

AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Northumbria University

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**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

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WELCOME TO AMERICAN STUDIES AT NORTHUMBRIA

Students and Alumni Lavish Praise on Humble American Studies Staff

Another year, another Newsletter, and another cornucopia of activities and accomplishments to report from American Studies at Northumbria.

We have always greatly appreciated the positive feedback we get from students taking our US-themed modules or studying on one of our three BA degree programmes (American Studies; English Literature and American Studies; History and American Studies). This year our teaching excellence was nationally recognized in the National Student Survey when the American Studies program at Northumbria was ranked No.1 in the UK in three key NSS categories ("Teaching on my Course"; "Academic Support"; and "Learning Resources"), and No. 2 for "Learning Opportunities."

Never happy to rest on our laurels, we have more exciting teaching and learning developments in the pipeline. In this Newsletter you can read about a new final year module on American Environmental history created by Elsa Devienne and Rebecca Wright that is set to debut in 2024-25. Prospects are also promising for a collaboration with Appalshop, a not-for-profit cultural

organization based in rural Kentucky, that might allow for undergraduate placements and, with a following wind, allow first-year American Studies students to make a podcast for broadcast on Appalshop's affiliated radio station, the mighty WMMT-Whitesburg.

It is also nice to know that long after they have left Northumbria, students continue to think well of us and value the education and support they received while at the University. Led by Elsa Devienne, with History & American Studies undergraduate Kat Franks working as a funded intern, this year we started to reach out to former students more systematically. Later in 2024 we will publish our first Alumni Brochure describing some of the wide range of career paths our students have taken. There's a sneak preview in the Spotlight on American Studies Alumni section of this Newsletter, along with instructions about how to get, or stay, in touch with us via the Northumbria American Studies Alumni Network on LinkedIn.

This year, we've also seen a lot of extra-curricular activities involving American Studies students, including a staff-student quiz where one of the rounds involved matching the lecturer to their toddler/baby photos...



Professor Brian Ward: living proof that doing American Studies at Northumbria reverses the aging process.

Of course, we do much more than just teach undergraduates and prepare them for a successful future. Northumbria has a thriving research community that make it one of the

main hubs for study of the "American Experience" outside the US. An important aspect of that research profile is a steady stream of excellent postgraduate students. In this issue of the Newsletter you can read about the latest work by some of our distinguished recent doctoral students, Simon Buck, Jack Hodgson, and Damian Shiels, and learn about one of our new additions, Ryan Thompson, who is working with Patrick Anđelic on political developments in modern Vermont.

You will also see that Northumbria staff continue to publish important scholarship in topics across the whole spectrum of American Studies, give numerous talks at academic and public events, and host important professional gatherings in the field, including the prestigious Annual Conference of Historians of the Twentieth Century US (HOTCUS) organised in June 2023 by Patrick Anđelic. This is the second time HOTCUS has come to Northumbria in the past decade, during which time we have also hosted the Annual Conferences of the British Association for American Studies (led by Joe Street) and the British Association of Nineteenth Century Historians (led by David Gleeson), as well as meetings of the Network for American Periodical Studies (led by Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters).

The fact that these kinds of professional organizations regularly come to Northumbria is yet another mark of our reputation, as well as testament to the friendliness and collegiality of staff, and, of course, to the many, many delights of Newcastle.

With very best wishes,

Brian Ward
Professor in American Studies
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NEWS & EVENTS

Northumbria Hosts 2023 HOTCUS Conference

Thanks to the organisational efforts of Patrick Andelic, the American Studies research group hosted the annual conference of HOTCUS (Historians of the Twentieth Century United States) from 20 to 23 June 2023. The [HOTCUS programme](#) was wonderfully rich, featuring over 70 papers as well as several round tables, “new books” panels, two ECR workshops and a keynote lecture from Prof. Bruce Schulman (Boston University) on “The New American Political Tradition and the People Who Made It”. The conference brought together a great range of researchers to Northumbria, including a notable cohort of US academics. Alex Riggs, who reviewed the conference for [usso.uk](#) wrote that in addition to showcasing the strength of the British community of modern US historians, it “clearly revealed HOTCUS’s significance as a home for scholars in early career stages, providing a welcome home for those embarking on one of their first academic conferences in a supportive environment that integrated them with established historians.”



