

BAAS Annual Conference 2026

Full Program of Abstracts

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Please refer to Conference Handbook & Schedule for timings, locations etc.

1. Keynote Speakers:

Mia Bay - Talking Back to Thomas Jefferson: African Americans Discuss the Founding Father, 1776-1877

A work drawn from my current book project “The Ambidexter Philosopher: Thomas Jefferson in Black Thought,” my lecture will discuss African American ideas about Thomas Jefferson from the American Revolution through to the post-emancipation era. My discussion will draw on sources that include African American commentary on Jefferson in speeches, letters, books, pamphlets and other available testimony, and use them to explore the connections between early black struggles for freedom and civil rights and African American claims on American nationalism and citizenship. It will offer an account of early black thought that underscored that pre-Civil War black freedom struggles first emerged within the changing political environment of a racially divided new nation and developed in dialogue with the party politics, the national political imaginary and the ideals of American political icons such as Thomas Jefferson.

Sinéad Moynihan - Author, Editor, Agent: The “Institutional Turn” and Mid-Century Magazines

In a 2021 special issue of *American Literary History*, Leo Konstantinou and Dan Sinykin describe and expand the “the institutional turn in post-1945 US literary studies”; in other words, scholarship that has focused on “the mechanisms that produce aesthetic phenomena”: creative writing programmes, literary prizes, student exchanges, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the CIA and, of course, the publishing industry.¹ Contributors to the special issue offer “new critical leverage on a long-ignored cast of characters (the agent, the editor, the book-buyer), bringing such figures squarely into literary history.”² Noting the emphasis of much on this work on the post-1960 period and on the novel, this paper highlights commercial magazines (*The New Yorker* and *Mademoiselle*, among many others) as an underexplored – but vital – component of the mid-century publishing ecology. Utilising extensive archival research, the paper provides a series of case studies of what are often thought of us as “fugitive” characters in the publishing industry: agent and editor.³ Emphasising the fact that the agent and/or editor space was one in which women could (and did) thrive, the paper extends recent scholarship devoted to exploring the personal and professional networks that underpin cultural production at mid-century.

Simon P. Newman - Fighting for freedom, 1776-2026

“THE REVOLUTION IS NOT OVER!” wrote Benjamin Rush in 1788. Abraham Lincoln agreed, and in the Gettysburg Address he argued that the ideals of the unfinished revolution could, when extended to all, heal the nation. It is in this context that historians have interpreted escape from slavery in late-18th century North America through the prism of the American Revolution, suggesting that enslaved people were inspired by Patriot ideology to seek life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for themselves. However, the stories of individual freedom seekers suggest that their myriad acts of self-liberation coincided with the revolution more than they were inspired by it. Often escape was motivated by individual experiences and conditions, and by the timeless

¹ Lee Konstantinou and Dan Sinykin, “Literature and Publishing, 1945-2020,” *American Literary History* 33.2 (2021): 230.

² Konstantinou and Sinykin 231.

³ Tim Groenland and Evan Brier describe the editor as a “fugitive character” in “Seeing Double: Editors in Postwar American Literature,” *Post45* 9, post45.org.

struggle against bondage. Understanding freedom seekers' determination to be free as separate and distinct revolutionary struggles requires us to reconceptualize not just the American Revolution but also the entirety of the last two hundred and fifty years in terms of two different movements for and understandings of liberty. Building from some stories of revolutionary-era freedom seekers I will reflect on that history and its significance today in the context of efforts to dismantle the legislative and judicial achievements of Civil Rights, championed by Martin Luther King Jr. as the fulfilment of the Declaration of Independence's "promissory note."

2. Round Tables

- **3G: American Studies Without American Studies: A roundtable on American Studies in Post-92 universities (JWS 375)**

Chair: Kate Ballantyne (Liverpool John Moores University)

Owen Clayton (University of Lincoln)

Rowland Hughes (University of Hertfordshire)

Stephanie Palmer (Nottingham Trent University)

Joe Street (Northumbria University)

At the BAAS 70th anniversary conference in Hertfordshire in 2025, a keynote panel provided a history of the Association from its postwar origins, through its cold war evolution to the present day, noting how important the 'new' universities of the 1960s, such as UEA and Sussex, had been in nurturing British American Studies. This roundtable proposes to add to this history of the discipline by providing a reflective discussion on how American Studies has been situated, both in terms of research and teaching, in an even newer group of institutions, from which BAAS draws many of its members – the post-92 universities. As many dedicated American Studies programmes in Russell Group or 'plate-glass' universities are being closed or absorbed into related departments, this panel will ask what lessons can be learned from the experience of colleagues in post-92 universities, in which American Studies has rarely been situated in its own department or been offered as a single-honours programme. Key questions may include:

- How can there be American Studies without American Studies degree programmes or departments?
 - How is the experience of teaching and researching American topics different at post-92 universities, and how have colleagues overcome institutional barriers?
 - How can we deliver innovative and challenging American Studies teaching with small student numbers?
 - How might we rethink the American Studies ‘canon’ in the light of sharing modules and programmes with other disciplines? How might we ensure that ‘specialist’ or ‘marginal’ subjects are retained or integrated into what is considered to be ‘core’?
- **4A: Collaboration Drives Resistance: A Closer Look at Transatlantic Research Relations – Royal Society of Edinburgh Report (Boyd Orr A)**

Chair: Jo Gill (University of Glasgow)

Josie Gwin (University of Edinburgh)

Eva-Maria Schnelten (Royal Society of Edinburgh)

This scoping report (to be published in early 2026) investigates how researcher mobility between Scotland, the United States, and Canada contributes to resilience in the international partnerships, with particular attention to early career researchers and faculty. In a context of geopolitical changes, restrictive immigration policies, and shifting funding priorities, the report argues that mobility-enabled partnerships serve as critical stabilising mechanisms. They enhance access to diverse resources, stimulate innovation, and support career progression.

Drawing on existing literature, survey data, and case studies, the report identifies the structural conditions for sustainable collaborations. The 33 responses to the survey came from a diverse sample of disciplines, including the creative arts, health sciences, environmental studies, AI, and the humanities. In total, respondents reported affiliations spanning over 50 different institutions across Scotland, Canada, the US, and several European countries. Intentional programme design, flexible funding models, and robust institutional support emerge as key components. Small-scale investments in mobility and seed funding are shown to yield disproportionate returns, including expanded professional networks, joint

publications, student training, and long-lasting research collaborations. However, stark barriers remain: visa constraints, funding deadlines, and complex bureaucracy continue to limit equitable participation.

Transatlantic research resilience depends on coordinated action across universities, funders, and policymakers. Expanding mobility schemes, strengthening administrative support, encouraging interdisciplinarity, and creating dedicated, flexible funding streams can mitigate uncertainty and enhance long-term planning. By embedding equity, accessibility, and disciplinary breadth into collaboration frameworks, stakeholders can cultivate a sustainable transatlantic ecosystem that supports early career researchers and advances knowledge that is mutually useful.

- **Roundtable 4B: Publishing in Journals Workshop (Boyd Orr B)**

Chair: Faye Hammill (University of Glasgow)

Chris Gair (University of Glasgow)

Helen Gibson (Freie Universität Berlin)

Katie McGettigan (Royal Holloway University of London)

Will Norman (University of Kent)

Will Rees (University of Exeter)

American Studies boasts a healthy publishing ecosystem, including several scholarly journals dedicated to our field. Many journals in adjacent areas also publish Americanist material; these include broad-based interdisciplinary titles and journals focused on a particular period, author or form. This workshop will help researchers – faced with this wealth of options – to find the most appropriate venues for their work. We will ask: how do you find out about a journal’s editorial ethos; what qualities make a journal a good fit for your scholarship; and how do you approach a journal most effectively? We will explore how peer review works and how the process varies across different journals.

Workshop leaders include five journal editors and an early-career scholar who has lately published a first article. We will begin by giving participants a detailed overview of how our journals approach the field, what makes for a successful submission, and how authors can tailor their work and interact effectively with editors. We will next open the discussion up for participants’ questions about how to choose journals and make the most of the submission process. This workshop is open to all conference attendees, though it is targeted particularly towards early-career and postgraduate researchers.

- **Roundtable 4C: State of the World: The United States in the Contemporary Global Order (Boyd Orr C) - Sponsored by the Scottish Council on Global Affairs**

Chair: Sarah C. Dunstan (University of Glasgow)

Juliet Kaarbo (University of St Andrews)

Dimitrios Anagnostakis (University of Aberdeen)

Philippe Beaugregard (University of Aberdeen)

Oliver Turner (University of Edinburgh)

The role of the United States in the contemporary world order remains a subject of intense debate, reflecting both the legacies of the nation's historical influence and the changing landscape of the 21st-century international order. This Scottish Council on Global Affairs (SCGA) sponsored roundtable seeks to critically assess the multifaceted dimensions of U.S. power in an era marked by geopolitical realignment, technological disruption, and shifting global norms. Participants will explore how American leadership continues to shape international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation, and security alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, while also interrogating the limits of its authority in the face of rising multipolarity.

The roundtable will address the evolving EU–U.S. relationship, a cornerstone of transatlantic cooperation. Panellists Dimitrios Anagnostakis and Juliet Kaarbo will examine this relationship through the lens of trade disputes, divergent regulatory approaches, and differing security priorities. Oliver Turner will focus on U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. He will reflect on the U.S. strategic competition with China, alliance management with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, and participation in regional economic frameworks to underscore the complexity of America's role in shaping the future of the Asia-Pacific.

A central theme of the discussion will also be the impact of presidential personality on foreign policy decision-making. Panelists Juliet Kaarbo and Philippe Beaugregard will reflect on the ways that the distinctive leadership styles of U.S. presidents have often shaped not only the substance of policy but also the narratives through which America projects its role abroad. From charismatic diplomacy to transactional pragmatism, presidential personalities have influenced how allies and rivals interpret U.S. commitments, credibility, and long-term strategic vision. Closely tied to this is the examination of foreign policy narratives—whether framed around democracy promotion, national security, or economic

competition—that define America’s global posture and legitimise its actions on the international stage. The current Trump Administration will be a particular focus in this discussion.

By situating these themes within broader debates about sovereignty, cooperation, and legitimacy, the roundtable aims to illuminate both continuities and ruptures in the global order. Rather than offering a singular verdict, the session will foster dialogue among scholars on whether the United States is best understood as a hegemon in decline, a resilient leader adapting to new realities, or a pivotal actor within an increasingly fragmented system. In doing so, the roundtable will provide nuanced insights into the evolving architecture of international relations and the contested future of U.S. global engagement.

- **Roundtable 4D: Mare Nostrum – 1776 Book Discussion Roundtable (Boyd Orr D)**

Hosts: Emily Brady & Riziki Millanzi

Roundtable discussion of recent academic publications pertaining to 1776 – reflecting on how the scholarship on America's founding can shape our research / teaching across broader periods.

- **Roundtable 4E: 5. The Transatlantic Literary Women Network Early Career Roundtable (Boyd Orr E)**

Chair: Laura Rattray (University of Glasgow)

Chiara Bullen (Independent)

Anna Girling (University of Edinburgh)

Lindsay Middleton (University of Glasgow)

Kari Sund (University of Glasgow)

The network “Cultural Connections: Transatlantic Literary Women” was established in 2017 with the support of a BAAS/US Embassy grant. Running free workshops, symposia, book clubs, talks and film screenings, TLW offers a lively literary and cultural transatlantic series putting women at its core.

Today’s practical session brings together early career TLW committee members, past and present, to discuss experiences of navigating a seemingly existential academic climate. Topics include surviving a self-funded PhD, the viva, life beyond, first publications, postdoc funding opportunities, handling rejection, networking, sessional work, independent, academic and academic-related career paths. The session

concludes with advice on establishing and maintaining a public event series with and without funding, maximising opportunities for impact and knowledge exchange.

This session is open to all conference attendees, though it is targeted particularly towards early career and postgraduate researchers.

- **AGM/Round Table (Fri 10th April) 16.45 - 17.45: Academic Freedom and American Studies in the Age of Trump 2.0 (Boyd Orr A)**

Mark Whalan (University of Oregon) - Blue State Humanities

Kate Ballantyne (Liverpool John Moores University) – The “Students Rise Up” movement

Ben Offiler (Sheffield Hallam University) - Academic Freedom in a Global Context

Michael Collins (Kings College London) - BAAS and Academic Freedom

This roundtable will occur as part of the AGM for BAAS and will reflect on the current climate in the Humanities, and in American Studies especially, and consider routes for thinking about routes for greater and fuller engagement with public political debate for the organisation and its partners. It will begin with a series of short comments by the panelists and then open up for wider debate.

3. Alphabetical List of Participants:

Claire Anderson - Rush Limbaugh and Gender Politics: The Politicisation of Sexual Harassment, 2008-2016

As the perceived pioneer of abrasive conservative talk radio, Rush Limbaugh has widely been credited by observers as a key contributor to the polarised politics that have intensified in the United States over the last few decades. His attitudes towards women and gender issues formed a key part of his antagonistic rhetoric, and his overtly dismissive attitude towards sexual harassment both contributed to his reputation as an anti-feminist conservative and was a defining feature in his overall approach to gender issues throughout his career on talk radio.

This paper explores Limbaugh's discourse on sexual harassment issues during the years of the Obama administration; a time during which issues of sexual assault were becoming more publicly recognised and accepted. Compared to other conservatives in the media, Limbaugh was distinct in his consistent politicisation of sexual harassment issues and his use of the topic to present a partisan narrative on the problem of violence against women. His engagement with the issue remained at the surface level, and issues of sexual harassment became a vehicle through which Limbaugh could continue the controversial rhetoric he had championed in the 1990s, postulating his presentation as an 'angry white male'. This varied discourse ultimately reveals that Limbaugh was not a traditional conservative in the same way that he liked to present himself, but instead represented more of an extremist position on gender and women.

Adrian Arana-Armesto - Contrasting Western Visions: [In/Out]sider Perspectives on Native American Representation in *Fools Crow* and *Comanche Moon*

This paper examines the contrasting representations that McMurtry and Welch portray of Native American communities in *Comanche Moon* (1997) and *Fools Crow* (1986), respectively. Hence, this analysis focuses on how each writer's background and heritage influence their narrative style and cultural representation. Unlike Welch, who is a Native American author, McMurtry is a descendant of Texas Rangers and, therefore, he is an outsider to Indigenous communities. However, his narrative challenges core American myths, such as Manifest Destiny and the cowboy myth. Nevertheless, in his effort to demystify the West, the author paradoxically contributes to the cultural hegemony, as he strengthens stereotypes of Native Americans as brutal or hostile individuals.

In contrast, James Welch, a Native American writer with heritage from the Blackfeet community, provides an insider's viewpoint. Therefore, in his work, the author portrays cultural, spiritual, and historical aspects of this community. *Fools Crow* highlights the experiences of the Blackfeet tribe amid the decadence of the Old West, a period marked by oppression and colonialism. The author represents in his work the impact of brutal colonization as a consequence of expansionism, which carries land loss and cultural annihilation.

Therefore, I interpret Welch's literary work as a means of safeguarding cultural values and subverting dominant and hegemonic narratives that have traditionally silenced Indigenous voices. Finally, this comparative analysis highlights the significance of literature and, particularly, of Native American storytelling in questioning hegemonic historical narratives. Hence, this work situates both writers within broader discussions of American identity and mythology.

Keywords:

Native American literature, cultural representation, subversion, cultural studies.

Gabriel Baker & Finian Smyth - Democracy is a Living Thing: 18th Century Civic Virtue, Commercial Interests, and the Genealogy of American Vice

This paper recovers key debates on the role of civic virtue in the 18th century American Republics. The genealogy of republican conceptions of 'active citizenship' and the role of these citizens in a robust central government is traced to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As political discourses in America shifted from republicanism to liberalism, the federal government expanded as political culture gave way to socioeconomic interests. We argue that to understand the transformations of US government authority versus vested economic interests, and to explain collapsing popular trust in an expansive, representative federal government, the original 18th century context of republicanism's conflict with commerce must be evaluated. By recalling the central role of civic virtue in arguments between the Federalists and AntiFederalists, many contemporary reflections on the collapse of the US constitution are clarified.

While mainly a work of intellectual history, we take a comparative approach, intervening in recent political science debates which explain the emergence of populism and the collapse of public trust in government authority in terms of liberal pluralism's contradictions. Robert Dahl's pluralist theory of democracy, for example, has been invoked by scholars assessing populist threats to US democratic institutions. This paper historicizes such claims, drawing comparisons to works by Tocqueville, Melancton Smith, Madison, and Jefferson, among others. We also argue that such historical context is critical to defining the relationship between the state and private economic interests. Several parallels between the federal government's 'structural dependency' on capital, can be drawn with the New York ratification debates.

David Ballantyne - More than "Footnotes to Louisiana History": Marcus B. Christian and Black Historical Writing in Mid-Twentieth Century New Orleans

This paper will use the writings and activism of the self-taught African American intellectual Marcus B. Christian and his peers as a window into Black popular historical writing, and its links to broader struggles for citizenship. In the 1930s, African Americans fought for inclusion in New Deal programs, including the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), where they sought to reshape Americans' knowledge of Black history and culture. On the all-Black Dillard University project in New Orleans, Louisiana, Christian and other workers collected and curated materials on Black history and folklore for the state FWP's major publications. Christian took the lead in assembling and writing a monumental reinterpretation of Black history, titled "The Negro in Louisiana." During and after their work on the FWP, Christian and a cadre of Black intellectuals took up the cause of broadcasting to Louisianans a fuller account of African American history.

The manuscript was never published. Christian received a Rosenwald fellowship to complete the book in 1943, but a series of personal and professional crises and impossibly high expectations meant he did not seek publication until the late 1960s. By that stage, peer review was harsh: the manuscript was too unwieldy, and the scholarship was 30 years out of date. Though details about the manuscript's multiple authors and dates of its drafting are difficult to untangle, the fact that it remained unpublished provides a window into claims Christian and other Black FWP employees made about Louisiana history free from the editorial pen of state or Washington officials.

David Barnes - White Modernities: Race and the construction of 'Europe' in Langston Hughes and Henry James

Developments in postcolonial, transnational, African American, Native American, border, and mestizo studies among others have made the transatlantic literary canon ripe for deconstruction. What meaning can we even attach to the term 'transatlantic' in this complex context? The reappraisal that I propose takes as its starting point an interrogation of constructions of 'race' implicit in the New Imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on postcolonial and 'whiteness' studies, I apply this thinking to two radically different American literary depictions of Europe – Henry James's novel *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and Langston Hughes's short story 'The Blues I'm Playing' (1934). Whilst critical readings of James's novel have focused on Milly Theale's 'blank' American 'white identity' (Patricia McKie), I argue that James's depictions of Venice in the text also depend on a marginalised black presence subtly encoded within the aesthetic construction of the city. In the imperialist context, this presence adds complexity to James's portrayal of 'whiteness' in the figure of Millie, by drawing attention to white (American) hegemony's relationship to racialised others. By contrast, 'The Blues I'm Playing' deconstructs white cultural assumptions about Paris to instead portray a city of cultural diversity and black colonial resistance. Through the viewpoint of its African-American protagonist Oceola, Hughes presents a Paris of 'West Indian' ballrooms and radical discussions of Pan-Africanism. Both texts may be read as forms of transatlantic modernist fiction, broadly understood. Yet both texts also, I argue, present complex literary responses to racialised colonialism and its discontents.

Chris Bates - The Domestic Dendrocapitalism of Lydia Maria Child's Instructional Writing for Women and Children

In addition to her pioneering work advocating for enslaved and Indigenous persons, Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) wrote extensively for the instruction of women and children. Taking the form of both periodicals (*The Juvenile Miscellany*) and domestic advice books (*The Frugal Housewife*, *The American Frugal Housewife*, *The Mother's Book*, and *Evenings in New England*), this work played a crucial role in the development of American letters, especially as it pertained to marginalized and underrepresented groups. Bringing Child's instructional writing in line with contemporary criticism in the energy humanities and energy history, this paper will assert that central to these texts is an acute attention to the role wood, timber, and their products played in the management of mid-nineteenth-century American homes. As such, I argue that Child's writing provides a unique insight into the domestic modality of "dendrocapitalism," my term for a political economy of wood and energy resource paradigm that dominated early America and the necessary precursor to today's petrocapitalisms. Running counter to fictional texts such as Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823) or Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (1799) that often advocated for the rampant destruction of forests in the name of profit and national progress, Child's writing, I argue, drawing on Cecilia Tichi and Rachel DeWitt's work on frugality, instructed nineteenth-century women and children in more prudent and sustainable methods of working with timber resources. In so doing, Child also provides a powerful model for those of us in the 21st century who are urgently grappling with the ecocidal side-effects of dendrocapitalism and its successors.

Rob Bates - The Civil War Pension System, Union Veterans Overseas, and the Global American State

The Civil War pension system was the most comprehensive social policy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century United States. Between 1880 and 1910, roughly a quarter of federal expenditures were devoted to this enormous system of pensions for the veterans of the Union Army and the widows and orphans of the war dead. This pension system was not confined to the United States, however, as most accounts seem to suggest; rather, it was a programme with an global reach. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the federal government was providing military pensions to more than five thousand people around the world, from Norway to New Zealand, from Siam to St Helena.

This paper will explore the Civil War pension system's transnational dimensions during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in so doing shine new light upon the expansion of the American administrative state on a global scale. By enmeshing veterans overseas in the procedures of the emerging administrative state, the provision of military pensions revealed a federal administrative apparatus that was far more expansive than historians once realized. Yet this responsibility also reflected all of the complexities and constraints that characterized late-nineteenth-century state-building, depending upon the cooperation of private actors and local officials who operated far beyond the reach of Washington. The result, as this paper will show, was a demonstration of a national administrative apparatus that was both strong and weak, and one that reflected deep-seated anxieties about the extension of federal bureaucracy and welfare.

Sara Bavakhani - Feeling the Climate Crisis in Mary Annaïse Heglar's Troubled Waters (2024)

Climate activist and essayist Mary Annaïse Heglar, based in the US South and recognised for co-creating and co-hosting the climate-focused podcast and newsletter *Hot Take* and its

successor *Spill*, published her debut novel *Troubled Waters* in 2024. Heglar's project coheres around the primary purpose of raising awareness about global climate crisis and emotions as well as situating climate injustice and activism within the longer history of existential threats unevenly imposed on and borne by a predominately Black population in the US South. In *Troubled Waters*, she avoids a formulaic, disastrous apocalyptic narrative associated with cli-fi, advancing, instead, a slow environmental catastrophe that allows her to foreground a constellation of difficult emotions. These emotions are ecological, rooted in loss and grief, and peculiar to the novel's temporo-spatial context of Black communities on Mississippi and Louisiana's Gulf Coast over 2014 and 2015, but also nonecological and historically precedented as the result of a subplot that yokes a traumatic history of civil rights activism to environmental grief. I will examine how Heglar maps emotions and traces a long history of resistance to injustices to illustrate how the effects of activism on the individual shape generational experience and emotional fallout in distinct yet comparable ways. I will argue that when read alongside her nonfiction, *Troubled Waters* consolidates Heglar's political-environmental project of conveying the exigency, gravity, and emotional implications of climate change and activism.

Bridget Bennett - The Circulating Library: Archival Encounters, Objects and Methods on the Move

My talk will focus on the transatlantic journey of a personification lithograph, 'The Circulating Library' (1831) I first encountered in the American Antiquarian Society. I imagine its probable impact on, respectively, the young Charles Dickens and the young Frederick Douglass imagining them encountering it displayed in book shop windows in London and Baltimore. The lithograph was first published in London by Charles Tilt, a highly successful London printer and publisher whose shop was located at 86 Fleet Street, close to where Dickens worked. Crowds would gather outside the shop to look at carefully orchestrated displays designed to pull punters in to buy his wares. It was reissued in Baltimore and may well have been displayed in the window of Nathaniel Knight's shop in Fell's Point, where Douglass purchased *The Colombian Orator*.

Stefan Benz - "I have the maps to take it back": JB The First Lady's Indigenous Hip Hop Feminism

Rap music has had a notoriously complicated relationship with misogyny. Perhaps more than any other genre of popular music, it has been decried and branded as misogynist, even if other

genres like rock and country also abound with misogynist songs and tropes (Morgan 1999; Rose 2008). Misogynist imagery in rap songs can be complicated because they both perpetuate the systemic oppression of women and they Signify on (Gates 1988), that is, they performatively mock White stereotypes of Black men as threats to (White) women. Yet, the global success of gangsta rap has often overshadowed the satirical nuances of Signifying rap songs as well as the body of conscious rap that thrived as early as the 1980s and was shaped by feminist rappers like Queen Latifah and Lauryn Hill.

For three decades, Native artists have participated in the creation of conscious rap and employed it to create pop-cultural Native presences and amplify Native political concerns (Mays 2018). Over the last ten years, more and more female Native rappers have made use of rap and its complicated history to negotiate a key concern of Indigenous feminism: the close ties between settler colonialism and the heteropatriarchy. Ever since the release of her first record in 2011, JB The First Lady (Nuxalk / Onondaga) has created music that must be understood as Indigenous feminist, both because of its ideological critiques and its activist messages. This talk studies songs from her most recent albums, *Meant to Be* (2017) and *Righteous Empowered Daughter* (2018), to showcase how JB The First Lady uses her lyrics, music, and music videos, to create an explicitly feminist notion of Native political agency and cultural sovereignty.

Ginevra Bianchini - “I’m going to give up feeling so hopeless. Or at least, I am going to try to feel hopeful as much as I can”: Communal Narrative Voice and Recovery from Gendered Violence in Katherena Vermette’s *The Break*

In Katherena Vermette’s critically acclaimed novel *The Break* (2016) readers encounter a complex and layered narrative structure that depicts the current living situation of Métis people in Winnipeg, Manitoba. At the same time this portrayal poses itself as an exemplification of

bigger narratives and histories of Indigenous people in North America. Through an ensemblestructured storytelling composed of ten different voices that alternate with each other, Vermette, a Métis woman herself, weaves a harrowing and intricate narrative that recounts from multiple perspectives the sexual violation of Emily, a teenage Métis girl from the North End of Winnipeg. With this background in mind, this presentation will analyse the novel's use of the communal narrative voice in connection with its representation of several forms of gendered and sexual violence. In particular, it will consider the metafictional relationship the narrators build with readers, rendering them witnesses as they become implicated in the politics of seeing of the story. Through this polyvocal storytelling technique Vermette revitalises a method of recounting experiences of violence that highlights the large reverberations of trauma within a community, with the proactive aim to emphasise the importance of healing. Through a comparison between three of the novel's narrators – Emily, Stella, and Rain – this presentation will demonstrate how Vermette's narrative crucially portrays healing paths rooted in fostering the Indigenous restorative concepts of kinship, resurgence, and grounded normativity (Coulthard & Simpson 2016).

