Civil Rights in the U.S. and Northern Ireland

Brianna Watkins

This past summer I had the amazing experience of participating in the American Studies Civil Rights Movements in the U.S. and Northern Ireland Maymester and my life has been forever changed. This course taught me so many things about global interconnectedness, history, social justice and how reasons for oppression are socially constructed by society.

As an African American female from the South, I grew up learning about the Civil Rights Movement in America every year in history. This course demonstrated to me that there was so much more to learn and understand about the movement because of the interdisciplinary approach used by this course. No longer was I just reading a textbook, but I was listening to speeches, reading testimonials, walking the streets where fighters of justice had previously walked, and learning with a group of students from Northern Ireland that did not have any comprehension of oppressing people because of race. Exploring the civil rights movement in America with the Queen’s University students helped me develop a better understanding of the situation in America because for the first time I was learning with people that did not experience this specific history themselves and could truly look at the issue objectively. It was fascinating to engage in discussions over meals and truly try to understand each other’s perspectives and how they each fit into the narrative.

Going to Belfast, Northern Ireland was the culminating part of this Maymester because students were able to combine the knowledge we learned in the United States with the information we were learning in Northern Ireland. Personally at this point I began to realize how limited my previous thinking was because I realized that I knew so little about the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement and Northern Ireland’s culture. I could not fathom growing up in a warlike state on the basis of religion. It was astonishing to me to grasp that my religion mattered more in this country than the color of my skin. This demonstrated to me the impact of societal standards and definitions of “difference”. The comparison of the two movements began to fully become clear the more we learned in Northern Ireland. We discovered the many connections between the two civil right movements such as both movements starting with the aim of peaceful protests, the influence of the American Civil Rights Movement on the Northern Ireland movement and both movements experiencing a “Bloody Sunday”. The most interesting aspect of the comparison was how the U.S. Civil Rights Movement maintained a non-violent approach, while the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement resulted in a state of war that has only recently attempted resolution. This course made us critically think and examine the potential reasoning for the two extremely different outcomes.

The learning experiences gained through this course were great but I believe that the relationships Vanderbilt students were able to make with the Queen’s University students was the fundamental piece to the success of this program. The readings, site visits, and lectures were great and informative to this learning process, but the most influential memory I have from this experience was a friend and classmate from Belfast crying at the Peace Wall and explaining what her family went through in order to avoid death. That moment taught me more than any reading or lecture could have...
OUTGOING DIRECTOR’S NOTE

The 2016 calendar year was a productive one for American Studies.

In the 2016 calendar year, we welcomed three new members to the American Studies team: Dr. Gabriel Torres Colón, Assistant Director and Senior Lecturer; Cindy Martinez, Program Administrator; and Cindy’s baby daughter Sofía. We are thrilled you are here! Also in 2016, Professor Paul Stob agreed to become Chair of the American Studies Advisory Board (a newly created role). Thank you, Paul, for actualizing your commitment in this way. Much appreciated!

Also joining the American Studies community in 2016 was the program’s 2016–2017 HASTAC scholar, Max Baumkel. (HASTAC stands for Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory.) Max has been building from the work started by our 2015–2016 HASTAC scholar Russell J. (R.J.) Boutelle. The project is an innovative digital platform for connecting folks interested in American studies across and beyond our campus. I first had the idea for the platform in 2015, when I stepped in as director and spent time talking and working with American Studies faculty members and students. I am so excited the idea is coming to fruition and that first R.J. and now Max have brought their own distinctive ideas and approaches to the project. They have taken it beyond what any of us could have imagined at the start.

