

American Studies Program Newsletter

Cynthia Gwynne Yaudes, editor

UNFAZED BY THE "UNCOOL"



www.indiana.edu/~gender/html/

Dr. Colin Johnson

Congratulations to Clark Barwick, winner of the Virginia La Follette Gunderson Essay Award Competition. A presentation and reception will take place Thursday, 27 April 2006 at 4pm in Ballantine Hall 004



Dr. Colin Johnson came to the Gender Studies Department at Indiana University in 2005, joining a faculty that charges itself with exploring the way that meaning has been made through and around the concept of gender over time and across space. His research on the history of same-sex intimacy in rural areas of the United States meshed well with the interests of the Department; it also drew the attention of American Studies Program Director Matthew Guterl. Invited to join the AMST faculty, Johnson was happy to accept. Recently, he sat down with me to talk about the intellectual and methodological niches he sees himself occupying.

Johnson holds an A.B. with honors in Law, Letters and Society from the University of Chicago and an M.A. and Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan. This type of training has been called "consciously interdisciplinary," a phrase that is frequently used in the world of American Studies, but not often translated. I asked Johnson to offer his take on

the phrase's implications.

For him, it is a liberating concept. In practice, consciously crossing disciplinary boundaries entails observing social and cultural phenomena and then acquiring appropriate methods to analyze them. He acknowledges that within the walls of academe, this can be a politically frightening undertaking since it sometimes engenders methodological concerns in people who identify primarily as experts in particular analytic traditions. But Johnson tends to set such issues aside, at least initially, so that he can focus more on the tasks of observation and speculative critique than on the process of legitimating knowledge in terms that satisfy institutional convention, but fall short of expanding our understanding of why and how people do what they do. In most cases, Johnson begins his investigations by asking, simply, "what is going on, and how can I make some sense of it?"

Such a question is not so intimidating to those scholars whose practices have

some relationship to American Studies. These researchers, Johnson suggests with a smile, are "natural scavengers" who routinely cross the traditional borders that separate academic fields in the hunt for methods that will be useful to their analyses. He quickly adds that methodological scavenging need not imply a lack of intellectual rigor. Rather, it usually entails a principled disregard for the somewhat artificial restrictions that usually define what are and are not valid objects of study, evidentiary sources and analytic methodologies. For his part, Johnson is most interested in those topics that fall between the cracks. Just as importantly, though, he's interested in why they fall between the cracks.

Rural sexuality is a perfect example. Of limited interest to scholars of gender and sexuality until quite recently, the subject of rural life in a U.S. context has typically been addressed by agricultural historians, students of pastoral literature or art, or rural sociologists

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CONFERENCE INVITATIONS

"After Katrina: Rebuilding Landscapes, Rebuilding Cultures"

**International Cultural Studies Conference
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA
16-17 June 2006
Abstract deadline 5 May 2006**

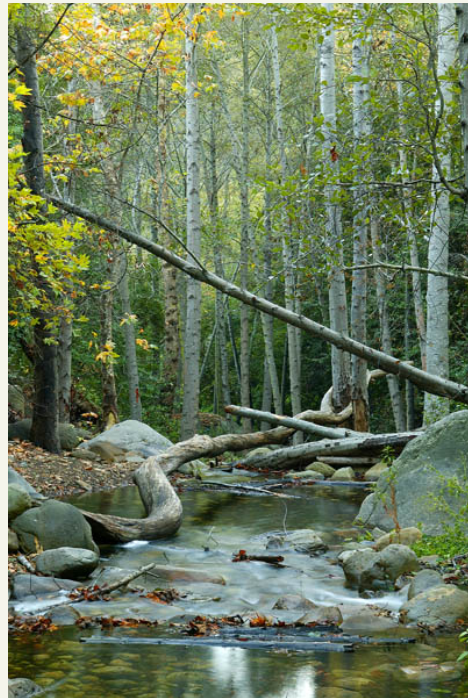
Papers are invited from all disciplines on topics related to cultural loss, preservation and change following natural and manmade disasters. Proposals on diaspora and recovery strategies are especially welcome. Send one page abstracts to reusti3@lsu.edu. Direct inquiries to Professor John Lowe at jlowe@lsu.edu.

