

AMERICAN STUDIES AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

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Department of American Studies



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>>From the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Sonia Lee

Students at IUB this fall have seen a number of exciting new courses and events hosted by the Department of American Studies. Professor Susan Lepselter, who joined our department this fall, is teaching a course titled "Captivity Narratives," as well as "Ethnography in the U.S." Professor Richard Henne-Ochoa, our Visiting Assistant Professor, is teaching our Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies and a course titled "The American School."

>>College of Arts & Sciences Expo

At the beginning of the fall semester, Paula Cotner, Whitney Olibo and Professor Sonia Lee helped introduce American Studies to the incoming freshmen at the College of Arts and Sciences Major, minors, and more Expo on August 22. We were thrilled to meet Abigail Carmichael, a freshman who just declared a major in American Studies.



>>AMST Career Night, 10/3/2019

In early October, we hosted our department's first Career Day, in collaboration with the Walter Center for Career Achievement. Justin Zuschlag and Molly McCurdy from the Walter Center helped us recruit three of our alumni: Alexander



Kayla McCarthy

Ashkin ('14), a data specialist at LEED Projects & Sports Facilities and Sustainability Dashboard Tools; Kayla McCarthy ('18), a mobile app research assistant at the Chicago History Museum; and Abby Rivin ('12), an associate planner in the City of Ketchum, Idaho. All three of them gifted us with the wealth of wisdom and knowledge they have as AMST alumni and people working in various fields today. When asked about what kinds of advice she would give to current undergraduates exploring their intellectual interests, Kayla McCarthy said, "Keep your curiosity alive, nurture the child inside of you that asks questions, that doesn't take anything for granted, and have a sense of play with what you want to do.

If you have interests in Poli Sci, or History, or American Studies, or whatever it might be, it doesn't have to be serious all the time. You can really explore and pursue those things and it doesn't have to be mutually exclusive with having a good career or being able to have a financial backbone to keep you provided for. It can be both of those things." McCarthy is walking the talk, as she continues to pursue her interests in art history by making virtual and augmented reality apps at the Chicago History Museum and by creating educational content for Smarthistory, a website dedicated to art history education. McCarthy's emphasis on "keeping your curiosity alive" was also echoed by Abby Rivin, who said that she decided to major in American Studies as an undergraduate because "American Studies courses taught me how to think critically in a way that really challenged me ... and gave me a well-rounded background for my career in city planning." An AMST course on whiteness shifted her interests toward American Studies, and given her interests in outdoor recreation and resource management, city planning became the perfect field in which she could fuse her interests.



Abby Rivin



Clockwise from left: American Studies major Isabella Salerno and Professor Phoebe Wolfskill; American Studies alumnus Alex Ashkin; Professor Sonia Lee and panelists; bottom left: American Studies major and senior Ann Lewandowski and AMST alumna Kayla McCarthy

Photos Courtesy of IU American Studies

>>New American Studies Minors

Margot Cohen, Hannah Ford, and Cedric Burnett recently declared an American Studies minor. Welcome to the Department, Margot, Hannah and Cedric! We look forward to working with you and learning more about your passions and interests!



>> Susan Lepselter, AMST Associate Professor

Dr. Susan Lepselter, Associate Professor of Anthropology, joined the Department of American Studies this fall. She is a prize-winning author and has published on topics including captivity narratives, UFO conspiracy theories, and hoarding shows. She has a special interest in the intersections between creative and academic writing.

In 2017, Dr. Lepselter was awarded the 9th annual Gregory Bateson Book prize, the major prize from the Society for Cultural Anthropology, for her book, *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity and UFOs in the American Uncanny* (University of Michigan Press, 2016). The Bateson award is meant to "promote theoretically rich, ethnographically grounded research that engages the most current thinking across the arts and sciences," notes the SCA, adding that the prize "singles out work that is interdisciplinary, experimental, and innovative." Judges for the contest wrote: "In this exquisitely crafted ethnography, Susan Lepselter explores how the uncanny saturates the everyday among believers in UFOs in the American West...exemplifying ethnography's potential to illuminate the political through immersion in the mundane and the apparently marginal. *The Resonance of Unseen Things* casts a startlingly penetrating light on our current moment."

