

This brochure showcases the diversity of Harvard's American Studies Program (until 2012, known as History of American Civilization). It includes reflections from students and alumni with a variety of backgrounds and professional trajectories.

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# American Studies

at Harvard's Graduate School  
of Arts and Sciences

*A Look at our Students, Alumni, and Faculty*

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Harvard University  
American Studies Program  
Barker Center 225  
12 Quincy Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Telephone: (617) 495-3325  
Fax: (617) 496-6377

Web: <http://americanstudies.fas.harvard.edu/>

Send your questions to [americanstudies@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:americanstudies@fas.harvard.edu)



**Salamishah Tillet** (Ph.D. 2007; now Associate Professor of English and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania). I had a transformative experience as a graduate student in Harvard's History of American Civilization program. I entered the program with a real love for the study of African American literature, and I left with deeper insight and appreciation for the conversations African American artists have with each other, across disciplines, and throughout time. This I think is the real gift of Am. Civ.: I learned both a methodology and philosophy of interdisciplinary studies that I can apply to almost any text or time period. Equally as moving, I learned how to ask the big questions about citizenship, democracy, and freedom. And over time and guided by the most brilliant minds in academia, I wrote myself into an answer.



**Matthew Briones** (Ph.D. 2005; now Associate Professor of History at the University of Chicago). I am a cultural historian who specializes in the history of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S., interracialism, and immigration. My first monograph, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America* (Princeton UP, 2012), focuses primarily on the home front culture of World War II, interrogating the ways in which different racialized and ethnic groups interacted during a heightened sense of possibility for a multiracial democracy. I could not have possibly written such a book (based on my dissertation) without the encouragement and support of advisors and friends in American Civilization. I was very fortunate to be a graduate student when the immediate cohorts above and below me boasted a multiracial cast of brilliant interlocutors whose interests in African American studies, Asian American studies, ethnic studies, urban history, mixed race, and im/migration, intersected with my own pursuits. To have models like Werner Sollors, John Stauffer, Akira Iriye, Cornel West, and Evelyn Higginbotham embrace your work and treat you like a peer, both professionally and intellectually, was an experience I will never forget. "Am. Civ." was my literal oasis then but remains a virtual one today, as our network continually shares scholarship, ideas, and stories at conferences and workshops. As one deeply invested in the study of race and the cultivation of younger scholars of color, I simply couldn't have had a better launching pad than "Am. Civ.."



**Sandy Placido** (current student; B.A. Yale). My research interests include the history and politics of present-day mass incarceration at a global level; the evolution of imperialism and colonialism; migration; and

social/political/cultural movements, with a focus on the work of radical women migrants, and musicians, especially those from the Caribbean diaspora. I have benefited from working with historians such as Evelyn Higginbotham, Lis McGirr, and Rachel St. John, given their respective work on law and multicultural history, social movements, and imperialism; literary critics such as Doris Sommer, Werner Sollors and Glenda Carpio, given their interests in artistry, community, and migration; and performance, gender and sexuality theorists such as Robin Bernstein and Brad Epps, given their interest in everyday life, culture, race, gender, and politics. Am. Civ.'s flexibility has also allowed me to explore my interests in ethnography and filmmaking in the Sensory Ethnography lab, as well as my interests in immigration law and activism at the law school. Am. Civ.'s support combined with Harvard's resources, have allowed me to craft a truly unique and rigorous program.



**Christofer Rodelo** (current student; B.A. Yale) Harvard's American Studies doctoral program has been a uniquely rigorous place for my graduate training. I have found my experiences as a first generation college student/queer Latinx person respected and supported. My work has benefited deeply from the mentorship of top-tier scholars like Robin Bernstein, Ju Yon Kim, Lorgia Garcia-Peña, David Alworth, Mayra Rivera Rivera, Genevieve Clutario, and many others. Their steadfast commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship and the complete needs of their students has deeply influenced my identity as a scholar. Flexibility in course selection has allowed me to weld a research trajectory—and stance on American Studies scholarship—from a variety of diverse perspectives. Moreover, I gained a more holistic sense of how "to be" in the university through engaging in activism within and outside the program—actions supported by students, administrators, and faculty alike. Finally Harvard's geographic location has allowed me to expand my intellectual community beyond any single institution, and towards a collective idea of academic production.