The year also saw the production and showcasing of the excellent and well-received senior project, an interactive digital archive and multimedia presentation by Priyanka Aribindi, Jacqueline Hall, and Will Hanna entitled “Food + Identity at Vanderbilt.” These incredible then-seniors, now alumni, describe their project in this way: “Through numerous interviews with undergraduate students of diverse backgrounds we have explored the complicated intersection of food, culture, college, and the very question of what is ‘American?’ We also asked students about their experiences with cultural food options through campus dining and received a wealth of stories and comments. Most students appreciate the effort of dining services to offer cultural options as a means of expanding the pallets and horizons of our community, but many cited discouragement with how cultural food isn’t contextualized or used as a tool for teaching and more in-depth exposure … As Vanderbilt strives to be a more inclusive and diverse community, we hope that food experiences—enhanced through collaboration between students, faculty members, administration, and staff—can be important pieces of that effort.”
Collaboration was a distinguishing hallmark of American Studies programming in 2016. In the following paragraphs, I describe some of the year’s productive partnerships.

In partnership with Queens University Belfast, and with co-sponsorship from the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities and the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy, American Studies’ Global Maymester course, Civil Rights in the U.S. and Northern Ireland, featured and facilitated hands-on, ears-on, and eyes-on learning in Nashville, Memphis, Belfast, and Dublin.

Thanks to an Southeastern Conference (SEC) Travel Grant and in partnership with the English Graduate Students’ Association, American Studies hosted Professor Barbara McCaskill, Professor of English at the University of Georgia and co-founder of the Civil Rights Digital Library. Professor McCaskill did three workshops during her visit: one public workshop that was open to the whole Vanderbilt community entitled “Work that Matters: Professional and Public Service;” one for junior faculty members, postdocs, and graduate students entitled “Career Advice for Early Career Scholars;” and one for graduate students entitled “Talking about Race with Undergraduates.”

With co-sponsorship from the Nashville Public Library Foundation; the Wisdom Working Group Trans-Institutional Program; The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy; the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center; the African American and Diaspora Studies Program and Research Center; and the Program in Latino and Latina Studies, we brought renowned poet Sunni Patterson to Nashville for two fantastic events: “Father’s Hopes, Mother’s Prayers,” which was held at the Black Cultural Center, and a “Creative Process Workshop” held in the Civil Rights Room at the Nashville Public Library.

In collaboration with lead organizer Professor Marzia Milazzo (English; Latino and Latina Studies), American Studies hosted iconic scholars George Lipsitz and Barbara Tomlinson (University of California, Santa Barbara) for “What is the Work You Want Your Work to Do?: American Studies as Accompaniment.”

Finally, in partnership with the College of Arts and Science Dean’s Office, Professors Dana Nelson and Jay Clayton, and the Graduate School, American Studies hosted Gordon Hutner (University of Illinois), founding editor of American Literary History, for three events: a workshop for graduate students entitled “Scholarly Publishing: What, Where, When, & How,” and two roundtables entitled “Publishing and Paying it Forward: Getting Published Yourself and Helping Others Get Published,” featuring Vanderbilt faculty members who are editors-in-chief or founding editors of top journals in their fields. These faculty members included Bob Barsky (French and Italian), Larry Isaac (Sociology), William Luís (Spanish and Portuguese; Latino and Latina Studies), Dana Nelson (English), and Tracy Sharpley-Whiting (African American and Diaspora Studies; French and Italian).

It included Works-in-Progress Wednesdays, during which faculty members and postdocs shared and discussed their work, and Third Thursdays: Music and Movement, which focused on the inter-American and inter-generational roots and routes of American music.

I am honored to have served as Director of American Studies and to have helped this program grow; I have moved on to become Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships. As American Studies moves into 2017, the program welcomes a new director, Professor Sarah Igo. Welcome and thank you, Sarah! American Studies is undoubtedly in good hands going forward.

