

AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Northumbria University



Volume 8

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**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

WELCOME TO AMERICAN STUDIES AT NORTHUMBRIA

Trump Trough to Biden Bounce?

Record Recruitment to American Studies Programmes at Northumbria

It's been a strange and unsettling year...

And, with that epic understatement out of the way, it's wonderful to be able to report on the continued successes of American Studies students and staff at Northumbria. With two new joint degrees (History and American Studies, and English and American Studies) now running alongside the single honours American Studies degree, we welcomed 24 new students to Northumbria in September 2020. While COVID-19 means that they have had an unusual introduction to university life, like all our students, they have been remarkably resilient and resourceful in the face of new ways of teaching and learning. Staff, academic and administrative alike, have worked extraordinarily hard to ensure that the students' academic experiences have been as positive and rewarding as possible in the most difficult circumstances.

Necessity being the mother of invention, we've found new ways to foster a sense of community among those connected to American Studies at Northumbria. This included our first formal Thanksgiving Event, hosted by Joe Hardwick, Dominic Williams and Elsa Devienne. The online lunchtime gathering on November 12, began with students and staff being asked: 'If you were a US state which one would you choose to be?' I selected Kentucky, only partly

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because of a shared dependency on bourbon. In another feature, everyone was asked to choose which three Americans, living or dead, real or fictional, they would like to invite to a (presumably socially distanced) dinner party. Pioneering civil rights activist Ella Baker and former US President Barack Obama were clear winners, but the third place at the table was hotly contested. Will Ferrell, Tiffany Pollard, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Gertrude Stein, Snoop Dogg, and Sarah Cooper were among the contenders.



In the final segment of the event, students were encouraged to ask American Studies staff any questions, academic or otherwise, they had always wanted to ask – bearing in mind that this was all happening well before the watershed. The questions revealed passionate disagreements about the merits of southern rock giants Lynyrd Skynyrd and the TV show *The West Wing*. It also turns out there is a lot of love for Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* books and its TV adaptations, and that Greil Marcus's classic about music and American identity, *Mystery Train*, has a lot to answer for. Responding to one question, most staff expressed a reassuring confidence that, if necessary, they could take down Donald Trump in a fight.

Talking of whom... the November 3, 2020 US Presidential Election, its long preamble and almost equally protracted afterlife, was naturally a major point of discussion for American Studies

staff and students this year. Patrick Andelic, Tony Badger, and Elsa Devienne made multiple media and podcast appearances to help the public try to make sense of events, while Paddy also hosted an open online forum featuring leading scholars of American politics. It was a hugely enjoyable, timely and informative event – marred only (and I suspect only in my mind) by the lack of attention to Kanye West's doomed run for the White House.

Throughout a difficult year, staff have continued to offer students excellent teaching and the kind of guidance and support that is such a conspicuous feature of American Studies at Northumbria – something reflected in the exceptionally positive feedback we routinely get from our students. We even introduced some new modules, including one on The American West, led by Joe Street. Embracing literature, history, music, visual culture, environmental studies, politics and film, The American West typifies the inter- and multi-disciplinary richness of the American Studies programme and the extraordinary range of expertise among our staff. I have personally been working closely with colleagues on the new Music degree programme and foundation year music courses to make sure that there's plenty of US coverage there, while Hilary Francis, an expert on Central and South America, has added another exciting dimension to our teaching and research portfolios, including a new module on Nicaragua in Revolution.

Finally, Northumbria's Americanists have once again published a variety of innovative, top quality research, including books by Brycchan Carey, Elsa Devienne and Hilary Francis. Moreover, despite the best efforts of COVID-19, they have published on and spoken about their research at other universities and to audiences far beyond academia. Cumulatively, these accomplishments have helped to confirm Northumbria's international reputation as one of Europe's leading centres for teaching and research in American Studies.

I hope you enjoy reading about our activities in this, our eighth annual newsletter. Here's hoping that by the time we put together the ninth issue, we will all have returned to something

resembling what we once thought of as normality. In the meantime, stay safe!