Kate Birkbeck - The NRA, the National Guard, and Counterinsurgency in American Cities

In response to the Great Strike of 1877, the National Rifle Association (NRA) and National Guard Association (NGA) innovated in riot control for the new context of class warfare in the industrializing United States. 1877 was a year of transfer for these armed social movements. The American NRA shot against and beat the British NRA to claim ascendancy both over rifle shooting and the international arms trade. And in the immediate wake of the strike the founder of the NRA founded the NGA. Both groups were hubs for coordination of formal military and

formal and informal militia organization through publications, annual meetings, and affiliated local and regional competitions. This paper considers a few novel features: the introduction of the 'tramp target' by the NRA at the 1878 annual meeting; articles promoting the importance of rifle training for controlling 'mobs'; short-range shooting manuals; disembodied imagery of railroads as the new enemy of the citizen soldiery. Through these it draws out three strands of ideological commitments: a foundation in the transnational Anglo-American militia movement, the cohering power of backlash to the strike, and new corporate investment in counterinsurgency in the latter half of the decade. Through this, the paper considers a longer tradition of state and nonstate armed groups occupying US cities, with resonance today.

Simone Blandford - Performing the Commune: Resistance and the Festival Form in Nineteenth Century Chicago

Beginning in March 1872, a group of Chicagoans chose to mark the inauguration of the Paris Commune of 1871 with a festival. More than a commemoration, this was a celebration of the first time urban space was reclaimed and transformed. This paper explores why Chicago took up the torch of the Commune more rapidly and fervently than any other American city. Building off the work of Henri Lefebvre, I argue that to understand this is to understand the Commune as a 'grandiose festival': a period of liminality marked by the transformation of time

and space, a moment where *communitas* was formed and change made possible. The possibility of cutting through spatial and social regimentation resonated with Chicagoans as they navigated a highly segmented city. Built through boosterism and the subdivision and speculation of land, the city's meteoric rise was marked by startling economic and social inequality. As it grew, divisions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion and trade grew with it—even down to the factional nature of the burgeoning labour movement. Thus, in March 1872, when a group of the city's radicals chose to hold a festival, it became in essence a microcosmic form of the Commune itself. The liminality of the festival form, with performance at the centre, produced these uniquely diverse affairs. They reliably cut through the fragmented city, allowed for the temporary formation of *communitas* and a space to imagine societal transformation.

Martyn Bone - Something Larger: New Black/Southern/Neoliberal Gothic

In 2018, Sheri-Marie Harrison identified a “New Black Gothic” emergent across an eclectic range of expressive forms by Black artists including Jesmyn Ward, Jordan Peele, and Donald Glover. In 2024, Jaleesa Reese Harris pursued Harrison's observation that practitioners of the New Black Gothic draw on “the Southern Gothic tradition.” What happens, however, when New Black/Southern Gothic texts strive to render contemporary socio-economic forces that sometimes seem to defy comprehension and representation? In this talk, I turn to memoirs by two Black

female Mississippian writers, Jesmyn Ward and Natasha Trethewey, to argue that the New Black/Southern Gothic morphs into a mode of Neoliberal Gothic. I assess how Ward's *Men We Reaped* (2013) and Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2010) deploy some of "the Gothic's core representational strategies"—ghosts and ghost stories, images of haunting and haunted houses, lupine metaphors—to explore "the ways in which neoliberal capitalism has wrought seismic changes" (Linnie Blake) on Black lives in the U.S. South. Yet "the emergence of capital as an abstract form of domination" (Japhy Wilson) also engenders a crisis of representation. Ward and Trethewey, like the Black southerners they write about, confront difficulties discerning, much less defining, neoliberalism as "an invisible, intangible presence-absence that dominates our reality" (Wilson). In *Men We Reaped* and *Beyond Katrina*, the emblematic built space of the Black/Southern/neoliberal gothic is the casino, which materializes the otherwise elusive operations of racial capitalism in its neoliberal form.

Sara Lopes Borga - Poetry, 'De-lyricised': the Formal and Moral Stakes of Claudia Rankine's Poetic Address

If the subtitle (An American Conversation) of Claudia Rankine's *Just Us* (2020), the third volume in her American Lyric trilogy, signals a retreat from the lyric while still holding onto its vestiges, how does this shift redefine the stakes of Rankine's poetic address? While the trilogy's reception as formally innovative has largely focused on its intertextual effects or the wayward lyricism of *Citizen* (2014), it often sidesteps an in-depth engagement with how the volumes relate to one another, particularly Rankine's distancing from the 'lyric' as a defining category. This talk will focus on how this transition aligns with Rankine's deepening concern with the intersection of language, accountability, and ethics evident in her dialogic exploration of racial justice in *Just Us* as an intimate, everyday practice. The book's title—echoing Richard Pryor's pun on 'justice' as 'just us'—

captures this tension, exposing how historical failures of justice permeate, and segregate, intimate and systemic interactions. I will discuss my current research on how the aesthetic potential of Rankine's poetics might be most fully realised by tracing her lyric's journey away from itself.

Aïcha Bouchelaghem - "I loved wild beasts": Navigating Settler Colonial Semantics in Okah Tubbee's Slave Narrative

Reasserting the humanity of Black people was long considered an idiomatic trope of Black self-expression, especially before enslavement was abolished in the United States. As Henry Louis Gates famously states, "literature was taken to be the central arena in which persons of African descent could, or could not, establish and redefine their status within the human community" (1988, 129). The function of autobiographical slave narratives as discursive acts of self-revelation makes them a key genre in this enterprise. While reclaiming human status is fundamental to the speaker's self-affirmation, the question remains how a given slave narrative defines humanity. Indeed, some associate personhood with modes of being that transcend ideals of rationality and intellectual (self-)control.

Studies on the critique of liberal humanism in slave narratives tend to center Frederick Douglass, which, while relevant, occults other significant texts, such as *A Thrilling Sketch of the Life of... Okah Tubbee* (1848, 1852). The autobiographical persona of Tubbee, a formerly enslaved man, resists the anti-Black violence of enslavement by fashioning himself as the son of the Choctaw chief, Mushulatubbee. The narrative deploys the settler-colonial trope of “Indian nature” as inherently “wild”—and therefore un-enslavable—to defy the correlation of humanity with civility. Far from enacting “tame” respectability, the text celebrates a personhood marked by violent temper and an affinity with animals. Paradoxically, then, the commitment of Tubbee’s narrative to re-signify the epithet “wild” as a desirable mode of resistance and existence upholds the discursive erasure of the Choctaw and of Natives peoples more broadly.

Max Bowden - Worldbuilding and Narrative in the Lyrics of the Grateful Dead

The Grateful Dead’s catalogue occurs in a unified universe, with its own history, population, philosophy, and metaphysics. This paper will explore how these elements combine to create a fictional world that not only frequently crosses paths with reality, but also comes together to create an interactive universe that rewards increased investment and enriches the lives of dedicated listeners. This rich worldbuilding helps to create a shared reality which was conjured in myriad forms via the band’s live experience, with different narratives explored not only in songs, but in combinations of songs, and even whole sets or shows.

Hunter’s “Glass Bead Game” approach to writing draws fans into a collaborative game of reference and meaning, leading deeper into the lore of the universe, the academic and historical milieu that Hunter centred in his work. From Joyce and Eliott to Husserl, Santayana and the Bible,

this universe is underpinned by a robust theoretical and literary foundation that both connects it to reality and elaborates upon it, mirroring the way in which fans engage with the songs.

This paper will be an overview of my PhD Thesis, which explores these elements in greater depth, and suggests ways in which this unique mythology functions to create an American mystery cult that facilitates access to spiritual experience and community in a world increasingly devoid of meaning. This unique approach to worldbuilding and songwriting sets The Grateful Dead's work apart, and can help us understand the particular compulsion the band inspires in its acolytes.

David Brauner - 'Do I Seem Real to You?': Authenticity and the 'Great Replacement' in Twenty-First-Century Black American Cinema

There are two endings to Spike Lee's 2018 film, *Black Klansman*. The story (loosely based on a memoir of the same title by Ron Stallworth) - of a black policeman infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan with the help of a Jewish colleague in the 1970s - ends with an image of a burning cross, visible through the protagonist's hallway window. However, the film itself closes by breaking out of its narrative frame to show footage of white supremacists at the 'Unite the Right' rally held at Charlottesville in 2017, chanting 'Jews will not replace us'. This juxtaposition of historical racism with the activities of contemporary white supremacists emphasises the dismaying tenacity of anti-black violence in America. Yet by highlighting the peculiar manifestation of racist ideology known as 'the Great Replacement' theory that gained such traction during Trump's first term and that continues to exert a powerful hold, not just over extremists such as those marching in Charlottesville but over large numbers of Republican voters, Lee was also tapping into what has proved to be a rich vein of material for a younger generation of black American filmmakers. In this

paper I will explore the ways in which three films made in the last decade by first-time black American writer/directors – *Get Out* (2017) by Jordan Peele (who was one of the co-producers of Lee’s film), *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) by Boots Riley, and *They Cloned Tyrone* (2023) by Juel Taylor – invoke the ‘Great Replacement’ theory as part of a larger critique of (racialised) notions of authenticity and ‘the real’.

H. Dorrell Briscoe - Cold War Liberalism and the Limits of Progress: Morris Ernst, National Security, and the Civil Rights Agenda

This paper examines how Cold War liberalism constrained progressive civil rights policies in the early postwar period, with particular attention to the role of Morris Ernst on President Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR). While *To Secure These Rights* (1947) is celebrated for advancing a bold civil rights agenda, the committee’s deliberations reveal the influence of an emerging Cold War consensus that tethered civil rights reform to national security imperatives and anti-communist orthodoxy.

Morris Ernst—longtime ACLU general counsel, free speech litigator, and self-described “red-baiter”—embodied the contradictions of Cold War liberalism. Fiercely committed to civil liberties in principle, Ernst nonetheless defended President Truman’s Loyalty Program, resisted criticisms of the FBI and DOJ, and advanced policies—such as his “disclosure” proposal for

political organizations—rooted in the belief that communist subversion posed the greatest threat to American democracy. His insistence on shielding federal security agencies from criticism diluted the PCCR's recommendations and reflected a broader reluctance among liberal policymakers to pursue structural reforms that might be framed as “radical” or “subversive.”

By situating Ernst's interventions within the political culture of the late 1940s, this session will explore how Cold War liberalism redefined the boundaries of acceptable reform, elevating procedural equality while sidelining more transformative economic and social justice measures. This paper will engage with recent scholarship on mid-century liberalism's pivot from New Deal economic interventionism to a narrower focus on civil rights, tracing the long-term consequences of this ideological shift for the scope and durability of racial justice policy.

Joan Bryant - James McCune Smith and the “Hill of Science” among Antebellum Black American Reformers

When he returned to New York after earning the medical degree at the University of Glasgow, James McCune Smith promptly assumed a prominent role in campaigns against the “science, falsely so called,” of phrenology. His action was part of an attack on craniology, which, despite its professional garb, was, in his view, no difference from popular “Bumpification” theory. This paper situates Smith's scientific work among broader engagements with science among Black American reformers. It explains how, taken together, the scientific claims and theories of individuals illuminate a collective endeavor to map warrants for a common humanity and natural equality among the world's peoples.

The paper places Smith's ideas in conversation with the arguments of such figures as Hosea Easton, William G. Allen, John B. Reeve in order to delineate the significance of scientific thinking in Black reform discourses that are typically framed in strictly moral undertakings.

Katie Burke - Magazine Margins: Advertising in magazines for lesbian sex-radicals, Black Americans, and interracial families in the late-twentieth century

This paper examines *On Our Backs*, a San Francisco-based erotic magazine for lesbians which launched in 1984 at the height of the feminist “sex wars”. Founding a sex magazine for lesbians during such a critical period of debate around pornography and sexuality was no easy feat, and the magazine’s editors operated on a shoestring budget which relied heavily upon reader subscriptions, strip show fundraisers, and advertisements for artisanal products made by independent queer businesses (chiefly leatherwear, sex toys and video pornography). In this paper, through a sustained focus on the rich archive of advertisements placed in *On Our Backs* magazine, I seek to trace the contours of what I term a ‘frottage industry’ of small-scale, erotic entrepreneurial efforts by lesbian producers in the 1980s and 1990s.

This history intersects with broader interactions between queer consumers and mainstream marketers toward the end of the twentieth century, as gay men and lesbians were increasingly identified as a viable market by businesses willing to chase the ‘pink dollar’. My paper takes *On Our Backs* as a case study for lesbian material production, exploring the unique challenges of maintaining a lesbian business which was decidedly political, erotic and

countercultural in nature, and arguing that the magazine's survival relied on networks of similarly-minded subcultural erotic entrepreneurs. By focusing on intra-community efforts to navigate the queer erotic trade, this paper complicates our understanding of the tangled intersections between American lesbians, capitalism, the feminist "sex wars" and pornography in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Nicole Burrowes, Hannah Thuraisingam Robbins – Research Journeys: Interminority Coalition or Conflict? Identity Formation and Interminority Relations Between Asian and Black Communities in Nottingham and New Jersey

This paper explores an ongoing research project about "Afro-Asian" relations in Nottingham and New Jersey. Although dominant accounts of race relations focus on white majorities and racialized minorities, inter-minority relations are increasingly relevant as western nations rapidly diversify. Conflict and coalition-building across communities of color are of growing salience to contemporary life in the UK and US, where racial minorities navigate complex racial hierarchies. This project, led by an international and interdisciplinary research team, examines where interracial convergence and divergence exist in social and political attitudes, memory, history, and popular representations through the use of surveys, oral histories and focus groups. This paper examines the possibilities and challenges of this research and explores our preliminary findings across our different strands on social values, history, memory, and popular entertainment.

Danielle Cameron - Cosmopolis, Haptic Geographies and Spaces of Adulthood: Situating Interdisciplinary Understandings of Age in Twenty-First Century America

By drawing upon age studies, literary analysis and spatial theory, this paper conveys a key tension in contemporary American constructions of adulthood and evidences the value of interdisciplinary approaches to examining age. The tension explored at the heart of my paper is the fluctuating roles that physical and digitally mediated spaces play in individuals' perceptions of self, particularly in relation to adulthood.

Looking to theorists such as Lauren Berlant, Harry Blatterer and Sophie K. Rosa, I situate cultural constructions of normative adult success as intertwined with capitalistic gain and, ultimately, a form of 'cruel optimism'. In response to this, I identify spatial immersion, informed by haptic engagement with physical surroundings, as potential means to resist the expectations of normative adulthood.

With this in mind, I offer a close reading of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) as an example of a novel that portrays adulthood as a subject position that is not fixed but, rather, one which requires constant renegotiation. My reading of spatial immersion in *Cosmopolis* reveals an affective depth to DeLillo's thirteenth novel, which has previously been considered a study of affectlessness and narcissism. In *Cosmopolis*, I argue, the blurring of boundaries between man

and city permits a higher level of self-perception for its protagonist than the intangible flow of capital and digital information underscoring his supposed 'adult' success.

Building upon my analysis of the physical and digital spaces in *Cosmopolis*, I examine the intensified role of digital media in post-2020 American youth's experiences of coming-of-age and expectations of adulthood. By connecting the themes of physical space and digitality, this paper offers an interdisciplinary and critical lens on meanings of age in an ever-changing America.

Natalia Cecire - Seductions of the Jellyfish: Elite Women's Education and Developmental Biology

Marianne Moore's 1909 poem 'The Jelly-Fish' first appeared in the Bryn Mawr College alumnae magazine, *The Lantern*, alongside a reprinted poem that she had published the same year in the student literary journal, *Tipyn O'Bob*. Uncollected in later volumes such as *Poems* (1921) and *Observations* (1924), 'The Jelly-Fish' appears as juvenilia that anticipates Moore's mature poetic fascination with animal bodies. In this paper, however, I recontextualise 'The Jelly-Fish' in the intellectual and social culture of Bryn Mawr College, the rare women's college with a genuinely cutting-edge biology department. Led by the charismatic M. Carey Thomas, then the leading exponent of women's higher education in the United States, the College cultivated an intense homoerotic intellectual culture that found expression in an abundant archive of student creative writing, performances, and personal correspondence. Examining 'The Jelly-Fish' alongside the creative work of Moore's less famous classmates, such as Marion Sturges Scott's 'Sonnet (To an Amoeba)', I reconstruct the role of new research in developmental biology in the intellectual, affective, and social lives of Bryn Mawr students. Generally white, occupying a middle-class position of both being able to invest in a future capacity to earn a living and needing to do so, and explicitly cultivated into specific forms of political subjectivity (especially in relation to women's suffrage), Bryn Mawr students before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment used their unusually good training in the biology of 'lower life forms' to make sense of their own status as inhabitants of that liminal category, the educated woman.

Marika Ceschia - Insurgent Ecologies of the Home in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*

This paper argues that Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) positions domestic and intimate spaces as crucial ecological sites through which Black diasporic subjects navigate, resist, and reimagine the slow violence of racial capitalism. Marshall turns to kitchens, bedrooms, ancestral homes, and ritual spaces to theorise insurgent ecologies: practices of care, kinship, and relationality that transform compromised domestic environments into loci of ecological survival and diasporic repair.

Through a close reading informed by Black feminist theory, Caribbean ecologies, and decolonial environmental humanities, the paper demonstrates how *Praisesong* reframes the home as a permeable and transnational ecology. Avey Johnson's dislocation—from the overregulated, consumerist interiors of North America to the nurturing domestic sphere of Lebert Joseph's home in Carriacou—reveals how capitalist modernity renders certain spaces ecologically barren while suppressing alternative modes of being. Lebert's mothering praxis, rooted in ritual nourishment and communal care, functions as an ecological method that reorients Avey toward relational, embodied forms of knowledge. Through this domestic pedagogy, Marshall constructs an ethic that collapses boundaries between body, home, land, and diaspora.

The paper contends that Marshall's novel offers a sustained critique of the ecological imaginaries underpinning Western modernity, while articulating a Caribbean diasporic model of ecological intimacy. *Praisesong* thus expands the conceptual and geographic scope of American

environmental literature and positions Black women's domestic practices at the centre of contemporary debates on environmental justice, climate ethics, and care.

Amna Umer Cheema - Arkiving 'Gestational Waters' in Foster letters

This paper examines “arkival thinking” in Elizabeth Bishop’s letters to her analyst Dr Ruth Foster through the intertwined frameworks of Jeffrey Cohen and Julian Yates’s “Noah’s Arkive” and Astrida Neimanis’s hydrofeminist concept of “gestational waters”. In doing so, I argue that Bishop’s correspondence with Foster functions as a hybrid ark, being an archival practice, a therapeutic container, and an eco-poetic laboratory. Reading the Foster letters as a deliberate gathering of fragile materials—confessions, memories, bodily traces, and relational debts—my paper contends that Bishop enacts a poetics of preservation that is neither triumphant nor totalizing but ethically attentive and provisionally sustaining. The letters operate as an “arkive” in three overlapping modalities: as selective archive (what is named, recorded, and carried forward), as vessel of care (the therapeutic work that shelters and transforms), and as hydric matrix (a figurative amniotic milieu in which affective and bodily fluids—alcohol, tears, breast milk, bronchial dampness—reconfigure subjectivity).

Grounded in close readings of these letters and others, as well as cross-references to Bishop’s letter-poems and Key-West notebooks, the analysis foregrounds recurring material of fluids and maps them onto the analytic registers of arkival curation and gestational waters. Bishop’s meticulous cataloging of detail resembles an ark manifest: inventories of sensation and relation that conserve endangered textures of experience. Simultaneously, the letters reveal a gestational logic in which alcohol and other corporeal fluids function as amniotic media—both preservative and corrosive—through which new relational forms take shape.

Jessica Chiriboga - Burning Issues: A History of Fire Management in the San Gabriel Mountains and Metropolitan Los Angeles (1892-1938)

In 1892, U.S. President Benjamin Harrison designated a national forest reserve in the San Gabriel Mountains north of Los Angeles. The reserve protected the watersheds that supplied the growing metropolis with its most fundamental need, water. Los Angeles's most prominent developers and politicians believed the reserve would curtail fires set by shepherders and campers that threatened agricultural and residential development in the range's foothills. Such fires denuded mountain slopes and limited the regeneration of local groundwater sources. Following the reserve's designation, this paper examines how fire management practices in the San Gabriel Mountains were shaped by efforts to safeguard continued metropolitan growth, even as human-caused fires in the range and its foothills increased during the early twentieth century.

The U.S. Forest Service and the fire departments of the city and county of Los Angeles jointly advanced a policy of fire suppression, working to extinguish fires as quickly as possible. Their efforts were supplemented by the Civilian Conservation Corps, whose workers constructed an extensive network of trails, roads, and fire breaks during the Great Depression. Yet, increased reliance on technical expertise and a striking expansion of firefighting manpower and infrastructure failed to contain the year-by-year increase in human-caused fires in the range and the foothill communities at its base. Although a devastating flood in 1938 prompted most resort owners and residents to abandon their mountain settlements, recurring fires and floods and alternative development proposals did not deter continued development in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Susan C. Cook - Hearing American Music in Glasgow, 1840-1910: Sonic Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy

What did American music mean in Glasgow? What did audiences hear? Who did they hear? How did these imported and recreated sounds shape understandings of American culture?

This paper answers these questions by drawing on primary source materials in Glasgow's Mitchell Library, including chapbooks, trade journals, published music, programs for the 1901 Exhibition, and the scrapbooks of Glasgow Herald music critic Robert W. Turnbull. The results reveal how blackface minstrelsy shaped the musical experiences of Glaswegians across class and venue, offering new evidence of the transatlantic power of Black music.

Blackface minstrelsy had been part of imported entertainments since the mid-1800s, and Glasgow, with ties to the U. S going back to the Virginia colonies, thoroughly embraced it. Chapbooks from the 1840s provide early evidence of U.S.-based minstrel tunes that continued to circulate through James Spiers Kerr's *Merry Melodies* as local performers donned blackface. American composers and performers such as John Phillips Sousa, in residence to close the 1901 Exposition, and Bert Williams, George Walker and Aida Overton, stars of the all-black musical *In Dahomey* (1903), both reinvigorated and resisted the practices while continuing to meet audience desires for syncopated Black music. This paper concludes with an exploration of the reception of American music by the Glasgow Herald's Robert W. Turnbull. While Turnbull focused on the performances by the Choral and Orchestral Union, he could not help but hear with ears conditioned by minstrelsy, through which he judged the U. S. as too commercial and second rate.

Amy M Cools - 'Get the Free Colored People Away:' Belonging and Identity in Black American Discourse Regarding Colonization and Emigration in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

Debates among leading black Americans over movements and projects for colonization – such as those to Sierra Leone and Liberia – and emigration – such as those to Haiti and Canada – in the early- to mid-1800s frequently centred on the question of whether black Americans were truly American – that is, belonged in America or had an American identity – or belonged elsewhere, either in an African ‘homeland’ or another place where they could make a new life free of oppression, usually in community with others of African descent. While black Americans often initially saw these efforts as very different in terms of intent (motivated by racial prejudice vs. concern for well-being, for example), justification (black Americans should leave the racially oppressive United States vs. they should stay there and continue the process of liberation that had already begun), agency (voluntary vs. coerced removal), and effect (undermining slavery by creating vibrant black self-governed communities vs. strengthening it by removing free black people’s destabilizing effect on institutionalized slavery), many came to consider them as two sides of the same coin: a larger project of oppression and expatriation rather than liberation and repatriation. This paper will conclude by briefly discussing how this debate influenced ideas of African-American indigeneity – that they are a new, indigenous American people and therefore belonged in America (as Samuel Cornish suggested and James McCune Smith more explicitly argued), and early forms of Pan-Africanism – which stressed the unity of all African-descended peoples (such as the 'negro nationality' promoted by Henry Highland Garnet).

Scarlett Croft - Petroleum and the Pentagon: Untangling Ecological and Military Devastation in Jayne Cortez's Poetic Imaginaries

The US department of defence is the single largest institutional user of petroleum in the world: yet their exceptional output of greenhouse gases has slipped past monitoring frameworks applied to other government bodies. Jayne Cortez's eco-poetry lays bare the dependency between the military industrial complex and the petroleum market. Spanning forty-three years of writing, from *Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Wares* (1969) to her final collection *Fishing in the History* (2012), her poems repeatedly trace the infrastructural enmeshment between militarisation and oil, considering the intertwined fantasies of complete military power and the total oversight of the earth's oil resource. This paper considers how Cortez's poems draw upon blues forms, as she repeatedly returns to and expands upon a central ecological riff in her work. This riff blurs the semantic and cognitive distinctions between military occupation, sexual conquest and oil dependencies, daring to envision where the dreams that animate the present order's imaginary of freedom will end up if followed through to their fullest conclusion. By frequently drawing upon aspects of horror and surrealism, her poetry de-sanitises ecological writing; ensuring the structures of racial capitalism are traced in nuclear wasteland, infested bodies and sexual desire.

Tom Cryer - Teaching Progress, Policing Critiques: Reflections on Racial Liberalism and Historical Knowledge in the Mid-Twentieth-Century United States

This paper situates the historical profession as a key site in the negotiation and consolidation of racial liberalism in mid-twentieth-century America. Specifically, it revisits the author's recent *Journal of American Studies* article to demonstrate a central paradox of racial liberalism: its simultaneous promotion of Black history as proof of American democratic vitality and its suppression of historical analyses that documented ongoing anti-Black violence and structural inequalities.

Focusing on the 1963 Emancipation Centennial, it first analyses how the Kennedy administration sought to censor the historian John Hope Franklin's drafts for the government's chief commemorative initiative, the pamphlet *Freedom to the Free*. While formally commissioned to narrate a century of civil rights since 1863, Franklin's historically grounded critiques of betrayal, stagnation, and violent retrenchment were excised through government revisions. The resulting text exemplified the hubris of postwar racial liberalism, offering instead a narrative of linear racial "progress" that championed Black adjustment and assimilation into a purportedly ever-more deracialised national project.