Best, Ifeoma Nwankwo

Associate Professor of English, American Studies, and Teaching and Learning
One answer to “Why American Studies?,” then, is that something as intricate as the texture of contemporary civic discourse can only be satisfactorily tackled by joining the insights of political philosophers, communications scholars, and social movement theorists to those of historians and literary scholars. Only by marshaling diverse texts, methods, and styles of analysis will we deepen our understanding of our present moment in all its complexity and contradictions. At its best, this is the kind of work that American Studies does. And it is everywhere evident in our corner of Buttrick Hall: in our classes and colloquia as well as our public partnerships and scholarly projects.

Already it’s been a delight to work with the American Studies team: administrative assistant Cindy Martinez; assistant director Gabriel Torres Colón; and chair of the faculty Advisory Board Paul Stob. In the year ahead we will field an array of innovative courses and design a host of new ones keyed to Immersion Vanderbilt. We will host an exciting day-long workshop on “Mapping Movements & Memories in the Americas.” We will continue to work with the Nashville Public Library and to forge collaborations with American Studies programs abroad. We will launch a series of “city walks,” rambles through different sections of Nashville to better grasp the nature of the city around us. And we will foster new writing groups for students and faculty working in shared areas of interest across campus. Finally, we plan to convene a Student Advisory Board to help steer the future course of the Program.

In the months ahead, I’ll no doubt continue to reflect on the question of “Why American Studies?” I will do so with deep gratitude for the program’s previous directors, most recently Ifeoma Nwankwo, for cultivating this most vibrant pocket of intellectual inquiry on Vanderbilt’s campus.

Best wishes,
Sarah E. Igo
Director of the Program in American Studies
Message from the American Studies Advisory Board

I am delighted to serve as chair of the American Studies Advisory Board for the 2016–17 academic year. Joining me on the board are accomplished faculty members from various disciplines in the College of Arts & Science and across the university:

- Joe Bandy, Assistant Director of the Center for Teaching and affiliated faculty in the Department of Sociology
- Jim Fraser, Associate Professor of Human and Organizational Development
- Joni Hersch, Professor of Law and Economics
- Ann Neely, Associate Professor of the Practice, Dept. of Teaching & Learning
- Cecelia Tichi, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of English and American Studies

Our job on the board is to help the program director and assistant director shape the future of American Studies at Vanderbilt.

In addition, this year the advisory board will assist with a mid-year transition of program directors. In the Fall 2016 semester, American was led by Ifeoma Nwankwo, Associate Professor of English, who took over the program in 2015 but recently began serving as Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships. Beginning in the Spring 2017 semester, American Studies is led by Sarah Igo, Associate Professor of History.

Professor Nwankwo has been a tireless advocate for American Studies, energizing the program and laying the groundwork for its future. One of her most important accomplishments has been to carry out an external program review, which involved bringing in faculty members from other universities to assess the strengths and needs of American Studies. This was a time-consuming yet strategically essential process that has resulted in a clear direction for the program. The Advisory Board as well as AMER faculty and students are indebted to Professor Nwankwo for her vision, leadership, and dedication to the program. We wish her all the best with her important work in the Provost’s office!

Beginning in January 2017, Professor Igo took over as Director of American Studies. She brings with her impressive accomplishments as a scholar and teacher, and American Studies...
I began to seriously consider the ways in which digital humanities work can create a bridge between the knowledge produced within academia and the knowledge produced outside of its walls when I was in the class “Reading and Writing for Our Lives: Afro-Diasporic Scholars and in ‘Public Humanities,’” taught by former Director of the Program in American Studies, Professor Ifeoma Nwankwo. In our class, we talked through the ways in which the many modes of personal storytelling—written or spoken, autobiographical, fictional, or scholarly—can be sustaining and motivational for the storyteller. We looked at example after example where digital humanities projects served as vibrant, living archives of stories—often stories from marginalized people whose truths would otherwise be lost to time. The digital humanities projects we looked at also told a quieter story about the intellectual, political, and emotional commitments of the scholars who made them.