**Kevin M. Burke** (Ph.D. 2006; now Director Research at Harvard's Hutchins Center for African and African American Research). My years of study in Am. Civ. prepared the way for a diverse and challenging career as a lawyer, writer, corporate communications director and independent movie theater co-founder and board president. As important, they gave me time and space to read and wrestle with the voices that shaped the American experimen

while helping me develop my own voice in its advance. In every role and setting, I draw on my education in Am. Civ. for perspective and inspiration and would recommend the course it sets to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of America and its place in the world.



**Shirley Thompson** (Ph.D. 2001; now Professor of American Studies at the University of Texas, Austin). I am an interdisciplinary scholar of African American and African Diaspora history and culture. My first book, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard, 2009), explores the shifting terrain of race, nation, and language for French speaking free people of color in nineteenth century New Orleans. It is based on a paper I wrote for a social history seminar during my very first semester of graduate school. The support and encouragement of stellar faculty members, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Werner Sollors in particular, and a generative atmosphere of camaraderie and friendly contention among my fellow students gave me the intellectual footing and the courage to step beyond disciplinary boundaries and expand that kernel of an idea into a rich project that never bored me. A wonderful home base, Am. Civ. was the perfect graduate program for me because it encouraged me to find common ground with colleagues in other departments and programs and, thus, shaped my career as someone who pursues questions using a wide variety of methodological tools and theoretical approaches. My new project, for example, considers African American conceptions of property and ownership from the vantage point of black historical memory, political economy, and expressive culture. Overall, I am grateful to Am. Civ. for its enduring relationships, its thorough preparation, and its organic sense of what it means to be a scholar.

**Peter L'Official** (Ph.D. 2014; now Assistant Professor of Literature at Bard College). My writing and research interests include the history and theory of the urban built environment, modern American art and architecture, 20th-century and contemporary American literature, and all of the places and spaces that those fields may meet. Am. Civ. has been a truly fantastic and productive place to pursue these and many other interests. The freedom that the program provides has allowed me to work closely with scholars of many different disciplines in both my coursework and, most importantly, in my own scholarship. It is the kind of freedom that allows a student to construct a dissertation committee featuring an art historian, a literary critic, and a scholar of American and African-American literature, and to compose a dissertation that borrows liberally from many such disciplines; the program is truly "interdisciplinary" in the best sense of the word.



**Miguel de Baca** (Ph.D. 2009; now Associate Professor of Art History and Chair of American Studies at Lake Forest College). My research interests broadly include modern and contemporary American art history, and I am especially interested in the expression of history and memory through traditional and new media, architecture, and marked sites. My manuscript, *Memory Work: Anne Truitt and Sculpture*, is a contextual study of the artist Anne Truitt, a figure widely recognized as a pioneer of Minimalism in the visual arts, but curiously marginalized in the existing scholarship. I am also assembling materials for a subsequent project on activism and new media, emerging out of work I began as a Teaching Fellow in the Visual and Environmental Studies program. Am. Civ. was an extremely meaningful place for me to begin my career. I found it to be a supportive and collegial environment that fostered scholarly independence and enterprise. The students and faculty of Am. Civ. come together out of genuine interest and respect for one another's work: an ideal model for working in the professoriate.



**Allison Puglisi** (current student; B.A. Dartmouth). Allison Puglisi's senior thesis at Dartmouth compared the welfare-right movement and Chinese-American labor movement. Her research interests include the Black radical tradition, queer of color critique and feminist theory. As a graduate student, she is exploring how queer and transgender people of color use different media to resist assimilation. More generally, she is interested in documenting and critically engaging social movement to prevent their erasure.