**Academic conference on Bob Dylan
Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire
11-13 August 2006**

For further information, see <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~english/dylan.html>

**American Art in Global Context
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Washington, DC
28-30 September 2006**

This symposium will look at American visual art in a global context—from circum-Atlantic migrations in the eighteenth century to the impact of European training, Asian decorative styles, trans-Pacific contacts, and immigration patterns on Americans in the late nineteenth century; from the export of U.S. culture and media in the twentieth century to the impact of Latin American and Asian immigrants on the nation's visual arts in the new millennium. The complete list of speakers and program will be posted at AmericanArt.si.edu/education/opportunities-symposium.cfm, where you will also find information about registration and lodging. Queries may be sent to SAAMSymposium@si.edu.



"Engaging Through Places"

**Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
6-8 October 2006**

Imagining America is a consortium of 80 colleges and universities committed to public scholarship and public culture-making through the humanities, arts, and design. Imagining America's mission is to strengthen the public role and democratic purposes of the cultural disciplines and interdisciplines. It supports publicly-engaged academic work and the structural changes in higher education that such work requires. Imagining America's national network includes collaborators in K-12 schools, nonprofit and public cultural institutions, public media, government agencies, and grassroots organizations. For more details and information regarding submission of session proposals, visit www.ia.umich.edu. If you have further questions, feel free to contact Josephine Tsai at jotsai@umich.edu.

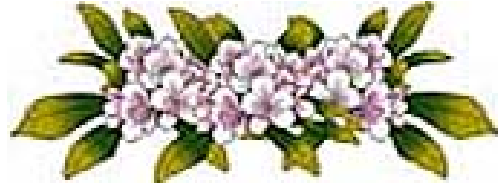
FUNDING OPTIONS

**School of Social Science
Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey
Proposal deadline 15 September 2006**

Each year, the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, invites fifteen to twenty scholars to be in residence for the full academic year to pursue their own research. The School welcomes applications in economics, political science, law, psychology, sociology and anthropology. It encourages social scientific work with an historical and humanistic bent and also entertains applications in history, philosophy, literary criticism, literature and linguistics. Each year there is a general thematic focus that provides common ground for roughly half the scholars; for 2007-2008 the focus will be The Rule of Law Under Pressure. Applications must be submitted through the Institute's online application system, which can be found, along with more information, at www.sss.ias.edu/applications.

Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

Foundation supports scholarly work on the humanities in the public interest. The VFH Fellowship Program offers time, space, and resources to scholars who bring the humanities to visibility—drawing on history, philosophy, ethics, cultural studies, and literary criticism to enhance understanding of critical issues. Proposals are welcomed on subjects of public interest in any field of the humanities. Particularly encouraged are projects on the South Atlantic U.S., Folk Culture, African-American Studies, Virginia History and Culture, and Violence and Survival. For more information on Fellowships, please see <http://www.virginiafoundation.org>.
Middleton Fellowship Program in Presidential Studies

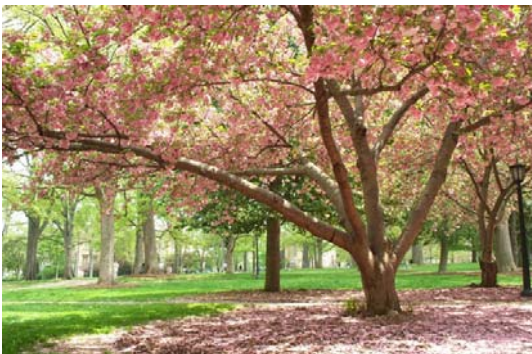


Harry Middleton Fellowship in Presidential Studies

The Lyndon B. Johnson Foundation, the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, and the Institute for the 21st Century have announced the creation of the Harry Middleton Fellowship in Presidential Studies. The Middleton fellowship carries a stipend of up to \$5,000, and as many as two will be awarded annually. These fellowships support scholars interested in presidential policy during the postwar period. Funds can be used at any presidential library in the National Archives system, though the successful candidate will develop at least a portion of her or his work from original research in the collections of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library. For additional information tap into the LBJ School of Public Affairs website at: <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/>

American Academy of Arts and Sciences Visiting Scholars Program Postmark deadline 14 October 2006

The Academy is interested in proposals that relate to its current projects in the following program areas: Humanities & Culture, Science & Global Security, Social Policy & American Institutions, and Education. For more information on these studies, please visit the Academy's website (www.amacad.org/projects.aspx). Projects that address American cultural, social, or political issues from the founding period to the present are especially welcome, as are studies that consider developments in America from a multidisciplinary and/or comparative perspective. In conjunction with its 225th anniversary, the Academy has launched a major archival initiative to preserve its historic papers and invites proposals that will draw upon these holdings as well. For details, contact vsp@amacad.org. Application information is available on the Academy's website at www.amacad.org/visiting.aspx