Around the same time, I was realizing that my own scholarship is most consistent with American Studies. For me, American Studies became a field through which I could articulate my project as interdisciplinary and political. It allows me the space to say that I’m invested in learning and writing about the lives of people living in the United States, rather than framing my scholarship around a static body of literature. For others, the field of American Studies affords something different, and that’s what is so great about it.

With the opportunity to serve as the HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory) fellow for the Program in American Studies, I get to ask what
American Studies is and does for other people. R.J. Boutelle, the 2015-2016 HASTAC fellow for the Program in American Studies, began the project that I’m working on now. “What Is American Studies?” is a straightforward project title that has some complicated answers. Last year, R.J. conducted a series of oral interviews with faculty and students of American Studies in which he asked interviewees what the field means to them and how they see their own work fitting into it. He asked them to define America, and to talk about their understanding of the “American Dream.” These interviews highlight salient characteristics of American Studies such as its interdisciplinarity, and the field’s mandate to interrogate hegemonic definitions of “America.” However, what shone through these interviews for me was a local story about what it means to do American Studies here, in Nashville, at Vanderbilt and how our location as an urban, Southern university shapes our intellectual pursuits.

This last point is where I am rooting my own contribution to this HASTAC project. If the Americas take on a unique and specific definition at Vanderbilt, it’s because the people in greater Middle Tennessee respond in their actions to this nebulous idea we call “nation.” In other words, the construction of the Americas happens in each town, city, or region just as it is happening at a larger scale across continents, borders, and waters. In all cases, why and how we study the Americas is a question that affects academics and non-academics alike, and all have stories that are relevant to our study. With digital humanities tools, I want to reach out to those outside of the field and outside of the academy to find new stories to define our field. I want to use digital humanities tools to bring those new stories back into Vanderbilt’s Program in American Studies to help build an even more dynamic, layered vision of our intellectual goals.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE MAYMESTER:
Maymester Testimonial

Elizabeth Winter

When I walked into the first Maymester class, I’ll admit I didn’t know what to expect. Very quickly though I found myself seated amid a pack of English and Northern Irish students, who introduced themselves and began to pepper me with questions about myself and about Vanderbilt and about college in America. I had no idea that when I would first walk into that room and sit down next to Fran and Robert and Jack that they would become real friends. Friends who would welcome me into their homes in Belfast, bring me and the other American students into their authentic university experience with an openness and generosity I strive to match, and friends who I hope to stay in touch with in the future. These and other students and professors in the room on that very first day and the meaningful relationships we’d form would make the course one of the most rewarding and fun experiences I have had at Vanderbilt.

The course not only brought me to an entirely new country for the first time and introduced me to the fascinating but unfamiliar history and culture of Northern Ireland and its civil rights movement, but it also exposed me to more of Nashville. Our bus tour took us to North Nashville and Fisk, among other locations—places I had never explored on my own. It made me aware for the first time of Nashville’s rich history and role in the national Civil Rights Movement. More generally, it helped me understand the uniqueness of my American college experience,
with its small discussion based classes and strong campus culture, and the ways in which it is different from experiences students have at universities abroad.

The course taught me to question the narratives of Civil Rights that I’ve been taught since high school and to examine issues and movements through a wide variety of lenses: linguistic, musical, artistic, strategic and psychological. The diverse array of professors we interacted with, both in Nashville and Belfast, exposed the class to an interesting array of perspectives and ideas, and our international peers also provided a fresh take.

Because of the Queens students, every experience I had, in and out of the classroom—whether it was a song-filled bus ride to Memphis, a barbecue in Belfast or a late-night trip to a Northern Irish “Chip Shop”—inevitably brought with it some invaluable piece of learning. Thanks to the Maymester I hiked the hill that inspired Gulliver’s Travels, learned to distinguish a few English, Northern Irish and Irish accents, and picked up a few invaluable phrases (what’s the craic?). I ate more than my share of Ulster Fries, and gained a new understanding of the power of language and the global impact of national movements. Most importantly though I learned to take risks, ask questions critically evaluating my own culture and formed lasting relationships with both American and international students and professors that I treasure and hope will continue to remain strong.

