

# Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies

University of Massachusetts Amherst

A Department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts

Fall 2017  
Newsletter

**Welcome back everyone!** We are settled into the new building, we moved the window (yay!) and can resume sharing alum and faculty news (grants! promotions!), and plans and ideas for the department in the future. We opted to do a black and white newsletter this time to save money; we thought you'd prefer a newsletter that is a bit longer and can include all our news! Read on:

## Faculty News

We have a lot going on! In addition to starting a search this fall in African-American feminist studies, we are welcoming two new faculty members, albeit short term. **Elizabeth Williams** and **Stina Soderling**, recently received their PhDs from the University of Minnesota (History) and Rutgers (Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies) respectively. Stina is returning and teaching a new course on Immigration and Settler Colonialism, while Elizabeth (see below for more) is offering a course for first year students on the Politics of the Sex Scandal. They are stepping in this year while **Miliann Kang** is on a Fulbright Fellowship in South Korea and **Banu Subramaniam** is on a Newhouse Fellowship at Wellesley College. In addition, **Kirsten Leng** won a Lilly Fellowship to develop new courses and teaching strategies. She is also celebrating the publication of her first book, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany 1900-1933* this fall. **Alex Deschamps** is continuing her work as Associate Dean for the Honors College, where, among her many responsibilities, she runs the Emerging Scholars program for first generation college students, while keeping up her teaching for WGSS. **Laura Briggs'** book, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump* (University of California Press) just came out. Last spring, we were delighted to welcome back **Svati Shah** from her research leave at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. **Angela Willey** was promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure, and **Lezlie Frye** is continuing to teach courses in disability studies, while taking on a new offering on Policing, Protest, and Politics: Queer Feminisms and Black Lives Matter. She is continuing to work on a manuscript based on her dissertation entitled *Enabling Genealogies: Post-Civil Rights Racial Disenfranchisement and the Birth of the Disabled Citizen*.

Farewell to **Mecca Jamilah Sullivan**, a sought-after teacher, and an innovative scholar who is now in the department of English at Bryn Mawr. Welcome back to **Julieta Chaparro Buitrago** and **Sonny Nordmarken**, experienced WGSS teachers who are teaching courses for the department this year. Welcome to new instructors: **Carlyn Ferrari**, **Katelyn Litterer** and to 187 teaching assistants **Kevin Henderson**, **Joy Jansen** and **Siyuan Yin**. We are also happy to be working with **Anne Moore** and **Isabel Espinal**, the two library liaisons working with WGSS. Anne's focus is History; Gay, Lesbian & Transgender Studies, and she is also a liaison to the Stonewall Center; Isabel works with Afro-Am, Anthropology, Caribbean and Latin American Studies, and Native American Indian Studies.

## Welcome to Elizabeth Williams

Elizabeth's research focuses on discourses of race and sexuality in the British empire. She completed her Ph.D. in History at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, with a minor in Feminist Studies. Elizabeth is currently developing her dissertation into a book manuscript, tentatively titled "Sexual Trusteeship: Constructing Race and Sexuality in Colonial Kenya, 1895-1963." This project explores how white Kenyan settlers contrasted the deviance and dysfunctionality of "civilized" sexuality with the supposed innocence of



(....continued on next page....)

African sexual mores and practices. By presenting East Africans as vulnerable to sexual contamination, they were able to oppose processes like urbanization, education, and Christianization that threatened white supremacy in the colony. Elizabeth's research areas include: History of Gender and Sexuality, Race and Ethnicity, African History, Imperialism, Modern Britain.

She writes:

*I'm excited to join the WGSS community at UMass! I have just relocated from Minneapolis, MN, where I divided my time between completing a PhD in History and trying unsuccessfully to meet Prince (RIP). My work focuses on the history of sexuality, especially in British colonial Africa. I have lots of good stories about poorly behaved British aristocrats that I'm excited to share with you. A new course I'm offering is WGSS 191: Scandal! The Politics of the Sex Scandal. This class will be a racy ride through the sexual foibles of the rich, famous, and powerful, from the ancient times to the present. Those who take this class will get to hear the coveted story of how much the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal confused me as a child. I look forward to meeting you all and sharing my love of history, gender studies, and cats.*

If you haven't checked our website lately, take a look! It is now comprehensive as it always was, with all of the past course guides (over 80!), many syllabi, newsletters from past to present, and more are all there plus tons of great pictures. The events page is easier to navigate and will now show you what is coming up next. [www.umass.edu/wgss](http://www.umass.edu/wgss)

## Chair's Message

*In which Laura Briggs reflects on the head-spinning quality of national politics and helpful analytical tools.....*

Something happened to time this summer. I'm not sure if it's standing still or speeding up, but the continued body blows from our political life is making it hard to keep up. It's dizzying, even for those of us who are feminists and supposed to be good at thinking about these sorts of things.