**Rebecca Scofield** (Ph.D. 2015; now Assistant Professor of History of the University of Idaho). The American Studies program at Harvard allowed me to pursue my research down unexpected and wonderful avenues. Prior to joining the program, I had earned my BA and MA in Japanese Studies with a focus on gender and popular culture. In American Studies, I expanded my interests into American culture and was able to work on interdisciplinary research with faculty in history, anthropology, and gender studies. My dissertation used marginalized rodeos, like gay rodeo and prison rodeo, to expose the creation and maintenance of various gendered, racialized, and sexualized American Wests over the twentieth century. As a graduate student I was offered the freedom to explore my interests in gender and performance in productive ways alongside a group of brilliant and caring scholars, peers, and administrators. As an assistant professor, I have utilized

the intellectual flexibility and fluidity encouraged by Harvard's American Studies program in both designing courses and pursuing my research interests.



**Hua Hsu** (Ph.D. 2008; now Associate Professor English at Vassar College). I began graduate school with a vague curiosity about Asian American cultural production and little sense of what to do with it. I didn't know who to take classes with; I had no clue what I wanted to write my dissertation

about. The diversity of Am. Civ.'s offerings as well as its position at the intersection of various disciplines, then, were perfect for me. I constructed a path of study that allowed me to engage a range of conversations about race and culture. I remain grateful and, frankly, astounded by the freedom Am. Civ. afforded me to explore my interests across various disciplines and in a variety of registers. I was given the opportunity to plan conferences, invite speakers to campus and serve on the editorial board of the *New Literary History of America*. I was surrounded by students and faculty who modeled dynamic approaches to intellectual work, whether it was through activism, the arts or simply writing for a broader audience. I moonlighted as a journalist during graduate school, writing about music, film and politics for publications like *Slate*, the *Village Voice* and *The Wire*. I am currently finishing my first monograph, *A Floating Chinaman*, which considers the competing visions for a U.S.-China future that circulated in the popular novels and reportage of the interwar years. But the book also considers the petty, often bizarre interpersonal rivalries that undergirded this back-and-forth and occasionally spilled onto the page. My book would have never happened without Am. Civ.—not just the resources the program provided me but the sense of perspective (and, in some cases, appreciation for the strange and ironic) I gained through my conversations with mentors like Werner Sollors, John Stauffer, Luke Menand and Akira Iriye. I met some of my best friends and most trusted collaborators in Am. Civ.. The time we shared in the program was one I will cherish forever.



**Judy Kertesz** (Ph.D. 2012; now Assistant Professor of History at North Carolina State University). Given the breadth and scope of Am. Civ.'s program and Harvard's faculty, I was able to develop an interdisciplinary course of study, while being grounded me as an early-Americanist historian. While working on my dissertation, I was able to organize two Native American Studies conferences; serve on Harvard's Standing Committee on Ethnic

Studies; co-curate "IndiVisible: African-Native Lives in the Americas," an exhibit with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian; publish articles; conduct research on behalf of Native American tribal nations; as

well as embark on research for a film documentary and up-coming museum exhibit on the Lebanese diasporic experience in North Carolina. Currently, I am an Assistant Professor at North Carolina State University, specializing in Early American, Native American, and Public History. My manuscript, *Skeletons in the American Attic: Curiosity, Science, and the Appropriation of the American Indian Past*, excavates the political economy and cultural politics of the "Vanishing Indian." The ancient mummified remains of an early Woodland aboriginal woman disinterred in 1811, are the axis around which my project revolves, linking American national identity formation with settler colonialism, capitalist imperative for natural resource extraction, the exploitation of slave labor, and the development of early American archaeology as yet another form of "Indian Removal."



**Dagmawi Woubshet** (Ph.D. 2007; now Associate Professor of English at Cornell University). Dagmawi Woubshet is an assistant professor of English at Cornell University, where he teaches courses in African American and African Diaspora literature and culture, 1980s culture, and AIDS literature. His essays have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Transition*, *As*

*South Africa*, and *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. He co-edited (with Salamishah Tillet and Elizabeth Wolde Giorgies) *Ethiopia: Literature, Art, and Culture*, a special issue of *Callaloo*. His book, *Looking for the Dead: Black and Queer Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS*, is forthcoming with Johns Hopkins Press.

