My experience taught me a lot about looking beyond my own understanding… and is something that I believe will stick with me forever.

KHALILA BLAKE

The American Dream in China

Khalila Blake, American Studies Alum ‘15

When I tell people that I was an American Studies major in undergrad many are under the impression that my studies were focused primarily on the history and culture of America. However, the American Studies program at Vanderbilt is far deeper than learning about just America. In many of the interdisciplinary courses that I took to fulfill my major, I learned about the multicultural nature of America and the ways in which American history can be traced back to various countries across the globe. As part of the American Studies senior seminar we sought to explore the idea of foreigners in the context of America, both the way that Americans are perceived by foreigners as well as the way an American can be a foreigner in his or her own country.

As part of our final presentation, I along with a few other students in the senior seminar was given the opportunity to present our research in Guangzhou, China, at Sun Yat-sen University. This opportunity not only enabled me to learn and better understand...
Vanderbilt University
Program in American Studies

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DIRECTOR’S NOTE
Welcome to the American Studies Program’s newsletter. As the new director of the program, I’m honored to follow in the footsteps of Vanessa Beasley and Teresa Goddu, the program’s two most recent directors, as well as foundation generation directors, including Cecelia Tichi and Sam Girgus. I’m thrilled to have the chance to work with Program Administrator Lindsey Bunt. As I step into this new role, I do so with great enthusiasm because of the opportunities this program offers all of us—students, faculty, staff, and community partners (local, national, and international)—to share and expand our knowledge; to connect, collaborate, and innovate; and to listen to, learn from, and teach each other about America’s, past, present, and future. The American Studies Program (AMER) features distinctive courses, immersion experiences, individual and collaborative research opportunities, and internships in addition to community building, community engagement, and community development avenues. Students can connect and collaborate with faculty members and local, national, and international community members from a range of disciplines to create, test out, and implement innovative approaches to understanding America’s stories. Importantly, they can also develop solutions to challenges facing our city, region, nation, continent, and world.

This year, the American Studies Program will continue to include road trips intended to “introduce Vanderbilt students to the rich cultural resources and pressing issues of our city and region” (vanderbilt.edu/americanstudies/events/roadtrips.php). Each journey will be led by a faculty member along with a community expert and will include a discussion component over a meal, with travel and meal expenses covered by the program. In addition to our Graduate Certificate, we will also continue to provide funded discovery and learning opportunities for graduate students, among them a dissertation fellowship at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities; travel to and participation in the Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth; and a Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) Fellowship with the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities.

Our “doings” this year will also include Third Thursdays: Music and Movement, which are gatherings hosted by a student and a faculty member that share the rhythms, routes, and roots of their favorite music and that help to remind us of the benefits of moving our bodies and spirits to the beats that surround us. The American Studies Program will also be hosting Works-in-Progress Wednesdays. These informal yet intensive and invigorating sessions will see faculty members from across disciplines helping each other to advance their scholarship through listening to each other, reading each other’s work, and providing each other with feedback on project ideas, work plans, and drafts in a safe space.
This year’s courses will include AMER 3830, a service learning course that focuses on key questions, including: What is service? Does service make a difference? Through this course, each student will be able to choose one sustained community service project to pursue throughout the semester (counts for AXLE Perspectives credit). Also included will be AMER 4100, an undergraduate seminar on history, memory, and national identity, that explores how specific historical events are re-membered—both resurrected and recontained—through different cultural forms (counts for AXLE Social and Behavioral Sciences credit). The year’s courses will also include AMER 8000, an interdisciplinary graduate-level course through which students will be able to listen to, learn from, and help to create a “People’s History of Nashville” while examining the processes of urbanization, the ways that different groups experience the city, and how both of these are articulated with issues of social justice. Finally, our course list for this year will also include a global Maymester course on the people, politics, and popular culture (especially music) of past and present civil rights movements in the U.S. South and Northern Ireland (travel to Belfast included!).

Much more is in the works, so stay tuned! Please also feel free to contact us with your ideas. Our program’s fundamental interest is in cultivating ethical innovations that reveal or add new layers to America’s stories, including stories of America and/in the world.

So, what is an American story, anyway? Here are three candidates: Are these American stories, as you understand “American”?

Story one:
I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

(“I Hear America” by Walt Whitman)

Story two:
I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.
Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.
Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.
(“I, Too” by Langston Hughes)

Story three:
Every seckey got him jeggeh
Every puppy got him flea
An you no smaddy
Ef you no got family ovah see.