In August, we had threats of a nuclear war with North Korea, a woman was killed and 19 injured by a car at a neo-Nazi and Klan rally, the president said "both sides" were to blame, then he took it back, then he re-affirmed it and compared Robert E. Lee, who led an army against the United States in defense of slavery, to George Washington. Fox News took down a video that it had put up in January that fantasized about a car running down "liberal protesters." The *Daily Stormer* put up the most fetid, misogynist screed against Heather Heyer imaginable, and then GoDaddy announced they were not going to host their site anymore. Great cracks and divisions appeared in the Republican Party over Trump's half-hearted condemnation of the racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, and sexist right, and Steve Bannon was ousted. Bannon returned to his perch at Breitbart News, from which he promised to wage war against the mainstream of the Republican Party. Fawzia Afzal-Khan was removed as chair of Gender, Sexuality, and Studies at Montclair State because *someone else* in the department offended the right with a tweet and became the subject of a campaign of targeted online harassment (she will be speaking about this incident here in October). A significant debate broke out on the left over tactics, whether to use violence and doxing, whether to confront the racist right or stay away from their demonstrations. 40,000 people turned out to protest the right in Boston, routing the fewer

than 50 right-wing racists who called themselves advocates of “free speech.” Trump, after campaigning against war in Afghanistan, reaffirmed and increased the US military’s commitment to continuing the 16 year-old war in Afghanistan (apparently without trans service members, whom he is continuing to try to fire for being who they are).

And then eight days had gone by.

As we move into a new year, we are trying to figure out how to cushion ourselves and our students from the ongoing political shocks while creating space in classrooms to slow things down, to discuss and try to understand what kinds of paroxysms of change our country and the world are going through. We have good tools at our disposal—history, sociology, critical race and ethnic studies, the long traditions of feminist theory and cultural analysis. We have the privilege few people do, of face-to-face communities in classrooms that are dedicated to rigorous thought and analysis.



It’s not lost on us, of course, that higher education is in the crosshairs; if we ever had the luxury of an ivory tower, we sure don’t have it now. The racist right began their demonstrations in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia, and its leaders acknowledged that the practice run for that demonstration was at Berkeley. Fox News and other conservative media outlets have gotten a dozen faculty members around the country fired over the summer by scouring social media for evidence that they’ve expressed morally “outrageous” views, and they’ve all been targeted for speaking about racism, misogyny, or queer folks. Meanwhile, closer to home, austerity politics are making it harder for us to do what we do. UMass faculty, staff, and graduate employees are starting the semester without a contract, and the state’s failure to fully fund transportation means that some PVT bus lines serving the five colleges have been cut.

While the situation is serious, in some ways WGSS faculty and students are better positioned than most to figure out and cope with the current conjuncture. We have the intersectional tools to understand what’s coming at us, seemingly from all sides. We can link racism, sexism, impoverishment and state disinvestment to anti-gay, anti-trans, and anti-immigrant rhetorics (and we will also host Nancy MacLean, author of *Democracy in Chains* for a four-day residency in the Valley to talk about how austerity politics got normalized). Many of us have faced controversy and criticism for our work before and know how to respond. Above all, we have always been about supporting students and listening hard to their analysis. Bell hooks wasn’t kidding when she said that the point of feminist theory was to save people’s lives.

So we’re looking forward to lively classes, continued vigorous discussion of scholarship, research, and the world around us, and to appreciate the opportunities to think critically and produce fresh analysis that come from living in interesting times.



Lauren B. J. J.