The plenary panel celebrating the career of Iwan Morgan at the 2023 HOTCUS conference held at Northumbria University. L-R: Ian Scott, Elizabeth Rees, Nick Witham, Gareth Davies, and Robert Mason.

Northumbria Celebrates Prof. Tony Badger’s Career and Hosts Book Launch

In October 2023, the Institute of Humanities at Northumbria and the Tyneside branch of

the Historical Association co-hosted a research event celebrating Professor Tony Badger’s long and illustrious career. The event served also as a book launch for Prof. Badger’s latest book, *Why White Liberals Fail: Race and Southern Politics from FDR to Trump*, which was published by Harvard University Press in 2022.

The book shows how liberal politicians’ faith in the healing powers of economic growth—and refusal to address racial divisions—fueled reactionary politics across the South. From FDR to Clinton, charismatic Democratic leaders have promised a New South—a model of social equality and economic opportunity that is always just around the corner. So how did the region become the stronghold of conservative Republicans in thrall to Donald Trump? After a lifetime studying Southern politics, Anthony Badger has come to a provocative conclusion: white liberals failed because they put their faith in policy solutions as an engine for social change and were reluctant to confront directly the explosive racial politics dividing their constituents.



Cover of Tony Badger’s *Why White Liberals Fail* (Harvard University Press, 2022)

Dr Simon Buck Returns to Northumbria to Talk about Statues and Slavery

As part of this year’s Institute of Humanities seminar series, Dr. Simon Buck (American Studies PhD, 2020) delivered an engaging lecture on the multiple projects that he is currently pursuing on statues and the legacies

of slavery in the North East of England and Scotland. Simon is currently a Research Fellow working for the Historical Links to African Enslavement and Colonialism project at the University of Edinburgh (2022-2024). He is also preparing a book on old age, aging, and music in the US South (University of Illinois Press) based on his PhD dissertation supervised by Prof. Ward.



Dr Simon Buck presents his new research on statues and the legacies of slavery in the UK.

New Office... And a Selfie to Celebrate!

Following the flooding that affected the upper floors of Lipman in December 2022, most American Studies staff were temporarily relocated in Sandyford. In September 2023, we found our way back to Lipman. The new occupants of Lipman 010, the unofficial American Studies HQ, seem to have adapted well to their new digs as you can see from the selfie below, although the long-term impact on productivity and waistlines (so much chocolate, so many biscuits...) is not yet clear!



Patrick Andelic, Joe Street, Elsa Devienne, Hilary Francis and Brian Ward (from left to right) in their new office on the ground floor of Lipman (010).

American Studies Social Events

To launch this academic year's series of social events, the American Studies team joined forces with the History Student Society to host an 'American Studies Movie Night.' Students and staff gathered with copious amounts of popcorn for a screening of the Broadway hit *Hamilton* (dir. Thomas Kail, 2020; adapted from the Broadway production written by Lin-Manuel Miranda).



Students and Brian Ward at the *Hamilton* (2020) screening, co-organised by the American Studies Research Group & the History Student Society.

Next in the calendar was the student-staff quiz, held on Monday 4 December in Lipman Hub, also co-hosted with the History Student Society, and for which Dr. Elsa Devienne – programme leader for the American Studies single and joint honours and the new lead for the American Studies research group – planned an exciting American Studies picture round.



Students attend the History & American Studies student-staff quiz in Lipman Hub.

Thanks to an enthusiastic response from students, further activities are planned,

including a Mardi Gras-themed research and social event on Tuesday 13 February 2024. Mark the date in your diaries! We welcome all suggestions from students for potential future events. More information about the History Student Society can be found on Instagram @nsuhistsoc.

Institute of Humanities American Studies Speakers, 2023-24

Prof. Tony Badger (Emeritus, Northumbria University), *Why White Liberals Fail: Race and Southern Politics from FDR to Trump*, October 25, 2023.

Adam Smith (Oxford University), *The Meanings of the Battle of Gettysburg (provisional title)*, January 31, 2024.

Ellie Armon Azoulay (Newcastle University), *title TBA*, April 24, 2024.