With very best wishes,



Brian Ward
Professor in American Studies

NEWS & EVENTS

New Resources on US Civil Rights and British Race Relations for Secondary School Teachers

Brian Ward co-authored a groundbreaking study (with former Northumbria PhD student Megan Hunt, who now teaches at Edinburgh University, and Newcastle University's Benjamin Houston and Nick Megoran) for the *Journal of American Studies*. The article, titled "He was shot because America will not give up on racism": Martin Luther King, Jr., and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools,' examined history textbooks and curricula used in UK schools and concluded that the African American freedom struggle has become 'a surrogate for serious engagement with Britain's own racial and imperial histories.' Moreover, the civil rights history that is taught often presents simplistic narratives focused on the 'heroic' figure of Martin Luther King. While acknowledging both the considerable efforts of UK history teachers to offer more nuanced interpretations of the US civil rights struggle, and the need for more attention to Black British history in schools, the article offered practical suggestions of themes, online resources, and lesson plans that could help teach King and the African American freedom struggle in more relevant ways for British students in an age of #BlackLivesMatter and in the wake of the Windrush Scandal.

Thanks to funding from Northumbria University, the article is Open Access and

freely available to teachers and students to use, reproduce, and redistribute:

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875820000742>.

Northumbria Welcomes Latest Early Career Visiting Scholar

We were delighted to welcome **Dr Eilidh A.B. Hall**, the 2019-20 American Studies Early Career Visiting Scholar, virtually, after her visit to the campus in March 2020 was cancelled. In December 2020, Eilidh gave a research seminar, 'Americano Studies: Latinidades Negotiating the Academy.'



Dr. Eilidh A.B. Hall

Eilidh is a researcher and teacher interested in Latinx literatures and cultures. She is a former Fulbright Scholar and the co-founder and co-Jefa of the SALSA (Scholars of América Latina Studying desde Afuera) Collective. She is the author of the forthcoming *Negotiating Feminisms: Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo's Intergenerational Women* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). She will be contributing to the undergraduate module Contemporary America and will host a postgraduate methodology workshop.

Launch of New Irish American Civil War Data-Mapping Project

Northumbria PhD student **Damian Shiels** has launched the Andersonville Irish Project, a new initiative aimed at identifying Irish Americans who died at the notorious American Civil War POW camp at Andersonville, Georgia.



Map showing the national origins of men interred at the Andersonville graveyard.

The deadliest location of the conflict, almost 13,000 Federal troops died at this location. As a result, Andersonville National Cemetery almost certainly has the highest concentration of Irish American casualties from the Civil War in the United States.



A still of the interactive project map.

The project aims to combine historical research with crowd-sourced information to compile a database of the Irish American fatalities. This will be publicly available in both tabular and mapped format. As well as highlighting the impact of Andersonville on Irish America and the scale of Irish service in the Federal military, the project seeks to open up a major new study group for detailed analysis of social life in nineteenth-century America.

The identification of Irish Americans interred at Andersonville can act as a vehicle for this because it will also aid in identifying large numbers of associated widows and dependent pension files—arguably the richest form of social documentation that exists for ordinary nineteenth-century Irish families. The project is being hosted on irishamericancivilwar.com, and is being undertaken in partnership with Dr. Nicholas Allen of the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts at the University of Georgia. The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs are also actively seeking to support the initiative. You can find out more about the project and check for updates [here](#).

American Studies Staff Comment on 2020 Elections

During this election year, members of the American Studies research group were interviewed on a number of media outlets. **Patrick Andelic** made several appearances on BBC Radio Newcastle. **Elsa Devienne** was interviewed on *France 24*.



American Studies Group Hosts First 'Ask A Tutor' Thanksgiving Event

With the newly expanded cohort of single and joint honours American Studies students, and to coincide with Thanksgiving, the research group held its first virtual 'Ask A Tutor' event. This drew an audience of undergraduate and postgraduate students to ask American Studies staff questions from the serious to the trivial.

Tutors explained their opinions on which US state they thought they were, which cultural products or experiences had inspired their love of America, who they would invite to their dream dinner parties, and which US president they thought they could beat in a fight.



One American Studies undergraduate, Jakub Szydłowski, emailed afterwards to say that they found the event ‘hilarious and very interesting’ and ‘really fun,’ and that they were ‘glad to get to know our teaching staff more.’ He added, ‘I understand that current situation is not helping us and teachers at all, but it amazing that you managed to prepare something like this.’

