Notes from the Chair of the American Studies, Professor Rachel Rubin

It’s been a busy and rewarding year for American Studies. In the fall, we welcomed Aaron Lecklider as a full-time tenure-track member of our department (after he’d taught here for several years part-time); he immediately filled in for me as acting chair while I was on leave during his first semester. This spring, we concluded a successful search for a new senior faculty member, and in the fall, we’ll be joined by Dr. Jeffrey Melnick, who comes to us from Babson College. A number of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates enjoyed the talk he gave on campus as part of the search: “Celebrating Arabs: American Productions of the Middle East After 9/11.” Professor Melnick received his PhD in American Civilization Harvard University in 1994; his books include 9-11 Culture: America Under Construction (2009); Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South (2000); and A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song (1999). He brings a specialization in the global circulation of American culture, the culture industries, and comparative ethnicity. During the upcoming Fall semester, he will be teaching the American Studies Department’s introductory courses at both the undergraduate (AMST 100: American Identities) and graduate (AMST 601: Introduction to American Studies) levels; Cont. page 3

Notes From Graduate Program Director, Professor Judith Smith

We welcomed a wonderful group of new students to the American Studies MA program. From outside of the US, we have Anastasia Karelina, a teacher of English and translator from Moscow, Russia, supported with a Fulbright grant; and Chiaki Ito, a student of American culture with a BA and MA in Communications from Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan. From out of state, we welcomed Shannon Gryntysz, an honors History major from SUNY New Paltz, NY; Lary Wallace, an American Studies major from University of Missouri at Kansas City and Granite State College, and a blogger about books and music; and David DiPietro, an American Studies and Psychology major from Roger Williams University in Providence, Rhode Island. From Massachusetts came Laurence Louie, a History major and Sociology minor from Rutgers, active there in the Asian American Leadership Cabinet for the Asian American Cultural Center and founder of an Asian American newspaper, Student Tongues, and in Boston, Internship Coordinator for the Chinese Youth initiative at the Chinese Progressive Association; Scott Janovitz, a recording studio owner/engineer (and music colleague of program alumna Joyce Linehan) with a BA from Providence College; and Emily Wandrei, Cont. page 3
Faculty Updates

Paul Atwood Along with teaching, Atwood published his book, War and Empire: The American Way of Life (Pluto Press, London, UK, 2010). A book party was held in his honor by the department. Congratulations Professor Atwood!

Philip Chassler, along with graduate student David DiPietro, has had the honor of inaugurating the department’s new course, AMST 211, American Dreams and Realities Part II, which covers American history and culture from the Civil War through the Great Depression. Meanwhile, he continues to participate in the Faculty Staff Union as a member of the Executive Board, the Grievance Committee, and the Non-TenureTrack teachers’ caucus. Chassler is also a member of the Massachusetts Teachers’ Association Candidate Recommendation Committee.

Robert Goff is taking an unpaid sabbatical and working on a biography of Alex Comfort, author of “The Joy of Sex” and many books on a variety of subjects, including anarchism, gerontology and medicine, as well as novels and books of poetry. He is now in London researching his papers at University College and interviewing people who knew him.

Aarón Lecklider published “Inventing the Egghead: The Paradoxes of Brainpower in Cold War American Culture” in the Journal of American Studies, as well as a review of Shane Vogel’s The Scene of Harlem Cabaret in the Committee on LGBT History Newsletter. He presented his paper “Shrieks, Outcries, and Fainting Boys: Intersections of Race and Homosexuality in Proletarian Literature of the 1930s” in a session titled “Queer (Be)longing: Sex, Race, and Radicalism in 20th-Century Literature on the Left” at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, November, 2009. Lecklider was also invited to present his paper “Gaydar in Hobohemia, Cher at City Hall: Political and Sexual Deviance in 20th Century American Culture” at “Carnal Knowledge: Sexuality in Religion, History, and Culture” at Boston University, April 2010. He is continuing to revise the manuscript, Brainpower: Intelligence in American Culture from Einstein to the Egghead; continuing research for second project on homosexuality and the left in the US from 1900-1960. He is also working on a co-edited volume titled Sexing the Left with Cheryl Higashida and Gary Holcomb.

Bonnie Miller is making progress in the publication of her book project, entitled From Liberation to Conquest: The Visual and Popular Cultures of the Spanish-American War of 1898, which is currently under formal editorial review. Coming out of her past work with the Center for the Improvement of Teaching, she published a piece in the November, 2009 issue of Perspectives, the magazine of the American Historical Association, that asked the question “Should Class Participation Be Graded?” Her article, “The Image-makers’ Arsenal in an Age of War and Empire, 1898-99: A Cartoon Essay, Featuring the Work of Charles Bartholomew (of the Minneapolis Journal) and Albert Wilbur Steele (of the Denver Post)” has been accepted by the Journal of American Studies and is forthcoming. She gave a talk at the New England American Studies Association conference in Lowell, Mass. in October, 2009, entitled “Connecting Americans to the Work of Empire: The Imperialist Debate in American Visual Culture, 1898.” In the spring of 2010, Miller taught, for the first time, her new undergraduate capstone, AMST 402L: American Visual Cultures, which is cross-listed in American Studies and Art.

