

FALL 2014

# AMERICAN CULTURE

>>> ACTION

**M** | LSA AMERICAN CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Arab and Muslim American Studies | Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies  
Digital Studies | Latina/o Studies | Native American Studies



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7 PH.D. PATHS

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DISRUPTING  
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*Pictured (L-R): The 2014 American Culture Graduate Student Cohort (Jallicia Jolly, Kathleen Whiteley, Maryam Aziz, Kyle Frisina, Kris Hernandez, and Janee Moses), Hannah Torres, Jill Rickard, and Sahana Prasad*



Dear Alumni,  
Students, Faculty  
and Friends of the  
Department of  
American Culture,

The Department of  
American Culture is  
very much in action  
this year! Sometimes  
that means driving  
out in a van to collect

papers and pamphlets from Chicana activists—  
material that might have been lost or ignored, but  
instead becomes part of an archive of American  
history (you can learn more in the article about  
the student researchers working on Professor  
Maria Cotera’s Chicana Por Mi Raza project).  
It might mean taking the students in a creative  
writing seminar focused on race and identity to  
visit the Detroit Institute of Arts—as shown  
on the cover image, which remarkably was  
taken by Professor Amy Sara Carroll’s 8-year-  
old son Zé. We’re proud both of our ability  
to sponsor research and class trips, and of the  
transformative conversations that happen in  
offices and classrooms on campus every day.

For me, “American Culture in Action” mostly  
means showing up in the morning at our central  
office. We’re keeping busy in 3700 Haven Hall,  
because our job is to help the members of the  
American Culture community do their jobs. If  
you want to know a little more about the specifics  
of my role in the department, I encourage you  
to look at the previous issue of the Newsletter  
(available online), where I introduce myself.

While there’s too much activity and innovation in  
the Department of American Culture to describe  
in one newsletter, I hope you enjoy reading this  
small sampling. This issue touches on a new  
course on videogames, two new minors, our new  
faculty member Professor Manan Desai, and  
some truly incredible alumni stories.

I’d also like to assure you that we have no  
intention of slowing down! Right now we are  
interviewing candidates for two new positions,  
each supporting one of the new minors: one  
(with the Residential College) in Digital Studies &  
Social Justice, and one (with the Department of  
Women’s Studies) in Arab and Muslim American  
Studies. I look forward to signing up some  
wonderful new colleagues—and soon after that,  
to sending more amazing graduates out into the  
world. It’s an inspiring moment when someone  
like Deputy Director of the White House  
Council on Women and Girls and American  
Culture alumna Avra Siegel speaks about the  
power of American Culture at commencement  
(as she did last May). Our 80th Anniversary is just  
around the corner, and we’re eager to celebrate  
all that the Department and our alumni have  
achieved in that time. If you have a story to share  
in preparation for the 80th, I encourage you to  
get in touch—we’d love to  
hear from you.

Best Wishes,

June Howard

*Arthur F. Thurnau Professor  
and Chair of the Department of  
American Culture*

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

## PHOTOS

COVER PHOTO OF AMCULT 405 STUDENTS  
[L-R] LEELA DENVER, LAUREN OPATOWSKI, & LIZ RAYNES  
AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS  
BY ZÉ CARROLL-DOMÍNGUEZ

PHOTO OF NOUR SOUBANI ON PAGE 12 PROVIDED  
BY NOUR SOUBANI

PHOTO OF NICKOLE FOX ON PAGE 14 PROVIDED  
BY NICKOLE FOX

## EDITING

EXECUTIVE EDITOR: EVELYN ALSULTANY  
MANAGING EDITOR/CREATIVE DIRECTOR: HANNAH YUNG  
ASSISTANT EDITOR: EVAN HOYE

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS, ARTWORK,  
AND ARTICLES BY HANNAH YUNG  
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

# CREDITS



HOW  
TO  
CHANGE  
THE

# G A M E

Last spring, best friends **Jill Rickard** and **Hannah Torres** decided to take one last class together before they graduated. They chose a Digital Studies class entitled **Race, U.S. Culture, and Video Games (AMCULT 334)**, taught by Professor Lisa Nakamura. For their final project, they used what they'd learned all semester to create a video game entitled "Societal Hero Simulator" that manages to be simultaneously entertaining, hilarious, and a shrewd commentary on representations of race and gender in U.S. pop culture. Professor Lisa Nakamura called their game, "a low-fi, retro-looking interactive entertainment that conveyed an intimate familiarity with and affection for the video game genre with a wicked critical insight," and their Graduate Student Instructor, Dimitri Pavlounis, praised its thoughtful cultural commentary and the way it "offers a very accessible entry point into a number of broader theoretical issues." We sat down with Jill and Hannah to talk about their unique game and how American Culture, Digital Studies, and the class are helping them shape the future.

