**FACULTY HAPPENINGS**


**Janet Fiskio** published two articles in Spring 2012: “Unsettling Ecocriticism: Rethinking Agrarianism, Place, and Citizenship,” in a special issue on ecocriticism in *American Literature* and “Ecotopia and Apocalypse: Narratives in Global Climate Change Discourse,” in *Race, Gender, and Class*. She received a Powers Travel Grant to conduct research in Iceland on Roni Horn’s installation *The Library of Water*, and she travelled with three students from Bellingham to Juneau via the Alaska Marine Ferry for the Association of Filipinos in the Americas’ *Claiming the Oriental Gateway: Prewar* event in October 2012 with Mitchell, and they also shed light on the lives and thoughts of people about whom we have little material. Their stories are complicated in all kinds of different ways, and they men talking about their lives. Their stories are complicated in all kinds of different ways, and they also shed light on the lives and thoughts of people about whom we have little material. This was for me really exciting because I really wanted to do something with it, and I knew I wanted to continue writing about the intersection of sex and race. These were transcripts….of the cases of the trials—100, 200 pages of Mexican women and men talking about their lives. Their stories are complicated in all kinds of different ways, and they also shed light on the lives and thoughts of people about whom we have little material. This was for me really exciting because I really wanted to do something with it, and I knew I wanted to continue writing about the intersection of sex and race.

**Shelley Lee** received tenure in 2012. In 2011, her first book, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway: Prewar Seattle and Japanese America*, was published by Temple University Press. She also recently completed the manuscript of her second book, *A New History of Asian America*, which will be published

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**Director’s Welcome:**

Greetings from the Comparative American Studies Program!

Once again we are in the midst of an eventful and productive year. 2012-13 has brought welcome additions to the CAS community. Professor Harrod Suarez, a new hire in the English department who comes to Oberlin with a background in Filipino American and ethnic literature, has joined the CAS program committee. Also new to the program committee is Professor Rick Baldoz of the Department of Sociology. Between Professors Suarez and Baldoz, as well as core faculty member Shelley Lee, CAS comprises an unprecedented critical mass of Asian American studies specialists at Oberlin.

Our students and faculty have also benefited greatly from the curricular contributions of our two visiting faculty members, Lani Teves and Afia Ofori-Mensa. Professor Teves, who recently completed her PhD in American culture at the University of Michigan, spent fall semester at Oberlin teaching courses on Native Americans, performance, and popular culture. Although we were sad to bid her farewell at the end of the semester, we wish her well at her new position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Professor

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**Interview with Pablo Mitchell on his New Book**

In 2012, the University of Chicago published Pablo Mitchell’s second book, *West of Sex* (see description on page 3). To celebrate its publication, the Latina/o Heritage Month committee devoted a panel discussion in October 2012 with Mitchell, students, and faculty. Below are selections from an interview with Mitchell by CAS student assistant and major Aly Halpert.

AH: What inspired you to write *West of Sex*?

PM: I had these [legal] sources that I thought were just terrific from my first book

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continued on page 5
INTERVIEW WITH PABLO MITCHELL, continued

AH: Was there a specific case study that you came across, or a specific entry that particularly stuck with you?

PM: A case of a man named Juan Munoz. He was convicted of sodomy in Texas in the 1920s for engaging in oral sex with another man. He was convicted of the crime, he confessed that he did it, [and despite being] marginalized in a whole variety of ways, he appealed the case to a higher court in Texas in the mid ’20s, and the Texas higher court agreed he was right. The argument he made was that it wasn’t sodomy because it was oral sex. Oral sex was not covered under the sodomy statute. The Supreme Court was vexed. They were not happy, but they had to agree that it was not sodomy. He was released; he went free. That really stuck with me. I think folks who are facing a variety of challenges in difficult contexts still feel a certain right within a legal system. So, to be able to ask for justice, and then go ahead and pursue it struck me as a story that needed to be told.

AH: How do you think that this material, which is from the early 1900s, speaks to today about citizenship and sex and normativity, and also resistance to that?

PM: Some things that really speak to me are the losses and damages of citizenship claims and the exclusions at the heart of so many [of them]. And I have great respect for these folks who under difficult circumstances claimed heterosexual marital reproductive families as the bases of their rights to citizenship, because this was really important, and was elusive for many of these folks. At the same time, however, I think there were some real losses and damage done to [these people who are not fitting into those norms], especially in terms of reasserting gender hierarchies. Mexicanos especially were placed in difficult situations due to these normative claims, not to mention folks engaging in non-normative sexual acts, and claiming non-normative sexual spaces who faced exclusion. I think those were losses to the Mexican American community, to the broader American community not to have those folks included. And that’s a lesson for the present, especially after the election with more attention paid to Latina/Latino families and voters. Recognizing the dangers of excluding certain groups in our claims to citizenship is worth remembering in the present.

