

May 2020

AMERICAN STUDIES

Skidmore College

Department Newsletter



Inside the Issue

**SENIOR
SPOTLIGHTS AND
HONORS THESES**

STUDY ABROAD

ALUMNI PROFILES

WHAT'S NEW IN THE AMERICAN STUDIES MAJOR?

Meet Professor Tammy Owens...



Beck Krefting's yearly recap

Though it is my second year as Chair of the Department, this year was full of firsts for me. It was my first year teaching Senior Seminar and it was the first year in many that the American Studies faculty genuinely feared they may lose the annual bowling competition between seniors and faculty. Not only did the seniors come to the Strike Zone in matching black monogrammed t-shirts but they had been practicing. The faculty collectively paled when we saw Henry Thomas bowl strike after strike during his first game. We won by a narrow margin called deceit (thanks, GP!). Other firsts: It was the first time I spearheaded an external review for the Department, the first time I chaired a national job search, and my first pandemic. Let me tell you all about it. In September of 2019, our Department underwent an external review meant to provide feedback to the departmental faculty and the institution about a number of matters ranging from curriculum to personnel to programming. In preparation for this review, throughout last summer American Studies faculty devised an 80-page self-study detailing the history of the Department, our faculty, students, curriculum, enrollment patterns, and co-curricular, internship and study abroad opportunities. It was a time-consuming but edifying task. In September, we welcomed American Studies professors from Wellesley College, St. Johns Fisher College, and Dickinson College to visit campus. They offered a favorable written evaluation of our Department, describing the faculty as “one of the strongest elements of this Department” and the students as part of the Departments’ “core strengths.” Later in the report, they described our students as “engaged, curious, well-read, and smart...They bring their passionate, wide-ranging interests to the Department, where they find an intellectual home that encourages their critical thinking and writing.” The students were instrumental during the external review process just as they are to the success of so many functions in the department including: programming, job searches, connecting with alumni, and this newsletter. In the fall, Cornell University Professor Samantha Noelle Sheppard imparted her wisdom on building a research proposal and paper with students enrolled in AM 374: Senior Seminar. She also gave a top-notch talk titled: “The Revolt of the Cinematic Black Athlete,” which was co-sponsored with the newly minted Black Studies Program. We co-sponsored a variety of events throughout the year. Brent Rodriguez Plate’s talk titled “The Spiritual Life of Dolls: The Technological Quest for the Soul from Adam to Barbie to AI,” and Saher Selod, “Racialized Surveillance of Muslim Americans During the War on Terror,” were perhaps some of the strongest programming we supported in the fall. Much of our spring programming was cancelled due to the pandemic.

I find myself most fortunate to work with intellectual rock stars like Greg Pfitzer and Dan Nathan. But we have been greatly strengthened and reinvigorated with the additions of two stellar colleagues: Aaron Pedinotti and Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas. Aaron holds a joint appointment with Media and Film Studies and his course offerings have brought new and exciting courses to our students such as courses focusing on virtual reality, horror fiction, and gaming. Jacque will replace faculty going on serial sabbaticals over the next several years and she brings a background in cultural geography to our department to offer courses on islamophobia and orientalism, affective heritage sites, and queer cartographies.

We already have an incredible set of minds teaching in this Department but we are overjoyed to welcome Tammy Owens to the American Studies family in the fall of 2020. She fills a gap in our curriculum in the area of African American history and culture. Included in the newsletter is a brief bio of Tammy. We are delighted to welcome her aboard—her courses will simultaneously help support Black Studies. This eagerly anticipated Program is directed by Winston Grady-Willis with whom we had the pleasure of working from 2008-2011. We were sad to see him leave Skidmore and elated to have him rejoin our ranks this year all the way from Portland State University.

This year, we focused on updating and rebuilding our alumni database and reviving the newsletter. This involved sending an online survey to over 200 AMST majors graduating over the past twenty years, training students to make changes to our web content, and building new pages to more effectively display alumni information. This project would not have happened nor be completed were it not for the hard work, creativity, and generosity of graduating senior and office mascot Adam Weinreb. He was assisted mightily by rising senior Syllas Hebert. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in March, the College transitioned to online instruction. Seniors lost all associated rituals used mark this remarkable milestone: convocation, honors induction ceremonies, presentation of capstone work, parties, celebratory gatherings, and commencement. We hope that the newsletter this year serves as an ode to and celebration of our seniors—we are so proud of your accomplishments and achievements, of which there are many. Even while feeling all these losses acutely, Liza Pennington gave her time and talents to design much of the newsletter. Indeed, she, Adam, and Sue Matrazzo are entirely to blame for much of this year's newsletter as well as its new look.

I conclude this message during uncertain times. It is hard to know what education will look like in the coming year. Here is what I do know based on the faculty we have in this department. We will rise to meet whatever challenges await us with verve, creativity, and integrity. To all 2020 graduates: You inspire me...now go out and make this world the place you believe it can be.



SENIORS!

EVE GERTZMAN

From: NYC, NY

Favorite American Studies Class: Critical Whiteness

"In the fall, I completed a written thesis titled *Your Catcall is not my Catcall*, in which I explored the distinct and disturbing effects street harassment has on adolescent girls and trans* women. Given the relevancy and potency of this issue, I felt called to act and wished to call upon others -- thus, I pursued an honors thesis in which I created (Cat)Call and Response, a website and online movement that empowers those subject to catcalls to respond. Even after graduation, I plan to continue to evolve the project to new heights, as anti-harassment work only becomes increasingly more critical.

When not working on my thesis, I work as Professor Beck Krefting's research assistant. Examining the perils of catcalling has been appropriately counterbalanced by studying the history and culture of American comedy.

Outside of the AMST, I am an avid member of Skidmore Theater, acting as a stage manager for the department for the last four years. Skidmore has been a home for me in so many ways. American Studies has helped make it so. Time really flies. As I move forward, I am excited to combine my American Studies critical thinking with my theatrical skills to pursue a variety of careers. I want to thank the Skidmore American Studies faculty for fostering a space of eager learners and supporting my peers and I not only for our ideas but for who we are as people."



