



Credit: Harper Pachel,
Max Umurzakov

PORCHLIGHT

AMERICAN STUDIES

Fall 2025
Cooper House
The University of Wyoming



WELCOME

TO FALL SEMESTER

2025



WITH OUR NEW GROUP OF FIRST YEAR AMERICAN STUDIES MA STUDENTS ARRIVING AT THE END OF AUGUST, THE FALL SEMESTER HAS WELCOMED SOME NEW FACES, NEW BEGINNINGS, AND A WHOLE NEW SET OF IDEAS.

THE ACADEMIC YEAR HAS BEEN KICKED OFF WITH SOME WONDERFUL EVENTS INVOLVING THE AMST ACADEMICS AND STUDENTS. KEEP READING FOR AN INSIGHT INTO WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN AND AROUND THE COOPER HOUSE.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES



Our Fall semester has been quite busy, as you can see from all the events discussed in the following pages. We have welcomed 8 new MA students from places as close as Colorado and as far as Vietnam, Nigeria, and the UK. Among the highlights of the semester were lectures by Dr. Nicole Fleetwood (New York University) and Dr. Mikko Saikku (University of Helsinki), the American Studies Association conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico that 7 of our MA students attended, the Prison Art Symposium, and our Halloween party in the Cooper House, which has become a well-attended annual event. I want to thank our graduate assistants Daisy Innes and Irelynn Holland for putting together the newsletter.

Have a wonderful winter break!
ULLI ADELT

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS



Vincent Crowson

Vince has moved over to Laramie from Waco, Texas where most of his family lives. He completed his undergraduate studies at Texas Tech University where he majored in History, Political Science and English. Vince's research interests primarily focus on two areas: whiteness and religion in the United States, and non-Euclidean biopolitical asymmetries in counterterrorism policy. When he's not studying and hanging out at the Cooper House, he loves reading science fiction and fantasy novels, as well as spending time with his nieces and nephews.

Daisy Innes

Daisy completed her undergraduate degree in American Studies at the University of East Anglia with a semester at a Liberal Arts college in Vermont. She has now moved over to Wyoming from the UK after receiving the British Association of American Studies (BAAS) Peter Boyle MA Award to continue with American Studies a little further from home. Daisy's research interests are situated in the world of country music, and the invaluable stories they tell about ordinary lives and locations. Now living in Laramie, she's excited to be following the paths that connect life in Wyoming to the sound of the cowboy state. Outside of her studies, she'll take every opportunity she can to see live music, go record shopping, bake a batch of bagels, and talk about Johnny Cash.



Our new American Studies MA students have joined the University of Wyoming from across the US, the UK, Vietnam, and Nigeria. Both in person and online, we're excited to have a new group of AMST enthusiasts to share their research interests, passions and ideas.



Irelynn Holland

Irelynn moved to Wyoming from Reno, NV. She completed her undergraduate studies here at the University of Wyoming, majoring in Sociology and Communication with a minor in Honors. As an undergraduate McNair Scholar she developed an interest in how popular music cultures, from the British Invasion to the Korean Wave, reflect, shape, and navigate complex global relationships and societal values. When she's not working at the Cooper House, Irelynn enjoys reading, traveling, listening to music, and hanging out with her friends.

Ryan Kelley

Ryan completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Northern Colorado with a major in Journalism / Mass media and minor in Gender Studies. He built up a wealth of experience working as a disk jockey at KFKA in Greeley, Colorado and at Wyoming Public Radio. After some revelations and a week before the deadline, Ryan put together an application to the American Studies program here at UW. His focus is on curatorial, archivist practices and storytelling through a variety of mediums. In his free time, Ryan likes hosting with his partner Logan and dog Archie, going to the gym, listening to a wide variety of music, and getting to know his Laramie community better.



Hoang Thun Nguyen

Hoang completed his undergraduate program in English Linguistics and Literature at Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City. His MA in American Studies marks his first step into the field and he is looking forward to growing in the Cowboy State. His research interests currently focus on culture-language education and diplomatic relations among developing nations. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, walking and sharing glimpses of his new American life on social media.



Beck Lambert

Beck graduated first generation at Grinnell College in '24 in History with an American Studies minor. During their time at Grinnell they studied Haitian Vodou and its possible resurgence through RPGs. Here at UW, their research interest is on Black American history and they consider David Walker's 'Appeal' one of the best written works ever created. In their free time they like to cook and knit. Their favorite thing about Wyoming so far has been the beautiful views. They hope to get their PhD and become an academic researcher.