AH: How has it been publishing the book for you?

PM: So far it’s been really terrific. It’s been great to be able to talk with people about it, and I’ve really appreciated the kind of forums that the faculty and students have set up to talk about it, because I feel like it came out of my experience here at Oberlin. And it was marked in some wonderful ways by working with students and faculty. So being able to give talks about it here at Oberlin is perfect, because this is really where it came about.

MEET CAS MAJOR & STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE ALY HALPERT ’13

On becoming a CAS major:
Due to a really great mentor from my hometown, I spent my first winter term working for Queers for Economic Justice in NYC, working with a participatory action research collaborative there. [The experience] really helped me to understand the importance of doing social change work, how identities and systems of power intersect (at QEJ, around race, class, queerness, and the prison industrial complex), and my position within all of that. I took Intro [CAS 100] when I came back second semester, but I didn’t decide that I wanted to be a major until I took Queer Positions with Meredith [Raimondo] in the Fall. That class turned my entire world upside down in the best way (no pun intended). We considered questions of time, space, and bodies in personal and politically meaningful ways.

On CAS as a distinctive area of study at Oberlin:
Although I’ve had some problems with academia as a whole over the years, I’ve had no doubts about the necessity of a program like CAS existing within Oberlin College. I see CAS as a space to really engage with what’s going on in our world, and explore a more honest and holistic history of the injustices that brought us to this point. Basically, I think CAS as a whole helps us be way more informed and self-reflective such that it would be a big loss if the program weren’t around.

On the CAS community:
Well, my position is biased because I sit in the CAS “suite” three times a week as the student assistant, and many of my friends are CAS majors. I feel really safe and happy in the CAS office, and sometimes if I get out of class in King I go there just to check in with myself and figure out what I’m doing next. I think all the professors are really kind, and they care about students in a personal way, not just academically. Those relationships have been really important to me. As I said, I’m also biased because many of my friends are CAS majors, but I think there are many incredible and thoughtful people in the major. I also think that we always have work to do (and I struggle with this myself) in finding out how to engage people around issues of privilege and oppression while maintaining that everyone involved in the conversation is good. Overall, though, the CAS community has been one of the most important parts of being in the major.

On a particularly meaningful experience as a CAS major:
There have been so many, [but] one that stands out was when I served as a teaching assistant in the Queer Positions course with Meredith Raimondo last spring. Meredith and I planned each class together, and we made some really lovely decisions, for instance having class every week in the ELC [Edmonia Lewis Center for Women and Transgender People] so that people could feel more relaxed than in King, doing check-ins, having people from the last class come talk about their final projects, for example. I got to have insight into the process behind Meredith’s incredible teaching, and also got to be a part of one of the best class communities I’ve ever experienced.
on Women at Barnard College; Karen Leong, associate professor of women and gender studies at Arizona State University; and Scott Morgensen, associate professor of gender studies at Queen’s University. They will join us on campus March 7 and 8 to discuss curricular developments and future possibilities in CAS with faculty, students, and staff from across the college. We thank all CAS alumni who participated in this process by providing thoughtful responses in the alumni survey, and we look forward to the participation of students and colleague in this important review process.

Finally, we are excited to announce that in 2013-14, Comparative American Studies will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a series of events bringing together current and former students, faculty, staff, and community members who have helped to support CAS throughout its first 10 years. We look forward to hearing from alumni, students, faculty, and staff as we prepare events to celebrate this important milestone anniversary and encourage those with ideas to contact any of the CAS faculty.

Please enjoy reading this year’s newsletter, which features updates on new courses, alumni, faculty, and campus events, as well as spotlights on students and faculty. Once again I want to thank the CAS program committee, its majors, alumni, and friends for your enthusiasm and support and look forward to working with you all to celebrate our tenth anniversary events.

