“I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society…”

inside porchlight: visitors come to the cooper house, residents visit elsewhere...

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message from the program director eric sandeen

This summer I had the pleasure of returning to the University of Paderborn, where I held my first Fulbright more than thirty years ago. When I spoke to the current students – and to other American Studies classes throughout Germany during the following weeks – I was reminded again how complex, even kaleidoscopic the views of American culture are. We are involved in an exciting, challenging field and I am happy to welcome the Program back to another year of exploration.

broeck speaks about german discourses of race

On October 4th, we had the pleasure of hosting a talk by Dr. Sabine Broeck, professor of American Studies at the University of Bremen (Germany) and current president of the international Collegium for African American Research (CAAR). The talk, "Traveling African American Cultures and German Discourses of Race," focused on the impact of African American icons, from Angela Davis to hip hop, on Germany, the "African-Americanophilia" of white Germans through a sequence of post-war generations and German discourses about racism. Broeck argued that "race" gets framed differently in Germany, on the one hand, because multiculturalism, for reasons of ethnic demography, does not have at its pressure base a black movement, but on the other hand, Germans treat blackness according to abolitionist models they have taken from American discourses, in particular Uncle Tom's Cabin. The talk was sponsored by American Studies as well as African American Studies and International Programs. Through our engagement, Dr. Broeck was also able to talk to our graduate students at a brown bag lunch, to visit the Ethnic Studies department at Colorado State University, visit a few of our classes, meet faculty and students and even have an encounter with moose on Turtle Rock trail.

knobloch returns from sabbatical

Professor Frieda Knobloch has returned to the Cooper House sofas after spending a year on sabbatical. During her year off, she has reported, she reconceptualized her work on the Red Desert into a work of fiction. Knobloch reported to students and faculty from American Studies and the MFA Creative Writing program that her struggle with framing her research as a cultural and/or environmental history, a memoir, or a work of nonfiction has been resolved after a year spent reading, playing piano, and meeting an already unforgettable character, Ed Ray, who was born from her inspired frustration to write the Red (Edray) Desert (Esertday) in pig latin. Welcome back, Frieda!
I especially liked the ideas of "history of hole/whole" discussed at a panel and hope I can incorporate that idea into my thesis. In addition, I found "The Question of Reparations for Slavery, Internment and Native Land" session interesting as it focused on the utility of comparative ethnic studies for addressing the topic of reparations to ethnic minorities. Although it was not directly related to my research interest, I also attended to "Japan in the Wake of 3/11 Eastern Japan Earthquake/Tsunami/Nuclear Disaster" session which examined the aftermath of the powerful earthquake the country experienced. The panelists brought up the question of "What is the role of American Studies (of America and that of abroad) in response to such a massive disaster?" Detailed follow-ups to this issue will be necessary for the next several years, but I was impressed to see many audiences in this session thinking of the disaster as a global catastrophe. Overall, my experience in Baltimore was very beneficial to my academic pursuits and I feel grateful to have been offered this opportunity. - Rie Misaizu

Kirsty Callaghan is from Milton Keynes in the UK. She graduated with a BA in American Studies in summer 2011 from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK, having spent her third year abroad at the University of Oregon as an exchange student. Soon after finishing her undergraduate degree, Kirsty came to Wyoming to pursue her interests further, thanks to an award she received from the British Association for American Studies. She is hoping to extend her research in the area she examined for her undergraduate thesis – that of Latinos in the US - and is particularly interested in the issues surrounding immigration, assimilation, citizenship, American identity, borders, and the political engagement of minority groups. She hopes that the American Studies program at UW, with its truly interdisciplinary approach, will expand her interests, while enabling her to learn about an area of the United States remarkably different from places she has experienced before.

Norma Haskell is a fifth generation Wyomingite. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Wyoming in 1986, majoring in Theatre/English Secondary Education. Norma taught school for one year in Jeffreyy City, Wyoming and was then an editor for UW’s College of Agriculture for five years before resigning and becoming a re-enactor/oral historian at the Wyoming Territorial Park 1990-2001. She has performed Martha Jane Canarie, Calamity Jane (her great great-grand aunt), all over the United States, mostly affiliated with the Great American Wild West Show. Norma is in American Studies to earn a master’s degree in hopes of further professionalizing and preserving her personal history. Her goal is to become a well-known and respected source on not only Calamity Jane, but on preserving oral history, teaching people how to tell stories and performing for people interested in what she has to tell.