Sunday Oduyale

Sunday Adedoyin Oduyale is originally from Nigeria, where he has spent several years teaching and researching the role of the United States in global affairs. His passion lies in understanding how American culture, history, and politics influence the world, and how global perspectives shape America. Kamal loves connecting ideas across borders, mentoring young people, and finding meaning in stories that unite us all..



Kamal Adeniyi

Kamal holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Obafemi Awolowo University and is currently pursuing a Masters degree in American Studies here at the University of Wyoming. His academic interests focus on sustainable environmental protection, climate change and global development. Outside academics, he is a basketball and football enthusiast and is a big fan of Arsenal FC.

MASCULINITY, CLASS AND RANCHING CULTURE IN WYOMING

Graduating senior Nik Pierson has been working with Professor Stephen Dillon for the last year on a major research project about mental health, labor, masculinity, and ranching in Wyoming. Pierson grew up on a ranch in Montana and has been drawing on gender studies, American studies, and a second major in Animal science to explore "how emotional suppression is normalized in male labor cultures and how this normalization produces hidden psychological harm."

He writes that, "The silence I learned on the ranch and the job site is the same silence men carry for decades, sometimes until it kills them." Pierson credits a flexible major and interdisciplinarity with allowing him to explore his research from a number of complementary approaches including ethnography, cultural analysis, and personal experience. He is currently applying to graduate programs in American studies in order to continue his research.



Congratulations, Nik!

The West is Waiting!



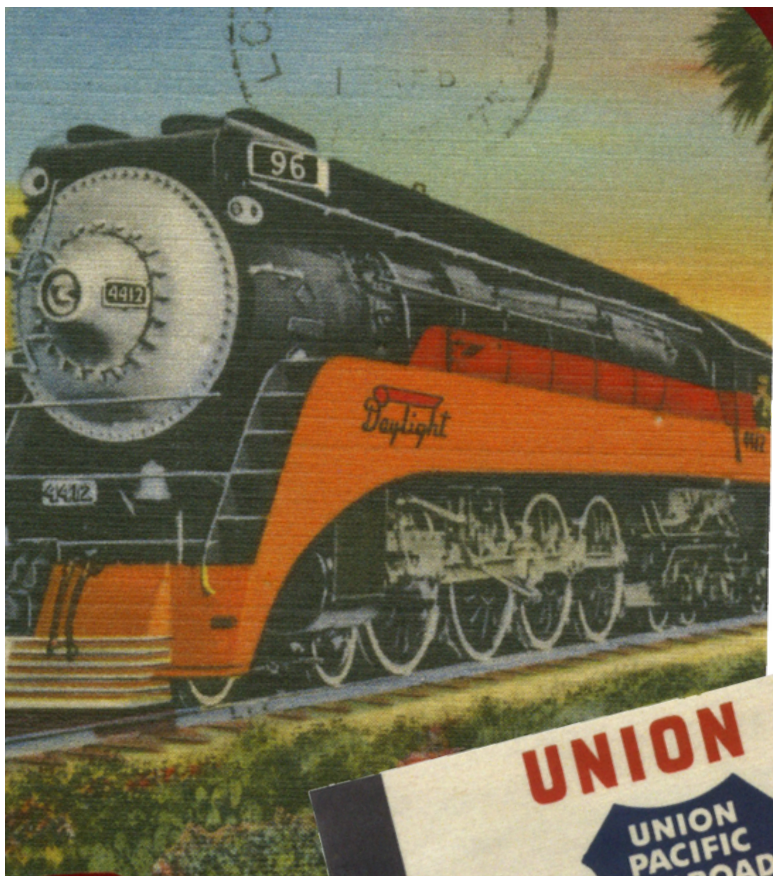
On September 24, The American Heritage Center held the opening reception for the new exhibition: 'The West is Waiting: An Exploration of Railroad Advertising'. The exhibition was curated by Kail Moede and examines how the railroad has shaped western migration and life.

The exhibition features a variety of materials including postcards, maps, matchbooks and photography along with a section celebrating railroad representations in Hollywood.

Second-year AMST Grad student Max Umurzakov worked on the exhibition and had an impressive artwork included in the collection. Combining photography with graffiti art and even some train replicas, Max's piece captured the spirit of Laramie's Union Pacific Railroad legacy and presence.

Second year AMST Graduate student, Harper Pachel was involved in the Railroad exhibition, working on designing and creating the promotional materials for the exhibition. She sourced many original materials and adapted their use to transform original matchbooks into bookmarks, and advertisements into postcards.