## STATS

### JILL RICKARD (L)

Year: 2014

Majors: American Culture & Screen Arts and Cultures

Hometown: Columbus, Ohio

Favorite video game: Kingdom of Hearts

### HANNAH TORRES (R)

Year: 2014

Major: English and Creative Writing

Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

Favorite video games: Call of Duty, Fable, & The Stanley Parable



**Can you describe your game for someone who hasn't played it?**

**Hannah Torres (HT):** The prompt was to make a non-Twine game – Twine is an open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear text games. So to make a game that's not text-based that discusses...

**Jill Rickard (JR):** Issues of either gender, race, or class. Ours is gender and race, not really class.

**HT:** Well, sub-culturally! It's under there. Not as blatant.

**JR:** [The game is] kind of sarcastic. It sets itself up as if it's a test for the player to see what kind of role they would play in a video game. The whole point is a test to see if you end up stereotypically as a boy or a girl in a video game, what race you would be, and the roles that would entail. And there's really snarky captions along the way.

**HT:** Yeah, it's very sarcastic... you get points and score as a certain race or gender. But it's rigged so that you score "white male" most of the time unless you really go out of your way to score the minority or female options. So you have to play the female and the race minority levels almost five times more than the white male levels in order to score a minority race or gender. Which was on purpose.

**What inspired the project?**

**JR:** I mean, when are you going to have another chance to make a video game for a class?

**HT:** This is something we want to do later in life, after grad school... this was a golden, random opportunity to test it out... and we knew our technical ability. We only had six weeks to make it - to write it, design it, and program it.

**JR:** We knew content was most important.

**HT:** And it's really easy to see negative attributes for minority races in video games.

**JR:** But we decided to play off [that to explore] the more "accepted" stereotype... this term "model minority."

**HT:** We figured out we wanted "positive" and "negative" attributes for each race and gender. So, as an example, [for the black person test] the black person mugs people for the negative stereotype, which is something that gets dinged every five seconds in the industry, like, "aha! This is racist." We were poking fun of the people who design characters like that who actually think that's okay.

**JR:** But then for the "positive" test, it's a basketball game.

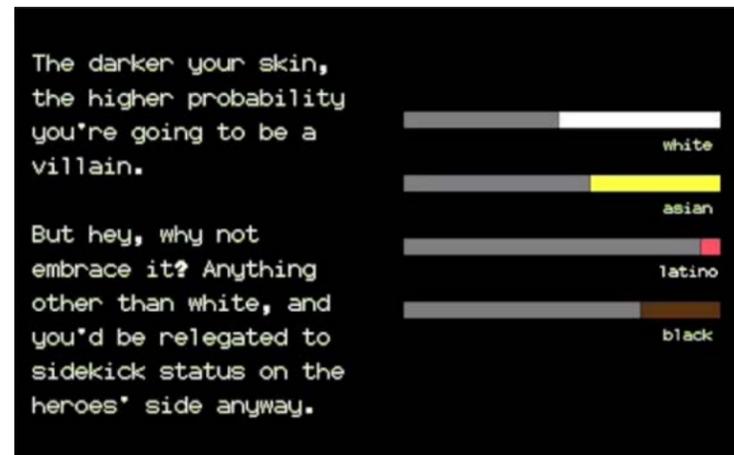
**HT:** So [if you want to score as a black person] you can be the basketball star or...

**JR:** The criminal.

**HT:** But those two stereotypes are your only options.

**Why do you think video games like the one you made are important?**

**JR:** We talked a lot about this in class. It's a complicated question, which is kind of a cop-out answer. Partly, it's important because it gets treated as not important. This game is not what gets played.



Screenshot from "Societal Hero Simulator"



**"NOT EVERY GAMER IS A 12-YEAR-OLD HOMOPHOBIC, CURSING BOY"**

**HT:** The way the industry works right now, games that make you think aren't [considered] games. Games that challenge the status quo of any kind often have their own little genre and get buried under everything else, all the mainstream games that are pretty and flashy and don't make you feel bad about yourself, frankly. So, I think this genre is more important than mainstream stuff because it shows a certain kind of content that's really smart and makes you think hard.

**JR:** [The game is] supposed to be funny in a way that actually makes you be like, "yeah, this is ridiculous that these stereotypes are things that exist."

**Why did you both decide to take Race, U.S. Culture, and Video Games?**

**JR:** I really wanted to take this class! One – definitely not the only – but one of the reasons I declared an American Culture major was thinking, "I can definitely get into the video games class if I declare an AMCULT major!"