My only regret is that I cannot go back and relive this fun, unique and eye-opening experience all over again.

Maymester Experience

Emily Campbell

My Maymester experience is easily one of my favorite memories at Vanderbilt. One of the biggest assets of the class is the comparative aspect. Even though I have family in Northern Ireland, I had never learned much about the Troubles. I also gained perspective on Civil Rights in the United States, a topic that I have been learning about since I was young. I am amazed at the complexity of issues faced, even today.

I enjoyed learning about how the education system works in Northern Ireland. I found the classes in Belfast were more lecture-rather than discussion-based, but all of our classes had thought-provoking conversations.

It was great to have students from both Vanderbilt University and Queen’s University Belfast. Not only did I make some amazing friends, but I also loved showing the QUB students around Nashville. Once we were on the other side of the pond, they were all very helpful in immersing the Vanderbilt students in Belfast life.

I highly recommend this class to anyone who has the opportunity to take it.
A Selection of our 2017 Fall Courses

**AMER 1002 01: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN STUDIES (TORRES)**
This course explores cultural diversity in the United States through the multifaceted experiences of its peoples, past and present. In addition to understanding a variety of worldviews, this course also examines how inequity has structured the U.S. cultural landscape. Questions of race, religion, gender, nationalism, and class continue to affect our civic and political conversations; and students are encouraged to engage in these conversations while considering diverse perspectives. Finally, students will learn and apply various methods for documenting and analyzing culture.

**AMER 1002w 02: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN STUDIES (NELSON)**
*Why Argue about Politics?: An American Studies Approach to Deliberative Democracy*
This course will offer an historical and political background to the ideal—and practice—of deliberative democracy in the US. We will consider from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including cognitive psychology and neuroscience—about the work of deliberation and conversation across differences, assessing what the prospects for democracy are in the US as we watch the continuing developments of the Trump Presidency and public responses, while thinking about what contributions we might ourselves make to these and future debates.

**AMER 3200 01: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE U.S. (TORRES)**
This course examines U.S. cultural presence in the world and global cultural presence in the U.S. Through case studies from various disciplines, we will examine the complex social, political, and economic entanglements that have connected the U.S. to the world. Students will research global ties in their immediate urban surroundings, and they consider global affairs from multiple cultural perspectives.

**AMER 3890 01: TOPICS IN AMERICAN STUDIES: THE ART OF SOCIAL JUSTICE (LOWE)**
This course explores ways in which artists and activists have used art to comment on issues of social justice in American culture, both historically and in the present moment. Throughout the course, we will be considering the efficacy of activist art, the relationship between activist art and its intended audience, and the varieties of ways that artists have used their work to communicate issues of social injustice to the public.

**AMER 4000 01: AMERICAN STUDIES WORKSHOP: URBAN GEOGRAPHY AND PLANNING (FRASER)**
The course provides an introduction to geographical perspectives on cities and connects these to broader themes in urban studies with a focus on the ways in which cities are planned, experienced and represented. The field of urban geography is broad, encompassing studies of socio-ecological systems that are shaped by political, economic, cultural and social structures and relations that span the globe. Moreover, urban planning is increasingly informed by geographical thought as, at its core, planning concerns itself with the production of urban space for a variety of intentions. Critical scholarship originating in both geography and planning typically ask questions related to social justice and the city, and throughout the semester we will focus on these topics as they relate to the morphology of cities in the U.S. from the end of the 19th century up to now. Students will have an opportunity to delve into a particular aspect of cities by using geographical and planning tools.