Not only has Harper's work on the posters and advertisement for the exhibition helped to expand the scope, drawing in many visitors from Laramie and beyond. But her creation of postcards and bookmarks that were available for free to all visitors recognises the importance of educational accessibility - interaction with local art should not come at a cost that some can't afford. Harper's work has allowed all visitors to take a piece of the exhibition home with them.



GUEST LECTURES



Mikko Saikku

Dr. Mikko Saikku from the University of Helsinki travelled over to Laramie to deliver our first guest lecture of the year at the Cooper House. His talk discussed the concept of the wilderness and connections between frontier culture in Nordic countries and its similarities to America's own frontier culture.

Nicole Fleetwood

Dr. Nicole Fleetwood from New York University travelled over to Wyoming to give the keynote lecture for the Paño Connections Traveling Prison Art Exhibition. The exhibition and Dr. Fleetwood's talk discusses the rehabilitation of those incarcerated through traditional prison folk art, fine art and a range of media.

During her visit, Dr. Fleetwood took some time to meet with the American Studies graduate students and faculty, and also did a book signing for her recent publication, 'Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration'.



American Studies was host to some interesting guest lectures over this semester.

The University of Wyoming PRISON ART SYMPOSIUM



In fall 2025, Dr. Trisha Martinez organized the University of Wyoming Prison Art Symposium, a series of events exploring how art and storytelling reveal the lived realities of mass incarceration. Working in partnership with the Wyoming Department of Corrections Education Team the project involved roughly 35 incarcerated artists, whose work—along with submissions from families and Wyoming Pathways from Prison students—was featured in Paño Connections | Vast Horizons Confined Spaces, a traveling prison art exhibition curated by Eric Christo Martinez and displayed at venues across the state.

The symposium also welcomed Dr. Nicole R. Fleetwood, MacArthur Fellow and author of *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* for the keynote address. Dr. Fleetwood spent time with American Studies graduate students and faculty and hosted a public book signing. Additional programming included a Wyoming Pathways from Prison reception recognizing WFPF faculty and showcasing student achievements, as well as testimony from formerly incarcerated artists and community members.



Photo: Rob Fleetwood

This event would not have been possible without the support of its sponsors, including the Department of American Cultural Studies, Department of Criminal Justice and Sociology, Department of English, Honors College, Alces Community Works, Chispa Devine Law, PC, Gerald Lovato Art, Gorgon Gallery and the Wyoming Territorial Prison, the Wyoming Pathways from Prison Program, and the Wyoming Department of Corrections.



Photo: Rob Fleetwood

Together, these events fostered dialogue, uplifted system-impacted voices, and highlighted the power of creative expression to build community and healing.

COOPER HOUSE AT HALLOWEEN



In usual spooky tradition when October rolled around, the Cooper House was host to the American Studies Halloween party. The night kicked off with a showing of 1922's *Nosferatu* before AMST students, staff and friends of the department arrived the historic building for some Halloween fun. We had a real range of costumes this year and it made for some fun photos, and a tough costume contest!



From Ranches to Runways: The Commercialization of Western Wear

An exhibition put together by second-year AMST Grad students Cara Barclay and Harper Pachel titled 'From Ranches to Runways: The Commercialization of Western Wear' was held at the Laramie Plains Museum in November.