**HT:** I'm the gamer out of the two of us. I kind of have this staunch belief that every gamer can be smart. Not every gamer is a 12-year-old homophobic, cursing boy. I saw this class as an opportunity to discuss things I didn't know too much about. I knew [other types of gamers existed], but I didn't have the actual content – the scholarly backing to say that I'm not actually crazy for feeling that way.

**How did Professor Nakamura and the course help shape this game?**

**JR:** Some of the stereotypes we probably could have come up with on our own without this course. But some of them, for instance the test to see how many you are, were from the class. One of [the tests to see if you're a man] has to do with men being more technically adept than women, which is a stereotype we read an article about in class and talked about. And that was an idea we hadn't thought or talked about before.

**HT:** Yeah, and the techie is always the ugly one in the game. Which is what made him the negative model. He's never the good-looking, strapping, Nathan Drake model. He's still a dude, he's just not buff and shirtless... but, they're both technically male. It's a dichotomy game even though they're both technically masculine.

**JR:** What both [tests] say about masculinity as opposed to femininity is that even though one is prized more than the other, especially in popular culture and video games, both of them are still more powerful and skilled than the female characters get to be.

**HT:** Which is reflected in your score! So no matter what, you're still more likely to be male than female. It's the same with race. The negative white stereotype is when you whitewash – you literally turn everyone white. And that was based on a color-blind article we read in class. The fact that we say we live in a post-racial society and everyone is colorblind. And so that stage was a literal interpretation. And it doesn't matter if you're the positive or the negative white stereotype, you're still going to score higher [and end up as white character] unless you put forth the effort to be a minority.

You can skip any part of the game! So if you only want to be, say, a black female, you can just play those parts of the game and it's very easy to manipulate. But at the end of the game there's kind of a kicker anyway, about how it doesn't matter.

**JR:** It says how if you score as a racial minority you would be either a villain or a side kick anyway. No matter what.

**HT:** Which is very true in video games.

**How do you think what you've learned from Digital Studies and American Culture is going to affect what you do in the future?**

**JR:** I'm going to law school,\* but I want to work as an entertainment lawyer and be in the entertainment industry. In any kind of creative work I do in the future, I think it's important to keep in mind how I represent characters and how to represent characters that aren't currently present.

**HT:** I've been toying around with this idea of making sure that the content like the readings presented in class can get to people. One of the biggest problems when it comes to literature and these issues is that people don't have [resources]... so I knew from this class that there are a lot of people who think this way about games but people just don't hear about it. I knew I could make a conduit for that information. To be a hub to say, "hey, have you ever thought further than shooting the guy in front of you? Well so have these four other people, so go read their stuff! And make the industry a better place." [Right now] you have to go hunting for it, so it would be better if it were all in one place... Professor Nakamura gave us so much reading that was awesome. And in the future I'd like to put out content that actually makes people think.

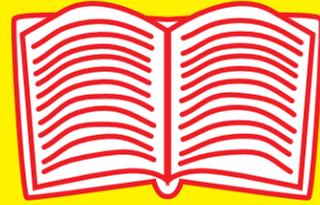
*\*Editor's Note: Jill attends UCLA Law School.*



## PH.D. PATHS



What do the Mayor of Hamtramck, the Vice President and Senior Editor at W.W. Norton, and the Golden State Warrior's most passionate blogger have in common? A Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan! Here are just a few of many paths a Ph.D. in American Culture can lead you on, selected by one of our favorite Ph.D. recipients, Associate Professor of American Culture and Director of Graduate Studies, Kristin Hass.



**AMY CHERRY**  
1986

*"Crowded Lives: a Bakhtinian Analysis of the Novels of Hurston, Arnow, Morrison, and Kingston"*  
Vice President and Senior Editor at W.W. Norton



**LISA MACFARLANE**  
1987

*"The Mild Apocalypse: Domestic Millennialism in the Novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe"*  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of New Hampshire



PH.D. PATHS



**BRIAN CHUNG**  
2011

*"Exceptional Visions: Chineseness, Citizenship and the Architectures of Community in Silicon Valley"*  
Co-founder and staff member of Golden State of Mind, the popular Golden State Warriors Blog.