Marisol Negrón published a review essay of the English translation of The Book of Salsa, one of most referenced books in Latin music, in CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies. She also completed an essay titled, “Whose ‘Latin’ Thing? The Spaces, Cultural Practices, and Discourses of the 1970s New York Salsa Boom,” which has been submitted for publication. In the fall she taught the graduate seminar of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality as well as an undergraduate course on Latinos in the U.S., which she taught again in the spring. During the spring she also taught Latino Border Cultures, which explores the various ways in which the idea of the “border” operates within Latino literary and cultural studies. Outside the classroom, Negrón participated on a panel at UMass Boston where faculty discussed the formation of Latino identities in the U.S. with students from Casa Latina, one of the Latino organizations campus. In addition, she organized a panel titled “Playing America’s Game: Manny Ramirez, Mentoring, and Baseball’s Latino Histories” that brought together Professors Jean Rhodes (UMass Boston), author of Becoming Manny: Inside the Life of Baseball’s Most Enigmatic Slugger, and Adrián Burgos (University of Illinois), author of Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line. Negrón also returned to Stanford University, where she received her doctorate, as part of a program to increase the representation of women and students of color in the academy.  

Cont. page 4
Notes from Chair of the American Studies Program Continued

in the spring, he’ll be teaching AMST 440: U.S. in Global Contexts and AMST 606: Studies in Popular Culture and Technology. We are very excited about adding his talents to our department’s offerings.

In addition to the talks that were part of the job search, American Studies participated in several intellectually stimulating events this year. In February, we organized a lecture (co-sponsored by Africana Studies and Art) on the African American painter Jacob Lawrence by Professor Patricia Hills from Boston University. The talk, titled “Jacob Lawrence’s Moral Compass,” was a standing-room-only event! American Studies also co-sponsored a talk this spring by artist Sheila Pepe, whose work Simple Drawing can be seen on the large wall in the Campus Center’s atrium, where it has been installed as part of UMB’s Arts on the Point sculpture park.

Dozens of department members and friends, together with folks from the Joiner Center and the wider UMass community, were delighted to come together in celebration of the publication of Paul Atwood’s book, War and Empire: The American Way of Life (Pluto Press, 2010). Instead of reading his own words from the book, Atwood gave a presentation in which he read the words of various historical figures, spanning the centuries from the first European presence to the present, whom he quoted in the book.

Finally, this academic year we introduced a new American Studies course, piloted by Phil Chassler, American Dreams/American Realities II: Men and Women in U.S. Society and Culture, 1860-1940 (AMST 211) was offered for the first time in the fall.

We wish everyone a summer that is both productive and enjoyable, as we continue to focus, during these tough economic times, on finding new ways to increase support for public higher education in Massachusetts, thereby sustaining (through that important work itself, as well as the budgetary results we hope for) our vision of American Studies at UMass Boston.

Graduate Director Notes Continued

a summa cum laude Anthropology major graduate of UMB. We are also pleased to welcome students entering the program on a part-time basis: Nicole Leete, a summa cum laude Journalism major/graduate of UMass Amherst who works in technology marketing; Matt Swiatlowski, an English major from UMass Amherst who works for Residential Life at Hampshire College; Brian Green, a legislative assistant to State Senator Steven A. Tolman, a former ESL teacher in Korea, and an Economics major from Boston College; and Melissa Siegal, a magna cum laude History major from Bridgewater State College and a high school history teacher in Norton, MA. What wide-ranging resources and interests our students bring from their diverse academic, community and working experiences!

This semester, I have the pleasure of working with the students in the writing seminar who have been presenting fascinating research as part of the process of completing their MA essays. Working with film, Annie Anderson is writing about black-cast Westerns in the late 1930s, Patrick Nanney is analyzing black-cast gangster films in the same period; Daniel Ferguson-Maltzman is critiquing the genre of James Bond films, drawing on Ian Flemings novels, produced between 1962 and 2008; Kurt Morris is exploring a series of “scare” films made by Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists during the 1970s; Jennifer Skinner is analyzing representations of motherhood, domesticity, and the pregnant body in dystopic films and romantic comedies made after 9/11; and Rachel Munyon is preparing a curriculum unit comparing representations of WWII combat in films made during WWII with those made during the Vietnam War era. Working with mass circulation magazines, Christine Gottshall is analyzing fiction and advice articles discussing housewives and their discontent between 1955 and 1960 published in Cosmopolitan, and Ann Terry is uncovering a broad-ranging set of conversations articulating black women’s different experiences and points of view as part of letters and articles published on the ostensible
Faculty Updates Continued...

Patricia Raub has helped form a new nonprofit organization called the Providence Community Library (PCL) that last year assumed the management of all nine neighborhood libraries in the city of Providence, libraries previously part of the Providence Public Library (PPL) system. PCL has succeeded in keeping all nine libraries open, despite PPL’s having threatened to close most of them last July. As Vice-President of the new library’s board, Patricia has been busy helping to get the new library organization up and running. She reflected on the new library’s experiences in “A Grassroots Solution to Library Closures,” a paper she co-presented in April at the New England Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

Rachel Rubin has become a weekly commentator on popular culture on WGBH’s “The Callie Crossley Show”; recent topics have included the New-Orleans set television series “Treme,” various new reality shows, the movie Hit Girl, and a wonderful mash-up of Lil’ Wayne’s song “Hustler Musik” with the theme song from The Office. In the fall, she delivered a paper, “Katrina, You Bitch: Singing the Flood,” at the American Studies Association’s annual meeting. That paper was drawn from a co-written essay, “We the People Under the Stairs: Musical Responses to Katrina.” Rubin’s co-edited essay collection, Radicalism in the South Since Reconstruction (Palgrave Macmillan) came out in its first paperback edition. She continued working on her current book project on the history of the American Renaissance festival.