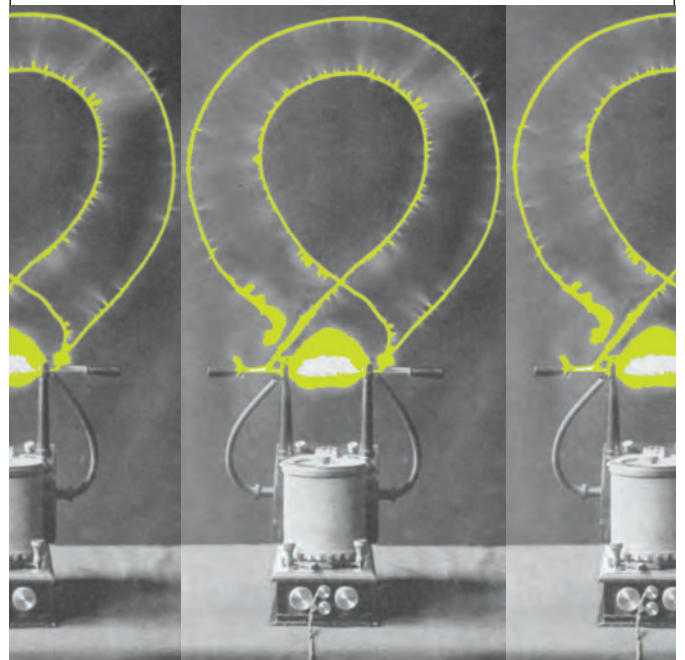
Since her book award, Dr. Lepselter has been invited to present her work and share her expertise in a variety of venues, including The University of Chicago, Columbia University, The Max Planck Institute in Göttingen, Germany, Yale University and Duke University. She was an invited speaker at Fall for the Book, the non-profit book festival based at George Mason University. Her book has also been the sole subject of two full-length podcasts: "Public Intellectual" by Jessa Crispin and "New Books in American Studies."

This past year, Dr. Lepselter ventured from writing about poetics to writing her own poetry. She received a CAHI New Frontiers Experimentation Fellowship to complete a book of original poetry, and participated in the competitive Colrain Intensive Poetry Manuscript Conference in Leicester, Massachusetts.

THE RESONANCE OF UNSEEN THINGS

Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny

SUSAN LEPSALTER





>>Richard Henne-Ochoa, AMST Visiting Assistant Professor

We are thrilled that Dr. Richard Henne-Ochoa joined our department this fall as a Visiting Assistant Professor. Dr. Henne-Ochoa's scholarship is grounded in cultural and linguistic anthropology, particularly indigenous language reclamation and the ethnography of communication. Also informing his work are sociocultural perspectives on learning and human development. The program of research he has developed concerns cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge and skill among Indigenous peoples. It focuses on Indigenous ways of speaking and language-culture revitalization. His findings have application to the development of culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies.

Since conducting two years of full-time ethnographic fieldwork among the Lakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota for his dissertation, he has been collaborating with residents there on research that is focused on school, family, and community approaches to language-culture revitalization. His work includes the study

of discourse about these revitalization approaches, what he calls "language-culture talk." This work, as well as his dissertation research among the Lakota before it, involves understanding Indigenous linguistic practices situated in sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic context.

Dr. Henne-Ochoa earned his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He subsequently held a postdoctoral research fellowship at IUB and at the University of California Santa Cruz. In addition to his position in AMST, he is the acting director of the American Indian Studies Research Institute at IUB.

His interests outside of academia include fly fishing, hockey, backcountry camping, and other physical pursuits. He lives in Bloomington with his wife Carmen, son Sebastian (14), and two daughters, Eliza (16) and Theresa (18).



