My Last Chair’s Column

By Lois Rudnick

Dear Colleagues, Alumni/ae, and Students:

I’m not usually at a loss for words (!), but I don’t think that I can sum up my 35 years at UMB and my 26 years directing the American Studies Program and chairing the Department in a column. Since you will hear from me elsewhere in this newsletter, I will be brief here. UMB has been my only full-time teaching home. I was “raised” here by my wonderful students, mentors, and fellow faculty and staff colleagues; honed into making a career-long commitment to urban public higher education; inspired to take risks in my teaching and professional work; and committed, sometimes crazily, to seeing my rich, provocative, and ever-evolving interdisciplinary become first a major and then a department.

There is no way that I could have accomplished all this without the love, support, nagging, bragging, and hours of devotion of those who make UMB what is still, to my mind, the best academic “bargain” in greater Boston. Most especially, there is no way I could have survived without the best staff—Shauna Manning, the rock and the redeemer!—and faculty: first and foremost my partner in running the department, Judy Smith, without whom I would not have borne the many administrative burdens we share; Rachel Rubin, always on call for taking over and attending to whatever needs to be done, including making sure that the department was well cared for whenever I was on sabbatical or leave. I feel terrific that I am leaving the department in your capable hands! To my “younger” colleagues who will be helping to shape the purpose and values of this department over the next decade, and beyond, I walk away proud and confident to think of leaving you with this task: Shirley, Lynnell, Bonnie, Mari, and our newest, Aaron; and Paul, Patricia, and Phil—you have been “fulltime” colleagues in every sense of the word; thanks for all that you have given to our department and students.

I leave UMB, and most particularly American Studies, with both a heavy and a light heart (or at least it will be light when I get to my actual retirement).

The heaviness relates to the fact that so much of the personal and professional that I am was formed in the offices, corridors, and classrooms of UMB, and that my faith in the mission of the institution, even during the toughest times, has never wavered. For me, the core value of UMB, and our department, is and always will be to provide the best education and preparation for life, work, and citizenship that we can. I take tremendous pride in what we have done toward that goal; small we may be, but we have made a mark that has shaped many of our students’ lives well beyond graduation, as well as influenced our profession.

The lightness relates to my being ready, willing, and able to move in new directions with my life; to close one door, and to open others, some tried, some new. I hope to continue to grow as an intellectual, teacher, mentor, bird-watcher, photographer, grandmother, hiker, art curator, and engaged citizen. I know this is good-bye, but that doesn’t mean you can’t all stay in touch. I might even learn how to “upload” stuff on my Face Book page once I have the time to look at it. A million hugs and a millions thanks to you all.

Photos from L to R: Kurt Morris (MA ’10), Marjorie Narcisse (BA ’09) and Professor Lois Rudnick, Professor Shirley Tang, Riva Pearson (MA ’09) and Valerie Jiménez (MA ’09).
Welcome Aaron Lecklider!

Please offer a warm welcome to Professor Aaron Lecklider, UMass Boston’s newest addition to our tenure track faculty. Some of you may know Professor Lecklider from the eight years he has taught at UMass. He comes to us with an expertise in gender and sexuality as well as literature and visual culture. He has taught classes on Popular Culture, The Sixties, Visual Culture of US Social Movements and Introduction to American Studies at UMass, Harvard, Boston University, and Endicott College. He was awarded a PhD in American Studies from Boston University in 2007, after receiving his MA in our program in 2001. Professor Lecklider’s dissertation “Brainpower: Intelligence in American Culture from Einstein to the Egghead,” currently under review for publication, expanded out of research begun for his MA essay “Yiddishe Springtime!: Einstein Enters American Culture 1919-1924.” In addition, Professor Lecklider has published and presented numerous papers and served as guest editor for the Journal of Popular Music Studies queer theme issue. Currently his research involves intellectualism and radicalism in the Cold War period with a special focus on gender and sexuality. We are honored to welcome Professor Aaron Lecklider.

American Studies is now on Facebook! Become a Fan by searching ‘American Studies UMass Boston.’

Dear American Studies Alumni,

As you know, we are all facing tough economic times, which will mean less funding for the kinds of activities that allow us to sponsor speakers and events for our students. Please consider designating your UMB alumni donations to the American Studies Department in honor of Lois Rudnick’s retirement.

We really appreciate it!

Save the Date!

Lois Rudnick’s “Retirement” Party will take place on June 1st from 5:00-8:30 in the Alumni Lounge, Campus Center.
We are so pleased to welcome a wonderful group of new students this year from all over the country as well as from the Boston area to the American Studies MA Program: **Annie Anderson**, an English major and Third World development minor from Calvin College and radio producer from Chicago; **Sarah Atwood**, a Philosophy and Religion major from Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota; **Zadina Cadyma**, a cum laude Sociology major from Salem State College; **Christine Gottschall**, a cum laude Education major from Boston College fresh from teaching fifth grade in the South Bronx and in the Boston Public School system; **Matthew Kostoulakos**, a Political Science major from Holy Cross; **Kurt Morris**, a History major from Taylor College with an MS in library science from Indiana University; **Rachel Munyon**, an English major from the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon; **Patrick Nannen**, an honors History and American Studies major from Southern Illinois University; **Jennifer Resmini**, a Social Studies Education and International Studies major from Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire; **Melanie Schmitt**, an honors American Studies major from UMass Boston originally from Hamburg, Germany via teaching in Wuxi, China; **Shelley Stolitza**, a middle school teacher from Charlotte, North Carolina with a BS in Science Education from Cleveland State University and post-graduate courses in English Education from UNC Charlotte; **Ann Terry**, a Journalism major and American Studies minor from University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa; and **Alison White**, a Philosophy and Women’s Studies major from the University of New Mexico.

This semester, I have the pleasure of working with the students in the writing seminar presenting their research as part of the process of completing their MA essays. **Rebecca Lewis** is probing the socioeconomic status and cultural place of female tavern owners in revolutionary-era Boston; **Celine Nader** is working on P.T. Barnum’s ethnographic exhibitions of Maximo and Bartola, billed as “the last of the Aztecs,” in 1850 and 1851; **Sarah Hewitt** is exploring the social meanings of the Civil War in Groton, MA; **Maggie Hunt** is working on a history of immigrant ethnicity, religion and community building through a study of the Polish National Catholic Church in Lowell, MA; **Colleen Flannery** is writing about the political and cultural meanings of Arabian fantasy films produced by Hollywood during WWII; **Michael Urso** is working on the history of surfing in Rhode Island, from an exotic exhibition performance in 1918 to a popular cultural form in the 1960s; **Valeria Jimenez** is writing about the changing meanings and cultural politics of Chicano Dia de los Muertos celebrations in East Los Angeles as part of the Chicano movement in the 1970s; **Dean Proserpio** is researching the mostly-unacknowledged musical and recording industry connections between disco and hip hop when hip hop music began to emerge as a popular form in the late 1970s; **Shannah Kurland** is working on the current public discourse labeling immigrant women as “anchor babies” in comparison with categorizing immigrant women as “liable to be a public charge” in the early 20th century; **Riva Pearson** is writing about the transnational identities in the performative self-portraiture of Asian American immigrant photographers; **Jon Iftikar** is creating a college-level curriculum designed to reveal a dialogue between different disciplinary approaches to the study of race and racialization, focusing primarily on a literary/cultural studies approach, sociology, and law. Other MA student final projects include **Jack Reynolds’** work on the history of the homeless shelter movement in Boston, focusing on the late 1960s and 1970s, and **Beth Ann Cornell’s** analysis of the underlying assumptions about motherhood and the normal body within contemporary internet discussion boards debating infant circumcision.