Judy Smith gave a paper at ASA in Washington, DC in November on Harry Belafonte’s effort to take control over his performances and critique the mainstream variety shows that commonly employed black talent on television through producing three network spectaculars between 1959-1966, and a paper in April on Belafonte as a public intellectual at a Harvard conference on intellectual history and public intellectuals. She spent a week at the Library of Congress working with film and sound recordings related to her two on-going research projects: a study of Belafonte as a radical cultural producer, analyzing his work in music, television and film from 1951-1970, and a study of left-wing influences on Hollywood filmmaking envisioning multi-racial citizenship between 1947 and 1965.

Shirley Tang continues to serve as a faculty associate of the William Monroe Trotter Institute, through which her grant-funded collaborative research on new immigrants of color in metro Boston is based. Her most recent article from this project, “Diasporic Cultural Citizenship: How Cambodians Negotiate and Create Places and Identities in their Refugee Migration and Deportation Experiences,” appears in the Spring 2010 issue of The Trotter Review. Through the intercollegiate Asian American Studies Program, Tang’s interdisciplinary expertise in media literacy, digital media production, service learning pedagogy, and community health has contributed to several successful current grant-funded projects focusing on issues ranging from social media tools and college student civic engagement (Corporation for National & Community Service), immigrant community public health issues in the undergraduate curriculum (Association of American Colleges and Universities), and Cancer Behavior Measurement among Southeast Asian Americans (NIH). She is faculty advisor to the Khmer Cultural Association on campus, and a member of the Transnational, Cultural and Community Studies Committee at UMass Boston, which is charged with the development of this strategic research cluster, including the recommendation of new transdisciplinary research projects and academic programs. Among her external commitments, Shirley plays a leadership role in the Campus Women LEAD—a national initiative for women in higher education affiliated with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). She was recently interviewed by NPR-WBUR for the series “Invisible Communities, Part 3: Cambodian Gang Members Seek Redemption In Lowell” on Cambodian immigrants in Greater Boston.”

topic of interracial intimacy in *Ebony* and *Essence* between 1968-1972. Using manuscript collections and published sources, **Melanie Schmitt** is making a case for interpreting the eighteenth century Mohegan Indian teacher Samuel Occum as a conscious cultural intermediary committed to both sides of an unbridgeable divide between Indian and colonial society; **Andrew Polk** is exploring the black theology of Howard Thurman and James Cone, and **Jennifer Resmini** is foregrounding claims of history, memory, and citizenship in speeches at and accounts of 19th century African American Emancipation Day celebrations. **Ali White** is using television news footage and popular media coverage of Lynndie England to write about how the Abu Ghraib torture scandal was introduced to American news audiences as a media event, and **Sarah Atwood** is combining archival research in late 19th and early 20th century newspapers, reform association records and one act plays with contemporary ethnography to explore the changing cultural meanings of second-hand clothes as necessity and charity to vintage. It is wonderful and dizzying to see the amazing range of research projects, and even more so when we add in some other students finishing between last year and this one: **BethAnn Cornell**, exploring online mothering blogs as a source for writing about the conception of motherhood embedded in debates over infant male circumcision; **Shelley Stolitza**, analyzing changing conceptions of masculinity and resistance to domesticity in the films *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975); **Rosa Giorgio**, tracing the positioning of consumer pleasures in the book (1900) and film (1939) versions of *The Wizard of Oz*; **Matthew Giorgio** analyzing the construction and meanings of Italian national affiliation and Italian heritage in Italy on the eve of migration, in the process of settlement and acculturation in Buffalo, New York, and as parts of debates about Mussolini and WWII in the late 1930s and early 1940s; **Maggie Hunt**’s research on the Polish National Catholic Church in Lowell, MA in the twentieth century; **Dan Hudder**’s high school English curriculum about the literary construction of race and whiteness; **Jon Ifitkar**’s college curriculum on meanings of critical race theory in Asian American Studies.


Have a wonderful summer, American Studies students and colleagues, and mark your calendar for September 2, the Thursday before Labor Day, our fall reception at UMass 6-7:30 pm.

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**Update on retired Chair of American Studies, Lois Rudnick!**

Lois Rudnick is happily getting settled in a new house in Sante Fe, New Mexico. She is giving lectures, curating an art exhibit on the work of the New Mexico modernist Cady Wells; she may give a seminar in the fall in the American Studies Department of University of New Mexico, chaired by Associate Professor Alex Lubin (MA 1995).
New Faculty Hire, Professor Jeff Melnick, Reflects on American Studies, Research, and Plans for the Upcoming Year

I am so pleased to be joining the American Studies department at UMass Boston—with its roster of truly accomplished colleagues, and its energizing array of undergraduate majors and graduate students. After more than ten years teaching American Studies to business students (wonderful ones, but business students nonetheless) I expect it to feel quite wonderful to return “home” to an actual American Studies department. I say “home” because all of my education since high school has been organized around this field: in fact, I am one of the few practitioners of American Studies I know who was actually an American Studies major as an undergraduate. Since my initial discovery of the appeals of this interdisciplinary field when I was an undergraduate—and above all its openness to objects of study neglected in other fields, its consistent reinvention of its own theoretical frameworks—I have always been impressed by how scholars in American Studies ask such wonderfully surprising questions. I can remember with clarity sitting in a class as an undergraduate just enthralled by the lecture I was hearing on the architecture of Chicago’s skyscrapers and thinking “I didn’t even know that a lobby could have a story to tell.”