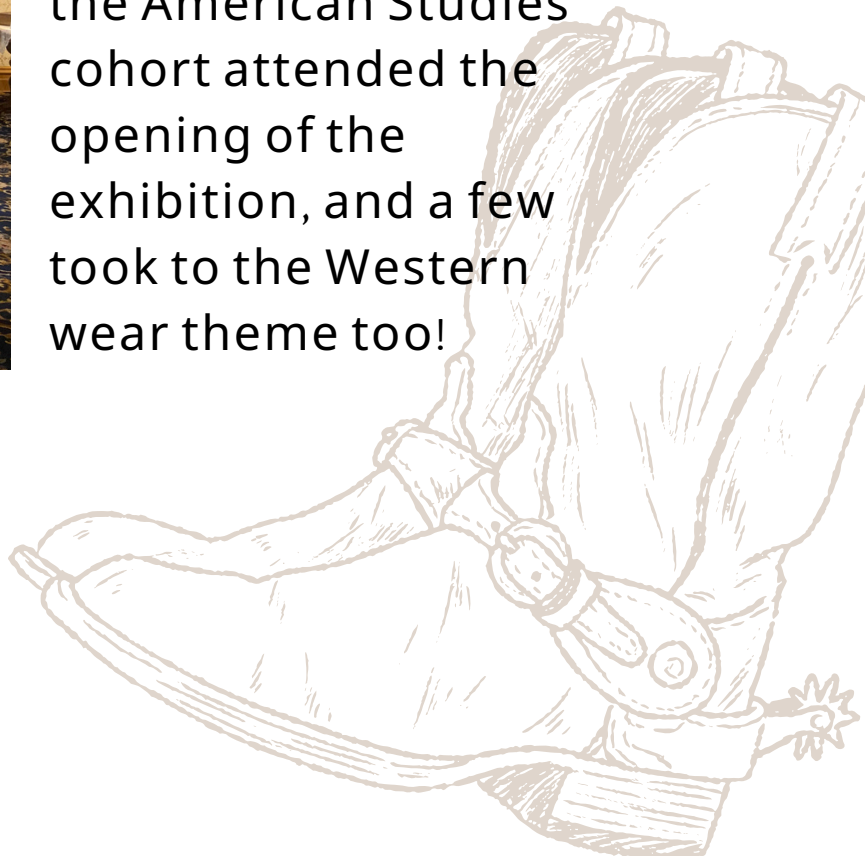
They curated outfits using pieces of iconic Western wear from various decades to demonstrate how the trend has both come back in style and remains timeless. An accompanying 'zine was made for the exhibition that led the reader through time, trends and purposes.



Several members of the American Studies cohort attended the opening of the exhibition, and a few took to the Western wear theme too!



Dive back into the Western landscape with Daisy Innes' playlist, made to accompany the exhibition



ASA CONFERENCE PUERTO RICO



From November 19th to 23rd, the American Studies Association Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, provided a rich and engaging experience for our department. The intellectual exchange began early, with our Program Director, Ulrich Adelt, delivering an 8am panel presentation, "Time Will Tell: Rhythm Guitar and the Politics of Temporality," on the very first day. Our graduate student, Joseph, also gave a compelling presentation titled, "Education, Incarceration, and Resistance: The Legacy of American Empire through Cultural and Racial Inequalities."



Reflecting on his presentation, Joseph shared: “The experience of giving my presentation at the ASA conference turned out to be an enlightening and enriching experience. Sharing my research with other scholars helped to generate discussion and receive feedback. Overall, it proved to be very inspiring and helped to affirm my desire to explore the areas of culture, race, and social justice.”



Between sessions, our group dispersed to attend various panels of personal interest, reconvening for the conference's presidential address. While the schedule was full, students still found moments to explore Old San Juan, relax on the beach, and even go snorkeling. The trip served as an amazing exploration of the diverse meanings within American Studies and offered a valuable opportunity to network with colleagues. Before bidding farewell to San Juan, the group shared one last piña colada at the airport, reflecting on a truly memorable conference.



AMST UNDERGRADUATE COURSES



AMST 4075/5075 (ANTH 4075, NAIS 4075, SOC 4075) Culture, Identity, and Place

This course examines how our identities take shape through *querencia*—a deeply rooted sense of place and belonging—with attention to Indigenous ways of knowing and relationships to the land. Students engage in close cultural analysis through film, interdisciplinary readings, and community-centered case studies to examine how identity connects with race, gender, migration, community, and belonging. Activities include reflective place-based writing, local mapping and ethnographic field work to explore how lived experiences, expressive culture, and social relations emerge from the landscapes and communities people call home. By the end of the course, students synthesize course materials into original scholarly arguments and/or creative artistic expressions that illuminate the connections among cultural production, history, and the sociopolitical forces shaping cultural communities.

HON 4152: Coal Stories:

Coal Stories exposes students first to the history of coal mining as an extractive industry in Wyoming and Appalachia and its critical role in the construction of community and cultural identity in these regions. The course also introduces students to the rich histories of activist movements of everyday citizens whose lives and livelihoods are affected by the coal mining industry, including labor activism, environmental activism, and efforts toward regional revitalization in the wake of coal-related disasters. Finally, the course will delve deeply into a broad diversity of cultural productions created by those same everyday Wyomingites and Appalachians about coal and its impact in their lives, such as novels, short stories, poetry, film, oral histories, and art. Students can expect to engage in creative analyses, short papers, and a group-based final project in which students will produce a creative deliverable meant to educate a lay audience about their topic.



