



# AMERICAN GRAFFITI

THE AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY • WEINBERG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

VOLUME 13, FALL 2012

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY IVY WILSON

Year One in the chair as director of the program. I was spun around a few times by the whirlwind of activity and excitement but was able to get my bearings before too long. Former directors of the program - Kate Baldwin, Jay Grossman, and Carl Smith - all provided helpful insights. If the year was a success much of it is due to their sage advice and their continued investment. Another large part is due to Natasha Dennison, our program assistant who performs important administrative work for us and is often the first face one sees when one walks into University Hall 20. I thank my colleagues for making the transition into the first year as director so smooth.

Our exemplary majors, who continue to work hard both in and out of the classroom, also helped to make the first year memorable. A large percentage of them earned honors and an impressive number were conferred as Phi Beta Kappa. Nicholas Ruge and Nathan Enfield directed Northwestern's Political Union (see page 8 for a feature on the organization). Upon graduation, the most recent senior class includes members taking jobs in finance, working as instructors for Teach for America, and pursuing

law degrees. The juniors and sophomores were no less impressive. Junior Ahsin Azim joined senior Farah Dayla as members of the South Asian Student Alliance as part of a dance troupe to compete in Aa Dekhan Zara at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Sophomore Rhaina Cohen was awarded the Jay Rosen Memorial Scholarship, a prize awarded to an American Studies major of exceptional promise with a strong academic record. Large numbers of students from across all classes participated in what have become traditions in American Studies now: the holiday gift-wrapping party (to give presents to a family we adopt) and serving sack lunches as part of a soup-kitchen program in Evanston. American Studies seeks to attract, and wants to support, exceptional students who can ably balance their academic interests with their extracurricular pursuits and this year we had a record number of students apply to become majors.

The program organized a number of extracurricular events throughout the year to further enhance ideas explored in the classroom. In the fall, we took a trip to the Jane Adams Hull-House Museum. Located in what is now the Near West Side, the museum is based in one of the original structures of the settlement house community. Our new predoctoral fellow, Elena Gonzalez, led a brief introduction on museum studies and a tour guide discussed the social issues of the day that preoccupied the community at Hull House including immigration, child labor, women's suffrage, and healthcare reform. In the winter quarter, we stayed a little closer to University Hall and made our way to Louis Theatre on campus to see a production of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Featuring a cast of Northwestern students and directed by Rives Collins, the play was adapted from the novel for the stage by Northwestern alumna Lydia Diamond. For our last extracurricular event,

the Program brought to Evanston Rebecca Traister, a contributor to the *New York Times Magazine*, writer at Salon.com, and author of *Big Girls Don't Cry*. Her talk "Making Women's Political History" in the Hagstrum Room was standing room only. The next day she graciously met with majors in our student lounge for more intimate conversations.

The Traister visit in the spring was wonderful for so many reasons, among them the fact that she is an American Studies alumna and her presence was a symbol of the transition from student to alumni that was fast approaching our seniors. The senior thesis was conceptualized as a capstone experience for the major and for many it essentially culminates their undergraduate experience. We had an unusually large class of seniors this past year and they had a chance to present their work in a public forum at our annual senior symposium. The 2012 senior symposium featured five panels, each with three student presentations followed by a faculty respondent as well as a question and answer period. A sample detailing the range of topics can be found in the 2012 Senior Symposium section of this newsletter.

While we remain focused on undergraduate education, we were able to work closely with the Program in Asian American Studies to gain support from Weinberg College for a first-ever joint postdoctoral fellowship in American Studies and Asian American Studies. Simeon Man, who recently finished his doctorate in American Studies from Yale University, will join us in the fall where he will add new courses to our curriculum, expanding the breadth of the topics we offer.

This has been a most exhilarating first year and I look forward with excitement to Years Two and Three!

# LOOKING AHEAD TO SENIOR YEAR

## :: SARAH LOGAN

*My senior thesis will delve into the regional and national performance and politics of the 2012 Democratic National Convention. I am heading to Charlotte to work for the Credentials Committee of the DNCC, and will additionally be doing advance work for the office of Scheduling and Advance for Vice President Biden. I received a summer grant from Weinberg College of Arts and Science to cover the trip and research costs.*

*This past year, and the coming fall I will return to work for the Surrogates Department of Obama for America while working on my thesis as a part time student at Northwestern. Outside of the realm of politics, my interest in specific regions of the United States was fostered by the move from Tallahassee, Florida to Evanston and my interest in Charlotte and the larger North Carolina area was stoked by twelve summers in the mountains surrounding Asheville.*

## :: BEN PURDY

*Benjamin Purdy hails from Los Angeles, CA and is double majoring in American Studies and Political Science. Throughout his time at Northwestern, he has served as vice president of his fraternity, played shortstop on the club baseball team, acted as a campus tour guide, and his love of politics led him to pursue research under Professor Peter Slevin in the Medill School of Journalism. He has been the recipient of the J.G. Nolan Scholarship, the Alice G. Hough Scholarship and the Charles Collins Scholarship for academic achievement.*

*His time in American Studies is something that he will truly cherish. The array of course content and the accessibility of the American Studies' instructors allowed him to pursue his interests in both politics and the arts. After receiving his degree, he plans to pursue a career in either business or the arts.*

## :: AHSIN AZIM

*Ahsin is an American Studies and English Writing - Creative Nonfiction double major. He will be working on two senior projects, both dealing with food. Ahsin has always had a growing passion for food (mainly eating but also trying new food) and international development, and it wasn't until serving as a ThinkImpact Scholar in South Africa (summer 2011) that he saw first-hand how food, power, and hunger were inextricably linked. ThinkImpact is an organization that has a strong focus on social entrepreneurship, and scholars are given the task to prototype a business with local community members with only \$33USD. During his time in South Africa, Ahsin had many conversations with the people living in the villages and bonds were easily created and cemented by receiving and giving food. Upon returning to the United States, Ahsin decided to take classes on food studies, policies, and natural resources, which in turn led him to having concentrations on food for both majors.*