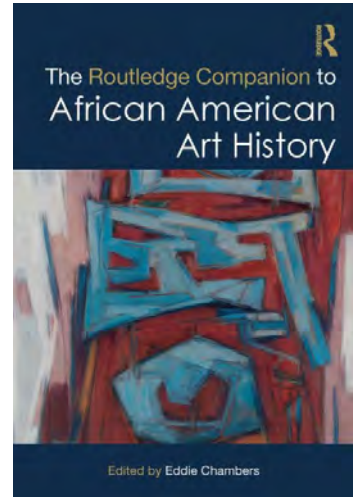


>>Phoebe Wolfskill- Tenure, Recognition

Last spring, Dr. Phoebe Wolfskill submitted her tenure materials! In May, she won a Trustees Teaching Award through the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs.

Dr. Wolfskill's "'I Wish to Reveal': A Conversation with Joyce Scott," was published in May as part of an online exhibition catalogue, "Fragments of a Crucifixion," for the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The catalogue can be found here: <https://mcachicago.org/Publications/Websites/Fragments-Of-A-Crucifixion>

Her chapter, "The Enduring Legacy of the Harlem Renaissance" will be published in Edward Chambers, ed., *Routledge Companion to African American Art* (New York: Routledge, 2019) this December.



>>Karen Inouye- Sabbatical at Brown University

Dr. Karen Inouye spent Fall 2019 as a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Race and Ethnicity in America (CSREA) at Brown University. While at Brown, she participated in bi-

monthly research workshops and

had an

opportunity to present some of her new research on her second book, *Indigeneity and Asian America: The Double Displacement of Wartime Incarceration*. In October, she also presented her research at Columbia University.



>>AMST Team-Whitney Olibo

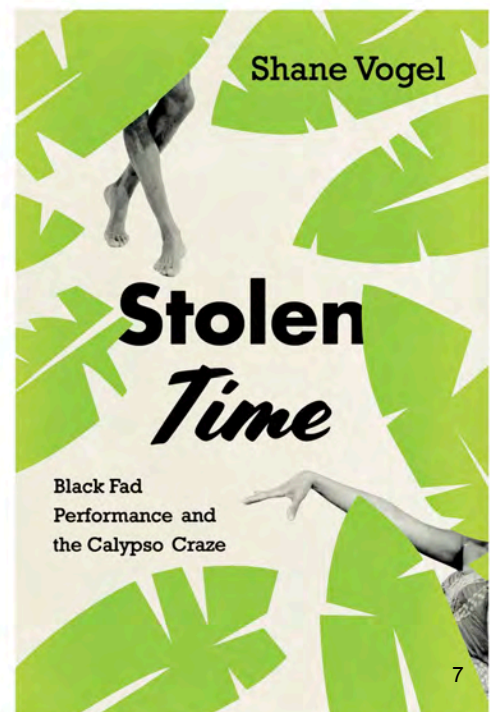
Whitney joined the IU Department of American Studies as Administrative Services and Program Manager in May 2019. She began her professional career at IU in October 2017 in the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education unit. She graduated from IU Bloomington in May 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and a minor in Sociology. In addition to her studies at Indiana University Bloomington, she studied overseas at the Complutense Universidad de Madrid during the 2014-2015 academic year in the Wisconsin-Indiana-Purdue-Tulane (WIPT) Study abroad program. She has visited seven countries including Spain, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Hungary, The Vatican, and Australia. She is concurrently completing her Master of Science degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs through Purdue University Global. Outside of her profession, she enjoys running half marathons, reading, attending IU Athletic events, and traveling.



>>AMST Affiliate Faculty Shane Vogel (Department of English) publishes a new book, *Stolen Time*



In 1956 Harry Belafonte's *Calypso* became the first LP to sell more than a million copies. For a few fleeting months, calypso music was the top-selling genre in the US—it even threatened to supplant rock and roll. Dr. Shane Vogel's *Stolen Time* is the first book-length study of this moment. It tracks the popularity of calypso across different types of postwar middlebrow entertainment to show how black



performers took advantage of this fad to expand African American performance history and its relationship to diasporic consciousness.