It’s not spring yet outside as I write this, but here’s hoping for that wonderful renewal that comes from more sunshine and more green around us. I am looking forward to meeting the families and friends of graduating MA students at our early morning breakfast in our hall on the morning of commencement, May 29. On June 1, we’ll be honoring and celebrating the many years of awesome teaching, scholarship, and creative leadership of our unretiring colleague Lois Rudnick, who is nonetheless retiring and leaving UMass Boston this June. For the returning and new students, we can look ahead to our occasion to meet as a program on Thursday September 3rd before the term starts, at our Fall reception in the Campus Center at UMass.
Faculty Updates

Paul Atwood was on half-leave for the fall 2008 semester finishing up a book contract with Pluto Press, London, UK, to be published probably in 2010. The book’s title is War and Empire: The American Way of Life. He was interviewed in, and provided voiceover narrative on the Korean War for the documentary Frozen Glory: The Secret Life of War Memorials produced by Stone-Pilgrim Films (2008). Additionally, Prof. Atwood was a guest lecturer for the annual Summer Institute at the JFK library. His talk was entitled “Remembering My Lai.” The Institute’s overall focus was on: “Law and Disorder in Times of War: Security, Surveillance and Civil Liberties.” Prof. Atwood continues to be the faculty advisor to the UMB Antiwar Coalition.

Phil Chassler’s review of Cheryl Lynn Greenberg’s Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century appeared in African American Review, Volume 42, Number 1 Spring 2009, a special issue on “Representing Segregation.” He submitted a short article about his experience teaching AMST 360: Work, Society, and Culture in Modern America, for publication in the members’ newsletter of The Labor and Working Class History Association. As a member of the FSU Executive Board, Prof. Chassler participated in the non-tenure track teacher (NTT) caucus, and belongs to the FSU Grievance Committee (more members needed!) as well as the MTA Candidate Recommendation Committee.

Robert Goff recently competed “Challenging the Glass Ceiling of Age: The Later Careers of Four British Actresses” for a collection of essays on celebrity and aging to be published in the second volume of the “European Perspectives on Aging” book series. His “Sex and Anarchy: Alex Comfort and The Joy of Sex” is included in a collection of essays on American bestsellers under consideration for publication by Palgrave.

After eight years at UMass, Aaron Lecklider has been hired as a full time tenure track professor. In addition to applying for jobs, Prof. Lecklider presented a paper titled “A Disastrous Vulgarization of Intellectual Life: Cold War Masculinity and Radical Perversion,” as part of a session titled “Rewriting Radicalism in the Cold War” at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, October 2008. In December 2008 he gave the talk “When Mr. 69 Met Princess Amy: Queens, Queers, and Commies in 1930s Radical Fiction,” at Harvard University. Additionally, he commented on papers for a session titled “Sex and the Family” at Rethinking American Political History conference in Boston in March 2009.

Bonnie Miller was on partial leave in the fall of 2008 as she completed her book proposal to prospective publishers for her project on Spanish-American War visual and popular culture. She also wrote a new piece, a Spanish-American War cartoon essay featuring the work of two lesser-known cartoonists of the Spanish-American War period. In October of ‘08, she gave a talk at the conference of the New England Center for Inclusive Teaching entitled, “Grading Class Participation: The Advantages and Challenges of Evaluating Participation in a Diverse Classroom” that stemmed from her interests in maximizing discussion and engagement in her courses. She spends the rest of her time chasing her little ones around the house. Sarina, her new baby, has just begun walking!

Marisol Negrón, American Studies’ newest professor has jumped right into the UMass community by becoming the advisor to Casa Latina. She was a guest lecturer at UMB’s Latino Leadership Opportunities Seminar in January, giving a talk entitled “Current Issues Facing Latino Communities.” She served as a panelist for “Changing History: A Panel on the 2008 Election” with UMB’s Trotter Institute in November. Additionally she presented: “Salsa at the Crossroads: Between Intellectual Property and Cultural Authority” at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association; “Made in NuYoRico: Salsa as Commodity and Cultural Signifier” at the meeting of the Puerto Rican Studies Association in October; and “Negotiating Performance, Cultural Authority, and Property Rights” for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. July 31 – August 3, 2008. Professor Negrón is also responsible for the American Studies Department’s new Facebook page.

Patricia Raub has helped form a new nonprofit organization called Providence Community Library (PCL) and successfully lobbied Providence city officials to sever its long-term relationship with Providence Public Library, which has threatened to close five library branches in July. Instead, the PCL incorporators have convinced the City to transfer its library funding to PCL in order to maintain services at all nine of Providence’s library branches and to provide for more democratic governance of the libraries. PCL’s successful campaign gained nationwide attention in library circles, and continues to have the support of the a number of community groups throughout Providence, including all of the Friends of the Library groups as well as the backing of most members of the City Council. For more information, visit http://providence.communitylibrary.org.

Rachel Rubin completed a co-written essay on musical responses to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. She continued to research her book project on Renaissance festivals in the United States, and delivered a paper in April at the Social Theory Forum on immigration and American popular culture.
More Faculty Updates

Lois Rudnick is retiring on June 26 after 35 years of teaching at UMB. She has recently completed editing a book titled *Cady Wells and Southwestern Modernism*, for which she wrote the lead essay. It will be published by the Museum of New Mexico Press in Fall 2009, just as she is hopefully moving to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The book will be followed, in August 2010, by two exhibitions of Wells’s life and work. Curated by Lois, these will be opening at the University of New Mexico Art Museum, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Aaron Payne Fine Art, in Santa Fe. For those of you who have been breathlessly awaiting her book, "The Syphilis Papers: Sex, Sin, and Psychoanalysis in Modern American Culture,” she will complete it after retirement. She was recently quoted in Bust Magazine (April/May ‘09) in an article entitled “Oh Mother!” about the development of Mothers Day. She asks that everyone please stay in touch!

Judith Smith was awarded a Dean’s Research Fund grant to support her work on how Harry Belafonte’s distinctive political voice, honed in the crucible of the 1940s black left, has shaped his cultural production of music, film, and television. She presented a paper at the New England American Studies Association exploring Belafonte’s turn from singing jazz to folk music in 1951, and is now working on how he used his celebrity status to showcase the rich cultural resources sustaining black working people’s resistance to racial exclusion. Smith will present a paper, "Racial Performance and Protest on Television: Harry Belafonte’s Network Musical Spectaculars, 1959 and 1966” as part of a panel on "Race, Music, and Performance in the Civil Rights Era” at the American Studies Association Conference in November in Washington, DC. She is enjoying the immersion in the historical scholarship on gender and sexuality required to teach AMST 604 this spring, on which she will draw when she teaches AMST 393L, *The Social History of American Women*, in the fall. Later this spring she will be serving as an outside evaluator for the American Studies Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

Shirley Tang published a number of journal articles and book chapters this year, including: “Challenges of Policy and Practice in Under-Resourced Asian American Communities: Analyzing Public Education, Health, Development Issues with Cambodian American Women” in *Asian American Law Journal* (Fall, 2008); “Community-Centered Research as Knowledge/Capacity-Building in Immigrant and Refugee Communities” in *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles R. Hale; and "Community Cultural Development and Education with Cambodian American Youth," in *Asian Voices*, edited by Lin Zhan. She co-wrote “Cả Trì Nhơi: Roles of Vietnamese American Studies and Education Post-Katrina” with James Dien Bui, Peter Nien-chu Kiang, and Janet Hong Vo, in *Asian Voices*. Prof. Tang presented her paper, "Resistance and Reconstruction at a Time of Recession and Reflection” at the Social Theory Forum in April 2009. This paper is one of the five pilot research projects focusing on investigating strategies of immigrant and mainstream organizations and is funded by the national Sociological Initiatives Foundation and administered by the William Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture. This spring, Tang is also teaching a new course focusing on media, culture and the Chinese Diaspora.

