

# THE AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALIST

WILLIAM AND MARY AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATE PROGRAM NEWSLETTER VOL. 5 FALL 2013



## ACADEMIC BENCHMARKS IN AMERICAN STUDIES AT W&M

JAN HÜBENTHAL

### FALL 2013

On behalf of the American Studies Graduate Student Organization (ASGSO) at the College of William and Mary, I welcome you to the fifth edition 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.

JAN HÜBENTHAL  
ASGSO SOCIAL CHAIR  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

ASGSO is proud to announce that the following students have achieved noteworthy academic milestones this semester, and we would be remiss if we didn't sing their praises here:

#### Meghan Bryant

- Co-curated the Muscarelle Museum of Art's original exhibition, "Glenn Close: A Life in Costume" (opened in September; closes in January).
- Was the guest speaker at the Graduate Studies Advisory Board's annual dinner on October 27 where she presented her M.A. thesis, for which she won the 2011-2012 A&S Thesis Award in the Humanities.
- Presented a paper, "Raising Consumers / Selling Producers: Images of Children in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century American Advertising and Ephemera" at the annual MAPACA (Mid-Atlantic Popular &

American Culture Conference) in Atlantic City (November 2013).

#### Frank Fucile

- Presented his paper "'I probably won't *actually* kill you.'" - Killer Landscapes in *The Eiger Sanction*" at the Western Literature Association Annual Conference in Berkeley, CA (October 2013).
- Presented at the *Film & History Conference: Making Movie\$* (Madison, WI, Nov. 20-24), where he was panel chair for Financing the Frontier I: Market Economics in the Wild West, paper title: "'Trouble With My Adding'" - The Innumeracy of Clint Eastwood."
- Presented a paper entitled, "*Green Target: The Aim of New Materialist Ecocriticism*" at the Association for Studies in Literature and Environment Biennial Conference in Lawrence, Kansas (May 28 – June 1, 2013).

### **Cathleene Hellier**

- Presented a paper entitled "'Miss in Her Teens': Parenting Adolescent Gentlewomen in Eighteenth-Century England and Virginia" at the Third Global Conference: Childhood, in Oxford, UK (July 2013).

### **Alexandra Méav Jerome**

- Published an article on Iraqi Women in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*.
- Published a review essay on Muslim women and terror forthcoming in *Feminist Studies* (2014).
- A revised version of Alexandra's Master's thesis, "Shahrazad in the White City: Gender, Performance, and Muslim Womanhood at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition" was accepted as a book chapter in the forthcoming edited volume, *Unveiling Fashion: Gender, Islam, and Global Modernities* (2014).

### **Stephanie Maguire**

- Presented a paper at the Film & History Conference in Madison, WI, entitled "Sex, Money, and Movement: Challenging Traditional Notions of the Female Tramp in *Johnny Guitar* and *The Ballad of Little Jo*" (November 2013).

### **James Padilioni, Jr.**

- Presented his paper "'We Younger Negro Artists who Create': Harlem's Production of the Aesthetic of Pride" at "Bridges Across Culture": The First International Conference on Arts and Humanities hosted by Washington & Jefferson College and the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy (June 2013).

### **David Camak Pratt**

- Presented a paper entitled "'I don't think I have any heroes': Hawkeye Pierce as Hard-Boiled Detective" at the South Atlantic MLA conference in Atlanta, Georgia (November 8-10).

### **Kate Previti**

- Passed her comprehensive exams in November 2013.

### **Sarah Stanford**

- Passed her comprehensive exams in December 2013.
- Completed a book review of Tucker, Jean Rhea. *Oysters, Macaroni, and Beer: Thurber, Texas, and the Company Store*. Texas Tech University Press, 2012. [Book Review] *Journal of American Culture* – In Press Fall 2013.
- Presented a paper entitled "Towers of Debt: Grain Elevators in the Southern Plains" at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the History of Technology in Portland, Maine (September 2013).

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**CONGRATULATIONS, EVERYONE!  
KEEP UP THE HARD WORK!**

## THE 2013 FIRST YEAR STUDENTS: AN INTELLECTUAL PORTRAIT



(from left to right: Alison Bazylinski, Mariaelena DiBenigno, Jan Hübenthal, Linda Monahan, Jessica Cowing)

The incoming graduate students in this year's cohort bring fresh perspectives and important intellectual energy to the American Studies Program. Their unique personalities and diverse research interests encapsulate and strengthen the interdisciplinary spirit of American Studies at William and Mary.