So me dah-go falla fashin,
Me dah lif-up an go weh,
Anuy time oono noh hear me mout
Is ‘Merica me deh.

Every hobo has his kindling wood
Every puppy has his flea
And you’re not “somebody” if you don’t
Have family abroad

. . .

So I’m going to follow the fashion,
I’m going to get up and go away,
Any time you don’t hear my mouth anymore
I’ll be in America.
(“A Merica” by Louise Bennett)
Here’s another candidate. Do you think it’s an American story?

So, I was born on the island of Jamaica to a Jamaican mother and a Nigerian father, who met at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I grew up spending summers in Flemington, New Jersey, learning how to say “honey chile,” among many other lessons in Americanness, while spending my days with my African American babysitter and my friends—her grandchildren and foster children. Up until the age of thirteen and a half, I spent every academic year in Jamaica learning “proper” behavior and listening to my Anglophile grandfather complain about all the bad American habits I had picked up during my summers in the States, like wearing flip flops and answering “Yeah” when he called me instead of saying “Yes, Grandpa.” I did my first three years of high school in Jamaica, first through third form to be more specific, with schoolmates who craved Michael Jackson leather jackets with lots of zippers and silver gloves and who were proud of their A-HA and AC-DC Trapper Keepers. Then I migrated to the United States for the good living, and I learned my Americanness in the era of MC Lyte, EU and their song “Da Butt,” Guns ‘n’ Roses (GnR to those in “the know”), and, of course, Jersey boy Jon Bon Jovi.

Because of the geographical and chronological scope of my scholarly work and multi-national, multi-cultural background, the question of the “object of American studies” (Castronovo and Gilman 2009) has been a recurrent theme in my life as a scholar. Where do/can I fit in as a scholar? What journals should I submit to? Which jobs should I apply for—posts in post-colonial studies? Caribbean literature? American literature? Diaspora studies? Latin American studies? Always in between. The questions that have shaped my work, its creation, and likely also its reception include the following: Is American Studies transnational? Is all work on the Caribbean to be automatically classified as Caribbean, post-colonial, or diaspora studies? What of work on communities that fall between fields—between Latin American studies, Caribbean studies, post-colonial studies, and diaspora studies? Taken literally, a field called “American studies,” would seem to be the perfect home for this sometimes unheimlich work.

American studies, for me, has two meanings: on the one hand, I understand it to be a very particular text-focused scholarly tradition, founded by Parrington and Miller, that embodies the paradigms delineated by Wise—especially with regards to the centrality of canonical writers and thinkers such as Emerson, Whitman, Melville, Twain, James and of themes such as liberalism, individualism, and transcendentalism. On the other hand, I see it as providing a wonderfully flexible discursive space for innovative interdisciplinary work on and with a wide range of American communities, sites,
and issues as they appear both within and beyond the borders of the United States. It is this second vision of the field that has drawn, and continues to draw, me to American studies. The objective of this American Studies Program is to illuminate hidden, neglected, forgotten, or purposely obscured aspects of the post-Columbian American world created by the “discovery” of the “New” World. This vision of American studies enables a focus on the particularities of the power dynamics, expressive cultures, and approaches to formulating and articulating individual and collective identities in the New World. It is this vision of American studies that can potentially provide a discursive space for talking about the parallels and connections between the narratives, manifestations, and implications of American ideologies and actions such as the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny, the Grenada invasion, and the imag(in)ing of the Caribbean as “the paradise next door” as well as the impact and import of inter-American folks such as Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, and Notorious B.I.G., among many others. The beauty of this moment is the opportunity it presents to connect these two visions of the field. I don’t see it as an either or choice. This is not a game of Pac-Man, in which traditional American studies is going to be consumed by its more transnational descendant; this is a moment in which we can value, combine, and connect both approaches and in which we can draw on their strengths to continue to deepen our understanding of where America has been and of where it can go in the future.

For me, America is all about crossings; about learning, unlearning, understanding, and misunderstanding; and about sticking to and transgressing the prevailing rules about borders and boundaries. What does America mean for you? What is your American story? What are the American stories that have made you who you are? What are the American stories that surround, inspire, and motivate you? What are the American stories you have created or that you dream of creating? What are the American stories that make you want to work towards making a different kind of future?