In the past year Lynnell Thomas has found many opportunities to combine her teaching, research, and service interests. She presented a workshop on the Civil Rights Movement to Weymouth public school teachers as part of a National Endowment of the Humanities grant and developed a new upper level course Black Popular Culture for UMass Boston students. “Romance and Racism in New Orleans,” her review of David Fulmer’s mystery *Rampart Street* was published in *belles lettres: A Literary Review* 9 (September/December 2008). She gave the paper “We Are Open, Fully Prepared, and Eager to Welcome All of Our Visitors Again’: Tourism Stories and Post-Katrina Realities in New Orleans” at the 2008 American Studies Association Annual Meeting in Albuquerque, NM. In 2009, she presented “Constructions of Blackness in Tourist New Orleans” as part of a panel she organized for the Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting in Seattle, WA. In September, she was interviewed for the radio broadcast “Three Years After Katrina” on *Commonwealth Journal* and was honored to be the guest speaker for 2009 Black History Month program at The Academy of the Pacific Rim charter school in Boston.

New Course Approved: **American Visual Cultures**

Bonnie Miller’s new course will be taught for the first time Spring 2010. American Visual Cultures (AMST 402L/ART 402L) will explore the historical, cultural, and aesthetic importance of visual images in shaping ideas about empire, race, gender, class, work, and nation in American culture. Students will learn how to interpret and analyze visual evidence from a variety of forms, including film, cartoons, live performance, photographs, and print advertising, from the mid-nineteenth through the twentieth century.

New Course Spring ’09: **U.S. Travel and Tourism**

Bonnie Miller, Lynnell Thomas and Patricia Raub have developed a new American Studies course on U.S. Travel and Tourism. The course is being offered for the first time this spring, taught by Patricia Raub.

The course explores the emergence of tourism in the nineteenth century; examines 20th-century tourist attractions like Coney Island, world’s fairs, Miami Beach, and Las Vegas; and analyzes the formation and persistence of iconic tourist images through advertising, postcards, and promotional films. In the final section of the course, students study Boston as a tourist destination and conduct an ethnographic fieldwork investigation of an aspect of Boston’s tourist economy.

The course has attracted students who have worked in the tourist industry— for airlines, restaurants and hotels; people who have lived in tourist locations, including Niagara Falls; and people who have traveled to a number of different tourist destinations, such as Disney World, Morocco, Tokyo, and Martha’s Vineyard.
Interview with Molly Goggin-Foley, AMST BA 2001

What drew you to UMass Boston initially?
I started my college career at Mills College in Oakland, CA (a 4-year private women’s college). While I thoroughly enjoyed the academics that Mills offered – I did not enjoy feeling isolated on a college campus. I transferred to Lane Community College in Springfield, Oregon and then transferred a second time to UMass Boston during my sophomore year of college. After having been on the West Coast, I wanted to return to Boston and attend a university with a commuter student body – where most students are living their lives already and where going to school was just one piece of the pie. UMass Boston provided me with the exact student community I wanted to be a part of – a place where students were working, raising families, living their lives AND going to school.

What inspired you to be an American Studies major?
I have always been interested in history, cultural diversity and community activism. I liked the fact that American Studies told the true story of American History and included the often untold stories from the diverse array of cultures that make up this country. I also felt that the AMST degree provided the political activism and community organizing perspective I needed to continue the great work that has already been done in this country. I don’t know any other degree that would have better prepared me for a career in the non-profit sector working on public policy issues.

What was your favorite part about being a student at UMB?
The best part of being a student at UMB was being a part of a student body that was already facing many of life’s challenges – many of the students at UMB are working, have families, and are already a vibrant active part of society. UMB is also an extremely diverse campus – and I greatly appreciated learning from the many different perspectives and life experiences that were brought into the classroom each day.

What classes or professors do you remember as being inspirational and why?
Lois Rudnick was by far my most inspirational instructor – she really helped me to feel confident that American Studies was indeed an avenue to bigger and better things. She always found a way to connect AMST to real life issues, social challenges, or current events/opportunities – that perspective helped me to feel confident about the employable skills I was gaining through the degree. I also was a part of the UMB Vietnam Today Program and traveled to Vietnam in 2001 right before Sept. 11th. I cannot stress enough how important travel is to AMST and having the opportunity to see firsthand some of the cultures that are now such an integral part of American society and culture. A Different Mirror by Ron Takaki, The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston, Storyteller by Leslie Marmon Silko, The Jungle by Upton Sinclair, Donald Duk by Frank Chin and many, many, many of the handouts were all fabulous as well.

What have you been up to since graduating?
AMST provided me with the critical thinking skills necessary to become an effective legislative advocate – as well as the historical background I needed to understand the socio-economic struggles faced by a variety of people in our society. The emphasis AMST puts on students gaining a broad cultural perspective of the diversity of our nation’s citizens has helped me to advocate for a wide variety of individuals facing multiple social and political barriers. The research, reflection, and writing skills I learned in AMST have laid the foundation for me to develop, pursue, and defend public policy initiatives on behalf of needy populations at both the local, state, national, and even international level.

Upon graduating from UMass Boston in 2001 -- I was hired at the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition to coordinate their public policy initiatives around immigrant access to health care. Working at MIRA was a dream come true for an AMST major because of the direct focus on immigrant issues. I highly recommend MIRA’s internship and volunteer opportunities for AMST students interested in immigration issues.

In 2003, I was hired at the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons where I organized medical students from around the world to advocate for the abolition of nuclear weapons and for international public policies encouraging nations to disarm. This position provided me with an international advocacy perspective -- a much broader (& much slower!) process involving many different forms of government with differing cultures and religions.

In 2005, I returned to statewide advocacy as the Chief of Staff at the Massachusetts Service Alliance, the state Commission on Community Service and Volunteerism. At MSA, I was responsible for advocating for state and federal funding/policies that supported community service as a means to addressing community needs.

Today, I am the Director of Government Relations at MY TURN, Inc. a dropout prevention and intervention organization based in Brockton, MA serving at-risk youth across MA, NH, and RI. There I have worked to secure and safeguard funding for MY TURN in an effort to curb the drop-out crisis in communities like Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford, Fitchburg, and Leominster so we can continue to provide these youth with the skills and confidence necessary to succeed in college and/or the workplace.

Are there books you read in the AMST program that have stuck with you?
Continued on next page
Molly Goggin-Foley Con’t

I recently served as the Campaign Manager for a candidate for State Representative in the 9th Plymouth district.

Overall, my interest in immigration issues, public policy, legislative advocacy and politics has stemmed from the same interest I had in obtaining a degree in AMST. AMST’s focus on social justice and understanding the frameworks for influencing public policy over the course of history has definitely benefited me at different times throughout my professional career. I think it is an extremely worthwhile degree for anyone interested in the field of political science, social work, grassroots/community organizing, public administration, fundraising, and/or non-profit management.

