

American Culture News

The Program in American Culture
at the University of Michigan

Spring 2009



*Live, on stage, from the Convention Center in Los Angeles....*Professor Amy Stillman, with Tia Carrere and Daniel Ho, accepting the Grammy for Best Hawaiian Music Album. Read more in our faculty profile on pages 4 and 5.

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**Dear Alumni, Students, Faculty,
and Friends of the Program in
American Culture,**

It does not take long for a new-comer to the University of Michigan to realize why the Winter Term is so named. Writing at the time of a hopefully final thaw of "W2009," writing, that is, in late April, I will not much indulge in the springing of the year—let me celebrate instead the abundant recognition the Program in American Culture has recently received for its faculty's, students' and even alumni's remarkable

accomplishments in research, artistic production, teaching, and service.

Since the last thaw, we were all awarded to a warm treat on You Tube, as our own Professor **Amy Stillman** was brought on-stage before the television cameras by vocalists Tia Carrere and Daniel Ho for a Grammy Award ceremony. Amy was co-producer, songwriter and lyricist for all the vocal pieces on the CD, *Ikena*, which won the Grammy Award for "Best Hawaiian Album." Professor **Magdalena Zaborowska**, our Director of graduate studies, received national distinction of another kind, when her new book, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* (Duke, 2008), crossed over from academe to public as it received a seven page review in *The New Yorker*. In my last newsletter I pointed out that Professor **Philip Deloria** was serving as President of the American Studies Association, and he continues to serve until May. Finally, Professor **Scott Kurashige** has won the truly prestigious Albert Beveridge Book Award from the American Historical Association for his book, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, 2008). The award is given for a distinguished book on—and note that this is a fairly broad category—the history of the United States, Canada, or Latin America, 1492 to present.

As impressive as this national attention and recognition in research might be, our students are giving the faculty a run for their money. Among these impressive students is Law/AC graduate student **Sam Erman**. Sam won this year's Carlton Qualey Best Article award from the Immigration and Ethnic History Society for his article "Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898-1905" (*Journal of American Ethnic History*, Summer, 2008). Errors are sometimes illuminating, so I note that the letter announcing

the award addressed Sam as "Professor Erman." This was not a graduate student award. AC graduate student **Jan Bernabe** emerged as a finalist for the Rackham Graduate School's Distinguished Dissertation award. Undergraduate **Laura Misumi**, a minor in our Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies program, won this year's UM Student of the Year award.

Service awards have gone to three faculty members. Professor **Julie Ellison** has won the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID) Distinguished Diversity Scholarship and Engagement Award. This award recognizes senior faculty members whose nationally recognized diversity scholarship has promoted social change, in line with the NCID's core mission of bridging diversity scholarship and multilevel engagement. Professor **Larry La Fountain-Stokes**, who is being promoted to Associate Professor with tenure, won the Harold R. Johnson Distinguished Service in Diversity Award. This award recognizes faculty who have exhibited outstanding leadership in the area of cultural diversity. And Professor **Joseph Gone** has won the Henry Tomes Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Psychology by an Emerging Psychologist. This award comes from The Council of National Psychological Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Issues, and Joe picked it up at a ceremonial dinner in New Orleans. All three awards address a critical mission of our program, and we are particularly gratified to see them bestowed upon our faculty.

If research and service are two legs of the academic tripod, the third leg, teaching, remains the university's primary mission. This year we are particularly honored to have had both a member of our faculty and one of our graduate students win the most prestigious awards offered in their category. AC's **John Bacon** won the 19th annual Golden Apple Award. This is the only teaching award at the University of Michigan that is presented by students. Created by "Students Honoring Outstanding University Teaching (SHOUT)," it is a high achievement. John, a lecturer in our program, teaches such courses as "The Rise and Fall of the American Sportswriter," and "The History of College Athletics." He was honored by SHOUT on March 31. **Lee Ann Wang**, an AC graduate student, won a 2009 Outstanding Student Instructor Award, presented by the Rackham Graduate School.

