

AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Northumbria University



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WELCOME TO AMERICAN STUDIES AT NORTHUMBRIA, WHERE RESEARCH MATTERS IN FIRST-RATE TEACHING

In 2014-2015, the American Studies programme at Northumbria University continued to enhance its reputation as home to one of the UK's most impressive constellations of researchers and teachers in US history, literature, and popular culture. As you'll see from the features in this latest edition of the newsletter, during the last year we have published an impressive array of books and articles, given countless talks at schools, conferences, and universities around the globe, hosted a couple of major international conferences, participated in a wide range of media work in television, radio, and online, been involved with a variety of public events that have showcased our expertise on everything from US religion and politics, to the impact in Britain of American popular music.

Meanwhile, Northumbria graduate students, whether doing MAs or PhDs on American-themed topics, are now a major and respected part of the American Studies landscape in Britain—a status exem-



plified by the election of doctoral student Megan Hunt as the postgraduate secretary for the admirably named HOTCUS (Historians of the Twentieth Century United States). Moreover, with the arrival of our third undergraduate intake in 2015, we also now have students in place at all three levels of the American Studies BA, while undergraduates majoring in history and literature continue to flock to US-themed modules. As ever, one of our priorities this year is to do all we can to make sure that those students have a thoroughly enjoyable educational experience and that they emerge from Northumbria with the kinds of skills, knowledge, attitudes and aptitudes that will set them up well for employment or further study. American Studies students at Northumbria do not only get the opportunity to learn about the US, its history, politics, and cultures, from a cracking team of world-class teacher-researchers, they also get to develop the kinds of analytical and communication skills that are invaluable in any number of careers. Another priority is to work even more closely with schools and colleges to make sure that they and their students are aware of the attractions of American Studies as a degree programme, and the many advantages of doing it at Northumbria.

In the pages that follow, you will be able to read more about the kinds of activities that students and staff have been involved with over the past year. In a particularly rich year, it is certainly hard for me to pick out personal favourites—but here are four just for starters. In April 2015, it was a tremendous thrill and honour for Northumbria University to host



Professor Brian Ward. Photo by Katie Ward.

the Diamond Anniversary conference of the British Association for American Studies, for 60 years the most important organisation for the study of all-things American in the country. BAAS's decision to hold its 60th annual

conference at Northumbria is a sure sign that Northumbria now occupies a special place in the American Studies universe and credit is due to all those who helped organise the 3-day event, especially Joe Street. A second highlight was working with the Journey to Justice organisation to bring to schools,

museums and cinemas around Tyneside an exhibition and various related film, musical and educational events focusing on the US civil rights movement and its links to social justice movements in the UK. Along with several members of staff, seven Northumbria undergraduates worked with Journey to Justice: a good illustration of how we encourage students to find practical applications for the expertise, in this case on the civil rights movement, they acquire in their studies. It was also a great pleasure to organise a visit to Northumbria by acclaimed novelist, Caryl Phillips, who participated in a marvellous creative writing/literary criticism workshop and a packed public lecture.

Finally, it was terrific to know that Americanists at Northumbria played a major role in Northumbria's strong performance in the government's 2014 Research Excellence Framework exercise. In this periodic rating of research in UK universities, history and English at Northumbria, the disciplinary cornerstones of American Studies, were both ranked in the top 20 for the sheer quality of the re-

search publications. That kind of external validation of our excellence as scholars also ought to come as good news for anyone thinking of undertaking a degree in American Studies at Northumbria, where the staff's passion for research, for making new discoveries and offering new interpretations of things about which we thought we already knew, feeds directly into their teaching. It is the mix of research, teaching and learning that creates such a rich, dynamic and invigorating student experience.

Sincerely,



Brian Ward
Professor in American Studies

NEWS & EVENTS

Northumbria Hosts International Conference for British Association of American Studies

American studies at Northumbria University attracted an international array of delegates for the 60th Anniversary conference of the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) between April 9-12. Current BAAS chair, Sue Currell of the University of Sussex, was delighted with the conference which attracted over 250 people: "It seemed very fitting to look back on 60 years of the British Association for American Studies while being hosted by one of the newest and most ambitious American Studies programmes in the country. As we approach another US election, I think the success of the conference speaks volumes about the vitality and significance of research and teaching on American topics

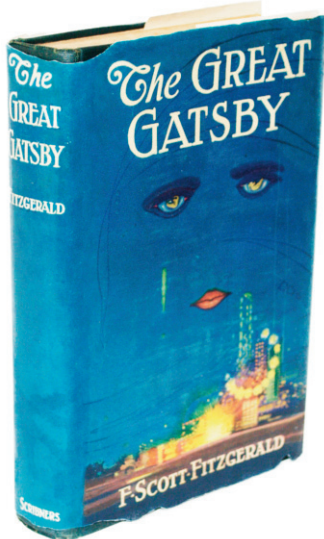
around the UK."