What has it been like working in the nonprofit sector? What advice do you have for others who might want to do this kind of work?

The non-profit sector continues gain public respect, political clout, and staying power. It’s the fastest growing sector in MA. That said, these are financially challenging times and often times in the non-profit sector you have to find the funds to support your own position/project. Fundraising and sustainability are critical parts to any non-profit job – and it helps tremendously to have as much information possible on how to financially back whatever cause it is you are hoping to work on.

Questions for Grad Alumna Liza Burbank (‘01)

What brought you to Boston?
I grew up in Pittsfield, MA. After I graduated from UMass Amherst, my then-boyfriend/now-husband and I decided to move to Boston just because we were ready for a change.

What drew you to UMass Boston?
I was hoping to get accepted into a PhD program in American Studies but wasn’t a particularly strong applicant. Doing my Master’s seemed like a good way to increase the likelihood that I’d get accepted into a good program – a way to demonstrate my ability to handle graduate work and to clarify my academic interests. I looked around and was really happy to find the American Studies MA program at UMB, since I was already living in Boston at the time.

What made you want to study American Studies? The Social Thought and Political Economy program at UMass Amherst (where Liza did her undergraduate work) introduced me to the study of systems of privilege and to the “rest” of history – the stories that don’t usually get told. I learned to think critically and gained the vocabulary to begin to make sense of the world around me. It was a really exciting time and I wanted to continue that education – and, ultimately, to make the shift from student/consumer of knowledge to scholar/producer of knowledge.

What classes/professors/ readings from the program that have stuck with you the most? The classes I enjoyed most were Intro (AMST 601) with Judy Smith, Popular Culture (AMST 606) with Rachel Rubin, and Historical Sequence II (AMST 603L) with Lois Rudnick. My very favorite book of all the ones I read during the MA program was Manliness and Civilization, which was my first introduction to cultural history. Other books that I liked or that were important for me were Reading the Romance, Mechanic Accents, Playing the Race Card, and The Possessive Investment of Whiteness.

Where was your favorite place to study while you were a Master’s student? I spent most of my time reading on my couch at home with a cat asleep on my lap.

What was your final project about? I looked at how the couple was represented in magazine advertising in the 1920s. I was interested in possible connections between the concurrent growth of consumer culture and the development of the companionate marriage model as the dominant paradigm in heterosexual relationships.

What do you do now? I’m a PhD candidate at Brown in the Department of American Civilization.

How has AMST prepared you for your life now both personally and professionally? I entered Brown with a clear sense of what I wanted to work on and was able to proceed quickly through my coursework and get on to preparing for my preliminary exams and then starting my dissertation.

What is your dissertation on? My dissertation is a cultural history that looks at how romantic love is represented in consumer culture. I’m looking at product advertisements in magazines and on TV, magazine fiction and articles, television shows, and personal ads. I’m interested in what happens to cultural ideals of love when the message we receive, over and over and over again, is that the way to find love is to consume the right products.

Your research focuses on relationships? How has your research affected how you see your own and other relationships? I would actually say that the effect has been the other way around. I started the MA program just a few months after I got married, and I don’t think it’s a coincidence that I ended up studying marriage for my final project. My own experiences in a committed partnership, which is both rewarding and a LOT of work, led me to think about the messages we receive in our culture about how to find and hold onto love.

Has having a baby changed your perspective on your career? In the short term, yes. Becoming a mother has been overwhelming, emotionally – I have been so wrapped up in my daughter that I’ve felt pretty disconnected from my work since she was born last summer. I’m just now rediscovering my identity as a student and scholar and am glad to find that I do still have an interest in this work! In the long term, I don’t think so. I’m sure there will be challenges to balancing work and the rest of my life, as there are with any career, but one of the best things I can do for Bebe is to be engaged in and excited about my work, to model that for her.

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My trip to Washington, DC for the Inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama as 44th President of the United States of America

by Annie Anderson

Overcoming my demophobia and a few fleeting pinches that what I was about to undertake would be an experience of intense extremes—the bouts of elation, the incessant walking, the overwhelmingness of it all—I left Philadelphia for DC on Sunday, two days before the inauguration. Upon arrival to the capital city, I oriented myself amidst the lively downtown streets, found the closest Metro station and commenced the DC inauguration shuffle. Lines to buy fare cards were 20 people deep, but the luggage-laden masses seemed content to wait with patience. We were rewarded with Metro cards emblazoned with the face of our newly elected president, and we were on our way to lodgings and celebratory activities. The red line whisked me to a party in Adams Morgan. The hosts were old friends from Chicago, relocated to DC in recent years for jobs clerking for Supreme Court justices and editing for national magazines. The party felt very DC, hob-knobby but friendly. Fast but not very furious. In the span of a few minutes, I met a Georgetown Law student, a policy wonk, the wife of a famous television reporter, and editors from The Atlantic Monthly and the New York Times. Happily, my introduction as an American Studies grad student was met with glowing approval, and someone even suggested I take into account the Hasidic Jewish rapper Matisyahu, playing from iPod speakers somewhere and inducing certain factions of the party to dance, as a possible thesis topic. I had hit the ground running, which seemed fitting for both the schmooziness of DC and the ecstatic possibilities of this most precedent-setting of weekends.

Monday was crisp and sunny, and I bummed around the National Gallery of Art before strolling along the Mall, passing roving troupes of teens, families, black folks, old folks, white folks, cops, port-a-potties, and all manner of Obama souvenir vendors, selling everything from patchouli oil to watches, all time-stamped with this historic moment—January 20, 2009. DC was in the grip of an exhilarating blowout, a jubilant family reunion of sorts, a euphoric fete that induced happy car honks and high-fives from strangers. Tuesday morning found me raring to go. I headed down to the Mall area with a few hours to spare before the scheduled 11:30 a.m. swearing-in time. I weaved in and out of the southbound crowds, attempted to get through a security checkpoint that several hundreds of others were lined up at, and eventually, around 11:00, decided my best bet at witnessing history would be on the western reaches of the Mall, far from the U.S. Capitol where the swearing-in was to take place, but within reach of a jumbotron. At around 11:40, I rolled up to the green surrounding the Washington Monument (about 16 blocks from the Capitol) to find enough space to breathe, see and hear the event on a distant screen, and still feel surrounded enough by other witnesses and revelers. I liked that the sky was open and bright above me, that I was alone but embedded with millions of others, that the sound and visual quality of the jumbotron was actually good, and that I was surrounded by people who did and did not look like me, that we all apparently agreed that this was the most important thing we could do that day, that this was the most important and relevant place to be.

The actual swearing in took very little time. Upon Obama's taking of the presidential oath, the Mall exploded in applause, and the protocol following his inaugural address—the recitation of a poem, some singing—felt like official rigmarole, pretty but unnecessary desserts following the perfect main dish. After enjoying an impromptu drum circle, complete with a few rounds of “We Shall Overcome,” I ducked into Constitution Hall and sat in the auditorium, where TV news clips and parade shots kept those inside informed of our new president’s whereabouts. Outside again, encountering hordes of inauguration-goers everywhere, I made my way up to Logan Circle for a pizza-and-champagne lunch. I was happy for the crowds, for the composite of Americans who cared enough—about our presidency, our country, our nation’s collective possibility—but I was ecstatic to get out of them.

