

Senior Seminar Topic Proposals Fall 2017

Ari Bogom-Shanon: Growing Jewish American Identity: The Potential of the Recent Jewish Food Movement in the United States

My paper considers how collective identity is constructed by forces inside and outside the Jewish community with particular attention to recent Jewish farm and food initiatives in the United States. Similar to the most recent trend of food movements in American society, this Jewish subculture looks towards food justice, health, community, and environmental justice as its guiding values. Unlike the inclination to prioritize the American in American Jewish identity, the Jewish food and environmental community is active in its reengagement of Jewish tradition and text. I argue that engaging with Judaism through food and the environment is poised to be the next collective glue for Jewish American identity. The momentum of food and environmental movements in American society coupled with the biblical importance of food and farming and the role of food in American Jewish identity place this movement in a unique position to actively connect a religious and cultural past to a broad and encompassing American trend. Additionally, I argue that part of the potential of this movement is in its accessibility to many different levels of Jewish observance and identity. I found that the Jewish food movement, due to its connection to Jewish history, its parallel to American food movements, and its accessibility to different levels of observance has the potential to be contribute significantly to this generation's collective Jewish identity.

Alessandra Canario: "Fashion Repeats": Vintage Clothing as Subculture vs Mass Produced Nostalgia

Have you ever heard the phrase "fashion repeats itself every 20 years?" It is a common saying regarding the cyclical nature of fashion inspired by the return of particular styles that periodically return to the mainstream. But what does it mean when former styles become new fashion trend? As speed of production and consumption of clothing has increased exponentially over the past 20 years so has the quickness of fashion's cycles. With it, the marketability of producing clothing indicative of the past and the popularity of vintage clothing is at a peak. If dressing is a voluntary presentation of one's self, what is it about retro and vintage styles that speaks to the identity of new generations? What compels someone to wear clothing worn by others previously in the past and how does that practice differ from wearing clothing inspired by that same history but produced in the contemporary moment?

Nora Faber: Why We Make Every Night a Late-Night

In my senior thesis, I explore how the late-night show franchise addresses political matters and current events. I analyze how these shows act as a bridge between the political and social boundaries in our country. Television hosts like Steven Colbert, Jimmy Kimmel, John Oliver, and more, have changed the ways that Americans learn and create opinions about current politics. Specifically, I look at what language, characters, and images are used in association with episodes that reference major political and social moments from the past two decades. These moments include natural disasters, 9/11, and the elections of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. In this paper, I strive to prove how the informal and conversational demeanor of late-night television shows and their hosts creates impactful lessons of history and current events to audiences across the world. In order to convey this accurately, I employ three common American Studies methodologies including: reception analysis, ethnographic analysis, and symptomatic analysis. These methodologies reveal how the honest, animated, and satirical attitudes of late-night hosts produce a significant and engaging practice of communicating with the public and inspiring young Americans to stay in touch with current events.

Miller Fina: “Bad Apples Win”: Gender, Trauma, and the State of Exception on Post-9/11 Television

This paper is about how, in the post-9/11 world, television serials such as *24*, *Homeland*, and *Hawaii Five-0* (the 2010 reboot), increasingly focus on main characters who, despite their heroics, are “bad apples.” Characters such as Steve McGarrett, Carrie Mathison, and Jack Bauer justify their anti-American actions in order to meet their goal of protecting the nation-state in the same way that guards guilty of torturing prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib justified their behaviors. These characters, and the series they represent, are the spawn of a post-9/11 traumatized culture that encourages violent nationalism, hyper-masculinity, and glorification of the greater good. Thus, these television serials are products and promoters of trauma culture and the state of exception but most importantly they encourage the perpetuation of both trauma culture and the state of exception by the viewer. By comparing these three characters and their actions I chart how these serials are informed by and perpetuate both trauma culture and the state of exception particularly in relation to the performance of masculinity.