We are pleased to announce that several new faculty members will be formally joining AC. Professor **Silvia Pedraza**, sociologist and expert on Cuba and Cuban Americans, is returning to the Program in American Culture as a regular faculty member. (...continued on pg. 8)



ACES Share the Love on Valentine's Day

American Culture News

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American Studies

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Please submit any changes, corrections, letters, updates, and/or suggestions to Judith Gray. judygray@umich.edu.

The Program in American Culture promotes publicly engaged and socially committed scholarship and teaching aimed at understanding the struggles and creativity that have produced the societies and cultures of America. In particular, we seek to illuminate the significance, the lived experience, and the relation among race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and class, both within and beyond national borders. The Program brings the history and interpretive strategies of ethnic studies into conversation with critical approaches to literature, history, cultural studies, and social sciences, as well as with knowledge produced outside the boundaries of the university.

President of the University of Michigan: Mary Sue Coleman

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This academic year students in the American Culture and Ethnic Studies undergraduate club (ACES) have channeled their plentiful extra-curricular enthusiasm into social service projects. After initiating an American Culture fall coat drive for needy individuals, the students teamed up with AC faculty members **Tiya Miles** and **Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof** in February to organize a diaper drive for families in economic distress. The Valentine's Day Diaper Drive rallied members of the American Culture, Afroamerican & African Studies, and History programs at UM to donate baby goods to the SOS Crisis Center for homeless and housing insecure families, located in Ypsilanti. Thanks to the partnership of Directors Greg Dowd, Brandi Daniels, and Patty Brennan, respectively, drop-off sites for the effort were established in AC's administrative office, at the Ann Arbor YMCA Childcare Program, and at the Ann Arbor Center for the Childbearing Year.

ACES members decorated cheery drop-off boxes (complete with heart-shaped beading and painted baby footprints), spread the word among their peers, and donated diapers for the cause. The Valentine's Day Diaper Drive collected over four-hundred dollars worth of diapers (many of them Chlorine free), wipes, baby formula, and organic baby and toddler food for the SOS Crisis Center and the people it serves. During the 6th snowiest winter in Ann Arbor's recorded history, the community-focused activities of AC undergrads are sure to have warmed some hearts.



American Culture students (pictured L-R) Elizabeth McCannell, Christine Barrera, and Maria Ryen decorate boxes for the diaper drive.

Baseball and TV



Faculty, students, friends and family gathered for a night of baseball and TV when graduating AC honors students, **Brett Ehrmann** and **Cheryl Friedman**, presented their honors theses. Students interested in doing an honors project take the AC honors writing seminar as a junior (offered jointly with Women's Studies). In this course they work on their research and writing skills and plan their honors thesis. The honors student then has the opportunity to investigate and write on an independent research project under the mentorship of one of our faculty, culminating in a formal presentation at the end of their senior year.

Brett Ehrmann's thesis, "Black, White, and Watched All Over: The Racialized Meanings in 1990s Sitcoms," focuses on how 1990s sitcoms produced meanings about race. Through an examination of "The Cosby Show," "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air," "Saved By the Bell," "Home Improvement," and "Seinfeld," Brett identifies useful strategies employed by writers and producers of sitcoms in challenging and re-inscribing racism under the guise of "good clean fun." These strategies provide an insightful analytical framework to understanding how the media produced and mediated race and racism in an era of presumed multiculturalism and colorblindness. (Faculty mentor: **Evelyn Alsultany**)

Cheryl Friedman's thesis, "Wendell Smith, A pioneer of Baseball: An Analysis of Works 1938-1961," examines the life and work of sports journalist Wendell Smith. A former standout baseball player himself excluded from the major leagues, Smith most famously wrote a sports column for the African American newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*. Most notably, Friedman argues that, in contrast to the well-worn history we know of Jackie Robinson's relationship with Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey, Smith's articles on Robinson (read in wide circulation) and his personal ties to Robinson, players and general managers equaled, if not surpassed, the efforts of Rickey to finally desegregate America's putative "national pastime" in 1947. (Faculty mentor: **Matthew Briones**)

Congratulations and well done to these outstanding students!

