Southern American Studies Association 2015 Conference Recap

We are still buzzing with excitement after hosting the recent biennial conference of the Southern American Studies Association (SASA) in Atlanta. Despite the threat of snow, almost 200 people attended. The theme of Reconstruction 1865-1965-2015 attracted panelists from around the country and set the tone for two keynote addresses from Shelley Streeby and Robin D.G. Kelley on Black radicalism over 150 years of historical time. Meanwhile, our digital-poster session on Atlanta history and culture grounded us in our specific location.

As the Southern regional chapter of the American Studies Association, SASA serves the dual purpose of bringing together American Studies scholars who work in the South with scholars from elsewhere whose work is about the South. Among our visitors from afar were Christina Heatherton from Trinity College who tied post-Reconstruction Southern capitalists to global imperial projects in Mexico and Marina Bilbija of Harvard University who, together with Garry Bertholf of Clemson University, engaged us in a fascinating conversation about teaching W.E.B. Du Bois’ Black Reconstruction. Graduate student Kristoff Kerl came all the way from Germany to present his work on Leo Frank on a panel on with regional scholars, while Katie Schank came from George Washington University to talk about OutKast’s representation of Atlanta’s public housing alongside KSU faculty member and Yale graduate, Ruthie Yow, and recent GSU history graduate, Daniel H. Garcia, who also does work on race and class in Atlanta.

Paola Garcia, one of our students in the MA Program in American Studies, appreciated the mix of faculty and students on her panel commenting, “presenting on a panel with experts allowed me to think critically about my own research as it relates to others’ and to feel camaraderie with American Studies scholars.” We also had a number of other graduate students and faculty members who presented their work. Thank you to everyone who helped to make this a successful weekend, and we look forward to the next SASA Conference in 2017, wherever it may be!

“I was truly inspired by the conference.” - Lynne Tipton, SASA Graduate Research Assistant and Presenter

“From the poster session to the two keynote sessions to the colloquy on Hammer and Hoe, this year’s SASA had numerous highlights. But these did not overshadow the conference itself, which featured high quality panels of faculty and graduate students that led to ongoing conversations.” - Robbie Lieberman, Interdisciplinary Studies Department Chair

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Summer 2015 Course Descriptions

AMST 7330: Identities and Social Groups – Literature and Popular Culture of Latinos in the US
Dr. Jaime Cruz-Ortiz, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00-7:45 PM
After having been humiliated and told “Get out of my country you stupid, ugly spic!” by a schoolyard bully, the character Miggy in a 1993 play by John Leguizamo responds by redefining the slur, calling himself instead spic-tacular, dis-spic-able, and spic-torious, and then vowing to make his life nothing less than a Spic-O-Rama, a word that also serves as the title to this one-man show about the diversity of the Latino experience within a single family. This course explores the panorama of Hispanic identities referenced by the title to Leguizamo’s play. It is a multidisciplinary study of the migration histories and cultural experiences of Latinos/Hispanics as expressed through literature (in theater, poetry and narratives) and through popular culture (in film, music, and stand-up comedy). In particular, this class looks at how Hispanic poets, playwrights, novelists, directors, rappers, reggaetoneros, salseros, actors, and comics describe what it means to be Latino, and how they present their complicated relationships with both the United States and their countries of origin.

AMST 7700: Practicum – Internship or Applied Research Project
This course requires students to apply American Studies knowledge, concepts, and theory to practical issues, non-academic environments, or to new research questions. The Practicum fosters the ability to (1) read and think critically while using diverse methods to study American cultural products and practices, (2) communicate effective analysis of American culture both orally and in writing, and (3) analyze and critique relationships between cultural products and social values.

AMST 7900: Capstone Experience
A major research project or a project using interdisciplinary methods from American Studies to investigate questions consistent with the program’s mission and the student’s professional goals. Students work with faculty advisors to develop a proposal, carry out research related to their topic or project aims, and complete a product drawing on the content of program courses and integrating it with new, individualized study.
Summer 2015 Course Descriptions

AMST 7000: American Studies Scholarship
Dr. Rebecca Hill, Tuesdays, 6:30-9:15 PM
This course explores a variety of themes, theoretical influences, and methodological approaches currently alive in American Studies and its related disciplinary fields. Particular emphasis is placed on the current controversies and scholarship focused on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The course is organized around broad thematic concepts, with attention to global perspectives and introduces some basic conceptual building blocks in the field, as well as explores some of the historical development of American Studies.