The book aims to make four contributions to American Studies. First, by locating the calypso craze in a deep tradition of popular performance across the color line, Dr. Vogel develops a new theoretical framework—black fad performance—for understanding the cycles of repetition and difference that shape race, performance, and mass culture during the Jim Crow era. Second, while there are numerous accounts of how black performers negotiated mass public spheres such as the 1890s ragtime craze and the 1920s “Negro vogue,” there is no such study of this phenomenon for the 1950s calypso craze. This book provides rich detail to locate this postwar moment within a longer trajectory of black fad performance during Jim Crow, arguing that the calypso craze was as full of artistic complexity and cultural significance as these earlier moments.

Third, it locates the calypso craze not solely as a musical fad or a recording phenomenon but within a larger field of performance that includes theater, dance, film, television, nightlife, and literature. Dr. Vogel returns to center stage neglected artists such as Josephine Premice, Geoffrey Holder, and Carmen de Lavallade, as well as lesser-known works by performers such as Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Maya Angelou, and Harry Belafonte. And fourth, by taking seriously African American appropriations of Afro-Caribbean cultures and histories, he argues that the calypso craze provides new insight into the development of diasporic consciousness in the mid-twentieth century.

Dr. Vogel follows the fad as it moves defiantly away from any attempt at authenticity and shamelessly embraces calypso kitsch. Although white calypso performers were indeed complicit in a kind of imperialist theft of Trinidadian music and dance, he shows that black calypso craze performers enacted a different, and subtly subversive, kind of theft. They appropriated not Caribbean culture itself, but the US version of it—and in doing so, they mocked American notions of racial authenticity. Though it did not last, the calypso craze provided black performers with new occasions to intervene in the public sphere during the Jim Crow era and demonstrates how mass culture could unmake and remake diaspora.



From the Director of Graduate Studies, Rasul Mowatt

>>Critical Ethnic Studies Symposium

In February, April, and November the Department of American Studies co-sponsored key symposia for graduate students and faculty examining power and responses to power in society. The third Critical Ethnic Studies Symposium was held in February of 2019, entitled "Nationalism. Borders. Personhood." The symposium critically challenged the status quo on matters of migration, citizenship, and biopolitics through a collaborative interchange between seasoned and emerging scholars at IU and beyond.

>> CRRES Symposium



In April, the Department of American Studies also co-sponsored the annual spring symposium that is coordinated by the Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity in Society (CRRES). The CRRES symposium, titled "Beyond the Center: Liminal and Peripheral Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity," was focused on graduate students who wish to infuse critical theory into questions of the body, public health, history, public memory, and land/ nation access.



>>Indiana Studies Symposium

In November, the Indiana Studies program of the Platform (an Arts + Humanities Research Laboratory funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) brought scholars, activists, and community-based programmers together to discuss the complexities and nuances of "The Secret/Lost Histories of Indiana." Two of our department's faculty members were involved with this symposium. Dr. Rasul Mowatt was the Faculty Director for Indiana Studies, one of the two Humanities Research Laboratories that organized the symposium. Dr. Micol Seigel gave a talk at the symposium titled "The Hidden History of Indiana's Prisons for Women." This symposium highlighted the work of graduate students and faculty at IUB and other IU campuses, Purdue University, as well as those students who are also enrolled in programs within Indiana Women's Prison. It reflects the collaborative work that is taking place between scholarship and community engagement.



>>Teaching the Benton Murals, AMST-A 100, Dr. Phoebe Wolfskill



Professor Wolfskill uses the Benton murals to teach her classes AMST A100 (What is America?), AMST A202/ARTH A200 (US Arts and Media: Race in American art), and AMST A298/ARTH A200 (Art of the Great Depression).

