began to think about what to write in the department newsletter—it's sometimes tough to come up with one topic when there are so many interesting things to tell you. But this morning (June 2, 2011) Garrison Keillor solved that problem, because his Writer's Almanac feature on NPR pointed out that today is the three hundred and nineteenth anniversary of the formation of the special court of Oyer and Terminer to hear the cases of the first women accused in the Salem witch trials. Of course! I'll write about the witch trials—after all, I've just taught a course on that topic.

When I first taught the trials in the very late 1960s, I found that students in one class hoped that I could teach them how to be witches. (It was, after all, the 1960s!) In another class, students reported that they felt threatened by a self-professed "witch" who lived in Moore Hall and claimed to have cast a spell of some sort on the virgins of Skidmore. (I repeat, it was the 60s!)





## FALL 2011 COURSE OFFERINGS



### AM 103 Natural and Unnatural Disasters Lynn | W/F, 10:10-11:30 | TLC 307

An interdisciplinary analysis of American's natural and unnatural disasters, this course will examine floods, fires, earthquakes, epidemics, and other disasters to explore the development of American culture. The course will emphasize writing and research, reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinary, acknowledging diversity, and making connections. The class will study the Chicago Fire, the 1910 Big Burn Forest Fire, the San Francisco



Earthquake, the 1918 influenza epidemic, the 1927 Mississippi Flood, the Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919, and the New England Hurricane of 1938. Fulfills expository writing requirement.

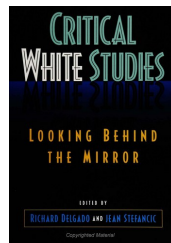
### AM 250A: Regional Culture: The Hudson River (4) Pfizer | MWF, 10:10-11:05 | TLC 303

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



### AM 260C: African American Experience TBD | M, 6:00-9:00 | TLC 301

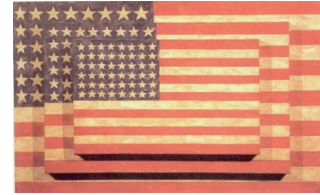
A study of the African-American experience, 1860s-1980s. Using both primary and secondary source material, the course examines the critical issues and period relevant to the African-American struggle toward freedom and equality. Topics include slavery, emancipation, and Reconstruction; the woman's era; the age of Jim Crow and the new Negro; the civil rights movement; and the post-reform period. Sources include narratives, documents, photographs, and films.



### AM 331: Critical Whiteness in the U.S.

Krefting | M/W 2:30-3:50 | TLC 308

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



### AM 374: Senior Seminar

Greg Pfitzer | Tu/Th 3:40-5:40 | Library 213

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



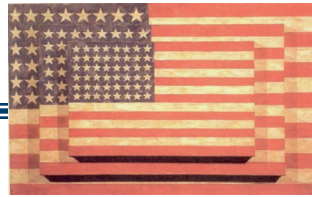
### AM 103: A Humorous (Dis)Course

Krefting | TuTh, 9:40-11:00 | TLC 302

*You want to know what's going on in our community?  
Watch our comedy.*

—Sommore

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



## FALL COURSES 2011



### AM 250C: REGIONAL CULTURE: The South

TBA | W,F 12:20-1:40 | TLC 301

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

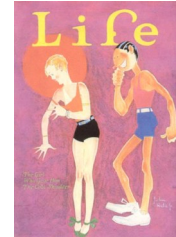


### AM 260J: Diversity in the United States

Krefting | TuTh, 12:40-2:00 | TLC 305

An examination of the ways in which people in the United States try to reconcile the realities of cultural difference with preconceived notions of a unified America and American identity. Students will learn about the United States as a complex, heterogeneous society that has been profoundly shaped by both the connections and conflict implicit in its multicultural heritage. Students will also address interrelationships and tensions that characterize a culturally diverse democracy by examining how accepted cultural traditions intersect with contested themes such as race, the family,

adoption, gender, sexuality, and education. (Fulfills social sciences requirement; designated as a Cultural Diversity course.)