The opening plenary was well-attended lecture given by Guardian journalist Gary Younge that featured in the newspaper the following day. The full transcript will be published in a forthcoming collection of essays on voting rights in the United States to be edited by Dr Henry Knight Lozano and Dr Joe Street, both of Northumbria University. Current political



events in the US were also central to another plenary lecture delivered by Professor Dana Nelson from Vanderbilt University, who spoke about the politics of Presidential power. Professor Nelson updated the audience on the findings of her 2008 book *Bad for Democracy*, to include observations on the current Obama administration. American literature Professor and Guardian columnist, Sarah Churchwell, also gave a lively guided tour of the world of F. Scott Fitzgerald as it appeared in *The Great*

Gatsby. Speakers were sponsored and supported by the *Journal of American Studies* and the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library. The audience and participants included members of the public as well



as representatives from the cultural affairs office of the US Embassy, who generously supported post-graduate student attendance at the conference.

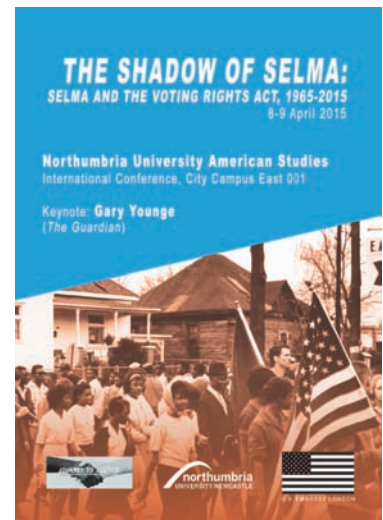
Alongside numerous academic panels in a wide-variety of sub-

jects of significance to American studies scholars, there were publishing workshops and representation from over 20 international publishers. Delegates also took the opportunity to visit the University's library holdings in American materials, including the papers of the Black Panther Party and the Records of Students for a Democratic Society. Local hotels and the local economy also benefited from such a large influx of extra guests as delegates took advantage of visiting the city, many for the first time. Sue Currell noted that "The annual conference is central to sustaining the network of scholars who are researching the history, culture and politics of America in the UK. BAAS is very grateful to the hosts at Northumbria University for creating such a welcoming and successful event to celebrate our Anniversary: there is no doubt in my mind that everyone who attended is now looking forward to the nearest opportunity to come back."

Conference on Selma and the Voting Rights Act at Northumbria

On 8-9 April, Northumbria University American Studies hosted an international conference, "Selma and the Voting Rights Act, 1965-2015," which brought together scholars from around the world to study and discuss the seminal Civil Rights march and Voting Rights Act of 1965 and their political, social, and cultural legacies up to the present. Scholars engaged with popular representations of the events from 1965, such as the recent Selma film, while demonstrating the significance of Selma and the VRA to the changing landscape of race and citizenship in the United States since 1965. Conference organisers are planning a book from the papers that brought together

interdisciplinary approaches to further our understanding of Selma and the VRA fifty years on. Developed alongside the "Journey to Justice" exhibit at the Discovery Museum that



provides insight into the U.S. civil rights movement and its connections with the Northeast and featuring a keynote from acclaimed journalist Gary Younge, "Selma and the Voting Rights Act, 1965-2015" confirms Northumbria University American Studies' place at the forefront of relevant and timely American Studies scholarship.

Renowned Author Caryl Phillips Lecture and Workshop at Northumbria

Clare Elliott

On Tuesday 26th May colleagues in American Studies and English welcomed the critically-acclaimed author Caryl Phillips to the University. Phillips is one of the most highly acclaimed novelists and essayist of his generation. His numerous works of fiction and non-fiction include *The Lost Child* (2015), *Colour Me English* (2011), *Dancing in the Dark* (2005), *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and *Crossing the River* (1994) He was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for his novel, *A Distant Shore* (2003) and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for *Crossing the River*. His many other awards include the Martin Luther King Memorial Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize.