### **Alison Bazylinski**

(by Jessica Cowing)

Alison returned to the East Coast this fall after living on the West Coast while completing her MA program. Alison has a lot of experience traveling; she recently visited Italy, and she has also lived in several parts of the United States. In fact, she has lived in six different states.

Alison received a Master's degree in History from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where she wrote a thesis on the appropriation of southwestern Native peoples in the American fashion industry from 1940-1968. Alison's interests are primarily in material culture and public history, and she is especially interested in the social and cultural implications of clothing. She would like to go into curation after completing the American Studies PhD program. Adding to the eclectic mix of interests and backgrounds represented in the fall 2013 cohort, Alison brings a fascinating historical perspective

to an American Studies context with her interest in commodity and the appropriation of Native peoples in the fashion industry. Her work in this area will have important implications for understanding the connections between Native American cultures, history, and the social and cultural significance of clothing in different periods of American life.

### **Mariaelena DiBenigno**

(by Linda Monahan)

A William & Mary alumna (Class of 2003), Mariaelena holds a B.A. in English. She earned her M.A. in English from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington in 2011. Her Master's thesis, "'I am not alone in my fascination': Cultural Fear and the True Wilmington Ghost Story," examined issues of gender and sexuality in ghost stories. She has taught as an adjunct professor at UNC-Wilmington, Marymount University, and

Northern Virginia Community College. Mariaelena currently holds an assistantship at the Mariner's Museum in Newport News.

Mariaelena is interested in the intersections of tourism, folklore, and identity. Her research explores these themes in heritage and Southern tourism, particularly in ghost tours. With her localized research interests and distinguished background, Mariaelena brings great energy to our Program!

**Influential books:** *Ghostly Matters* *Ghostly Matters* by Avery Gordon and *The House on Diamond Hill* by Tiya Miles.

**Recent fiction pick:**  
*Beautiful Ruins* by Jess Walter

### Jan Hübenthal

(by Mariaelena DiBenigno)

Jan came to the Ph.D. program after completing his undergraduate degree at the University of Bremen in northern Germany. After interning with the German Consulate General in San Francisco, Jan recently completed an internship stint with the American Academy in Berlin. Following a study abroad opportunity at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Jan decided to pursue his American Studies M.A. degree at W&M. And his M.A. experience made an obvious impression: Jan decided to join the incoming Ph.D. cohort in Fall 2013!

His research interests center on theories of masculinity and identity-based violence in the United States. His Master's thesis combined masculinity studies with popular and sports culture to interrogate depictions of hegemonic masculinity in the context of the Super Bowl. Currently, Jan focuses on bachelorhood in the eighteenth century, the relationship between

health and violence in sports, and histories of gender and sexuality in the twentieth century. Jan adds an important, well-informed voice to the Program and encourages communal merriment as Social Chair of the American Studies Graduate Student Organization. He is always complimentary of the program's students and faculty: "Everybody is so intellectually and personally supportive. Professors really go out of their way to make themselves available."

**Favorite Books:** *Masculinities* by Raewyn Connell, *The Trouble With Normal* by Michael Warner, *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, and anything by John Grisham (for lighter reading).

### Linda Monahan

(by Alison Bazylnski)

Linda is a first year MA/PhD student with the American Studies program. She comes to William & Mary from American University, where she recently completed her B.A. also in American Studies. After completing a senior internship with the Washington Animal Rescue League, Linda became interested in the field of critical animal studies. As Linda explores her options at William and Mary, she is focusing her research on nonhuman animals as historical agents and developing "animal" as a methodology. Linda's favorite book, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* by Tristram Stuart, reflects her research interests. Linda's work brings a fascinating dynamic to an already diverse cohort and will provide a new perspective and methodology to the program!

## Jessica Cowing

(by Jan Hübenthal)

Jessica came to William and Mary from Maryland, though she has lived in nine (!) different states. She holds an M.A. in English from the California State University at Long Beach and a B.A. in English and Psychology from the State University of New York at Oneonta. After college, she lived in Ukraine for two years as a member of the Peace Corps. Towards the end of her Master's program, Jessica was looking to branch out into more interdisciplinary endeavors and became interested in pursuing a doctorate in American Studies. A visit to the W&M campus won her over and solidified her decision to join our Program (we're so happy that she did!). Jessica particularly enjoys the close-knit intellectual community here and has taken a liking to Williamsburg, having grown up in a small town setting.