American Studies Staff News

Patrick Andelic delivered a paper at a two-day workshop held at Trinity College Dublin, *Beyond Consensus: New Histories of American Liberalism*, in June 2023. The papers from this workshop form the basis of a forthcoming edited collection from University Press of Pennsylvania.

Patrick Andelic also participated in the latest British Association for American Studies (BAAS) US Politics and Modern American History Schools Conference at Methodist Central Hall, Manchester, in October 2023. This event drew together over 100 A-Level students from schools in Manchester and the surrounding region.

Brycchan Carey's forthcoming book *The Unnatural Trade: Slavery, Abolition, and Environmental Writing, 1650–1807* is now in press. It will be out from Yale University Press in Summer 2024.

Brycchan Carey also delivered the keynote ‘An Unnatural Trade: The Eco-poetics of Antislavery’ at The Biennial Conference of ASLE-UKI – The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, UK and Ireland – at the University of Liverpool (September 2023).

Elsa Devienne delivered the Annual W. P. Whitsett lecture at the California State University at Northridge (CSUN) on April 8, 2023. She presented her forthcoming book, *Sand Rush: The Revival of the Beach in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. It will be published by Oxford University Press in Spring 2024.



Elsa Devienne delivering the annual W.P. Whitsett lecture at Cal State University Northridge.



Cover of Elsa Devienne's *Sand Rush: The Revival of the Beach in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

While in Southern California, **Elsa Devienne** also co-led a “Hidden Stories of the Los Angeles’ Beaches” tour with Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson, author of *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow*

Era (University of Nebraska Press, 2020) as part of the Annual Organization of American Historians annual conference (April 2023). The tour took participants from LA's historic black beach to Santa Monica's "Muscle Beach," where mid-century bodybuilding, acrobatics, and fitness enthusiasts used to exercise and show off their bodies.



Dr Alison Rose Jefferson & Dr Elsa Devienne with the OAH conference participants who joined their tour of the Los Angeles' beaches.

Elsa Devienne was re-elected in May 2022 to serve a 3-year term on the executive board of the British Association of American Studies. She co-leads GREEN BAAS, the organisation's sustainability and environmental humanities initiative. With her GREEN BAAS hat on, **Elsa Devienne** edited a roundtable entitled "CODE RED for American Studies: Embedding Climate and Environmental Justice in the American Studies," which was published in open access in *Transatlantica* (December 2022).

Finally, **Elsa Devienne** presented a paper "A Small Thing to Save the Earth': Historicizing the Beach Clean-Up in the Neoliberal Era" at the 2023 HOTCUS conference held at Northumbria University in June 2023.

Clare Elliott published a book chapter, "Transatlantic Feminism and Antislavery Activism: Women's Networks, Letter Writing, & Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century" in the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Feminism* edited by Rachel Carroll and Fiona Tolan (London: Taylor & Francis, 2023), pp. 125-137.

Clare Elliott published the paperback edition of her co-edited volume (with Leslie Elizabeth Eckel), *The Edinburgh Companion to Atlantic Literary Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

Clare Elliott presented her research paper "Using/Refusing Phillis Wheatley Peters's Name in the Nineteenth-Century US and Beyond" at the British Association of Nineteenth-Century Americanists (BrANCA) 6th Biennial Symposium, Bristol University, 1–2 December 2023.

Clare Elliott gave her paper 'Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, and Female Sympathy in the Atlantic World' at the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) 67th Annual Conference, Keele University 13–14 April 2023.

Clare Elliott organised and chaired the Pre-1900 Americanists in the North group, February-May 2023. This involved, among other things, chairing the roundtable at the "Facing the Past Symposium", Lancaster University, 17 July 2023.

David Gleeson published "The Rhetoric of Insurrection and Fear: The Politics of Slave Management in Confederate Georgia," in the *Journal of Southern History* 89 (May 2023): 237-66.