The University held two main events that day. The first was a Creative Practice and Critical Engagement Workshop which was attended by literature and creative writing students. This was an inspiring event where Phillips answered questions about his novel *Crossing the River*. After a long interview with Dr Clare Elliott, Phillips engaged with several students in discussion about this text and his other work. We talked about how Phillips's fiction and non-fiction deals with the Black Diaspora and notices a tension between a sense of homelessness and an African belonging that is often experienced by his diasporan characters. We discussed issues of class and race and how Phillips connects the two in his writing and we talked about gender, place and identity, and reimagining histories of migration. In the latter half of the workshop creative writing students were asked to write a short piece with these themes in mind. The exercise was fruit-

ful and the author gave a full critique of each short story. In the evening we had the pleasure of hearing from Phillips again as he read from his new novel *The Lost Child*. This was a public event where the audience heard Phillips in conversation with Professor Brian Ward and



L-R: Brian Ward, Laura Fish, Clare Elliott, Julie Taylor, and visiting author Caryl Phillips.

Dr Clare Elliott. We talked about *The Lost Child* as a response to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; themes of education, class and race in the novel as well as music and literature more broadly. The day was full, enriching and thoroughly enjoyed by all!

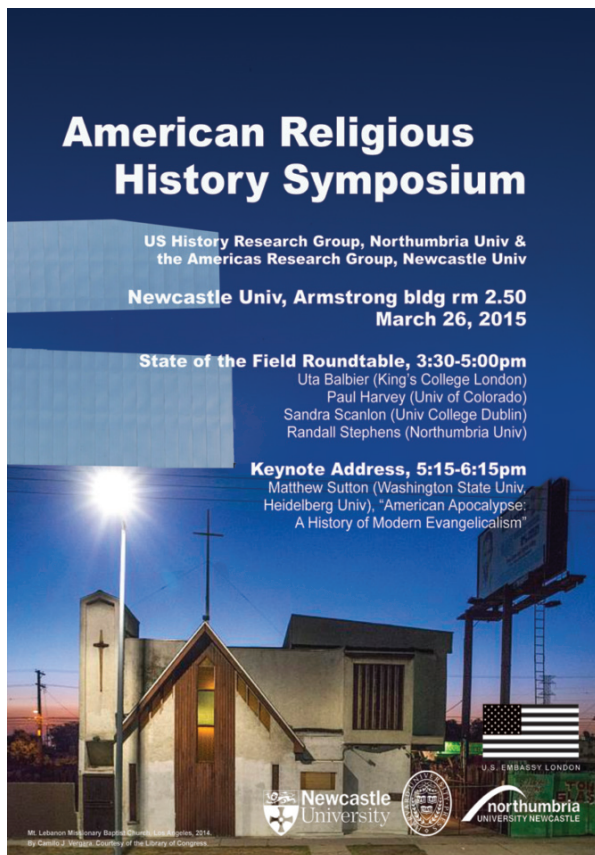
US History Research Group's Symposium on American Religious History

On Thursday 26 March the Northumbria University US History Group and the Newcastle University Americas Research Group co-hosted a symposium on American Religious History. Among other things, speakers focused on the growing subfield, described how their work fits in, and looked at trends in research and writing. Sponsors included Harvard University Press, the US Embassy London, Northumbria University, and Newcastle University.

Participants hailed from Norway, the US, the UK, Ireland, and Germany. Roughly 20 established scholars, graduate students, and early career historians took part. The Keynote by Matthew Sutton (Visiting Professor Heidelberg University and Professor at Washington State University) was titled “New Trends in the

can religious history? Has the study of religion in America been as influential in the UK as it has in the US? To what degree was religion a factor in the modern civil rights movement and in ongoing social justice campaigns?

The *Journal of American Studies* will be publishing the symposium in a future issues. Additional articles on film and literature will be supplied by Megan Hunt (Northumbria University) and Tracy Fessenden (Arizona State University).