## EVENTS

*Sign up for our events listserv (details on our website – click on “stay connected”) to get all the info. We are planning large events, small events, and are co-sponsoring events around the area. Stay tuned!*

By the time you read this, we will have a great welcome back event where current and new faculty spoke about their research. We also hosted **Medhin Paolos** and a showing of the film, *Asmarina*, about African and Arab undocumented immigrants in Europe. We have more events coming up:

***Intersectional Resistance and Resilience: Strategies for Survival***

**Willy Wilkinson**

**Award-Winning Transgender Writer & Public Health Consultant**

**Tuesday, October 24, 6:00 p.m. Cape Cod Lounge**

In this time of bigotry, violence, and uncertainty, resistance and resilience are critical to our survival. Join the author of the Lambda Literary Award winning book *Born on the Edge of Race and Gender: A Voice for Cultural Competency*. How do we deal with the hassles of existing in public, expand the rules of community membership, navigate devastating losses, do what we love despite threats to our safety, own our super powers, and unapologetically celebrate who we are? Willy Wilkinson, MPH is an award-winning transgender writer and public health consultant who has been advocating for marginalized populations since the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Willy’s memoir blends his intersectional experiences of race, gender, sexuality, disability, class, and parenthood with lessons from the fields of cultural competency, public health, and policy advocacy. Sponsored by the Chancellor’s Office; Stonewall Center; Institute for Teaching Excellence and Faculty Development; School of Public Health and Health Sciences; and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies

***Panel Discussion: Academic Freedom and Targeted Online Harassment in the Age of Trump***

**Johnny Eric Williams and Fawzia Afzal-Khan**  
**Thursday, October 5, 3:00, Campus Center 165-69**

Trinity College shut down when the right wing found that sociology professor Johnny Eric Williams had reposted something to his personal Facebook page asking why a Black lesbian cop should have to protect from gunfire a conservative Senator who had backed both racist and sexist measures. Trinity also put Professor Williams on involuntary leave. Fawzia Afzal-Khan was forced to

step down as chair of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies at Montclair State after right-wing commentators got the vapors about an adjunct faculty member, Kevin Allred, who tweeted that he wished someone would just shoot Donald Trump. This panel will explore the rising moral panic on the right over higher education and the views faculty members express on their own time about gender, race, sexuality, and Trump.

***Democracy in Chains***

**Nancy MacLean**

**Monday, November 13, 4:30 p.m.**

**Marriot Center, Campus Center**

Feminist historian Nancy MacLean is the author of *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Plan for America*, the most talked-about history book this year, which offers an explosive exposé of the ideas behind the well-heeled right’s relentless campaign to eliminate unions, suppress voting, privatize public education, and curb democratic majority rule. The book takes us from right-wing academics like James Buchanan to the Koch brothers. The first 100 people at the talk will get a free copy of her book. Sponsored by the Political Economy Research Institute, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, and the History Department.

**Masculinities Research Brown Bag Series**

Join us this semester for the monthly Masculinities Research Brown Bag series. Our aim is to bring together members of our community who are doing research about masculinities, and those interested in learning about this research, to share research, discuss methodological issues, trends, and more.

**Wednesday, September 27**

**Tom Schiff, Director UMass Men and Masculinities Center, Lecturer WGSS**

***Using Theater to Address Hegemonic Masculinity***

**Wednesday, October 25**

**Sonny Nordmarken, Doctoral candidate in Sociology, Certificate in Advanced Feminist Studies**

***Trans Masculine Selves: Reinscribing New Gender Meanings***

**Wednesday, November 29**

**Greg Coleman, Doctoral candidate in English**  
***Black Masculinity and Race Traitors: Examining Black Male Race Traitors in 100 years of African American Literature***

## EVENTS

All will take place in the WGSS Conference Room, South College W465 at 12:15. Bring your lunch. Coffee, tea, and water will be available. Co-sponsored by Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies and the UMass Men and Masculinities Center. For information Tom Schiff, [tschiff@umass.edu](mailto:tschiff@umass.edu).

### ***Coming up in Spring 2018!***

Look for a conference on the gay and lesbian left and the 1987 March on Washington on February 23-24, 2018. While many histories of the LGBT movement move quickly from Stonewall to ACT UP, this conference will bring together historians and multiple generations of activists to talk about the queer left in the 1970s and 80s—and today. Emily Hobson, author of *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*, will keynote this two-day conference with a particular focus on the work of the People of Color caucus and the civil disobedience committee in holding down a left and feminist presence in the 1987 March on Washington.