Let’s build these stories together. Let’s work together to see what innovations we can create to help us all better comprehend and positively impact the American world(s) in which we live. Let’s explore how we can draw on and add to the diversity of research methods, digital technologies, narrative tools, and cultural wisdoms that surround us to make all our worlds even better.

Best,
Ifeoma Nwankwo

Director of the Program in American Studies
Associate Professor of English, American Studies, and Teaching and Learning

the rich culture of China; it also changed much of my perception of my own experience as an American. Many of the people we crossed paths with, students and administrators alike, were all very fascinated with the examination of the American Dream as part of our research, given all of its attention in literature and popular culture. Despite the obvious use of the word “American,” it never dawned on me how truly American this theory was. The students asked questions such as, Is the American Dream real? Do people really achieve the American Dream? While students in my American Studies Senior Seminar were not in total agreement on the answer to those questions, it was interesting to share these conversations among students who had no personal relationships to the American Dream.

As an American born to a Trinidadian family who migrated to America in hopes of more opportunity, I feel as though I live the American Dream every day. However, by the culmination of my trip to China and the senior seminar, the ways in which I understood the American Dream changed and extended beyond my individual experience. I am so thankful for the conversations I had in China. They were eye-opening in the sense that many of the Chinese students and administrators’ outlooks on life, specifically mobility and achievement, were far different than mine. My experience taught me a lot about looking beyond my own understanding because there is no one way to pursue happiness. Having the opportunity to see people lead happy and joyful lives without the opportunities and resources that I deem fundamental to my happiness was impactful and is something that I believe will stick with me forever.
STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE MAYMESTER:

Comparative Conversations on a Comparative Civil Rights Study

Q&A with Jacqueline Scott and Lucy Wray

Jacqueline Scott is a senior at Vanderbilt majoring in American Studies and sociology.

Lucy Wray is a third year at Queen’s University Belfast.

What were the challenges and rewards of studying in a university environment different from your own?

JS: I had a naïve assumption that the classroom setting would be the same across the pond, but I was so wrong and the experience made me not only more appreciative of the U.S.’s style but also more aware and curious of the multiple ways of teaching and learning.

While it was challenging to be in a classroom where for half of the students the style was familiar and for half it was totally different, this is what made it rewarding. Everyone came with different perspectives and expectations and thus discussion or group work made us all think about how we are accustomed to learning and how we can be more engaged participants, whichever side of the pond.

LW: One of the greatest challenges I faced at Vanderbilt was the level of oral participation expected from the students in class. At Queen’s, lectures, more often than not, solely consist of lecturers presenting information whilst seminars are set aside for discussion. At Vanderbilt I found that students were encouraged to engage in all steps of the teaching process by asking questions and giving opinions, when appropriate. I initially found this a daunting prospect but soon came to realise that this level of participation not only aided my understanding of the topics of discussion but made the studying process more enjoyable, making it a great reward.

How did the Maymester and its comparative element influence the way you think about your respective civil rights movement?

JS: Through the course’s themes of commemoration and understanding how societies and institutions remember their respective movements, I gained insight into the complex nature of commemoration of the U.S. civil rights movement, especially in the South.

While many monuments and museums present important findings and narratives from the struggle, in Northern Ireland the commemoration is far less prevalent and is often sterile or quite one-dimensional. I realized the importance of community and national efforts to commemorate the movements and that commemoration can be as dangerous as it can be powerful.

LW: Growing up in Northern Ireland, topics such as religion and “The Troubles” are almost unavoidable and I believe our interpretation of events is influenced by the communities we come from rather than the facts.

The comparative element of the module made me view the civil rights movement in a new light as I considered suppressed narrative voices that are frequently overlooked in mainstream presentations of events. The questions and opinions of Vanderbilt students also provoked me to consider the civil rights movement in a different light. Due to the sensitivity of events and religious tensions in Northern Ireland, topics such as the civil rights movement are common knowledge but rarely discussed. The module therefore gave many Queen’s students a chance to discuss questions we had never considered before.
A lot of cross-cultural study happens outside the classroom. How did you find yourself learning about a different culture during the Maymester?