Historiography of American Fundamentalism.” Matt described the scope and impact of this influential conservative movement and discussed the field of study. Other papers explored how American religiosity compared with that of other western nations. Other questions included: Does religion mostly unite or divide Americans? How is religion now being debated in relation to diplomacy, politics, and social policy? In what ways have religious leaders and organizations promoted innovation in media, outreach, and missions? What accounts for the recent boom in Ameri-

Professor David Gleeson Appointed to Organization of American Historian’s Distinguished Lecturers Programme

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) has appointed Professor David Gleeson as one of its Distinguished Lecturers, a high honour in the history profession. Launched in 1981, the OAH’s Distinguished Lecturers programme is a speakers bureau, described by the OAH as “dedicated to American history,” and serving as a “reliable, and easy-to-use resource for identifying and contacting leading historians who can share their expertise with your audience.” The OAH, established in 1907, “is the largest professional society dedicated to the teaching and study of American history. The mission of the organization is to promote excellence in the scholarship, teaching, and presentation of American history, and to encourage wide discussion of historical questions and the equitable treatment of all practitioners of history.” Scholars appointed to the selective Distinguished Lecturers programme “speak around the country every year, not only visiting college campuses and addressing undergraduate and graduate student conferences but also leading teacher

seminars and engaging general audiences at public events sponsored by historical societies, museums, libraries, and humanities councils.”

David is part of a 2015-16 cohort of 47 respected and accomplished scholars and teach-



David Gleeson delivering a lecture at Northumbria.

ers from the United States, Canada, and England. He is only one of two from England in the current class. David’s lectures include: “The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America”; “The Hidden Diaspora: The English in the United States, 1783–1914”; and “Did the Irish ‘Become White?’” “I’m delighted to be taking part in this programme,” said David, “and I look forward to delivering lectures on my research and teaching in the states.” “This recognition,” he continued, “speaks to our department’s strengths in American history and American Studies.”

Indeed, Northumbria University now has three OAH Distinguished Lecturers. Professor Brian Ward and Dr. Randall Stephens were appointed in previous years. (In February Randall delivered one of his lectures at Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee, titled: “The Devil’s Music: Race Rock and Religion in the 1950s.”) In Great Britain the only other university with three Distinguished Lecturers

is Oxford University. David’s appointment is a sure indicator of Northumbria University’s leading role in the study of the United States.

Literature, History, and Culture Speakers, 2015-16

Semester 1

Wed 23 September

Chris Jespersen, (Professor and Dean of the College of Arts & Letters, University of North Georgia), “Graham Greene and The Quiet American as History and Literature,” 4:30, Humanities Institute Seminar Rm, Lip 121. Co-sponsored with English Literature.

Thur 12 November 2015

Simon Philo (Senior Lecturer in American Studies, University of Derby) “Like a Rolling Stone . . . or a Beatle: Why the Invasion Peaked in ‘65,” 4:30, Humanities Institute Seminar Rm, Lip 121

Mon 23 November

Frank Towers (Mary Ball Washington Professorship of American History, UCD, and Associate Professor of History University of Calgary), “The Slave Power’s Grassroots: Voter Mobilization and Proslavery Politics before the American Civil War,” 4:30, room TBD.

Semester 2

Thur 4 February

Megan Hunt (American Studies PhD Student, Northumbria University), TBD, 4:30, Humanities Institute Seminar Rm, Lip 121

Wed February 24

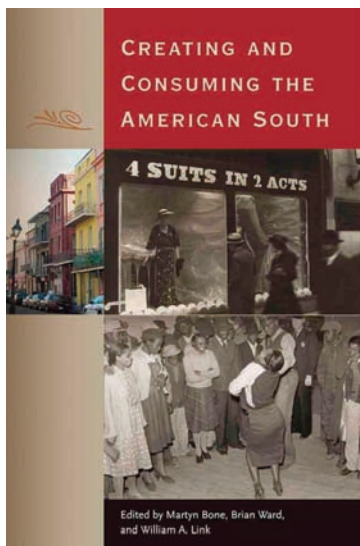
Matthew Shaw (Curator of US Collections at the British Library), TBD, 4:30, Humanities Institute Seminar Rm, Lip 121. Co-sponsored with English Literature.