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taught me about the Catholic experience in Northern Ireland. These special ties we made with the students are what makes this Maymester different and more meaningful than any other course offered. Not only were we classmates and friends, but we were also allies because we were all immersed in cultures we had never previously experienced with each other as our primary guides. Though I enjoyed the insights from the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, I also remember the fun that came with all of the students dressing up as soul singers at STAX Museum, the interesting chats over a massive Maggie May's milkshake before we headed to class, the strength that came from walking along the peace bridge in Derry Northern Ireland, and the terrible bus karaoke that made our professors cringe on the way back from Memphis. These memories and friendships combined with the thought-provoking material we learned through this course made this experience something I will always treasure. I encourage anyone looking for more than just a class to think about this life changing experience that this Maymester offers because no matter how you view the world this experience can only positively add to your perspective. Also hopefully you will add a couple of life-long friends along the way.
Group Work: Professor Barbara McCaskill’s Advice for Young Scholars

Thea J. Autry, English Department doctoral program

In the infancy of my college career, I would have characterized academic life as blissfully solitary, as the lone journey of an intellect through the world of the text. Intense moments of isolated study notwithstanding, today’s academician is hugely reliant on her fellows and, as Professor Barbara McCaskill explained during her recent visit to the Vanderbilt campus, graduate students should be guided through the process of cultivating and nurturing professional alliances. Taking several days away from her responsibilities as Professor of English at University of Georgia to speak with Vanderbilt graduate students, Professor McCaskill explained during her recent visit to the Vanderbilt campus, graduate students should be guided through the process of cultivating and nurturing professional alliances. Taking several days away from her responsibilities as Professor of English at University of Georgia to speak with Vanderbilt graduate students, Professor McCaskill began by saying, “Knowledge and political savvy are both important. And there are things you can start doing today to navigate through academia.”

McCaskill encapsulates her advice in a single acronym whose succinctness masks its power and import: MIT. The three ideas paramount to graduate students’ professional success, she argues, are mentoring, integration and trust. Being intentional about surrounding oneself with effective mentors is of basic importance. “You need to think of mentoring as multifaceted,” she explains. “It’s group work, collective work.” Challenging notions that academic success emerges out of independent hard work and studiousness, McCaskill focuses on the communal, collegial aspects of academic life and the need for young scholars to surround themselves with faculty members, inside or outside of their prospective fields of research, who share an enthusiasm about their work. “It doesn’t need to be a committee member,” she says. “Historians and area studies scholars are great mentors for students of literature. You need cohorts of people who aren’t scholars at all—for example, librarians. They know the inside of an archive. The people with the titles aren’t necessarily where power lies. And peer mentors are invaluable.” Her advice, when becoming acquainted with potential mentors is to read their work, to politely request a few moments of their time, and to invite them to read your work, as well. Ultimately, it is necessary to be explicit about the kind of professional relationship you’re seeking. “And it is common and acceptable to change mentors over time,” says McCaskill. “They may lack the tools to help you over the entire course of your career.” The most important consideration is what McCaskill calls “spiritual feeding,” and the development and reassessment of mentorships may be a reflection of the kind of personal growth the individual graduate student values.
Reflections on McCaskill

Danielle Procope, English Department doctoral program

It was an honor to meet and absorb the knowledge of eminent scholar, Dr. Barbara McCaskill of the University of Georgia. Last fall, she visited Vanderbilt and spoke to students on several topics including career advice for early career scholars, how to create scholarship that matters within and outside of the academy, and how to speak about race with undergraduate students.

Her insight was very helpful to me and the other graduate students in the room. In particular, her thoughts on the importance of collaborative work within the humanities stuck me as pivotal advice that is not often told to us or even encouraged. Dr. McCaskill’s career exemplifies the creative and intellectual potential of collaborative work, such as her co-founding of the academic journal, *Womanist Theory and Research* (formerly called *The Womanist*). This talk inspired me to think about ways that my scholarship can be collaborative, not only with my colleagues but with members of the Nashville community.