Mathies Gorm Jensen, originally from Skovshoved, Denmark, is visiting the University of Wyoming on exchange from the University of Southern Denmark, where he has a BA in History with a minor in Political Science. His main academic interest is US Politics and History, specifically the Civil War. Once finished at the University of Wyoming, he will return to the University of Southern Denmark and write his Master thesis. When not involved with school, Mathies loves spending time with his wife Emily and obsessing over his other love, the Boston Red Sox.

Kiah Siobhán Karlsson is mostly from Colorado by way of entirely too many states to warrant mention. She holds a B.A. from University of Colorado at Boulder in English with
class of 2013 continued

Jessica Marie King is a first-year American Studies graduate student. She earned her Bachelor’s from Indianapolis University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) in 2006. Since college, she has worked as a freelance journalist for various publications including the Wyoming Business Report and the Cowboy State Free Press, and was News Editor for The Independent Record in Thermopolis. Her academic interests include narrative and feature writing. Within American Studies her concentration is on women’s issues, particularly domestic violence, and spirituality.

Shaun Milligan was raised in Burns, Wyoming and graduated from Burns Jr./Sr. High School. He completed his undergraduate studies at Hastings College in Philosophy and International Studies, and during his time there, studied abroad in Paris at the L’Institut Catholique de Paris. Shaun’s goal in American Studies is to complete a study of resource development on cultural landscapes, particularly in the western United States. He is a massive fan of “This American Life,” David Sedaris, and “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia.” Shaun spends his spare time grooming and training his cat, Miss Catherine Berkeley.

Creative Writing, and Ethnic Studies. Still uncertain whether a future in academia is in her calling—whilst escapist dreams of part-time scholarly pursuit as farmer, social worker, or expatriate fill her mind—she has decided to test out a master’s degree in a setting not too far from home base. Her love of things “American” stems from a geographically sporadic childhood and from a classic combination of love and hate—deep connection to the North American landscape and its diverse people and history despite an undercurrent of critique, which remains un-willfully present. Kiah’s academic passion is literary, but she believes you cannot read or write good literature without healthy doses of historical and cultural context. Her academic interests broadly include 20th-century literature, frontier history and border studies, nationalisms and identity, race in U.S. culture and history, post-colonialism, Native American and Chicano studies and literature, and fiction writing. In her spare time, she’ll jump at any excuse to be outside, listening to music, driving, or cooking.

American Studies Association Annual Meeting

“Imagination, Reparation, Transformation” 2011, in Baltimore, MD

I found the annual meeting reflected much of what we have discussed in class about the nature and state of American Studies and provided a great opportunity to experience and feel a part of the community. I attended ten panels, focusing on the themes of Latinos, borders and also on work in the public sector. Some of the sessions about Latinos were more literary, such as “Imagining Mexicanness, Imagining Mexican Women,” which looked at the work of Gonzalez and Atherton, and the “Geographies of Latinidad.” Others were more sociological or historical such as the paper Myrna García gave on Chicago’s immigrant rights movement in the “Radical Imagination: Comparative Social Movements” panel. The two panels I enjoyed the most were “Reimagining Bodies at the Borders: Gender, Sexuality and Immigration” and “Commemoration and the Politics of the Past.” - Kirsty Callaghan

Attending the annual meeting was very rewarding. Not only did I have the opportunity to meet and learn from many American Studies scholars, but gained a considerable insight into the variety of research topics that are pursued within American Studies programs nationally and internationally. Every one of the sessions I attended were interactive and gave me ideas to use for my own research. Some of the sessions I attended are as follows: “Encountering the Nation: Performances of Belonging, Community, and Transformation”; “Religion and American Culture Caucus; Travel and Transformation: Global Perspectives on American Religious Cultures”; “The Global Creation of American Citizens; Migrations and Mobilities”; “Reparations, Revolts and the Redefinition of Citizenship.” Even though their particular topics varied, each of the presenters in these sessions focused on transnationalism, which creates identities and citizenships through movements of commodities, ideas, and people across nations. Their approaches, research methods, and theses inspired me with new ideas for my thesis research. I left Baltimore with a feeling of optimism and motivation. - Zeynep Aydogdu

At the annual meeting, I traced the theme of mutual impact between the natural environment and human society and how that affects the formation of our identities and socio-cultural perceptions. Of the 8 sessions I attended, I liked "Imagined Spaces and Reparative Performances: Constructing Public Memory in the Americas" session which explored the ways communities and individuals "perform" American identities through public memorial practices.

(continued on next page)
What exactly is folklore? Before I went to the American Folklore Society 2011 Annual Meeting, I didn't have a very clear idea other than something to do with fairy tales and legends. As it turns out, the field of folklore encompasses stories, music, dance, art, food, traditional celebrations and almost anything else relating to culture. Now with this understanding, you may think spending a week with folklorists from all over the world sounds like an interesting proposition—and you would be right.