Magden Gipe: Art and Authorship in the Digital Age

The debut of the world-wide web has changed the stakes on a number of issues, from identity politics to freedom of information. In my paper, I explore the ways in which our assumptions about intellectual property, originality, and authorship are challenged by new modes of art that have risen to popularity in the past several years. Whether

musical, commentative, cinematic, or a mix of the three, they all have appropriate aspects to them, and flourish on a platform where media sharing is a straightforward and uncomplicated process. First, I will identify the ways in which these art forms tie in with larger historical conversations about artistic license, and how the discourse surrounding them compares with that of past debates concerning originality and intellectual property. Next, I discuss modern attitudes and debates surrounding their legality and authenticity, from the perspective of both the average internet user and traditional media companies. Finally, I elaborate on how the evolution of our collective stance on authorship may affect the practices of said companies, in ways that I predict will be beneficial for everyone involved.

Brian Hall: Pulling It Apart: Why “Student” and “Athlete” Should Be Two Separate Entities

The goal of this paper is to examine the concept of the student-athlete in collegiate athletics. It is one of the simplest and yet complex terms in the world of sport, with many more layers than one would initially think it would have. To examine this term is to critique the current model of sports in the United States, exploring possible alternatives, and presenting new ideas that may change the way sports and academics are viewed in relation to one another. The basis of this examination is that the “accepted truth” that academics and athletics must co-exist in the same realm in this country should no longer be taken for granted. These are two terms that mean separate things and would be better pulled apart than to co-exist as a single concept.

Ian Iversen: Laughing at the News: Satirical Dilemmas in the Trump Era

In this paper I explore the contours of contemporary American late night television political satire during the Trump era. Over the course of the semester I was able to take my research to University of Albany and New York City: attending an off-campus lecture, interviewing insightful peers, and witnessing two live tapings of late night comedy shows. My thesis identifies a paradoxical dilemma within Trump Era satire, which makes creating satire both easier and more difficult. Through this paradoxical framework my research analyzes how particular late night political satire shows, mainly *The President Show* and *The Opposition with Jordan Klepper*, are responding to the contemporary news cycle. Ultimately my paper establishes that Trump era political satire on contemporary late night television is a genre unto itself.

Devon Kilburn: Leo Fender and the Telecaster: How a Solid-Body Guitar Rocked the Industry and Became a Mainstay of American Music

I present a case for the Fender Telecaster as quintessential American instrument and American icon, referencing American Studies scholar J.A. Kouwenhoven's 1961 article "What's American About America" and my religious upbringing as a Unitarian Universalist. I also explore the success of American artists Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan with reference to the Telecaster. I explain the radical aspects of the Telecaster's design and conclude that the Fender Telecaster is a seminal achievement of American manufacture and design and has been rightfully elevated from station of mere tool to venerated icon.

Lisanny Manzueta: Dominican Immigration and Society's Role in the Process of Acculturation

My seminar paper is an ethnography of Dominican and Dominican American immigrants. I have interviewed Dominicans of different ages who arrived to the United States at different times in their lives, and I argue that people experience immigration into the United States differently, and that there cannot be an immigration reform drafted that caters to the experiences of all immigrants equally. For instance, those who immigrate to the country at a younger age are often provided the opportunity and resources to learn English through bilingual programs in schools or in after school programs. It is more difficult for older immigrants to acquire language skills because they have to find employment and take care of their families. In order to address the disadvantages that older immigrants face, I propose the implementation of an English language learner program, called University English Learning (UEL), in all communities throughout the United States. I argue that in order for this program to be extended to broader communities, it should be funded by colleges, universities and donations from alumni. The program should be conducted by students with an interest in teaching foreign languages for academic credits. In order to demonstrate the need for such a program, my paper focuses on the experiences of Dominican immigrants, especially on how different generations acclimate, or not, to American culture and the importance of older Dominican immigrants learning the English language in order to succeed in the United States.

Laila Morgan: "Where Do You Think You're Going, Girlie?" Doulas as Witnesses and Advocates for Birth Justice in the Capital Region."

The New York State Department of Health reports that for Albany County, the infant mortality rate for white babies is 4.7 deaths for every 1000 live births, while the infant mortality rate for Black infants is 23.2 deaths. To doulas and midwives in the Capital Region, these numbers are no surprise — they witness the reality of racial disparity in maternal healthcare constantly. Doulas, as non-medical support persons for individuals going through childbirth, provide emotional, physical, and educational support to pregnant and birthing people. They also act as advocates for the families they support, trying to ensure they and their vision for the birth of their child are treated with respect, a job that is difficult in hospitals often focused on efficiency, financial gain, and liability.