Throughout her visit, Dr. McCaskill was warm and effusively helpful. She proved to be more than willing to mentor others who seek to follow in her footsteps. I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. McCaskill one-on-one following her public lecture and workshop about becoming more involved in black feminist academic spaces, one of her specializations. She provided me with concrete advice about what journals to read and conferences to keep an eye out for but she also listened to my broader intellectual interests and helped me to think about how I can incorporate them throughout my graduate education at Vanderbilt. I left our meeting feeling inspired and reinvigorated.

Dr. McCaskill is a profound example of what faculty mentoring should look like and about what is possible when collaborative work is foregrounded, rather than discouraged. I thank Dr. Ifeoma Nwankwo for organizing the visit and I look forward to future collaborations between Vanderbilt and the University of Georgia.

The project of integration, for the young scholar, says McCaskill, is about ensuring that one’s research “syncs with teaching syncs with service.” This is especially true in grant-writing, which is in itself a crucial skill to develop. Be clear about this integration in your curriculum vitae, as well, she says. Demonstrate that there exists across these modes of your academic career a cohesive relationship. The goal is not merely to describe your research but to convey who you are as a scholar. Lastly, says McCaskill, surround yourself with people you trust.

Most important, it seemed to me, as McCaskill generously extended the invitation for graduate students to contact her in the future, is debunking the myth that one can make the journey through the academy alone. Honing the collegial realm of one’s academic life is not always an intuitive process, and McCaskill provided tools with which every young scholar should be equipped.

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“When I Got Homesick, I Got Hungry”
– Food and Identity at Vanderbilt

An American Studies Capstone by Priyanka Aribindi (’16), William Hanna (’16), and Jacqueline Scott (’16)

Jacqueline Scott

As a residential college, campus dining plays a substantial part of each Vanderbilt student’s experience. Whether it is grabbing a quick snack before class or taking pause for a meal with friends, there are a range of options for students, including foods from a diversity of cultures and ethnicities. It was this unique part of life at Vanderbilt that formed the basis for the American Studies Class of 2016’s senior capstone project. In our seminar focused on immigrant pathways and storytelling in the United States, we found that American foodways reflect our unique heritage. The influx of people and cultures to urban centers in the 19th and 20th centuries fostered the creation of distinctly American dishes such as burritos, Chinese takeout, or spaghetti and meatballs. Food studies scholars note that food and cooking are closely tied to heritage as they are resistant to change and were a way for immigrants surrounded by uncertainty to perform their culture, publicly or in the home. We thought to connect our study in the classroom and interest in food studies to our surrounding environment—how do Vanderbilt students perceive food as part of their identities, and how do they experience the variety of cultural food options on campus?

We interviewed twenty Vanderbilt students from a variety of backgrounds and found that, almost universally, food was an important part of individual and familial identities and memories. Many praised the university’s effort to offer a diverse palate to students and provide a place where one can experiment with taste and culture. Yet, many felt disappointment with the presentation
of ethnic food options. While understanding that such options could not be completely authentic, just like in restaurants, there was consensus that the university missed opportunities to offer ethnic food in context or teach students about cultures through food. Whether through campus dining partnerships with student cultural groups or offering more descriptive signage, students wanted Vanderbilt’s already outstanding dining services to raise the bar and incorporate campus dining as one of the many ways the university is striving to facilitate greater inclusivity.

We invited dining services to our final presentation and discussed the challenges of ethnic food production on a large scale but agreed that students and dining can do more to make ethnic food a better, multi-dimensional experience Vanderbilt. We in American Studies felt proud to engage in a project on the unique role of food in American culture in a way that will impact the university we hold dear. For the reader, I hope the project encourages you to reflect on food and your own identity and use taste to explore other cultures and foster inclusion and acceptance.
“Mapping Movements & Memories in the Americas”

Paul Stob

The Program in American Studies is delighted to announce an interactive, digitally oriented symposium in Spring 2017: “Mapping Movements & Memories in the Americas”


When: Monday, April 3 (time TBA)

Where: First Amendment Center Auditorium

While some details are still being worked out, the symposium will be both academic and interactive. Scholars from different disciplines will present digital mapping projects that explore the intersections of space, meaning, memory, and discourse. Their presentations will be followed by a reception featuring interactive displays and the chance to discuss the projects with the presenters.