Warmly,
Gina Pérez
Eric and Jane Nord Associate Professor and Director
Comparative American Studies

**DIRECTOR’S WELCOME, continued**

**RECENT BOOKS BY CAS FACULTY**

**Beyond El Barrio: Everyday Life in Latina/o America**
Edited by Gina Perez, Frank Guridy, and Adrian Burgos (New York University Press, 2010)

“By complicating current representations of Latina/o lives and communities, this groundbreaking work provides a more global, transnational, and fluid understanding of barrios both as physical spaces and as metaphors. A smart and engaging intervention on some of the most critical questions surrounding Latinos’ citizenship, sexualit, activism, and cultural politics.”
—Arlene Dávila, New York University

**West of Sex: Making Mexican America, 1900-1930**
By Pablo Mitchell (University of Chicago Press, 2012)

“Beautifully crafted, tightly argued, and capably documented, West of Sex brilliantly shows how Mexican Americans turned to American courts to contest discrimination and to demand their rights as citizens decades before formal civil rights organizations were formed.”
—Ramón A. Gutiérrez, University of Chicago

**Doing Recent History: On Privacy, Copyright, Video Games, Institutional Review Boards, Activist Scholarship, and History That Talks Back**
Edited by Claire Bond Potter and Renee C. Romano (University of Georgia Press, 2012)

“How I wish Doing Recent History had been available when I began writing histories that were ‘just over my shoulder.’ Potter and Romano demonstrate that tackling recent history poses unique challenges, and they offer absolutely indispensable guidance in meeting them.”
—Alice Echols, University of Southern California

**The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946**
By Rick Baldoz (New York University Press, 2011)

“A scrupulously researched and compellingly argued work of historical sociology. Baldoz has an eye for the telling details that help to illuminate larger patterns of American empire, racial formation, and the politics of immigration. This elegant book makes a quantum leap by integrating Filipino and Filipino American scholarship and will surely become a classic in racial and ethnic studies.”
—Evelyn Nakano Glenn, University of California, Berkeley

**Fasting for Ramadan**
By Kazim Ali (Tupelo Press)

This book is more than just a simple account of spiritual hardship. It’s an incisive look at what it really means to be Muslim in today’s world, essential for anyone interested in understanding the multicultural fabric of America and of the Muslim community that exists here.
—Samina Ali, novelist, author of *Madras on Rainy Days*

**Claiming the Oriental Gateway: Prewar Seattle and Japanese America**
By Shelley Lee (Temple University Press, 2011)

“An engaging and well-researched study of how life in the international ‘ghetto’ of Seattle’s Jackson Street neighborhood reflected the racial dynamics of Pacific Rim geopolitics in the years prior to World War II... This book is a treasure. Lee superbly evokes the consciousness of both a place and an entire era.”
—Pacific Northwest Quarterly
Dani Levine, 2006
After graduation I moved to San Francisco to do environmental justice work, where I ended up meeting my now wife. We moved to New Orleans (her hometown) in January 2009, where I received my master’s degree in environmental health and policy at the Tulane School of Public Health. After doing policy work for the city, I decided to leave government and for the last year have been running a nonprofit in New Orleans called AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps. Our mission is to strengthen the Jewish community’s fight against the causes and effects of poverty in the U.S. We do this by engaging participants in service and community-building to inspire them to become lifelong leaders for social change whose work for justice is rooted in and nourished by Jewish values.

Kim Meinert, 2007
Since graduating from Oberlin I have been living in the Portland (Ore.) area. I spent a year helping to develop a free, specialty health care program at a free health clinic, and then I tried my hand as an independent contractor writing grants for the local health care safety net. After that, I accepted a position working for the state of Oregon as a case manager for families receiving public assistance benefits, and I am still there, going on my fourth year. While a love my job, I found I needed more direct community organizing activist activity in my life, so I welcomed to join the board of directors at In Other Words Feminist Community Center. I find that In Other Words reminds me of my oberlin days at the ELC and TWC/OSCA. I have truly found a sense of community and belonging at In Other Words.

Kantara Souffrant, 2008
Since graduating from Oberlin, I spent a year working at Oberlin College as the Africana community coordinator in the Multicultural Resource Center (2008-2009); completed my master’s in performance studies at NYU Tisch School of the Arts (2010); and am currently pursuing my PhD in performance studies at Northwestern University. In between this wonderful and challenging work, I’ve been curating and producing installation art and performances in venues throughout Chicagoland and New York.

Thomas Shannon, 2009
After graduating, I spent two years teaching kindergarten in Qingdao, China. I returned to the states almost a year ago and am now studying for a master’s degree in public administration at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Rusty Bartels, 2010
Since graduating from Oberlin, I’ve begun a PhD program in cultural studies at UC-Davis, where I’m continuing to develop my research interests concerning race, the environment, American West, and American expansion/imperialism. My current project looks at Angel Island State Park as a militarized landscape, and how the representation of the military history contributes to narratives of the military as a national defense force rather than an imperial force. Eventually I’ll expand this to look at how various national parks and monuments in U.S. states and territories in and around the Pacific represent the U.S. and its military history in the region.