*For his American Studies senior project, Ahsin would like to explore the effects that American food policies and donations have on African economies and people. He would also like to explore the role of social entrepreneurship in the international development*

*sphere. For his Creative Writing project, Ahsin plans on examining and deconstructing cookbooks to shed light on how cookbooks can influence and contribute to discourses on discrimination, history and identity. This project will be presented in the form of a cookbook.*

*Aside from academics, Ahsin likes to be involved in extracurricular activities on campus. Ahsin is the Captain of the Northwestern Bhangra Dance team, a member of the Northwestern Speech team, the SAB representative for the English major, and served as a co-chair for the Global Engagement Summit. Additionally, after serving as a Peer Adviser for two years, Ahsin is now the Director for Weinberg on the Wildcat Welcome Board of Directors. This year, Ahsin will also be a Senior Admissions Counselor in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and a Campus Outreach Coordinator for Teach For America.*



## WAITING FOR LEFTY

BY MAX JONES

With the gift of hindsight, it seems to me that our 301 seminar's trip to the American Blues Theater's production of Clifford Odets' 1935 labor drama *Waiting For Lefty* was pretty much impeccable. The performance offered us a fairly unique perspective – shedding light on both the texts we were examining at the time in Professor Grossman's seminar and affording a great deal of historical context as we considered the emerging "Occupy Wall Street" protests.

By attending the play we were able to approach the rest of our seminar with a little more intellectual ammunition. In particular, *Waiting for Lefty* figures prominently in Michael Denning's book *The Cultural Front*, serving as a prime example of organized labor's increasing hold on American culture over the course of the 1930s. The production itself offered an exciting type of interactivity: as an audience we were integrated into the context of a union meeting in the midst of a cab drivers' strike in New York, with actors scattered throughout the seats handing out protest buttons and shouting from off-stage. The aura of outrage pervading the play was not at all out of place with the political climate at the time--with the "Occupy" movement just beginning to pick up it was rather impossible to consider the protest within the play without comparing it to the growing culture of protest around us.

Coupled with a heartwarming class-bonding meal of Mexican food in the neighborhood, it made for an excellent night.

## HOLIDAY PARTY & FRIDAY SACK LUNCH PROGRAM

BY NATASHA DENNISON

The American Studies community is a group of compassionate individuals who are the very embodiment term and two illustrations of this aspect of the Program are the annual Holiday gift drive and the Friday sack-lunch program.

This is the third year that American Studies has participated in the Northwestern University Staff Advisory Council (NUSAC) Annual Holiday Gift Drive program. The program was initiated by the NUSAC outreach committee to cultivate the spirit of giving during the holiday season; and as a former chair and initiator of the committee, the program is dear to my heart. I join the American Studies majors collecting donations and we collectively purchase the presents. This past December, we spent a cold early afternoon together in the basement of University Hall gift-wrapping presents from the wish-list of an Evanston family. With presents ranging from basic living necessities such as space heaters to playful items such as movie passes, we hope the five members of the Jones family, aged 4 to 47, had a warmer holiday season with the gifts that "Santa" provided.

If the holiday gift-wrapping party marks the end of the calendar year for us, then the Friday lunch-sack event is one way that the idea of civic engagement and community is

foregrounded as we begin the new year. On a Friday morning in early January, we made lunches for over 100 patrons at the First Congregational Church of Evanston. Working on an assembly line, we bagged lunches that included sandwiches, snacks, fresh fruit and a drink for the needy. It is as humbling as it is eye-opening to our students when they realize that such poverty exists in such close proximity to campus

Our majors are remarkably active students with many commitments. We are pleased beyond words that, even with their schedules, they make an effort to build communities within Northwestern and outside it and that our majors have come to think about these two annual events as signature aspects of the Program.

All the "Santa" gifts wrapped and ready! Among the volunteers were majors Ahsin Azim, Mike Elsen-Rooney, Jack Foster, Gabe Brotman, Bridget Illing, Jonathan Green, Amanda Litman, and Sarah Logan.



BY RHAINA COHEN

A crowded room greeted American Studies alumna ('97), author, and journalist Rebecca Traister, as she returned to campus to deliver the talk, "Making Women's Political History." Charismatic and passionate, Rebecca discussed issues covered in her book, *Big Girls Don't Cry: The Election that Changed Everything for American Women*. She explained how the 2008 election was transformative; it unleashed long overdue conversations about gender and race, ultimately reshaping Americans' views on women and power. Rebecca traced the changing role of women in American politics up through current debates about women's access to contraception. The students I spoke to left the lecture captivated, even if they had entered the room with little previous interest in women and politics. Following the talk, a long line formed as students waited to ask questions, share their thoughts about feminism or simply connect with a like-minded alumnus.

American Studies students were invited to continue the conversation with Rebecca over lunch the next day. Though she talked further about the subject of her lecture, this discussion centered on her personal stories. Rebecca offered thoughtful advice for graduating seniors and shared reflections on her Northwestern experience--one in which the American Studies program played a defining role. For faculty, the visit was a chance to witness the success of a former student, for current American Studies students, to speak to a mentor, and for everyone involved, a welcome opportunity to be part of Rebecca's Northwestern homecoming.