This paper then zooms out from this case study, situating it alongside the broader professional, intellectual, and institutional mechanisms through which racial liberalism structured historical knowledge. In particular, it centres higher education as a key arena in which racial liberal ideas were promoted and perpetuated, shaping how generations of scholars, students, and policymakers understood Black progress, citizenship, and history. Racial liberalism and higher education, it argues, converged to define the limits of acceptable Black intellectual practice and production, a tension that endures in today's increasingly fractious debates over race, curricula, and public memory.

Matthew Cunneen - "...A lawless, drunken rabble..." Patterns of violence, abuse and the proclivity for massacre within the United States Volunteer companies during the Mexican American War, 1846-1848.

Manifest Destiny and the Mexican-American War are intrinsically intertwined. The ideas of a divine mandate to spread from coast to coast, saw the United States launch its largest external war of the century on its southern neighbour with dubious legality. 73,000 volunteer citizens-soldiers were employed during the war, with hundreds of thousands more volunteering. They dwarfed the regular army by a ratio of 2:1 and many found service during the war a prerequisite for political advancement. However, accounts and reports paint a picture of these volunteers as a drunken rabble, murdering and raping in the name of American exceptionalism. Contrary to their depictions as the vanguard of American ideals at the head of a civilising army of democracy made manifest. Through the accounts of regular soldiers such as D.H. Hill, newspaper reports of the wanton violence and the correspondence of the volunteers themselves, the paper intends to show a pattern of violence and excess inflicted on the Mexican people in name of Manifest Destiny. Showing how such barbarity was often excused and overlooked by politicians and commanders alike as a byproduct of war or even the righteous punishment for opposing American expansion. Exploring how the ideals of Manifest Destiny permeated these volunteer companies and created a culture of accepted political violence and the role immigration played in the need to be seen advancing the American cause and why this differed compared with the lack of such reports of violence within regular United States military servicemen.

Gemma Curto - Erasure and Braiding Beyond the Human in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*

Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010) reimagines Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* (1934; trans. 1963) through erasure, producing a text that reconfigures representations of interspecies relations and the boundaries between human and nonhuman life. This paper argues that kinship between human and nonhuman animals emerges not through explicit metamorphosis but through adjacency and shared postures. The die-cut form materialises this shift. As words are read in print and the gaps are exposed, the reader assembles connections across layers of texts, producing connections that align with Thierry Groensteen's (2007) model of 'braiding' in graphic narrative. In this way, *Tree of codes* draws attention to how meaning is generated between gaps rather than within a linear narrative voice. *Tree of Codes* decentres human subjecthood and elicits participatory modes of reading that reflect the entanglements of multispecies life.

The paper situates *Tree of Codes* within debates on biocentrism. Biocentrism, understood here as an approach that recognises the intrinsic value of all forms of life, provides a framework for reading Foer's text beyond anthropocentric categories. Using David Herman's (2018) conception of a biocentric narrative, I argue that *Tree of Codes* adopts a biocentric stance both thematically and formally. Through the technique of erasure and the active participation it requires of readers, the text reconfigures human–nonhuman relations and opens up possibilities for modes of ecological awareness grounded in interdependence and continuity.

Keywords:

erasure; braiding; Anthropocene; adjacent; Jonathan Safran Foer

Anna De Vivo – A poet in the workshop: Jayne Cortez’s notes and sketches for Bob Blackburn’s printmaking workshop, 1983

This paper unpacks the significance of Jayne Cortez’s involvement in Bob Blackburn’s printmaking workshop as a collaborator, cataloguer and critic. By referring to Cortez’s notes and sketches she recorded while involved (held in her papers at Schomburg, NYPL), we can better understand what activity occurred in this space: which artists worked there, what materials they used, and how these mixed-media collaborations informed her poetic practice. In doing so, I suggest that Cortez’s collected notes on print production, all compiled for a speculative catalogue entitled ‘In a Stream of Ink’ (which would instead form the title of her poem dedicated to the workshop), helps form this image of the poet as a curator and art-critic. As Hal Foster suggests, the premise of the archives in art is ‘institutive’ and ‘legislative’; with part of its purpose being to reinscribe silenced representations, I argue for the archival impulse behind Cortez’s insight into this space as she offers us a glimpse into one of the sidelined hotspots which informed modernist art practice. As curator Deborah Cullen has described, Blackburn’s workshop is an example of a ‘contact zone’ where ‘individuals hailing from diverse homelands are free to dialogue, experiment, and collaborate’ with Cortez and her husband, Melvin Edwards too working there from 1983 onwards. I will end by considering how Cortez internalises and reproduces a language of making which emerged from what she witnessed, of which we can trace from her notes on these prints, and the enduring effects of this style.

Lewis Defrates - US World War I Veterans in Global War and Revolution

Much has been made of the rhetoric that surrounded the American Expeditionary Forces, particularly the role it played in assimilating immigrants into the American polity. As one poster produced by the Committee on Public Information put it, military service made “Americans All” out of a diverse ray of foreign-born servicemen. But comparatively little attention has been paid to the role these veterans played in the military conflagrations that followed the armistice. In Ireland, Russia, Turkey and Spain, American citizens wielded their military training and experience to advance the national causes of their countries of birth. Through their involvement, the U.S. was enveloped in the “Greater War” that stretched long into the “interwar” period. Moreover, when they ran into trouble overseas, veterans wrote to American consuls, frequently pointing to their military service as proof of their ultimate allegiance to the United States. This paper explores the complex dual loyalties that US AEF veterans carried with them as they travelled the world and the response of the state that they appealed to for protection. While the State Department disapproved of the attempts made by veterans to leverage their citizenship to gain assistance – according to the U.S. consul at Belfast, claimants tended to “bleat for American protection” whenever they were detained – the bonds of service made it difficult for the government to completely disavow its stated interest in the wellbeing of its overseas citizens.

Charlotte Disley - The Conservative Mind in a Haunted Town: Russell Kirk’s St Andrews in the Origins of the American Conservative Order

This paper investigates how a key founder of the American Conservative Movement, Russell Kirk, used the geography and politics of post-war St Andrews to create his ideal conservatism. Drawing from his published work, such as his book creatively titled *St Andrews* and his unpublished DLitt dissertation, this paper argues that Kirk's time in St Andrews reframed what a 'good conservative town' should look like: small, steeped in tradition, strictly ordered, and imbued with what he termed the 'moral imagination'. The analysis situates this description within the broader mid-century project of American conservative self-invention, showing how Kirk leveraged the material landscape of St Andrews to legitimise strict social hierarchy. The paper further explores how Kirk's belief in the supernatural shaped his ideology, specifically how he believed that ghosts reinforced his vision of social order, grounded in ancestral presence and inherited moral authority. The paper touches on how Kirk marries his own identity as a first-generation student to someone who spoke openly about his poverty to someone who could inherit the moral authority of established institutions like St Andrews. Ultimately, the paper argues that Kirk's St Andrews is less a reflection of the town's reality and more a rhetorical device that allowed him to reconcile his own social mobility with his political philosophy, which relied on hierarchy. His romanticisation of St Andrews and Scotland more broadly became a template for imagining what conservatism should look like in America, an ideal space where tradition remains undisturbed and the past remains literally alive.

Andrew Dix - The Transatlantic Migrations of Saoirse Ronan

Comprising part of a larger project tracking the itineraries of selected film stars in contemporary globalised conditions, this paper aims to bring to one of the newest generation of Irish American

screen actors the kind of analysis, attuned to geographical and cultural mobility, practised in studies such as Ruth Barton's *Acting Irish in America: From Fitzgerald to Farrell* (Irish Academic Press, 2006) and Barton's edited collection *Screening Irish-America: Representing Irish-America in Film and Television* (Irish Academic Press, 2009). Multiple trajectories followed to and fro across the Atlantic by Ronan will be pursued in detail and assessed for their modellings of identity in the Irish cultural diaspora of the present. Geographically, the paper will travel from Ronan's birth in the US to her upbringing in Ireland, then back-and-forth again in open-ended transoceanic journeying; cinematically, the itinerary will range from Ronan's US projects such as *Lady Bird* (2017), *Little Women* (2019) and two Wes Anderson films (2014, 2021) to UK-centred work such as *Ammonite* (2020) and *Blitz* (2024). Unsurprisingly, Ronan's work in *Brooklyn* (2015), adapted from Colm Tóibín's 2009 novel of Irish American experience, will play a role. Suggestive on its own terms, I hope, the paper may also enter fruitfully into dialogue with other proposed contributions to the conference that aim to explore transatlantic dynamics from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Chris Dixon - "The Pause that Refreshes": Preconceptions and Experiences of R&R

The “friendly invasion” of nearly 300,000 Americans on R&R in Australia during the Vietnam War constitutes a substantial, albeit neglected legacy of the conflict. Across dozens of oral history interviews and memoirs, US servicemen recall with fondness their week-long respite in a nation that was both reassuringly familiar and safely distinct. With their preconceptions of Australia framed by racialised and sexualised imaginaries, and comforted by the prospect of spending time in a predominantly “white” nation, white American servicemen were candid about their desire to enjoy the company of Australian women. At the same time, perceptions of Australian racism and immigration exclusion framed the expectations of African American servicemen. Reality, however, was more complicated, and the experiences of Americans were far more diverse than popular narratives suggest. Perhaps surprisingly, the experiences of African American and Latino servicemen in Australia were frequently welcoming and non-discriminatory. Reinforcing scholarly findings regarding the reception of Black servicemen in Australia in World War Two, during the Vietnam War individual Australians were more colour-blind in their everyday interactions than their governments.

Aisha Djelid - Enslaved children, resistance, and refusal in the antebellum South

Enslaved people across the South resisted slavery in small and large ways, ranging from violence and arson to illicit parties and absenteeism. But are these all distinctly adult forms of resistance? Despite comprising half of the population, children's involvement in resistance remains understudied. Contributing to an emerging scholarship on childhood by exploring concepts of agency, resistance, and refusal, this paper aims to answer: how did enslaved children resist their enslavement? How did enslaved children develop under an institution where terror was a method of control? Is it more appropriate to discuss "refusal" instead of "resistance"? What are the political implications of these terms? Were these methods unique to children or similar to adults, thus representing the liminal space and process of "becoming" between childhood and adulthood? What are the long-term political legacies? This paper ultimately argues that enslaved children resisted emotionally and physically and contends that children fought a triple burden of age, race, and gender that influenced their every-day experience of racism and "otherization" well into the twenty-first century.

Lindsay Elizabeth Doran - 'Pageantry and Showmanship': Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School and the Rhetoric of Paternalism in Michigan Newspapers

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Michigan newspapers frequently mentioned the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (MPIIBS) during its operation from 1893 to 1934.

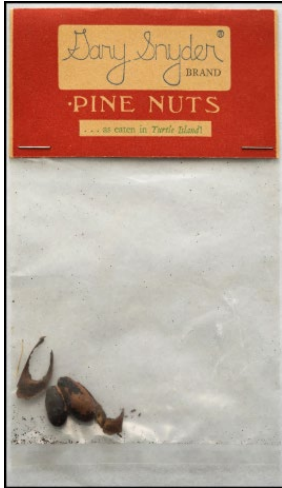
The school, constructed upon the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe's Isabella County Indian Reservation and designed to facilitate assimilation of Indigenous children into white Christian-American society, was often treated as an attraction by surrounding communities; including organizations of day-trip campus tours, performances by student bands, and highly-anticipated sports matches between MPIIBS and regional schools. This critical analysis of discourse found within MPIIBS publications and local newspapers such as The Mount Pleasant Times, Isabella County Enterprise, Clare Sentinel, and Provemont Courier argues that rhetoric used in school publications informed and enforced relationships between newspapers, Indigenous students, and surrounding non-Indigenous communities of northern-central Michigan. Additionally examined are presences of paternalistic or settler colonialist rhetoric within newspapers that may have been intentionally utilized to create perceptions of paternalistic bonds formed by MPIIBS staff and non-Indigenous community members towards Indigenous students.

Clare Elliott - Beginnings and Borders in Phillis Wheatley Peters's *Poems* (1773)

Joseph Rezek in 'The Racialization of Print' (2020) has outlined 'the essentializing phase' in print culture, during which, over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'a published book by a single author was understood as capable of representing the essential nature of an entire race of people.' It's easy to think of Phillis Wheatley Peters's *Poems on Various*

Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773) as a primary instance of this phase, as she has often been positioned as the foremother of African-American writing. However, as well as being essentializing, this way of framing *Poems* limits our understanding of Wheatley Peters's connection to literature and literary circles, both real and imagined, that crossed national and societal dividing lines. In this paper, I identify various significant transhistorical, cross-racial, and transatlantic solidarities that shaped Wheatley Peters's poetry collection and its legacies. She was an African poet whose one published volume was financed, and influenced, by an evangelical, aristocratic, white sponsor connecting her firmly to England and to the evangelical Atlantic. As an inaugurating figure of Black US writing, her nationality is complex and hybrid, and *Poems* is a book so full of transnational connections that it is arguably misleading to think of it as an 'American text' at all, as my paper will explore.

Nina Ellis - The National Endowment for the Arts and the 1970s Bay Area Publishing Renaissance



In the second half of the twentieth century, the National Endowment for the Arts transformed the United States' literary landscape by allocating resources to writers and publishers across a range of forms, genres and belief systems. This conference paper focuses on the 1970s, and on the San Francisco Bay Area, where many radical small publishers won NEA support: surprising, perhaps, given their subversive missions, and, in many cases, their refusal to pay taxes on ideological grounds.

But why fund these avant-garde publishers? In this paper, my hypothesis is that the NEA's celebration of 'freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry', which included its amplification of dissenting radical voices, was intended to contribute to the Cold War project of national branding around ideas of creative liberty. Seen through the activities of the NEA, the USA was a free country, which underwrote literature across the boundaries of ideological affiliation. Although NEA-funded chronologies have argued that it never sought to 'align itself with a socio-political agenda', the underlying implication was that the USA's global rivals did not share its ideals of creative liberty.

This conference paper takes the small press Zephyrus Image (1970–1982) as a case study, analyzing how NEA funding enabled and shaped its publications, despite its explicit anti-government stance — and how the press pushed back against the NEA's mission to fund works that would endure. Zephyrus Image developed a distinctive personal style which always emphasized ephemerality. Their NEA-funded publications included pamphlets, leaflets, newspapers, magazines, survey forms, bumper stickers, posters, and even products like the 'Gary Snyder Brand Pine Nuts' (above, 1975, making reference to the avant-garde poet), which were intended to be 'an echo of the time: the 1970s', rather than making any claim on longevity.

Ece Ergin - Re-membering MMIWG2S+ in Indigenous Urban Spaces in Tasha Spillett and Natasha Donovan's *Surviving the City* Series

This talk intersects at the junction of Indigenous Feminism, Comics Studies, and Urban Studies to explore how Tasha Spillett and Natasha Donovan's graphic narrative, *Surviving the City* series, showcases that the cityscape accentuates the ways Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit

people can connect with their communities, form Pan-Indian identities, and take part in activism while commemorating community members who passed away. As a pedagogical series, *Surviving the City* is framed as a coming-of-age graphic narrative that centers around two Indigenous adolescents, Miikwan and Dez, who navigate the urban landscape. Presenting a kaleidoscope of different issues that many contemporary Indigenous youths face, the graphic narrative offers an avenue through which Indigenous youth can find themselves represented in comics while settler youth can learn about Indigenous history and experiences. Utilizing Renya K. Ramirez's Native Hubs as a theoretical framework that focuses on Indigenous urban experiences and women's active roles within them, this talk will negotiate how Spillett and Donovan reimagine the city of Winnipeg and its urban landscape as Indigenous spaces of activism against gender-based violence. It will showcase how the Indigenous youth can connect with their communities and ancestral roots outside of their reserves/reservations as the narrative explores themes such as MMIWG2S+, the legacy of the residential schools, and the foster system.

Cassandra Falke - "Revealing what's not there:" Empathy, Disability and Refugee Fiction

This presentation advances an understanding of readerly empathy with implications for disability studies and refugee fiction. I will focus on a scene from *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, by the queer Vietnamese-American refugee author Ocean Vuong. The novel is presented as a letter to the narrator's illiterate mother, Hong or Ma, who works at a nail salon. In one scene, a client with a prosthetic leg explains that she can still feel her absent foot and ashamedly asks Ma to massage

it. As she massages and cares for her client's absent foot, Ma treats the amputee's subjective experience of embodiment as more real than her own perception. In doing so, she makes the amputee's subjective experience visible for her son, without violating the primacy of the woman's en fleshed experience or obscuring the difference between that experience and body as perceivable by others. I will use this scene to describe empathy as the basis for public, embodied acts of bearing witness to another's experience, not merely private emotions.

This phenomenologically-informed description will then be used to intervene in scholarly debates about reading fiction as a mode of entering into solidarity with disabled people and with refugees. It may seem problematic to link disability and refugeehood in this way, but insights from disability studies can be useful for thinking about refugee fiction because the dynamics of exclusion in American society hinge on visibility for both populations in similar ways.

Lisa Featherstone - Rape and R&R: Americans in Australia during the Vietnam conflict

From 1967 and 1971, some 280,000 United States military personnel visited Sydney, Australia, on 'Rest and Recreation' (R&R) leave. Designed to offer the men a temporary respite from the war, the troops enjoyed a range of activities from the beaches to the nightlife of the infamous red-light district in Kings Cross. This presentation examines the complex relationships that underpinned R&R, exploring the tensions around gender, race and foreign policy. To do so, it draws on archival records pertaining to the alleged rape of an Australian woman by an American serviceman while on R&R, a case which had the potential to be a substantial disruptor in American-Australian relations. As well as speaking to the racial tensions brought about by the

presence of African American servicemen in Sydney, this case also sheds light on the way victims of rape were treated in Australia in this time period. Using archival evidence, this article reveals the tensions between individual crimes and the wider war effort, arguing that the alleged crime was understood in terms of the relationship between the Allies, rather than for its impact on women and soldiers.

Yelimska Crespo Feliciano - Land, Body, and Sound: Afro-Puerto Rican healing practices

This paper examines Yelimska's own interdisciplinary practice as an Afro-Puerto Rican artist, educator, farmer, and cantaora/bailaora of bomba, highlighting how her work generates decolonial possibilities at the intersections of land, art, and embodied memory. Drawing from her training in agroecology, education, and the visual arts, her sculptures, linoleum engravings, and botanical illustrations engage agriculture and sustainability not as aesthetic metaphors but as grounded epistemologies through which Afro-Puerto Rican histories are remembered, cultivated, and defended. Simultaneously, her long-standing participation in bomba—the island's foundational

Afro-diasporic musical and dance tradition—anchors her practice in a communal archive of resistance, care, and cultural continuity. She will also speak to how work confronts racial discrimination, gendered violence, and the daily erasures produced by coloniality, while also offering pathways for healing and repair. Through community workshops in botanical drawing, agricultural pedagogy, and bomba performance, she develops accessible, practice-based forms of knowledge that challenge institutional boundaries around who produces research and how. Ultimately, her contribution to the panel demonstrates how Afro-Puerto Rican artistic and ecological practices generate living forms of decolonial memory—insisting on art, land, and embodied sound as technologies for collective liberation.

Katie Fitzpatrick - Liberal Feminism in the Dobbs Era: Abortion, Eugenics, and Middlebrow Fiction

Published just five months before the Dobbs vs. Jackson decision, and centered on a besieged abortion clinic in Boston, Jennifer Haigh's novel *Mercy Street* offers a timely, liberal defense of reproductive rights. Through the character of Victor – a virulently racist, pro-life crusader who seeks to increase white reproduction in particular – Haigh demonstrates an awareness of the long (and continuing) mutual imbrication of eugenics and American anti-abortion politics (Beisel and Kay, 2004). Yet Haigh's most sympathetic character – a white woman working as a counsellor at an abortion clinic – also betrays more subtle eugenic attitudes towards the reproduction of the poor. In this way, I will argue that the novel continues an equally long American tradition of feminist

eugenic thought. As scholars like Angela Davis (1981) and Dorothy Roberts (1997) have shown, early feminist crusaders like Margaret Sanger saw birth control as, in part, a way to limit the reproduction of 'undesirable' populations. Davis also shows that, in the 1960s and 70s, pro-choice feminist movements advocated for white middle-class women's right not to have children while largely ignoring the coerced sterilizations of poor, disabled, and racialized women. As my presentation will show, Haigh's novel embodies the most recent version of this ideological formation, reflecting Clintonian liberalism's simultaneous embrace of pro-choice politics and skepticism towards the beneficiaries of the welfare state. Merging historical and literary analysis, my paper will critique the limitations of the feminist tradition that Haigh's novel represents and point towards "reproductive justice" as a more promising alternative.

Christian Frantz - The Great Gay American Novel? Deconstructive Bisexuality and Queer Desire in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* (2015)

In 2015, Hanya Yanagihara published *A Little Life*. Over the years, the novel has gained notoriety on social media. Goodreads reviews describe readers' experiences of feeling anguish and sadness upon being exposed to the protagonist Jude's suffering. Similarly, on TikTok, readers are shown to sob after finishing the novel. The novel was hailed as the 'great gay novel', even though the main character and his life partner have never self-identified as gay. Indeed, Jude's sexuality can more accurately be portrayed within a paradigm of deconstructive or non-restricted sexuality. In this paper, which is due to be published in a collection entitled *Bisexuality and Popular Culture* (Palgrave), I argue that the novel employs the narrative conventions of the Anti-Bildungsroman and assigns sexuality a deconstructive approach which takes into consideration factors beyond the gender of the sexual object choice. A distinctly American novel in the ways it

treats gender, sexuality, and race through an employment of “post” – Jude is post-racial, post-gender, post-sexual because his experiences constitute a mesh of ambiguousness. Ultimately, this paper seeks to address the claim that *A Little Life* is the great gay novel as a mischaracterisation of Jude’s sexual subjectivity and employs a Sedgwickian deconstructive analysis to consider trauma, guilt, and commitment to be equally important factors in sexual identity formation as the gender of the sexual or romantic object choice.

Gregg French - Remembering Spanish Contributions to the American War of Independence: Ongoing Transatlantic Endeavor

Authentic and fabricated representations of the historical bonds between the United States and Spain are scattered across the United States and the country’s colonial empire in the form of statues, plaques, monuments, and memorials. These representations began to emerge in the immediate post-Revolutionary Era and have since reinforced historical narratives that position Spain as being integral to the founding of the United States. Likewise, since the late nineteenth century, influential Spanish figures have sought to bolster these interpretations of the past to draw themselves closer to the United States and counter negative beliefs associated with the Black Legend, the Spanish-America War, and the Franco dictatorship.

This project will explore how representatives of the United States and Spain have memorialized Spanish contributions to the American War of Independence. Existing at the intersection of the fields of public history and collective memory, this work will juxtapose the monuments associated with the Revolutionary Era with those of earlier Spanish figures. More specifically, the study will consider who supported these forms of commemoration; when were

they erected and why; as well as how they inform our understanding of the collective memory of Spanish contributions to the American cause during the conflict. This will be done to continue to foreground the shared, transatlantic history of the two nations and to broaden our awareness of the diverse iterations of the United States's Hispanic foundations.

Mariane Gallet - "I'm a nationalist": Negotiating Contemporary Conversational Ethics in Claudia Rankine's *Just Us* (2020)

Are we beyond an ethics of conversation? In 2020, in the wake of a presidency intent on destroying individual and national memories of genocide and enslavement, the "America First" agenda revived a nationalist and protectionist agenda embodied domestically by a radical roll back of civil rights. W.E.B. Du Bois' 1947 petition to the United Nations addressing systemic racial discriminations in the United States as human rights' violations indeed contextualised his plea in the global defense of democracy. This paper examines the (im)possibilities of finding ethics of conversation in this American landscape through Claudia Rankine's 2020 *Just Us, An American Conversation*. Publishing this lyric-visual-essay three years into a presidency she describes, quoting President Donald Trump, as "nationalist" (148) and only a month before President Joe Biden's election, Rankine investigates the hold of white supremacy in US democracy and questions what communal terms of engagement are required when interpersonal trust is structurally undermined by political authority. Rankine engages with the structural, not just individual, dimensions of racism. Moving through and beyond afro-pessimist theory (Mbembe,

Wilderson), I apply an interdisciplinary “systems lens” (Rose 2024) tracing how and in what forms racist structures persist. I develop this framework to examine the perpetuation of systemic racism by analysing how narrative modes of memory and history in Rankine’s *Just Us* function as systemic critiques of these legacies. I consider Rankine’s discursive engagements with the contemporary and multimedia archival narration of systemic racism as interventions into the digital treatment of spectacular acts of racist violence.

Giorgia Garilli - Care, Curation, and the Queer Archive in Jenn Shapland’s *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers*

This paper reads Jenn Shapland’s *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers* (2020) as illness memoir and queer historiography. It explores the lively interplay between the explicit preoccupation with care and caregiving that Shapland traces in Carson McCullers’ archive and the complex care dynamics inherent in Shapland’s project of archival enquiry, biography, and autobiography. In doing so, it takes up and complicates the growing prominence of McCullers’ queer life in biography (Mary V. Dearborn’s *Carson McCullers: A Life*, 2024) and scholarship (La Shonda Mims’ *Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists*, 2022) to unearth the literary and curatorial processes through which this version of McCullers comes into being in the contemporary imagination. Foregrounding Shapland’s somatic encounters with McCullers’ archive, my paper will address the implications of a recent proliferation of literary scholarship on touch for contemporary queer auto/biography, and will confront the growing ambivalence in literatures of care. Through my reading of Shapland, I explore how archival inquiry and curatorial practice unfold as troubled forms of care in their own right, and how this caregiving dynamic extends

across time—towards McCullers as Shapland’s subject; Shapland’s younger self; the present writing body; and the imagined future reader.

Molly Geidel - “The Development Film in the Americas”

Molly Geidel’s “The Development Film in the Americas” traces the rise and fall of the development film, an overlooked film genre that circulated widely from the 1940s through the 1970s. Geidel remaps the post-45 period by tracking how leftist New Deal documentary projects and aesthetics get captured by the Cold War agenda of capitalist modernization, before running out of steam when faced with the failures of many capitalist modernization projects and the overt violence of others.