### AM 360A: The 1920s

Lynn | TuTh,  
2:10-3:30 | TLC 308

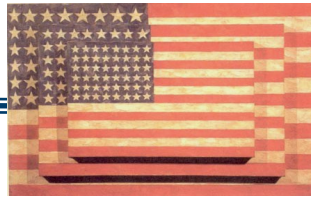
An intensive examination of the "roaring twenties," with special attention to the impact of class, race, and gender on the development of American culture in the period. The course focuses on a series of controversies illuminating some of the conflicting forces at work in American society, including debates over immigration, Prohibition, evolution, sexuality, and the role of women in society. It will examine some of the major intellectual, social, and cultural issues of the era.

## Seniors continued



**Preety Aujla, Major** I'm from Baltimore, MD and can certainly say that my experience and socialization growing up there have influenced my studies at Skidmore especially with my focus within American Studies. I chose to write my senior seminar paper about Black gangs in Chicago during the 1960s, specifically the ways in which they pushed the stereotypical image of violent gangs and tried to help their local communities socially, economically, and politically. After Skidmore I hope to go back to Baltimore and infuse my understanding of social justice to work on basic rights issues. The close, tight-knit nature of the American Studies department has been key in making some of my academic pursuits some of the most enjoyable here at Skidmore. I'd especially like to thank Professors Grady-Willis and Pfitzer for their input and support over the years.





## Rebecca Krefting



I joined the faculty as a visiting assistant professor while Joshua Woodfork took a leave of absence and headed to American University. It has been a busy year—my first professor gig ever—but a rewarding one. I taught three courses in the fall, two sections of *AM 103: Introduction to American Studies: A Humorous (Dis)Course* and one section of *AM 260J: Diversity in the United States*. I modified both courses drawing from my research interests including studies in humor and laughter; gender and sexuality, race/ethnicity studies of visual and popular culture; identity and difference; and feminist and disability theater. In the spring, I taught a section of each of those courses again alongside the course *AM 376E: Disorderly Women*, originally conceived by former American Studies Professor and Chair Joanna Zangrando. Over winter break, I redesigned *Disorderly Women* according to new departmental writing guidelines and turned it into a service-learning course wherein students were taught to research, develop and write grants for service projects. Students opted to work together to develop an arts festival meant to generate discussion and debate about identity, community and the efficacy of disorderly behavior. The (Dis)orderly Voices Festival featured a performance by the punk band Screaming Females, a children's theatre and arts workshop focusing on gender and racial equality, a video dialogue forum aimed at strengthening the Skidmore community, and a performance by soul-wrenching spoken-word artist Andrea Gibson. Post-festival evaluations and assessments were conducted and presented at this year's annual Academic Festival. I am already thinking of ways to incorporate similar curricular models into other classes I will redesign over the summer and winter break.

Over the past year, I presented or spoke in a number of capacities—as scholar, expert, and funny lady. I was invited to speak at Russell Sage College where I gave the talk: “Comics and Modern-Day Minstrels: (Dis)Membering the Chuckle Effect.” In December, I traveled to San Diego, CA to attend the American Humor Studies Association Annual Meeting where I presented the paper: “More than Just a Joke: Charged Humor and the Production of Cultural Citizenship.” As a stand-up comic whose main-stage is limited primarily to the classroom, I was excited to perform comedy to benefit the Pride Center of the Capitol Region. Here at Skidmore, I participated on a number of panels including the Intersections Panel Series: Sexuality, Women in Academia Panel, Bias in Racial Humor Panel and visited several student organizations and classrooms to talk about intersections of humor and identity.

Last summer and fall, I spent time conducting a literature review in order to write a book chapter titled: “Placing Space: Architecture, Action, Dimension—Pedagogy and Practice.” Co-authored by myself and Ronit Eisenbach (Associate Professor in the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at the University of Maryland, College Park), this offered me a great opportunity to work with a senior scholar, mentor, and friend while studying the application of feminist pedagogical practices in the field of architectural education. The chapter will be published in *Feminist Practices: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Women in Architecture* (Ashgate, 2011). Over the winter break and spring semester I turned my attention to developing a book proposal for my dissertation-turned-manuscript titled *Not Just a Joke: American Humor and Its Discontents*. Having found a good home for this book, I am looking forward to a quiet summer spent writing, researching and revising the manuscript for review. Everyone has been exceptionally kind since my arrival but I want to especially thank the faculty in the American Studies Department for their unflinching support during my first year here!

