



**AMERICAN STUDIES**  
**2025-  
2026**  
**NEWSLETTER**

american  
studies

# A message from our chair

## DR. LAUREN GUTTERMAN

Dear AMS Community,

It has been an incredibly difficult year for American Studies.

As you all probably know, the President and Provost have decided to close our department and merge our unit with African and African Diaspora Studies, Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in a new Department of Social and Cultural Analysis. This is a tremendous loss. American Studies courses were first offered on this campus in 1941. The first PhDs in American Studies were granted at UT in 1970, and American Studies departmentalized in 1998. At the time of this writing, it is unclear if we will continue as a program within the new Department.

Whatever happens next, the intellectual community scholars, students, and staff in American Studies have built at UT Austin over the past 85 years will not disappear. Critical thinking about our nation's past and present, about what it means to be American, and about the place of US in the world remains vital. Your classes, your degrees, and your research matter. Institutional administrators cannot take that away.

With that in mind, it is important that we recognize and celebrate our department's accomplishments over the past year, and there have been many. This fall we welcomed Dr. Nic John Ramos and Dr. Aabiya Baqai to the department. Dr. Ramos's research and teaching encompass the history of medicine, Black history, urban studies, and sexuality studies. He just published his first book, *Health as Property: Racial Capitalism and Sexual Liberalism in Los Angeles*. Dr. Baqai, co-director of the Urban Studies Program, recently earned her doctorate in Community and Regional Planning from UT Austin's School of Architecture. She studies urban planning and development in South Asia with a focus on citizenship, marginalization, housing affordability, and displacement. We are so lucky to have these incredible teachers and scholars at UT.

Five new graduate students joined our department this fall and many others passed comprehensive exams or defended dissertations or prospectuses. Forty students are graduating with majors or minors in American Studies or Urban Studies, and two AMS majors completed senior honors theses this year. Our faculty members continued to publish research, organize workshops, and deliver lectures and conference papers across the country and internationally. A highlight of the year was our reception at the annual American Studies Conference in Puerto Rico, which brought together past and current students and faculty members.

I hope you all find the rest and joy you deserve this summer. Things will be different when we return in the fall, but we will continue to carry out our research and teaching and to support one another through the challenges ahead.

Sincerely,  
Lauren



**JOIN US IN  
WELCOMING**

## **DR. AABIYA BAQAI**



I joined the American Studies Department in Fall 2025. I recently completed my Ph.D. in UT's Community and Regional Planning program at the School of Architecture, where I studied how Christian women living in informal settlements in Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, conceive and experience socio-spatial citizenship. In this realm, as an Assistant Professor of Instruction in Urban Studies, I'm interested in questions of social and spatial marginalization that emerge through planning and development in cities and their impact on such conceptions of citizenship. My interest in this work stems from my background as a Pakistani expatriate born and raised in Saudi Arabia.

When I'm not teaching the wonderful cohort of students at Urban Studies, I'm conducting policy research and analysis to address issues of housing affordability and displacement with a tenant organizing and advocacy group in Austin called BASTA (Building and Strengthening Tenant Action). This work keeps me grounded and reminds me why I'm doing it in the first place. I am grateful for the opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice, where my teaching informs my fieldwork and my fieldwork informs my teaching.

At home, I'm a mother and wife who likes to check out the latest halal spots around town and discover spaces through my 4-year-old son's joyful perspective.

## **DR. NIC RAMOS**

Born in Grand Prairie, TX and raised in San Diego, CA, Nic spent 6 years as a union organizer working with healthcare workers and city workers before becoming an academic. His experience as a labor organizer animated the questions and approaches explored in his new book, *Health as Property: Racial Capitalism and Sexual Liberalism in Los Angeles* (UC Press) (get 40% off at [ucpress.edu](https://ucpress.edu) by using AUTHOR40 at checkout). He's interested generally in the history of medicine and psychiatry, US and the world, capitalism, urban studies, comparative race and ethnic studies, and queer and trans histories.

Trained as an interdisciplinary historian in an American Studies PhD program, he's looking forward to teaching undergraduate courses (Health and the City, Intro to American Studies, and Policing Sexuality) and working with graduate students. When he's not working, he's either snuggling with his dog (Dickens, a Schnoodle), watching Masterpiece Theater with his husband, or out training for a marathon.



