

# THE AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALIST

WILLIAM AND MARY AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATE PROGRAM NEWSLETTER VL. 4 Spring 2013

## HIGHLIGHTS IN AMERICAN STUDIES AT W&M

NABEEL SIDDIQUI

We have had a great number of our students present not only at the William and Mary Graduate Research Symposium but also at conferences throughout the academic world. Some of our graduate students have also published recently. We want to make sure that we acknowledge the work that they have done to make the community proud::

- **James Padilioni, Jr.** presented his first brown bag at the American Studies program titled "'She's Got her Own': The Political Economy of Billie Holiday." He later presented the same paper at the Association for Private Enterprise Education Conference.
- **David Pratt's** essay "Squidbillies and White Trash Stereotypes in the Corporate Postmodern South" was published in *Appalachian Journal*.
- **Meghan Bryant** presented her paper "What Shall the Harvest Be?: Racialized Representations in Cream of

Wheat Advertisements, 1900-1925" at the Eastern American Studies Conference (March 2013).

- **Lita Tirak** won the graduate student prize at the North East Popular Culture/American Culture Conference.
- We had great representation at the William and Mary Graduate Research Symposium. Our own **Alexandra Méav Jerome** served as the Program Chair. **Sarah Stanford-McIntyre** won the Market Access International, Inc. Award for Excellence in Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences. **Kathryn Bennett** also won an Honorable Mention Award. Finally, we had presentations by **Sarah Stanford-McIntyre, Katherine Previti, Stephanie Maguire, Jenna Simpson, Kathryn Bennett, Alexandra Méav Jerome, Amanda Stuckey, Kevin Kosanovich, Frank Fucile, and Shuting Zeng.**

## FOURTH ISSUE

The American Studies Graduate Student Organization (ASGSO) welcomes you to the fourth version of *The American Exceptionalist*. The newsletter presents student perspectives on program news to keep alumni informed, current students involved, and prospective students interested in our program. We hope you enjoy this issue and we welcome your feedback.

Thank you for reading.

Nabeel Siddiqui  
ASGSO Vice President  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

AMST MACABRE CLASS  
 SKYPED WITH STEVE  
 HODEL, SON OF THE  
 BLACK DAHLIA  
 MURDERER  
 LITA TIRAK

This semester I taught *The Macabre in American Visual and Material Culture, 1865-1965*. In this course, we used art history, cinema, photography, and material objects to explore the visibility and the invisibility of death in America between two “wars” over civil rights and two assassinated presidents. The macabre, as we defined it for this course, is mediated death—in other words, it includes visualizations of imagined and actual deaths captured through paint, drawing, sculpture, or the camera.

A key topic of the course was the Black Dahlia murder: a case that reveals complex relationships among the Hollywood industry, Surrealist art, corruption in the Los Angeles Police Department, and multiple cover-ups involving all three circles. I assigned my students to read *The Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder* by Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss (2006). This book, written with art-historical emphasis, argues that the parlor game of surrealist artists—the “exquisite corpse”—inspired the bizarre killing of Elizabeth Short (newspapers referred to her as the Black Dahlia). *The*

*Exquisite Corpse* is an incredibly disturbing book, not just because it contains gruesome crime scene photos but also because it argues that the answer to the unsolved case was always in plain sight—in the works of Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and William Copley. One of my students told me she hyperventilated while reading it and another became very angry that the authors aestheticized a young woman’s murder.

Nelson and Bayliss’s book builds upon the arguments made in Steve Hodel’s book *The Black Dahlia Avenger* (2001). A former LAPD, Hodel purports that his deceased father, George Hodel, brutally tortured, killed, and mutilated Short in 1947 to make a surrealist-art masterpiece using a real body. Hodel initiated the investigation into his father’s life based upon some photographs of women he found in his father’s photo-album. Although he later discovered that these photographs were not of Short, Hodel’s research into his family’s dark past eventually convinced 21<sup>st</sup> century authorities to open the sealed files on the case and found that his father was indeed the prime suspect and he even half-admitted to the crime on police surveillance tapes. The District Attorney of Los Angeles and the living policemen who covered the case in the 1940s now believe that Steve Hodel solved the murder. I also assigned about twenty pages (all reproductions of primary sources) from Hodel’s *Black Dahlia Avenger* and *Black Dahlia*

*Avenger II* (2012), which conveyed the mind of his father as an aesthete serial killer.