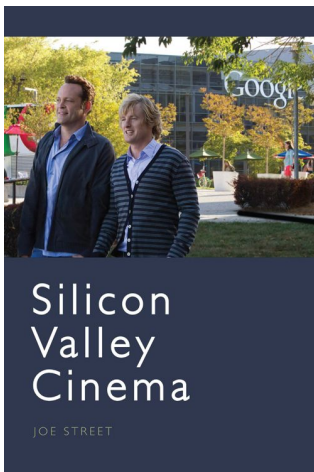
Civil War Bluejackets update: the AHRC-funded project is now half-way through. It has almost 1500 registered citizen scientists helping transcribe the US Navy Civil War Muster rolls on the [Zooniverse platform](#). Principal Investigator **David Gleeson** and PDRA **Damian Shiels** conducted qualitative research in the Spring in important Civil War Navy collections at the New York Historical Society, Library of Congress, the US National Archives in Washington, DC and the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. They presented a paper entitled "Race and Common Sailors in the American Civil War" at the

British Association of Nineteenth Century American Historians (BrANCH) Annual Meeting, The Queen's College, Oxford University, September 2023. For more information see www.civilwarbluejackets.com, @CWBluejackets on X/Twitter, @civilwarbluejackets on Instagram and Civil War Bluejackets on Facebook.



Prof. Gleeson and Dr. Shiels on their first day at the Huntington Library (and their first ever day in Southern California). "They say it never rains in southern California..." Well, that was a lie!

Joe Street published *Silicon Valley Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023). Professor Sherryl Vint (a leading voice in science fiction studies) calls it an 'indispensable' book, while Professor Ian Scott (one of Britain's leading scholars of American film) considers it "a terrific read for anyone with an interest in movies, the big-tech takeover, and Californian society and culture." You can read more about it [here](#).



Cover of Joe Street's *Silicon Valley Cinema* (EUP, 2023).

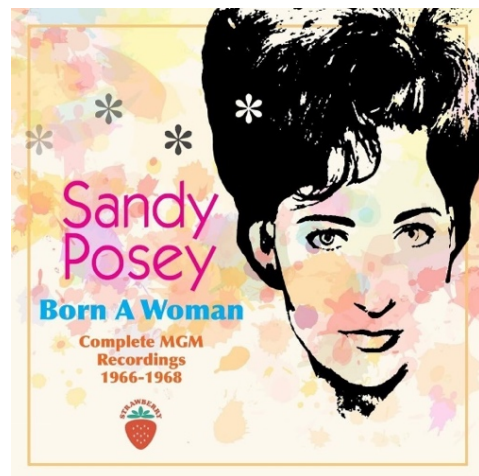
Brian Ward gave public lectures to several local history societies (Alnwick, Amble and Whickham) this year and once again appeared with acclaimed writer-musician Bob Stanley for a Newcastle City Library Event in June 2023, to discuss Bob's new book on the Bee Gees, *Children of the World*.

Brian also helped Bob with research in Elswick and the City Library's local studies archives for Bob's next book, which will be on The Shadows, the most significant British rock and roll group before the advent of The Beatles.



Bob Stanley and Brian Ward searching for *The Shadows* in the City Library Archives, June 2023.

Brian Ward published his first set of CD liner notes, a 6,000-word essay on Alabama-born 1960s country-soul-pop maverick Sandy Posey for the Grapefruit Records release *Sandy Posey: Born A Woman - The Complete MGM Recordings, 1966-1968*.



Cover of the CD *Sandy Posey: Born A Woman - The Complete MGM Recordings, 1966-1968* for which Brian Ward wrote extensive liner notes on Posey's life and works.

Rebecca Wright published an op-ed for the *Washington Post* reacting to the Bronx fire that killed 17 people in January 2022. Entitled “The deadly Bronx fire exposes the perils and politics of heating one’s home,” the [article](#) argues that heat is a political matter and that Black and ethnic minority New Yorkers have long faced difficulties in keeping warm.

Rebecca Wright published “68 Degrees: New York City’s Residential Heat and Hot Water Code as an Invisible Energy Policy” in *Environmental History*, Volume 28, Number 4 October 2023, 637-835.

Rebecca Wright submitted the final manuscript for her forthcoming book, *Moral Energy in America: From the Progressive Era to the Atomic Bomb*, which will be coming out with Johns Hopkins University Press.

Postgraduate News

Lewis Kimberley delivered a paper on “Rumour and Racial Violence in the US South, 1873 to 1906,” at the Southern Historical Association Annual Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina (November 10, 2023).