The two-and-a-half days I spent in Washington were underlain with jubilation and punctuated by fits and starts of giddiness. There were surface excitement—seeing at least one celebrity a day—and deeper pleasures—the steady conjuring from celebrity a day—and deeper pleasures—the steady conjuring from handmade signs, street corners and schwag stands that larger spirits (including MLK, whose legacy our country honored the day before the inauguration) observed and approved of the city’s crushing cloud of witnesses.

The Atlantic Monthly and the New York Times. Happily, my introduction as an American Studies grad student was met with glowing approval, and someone even suggested I take into account the Hasidic Jewish rapper Matisyahu, playing from iPod speakers somewhere and inducing certain factions of the party to dance, as a possible thesis topic. I had hit the ground running, which seemed fitting for both the schmooziness of DC and the ecstatic possibilities of this most precedent-setting of weekends.

Monday was crisp and sunny, and I bummed around the National Gallery of Art before strolling along the Mall,
Graduate Students Going Places

Beth Anne Cornell presented "Stuff White People Like: Bloggers’ Deconstruct and Reconstruct White Authenticity" at the Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture/American Culture Association Conference in October 2008. She originally wrote the paper for Rachel Rubin’s grad level Popular Culture class.

Valerie Jiménez’s paper “Re-Imagining the Dead in East L.A.: Self-Help Graphics and the Cultural Politics of Dia de los Muertos,” started as a paper for Rachel Rubin’s graduate level Popular Culture class, was accepted at the American Popular Culture Association, the National Ethnic Studies Association, and the Cultural Studies Association.

Shelley Stolitza has been accepted to UCD Clinton Institute for American Studies with the University College of Dublin (http://www.ucdclinton.ie/summerschool2009.htm). She’ll be part of the Media and Conflict workshop.

Annie Anderson’s paper "Harlem Rides the Range: Reimagining the Prairie's Racial Paradigm" has been accepted at the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association annual conference Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 8, 2009. The paper was written for Lynnell Thomas’s Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality class.

Kurt Morris’s paper “A New Look at the End Times: Christian Scare Films of the 1970s” has been accepted at the Northeast Popular Culture Association's annual conference, October 23-24, 2009 in Queens, NY.

Celine Nadar recently had a fantastic time attending the Popular Culture Association Conference in New Orleans, LA this past April.

Jennifer Skinnon attended Radcliffe’s Gender and Law conference in March as well as Radcliffe’s Gender and Religion conference last year. She also attended the Association for Institutional Research Conference last summer in Chicago.

Valerie Jiménez and Dean Proserpio attended the American Studies Association Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico in October. They got to see Professor Marisol Negrón in action presenting her paper “Salsa at the Crossroads: Between Intellectual Property and Cultural Authority.”

Annie Anderson, Colleen Flannery, Kurt Morris, Patrick Nanney, and Ann Terry attended the New England American Studies Association Conference held at Yale September 19-21. The theme was "Infectious Democracy: Histories and Cultures of American Politics." They attended many presentations including Judy Smith’s entitled "Harry Belafonte and the Culture of the Black Popular Front, 1944-1970,” Kurt commented, “It was the first conference for all of us (I think) and we all learned a lot, not just through the topics, but also how a conference works, what it takes to present papers, etc. And the importance of networking can’t be discounted either. Good times were had.”

Upcoming Conferences:

New England American Studies Association

Northeast Popular Culture Association
Conference, October 23-24, 2009, Queensborough Community College, Bayside, Queens, New York City.

Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture Association
Conference November 5 -7, 2009, Hilton Boston Logan Airport in Boston, MA.

American Studies Association

American Historical Association
On the last day of Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, the American Studies Roundtable had a screening of *The Order of Myths*, an independent film about Mardi Gras societies in Mobile, Alabama. Ann Terry, a native of Mobile, introduced the film to the northern audience who knew very little about Mardi Gras.

Those of us who have stayed north of the Mason Dixon line were surprised to learn that Mardi Gras societies are still racially segregated in Mobile. The story line focused on the 2007 Mardi Gras and the Mardi Gras courts: the white king and queen, Max Bruckmann and Helen Meaher, and the black king and queen, Joseph Roberson and Steffanie Lucas. Mobile celebrated the first Mardi Gras in the United States in 1703. In 2007 the past met the present when the reigning queens were direct descendants of a prominent slave trader who brought in the last slave ship (*Clothilde*) to Mobile harbor and the slaves who were on that ship.

Steffanie Lucas was the African American Mardi Gras queen whose ancestors swam to shore and hid in the woods after Captain Tim Meaher and his crew set the ship *Clothilde* on fire with the Africans aboard to destroy the evidence of having slaves for sale. The woods the Africans fled to ended up being called Africa Town, and is still part of the vast Meaher real estate holdings. Helen Meaher is the descendant of the Meahers, recognized as founders of Mobile.

The film chronicled the black Mardi Gras court’s successful efforts to have the two segregated monarchs attend each other’s coronation and balls. 2007 was the first year that this interaction had happened, and both courts commented on this historic precedent.

The women kept their own names as queens, and were known as Queen Helen and Queen Steffanie. The men used different names; Joseph Roberson was King Elexis I and Max Bruckmann was King Felix III. Each court paid elaborate attention to their costumes. All the outfits were custom made and the monarchs each had enormous (and heavy) trains that were attached with harnesses. The trains were exhibited to the public at special parties prior to the coronations. Mardi Gras brings over $250 million to Mobile each year. Queen Steffanie, an elementary school teacher, commented on how she had worked hard to save money for her reign as Mardi Gras queen; she said it cost a good $20,000.00.

It was interesting to see the contrasts. The white court’s events looked very prim and proper with careful cocktail conversations. The African American court’s events were more lively and enthusiastic with more laughter and joking. In the film, even Queen Helen and King Felix commented that the African American ball was more fun than their own. The old money patrician parties of the white Mardi Gras all had uniformed black waiters. Most of the white interviewees commented on the importance of history, tradition, and roots, while eliminating some of the more unsavory aspects of their history.

Organized Mardi Gras groups are called Mystic Societies. The Order of Myths, founded in 1883, is the oldest continuously parading Mystic Society in Mobile. The Conde Explorers, founded in 2000, is the only Mystic Society that is integrated. It was started by an African American man who saw his young son at the Mardi Gras parade passed over by those on the floats throwing beads and moon pies. Although others (white) who caught the beads and moon pies passed some to his son, witnessing this discrimination was too much for this young father. The Conde Explorers currently have only one white member.

Ann Terry’s mother sent the traditional King cake and moon pies eaten in the South during the Mardi Gras festivities from Alabama. A small plastic baby Jesus is inserted into the cake, and the person who gets the baby Jesus is supposed to buy the next King cake. King cakes now come in a variety of flavors and families often go to their favorite bakery each year for their King cakes.