I suppose learning that lesson (that everything has a story to tell) has been the main framework for my research and teaching. The first stage of my scholarly life was taken up with exploring the underappreciated cultural history of Black-Jewish relations in the United States, which I did in two books (A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song and Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South). More recently I have been doing work in immigration and popular culture, and on the cultural effects of the 9/11 attacks. I have also been focusing on a kind of tall building that my undergraduate professor never got around to—in an ongoing study of the culture produced in around public housing projects. I am also in the very early stages of research for a cultural history of the Manson family.

This coming fall I will be teaching American Identities and the Introduction to American Studies in the graduate program; I am tremendously excited to take on these two crucial courses and to get to know the wide range of people who contribute to daily life at UMass. In coming years I hope to develop a set of courses—to supplement the nuanced and rich curriculum developed in the past decade or so by the fantastic teachers in this department—that push students to engage with contemporary history (as with the 9/11 culture course that I have been teaching at Babson), with the cultural realities of globalization, and with Boston itself (as with a course I taught last year called LGBT Boston).

American Studies Book Prize Recipients

Aniela Burke is the recipient of the Undergraduate Book Prize in American Studies. Aniela brought a quiet intensity and a powerful intellectual curiosity to her work in American Studies. She developed the ability to ask important questions in her research papers; she was especially adept at locating both primary sources and scholarly secondary sources to enable her to begin answering those questions. Burke was attentive to the rhetorical dimensions of a primary source, using vivid quotations from them to bring to life a position or concern. She delighted in the way American Studies approaches provided the tools to follow the clues from a given historical event that would enable her to place it in historical context and to speculate on its larger significances. She was consistently an insightful and well-prepared contributing member of the classroom community.

Burke’s excellent written work in American Studies included a family history that blended Romanian and family history, and a research paper on the early 20th century Triangle shirtwaist fire, exploring what transpired, the particular narrative about the strike and the strikers that circulated in the coverage in the mainstream press, and the openings following the tragedy for new kinds of alliances in demanding changes in regulation and organization of New York’s garment industry.

Graduate student Melanie Schmitt is the recipient of the American Studies Award for Academic Excellence. Her ambitious MA essay, “Samson Occum: Representations and Challenges of Hybridity for a Traveling Mohegan Evangelist in America and England” is a study of an for a Traveling Mohegan Evangelist in America and England” is a study of an eighteenth century Indian who lived and supported himself as a Mohegan and as a Christian. Occum’s education, conversion, and missionary travels as a part of the Great Awakening in New England and England made him a kind of literary critic, writing an autobiography not as a record of his spiritual progression but in order to challenge “many miss representations and gross Mistakes” in accounts by “Gentlemen” who had written about him (1768). Observing drinking and cursing on the Lord’s day in New York led Occum to reverse language belittling Indians, describing Sabbath breakers as “English Heathen” even “worse” than “ye Savage heathens of the wilderness” (1761) Occum’s education,
Rachael Wilcox Joins the Office Staff

In February, Rachael Wilcox joined the American Studies & Women’s Studies Departments as a part time staff member in the office. Rachael works Monday mornings and all day on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. This half time benefited union position was bargained by the Classified Staff Union to grant release time to the union president (currently Shauna Lee Manning, the AMST/WOST administrative assistant).

Rachael is a full time student at the Boston Graduate School for Psychoanalysis and intends to continue her studies for a Ph.D. after earning her LMHC (Licensed Mental Health Counselor) to be a psycho-dynamic psychotherapist. Her undergraduate degree is in Fine Art with a focus in Art History. She is a practicing artist in ceramic pottery and sculpture.

Rachael has worked on campus for over a year in the Center for Rebuilding Sustainable Communities After Disaster before joining American Studies and Women’s Studies. She is originally from upstate New York and has lived in Massachusetts for nine years.

Awards Continued

Christian conversion, and missionary successes gave him cultural capital, but he remained economically and socially vulnerable in a world ruled by the economic exploitation and social and racial hierarchies embedded in British colonialism. Relying on published and archival sources, Schmitt argues for an interpretation of Occum as a conscious cultural intermediary committed to both sides of an unbridgeable divide between Indian and colonial society.

Ann Terry was awarded the Michael Lenz Award for non-traditional research for her final project, “‘Non-Sisters’ and ‘Soul Brothers’: African American Women Letter Writers, the Discourses of Interracial Intimacy, and the Politics of Sex and Identity in Ebony and Essence, 1968-1972.” Terry imaginatively re-read a set of letters, addressed to the editor of these magazines, which had been previously understood simply as expressing black women’s objections to interracial relationships in general. Terry read these letters as demonstrating black women’s effort to articulate a gendered perspective distinct from that of black men or white women, on a broad set of issues, using the “letters to the editor” column as a public forum where they could comment on articles and other readers’ responses. Drawing on extensive research into prior discussions of interracial intimacy in Ebony, Terry argues that between 1968-1972, black women were particularly vocal in using letter-writing as an opportunity to defend themselves from representations of black women as domineering and from the mother-blaming rhetoric circulated by the Moynihan report, as an attempt to destabilize the privilege of white beauty norms, and as an opening with which to frame a critique of what they saw as a renewal of patriarchy in some Black Power formulations, and an exclusion of black women’s lived experiences in the demands of Women’s Liberation.