MAX GROSSMAN

From: Los Angeles, CA

Favorite American Studies Class: Wild America

"My thesis looks at how streaming giants in the modern digital age commodify nostalgia, and how our collective throwback fixation has become more of a public public experience due to commercialization and the fact that nostalgia sells. My paper specifically looks at the commonalities, differences, and period details of top-rated television shows set in different historical eras, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (Amazon) and *Stranger Things* (Netflix), in order to examine the varying ways production vendors use collective nostalgia to retain audiences. The escapist experience of these shows has made them global hits, which begs the question: what are we nostalgic for and how is it cultivated?

Along with my American Studies major, I have a minor in Media and Film Studies. During my years at Skidmore, I have also loved immersing myself in my extracurriculars and on-campus involvement. Specifically, in my time as the President of the Skidmore Outing Club, as a member of Skidmedy (sketch comedy group), and most recently as a Producer for the 2020 National College Comedy Festival. My academics have additionally been influenced by my summer internships at Skydance Media and DreamWorks Animation."



SENIORS!

BEN HAYES

From: Gardiner, NY

Favorite American Studies Class: The 1960s

"My thesis is an exploration of the relationships Americans hold with their homes, the objects inside, and their methods of production. It analyses the cultural values and practices of domesticity while simultaneously tracing the supply chains of our built environments and objects back to their sources. Juxtaposing the way we live with the forces of production behind our lives, a stark contradiction emerges: Why are we Americans so ignorant of the productive forces we're implicated in, and so complicit with exploitative practices in obvious contradiction with our values? The ensuing paper employs a variety of theoretical tools to analyze our condition, and hopes to act as a link in the chain between theory and practice, helping the reader map their relationship with multinational capitalism."



KIT MEYER

From: Orange, NJ and Camden, ME

Favorite American Studies Class: Critical Museum Studies, Mark Twain's America, American Material Culture

"I wrote my thesis on Quaker Norman Morrison's 1965 self-immolation in protest of the Vietnam War, tracking how the event was reported on in print media from the 1960s to the early 2000s. I found that, rather than being forgotten over time, Morrison's memory was omitted and resurrected at specific moments based on which figures wielded the most influence and what political or personal narratives they sought to advance."

The American Studies Department helped foster my love of archival research and appreciation for public history and museum studies, and I am tentatively planning on pursuing a career in one of (or all? Who knows!) these fields. You'll likely find me in the Boston area over the next few years, or somewhere in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I'm thrilled to announce that, following my cheery thesis and the current state of all things, my summer plans will include quarantinis."



SENIORS!

LIZA PENNINGTON

From: Hastings-on-Hudson, NY

Favorite American Studies Class: Sexuality and Space, Wild America

"My thesis explores the intersections of gender and sexuality in two YA bestsellers, *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. I specifically examined the compulsory heteronormativity in these books and the way that straightness enables survival for their protagonists. I decided to continue my work through an honors thesis and celebrate contemporary intersectional queer YA. I created a virtual exhibit on the Lucy Scribner Library website featuring 9 books, interviews with queer authors, videos, podcasts, and more.

Outside of American Studies, I have a double major in Spanish and spend lots of time in Zankel ushering and rehearsing with two musical groups. I also have a radio show at WSPN!"



CHARLOTTE SWEENEY

From: Cranford, NJ

Favorite American Studies Class: The Wizard of Oz, The 1960s

"My thesis explores the myth of the self-made man and how it is repurposed in the current day. I am looking at the evolution of the myth in the U.S. over time and how toys teach children the lessons of an adapted historical myth in the present day. In the fall I examined how Lincoln Logs taught children about the wild, being self-taught, and how to build. This spring I am expanding my honors project to look at the American Girl Doll collection and how the myth of the self-made man has evolved to include women. It looks at the lessons young girls are taught through one of the original characters Kirsten."



SENIORS!

HENRY THOMAS

From: Rhinebeck, NY

Favorite American Studies Class: The 1960s

"My thesis focused on the commercialization of recorded American folk music from 1952-2003. I critically analyzed the content, historical background, and popular reception of two iconic collections of folk songs: the Anthology of American Folk Music (1952) and the soundtrack of the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2002). Outside of Tisch Learning Center, I'm on the eboard of Skidmore's FM radio station, 91.1 WSPN, and I was most recently a featured actor in Skidmore Theater's mainstage production of *Radium Girls*."



NOAH WALKER

From: Brooklyn, NY

Noah's thesis examined the production of toxic and hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop music. He plans to pursue work in the music industry. We wish him professional success but mostly happiness, whatever that may look like. Fly high!



SENIORS!

ADAM WEINREB

From: Andover, MA

Favorite American Studies Class: Post-Apocalyptic Literature and Film, Senior Seminar

"I wrote my thesis on queer versus straight representation on teen television dramas. Specifically, I looked at Riverdale, Pretty Little Liars: The Perfectionists, and The Society. My findings were mostly what I expected, with the numbers of representation rising but the quality of representation still lacking in key ways.

Outside of my academics, I work for the American Studies department as one of the department assistants, I am a head Admissions ambassador, I write for the satirical newspaper, and my goal for the future is to become a screenwriter living it up in Hollywood!"



ISAAC WEISS-MEYER

From: Manhattan, NY

Favorite American Studies Class: The 1960s

"I wrote my thesis on the evolution of the rock star image in music with specific regards to identity expression. I investigated the ways in which qualifications of rock star status have expanded to become more inclusive and broad. I tracked these evolutions beginning in the 1960s with Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, Prince in the 1980s, and rapper Young Thug in the contemporary moment.

Beyond my thesis, my general interests lay in the general realm of music, and wanting to pursue the music industry at a professional level. On campus, I hosted a radio show (every semester), and acted as Publicist for Skidmore Entertainment Committee (SEC), the school's committee for booking on-campus concerts. I also spent the past two summers interning in marketing and digital marketing within the music industry, first at Mom + Pop music (indie record label), and then The Fader/Cornerstone (music and culture publication/marketing agency). I remain deeply passionate in the music and continue to explore possibilities in the industry after graduating Skidmore. I have been fortunate to use the American Studies Department as a binding power throughout my time at Skidmore."