Jessica's research interests include U.S. ethnic literature, which she previously studied in her MA program as a field for her comprehensive exams, and disability studies. At W&M, she is looking to pursue Native American studies and hopes to explore ways in which that field may converge with disability studies in interesting and meaningful ways.

Her favorite books include *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich, *Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, and she has a soft spot for Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In her "abundant" spare time, she also likes to indulge in a bit of recreational reading (Hello, Harry Potter!). Jessica's perspective and academic interests are a great asset to our Program!

## LETTIN' LOSE...

JAN HÜBENTHAL



It is a well-established fact that the human brain works at its highest capacity when exposed to a variety of different stimulants. For this reason (and for this reason only), ASGSO is committed to increasing graduate students' intellectual output through social festivities.

Arguably the highlight of this semester was our annual Halloween Party, a collaboration with the Psychology grad program. Inventive costumes, libations, and snacks made for a delightful evening.

Earlier in October, American Studies teamed up with the History grad students for a lovely Karaoke night at the Bourbon Street Bar & Grille! If anything, ASGSO is known for its singing chops—and, well, let's just say our beautiful renditions of the American songbook brought tears of joy to the eyes of all onlookers.

We concluded this year with our annual Holiday Party, hosted again by James Padilioni Jr.—thank you, James!

## NEW FACES I: ALI COLLEEN NEFF

JHARI DERR-HILL



Ali Neff, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology and American Studies, comes to us from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she received her

Ph.D. in Communication Studies early this fall. As a scholar and documentarian, Dr. Neff's work engages the anthropology of sound, material culture, and politics in the Global South, most recently women's music in urban Senegal. Neff's fieldwork in Senegal formed the basis of her dissertation. For those of us still in the throes of course work or comprehensive exam reading, defending one's dissertation is a milestone set off at an uneasy distance. We may wonder whether chapters of our work will be sold off as articles and conference talks. Or maybe our books will be embraced by our dream University Press. Though it is likely that Neff asked herself those same questions, she developed her Master's thesis into her first book, *Let the World Listen Right: The Mississippi Delta Hip-Hop Story* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

We each have our own working methods to do all the reading, writing, and hyping oneself up required of a graduate student. Each edition of the *American Exceptionalist* enumerates the papers published and conferences attended by our ever-busy student body. So, after a few moments of gawping, let's

screw our courage deeper and see what we can learn from Dr. Neff. What can we do to publish by the end of 2014? Of course that may not be the most well-reasoned perspective, but the underlying sentiment holds. There's a lot of good talent out there, lots to admire, and lots to learn from.

When I first contacted Dr. Neff I had *Daily Rituals* by Mason Currey (Knopf, 2013) in mind. Currey anthologizes compact and vivid summaries of the working habits of some of the greatest artists, writers, and politicians of the last four hundred years in a neat bed-side-table volume. The idea, beyond delectable voyeurism, is to understand that there are a million ways to be brilliant. When I sat down with Dr. Neff at the Blue Talon for coffee, I tried to draw a mental schematic of her life course, what inspired her long ago so that she'd arrive at where she is today, how she adapted plans to suit new interests and opportunities, and, when it came down to it, what she did to get work done.

What I learned could become a new Cameron Crowe Film. At 15, Neff wrote a review of a Guns and Roses show that her local newspaper in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, published. From then on, the paper would periodically reproduce Neff's work from her high school newspaper in which she profiled bands and free concerts. While at Grinnell College, she majored in Political Science and planned to become a music journalist. Not wanting to treat her passion as a hobby, Neff took on freelance jobs writing for local and campus magazines and journals, publishing on fashion, music, and culture.

After graduating in 1998, she moved to San Francisco, where she interned with the SF Bay Guardian and worked as a waitress and record store DJ. For seven to eight years, Neff honed her writing and cultural analysis skills in freelance. By her own

interpretation, this was a period when print journalists could still explore cultural issues in a more thorough form than the web, at that point, was equipped to do. Critical cuts in print advertising budgets for tobacco and alcohol in the early 2000s, however, effectively withered opportunities for experienced writers like Neff, and her cohort of freelance writers was among the first to be let go.

