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. The Program is committed to supporting students of diverse backgrounds and identities, including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability.

American Studies
at Harvard’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

A Look at our Students, Alumni, and Faculty
STUDENT AND ALUMNI PROFILES

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committed to supporting students of diverse backgrounds and identities, including but not
limited to race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability.

Salamishah Tillet (Ph.D. 2007; now Associate Professor of
English and Africana Studies at Rutgers University). 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
deepen 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 (Ph.D. 2017; now Assistant Professor of History at Queens College, City University of New York). 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, Lisa 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 commitments 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 experiment 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-rights 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 movements to prevent their erasure.
**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 imperatives for natural resource extraction, the exploitation of slave labor, and the development of early American archaeology as yet another form of “Indian Removal.”


“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 a chance to work closely with exceptional scholars in the humanities—Marc Shell and John Stauffer, in particular—mentors whose critical feedback, affirmation, and generosity allowed me to hone my own voice.”

**Collier Brown** (PhD. 2017; now Preceptor at Harvard University). 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 utopists 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 at 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.

Dean Budnick (Ph.D. 2000; now editor-in-chief at 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 Masters: 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 I completed in Harvard’s Am. Civ. program. Am. Civ. was really a wonderful program and scholars like Lizabeth Cohen, Lawrence Buell, Evelyn Higginbotham, Werner Sollors pushed me and my fellow students to think in new ways that I 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.
CURRENT AND RECENT DISSERTATIONS

“Rubber Souls: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination” (Jack Hamilton)

“Savage Preservation: Race, Culture and the Making of Modern Media” (Brian Hochman)

“Beyond Broken Glass: Looking at the South Bronx in Ruin” (Pete L’Official)

“Queer Visions: Fairy Spectacles, Police Surveillance, and the Politics of Gay Visibility in Twentieth Century America” (Anna Lvovsky)

“From Delta Fields to Chicago Streets: An Environmental History of the Great Migration, 1915-1940” (Brian McCammack)

“Representing Modern New Orleans: Food and the Evolution of the Multiethnic City” (Theresa McCulla)

“Afro-diasporic Solidarities: Dr. Ana Livia Cordero’s Movements in the Caribbean, Ghana, and the United States, 1931-1992” (Sandy Placido)

“‘Movin’ On Up’: Uplift, Citizenship, and the Cross-Racial Politics of 1970s U.S. Popular Culture” (Scott Poulson-Bryant)

“Riding Bareback: Imagining American Sexuality, Gender, and Race through Rodeo” (Rebecca Scofield)


“Race for the Pacific: Samoa in the Age of Empire” (Holger Droessler)

“Skeletons in the American Attic: Curiosity, Science, and the Appropriation of the American Indian Past” (Judy Kertesz)

“Feast, Fast, and Flesh: The Violence of Hunger in Colonial New England and New France” (Carla Cevasco)
“Snowshoe Country: Winter Mobility and Cultural Change in the Uplands of the Gulf of Maine, 1619-1725” (Thomas Wickman)

“Protestant Relics: Objects, History and the Sacred in Early America, 1770-1860 (Christopher Allison)

“Statistically Significant: Economic Indicators and the Capitalization of Everyday Life, 1835-1935” (Eli Cook)

“American Whaling in Culture, and Memory, 1820-1930” (Jamie Jones)

“From Memory to Mastery: Accounting for Control in Antebellum America” (Caitlin Rosenthal)

“The Disappearing Bridge: A Literary History of the United States and Czechoslovakia, 1947-1989” (Brian Goodman)

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AMERICAN STUDIES FACULTY

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://americanshudes.fas.harvard.edu. There you will also find a program description and full list of current students, among other information.
David Alworth (English, History and Literature): 20th century American literature and culture, visual art, social theory.

David Armitage (History): intellectual and international history.

Sven Beckert (History): 19th century U.S. history; emphasis on social, economic, and transnational themes.


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


Catherine Brekus (Divinity): religion and American culture, history of women, gender, Christianity, and the evangelical movement, religious history of American exceptionalism and the relationship of Christianity, capitalism, and consumerism in the U.S.