Literature, History, & Culture Speakers, 2020-21

Semester 1

Making America Great Again Again? A Roundtable on the 2020 US Elections

Prof. Clodagh Harrington (De Montfort University), Prof. Hilde Restad (Bjørknes University College), and Dr. Daniel Rowe (University of Oxford)

November 4, 2020

Americano Studies: Latinidades Negotiating the Academy

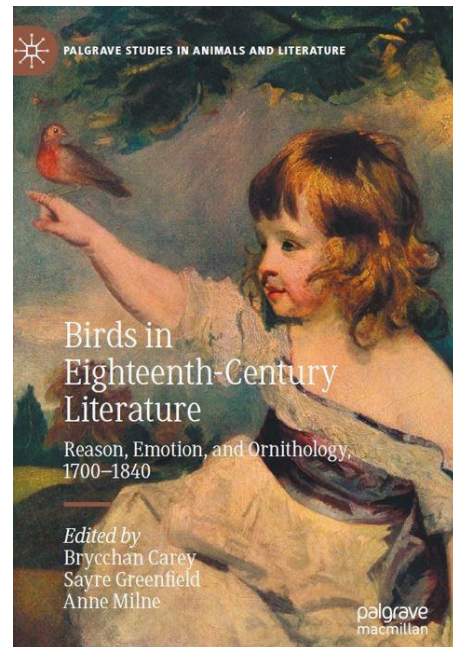
Eilidh A.B. Hall (Independent Scholar)
December 10, 2020

AMERICAN STUDIES STAFF NEWS

Tony Badger contributed to a three-part BBC Radio 4 [series](#), *The New Deal: A Story for Our Times*, presented by Marybeth Hamilton and broadcast in October 2020. This series was praised as ‘timely’ by the *Scottish Mail on Sunday*.

Tony Badger appeared on *The Naked Scientists podcast*, with Dr Ruth Lawlor (University of Cambridge) reflecting on the aftermath of the US presidential election and Donald Trump’s legacy.

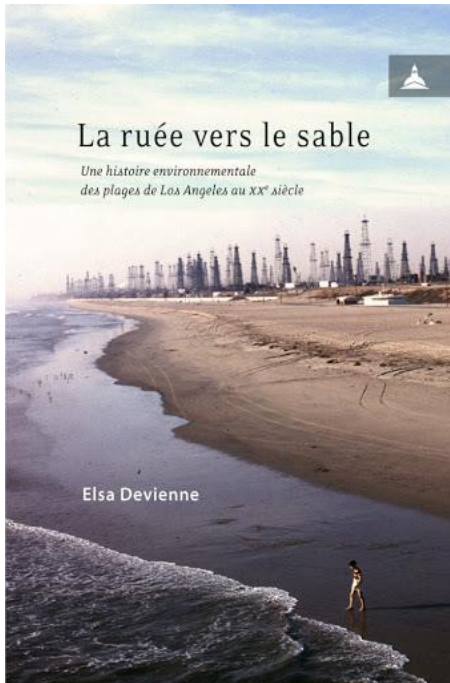
Brycchan Carey published a co-edited collection, *Birds in Eighteenth-Century Literature: Reason, Emotion, and Ornithology. 1700-1840* (with Sayre Greenfield and Anne Milne; Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). This collection draws together contributions from scholars from Canada, Ireland, the USA, and the UK to explore literary representations of birds from across the world in an age of expanding European colonialism.



Brycchan Carey’s new edited collection.

Elsa Devienne published a monograph, *La ruée vers la sable: une histoire environnementale des plages de Los Angeles au XXe siècle* (Sorbonne Editions, 2020).

An English translation, *The Sand Rush: An Environmental History of the Los Angeles Beaches in the 20th Century*, is under contract with Oxford University Press.

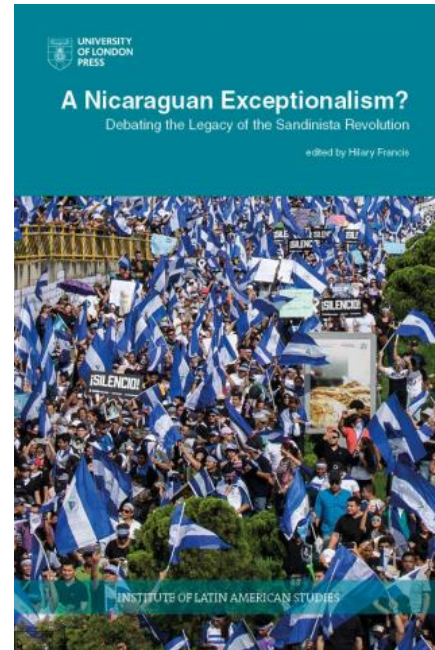


Elsa Devienne's new monograph.

Elsa Devienne published a chapter, “‘There’s Law on the Beach!’ Law and Public Order on Los Angeles’s Beaches, 1920-1970’ in Carina Breidenbach et al. (eds.), *Narrating and Constructing the Beach* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 171-193.