**JS:** The simple act of just being all together and sharing our stories alongside a common experience fostered comparative cultural learning. As a point of foundation, I learned a great deal about how our different educational systems shape us as individuals and societies. I also gained great insight from all of the Queen’s students when they shared their personal perspectives and encounters with the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, as it really brought to life the divisiveness of the conflict and the ongoing tension experience in that society. Those personal stories are something you can’t get in a textbook.

**LW:** I had the time of my life in Nashville and outside of the classroom I did a lot of socializing, sightseeing, and eating; all of which I firmly defend as “cross-cultural study”! Aside from these recreational activities I gained a lot from our visits to museums and national heritage sights, many of which were interactive and visually impressive, making us feel like we were transported back in time. Our Vanderbilt peers were also so helpful and welcoming. They were always willing to answer questions and I loved conversing with them, hearing about their culture and university experience.

What is an element of the Maymester that you most hope to take with you throughout your academic career and beyond?

**JS:** This immersive experience provided not only strong friendships and connections but also an enhanced insight into how we learn in our societies and the importance of what we learn. This program pushed me to think about what I’m learning from a dimension of critical examination of the agenda and assumptions infused into so much of our information. After this experience I know I won’t just lap up facts or symbols that are claimed to be representative of an event or people, but instead push for more perspectives, ideas, and notions of the past, present, and future.

**LW:** I hope to maintain an ability to challenge my own pre-existing ideas and look beyond mainstream historical narratives. As the role and voices of the women involved in both civil rights movements were often suppressed, I am now more conscious that my gender can shape my opportunities and aim to actively challenge any limitations I may face. Furthermore, I hope to keep the friendships I have made with both Queen’s and Vanderbilt students.
Stepping outside of our society and observing another one enriches our understanding of humanity, and our own assessment of social problems and the possibilities for change.

DAN CORNFIELD

THE FACULTY PERSPECTIVE: American Studies Maymester 2015

Dan Cornfield, Professor of Sociology and Political Science

Alexis de Tocqueville’s trans-Atlantic adventure from France to the United States during the 1830s left us a lasting legacy of democratic theory and his weighty tome *Democracy in America*. Stepping outside of our society and observing another one enriches our understanding of humanity, and our own assessment of social problems and the possibilities for change.

In Maymester 2015, our trans-Atlantic adventure—“Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and the Southern U.S., 1950–1970” (American Studies 202)—was an exhilarating course comparing these important civil rights movements, and assessing contemporary pathways for realizing social change. Its inaugural offering, the course itself was trans-Atlantic and trans-institutional in content and design: Professor Vanessa B. Beasley1 and I team-taught the course with several professors on the Queen’s University Belfast faculty; the course enrolled a total of twenty-five Vandy and QUB students; and it was offered sequentially on both university campuses, beginning in Nashville and culminating in Belfast, Northern Ireland. All of the course participants—students and faculty—were physically present on both campuses.

1 The former director of the Vanderbilt American Studies program, Vanessa Beasley is Associate Professor of Communication Studies and now Dean of The Martha Rivers Ingram Commons. She created the course in partnership with Queen’s University Belfast.
American Studies Courses for 2016

AMER 3200 – Global Perspectives on the U.S.
Dan Cornfield, Ifeoma Nwankwo
Maymester
AXLE: US

U.S. and Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movements Past & Present: People, Politics, Music, and Memory

This interdisciplinary course, taught by scholars representing multiple disciplines and colleges, offers a comparative study of the Civil Rights movements in Northern Ireland and the American South. The course will identify the historical origins and contexts of the campaigns for political and legal equality for African-Americans in the United States, and Catholics in Northern Ireland; the role of gender, religion, nationalism, music, historical consciousness and political leadership in shaping each campaign; the nature and dynamics of “civil rights” as a political concept; the relationship between political and socio-economic agendas; the tensions between non-violent and revolutionary elements; and the response of states and majority communities to the civil rights campaigns. It will address parallels, influences and discontinuities between the case studies, encouraging students to assess the nature, impact, and modern-day resonance of both, and to do so through a transnational perspective.