HONORS THESES

Eve Gertzman - (Cat)Call and Response

This project activated my original thesis—an exploration of the distinct and disturbing effects street harassment has on adolescent girls and trans* women—into social action. The website catcallandresponse.com galvanized victims of catcalling to mobilize against this behavior via video submissions. These responses coupled with sobering data around catcalling inform a short film meant to raise awareness and empower women.

Benjamin Hayes - The Invisible Home

In an exploration of the architecture of my childhood, *The Invisible Home* guides the reader through the various rooms of my family's house, contemplating the practices and products of each space. Along the way, the thesis explores questions of alienation and representation, contemplating how, in a postindustrial globalized society, we should best understand the implications of our domestic lives. The paper is accompanied by a virtual reality project, mapping the home's spaces digitally, offering an interactive counterpart to the intellectual themes of the paper.

Liza Pennington - Queering and Reimagining YA Literature

My thesis examines compulsory heteronormativity in *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games*. The honors thesis extends this work by celebrating contemporary, intersectional queer young adult fiction by conducting author interviews, researching the genre's chronology, and reading in the canon. To showcase this literary genre, I created a virtual exhibit that will work in tandem with a physical exhibit at the Lucy Scribner Library to spotlight queer young adult fiction—a sub-genre depicting queerness as legitimate identity.

Charlotte Sweeney - Toy Stories: Teaching Children How to be Self-Made in America

The myth of the self-made man is foundational to the United States. Over time, this previously gendered myth has morphed to accommodate certain groups (females especially) and to exclude others (the less socio-economically fortunate). This paper tracks this mythology and examines how *Lincoln Logs* and *American Girl Dolls* both altered and reaffirmed the myth, encouraging adaptations to its basic formula while simultaneously teaching its most impressionable consumers, children, what it means to be self-made in America.

Adam Weinreb - Queer Teen Televisual Representations in Theory and Practice

Using a combination of representational and close-reading analyses, my senior seminar paper analyzes representations of queer teens in three televisual texts—*Riverdale*, *The Society*, and *Pretty Little Liars: The Perfectionists*—specifically the physical intimacy allowed or alternately forbidden in the name of decency. My honors thesis project attempts to remedy these gaps by writing an original teen drama pilot that aims to create a world in which all teen characters, regardless of sexuality, are equal.

STUDY ABROAD

JULIA BORAL
Madrid, Spain



"During my two months abroad in Spain I became fully immersed in the Spanish language, delicious foods, and the beautiful art. Every day brought new adventures and places to explore. Some of my most memorable moments were spent strolling down hidden streets with friends, finding cafes to hang out in, and taking in views of the city. One of my favorite aspects of the Skidmore in Spain program was living with a host family. I stayed with a woman named Laura in her apartment that was only a short walk from the program center. We would eat dinner together most nights and talked about everything from the differences between the healthcare systems in Spain compared to the U.S, to the movie Parasite, to our favorite foods. These conversations we had not only improved my Spanish speaking ability, but formed a lasting friendship."

SYLAS HEBERT
Copenhagen, Denmark



"I had such a fun time studying in Copenhagen last fall. It was as challenging as it was rewarding. Academically, I took classes on topics that I had never studied in school before. I learned about the incredibly nuanced debates of prostitution policy in Europe, and took class trips to Sweden and the Netherlands to speak the people on the ground impacted by these policies. Culturally, I fumbled my way through simple Danish phrases. I biked to class alongside hundreds of Danes commuting to work (and only fell off twice!). I bought a season pass to Tivoli, one of the world's oldest amusement parks. And I bonded with my seven flatmates—a mix of four American students from my program, and three Danish university students from Denmark, Tunisia, and Greece, respectively. I'm so grateful for this wonderful opportunity and I can't wait to go back and visit!"

STUDY ABROAD

CLARA PYSH
London, England



"My time in London was an incredible experience. When I was not in classes at Goldsmiths, I was exploring the city and wandering around different parts of London, experiencing the many cultural aspects the city had to offer. My friends and I would go to museums for hours, and then find a pub somewhere and hang out for the rest of the night before taking a bus or the tube back. Or we would walk along the Thames and find markets under bridges, tucked away from the immediate public eye, filled with food vendors, booksellers and people selling all sorts of things. When I was in London, I felt like I had finally become the person who I always wanted to be. Being in a city surrounded by such diverse culture which could be felt in the streets, transformed the way I now look at the surrounding world."

HANNA YURFEST
Moscow, Russia



"I spent the Fall 2019 semester abroad in Moscow, Russia studying acting at the Moscow Art Theater School. The Moscow Art Theater was founded by Stanislavski, father of modern acting, and was also where several of Anton Chekhov's plays premiered. With an intense, six-day a week schedule most of my time abroad was spent in the studio with incredible teachers. In addition to school, we spent lots of time seeing plays in Moscow, experiencing both traditional and modern Russian theater. One of my favorite parts of the experience was spending a weekend in Saint Petersburg and visiting the Hermitage and Saint Catherine's Palace. Going to school just steps away from Red Square, The Kremlin, and the Lenin Mausoleum was also pretty incredible!"

ALUMNI

HANNAH DOBAN, CLASS OF 2016

Favorite American Studies Class: Reading The Wire

"I am an aspiring director, currently working as a Production Assistant in NYC on a variety of film and TV projects ("The Deuce", "Marvelous Mrs. Maisel", "For Life", a Denzel Washington film based on Ma Rainey's Black Bottom). I'm on a track to be an Assistant Director and join the DGA. I work in media and help tell stories about all walks of American life! My major has been instrumental understanding the medium in which I work. I wrote my thesis on David Simon's "The Wire," and then ended up working for David Simon on "The Deuce". An American Studies dream come true."