On March 28, Steve Hodel Skyped my class from his home in Los Angeles. He explained that my students could ask him anything they wanted, nothing was off-bounds. First the students wanted him to recount his father’s education and familial history. Then they asked him about the cryptic signatures and metaphors his father and the surrealists often employed their writings and art. One important question they wanted to know is how he felt about implicating his own father to such vile acts. Hodel replied that he continues to reconcile the uncanniness of it; he loves the familiar man who gave him the flesh and blood and who saved many lives as a medical doctor, but that he loathes the violent sadistic monster—the “Mr. Hyde.” His perspective provided the students with a nuanced understanding of the killer, and the ideologies and artistic methods that fashioned the “exquisite corpse” of Elizabeth Short.

Our study of this case is timely as well, since in the last few months a cadaver dog recently detected the scent of human decomposition in the former Hodel home on Franklin Avenue—known as the Sowden House designed by Lloyd Wright. Steve Hodel accompanied the dog and collected soil samples which are currently under lab analysis.

## GREY'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE EXPERIENCE

JAMES PADILIONI, JR.

The year was 1967. *Bonanza* ruled the airwaves while *Gilligan's Island* signed off with the *Minnow* crew stranded from the longest three-hour tour ever. Israel waged the quick but intense Six-Day War, while the slow nightmare that was Vietnam further ensnared the United States, which incidentally added the 25th Amendment to its Constitution this year, clarifying presidential succession (a topic unfortunately pertinent at the time). In the middle of these happenings, our own Grey Gundaker, a rising high school senior, found herself in England on foreign exchange, and little did she know then that she would participate in rock and roll history legend.

That summer, Grey attended a Jimi Hendrix Experience concert at The Cave in Nottingham, at a time that the Experience was still relatively unknown in both Jimi and Grey's native America. Having only arrived in England in the fall of '66, Jimi quickly formed a "power trio" in the vein of Cream with bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell, and the Experience would go on to record three albums that *Rolling Stone* placed in the Top 100 Greatest Albums of All Time - *Are You Experienced* (1967), *Axis: Bold as Love* (1967) and *Electric Ladyland* (1968) - #s 15, 82, and 54 respectively.

And as for that heady night at The Cave, what does Grey remember? "The music was loud..." Undoubtedly it was, as it always should be.

## AMERICAN STUDIES

### LECTURE SERIES:

KYLA WAZANA

TOMPKINS

SARAH STANFORD-  
MCINTYRE

On March 14, 2013 the Program was host to Professor Kyla Wazana Tompkins as part of the American Studies Lecture Series. An associate professor of English and Gender and Women's Studies at Pomona College in California, Tompkins gave a talk titled "'Sweet! Sweet!/Come, Come and Eat/Dear Little Girls/With Yellow Curly': Race and the Queer History of Eating in the Nineteenth Century." Her talk explored the ways in which images of eating and being eaten were deeply connected to the politics of race and gender in the nineteenth century. In particular, she examined *The Candy Country* by Louisa May Alcott and racist images of the non-white body in early advertising cards.

During her visit, Tompkins also led an informal round-table discussion with graduate students, exploring the process of graduate student professionalization and offering real-world tips for how students can become more involved in the process of presenting, networking, and

publishing. Tompkins stressed the importance of genuine enthusiasm and interest when networking. Also, remarking that the best thing students can do is "show up and do the work," Tompkins instructed students to embrace editing, committee work, and volunteer opportunities as important professional stepping-stones.

Kyla Wazana Tompkins earned her doctorate at Stanford University in Modern Thought and Literature in 2004. She is the recipient of fellowships and funding from the Charles Warren Center for American History at Harvard University, the Mellon Foundation, the FEH, and the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation. She has also been a visiting scholar and dissertation fellow at the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University. Her book, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century* was published in 2012 by NYU Press and she is currently co-editor of an upcoming issue of GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Quarterly entitled *On the Visceral*. Her writing has appeared in *Callaloo*, *Gatromonica*, and the *Journal of Food Culture and Society* and is forthcoming in the *Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Literature*, J19 and in the collection *On Moving Ground* edited by Dana Luciano and Ivy Wilson. We will be on the lookout for her second book entitled *So Moved: Time, Form, Gesture*.