Elsa Devienne was also elected a member of the executive committee of the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) in spring 2020. She is currently chairing their award subcommittee and their environmental sustainability initiative (GREEN BAAS).

Hilary Francis published a new edited volume, *A Nicaraguan Exceptionalism? Debating the History of the Sandinista Revolution* (University of London Press, 2020).



Hilary Francis's new edited collection.

Joe Street coordinated the first delivery of a new core module, The American West, for second year students. This team-taught module covers the politics, culture, society, literature, and environment of the American West.

Joe Street had an article accepted by *Foundations*, the leading British scholarly journal of science fiction studies. This article, ‘Do Androids Dream of Black Sheep?’ offers the first analysis of the racial subtext of Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, arguing that the novel is best understood if we equate the experience of being an android with blackness, reconsidering the novel’s references to themes of colonialism, segregation, and racism, and how they relate to contemporary San Francisco, where the novel is based and where Dick lived as he was writing it.

In June 2020, **Brian Ward** spoke to the Cultural History, Cultural Studies research seminar at the University of Oxford, offering ‘Reflections on Studying US Popular Music and Mass Media.’ Proving that life online has some virtues, in October he was also able to make a guest appearance in Professor Bruce Schulman’s ‘Postwar America’ undergraduate history class at the University of Boston to

discuss links between popular music and the US Civil Rights Movement.

Also in October, **Brian Ward** made his second appearance at the annual Berwick Literary Festival. More than 200 people tuned in from all over the world to hear him speak on 'Before Martin Luther King: Frederick Douglass and Abolitionism in the North East.' You can watch the talk [here](#). He also published (with Megan Hunt) a short companion piece to the *Journal of American Studies* article on how the US civil rights movement is taught in the UK in [The Conversation](#).

Brian Ward appeared at an event at Oxford Brookes University, sponsored by the European Blues Association and the Think Human Festival: 'Discovering the Blues: Paul Oliver and the Blues – An Evening of Live Music and Discussion.' Brian joined Dr. Christian O'Connell (University of Gloucester) and Dr. Dai Griffiths (Oxford Brookes University) to discuss the life and work of blues historian Paul Oliver, with live sets from guitarists Michael Roach and Dr. Tom Attah (Leeds Arts University).



Brian Ward at the European Blues Association-Think Human event, Oxford Brookes University.

Rebecca Wright signed a book contract with Johns Hopkins University Press for her forthcoming monograph, *Moral Energy in America: From the Progressive Era to the Atomic Bomb*.

GRANT BIDDING SUCCESS

Patrick Andelic was awarded a four-month fellowship at the John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., worth \$20,000. The grant supports Patrick's research on California Democratic Congressman Harry Waxman who served in the US House of Representatives from 1975 to 2015.

POSTGRADUATE NEWS

Rowan Hartland successfully defended his thesis, 'Black Power Culture in the American South, 1967-1997,' in his viva in March 2020. Rowan's examiners, Prof. Tony Badger and Dr. Ben Houston (Newcastle University) praised Rowan's 'engaging and insightful' defence of his thesis.

Lewis Kimberley was awarded the Peter J. Parish Dissertation Prize by British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH) for his MA dissertation, 'Blood and Loyalty: An Examination of Collective and Individual Loyalties during the Race Riots of Presidential Reconstruction.'

Jack Hodgson established the Youth in America Research Network (YARN), in collaboration with the British Association for American Studies (BAAS), to bring together scholars working in the field of youth in America across all disciplines. The network is planning its inaugural research event, scheduled for summer 2021.



Follow YARN on Twitter at [@YouthinAmerica1](#)

Simon Buck, who submitted his PhD thesis in September 2019, signed a contract with the University of Illinois Press to publish his first monograph, *The Aged South: Old Age and Southern Music*.

SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICAN STUDIES STUDENTS:

ALEX SANDERSON, 3rd YEAR

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

A: I became interested in American Studies, right before I decided to go to university. I was thinking of various avenues and topics to look at. As for many people, it was a difficult decision deciding what to do as a degree and eventually a career. I was thinking of various subjects, but initially history. I came across Northumbria University's history program and found it quite interesting. However, I was always interested in the Americas. Specifically, I had an interest in the US and had already dipped my toe in the culture, and history of the country through various friends, from Chicago, Los Angeles, and Texas. When I found the American Studies field, I became enthralled by the subject. I looked at the Northumbria modules and almost immediately knew it was something I wanted to do.