## MAKING WOMEN'S POLITICAL HISTORY



REBECCA TRAISTER, AMERICAN STUDIES CLASS OF 1997  
Senior Thesis: "Acting Like a Soap Opera Queen": Erica Kane as Postmodern Subject - Advisers: Wendy Wall (English) and Julia Stern (American Studies and English)

## REFLECTIONS ON *THE BLUEST EYE*

### SAMMIE OFFSAY:

This Winter Quarter, the American Studies Program took all of the students to see the Northwestern production of *The Bluest Eye*, a theatrical adaptation of Toni Morrison's acclaimed novel. The event, though seemingly non-academic, is a perfect example of why I applied to the major in the first place.

When I decided to apply to the program, I was looking for a way to embrace all that Northwestern had to offer. I wanted to learn about history and culture, but was convinced that in order to learn one, I needed a solid understanding of the other. The trip to see *The Bluest Eye* was just one example of the program's commitment to interdisciplinary learning. Rather than separate from other areas of the university, the department embraces them by highlighting points of overlap and tension.

Often, students at universities are expected to *specialize*. People generally believe that in order to become an expert, one must devote oneself to one field, or narrow in on a particular subject. I agree that committing oneself to a topic is important, but feel that "narrowing in" is not the only approach. Sometimes, you learn the most when you embrace interdisciplinary learning. Sometimes, you have to read the book *and* see the play.

### ADAM MASUROVSKY:

While sitting down to a nice meal at Mt. Everest restaurant, American Studies students had no idea what was in store for them that evening. We witnessed a powerful performance by Northwestern students of a play adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The cast explored questions of beauty, love and

freedom in the context of racism and oppression in rural America. Particularly moving was a scene in which the protagonist's father discusses the nature of freedom, wondering how he can truly express this abstract concept that he supposedly possesses. The scene culminates in the central climactic event of the story in which this character, the protagonist's father, rapes his daughter. In addition to the performance, the cast invited the audience to stay after the show for a discussion of the production with both cast members and the play's author, Lydia R. Diamond. Diamond took questions from audience members asking her to discuss her writing and the decisions she made on adapting the novel to the theater. Her insight offered

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### THE TRIP TO SEE THE BLUEST EYE WAS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF THE PROGRAM'S COMMITMENT TO INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING.

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a glimpse into the process of playwriting and also her personal relationship with the novel and the story it tells. One senior cast member also spoke about why, as an African-American theater major, this play was especially important to her. She explained how she first felt out of place in the theater scene when she came to Northwestern, and considered it a milestone to have an all-black student cast performing this play. Not only did the show capture the pain and difficulties of life as a young black girl struggling to understand the world's white standard of beauty, but the discussion of it afterward also offered eye-opening insight into the importance of this production for the theater community and for questions of racial diversity in general at Northwestern.



# CONGRATULATIONS!

Please join us in congratulating **Hayley Altabef**, **Jonathan Clow**, **Nathan Enfield**, **Jonathan Green\***, **Joshua Levin\***, **Zachary Ratner**, **Nick Ruge**, and **Hyungjoo Han** (WCAS 2013) on their achievement in being elected to Phi Beta Kappa. All have excellent academic records and we are extremely proud of all these students!

*\* Student elected to Phi Beta Kappa in Spring 2011*

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**Rhaina Cohen** (WCAS 2014) was the recipient of the 2012 Jay Rosen Memorial Scholarship,

which is awarded each year to recognize an outstanding American Studies major.

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Please join the Office of the Provost and the Undergraduate Research Grants Committee in congratulating American Studies major **Amanda Litman**, who was awarded an academic year Undergraduate Research Grant in support of her project, “Political Identity and Gender in Woman vs. Woman Races” (Adviser: Angela Ray, Communication Studies).



Professor Carl Smith with several of the seniors, toasting to the success of turning in their theses. Opposite page: Professor Michael Allen with students in the American Studies 301-2 seminar, “Global 1968 and Its Afterlives” (Winter Quarter 2012).

## American Studies Departmental Honors 2011-12:

*Hayley Altabef*

*Gabriel Brotman*

*Jonathan Clow*

*Michael Elsen-Rooney*

*Nathan Enfield*

*Nora Gannon*

*Emerson Gordon-Marvin*

*Jonathan Green*

*Andrew Levin*

*Joshua Levin*

*Zachary Ratner*

*Nick Ruge*

## BY NICK RUGE AND NATHAN ENFIELD

The Political Union concluded its fifth and most successful year this past June. Co-founded by former American Studies major Sam Kleiner in 2007, the Political Union has evolved into one of Northwestern's premier forums for undergraduate debate and scholarly inquiry. The group, which is now comprised of roughly 25 core members and a 7-person executive board, meets at the Roberta Buffett Center every Monday night of the quarter to debate current events, social policy, and cultural issues. Academics and public intellectuals from Northwestern and abroad join undergraduates for these weekly gatherings, which are moderated by members of the Executive Board.

Under our leadership, the Political Union increased its membership and attracted some of the country's brightest minds to campus. Arguably, the highlight of the year was the annual Intellectual Titans Collide debate. Journalists Rick Perlstein and Ramesh Ponnuru, as well as academics Barnor Hesse and Charles Mills, have joined us in the past for this exciting event in which two featured speakers debate one another. This year, we stayed in-house for our speakers and were fortunate to have Professors Martin Redish and Stephen Presser of the Northwestern Law School lead our group through

a fascinating inquiry into the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. Professors Redish and Presser parsed through the complexities of the Constitution for over an hour, and our members left this event with an improved understanding of the nuances inherent to debates over health care in America. Indeed, both Professors Redish and Presser anticipated many of the key points found in the concurring and dissenting opinions of the Supreme Court's decision to uphold what the Obama administration considers its signature legislative achievement.