American Studies Staff News

In Spring 2015, **Brian Ward** was elected to the executive committee of the British Association for American Studies where he now serves as vice chair. Since the last American Studies Newsletter, he has published a co-

edited book, *Creating and Consuming the American South* (University Press of Florida, 2015), and been convenor of a Forum on “What’s New in Southern Studies – And Why Should We Care?” in

the *Journal of American Studies*, to which he contributed an article entitled “Grand Theories and Granular Practices: The South and American Studies.” Brian has been on sabbatical during Semester 2, working on a book called *Architects of American Roots Music*, which explores the crucial role of Artists and Repertoire men (and a few women) in shaping the early US recording industry. Away from his current research, Brian has also served as Principal Historical advisor for the Journey to Justice “Footsteps to Freedom in the North East” project



(<http://tinyurl.com/knrykvs>) which showcased links between US civil rights and UK social justice movements through exhibitions, performances, and other events around Tyne-side. As part of the project, Brian gave a public lecture at the Great North Museum on Martin Luther King’s 1967 visit to Newcastle, while *A King’s Speech*, the BBC North documentary that was based on his discovery of lost footage of King’s Newcastle speech, won a 2015 Royal Television Society Award for Best Factual Programming.

In June **Joe Street** and Kevin Yuill (University of Sunderland) organized the Firearms and Freedom conference at the British Library. The event featured keynote addresses from Saul Cornell (Paul and Diane Guenther Chair in American History at Fordham University) and Joyce Malcolm (Patrick Henry Professor of Constitutional Law and the Second Amendment at George Mason University). Throughout the day, academics from both the US and the UK engaged in heated debate over the role of firearms and gun control legislation in American history. The papers will be collected in an edited volume (Street and Yuill) for publication in 2017 or 2018. Joe’s *Dirty Harry’s America* will be published by the University Press of Florida in February 2016. Professor Sam Girgus, author of Clint Eastwood’s *America*, says “Street provides a crucial critical and cultural service by not only studying Eastwood’s individual films in sharp detail but also by providing a close and serious analysis of the cultural and historic times of the films.” The book argues that the series sheds critical light on the culture and politics of the post-1960s era and locates San Francisco as the symbolic cultural battleground of the time. Across the entire series, conservative anger and moral outrage

confront elitist liberalism and moral relativism. It maintains that through referencing real events and political struggles, the films themselves became active participants in the culture wars, paying particular attention to the films' representation of crime, family and community, sexuality, and race.

Victoria Bazin has co-founded (with Sue Currell of Sussex University), The Network of American Periodical Studies (NAPS). NAPS is a new research initiative that aims to bring together scholars working on American periodicals (magazines, newspapers and other periodical publications)

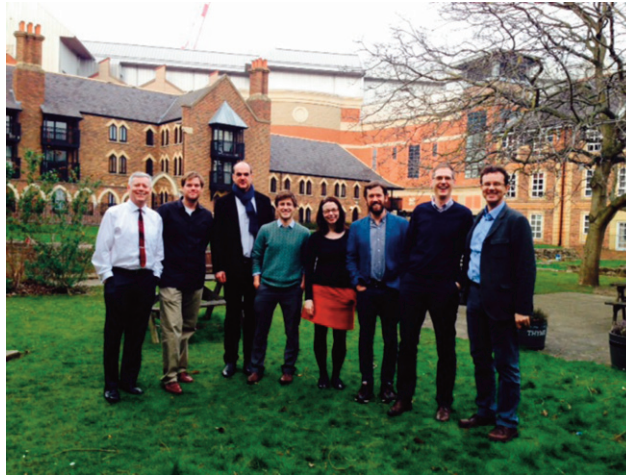
from any historical period. The network seeks to promote and support scholarship and criticism on periodicals by organising dedicated panels at conferences, forging links with other organisations and networks and promoting collaboration between institutions and across disciplines. If you would like further information about NAPS please email

Victoria.Bazin@northumbria.ac.uk. Victoria and Sue will be organising a one-day symposium on American periodicals at the British Library in December 2015. Victoria also has a forthcoming publication in *The Journal of Transatlantic Studies*: "Careless People/Restless Subjects: Re-Reading *The Great Gatsby*" will appear this fall.