*Order of Myths* is a very provocative film that will leave you pondering issues of race, culture, segregation, equality, the legacy of ancestors, and how differently people can view the same situation.
Pipo Nguyen-duy Visits Campus

By Riva Pearson

During my first semester in the graduate program at UMass I had a conversation that changed the course of my studies. I was working on a paper for Shirley Tang’s “Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality” (AMST 605) class about self portraiture. I had been looking at the work of the Vietnamese American photographer Pipo Nguyen-duy whose AnOther Western series portrays him dressed as character tropes from the nineteenth century. I was talking to one of my fellow students about a presentation he was doing in Bonnie Miller’s course “Historical Sequence I” (AMST 602L) about Civil War photography, we were talking about the Pipo’s self portrait as a Civil War soldier. I asked if he knew if there were real stories about Asian American Civil War soldiers and he answered that he didn’t think so. But the magical world of the internet proved this assumption wrong and we discovered Joseph Pierce, a Chinese American Civil War soldier from Connecticut. When I later asked Pipo whether he had been thinking about Joseph Pierce when he took his photo, he answered that he had not known that there were Asian Americans who fought in the Civil War. Previous to this experience I had understood photography (and art in general) as a form of both self and communal expression where people could take control of their own images and combat negative stereotypes. Until then I had not fully comprehended the ways that art could not only teach but that could re-write dominant historical narratives. Pipo’s photograph as a Civil War soldier helped to re-insert Asian Americans into an American history and culture from which they have been largely erased.

When I later presented Pipo’s work to Peter Kiang’s class “Asians in the United States,” several students, many of whom were of Southeast Asian descent, commented that they were inspired because they had never seen art by a Vietnamese American artist and expressed surprise that such a thing was possible for an immigrant and refugee. Twelve percent of UMB students are Asian American. Almost five percent of graduate students, and almost twenty percent of first year students are Asian American, many of whom are Southeast Asian or of Southeast Asian descent. One student commented that the presentation of Pipo’s work was “inspiring” and that he would now “look into the possibility of pursuing art more.” In this way, Pipo’s work is not only a way to open up history but a place where contemporary understandings of the limits of one’s own identity can be re-imagined.

Pipo Nguyen-duy was born in Vietnam and came to the United States as a refugee in 1975. While living in NYC and working as a fashion model and nightclub manager, he grew tired of being consistently cast as a waiter in modeling assignments. Pipo wanted to take control of his own image and portray himself and other Asian Americans as powerful players in their own representations. His work explores the relationship of Asian Americans to broader American history as well as the impact of colonialism and the Vietnam War on his home country of Vietnam. His most recent works have moved away from his traditional self-portraits to document some of the vanishing landscapes of his home in Ohio which he imbues with the potential of rebirth of a post 9/11 United States by photographing abandoned greenhouses through different seasons. He is currently a professor of photography at Oberlin College in Ohio.

After the great reception that Pipo’s work had in Dr. Kiang’s class we decided to bring him to campus. This would provide a way for students to interact with him in person as well as give me a chance to interview him for my final project. On October 28th, 2008 Pipo arrived in Boston and spoke to two classes of students in the Asian American Studies program. The next day almost 150 people crowded into a room in the Campus Center to hear his lecture. The lecture was co-sponsored and organized by the American Studies Graduate Roundtable with the help of the American Studies Dept., the Asian American Studies Program, the Graduate Student Assembly, the William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences, the Institute for Asian American Studies, the Art Dept., and the Women’s Studies Dept. That evening he had dinner with several students who had the opportunity to further discuss his work with him. Pipo’s photographs have become an integral part of my final project and the ability to meet and interview him in person has been invaluable. Additionally, a student in Lois Rudnick’s “Immigration Experience” class (AMST 405) is writing her final paper on his work. All in all, his visit was a huge success.
Greg Kornbluh (2008) taught a course in the UMB Communication Studies program in the fall semester. In January, he accepted a job in the Sales Department of the Harvard University Press. Courtney Williams Barron (2006) is finishing her first semester in the University of Texas American Studies doctoral program. She says, “The experience so far has made me appreciate the superb grounding in the field that I received at UMASS. In fact, the core courses were really valuable and definitely stronger than UT’s (I feel).” Tad Suiter (2006) recently enrolled in the PhD program in History at George Mason University. He has been working as a research assistant at the Center for History and New Media where he is developing interests in digital pedagogy and public history alongside his fields in cultural history. Warren Hynes (2003) teaches English in Westfield (N.J.) High School, where he helped to write the curriculum for the school’s new American Studies classes for 11th-graders. During the past two summers he taught a Social Science Writing course to high school students as part of the Princeton University Preparatory Program for high-achieving students and for the past four years he has been an adjunct instructor at Hudson County Community College, teaching reading to adults with high aspirations yet low reading skills. He is a free-lance journalist who recently completed manuscripts for a children’s book and a memoir. His most recent writing can be viewed at http://thepitchbaseballlife.blogspot.com. He has two daughters with his wife Amy, a real-estate agent. Rena Levin (2000) and her husband Christian have recently moved back to Norway where she has been working as a volunteer at the United States embassy. During the election season she spent time talking to high school students about the U.S. electoral system. She says that their questions “reflected general media coverage here by focusing on race and violence. The death threats against Obama received an inordinate amount of coverage and many were worried that he would be shot. I think this is partly due to historical memory of the civil rights movement and partly due to where Norway is in terms of its own race relations. When I was here 10 years ago “racism” and “xenophobia” were taboo words. The conversation has opened up now and you can talk about racism, but the focus tends to be on violence against immigrants and hateful language rather than things like employment discrimination.” Barbara Brown (1999) is now the executive director of the Lawrence historical society which is engaged in planning a major commemoration of the 1912 “Bread and Roses” strike of the multiethnic textile work force in Lawrence. Lance Eaton (2005) is currently teaching at North Shore Community College, Salem State College, Emerson College, and UMASS Lowell. He teaches everything from world history to American literature to comic books, to film, and even a course on monsters. He also recently presented at the Popular Culture Association Conference in New Orleans.

Taylor Bingle: “Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the Cultural Radicalism of Randolph Bourne”
Primary Advisor: Lois Rudnick, Secondary Advisor: Lynnell Thomas

This paper reassesses American progressive Randolph Bourne’s (1886-1918) ideas about radicalism, socialism and democracy during the American Progressive Era (1877-1920). Using Bourne’s original writings, published in the Columbia Monthly, Atlantic Monthly, New Republic, Seven Arts, Dial, and The Masses, as well as in Youth and Life (1913), The Gary Schools (1916) and Education and Living (1917), this paper examines how Bourne’s radical cultural philosophy was shaped by the historical, social, cultural and intellectual context of the era. In particular, using class as a lens, this paper thematically traces tropes and themes in Bourne’s writings and thinking about labor and capital relations, American education, immigration and nationalism, and war and the modern State to argue, contrary to previous studies of Bourne, that Bourne’s radical philosophy was centered on the intersection of class and culture and remained consistent over the course of his life. In conclusion, I argue that Bourne was original in his assessment of the intersections of class and culture and believe that scholars and students who seek to confront the modern issues of class could consult Bourne's radical philosophy to diversify their thinking and understanding of how class intersects culture historically and in our modern world.

Greg Kornbluh: “Courting Context: The NBA as a Site of White Contact with Blackness”
Primary Advisor: Rachel Rubin, Secondary Advisor: Lynnell Thomas

To an extent arguably greater than other sports leagues in the United States, the National Basketball Association (NBA) highlights race and its role in American society. This article explores some of the ways in which discussion of the NBA can be characterized by ideological investment in a variety of racialized perspectives. After a brief background summary of the NBA’s long, uneasy emphasis on race, the article highlights three significant episodes in the advancement of this rhetoric. Through analysis of David Shields’ Black Planet, written in the late 1990s, the various writings of the white basketball player Paul Shirley, and FreeDarko.com, a website launched in 2005, the article examines how fans and even players have attempted to make sense of race’s impact on their relationship with the NBA. The article pays special attention to the manner in which NBA fandom can serve to place the league in a lineage with such historical phenomena as blackface minstrelsy.