**KAREN MAJEWSKI**  
1998

*"Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity, 1880-1965"*  
Elected Hamtramck's first female mayor in 2005 and currently serving her third term



**RICHARD WILSON**  
1972

*"Charles F. McKim and the Development of the American Renaissance: A Study in Architecture and Culture"*  
Commonwealth Professor and Chair of Architectural History at the University of Virginia



**HARRY LUTON**  
1986

*"Wainwright, Alaska: The Making of Inupiaq Cultural Community in a Time of Change"*  
Lead Social Scientist for Environmental Studies in the Gulf Region at the Department of the Interior



**ESTEVAN RAEI-GALVEZ**  
2002

*"Identifying Captivity and Capturing Identity: Narratives of American Indian Servitude in Colorado and New Mexico, 1750-1930"*  
Senior Vice President for Historic Sites at the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Many of our graduates have remarkable, field-changing careers. We want to hear from any and all of our alumni about where you are and what you're doing. We are especially curious about our Ph.D.'s who have had careers outside of the academy. What does American Culture in action look like for you?



# THE NEW MINOR

## IN ARAB AND MUSLIM AMERICAN STUDIES

After granting a Certificate in Arab American Studies to 42 students between 2010 and 2014, The Department of American Culture will be offering a minor in Arab and Muslim American Studies (AMAS) starting in Winter 2015. Two undergraduate students who have taken Arab and Muslim American Studies courses and who plan to pursue the minor were asked how they might put what they learn into action, for example through on-campus activism and a future career.

—Professor Evelyn Alsultany

Associate Professor of American Culture  
& Coordinator of Arab and Muslim American Studies

### Melissa Rosenbaum

Senior · International Studies Major, Arab and Muslim American Studies Minor

I came to the University of Michigan after spending a gap year in Israel with a plan: pursue a major in Biology, fulfill pre-med requirements, and advocate for Israel. To satisfy the Race and Ethnicity requirement I enrolled in Professor Alsultany's AMCULT 235, "From Harems to Terrorists: Representing the Middle East in Hollywood Cinema." This unique topic piqued my interest and had a profound impact on my college experience. I became enthralled with the concepts of eurocentrism and ethnocentrism because I was challenged to question what I had previously learned about Muslims and Arabs and how a race, religion or ethnicity can significantly shape a person's experience in America. I made a critical decision to pursue a major in International Studies with a focus on the Middle East to expand my personal boundaries.

I am learning how my own background and social identities – a White, Jewish, female – has shaped my own experiences. On campus, I have challenged myself because I realize that to work through a conflict, like the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is crucial to better understand all perspectives and the foundations for peoples' beliefs. Pursuing the AMAS minor in my senior year, represents, for me, an important decision I made during my freshman year: continue to challenge myself in the classroom, reconcile differences with my classmates and professors and better understand the experiences of Muslims and Arabs in America in our post 9/11 world. I still hope to pursue a career in medicine and I am confident that my experience as an AMAS minor coupled with my International Studies major will be of utmost value to me in appreciating the differences among races, ethnicities and religions. Hopefully, in some small way I can be part of the solution to religious, ethnic and national conflicts that we must all admit are the reality of the 21st century.

### Nour Soubani

Senior · American Culture Major; International Studies Major; Arabic, Armenian, Persian, Turkish, & Islamic Studies Major; Arab and Muslim American Studies Minor

Like many people, I went through different phases and ideas about what I want to "do" with my life from my first through senior year. They included medicine, public health, law, business, journalism, international affairs – the list goes on. What helped me focus my interests was a combination of classes I took and the organizations and communities I was drawn to. In my first year, I became involved in the Muslim community on campus, where I developed an interest in community organizing as it related to American Muslims, and the specific challenges related to race, gender, and other issues of identity. At the same time, I became active in SAFE, the U-M Palestinian solidarity organization, through which we build the Palestinian and Arab American community on campus as well. These activities allowed me to recognize my interest in community-building among the identities I identified with as an American Muslim Palestinian woman. So I began to take classes that gave me the academic foundation I needed to critically challenge myself in the spaces I was a part of on campus; I found these mostly in American Culture, and AMAS in particular, because the basis of each class was an analysis of power. It was a different approach than what I often encountered in classes: memorization, history, facts – Arab and Muslim American Studies took these approaches and gave me a space to contextualize and analyze the many different "truths" about power and identity in the American and global context I am a part of.

So far, my experience in AMAS classes has helped me develop my worldview, and learn how to argue my perspective and analyze different perspectives and arguments, recognizing that every argument and author comes from a place of bias. It has sparked in me an interest in academia, in writing, and in organizing in the Arab and Muslim American community. More than directing me towards a specific career path, AMAS has taught me how to think, challenge, analyze, and construct and deconstruct arguments – skills that I will employ in whatever job or position I hold in the future.