Henry Knight Lozano spent the sabbatical semester working on his book project, provi-

sionally titled, *From California Groves to Hawaiian Reefs: Cultures of Promotion and Peril in the U.S. Pacific*. He also co-organised "The Shadow of Selma" conference, which saw scholars from the UK and US presenting work that engaged, on its fiftieth anniversary, with the 1965 Selma march and the Voting Rights Act. The conference papers will be

published in a forthcoming book by the University Press of Florida. Henry also has had an article accepted by the US journal, *Environmental History*. The article is entitled: "Water in Paradise: California, Florida and Environmental Rivalry in the Gilded Age."



University Press of Florida authors who took part in the Selma conference, Blackfriars, April 8, 2015.

Rosie White presented a paper on "Remembering Roseanne" as part of a panel on women and television comedy with Professor Linda Mizejewski (Ohio State University) and Professor Roberta Mock (Plymouth University) at the annual *Console-Ing Passions* (International Conference on Television, Video, Audio, New Media and Feminism), which took place in Dublin, 18th-20th June 2015. See more at:

<http://www.console-ingpassions.org/>

Randall Stephens spent 2014-15 continuing to work on several book chapters for edited volumes and several journal articles, while also completing work on his book project. In 2015 two of his articles appeared: "From Abolitionists to Fundamentalists: The Transformation of the Wesleyan Methodists in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *American Nineteenth*

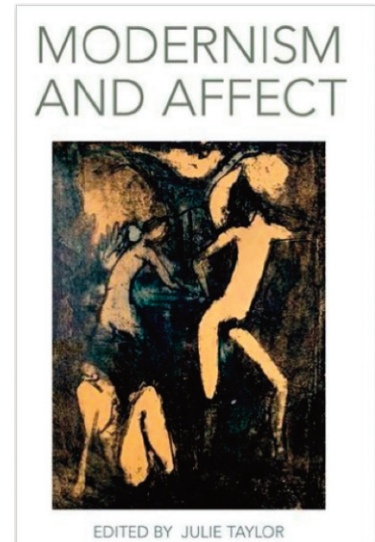
Century History; and “‘It has to come from the hearts of the people’: Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, Race, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act,” *Journal of American Studies*. Randall has also been able to speak about his work to the larger public. A July 2015 article in *Salon* dealt with the startling rise of Donald Trump as a presidential candidate. In October 2014 Randall was featured on the Interview with Roisin McAuley’s on BBC Ulster Sunday Sequence program. He spoke about the intersection of rock ‘n’ roll music and religion in the early days of the genre. (Listen here: <http://tinyurl.com/nu9lzwc>.) He also discussed some of his work on southern religion for the Charlottesville, Virginia-based Na-



Randall giving a lecture at Nottingham University, December 10, 2014.

tional Public Radio programme *BackStory with the American History Guys*. (Listen here: <http://tinyurl.com/nqyzt3>.) In the coming year Randall will also be giving talks at Mercer University, the Southern Historical Association (Little Rock, Arkansas), Emory University, Derby University, the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and the University of the South.

Julie Taylor spent her sabbatical in Semester 1 working on a new book project exploring the intersections between modernism, children’s literature, and pedagogy. She also completed an edited collection, *Modernism and Affect* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), to which she contributed an introductory essay and a chapter on Jean



Toomer’s *Cane*. Her article, “On Holding and Being Held: Hart Crane’s Queer Intimacy,” appeared in the fall 2014 issue of *Twentieth Century Literature*. She has recently been asked to serve in an advisory capacity on the organising committee for the SEM (Société française d’études modernistes) 2016 international conference on “Modernist Emotions,” where she has also been invited to participate in a plenary workshop.

Grant Bidding Success

American Studies staff continue to put in major group and individual bids to support research, teaching, and public engagement.

Randall Stephens received a six-week fellowship from the Wesleyan Center, Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, California. While at the center he worked on his forthcoming book, *The Devil’s Music: Christianity and Rock since the 1950s* (under contract, Harvard

University Press) and completed a couple of other writing projects. Stephens also received a U.S. Embassy London Grant to help support the Religion in American History Symposium held in late March. Randall also completed research for his book project with a 2015 Lynn E. May, Jr. Study Grant at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Michael Cullinane was awarded an esteemed AHRC Early Career Fellowship, 2014-15.

Over the last academic year Mike worked on a project titled “Memorial Communities and Presidential Legacy: Remembering Theodore Roosevelt.”