For my seminar paper, I have interviewed doulas, midwives, and OB/GYNS in the Capital Region, exploring the racial disparity that exists in their maternal and infant care practices and what can be done about it. Ultimately, I argue that doulas, because of the qualities inherent in their roles as support persons and advocates, can and should play a vital role in achieving birth justice.

Lucas Pickering: The Closing of the American Mind: The Rise of ADHD and the Ramifications of Giving ADHD Medications to Children

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders defines Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) as "a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity that interferes with functioning or developing." ADHD became an official disorder in 1987 as a way to help children who were suffering from a lack of focus and attention that greatly derailed their inherent intelligence and well-being. Over the last two decades there has been a considerable rise in ADHD diagnoses and medications given to children between the ages of 4-17. I argue that these increases stem from two things: the profit-motives pursued by pharmaceutical companies and the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2001 that fundamentally changed the way teachers were expected to teach their students. My paper will discuss how treatment for this disorder started began with the best of intentions and how it slowly was corrupted by monetary and political considerations.

Zoe Resnick: Identity in The Digital World: How Building a Digital Identity Is Changing the Way We Are Perceived

In today's digital age, individuals are creating new identities online through social media. Social media has become an outlet for individuals to express, judge and build characters online. Digital identity is now crucial to one's self-representation, social life and self-esteem and online platforms have affected the ways in which we perceive ourselves and present ourselves to the public. By understanding individual experiences of digital identity formation in Skidmore students and alumni, I explore the pre-formatted technicalities and social patterns within social media to gauge the effects of living within a digital culture. I argue that America's youth has transformed into an ambitious, individualized and digitally obsessed generation, using social media in ways that increasingly affect the way our institutions are run, both good and bad. The digital age has created a space in which securing our identities relies on technology and the perception of others through one's social media profile. While digital identities foster a sense of expression and freedom, it is also a dangerous form as it detracts from authenticity through judgment, filters and followers, creating risky platforms that will determine the modes of identity formation of future generations and their relationship to their peers.

Jack Spiegelman: Love & Haight in the 1960s

From the Shakers to the Mormons, countercultural movements have existed throughout American cultural history. No decade in contemporary American history has been defined by greater social tumult and agitation to disrupt the status quo more than the 1960s. That decade witnessed a series of tectonic shifts that irrevocably altered the fabric of American society, including a civil rights movement led by an emboldened African American community resulting in the enactment of far-reaching federal civil rights laws; a protest movement gaining momentum as war being waged in Southeast Asia was becoming increasingly unpopular; and a women's movement that was causing profound change in both the American family and workplace. The convergence of all of these forces, coupled with a mass media gaining a growing influence over how Americans perceived the world around them, helped to create unprecedented cultural and political upheaval. Given such a backdrop, denizens of San Francisco's Haight Ashbury neighborhood during this period offered a bold and radical attempt to think and behave differently, questioning the norms of mainstream America and disrupting a society historically resistant to change. By examining relevant reporting, studies and historical artifacts of what was to become the epicenter of the hippie cultural movement, this paper attempts to demonstrate how "the Haight," in its own unique way, offered an agitated nation an escape from intolerance and conformity that would help to define generations to come.

Bailey Wilmit: Back in the USSR: How "The Americans" is Slowly Changing Cold War Attitudes towards Russians

Throughout the history of television, the trope of the Russian villain has consistently been used as an easy fallback for programming, especially spy shows. From the beginning with 1950s serials such as *I Led Three Lives* to modern shows such as *Covert Affairs*, Russian spies have always been cold, ruthless, and dangerous, while at the same time easily outsmarted by the hero. These tropes have helped to maintain the Cold War attitudes that have been around since the 1950s. *The Americans*, a critically acclaimed FX show that first aired in 2013, follows the lives of two deep cover KGB agents during the 1980s, and through them, is actively working to undo Cold War era way of thinking by humanizing its KGB protagonists. The success or failure of this show to provide this change in the American way of thinking can potentially provide a great impact on current events in light of allegations of the Russians tampering with American national elections may bring about another Cold War. This paper analyzes *I Led Three Lives*, *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, and *Covert Affairs* along with *The Americans* in order to show how the tropes associated with the Russian villain have persisted and have been altered to reflect changing cultural priorities.