PUBLICATION OPPORTUNITIES



Women and Science. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought*
Submission deadline 1 June 2006

The journal invites contributions for its next issue, which will be devoted to the theme Women and Science. Papers are sought in all disciplines; joint papers and papers co-authored with student researchers are also encouraged. Papers should be 20-25 pages in length, typed, and formatted according to the accepted method for the discipline. Send three blind copies of all manuscripts to

Drs. Carol Gibbons and Lois Eveleth, co-editors
 c/o Hare Academic Center
 Salve Regina University
 Newport, RI 02840.

Each copy should be accompanied by a title page with contact information: author(s) name(s), institutions, telephone number(s) and email address(es) for all authors, and home and work address for the corresponding author.

Representing Segregation
African American Review
Inquiry deadline 15 December 2006
Submission deadline 1 May 2007

Is there an identifiable literary tradition responding to, representing, or protesting U.S. racial segregation? Examination of individual works, authors, genres, or movements welcome for a special issue of *African American Review* slated for early 2008. Inquiries first to: Brian Norman (normbria@isu.edu) and Piper Kendrix Williams (williamp@tcnj.edu). More information, including a link to the special issue website at <http://aar.slu.edu/>.

Studies in American Humor, the journal of the American Humor Studies Association, will be edited by M. Thomas Inge beginning with the 2005 volume. Essays are solicited on any aspect of American humor in any genre or field of study. At present we are especially interested in essays on humor in the comics or on subversive humor among women and minorities. Send manuscripts (2 copies with MLA style documentation) or queries to M. Thomas Inge
 Blackwell Professor of the Humanities
 Randolph-Macon College
 Ashland, VA 23005

Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States
***American Quarterly* special issue**
Submission deadline 1 September 2006

We invite submissions for a special issue of the *American Quarterly* focused on religion and politics in the United States, to be published in September 2007. In recent years, the role of religion in public life has become a matter of intense deliberation, as journalists, policy-makers, and others have turned to questions ranging from the nature of Islam to debates over marriage, from the role of religion in the 2000 and 2004 elections to the religious diversity of local school districts. This special issue will examine the politics of religion, broadly defined, attending to axes of power and categories of difference, placing the United States in its global context. We are interested in two types of work: articles that examine some aspect of the diversity of contemporary religious communities and the political valences of their practices and/or beliefs; and essays that explore the methodological and disciplinary questions that American studies scholars bring to the examination of religion.

This issue will bring together scholars from a wide variety of disciplines and interdisciplinary models, such as anthropology, cultural studies, religious studies, history, and political science. We will problematize the presumed congruency between conservative religion and politics, by featuring work on religion, race, law, and politics across a wide spectrum. We welcome historical analyses that shed light on contemporary issues, as well as transnational and diasporic approaches, studies of popular and material culture, and legal or policy studies. We are also interested in studies of secularism, particularly in the context of the rise in religious-based activism.

Essays should be no longer than 10,000 words, including notes. Please send any questions about the call for papers to american.quarterly@usc.edu. Information about *American Quarterly* and submission guidelines can be found on our web site:
www.americanquarterly.org

AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSMAKERS



Nathan Carroll (Communication and Culture) will be publishing an article entitled "Mitchell & Kenyon, Archival Contingency, and the Cultural Production of Historical License" in a forthcoming issue of *The Moving Image*.

Victoria Elmwood (English) has accepted a teaching post-doctoral fellowship for 2006 at Tulane University.

Professor **Yeidy M. Rivero** (Communication and Culture), together with Charles Husband and Yasmin Jiwani, spoke at the symposium entitled "Race and Media in Comparative Perspectives: Europe, Canada, and the Spanish Caribbean." The one-day symposium was sponsored by The Global Media Research Center at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

Professor **Shane Vogel** (English) will be a Post-Doctoral Fellow at The Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University in 2006-2007.

Professor **Eric Sandweiss** (History) delivered the keynote address to the Mid-American American Studies Association in St. Louis, on April 8. His talk was entitled "A Roadside Perspective on the Midcentury American Landscape."

In June Professor **Jesse Goodman** (Education) will publish Reforming Schools: Working Within a Progressive Tradition during Conservative Times (Albany: State University of New York Press).