JOSH LAUREN, CLASS OF 2007

Favorite American Studies Class: Methods, American Memories

"I'm the Regional Director for Teach For America in Western Massachusetts. I oversee Corps Member and Alumni Recruitment, placement, and hiring within our 12 partner schools in Springfield and Holyoke, MA. Being an American Studies major at Skidmore was transformative for me. I learned about the power of great teaching, and interdisciplinary approaches to education. I'm forever grateful to Dan Nathan, Greg Pfitizer, and Joanna Zangrando for their mentorship and belief in me as a student athlete."

BECKY STERN, CLASS OF 2014

Favorite American Studies Class: The 1960s, A Humorous Discourse

"I am currently a senior associate at small a political communications firm. I work on a wide-range of issues from changing NYS law so sex abuse survivors can have more time to sue their abusers to passing ranked choice voting in NYC. American Studies made me a stronger writer -- and solid communicator. It forced me to think critically and question how and why things happen. Also, professors -literally- taught me historical knowledge I need to take on new issues!"

BROOKE WILLIAMS, CLASS OF 2011

Favorite American Studies Class: The 1960s, 1920s

"I have my master's degree in library science and I'm a research and instruction librarian at Northeastern University in Boston. I teach classes on information literacy and research, and I work closely with students and faculty on their research projects. And I get to buy ALL the books! My AmStud major required me to do a lot of the types of research that my students and faculty do now, so having that background is really helpful."

American Studies Events!

"Students in AM 221: Methods and Approaches took a class field trip to the FDR Presidential Library, Museum, and Home in late February where we were given a tour of Roosevelt's boyhood home, consulted with archivists and examined manuscript holdings in the library, and took part in a critical review project evaluating the choices made by the museum's curators in presenting the Roosevelt legacy."



Bowling anyone?
Our Seniors enjoyed a well deserved fun day at the Strike Zone December 2019



Congratulations Liz Tybush!

Liz Tybush's Palamountain Award-winning essay, "Finding the Tin in the Tin Woodman: An Ozdyssey," was produced for AM101W: Wizard of Oz, a gateway course to her American Studies major that examines the cultural impact of L. Frank Baum's novel, *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), and its various twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations. Tasked with considering how revised versions of the Baum narrative have reflected and shaped cultural priorities as they have intersected over time with gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, spirituality, and consumerism as categories of analysis, Liz asked (and then answered) a deceptively simple question: "Why tin for the Tin Woodman?" Her response is anything but simple, analyzing as it does the resiliency and sustainability of Baum's endearing character by spanning disciplines as diverse as literary criticism, film analysis, political science, and even chemistry. Deftly and playfully written, Liz's essay demonstrates that, despite being stretched and pulled so dramatically out of shape as to be unrecognizable to those he was created originally to serve, the Tin Woodman is still a vital mythic figure today, retaining his status and utility by virtue of his ability to help twenty-first century Americans cope with the world around them in meaningful ways. As she concludes her essay, "The Tin Woodman, apparently, does not rust, and in fact resists corrosion."

Aaron Pedinotti

This academic year was a full, busy, and rewarding one for me. In the Fall semester, I taught two sections of Introduction to Media and Studies (in keeping with my job as a joint appointee of MFS and American Studies), as well as a new course for American Studies entitled American Horror Fiction. The latter of those courses surveyed works of American horror fiction produced from the nineteenth century to the present. The students and I examined texts in multiple media, including print fiction, film, and television. We read works by many horror authors, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, H.P. Lovecraft, Ira Levine, Stephen King, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, Shirley Jackson, Thomas Ligotti, and Victor Lavelle; screened films (or scenes from films) including Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*, Joyce Chopra's *Smooth Talk*, Johnathan Demme's *Beloved*, Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, and David Eggers' *The Witch*; and watched some scenes from the recent Netflix adaptation of *The Haunting of Hill House*. Taking an adaptation studies-focused approach to much of this material, we examined the ways that cinematic and televisual reworkings of literary texts reflect changing cultural attitudes towards social issues and identity categories in differing eras of American history, including the representation of race, gender, sexual identity, the nuclear family unit, religion and the occult. A major historical focus of the course was the extent to which anxieties about witches, Satanism and other occult phenomena have been a perennial tendency of American culture from colonial times to the present. In our examination of the ways that these anxieties have been refracted and fomented by works of horror fiction, we explored their relationship to moral panics, paranoid subversion narratives, and collective societal processes of scapegoating and projection.

In the Spring semester, I switched up genres and mediums, teaching one course entitled American Science Fiction and another named Videogaming in American Society and Culture. The approach of the science fiction course resembled that of American Horror Fiction. It examined the relevance of science fictional texts from different eras of American history to the representation of intersectional identity categories and other major social issues. Readings included works by Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Octavia E. Butler, Grant Morrison, Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, Pat Cadigan, and Ted Chiang. In addition to print fiction, we examined the two American Star franchises, i.e. *Trek* and *Wars*, in terms of their social and historical resonances, and screened some recent indie SF cinema (namely the cyberpunk thriller *Upgrade* and director Shane Carruth's sophomore arthouse effort, *Upstream Color*). In addition to examining how diverse forms of social identity are represented in these works, this course explored the ways that depictions of the future have been informed by the social anxieties and expectations of the eras in which they were produced, particularly in relation to the emergence of new technology. Among other topics, we examined the ways that cybernetics, the Cold War nuclear arms race, the advent of the internet, and the utopian and dystopian potentials of cyborg technologies have been extrapolated towards pessimistic and hopeful outcomes in works of speculative fiction. Discussions of this content were informed by the idea that science fiction is as much about the present as it is about the future—a point to which we returned repeatedly throughout the course.

Videogaming in American Society and Culture similarly explored representations of diverse forms of identity in its relevant medium. It also focused on issues of socio-economic, racial, and gendered disparity in the videogames industry and contemporary practices of gaming. At a more macrocosmic and historically oriented level of analysis, the course examined the formative connection of videogames to

both the US military-industrial complex that developed the technology that made videogames possible, and to the global capitalist economy in which they currently function as value-producing commodities. While doing so, it unpacked the ways in which this double-edged pair of influences relates to contrasting theories of historical determination, specifically with regard to the underlying forces that lead to the development of new technologies. I will refrain from saying more about that approach, however, because I recently published a writeup of the course's overarching pedagogical methods and thematic concerns in the journal *Films for the Feminist Classroom*. Readers who want to know more can find it here: http://ffc.twu.edu/issue_9-1/feat_Pedinotti_9-1.html.