# The Political Union





We were also honored to host Professor Breen of the History Department for a lecture acknowledging the end of his 42-year career and the beginning of what we hope will be a new tradition at Northwestern called the “State of Society Lecture.” Professor Breen delivered his talk – The Secret of the Locke Box – to a large gathering of undergraduates, graduate students, the provost of the university and numerous other historians and political scientists, all of whom helped fill the Leopold Room to maximum capacity. Professor Breen’s remarks focused on the centrality and persistence of rights-talk within American political discourse, specifically the strain of natural rights that the eighteenth

century political theorist John Locke powerfully articulated in his Second Treatise of Government (1689). Since we hope this event continues to be a time to reflect on relevant social topics, Professor Breen’s talk was a perfect example of the kind of questions this lecture will answer in the future.

Much of the Political Union’s success this year would not have been possible without the support of the American Studies Program and other on-campus entities. Each of the professors we mentioned has maintained close to the program. Professor Breen, for example, advised both of our theses, and Professors Redish and Presser have worked with seniors in previous years. Moreover, Natasha

Dennison never failed to provide brilliant guidance to make sure our larger events could come together, and through significant financial and administrative support, the Office of the President and the Buffett Center have been integral to our growth.

With such strong support on campus and an impressive new crop of undergraduates at the helm of the group, we leave Northwestern confident and optimistic for the Political Union’s future five, ten, and even fifteen years down the road.

**LIST OF 2011-2012 SPEAKERS ON PAGE 11 >>**

*Nick Ruge and Nathan Enfield (opposite) and Professor Timothy Breen (below) addressing the group.*



# THAT ONE TIME WE KIDNAPPED A FRESHMAN

BY STEPHEN REES

“Excuse me, where’s the Engineering Department?”  
Poor kid. Must be a freshman.

“Sorry dude, but this is the American Studies Department. Why?”

“I wanted to declare my Engineering major. What’s American Studies?”

Although seemingly harmless, this query is not an ideal question to ask a group of American Studies majors who have spent five weeks in Am\_Stud 301-1 hashing out its answer while trying to explain their field to curious parents, roommates, friends from home, grandparents, significant others, potential employers, parents of significant others, and even – in the darkest hours – themselves.

“It’s an interdisciplinary field that deals with the study of the United States.”

“Oh, okay,” he responds. You’re not in the world of material science any more.

“Although the discipline of American Studies once focused on finding recurring themes throughout the nation’s literature to determine a unique American culture, we’ve totally moved beyond that now to critically examine the United States in terms of issues like race, class, ethnicity, gender, and transnationality.”

His eyes are starting to glaze over.

“Here, look at it this way. You know how in *Lethal Weapon*, Danny Glover and Mel Gibson have two totally different methodological frameworks, but they blend them together to fight crime in Los Angeles? American Studies is kind of like the two cops in *Lethal Weapon*, combining the stodgy and traditional study of history, literature, and critical theory with the younger and more exciting ethnic, gender, and post-colonial studies. Except instead of fighting Gary Busey’s *Shadow Company*, American Studies uses its unique perspective to interpret the American experience. And as far as we know, none of the American Studies majors are manic depressive anti-Semites. Anyways, want to go on a field trip with us?”

Now I am admittedly fuzzy on the details, but I remain fairly certain that was how we convinced a freshman would-be engineer to get into a van with American Studies Director Ivy Wilson, Program Assistant Natasha Dennison, Visiting Scholar Elena Gonzalez, and a handful of undergraduate majors that cruised down Lake Shore Drive to arrive at the Jane Addams Hull House Museum on a blustery November afternoon.

Located at 800 S. Halsted in the Near West Side of Chicago, the Hull House settlement was opened in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. Originally intended to offer a literary education to the settlement’s less fortunate neighbors, the residence quickly grew to a thirteen-building complex that offered the area’s diverse community of immigrants a safe haven of support and assistance for coping with a modern city. Under the direction of Addams, the Hull House featured night school for adults, a public kitchen, an art gallery, a coffeehouse, a gym, a music school, a drama group, a library, and other

such amenities to provide residents of Hull House and the surrounding community with both a practical and cultural education to help the new immigrants integrate into American society.

Today, much of Addams’ complex has been swallowed up by the UIC campus. Yet two of the settlement’s buildings remain, the Hull Home and the Residents’ Dining Hall, while the Jane Addams Hull House Museum resides within the Hull Home, an Italianate Victorian mansion nestled in between the UIC Student Center East and Halsted Street.

Besides housing and displaying artifacts relating to Hull House history, the museum and its now-defunct Jane Addams Hull House Association memorializes Addams and other resident social reformers by continuing to connect the work of Hull House’s former residents to contemporary social issues. To this end, our American Studies contingent was fortunate to receive a private tour throughout the Hull House museum by both the museum’s exhibition designer Amy Reichert and Northwestern American Studies visiting scholar Elena Gonzalez, a doctoral student in American Studies at Brown University whose research focuses on curatorial work for social justice.

Although Gonzalez and Reichert detailed the effect of a museum’s presentation of its artifacts on both our interpretation of the past and contemporary policy issues, the most fascinating display of the intersection of curatorial work and social justice at the Hull House came in Jane Addams’ bedroom. There hung an enormous portrait of Mary Rozet Smith, Addams’ companion and supporter of the Hull House program, not to mention longtime romantic friend of the social activist.

Addams’ emotional attachment to Smith was clear. Their correspondence is filled with love and longing, neither of the two had a romantic relationship with

a man, they shared beds on the road, and when they were apart, Addams insisted on travelling with the portrait of Smith that now hangs beside her bed. But intimate relationships between women were common in the Victorian era, and it remains unclear whether Addams and Smith's relationship was sexual in nature.

The display and labeling of Mary Rozet Smith's portrait poses a unique dilemma for Reichert and the Hull House museum. Should the caption describe Smith as a supporter and friend of Addams, or her lover? Does the museum have the right to out the sexuality of the complex's founder when Addams herself never openly did so? Or does the museum have the moral responsibility to reveal a part of Addams' life and provide gay and lesbian history with a role model? Can you even out somebody as a lesbian when the very term was not in popular use at their time of death?