POSTGRADUATE NEWS

Megan Hunt has been appointed PG Secretary for HOTCUS (Historians of the Twentieth Century United States), so will be bringing PG concerns and ideas to the committee. She is also in the early stages of organising a conference on regional identity in American Studies with some students at Manchester. She has recently been involved in organising the Humanities Seminar Series and Summer Speaker Series and is due to publish an essay in the Selma volume edited by Henry Knight Lozano and Joe Street.

Jon Coburn is Postgraduate Rep for the Society for the History of Women in the Americas (SHAW), whose monthly seminar series, “Gender and History in the Americas,” will be held at the Institute of Historical Research on the first Monday of every month starting

on Monday 5th October. SHAW is also co-organizing, with the Mexican Embassy in London, the SALSA Collective (a network for UL scholars interested in latinidades across the Americas) and the UCL Institute of the Americas, “Hijas/os de la Malinche? Disruptions and Discussions on Gender and Mexicanidad,” a one-day conference at UCL Institute of the Americas on Friday 13th November.

ALISON GARDEN, EARLY CAREER VISITING SCHOLAR GIVES TALK ON “BLACK AND IRISH ATLANTICS”

Alison Garden was the Early Career Visiting Scholar in



Alison Garden

American Studies at Northumbria University for 2015. Alison’s PhD thesis, funded by the AHRC, explored the fiction of the

contemporary author Colum McCann. Alison is currently teaching Scottish literature at the University of Edinburgh and English literature, film, and critical theory at the University of Stirling. In 2015, she will take up a Post-doctoral Fellowship at University College Dublin, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. While at Northumbria Alison interacted with students in the classroom and gave a paper, based on her larger work, “Black and Irish Atlantics: Reading Seamus Heaney in Kwame Dawes and Natasha Trethewey.”

PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY NETWORK CONFERENCE TO BE HELD AT NORTHUMBRIA IN 2016

Michael Cullinane

The Presidential History Network announces its third annual event (26-27 May 2016) to be hosted at Northumbria University on the topic of presidential legacy. The Presidential History Network serves the academic needs of scholars interested in the presidency, individual presidents, the state, and corollary interests in the institutional, political, or cultural history of the American polity. Presidential studies, once considered “traditional political history” has been rehabilitated and the PHN aims to take advantage of the new era of political history.

With that aim in mind, the 2016 event (26-27 May) examines presidential “legacy” in a broad sense and we invite scholars to submit paper proposals that investigate the presidential image in:

- popular culture
- political rhetoric
- monuments and memorials
- and depictions produced outside the United States.

Proposals for individual papers or panels (up to 4 papers per panel) should include a 200-250-word abstract. E-mail submissions to

michael.cullinane@northumbria.ac.uk. The deadline is **October 16, 2015**.

PHN and Northumbria University are proud to welcome Prof. H.W. Brands as the keynote speaker at this year's event. Prof. Brands has published several books on the presidency, including his latest on Ronald Reagan.



Ronald Reagan speaking at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, June 12, 1987.

The symposium will also include a panel on presidential libraries devised to understand the way they shape public memory. Speakers will include staff and scholars from presidential libraries.

Finally, the event will discuss the future of the Presidential History Network and how we can build on the success of the past few years. All welcome!

For more, go to:

<https://presidentialhistorynetwork.wordpress.com>

SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICAN STUDIES STUDENTS

Adam Sharp, BA Student

Adam has just completed the first year of a BA in American Studies at Northumbria.

Q: You have travelled around the world quite a bit and lived in some interesting locales. Could you tell us a little about your background and how you became interested in American Studies?

I was quite restless for a while and have lived,

for varying lengths of time, in Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland, the Channel Islands, the Canary Islands, and North America. Throughout my teens I also had the unusual summer job of stilt walker for a street theatre company and got to see a lot of Europe that way. My compulsion to escape to the farthest corners of the world can probably be explained by the fact that I grew up in Manchester. (I love Manchester really).



Adam Sharp on the high seas.

As for how I became interested in American Studies, it was initially purely for research for future books I plan to write. My previous books have all been set in Britain, addressing British topics (English music primarily), but I have always loved American literature and have been interested in writing American historical fiction for some time. When I heard Northumbria was establishing an American Studies program I figured going back to university would be a more enjoyable, and sociable, way to do the research than doing it alone in my gloomy office, which it has been.

Q: What might you tell incoming students about living in the northeast and Newcastle?