These classes highlight the function of history painting and how American history has been constructed through visual narratives; in using the Benton murals, Dr. Wolfskill considers how Depression-era artists are reviving this genre to offer new insights into American history, and what it means to create a visual history of a specific state. The Benton murals are ideal for this purpose. In AMST A100 and AMST A298, Dr. Wolfskill focuses on the narrative as a whole, and in AMST A202, she focuses specifically on how Benton confronts race and race relations by considering his representational devices and narratives regarding indigenous, white, and black people within Indiana history.

The ability to study these murals in person provides a completely different experience than studying digital images from PowerPoint slides in class, and is essential to any close study of a work of art. Benton was a master of space and narrative, and the minute details of his techniques can be viewed when seen in person. The artist provided a broad history of Indiana, from the culture and work of its original inhabitants through modern developments in industry. Throughout, the artist considers radical changes to the environment and the workplace and a range of overlapping and conflicting political, cultural, and religious beliefs. Professor Wolfskill wants the students to understand the complexity of Benton's narrative, which stresses development as well as conflict, and Benton's privileging of the common person to understanding a state and nation's history. Teaching the Benton murals further allows conversation about the controversial "The Parks, the Circus, the Klan" panel located in Woodburn 100, which generates protest every ten years or so. While this panel faces criticism for its inclusion of the Klan, the work actually offers an anti-racist narrative, as emphasized by the integrated hospital in the foreground and the Indianapolis press that brought down the Klan's stronghold on politics in Indiana in the 1920s. Indeed, Benton structured the narrative to emphasize the importance of the free press in dismantling the Klan's political power. Regardless of artistic intention, however, Dr. Wolfskill discusses why the image of the Klan continues to cause discomfort and the significance of Provost Robel's 2017 decision to close the space to everyday classroom use. She also considers how the panel reads differently from its original placement in the 1933 Chicago exposition as a continuous mural sequence. Indeed, the mural's repositioning in three locations at IU in the 1940s (Woodburn 100, the IU Auditorium, and the IU Cinema) changes their order and the focus of the class; notably, the Klan is less conspicuous when viewed as part of a continuous cycle, as suggested by the mock ups of the original order that are positioned outside of Woodburn 100.

During the class period, Professor Wolfskill breaks the students into groups of four or so to study and discuss questions about each set of panels. She then regroups and the students present their findings. This activity allows the class to look closely at artistic style and key themes and narratives, while also working together to generate ideas about the panels and teach one another about their observations. Professor Wolfskill hopes for the students to appreciate the Benton murals as part of the larger artistic bounty that IU has to offer.

>>Legacy of Lynching Course

Student Essay by David Paris, AMST-A201

My name is David Paris and I am a student in the Legacy of Lynching course this semester. In 1959 the Tuskegee Institute defined the basis of a racially motivated killing as a lynching. Lynchings were racial terror employed against African Americans. The dark history of racism and lynchings in this country is an important element to the African American experience after emancipation.

Lynchings were not solely used against African Americans. So, who were the victims of lynchings?

Black citizens,
white citizens,
Jews,

Italians, Poles, Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans, Asian Nationals and Asian Americans, Native Americans, men, women and children. Lynchings are a part of the history of every American and thus, lynchings must be remembered and reflected on. Lynchings contain four key aspects. First, there must be legal evidence that a person was killed. Second, the dead met death illegally. Third, a group of three or more must have participated in the killing. Fourth, the killers acted under the pretext of service to justice, race or tradition. The stereotype that lynching holds in American memory is that it was a

Southern tradition. However, lynchings occurred across

the country and at least one documented lynching happened in each of the fifty states. Day or night, outside a city hall or on the side of a county road, lynchings occurred anytime and anywhere. From 1887 to 1927 there were close to 4,000 lynchings of African Americans out of a total of 5,125. These numbers are not final, many lynchings were never confirmed or covered up and although a rare today they still occur.