Allison Swaim, 2010
I spent the past year on a Watson Fellowship, circumnavigating the globe by cargo ship and stopping at global ports en route. I collected sound, image, and text to bring back stories of modern-day sailors, who spend much of their lives in a world where the maps detail water and show land as a blur. I witnessed a fascinating cross-section of a global migrant worker economy and saw the privilege of geography play out in an international work context, outside of national boundaries, among workers of different rank and background, such as the dynamics of a Greek captain commanding Filipino officers. I’m currently working with terabytes of footage I brought back to produce audio, video, installation, and text-based documentary work to tell the story of these workers who are crucial to keeping the global economy moving.

Sam Bass, 2011
I teach kindergarten at a charter school in New Orleans called Pride College Prep, which was founded four years ago. The school moved into a new building in New Orleans East, about 15 minutes from downtown New Orleans. It houses grades K-5 and will add a new grade each year until 8th.

Matt Richardson, 2011
I’m working for a nonprofit organization in Managua, Nicaragua, called CANTERA (http://www.canteranicanagua.org) as a volunteer sent by the Franciscan Capuchin Corps (http://www.capcorps.org/). I work in a community center called la Olla de Soya in barrio Jorge Dimitrov in Managua, where I teach English classes to teenagers and adults, help run a group called Jóvenes Comunicadores (Youth Communicators), and help maintain a community vegetable garden. I’ll be here until December 2013, upon which I’ll probably return to the United States.

Isabelle Rozendaal, 2011
I teach Suzuki violin at the Chicago West Community Music Center and perform on violin and baroque violin in various ensembles in the Chicago area, including Baroque Band, the Callipygian Players, Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra, Northbrook Symphony Orchestra, Park Ridge Fine Arts Symphony Orchestra, and the Chicago Bach Ensemble. I have also been teaching yoga, traveling the world, learning French, and perfecting my chocolate chip cookie recipe.
FACULTY, continued

by Routledge in fall 2013. In spring 2012, she presented new research from her project on Korean Americans in late 20th-century Los Angeles at the Organization of American Historians meeting and will continue to work on this project while on sabbatical in 2013-14.

Pablo Mitchell was promoted to full professor. His second book, *West of Sex: Making Mexican America, 1900-1930*, was recently published by the University of Chicago Press. He is currently completing a history of Latina/os in the United States and is at the early stages of new research into the history of race and palliative care in the nation’s past.

In September 2012, Gina Pérez gave the keynote address for Latino Heritage Month at the University of Akron. She presented papers at the meetings of the Puerto Rican Studies Association and the American Studies Association and participated in panel discussions on Latino politics and immigration at Northwestern University as well as during parents weekend at Oberlin. She is currently coediting with Luis Plascencia a special issue for *Latino Studies Journal* on Latinos and militarism. Finally, she was awarded research status for the next academic year to complete her book-length project on Latina/o youth and JROTC.

**NEW AND FEATURED COURSES**

CAST 400: Research Seminar: Expanding the Archives, *Wendy Kozol*
How do American studies scholars use archives? Is this changing in the 21st century? Do new archives like the Internet require different methodological approaches? This seminar explores the distinctiveness of interdisciplinary research in Comparative American Studies as well as the range of traditional and contemporary sources of evidence available to scholars. In this class, students will work through the various steps of evidence gathering, analysis, and writing a research paper. This course is required for the CAST major and may also count for the major in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies.

CAST 345: Narratives of Passing (cross-listed in African American Studies), *Afia Ofori-Mensa*
Is passing about pretending to be someone you are not, or is it about becoming someone different than you were before? This course uses passing as a paradigm to destabilize normative understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. Through literature and film about various forms of passing from the early 20th century through the present, we will analyze relationships between privilege and oppression, representation and performance, normativity and difference, and visible and invisible identities.
CAS FACULTY AND STAFF

**Core Faculty:**
Gina Pérez, Associate Professor and Director
Shelley Lee, Associate Professor
Meredith Raimondo, Associate Professor
Wendy Kozol, Professor

**Comparative American Studies Program Committee:**
Kazim Ali, Associate Professor of Creative Writing (on leave 2012-13)
Rick Baldoz, Assistant Professor of Sociology
Janet Fiskio, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies (on leave 2012-13)
Meredith Gadsby, Associate Professor of African American Studies
Harry Hirsh, Professor of Politics
Daphne John, Associate Professor of Sociology
Gillian Johns, Associate Professor of English
Pablo Mitchell, Professor of History
Renee Romano, Associate Professor of History (on leave 2012-13)
Harrod Suarez, Assistant Professor of English

**Administrative Assistant:**
Judi Davidson

**Student Representative:**
Aly Halpert ’13

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