Katie Kuba: “The Politics of Respectability and Intra-Racial Intimacy in Jessie Fauset’s There Is Confusion and Nella Larsen’s Quicksand”
Primary advisor: Lois Rudnick, Secondary advisor: Susan Tomlinson

My final project examines the impact uplift ideology and the politics of respectability had on heterosexual love relationships in middle-class African-American communities of the 1920s. Using the novels of Harlem Renaissance writers Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset; black feminist literary criticism; and historical work on the intersections of race, gender and class in early-twentieth-century America, I demonstrate that both writers were critical of the politics of respectability practiced by the black bourgeoisie. However, in contrast to Larsen, Fauset does not appear to view them as a barrier to the development of heterosexual intra-racial intimacy. Larsen’s novels, Quicksand and Passing, reflect her pessimistic belief that the politics of respectability were an interruptive factor in the formation of such relationships. I conclude that Larsen’s novels ultimately challenge the notion that companionate or “modern” marriage could exist with any real frequency in middle-class African-American communities of the 1920s.
We would like to welcome Marisol Negrón to UMass Boston. Prof. Negrón has just completed her first year of teaching with joint responsibilities in American Studies and Latino Studies. Her courses have thus far included Latinos in the US (AMST 201), Latino Border Cultures (AMST 353), and Race, Class, and Gender: Issues in US Diversity (AMST 350L). This fall she will be adding the graduate level class Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality (AMST 605) to her repertoire. Born and raised in Bridgeport, CT, she graduated from Dartmouth in 1993 and completed her MA and PhD at Stanford in 2006. She comes to us from Brandeis University. Prof. Negrón’s current research is on Salsa as a commodity and cultural signifier in New York City in the 1970s. When taking a break from research and teaching, she enjoys reading mystery novels, entertaining friends, traveling throughout New England, traveling to Puerto Rico to visit her father, and is looking forward to gardening once summer rolls around. Please take a chance to welcome Marisol Negrón to UMB if you find yourself on the 5th floor of Wheatley.

Give us a sense of your academic interests. In college I discovered that literature could provide a language that reflected and helped shaped the world we live in. It was a transforming experience for me to read the Nuyorican poets of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. I was 17 years old when I realized that my family’s history as Puerto Rican migrants lay within a broader social and historical context that included the island’s colonial relationship to this country, labor demands in the U.S. after World War II, and the desire of the U.S. to use Puerto Rico as an “example” to “Third World” countries. So I spent an entire summer reading everything written during the 1960s and 1970s by Nuyorican writers. I would have been a lawyer, however, were it not for the Mellon Mays University Fellowship program, whose missions remains to diversify the academy. It was through my participation in that fellowship that I decided to pursue a doctorate. I went to graduate school to research how racialized and colonized communities negotiate their political and cultural identities in the United States. My research and teaching interests continue to address that question.

What are you working on now? I’m currently working on two projects. The first is a manual I’m co-editing on the teaching of Spanish as a heritage language that takes into consideration the status of Spanish in the U.S, the relationship between Spanish and Latino identities, and both theory and pedagogy based in sociolinguistics and language teaching. My larger project is a manuscript on the development of salsa music as a cultural product during the 1960s and 1970s New York salsa boom. I examine how the commodification of salsa became a way for Puerto Ricans in New York to articulate a Nuyorican subjectivity that didn’t require birth or residency on the island to be “Puerto Rican.”

What appeals to you about American Studies? American Studies provides the opportunity to bring together my training in literary and cultural studies while teaching courses that recognize that to specialize in “Latino” Studies is to form part of “American” Studies. The two areas compliment each other and allow me to work across various intellectual communities.

What drew you to UMass? The faculty at UMass attracted me because I knew I would enter an intellectually diverse and stimulating environment where I would not be the only Latina or person of color in the department or the University. Just as exciting was the opportunity to work with students from a variety of backgrounds who would bring their life experiences into the classroom, thereby enriching the learning environment. I knew the courses I taught would be diverse, yet the ethnic, racial, national, and religious diversity of my students blew me away my first semester. The impact of this heterogeneity in the classroom and at UMass in general cannot be quantified. It also means a lot to me too to be teaching first-generation college students and to be the advisor to Casa Latina, the Latino student organization on campus.

How has your first year been so far? What was the most surprising thing you have found at UMass? I’ll be honest, it’s been exciting and overwhelming at the same time. Any first-year faculty member would know I was lying if I didn’t admit that that this year has been tough – boot camp tough. As a faculty member, I need to balance teaching, administrative responsibilities, and research and writing. It’s required a lot of self-discipline to manage it all. That being said, I have extremely supportive colleagues who have helped me navigate these first two semesters and I am indebted to them. And it’s exciting to take part in the restructuring of the Latino Studies Program and the revision of its curriculum. Most surprising? The volumes of email that I get every day. No one tells you that email will increase exponentially once you accept a faculty position!

You teach in both the American Studies and the Latino Studies Departments. How do you see yourself negotiating roles in both places? Having joint responsibilities in American Studies and Latino Studies allows me to teach a broad range of courses that support both departments and create links between these two different, but related areas of study.

What are your summer reading book recommendations? I love reading! And I have a habit of picking up books in used bookstores, piling them up, and working through two or three simultaneously. I’ve always got a mystery novel ready. Instance of the Fingerpost by Ian Pears, a historical mystery that takes place during Restoration England, is possibly the best murder mystery you will ever read! A friend passed it to me and I’ve since passed it on to someone else. I do that when I really love a book. That’s also what happened with Octavia Butler’s sci-fi series Lilith’s Brood, which narrates the return of humans to Earth after having been “put to sleep” by aliens in order to stave off the planet’s destruction. The first to be awakened is an African American woman named Lilith who must decide the order in which to revive the remaining humans – bringing gender and ethno-racial relations to the forefront of her choices. As good as that series, or even better, is Butler’s Kindred, a novel about a an African American woman who, in 1976, is somehow transported through time to the antebellum period. As for me, I’m reading Gwen Ifill’s The Breakthrough: Politics in the Age of Obama and the Maisie Dobbs series by Jacqueline Winspear, which narrates the coming of age of a female detective in England after World War I.
Lois’s Legacy

By Katie Kuba

I remember how disconcerted I was when that e-mail arrived in my inbox. “You’ve done great work in less than a week on this, but it’s still a draft.”

The “this” to which Professor Lois Rudnick referred was my final project on which I had just spent more than ten hours of the last seven days editing. Following her advice and edits meticulously, I had cut more than thirty pages expounding upon which she thought I should expound upon and cut what she thought I should cut. And it was “still a draft”?! Though a felt annoyance at the time, now I am profoundly grateful for the Lois-style tough love that pushed me to write a much-improved project – one of which I am truly proud.

Throughout her accomplished career in higher education, Lois has deliberately urged her undergraduate and graduate students to move beyond their critical thinking comfort zones. Sadly, I’m one of the last of innumerable students she has challenged in the thirty-five years she has been teaching in the American Studies and English departments at UMass Boston. At the end of this academic year, she will retire and hopefully head to the sunny Southwest – preferably a community near Santa Fe, New Mexico.