We will announce the final list of participants in the spring, but two accomplished scholars have already agreed to share their work:

Dave Tell from the University of Kansas will present on “The Emmett Till Memory Project.” An Associate Professor of Communication Studies, Tell is also Director of the Emmett Till Memory Project, a digital, public, collaborative humanities initiative that commemorates the sites of Till’s murder while transforming the nature of commemoration. Currently a Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities, he is writing on the commemoration of Till’s murder in three counties in the Mississippi Delta.

Christopher Ball from the University of Notre Dame will present on “Language and Riverscape in Indigenous Brazil.” An Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Ball’s research explores the political economy of language in Amazonian ritual performance and development. For this project he investigates how the Wauja people, an indigenous Brazilian tribe, use words to create an identity that ties their culture to a nearby river. Combing video, photographs, and audio recordings with GPS coordinates, Chris is creating an interactive map of the Wauja experience that can be accessed via computer or tablet.

Stay tuned for more information on this exciting, interdisciplinary event that will showcase digital mapping projects across the Americas.
American Studies on American Cities 2016-2017

James Fraser

In 1872 Frederick Engels penned a series of articles in response to the housing shortage that accompanied the urbanization of many European cities during industrialization. In The Housing Question, Engels said that remedying the lack of decent housing for the urban working class required a radical transformation of society itself whereby the exploitation of labor must be abolished. He submitted that the “house owner in his capacity as capitalist has not only the right, but, in view of the competition, to a certain extent also the duty of ruthlessly making as much out of his property in house rent as he possibly can”, and that housing displacement would continue until “the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned.”

While only one perspective, what Engels identified across the Atlantic during the 19th century remains germane for the study of U.S. cities today. In the Fall of 2016, 25 students and I embarked upon the task of analyzing the ways that urban space is produced and the ways in which different populations have an unequal right to the city. Entitled Gentrification and Uneven Development (American Studies 4000), our class examined social problems—such as the affordable housing crisis Nashville and other cities are currently facing—and how these have persisted, yet transformed, over time.

By bringing together a multidisciplinary set of readings form the social sciences and humanities we examined the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics that shaped cities from the era of slum clearance and urban renewal during the mid-twentieth century, to the dismantling of public housing and the rise of so-called mixed-income neighborhoods today. Informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives but with an aim to produce policy-relevant suggestions, each student chose a topic related to urban development and city life in order to advance interventions aimed at promoting social justice.

During Spring 2017, I am teaching a graduate seminar entitled Urbanization and the Environment (American Studies 8000) which examines the production of urban environments and the ways in which human and non-human components affect each other. Taking U.S. cities as the vehicle for our inquiry, the course covers material on how cities became the way they appear now, how different groups of people experience the city, and what we would like our cities to become.

A good portion of the course covers material on urban planning and geography, the built environment, and the political, economic, and cultural forces that shape these. The substantive topics we cover include but are not limited to housing, neighborhood environment, transportation, city infrastructure, water and soil, natural resources and green spaces, food systems and security, and social justice. The course also has an applied component where students will choose issues that are relevant to cities today and explore potential lines of action and policies to address them.

I am excited about how the American Studies program at Vanderbilt University is taking a lead on providing a space for interdisciplinary inquiry and the discoveries we, as faculty and students, make about urbanization and urban life.
STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD

We are excited to announce the formation of the American Studies Student Advisory Board, charged with helping the Faculty Advisory Board and the staff chart the Program's future course. Our inaugural members are:

RYAN CONNOR    TARIN DENNEY    STAR KIMBROW
KIARA RHODES    MEGAN WARD