**Graduate Certificate Student Final Research Presentations** will take place in March of 2018.

**Adriana Garriga-López** will offer a queer feminist analysis of the response to Zika in Puerto Rico. April 10, 2018 at 4:30pm.

And of course, our gala celebration of our grads is scheduled for May 10, 2018.

*Encoding, Uncomputability, and the Myth of Source Code*

**Alex Carter**, *"How We Hear": Koori-Bina: A Black Australian Newsletter and Aboriginal Women's Activism in the 1970s*

**Seray Ergene**, *Organizing for Natural and Cultural Ecologies: Un-making 'People' and 'Nature' Exploitable*

**Carlyn Ferrari**, *Black Women's Writings and Eco-poetics*

**David Ke**, *Engaging Masculinity: Integrating Pedagogies of Counter Hegemony in Systems of Education*

**Eun Y. Lee**, *"Maps, not Monuments": A Curricular Proposal on Feminist Pedagogy for Social Justice Educators*

**Finn Lefevre**, *Untitled Trans Naming Project*

**Castriela Hernández Reyes**, *The Contested Terrain of Extractive Economic Model: Black Women Subjectivities, Land Struggles, and Everyday Forms of Resistance in Colombia*

**Siyuan Yin**, *Domestic Workers in China: Advocacy and Self-Transformation Through Performance*

Thanks to the participants and discussants from departments across campus for an enlightening day!

## PAST EVENTS

*We were thrilled that hundreds of people attended a lecture on a sunny Friday afternoon by Linda Sarsour, co-chair of the Women's March, who spoke on campus last spring.*



In March of 2017, we had our WGSS Graduate Certificate Conference for students who were completing the certificate. The conference was entitled: **Transformative Feminisms: Interventions & Innervations** and included the following papers:

**Ximena Abello**, *Towards a Black Feminist South American Thought*

**Pratistha Bhattarai**, *Algorithmic Values: Cultural*

## AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

Our undergraduates and graduate students won many awards ranging from College of Humanities and Fine Arts Awards, to Alumni Awards and more. Congratulations!

**Ann Ferguson Women and Gender Studies scholarship**--Ann created this fund through the Community Foundation of Western Mass. to commemorate her retirement from full time teaching in the Philosophy and the department. The 2017 winner is **Mariana Delmonte-Gladstone**.

Joyce Berkman also set up an award when she retired. The **Joyce Berkman Award for Outstanding Graduate Feminist Scholarship** is awarded to WGSS graduate certificate students who are

## STUDENT NEWS

completing requirements. This year we had a group of truly excellent papers so awarded the prize in three parts:

**Pratishtha Bhattarai** was finishing her M.S. in Computer Science. She uses feminist theory and method to study computational algorithms, paying particular attention to how algorithms operate as a structural mode of codifying difference along lines of race, gender, class, and ethnicity.

**Alex Carter** utilizes ethnographic, historical, and theoretical analysis to study transnational feminist coalitions. Alex is a doctoral candidate in the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro American Studies. His research examines the transnational relevance of the US Black Arts Movement in Australia and its relation to Black feminism and 'Black' Internationalism, among other interests.

**Carlyn Ferrari** brings Black feminist and ecofeminist critiques together through literary analysis. Carlyn is a doctoral candidate in the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies. Her research explores African American literature with concentrations on New Negro Renaissance women writers, Ecocriticism, African Diasporic literatures, centering analysis of gender and sexuality.

Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies gives a book award at Amherst Regional High School to a junior who is active in feminist issues or has done outstanding work in the area of women, gender, sexuality studies. The 2017 winner is **Claire Basler-Chang**. Congratulations!

Congratulations to Certificate graduates **Nneka D. Dennie** and **Jacinta R. Saffold**:

**Nneka** is a Ph.D. candidate in the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies and was awarded the 2017-2018 MIT School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship. She is a Visiting Scholar in the MIT Program in Women's and Gender Studies as she completes her dissertation, "*(Re)defining Radicalism: The Rise of Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability, 1831-1895.*"

**Jacinta R. Saffold** has been awarded a Mellon/ ACLS (American Council of Learned Societies) Public Fellows postdoctoral appointment. She is the Associate Director of Diversity, Equity and Student Success at the

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

### Undergrad Student News

We are a small department and can't offer every class each semester. Keep in mind: Courses fulfilling the Theory and Junior Writing requirements for majors are offered every fall semester. This fall WGSS 310, Writing for WGSS majors, and WGSS 394H Critical Race Feminisms are being offered. The Integrative Experience course is offered every spring semester: WGSS 494TI Unthinking the Transnational. Often electives are only once a year or even less often, so grab those fascinating classes when you see them.