Lewis Kimberley delivering his paper at the Southern Historical Association Annual Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Lewis Kimberley’s article “‘If You Kill Him, You Have Got to Kill Me First’: Examining Individual and Collective Loyalties during the Memphis Massacre (1866)” has been accepted for publication with *American Nineteenth Century History* (2024).

Jack Hodgson, who successfully defended his PhD in 2022, published an article, published “‘The Santy Claus myth’: The Politicisation of Santa Claus During the Great Depression” in *Comparative American Studies An International Journal*, 20:3-4, 291-307. Jack is now working as a Lecturer in History at Roehampton University.

AMERICAN STUDIES ALUMNI: WE WANT YOU!



Thanks to a successful NU: Opportunities bid, we were able to offer an American Studies Alumni Affairs Internship to our students in June 2023. Kat Franks, one of our History & American Studies undergraduate, was selected to find and contact American Studies alumni and put together a brochure detailing their various career trajectories. Working under the supervision of Elsa Devienne, Kat also set up the basis of a Northumbria American Studies alumni network using various social media platforms. Our hope is to have an active network of alumni that we can bring back on campus for career events and chats with

current students. So, alumni, you know what to do! Head online and find us on [LinkedIn](#) (search for “Northumbria American Studies Alumni Network”). The Alumni Brochure will be out in early 2024, but we give you a taste of it at the end of this Newsletter!

SPOTLIGHT ON AN AMERICAN STUDIES PHD STUDENT: RYAN THOMPSON

Ryan Thompson

Ryan started his PhD under the supervision of Dr Patrick Andelic in Autumn 2023



Could you tell us a little about how you became interested in American Studies?

As a kid I watched this segment of a documentary on the Second World War. I've always remembered this American survivor of the Pearl Harbor attack, in a rather thick southern drawl I might add, describing looking up into the sky and seeing the planes with 'the big red meatballs' painted on the side. I don't know what it was about it, but it launched a fascination with the history of the United States, particularly during the twentieth century. Equally, while I was born during the Clinton years, I spent my childhood amidst the post-9/11 world. American influence was (and still is) everywhere, it seemed inescapable, hegemonic even. As I became more politically aware as a teenager, it seems I just naturally

drifted towards the history of American politics. I wanted to understand and discuss everything I could about presidents, elections, and American engagement with political institutions, at times much to the chagrin of those around me, I fear.

You're starting a PhD on an American Studies subject, could you tell us more about your research and how you came to choose your topic?

My PhD, *The People's Republic*, examines the history of politics in Vermont between 1968 and 2006. For many people, Vermont is just 'the Bernie Sanders state'. However, while it's weird to think about nowadays, if you told your average Vermonter in 1960 that one day their Congressional delegation would consist of two Democrats and an independent socialist, they'd have looked at you like you'd told them President Eisenhower was actually a hyper-intelligent cat alien in disguise. It wasn't even a century ago that Vermont was essentially a one-party state under the GOP, a state where New Deal Democrats of the 1930s joked that the Vermont border was adorned with a sign reading 'now leaving the United States'. What my research seeks to understand is how America's most 'red state' became one of the only states with a robust three-party system. To do this, I consider the long-term ramifications of the counterculture and 'back-to-the-land' movements of the 1960s and 70s, where tens of thousands of young newcomers flocked to Vermont to flee urban life and begin anew. Covering around 40 years of history, I aim to examine how counterculture transplants eventually contributed to broader intra-governmental electoral efforts to wage a ballot-box revolution in Vermont, and how the success of this 'political revolution', as I'm sure Bernie Sanders would call it, created deep-seated tensions between left-wing activists and institutional liberals that we still see reflected in the modern politics of the Democratic Party.

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

I think the best piece of advice I can impart, at least from my own experience, is that if you want to pursue American Studies you should try your hardest to be original. Carve out your own path in the landscape of academic research. This doesn't mean that you should avoid the 'big popular topics' like the Civil War or Vietnam, for example. However, it is best to find new ways of thinking about those events. This is just about the corniest thing I'll say, but I think there's truth to it. The United States is a grand yet messy tapestry. If you look beyond the, at times, mythological narratives of America, I think you'll find a lot of very human stories that you'll want to explore and research. Whether that's the history of a single town in Nowheresville, Montana or the literature left behind by someone nobody outside of Rhode Island has heard of.