*Pictured: Nickole Fox (center) and family.*

THE MINOR IN NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

## “SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THAT?”

Time and time again I was posed with that question after telling people about my coursework. Planning to major in Sociology with a minor in Native American Studies, I didn't really know the answer, and now I'm certain that there are so many answers to that question that the only answer is, "Whatever I want!" **I am officially the first person at the University of Michigan to graduate with a Native American Studies (NAS) minor.** NAS and the faculty had a big part in shaping who I am and the community work I engage in. In fact, my first job out of college is where I still am 10 years later: American Indian Health and Family Services ([www.aihfs.org](http://www.aihfs.org)). Hap McCue was one of my NAS (Ojibwe Language) instructors, and he was the one who suggested that I put in my resume at AIHFS.

At AIHFS I have been involved in such an amazing community. I started as the Tobacco Project Coordinator doing work around traditional use of tobacco among the Native community while also educating people about the ills of commercial tobacco use. Later I became the Prevention Coordinator, organizing youth programs that promote culture and healthy lifestyles. After going back to earn a Master of Arts in Social Justice, I was promoted to Director of Health Education and now work with some

amazing programs including suicide prevention, maternal child health, nutrition, physical activity, substance abuse prevention and more. We also work closely with our medical clinic and behavioral health services to provide opportunities for families and the community to heal mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. We pride ourselves on our foundation acknowledging that culture is core to healing and prevention and creating a space in Detroit for traditional gatherings and ceremonies. Students can also be involved in this important work. Whether students are interested in Native American Studies, health, business, social work, or community-based initiatives, there are great opportunities available at AIHFS. Students interested in interning for a semester or two for course credit, can contact NAS Director Scott Lyons ([lyonssr@umich.edu](mailto:lyonssr@umich.edu)). We have had dozens of interns working on projects related to mental health, insurance enrollment, youth development, and more, but we are always open to establishing internship goals that meet your specific interests. Hope to see you soon!

**Nickole Fox**, Class of 2004  
M.A., Social Justice  
[nfox@aihfs.org](mailto:nfox@aihfs.org)

# manan DESAI

*Meet the newest Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies faculty member, Assistant Professor Manan Desai. A U-M alumnus raised in Michigan with a love of vinyl records, he talks about his research and the importance of South Asian studies.*





My research looks at the history of South Asians in North America, and is really guided by two broad questions: First, to what extent have South Asians in this country been interpellated, by both the complex racial formations in the U.S. and by those formations forged by the long project of empire? And second, how have writers, artists, and political actors resisted, negotiated, and even accommodated those interpellations?

As a graduate student, I started to explore these questions in my dissertation, a study of the cultural and political exchanges between Indian and American intellectuals before 1965 – a period of restricted South Asian immigration to the U.S. In that project, I trace the story of Indian travelers to the U.S. – the political exiles, intellectuals, muckrakers, and self-described “national ambassadors” – whose engagement with American history allowed them to begin to fashion a new vocabulary for discussing the political discourses of caste, race, nationhood, and empire. More recently, my research has moved in different directions, and I have been

writing about how representations of South Asians in early- to mid-20th century U.S. popular culture – from TV shows to radio dramas to pulp fiction – reflected shifting discourses on race and empire in the American popular imagination.

Alongside these projects, I’ve been involved with the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), a non-profit that has been developing an online repository for materials related to the South Asian diaspora. Part of what motivated us in SAADA was that we saw a need to make our research accessible and resources more available to a larger public beyond academia, for whom the histories of the South Asian diaspora were either unknown or misrepresented. In many ways, joining SAADA has transformed the way I do research and understand the public role of scholarship. One thing I really hope to underscore for students at Michigan is that they have an active stake in the creation of historical knowledge, just as much as they are part of the larger unfolding history of race in the U.S.

# DISRUPTING THE *Loop*

//

*A conversation with undergraduates  
Ariel Kaplowitz and Sahana Prasad  
on their work for Chicana Por Mi Raza,  
how they're challenging the ways history gets told,  
and how they're changing what knowledge gets passed on.*

[L] Sahana Prasad  
[R] Ariel Kaplowitz



## ABOUT CHICANA POR MI RAZA:

Chicana Por Mi Raza (CPMR) is a digital archive run by American Culture, Latina/o Studies, and Women's Studies Associate Professor, Maria Cotera, and dedicated to the preservation of Chicana feminism. CPMR collects and records archival materials, ephemera, and oral history and is committed to involving undergraduate students with this important work. Their website is <http://chicanapormiraza.org>.

## SAHANA PRASAD

### What drew you to this project?

Well, this is an epistemological project; feminist epistemology doesn't get studied a lot within the Women's Studies community. [Associate Professor Maria Cotera, founder of CPMR,] talks a lot about the feedback loop in archives and how it affects the way knowledge gets produced. So the people who produce knowledge are the people who are in power and the people in power only produce knowledge about people in power. So then, the archives – archives everywhere – only have very selective information. And when people look at the archives to see what's important to study, they say, "well, here's all this knowledge produced about old straight white men and so clearly that's who we should be studying." And women – specifically women of color, queer

women of color, queer disabled women of color, poor women of color – their stories get left out of the archives. And what we're doing with this project is disrupting that feedback loop.