The issue remains in flux, yet despite the curatorial and interpretive dilemmas surrounding the painting's caption, there is something heartening about the portrait itself. Regardless of the nature of their relationship, it is clear that Addams and Smith were intimate companions that needed and relied on one another. In the end, questions regarding Addams' sexuality are sideshow trifles that distract from the power that a loved one – man, woman, transgender, whatever – provides. Addams was lucky enough to have found a companion who loved her deeply, brought out the best in her and affirmed her commitment to one of the greatest social justice achievements in the Progressive Era.

Needless to say, we pulled out all the stops for this freshman.

We even threw in dinner, a delicious affair at Tufano's Vernon Park Tap, located in Little Italy a few blocks to the northwest of the Hull House. Like the Hull House, Little Italy is a holdover from an older era, when the area was a bustling immigrant community until the construction of the University in the 1960's decimated the Italian neighborhood along Taylor Street. Also like the Hull House, the family-run restaurant continues the traditions of the past, such as serving massive helpings of pasta and accepting cash only.

For me, the conversation engendered around the dinner table, as well as throughout our trip to the Hull House, is the best thing we can glean from excursions like this. There is nothing like what you gain from talking to a group of American Studies majors for a whole evening. Everything from the best classes to take to the relative merits of raising a trilingual child just kind of crop up alongside discussions of how much bank you can make writing textbooks and whether or not we could use the American Studies fund to buy booze during dinner. The community and camaraderie in a small major filled with the most intellectually curious and diverse minds I have met at Northwestern only grows stronger on trips like our drive down to the Hull House.

As for the freshman, I think he's a mechanical engineer now. That may or may not be because we almost left him in the Tufano's bathroom. But at least he has a sense of what the field of American Studies is all about.

## 2011-12 POLITICAL UNION SPEAKERS

Professor T.H. Breen, Northwestern History Department

Professor Martin Redish, Northwestern Law School

Professor Stephen Presser, Northwestern Law School

Professor and former U.S. State Department Senior Adviser Bruce Jentleson, Duke University

Professor and former President of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs John Rielly, Northwestern Political Science Department

David Vitale, President of the Chicago Board of Education

Dr. Henry Bienen, President emeritus of Northwestern University

President Morton O. Schapiro, Northwestern University

Cara Tuttle Bell, Director of Programs for the Northwestern Women's Center

Congressman Jim Kolbe, Arizona

Coach Pat Fitzgerald, NU Football

Professor Bill Haarlow, Northwestern American Studies Department

Professor Will Reno, Northwestern Political Science Department

Professor Jeffrey Winters, Northwestern Political Science Department

Professor and Nobel Prize Winner Dale Mortensen, Northwestern Economics Department

John Meixner, Editor in Chief of Northwestern University Law Review

Professor Mark Witte, Northwestern Economics Department

Gary Johnson, President of the Chicago History Museum and Rhodes Scholar

# 2012 SENIOR SYMPOSIUM

In mid-May, when all of the senior theses have been submitted to the department for evaluation, the American Studies Program invites friends, family, sponsors, and the Northwestern community to a presentation of the projects conducted over the previous year. Each major gives a brief presentation on his or her thesis and attendees have the opportunity to ask questions or provide comments on their research. The Senior Symposium is also an opportunity for the program and its students to celebrate the intellectual accomplishments of its seniors, and the presentations are followed by a reception which gives audience members a chance to congratulate the presenters or ask them more in-depth questions about their research.



## GABRIEL BROTMAN

**Strategy and Competition at the Dawn of the Digital Century: Strategic Alliance Formation in the United States Newspaper Publishing Industry, 1994-2000 (Adviser: Pablo Boczkowski, Communication Studies)**

*Born and raised in the Greater Boston area, Gabe majored in Communication Studies and American Studies, concentrating on U.S. media history and economics. Outside of the classroom, Gabe was active in his fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau; assisted in various faculty-led research programs in the School of Communication; and worked in several year-round internships at communications and technology companies, such as Time Inc., Square, and Weber Shandwick. A Communication Century Scholar and Kaneb Scholar, Gabe was also a recipient of two undergraduate research grants, respectively focused on healthcare IT policy and agricultural modernization in Argentina. Gabe's senior project focused on joint venture agreements among the largest 14 publicly traded newspaper companies. Since July 2012, he has served as Special Assistant to the Chairman and CEO at Allbritton Communications Company, one of the largest privately-held media companies in the U.S., where he oversees special projects for the company's Washington D.C.-based media properties.*

## FARAH DAHYA

**Performing America: Examining the U.S. Government's Export of Alvin Ailey's Revelations during the Cold War (Adviser: Harvey Young, Theatre)**

*I began my career at Northwestern as a dance major, and dance consistently remained an integral part of my academic and extracurricular pursuits. My senior project, titled Performing America: Examining the U.S. Government's Export of Alvin Ailey's Revelations during the Cold War, employed a dual historical and dance*

studies approach to understand the history and nature of government sponsorship of the performing arts. Outside of the academic realm, I was a performer and leader on Deeva Dance Troupe, an all female Indian-fusion dance company. Deeva integrates a multitude of dance styles - from traditional Indian dance to classical ballet - to create a hybrid technique that is unique to the team and its dancers. As a team, we participated in national competitions, and won first and second place titles during our 2011-2012 season. Over the course of four years, I also formed a strong interest in entrepreneurship and start-up companies through my experience working for NU|Tutors, Northwestern's student-founded and operated tutoring company. I began my experience with the Company as a Client Relations Manager, and by my senior year served as the Company's CEO. I currently work as a financial analyst in Chicago for JPMorgan Chase and, in the future, I hope to integrate my passion for dance and entrepreneurship to one day run my own business.