AMST 7210: Historical Period – The 1960s
Dr. Robbie Lieberman, Mondays, 5:00-7:45 PM
This course explores the roots, events, ideas, and legacies of the sixties. The focus is on the protest movements of the era: civil rights and black power, antiwar, New Left and counterculture, women’s liberation, and others. Throughout the course we will be concerned not only with what happened and why, but also with representations of the decade’s protest movements in manifestos and other documents as well as in the media, film, art, and music of the era. We will also discuss present-day depictions and interpretations by scholars, politicians, filmmakers, and cultural critics. Students will be encouraged to explore the transnational connections made by 1960s social movements.

AMST 7460: Movements in American Culture – Indigenous/Settler/Arrivant
Dr. Kathryn Walkiewicz, Wednesdays, 6:30-9:15 PM
Historian Patrick Wolfe has called settler colonialism a “structure, not an event,” observing that colonialism is not about one particular moment in which Indigenous Peoples’ are colonized and their lands taken, but is rather a matrix of power that produces categories of identity, such as race, nationality, ethnicity, and gender. In this class we will think through colonial structures and their impact not only on Indigenous peoples, but also on migrants, immigrants, refugees, and other arrivants. The bulk of the course will focus on issues surrounding the Americas, with special attention to U.S. colonialism. By thinking in terms of the relationship between settlers (those who govern), arrivants (those who are brought, forcibly or not, to a place but often hold a less-privileged status than settlers), and Indigenous Peoples (those peoples who have long-standing relationships to the land that precede colonialism) we can begin to think through the machinations of power, inequality, injustice, migration, and mobility that open up questions like the following: How do our understandings of the South change if we think about relationships between chattel slavery and Indian Removal? What does the mass incarceration of people of color in the twenty-first century have to do with Indian reservations?

AMST 7520: America in Transnational Context – Transnational Feminism
Dr. Stacy Keltner, Online
This offering of AMST 7520 will focus on transnational feminisms. ‘Transnational feminisms’ is the interdisciplinary study of the economic, social, and political conditions and consequences of the phenomenon known as globalization and its relationship to issues of gender. Students will analyze transnational feminisms, studying both the opportunities and challenges that are inherent in transnational feminist scholarship and activism, with particular attention to the role of the U.S. in gendered processes of globalization. Through critical inquiry into a variety of texts, the course dynamically reconceptualizes relationships between women and nation; between gender and globalization; and between feminist theory and practice. Students will be responsible for participating in formal discussion forums, presenting course material, and completing a final essay.

AMST 7700: Practicum – Internship or Applied Research Project
AMST 7900: Capstone Experience

Faculty Spotlight: Jaime Cruz-Ortiz
Assistant Professor of Spanish
Dr. Jaime Cruz-Ortiz has been an Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages since the fall of 2010. He generally teaches classes on Grammar and Composition, Early Modern Literature, and, most recently, Spanish Film. Additionally, he is the co-coordinator of the Master of Arts in Teaching Program, for which he has given classes on the twentieth-century Latin American novel, classical Iberian theater, and the culture, music, and literature of Latinos in the United States. As part of his duties, he also coordinates internships in the Spanish department, connecting students of Hispanic culture and language to the local Latino community.

In terms of research, his area of expertise is seventeenth-century theater. In particular, Dr. Cruz-Ortiz has focused on bilingual and bicultural writers from that time period who where born under the Dual Monarchy, a time when the Portuguese and Spanish crowns were united under Habsburg rule. In essence, a generation of Lusitanian writers had to compete in a second language with the greatest Hispanic writers of the period. As with his research of the sixties, he is also concerned with the relationships between cultures and languages. He was introduced to these writers as a young poet and graduate student and became fascinated with their work, seeing them as precursors to himself and the Puerto Rican poets that he loved. Like us, they were people who lived between cultures and languages. As a result, his research borrows heavily from the vocabulary that contemporary cultural theorists use to describe Latino literature. In 2014, Dr. Cruz-Ortiz’s work in this field culminated in a critical edition of Jacinto Cordeiro’s El juramento ante Dios, y lealtad contra el amor, a play that was popular for centuries in both Portugal and Spain, but was later marginalized for not being Spanish enough for the one and not Portuguese enough for the other.

Most recently, he has returned home, in a sense, by writing about Latino hip hop and theater, which brings him to his new involvement with American Studies. Dr. Cruz-Ortiz is excited about his AMST 7330 course this summer, which will cover a range of Chicano, Nuyorican, and Latino writers, poets, novelists, salseros, rappers, reggaetoners, dramatists, filmmakers, and intellectuals.