In each of these courses, I have tremendously enjoyed and benefitted intellectually from my engagements with students, both during class discussion and when reading and grading assignments. Sadly, in-class conversations were cut short by the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic, but despite the unavoidable challenges entailed by that development, I was encouraged by the levels of engagement and enthusiasm that students brought to the online participation forums that became central to post-Spring Break instruction. In addition to those forums, my virtual courses involved podcast-style prerecorded lectures, paired to visual PowerPoint displays containing images and some written text, that I would make available to students on Blackboard prior to scheduled class time. At the beginning of each week's prerecorded lecture, I would respond to student's Blackboard comments from the previous week, addressing and riffing on the content of those comments with remarks to which students would in turn respond in their posts for the following week. Over time, this began to feel like a genuine form of dialogue about the weekly readings. Despite the staggered and, to me, rather novel quality of this way of conversing with students, I came to enjoy and benefit from it in ways that resembled classroom discussions.

Along with teaching, I have pursued academic research, writing, and creative projects throughout this academic year. Over the winter break, I traveled to London with a group of Skidmore students to carry out a detailed photographic rendering of the Strawberry Hill House. This structure—a neomedieval Gothic revival villa—is a British cultural heritage site built by eighteenth-century writer Horace Walpole, whose novella, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), is widely regarded as the first work of Gothic fiction. The purpose of this photoshoot was to acquire images for a virtual/ augmented reality simulation of the house that can be used to illustrate its inspirational relationship to the setting for the fictional text. Users of this simulation will be able to explore a three-dimensional rendering of the house and watch animated scenes from the novel play out in the real-world rooms on which the settings of those scenes are based. When completed, this project will serve as an experiential means of illustrating the thesis of a book that I am currently writing, which is that British and American Gothic texts of the past three centuries have compelled the development of increasingly virtual environments and experiences in various forms of media. Although the creation of the simulation has been temporarily put on hold by the pandemic (which has restricted my access to necessary technology), its photographic raw materials have been procured, and I will return to it as soon as safety permits. In the meantime, I am focusing on the book. For anyone who wants to know more, a profile of this project and its relationship to the book was recently published in *The Collaborative*, an art and culture magazine for New York's Capital Region. The profile can be read here: <http://collaborativemagazine.org/2019/09/04/skidmore-professor-uses-virtual-reality-for-new-kind-of-documentary/>

Alongside these academic pursuits, I continued my work as a content producer for the Hudson Mohawk Magazine during this academic year. The magazine is an independent, alternative daily radio news show for the Capital Region, produced by WOOC 105.3, the radio station for Troy's Sanctuary for Independent Media. Out of the segments that I produced this year, I will mention two here. The first is a news piece that examines the links between Representative Elise Stefanik of New York State's 21st Congressional District and Mike Kibling, a far-right activist who has threatened journalists and activists with violent rhetoric and publicly brandished toy weapons in the Glens Falls area. The piece, which combines news analysis, commentary, and on-the-ground reporting, is available for listening here: <https://www.mediasanctuary.org/podcasts/on-the-link-between-rep-elise-stefanik-and-far-right-activist-mike-kibling/> The second segment is a joint interview with the marketing manager and community outreach coordinator of Caffè Lena, a music venue and major cultural landmark of Saratoga Springs. Topics covered in the interview include the Caffè's history and recent remodeling, its launch of a YouTube channel, and its new community outreach programs. The segment can be heard here: <https://www.mediasanctuary.org/podcasts/caroline-shapiro-and-reese-fulmer-of-caffe-lena-on-its-history-present-and-future/>

In closing, I want to mention how much I have enjoyed and appreciated the conversation and companionship of my colleagues, Beck, Dan, Greg, and Jacque, throughout this academic year. I am still relatively new to American Studies, and they have made me feel welcome and supported in the department. I would also like to extend appreciation and thanks to my students, who have contributed—as they do every year—to my growth and learning, both as a teacher and as a person. In this time of troubles, I wish safety, health, and the comfort of loved ones to you all.

With all my best wishes,

Aaron





Tammy C. Owens

Tammy will join Skidmore College faculty in Fall 2020 as an Assistant Professor of American Studies. Owens is currently an Assistant Professor of Ethnic Studies and Diasporic Youth Cultures at Hampshire College. Owens earned a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota and an M.A. in Women's Studies from the University of Alabama. Her research and teaching interests lie at the intersections of race, gender, and childhood. Owens is currently working on her book manuscript, *Young Revolutionaries: Black Girls and the Fight for Girlhood from Slavery to #Sayhername*. Owens' research has been published in journals such as *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* and *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*. Owens enjoys teaching courses that are related to her primary research, but she also likes to challenge herself and teach courses that are related to other interests such as hip hop, social media, and southern culture. Teaching and exchanging ideas with students fuels her research and creativity. The primary goal of Owens' pedagogy is to empower and equip students to use the social theory that they learn inside the classroom to unearth and center the invaluable knowledge produced by marginalized communities, especially youth, outside of the classroom.

FALL 2020 AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE OFFERINGS

AM 101W 001 Introduction to American Studies: Growing up in America

MW, 4:00-5:00, Tammy Owens, 4 credits

What does it mean to be an American child in 2020? How have definitions of childhood changed over time? How does race, class, gender, sexuality, or ability influence perceptions of American children or childhood? How does geography shape ideas about American childhood? In this course, students will engage in an interdisciplinary study of the history of American childhood to answer these questions. By studying the history of American childhood, students will learn how major social, cultural, political, and economic changes in the U.S. have defined the nation's culture. Students will gain a better understanding of how our ideas and beliefs about what it means to be an American have influenced our ideas about who is or who is not a child, where childhood can or cannot exist, and the role of children and young adults in shaping our world. Students will examine a diverse mix of sources including literature, archival documents, films, music, social media, and critical social theory.