I spent four days wandering around the Biddle Hotel and Conference Center in the center of Indiana University, a gorgeous campus of sprawling castle-sized limestone buildings filled with stone staircases and hidden atriums that resemble Harry Potter’s magical school, Hogwarts. I heard presentations and papers on storytelling trees in India’s comic culture, Finnish magical incantations, folk blues commentary on prison sentencing, the concept of power towards the enemy in Israeli soldiers’ songs, storytelling in Northern Ireland, and ethics and practice in middle-class food movements; the list of strange and fascinating topics went on and on. There were so many intriguing narratives it was truly difficult to choose between presentations.

Folklore is a very diverse discipline among a fairly small group of scholars. There are only about 2,200 members, according to the National Endowment for the Arts. Such an intimate group meant that everyone was very accessible and people were very helpful about connecting students to scholars or others who shared the same area of interest. Since the conference theme this year was “Peace, War and Folklore,” there was more of an activist feel than in previous years, according to veteran scholars. According to the AFS website, the annual meeting was also held at IU in 1968 during the Vietnam War. Amid talks of the current world conflicts and crises, there was plenty of discussion and several folklorist visitors to the Occupy movement happening a few blocks over from the conference center. Margaret Mills, a longtime folklorist from the Ohio State University, gave a moving AFS Fellows lecture on folklorists as activists based upon her experiences in field work and scholarly study of Persian culture and education in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan since the early 1970s.

All in all, for a new graduate student (or prospective undergraduate) the AFS meeting was a great way to see what was being talked about in the field of folklore and to be inspired with ideas for how I might fit into this field. - Jessica King
This fall, two alumni from the graduate program returned to the Cooper House to share their professional careers and research interests.

Our first returning alumni, Mike Amundson, graduated with a BA in History in the late 1980s and already had a book in the works (Wyoming Time and Again, a rephotography project based on the early 20th century work of Edward Stimson). He then turned to American Studies; his thesis on the wealthy ranchers near Sheridan (whom he dubbed “the mink and manure crowd”) caused something of a stir. He continued on for his Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska. Most of his publications have focused on Western uranium towns; all of his work has been on the American West. Mike’s lecture topic was based on a set of stereo slides that he bought in Lincoln, NE in 1996. There were about 20 boxes of 3D color slides taken in 1939 and 1940 of western national parks and the two world’s fairs and a projector. All of the slides had the name Clyde A. McCoy on them but little else. Mike posted an inquiry to a 3D newsgroup did not hear anything until 2008 when he received an email from a man in Chicago telling me that he had found my 1996 posting and had some newspaper clippings about Clyde McCoy from his grandmother’s estate. In these, Mike learned that McCoy had indeed pioneered this stereo process before being murdered in Detroit in 1942. With these articles, he started doing research and have put together a basic biography and contextual piece about the photographer. He has also learned how to turn the slides into anaglyphs that can be projected through a regular digital projector and viewed with red and blue glasses. Mike noted, “It is all quite fun,” and all those at his presentation agreed.

Recently, I attended a forum at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting for students seeking jobs outside of academe. The take away message was two-fold: diversify your skill sets and take an internship or two. One panelist emphasized the need to ensure the internship was not exploitative, noting that interns are too often delegated menial tasks, like photocopying, and need to assert themselves to gain useful experience. Though this session did not do much to allay fears of unemployment, I did feel some encouragement that with a highly valuable internship under my belt, I was on the right track.

The good news is you can too! Of the summer internships well suited to American Studies scholars and available to University of Wyoming students, I highly recommend the one offered by the Sweetwater County Historical Museum. I completed this internship this summer and it was this experience that allowed me some confidence at the job seekers ASA session.

Above all, I recommend this internship because of the work place atmosphere that encourages independent motivation, self-directed projects, and diversity of interests. The museum staff are, across the board, lovely and energetic people motivated by shared passions of research and community outreach, who make an intern feel like staff. Too often, at internships of the past, have I felt like expendable unskilled labor. At the SWCHM I felt a sense of inclusion that encompassed both the welcoming attitudes of staff as well as their approach to my work.

The Museum generally offers an internship working with the curation department, but I was able to combine my past interests and skills in community outreach with several projects the museum had in queue. With funding from the Sweetwater County Historical Society, I set to work.

As an intern in public history, I worked on three projects, each of which combined previous skills with new learning. Above all, according to Executive Director Ruth Lauritzen, I was to be her shadow to experience a “summer in the life of a museum director.” This made my daily work diverse and very rewarding. I would do everything from research my own projects, answer phones and visitor queries, conduct tours of the gallery and historic downtown, review budget protocols, attend county commissioner budget proceedings, scan photographs for other researchers, and stay happily and energetically engaged with staff life. It sounds exhausting, but “rewarding” is a better descriptor.