Lynchings are a part of American history, a dark and evil act that in many aspects has been swept under the rug and forgotten. It seems today that the only time the history of lynching is evoked is when we remember Emmett Till's story, or when politicians wrongfully use the term in a disproportionate comparison. I hope to share a constructive dialogue that will force us to remember the horrors of racially motivated lynchings and how society can move forward from this dark and forgotten history.



Alumni Spotlight

>>Undergraduate Alumni



>>Grace Branham

Grace graduated from Indiana University in 2018 with a BA in Gender Studies and American Studies. She is currently a first-year PhD student and University Graduate Fellow in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Kansas. Her research examines interactions between the LGBT community and the healthcare industry, with a particular focus on cases of transition-related regret following sex reassignment. She aims to analyze how both practitioner and activist approaches inform the relationships between gender non-conforming patients and their providers. The goal of this work is to foster a deeper understanding of the complexity of trans/gender identity and to explore ways that healthcare providers might better serve sexuality and gender diverse communities.

>>Gabby Kriebel

Gabby Kriebel graduated from Indiana University in 2018 With a BA in American Studies. She worked as the Collections intern for the Monroe County History Center as well as the assistant manager of Cactus Flower in 2018. This year she returned to IUB to pursue a dual MA in Art History and Master of Library Science program. She's hoping to work in collections care in the future, ideally in a costume collection. She also snuck in some travel, and added three new countries to the list of places she's visited: Northern Ireland, Austria, and Portugal.

>> Graduate Alumni

>> Nzingha Kendall

Nzingha Kendall is a post-doctoral fellow at the Carter G. Woodson Institute at the University of Virginia. She's working on a research project that analyzes how experimental filmmaking allow for moments and spaces for liberation in a world that constrains black women's expression and their ability to live. Titled "Imperfect Independence: Black Women & Experimental Filmmaking," this project looks at black women across the diaspora, from the late 20th century to the present, who use experimental techniques and practices. She argues that experimental filmmaking practices offer black women fleeting, yet profound sources of freedom; these moments of freedom constitute instances of imperfect independence.



Nzingha and her collaborator Madeleine Hunt-Erich, have been selected as inaugural fellows for the Undo Fellowship, sponsored by the UnionDocs Center for Documentary Art. Kendall and Hunt-Erich join a cohort of three other artist/writer pairs in this initiative to expand radical filmmaking practices and research new languages of documentary cinema. During the fellowship they will

explore alternative ways of telling stories by and about black people by delving into fragmented archives.

>> Alex Chambers

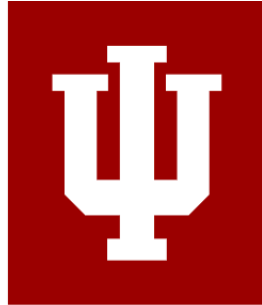
Alex Chambers teaches radio and podcasting at the Indiana University Media School. He's also a 2019-2020 organizing fellow with We Own It. , working to re-energize democratic participation in rural electric cooperatives. His poetry book, *Binding: A Preparation*, came out in December 2019. His next book project, *Climate Violence and the Poetics of Refuge*, is based on his dissertation. Through literary and cultural productions of the early twenty-first century, the book explores climate dispossession by listening to the ways history haunts. Rather than recuperating buried social movements or illuminating struggles over policy, *Climate Violence* traces the poetics of social-ecological life at the margins of survival to explore the tensions between fear and desire, survival and freedom, the pull of infrastructure alongside the necessity of escape.



>> Yarí Cruz Rios



Yarí is currently working as a high school Spanish language teacher at a public high school in Carolina, Puerto Rico. She is also working on a project about representations of latinidad on Tik Tok and another one about Taínos in Puerto Rican pop culture.



COLLEGE OF ARTS +
SCIENCES
AMERICAN STUDIES

>>**Stay tuned** for the next AMST
Newsletter in
April 2020.

Suggestions or Comments? Let us
know at amst@indiana.edu