Graham Glovka - Old Times Are Not Forgotten: Southern Mythmaking in The Band's *The Band* (1969) and Randy Newman's *Good Old Boys* (1974)

In the decades since the release of both The Band's eponymous sophomore album and Randy Newman's *Good Old Boys*, there has been much discussion and controversy surrounding their subject matter. I will argue that *Good Old Boys* is Randy Newman's response to the Band's mythologizing of the South, from a "Southerner." I'll begin by analyzing both albums separately and then in conversation with each other. My analysis of *The Band* will focus on the place of the South within the broader concept of the album and the effect of the Band's composition of mostly Canadians on their mythologizing the south – with special attention to the song "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" as it relates to this myth. Then I will discuss Randy Newman's concept album *Good Old Boys*, an album that opposes the mythologizing of the south, by both Northerners and Southerners. I will focus heavily on the use of satire to achieve this, particularly in the most contentious song on the album "Rednecks" a song, which despite its shortcomings in its use of insensitive language, provides insight into this mythologizing

Emily Green - Number's up: Empowerment in the underground economy and the resistance of Black policy bankers against white organised crime

During the early twentieth century, many formal financial institutions in the US, such as banks, refused to serve Black customers. For those who wanted to “invest” their money, an alternative emerged in the form of illegal lotteries such as the “numbers game”. Policy rackets were not only a popular recreational activity, but successful enterprises were also often the largest employers within Black neighbourhoods. For players, runners, and policy bankers alike, the numbers game offered different levels of economic agency to communities which were otherwise overlooked and faced discrimination in legitimate enterprise.

This paper looks at two leading Black policy bankers; Stephanie “Madame” St Clair, who operated in Harlem, and Theodore “Teddy” Roe, who operated in Chicago. Both were known for their generosity within their respective communities and examples of the “Robin Hood” side of organised crime, and both were also targets of white mobsters who sought to take over their enterprises. Dutch Schultz gave St Clair a lot of bother, but not as much as she gave him. For Roe, his threat came from the Chicago Outfit, but he was able to use the community loyalty he had cultivated as a tool of resistance. This paper will explore how St Clair and Roe act as symbols of Black empowerment and illuminate the dynamics of underground economies, as well as discussing the debate surrounding “respectability” of illicit activity in Black communities.

Nicholas Griffin – ‘Pure VISION’: Kathy Acker’s American Dream

This paper proposes to examine the representation of ontic and disrupted mental states in the work of Kathy Acker, indexing these concerns to the wider question of the American Dream. This will be done through a reading of her novel, *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984), and its representation of US commodity culture as an act of collective dreamwork.

Acker, an American but also transatlantic figure, has often been the topic of scholarship on questions of madness, formal experimentalism, and bodily alienation. Yet, these concerns are often divorced from questions of Acker’s positioning as an American writer, and, further, her depiction of the US as an archetypal site for these literary concerns. I will argue that Acker’s writing engages directly with distinctly American themes. From her use of plagiarism as critique of the right to private property – land, culture, and bodies – to her rendering of a violent fantasy of freedom and self-creation, Acker captures what she considers the troubling unconscious of American society. In *Blood & Guts*, the concerns listed above are present and delivered in a bildungsroman that parodies self-determination and the vision of self-made individuality. In their place, a fragmented subject searching for authenticity.

In raising these convergences, Acker enters into dialogue with the American canon, a tradition which in her final interview she finds originating in radical ideas and practise.

Julia Guarneri - Energy and clean clothes in U.S. households, 1920-1980

Across the middle decades of the twentieth century, residents of the United States practiced the most energy- and resource-intensive laundry habits in the world. Early twentieth-century soap advertising stirred up so much demand that it put pressure on supplies of the natural fats—lard, suet, palm oil, and olive oil—used to make soap. In the 1950s, the major soap companies instead began to synthesize detergent from fossil fuels such as coal tar and petroleum.

Different kinds of energy substitution took place, meanwhile, in the laundering process. Where people used to grate bar soap into wash water, factories now blasted detergent into cooling towers, creating powder. Where laundresses and homemakers once hauled water, tended fires, and then scrubbed, stirred, wrung, and hung linens, electric washing machines and tumble dryers took over.

With visibly clean clothes much more easily achieved—and with washlines newly prohibited in many suburban and urban neighborhoods—smell became a new signifier for clean. By the 1970s most Americans associated the synthesized perfumes of detergent and dryer sheets, rather than the whiff of laundry hung outdoors, with cleanliness. Laundry's seeming divorce from nature, seasons, and the outdoors was complete.

Midcentury laundry required hydroelectric dams and oil rigs; it produced algae blooms in the Great Lakes. Yet power lines, plumbing, branding, and packaging effectively hid laundry resource use. Most Americans did not know the original source of either their detergent or their electricity, and did not see any byproduct of their laundering other than dryer lint.

Silvia Guselli - Scots and the “New Man”: Crèvecoeur’s Literary Vision of Scottish Migration in 18th-Century America

This paper explores the migration of Scottish and Scotch-Irish settlers to America during the eighteenth century, with a particular focus on their literary representations in the works of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. Crèvecoeur devoted several of his sketches to Scottish migrants, portraying them as industrious and resilient settlers who sought new beginnings in America after escaping poverty and the harsh conditions of their homeland. This study examines three such portrayals: the well-known episode of “Andrew the Hebridean” from *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), a narrative that reflects “the story of many an immigrant who penetrated to the hospitable backcountry” (Parrington 2017, 145); the lesser-known depiction of a Scotsman in the sketch “Socialburg” (1787), which depicts the decision to found, along with other British and European migrants, an egalitarian community; and the account of Mr. J.U. in *Voyage dans le Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'état de New York* (1801), who recounts his personal emigration experience from poverty to a bountiful new life. Collectively, these depictions reveal Crèvecoeur’s forward-looking understanding of the Scottish settler as playing a major role in the texture of backcountry and Appalachian settlement. Given that the Scottish and Scots-Irish constituted one of the most significant groups of the American backcountry, Crèvecoeur’s sustained attention to them reflects both his personal experience among Scottish migrants as “a resident of Pennsylvania and of Ulster County in the province of New York” (Parrington 2017, 141) and his recognition of their vital contributions to the formation of American society. A close reading of these texts offers deeper insight into Crèvecoeur’s oeuvre and into the broader cultural role of Scottish migration in shaping eighteenth-century American identity.

Emma Hall - State Architects of Exceptionalism: How Texas and California Embed American Exceptionalism in US History Curricula

The salience of the discourse of American exceptionalism in presidential speeches and policy pronouncements at the national level is widely recognised, but its use by states in places that reach much closer to the American public remains less examined. Through a critical discourse analysis of state curriculum frameworks and legislation in Texas and California, this paper demonstrates that both states imbue US history and civics teaching with a discourse of American uniqueness and superiority, while forgiving the nation's sins as exceptions to this exceptionalism.

The Texas education framework is awash with overt politicized language and content choices directing students to understand the concept of American exceptionalism as a reality. While California's documents show a more measured approach, with exceptionalism as a narrative present throughout US history, the nation's values are presented as the envy of the world. While the national belief in American exceptionalism may be on the decline, members of the educational infrastructure are directing teachers and textbook publishers to perpetuate the discourse of American exceptionalism in history classrooms across the country. Following Donald Trump's re-election, the subsequent reinstatement of the overtly patriotic and at times inaccurate 1776 Commission, and an array of southern states on course to ban every 'controversial' book except the Bible, the attempted reduction in the Department of Education will only serve to shift greater power to state legislatures on educational issues. It is essential that decisions by state legislatures on curricula development continue to be analyzed in an increasingly volatile political situation.

Cathryn Halverson - Dangerous Dakota Dick, the Chicago Defender, and Imagined Community

In her capacity as Ebony magazine editor, Era Bell Thompson exchanged cordial notes with Langston Hughes, congratulating him on new publications and making plans to meet up in New York. However, decades earlier, in the 1920s, they had a very different correspondence, as two of the many regular contributors to Dewey Roscoe Jones's "Lights and Shadows" poetry and letters feature in the Chicago Defender.

Through focus on Thompson, who wrote under the pseudonym "Dakota Dick" while a student at the University of North Dakota, this presentation examines the role that "Light and Shadows" played for young Black women and men who, like Thompson in Grand Forks, often lived far from urban centers in white majority communities. The column offered entry into a creative, intellectual African American community that was not based in Chicago but routed through it, and which gathered up isolated individuals in provincial locations across the nation. It was also a way to have fun--liberated by the personas they assumed along with Jones's prescription that they discuss anything but race. This playfulness often involved regional and gender identity. To Georgia Peach, Egg Nogg, Ann Accident, Nevada Ester, and all the others whom Dick was said to "make love" too, Thompson promised, "I've got the handsomest nags in the outfit. Can ride em scared, dead, dying, or hypnotized. I am less than five feet and love ice cream and cake; I am a mighty cowboy of the Wounded West; I, Dakota Dick."

Sally Hamilton - Examines Narratives by American Women in the First World War, Concentrating on the Nursing Memoirs of Mary Borden and Ellen La Motte

This paper examines narratives by American women in the First World War, concentrating on the nursing memoirs of Mary Borden and Ellen La Motte. With the outbreak of war, women strode enthusiastically into previously male-dominated functions at home and took on indispensable responsibilities abroad. As nurses they were vital witnesses; and the liminal space they occupied as serving non-combatants created a need to express their trauma.

The Forbidden Zone (1929) and *The Backwash of War* (1916) starkly portray the consequences of the catastrophic physical and psychological damage that those behind the lines were expected to recover and repair. England and France banned La Motte's book on publication, swiftly followed by the American government. It was not republished until 1934. Similarly, Borden's refusal to tone down her manuscript when requested to do so by military censors, led to the hiatus of more than a decade until its publication.

The censorship exercised to shield the innocent public from unpalatable truths serves to emphasise the paradoxical position of women in war. While mechanised warfare necessitated — and in part produced — the stylistic challenge of Modernist expression, society appeared unable to stomach the stark realism of its attendant creativity when expressed by a woman. Through a fetishised emphasis on the shocking and abnormal, Borden and La Motte chronicle their encounters. Through their memoirs this paper explores the transformation of female identity in the war years, offering an alternative reading of the experience of war and of these women's unique contribution to the genre.

Jennifer Harbour - Teaching Good History in the Anti-DEA Age: Some Suggestions for avoiding Powerless Pedagogy

We now find ourselves in defense of our profession, especially in the United States. The Trump Administration, assuming a mandate from its voting base, has launched attacks on universities and colleges, archives, libraries, historical societies, the National Park Service, school loans and lunches, and even statues. No one appears to be safe – but at the end of the day, we are still teachers.

In an age of broad resistance to so-called “DEI initiatives,” this paper asks: How do we carry on teaching and learning topics that appear to have everything to do with “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity” in our history classrooms? Nineteenth Century is replete with historical antecedents that have allowed scholars to investigate a widely pluralistic American society. Our society is ever-changing, but clearly immigrant, indigenous, Black & Brown, gender and sexuality, and queer histories still need to be told and taught. How can we transmit ideas from the latest and best research, focus on student success, and avoid acrimony all at the same time? This paper is decidedly not political, nor will it take up the current assortment of protest movements and lawsuits against the current presidential administration. Universities are now sites of unprecedented budget cuts and professorial anxiety; the author will offer examples of proven experiential lesson plans which will allow instructors to imagine the most impenetrable of pedagogies.

Megan Hickes - 'that one is not hearing': Gertrude Stein and the rhythms of disordered reading

This paper is a work-in-progress as part of my PhD project on poetic rhythm and neurodivergent experiences. It explores the work of Gertrude Stein and argues that recent neuroscience research in reading acquisition and dyslexia can help to better understand Stein's early experiments with language structures. Critics have acknowledged the unique rhythm of Stein's writing – in particular the decision-making involved in discerning intonation and stress. I will demonstrate how this ambiguity of emphasis resonates with recent theories in neuroscience which argue that the neural networks in the dyslexic brain are 'out of time' (Goswami, 2020) with rhythmic speech signals and, therefore, the linguistic hierarchy. In *The Making of Americans*, Stein uses language as her medium for comprehending the 'rhythm' inside her subjects. Rather than the brain being the focus (a system she had studied extensively in her youth), language is the crux between people and knowledge in her early work. As a result, reading complex language structures challenges readers to 'know' themselves ('Poetry and Grammar') in confrontations with errors and missed signals, the risk of reading it wrong being fundamental to the experience of language and our understanding of ourselves and others. I will then begin to explore what it means to describe Stein's writing as 'dys-lexic' (as Joseph Riddel did in 1996), drawing on how this term shaped ideas about 'good' and 'bad' readers in the twentieth century as well as what Stein's work has to offer to ongoing research in disordered reading.

Maya Hollander - Lilith at the End of the World

This paper opens by tracing a tradition of biblical reception in American literary imaginations of the apocalypse, in which the longing for severance from original sin is fulfilled through apocalyptic destruction. This tradition, tied up in Edenic fantasies inherited from colonial European depictions of American land, imagines in the post-apocalypse a prelapsarian landscape ripe for new Adams and Eves who can repopulate and rebuild it. This fantasy serves as a familiar framework to which the contemporary apocalyptic imagination repeatedly returns, often to revise and reconsider popular imaginations of destruction, sin, and (re)creation. I examine Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis/Lilith's Brood* trilogy as an inheritor of this Edenic tradition: translating the quest for paradise into a biological imperative, the trilogy is premised on the fantasy of mass destruction as an escape from original sin, imagining genetic engineering as a path towards the prelapsarian. However, in centring the demonic Lilith, Adam's first wife, the narrative invites us to question its premise: while prelapsarian innocence cannot return in apocalypse, hope may instead emerge in the creaturely, wild, and demonic connections that arise in the process.

Megan Hunt - Jim Crow at the Box Office: Cinema, Culture and the Civil Rights Movement in 1963

This paper seeks to increase scholarly understanding of cinemas as key sites in the African American freedom struggle. Often overlooked in studies focused on schools, housing, and public transport, the cinema rarely figures in wider assessments of desegregation policy and civil rights strategy. Meanwhile, studies of race and cinema in the 1950s and 1960s often focus exclusively on representation onscreen rather than the freedom to enter and equally enjoy the physical space of the movie theatre. But 1963 proved a critical year in which prominent constituencies of the modern civil rights movement identified both culture and cultural venues as key to social and political freedom, both as venues for Black consumption and as sites of unfettered representational and employment possibilities. Examining the connections between these concurrent economic and intellectual developments and the events of 1963 therefore adds further nuance to existing narratives of federal and cultural efforts that later culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on the one hand, and the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s on the other. It also raises vital questions about freedom of consumption at the height of the civil rights era, and efforts to balance concepts of Black “buying power” with an emerging culture of Black production, which provided opportunities for identity expression previously unavailable via mainstream markets, but which ultimately sought to challenge white hegemony in American cultural industries.

Kristen lemma - American Archival Theory and U.S. Nation Building in the Early Twentieth Century

In the first half of the twentieth century, the field of American archival theory was developing alongside the growth of the United States' overseas empire, each informing the development of the other in complex ways. As the newly formed U.S. National Archives was establishing standards and determining which records would be accessioned into its new facility, records were being removed from newly colonized territories and consolidated in the imperial core. These records would function as evidence of, and justification for, the expansion of national borders overseas, as well as serving as technologies for the administration of an increasingly global empire. Where archival documents are often framed as the byproducts of imperial governance, I argue that they are in fact powerful technologies leveraged in the service of colonial expansion.

Looking to the first half of the twentieth century, this paper engages the history of records removal from across the United States' colonial empire and their consolidation at various U.S. federal agencies, most notably the U.S. National Archives. I look to the extraction of records from the Philippines, Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal Zone, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to build a set of arguments about the role of archival infrastructures in U.S. nation-building efforts and imperial expansion in the early twentieth century. I argue that by looking closely at historical state record keeping practices, the entanglements of federal bureaucracy with projects of imperial and American national identity construction are brought into sharper relief.

Joseph Ironside - Modern Myth Making: How Fascism and Fantasy make Not-So-Strange Bedfellows

The relationship between fascism and fantasy, whilst not new, has become increasingly present in contemporary politics. Whether it is J.D. Vance, Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, or Stormfront forums, the public enjoyment and appropriation of fantasy by fascist figures and communities is a recurring theme. This begs the question: is this a misappropriation or is there an inherent proximity between fantasy literature and the fascistic? This paper will investigate the relationship between fantasy literature and fascist ideological dynamics in an attempt to highlight why this point of connection is so prevalent. Using Roger Griffin's work on the ideological content of fascism and Robert O. Paxton's concept of its mobilizing passions, I will be providing an outline for the core points of intersection between fascism and fantasy. This will include, but are not limited to, heroic violence, anti-materialism, communalism, natural orders, masculine leadership, cultural decline and revitalization.

The argument for this proximity is made not only on the grounds of fantasy literature having fascistic elements but also that fascism itself contains fantastical elements. This point is perhaps even more relevant in an era of technofascism, in which many of the influential figures of the far-right seemingly have a worldview informed by speculative fiction.

Ziggy Israel-Hopkins - Technofascism of the Past and Future: How Silicon Valley Technofascism reflects and differs from the fascist futurism of the past

This paper explores the science fiction inspired technofascist movement of Silicon Valley today and how it reflects and differs from the fascistic futurism of the past. In the last decade a new strain of fascism has arisen: bay area entrepreneurs and techno-oligarchs use science fiction to theorise a return to feudalism and the dream of creating a god-like sentient AI. Meanwhile, fears of the rise of such an AI, based not on rational criticism of Large Language Models but instead fears of an allpowerful AI torturing humans for eternity, have grown exponentially. This extreme anti-AI movement is also clearly inspired by a mix of popular science fiction including the story by Harlan Ellison 'I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream' (1967). Silicon Valley technofascism is now vastly influential in the new fascist American administration. Futurism has been a visible element of fascism since its inception; but can our understanding of early Italian fascist futurism help us understand this new smart-technology-centric brand of fascistic futurism? Which science fiction stories may have influenced the hopes and fear of advocates for artificial intelligence and why is sci-fi fandom such an intrinsic part of these emerging techno-fascist practices? To explore these questions, I will draw on Stewart Brand's analysis of the countercultural strains which lead to our modern digital age. I will also make use of key ideas from the fields of fan studies (Jenkins, Duffet) as well as science fiction studies (Suvin, Santesso) to better illuminate the fascist fan relationship.

Lynn Mie Itagaki – The B-Roll of Border Unknowing: From the Brown Pacific to the African Atlantic

From Black Europe, the Black Mediterranean, African Atlantic, and Indian Ocean as method, I posit “border unknowing”: the deliberate rejection of migrants’ dignity, humanity, and personhood couched as ignorance. Built from “colonial unknowing” in global studies of white settler colonialism and racialization by US critical ethnic studies scholars Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues and Alyosha Goldstein, “border unknowing” indexes the normalization of violence by neo/colonial, white supremacist border regimes. I examine two 2016 films, the first, Josh Begley’s digital short “Best of Luck with the Wall” and the second, Gianfranco Rosi’s documentary *Fire at Sea*, (Fuocoammare) for their aesthetic practices of border unknowing. Both filmmakers’ depiction of bodies of water force viewers to recognize how border unknowing refuses the radical possibilities of oceanic thinking from the Pacific, the Rio Grande, the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean, as it refuses migrant experiences in and across these bodies of water.

Fire at Sea is primarily comprised of B-roll, scenery, and background footage. Nation-building occurs through the images of this everyday, the daily rituals of a young boy and his family around Lampedusa, the Italian island closest to Africa and a primary destination for refugees’ Mediterranean boat crossings. Begley’s film dizzyingly sutures four hundred thousand Google Maps satellite images of the US-Mexico border. Both films create an imagined border geography—a border unknowing—and emphasize migration’s inhuman dangers by prioritizing what would be background—the mundane depictions of US and EU security and comfort refused to migrant lives and deaths.

Adriano Adewale Itaúna - Sonic Equity: decolonial possibilities of the berimbau

Adriano’s performance-based paper investigates questions of inclusion, equity, and

decolonisation through the central voice of the Brazilian berimbau. Adriano refined his own artistic practice by reducing his setup from a sprawling drum set to a single berimbau—a one-string musical ‘bow’ traditionally connected with capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian martial art. Through shining a light on the unique possibilities of the berimbau -- and drawing on ideas of faith, vulnerability and a Congo-Bantu cosmogram — questions arise in terms of why this instrument and its interconnected traditions have not been given equal space and value within higher music education. The world continues to face enormous challenges that are connected to issues of power imbalances and some voices being heard and valued above others (Kallio, 2019; Hess, 2014, 2018). This same phenomenon can be seen in the ways different forms of musical expression have been valued above others, with one issue being the dominance of Western approaches to music in institutions, for example (Lee, 2023; Shippers, 2010; Tan, 2021; Thomson, 2021). A case in hand is Adriano’s experience of not being able to study the Brazilian berimbau in his home university in São Paulo but rather being offered a Western classical music degree instead, raising important questions and ethical dilemmas. Why was the berimbau not given the same level of importance within the context of higher music education? Why is one form of musical expression valued more than another? And what are the implications of this for society and the world at large? Adriano’s investigation of these questions highlights the need for institutions to continually reassess their policies through the lens of decolonisation.

Justin F. Jackson - ‘Rudimentary Sovereignty’: American Counterinsurgency, the Dual Colonial Occupation, and Empire’s Limits in a Philippine Province

Scholars have noted how US empire-formation in the Philippines built on a Spanish colonial “dual-mandate” state dividing governance along ethnolinguistic religious lines, creating one form of rule for Hispanized Catholic Filipinos, and another for Muslims and aborigines. Yet less studied has been the contingent process by which Americans actually first negotiated and attempted to transform this inherited political-cultural divide in colonial administration within the Philippines. In this paper, I reconstruct the history of Benguet, a province in the Cordillera Mountains of northern Luzon, during the Philippine-American War, to explore and explain change and continuity in the nature of Spanish and US imperial power as a politics of sovereignty. Spanish and US military forces that were granted civil authority in the Cordillera, a region inhabited primarily by aboriginal Igorots, struggled to subdue such indigenous peoples as they used the region’s rough terrain to preserve their autonomy from lowland Christian state authorities. Yet I argue that, paradoxically, during the Philippine-American War, the rise of a dual civilian American state within the US colonial bureaucracy, one ostensibly committed both to local self-governance and preserving indigenous autonomy and culture, almost defeated US counter-insurgency in Benguet. Civilian American authorities committed to US colonialism as an ethnographic project, competing with Americans soldiers for state power, created a fractious politics of sovereignty in Benguet, and revealed US counter-insurgents’ limited ability to pacify and rule their nation’s new empire.

Tim Jelfs - Westalgia, or the Literature of Imperial Exhaustion

What affects and genres, what cultural logics and dominants, cohere in an age of imperial exhaustion?

Internet slop might be one answer to that question, but two others, this paper argues, are Westalgia and the literature of imperial exhaustion. While the former describes an affect traceable across the ideological political spectrum in many Western cultures, the latter nods to John Barth's well-known 1967 essay on literary postmodernism to describe a prominent genre in the narrative culture of the twenty-first century United States. My paper attempts to elucidate these two theoretical concepts—which emerged at the intersection of two interdisciplinary research collaborations in which I am involved here in Groningen—by drawing on a diverse set of examples, ranging from fictional podcasts that were briefly popular in the 2010s to Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *The Dream of the Celt* (2012) and movies including *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022).

Westalgia, my readings of these texts will demonstrate, names a cultural nostalgia for “the West” that predates by some years open acknowledgment of the West's parochialization in an age of multipolarity. The literature of imperial exhaustion, meanwhile, is what you get when the self-referentiality and endless chains of signification that characterize a cultural logic that is still postmodern collide with an awareness that the imperial power of the US has reached its historical limits.

Paul Jenner - The argument of the ordinary: Marilynne Robinson, Stanley Cavell, Christina Sharpe

Focussing in particular on Marilynne Robinson's novels *Gilead* (2004) and *Jack* (2020), my paper places arguments about the ordinary found in Robinson's writings (which insist upon the

ordinary's theological, epistemological, political and aesthetic weight) in dialogue with the philosopher Stanley Cavell's career-long meditations on the ordinary (encompassing Cavell's methodological commitment to ordinary language philosophy and his broader narrative concerning philosophical skepticism's perennial conflict with, and discovery of, the ordinary). My paper will also draw on the aesthetic and political contestations of the ordinary found in Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes* (2023). 'I've been thinking', Sharpe writes, 'about what beauty as a method might mean or do; what it might break open, rupture, make possible and impossible. How we might carry beauty's knowledge with us and make new worlds' (79). Sharpe's words resonate with the democratic stakes of the ordinary aesthetics found in Robinson and Cavell, not least with the careful reflections on beauty's knowledge and the radiant beauty of the ordinary found in Robinson's *Gilead*, a novel attuned to the ways ordinariness is broken open and ruptured as a place of both possibility and impossibility. In Robinson's most recent novel *Jack* the main protagonist feels himself captive to and captivated by a sense of the fragility of the ordinary and by what he refers to as an 'impulse' to do damage to that fragility. My paper will ask whether Jack is a skeptic in a Cavellian sense, whose metaphysical fixations are expressive of a world-denying disappointment at the absence of new worlds, new ordinaries.

Genevieve Johnson - Diasporic Echoes: Silences in the Archives of the Roper Women

The life of fugitive abolitionist Moses Roper is well-known and studied, thanks largely to the hugely influential narrative of his life he left behind. What is less knowable are the details of the lives of the women who surrounded him and the ancestors who made him, including his enslaved mother and grandmother. Additionally, his wife, who seemingly left behind no personal writing of her own, I will argue, was hugely important to Roper's work. The daughters who were part of his legacy,

are the easiest to trace. His roots are in Black and Indigenous American women, and the family he formed in Britain were Welsh and went on to set down their own roots in Australia, New Zealand and Palestine. This paper will explore diaspora as the afterlife of slavery. It will examine the more traceable journeys of two of his daughters, and consider what can be conjectured from the silences in the archive which surround Roper's enslaved mother and grandmother. It will consider the role of Ann Roper, Moses Roper's wife, and why she has been left on the sidelines of Roper's anti-slavery journey. The paper will consider the historical, racial, gendered barriers which caused these silences in the archive.

Lewis Johnson - The Republican Party and the Question of Civil Rights, 1947-1949

This paper explores the Republican Party's relationship with civil rights during the Eightieth session of Congress, the first Republican-controlled Congress since the Great Depression. In 1947, the publication of *To Secure These Rights* thrust racial issues to the top of American political debate. While Truman's and the Democratic Party's relationship with race in the late 1940s is well understood, the Republican Party's reaction and response to increased calls for civil rights reform in this period is under-researched. Only with a proper understanding of the Republican

perspective can historians make sense of the electoral promise and peril of racial liberalism in the immediate postwar period, however.