My own projects were diverse in and of themselves and taxed my research skills, strengthening them, while also building highly resilient multi-tasking abilities. I divided my own project time between a historical byway nomination, a Main Street historical study, and community outreach programs.

The diversity of the work and the atmosphere at the Sweetwater County Historical Museum make this an incredibly rewarding experience – both professionally and personally. - Julia Stuble
Dear first year graduate students and later-year undergraduates. The time is almost upon us, when you too should apply for and work at an internship. Enjoy these internship dispatches from two of the American Studies summer 2011 interns and be inspired.

Intern. When some people hear this word, they relate it to being a slave, boring, useless, not worth it. However, I'm writing today to tell you internships are the exact opposite. I have done two internships, this summer and last summer, and am in the middle of one now. My current internship is directly related to my first internship. Today, I will explain my internship from this summer in which I was in Sheridan, Wyoming. One of the best things about internships is getting to go to different locations and meet many exciting people who will change your life.

Mary Humstone set up my first two internships. The internship she set up for me this summer was in Sheridan working for the Downtown Sheridan Association (DSA), which is also the Main Street program in Sheridan. The DSA is a non-profit organization with an executive director, assistant director and a board of people to manage the program. The focus of the DSA is historic downtown Sheridan using the four-point approach dictated by the National Main Street Program; the four-point approach is design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring. Based on this approach the DSA works with businesses downtown to maintain the historic character of downtown, increase businesses in the downtown area, increase the economic development of the downtown businesses, and get the general public involved and interested in what is happening in historic downtown Sheridan. I learned most of this while working for the DSA this summer.

My main responsibility while in Sheridan was to organize, catalog, and scan the many historic negatives donated to them from a local photographer. There were at least 900 negatives donated that needed sorted and organized; I chose about 450 for DSA to keep, which needed to be scanned and properly archived. I also set up a fundraiser for DSA using these historic negatives that will not only help DSA with fundraising, but also the public by making these great photographs available to them to purchase or for research use. This task may sound rather dull and unexciting to many, but for me it was just a foot in the door to explore the other opportunities offered to me. While working with these historic negatives was my main project for two months, I also helped DSA with anything else they needed – and I mean anything else. Their summer months are very busy with many activities, including Third Thursday Street Festival, Farmers Market, Cowboy Auction, and concerts just to name a few of the most popular. I was another person who could help set up for events, manage the crowds, sell raffle tickets, manage the DSA booth at events, etc. By jumping in with both feet, I made the most out of the opportunities available to me. I learned a lot about the organization and the town, met a lot of people I know will be in my future, and I learned a lot about myself as well. - Stephanie Lowe

Our second alumni visitor, Paul Draus, travelled to the Cooper from University of Michigan, Dearborn, where he teaches in the sociology department. Paul joined Susan Dewey, from the University of Wyoming’s Gender and Women’s Studies program to discuss “Exploring the Human City: A Symposium on Contemporary City Life.”

Paul’s lecture, “Horror and Hope in the Motor City,” took audience members on a tour of the narratives and the constructed landscapes of Detroit, MI, including plenty of literary references (especially to Heart of Darkness) and horror movie metaphoric dissections. Ghosts, devils, cyborgs, zombies, and vampires all made a post-Halloween appearance in the presentation. Paul noted, “Images shape places and places shape images,” as he and the audience explored the places, images and narratives of post-industrial Detroit. Ending with a discussion of urban agriculture in the city, Paul concluded that, “the battle for the soul of the city is an ongoing process.”

At a brown bag lunch on the Cooper’s sofas, Paul discussed his professional trajectory, from studying discourses of homelessness at UW to working with tuberculosis patients in New York City and completing a PhD while doing social work in Chicago.
First year graduate student Jessica King came to the cooper house after teaching English in French Guiana. She submitted this dispatch to porchlight to share this pre-American Studies (chronologically) but very American Studies (thematically) experience.

Frenchy, I am not. Though I adore the French, I learned I am thoroughly American after seven months working in the tropics of French Guiana, an overseas department of France on the northeast coast of South America. My assignment was to teach English in a French middle school and several elementaries. On my application to the French Ministry of Education a year earlier I had checked the box that I would accept a school in a rural area, and I had been given Maripasoula, the last town on the river before it flowed into the Amazonian Park Reserve where permission from the native Amerindienne tribes was needed to enter. No roads had been built through the jungle to Maripasoula — the French government is planning to complete a highway circuit from the capital of Cayenne to Maripasoula sometime in the next ten years — and so the only way to the town is by plane or piragre, a native-style dugout canoe modernized by gasoline motor.