## MICHAEL ELSEN-ROONEY

**High School Football, the Daily Press, and the Creation of Meaning in Chicago's Prep Bowl: 1927-1943 (Adviser: Janice Radway, Communication Studies)**

A family friend once told me, regarding my major, "Ah, yes. American Studies. The refuge for those of us who don't know what we want to do yet." I realized in my three years in the program what he was talking about. American Studies is a place where it's okay not to know what you want to do, and where you have the room and support to try to figure it out. American Studies was one place, along with my fraternity, I found on campus that gave me a community of people to talk to and commiserate with. I discovered my interest in the human dimension of education - the culture, the personality, the feelings that all go into it - in an American Studies class. I also had the freedom to travel to Chile, and pursue a Spanish minor.



*A lot of those things are coming together - some of that by design, some by chance - in the job I am starting as a high school Spanish teacher in Prince George's County, Maryland (along with three of my fellow American Studies grads who are also teaching).*

*Finally, American Studies gave me the biggest challenge of my college career in the thesis. I wrote about how people created and interpreted the meaning of a high school football game in Chicago. I found that the daily press played a central role in creating the meaning of the game to suit their own designs of attracting large, diverse and loyal readerships. The role of the papers, however, didn't completely stifle the many ways that Chicagoans interpreted the Prep Bowl game based on their individual backgrounds and perspectives. I will always be grateful to Professors Radway and Smith for guiding me through it.*

## NATHAN ENFIELD

**Frontier Philosophy: Samuel Williams, Nathaniel Chipman, and the Formation of America's Social Contract (Adviser: Timothy Breen, History)**

*In my senior thesis, I argued that Williams and Chipman - two influential political philosophers from Vermont's eighteenth century frontier - made deliberate changes to John Locke's social contract theory as part of a shared attempt to outline a political vision for the young republic that would better promote equality and individual rights. My key primary sources for this project were Chipman's Sketches on the Principles of Government (1793) and Williams' Natural and Civil History of the State of Vermont (1794). When not writing my thesis, I spent much of my senior year working with fellow major Nick Ruge on programming for the Northwestern Political*

Professor Smith with American Studies majors Altabel, Elsen-Rooney, and Gannon at the Senior Symposium (top); Levin, Litman, and Director Ivy Wilson are also pictured (bottom).

*Union. After graduation, I moved to Richmond, California, to begin a two-year teaching commitment with Teach for America. I am the newest AP Government and Social Studies teacher at De Anza High School in El Sobrante, California. I am also slated to coach the girls basketball at De Anza this year.*

## **NORA GANNON**

### **A People's History of Agent Orange: Vision, Corporeality, and Victimhood Forty Years Later (Adviser: Michael Allen, History)**

*During my first two years at Northwestern, I led an Alternative Student Breaks (ASB) trip to Rio de Janeiro, participated in the Gilder Lehrmann History Scholars program, and served as a research assistant to Professor Carl Smith on his *City Life, City Water* manuscript. Fall of my junior year, I studied abroad in Vietnam. While in Vietnam, I volunteered at two Agent Orange centers, the Vietnam Friendship Village, and the Tu Du Hospital Peace Village – experiences that largely served as the inspiration for my senior project. Upon returning to Chicago, I spent my final two years at Northwestern interning at RefugeeOne in Uptown; serving oversized sandwiches and craft beer at Bat 17; tutoring at the Writing Place; and, of course, watching the sun rise and set from the stacks as Mike paced, Adam procrastinated, Emerson scrawled poems on the wall, Nick Ruge played it cool, and (somehow) all of our theses got written. I currently live in Brooklyn as a founding fifth grade math and special education teacher at Achievement First Brownsville Middle School. I am also getting my masters in special education at Hunter College.*

*My thesis approached the topic of Agent Orange through the lens of two lawsuits, *Ryan v. Dow* of 1984 and *VAVAO v. Dow* of 2004. By first deconstructing the legal framework within which these two suits arose, I examined these cases beyond their limited legal contexts and in terms of the important social and political changes*

*they engendered. I used newspapers, magazine articles, pamphlets, photographs, and the text of legal documents and congressional meetings to piece together how Agent Orange was publicly written about, represented, and understood. I combined the theories and methods of memory studies, body politics, visual studies, and victim testimony to narrate how individuals constructed, articulated and mobilized Agent Orange victimization. I argued that because unsound scientific evidence undermined the legal success of each case, plaintiffs ignited a populist politics of victimhood that prioritized personal testimony and visible bodily trauma over clinical and legal standards of proof. To do so, Agent Orange victims and activists used the evidence of experience, rather than scientific certainty, to shape the public discourse and social imaginary through which people learned of and came in contact with Agent Orange. Both American and Vietnamese advocates and victims, therefore, actively rejected a history of Agent Orange narrated from the top-down. Instead, they worked to map that history onto their own bodies and create counter-narratives within which they could voice pain, assert victimhood, and build communities. By examining these cases beyond their legal implications, this study documents an alternative historiography through which Agent Orange victims, while dismissed and silenced in the legal realm, actually obtained a legitimate public voice.*

## **JONATHAN GREEN**

### **Revolution and the Ancient Constitution: John Quincy Adams, Friedrich von Gentz, and the Nature of the American Republic (Adviser: Stephen Presser, Law School)**

*My thesis looked at how eighteenth century German conservatives – and, in particular, writer Friedrich von Gentz – understood the American Revolution and how their foreign interpretation played in America. Tracing the origins of antirevolutionary*

*thought on both sides of the Atlantic, I highlighted conservative arguments against liberalism as an intellectual and historical phenomenon.*