AM 101W 002 Introduction to American Studies: Basketball

WF, 8:40-10:00 and R 6:30-7:50, Daniel Nathan, 4 credits

This course introduces students to different forms of cultural criticism and examines some recurrent American cultural values and themes, such as the tension between community and individualism, and the disparity between American ideals and social realities. It also emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, acknowledging diversity, and making connections. Students will analyze and synthesize many kinds of texts in order to better appreciate the complexity of American life and culture. The course employs an Interdisciplinary approach that melds history, sociology, journalism, autobiography, fiction, poetry, art, film (feature and documentary), and other forms of knowledge and expression.

AM 261D 002 Peace Studies: Performing Communications of Peace in Precarious Times

WF, 12:20-2:10, Visiting Assistant Professor Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, 4 credits

The 21st century has seen the proliferation of terrorism, asymmetrical war, communal violence, and increasing economic and ecological precarity throughout much of the world. In these uncertain times, human and non-human exposure to vulnerability and violence has intensified. In a moment where coalescing fundamentalisms and right-wing populisms expand globally, what does it mean to be a 'chisel of peace'? What does it mean, in other words, to resist mechanisms of violence without reproducing their terms, at home or abroad? What are the institutions, ethical codes, and moral principals of non-violent resistance? And when is violence justified?

AM 264 001 Themes in American Culture: African American Experience

TR, 2:10-3:30, Tammy Owens, 3 credits

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

FALL 2020 AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE OFFERINGS

AM 265 001 Post-Apocalyptic Film and Literature

TR, 3:40-5:30, Beck Krefting, 4 credits

Fear of nuclear warfare in the mid-twentieth century led to a surge in family home bomb shelters and elaborate underground fortresses intended for high-profile public officials and authorities. A computer glitch that threatened to bring an end to the electronic age, spurred the Y2K problem, prompting people to hoard water and provisions on the millennium's cusp. Religious groups continue to forecast an apocalypse and the Mayan calendar predicted December 21, 2012 as that "end date." The DIY and self-subsistence movements reflect a desire to broaden our skill sets as much as they reflect a desire for readiness in the face of imminent disaster. Threats of an apocalypse shape human behavior, practices and identity. How these are imagined and what happens in the aftermath can tell us about who we are, how we will behave in crisis, what we are afraid of and who matters.

AM 351C 001 American Horror Fiction

W, 6:00-9:00, Aaron Pedinotti, 3 credits

This course explores the subgenres and modalities of American horror fiction in multiple media, including print, film, television, videogames, graphic novels and virtual reality. Its goals are four in number: 1) to introduce students to the formal characteristics of various horror subgenres, including American Gothic, ghost stories, pulp horror, weird fiction, sci-fi horror, body horror, post-apocalyptic horror, slasher films, splatterpunk, and the horror of the anthropocene; 2) to investigate the ways in which the texts of horror are refracted and inflected by the specific mediums in which they are presented; 3) to explore theoretical takes on how the classic aesthetic motifs of horror fiction—including the terror/ horror schism, Gothic sublimity, and cosmic pessimism—are refracted through specifically American texts and contexts; and 4) to relate the genres and texts that are studied in the course to major issues in American history and society, including racial and gendered oppression, economic exploitation, settler colonialism, genocide, imperialism, militarism and other forms of social violence. Specific authors studied in the course will include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Shirley Jackson, Richard Matheson, Stephen King, Kathe Koje, Octavia Butler, Scott Snyder and Jeff VanderMeer. (Some of the works by latter authors will be full novels, but several will be short stories.) Films and television screenings will include Rod Sterling's *The Twilight Zone*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, David Cronenberg's *Rabid*, Matt Reeves' *Let Me In*, David Mitchell's *It Follows*, Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, Alex Garland's *Annihilation*, Season 2 of SYFY's *Channel Zero*, and Jen and Sylvia Soska's remake of David Cronenberg's *Rabid*. Some experiential engagement with horror-themed videogames and VR experiences will also be a part of the curriculum. Some accommodations will be made for anxiety responses, but students are advised that this course is not for the squeamish or faint of heart...

FALL 2020 AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE OFFERINGS

AM 351C 002 Post-9/11 America

T, 6:00-9:00, Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, 3 credits

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 stand as the defining moment for United States foreign policy and, more generally, U.S. culture in the 21st Century. We will examine the cultural impact the post-September 11th period, asking both what the domestic and foreign policy responses to the attacks have been, how Americans engaged with those events and policies, and how they have been represented in American public culture. As we do so, we will read primary documents from the period, the best recent scholarship, and a range of popular texts that includes graphic novels, long-form journalism, documentary film, and memorials. Our discussions will take seriously the premise that cultural texts do not simply reflect already-extant cultural ideas but rather play a critical role in the production of competing ideas about historical events, their cultural significance, and their political import. Our goal will be to analyze not only the events of September 11 and the United States' political, military, and cultural response to them, but also how those events and responses are significant within larger debates about race, gender, citizenship, religion, and patriotism in the contemporary United States as well as questions about the United States' role in global affairs.

AM 374 00 Senior Seminar

TR, 9:40-11:00, Daniel Nathan, 4 Credits

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.



Gregory Pfitzer

Well, 2019-2020 certainly has been an interesting academic year for all of us. It started out in routine fashion for me, as I offered three courses in the fall semester: 1) my First-Year Experience seminar on “Disney’s America”; 2: an introductory course on “The Wizard of Oz as an American Myth”; and 3) A 300-level seminar on the 1960s. Typically I only teach this latter course in the spring, but because I will be on sabbatical for the entire 2020-2021 academic year, I wanted to give current juniors a chance to take it in the fall before they went off to their various study abroad programs the following semester. Among other things, we reenacted role play exercises conducted by Freedom Summer workers preparing for life in Mississippi in 1964, we retried William Calley for his role in the My Lai Massacre of 1968, and we produced our own Sixties Revival radio program that aired on WSPN, featuring songs from the “long Sixties (1955-1974).