One of my particular interests was the Cold War. I previously knew of the major events and historical timelines through the 'Long 1960s' (c.1955-73), but I knew that becoming involved with the historiography and scholarly opinion would further increase my knowledge and understanding of Cold War conflicts.

I was always watching American TV and film, and major events such as 9/11, presidential elections, Civil Rights. These were all major moments throughout my life, and they were huge moments in the history of the world. I was stuck on my TV, watching American late-night shows, news and became interested in

various publications and literature. These things influenced my upbringing. I was constantly viewing the issues and problems of the US and their global effects. The American Studies degree almost became a 'perfect fit' in my eyes, as something I wanted to focus on during my time at university.

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

A: One particular period that interested me was the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Before starting my degree, I was interested in the topic, but I had very little experience with the historiography and important moments in the Movement. I knew of Martin Luther King Jr., the Sit-Ins, and the brutality against the protestors, but I did not have knowledge of the experiences of the mass of people involved, or of specifics within each campaign, locally and nationally. However, doing a module on the African American Freedom Struggle since 1945 has really helped me to develop my knowledge of that aspect of American Studies.

One important primary source I have studied is John Lewis' *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. This book detailed many periods of Lewis' life, including the period of the Civil Rights Movement and his role within the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) of which Lewis was chairman until 1966. Such literature really helped me improve my understanding of what people had to overcome during the Movement, detailing the severe violence within Selma, Birmingham, and other campaigns. I loved getting into specifics, learning about diverse individuals, groups and organizations, all with different aims and objectives; and the idea of contrasting local movements to the more nationally focused groups such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Dr. King.

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

A: The only real advice I could give is to research what American Studies can bring to you, and your career. If you have particular aspects or themes in the Americas that interest you more so than other subjects, then you should definitely involve yourself with American Studies, particularly if you, like me, are already interested in history and/or literature. This American Studies degree is not solely based on the *history* of a continent, nation or events. The subject allows you to implement and utilize many aspects of humanities – literature, history, politics, film, music and sociology – to enhance your study of the US. This degree allows to really integrate anything you have learned and will learn to progress your knowledge and understanding of the American Experience.

SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICAN STUDIES STAFF:

HILARY FRANCIS

Hilary Francis joined Northumbria as Vice-Chancellor’s Research Fellow in March 2018. She is a historian of contemporary Nicaragua. Her research looks at political, social and environmental change since the 1950s, with a particular focus on the impact of US policy and conflict in the region.



Dr. Hilary Francis

‘This has been a really interesting year for me, particularly in terms of intersections between

teaching, research and wider engagement work. In February, my edited volume *A Nicaraguan Exceptionalism?* came out with the University of London Press. The volume links the wider legacy of conflict in the country with Nicaragua’s recent shift towards dictatorship. This research informed an expert witness report I wrote for a Nicaraguan asylum seeker in March. In August, partly as a result of my report, the asylum seeker was granted leave to remain in the UK. This was definitely a highlight of the year for me! More recently, I wrote a short piece for the Guardian, and I’ve been preparing a third year module, *Nicaragua in Revolution*, which looks at the local and international turmoil that followed the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979.’



Hilary speaks to residents of El Panamá, Nicaragua about the historical impact of the nearby Masaya volcano, part of a wider interdisciplinary project supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund.

WHY STUDY AMERICAN STUDIES AT NORTHUMBRIA?

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 was recognized at the Northumbria Student Union's Student-Led Teaching Awards for 2019-20, where many members of the American Studies staff were commended for their engaging teaching and overall commitment to their students' education. Moreover, the staff constitutes one of the largest concentrations of Americanist scholars outside the US and are internationally recognized as leading experts in their field.

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 programme at Northumbria University 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 organizations, public history, and the Foreign Office.

As part of an innovative, new "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.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected these exchanges during the 2020-21, we hope that they will soon resume.

TEACHERS – WE NEED YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS!

Every year American Studies at Northumbria hosts a "Taster Day" and other events which will be of interest to any students and teachers whose A-Level or GCSE curriculum includes material on the US.

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

Dr. Patrick Andelic
(patrick.andelic@northumbria.ac.uk)
or Professor Brian Ward
(brian.ward@northumbria.ac.uk)

For more information on American Studies at Northumbria, please visit us at:

<http://northumbria.ac.uk/americanstudies>

Follow us on Twitter: @NUAmStudies.



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