*Outside of the American Studies program, I spent most of my time at Northwestern in student government. I was a member and chair of the UBPC, a group that presents annual budget recommendations to Northwestern administrators on behalf of undergraduates. I was also involved in RUF, a Presbyterian student group on campus, and the NILR, a student-published law review (started by Sam Kleiner, another American Studies grad!).*

## **ANDREW LEVIN**

### **Throwing Spaghetti at the Wall: The CBOE, 100 Index Option Contract, Financial Journalism, and Popular Perceptions of the Derivatives Market from 1982 to 1986 (Adviser: Brian Edwards, English & Comparative Literature)**

*Through an analysis of financial newspapers and magazines during the early to mid-1980s, I tried to show how financial*



journalists discussed and explained the CBOE 100 index option contract. As the first index derivative of its kind, this financial instrument changed the universe of traded instruments, which had a profound effect on equity market patterns, processes and the interactions between the market's participants. More importantly, the way this product was covered in the financial news of the time period changed the way the financially interested American citizen related to and interacted with the financial marketplace. Because of the news coverage, this group of individuals were in effect, made incapable of understanding the products that started to exist in the financial markets during the 1980s, and therefore, much of the American populous was pushed away from this integral part of our economy.

As someone who is overly nostalgic, I can't stress enough how important both the academics and activities at NU were to me everyday of the past four years. In American Studies, I was able to explore my interest in history and cultural studies as well as finance all at the same time. Although weaving this content into my study was difficult, this course

of study was made possible because of the structure of this program and the faculty that made themselves available to me at all times. Although there were activities and clubs that I took great pride in being a part of (namely LEND and SAB), the relationships that I made with professors and students in and through this program constitute my awards and fellowships over the last four years (that being said, I will admit, I did not win any academic awards). My post-graduate career plans are to work in a financial institution in New York City.

## JOSHUA LEVIN

**Commemorating Slavery in the "Temple of Liberty": Emancipation Hall and the Disavowal of Slavery's Afterlife (Adviser: Kate Masur, History)**

In 2009, Congress named the grand public entrance to the U.S. Capitol "Emancipation Hall" in honor of the more than 400 black slaves who the federal government rented to construct the Capitol building during the late 18th century. Today, Emancipation Hall contains several commemorative objects and markers that pay tribute to the slaves' labor.

My thesis explored this commemoration and the political process that produced it in order to analyze the understandings of race and racial inequality that they engendered. What, I asked, is the relation between the commemoration of slavery and the failure

to dismantle present-day racial inequality in the United States, given that this inequality is the afterlife of slavery? I argued that the very notion that slavery brought contemporary racial inequality into being—that there exist continuities between slavery and present-day racial injustice—was eclipsed and erased through the various ways that Congress conceptualized slavery.

As a double major in American Studies and History, my academic work at Northwestern concentrated on African American history, critical race studies, and cultural studies. I was fortunate to be able to explore these interests through two independent research projects funded by Undergraduate Research Grants (URGs) and a Leopold Fellowship with History Professor Kate Masur, who then advised my senior thesis. Outside of my academic work, I spent three deeply rewarding years on the Northwestern Mock Trial Team and as a member of the University Chorus. Perhaps the greatest highlight of college, however, was studying abroad in Nantes, France for the first quarter of Junior year. I am looking forward to starting law school at Yale in the fall of 2012.

## AMANDA LITMAN

**Running Like a Girl: Analyzing Women Candidates' Gender Presentation in Political Advertising from 2002 to 2010 (Adviser: Angela Ray, Communication Studies)**

Amanda came to Northwestern from Fairfax, Virginia. Her first two years on campus, she was extremely involved with the on-campus online newsmagazine, North by Northwestern, and served as editor-in-chief from January-June of her sophomore year. She was also involved with Dance Marathon and the Northwestern Class Alliance. Junior year, Amanda spent fall quarter in Buenos Aires, and then took off winter-spring to work at Ms.



Gordon-Marvin, Dahya, and Levin during the Senior Symposium, which has become a program tradition for each graduating class (left); graduates and their families at the annual senior breakfast (right).

*magazine in Los Angeles. She returned to campus for senior year, and wrote her thesis, titled “Running Like a Girl: Analyzing Gender in Political Advertising from 2002 to 2010.” Amanda also served as a co-chair of the Senior Year Committee, which planned and executed Senior Week 2012, along with other class unity events throughout the year.*

*Amanda also spent senior year interning on Obama’s presidential campaign, and in May was hired on as a writer on the email team. She’ll stay in Chicago working for the campaign through November. What happens after that is anyone’s best guess.*

## ADAM MASUROVSKY

### Politics of Hazard: The National Discourse and Grassroots Dynamics of the Environmental Justice Movement (Adviser: Al Hunter, Sociology & Urban Studies)

*I came to Northwestern with only a vague sense of where I wanted to take my education, and joined American Studies in the hopes of figuring that out on my own terms, and because at the time I thought Gabe Brotman was cool. I soon learned that being an American Studies major did not make that sense any clearer, but instead introduced me to a host of new opportunities, interests and possible paths to take. American Studies encouraged us to explore, and some of my best and most memorable courses were in subjects and disciplines I otherwise might never have taken – such as the history of the Chicago Fire with Professor Smith, or punitive culture in America with Professor Sherry, and even an attempt at writing poetry with the legendary Professor Curdy. Outside of academics, I became involved with the student environmental advocacy group, SEED, helping to organize events that pushed for environmentalism on campus, and eventually made this a significant focus of my time at Northwestern. One of the most valuable experiences of my college career came in the fall of my junior year, when I studied abroad in Buenos*