This paper seeks to explain the Republican Party's poor record on civil rights during this Congress. Though historically the "party of Lincoln," this paper argues that the GOP's relationship with civil rights from 1947 to 1949 is better understood if put in conversation with the party's developing ambitions in the white South. While progressive Republicans urged their colleagues to support racial reform, other, more conservative Capitol Hill Republicans prioritized a relationship with segregationist Democrats and thus avoided racial 'controversy.' This was to capitalize on the breakdown in relations between Truman and southern Democrats and cultivate white Southern support, which, for some, was an electoral prize of greater value than the support of African Americans. This paper therefore highlights the ways in which Truman's civil rights agenda drove wedges between and among Republicans and fueled a fierce factional infighting that would profoundly shape the Republican Party.

Caroline Johnston - The Nation's Way Out: the Promises of Oil Shale in the Rocky Mountains

Beginning in 1974, the United States federal government subsidized oil shale extraction projects across the Rocky Mountain region. With the help of loan guarantees, price guarantees, research funding, and other federal subsidies, multinational oil corporations built shale mines and processing plants across Wyoming and Colorado. As Americans faced an oil crisis and an economic slump, western oil interest groups promised that these projects would ensure national security, energy independence, and economic prosperity.

All three promises, however, remained unrealized. This paper examines how oil executives ignored the geologic realities of oil shale extraction, and asks why many politicians, journalists, and members of the public followed suit. Following oil executives at the Rocky Mountain Oil and Gas Association, geologists at the Denver Research Center, staff members at Colorado's Friends of the Earth office, and leadership in the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations, this paper traces ideologies that sustained a carbon-based extractive economy. Oil and gas associations developed an extractive posture toward state intervention that distinguished individual oilmen as those responsible for regional economic success. Proponents of shale mining dismissed environmental analyses, cast environmentalists as irrational, used logics of crisis, and gestured to collective mythologies about the American western frontier. By examining a moment of potential energy transition, this paper untangles the process through which fossil fuel extraction and consumption became convention.

Derrick Johnstone - Scots emigration to East Jersey in the 1680s: kinship and merchant networks

Between 1683 and 1685 at least 600 Scots emigrated to East New Jersey. This colonial undertaking stands out in Scottish terms when compared to the failure of others before 1700. It brought together a diverse cast of Quakers, Episcopalians and Presbyterians, and of landowners, merchants, tradespeople and farm workers. Some travelled as free emigrants, others as indentured servants, and the remainder as transported Covenanter prisoners. Most came from the East of Scotland, and left aboard ships from Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Montrose.

Kinship and merchant networks intertwined and played a critical role in enabling the venture, not least those of Robert Barclay of Urie, the leading Quaker of his generation. This presentation will illustrate briefly the contribution of these networks in raising awareness of the opportunities presented by East Jersey, in mobilising resources and recruiting emigrants. It will also reflect on business networks post-emigration, on continuing links with Scotland and those formed in New Jersey and New York, drawing on a few examples from current research-in-progress.

The paper builds on the pathbreaking work of Ned Landsman (*Scotland and Its First American Colony*, 1985) by delineating these networks and establishing more of the back-stories of the emigrants and promoters of the venture. It is informed by a new prosopographical database of the emigrants, their kin and associates. This draws on an extensive range of sources including deeds, wills and life event data from both Scotland and Colonial America.

Sophie Jones – The Reproductive Politics of American Literature and Film, 1959-1973

Sophie Jones' "The Reproductive Politics of American Literature and Film, 1959-1973" explores American literature and film in a period when reproductive planning was often emphasised as a solution to global and domestic crises. Through close readings of drama, film, poetry and prose, the book shows how writers and filmmakers took contingency as a starting point for addressing the relationships of race, disability and reproductive freedom.

Dr Michael Kalisch - The Man in the Glass Booth: The Eichmann Trial in American Fiction

The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 was a landmark in post-Holocaust legal and cultural history, becoming a crucial site for the contestation of questions of guilt and responsibility in the wake of the Nazi atrocities. One of the first trials to be televised, the Eichmann trial broke new legal ground in the inclusion by the prosecution of extensive witness testimony, providing Israelis and a larger international audience one of the first public occasions to hear directly from survivors, whose voices had been largely absent from the earlier Nuremberg trials. The Israeli government, meanwhile, understood the trial as an important opportunity to tell the history of Holocaust and to consolidate international support for the still-fledgling Jewish state — a political

agenda that Hannah Arendt, in her report from Jerusalem, suggested risked turning the proceedings into a 'show trial'.

This paper explores representations of and responses to the Eichmann trial in 1960s American fiction. It analyses how novels by Saul Bellow (*Mr Sammler's Planet* (1969)), Norma Rosen (*Touching Evil* (1969)), and Robert Shaw (*The Man in the Glass Booth* (1967)) turn to the Eichmann trial to think through issues of justice, the nature of evil, and the meaning of the Holocaust to Americans. More broadly, the paper considers how the trial and novels about the trial offer different forms and modes of moral deliberation and judgment.

Gayle Kennedy - 'The Independent American Woman is a Myth': Constructions of American Womanhood in Simone de Beauvoir's *America Day by Day*

America Day by Day chronicles Simone de Beauvoir's four-month journey across the United States in 1947. More than a mere travel journal, Beauvoir's text critiques the nation through its foundational language of 'liberty' and 'equality', and subsequently exposes patterns of systemic racism, warns of a "reactionary" press stoking Cold War hysteria, and diagnoses a pervasive anti-intellectualism that she fears threatens American democracy itself.

Yet when Beauvoir turns her gaze to women, she fails to apply this same critical lens. Instead, she evaluates American women almost entirely through their clothing, determining them as symbols of vanity and self-betrayal rather than evidence of a culture aggressively reasserting

gender hierarchies in the postwar period. The gap between her incisive political analysis and her superficial reading of women reveals a striking inconsistency in her feminist thinking at the very moment her philosophy was taking shape. Equally, it also speaks to how the workings behind constructions of American womanhood in the postwar period, such as legislation, propaganda, and cultural pressures pushing women out of wartime labor and back into domesticity, were quietly yet effectively pervading public consciousness – even those of a foreigner visiting the country for the first time.

In tracing these inconsistencies and omissions, the paper illustrates how *America Day by Day* offers – almost by omission – provides evidence of Beauvoir's own internalized misogyny, the broader postwar construction of American womanhood, and the embedded biases that thwart repeated attempts to assert women's rights in the U.S.

Dmitry Kharitonov - Les Feuilles Mortelles: Faulkner Meets Hemingway on His Own Turf

My proposal aims to enhance our understanding of a complicated relationship between William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway by taking a close look at two canonical short stories, "The Killers" (1927) and "Red Leaves" (1930). I will focus on the similarities between them that, as I contend, indicate an influence informed by a sense of challenge. This sense would not have been out of place in Faulkner, as a review of his distant interactions with Hemingway could prove.

These interactions have been studied rather thoroughly, revealing an explosive mixture of mutual admiration, respect, antagonism, resentment, envy, and jealousy. This mixture underpinned a rivalry that, given the domineering status of Faulkner and Hemingway, represents a major fact of American literary history. This rivalry manifested itself primarily in what the two

writers had to say (and write) about each other, but its creative implications should not be overlooked either.

Both "The Killers," set in a small Illinois town in the 1920s, and "Red Leaves," set in a Mississippi plantation in the first half of the nineteenth century, deal with two men pursuing the third. This third man has to die in line with a certain code; although he tries to postpone his death, he knows that it is inevitable and accepts it. It has been vaguely suggested that some work done by Hemingway may have influenced "Red Leaves"; my proposal will for the first time address and contextualize the ways in which this story appears to respond (polemically) to "The Killers."

Lucie Kýrová - "An Indian Think Tank": Native American Internationalism and the Question of Intellectual Sovereignty

During the 1970s, Native American activists increasingly engaged in transnational activism, working with international organizations such as the United Nations and creating hemispheric and global networks of Indigenous cooperation and idea exchange. This work brought them into a closer contact with non-indigenous ideologies and concepts. Using their global connections, Native intellectuals discussed the potential usefulness of ideologies such as Marxism, philosophical differences between European-based concepts and traditional Native worldviews, and their practical application to Indigenous issues. Connected more by the questions they asked rather than the answers, some Native intellectuals saw non-Indigenous leftist ideologies as a potentially useful tool, with aspects that could be incorporated into the struggle for Native rights. Others rejected them out-right as having nothing to offer. Yet others started to question whether the use of non-Indigenous concepts and philosophies was not, in and of itself, a form of

colonialism. By the mid-1980s, some of these Native leaders and intellectuals increasingly called for the development of a coherent, tradition-rooted Native ideology to base their movement on - a call for intellectual sovereignty.

This paper will examine the discourses and aspirations of selected Native intellectuals to create such an ideology and to incorporate Indigenous concepts to the mechanism of international law and organizations.

Janne Lahti - Working in the White World: Settler Colonialism, Boarding School Outings, and Indigenous Resilience

Centering on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, this paper explores the experiences and emotions of Indigenous students regarding their industrial training and work outside the institution, particularly during outing programs that placed them in white households and communities. Many students took pride in their labor and their willingness to work, yet some felt disillusioned when U.S. society failed to meet the expectations they had developed. Their training and outing experiences at Carlisle had instilled in them the belief that industrial education promised a path to “civilized” life and social status through work—portraying labor as both a route to respectability and a means of integration into settler society. Positioned at the crossroads of assimilation and resistance, Indigenous students’ resilience generated tensions along a difficult and complex journey toward cultural survivance and/or racial integration within an imperial world. Many students did not seek assimilation at any cost, but sought to retain, regain, and reinvent their Indigenous identities and used work and outing experiences toward those ends.

Róisín Lambert - The Race Game: Mimetic Play in Turn-of-the-Century Newspaper “Funnies”

This paper examines turn-of-the-century newspaper “funnies” as a participatory game in which readers and cartoonists collaboratively produced racial meaning through practices of mimicry, exaggeration, and repetition. I argue that these early comics relied on what I term mimetic play, a process through which caricature solidified and normalized the racial logics of the time. The emerging formal technologies of the 1890s, such as color printing and serialization, invited readers to participate in what I call the race game, a mode of interpretive engagement that made racial difference appear both humorous and self-evident.

Through a comparative study of two child figures, The Yellow Kid and Little Ah Sid, The Chinese Kid, the paper demonstrates how mimetic play generated contrasting modes of racial sense-making. The Yellow Kid depicted racial ambiguity: his ambiguous physiognomy, as well as his performance of ethnicity, rendered race a malleable, ever-shifting category that meant his characterization could be re-coded to match the ‘racial anxiety of the week’, from tenement

overcrowding to miscegenation. *Little Ah Sid*, by contrast, explored the possibilities of immigrant assimilation, pairing a sympathetic immigrant child with an unfit foreign elder to reassure readers that racial difference could be (somewhat) managed generationally.

Across both comics, mimetic play trained readers to decode, sort, and emotionally respond to racialized bodies. By foregrounding this mimetic logic, the paper reframes early newspaper “funnies” not as benign entertainment but as active engines of the racial imaginary, where the practice of mimesis simultaneously informed and reproduced the racial ideologies of the period.

Samantha Lanevi - World War II Veterans & US Immigration Policy

Before the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, the United States was a country of exclusion. The Immigration Act of 1924 had limited immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and outright banned immigration from Asia. This changed in World War II. As the United States deployed troops to Europe and Asia, these soldiers went on to meet and strike up relationships with foreign women - ignoring various non-fraternization orders. While some of these relationships were fleeting, and sometimes non-consensual, there were a number of relationships which evolved into a proposal and the hopes of marriage. But, a lot of these women were unable to migrate due to strict quotas. Veterans changed this. Through lobbying efforts by their Congressmen and through swaying the brass, veterans were able to advocate for exceptional legislation to enable their wives to immigrate to the United States. In total, over 100,000 women were able to immigrate through exceptional “war bride” legislation thereby changing the fabric of the nation forever. Without these veterans, this legislation would not have existed and these women’s migration would not have been possible. This paper explores the role of WWII veterans in galvanizing the creation of this exceptional war bride legislation and their subsequent impact on immigration policy in the

midtwentieth century. These relationships, I argue, opened the door for further immigration policy changes, the loosening of restrictions, and the eventual abolishment of the quota system.

Dingkun Lei - (Inter)Nationalism, Communism and Labour: Wen-Wu Masculinity in Early Chinese American Poetry

This paper examines the representation of Chinese laundrymen in early Chinese American literature, focusing on poems by Ben Hecht, Gerald Chan Sieg, Wen I-to, and Hsi Tseng Tsiang. These writers, coming from diverse backgrounds—one Jewish American, one second-generation Chinese American woman, and two Chinese international students—offer alternative portrayals that challenge mainstream discriminatory discourses surrounding Chinese labourers. Their depictions of laundry workers range from nostalgic to confrontational and appear across journalism and poetry, including some self-published works, collectively forming what Nancy Fraser calls “subaltern counterpublics.” Building on scholarship on Chinese male masculinity, this paper employs Kam Louie’s framework of wen-wu masculinity, which defines traditional Chinese manhood through cultural attainment (wen) and martial courage (wu). I argue that early Chinese labourers, exemplified by laundry workers, used poetry not only to express personal feelings in the face of discrimination but also to forge social bonds, organise politically, and assert a shared wen-wu masculinity. By connecting Chinese labourers to Chinese poetic and heroic traditions, these writers reconceptualised them not as racial and gendered Others but as culturally and politically empowered agents.

Günter Leyoldt - Curating the Gardens of Heroes: Heritage-Making and its competing Deep-Stories

This paper examines the escalating conflicts over U.S. heritage making that culminated in the federal government's controversial January 2025 executive order to redirect funding from the NEH and the NEA toward establishing a "National Garden of Heroes." While cultural heritage is often broadly described as the totality of a society's traditions and monuments, the active production of heritage involves the intertwined processes of consecration and symbolization. Consecration elevates a site of memory from the ordinary archive into the realm of the culturally "sacred," while symbolization attaches the elevated status to the "deep stories" (Hochschild) or "mythologies" (Barthes) that interpret and justify its prominence. As the example of the Cecil Rhodes monuments illustrates, consecrated sites can rapidly become contested or even "dark heritage" when their underlying deep stories are reinterpreted by an expanding public. In the United States, disputes over "national heroes" are more complex. The fractured US civil sphere produces divergent and competing symbolizations that circulate within polarized publics, as seen in debates over confederate monuments and the competing imaginaries of the 1619 and 1776 projects. This paper explores these dynamics through the contested legacy of Thomas Jefferson, tracing how competing symbolic regimes struggle to define which past—and whose heroes—can or should be consecrated as national heritage today. I argue that attempts to resolve these conflicts through

appeals to historical accuracy misunderstand the nature of mythologies/deep stories, which operate not as falsifiable accounts but as acts of participatory resonance that bind communities to particular pasts and futurities.

Valentina López Liendo - “Human Flotsam”: Environmental Dread and Precarity in Lauren Groff’s *Florida*

“[T]he moon is, in fact laughing, but not at us, we who are too small and our lives too fleeting for it to give us any notice at all,” notes the narrator in one of Lauren Groff’s short stories featured in *Florida* (2018).⁴ Groff depicts a Florida that is all gloom: its atmosphere suffocating and its nature sublime. Her characters remain preoccupied with pending anthropogenic climate catastrophes and forces of nature that dwarf their existence. Simultaneously, they find themselves in precarious positions: a grad student without funding drifting into homelessness, a mother caught between life and death, and a woman coping with a difficult family life via nightly walks in an “imperfectly safe” neighborhood, e.g.⁵

Drawing from Val Plumwood’s critical ecofeminism, and conceptualizations of the ecogothic, this paper examines the tense relationship between Groff’s flawed protagonists and their nonhuman environment. Groff’s stories engender a sense of unease by employing gothic elements, i.e. uncanny doubles, liminal states, and destabilized boundaries, all inextricably bound to the protagonists’ non-human environment and their sense of loss of control over it. Groff creates an atmosphere of unease, in which her characters’ precarious situations are heightened through environmental dread – a constant sense of impending natural catastrophe. For her white, middle-

⁴ Groff, Lauren. *Florida*. Penguin Books, 2023, p.14.

⁵ Groff, p. 2

class characters, non-human nature is thus both a source of preoccupation and fascination. Simultaneously, by delving into their paralyzing anxieties, Groff's collection explores how structures that engender inequality within human society are deeply intertwined with those leading to the exploitation of nonhuman nature.

Rachael McLennan - Searching for Late Style in Anne Tyler's *A Spool of Blue Thread* (2015) and *French Braid* (2022)

Edward Said's concept of late style is usually applied to discussion of works by men. This paper explores whether there are features of late style which distinguish works by women, looking at two of Anne Tyler's novels and in addition considering Said's ideas in relation to Julia Kristeva's notion of 'Women's Time' and Susan Sontag's essay 'On Style'. This paper aims to contribute to discussions of ageing in American literature and culture by exploring gender and authorship in late life as well as representations of ageing in contemporary fiction.

Rachel Malkin - 'Endless Responses': Claudia Rankine's *Just Us* and Conversation

Claudia Rankine's genre-crossing text 'Just Us' (2020) is significantly subtitled 'An American Conversation'. My paper explores what conversation as a governing motif makes possible, as well as highlighting the issues it raises. In interview, Rankine describes *Just Us* as not only staging exchanges drawn from her ordinary life, but as 'desperately seeking conversation [...] in search of a shared place for understanding, a shared reality, shared recognitions' in a social world shaped by racial discrimination.¹ The dialogues in *Just Us* highlight the sedimented assumptions and histories that play out in the everyday, alongside moments of connection. Rankine finds dynamics of accountability, intimacy, and disturbance in conversation, and stresses the need for ongoing responsiveness. She shares this latter emphasis with the philosopher Stanley Cavell. My paper draws on Cavell's work, prompted by his address to an American 'we', and the stakes of conversation in his work. Rankine, like Cavell, suggests that in conversational encounter, we discover where we are speaking from. And she argues that art is in conversation with the culture and can make certain further conversations possible. But such modes can also seem frustratingly conservative or inconclusive. What is more, conversational exchange is not always equal or

rational, and its content can overflow or exceed speech. What does the model of conversation facilitate, and what does it shy away from?

Andrea Marzocchi - Narrating Covid: American short fiction and the aesthetics of the pandemic

In 2020, the world was cast into a spiral of fear and uncertainty by the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic. With most countries entering lockdown and forcing everyone into isolation, we became exposed to images that, before then, we had always associated with science-fiction films and post-apocalyptic scenarios: deserted mega-cities cast into a dreadful silence, interrupted only by the sound of ambulances.

The relentless upload of new video content on social media fostered a sense of connection at a time of complete and imposed disconnection by establishing a new set of common experiences and shared situations: from the banging on frying pans to cheer essential workers from the balconies and rooftops of our homes, to the baking of bread. These images and situations, together with the affects that characterise them, soon started seeping into literary fiction, and first of all into the short story.

“As the planet did battle with the enemy, we as humanity became more of a ‘we’,” Heidi Pitlor wrote in her foreword to *The Best American Short Stories 2021*. By looking at short fiction that appeared in wide-circulation magazines like *The New Yorker* and at the stories featured in a

special anthology commissioned by the *New York Times* called “The Decameron Project,” this paper wants to investigate how American short fiction responded to the Coronavirus pandemic and the role it played in establishing a new aesthetics conversant with the sublime aimed at helping readers come to terms with and start making sense of this traumatic event.

Ruth Maxey - Rethinking disability and place in Percival Everett’s *Walk Me to the Distance*

Michael K. Johnson has observed the “consistent use of disabled characters” in the African American writer Percival Everett’s Western fiction, contending that, through “metaphors of disability... he both explores and deflects the issue of race”. In relation to Everett’s under-researched, early novel *Walk Me to the Distance* (1985), set in Wyoming, Claude Julien reads the protagonist, David Larsen, as black; by contrast, Johnson notes that David, a Vietnam War veteran, is not presented as “either white or black”. Indeed, within the storyworld, the only racialised character is Butch, a young Vietnamese girl unofficially adopted by David and his ageing landlady, Sixbury, a one-legged rancher.

In this paper I explore another key character: Patrick, Sixbury’s adult son. A young, non-speaking, learning disabled man who works for his mother, he is Othered as sexually deviant and later lynched in an act of local vigilante “justice” involving David, concealed by the community, and unprosecuted by law enforcement. In his analysis of the novel, Julien fails even to name Patrick and dismisses him as an “idiot without a future”. More recently, Keith Mitchell has argued that Patrick is dehumanised by Sixbury and communally excluded as a threat to the hypermasculine values of his remote town. Building on Mitchell’s work, I interrogate Everett’s use of narrative voice – a third-person limited narrator privileging David’s ambiguous perspective and

questionable moral actions – to re-read Patrick vis-à-vis themes of agency, visibility and the gaze; humans and animals; intellectual disability and ableism; race and racelessness; and Everett's re-imagined West.

James McBride - Trump's America and the Demise of the Rule of Law

This paper reviews the case against Donald Trump, filed in D.C. District Court on August 1, 2023 (*United States v. Trump*), submitted by Special Counsel Jack Smith, pursuant to a grand jury indictment to investigate Trump's involvement in the assault on the U.S. Capitol. The paper analyzes the events of January 6, 2021, the substance of the federal grand jury indictment, and the interlocutory appeals by Trump's lawyers to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals (*United States v. Trump* (D.C. Cir. 2024)) and the U.S. Supreme Court (*Trump v. United States*, 603 U.S. 593 (2024)). The paper examines the arguments of the Supreme Court's majority opinion, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, used to create Presidential immunity from criminal prosecution for official conduct, which includes barring future courts from probing a President's motive for their acts. Accordingly, future jurists will not be able to distinguish between official and unofficial acts, other than to accept the President's designation at face value. Ostensibly a President may order the assassination of a political enemy by SealTeamSix in the name of national security. The resulting oxymoron—that it is the law that the President is above the generally applicable law—undermines American democracy, the rule of law, and the Lockean philosophy of governance upon which the United States is founded. Finally, the conclusion opens discussion of a disturbing similarity between the Supreme Court's dismissal of the rule of law and the Chinese Communist Party model of rule by law.

Alice McCusker - Articulating trans narratives through the Gothic in Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker*

The lesbian pulp novel flourished between 1950-1965 in the United States. They explored lesbian life and experiences, forming the basis for a much-needed textual community at a time of severe persecution. However, it is only very recently that researchers of the lesbian pulp have come to understand that they hold evidence not just of lesbian life, but also store potential trans narratives. The exploration of these narratives has the potential to enrich our understanding of mid-century trans embodiment and offer up new ways to identify trans literature. But how can we best unlock the trans potential within these novels?

The Gothic has long been in proximity to and had a complex relationship with articulations of transgressive sexualities and gender identities, providing a fertile space in which to explore the two while evading the threat of censorship. The lesbian pulp novel has frequently mobilised Gothic tropes and concerns to articulate the complexities of the mid-century queer experience. But how has the utilisation of Gothicism in the lesbian pulp facilitated the potential trans narratives within the texts?

This paper will explore the mobilisation of Gothic tropes in Ann Bannon's novel *Beebo Brinker*. I argue that the Gothic enabled the articulation of potential trans narratives within the novel, particularly the articulation of Beebo's trans masculine embodiment. By exploring the

relationship between trans identities and the Gothic within the lesbian pulp, we can begin to reshape the textual boundaries between the two and redefine what we think of as trans literature.

Theo McKinnon - “Americans All Immigrants All” – The American Communist Party and the building of a Pluralistic Americanism

Americanism has its origins in the political environment of the post-WWI Red Scare, characterised by widespread nativism and fear of the spread of revolution to the US by foreign radicals. It was initially staunchly hostile to immigration and to all forms of political radicalism. When the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) was founded in 1921 they represented everything early proponents of Americanism stood against. The Party advocated for revolution and in its first decade of existence primarily consisted of foreign-born members. However, the 1930s heralded a more hospitable environment for the left and provided space for an Americanism compatible with left-wing politics to develop. In the mid to late 1930s, when Communists were trying to build alliances with the political mainstream, Americanism became a central component of their rhetoric. This paper will examine how the CPUSA’s multi-ethnic makeup influenced the pluralistic form of Americanism they attempted to foster, in which both radicalism and different ethnic and racial identities were intertwined with American identity. This resonated with an ethnically diverse membership, particularly the growing proportion of second-generation immigrants within Communist ranks, who wished to integrate while preserving both their ethnic identities and radicalism. Nevertheless, Communists failed to truly escape Americanism’s right-wing origins. To ‘Americanise’ themselves they increasingly began to downplay their multi-ethnic identity and sidelined their commitment to racial equality in favour of appeals for national unity. Nativism

continued to heavily influence mainstream views of American identity in the 1930s, and this impacted upon the Communists' own interpretation of Americanism.

Sarah McLennan - "Dangerous Harbor": A Collaborative Project to Document Escaped Unfree Laborers in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake

'Dangerous Harbor: Finding Escaped Unfree Laborers in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake' is a collaborative project to make accessible stories of escape from servitude and enslavement through digitizing, transcribing, and creating an online dataset of court records from the colonies of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. These records, not previously digitized, chronicle the evolution and enforcement of legal bondage and the efforts of unfree people to resist it during a key early period when social and legal ideas about race, servitude, and slavery in these colonies were still forming. The project not only gathers and interprets accounts of strategy, networks, conspiracy, and punishment, but the collective story of resistance as tobacco planters' reliance on enslavement over indentured servitude grew over the course of the seventeenth-century. Funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant, the dataset is designed to be interoperable with other large-scale projects like Enslaved.org and Freedom on the Move, and accessible to researchers, students, and the general public.

My paper will discuss early insights gained from processing records from three Virginia counties, and the ongoing work of our cross-disciplinary team of data and preservation specialists, historians, and university students. A central focus of the project is education and outreach, and the ways technologies (from digitized materials to data visualizations and natural language

processing) can make archival sources accessible and reveal new perspectives- as one student on the project noted, giving "voice to people who otherwise would not have been heard."

Oisín Meenan - Interventions: Privilege and Responsibility in the Contemporary US Campus Novel

This paper examines how contemporary campus fiction navigates the volatile discursive climate surrounding elite American universities—a climate shaped not only by commentators who portray these institutions as engines of hereditary privilege, but by a growing corpus of campus novels which depicts them as ethically compromised or structurally exclusionary. Building on work by scholars including Rita Felski and John Guillory, the paper argues that Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* (2017) and Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Marriage Plot* (2011) offer a counter-tradition within the recent genealogy of the campus novel, resisting the demand that literary work function as a vehicle for social intervention.