"I cannot imagine another program at Harvard that would have allowed me to fully realize my work on the early era of AIDS. Am. Civ. was the choice program for me because it prized interdisciplinary work, encouraged independent and bold thinking and fostered a rare intimacy among its students. Not only that, Am. Civ. gave me the chance to work closely with exceptional scholars in the humanities—Marc Sheinman and John Stauffer, in particular—mentors whose critical feedback, affirmation, and generosity allowed me to hone my own voice."



**Steven Brown** (current student; B.A. and M.F.A. McNeese State). Getting accepted to Harvard was never on my radar. I grew up in a camp in southwest Louisiana, attended public schools, and started a family right out of high school. But where money and advantage were lacking, there was plenty of encouragement and

support. I worked odd jobs and graveyards at a hotel, reading American utopian until the sun came up, then went straight to class. Several years later, I had my BA, MA, and MFA in poetry, and my eye out for Ph.D. programs. At first, I didn't bother applying to elite universities. No one I knew had attended one. And without the resources, the application seemed a waste of time. A professor of mine a

McNeese, however, urged me to meet John Stauffer, whose books I had read at the hotel. We met, and Stauffer urged me to apply to American Studies. I cannot account for other programs of this kind, but I have to give much respect to Harvard's for looking beyond the personal pages of the application to the merits of the work submitted. That work in American utopianism continues today under the careful guidance of professors in History, American Literature, Religion, and Visual Art. Opportunity may be talked up by institutions of higher education, but it is often in short supply. I am grateful to Harvard's American Studies program for affording such an opportunity to me and my family.



**Laura Serna** (Ph.D. 2006; now Assistant Professor of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California). When I joined the History of American Civilization Program I thought I was interested in art history and religion. I remain interested in those things, but my scholarly energies converged not on a particular sub-field but on a question that I set out to answer about Mexican-American audiences and American silent cinema. Honestly, it wasn't a question that any of my professors knew a great deal about in its specifics, but they trained me to approach my research and analysis with rigor, provided me with the intellectual training that gave me confidence in my own answers, and encouraged me to pursue the possibilities of the weird across national borders. The resources of Harvard as an institution were likewise indispensable in affording me opportunities to engage in sustained research in pursuit of answers. The Am. Civ. program allowed me to work with some of the very best minds who taught me how to teach myself, something I hope I'm passing along to my own students.



**Scott Poulson-Bryant** (Ph.D. 2016; now Assistant Professor of English at Fordham University). He is the author of *HUNG: A Meditation on the Measure of Black Men in America* (2006) and a novel, *The VIPs* (2011). His scholarly work has appeared in *Palimpsest*, *The Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and *American Studies*. Before coming to Harvard for his PhD, Poulson-Bryant worked as a journalist; his work appeared in such publications as *The Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, the *New York Times*, and *VIBE*, the hip hop and urban culture magazine for which he was one of the founding editors. His research interests include 20th century African American literature and popular culture, gender and sexuality studies, and film and media. He is currently writing *Bicentennial Black: Uplift, Citizenship, and the Cross-Racial Politics of 1970s US Popular Culture*, based on his dissertation, overseen by Professors Robin Bernstein, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Vincent Brown.



**Dean Budnick** (Ph.D. 2000; now editor-in-chief of Relix Magazine). Dean Budnick, who along with an Am. Civ. Ph.D. also has a J.D. from Columbia Law School, is Executive Editor at Relix Magazine. His latest book which he co-authored with Josh Baron, is *Ticket Master: The Rise of the Concert Industry and How the Public Got Scalped*. *Ticket Masters*, which received praise from the *Wall Street Journal*, *Rolling Stone*, *Hollywood Reporter* and many other outlets, chronicles the previously untold story of the modern concert industry, revealing the origins, development and ongoing strategies of companies such as Ticketmaster, Live Nation, StubHub and the efforts of numerous independent competitors. Budnick has written three prior books on improvisational music: *The Phishing Manual: A Compendium To the Music of Phish* (Hyperion, 1996), *Jam Bands: North America's Hottest Live Groups* (ECW, 1998) and *Jambands: A Complete Guide to the Players Music and Scene* (Backbeat Books, 2004). He also directed *Wetlands Preserved: The Story of An Activist Rock Club*, which earned numerous film festival laurels, opened nationally via First Run Features and currently airs on the Sundance Channel. Budnick is the founder of the website Jambands.com, the co-creator of the Jammy Awards and for many years co-hosted a radio show that aired weekly on XM Satellite Radio.