I think [this project speaks to] the value of experiential knowledge – I don't think there's enough value placed on experiential knowledge, specifically in academia but also outside of academia. The knowledge that can be gained from people being forthcoming about what their experiences are is so huge.

People are more likely to respond strongly to statistics, but projects like this – projects that take the time to document people's lives and the work they've done – give further weight and legitimacy to valuable experiences that we can learn from.

I think [CPMR is] also giving people access to this knowledge. A lot of these things are personal items from personal

collections: their family memorabilia and photos. Giving the public access to all these things is a really incredible opportunity for people to learn about these women's lives. And I think that can be very inspiring to young activists, to see what kind of impact these women have made.

### What duties do you have for this project?

It's a mish-mash of things. A lot of what I do is scan and catalogue the archives. We've been converting those from .tif form to .jpg form... I upload all the scanned materials onto our online archive server and I tag them so you can search through the tags. I rescan things if information has been lost. I'll be stitching things together – some things are too big for the scanner so we have to scan them in multiple parts – then I'll use Photoshop to stitch them together. There's so many things you can

do on this project! It's really nice because you never get stuck doing one thing for a really long time. It's never boring.

It's been really great to work with and learn from "the Marias" [Maria Cotera and Maria Seiferle-Valencia, digital archivist for CPMR]. I think they both have different roles in this project and it's cool to be able to work with both of them. Maria Cotera – the reading she gives us and all the knowledge she has – gives us such a helpful and interesting historical background. And then the amount of technical skills Maria [Seiferle-Valencia] has is astounding to me. To be able to access and learn even a fraction of that knowledge is incredible. For example, in just three and a half hours she's given me a Photoshop training; that's something I would never otherwise had the opportunity to do!

### What do you think you've gotten out of this work?

The research experience is great. I've had research experience [before working on CPMR] but it's just been data entry. To now have research experience that integrates my field of study, my knowledge of feminist history and the intersection of race and gender and feminist history – all of those things are very important. Sometimes [history] can appear to be a nebulous cloud of knowledge that isn't applied concretely, but this research project is concrete and linked to the history. And I think my work here will give me opportunities in the future and examples to prove that this knowledge is directly applicable and has everything to do with reality.

After graduation, I know I want to work in advocacy. I'm interested in advocating for women of color who have experienced sexual violence. I think it's not something

people think about very often: the way in which race specifically affects the experience of sexual violence and the way healing from trauma has to incorporate people's identities.

CPMR ties into that because I think common narratives of sexual violence focus on young white women on college campuses – which is not wrong, that experience is real and one that people have – but this standardized, documented experience often leaves out the way that women of color experience higher rates of sexual violence, often *because* they're women of color. And that's similar to what we're addressing in this project; we're changing the fact that stories of women of color are often unheard. The ways that knowledge is produced about certain things, sexual violence or otherwise, are all feedback loops that need to be disrupted. And that's something that I'd like to continue to do.

## ARIEL KAPLOWITZ

### Why did you get involved with this project?

The project works with Chicana feminism; my two areas of interest in American Culture\* are race and gender. So it was a great combination! I'm also working in different communities in East Lansing and Ann Arbor, so getting to research the history of women in those communities was really powerful to me. I think studying histories that have been omitted from my education – from my elementary, middle, and high school education – is super important because there's a reason those histories have been erased: to promote a dominant narrative.

With CPMR I get to do all the things I love in the same project. I'm looking at social work, a Ph.D., or a Masters in Fine Arts. There are a lot of directions my life could take. I think this project will help me if I get a Ph.D.; I'll have looked at these primary documents, I will know the process of figuring what this image is about, and I'll have incorporated it into my own learning and teaching. I also

get to start writing for this! Maria [Cotera] interviewed women in San Diego, so I'm looking at the women whose artifacts she collected and cataloging the artifacts, describing them, writing short biographies of the women, and watching the videos and the interviews they gave to create a complete picture of their experience. I'm getting to write some of the content for the website. And that's helpful in any career; especially with writing, but also academia. Being able to write something cohesive and also important and valued in the community will give me a big leg up. I also think being involved with such a big research project is helpful in any sort of career; you get to work with other people and you're trusted to work with important resources and documents.

Maria Cotera and I have worked closely together, particularly last winter when I had an independent study with her. We'd meet every week and get coffee and talk;

she had so many interesting things to say about Chicana feminism, but also advice on life! She offered a lot of guidance for me, talking about grad school, publishing, and other opportunities; as someone to consider myself a writer, I found [Maria Cotera] very supportive.