## Academic Festival



Academic Festival had an amazing turn out this year! It was an eclectic group of parents, faculty and students. Some presentations were directly connected to Skidmore. This event makes it clear the pride students take in their research.

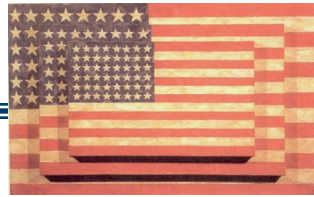
Professor Gregory Pfitzer was the faculty sponsor working with students on Presenting the Past: American Studies Senior Honors Eliza Straim, Elise Fariello, Suzie Finkel, and Brooke Williams. These four American Studies honors students worked on diverse research projects (Sexual Assault, Generational Memory, Identity and Food, and Diversity in the Workplace) gave brief introductions to their work followed by a panel discussion on the common methodological and theoretical challenges they faced in studying the past via primary and secondary sources.

Faculty sponsor Rebecca Krefting worked with students on the Dis (orderly) Voices Festival

Presenters included: Odemaris Alicea; Ann Cascella, Kathleen Cullum, Rebecca Drago, Sarah Elwell, Laverie Foster, Wendy Rodriguez, Eliza Straim, Mariel Bazil, D’Juan Gilmore, Nenesi Ibru, Shawn McGrievy, Olivia Morrow, Allison Dell Otto, Ivana Portes, Hannah Ronson, Sarah Rosenblatt, Alexander Steinberg, Eric Strelbel. The (Dis)orderly Voices Festival included performances by The Screaming Females and Andrea Gibson; a youth art project to explain issues of gender, race, and identity; and a student produced video focusing on unheard voices. The panel focused on the process and impacts of the Festival on the Skidmore community.

Some of our majors presented for other campus departments:

Eliza Straim and Brian Connor worked with faculty sponsor Tom Lewis, English Department on documentary Films. Brian presented on “A Missing Person” and Eliza presented “Sexual Assault at Skidmore College”



## Mary C. Lynn

When I first encountered the trials in graduate school, probably the best modern analysis was the 1949 book, *the Devil in Massachusetts*, written by Marion Starkey and powerfully influenced by Freud. The afflicted girls, according to Starkey suffered from hysteria (still a legitimate psychiatric diagnosis in 1949) which made them see themselves as victims of the Devil's adherents. Arthur Miller read Starkey when he was writing *The Crucible*, which drew parallels between the witchcraft accusations and the cold war Red Scare in which various government officials, teachers, and academics were accused of subversion.

As I looked through the witch trials section on my office bookshelves (and it turned out to be a remarkably large section!) I began to see that looking at the way scholars explored the witch trials also provides us with a sort of history of scholarship about the past. Starkey's book, written very early in the evolution of American Studies, is a clear example of a scholar examining the past to shed light on the present, and her Freudian explanation of the suffering of the afflicted suggests the influence of psychology on American intellectual life in the postwar era.

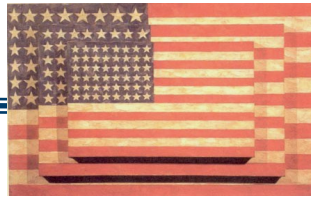
Later on, the "new social history" of the sixties began to explore the experiences of Americans previously ignored by scholars—workers, the poor, people of color, children, women, immigrants—as a way to understand the complexities of our society and culture. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum's 1974 study *Salem Possessed: the Social Origins of Witchcraft*, was powerfully influenced by the new social history and is still my favorite exploration of the trials.