During her career here, twenty-five years of which she spent as chair of the American Studies department, Lois has lived by the logic of record-holding distance runner, Steve Prefontaine, who is famous for saying, “To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift.” Never afraid to risk ruffling feathers, she has continually challenged students to do their best academic work. “I would be doing their abilities an injustice not to push them to their potential,” she tells me over the phone from her sun-laden front porch on a mid-afternoon in late-March. She is wholly unapologetic: “There is a need for faculty to let students know how capacious they are. It’s important not to just say because things have been difficult for you, I will go easy on you.”

Lois doesn’t “go easy” on herself either. This academic year has been a busy one for her. She recently completed a book that explores the life and work of the artist Henry Cady Wells from the 1920s through the early-1950s. Slated to appear in October of this year, Cady Wells and Southwestern Modernism will explore the painter’s ambivalence about his gay identity as well as his engagement with post-War War II atomic bomb testing in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Her book depicts Wells as a kind of “counter-O’Keefe,” who represents Southwestern lives and landscapes in a much bleaker manner than O’Keefe’s. An accompanying exhibit of Wells’s work will open up August 1, 2010 at both the University of New Mexico Art Museum in Albuquerque and Aaron Payne Fine Art in Santa Fe.

Wells, who struggled to come to terms with his sexuality, was born into a relatively wealthy family. He fits the mold of the kind of people Lois loves to write about: bourgeoisie Anglo-Saxon “ethnophiliacs” – people who are not connected to the eugenics or nativist movements of the early twentieth century but who are, in Lois’s word, “fascinated with ‘the other’ as a way of finding and/or reshaping themselves.” “It is a very fraught, very complicated way to live one’s life,” she explains. “This is about privileged people and in that way, I don’t write at the center of American Studies and I never have.”

However, she has worked tirelessly from the middle of American Studies when it comes to pedagogical practice. As someone who was primarily motivated to earn her Ph.D. from Brown University by her love of teaching, she does not privilege university-level pedagogy over elementary and secondary-levels. Rather, she sees relationships between elementary schools, secondary schools, community colleges and universities as mutually beneficial and essential to the flourishing of both public education and the field of American Studies. In an address to the American Studies Association’s K-16 Collaborative Committee last year, she argued that such collaborations are “one of the key critical sites where American Studies teacher-scholars can, as we say – too often rhetorically – intervene in opening and redefining our understanding of what it mean to live, act, be, and perform in the US...”

In 1993, Lois developed and organized “Focus on Teaching Day,” an ASA yearly conference with the goal of nurturing an ongoing and productive partnership between schoolteachers and university-level faculty. She pieced together and published a pioneering “National Guide to American Studies Resources in the Secondary Schools” in 1998 with the help of local school teachers. Her work didn’t stop there. Lois collaborated with professors Judith Smith and Rachel Rubin to create an American Studies course appropriate for high school classrooms and in 2006, they edited and published the American Identities textbook as a curriculum guide.

Continued on next page
**Student Awards**

**Undergraduate Awards**

Emma Marra is the winner of the American Studies Founder's Award, given to a graduating senior in American Studies who has done outstanding work in the major. Emma completed an exceptional Honor's thesis, titled “Learning Takes Two: Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs and Their Effectiveness for Latino/a English Language Learners,” in which she situated English language programs within a complex historical context; evaluated the scholarship on their effectiveness; and, most importantly, created her own case studies of three local elementary schools that have successfully implemented language programs in which all children learn both in Spanish and English.

Marjorie Narcisse and Amy Starnes will receive “Distinction in American Studies” and share the American Studies Book prize for the excellence of their work in the American Studies major.

Marjorie (Jolie) Narcisse has impressed the American Studies faculty with her passionate intellectual curiosity and her analytical acuity. A fully engaged member of the department, she served as a freshman seminar mentor, and was an active participant in our search for our new faculty hire.

Amy Starnes, while working and studying full-time, achieved the highest GPA of all graduating majors in her class, with a 4.0 in American Studies. Her professors describe her as a deeply engaged thinker and a graceful writer with an impressive talent for cultural analysis.

**Graduate Awards**

Riva Pearson is the winner of the Michael Lenz Award for non-traditional research for her final project on the performative self-portraiture of Asian American immigrant photographers which looks at the ways that Tseng Kwong Chi, Pipo Nguyen-duy, and Nikki S. Lee use their photography to re-imagine Asian American identities. Pearson’s essay combines astute readings of the photographs with thoughtful analysis of how these artists comment on the construction of race, ethnicity, and citizenship.

This award commemorates Michael Lenz, a gifted student and poet from Minnesota who began his Masters in 2000 and died in 2001. Lenz’s creativity was an inspiration and we are proud to give an award in his name to the student whose work best exemplifies unique and imaginative techniques in research.

American Studies Award for Academic Excellence goes to Katie Kuba for her outstanding work during her tenure at UMass and her final project “The Politics of Respectability and Intra-Racial Intimacy in Jessie Fauset’s There Is Confusion and Nella Larsen’s Quicksand” which studies the ways in which these two African American women writers responded to complex racial politics that impinged on the intra-racial class and sexual politics of the Black middle classes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Celine Nader has won the American Studies Award in Cultural History for her overall academic merit and her excellent final project “Myth, Medicine and Merriment: Maximo and Bartola, Mid-19th Century Othering, and the Curious Construction of Citizen-Subjects” exploring the cultural and political context for the exhibition of “human specimens” during the 1860s, focusing on the display of Maximo and Bartola, known as “the Last of the Aztecs.”

**More on Lois...**

These efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 1997, ASA rewarded Lois for her dedication to excellence in teaching and local curriculum development by naming her that year’s recipient of the Mary C. Turpie Award. More recently, she had the high honor of receiving the 2008 Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award – based largely on student testimonial – shared with biology professor, Brian White. Standing in front of the crowd while the chancellor read complimentary student comments about her “felt fantastic.” “There aren’t a lot of external confirmations of your success as a teacher, and it was wonderful to get that confirmation,” Lois recalls.

She’ll take that confirmation with her in her retirement while she hikes, bird watches and spends long overdue time with her granddaughter Hannah, who will turn 3 in June. She may even teach a seminar for the American Studies department at the University of New Mexico, chaired by Alex Lubin (1995 AMST MA from UMB). Lois will miss mentoring junior faculty and working closely with beloved colleagues and students.

Meanwhile, the fifth floor of Wheatley Hall just won’t be the same without her bubbling enthusiasm, overflowing terms of endearment (think “hon,” “babe” and “darling”) and contagious optimism.

**Liza Burbank Con’t...**

*What book suggestions do you have for summer reading?* Well, I’ve been knee-deep in research for a while so I actually haven’t been reading much but these are a few that jumped out at me as having been particularly fun or interesting: Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*; Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*; Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top*; Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era*; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*; Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. And, this is totally in a different vein – I just finished Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and am pretty sure it’s going to change my life. I feel like I’m kind of late to this party but am gonna be so about eating locally and seasonally from here on out.

**Newsletter Staff**

Issue Editor: Riva Pearson

Program Assistant: Shauna Manning

Faculty Editor: Judith Smith
We want to hear from you!

The American Studies Department newsletter comes out every spring with the purpose of creating links among faculty, students presently enrolled in the program, American Studies alumni, members of other American Studies programs, and members of related programs. Please share your news with our community. Let us know what you are doing by filling out the form below and mailing it to: American Studies Department, UMASS Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. Or you can email your news to: american.studies@umb.edu. We also welcome comments on how we can improve the newsletter.

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Address

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Phone

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American Studies Department
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393