Faculty Profile: Amy

Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman, associate professor in American Culture and the School of Music, took center stage, with Tia Carrere and Daniel Ho, at the 51st Grammy Awards to accept the award for the Best Hawaiian Music Album, *Ikena*. In this article, she discusses the writing and collaborative processes for creating an award winning CD and the Grammy experience with Susan Najita, associate professor of American Culture and English.

Susan: Congratulations on your win at the 2009 Grammy's in the Hawaiian music category. You were recognized as a *baku mele* lyricist and co-producer on the CD, *Ikena*. Would you tell me about the inspiration for the album and the collaborative process?

Amy: Thank you. Daniel Ho and I had co-produced two prior CD projects of repertoire from the tremendous archival stash that I have been documenting in my research (*Kaākāua* 2006, *Kapiolani* 2007). It was Daniel's idea to collaborate on creating original songs with Hawaiian language lyrics. That's what got us started. But I never dreamed I would be a songwriter, much less a published one, and then on a CD that just won a Grammy award!

Susan: How did the two of you work it all out?

Amy: It was totally open. We worked every possible way. Sometimes I completed lyrics first, then he created the music; other times he would send me tunes, and I would figure out what the character of the tune suggested in terms of topic, then find ways of expressing those thoughts poetically. We emailed lots of text files and mp3s back and forth (Daniel lives in L.A.). Fortunately, we're on the same cell phone network. It took us over a year to create the songs, then several more months for Daniel to work on the recording and engineering. Tia Carrere came on board as vocalist about halfway through the composition process.

Susan: How did you approach the actual writing of the songs?

Amy: I start from a theme and ponder the various expressions available. Then, to expand my resources, I explore a wider vocabulary in the Hawaiian dictionary and see where it takes me. I begin to have a sense of poetic expressions coming together, and I start to be aware of things like line length, duration, and meter.

Susan: Would you talk about "The Spam Song," a



During a commercial break, Amy Stillman takes in the bright lights of the Staples Center at the televised segment of the Grammy Awards.

composition that has extremely playful lyrics, the sounds from one line are echoed in the next line.

Amy: Even metrically, there's a parallelism in how the words fall. In the first stanza, there are two lines that have four-syllable verbs starting the line. I didn't arrive at that consciously or intentionally; I just played around with what I wanted to say, and it flowed. It's a kind of affirmation that I've internalized a lot of the poetry I've been studying for years.

Susan: One would think that as a historian of hula, you would be committed to a fairly rigid notion of tradition. Yet, in the liner notes, you write about moving beyond the boundaries of traditional poetry.

Amy: This project was really an opportunity to explore different terrain, outside of the conventions, outside of the expected. My intention was to explore what was possible. It's like saying, "Let's see what else we can come up with" as opposed to "Let's just replicate what we already know and have." I guess, too, as a historian, I knew that really interesting interventions have been put out there by people who shocked listeners in their own time, but in hindsight they were revered and appreciated such that they became convention for subsequent generations. There's always a risk in pushing envelopes, because you never know if anything will ultimately backfire in your face. Daniel is respectful of tradition, but he is not going to let that respect paralyze him.

Susan: Is it necessary to understand some of the formal conventions of Hawaiian music in order to appreciate the

Ku'uleialoha Stillman

innovations on *Ikena*?