Newcastle is small and intimate enough to regularly bump into people you know and to not get lost (even I have never managed that

and my sense of direction is terrible) yet at the same time there is always plenty going on, such as the Vamos! Festival or the Summer-Tyne Americana Festival, and there seems to be a new and interesting bar opening every other week. Newcastle is also much more culturally diverse than it used to be, which is great (unless you're a Daily Mail reader) and adds to the vibrancy of the place. I think it is a wonderful time to be here.

Q: What research and writing have you undertaken in your American Studies modules that have sparked your interests?

The module on Abraham Lincoln was fascinating. In fact, I developed an unhealthy obsession with him that I'll probably have to seek professional help for at some point. There have been lots of other topics aside from Lincoln that have sparked my interest though. I was expecting to mostly be interested in the literature side of things coming into the course, and I have indeed enjoyed studying it, especially Mark Twain and F. Scott Fitzgerald and the poetry of Walt Whitman and short fiction of Flannery O'Connor, but the history topics have sparked my interest just as much, if not more, particularly the Civil War, the Western Frontier, slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement. Some of the popular culture studies, such as Avatar and South

Park, have been a lot of fun too.

Q: Do you have any advice for someone who is considering choosing American Studies at Northumbria?

It is a particularly good course if you are not a hundred per cent sure which subject you want to do because you get to sample a bit of everything in the first year (as they do in American universities, which I think is a really



At the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.

good system)—literature, history, politics, film etc. – and then tailor the degree to your main interests in the second and third years with the many module options you have. I would say, though, that anyone who has an interest in American life and culture in general would get a lot out of it. And if you admire Abraham Lincoln all your dreams will come true.

Q: What are your future plans beyond the degree programme?

I will continue writing and publishing my own projects but I have enjoyed the American Studies course so much, and being back at

university in general, that I would love to carry on studying longer, if I can juggle it all—I'm not a very good multi-tasker—and do a master's degree and even a PhD (on Abraham Lincoln, obviously).

BOUND FOR TENNESSEE: RESEARCHING AND WRITING ABOUT MUSIC IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

Allan Symons

This September I find myself in the very fortunate (but slightly surreal) position of travelling to the US for a research trip. I'm headed to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, which is approximately 30 miles from Nashville and will be staying with a history Grad student named Michael Fletcher who has very kindly offered me a room for the duration of my stay. Murfreesboro is the home of Middle Tennessee State University, an institution where Michael studies and also where I'll be conducting archival work in the Center for Popular Music. During my time at MTSU I will be presenting my own research to the history faculty at a brown bag lunch that the faculty have very kindly organised. Again, this is a slightly surreal, but nevertheless very exciting opportunity to share my work with an audience of academics in the southern States.

The working title of my thesis is “Guns, Knives, and Troublesome Wives: Male Control, Misogyny and Murder in Commercial Roots Records of the Interwar Period.” As the title of the thesis may suggest, my research focuses on commercial roots records in the 1920s and 1930s. Much of this music sought to denigrate southern womanhood and punish transgressive females for “improper” behaviour that threatened the stability of traditional

gender roles at the time, and quite often these behavioural traits had a racial dimension in southern culture.



PhD student Allan Symons with his guitar.

My trip to Tennessee will enable me to access the first-rate archive that is the Center for Popular music at MTSU. The archive houses the Charles K. Wolfe Audio Collection: a collection of recorded interviews with artists and record company personnel active in the industry during the interwar period. Working with these materials will be both a privilege and most certainly a boon with regards to my ongoing research. However, the excitement doesn't stop here. Whilst in Tennessee, I'm also heading to Nashville (it would be rude not to!) for a number of reasons. Located in the heart of Nashville, The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum also has an excellent

archive, and whilst there I'll be working with historian John Rumble and archivist Becky Miley on materials that are imperative to my own work.

On a separate but related note; I'm told that Nashville is home to such wretched places as Honky Tonks: venues where folk gather, listen to music, eat BBQ, drink, and even dance. Whilst many may prefer to glean their knowledge of such places from the experiences of others, I find it's best to experience these things first-hand!! Suffice to say, this promises to be a great trip and a wonderful way to begin the final year of what has been an equally wonderful period of study at Northumbria University.

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Detail of Brooklyn Bridge. Photo by Randall Stephens.

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