In the spring term I taught the 1960s seminar again as well as AM 221: Methods and Approaches. The Methods course focused on how the decade of the 1930s has been variously interpreted by American Studies practitioners from differing methodological schools of thought. Students who signed up for Methods had no idea how relevant the topic of the 1930s would prove later in the semester. Given our desperate desire for practical advice about how to survive the current COVID crisis, many of us have been looking back to the 1930s for guidance, taking cues from the strategies employed by government officials, public intellectuals, and average citizens during the Great Depression.

The COVID-19 virus required us to shift gears rather dramatically after the Spring Break, as we all scrambled to meet the social distancing requirements outlined by health officials. It has been an interesting experience learning to teach remotely. It is not an ideal format, in my estimation, but we made it work, employing a variety of visual mediums, Zoom meetings and Blackboard discussion forums.

In addition to my teaching responsibilities I have made some progress on my latest book project, currently titled “‘Fame is For the Fellas’: Images of Girlhood in the Bobbs-Merrill Childhood of Famous American Series.” It deals with a subset of a series of more than 100 volumes of children’s books published between 1932 and 1958 by Bobbs-Merrill of Indianapolis. It’s my contention that these volumes had a significant influence on the historical sensibilities of a generation of baby boomers (myself included) who read with alacrity “COFAs” (as they were called) and derived from them their first juvenile understandings of what history was as a discipline and the roles important females played in shaping the past. While the promoters of the series at Bobbs-Merrill were very clear that these narratives of the girlhoods of famous women should be read as fictional accounts that relied on invented dialogues and imaginary figures and events and should not be considered exact transcriptions of the past, they also advertised the volumes as part of a series informed by history that could serve as a suitable point of entry for students hoping to gain insight into the history of their country, especially as it related to girls who became famous women. I hope to finish the book during my upcoming sabbatical.

I became a grandfather for the first time this year, my granddaughter, Halia Pfitzer, having been born on September 13 to my son Michael and his wife Caitlin. I try to FaceTime with them every day and am looking forward to getting to spend time with my entire family (most of whom are in Boston) once the current social distancing protocols have been lifted.

For now, I’m confined to my home where my dog, Ella, and my two cats, Sydney and Madison, keep my on my toes. And speaking of toes, I am also the proud owner of new bowling shoes and a new bowling ball. I managed to roll a 191 shortly after purchasing these items, but it’s been downhill ever since. I hope everyone remains safe.

Yours truly,
Grandpa Greg

Daniel Nathan

The 2019-2020 academic year was definitely a tale of two semesters. This is true for everyone, of course. Some people certainly felt it more acutely than I did.

In the Fall, I taught two courses: AM-234, American Sport/American Culture, and AM-332, Global Perspectives of the United States, both of which were well enrolled and full of bright students. I'm usually not the best judge of these things, but both classes went well. Most students in both classes worked hard and were engaged. I know we had some rich, meaningful discussions and that I learned new things in both courses. I also saw growth and improvement in terms of the students' work, which is one of the best and most important things about this job.



Keeping with pedagogy, I'm in the process of developing a new course, which (when approved) will fulfill the new all-college Bridge Experience requirement. The class is going to be called True Crime in America and will be at the 300-level. I have been fortunate to work with Professor Mao Chen of the Department of World Languages and Literatures and Professor Ela Lepkowska-White of the Department of Management & Business as part of a "pedagogy cluster" to develop this idea. Additionally, AM's own Aaron Pedinotti and I discussed the course. He is a wealth of information and insight on the subject, and I will be pleased if he too teaches the class someday.

This year, for the first time in a long time, I was not on any Skidmore committees. That was odd. Nevertheless, the AM job search we conducted, which yielded our new colleague Tammy Owens, was time and energy consuming. It was, though, made less arduous due to my super terrific awesome department colleagues and Winston Grady-Willis, who served as an external member of the search committee. So glad he is back with us.

Despite the hiatus from Skidmore service, I continued to serve as an Associate Editor of the Journal of Sport History and as a co-editor of the Terry and Jan Todd Series on Physical Culture and Sports book series with the University of Texas Press. Also, I was a member of an ad hoc Ethics Committee for the North American Society for Sport History, and peer reviewed several article manuscripts. I also agreed to be on a University of Otago graduate student's dissertation defense committee.

In terms of my scholarship, before I went on my long-anticipated sabbatical in the Spring semester, I finished a book chapter titled "Narrative/s in Sport History" for the forthcoming Routledge Companion to Sports History, and a review of Edmund F. Wehrle's *Breaking Babe Ruth: Baseball's Campaign Against Its Biggest Star*, which appeared in the December 2019 issue of the Journal of American History. I also had an article I published years ago translated into Spanish and republished in a book: "Preguntándole a un pez sobre el agua: tres notas hacia la comprensión 'del giro cultural' y la historia del deporte," in *El Rostro Cambiante Del Deporte: Perspectivas Historiográficas Anglóparlantes 1970-2010*, which is edited by Pablo Ariel Scharagrodsky and César R. Torres.

This spring, I have been working on several things. I finished a review of David Naze's Reclaiming 42: Public Memory and the Reframing of Jackie Robinson's Racial Legacy for The Public Historian and started a review of ESPN's documentary series The Last Dance for the Journal of American History.

I have also been working on an article about Lawrence Ritter's oral history The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It (1966). It's a fascinating book, with a rich history, and my essay has sprawled. It was supposed to be 5,000 words and its over 7,000 and I'm not done. I'm sure Professor Pfitzer can relate.

Of course, I have also been chipping away at my book about the Negro baseball leagues and American memory. It's slow going but it's going.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic transformed everything, I had a paper, titled "'Honest and Vividly Rendered Confusion': At the Palio di Siena, Part II," accepted for this year's annual North American Society for Sport History conference in Chicago. It was scheduled for May and got cancelled. I was also planning on attending and presenting at the annual Society for American Baseball Research meeting in Baltimore in July. Canceled.