This award commemorates Michael Lenz, a gifted 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 exemplifies particularly imaginative techniques in research.

Saying Goodbye to Jolene

Jolene Schmitz, our undergraduate workstudy office assistant for the past three years, is graduating with her B.A. this June. Jolene finally majored in Anthropology with a minor in Women’s Studies, after much resistance to being pinned down to a single discipline. Her passions for ancient civilizations, religion, spirituality, philosophy, and the rights and experiences of marginalized populations finally found a home in Anthropology.

After finals week, Jolene will be returning to Montana. It will be hard to leave her friends and life in metropolitan Boston, but her real home is in the wilderness of Montana, where she hopes to use her education and experiences on the East Coast to pursue meaningful work helping others find their voices and passions. Jolene also wants to help her fellow Montanans become comfortable with the diversity many of us in Boston take for granted. She will be taking her Boston born cat, Connor, with her out west.

Thank you, Jolene, for all of your help in the office and your cheerfulness and enthusiasm. We will miss you very much and wish you the best in your next phase of life!
MA Alumni Updates

Beth Harrington (MA 1980s) has recently completed a new documentary for Oregon public television, *Kam Wah Chung*, featuring the history of a Chinese general store, and the Chinese herbal doctor and businessman who opened it. Chheub Bun Heng (AMST graduate courses in the 1990s) is the Immigrant and Refugee Health Manager at Massachusetts Asian and Pacific Islanders for Health, a non-profit organization focusing on HIV and sexuality awareness and community research. Derrek Shulman (MA 1996), director of the Anti-Defamation League New England, took the lead in building a broad coalition in support of statewide anti-bullying legislation, a version of which was recently passed by the Massachusetts House and Senate. Sonia Melo De Jesus (MA 2002) successfully defended her dissertation, “What’s Carmen Miranda’s Ghost Doing in Space Station Three?: The Brazilian Bombshell in Two Sci-Fi/Fantasy Short Stories,” for the PhD in Comparative Literature from the Universidade Federal Fluminense in Niteroi, Brazil, in September, 2009. Nicole Currier (MA 2002) recently took a new job as Dean of Humanities at Quinsigamond Community College. Beth Sternheimer (MA 2004), working in Chicago as a producer and researcher for documentary films, is the co-ordinating producer for a new documentary being made, *Muhammad Ali: The Struggle To Be Free*, which explores Ali’s political struggles outside the ring and his meaning as an international symbol of resistance. Molly Geidel (MA 2005), PhD candidate in American Studies at Boston University, recently returned from a grant supported research year in LaPaz, Bolivia, had an article accepted for publication in *American Quarterly*: “Sowing Death in Our Women’s Wombs”: Modernization and Indigenous Nationalism in the 1960s Peace Corps and Jorge Sanjinés’ Blood of the Condor (Yawar Mallku).” Yuya Kiuchi (MA 2006) received a PhD in American Studies at Michigan State University 2009, is working at Michigan State as an assistant professor, and serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Popular Culture*. Brian Comfort (MA 2007) PhD candidate in history at U Mass Amherst where he is doing fields in 19th and 20th century cultural history with Heather Cox and Chris Appy, as well as a 3rd film in film studies, has published a version of his final project at UMass Boston on *Twin Peaks* and Eccentricity in a peer reviewed Internet journal called *Gender Forum*. Taylor Bingle (MA 2009) was recently offered a position teaching US History at Punahou Academy in Hawai’i. Bingle is excited to incorporate his background in American Studies into the US History curriculum. Rebecca Lewis (MA 2009) is moving from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles to begin her first years as a PhD candidate at UC Irvine. Lewis was the recipient of the prestigious Regent’s Fellowship offered to outstanding incoming PhD students. Riva Pearson (MA 2009) has been teaching ESL in a college preparation program for foreign students since September. She has also just completed her first semester teaching Communication Studies at UMass Boston. She lives happily with her two cats in Savin Hill, near many other American Studies graduates and current students. Celine Nader (MA 2009) is living and working in Plasencia, Spain as an emissary, and interpreter of U.S. American culture and language. She will be returning to the inspiring world of job-searching in Boston come June. Valeria Jiménez (MA 2009) is in her first year of the PhD program in History at Northwestern University and is working in both the U.S. and Latin American fields. Currently, she is working on a project that examines how Mexican nationalism and U.S. American exceptionalism intersected in the 1933 Detroit Industry mural controversy. Colleen Flannery (MA 2009) will begin next fall as a student at the Divinity School at Harvard University. She hopes the pursue pastoral counseling and is hoping to combine it with study of the history of religion and psychology. Sarah Hewitt (MA 2009) is teaching history at Atlantic Union College (her alma mater).
Report on the transition to a PhD program according to Valeria Jiménez (MA 3009), interviewed by MA student Kurt Morris

KM: What schools did you apply to and why did you choose Northwestern?

VJ: I applied to seven schools, UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, University of New Mexico, Yale, USC, Northwestern, and UC Riverside. I was accepted to 5 of those schools but was really torn between 3 of them. In the end, I chose Northwestern because I would have two very attentive advisors there and that really mattered to me, especially after being at UMass Boston. The Latina/o and Latin American History fields are small at Northwestern which means that my advisors don’t have too many students and are much more accessible to me. That has proven to be incredibly important in my first year. Northwestern also had the best funding package and the cost of living in Chicago is relatively affordable.