# WHISKEY & POP CULTURE TRIVIA: ASGSO'S SOCIAL EVENTS

JANINE YORIMOTO

Shortly after the close of last semester, ASGSO hosted our annual Holiday Party, this year at James Padilioni's beautiful home. Many people came, including a number of our friends from the Anthropology and History departments. We enjoyed some fine port, Fireball cinnamon whiskey, and other classy drinks while blowing off end-of-the-semester steam. Stephanie Maguire was kind enough to buy us all pizza and wings. Singing and dancing to the classic Mariah Carey tune "All I Want for Christmas Is You" may or may not have occurred in the kitchen. It was a fun night for all.

In February we found ourselves once again at Chez Stamanda, the home of Sarah Stanford-McIntyre and Amanda Stuckey, for a Valentine's Day themed party. It was a low-key but fun night to just hang out and eat chocolate.

Over Spring Break ASGSO took over trivia night at the Corner Pocket. We answered questions about The Rolling Stones (David Camak Pratt's specialty), TV shows (Liz Howard's forte), and Irish culture



(which no one was very good at) among other topics. We had to split into two teams, but one of ASGSO's teams came in first and won a \$20 gift certificate! So naturally a number of us returned the following week, putting that \$20 to good use on beer, and managed to come in third. If trivia night taught us anything, it is that American Studies students excel at popular culture and don't do so well with business or science trivia. Hopefully ASGSO will make a triumphant return to the Corner Pocket in the future.

Jan Hübenthal will be returning both to William & Mary and his former position as ASGSO Social Chair in the fall, so I am sure that next year will be full of more wonderful social events. Until then, have a great summer!



## WOES AND WOAHS

FRANK FUCILE

In the past few months, the graduate students in the College of Arts and Sciences have been forced to confront the cruel truth that the lion's share of funding for Graduate Student Association events originates in the undergraduate Student Assembly budget. This year, due to a perfect storm of tightened budgets across the board and the enforcement of long-ignored policies on resource allocation, next year's Graduate Research Symposium was on the chopping block. Of course, the rules by which the Board of Visitors judges the budget are more appropriate to undergraduate clubs than to graduate-level research and networking events. The importance of colloquia and the GRS to fostering a sense of academic community is thus lost amidst rules designed to fund intramural sports. While the proposal to cut *all* funding to GSA was subsequently revised by allocating some money (less than half of what was requested) to GRS, all colloquium funding was cut.

What came of this? The graduate students banded together and made a show of force at the Student Assembly meeting where the

budget was passed. Certain SA reps vaguely assured us that money could be allocated to GSA later, and the event was covered rather sympathetically in *The Flat Hat*. GSA officers then worked on legislation with Student Senate Chair Kendal Lorenzen that would allocate funding for the GSA next year and amend the budget code to guarantee GSA funding the way that it guarantees funding for other organizations. Sadly, these bills were not passed. However, now that a new SA President has been elected on a platform that is explicitly amenable to graduate student issues, there *is* hope for the future.

Furthermore, working with SA Reps has provided us insight into what kinds of proposals are more likely to get funding and has forged important political connections between GSA and the Student Assembly. Moreover, the crisis underscored the importance of graduate student participation in GSA politics and has established a number of important concerns for next year. While ideally we might one day be able to secure a stream of funding separate from undergraduate oversight, these events enabled us to learn strategies for working with SA under the current system. Ultimately, there is some optimism for next year given the change in SA leadership and our increased involvement in their system of political wrangling. Finally, let's all thank Janine Yorimoto for her hard work as GSA's SA Rep this year.



**WILLIAM &  
MARY AMERICAN  
STUDIES**

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Thank you to all contributors and special thanks to Neeve Kelly for creating the layout and providing editorial assistance.