By size French Guiana is tiny, equivalent to the eastern half of Wyoming. Originally discovered by Christopher Columbus, it began modern life as a penal colony of France. Sitting just above Brazil on the equator, today more than 60% of the economy is dependent on the Guiana Space Center built there by Charles De Gaulle to take advantage of the location. The other major exports are natural resources including timber and gold, which is a point of severe environmental concern due to legal chemical pollution and illegal goldmining use of mercury to separate ore in the rivers. This summer, offshore oil drilling (by American contract companies) opened up in earnest with the discovery of a large hydrocarbon basin about 100 miles off the coast.

The population of French Guiana — about 230,000 — is a diverse mix of cultures and histories; there are at least 16 spoken languages. Two large rivers, the Oyapock and Maroni, bound both sides of the overseas department from Brazil and Suriname respectively. I lived on the Maroni, the border between Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana) which is still contested. When the French and Dutch were fighting each other for territory in the new world, they established sugar cane plantations on the coast of South America, from which to export sugar and rum back to Europe. African slaves were the main workforce on these sprawling agricultural estates and as the Dutch colonizers traveled into the jungle seeking more and more land, they would take boats with a hundred slaves down the river and perhaps a handful of European men. The slaves would jump ship and disappear into the forest. They made friends with the peaceful Amerindienne tribes, Wayana and Teko, and established their own villages on the French side of the river. Today their ancestors, called bushinengue or bush negro, have continued living in their traditional African ways, speaking a mixture of traditional African languages, Dutch and French called taki-taki, and creating new artwork based on traditional African tribal designs. While the French kept their slaves on coastal plantations until slavery was definitively abolished in 1848 (their descendants are called creoles in French Guiana and they speak a separate dialect of French). The bushinengue were granted amnesty as long as they defended the river border against the Dutch. This sense of pride and fighting for freedom is still a huge part of the bushinengue culture in French Guiana, and especially where I taught in Maripasoula, founded as a tribal village.

So what did it mean to be an American in Maripasoula? When I first arrived and talking to people at school or in town, so many were shocked to meet “a real American,” in this backwater town that most French people will never visit. I have always felt a sense of pride in my country, but not more so than when I realized what it meant to so many other people. When someone learned I was an American, they would invariably say, “It is my dream to visit America! Los Angeles!”

In the shops across the river, spacious one-level wooden buildings set atop tall stilts, you could buy cheap canned food and clothing from Suriname and China, illegally burned DVDs, and plastic items of every variety. Toward the front of one of the stores was a display of plastic purses covered with pictures of the First Family in front of the White House and First Lady Michelle Obama.

Since France is a socialist country, I was only required to work 12 hours per week plus a small amount of preparation, so I spent a lot of time entertaining my neighbors’ children and making very good friends with their family. They were Amerindienne, but of mixed tribes Wayana and Teko. We talked about life in the U.S. over bowls of fish (and sometimes monkey) and the children taught me what fruits to eat and how, as well as where to swim in the river. After seven months spending time with the people there, I began to understand this love of America. American music played on the radio and blared from stereos on front porches around town. American music videos showed 24/7 on TV screens at restaurants and bars. I watched the OC dubbed in French at one of my student’s houses, where they had a large TV and satellite dish in a clapboard-sided house with tinolium laid over the dirt floor. As homage to this, I decided to bring a truly American experience to my students for my last classes: I put on an American-style cinema. The kids earned tickets to the movies, and then the day of we set up a movie screen, shuttered the ever-present sun as best we could, and I made them popcorn and flavored drinks. (I really wanted to splurge on Coca-Cola, but at six euros for a 2-liter and almost 200 students, this was a bit pricey.) The kids were so excited to hand me their ticket, say “thank you,” and go into the ‘theater.’ It was a big hit.

Seven months is not a long time in the scheme of things, but I hope that the students I taught will remember me and have a good impression of what it is to be a regular American. I told them all repeatedly, Miami is closer than Paris. In return, French Guiana taught me a lot about what things are truly necessary in life, that it doesn’t take a common language to communicate and build relationships, and how important it is to see who you are through someone else’s eyes because you might realize you haven’t really seen yourself before. Though at times as I was sipping espresso from a tiny cup in the Cayenne airport café, waiting to board a tiny plane and fly over the Amazon jungle, I probably could have been mistaken for any one of the mainly French travelers. I recognize how many things make me a good ‘ol American.