KM: What have been some of the surprises (either good or bad) in your first year in the PhD program?

VJ: I think what has been the greatest surprise has been realizing just how well the American Studies graduate program at UMass Boston prepared me for the rigor of a PhD program. I often feel like I have an advantage over some of the other students in my cohort (both those that came from undergraduate programs and those with an M.A.). A less exciting surprise has been the quarter system. Things feel incredibly rushed and sometimes it feels like you don’t have time to absorb any of the material you’re reading.

KM: What has been the toughest adjustment you’ve had to make?

VJ: I think the toughest adjustment for me has been attending a private school for the first time in my life. There’s a very different culture on my campus and in my cohort. People tend to be much more competitive with one another which is something I didn’t experience as an undergraduate or at UMass Boston.

KM: What are some of the pluses and minuses of going straight into a PhD program from the masters program?

VJ: I think one of the “minuses” of going straight into a PhD program is that you can easily feel “burned out.” After two years of coursework, another two years of coursework can be overwhelming. However, some programs do give you credit for certain requirements if you come in with an M.A. It’s something to definitely consider when looking into PhD programs. One of the “pluses” is that you’re still familiar with the scholarship and the discussions being had in the field. You’re familiar with the (sometimes) grueling pace of graduate school and the adjustment isn’t as difficult.

KM: Are you doing any teaching? If so, what has that been like?

VJ: We don’t teach until our second year. I’ll keep you posted.

Dear American Studies Alumni, As you know, we are all facing tough times and budget cuts, which will mean less money for the kinds of activities that enhance the intellectual life and social community for our students. Please consider designating your UMB alumni donations to the American Studies department--you can specify the Department or the Graduate Program if you want to. And for those of you who do support us in this way, we are really touched by and thankful for your contributions!
Why American Studies? By Amy Starnes (BA 2009)

When I came to UMass Boston, I didn’t know there was such a thing as American Studies. I was pursuing an English degree when I took a 100 level American Studies class on popular culture that sounded interesting and exciting. During that class, I realized that American Studies was the direction I wanted my education to move in. I felt like someone was filling in the blanks and giving me the back story on my own culture. I eagerly took classes in history, music, literature, film, gender studies, and labor history. I loved the interdisciplinary approach to learning that the American Studies department embraced. I also loved the professors- brilliant, funny, innovative, and compassionate role models.

At the risk of sounding clichéd, I felt myself grow and change into a better person during my time in the American Studies department, one more cognizant of the culture I lived in, one more compassionate and better informed. I feel like my priorities have changed as a result of my experiences on American Studies.

Currently, I work in healthcare project management and am involved with animal rescue organizations. I find a deep sense of commitment to my community and to making a difference wherever I can. My time in the American Studies department at UMass Boston was truly one of the most influential and positive experiences of my life, and I am so very thankful for the experience.

American Studies Students Getting Involved

AIDS WALK BOSTON: A Walk Against AIDS and Apathy
By Daniel Ferguson-Maltzman

Eleven years ago in the summer of 1999 I participated in AIDS Walk Boston and have done so again almost every year since. I’m not sure what made me do it in the first place but it is something I feel compelled to do again and again every year.

HIV/AIDS isn’t really something that is discussed as much today as it was in the early 90s, where the topic seemed to be constantly addressed on TV talk shows, was the subject of soap opera plots and after school specials. It’s as though HIV/AIDS has been forgotten—or at least put on the back-burner. Unfortunately, however, HIV/AIDS is still very much an epidemic. According to YouthAIDS.org, world-wide, 33.2 million people are currently infected with HIV or AIDS, five becoming infected every minute and 5,700 die every day. In the United States one million people are currently living with HIV/AIDS with 40,000 new infections each year. While in industrialized countries with proper care HIV/AIDS treatments have no doubt greatly improved over the years due to advancements in medications, living with the disease is no picnic.

It’s easy to look at HIV/AIDS and feel totally hopeless. If you do not personally know anyone who is infected you may see HIV/AIDS in the abstract, like the black plague. Maybe you care about people being infected but that it’s out of your control, that there’s nothing you can do about it—you feel apathy.

In the early 1970s John Lennon, commenting on the failure of the 60s youth culture to make much impact, said “apathy isn’t it. We can do something. Okay, so Flower Power didn’t work – so what? We start again.” So if you are feeling apathetic, that activism in general is stupid and the whole world is going down the crapper—think again, there are things you can do, and do right now. You can start by signing up and walking this year. The money that you will raise is, according to the AIDS Walk Boston website, “the largest single source of funds for AIDS Action Committee” and the donations that you will raise will do a number of things including (1) providing free, confidential services to low income individuals (2), offer housing to people with HIV/AIDS (3), will help pay for the administration of tests and HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C education (4), will fund hotlines (5), will provide counseling and legal services and (6) will provide people with rides to health clinics.
American Studies Welcomes Guest Lecturer, Professor Patricia Hills, to Campus

It was with great pleasure that the American Studies Department, in collaboration with Africana Studies, the Art Department, and the William Monroe Trotter Institute, hosted Professor Patricia Hills as a guest lecturer on February 3, 2010. Prof. Hills, one time curator of the Whitney Museum in New York and current professor of Art History at Boston University, presented on her recently published work, *Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence.*

The lecture, entitled “Jacob Lawrence’s Moral Compass,” included excerpts from her new book with an array of slide images of Jacob Lawrence’s work. Jacob Lawrence exhibited the “Democratic spirit of the 1930s” stated Professor Hills, as she proceeded to lecture extensively about his political engagement in the 1930s and how his political consciousness helped shape his paintings, but did not “eclipse his artistic concerns.”