Finally, a silly question: who would you invite to your dream historical party (pick three American guests)?

Ok, it might give away my own political leanings, but I think I'd invite Dorothy Day, Joe Hill, and Smedley Butler. Day is such a unique figure, a former bohemian turned devout Catholic, but one who championed the principles of libertarian socialism until her dying days through her involvement with the Catholic Worker Movement. I'm not religious myself, but I've always found that ideological devotion admirable. The voice of the IWW, Joe Hill, is obviously there to man the aux cord. You'll usually find one of his folk labour songs awkwardly sandwiched among a mountain of rap and hip hop in my Spotify top songs each year. As for Butler, well he would probably spend dinner raving about the continued intermingling of capitalism and warfare. So, in hindsight...this would be a terrible dinner party.

SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICAN STUDIES ALUMNI

Alex McGuire

BA (Hons) American Studies



Alex McGuire

Tell us about yourself in 3-4 sentences. What did you study at Northumbria?

I studied American Studies at Northumbria as American history was something I always enjoyed learning about in school and I wanted to continue to learn about it.

In my current job I'm a Train Manager at LNER. As you can imagine my American Studies knowledge isn't required as much in this job. However, a lot of the skills I gained from doing presentations and essays have been beneficial to me in interviews and job applications.

Northumbria's study abroad program really appealed to me. It felt like the perfect opportunity to explore the US whilst also continuing with my degree. For me, that was my favourite part of the course.

Which skills/ knowledge did you learn on your course that you use most now?

Studying at Northumbria definitely helped me improve my presentation and writing skills. This was definitely beneficial as I was required to present a PowerPoint and complete written

answers to interview questions in order to secure my position.

Studying at Northumbria gave me an edge over a lot of others in the railway industry. Being professional and knowing how to professionally put yourself across to your employer has really improved my chances. I've been able to move up the ladder numerous times starting as a customer service assistant and getting to where I am now as a Train Manager.

What was the best thing about your course?

The best thing about the American Studies course was that, because there was only a small number of us, the professors were really easy to access and it felt a lot more personal. You feel like they're able to get to know you more as a person and therefore get the best out of you.

The course was great for ensuring I was ready to go into the working world and make a career for myself. I'm comfortable and confident communicating with superiors via email as I know I'm able to come across competent and professional.

What did you enjoy most about your time at Northumbria University?

Northumbria was great for social life. Everyone is there to have a good time and there's plenty of opportunities to get involved in social gatherings and other activities like sports clubs.

What advice would you give somebody who is thinking of studying at Northumbria?

Definitely, if you can, look into studying abroad. That was the biggest thing for me and really helped me grow as a person. Complete independence and freedom really allows you to learn about yourself and grow as a person.

How would you describe your time at Northumbria in 3 words?

Socialising, Exploring, Preparing.

Adam Sharp

BA (Hons) American Studies
MA Creative Writing
PhD American Studies



Dr Adam Sharp

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).

As for how I became interested in American Studies, it was initially purely for research for books I planned to write. My previous books had all been set in Britain, addressing British topics (English music primarily), but I had always loved American literature and had 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 certainly was.

What might you tell incoming students about living in the north east 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. Newcastle is also more culturally diverse than it used to be, which is great and adds to the vibrancy of the place. I think it is a really good time to be here.

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. There have been lots of other topics aside from Lincoln that sparked my interest though. I was expecting to mostly be interested in the literature side of things coming into the course, and I did enjoy studying it, especially the poetry of Walt Whitman and short fiction of Flannery O'Connor, but the history topics sparked my interest just as much, if not more, particularly the Civil War, the Western Frontier, and the Civil Rights Movement. Some of the popular culture studies, such as Avatar and South Park, were a lot of fun too.

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

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.

What are you doing now?

While doing the American Studies degree I also became fascinated with 19th century US abolitionist Frederick Douglass and embarked on a project to commemorate his connection to Newcastle, which is still ongoing. As part of that, I have written historical panels, website pages, and given educational talks on Douglass and his time spent in Newcastle.



American Studies alumnus Adam Sharp campaigned for the installation of this plaque at 5 Summerhill Grove where abolitionist Frederick Douglass stayed in Newcastle.