*Aires, Argentina, living with a Spanish-speaking family and taking classes at local universities. I eventually chose to concentrate my coursework on environmentalism and urban society, writing my senior thesis on the environmental justice movement. Central and to all of these experiences, and hopefully what will stick with me most down the line, were the people I got to spend time with, both inside and out of the library carrel. My longer-term post-graduate plans are still undetermined. For the time being, I have been working on a farm in the Pacific Northwest, learning about organic and sustainable agricultural practices.*

*In the early 1980s, the environmental world began to speak up about the threats hazardous waste posed to the environment and to human health. At the same time, another debate was forming around the racial politics behind the dumping sites of these hazardous wastes. Out of these broad discussions and local protests against*



*waste landfills and incinerators formed the Environmental Justice movement, which sought to expose and fight what activists saw as a racist imbalance in the siting of toxic and hazardous waste facilities in proximity to disenfranchised minority communities. The goal of my thesis was to break down the message of this alternative brand of environmentalism, to analyze its rhetoric and its actions in the hopes of forming a cohesive understanding of what it identified as the roots of injustice, and what it meant to achieve in its quest for justice. I analyzed major documents produced by the movement – sociological studies on the distribution of environmental protections and regulations across racial demographics – and then examined a particular grassroots struggle against the siting of a high-capacity waste incinerator the small, economically depressed community of Robbins, IL. I found in this research evidence of a distinct argument against the nature of power and decision-making in the environmental world. I argue that in the national discourse of the Environmental Justice movement, scholars and activists point to the strictly scientific and top-down approach of the environmental protection establishment as the source of injustice, having created regulations that allow for abuses of politically disadvantaged minority communities. On the grassroots level, I found that, more so than keeping hazardous wastes out, the justice the movement sought to achieve was in empowering local communities to have an equal level of participation in the environmental decision-making process in the hopes of making the regulations appropriate and the trade-offs with the community more fair.*

## ZACHARY RATNER

### “Welcome to the Solar Age”: Sun Day and the Evolution of American Environmentalism (Adviser: Michael Allen, History)

*During my time at Northwestern, I used my American Studies major to look at energy and sustainability in the modern United States. I wrote my thesis on solar energy*



advocacy during the 1970s and an Earth Day-like event in 1978 called "Sun Day". During my time on campus I was also involved with SEED (Students for Environmental and Ecological Development) and a tour guide for the admissions office. Since graduating I've been interning with the Obama campaign doing energy and environmental related organizing and I'm hoping to get involved with renewable energy and sustainability policy going forward.

## NICK RUGE

**William Bingham and the Land Speculation Moment in 1790s Maine: Class Tensions and the Democratic Impulse in Early America (Adviser: Timothy Breen, History)**

*There is something intimidating about writing even a short biography of one's Northwestern experience for an American Studies publication. I applied to the program three years ago because it promised the highest level of academic attention available in the humanities. Now, freshly graduated from the program, I have even greater respect for the quality of its scholars and know all too well that the eyes that read this publication are unlikely to miss the wordiness and passive sentence construction of this sleep deprived campaign staffer.*

*The last four years at Northwestern, however, have defined me and changed how I view the world. I carry with me the experience of helping to lead the Political Union whenever I organize events for the campaign or give talks to constituency groups. My time spent researching early American history with historian TH Breen through the Leopold Fellowship has informed my conversations with undecided voters on the meaning of our country's founding moment in relation to the appropriate role of government in society. The Brady Scholars program engaged me in ethical debates on the issue of individual responsibilities and then gave me the chance to apply my study of philosophy through a year of social justice activism in Evanston. And courses*

*in American Studies asked me to examine and challenge the simple narratives of American exceptionalism that so often obscure stories of class, race, and gender oppression in our country.*

*My thesis explored economic opportunity in the decade that followed the signing of our Constitution. During this period land figured as the most important element of capitalist exchange. I argued that the process by which large-scale land speculators attempted to monopolize the land market inadvertently serviced a broad popular pursuit of economic opportunity and destabilized the economic position of wealthy investors. I am deeply indebted to Professors Carl Smith and TH Breen for the many hours they spent guiding me throughout the experience.*

*I miss Northwestern - four years of intramural basketball games, stimulating guest lectures, Natasha Dennison's thoughtful treats in the American Studies office - but I*

*look forward to visiting often. Thank you to the American Studies professors, administrators, and fellow students for everything. Now back to work! Only 58 days left to make a difference in this election.*

## HAYLEY ALTABEF

**The Discovery of Adolescence and the Progressive Fight Against Cocaine Use in Chicago from 1904 to 1907 (Adviser: Henry Binford, History)**

## JONATHAN CLOW

**The Value of Prisons: Debate Over Prison Privatization in 1980s Tennessee (Adviser: Dylan Penningroth, History)**

## EMERSON GORDON-MARVIN

**Walter Rodney's Theoretical and Practical Approaches to Race and Class (Adviser: Brian Edwards, English and Comparative Literature)**



Graduating seniors from the class of 2012 spend a few moments posing for the camera before heading to the ceremony stage. Opposite page: Senior Nick Ruge pictured with Professor Jay Grossman.

Top (L-R): Professor John Low, who taught the 310-2 American Culture seminar, "American Indian in Film" (Fall Quater 2011); students and faculty celebrating Program Assistant Natasha Dennison's 15 years of service to the university; and majors Will Bloom and Madeleine Colis hanging out in the program office. Bottom (L-R): Visiting scholar Elena Gonzalez - a doctoral student in American Studies at Brown University whose research focuses on curatorial work for social justice - with Sunjay Kumar (the kidnapped student from page 10!) and Rhaina Cohen at the Hull-House Museum; the seniors presenting a gift to Professor Smith, who led their thesis seminar; and the seniors with Natasha and her son AJ, just before the WCAS convocation ceremony.





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