AMER 4100 – Undergraduate Seminar
Teresa Goddu
TR 2:35-3:50
AXLE: SBS

History, Memory, and National Identity

This course examines the representation of historical trauma through literature, film, and the built environment. It explores how specific historical events are remembered—both resurrected and recontained—through different cultural forms. We will locate ourselves in historical sites that are crucial to the production of U.S. national identity: slavery, the Holocaust, 9/11 as well as the contemporary moment of climate change. In doing so, we will examine how cultural texts represent and reconstruct a traumatic past (or, in the case of climate change, an imagined future) in dialogue with the present needs of national identity. Our focus will be on the production of public memory and its central role in the formation of national identity.
As the Dartmouth Coach approached campus and I prepared to disembark for Futures of American Studies, I noticed I had arrived on Wheelock Avenue, named for the eighteenth-century Dartmouth founder and congregational minister, Eleazar Wheelock. The story of Eleazar Wheelock and the founding of Dartmouth College provides one lens for considering the ongoing tensions within the field of American Studies and its institutional contexts—tensions many of the plenary sessions and seminars acknowledged and interrogated throughout our week at Dartmouth. Eleazar Wheelock provided education for many Native American converts during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. His most famous student was Samson Occom, a Mohegan who in adulthood became an educator and minister to New England Indian communities. When Occom completed his education, he was asked by Wheelock to set out on a preaching tour in England to raise funds for an Indian College. Once Occom returned however, Wheelock had abandoned his commitment to Native education and reconstituted what would have been Moor’s Indian Charity School as Dartmouth College in 1771. Occom wrote in response: “I am very Jealous that Instead of your Semenary (sic) Becoming alma Mater, she will be too alba mater” (July 24, 1771).

Too alba mater. Too alba to matter. Occom’s words anticipate the urgent, deadly political context American Studies must account for: the bodies that haven’t mattered and don’t matter in American history. The dispossessed past so central to the founding of one of the United States’s most prestigious schools was often on my mind during my week at Dartmouth. Futures of American Studies—called “Dartmouth Futures” by participants—is a collaborative and interdisciplinary enterprise initiated by Dartmouth professor Donald Pease that trenchantly reflects on the position of American Studies scholars within institutions at once defined by dispossession and critical of them. As a result, speakers frequently linked their arguments to topics reflecting broader concerns on the academy and its relationship to politics and culture at large, such as the university’s reliance on adjuncts, the future of tenure, state intervention in university life, the Black Lives Matter protests, and the recent shootings in Charleston. This year’s session begins the first of a five-year focus on “Questions Worth Asking.” The plenary speakers were invited to address questions emerging within the field of American Studies, including (but not limited to), “What are the strengths and limitations to the digitization of American Studies?” “What is Surface Reading? Why did it emerge? What are its strengths and limitations?” “How has Afro-Pessimism reconfigured the field of American Studies?” and “What are new directions in Queer Studies?”

This session’s plenary lectures challenged prior critical frameworks and offered new theories of state securitization and financial speculation, periodization and canon-building, and the relationship of gender, race, and sexuality to visual and digital cultures. By framing Dartmouth Futures around questions that then developed through collaborative engagement between plenary sessions and seminars, this year’s session pushed the boundaries of critical commonplaces, terminologies, methodologies, and research agendas of American Studies within the academy.

One way Dartmouth Futures navigates these pressures is by fostering conversations between scholars in the field and graduate students. To my mind, the seminar spaces are some of the most enriching at Dartmouth Futures. Each seminar consists of approximately ten graduate students and a faculty leader, and I had the opportunity to participate in a seminar led by Professor Elizabeth Maddock Dillon (Northeastern University). Professor Dillon organized our presentations so that many of us were in dialogue with plenary sessions from previous plenary talks, allowing the conversation between plenary session and seminar to organically continue from day to day. Our seminar was also enriched by the variety of participant backgrounds. Although Professor Dillon’s specialty is in early American literature and most of the graduate participants were coming from the fields of early American literature or nineteenth-century American literature, our sub-specialties (queer theory, financial speculation and economics, religious studies and spirituality, etc.) offered us opportunities to explore new directions in our individual projects. Professor Dillon’s facilitation was especially valuable: she asked incisive, productive questions of each participant’s work and endeavored to link our projects in illuminating ways. She also requested plenary speakers to attend our seminar to hear specific papers she thought were in conversation with a plenary speaker’s own work. This allowed us the opportunity to receive questions and
feedback from important scholars in our fields and specialties—an especially valuable practice since many of us were presenting on portions of our dissertations.