**Suleiman Osman** (Ph.D. 2006; now Associate Professor of American Studies at George Washington University). I specialize in U.S. urban, cultural and social history, and the study of race and ethnicity, with a particular focus on the way urban space both shapes and is produced by culture and politics. My first book, *Inventing Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity*, was an outgrowth of the dissertation completed in Harvard's Am. Civ. program. Am. Civ. was really a wonderful program and scholars like Elizabeth Cohen, Lawrence Buell, Evelyn Higginbotham, Werner Sollors pushed me and my fellow students to think in new ways that could have never imagined before going to graduate school. Am. Civ. was and continues to be a dynamic, creative, interdisciplinary and rigorous program that I feel very lucky to have been part of.



**Diana Williams** (Ph.D. 2007; now Assistant Professor of History, Law, and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California). Diana Williams writes on the relationship of law (particularly civil and family law) and culture in North America; her work focuses on race, gender

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and sexuality. She is completing a book that links the history of interracial marriage to changing definitions of U.S. citizenship in the nineteenth century. Her next project investigates the administration of Civil War widows' pensions as an epilogue to Reconstruction. Williams' dissertation won the American Society for Legal History William Nelson Cromwell Dissertation Prize, and she was the 2006-07 Raoul Berger fellow in Legal history at Harvard Law School.

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The faculty associated with Harvard's American Studies Program is drawn from a wide range of the University's academic units. These include the departments of African and African American Studies; Economics; English; Government (political science); History; History of Art and Architecture; Music; Visual and Environmental Studies; Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; and the faculties of Divinity, Education, Government (public administration), and Law.

For a listing of faculty by time period and theme, please consult our website: <http://americanstudies.fas.harvard.edu>. There you will also find a program description and full list of current students, among other information.

Joyce Elizabeth Chaplin (American Studies Chair; History): early American history, intellectual history, environmental history, history of science.

David Alworth (English): Twentieth-century American literature and culture, visual art, social theory.

David Armitage (History): Atlantic history, early modern intellectual history, global history, international law, political thought, literature and history.

Sven Beckert (History): nineteenth-century U.S. history; emphasis on social, economic, and transnational themes.

Aisha Beliso-De Jesús (Divinity): cultural and social anthropology, African diaspora religious studies, transnational feminisms, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Robin Bernstein (African and African American Studies; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies): U.S. performance and theatre; cultural history; women's, gender, and sexuality studies, childhood.

Steven Biel (History and Literature): cultural and intellectual history.

Ann D. Braude (Divinity): American women's religious history.

Catherine Brekus (Divinity): American religious life, women and religion.

Vincent Brown (History; African and African American Studies): Atlantic history, African diaspora studies, history of slavery, digital humanities.

Stephen Burt (English): poetry, especially 20th and 21st centuries; science fiction literature and geography; contemporary writing; comics and graphic novels; literature alongside other arts.

Daniel Carpenter (Government): American political science, bureaucratic development.

Glenda Carpio (English, African and African American Studies): literature, history and culture of New World slavery; African-American visual art; Anglophone Caribbean literature; theories of memory and textuality; gender and cultural studies; Native American and Latino/a US literature.

Amanda Claybaugh (English): nineteenth-century American literature; Victorian literature; trans-Atlantic literary relations.

Genevieve Clutario (History): colonialism, especially the Filipino diaspora; gender and race.