# FACULTY NEWS



In October **Dr. Janet Davis** gave a talk at the National Museum of the Pacific War, in Fredericksburg: "'Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition': Popular Culture and Wartime Morale during World War II," as part of the annual Helen McDonald Memorial Nimitz Conference, "Pop Culture, Propaganda, and Politics: Reflections on the Pacific War 80 Years Later." Dr. Davis stated the following "I mostly talked about sharks, morale, and propaganda!! Huge turnout, great fellow speakers, and a wonderful audience."

You can find the program [here](#).

**Dr. Iván Chaar López's** new essay, "[Borders are War by Other Means](#)," in *Public Books*. The essay discusses his recent book, *The Cybernetic Border*, in light of contemporary events.

## BORDERS ARE WAR BY OTHER MEANS

*In this series commissioned by Gerald Cadava, A. Naomi Paik, and Catherine S. Ramirez, contributors unpack how the cybernetic border prioritizes the production, processing, circulation, and communication of data as a means of enacting social inclusion and exclusion.*

10.13.2025

BORDERLANDS



BY IVÁN CHAAR LÓPEZ



**Dr. Julia Mickenberg** gave the keynote address at Princeton's [SovMode symposium](#) on Soviet Modernity; this year's theme for their symposium was "Reconsidering Modernity and Socialism."

# FACULTY NEWS

Over the summer **Dr. Randy Lewis** was a visiting professor at the University of Gdansk in Poland. He also released two documentary shorts on his educational Youtube channel: [High Tech](#) (2025) is a small architectural doc about an important brutalist structure in Berlin, and [The Last Rave](#) is a lyrical encounter with Berlin's rave culture. Finally, the curators of Europe's largest art and technology event, [Ars Electronica](#), asked Randy, anthro colleague Craig Campbell, and Berlin-based scholar Florian Grundmiller to create a two-room installation at their 2025 event in Linz, Austria, in September. 20,000 people were able to interact with an installation of their tech-oriented magazine while their documentary film Tesla Orbital was screened on a loop.



In March we also celebrated the release of Randy's new book *Bummerland: Ruin and Restoration in Trump's America* from the University of Nebraska Press. The book offers an autopsy of the recent past, looking for glimmers of hope and redemption among the detritus strewn about by neo-Gilded Age billionaires, Big Tech, and political extremes during the first Trump administration and the pandemic era.

# FACULTY NEWS



**Dr. Sage Ponder** co-authored "Crisis, Care Work, and Carceral Geographies: A Case for an Ethics of Crisis Care." Likewise, she facilitated a workshop in Australia! The following image was shared and captioned by Dr. Ponder:

"This was taken during a walking tour of Redfern, Sydney - known as the "Black heart of Australia". A super gentrified neighborhood that was at one time the site of a rich indigenous cultural, political, and arts-based renaissance. Workshop members are listening to indigenous elder Lorna Munro (in red in the image), multidisciplinary artist and radio and podcast host at Sydney's Radio Skid Row and long-time active member of her Redfern/Waterloo community, learning about the Black/Indigenous history of Sydney and the staunch organizing of its community against dispossession, gentrification and displacement."



Nic John Ramos and Lina-Maria Murillo  
**HEALTH AS PROPERTY & FIGHTING FOR CONTROL**



In March we celebrated the publication of **Dr. Nic John Ramos'** new book *Health as Property: Racial Capitalism and Sexual Liberation in Los Angeles* at a joint event with Dr. Lina Maria Murillo and the Center for Women's and Gender Studies.

# STUDENT NEWS



**Kameron Dunn** successfully defended his dissertation, "Aesthetic Creatures: Furies, Style, and the Intimacy of Mass Consumption," supervised by Alex Beasley and Janet Davis.



**Hartlyn Haynes** successfully defended her dissertation, "Memory Materials: The Political and Economic Utility of AIDS Memorials," supervised by Alex Beasley.

# STUDENT NEWS



**Henrik Schneider** successfully defended his dissertation "The Truth in These Rocks: Fossil Extraction, Settler Colonialism, and the Dinosaur in the American Imaginary," supervised by Alex Beasley.



**Kristen Wilson** successfully defended her dissertation, "Made to Measure: The Tape Measure, Human Measurement, and the Creation of the Ideal Citizen," supervised by Janet Davis.

# STUDENT NEWS



**Ray Ishibashi and Kat Blackwell** completed their MA in American Studies degrees this semester - Congratulations Kat and Ray!

## Completed oral exams:

Jeremy Boorum  
Levina Parada  
Crys Zhao



## Advanced to Doctoral Candidacy:

Giulia Oprea  
Marco Guarino  
Colleen Small  
Rene Arteaga (not pictured)



# STUDENT NEWS



**Kat Blackwell** published a book review titled "New Destinations of Empire: Mobilities, Racial Geographies, and Citizenship in the Transpacific United States" in *Gender, Place, and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. Read [here](#).