A packed room, resulting in standing room only, was filled with undergraduates, grad students, and professors alike, as Professor Hills fielded questions about Lawrence’s relationships with other prominent black artists, his political alliances, and the affect violence, particularly lynching, had on his work. This was a thought provoking and memorable lecture that married Lawrence’s ground-breaking work as an artist with his personal life.

Many thanks to all who made this event a wonderful success, particularly Professor Aaron Lecklider for spearheading the event and coordinating with Prof. Hills. Also special thanks to Shauna Manning, office manager for the American Studies Department, for arranging accommodations and refreshments.

Reflections on the American Studies Association’s Annual Meeting
By Annie Anderson

This past November, I attended the American Studies Association’s annual meeting in Washington, DC. Nearly every moment of the four-day conference was jam-packed with exciting panels, roundtables, and research, producing an embarrassment of intellectual riches. I felt overwhelmed—in a good way—and truly thrilled to be a part of the field, privy to so many stimulating conversations. With an average of 15–20 panels and events per session, the meeting and its theme of “Practices of Citizenship, Sustainability, and Belonging” provided endless opportunities for hearing all kinds of American Studies voices and engaging in rich dialogue with colleagues both familiar and freshly acquainted. Indeed, the abundance of opportunities rendered me a bit indecisive; how to decide which panel to attend when so many sounded so compelling? Seeing Lisa Lowe moderate a panel on race, necropolitics, and disability meant missing Lisa Duggan chair a mock job interview workshop for graduate students. Similarly, attending the panel “Performing Indian Identities” meant missing the “We Need the Funk? Folklore, Fiction, and Humor” panel.

The academic excitement permeated the evening receptions and the morning coffee breaks, and asserted itself in post-panel discussions that often extended beyond the allotted time and spilled into the conference hotel hallways. UMass Boston’s American Studies program represented itself very well, with Professors Rachel Rubin, Aaron Lecklider, and Judy Smith presenting their respective research at well-attended panels. “Race, Music, and Performance in the Civil Rights Era,” a particularly lively panel (and a conference highlight for me) that featured Professor Smith, also included Yale’s Matthew Frye Jacobson and Princeton’s Daphne Brooks. Professor Smith’s presentation on Harry Belafonte’s network musical spectacles joined with Jacobson’s discussion of the singer Odetta and leftist coffeehouse culture, and Brooks’ lecture on Eartha Kitt’s Afrocosmopolitanism. Having read and enjoyed Jacobson’s Whiteness of a Different Color in our Intro to American Studies class, it was a treat to see him “live” and hear him present research on a very different topic. The full-capacity crowd revealed in all three presenters’ work, got a particular kick out of Brooks’ superb imitation of Eartha Kitt’s tantalizing speaking voice, and participated in a lively question-and-answer session following the panelists’ papers.

Jacobson was just one of many scholars at the ASA conference whose work is included in UMass Boston American Studies syllabi. By meeting’s end, I had passed in the conference hallways—their “celebrity” remaining yet intact—the likes of Natasha Zaretsky, Rachel Buff, Shelley Streeby, Laura Briggs, and others whose books I have read in various classes during my two-year tenure at UMass Boston.

Another highlight from my trip to DC was spending time at the Library of Congress’s Motion Picture and Television Reading Room, watching films from as early as the 1890s as part of my final project research. I viewed about 20 short films and one feature-length film. Working alongside other researchers in the darkened room, threading each film through the vintage reel machines, I engaged with the exhilarating possibilities of primary research, the practice of engaging with American history and culture a pleasing compliment to all the listening and absorbing I had done over the course of the weekend.

Upcoming Conferences
New England Popular Culture Association Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Boston, Mass. – October 23, 2010
The 2010 Mid-Atlantic Popular American Culture Association conference will be from October 28, 2010 to October 31, 2010 at The Crowne Plaza Hotel 901 North Fairfax Alexandria, VA 22314
American Historical Association 125th Annual Meeting
The American Studies Roundtable, the organization maintained by American Studies graduate students at UMass, has several people to thank for helping coordinate events this year. Many thanks to Professors Philip Chassler and Bonnie Miller for participating in a Q & A for graduate students on their experiences as doctoral students. Prof. Chassler and Prof. Miller offered honest answers and provoked some intriguing questions about the realities of applying for and earning a PhD.

We would like to recognize Colleen Flannery, class of 2009, for her help in implementing the American Studies Graduate Student Lending Library, located in the AMST/WOST 5th Floor conference room.

Thanks are due to graduate students Annie Anderson and Kurt Morris for hosting a wonderful party for graduate students off campus.

Special thanks to Shauna Manning for helping to coordinate funds for this gathering and being supportive all year!

Roundtable News

Graduate students Shannon Gryntysz and Anastasia Karelina
Graduate student Laurence Louie prepares for class

Graduate Student Awards, Conference Trips, and Presentations

Annie Anderson and Rachel Munyon traveled to Washington DC for the annual American Studies Association national conference.

Annie Anderson presented her paper, “Playing Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” at the Boston University Graduate Student American Political History Conference.

Beth Anne Cook-Cornell presented the rough draft of her MA Final Project, entitled “Writing the Rules for Mothering: The Construction of Motherhood through Online Debates Over Male Infant Circumcision,” at the Northeast Popular Culture Association’s meeting in Queens, New York.