Nancy F. Cott (History): social, political, and cultural history of the U.S. in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Christine Desan (Law): legal and political thought, history of capitalism.

Lorgia Garcia Pena (Romance Languages and Literatures): U.S. latino/a literature and cultures, Caribbean literature and cultures, performance studies, race and ethnicity, transnational feminism, migration, human rights, Dominican and Dominican diaspora studies.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (African and African American Studies, English): African and African-American literature; cultural theory.

Claudia Goldin (Economics): economic histories of education, income, inequality, immigration, technological change.

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Evelynn Hammonds (History of Science): African and African American studies, medicine, science and race, science and technology studies, women and gender.

David Neil Hempton (Divinity): social history of religion, with focus on populist traditions of evangelicalism.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (History, African and African American Studies): 19th and 20th-century American history, African American history, women's history, religious studies.

Elizabeth Hinton (History): 20<sup>th</sup>-c. U.S. history, carceral studies, urban studies, African American History, race and inequality, social movements.

Jennifer Hochschild (Government): U.S. politics, immigrant political incorporation, social welfare policy, public opinion, political thought.

David Holland (Divinity): religious history, early America especially New England.

Andrew Jewett (History): U.S. since 1865, American intellectual history, politics, modern social thought, science and religion, history of the social sciences, American higher education.

Walter Johnson (History, African and African American Studies): nineteenth-century U.S., slavery, capitalism, imperialism, social and historical theory.

David S. Jones (History of Science): science and race; medicine, including among native peoples; psychology and theories of mind, technology and society.

Jane Kamensky (History): early America; Atlantic World; family, culture, and everyday life.

Robin E. Kelsey (History of Art and Architecture): photography and American art, environmental studies, art and law.

Alexander Keyssar (Kennedy School of Government): modern U.S. politics and history, especially history of poverty, of democracies, and election reform.

Ju Yon Kim (English): literature, especially Asian American; theater and performance.

James Kloppenberg (History): intellectual history of the U.S. and Europe; U.S. history.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty (Visual and Environmental Studies; History of Art and Architecture): art history, especially performance and video; dance; art and activism.

Jill Lepore (History): American history and literature.

Kenneth Mack (Law): civil rights, legal and constitutional history, race and the law.

Lisa McGirr (History): twentieth-century U.S., politics and social movements, reform movements, intersection of religion and politics, state and civil society, U.S. and the world.

Daniel McKanan (Divinity): American religious history, religious movements for social transformation.

Louis Menand (English): nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural history

Ingrid Monson (Music; African and African American Studies): music especially jazz, African American music, music of the African diaspora.

Elisa New (English): poetry, literature to 1900, religion and literature, Jewish literature.

Carol J. Oja (Music): twentieth and twentieth-first-century American musical traditions, including modernist composers, cross-cultural composition, musical theater.

Orlando Patterson (Sociology): historical sociology of slavery and freedom; sociology of economic development, especially in the Caribbean; Caribbean and Afro-American culture and social structure.

Julie A. Reuben (Education): education in American society and culture.

Mayra Rivera Rivera (Divinity): religious studies, gender, coloniality, ethnicity, race.

Jennifer L. Roberts (History of Art and Architecture): American art (colonial to present), with focus on landscape, expedition, material culture theory, history of science.

Marc Shell (Comparative Literature, English): economics and aesthetics; nationhood and language difference; kinship studies; non-English languages and literatures of the United States; disability and medical studies; Renaissance; comparative literature; theory.

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Doris Sommer (Romance Languages and Literatures, African and African American Studies): literature, especially Latin American, women's, ethnic; bilingual aesthetics.

John Stauffer (English, African and African American Studies): literature and culture (especially the 19th century), American Studies, Civil War, slavery and abolitionism, protest literature, religion and literature, American novel, autobiography.

Brandon Terry (African and African American Studies): political theory and philosophy, history, African American studies.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (History): early American social history, women's history, material culture.

Kirsten Weld (History): Latin America, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements in the Americas, politics of historical and archival knowledge production.