Professor **Purnima Bose** gave an invited talk on "Professing Progressive Politics in the Heartland," at the University of Texas on 1 April 2006. She also delivered a series of lectures at the University of Hawai'i in Manoa in April 2006. As part of the International Cultural Studies Certificate's lecture series on "Class," she gave a talk on April 12, 2006, "From Agitation to Institutionalization: The Anti-Sweatshop Movement in the New Millennium." On 13 April 2006, the journal *Biography* sponsored a joint lecture by Bose and Laura E. Lyons on "Corporate Genealogies: From Corporate Personhood to Entrepreneurial Individualism." Later that afternoon, she also delivered a talk, co-sponsored by



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the English Department and South Asian Studies Program, on "Hindutva Abroad: Tempest in a Textbook." An article based on this lecture will be published in the May/June 2006 issue of *Against the Current*.

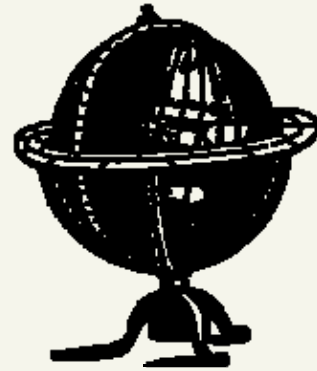
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Matthew Guterl, Director
Deborah Cohn, Associate Director



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whose primary concern was mapping the relation between industrialization and the deepening economic and cultural impoverishment of non-metropolitan spaces. Johnson, however, sees a far more complicated story. His forthcoming book, *The Little Gay Bar on the Prairie*, will address “two separate but interrelated aspects of the history of sexuality in non-metropolitan America between 1900 and 1945. First, it considers how men and women living in small towns and decidedly rural areas gradually came to share a common sense about the nature and meaning of sex and gender with others nationwide. Second, it demonstrates that this process—this geographic expansion of what Michel Foucault has called the ‘discourse of sexuality’—occurred unevenly across the American landscape, and in conflict with other already extant sex and gender ways.” Building on Foucault’s work, Johnson, examines the institutional means by which normative ideas about sex and gender circulated through non-metropolitan space during the early twentieth century. He also documents previously unexamined rural contexts in which same-sex sexual behavior flourished.

Conceptually, the classroom is Johnson’s laboratory—the place where he tests the intellectual utility of particular methods by employing them as means to reconsider some of the traditional

concerns of American Studies that have, over the past few decades, been marked “passé” or fully resolved issues. For Johnson, being a good teacher means finding a way to make these topics important in the present tense. For him good pedagogy also means selecting excellent examples of scholarship that have made old topics new again by raising an entirely different set of questions than have typically been asked in relation to them. “For example,” Johnson notes, “I love teaching Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft*, less because I have a particularly pronounced interest in the phenomenon of blackface minstrelsy than because I think Lott’s book is a great example of what psychoanalysis has the potential to do to and for cultural history and critical race studies. Lott’s book doesn’t always succeed in its analysis, but it definitely changed the way a lot of us think about a performance tradition that was, for many years, dismissed as a manifestation of simple-minded racism. As Lott shows, I think, minstrelsy was deeply racist; but it was anything if simple minded, at least on the level of the unconscious. Disciplinary historians don’t talk about the unconscious very much because there aren’t a lot of letters in the archive or census entries signed, ‘Sally’s Id.’ Yet the basic conceptual proposition that Freud’s notion of the unconscious represents—the proposition that all of our motivations aren’t immediately available to us at the moments when we act—seems as crucial a factor to

consider when trying to understand human behavior as anything.”

These methods will also broadly frame the cross-listed courses Johnson will be offering during the upcoming academic year. *Gay Histories/Queer Cultures* will examine the social, cultural and political history of same-sex desire in the United States and abroad. *The Cultural Politics of Sexuality in the 20th Century* will pair a broad range of theoretical readings with primarily American case studies to explore constructions of gender and sexuality during the “American century.”

Ultimately, what Colin Johnson promises to bring to American Studies, besides a solid teaching and research agenda, is an affinity for both the cutting edge and the deeply “uncool.” By his own admission, he is drawn to intellectual outliers—sources and methods that are either so new that they’re still intellectually unfinished or so old and worn that most people are hard pressed to believe that anything original can be gotten out of them. And he’s happiest, of course, when he can have both in the same project. “Like Agricultural history and queer theory,” Johnson ruminates. “Who’d’a thunk it?” Sometimes the unlikely juxtapositions of which he is so fond get him nowhere, and then it’s back to the drawing board. “But when it works,” he concludes, “it’s beautiful.”