### How has your work with CPMR informed the rest of your life?

I'm involved with community work through PALMA [Proyecto Avance: Latino Mentoring Association]. We work with the Latino community of Washtenaw County with things like English language learning. I work with a young girl – I've worked with her since my sophomore year – and [working at CPMR] helps my work at PALMA because she's Chicana and knowing her history [means] I'm able to contextualize what she's saying when she's talking about her history and bring in aspects of what I've learned about Chicana

feminism and Chicana history into what we talk about in our sessions.

Being able to watch the videos of these women and hear their oral histories has been so meaningful. They're really inspirational – they were going against so much! There was so much going against them in society at the time and they rose above it. Even within [the Chicano community] there was a lot of opposition from some Chicano men against Chicana women and their feminism. And I hear [the women's stories] and I think, "it's so courageous that they stood up in the face of that in defense of justice." It's really meaningful as a woman to see these role models who put themselves out there and really created change.

*\*Editor's Note: Ariel is an American Culture major.*



Image from the Chicana Por Mi Raza archive, courtesy of Alex Escalante  
Pictured: Women of the Nutrition Seminar and Study Tour walking

Image from the Chicana Por Mi Raza archive,  
courtesy of Emily Martinez  
Pictured: Emily's grandmother Vicenta Castillo Ybarra,  
her Tia Pancha, and her Tia Victoria in Harlingen Texas



## 1 PIECE OF ADVICE I'LL NEVER FORGET...

Ariel and Sahana pass along some knowledge

### ARIEL:

My mom, who is also one of my best friends, recommended I watch Brene Brown's TED talk on vulnerability, which has really influenced my way of living and thinking. So I guess that's two pieces of advice: my mom's advice to watch the TED talk, and Brene Brown's advice to live openly and vulnerably!

### SAHANA:

One of my favorite quotes also doubles as some of the best advice I've ever read: "Nobody's going to save you. No one's going to cut you down, cut the thorns thick around you. No one's going to storm the castle walls nor kiss awake your birth, climb down your hair, nor mount you onto the white steed. There is no one who will feed the yearning. Face it. You will have to do, do it yourself." - Gloria Anzaldúa

### FROM PROFESSOR MARIA COTERA:

Our undergraduate research assistants do everything from collecting and transcribing oral histories, to traveling with us to places like Texas and California, to scanning, cataloging, and interpreting the archives we collect. They experience the whole process – from the logistics it takes to set up an oral history interview, film it, and follow up, to processing and interpreting the documents we collect – so they get research experiences that will give them skills that they can't necessarily get inside the classroom.

I want students to develop an understanding of the complexities of oral history and archival projects. I want them to have an experience that will take them outside of their comfort zone, both in terms of their skill-level and in terms of the kind of material and content we're talking about. I hope my research assistants get the chance to witness an oral history, because listening to the stories of the women we interview and being a critical witness can be very powerful for students.

We identify the talents students bring to the table, where their interests seem to lie, and also what they want to do with their careers beyond the University; then we can steer them into activities that will really support their professional and creative aspirations. Ariel, for example, is interpreting and producing text for the website we're developing because her forté is as a writer.

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR CHICANA POR MI RAZA?

- A public face via a website with curated exhibits, an accessible archive, and scholar-produced content. The site will be modeled on a the South Asian American Digital Archive (a project Professor Manan Desai has worked on – see article on page 15) that involves collaborators across time and space working to produce content based on the archive.
- Interviews in Los Angeles and other locations around the U.S. to add to the archives.
- Developing critical partnerships where teachers and researchers who want to do local oral history projects can access teaching materials, guidelines and the online database system to structure courses and research projects. These oral history projects can then be added to the digital archives in the CPMR archive.



**Kavitha Iyengar**, an American Culture major, delivered a history paper entitled “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: Creating the Mexican-American Frontier.” Kavitha assessed the shifting circumstances that Mexicans and Mexican Americans faced in New Mexico during the nineteenth century. Kavitha drew together a complementary set of primary and secondary sources from 1850, 1870, and 1880 to think through the changing terms and meanings of U.S. citizenship. Her paper presented a fresh outlook on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in both its English and Spanish translations. All of this suggests that Kavitha is poised to become a brilliant historian and Latina/o Studies scholar.

# AWARDS

EVERY YEAR FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS, THE DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE HAS AWARDED TWO PRIZES FOR OUTSTANDING ESSAYS IN AMERICAN STUDIES TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS. THESE ESSAYS EXEMPLIFY OUR UNDERGRADUATES' ABILITY TO PRODUCE CRITICALLY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP.