Kurt Morris presented his paper, “Exploring The Place of Christian Scare Films in the Horror Genre,” at the Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association’s 2009 meeting and at the National Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association’s 2010 meeting, for which he received one of thirty travel grants. He also presented a paper, entitled “A New Look At The End Times: Christian Scare Films of the 1970s,” at the 2009 meetings of the Northeast Popular Culture Association and the Rocky Mountain Interdisciplinary History Conference at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Jen Skinner’s paper, “Renewing “Republican Motherhood”: The Legacy of 9/11 Culture in Contemporary Visual Media,” was accepted to the New York Metro American Studies Association annual meeting. Unfortunately, she was unable to attend.
Final Project Abstracts

**Shelley Stolitza (MA Fall 2009)**
“Reconstructing Masculine Identity in the Reform Institution: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975)”

My final project explores the complex role of the male anti-hero in film during the 1960s and 1970s, decades laden with social and civil transformations. Using *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) and *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) as cultural texts, I examine how these films engaged with concerns over new gender hierarchies and definitions of manhood that accompanied the containment culture of the 1950s. The essay discusses how the restrictive rhetoric of the nuclear family during this decade often made it difficult for men to navigate between imagined ideals of manhood and their ability to live out those ideals. *Cool Hand Luke* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* depicted images of men working through apparent attacks on their masculine authority and revealed the many social anxieties men experienced in the private and public spheres. My project highlights three concerns for the films’ rebellious outsiders, including anxieties over domestic roles, male identity, and social authority. I demonstrate how these films use the metaphor of institutionalization to critique the encroachment on individual male identity by overarching authority. I also conclude that these films depict a use of homosocial relationships with other men, as well as contempt for women, to show efforts to maintain male dignity, affirm a sense of personal success, and resist a label of “failure” by conventional standards.

**Rosa de la Cruz Giorgio (MA 2010)**
“The Wonderful Wizard of Awe: A Historical Journey through Oz and Consumer Culture, 1900-1939.”

This paper discusses the underlying subliminal messages of consumer culture that were produced in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* book and film throughout the period of 1900 to 1939. The paper delves into the life of author L. Frank Baum and his personal contributions to the culture of consumption as a theosophist, actor, salesman and window-trimmer. As the first American fairy tale, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* captures the essence of consumerism as goods and commodities are portrayed in the Baum and MGM classic. In the beloved children’s novel, Dorothy is distressed with being in the strange place called Oz, yet finds comfort within her sparkly, new silver (in book)/ruby-red (in film) slippers. This paper examines how the film *The Wizard of Oz* attempts to promote sentimental value to consumer culture through the theme of “there’s no place like home.” I argue that the book and film both aimed to baptize future generations into this belief that within goods and services lay the key to happiness.

Student Conferences Continued From Page 12

**Shelley Stolitza** will present at the 2010 Australia and New Zealand American Studies Association Conference (ANZASA) at the University of Adelaide in July. She will present a portion of her master’s thesis, entitled “Reconstructing Masculine Identity in the Reform Institution: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975),” on a panel called “Screen Studies: Melodrama and Fractured Masculinities.”


**Alison White** presented her paper, “A Paradoxical Perspective to a Progressive Movement: Political Images from Men’s Support of the Fight for Women’s Suffrage,” at the Rocky Mountain Interdisciplinary Historical Conference. She also attended the”Materials of Persuasion, Graduate Student Symposium” at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in Decorative Arts, Design and Culture in NYC.
Reflections on New Spring Course with Prof. Philip Chassler

This semester I had the honor of inaugurating AMST 211, American Dreams/American Realities II: 1860-1940. The follow-up to American Dreams/Realities I, this course covers American history, society, and culture from the Civil War through the Great Depression. To ponder the sometimes clashing ideas about America, we examined history, literature, and music. We read a fascinating book that traces the story of the well-known song “John Henry,” and listened to old and new versions of this enduring tune. We listened to early jazz and blues. We studied the textbook Who Built America Volume 2, which details the role of working people and social movements in modern USA history--this book features photos, drawings, paintings, cartoons, poems, song lyrics and other expressions of our popular culture. We analyzed poems by Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg, essays by Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford. Perhaps the highlight of the course were weekly reading groups of 3 to 5 students which each read a novel from among the choices: Willa Cather’s O Pioneers!, Erskine Caldwell’s Tobacco Road, and William Attaway’s Blood on the Forge. Their lively discussions made for noisy, freewheeling, and fun classes. I am looking forward to teaching it again this fall.

I want to thank recently retired, department chair Lois Rudnick who dreamed of this course, and Patricia Raub its principal designer who helped make it a reality. Thanks, too, to graduate assistant David DiPietro whose enthusiasm, contributions, and criticisms helped make this first class go.

AMST Major Shares Delicious Findings of his Independent Study

We would like to thank undergraduate Michael Boulos (BA 2010) for sharing his knowledge and expertise of New Orleans’ cuisine at the graduate students’ last class reception. Michael wrote his final undergraduate project on New Orleans’ food and culture. He offered a wonderful array of traditional dishes, like gumbo, red beans and rice, and shrimp with homemade remoulade sauces. Thank you, Michael, and congratulations on graduating!

Michael Boulos shows off his cooking skills. Graduate students Patrick Nanney and Christine Gottshall enjoy the food and reception.

Newsletter Staff

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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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