So, despite everything—that is, the pandemic which caused my kids, Ben (18) and Zoë (16), to have to go to school remotely, just like Skidmore students—and all the inconveniences and anxiety of the last few months, I have tried to stay positive and productive. It helps, of course, to have a supportive family and a network of great friends and colleagues, of which I'm deeply appreciative.

This summer, well, who knows? My family and I hoped to do many things. All are on hold. Which is OK. Like most of you, I'm sure, I have a lot to be grateful for and am looking forward to next semester and the adventure it promises to be. Do your best to have a great summer, everyone, but especially our graduating seniors. We wish you the best, and will miss you.



Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas



Jacque is overjoyed to return to Skidmore College and rejoin her beloved colleagues in the Department of American Studies as a Visiting Assistant Professor.

A busy first year back, Jacque has taught four of her specialty courses: Popular Culture: American Orientalism & Islamophobia; American Cultural Geographies; Critical Museum Studies; and Sexuality and Space, with plans to offer Post-9/11 America and Peace Studies this coming fall. Some class highlights included the usage of Ramblr-- a geolocation smartphone application for final course projects in Cultural Geographies, and a critical media interpretation assignment for Orientalism & Islamophobia, which even included a creative facilitation with Skidmore's Theatre Department.

Jacque was fortunate to be selected as a Faculty Mellon Fellow as part of the TANG Teaching Museum. This year's Mellon Seminar traveled to Washing D.C. to attend premier museum sites addressing issues of identity and social justice in the Nation's capital. At the conclusion of the Mellon Seminar, Jacque began a pilot study in partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. The study gathers biosensory data to measure audience reception of the Museum's permanent exhibitions, and, with the recent acquisition of biosensory equipment through a Faculty Research Initiative Grant, Jacque is looking forward to engaging her future Critical Museum Studies and American Cultural Geographies students in exciting digital data collecting experiences!

Jacque has also been keeping herself busy with her research. In the fall of 2020 she will publish two book projects: *Affective Architectures: More-than-Representational Geographies of Heritage*, a co-edited collection of essays published as part of the Critical Studies in Heritage, Emotion and Affect Series, Routledge. And her single authored book monograph, *Affective Heritage: Mining Memory, Mediating Trauma at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum*, in press with *Interventions: Cultural Approaches to International Relations Series*, Routledge. She was also invited to give an Inaugural lecture for the Journal of Emotion, Space and Society at the 4th international meeting of the Memory Studies Association conference.

Jacque and her family are thoroughly enjoying their return to the Skidmore and Saratoga communities; they especially enjoy departmental bowling, local hikes, and family dinners with friends.

Beck Krefting

This year I served as Department Chair. The newsletter opens with a lengthy and riveting accounting of many successes. I will not belabor that work here but I will say that it is important and satisfying work mostly because I do it with people I enjoy working with: students, staff, and faculty alike.



It was an honor to work with the cohort of seniors this year in AM 374: Senior Seminar. Thesis topics this year tackled cultural forms such as music (folk and hip-hop), literature (queer YA), and television. Isaac Weiss-Meyer analyzed ways changes in identity politics shifted public conceptions of rock stars from white men like Elvis to genderqueer hip hop artists like Young Thug and Lil Uzi Vert. Kit Meyer examined shifting collective cultural memory around the self-immolation of pacifist and Quaker Norman Morrison protesting the Vietnam War. Max Grossman studied the how's and why's around televisual cultivation of nostalgia in shows like *Stranger Things* and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. Their work was relevant, critical, analytically sound, and frankly quite interesting. The three faculty members winning annual awards in teaching, service and research are asked to call out the names of graduates at Commencement. As the Ralph A. Ciancio award winner for teaching excellence this year, I was going to be one of those faculty members. I will miss having that moment with seniors this year but I will never forget this crew: smart, funny, warm, vibrant, and generous. Stay in touch, friends.

Before the pandemic arrived and decimated a half dozen conferences, invited lectures, and events in my professional future, I was able to sow some professional oats and engage in professional development activities. Last year, folks at Columbia College in Chicago paid me to blather on about Hannah Gadsby and feminist comedy studies. In October, Brooklyn's BRIC TV invited me on #BHeard Town Hall, a Brooklyn television show tackling social and political issues for the community to discuss. I was joined by comics, an entertainment lawyer, and owner of a comedy club for this show's topic on "Laughing Matters: Comedy and Accountability." Turns out they are a chatty bunch and I could barely get a word in edgewise but it was a terrific time. I had the good fortune of being able to participate in this year's annual Tang-Mellon Museum Seminar. After staving off requests to do so for the past four years, I have finally agreed to serve as vice-president of the American Humor Studies Association. One of the principle tasks in this role is to put out calls for conference proposals focused in humor studies and create networking opportunities for people in the field. The pandemic has introduced challenges in nearly every quadrant of my life. Bring it on.

I continue to maintain a robust research agenda. In the past year, I published a chapter titled, "Savage New Media: Discursive Campaigns For/Against Political Correctness," in *The Joke Is On Us: Political Comedy in (Late) Neoliberal Times* (Lexington Books, 2019). This chapter examines the discourses of

political correctness and their impact on the economy of stand-up comedy. I also published two journal articles in 2019—one in the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* and another in *Studies in American Humor*—on Tasmanian comic Hannah Gadsby whose stand-up comedy special *Nanette* took the world by storm. I have two forthcoming chapters in edited collections due to be published in the very near future but I will wait and tell you all about those in next year's newsletter. Spoiler: one focuses on the funniest person alive—Maria Bamford. I was also invited to submit a short article about humor's role in the #MeToo Movement for a special issue on humor in the *Contemporary Political Theory Journal* (spring 2021). Stay tuned!

Last summer I began a new book project tentatively titled: *The Economy of Stand-up Comedy: Tribalism, Identity Politics, and Emotional Capital* and I am eager to spend the summer diving back into this exciting new research. I plan to work on this as much as possible, finishing it while on sabbatical in 2021-22. In the meantime, we plan to spend the summer close to home mostly by decree and not by choice. Luckily I am quite content to garden and nest when I cannot roam. I plan to play with pickling and more generally, jam on.