In April 1976, a graduate student in psychology published an entirely new explanation for the behavior of the afflicted girls. Linnda Caporael's article in *Science* argued that the afflicted were probably suffering from ergotism, or poisoning by a fungus which commonly affected certain grains, and caused hallucinations and convulsions. Two other psychologists quickly published an article arguing that the girls' symptoms were not in fact consistent with ergotism, and the debate continued for several years. My class this spring on 17<sup>th</sup> century New England experienced an interesting perspective on this particular aspect of the witch trials, as we were invited by Neuroscience professor Rob Hallock, who was teaching a Biology course on Toxic Fungi to participate in a debate on whether or not the afflicted suffered from ergotism. We attended, some of us in costume, (thanks to the costume resources of the theatre department), and enjoyed the lively debate, in which ergotism lost, but not without a valiant struggle.

I'd recommend that anyone interested in exploring the witch trials consider reading John Demos's 1982 book, *Entertaining Satan*, which explores the experiences of communities outside of Salem which experienced multiple 17<sup>th</sup> century prosecutions of witchcraft—though none of these outbreaks was as large as Salem's, collectively they involved a larger segment of the New England population. Demos uses sociology, psychology, biography, and history in a wonderfully American Studies-friendly interdisciplinary effort, and he points out some surprising facts which enriches our understanding of Salem by explaining how witch accusations were usually handled: most people accused of being witches were not convicted, and some even successfully sued their accusers for slander, something which did not occur in Salem at all.

Even though most accused witches in New England and in Salem were women, and Marion Starkey's 1949 book drew attention to that fact, it was nearly forty years before scholars of women's history applied their feminist analyses to Salem. Carol Karlsen's 1987 study, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* was the first of several such interpretations of the trials demonstrating that relatively women who had inherited money from fathers and husbands but had no adult male in their households to keep them under control were much more likely to be accused of witchcraft, perhaps because of their relative independence.

Scholarship on the 17<sup>th</sup> century has taken a surprisingly long time to consider the importance of race and ethnicity on what happened in Salem. The first person accused in Salem was Tituba, an enslaved woman "owned" by Samuel Parris, minister of Salem Village. Tituba was probably of Carib Indian descent (Parris was a failed merchant in Barbados before he took the pulpit in Salem, and it is thought that he purchased Tituba and her husband, Indian John on that island.) The African American novelist Ann Petry, in her novel, *Tituba of Salem Village*, portrayed Tituba as of African descent, as did Miller's *Crucible*, and several Hollywood treatments of the trials, the best known of which is the 1937 *Maid of Salem*, starring Claudette Colbert, Fred



MacMurray, and Madame Sul-Te-Wan (a well-known African American actress whose other films included *Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, and *King Kong*.) We need to think about the reasons for Tituba's shifting ethnic identity, which most scholars now believe was Carib, in part because there were several other enslaved defendants, all identified in the court records as "Black," a description never applied to Tituba in 1692.

An important though lately discovered aspect of the historical context of the events in Salem has to do with the "French and Indian" wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As part of a world-wide struggle for empire and expansion, Britain and France fought each other on land and sea in decade-long conflicts which often ended up with agreeing to the *status quo ante-bellum*. Salem was all too close to the conflict that in Europe was called the Nine Years War (or also the War of the League of Augsburg) and in North America King William's War (1688-97). This was the first of four "French and Indian" Wars, fought between England and France (with occasional participation from Spain and Holland) and their respective Native American allies. Recent research into the culture of seventeenth century European colonists in North America is in many ways part of a trend among scholars to consider Atlantic culture rather than restricting their efforts to the experiences of a single colony or colonial region. Conflicts between different groups of colonists and the near-by native peoples are among the most interesting subjects for the scholars who specialize in Atlantic culture.

Cornell University historian Mary Beth Norton's 2002 book, *In the Devil's Snare*, is the very first work of scholarship exploring the witch trials to include the results of thorough research into the French and Indian wars on the Maine frontier. A surprising number of the people involved in the Salem trials had witnessed the terrifying Native American massacres of New England settlers in the years before the witch trials. A number of the so-called afflicted girls were war orphans, and others had grievances against the Reverend George Burroughs, who had once served the people of Salem Village, but was later suspected of having sold weapons to the Indians. A few years before the witchcraft accusations Burroughs and his family unexpectedly left his frontier village just before the French and their Native American allies attacked the settlement. Burroughs was brought back to Salem in 1692 where he was tried and convicted of witchcraft, and hanged. Norton places the witch trials in the context of the Atlantic world, not just the history of New England, and what happened to Burroughs as something which was not terribly unusual for settlers who did business with both the English and Native American allies of the French.