## UNDERGRADUATE WRITING AWARDS



**Carlina Duan**, currently an English major with a minor in Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies, wrote a memorable reflection entitled “I am Not a Geisha.” Carlina thoughtfully considered how some of her own experiences have been informed by the larger discourses on race and gender that circulate in the United States. The interconnections that she made between representations of Asians and Asian Americans in consumer culture, media, and local campus events showed admirable scope. The essay had a compelling trajectory that ran from Carlina’s memory of a difficult adolescent Halloween to the condescension and micro-aggressions that all too often continue to occur at most universities today. We are certain that Carlina’s gift for keen and creative analysis will serve her well in her future endeavors.

# CONGRATULATIONS

**WE CONGRATULATE  
THE DEPARTMENT OF  
AMERICAN CULTURE  
CLASS OF 2014!**

## **Bachelor Degrees American Culture**

Phoebe Barghouty  
Myles Barkoff  
Christian Brandt  
Anndrea Boris  
Laura Cohen  
Sean Cope  
Erin Corrigan  
Allison Froehlich  
Darren Garson  
Imani Henderson  
Adam Janecyk  
Isaiah Knight  
Abraham Liddell  
Kelsey McInnis  
Jasmine Pawlicki  
David Penner  
Jadee Pope  
Jillian Rickard  
Jordan Steiger  
Akshay Verma  
Andrew Wehner  
Ari Weinberg

## **Bachelor Degrees Latina/o Studies**

Nicole Garcia

## **Minors**

### **American Culture**

Claudia Celovsky  
Kristen Fitzsimons  
Payton Halbeisen  
Mackenzie Meter



*Pictured (L-R): Rima Hassouneh, Evelyn Alsultany, Ari Weinberg, Gregory Dowd, & Abraham Liddell*

Peter Morgan  
Sara Morosi  
Lorna Mosher  
Anna Storey  
Alicia Venchuk

## **Minors**

### **Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies**

Gina Benedicto  
Erica Gehringer  
Peter Ta  
George Xue

## **Minors**

### **Latina/o Studies**

Evelyn Galvan  
Elizabeth Perez  
Rebecca Villegas

## **Certificate**

### **Arab and Muslim American Studies**

Haneen Abudayyeh  
Sahar Adora  
Arooj Aslam  
Brandon Baxter  
Farah Erzouki  
Bayan Founas  
Zeinab Khalil  
Julianne Potter  
Hanah Stiverson

## **Ph.Ds.**

### **American Culture**

Annah MacKenzie  
Veronica Pasfield  
Alyssa Walker  
Stephen Wisniewski

## **ASK AN ALUMNA:**

*How have you drawn on your degree in American Culture since graduating?*

*In 1993 I graduated from U-M with a B.A. in "The Politics and Society of American Culture." I contemplated Political Science, but wasn't getting the real-life perspective I longed for. American Culture filled that void for me. I wrote my independent study on the change in how the media covered the Presidential election in 1992 (Bill Clinton) as compared to prior TV elections. That summer, I interned for a Congressman and worked at the Democratic National Convention in NYC. Then, a couple years after graduation, I went to work for U.S. Senator Bill Bradley (also a former New York Knick) who ended up vying for the Democratic nomination against Al Gore a few years later!*

*I have long since moved away from politics, and this year celebrated 10 years at PwC (Pricewaterhouse Coopers), where I*

*am a director of public relations. Perhaps the most exciting thing I do is oversee PR for PwC's role in counting the Oscars ballots, focusing on getting media interviews for the lead balloting partners, aka the "guys with the briefcases." Who knew how exciting working at an accounting firm could be!*

*Outside of my day job, I use my skills to help promote various cultural endeavors including an artist, a rock star, and – currently – a documentary film about a music industry icon. I have also taken up stand-up comedy and improv, and have created my own baseball podcast/social media character known as Bullpen Betty.*

*And they say there is no such thing as "American Culture"!*

**Laura Schooler, Class of '93**

*We encourage all of our alumni to write us and let us know how American Culture has changed their lives!*

## CONTACT

**DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
3700 HAVEN HALL  
505 S. STATE ST.  
ANN ARBOR, MI 48109-1045

[HTTP://LSA.UMICH.EDU/AC](http://lsa.umich.edu/ac)  
1-734-763-1460  
[AC.INQ@UMICH.EDU](mailto:AC.INQ@UMICH.EDU)  
[HTTP://FACEBOOK.COM/UM.AMERICAN.CULTURE](http://facebook.com/um.american.culture)  
[HTTP://TWITTER.COM/UMICHAMCULT](http://twitter.com/umichamcult)