As I participated in Dartmouth Futures this summer, I’d like to believe Samson Occom would welcome the program’s mission and its efforts to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, diverse scholarship, and boundary-pushing conversations. Even more than the collaborative spirit of Dartmouth Futures, I think he would have appreciated the attention paid to issues of race, dispossession, and political action. Many of the plenary speakers invoked a sense of temporal displacement to describe the current political climate both inside and outside the academy. As Hortense Spillers put it best when reflecting on the June 17th shootings in Charleston, South Carolina, “What year are we in? 1915? Or 2015?” While we are certainly living in a world too “alba” still, I would venture that Dartmouth Futures has become an important space to explore not only new directions in American Studies, but to express both rage and hope for our futures as scholars, teachers, and critics within the academy and the world at large.

R. J. Boutelle, American Studies Futures Fellow (English)

Like many participants before me, I arrived in the quaint village of Hanover, New Hampshire, for the Futures of American Studies Institute with a mix of anticipation and apprehension, unsure of what to expect, but excited nonetheless. Though I have participated in other intensive summer programs, I can say, without hesitation, that Futures presents the most daunting, rigorous, and unyielding week of study that I have ever experienced: each meal was bookended by a two-hour plenary (many of which ran over time thanks to the excitement the Q&A sessions generated) and each afternoon occupied with intimate, focused, workshop-driven seminars. Macerating in the intellectual culture of the Institute and rubbing elbows with the leading academic voices of American Studies, however, ultimately proved to be far more energizing than enervating.

The plenary sessions indexed many of the current keywords in American Studies: Afro-pessimism, digital humanities/methodologies, and gender were ubiquitous terms across the talks, while a plenary session on “Surface Reading” signaled, for many, the ways in which the entire Institute was preoccupied with questions of reading, interpretation, and, to the pleasant surprise of many, pedagogy. This extended to a discussion of how digital/pedagogical tools might connect the political concerns of American Studies with public activism, like #BlackLivesMatter. As a result, I decided to live-tweet (for the first time!) the Institute using #fas2015. The lively and lightning-paced online component to the conference enriched the talks themselves, providing opportunities for real-time engagement with a wide range of scholars. Not only did Twitter allow me to process my comparative understanding of the talks, but it allowed for knee-jerk reactions, questions, and citations that prompted further discussion with other tweeters in both online and offline spaces.

While these plenaries illuminated the “state of the field,” the seminars were, in my mind, the most valuable part of the Institute experience. Led by Colleen Boggs (Dartmouth College), my seminar generously and generatively scrutinized each other’s projects, all of which variously explored the contours of race and racism in literature, popular culture, film, photography, performance, music, installation art, and material artifacts. This was interdisciplinarity at its best: a diverse range of archives and methodologies organized around a central set of questions and motivated by shared political commitments. Beyond the exchange of feedback, our seminar spent one afternoon launching into an impromptu discussion of how the issues our projects explore affected our universities, our educations, and our pedagogies—what developed in that conversation was a truly remarkable set of reflections about the stakes of American Studies. My seminar is continuing our fruitful conversation in the form of an online reading/writing group, aptly titled “Perpetual Futures.”

And this, in truth, is the spirit of the Institute: forging lasting relationships among scholars and, in doing so, confirming both the capacity and necessity of scholarly discourse to extend beyond the walls of our own universities. Futures was not simply a “boot camp,” but rather a momentous and transformative step in my sense of myself as a participant in academic discourse.
American Studies Graduate Workshop to be offered in Spring 2016

AMER 8000: Social Justice and the City
James Fraser, Associate Professor
Department of Human and Organizational Development
Advisory Board and Affiliated Faculty, American Studies Program
Affiliated Faculty, Institute for Energy and the Environment
Affiliated Faculty, Women’s and Gender Studies
Curb Public Scholar
T 9–12

This course examines the production of urban space (processes of urbanization), the ways that different groups experience the city, and how both of these are articulated with issues of social justice. Central to this task is developing an understanding of how space and place are dynamically constituted by, and affect, spatial (political-economic and cultural) projects of different coalitions of actors that are comprised of globally “stretched out social relations” (Doreen Massey). In addition to developing theoretical approaches to the city, the course will provide multiple opportunities for application of the material by examining the significance of different places in Nashville for issues of social and environmental justice. Class participants will have an opportunity to develop publishable entries for “A People's Guide to Nashville” a book project that will identify, analyze, and bring to light the importance of space and place for creating a better world. Through both theoretical and applied class activities the course concludes with a section on putting forth more just futures for the city and examines the role of utopian thought for guiding these visions.