After discovering the location of the house where he had stayed (just opposite where I was living at the time!) I campaigned for, and then helped write the words for, the historical plaque that went outside that house, while also working with local schools and community groups to raise awareness of Newcastle's role in fighting US slavery. I also project led a week-long Frederick Douglass festival in the local area, funded by a Heritage Lottery grant, and researched and wrote a series of educational panels about Douglass, which are permanently displayed at Newcastle Discovery Museum. I'm currently writing a play about

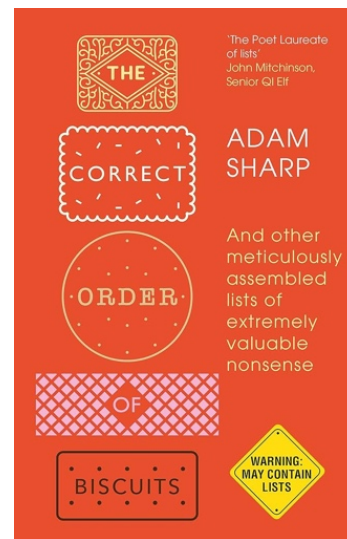
Frederick Douglass and the Richardsons, the Quaker family who he stayed with while in Newcastle.

Since finishing the American Studies degree at Northumbria, I went to London to do an MA in creative writing (with a focus on novel writing). I then came back to Northumbria as I got a studentship to do a PhD (the thesis was called “Punk Rock, Family, and Trauma: Exploring the Childhood Memoir”).

After finishing the PhD, I got a two-year role with New Writing North as a Creative Associate, which has allowed me to focus on finishing my latest book, whilst also working on several projects to help other writers, such as doing writing workshops with kids in care and establishing a monthly literary night, Read Them Your Writes, for new writers to read out their work.

I somehow got a Leverhulme Fellowship at Leicester University, working with the author Kit de Waal. So from February 2024 I’ll be spending three years working on a book called *Heroin Baby*, which will employ an interdisciplinary approach that combines memoir, biography and autoethnography to explore the transformative power of creative writing in understanding the experiences of being a drug-exposed child.

While doing this I will also continue writing and publishing other books, as I’ve been doing since finishing the American Studies degree. My short memoir “Play” was published in *Common People: An Anthology of Working-Class Writers* in 2019. My book about language and lists, *The Correct Order of Biscuits*, was published by Orion in 2020. The following year it was released in the US as *Euphemisms That Get on My You-Know-Whats*. My next book about language, *The Wheel is Spinning but the Hamster is Dead: A Journey Around the World in Idioms, Proverbs and General Nonsense*, will be published by Orion in September 2023. Next year should see my final book of lists published, as well as (hopefully) my first novel.



Cover of Adam Sharp's *The Correct Order of Biscuits* (Orion, 2020).

How did studying at Northumbria help you achieve your career goals/ give your career an edge?

I'd been writing for ten years before doing the American Studies degree at Northumbria. And all the major breakthroughs in my career have come since then, in large part due to the research skills and academic grounding it gave me.

Which skills/ knowledge did you learn on your course that you use most now?

I use the research skills I learnt on the course in everything I do, whether that is researching how to express idioms in languages around the world, for the series of list books, or researching characters to write about in my fiction, which are often based on real-life people. And it will be especially useful in the upcoming *Heroin Baby* project, which will involve an extensive review of existing literature on drug-exposed children, as well as interviewing other heroin babies, and the specialists who work with them, across not just the UK but also in Norway, Germany, and the US.

**SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICAN STUDIES
MODULES: *Red, White and Green: The American Environment Through Time*
(Third Year / Level 6).**

Red, White and Green: The American Environment Through Time is a third year (Level 6) core module and will be running for the first time in the second semester of 2024-5. The module invites students to consider the complicated relationship between the US and nature. Think about it: it is both the country that invented the national park concept and the biggest carbon dioxide emitter historically; it was the first country to celebrate Earth Day in 1970, but it is also where the hyper consumerist lifestyle first emerged; it is the birthplace of some of the oldest and most important environmental NGOs and of climate denial. How can we make sense of these contradictions? Are Americans doomed to destroy the natural wonders of their nation? Can we envision a red, white and green nation that would put science and technology at the service of sustainability and environmental justice?