There have of course been many more books about the witch trials in the past half-century than I have space to write about here. But this journey through my book shelves is enough to share with you the evolution of scholarly research into this one area, and perhaps may entice you to dip into the scholarship mentioned here to think critically about the events of 1692 and see some of the most recent ways students at Skidmore are considering what happened at Salem. Have fun!

## Majors and Minors

### Majors:

Rebecca Stern  
Kali Block-Steele  
Taylor Dafoe  
Evan Krasner  
Mallory Mendelsohn  
Megan Barlow  
Adam Becker  
Abigail Bowling  
Jessica Garretson  
D'Juan Gilmore  
Isabel Kagan  
Kathryn Lazell  
Rebecca Meyer  
Benjamin Mickelson  
Allison Otto  
Ivana Portes  
Hannah Ronson  
Andrew Schrijver  
Alexander Steinberg

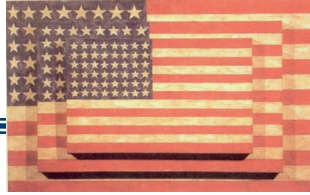
### Callison Stratton

Eric Strebel  
Jacob Wolf  
Steven Zapata  
Manpreet Aujla  
Brian Connor  
Elise Fariello  
Rainey Ferdinand  
Suzanne Finkel  
Lavera Foster  
Elizabeth Franke  
Kelsey Hastings  
Eve Lewis  
Kate Neri  
Eliza Perkins  
Courtney Spiller  
Alexander Stavrou  
Eliza Straim  
Mary Ann Weiss  
Brooke Williams

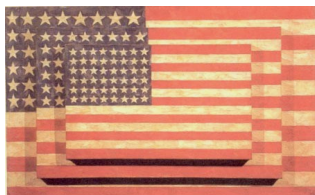
### Minors:

Alexandra Becker  
Michael Pannozzi  
Hailee Minor  
Odemaris Alicea  
Karen Granados  
Nicholas Laracuente  
Nicole Peterson  
Emily St. Denis



**Daniel Nathan**

Dan Nathan's streak of interesting, productive years at Skidmore has now reached nine. Not quite Ripken-esque, but getting close. In the Fall, he taught his Scribner Seminar about American memories, which included field trips to the Saratoga Battlefield and to Boston's Freedom Trail. As in the past, the course yielded some first-rate final papers (one of which won a Candace Carlucci Backus '66 FYE Prize) and at least one AM major. That same semester, he also published an essay, "Asking a Fish About Water: Three Notes Toward an Understanding of 'The Cultural Turn' and Sport History," and a review of Billy Hawkins's *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions*. In December, he was elected president-elect of the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH), one of the professional organizations to which he belongs. In the Spring semester, he once again taught his classes on American Sport/American Culture, and Global Perspectives of the U.S. Also in the Spring, he gave a keynote lecture at a symposium hosted by his alma mater, the University of Iowa. The lecture was titled "Playing Together, Playing Apart: Sport, Community, and Identity." In late May, he presented a paper at the annual NASSH conference, which was in Austin, Texas. This summer, Nathan will teach a five-week course for the Advanced Studies in England program in Bath, come home to hang out in his hammock with his children, and then in August he and his family will head to London for the Fall, where he will Co-Direct the Skidmore FYE London Program with Professor Pat Oles—leaving the chairpersonship of the American Studies department in Professor Greg Pfitzer's more than capable hands.



American Studies  
Skidmore College  
815 North Broadway  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866  
Phone: 518-580-5021  
Fax: 518-580-8021

Email: [dnathan@skidmore.edu](mailto:dnathan@skidmore.edu)



## Professor Pfitzer's 1960's Class Spring 2011