Today, most twenty-somethings with a Bachelor's degree have known whether or not they should have an answer to the graduate school question since their sophomore year. For Neff, graduate school arose as an option as she watched jobs that would have been hers get delegated to interns. She knew she wanted to write and a chance purchase of *Blues from the Delta* by William R. Ferris (Da Capo Press, 1984) from a used bookstore in Oakland, CA inspired a new life course. Ferris would eventually become Neff's advisor as she worked on her Master's in folklore at UNC Chapel Hill. The elision here of the process, the soul wagering that goes on when one applies to graduate school, can be filled in by your own memories. In fact Neff put in a considerable amount of leg work, researching the Delta in the field for a year and a half, exploring the contemporary blues community with its new forms and variety, as well as how classic blues influenced contemporary gospel and hip hop. Once her thesis was complete, Neff's work, supported Ferris and an encounter with University Press of Mississippi editor Craig Gill at a conference, set her on track for publication.

For her dissertation, which was completed in roughly five years, getting the writing done became a process of ritual. Early in the day, Neff and other dissertators sat down at The Looking Glass Café in Carrboro, North Carolina. Amidst the typical ambient sounds of an indy bobo coffee house—board game

pieces clacking, children's gibberish, the metallic explosions of the cash register—and surrounded by other poker-faced and determined grad students, she wrote, motivated by herself and the group. Now that she has transitioned from student to faculty, Neff continues the ritual of working alongside her colleagues. Writing group is a sacred time and space in which to achieve a set of goals and hold oneself and each other accountable.

When asked how she approaches the next few years of her life, in terms of scholarship and career milestones, Neff said that she loves teaching and research, being a classic academic, which for her includes the digital humanities. Though the newness of the field is one of its greatest challenges, Dr. Neff is intrigued by the ways a broader interpretation of media in cultural studies and a greater use of digital media will evolve the humanities. She is happy to identify herself as a digital humanist because she finds that it puts her in the company of other interdisciplinary scholars who think creatively and expansively.

**Personal website:**

[http://www.ethnolyrical.org/?page\\_id=381](http://www.ethnolyrical.org/?page_id=381)

**Ali Neff's must visits:** <http://www.duttyartz.com>  
and <http://wayneandwax.com>



## NEW FACES II: HANNAH ROSEN

JAMES PADILIONI JR.



**Hannah Rosen**  
Assistant Professor of History  
and American Studies

**You come to W&M as an African-Americanist. What is the focus of your work, and what is/are its guiding motivation(s)?**

Both my research and teaching have focused on African American social and cultural history, and particularly on slavery, emancipation, and postemancipation society. I have been motivated from as early as my undergraduate years to explore these histories as a way to illuminate the workings of race and gender in the United States and particularly to understand the historical nexus -- the interlocking and mutually constitutive nature -- of these modes of power and identity. I have also always been captured by the powerful and compelling narratives this field offers, narratives that have shaped the politics and culture of the

United States in profound ways that I think everyone would want to explore.

Both the crucial and compelling stories that characterize African American histories of emancipation and my desire to unpack the workings of race and gender together formed the driving force behind my first book, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009). This book examines histories of rape that African-American women suffered at the hands of white men during episodes of Reconstruction-era political violence, and situates these histories in the context of the gendered dynamics of political struggle overall in this period. The questions I sought to answer in this book -- for instance, how contests over the unstable significance of race following the end of slavery were fought on the terrain of gender -- and questions I continue to pursue in my current research, are not answerable through entirely empirical means. For this reason, interdisciplinary fields such as American Studies have been a crucial source of both inspiration and practical guidance for my work. I learned from American Studies how to combine social historical methods and theoretical cultural analysis, and how to join exploration of the lives of African Americans with analysis of racial and gender meanings.

**Word on the street is that you are working on a new book about African death and burial rituals. Where are you in this project and what are you investigating?**

I am not studying rituals so much as experiences surrounding death, burial, mourning, and remembrance. The project, tentatively titled "Separate Suffering: African Americans and



Segregated Death in the Postemancipation South,” seeks to provide a social and cultural history of how African Americans experienced and managed death in their communities after the end of slavery; to explore the specific role of African American women in that history; and to illuminate the broader phenomenon of racial segregation in the United States by investigating the segregation of burial sites – one of the earliest segregated spaces in the postemancipation south – and the landscapes of difference and inequality thereby produced in southern towns and cities before the turn of the twentieth century.