Amy: When you know the rules, you can begin to see how rules have been exceeded. I do think it is important to understand that there are rules. Rules are most successfully broken when the people breaking them know exactly what they are breaking. “Hula in Seven” is an obvious example. I saw Daniel in a concert with the South Bay Youth Orchestra. One number featuring Daniel and his drummer was a rhythmic routine with pairs of sticks, like a stick game. But they went off into these odd meters. I thought, “You know, this would be cool in hula using the *kāla‘au* sticks.” So “Hula in Seven” is designed as a play on meter. There’s no reason why we cannot do rhythm routines in groups of seven beats; it’s just that we have been chosen to be bound by groups of four beats in 4/4 common time! It’s the same with “Papahānaumoku”—a chant, but in 7/8 time.

Susan: What you just said made me think about time. “Welo” has a floaty feel—really free, not necessarily going anywhere.

Amy: “Welo” actually uses the 5-7-5 syllable pattern of *haiku*. It is deliberately amorphous and ambiguous, because it is really about modes of movement and mobility.

Although it can be about something specific, it doesn’t have to be. In that respect, that’s already outside of conventional Hawaiian songwriting techniques. Songwriters have always grounded their lyrics in specific subjects or events. One of my challenges to myself was, “Can I write lyrics that can be about more than one thing at the same time, depending on your perspective, depending on where you are standing?” “Welo” was like that.

This project started out being a grab bag of songs that explored different musical possibilities. In hindsight, there appears to be an organic trajectory that was actually coincidental. The connecting thread is in the CD title, *Ikena*, which translates as “panoramic vistas.” On our life journey, seeing new things and opening ourselves to new experiences broadens our horizons. The sense of motion in “Welo” carries the listener into recollections of past experiences (in “The Spam Song,” “Pineapple Mango,” and “Oia Uka”) and future aspirations (“Hula in Seven” and “Papahānaumoku”), as the three of us—Tia, Daniel and myself—have moved from our island home across the ocean (“Nā ‘Ikena Like ‘Ole”).

Susan: Can you talk about the controversy in Hawai‘i

about the Grammy? In the five years’ history of this category, the award has gone to producers of compilations. Tia Carrere and Daniel Ho are the first artists to be recognized. Although both grew up in Hawai‘i, they now live in the diaspora.

Amy: Clearly, there are widely divergent perspectives on what the Grammy Award should be for Hawaiian music. Many would have liked to see the award go to someone who has had a long, established presence in Hawaiian music in Hawai‘i, as if it were some kind of lifetime achievement award—which it is not. Those who look to the Grammys as a way to affirm the Hawai‘i music industry fail to recognize that Hawaii’s music industry is part of a broader national context, and that there are people producing Hawaiian music outside of Hawai‘i, like Daniel, who operate in this broader sphere. Then, there are those who assert that voting members of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences do not know Hawaiian music. That may be the case, but voting members are industry professionals who use their knowledge of professional standards of excellence to cast their votes. They may not know all of the intricacies of Hawaiian music, but they recognize when something has been engineered well, and they recognize excellence in artistry. I think our positioning outside Hawai‘i complicates all of these questions about Native Hawaiian self-determination in Hawai‘i. But I also think that these questions are entirely separate from the merit of what we have created.



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Three Good Reasons to Write About Boxing— and lots of good advice on writing for American Culture Concentrators

Prize-winning writer Carlo Rotella was on campus February 16 to work with students in our sophomore-junior seminar on methods and approaches to the study of American Culture. Rotella is one of the finest writers of contemporary American creative non-fiction and—as students discovered—a thoughtful and perceptive teacher of the writer’s craft. He contributes regularly to the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Washington Post Magazine*, *Boston Magazine*, *Slate*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, among others, and is the author of Cut Time: An Education at the Fights and October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature. Students had read Rotella’s Good With Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt, and he revealed a number of the writing strategies used in the book.

Students in the methods class aim to produce a polished piece of analytical writing, and they had drafted introductory paragraphs, which Rotella used to step them through a range of new possibilities for their writing. “Too many of our introductions rely on a kind of ‘throat-clearing’ gesture,” he suggested, “...a vague set of statements about ‘society’ or ‘culture’ that don’t really grab a reader. Instead, why not tell a story? And in the body of the paper, think of a sequence of ‘beats’ and ‘stepbacks’—the beats are stories, descriptions, characters; the stepbacks are the moments when you tell us what these things mean.” Students pitched their paper topic ideas to Rotella, who responded with thoughts on sources, stories, paper structures, and possible directions for the work.