Stephanie Burt (English): poetry - 20th and 21st centuries, science fiction, literature and geography, contemporary writing, comics and graphic novels.

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

Joyce E. Chaplin (History): histories of science, climate, colonialism, and environment.

Philip Deloria (History): social, cultural and political histories of the relations among American Indian peoples and the United States, comparative and connective histories of indigenous peoples in a global context.

Christine Desan (Law): international monetary system, the constitutional law of money, constitutional history, political economy, and legal theory.

Lorgia Garcia Peña (Romance Languages and Literatures, History and Literature): Latinx Studies in global perspectives, Hispanic Caribbean literatures and cultures, performance studies, race and ethnicity, transnational feminism, migration, human rights, Dominican and Dominican diaspora studies.


Roberto Gonzales (Education): contemporary processes of immigration and social inequality, race and ethnicity, immigration, and policy.
Evelynn Hammonds (History of Science): African & African-American studies, history of medicine, science and race, science and technology studies, women and gender studies.

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


Elizabeth Hinton (History): 20th century 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): American religious history, early America.


David S. Jones (History of Science): science and race, global/public health, history of biology/medicine, medical humanities, psychology and theories of mind, science and technology studies.

Ieva Jusionyte (Anthropology): Political anthropology; statecraft, borders, and security, crime and violence, space and infrastructure, news media and journalism, Argentina, Mexico, U.S.-Mexico border.
Robin Kelsey (History of Art and Architecture): history of photography, American art, environmental studies, art and law.


Ju Yon Kim (English): Asian American literature and performance, modern and contemporary American theater and drama, and cross-racial and intercultural performance.

James Kloppenberg (History): intellectual history of the U.S. and Europe, European and American thought, culture, and politics.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty (Art, Film, and Visual Studies): art history, dance and visual art, performance documentation and reenactment, art in media culture, art and activism, artistic interventions in daily life.


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


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

Tiya Miles (History): African American, Native American and women’s histories.


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


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): intersection between American thought and culture and educational institutions and practice.

Mayra Rivera Rivera (Divinity): religious studies, gender, colonialist, 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.

Kay Shelemay (Music, African and African American Studies): musical ethnography and music and memory, Ethiopian music and musicians in their North American diaspora.

Marc Shell (Comparative Literature, English): economics and aesthetics; nationhood and language difference, kinship studies, non-English languages and literatures of the U.S.


Doris Sommer (Romance Languages and Literatures, African and African American Studies): arts and humanities throughout Latin America and beyond, aesthetics of minoritarian literature.

John Stauffer (English, African and African American Studies): antislavery, Civil War era, antislavery, social protest movements, and photography.


Todne Thomas (Divinity): African American Religions; racial, spatial, and familial dynamics of black Christian communities in the U.S.
Kirsten Weld (History): Latin America, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements in the Americas, politics of historical and archival knowledge production.

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RESOURCES

Christofer Rodelo, Fellow for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging in the American Studies Program, 2019-20: crodelo@g.harvard.edu

Office for Diversity and Minority Affairs (ODMA), Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS): staff list at referenced url, including Sheila Thomas (Dean for Academic Programs and Diversity; sthomas@fas.harvard.edu) and Stephanie Parsons (Assistant Director of Diversity and Minority Affairs; sparsons@fas.harvard.edu)

Diversity and Inclusion Fellows of GSAS: see more information including bios at https://gsas.harvard.edu/diversity/fellow.

Xavier du Maine (xdumaine@g.harvard.edu)
Lara Roach (lroach@g.harvard.edu)

To download our Graduate School’s diversity brochure, see the right-hand sidebar at https://gsas.harvard.edu/diversity-gsas: “Perspectives: Resources for Minority Applicants,” a publication of the Office for Diversity and Minority Affairs at Harvard’s GSAS

To learn more about the following student groups, go to https://gsas.harvard.edu/diversity/student-groups
Harvard GSAS Latinx Student Association
Harvard LGBTQ@GSAS Association
Harvard Puerto Rican Student Association
Harvard University Native American Program
W.E.B. Du Bois Graduate Society of GSAS