The project also opens up questions of historic preservation, given the deteriorating condition of one of its primary archives – the landscapes, headstones, and records of African American cemeteries that were established during the Civil War and postwar years. It was, in fact, a visit to a struggling African American cemetery, Magnolia Cemetery in Helena, Arkansas, that ignited my interest in the project. And the bulk of my research thus far has been conducted on Magnolia and the African American community of Helena.

In Helena, Arkansas’s key Mississippi River town, one finds a tumultuous and racially charged history of post-Civil-War burial and reburial, a history not unlike that of other southern locales that were the sites of Civil War battles. In the case of Helena, its major battle occurred by chance on top of, and thereby destroyed, the town’s antebellum – and racially undifferentiated – graveyard. The battle also left in its wake hundreds of dead soldiers who were hastily interred on lands throughout the town and its outskirts. Following the war, the town’s white residents undertook a major reorganization of their dead. Confederate soldiers’ bodies were

disinterred and reburied in a new Confederate Cemetery in Helena, while the corpses of many white civilians once interred in the town’s former graveyard were reburied in a new and explicitly segregated “rural cemetery” surrounding the Confederate Cemetery. The “colored” side established in the new cemetery became, at the turn of the century, the independent and black-governed Magnolia Cemetery.

In addition to portraying the history of a large African American community in post-Civil War Arkansas and its efforts to gain control of, maintain, and celebrate its cemetery, my work on Magnolia will highlight how that cemetery’s past is tied to the town’s more famous (and better preserved) Confederate Cemetery through white Helena residents’ dramatic history of segregating the dead. This work has two aims. First, it constitutes an important part of the larger book project that will eventually expand beyond Helena to investigate numerous cases of segregated burial and the practice’s impact on postemancipation racial meanings and on postemancipation African American communities’ struggles to maintain and preserve a connection to their past. The research also contributes to an ongoing public history collaboration, the Magnolia Cemetery Project. This project has been working to draw broad public attention to Magnolia as an important historic site through presentations, cemetery tours, receptions, and small publications. This project has acquired a new relevance and urgency in the context of events planned in Helena, and throughout the South, to mark the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. Such events often include tours of spruced up Confederate Cemeteries, including Helena’s. It is my hope that promoting Magnolia as a

historic site will not only expand resources for that cemetery's preservation, but will also foreground the histories of racial segregation and inequality that too often are neglected or suppressed in narratives of the Civil War and its aftermath circulated through public commemorations.

**What was your favorite class in graduate school?**

Two courses come immediately to mind. African American Women's Literature, taught by Professor Lauren Berlant, and Comparative Plantation Societies, taught by Professor Thomas Holt, had the greatest impact on my thinking about American culture and on my future research.

**Williamsburg forms part of the Historic Triangle, along with Jamestown and Yorktown. Have you had a chance yet to visit any of the Tidewater's historic sites?**

I have visited a number of the region's historic sites, and I hope to visit more soon. Most intense for me, though, more than the public history and museum exhibits, has been simply standing on the ground of Tidewater Virginia. So many formative moments of African American history happened right here. Being here, walking on the same terrain, looking out over these same waters as the first African Americans and many of their descendants, while teaching and researching African American history, has moved me in ways that I did not expect.

**Your husband will soon be joining the faculty as a Caribbeanist. Have you two ever worked on a project together? If so, what? If not, would you?**

My partner, Richard Turits, is a scholar of the Hispanic Caribbean and Haiti. Though we have not published together, our shared interest in the histories of race and slavery in the Americas has added broad and comparative perspective to, and thus has shaped, both of our work in important ways, I think. We have frequently traveled for research together. (One of my most exciting research experiences was reading baptism, marriage, and death records for enslaved and free people from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Hispaniola in the Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic when visiting there with Richard. These records are not generally open to the public, and we were reading them while sitting in a 16<sup>th</sup>-century church building attached to the oldest cathedral in the Americas. It was pretty amazing!). We have taught together (a graduate seminar in Histories of Racial Formation in the Americas). And we have talked about one day collaborating on an article surveying the history of race and marriage laws throughout the Americas.

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

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!!**