Following the undergraduate seminar, Rotella offered a public discussion of writing, co-sponsored by the Zell Visiting Writers series and the Program in American Culture. Arguing for the serious writing opportunities offered by the art of boxing, Rotella charted out a general course for aspiring writers, peppering his talk with humor, fabulous stories (which did indeed function as “beats” in his narrative), and an occasional dose of the gritty language emerging from the ring.

“This visit was not only educational for the students,” observed faculty instructor Phil Deloria. “Rotella is an exceptional teacher of writing and he has a way of communicating about ideas that is second to none. I experienced the seminar as a pedagogical clinic for my own teaching, and have been imagining new ways to work with student writing. Indeed, following Rotella’s visit, I decided to expand the time allotted for writer’s workshops at the end of the semester. I’m hoping that Rotella’s visit will be the catalyst for a fabulous set of American Culture papers this semester!”

AC Writing Awards

Each year, the Program in American Culture awards two prizes to American Culture and/or Latina/o Studies concentrators for the best essays on a topic related to the field of American Studies/Ethnic Studies. Congratulations to our 2008-09 winners, **Adonia-Lynn Arteaga and Andy Kroll**.

In her essay, “Is It Hard? Is It Easy?” **Adonia-Lynn Arteaga** crafts a striking document, an “altered art book” in which “words are lost, layered, and rearranged.” This complex “object” is “unconstrained” by “the boundaries of a conventional presentation.” “Is It Hard? Is It Easy?” is the name of the children’s book that serves as the armature for Arteaga’s overlay of original writing, drawing, and collage. As Arteaga notes in her prefatory comments, the work is “informed by visual cues and stimulated by music.” This is an inventive treatment of the “process of navigating the space in between adolescence and adulthood” in the “post-industrial urban setting of Flint, Michigan.”

Andy Kroll’s, “A Feast for Peace: How Feasts of the Dead Created Intertribal Alliances, Sustained Crucial Kinship Networks, and Promoted Peace” is a deft, lucid synthesis of primary sources and scholarly treatments of the Feast of the Dead, a periodic intertribal gathering of Huron origin practiced by the Great Lakes Algonquian in the seventeenth century. In this poised and discerning treatment of multiple accounts by French observers as well as of recent research, Kroll shows that the Feasts of the Dead—complex occasions of gift exchange, competition, relationship-building, and (at times) common burial of the dead—were “critical to intertribal peace and alliance.” They were critical, too, to sustaining the fluid kinship networks that, for a time, slowed “the spread of French imperialism.”

**Bachelor Degrees,
American Culture**

Christina Carter
Catherine Chang
Corinne Charlton
Jordana Cohen
Roberto Cornier
Jeffrey Deikis
Brett Ehrmann
Cheryl Friedman
Adam Gartenberg
Phoebe Goldberg
Kelsey Haley
Caroline Hartmann
Jung Hyen Kim
Amy Klein
Jonathan Krane
Andrew Kroll
Colleen Lawson-Thornton
Kathryn Lerner
Noah Levinson
Danielle Lewis
Stacey Martin
Elizabeth McCannell
William Neff
Kathleen O'Connell
Emily Pearson
Sean Riddell
Benjamin Righthand
Emily Rollet

Gregory Rosenberg
Maria Ryen
Karl Schubert
Amanda Siegel-Mevorah
Emily Silver
Kenyon Sivels
Erica Spevack
Jessica Vera
Allison Yura