The module was created by Americanists Elsa Devienne and Rebecca Wright and showcases Northumbria's strength in the environmental humanities. It emerges from their belief that students should graduate with the required tools to understand the origins of our environmental crisis and the current transition away from fossil fuels, and imagine more sustainable futures. While climate change is often featured in the news, too rarely is a historical perspective provided on how the current fossil fuel regime came into force and how long-held ideas and values about nature prevent us from breaking away with it. Examples of themes covered will include: nature and conquest; Native American environments; nature and technology; the wilderness myth; animals in US history; environmental disasters; urban nature; the rise of environmentalism; environmental justice and environmental racism; waste and pollution; toxicities, etc. From Jamestown to Central

Park, from Yellowstone to Hollywood, from Walden Pond to Disneyland, Americans have profoundly changed their environments while investing nature with powerful, and at times contradictory, values and ideas.



Photograph of Yosemite National Park in California by Carol Highsmith (2013), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

**WHY AMERICAN STUDIES? WHY
NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY?**

Intellectually challenging and hugely enjoyable, American Studies is an ideal subject to study at university if you want to learn more about American life and culture, wish to develop your critical, imaginative and communication skills, and have an interest in multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to studying the American experience and its global significance.

In American Studies at Northumbria University, you will receive an excellent education in a friendly environment, in partnership with an exceptional collection of internationally acclaimed scholar-teachers.

Through a variety of lectures, smaller group seminars, and guided individual study, our staff will help you develop your skills, work towards a successful degree and prepare yourself for life beyond the university.

Our commitment to teaching excellence is regularly recognized at the Northumbria Student Union's Student-Led Teaching Awards, when many members of the American

Studies staff are commended for their engaging teaching and overall commitment to their students' education.

Employment and Study Abroad

Many careers require self-motivated, creative, and ambitious individuals with a dynamic skill set. American Studies graduates are especially valued because of their excellent communication skills and ability to think intelligently, critically, and laterally as they draw on a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and skills to analyze and interpret the American experience. The American Studies BA and related programmes (English Literature and American Studies; History and American Studies) at Northumbria will enable you to develop into this type of graduate.

American Studies graduates are attractive to employers in such fields as teaching, publishing, journalism, cultural administration, advertising, public relations, the civil service, heritage management, social research, non-governmental organisations, public history, and the Foreign Office.

As part of an innovative "Your Graduate Future" module many of our students will hone their employability potential. Here students will build resumes, refine experience for future careers, and link their work in American Studies to the job market.

Students also have the opportunity to spend a period of time studying abroad during their second year. American Studies has established links with a large number of institutions in North America, including Florida Atlantic University, Georgia State University, the University of Arkansas, Middle Tennessee State University, and Montclair State University (near to New York City). This exchange programme is covered within the existing tuition fee structure.



American studies undergraduates Phoebe Clegg and Talullah Wordsworth, who spent a year at Montclair University (New Jersey) in 2022-23, here portrayed in Grand Central station in New York City.

TEACHERS – WE NEED YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS!

If you or your students would like to learn more about American Studies, or to participate in events at Northumbria University that offer you and your students the latest insights into US history, literature, and politics in preparation for GCSE, A-Level or International Baccalaureate Exams, please contact:

Dr. Elsa Devienne
(elsa.devienne@northumbria.ac.uk)

or Prof. Brian Ward
(brian.ward@northumbria.ac.uk)

For more information on American Studies at Northumbria University, please visit us at:
<http://northumbria.ac.uk/americanstudies>

Follow us on Twitter: @NUAmStudies



Front page banner image credit: the USS Hunchback's crew on the James River, Virginia, during the Civil War (1864-65), photographed by Matthew Brady, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph.

Finally...



Can you match the lecturer to their photo?

Answers. Clockwise from top left: Julian Wright, Brian Ward, Daniel Laqua, Edward Anderson (sleeping), Carlos Conde Solares (in cap), Katarzyna Kosior, Lara Douds, Joe Hardwick, Gareth Roddy, Patrick Andelic, Joe Street and Elsa Devienne.