Attending to each novelist's turn to the archive, I read Batuman's interlocution with Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*—in particular her resurrection of the aesthetic life as a mode of attention—alongside Eugenides's engagement with George Eliot's moral psychology and the campus climate of the high-theory moment in which his novel is set. These intertextual strategies widen the frame in which debates about privilege, precarity, and responsibility unfold, enabling both authors to think beyond the narrow scripts often imposed on fiction produced by the "elite."

Taken together, I argue that the novels illuminate a subtler landscape of feeling in which aesthetic commitment and ethical attention are not placed at loggerheads, instead constituting dynamically entangled modes through which the contemporary novel considers its remit.

Emphasising ambivalence, aesthetic autonomy, and the interpretive pressures of their cultural moment, Batuman and Eugenides gesture towards a more capacious reimagining of literary vocation.

Benoit Abraão Mes - *Interrace*, and Its Supplementary Spinoffs, *Interrace Jr.* and *Interrace Singles*

This paper centres around the magazine, *Interrace*, and its supplementary spinoffs, *Interrace Jr.* and *Interrace Singles*. First published in 1989 and running until 2000, the Interrace Publications' family of magazines worked to 'celebrate the interracial family, the interracial child and adult, and the interracial couple'. Spearheaded by its editor and publisher, Candace 'Candy' Mills, the small team behind this family of magazines achieved wide engagement, reaching readers across, and at times beyond, the United States. Through its core topics of discussion, including dating, marriage, and parenting, it in many ways worked to not only develop multiracial community but also a distinctive multiracial culture.

Focusing in on the various advertisements, products, and commercial offers which appear across *Interrace*, this paper will first consider how advertising choices deliberately worked to foster and validate this distinct multiracial culture. Funded primarily through a subscription model, the choice of advertisements in *Interrace* sheds further light on the politics which drove the magazine. Analysis of these advertisements will also open a discussion into some of the magazine's wider themes. Notably, the paper will consider how some of the products advertised supported *Interrace*'s normative leanings, where multiracial family life was pushed to conform and integrate with broader understandings of heteronormative, modern American family life and structure. Ultimately, this paper aims to speak to the challenges and complexities of multiracial identity and community building, especially during a period in which parts of the US increasingly construed and constructed American society as post-racial and or color blind.

Josephine Metcalf - The 'Dangers' of Writing Prison Literature; the Case of Arthur Longworth

2026 marks the ten-year anniversary of the publication of *Zek; An American Prison Story* by Arthur Longworth. The novel recounts just one day in the life of Jonny, a prisoner serving time in an eastern Washington state penitentiary in the US. As noted in marketing materials, *Zek* was inspired by Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovic* (1962), set in a Soviet labour camp in the 1950s ('Zek' is an abbreviation for 'Zaklyucheni', Russian slang for an inmate). In 1985 aged 20, Longworth became one of the youngest prisoners ever to receive a Life Without Parole Sentence at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla. While incarcerated, Longworth would educate himself and ultimately become an award-winning PEN author. Though *Zek* was formally published by Gabalfa Press in 2016, it had originally been completed and distributed informally over ten years earlier. Indeed, the initial manuscript was 'illegally' photocopied and then garnered a significant readership among fellow prisoners throughout the Washington State Department of Corrections. Engaging with comments made by Longworth in an interview with the author, this paper explores why – and with what ends and effects – Longworth made the decision to write a novel rather than a memoir. Longworth was paying homage to a Russian literary great. But writing (autobiographical) fiction also served practical and necessary purpose for an author embedded in the American prison industrial complex, as reflected in the remarkable story of *Zek's* production, its initial readership, and the state response to both the informal and formal release of the novel.

Heather Ray Milligan - Reintroducing Wolves in the Cultural Imagination

American biotech company Colossal describes their dire wolf de-extinction project, which launched to mixed reception in early 2025, as 'FAR FROM FICTION'. But the dire wolf experiment is undoubtedly tied to fiction: notable investors include fantasy author George R.R. Martin – who popularised knowledge of dire wolves in his *A Song of Ice and Fire* series – and director Peter Jackson, best known for his film adaptations of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Hunted to extinction in Britain and most of western Europe, the Big Bad Wolf has accrued conflicting meanings in contemporary culture. On one side, Nobel-winning author László Krasznahorkai constructs a parallel between the reappearance of wolves in Germany and the rise of a neo-Nazi group in his 2021 novel *Herscht 07769*. On the other side, Sarah Hall's *The Wolf Border* (2015) and Charlotte McConaghy's *Once There Were Wolves* (2021) depict the reintroduction of wolves to Scotland as progressive, even utopian projects. Somewhere in the middle is Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing* (1994), in which the protagonist's plan to trap and kill a pregnant wolf is overturned when he develops a bond with the wolf and decides to return her to Mexico. In this paper I take a comparative approach to the fraught and evolving symbolism of the wolf in contemporary literature, ranging from extremist politics to migration, national identity and sovereignty to autonomous female sexuality. How wolves appear in our cultural imagination has ramifications for public opinion, conservation, and rewilding efforts. What futures does literature summon for wolves today?

Gareth Millington, Sophie Rainbow - Urban history as “churn”: Harlem (1959-1976) in Colson Whitehead’s *Harlem Shuffle* and *Crook Manifesto*

The 1960s and 1970s were a turbulent period for Harlem. Decline experienced since the Depression had exacerbated and the optimism of the earlier part of the century—particularly in the 1920s during the ‘Harlem Renaissance’—was in short supply. Harlem was less of an exception, viewed as experiencing a similar economic and social fate to other North American ‘ghettos’. Kenneth Clark portrays Harlem as saturated in paradox, representing ‘hope’, ‘despair’, ‘aspiration for change’, ‘apathy’, ‘vibrancy’, and ‘stagnation’. The Harlem conjured by Colson Whitehead’s recent novels *Harlem Shuffle* (2021) and *Crook Manifesto* (2023) also experiments with contradictory characterisation: in terms of his characters, community, and the physical setting of Harlem. It is a place where everything and nothing changes, where people appear both propelled and constrained by ideas of progress. With retrospect, this period is viewed also as the seedbed for the New York City fiscal crisis of 1976 and the subsequent shifts in governance that have since become understood as neoliberalism. In this paper we seek to clarify, expound upon and critically evaluate Whitehead’s assertion—made across the two novels and largely via the musings of main protagonist Ray Carney—that Harlem between 1959-1976 was characterised by ‘churn’: a notion grounded in the narratives of the novels but which is also important to consider at a more conceptual level. Our suggestion is that Whitehead’s historical novels recover and document urban history as well as offering an explanation of urban change that is attentive to materialist and subjective dimensions.

Andrew Monteith - “People in This Room Have Literally Lost Children to College”: Judeo-Christian Nationalism and the Federal Incursions into American Higher Education

Although many people have noticed Donald Trump’s aggressive posture toward American universities, popular commentary typically omits its religious dimensions. This may be due to skepticism about Trump’s sincerity; his personal character sometimes seems at odds with Christian conviction. Furthermore, on the surface his interventions appear both chaotic and procedural: threatening Columbia’s accreditation over antisemitism, blocking foreign student visas, demanding UCLA pay one billion dollars and rescind sports awards for transgender athletes—none of this looks especially religious.

The Heritage Foundation, best known for Project 2025, has been strategizing “ideological recapture” of higher education for many years, promoting a restoration of “Judeo-Christian values.” This is an unstable signifier. The worldview Heritage terms “Judeo-Christianity” overwhelmingly aligns with conservative Christian moralities while deviating from what polls show four-fifths of American Jews actually believe.

Heritage has developed long-term goals and strategies for reinstating Christian dominion over academia. They hope to force universities to choose between embracing a hard-right expression of Judeo-Christian morality or facing fiscal insolvency. Since the government controls significant academic revenue streams—student loans, research grants, tax exemption, and so on—Heritage theorizes that conservatives could leverage this to mandate ideological change. They aspire to abolish DEI in all forms, LGBTQ acceptance (especially transgender), “Marxist” curricula, criticisms of Israel, and foreign student enrollments. They also hope that limiting Americans’ ability to attend college will boost the birthrate. Trump’s educational goals not only align with Heritage’s, he has hired their senior education lobbyist to run policy at the now-eviscerated Department of Education.

Andrie Morris - Race, Resistance and the Lifeworld of Bare Bottomhood

My talk considers satire in Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah's speculative fiction. I suggest his engagement with spectacular blackness illustrates Christina Sharpe's observation that 'spectacle is a relation of power.' Ironically, the Black Lives Matter-era 'realist' novel relies upon constructions of the spectacular male body to render its diasporic dreams of black freedom. I argue that an antiracist politics of publishable blackness produces a literary black body that simultaneously chastises and flatters non-black readers, implicating them in quotidian antiblack violence from within the legibility of decentred blackness. I posit a concept of empathic reading that relies on the ethical dynamics in speculative alignments between black particularity and the downgrading of black racial identity. Such an approach to reading makes spectacularity a useful lens through which to focus on manifestations of black authors' radical imaginings of cross-racial relationality.

Niall Munro - Uncanny Civil War in Evelyn Scott's *The Wave*

Despite the achievement of telling the story of the Civil War from a hundred different perspectives, one of the most remarkable aspects of Evelyn Scott's novel *The Wave* (1929) is the attention paid to the local and private, especially when dealing with the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg.

Whilst Scott does include battlefield scenes, including the disastrous Confederate attack known as Pickett's Charge, numerous episodes examine the fighting in the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania itself. Both the Union and Confederate armies took up residence in the streets and in homes, converting houses into makeshift hospitals and Scott describes a situation that is decidedly unfamiliar to many townspeople, particularly women. In this paper I will show how this version of the war can be considered 'unhomely', or, as Sigmund Freud conceptualised it in *Das Unheimliche* (1919), an 'uncanny' experience.

The uncanny has been studied extensively, but my discussion will consider an area which has received less attention: the connection between the uncanny and violence and what John Zilcosky has called 'the dread of unexpected similarity'. I will argue that *The Wave* dramatizes an intimate violence that was characteristic of the Civil War, one based on what Freud called 'an interchanging of the self', or an unwelcome but unavoidable encounter with a familiar enemy. Considering the uncanny way in which Scott represents this battle also allows us to reflect on how Americans memorialised the conflict in the 1920s – and what they chose to repress.

Sarah Naramore - Marketing the Magic Bullet: Selling Americans on Iodized Salt, 1924-1940

At the urging of the state board of health and with cooperation from multiple manufactures, Michigan grocery shoppers became the first in the nation to buy iodized salt. Physician-sponsored information promised that the new product would not carry any extra cost compared to 'plain' salt in an attempt to sway consumer choice. At the time, physicians believed endemic goitre (caused by iodine deficiency) had become epidemic in the United States from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Northwest. More than an unsightly swelling of the thyroid gland, they associated goitre with general 'weakness,' 'slowness,' and 'feble-mindedness' in girls and women. Curing and preventing the disorder, however, required more than physician awareness, business partnerships, or eugenic paranoia. Millions of Americans needed to change their behaviour and consider the iodine content of their foods.

This paper explores the way ordinary Americans, especially American women, learned about the 'goitre epidemic' and how to respond in Michigan and beyond. Businesses, schools, and physicians assumed that women controlled the grocery buying and meal planning for families. As a result, efforts to curb the goitre problem primarily targeted married mothers and homemakers. Popular magazines, newspaper advertisements, and school leaflets told women that the physical and mental health of American children was at risk, but they could stop it by making the right choices at the market. By examining the advertising patterns alongside educational material we see concepts of modern 'scientific motherhood' at work and public health's attempts to shape a culture of health and wellness.

Marcus P. Nevius - Political Economy and Maroon Power in the Eighteenth Century British Atlantic

At the end of the First Maroon War (1728-1740), the British Crown recognized maroons'-- freedom seeking African diasporans -- partial subjecthood.⁶ In the war's wake, treaty agreements bound maroons to the Jamaica Assembly as allies in the security of the island's slave society.⁷ Britain's Parliament and Crown labored to establish that Jamaica's maroon communities were thenceforth governed by imperial and colonial agents under a system of complex imperial sovereignty.⁸ Historians Charles Leslie and James Knight cast maroons as unconventional belligerents who had defeated British colonial militia and regular troops in a sustained guerilla war.⁹ Peace between the belligerents held, even as the island's sugar plantation zones expanded, enforced by unabashed violence against enslaved bodies.¹⁰ But the island's maroon communities never fully conceded to Britain's imperial approach.¹¹ During the Second Maroon War (1795-1796), one hundred fifty maroons and an estimated three hundred fifty enslaved people broke with peace, led by Leonard Parkinson and others, to wage a guerilla campaign against a combined force of five thousand colonial militia and British regular troops.¹²

⁶ Lisa Ford, *The King's Peace: Law and Order in the British Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2022): Ch 3.

⁷ Tyson Reeder, "Liberty with the Sword: Jamaican Maroons, Haitian Revolutionaries, and American Liberty," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 81-115; Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*. (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020); Trevor Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

⁸ Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. (Yale University Press, 2011).

⁹ Charles Leslie, *A New History of Jamaica from the Earliest Accounts, to the Taking of Porto Bello by ViceAdmiral Vernon*. 1st edition. (R. Fleming, 1739 [1740]), Library of Philadelphia copy.

¹⁰ Helen McKee, "From Violence to Alliance: Maroons and White Settlers in Jamaica, 1739-1795," *Slavery & Abolition*. 39, no. 1 (2017): 27-52; Kathleen Wilson, "The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound," *William and Mary Quarterly*. 66, no. 1 (January 2009): 45-86.

¹¹ Tessa Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti*. (Yale University Press, 2019); Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781-1834." *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (April 2019): 197-222; Lennox Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom: The fighting Maroons of Dominica*. (Papillote Press, 2017); Brett Rushforth, "The Gauolet Uprising of 1710: Maroons, Rebels, and the Informal Exchange Economy of a Caribbean Sugar Island." *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (January 2019): 75-110; Randy M. Browne, *The Driver's Story: Labor and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024); Marjoleine Kars, *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (The New Press, 2020); Linda M. Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean." *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 3 (September 2009): 361-382; Matthew J. Clavin, *The Battle of Negro Fort: The Rise and Fall of a Fugitive Slave Community* (New York University Press, 2019); Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. (New York University Press, 2014); Nathaniel Millett, *The Maroons of Prospect Bluff and Their Quest for Freedom in the Atlantic World*. (University Press of Florida, 2013).

¹² Michael Sivapragasam, "The Second Maroon War: Runaway Slaves Fighting on the Side of Trelawny Town," *Slavery and Abolition* 41, no. 3 (2020): 555-581.

Beginning in the 1790s, Bryan Edwards and Robert Charles Dallas cast maroons as uncivilized savages unworthy of the Crown's protection.¹³ Thus, an important historiographic puzzle began. This paper interrogates the puzzle: the history of how a colonial political economy of marronage shifted across the eighteenth century such that Leslie and Knight's maroon allies became Edwards' and Dallas's maroon savages. Were the maroons as partial British subjects in Jamaica, allies in the colony's security, so unique in the British empire, seen in the broader imperial context of Irish Catholics in Ireland, or Highland clansmen in Scotland, or South Asian bureaucrats, or soldiers compelled to submit to military hierarchy? To these ends, this paper interrogates a core question: to what extent might new scholarship consider Jamaica's maroon history in an eighteenth-century context of Atlantic world political economy?

Lily Ní Dhomhnaill - Orality and Historiography in Late Twentieth Century US Poetry

Performance scholar Diana Taylor has argued that the collective memory and history transmitted by performance is fundamentally different to that stored in archives. My paper will discuss some of the implications of this for experimental written poetry in the US in the 1980s and 1990s, when poets like Nathaniel Mackey, Harryette Mullen, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Susan Howe, were all drawing from oral traditions in their written poetry to create radically idiosyncratic responses to violent world events. These poets, I argue, all combine graphic elements with an ear to the culturally specific histories sustained by orally transmitted repertoires (Taylor, 2003), to create historiographies that register the persistent resonance of these events in the present, outside of individualist, patrilinear, and Eurocentric understandings of history.

The paper will be part cultural history, part close reading. It will involve a discussion of what Eric Havelock, in *The Muse Learns to Write* (1986), called 'the modern discovery of orality': in art and scholarship (Ong, McLuhan, and think about some social and technological reasons for

¹³ Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies, with a Continuation to the Present Time*, 4 vols. (T. Miller, 1793 [1794] [1810] [1819]): 197, *American Revolution Institute, Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C. copy*; Robert Charles Dallas, *The History of the Maroons from their Origin to the Establishment of their Chief Tribe at Sierra Leone*. 2 vols. Letter IX. (T.N. Longman & O. Rees, 1803), *Library of Philadelphia copy*.

this interest. I will then focus on the Muse, a rhetorical device originating in Greek epic poetry and deeply associated with orality who appears in poetry by Mackey, Cha, and Mullen at this time. In different ways, and with varying degrees of success, these poets complicate ideologies of race, gender, and subjectivity sustained by the figure of the Muse—ideologies that perpetuate stark dichotomies: subject and object, mind and body, literate and oral, human and other.

Sean O'Brien - Representing Precarity: American Literature and Culture from Boom to Crisis

Sean O'Brien's "Representing Precarity: American Literature and Culture from Boom to Crisis" tracks rising precarity and the representational challenge it poses in post-1945 American literature and film across what he identifies as its two key moments—the boom of the 1940s to the 1970s and the long crisis from the 1970s to the present. Placing precarity rather than plentitude at the centre of the American century, "Representing Precarity" rethinks the cultural practices and political projects of the post-45 period.

Katie O’Neill - From Belief to Behaviour: Misplaced Certainty and Political Engagement in the Age of Conspiracy

This paper examines how conspiracy narratives in contemporary American culture convert belief into political behaviour through misplaced certainty – confidence in claims that are unjustified or unfounded.

Different disciplinary approaches often speak past one another, leaving a gap in understanding how conspiracy beliefs leads to behaviour. Psychologists have tended to focus on the individual traits and cognitive biases of believers, while historians and social scientists have emphasised the cultural, institutional, and social contexts in which conspiracies arise.

This study develops an interdisciplinary approach through a Conspiracy–Certainty–Engagement model. The model explains how social, political, and economic conditions, such as inequality, institutional distrust, polarisation, and the erosion of authority, create fertile ground for social anxiety and uncertainty. Conspiracy narratives exploit these conditions, offering moral and epistemic certainty through emotionally compelling rhetoric. This misplaced certainty fosters unwarranted conviction that shapes political engagement: normative, non-normative, or disengaged, based on belief rather than evidence or critical reasoning.

Drawing on a mixed-methods doctoral project that combines qualitative content analysis with a quantitative experimental survey, the paper uses case studies of QAnon, COVID-19, and the 2020 “stolen” U.S. election to examine how conspiratorial discourse converts structural insecurity into psychological experiences of certainty that drives engagement.

As conspiracy theories erode trust in democratic institutions and justify extremist action, understanding the pathways from belief to behaviour is critical. This study provides a conceptual and empirical framework for explaining how misplaced certainty mediates between conspiratorial belief and political engagement in contemporary America.

Aija Oksman - Re-imaging and Re-imagining: Acts of Resistance and Affirmations of Selfhood

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” – Paulo Freire

This work in progress explores the ability to learn to read a photograph as an act of resistance, where the reading is an interpretation as much as it is an imposition. It comes with preconceived notions of what the world is like and what the images of that world therefore present – to us. Some may have a negative visceral reaction due to their personal opinions; some may immediately feel empathy. Therefore, reading image alone is not valid. One must understand who is in the image, who took the image, when it was taken, where it was taken and why it was taken. What do these mean for examining both of their images and works via pedagogy of resistance?

What Paulo Freire calls the act invention and re-invention, in this case study, Sojourner Truth and Claude Cahun re-imagine and re-image selfhood beyond racism, pseudoscience,

societal expectation, and gendered framing used by the majority white, heteropatriarchal society during their lifetimes. Truth separated the Black female body from white voyeurism by re-imagining the tropes of femininity normally associated with white womanhood (fine clothing, reading, being photographed, etc), putting them in distinctly new setting with placing herself in the centre among these tropes. Claude Cahun explores their gendered and androgynous identities through collaborative photography with partner Marcel Moore. In Cahun's work there are literal and figurative masks in play, there is world play and there is re-iteration of re-imagining what one identifies as in a world against those who deviate from expected white, heteropatriarchal norms.

Adèle Oliver - Ecologies of Liberatory Listening: deltas, quebradas, gullies

The poetics of Black music genres, performance and improvisation can explain social facts of Black life, expose the underlying structures and systems that determine it, and provide frameworks for reimagining and resisting technologies of racial capitalism, the afterlives of slavery and the conditions that they create. In other words, Black music sounds out the convergence between politics, ecology, and sociality to create a 'Black sense of place' that makes ongoing violence plain and offers possibilities for new futures (McKittrick, 2011).

Starting with the epistemologies of the blues (Woods, 1998) in the Mississippi Delta, which developed a transatlantic cornucopia of Black sonic possibilities, this paper travels to Jamaica to explore Dub and the affective and material potential of 'gully' infrastructures (Jaffe and Evans, 2022). We then move to explore avant-garde funk pioneered at the periphery of Brazil's big cities, often referred to as 'quebradas'. This translates to 'gully', and, more literally, quebrada, as a conjugation of the verb 'quebra' means 'broken' or 'breaking'. What does it mean to listen from a place of brokenness? In this paper, I discuss this through my concept of 'quebrada listening', an experimental kind of embodied listening with the body from the margins. In this paper, I explore how engaging in quebrada listening, and the sonic-ecological work of funk, dub, and the blues could be generative across different geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

Anna-Primrose Orchard - Separating the Men from the Boys: The Embodiment of Violence through Childhood Play

From birth we are surrounded by materiality, a medium which informs and defines experiences. In Cold War communist fearing America, children were taught to positively perceive guns as a form of freedom, protection and masculinity. The 1950s contained a “mania” for toy guns of the American West, as the Cowboy became a popular icon within children’s play, amassing a multimillion-dollar industry. These children grew to fight the Vietnam War, being drafted into the military and assigned to Basic Training, an eight-week programme designed to condition men to become homogenous and remove all parts of their civilian identity. Men were intensely trained for war as violence was “embodied” in their new identity.

This paper explores the embodiment of violence within soldiers of the Vietnam War, arguing that it did not commence on entry to the army, but through a learnt childhood connection to masculine material culture of guns and war. Using the lens of Cohen’s Consumers’ Republic (consuming to help the state) it will trace how boys were positively trained for war and learnt understandings of performative gender from youth, as well as how this was capitalised on by the government and military.

Through the notion of play being the work of children, using material culture of American childhood in the 1950s and 1960s, this talk displays the parallels between childhood play and military training in how boys were positively taught military behaviour through toys, racial narratives of “Cowboy and Indians” and the belief of the gun as a companion and friend.

Rowena Azada-Palacios - The US Insular Government's Philippine Herbarium as a Nexus of Imperial Knowledge Production

While the role of botanical gardens in the history of Anglo-European empire is wellknown, institutional herbaria have been less explored. Investigating their history can help shed light on a number of aspects of empire. First, as the study of plants professionalized in the 19th and 20th centuries, herbaria were of greater interest to 'pure' rather than economic botanists; investigating them allows us to home in on the epistemic (as opposed to economic) interests of imperial actors. Secondly, building herbaria required collaborations between a range of imperial and local actors: botanists and curators, collectors, artists, and guides; studying their exchanges can shed light on the dynamics of imperial knowledge production. Third, the processing of plant materials into herbarium sheets allowed them to be sent cheaply across the world, facilitating scientific communication and turning botany into a cross-border, globally-minded endeavour; this can reveal inter-imperial and inter-colonial dimensions of knowledge production. The present paper draws on archival material from the Philippines, the US, and the UK about the first five decades of the Philippine Herbarium, which was established by the US Insular Government at the beginning of the twentieth century. It shows how the collection and systematic cataloguing of colonial plants allowed US colonial scientists to gain access to networks of Anglo-European inter-imperial science as it was being shaped by the aspiration of 'universal knowledge'. It also demonstrates some of the factors that enabled postcolonial scientists' entry into these networks but limited them to the peripheries of knowledge production.

Mikel Barea Pérez - From Lockerbie to Lower Manhattan: Scottish–American Memory Work after Aerial Terror

This paper offers a comparative study of how two emblematic episodes of aerial terror— Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie (1988) and the attacks of 11 September 2001—have been remembered, ritualized, and securitized across Scotland and the United States. I ask how grief is made public, who gets to speak for the dead, and how memorial cultures shape (and are shaped by) security policy. Drawing on close readings of museum and memorial texts (exhibit labels, audio guides, and site brochures), commemorative programs and speeches from annual ceremonies (21 December and 11 September), and press coverage in Scottish and U.S. outlets, I track a transatlantic repertoire of mourning that moves between vernacular practices (candles, name-reading, empty chairs) and institutional forms (visitor screening, perimeter design, surveillance). Methodologically, the paper combines discourse and ritual analysis with visual analysis of memorial architecture and iconography; where available, I incorporate publicly accessible policy documents and family advocacy materials.

I argue that the two memory regimes converge around the figure of the bereaved advocate—families who become investigators, curators, and policy interlocutors—yet diverge in their temporalities and scales: Lockerbie’s *longue durée* of casework and cross-border legalism contrasts with 9/11’s rapid nationalization and global securitization. Conceptually, I develop “infrastructures of mourning” to name the way memorial design, ceremony logistics, and media staging naturalize new security commonsenses. By situating American memory work within Scottish sites and publics, the paper reframes 9/11 not as an exclusively U.S. story but as a

transatlantic formation, illuminating how allied communities negotiate grief, responsibility, and the politics of safety. The project speaks to memory studies, visual culture, and security humanities.

Florence Petroff - Scottish Perspectives on the American Revolution: Shaping the Boundaries of British Empire and Identity (1768–1783)

This paper examines how Scottish ministers, politicians, Enlightenment thinkers, and other professionals responded to the American Revolution – a conflict most of them regarded as a rebellion. Scottish pamphleteers primarily debated with fellow Britons, most notably Richard Price, framing their arguments within a British context that highlighted a domestic divide between the “friends of government” and the “friends of America”, each advocating competing policies toward the Thirteen Colonies.