**Lillian Nagengast's** co-written chapter on "The Rural" was recently published in the *De Gruyter Handbook of Feminist Political Geography (2025)*.



AMS PhD Graduate **Leah Butterfield** published an article titled "Black American women's roots travel" in the journal of *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*, Volume 6, Issue 1. Read [here](#).

# STUDENT NEWS



## AMS UNDERGRADUATE HONORS 1 THESIS SYMPOSIUM

April 10, 2026

### Evan Craig

Thesis title:

"Between Liberation and Exploitation: Visualizing Black Identity in Blaxploitation Film and Poster Art"

### Catie Graves

Thesis title:

"I learned about the Great Depression because of Kit Kittredge: Exploring Pleasant Company and the historical American Girl dolls as a byproduct of the 1980s-1990s American culture wars"



# CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025-2026 AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATES!

### BA in American Studies

Evan Christopher Craig  
Michael Dehlinger  
Catherine Graves  
Pablo Gutierrez Rodrig  
Laura Li  
Hannah Rachelle Wesley  
Jordyn Denise White

### Minor in American Studies

Dillon Beechner Aitala  
Miranda Lisette Cavazos  
Marisol Gloria Gonzalez

# STUDENT NEWS

## CONGRATULATIONS 2025-2026 URBAN STUDIES GRADUATES!

### **BA IN URBAN STUDIES**

Leslie Isabel Abrego  
Rachel Eucogco Baleto  
Fredrick Garrett Behmer  
Leo Taber Brewer  
Madison Kaylee Castro  
Josh Cervantes Torres  
Clover Chen  
Megan Huan  
Patrick Alexander Hunt  
Ethan Jolly  
Ella Dumas Jordan  
Cory Alexander Kardesch  
Diya Brijesh Kumar  
Lauren Margaret Maher  
Marcelo Alejandro Molina  
James Thomas Pyle  
Jaime Arturo Reyna  
Joseph Raymond Romero  
Ella McKay Schmidt  
Liz Anne Schweers  
Owen Andrew De Wu Smith  
Ava Brooke Stein  
Jude August Strelitz-Block  
Kell Craig Taylor  
Tahlia Lien Tran  
Zhenwei Xie

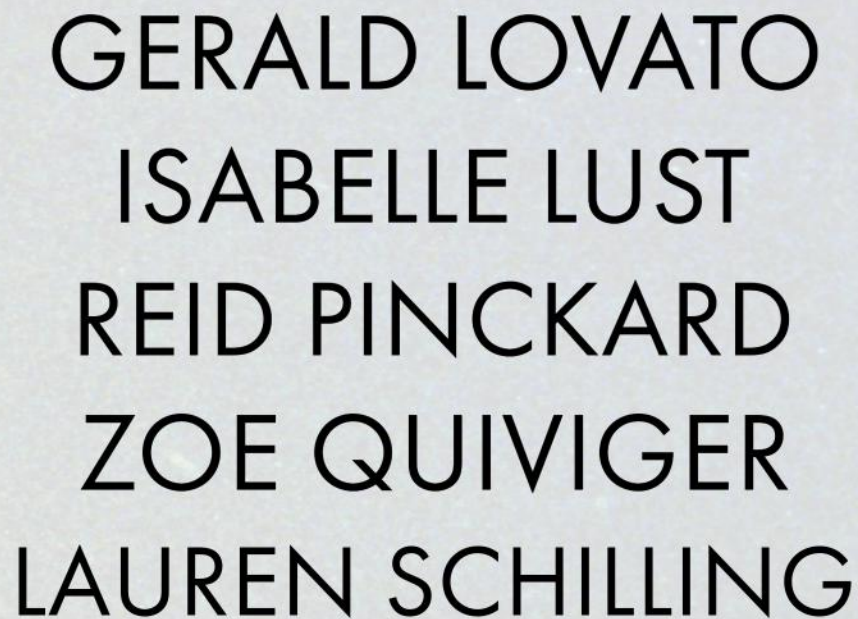


### **MINOR IN URBAN STUDIES**

Katherine Hannah Chang  
Gregory Nikolai Goga  
Abigail Rose Parker  
Whitney Olivia Spradlin