AMST 3600: Institutional Violence

Institutional Violence takes a critical, interdisciplinary look at social institutions--such as mass media, education, science and medicine, foster care, religion, and the criminal justice system--and investigates historical and contemporary examples of the violence and harm to marginalized populations that can occur within them. Students will engage in critical source analyses, a multi-part "choose your own" podcast assignment, and a research project on a topic related to a social institution of their choosing. Readings and assignments emphasize critical thinking about social issues, analyzing multiple forms of media, and building interdisciplinary research skills.

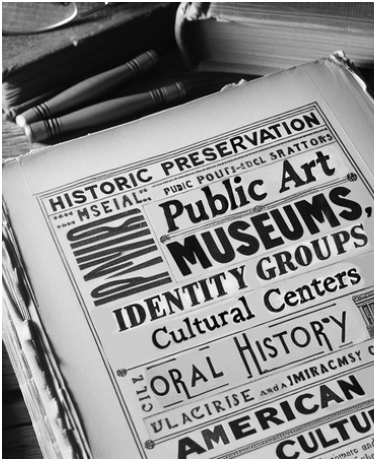
AMST 4500/5500: Critical Bioethics

In this asynchronous online course, students will consider different perspectives on ethical issues in healthcare, medicine, research, biotechnology, and the environment. Our class readings will deepen our understanding of the four principles of bioethics (autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice) and prompt us to think about how they relate to each other in a given scenario. We will take a multilayered approach to bioethics, from the philosophical underpinnings to the application of theory to central challenges in bioethics and relevant policy. Students will engage in discussion posts, case studies, a 3-page midterm paper, and a longer (5-6 pages) final paper.

Food in American Culture:

This course provides an interdisciplinary exploration of food as a medium of cultural expression, social interaction, and aesthetic experience in American life, both past and present. It examines food as, among other things, a symbolic system, a vehicle of social communication, and an arena for the performance of identity. In short, the course looks at the construction of food and meaning. A few questions to consider might be: What does it mean to have food as part of your identity? How does food play into one's worldview, and connect one to the world

AMST UNDERGRADUATE COURSES



American Culture in the Public Sector

This course introduces students to the professions, practices, and current issues involved in creating, preserving, and interpreting American culture across museums, archives, historic preservation, public arts, libraries, and other public cultural institutions. Through lectures, guest speakers, and site visits, students gain firsthand insight into how public-facing cultural and humanities organizations operate and shape community life. Readings focus on current issues in these organizations, while assignments ask students to both reflect on their own experiences and reactions, while also thinking critically and creatively about the humanities in practice.

Queer Life Through Memoir

Queer Life through Memoir explores a breadth of queer life in the United States through the genre of memoir. There are texts written 25 years ago as well as those written in the past few years. Authors who identify as gay, lesbian, bi, trans, queer and none of the above are included. While too few memoirs of queer individuals of color have been published, several have been included in our required readings. Each week we explore a new text as well as reflect on our own lived experience through written prompts. This class is asynchronous and online.



Pop Music and Sexualities

In this course, we will look at ways in which popular music has intersected with sexual and gendered identities as a means and expression of both oppression and liberation. We will begin with a few theoretical texts discussing the performative qualities of gender and sexuality and then symptomatically analyze constructions of sexual and gendered identities in a number of historical time periods and musical genres (for instance, 1930s blues, 1960s rock, 1970s disco). We will pay particular attention to the queering of popular music by LGBTQIA+ artists and scholars. Throughout the semester, we will be using film clips and music played in class in order to symptomatically prove or disprove the theories we are discussing.

RELI/AMST 3260 African Spirits in the New World

This course introduces a historical, comparative, and ethnographic approach to the study of African diasporan religions in Haiti, Brazil, Cuba and Cuban American communities, Jamaica, and the Black Church in the U.S. Our book, *Working the Spirit* by Joseph M Murphy explores the particular history and cultural specificity of each region, while noting the shared commitment to African religious roots and resistance. We learn about the ritual process and consider each community's creation of a liminal space in which ancestors become a force for community healing, protection, and resistance.

Blues and African American Literature:

In this course we will examine blues music as the first form of African American popular music in tandem with the early recording industry. This class is composed of blues history, studies of specific African American artists, labels, blues revivals, blues and Black feminism, and the adaptation of blues to various literary and film texts. We will look specifically at Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Robert Johnson, and B.B. King for their contributions to the blues. Because this is an interdisciplinary course, we will utilize a vast range of materials, from documentary film to fictional film, visual culture, literature, scholarship and criticism, and of course the music itself to draw conclusions about the medium. An underlying thread that binds all the above texts together is the idea of authenticity, and we can question this notion about the music in how its meaning has been constructed and played out, while evolving as an international phenomenon.



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