Scottish pamphlet literature of the 1770s did engage with the American political writings generated during the Stamp Act crisis (1765), but with a ten-year delay, ignoring the Declaration of Independence. In contrast to the American Patriots’ appeals to natural rights, direct representation, and shared sovereignty within the empire, Scottish pamphleteers affirmed their commitment to parliamentary sovereignty, their faith in the perfection of the British constitution, and their loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty. They promoted a vision of a centralised empire knit together by trade, a common system of taxation, and a shared political and religious culture.

For Scottish conservative elites, participating in the American controversy thus became a means of expressing their British patriotism while also promoting the interests of Scotland within Great Britain – most notably through military recruitment in the Highlands. Three decades after the Jacobite rising of 1745, Scots emphasised their sense of “North Britishness”, a hybrid identity forged in contrast to an emerging American one.

Jon Piccini - Tourism, Americanisation and the Vietnam War R&R Scheme in Sydney

Australia's addition to the Vietnam War R&R scheme in September 1967 brought some 280,000 short stay tourists to Sydney, and particularly its notorious 'red light district', Kings Cross. Australia's experience of this 'friendly invasion' aided considerably in the development of a nascent tourist industry in Sydney, due in no small part to the considerable efforts of government promoters and local entrepreneurs. Sydney proved a popular destination for visiting Americans, owing at least in part to its being another white settler society. This influx also created tensions and debates, reflecting concerns expressed across the South-East Asian cities where American troops took their leave. Issues of sex, drugs, criminality, and ever-lurking anxieties around cultural Americanization, often threatened to imperil the scheme. Drawing on press reportage and government documents, this paper reveals that some Sydneysiders and their representatives saw a similarly exploitative dimension to the American presence in their city to that in Kowloon or Bangkok.

Abigail Pinsent - Imagining Resistance: The Alternative Politics of Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal*

This paper constitutes one part of a three-person panel dedicated to deconstructing and reimagining politics through speculative fiction. Focusing on American puppeteer Jim Henson's iconic Dark Fantasy film, *The Dark Crystal* (1982), and the Netflix series prequel, *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance* (2019), this facet of the panel examines how Fantasy functions as a space to not only imagine but play with alternative forms of governance. In the world of *The Dark Crystal*, this reimagination takes the form of resistance to colonial authorities, the organization of the collectively oppressed, and the subversion of gendered divisions of power. In Henson's world, the Skeksis – exiled from their home planet – rule over the indigenous Gelfling race with feigned benevolence, consuming them in secret to sustain their livelihood. The 1982 film demonstrates the catastrophic ecological results of this abuse of power, while the 2019 prequel follows the Gelfling's realization in a failed government and subsequent rebellion. One of the driving forces behind this rebellion is attributed to the divisions of power among the seven Gelfling clans. By concentrating authority in figures like the Maudra, female Gelfling who rule over their respective clans, and characterizing wings – a secondary sex characteristic – as a symbol of female agency and rule, *The Dark Crystal* imagines an entire world that is not only inherently feminine in ways of being, but ways of governing. Examining the sociocultural worldbuilding in Henson's work through the matriarchal society of the Gelfling thus reveals a decentralization of traditional patriarchal and colonial structures.

Zaynab Quadri - Counterinsurgency as Post/Colonial Theory: British and American Imperial Redux in Iraq and Afghanistan

Normative modern counterinsurgency (COIN) theory self-presents in an ostensibly neutral, universalized vernacular. In the then widely-acclaimed 2006 US field manual— assembled in pointed response to the violent deterioration of Iraq— “insurgencies” were carefully defined: “legitimacy” was the prize sought by the government in question, and “different cultures” were said to view “development, corruption, and participation differently.” As a growing body of scholarship in American Studies and US diplomatic history has shown, COIN has never been neutral or universally applicable political science. Rather, COIN is a military knowledge alchemized through the brutal violence of British colonialism, and was then refurbished into a technology of population management by the United States in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This paper will specifically focus on the US application of COIN in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2006-2015. It argues that initiatives as “The Surge” and the Human Terrain System were articulations of a nominally disavowed post/colonial governance rooted in deep Anglo-American histories of mass-scale pacification and domination.

Ben Quail - My Dear Lyndon: Harold Holt, Lyndon Johnson, and US-Australian Relations in the 1960s

Did you know that President Lyndon Johnson became such close friends with his Australian counterpart Harold Holt that he became the first sitting US President to perform a state visit there in 1966? Or that the 1960s was a key turning point for Australia's Pacific alliance system as they turned away from receding British influence and fully embraced the protection of the United States? Or how Britain's entry to the single market – which Boris Johnson infamously apologised to Australia for during Anglo-Australian trade negotiations while Prime Minister - can be directly linked to the strengthening of Australian American relations in the 1960s? This paper posits that the Holt prime ministership was the point at which Australian foreign policy irrevocably swung from Britain to the United States as the key provider of Australian security. Drawn from archival research in Canberra, London, and Austin Texas, this work traces the growing relationship between Johnson and Holt prior to the latter's untimely death in December 1967 and argues that it became central to Australian attempts to ensure security at a tipping point in Anglo-Australian relations. It also reviews Anglo-American relations in the same era, as the United States and President Johnson used Australian concerns to oppose British withdrawal from east of the Suez Canal. The relationships that developed between Johnson, Holt, and Wilson highlight the intersection of diplomacy, strategic necessity, and the relationships formed within the Anglosphere during the Cold War. They continue to be relevant today through the AUKUS security partnership, announced in 2021.

Zélia Catarina Pedro Rafael - “America Was Never America to Me”: Visions of America in the Poetry of Walt Whitman and James M. Whitfield

As the bard of America, Walt Whitman envisioned a national democratic utopia where the differences between races, genders and classes no longer existed - what he defines as a “land of equal daughter, equal sons,” in his 1888 poem “America.” James M. Whitfield, a Black barber whose father was a runaway slave, had a completely different vision of the country where he was born. His “America,” a poem written in 1853, at about the same time that Whitman was finalizing the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, represents a diametrically opposed experience, in many ways foreshadowing Langston Hughes’ cry of “America was never America to me.” While comparing and contrasting the poetic works of these authors, it is possible to discern the racial tensions that have historically characterized the American experience. Further, the analysis of these poems foregrounds the manifold ways whereby race affects and molds said American experience, in a country, and at a time, when skin color dictated reception and perception, as well as mobility. Progress notwithstanding, 250 years after the independence of the United States, ideas and practices of racial discrimination continue to determine policies and shape everyday life in the land of the free.

Shivangi Rani, Iona Shannon - Word and Wordlessness: Articulation through Non-Human Imagery in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) and Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002)

If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word? — Joy Kogawa

In the epigraph to *Obasan* (1981), a novel documenting the internment experience of Japanese-Canadians in World War II, Joy Kogawa renders the word as a 'living', breathing, and 'freeing' entity that is conceived in the wordless knowledge of the 'amniotic deep'. In *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), Julie Otsuka follows Kogawa's stream in pursuit of the liberating word, engaging with the buried history of Japanese-American internment through her transgenerationally osmosed memory. The word that remains trapped in the silences of the characters in *Obasan* finds release in the latter's confessional ending, an utterance of 'subterranean anger'. The presence of the unuttered word indicates the ways in which language fails to encompass the lived experiences of the generation and, in its present form, functions as a weapon of oppression. This paper will explore the use of non-human imagery (elements, animals, material objects) as a way to access wordless knowledge and speak the unspeakable. In comparing the exploration of non-human imagery in the two historical fictions as a way to express ideas of silence and articulation, this paper argues against the universalisation of internment experiences across America and Canada. This paper aims to bring into dialogue the generational shift in experience, and understand how Kogawa and Otsuka differ in their utilisation of non-human imagery to engage with diverging national myths and discourses of belonging.

Keywords: Japanese internment, transgenerational, non-human imagery, silence and articulation, historical fiction

Zhengbang Ren - The “Brooding Tourist” and the “Mixture” in Europe: Henry James, Travel Writing, and Modernity

Henry James is well-known for his frequent visits to the European Continent. Most of his European travel sketches, dating from the 1870s onward, were collected in *A Little Tour in France* (1884) and *Italian Hours* (1909). As a textual milieu of personal thoughts, aesthetic experiences, and self-expression, James’s travel writings on Europe epitomise his strong affiliation with historical and cultural treasures and his deeply-felt regret over the irresistible advance of the modern. Although these sentiments do not mark him as an absolute “antimodernist”, they bring the dichotomy of then and now—between “what has just incalculably been” and the “oblivious modernness that surrounds it”—under the spotlight, especially in the setting of Europe from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. This dichotomy, indeed, has become one of the general frameworks for understanding James and his experience of the world he inhabited, whether he appears as an ethnographer, a novelist, or a tourist in Europe. Yet, James’s European travel writings also reveal his attempt to achieve a simultaneous vision of emerging modernity and the wondrous past, despite his preference for the latter. This paper will argue that, in these travel writings, James fuses the intellectual resourcefulness provided by “facts” of the past with the present, contributing to a moment of pictorial vividness that produces a synthesis of then and now. His European travel writings, thus, show an open attitude towards the selection of aesthetic objects and an attempt to bring about what he calls “mixture”. By examining his travel writings, together with his letters and literary reviews on the theme of travel in Europe, the paper aims to display how writers like Henry James adapted the tradition of the Grand Tour to the onset of modernity and developed a posture of “brooding tourist” that characterises this historical transition.

Alan Rice - Fighting Jim Crow in Britain: Local and Transatlantic Interpretations of the Battle of Bamber Bridge (1943)

This paper is an analysis of the Transatlantic implications of the Mutiny of African American Troops and the memory of the event in Britain. On the night of 24 June 1943, a mutiny against racist Jim Crow practices took place in the small British village of Bamber Bridge, Lancashire. The villagers and the African American troops stationed there saw each other as allies in a fight with a shared enemy, Nazi Germany, and refused American military demands to impose segregation. This led to fighting between the white military police and soldiers from the 1511 Black Quartermaster Truck Division, with over 400 live rounds being fired. One of the African American soldiers, Private William Crossland, died on the village streets. Afterward 35 soldiers were tried for mutiny and most convicted. This battle galvanised the fight for civil rights that unfolded over the ensuing decades but remains little known in the US. Reading against the grain of the court martial records, I situate the mutiny as part of the wider Double-V campaign and in the context of the Detroit riots which happened a few days before; furthermore, I outline the importance of this incident for an understanding of the Transnational fight against Jim Crow and for human rights by African Americans in a segregated army far from home. At the same time using oral narratives and primary local research I analyse the way the battle has been remembered in Bamber Bridge through oral testimonies, memorials and battlefield tours as well as in an annual Commemorative event.

Siân Round - A Guide to the Southern States: The FWP's American Guide Series and Sterling Brown's A Negro Looks at the South

When the poet and critic Sterling A. Brown was appointed as the editor for Negro Affairs at the Federal Writers' Project in 1936, he was both excited and anxious to represent the richness and variety of African American culture in the planned five-volume American Guide series. Four years later, the Negro Affairs department was dismantled and Brown let go, with the forty-eight state guides representing little of Black culture.

Following this disappointment, Brown set out on a tour of the South, funded not federally but by the philanthropic Rosenwald Fund. Brown spent decades trying to structure his experiences on the tour into a book, that would be part-travel guide, part-documentary, and part-musing on the Black South. Finally published posthumous 2007 as *A Negro Looks at the South*, the essays Brown wrote explore the difficulties of travelling the region as an African American, the Black cultures and folklore that exist across the region, and African American attitudes to World War II.

Drawing on Brown's archive, this paper argues that *A Negro Looks at the South* fulfils the thwarted ambitions Brown had for the American Guide Series. More so than that, *A Negro Looks* represents the formal and logistical constraints of the travel guide, revealing the impossibility of representing regional identity within the genre and the impracticalities of travel in the Jim Crow South. Focusing on the guides to the Southern states, this paper uses Brown as a lens to explore how the guidebooks reflect the aims of the Federal Writers' Project.

Tessa Roynon - A Special Collection Awaiting Recognition: Curating Toni Morrison's Editorial List

This paper describes my forthcoming project at The British Library: from 2026 I shall be advising and assisting BL professionals in the acquisition and curation of the titles that Toni Morrison commissioned and published at Random House, where she was a senior trade editor in the late 1960s and 1970s. Until the appearance of Charlotte Terrell's 2024 essay, and Dana Williams's long-awaited book, *Toni at Random* (2025), only one scholar (Cheryl Wall, 2007 and 2012) had analysed this major dimension of Morrison's career in any detail. During her publishing years, Morrison brought around fifty titles into being. These ranged from the autobiographies of civil rights activists to a raft of fiction by previously-neglected Black authors; from radical theoretical, historical and anthropological studies to poetry anthologies and memoirs; from archival 'scrapbooks' such as *The Black Book* (1974) and *The Cotton Club* (1977) to a cookbook, a tennis guide and a medical manual.

Terrell's and Williams's analyses are to be followed by the forthcoming exhibition of Morrison's Random House archive at the Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library (2026), to which I am contributing curatorial commentary, and on whose blog my project was recently featured. During this long overdue moment of recognition for the Morrisonian editorial corpus, my own contribution combines my expertise as a Morrison scholar, historical bibliographer and librarian. As outlined in my recent *Book Collector* article, my campaign is for major US and UK libraries to collect and curate the titles on her list as a special collection in their own right. My first step is to create a scholarly bibliography of all the titles. My second step, working initially with The British Library, is to advise on new acquisitions; at my behest, the BL has recently purchased the anthology *Contemporary African Literature* (1972) as their first accession in this process. My third step will be to work with cataloguers on connecting the titles through notes in the 500 field of the cataloguing records, and my fourth will be collaborating with the BL on a series of public engagement projects that will both celebrate the unparalleled aesthetic-political significance of Morrison's editorial list, and raise awareness about the new special collection campaign.

Marr Sinisi - *Oh, Mary!* And the Campification of Mary Lincoln by Marr Sinisi

The Pulitzer Prize for Drama finalist and two-time Tony award winning play *Oh, Mary!* is a comedy about First Lady of Civil War America, Mary Lincoln. But it is also not about Mary Lincoln. Author of *Oh, Mary!* and originator of the titular role, Cole Escola, imagines her as an erratic, alcoholic, wannabe cabaret star who needs to be managed by her closeted husband, Abraham. Escola has been very open about the fact that they did “less than no research” about Mary Lincoln when writing it, confirming as much in their interview on *Late Night with Seth Meyers* on 7th May 2024. But how can a play that makes a mockery of a real woman by turning her into a farcical character be a success?

The answer for this lies in how the play is predicated on being a deliberate work of camp, in the tradition of how camp is defined as stylistically geared toward exaggeration and frivolity. This paper will explore how *Oh, Mary!* utilizes camp as a rhetorical, comedic, and theatrical device in order to construct “Mary Lincoln” the character. In doing so, I will also examine what is it about Mary Lincoln, the woman, that lends herself to being fashioned into a campy figure. Through examination of the dichotomy between Mary Lincoln, the character, and Mary Lincoln, the woman, the way in which she is (mis)remembered and (mis)represented will demonstrate her present place in public memory.

Mark Slater - A Necessary Relationship?: Big Tobacco Advertising and Black American Marketers Post-WW2

This paper examines *Ebony*, a Black American magazine, and its relationship with Big Tobacco advertisements in the period following the Second World War. Founded in 1945, I analyse the magazine's origins and its desire to look at the 'happier side of Negro life,' particularly the Black middle-class side of life. This paper discusses the marketing and public relations specialists who facilitated such advertisements entering this magazine, while considering the motivations of the owner, John H. Johnson, and the editor, Lerone Bennet Jr., and how they may have felt about accepting advertisements from tobacco firms. Conversely, this paper situates the magazine's advertisements and message in the broader context of leftist critiques of the time, considering how *Ebony's* message was seen to be perverse to many Black leftists. Furthering this, I consider the different political leanings of the ownership of *Ebony* versus the editorial staff, or even readership.

More broadly, this paper speaks to the efforts made by white advertisers and tobacco companies to seek to exploit the Black masses in postwar United States. Indeed, it questions whether, or to what extent, were the owners and marketers involved in *Ebony* deeply involved in this marketing, or were they, due to structural inequalities which exist to the present day for minorities in the US, engaging in exploitative practices against the very community of which they are a part, unbeknownst to them. Using the advertisements themselves, letters, office reports, and a variety of other primary material, this will be analysed.

Naomi Smith - Wherefore Art Thou, Trans Men? Transgender Identities in American Television News

Over the last two decades, transgender Americans have become more visible in society, media and culture – and, consequently, been exploited as a political tool by both Democrats and Republicans alike, forcing them into an unwanted spotlight and placing them at risk.

With this in mind, this paper explores the ways in which transgender identities are constructed and communicated to the American public via national television news broadcasts, and how this has changed over time.

Using archival data drawn from evening news broadcasts on four national television networks in 2004 and 2022, it identifies the kinds of narratives that are told about transgender people and identities, and how those stories are told.

Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality, it discusses the relative complexities – or lack thereof – in the ways transgender people are depicted in these narratives.

In particular, it asks: who is seen on camera and who gets to be heard? How does this intersect with race, indigeneity and other forms of gender identity? And where do these narratives originate? What underlying socio-political structures may be at play?

Finally, it makes use of Stuart Hall's 'encoding/decoding' theory to consider how these narratives may influence public perception of transgender Americans, and what the potential consequences might be for both transgender and cisgender Americans alike.

Hannah Snell - Sites of punishment in the plantation economy; violence upon enslaved females

A spatial analysis would commonly use archaeology such as maps, photos or material culture to analyse the boundaries, perimeters and rules for people within those spaces. However, this paper uses a spatial analysis to uncover the spatial relationships, power and agency of enslavers and enslaved females within spaces of the antebellum plantation through first person narratives. This paper investigates how some enslavers used the plantation as an economic space as they exploited enslaved females' bodies for profit from 1830-60. This study uses first-person narratives to demonstrate strategic and often hidden forms of violence used to prevent the refusal of sexual and non-sexual labour by enslaved females on the plantation. Jails on the plantation for enslaved females are an often-over-looked site of punishment during the antebellum period. First-person narratives are crucial to a spatial analysis as photographs of jails on plantations are not numerous however, descriptive narratives of their existence by formerly enslaved are given in multiple forms of evidence. Formerly enslaved people's narratives by the WPA are used for much of this paper to examine how slaveholders established spaces of violence, punishment, and power over enslaved women's bodies to sustain a plantation economy.

Hannah Spruce - Fiction, Folklore, and Psychopathy: Intertexts in Psychopathy's Clinical Construction

This paper discusses the psychiatric concept of the psychopath – a person clinically devoid of a conscience – by exploring the role that fiction and folklore play in its contemporary stabilisation. Although psychopathy as a medicalised concept has roots in European criminological, legal, and psychiatric traditions, its contemporary form was popularised largely by psychologists working in Canada and the United States.

These psychologists popularised a psychiatric narrative of psychopathy and employed literary techniques and fictional strategies to flesh out their sketches of psychopathy as a meaningful and valid clinical concept. Using a literary studies approach, I underscore how psychopathy discourses draw from, conceal, and transform a series of literary, folkloric, and pseudoscientific intertexts that obscured these origins to modernise archaic ideas about evil and its detection through a contemporary medicalised frame.

At stake in the medicalisation of human cruelty and remorselessness is not only an obscuring of its origins in fiction, but the eclipsing of less dominant and potentially more meaningful ways of thinking about human cruelty and violence.

Susan Stanfield - Cooking for Freedom: The Free Produce Movement and Women's Support of Abolition

Boycotts of items produced by enslaved individuals gained popularity in Great Britain in the 1790s and became more widely followed in the United States in the 1820s. These associations were among the earliest antislavery societies integrated by race and gender. Not always popular among abolitionists, the free produce movement was seen as extremist and an off-shoot of the more radical Hicksite Quakers. However, for some, isolating the southern economy was considered a critical addition to the Garrisonian approach of moral suasion. Women were central to this movement. Antebellum women recognized the power they held as the buyers for household goods. Given the number of items cultivated by the enslaved (most importantly sugar and cotton) the free produce movement sought alternatives to make the boycott easier to maintain. The early Free Produce organizations became part of female abolition societies providing them the opportunity to organize and advocate anti-slavery, education of former slaves and encourage membership of more women, both black and white. Females participated at all levels of the movement, as cooks, shoppers, and some women even served as shop owners. Some activists even tried to become producers of the goods and establish sugar beet farms to create an alternate to slave cultivated sugar. Using a source base of letters, newspapers, and pamphlets, this paper argues that women used the power of domesticity to create a social justice economy.

Anticommunist education activist Samuel Blumenfeld (1926-2015) believed he had found the silver bullet to solve most, if not all, the problems that marred modern America. With phonics, children would learn to read the way God intended—connecting sounds and letters—and become productive and patriotic citizens. Returning to phonics, Blumenfeld believed, would make a bloated and corrupted public education system redundant and it would show how Great Society programs were unnecessary. Blumenfeld spread his message far and wide through books and public speeches and by networking across several conservative groups, from the John Birch Society to the Reading Reform Foundation and from Christian Reconstructionism and to George W. Bush' Reading First initiative. This paper takes Blumenfeld's career as a starting point to explore how phonics unified various strands of American conservatism from the 1960s through the 2000s. As such, Blumenfeld casts a new light on how ideas spread and adjusted to new contexts.

Randall J. Stephens - Battling the Red Menace: Fundamentalists, Race, and Politics in the Cold War US

In the middle of the 20th century white American fundamentalists, invigorated by anti-communism, were connecting their religious outlook to political realities in new ways. High profile ministers and organizations warned fellow believers of the demonic red menace at home and abroad. Pastors like Billy James Hargis, Carl McIntire, Kenneth Goff, and John Rice crusaded against communism in their publications as well as on radio and TV programs. Stalwarts described the threats to global missions overseas just as they warned of the civil rights movement's communist infiltration on the home front. (The latter was especially important in the Cold War South.) More moderate evangelicals were often at loggerheads with fundamentalists on a host of issues. Yet, they largely shared similar views of communism and its satanic influence. For instance, in 1951 evangelist Billy Graham claimed, "there are over eleven hundred social sounding organizations that are communist and communist operated in this country." Such warnings echoed the bold assertions made by Senator Joseph McCarthy the year before. The shared language and style of anti-communism united conservative believers across the religious right long before the Reagan Revolution. Accordingly, this paper will examine how anti-communist crusading shaped fundamentalists' understanding of race and politics. It will particularly focus on anti-liberal campaigns, segregationist arguments, and the various ways that red baiting helped politicize white fundamentalists.

Lucy Stevens - Making AI Great Again: Trump, Masculinity, and Techno-nationalism in Fiction

Donald Trump has repeatedly cast artificial intelligence (AI) as central to securing U.S. dominance over rival nations. Headlines such as Melania Trump's declaration that "the robots are here" illustrate how AI functions not only as a technological advance but as a symbolic frontier of American power. Drawing on Judith Butler's performativity theory [1988] and Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* [1960], this paper argues that Trump enacts a presidential masculinity that fuses technological command with exclusionary nationalism. Through analysis of Trump's speeches and media coverage, I show how his evocation of an AI "race" recalls Kennedy's New Frontier and the Cold War space race, projecting both nostalgia and competitive urgency.

Literary fiction provides a crucial lens for understanding this performance. Nicholas Gaskill has noted how novelists respond to Trump through "panic fiction," staging his persona as both threat and symptom of broader cultural anxieties. Paul Auster's *4 3 2 1* [2017] and Don DeLillo's *The Silence* [2020] illuminate how Trump's rhetoric of AI as an existential threat is bound to apocalyptic fantasies of survival, technological transcendence, and the fragility of American exceptionalism. Their novels treat Trumpism as a fiction in itself – an unstable blend of performance, myth, and fear that refracts the ways AI is bound to presidential authority. While Trump invokes the positive mythology of past presidents, I will argue that these novels reveal how such nostalgia is inseparable from anxieties of national decline.

Annie Strausa – "A Desert Road from Vegas to Nowhere": Cinematic Influence in Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* (1992)

This paper explores the hitherto unexamined influence of Percy Adlon's 1987 film *Bagdad Cafe* on Gloria Naylor's 1992 novel *Bailey's Cafe*. Bringing new insight to the novel's subversion

of sexual stereotypes and Naylor's decision to begin writing for stage and screen in the 1990s, I argue that this influence—revealed by material in Naylor's archive—indicates Naylor's alignment with contemporary Black feminist filmmakers such as Julie Dash and Salem Mekuria, whose work not only challenges overtly racist and sexist portrayals of Black women but also counters subtler stereotypes embedded in cinematic fantasies of multiculturalism. *Bagdad Cafe* presents such a fantasy. Although well received by feminists for its focus on female friendship—between an African American café owner and a Bavarian tourist—the film's progressive aims are undermined by its latent inclusion of Black female stereotypes, including the “nagging” wife and hypersexual girl. Drawing on Jeanne Theoharis's work on post-Civil Rights progress narratives, scholarship on Black women's cinema by bell hooks and Jacqueline Bobo, and Naylor's archived materials on film and music, I show that *Bailey's Cafe* revises Bagdad's stereotypes by directly confronting the issues these stereotypes obscure. While Adlon's use of music and magic erases tragedy in his comedy-drama, Naylor blends these elements to craft a Black feminist narrative attuned to both the triumphs and violence of the late post-Civil Rights era. As such, expanding Emily Lordi's work on Black women's writing and song, I highlight the value of new intermedial and archive-based approaches to Black women's histories.

Fionnghuala Sweeney - Surfeit or Loss? The many autobiographies and slender book of poems by James Watkins, formerly a slave in Maryland

James Watkins arrived in Britain in 1850 and began publishing his autobiography in Bolton in 1852. Many subsequent editions of this work followed, as did, unusually in this period of African American writing, a pamphlet of original and selected poetry. Few copies of the autobiography survive, not enough to constitute a full run of the editions that were published. Copies of the poems are likewise very thin on the ground. This paper examines the publication, circulation and sale of these works, and asks whether and how to address them within an economy of surfeit and loss. What relationship exists between the literary object and the possibility of its persistence, and the materiality of its form? How does the literary object behave when it is treated as a residue – of an otherwise unknowable history and a site of encounter between the slavery system and its jurisdictionally distinct free counterpart? What do we do with African American-authored literature published in Britain? None of these questions will be possible to answer in any depth, but I hope to raise them anyway.