# JOIN US IN WELCOMING OUR FALL 2025 GRADUATE STUDENT COHORT!

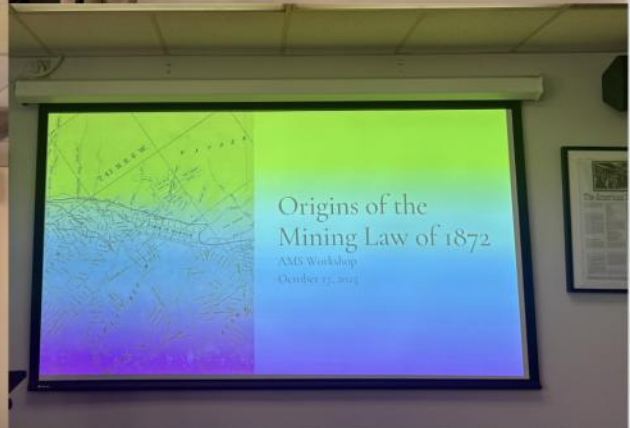


GERALD LOVATO  
ISABELLE LUST  
REID PINCKARD  
ZOE QUIVIGER  
LAUREN SCHILLING

# AMERICAN STUDIES EVENTS: AMS WORKSHOP SERIES



The **American Studies Workshop** series, facilitated by Dr. Iván Chaar López, Dr. Nic Ramos, and Levina Parada, serves as an interdisciplinary community space that brings together faculty and graduate students to share their work. We had the pleasure of hosting wonderful faculty members across the University of Texas at Austin this year! Thank you to all presented and attended.



# AMS AT THE 2025 AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION IN PUERTO RICO!



In November, AMS faculty, graduate students, and alumni attended the annual meeting of the **American Studies Association** in San Juan, Puerto Rico. AMS hosted a reception and many folks presented their research, including Lina Chhun, Iván Char López, Nic Ramos, Holly Genovese, Alec Ainsworth, Levina Parada, Rivers Liu, Crys Zhao, Colleen Small, Lily Nagengast, and Amanda Tovar.

# IAN LEKUS TALK



## FEAR OF A QUEER PLANET

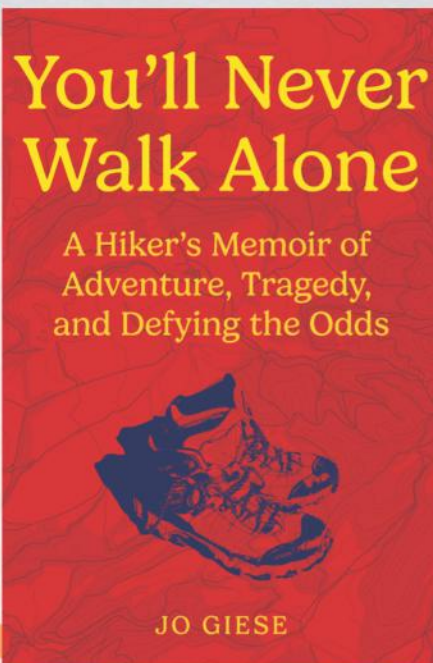
Ian Lekus,  
Ph.D



The global anti-gender activist network is a reactionary movement against women's reproductive freedom and LGBTQI+ people, but it's also a proactive movement to reframe who gets rights – and which types of rights – in the twenty-first century. This talk examines this project and its leaders, drawing connections across organizations and national borders to make sense of where the movement came from and where it is going.

On March 3rd, AMS co-sponsored a talk with **Dr. Ian Lekus**. Campus partners the Center for Women's and Gender Studies, the LGBTQ Studies Program, and The Humanities Institute also supported the event.

# JO GIESE BOOK TALK



Award winning journalist and AMS alum **Jo Giese** published a new memoir, *You'll Never Walk Alone*. On April 2nd she gave a talk at the Glickman Conference Center and shared her story of resilience. Her grandson and UT student Finn Warren hosted the discussion!



Undergraduate Student Advising:

Justin Hayes  
Associate Academic Advisor  
justin.hayes1@austin.utexas.edu

Graduate Student Program:

Mary Dillman  
Graduate Program Administrator  
mdillman@austin.utexas.edu

Course Scheduling & Program Development:

Daniel Vargas  
Academic Program Coordinator  
daniel.vargas@austin.utexas.edu

General Questions:

Stephanie Kaufman  
Department Manager  
stephanie.kaufman@austin.utexas.edu

Main Office: BUR 437  
Phone: 512-471-7277  
Fax: 512-471-3540

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The University of Texas at Austin  
College of Liberal Arts

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