**Bachelor degrees,
Latina/o Studies**

William Lopez
Elizabeth Mota

**Minors, Asian/Pacific
Islander American
Studies**

Laura Misumi
Melissa Sia

**Minors, Native
American Studies**

Marie Beaudoin
Stephanie Cote
Justin Crosby
Ann Judge
Timothy Lozon Jr.
Renee Mitch
Nathan Strick
Geraldyn Wenkel
Jessica Wynne

Shannon Zingle

M.A.s, American Culture
Brian Chung

Ph.D.s, American Culture

Jan Bernabe (August, 2008)
Improbable Visions: Filipino Bodies, U.S. Empire and the Visual Archives
Co-Chairs: Sarita See and Penny Von Eschen

Lloyd Buss (July, 2008)
Religion and Culture: Detroit's Open Housing Movement
Chair: Francis Blouin, Jr.

Justine Pas (May, 2008)
Finding Home in Babel: Transnationalism, Translation, and Languages of Identity
Chair: Magdalena Zaborowska

Rachel Peterson (September, 2008)
Adapting Left Culture to the Cold War: Theodore Ward, Ann Petry and Correspondence
Chair: Alan Wald

Deidre Wheaton (August, 2008)
Seeking Salvation: Black Messiahs, Racial Formation, and Christian Thought in Late 20th Century Black Cultural Texts
Co-Chairs: Angela Dillard and Joshua Miller

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Director's Letter (continued from page 2....)

Colin Gunckel, who works on Mexican Americans and Film as a Ph.D. student at UCLA, joins our program as an Assistant Professor. Both add strength this fall to our flourishing Latina/o Studies Program. **Brandi Hughes** will be on fellowship at Stanford University next year and will then start as an assistant professor in 2010. She is a Ph.D. student at Yale and specializes in African American missionaries. **Gerald Carr**, an expert on American folklore, museums, and Native American studies, also joins the instructional and research faculty. Welcome to them all! We have several additional formal offers outstanding at the time of this writing. Surprisingly, given the national economic picture, AC has been in an aggressive recruiting mode.

We have seen real growth in the numbers of our undergraduate minors this year and we are maintaining our new high levels of undergraduate concentrators. The undergraduate program, now headed by Professor **Julie Ellison**, has reached such a level of dynamism that students have formed an extracurricular group called ACES (American Culture/Ethic Studies). We worked hard this year to streamline the graduate program with an eye toward increasing summer funding and accelerating time-to-degree. Our graduate director, Professor **Magdalena Zaborowska**, led these efforts.

This year we have also turned our attention to former students. The U's Alumnae Council awarded **Ann Marie Lipinski** (AC '77) its Athena Award, and AC was involved in the organization of this event. The Pulitzer-Prize winning Lipinski's visit will be followed by a fellow

winner of that prize, **Amy Harmon** (AC '90), who will speak at our Program's graduation ceremony this May. In welcoming our alumni to campus, we remind ourselves that our unit's work, and the occasional recognition that goes along with it, continues beyond commencement.
- Greg Dowd

Student News

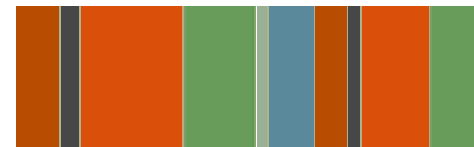
Dean Saranillio has received the University of California's postdoctoral fellowship and will be at UC Riverside next year.

Shaneshia Brooks Tatum and **Rachel Afi Quinn**, have each been awarded a four-month Community of Scholars fellowship from UM's Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWG).

Kiara Vigil, along with three other graduate students in History, Art & Design, and the School of Information, have received a grant award called: (Grant Research Opportunities-Collaborative Spaces). Professor **Tiya Miles** is the advisor for the group's interdisciplinary project titled, "Digitizing Knowledge: Navigating Digital Archives in Virtual Spaces."

Alumni News

Dr. Shawn Kimmel, Kellogg Health Scholars Program alumnus, started a full-time position in November 2008 as the Director of Policy Initiatives with the environmental justice organization, *Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice*.



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