Jarkko Tanninen - Tender Moments in St. Charles, Virginia: Photographic Regionalism and the Appalachian Gaze

Amidst the political tension and division of the 21st century United States, both national and regional mythologies have come under scrutiny for their unstable and exclusionary foundations. Regionalist photography today consciously negotiates such myths, including the historical

representations of Appalachia as a poverty-stricken and isolated region. Documentary photography has largely contributed to these persistent narratives of suffering in the region. In her photobook *Hillbilly Heroin, Honey* (2010), Hannah Modigh's tender portraits of the inhabitants of St. Charles, Virginia, acknowledge the social and economic struggles within Appalachia, yet defy photographic traditions of othering and marginalisation the region has been subject to. With a lens that empathises more than it exoticizes, Modigh redefines Appalachia through familial love and intimacy. *Hillbilly Heroin, Honey* challenges and expands cultural imaginaries of Appalachia by seeking answers in the communities and microhistories of the region.

Through Appalachia, the paper addresses larger aspirations in recent American photography to resist, critique, and transform legacies of regional stereotypes and prejudices inherited from wider popular culture. The paper thus argues that contemporary regionalist photography traces the formation of both regional and national identities, reveals methods of visual placemaking, and places emphasis on themes of community, belonging, and resilience during a time of division and insecurity. Although regionalism as a lens and subject matter has historically been associated with the conservative values of American nationalism and traditionalism, Hannah Modigh's photography highlights its power as a representational and critical tool that steers American visual culture toward practices of inclusion and empowerment.

Jennifer Terry – Sources Notes: Repositories of Word and Image in the Art of Lorna Simpson, Ellen Gallagher and Wangechi Mutu

This paper examines how assemblages of word and image in the work of three contemporary Black women artists are central to their referential, archival and subversive practice.

In her art Ellen Gallagher regularly recycles material from her collection of mid to late twentieth-century Black lifestyle magazines. She painstakingly reworks images and text from publications such as *Black Digest*, *Sepia*, *Ebony*, *Our World* and *Jet*, using these sources to capture Black style, rehearse advertising copy, and play with representational expectations and timeframes. Lorna Simpson similarly works with found photography and magazine back issues, also more recently drawing on the page layout, labels and illustrations of a 1929 scientific textbook – *Minerals from Earth and Sky* – in order to reveal entanglements of geological knowledge, power and Black life. Meanwhile, Wangechi Mutu takes prints from earlier medical, anatomical and botanical guides, reconfiguring them in collages that both suggest myth and metamorphosis, and lay bare historical exploitation. Beyond mere revision, I pose that the relation to print culture in these works, and specifically the incorporation of the written within the scheme of the visual art, is key to their activation and their critical engagement with capitalist, extractive, colonial and reproductive processes.

Simona Tobia - “Being here meant that I could be happy”. Americans, Pau and Transnational Belonging

I already had some friends residing at Pau. [...] This place is very beautiful to me surrounded by the Pyrenees whose distant peaks are already covered with snow.

[...] The drives, are simply enchanting [...] and the lovely Chateaus built upon the hills all facing the mountains I cannot attempt to describe clearly.

Mary Todd Lincoln arrived in Pau in September 1876, after having been declared “insane”, spent months in an asylum and finally “restored to sanity” with the help of some friends. She found a place where she could rest and bring back her serenity with the pleasurable pastimes that attracted to this little known-place many other members of the English-speaking elite.

This paper examines the presence and evolving experiences of Americans in Pau, France, by attempting to contextualize contemporary migration within a longer history that began in the 19th century. Figures such as Mary Todd Lincoln and Wilbur Wright, who contributed to settle in Pau the first flying school, are examples of an early migratory experience driven by climate and social prestige. Today, the American presence in Pau is a more heterogeneous experience and a series of oral history interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023 with residents from the U.S. show that they are a socially and economically diverse group and their paths reflect a complex mix of personal aspirations, identity, but also shifting global values (Hedegaard and Larsen 2019).

The analysis explores how American migrants in Pau conceive of ‘place’ through their emotional attachment and how their accounts move between a liminal space and belonging. Drawing on Benson and Osbaldiston (2014), the study investigates “the cultural significance of place” and how this destination becomes a repository “of culturally framed imaginings of a better way of life.” Narratives of Americans “opting for elsewhere” (Hoey 2014) suggest that home is not only a geographical element, but a more fluid construct, shaped by movement, memory and adaptation, and Pau is a place that offers emotional resonance and community, but it also has obstacles, such as linguistic and bureaucratic barriers, that contribute to shaping feelings of in-betweenness in these accounts. The paper draws on the concept of in-between or “third space” (Bhabha 2006), to analyze how American migrants negotiate past and present emotional attachments, and it reframes lifestyle migration as a context of varied experiences, with complex negotiations on identity, place and belonging, and to what extent it is “rooted in relative privilege” (Croucher 2018).

Gyorgy Toth - The Memory of John Paul Jones in Cold War US-UK/Scottish Relations

John Paul Jones was a Scotsman turned American revolutionary who commanded a US fleet against the British Royal Navy on the high seas in the late 18th century. Despite his controversial past as a 'brutal' ship's captain, a 'slaver', an alleged murderer and rapist, and subsequently a 'mercenary' rear-admiral in the Russian navy, Jones' figure and memory served as a symbolic plank in the Anglo-US relations of the Cold War. By 1947 the US Congress had established the John Paul Jones Bicentennial Commission to orchestrate anniversary celebrations, including official events in Scotland. In 1953, a plaque was unveiled at Jones' birthplace in Scotland by the

Navy and the Daughters of the American Revolution. In the 1950s, the United States Navy took groups of officers from its ships in port at Leith, Scotland, on training and goodwill visits to Jones' birthplace in Arbigland in Dumfries and Galloway. Such transatlantic commemorations served not only the US government's domestic agendas, but also a realignment in early Cold War Anglo-American relations. Memory diplomacy continued with the Bicentennial of the American Revolution in 1976, by which point the rise of Scottish nationalism served to complicate representations of Jones's overlapping Scottish-ness, British-ness, and American-ness.

Combining approaches from Memory Studies, Performance Studies and Transatlantic American Studies, this paper will analyse John Paul Jones' image as depicted in the 1959 Hollywood film *John Paul Jones*, produced in the US but marketed in the United Kingdom in that same year. I will be interpreting the film in the context of the United States and United Kingdom reasserting their transatlantic alliance in the face of supreme geopolitical competition. In this case of audiovisual culture, while cultural producers and distributors were working for profit, they were also serving the United States and United Kingdom's effort to impose their current Cold War framework of their particular geopolitical alliance on the memory of a figure who in his own time frequently subverted national categories and allegiances.

Key phrases: Scottish-American history, culture and exchange; the "special relationship"; the Cold War; the global image of Scotland and Scottishness; the history of visual culture; the history of Hollywood; the United States Navy.

Gabriella Treglia - Knowledge Hierarchies and Replacement Narratives: Settler Colonialism versus Cultural Pluralism in the "Indian New Deal" Education Program

Settler colonialist control of education narratives persisted beyond the ending of the coercive Assimilation era. The 'Indian New Deal' (1933-1945) was characterized by professed 'cultural tolerance' and the federal government's apparent rejection of both aggressive assimilationist rhetoric and policies of overt dispossession, notably land allotment. The New Deal BIA promoted day schools for younger children, lifted the ban on Indigenous languages in the school environment, and commissioned the production of bilingual school books focused on Indigenous histories and socio-cultural traditions. Yet despite these moves towards cultural pluralism, the BIA schools remained spaces of cultural conflict and attempted colonization – notably in the promotion

of Eurocentric narratives that framed lesson plans, textbooks and the learning experience. This paper explores the ways in which history, science/ecology and healthcare narratives were taught at the boarding and day schools in the 1930s, focusing on BIA-commissioned textbooks and teachers' correspondence and lesson plans. I argue that despite some moves towards cultural pluralism, the teaching materials and wider BIA attitudes represent an attempt to wrest control of - and reshape - narratives relating to the framing of history, science and the natural environment. In this respect, while the New Deal largely eschewed the land-grabbing impulse widely associated with settler colonialism, it practiced a settler colonialist attitude to Indigenous knowledge systems, seeking their erasure and replacement with Eurocentric narratives based on Western science. This paper also examines the ways in which Indigenous students and teachers challenged the imposition of knowledge hierarchies and sought to reshape the BIA's education agenda.

Ryan Trimm - "Ergonomics" and the Times of Capital: Rancière, Value Form, and Lyric Realism in *Netherland*

Joseph O'Neill's 2008 *Netherland* has been associated with stylistic "lyric realism" since Zadie Smith's infamous review. However, this mode intersects with its uneasy discourse around capitalism: banker Hans van den Broek assesses investments involving petroleum ventures; as he and his wife maintain "comfortable" lives in New York and London, the prose of his first-person narration is peppered with the brand names delineating their lifestyle. And yet, the style remains fraught with his self-conscious interventions betraying anxiety about clichés and how things connect with one another. Indeed, Hans' job is jokingly labeled "ergonomics" by his wife in reference to the sophistry he employs in his equities analysis: deploying his classical education, Hans generates apparent chains of reasoning linked by "ergo" to convince himself and others of the advisability of investments. This pattern of plausible and seemingly ratiocinative connections

contrasts with his refusal to link dots both in his own life and his narrative style. A tension thus develops between the smooth presentation of the self and the undercurrents troubling how subjects and events link together. The novel thus betrays what, following Jacques Rancière, constitutes the competing times of neoliberalism: the time of the self and the time of capital. Value form theory allows us to understand these as a forward-driven linear temporality of production and hence of subjectivity; and the competing cycles of capital operating to retroactively evaluate already sunk investments. This tension roils Hans' uneasy "lyric" realism, betraying a temporal division within his neoliberal reality.

Myka Tucker-Abramson - Cartographies of Empire: the Road Novel and American Hegemony

Myka Tucker-Abramson's "Cartographies of Empire: the Road Novel and American Hegemony" both offers the first global study of the road novel, and makes an argument for the road novel as a key, global genre of the post-45 period that is coterminous with, and revealing of US hegemony's global trajectory.

Aliki Varvogli - Mothers and others: Raven Leilani's *Luster*, Keiley Reed's *Such a Fun Age* and the inequalities of caregiving

Mothers play a crucial role in the construction of the US national imaginary and, consequently, images of motherhood in American literature reflect, contest, or reconfigure that role. *Luster* and *Such a Fun Age* both contain major characters whose experiences are defined by motherhood, but they shift the emphasis from the mother to the caregiver. By building their plots around the financial implications of motherhood and around a black caregiver's interactions with a white mother, the two authors highlight the seen and unseen labour of motherhood, the inequalities of childcare, and the ongoing challenges faced by people of colour in a world where constructions of the family continue to emphasize its primacy as the building block of nationhood, presumed white, monogamous and heterosexual. This paper has a two-fold aim: to argue that the tropes of motherhood and caregiving need to be considered more fully for their contribution to thematic explorations of ongoing racial inequalities in the labour market, and to argue that the formal complexity of each narrative supports and amplifies its themes.

María Fernanda Ortiz Vivas - Sands of Repair: Afro-Puerto Rican coastal ritual as maroon legacies of repair

This paper/presentation examines how Afro-Puerto Rican communities in the southern coastal town of Ponce transform colonial infrastructures of circulation—ports, plantation coastlines, racial democracy, and extractive geographies—into sites of rupture, refusal, and decolonial possibility. Puerto Rico’s coast, historically shaped by slavery, maritime marronage, industrial contamination, disaster capitalism, and ongoing U.S. colonial governance, has long functioned as an “island-laboratory” in which empire experiments on racialized and gendered life. Yet this same coastline is also where Afro-Puerto Rican communities enact what I call internal Afro-repair: embodied, ritual, and communal practices that exceed the narrow frameworks of external reparations and unsettle the epistemic and material circulations of empire. Focusing on the Puerto Rico Organization for Performing Arts’ (PROPA) ceremony in la playa de Ponce—a ritual honoring eight enslaved ancestors who entered the archipelago through this port—I analyze how Yoruba-inspired performance, bomba, and coastal ritual operate as insurgent infrastructures. Drawing on Wole

Soyinka's theory of ritual space, Christina Sharpe's "wake work," and Caribbean scholarship on cimarronería, I argue that PROPA's activation of the coast reconfigures temporal, spatial, and ancestral relations. Through the drum, the body, the batey, and the omnipresent element of sand, the ceremony generates alternative infrastructures of connection and world-building that reroute colonial circulatory systems. By reframing the coast not as an extractive node but as a maroon geography of memory, relation, and repair, this paper contributes to broader conversations on how Black and Afro-Indigenous communities craft infrastructures of otherwise-patchworked, embodied, and profoundly decolonial.

Phillip A. Voight - Confronting the fascist turn in American politics: Teaching students to over-code missing or inaccurate historical information

Jason Stanley has argued that fascist states feel deeply endangered by historically accurate national narratives. "At every opportunity," he noted, "these regimes find ways of erasing or concealing history in order to consolidate their power" (2024, p. 9). True to form, President Donald Trump, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Texas Governor Greg Abbott have gone to extraordinary lengths to rewrite the American national experience with slavery and racism, and to obscure or erase the contributions of African Americans, women and LGBTQ citizens. Together with allied groups like Moms for Liberty, these censorship efforts have targeted museums, public and school libraries, textbooks and curricular materials, and even teachers themselves. In addition to erasing the lived experiences of minority groups, these actions hinder historical understanding, undermine civic education, and threaten the very foundations of American multi-racial democracy.

In response, this paper calls for educators to teach students to deploy readily accessible low-technology augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) methods for over-coding dominant

narratives. Building on the successful use of these techniques during a study away course, the author contends that guerrilla media strategies like over-coding offer a powerful tool to combat official censorship and to increase student engagement with historical narratives. While perhaps not practical as the sole means of confronting the fascist turn in American politics, over-coding encourages students to recognize the power of personal agency in response to state censorship.

Jonathan Ward - Spectacles of Power: Black Masculinity, White Supremacy, and Violence in American Visual Culture

Looking at a range of cultural examples, including lynching postcards, D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* (2018), and Pixar's *Soul* (2020), this paper will examine the cultural representation of the relationship between Black masculinity, White supremacy, and violence. Beginning with the circulation of lynching postcards as both documentation and reinforcement of White supremacist power, this paper situates these early visual artifacts within a longer trajectory of racial spectacle, where *The Birth of a Nation* further codifies this nexus, mythologizing Black male aggression and legitimizing White violence as civic duty. In contrast, *Django Unchained* attempts a revisionist revenge fantasy that ostensibly empowers the Black male hero yet risks reproducing the spectacle of racialized violence for entertainment. *Black Panther* situates the Black male body in relation to violence in a variety of problematic ways, while *Soul* effaces the multiplicities of violence that Black people face as a result of White supremacy. Together, these texts reveal the shifting aesthetics and politics of representing Black male subjectivity within systems of racial control. By interrogating the visual economies that bind Black masculinity to violence (whether as threat, victim, or hero) and efface the violence of Whiteness, this paper argues that American popular

culture continues to stage and negotiate the terms of racial power through the spectacle of the Black male body.

Matthew Ward - 'The Great Object is that Every Man Be Armed': The Creation of American Gun Culture, 1750-1825

Historians interested in the origins of American gun culture have mainly focused on counting guns and showing widespread gun ownership in early America. However, widespread gun ownership does not necessarily mean that there was a gun culture; many people in eighteenth-century America owned butter churns, but there was no 'butter churn culture'. By studying guns as material culture, it becomes possible to see how Americans' relationship with guns changed over time. Specifically, by tracking how often discussion of guns appeared in American publications—such as books, pamphlets, and newspapers—it is possible to identify a clear and significant shift in American attitudes towards firearms between 1790 and 1810. For instance, references to guns in newspapers were more than 10 times as frequent after 1810 as before 1780. This change was driven by intense political debates between Federalists and Republicans over the militia's role in society and by widespread fears of a standing army. These debates helped to foster a belief that it was patriotic for every American man to bear arms; Patrick Henry, for example, said that 'The Great Object is that Every Man Be Armed'. Republican support for the militia connected gun ownership with patriotism and national service, and gun ownership appears to have been higher in Republican counties than in Federalist ones. This allows us to consider the Second Amendment,

and its emphasis on 'a well regulated Militia,' as creating a new gun culture, rather than reflecting an existing one.

Claire Watt - Allen Ginsberg in Scotland: Counterculture, Spirituality, and Transatlantic Poetics

This paper examines Allen Ginsberg's underexplored relationship with Scotland, arguing that his visits in the early 1970s formed a crucial point of transatlantic exchange between the American Beat movement and Scottish literary and spiritual culture. Although Ginsberg is firmly situated within the New York countercultural milieu, his travels through Scotland, encompassing Glasgow, Edinburgh, Iona and the Tibetan Buddhist community at Samye Ling, reveal a reciprocal dialogue that shaped both his poetics and his reception in Britain.

Ginsberg's Scottish itinerary included public readings in Glasgow, where he engaged directly with audiences shaped by a distinct working-class and socialist cultural landscape. His famed meeting with Hugh MacDiarmid in 1973 represented a symbolic encounter between two revolutionary poetic traditions: the American Beats and the Scottish Renaissance. My paper considers how their exchange reflects their shared linguistic experimentation, political dissent and the reimagining of national identity.

My paper also considers Ginsberg's 1973 visit to Samye Ling, the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the West, located in Dumfries and Galloway. This visit positioned Scotland as a site

of international Buddhist practice for Ginsberg, combining his interests in meditation, mantra, and non-Western philosophies. By foregrounding these moments, I argue that Scotland served not merely as a backdrop to Ginsberg's travels but as an active contributor to his artistic and spiritual evolution. In turn, Ginsberg's presence catalysed new transatlantic cultural exchanges, influencing Scottish writers, activists, and countercultural networks. My paper situates Scotland as a meaningful, though often overlooked, touchpoint within the geography of American postwar experimental poetry.

Christy Wensley - The Transatlantic Sound: Literary passages between the Caribbean, the United States & Europe

In the Prologue to *The Atlantic Sound*, Caryl Phillips travels from the Caribbean to England, tracing what for the 'West Indian emigrants of an earlier generation... was merely the prelude to a larger adventure', while recognising 'for me this will be no Atlantic crossing into the unknown.' (4) As he crosses the ocean from Europe back to America, James Baldwin closes an unpublished essay addressed to a 'European friend' with the haunting realization that as he and the white Europeans he is travelling with approach the U.S., these friends will succumb to the fiction of Baldwin, and of Black people, as 'dark strangers' in the ongoing wake of the transatlantic slave trade, unable to resist the pull of the more brazenly hostile 'American' view. Alongside Phillips and Baldwin, I explore how, in this space between their various home(lands), the 'routes' and 'roots' of theorist Stuart Hall's diasporic thinking emerge. In conversations between Baldwin, Phillips, and Hall, including interviews and radio appearances, as well as across their writing to and about each other's work, I trace a fluidity of influence, inspiration, and closeness that marks these authors' relationships with one another. My paper considers the ways in which influence is refigured beyond literary anxieties and shared places, identities, or histories, and is guided by a multilayered and multidirectional sense of the (trans)atlantic. Through this, I examine how the

'passage' is literally and literarily experienced and mobilized in their work as each writer creates narratives around and through their personal journeys.

Lucy Whitehead - Diplomacy, Reparation, Soft Power? Americans Repatriating British Cultural Heritage, 1905–1948

The first half of the twentieth century saw a mass transfer of British literary heritage to America, as wealthy US collectors and institutions purchased thousands of manuscripts by hundreds of British authors. This acquisition of unique artefacts marked a shift in cultural power towards America before 1945. The direct links between such cultural authority and broader geopolitics are evident: during the First and Second World Wars, for example, auctions of literary manuscripts in America and Britain financed the war effort and raised money for the Red Cross.

Amidst this prevailing westward flow and a growing rhetoric of American archival hegemony, manuscript repatriation to British institutions offered a distinctive opportunity for US (inter)national self-fashioning and cultural and geopolitical positioning. Drawing on original archival research in multiple American and British libraries, including work funded by a BAAS Research Assistance Award, this paper will focus on two key case studies: the 1926 bequest to the newly established Brontë Parsonage Museum of Charlotte Brontë manuscripts amassed since 1905 by the Philadelphia millionaire Henry Bonnell, and the 1948 repatriation to the British Museum of the manuscript of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, arranged by the Librarian of Congress Luther Evans in company with multiple wealthy and influential American donors.

My paper will investigate the significance of these overlooked repatriations for American studies. I will show how they generated fierce discourse and competing narratives on both sides of the Atlantic about America's cultural and geopolitical identities, the balance of power in transatlantic relations, and the nature of Anglo-American literary heritage. In particular, I will examine how the framework of repatriation — more commonly invoked in relation to the return by a violent power of objects taken from an exploited nation or people — impacted on each country's sense of America's place in the global order. By illuminating the extra-literary stakes of manuscript transfer, my paper will break down barriers between literary studies and political histories, challenging the widely accepted paradigm within the latter of American pre-eminence as a post-1945 phenomenon.

Laura Wildgoose - An Analysis of 'Lounge' by Rachel (Inuit-Cree) and Sean (Scottish-Mohawk) Qitsulik-Tinsley

In this paper I will be conducting an analysis of 'Lounge' by Rachel (Inuit-Cree) and Sean (Scottish-Mohawk) Qitsulik-Tinsley, a short story from the Indigenous North American and First Peoples-written collection *Taaqtumi: An Anthology of Arctic Horror Stories*. I will be considering how we can interpret mental, political and emotional states from how the body reacts or transforms in this text, specifically within the multi-genre context it lies in: including horror, science-fiction and dystopia. Within 'Lounge', the authors also explore the responsibility of witness. Therefore, I will be looking at role of the protagonist as witness, how she sees and experiences the events of the story and how this effects the reader. Additionally exploring the difficult lines between fantasy and reality that Rachel and Sean Qitsulik-Tinsley both draw and dismantle. This paper will be employing theories from Indigenous Studies, disability studies, and bioethics; I will present how this text engages with issues of Indigenous sovereignty and generational knowledges, and with the exploitation of the body for profit.

Paul Williams - Shary Flenniken at the National Lampoon

This paper examines the contributions of underground comix creator Shary Flenniken to the *National Lampoon* (1970-1998), a US humour magazine known for being shocking, satirical, and puerile, and which at its height of popularity in the mid-1970s sold over a million copies per issue. Flenniken, part of the Air Pirates underground comix collective in the early 1970s, was first published in the November 1972 issue of the *Lampoon*. She was a regular contributor for many years, usually drawing comics featuring her well-known characters Trots and Bonnie, and she was an editor at the magazine from August 1979 to January 1981. Based on interviews conducted with Flenniken, I will examine the work she performed as a *Lampoon* editor, which included recommending cartoonists for the “Funny Pages” comics section of the magazine and designing features such as a parody of a West Coast women's humour magazine. I will also discuss the comics that Flenniken drew for the *Lampoon*, which were formally innovative and reflected on the gendered relations of production at the magazine. This is part of a larger research project that explores how and when underground comix appeared in non-underground contexts in the 1970s, in ways that complicate narratives of “selling out” or “mainstreaming.”

Robert S. Wolff - Elihu Burritt and Anglo-American Antislavery Thought

In the 1840s and 1850s, Connecticut's Elihu Burritt gained fame in the United States and Great Britain as "The Learned Blacksmith," an artisan and self-taught intellectual who became a prominent reformer and prolific writer. Immersing himself in a Worcester (Massachusetts) library, he read far and wide with a particular interest in ancient and modern languages. He lectured on evangelicalism, temperance, and antislavery. He championed the international peace movement, helped organize European peace conferences, and edited *The Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood*. He chronicled the Irish famine after a visit to County Cork and authored a broadside entitled *Twenty reasons for total abstinence from slave-labour produce*. President Abraham Lincoln later appointed him United States Consul to Birmingham. Nevertheless, Burritt remains an obscure figure in histories of 19th-century reform, arguably because his views deviated from intellectual orthodoxies at the time and standard historical narratives later. For example, Burritt opposed slavery in the American South but did not demand its abolition. Instead, he proposed a "compensated emancipation" scheme in 1856 that would have paid southern slaveholders to free enslaved Africans. This proved to be anathema to both avowed abolitionists who demanded "immediate" repentance from America's "national sin" and slaveholders who were as dependent upon white supremacy as they were upon slaveholding. Rather than treating Burritt as an anomaly, this paper uses his published writings and extensive correspondence to explore the collision of American and British antislavery thought, including the variable influence of factors such as Christian pacifism and Chartism.

Tymek Woodham - Black Mountain College and the G.I. Bill

The salad days of Black Mountain College owed much to the GI Bill. Even before the passing of the Serviceman's Readjustment Act in 1944, faculty had lobbied to change the bill's wording from 'accredited' to 'approved institutions'—an important detail for a renegade progressive college that forewent grades and varsity sports in favour of communal living and democratic decision-making. After gaining approved status in 1945, Black Mountain's enrolment expanded dramatically, kickstarting a process that would transform an obscure, Depression-era experiment into the global hub of arts innovation we know today.

Yet Black Mountain's post-war success also represented a crisis in the way the institution understood itself as a prefigurative social field. While attracting practitioners from across the world and students from more diverse walks of life, the period was also marked by a bruising debate surrounding the College's future direction. Would it stay true to its inaugural mission statement of holistic educational transformation? Or would it capitalise on its newfound reputation and transition into an arts institute more amenable to public and private funding bodies?

In this paper, I seek to complicate the prevailing mythologies of Black Mountain's 'golden age'. With particular focus on publicity materials for the 1946 and 1948 summer programmes, I trace the College's conflicted self-image as it oscillated between radical counterpublic and 'approved' private institution. In these years, Black Mountain attempted to prefigure an optimistic

vision of postwar national renewal, one which was ultimately at odds with the tightening political climate of Cold War liberalism during the late 1940s.

Olivia Wright - “Help me to Fight”: Aid to Incarcerated Mothers and Feminist Anti-Prison Organising

This paper examines the anti-carceral feminist organising enacted by and for incarcerated women in the 1980s as part of the Boston-based organisation Aid to Incarcerated Mothers. Aid to Incarcerated Mothers (AIM) sits at the junction between the anti-prison and welfare rights movements and feminism. By working within and against the prison, AIM not only tackles the issues of parental rights and family separation, but also challenges systemic problems relating to gender, race and class within housing, welfare, and (care) work. In this paper, I will discuss what I perceive to be AIM's four core strategies: maintaining positive family ties; parental rights and legal matters; integration back into the community; and challenging problematic views of incarcerated mothers. In doing so, I will explore the ways in which AIM seeks to address issues in society through community-based solutions (instead of incarceration), and articulate an intersectional, anti-carceral feminism that emphasises human rights and dignity.

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