Students, our faculty are here to help! If your sponsor isn't here (away doing research, moved to another institution) don't hesitate to reach out to our faculty for a new sponsor. See Karen for assistance. And, if your paperwork isn't in, get it done—you will be official, get special messages and invites, and have a faculty sponsor.

### Grad Student News

This fall, Professor **Kiran Asher** began the position of Graduate Program Director for WGSS and **Lezlie Frye** will continue as Associate Director of the Graduate Program. They look forward to working with each other and with you to make this a productive and fun year for the Advanced Feminist Studies Certificate program, and other activities. If you are not yet part of the program, March 1, 2018 is the deadline to apply for acceptance into the certificate.

Stay tuned for info on upcoming events, and the deadline for employment applications next spring.



## ALUMNI NEWS

***As always, our grads are doing great things in the world, and reaching out to each other and to us—we love it that we are in touch with decades of grads!***

**Maria Bastos-Stanek** just graduated, moved to New York City and is interning at Pace Gallery as an archival assistant, and at a small-arts non profit called Voices in Contemporary Art as a writing intern. She added “Double majoring with WGSS is giving me an edge I think. . . “

**Cara Bedick** is a senior Editor at Touchstone books, where she recently published GIRL UP by Laura Bates a “hilarious, bold, and unapologetic look at the ludicrous pressures and stereotypes faced by young women today.”

**AnnMarie Duchon** is the Interim Co-Director of Disability Services at UMass Amherst. She continues to advocate for social justice issues and has testified in the US House and Senate on the issue of equal pay. She adds “I also have the good fortune of being the mom of an 8 year old outspoken feminist!”

**Amy Ferrer** has been appointed to a second five-year term as the executive director of the American Philosophical Association.

It was great to see **Megan Murphy Flood** on a recent visit to UMass. She is enrolled in a MS in Nursing program at Sacred Heart University. She added she is happy to be now working at Mass General Hospital in the pediatric hematology/oncology clinic.

**Tracey Gebhart** “...started her dream job as an early childhood development researcher at Child Trends, a non-profit organization.”

Congratulations to **Virginia Iris Holmes** on the publication of her book *Einstein’s Pacifism and World War I* by Syracuse University Press.

**Jessica Kinckman** wrote last winter about working as a Software Project Administrator at Aliya Financial Technologies in Austin, Texas. The mission of the organization is to impact the financial wellbeing of every hardworking American.

**Emily Labarbera-Twarog** is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois. Emily’s book *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America* will be published by Oxford University Press in the fall.

**Jody Clarke Midura** is an assistant professor in the College of Education at Utah State University.

**Stefana Soitos** is the Assistant Director at the Office of Cornell Commitment at Cornell University and is working on her Master’s in Public Administration at Cornell, with a focus on education policy.

**Yifat Susskind** is the Executive Director of MADRE, an international women’s human rights organization. She authored the MADRE report “Promising Democracy, Imposing Theocracy: Gender-Based Violence and the US War on Iraq,” and her critical analysis has appeared in online and print publications such as The New York Times, The Huffington Post, The Guardian, and The Washington Post. She has also been featured as a commentator on CNN, National Public Radio, and BBC Radio.

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Look inside for news for enews, student awards, faculty books, events and more!

**Thanks to donors and special matching grant for the window! Bring us over the top!**

Special thanks to the people who responded to the “save the window” campaign. We got lots of modest and larger donations and nice notes about what the window means to you. We managed to move the window (pic on page 7). It looks beautiful and right at home after good work by UMass union labor and a local glass shop, but we haven’t yet completely covered the cost. Our Dean, Julie Hayes, has promised to match the next \$1000 in gifts we receive to finish our fundraising! Giving online is easier than ever before, you can designate to us easily. Go to our website [www.umass.edu/wgss](http://www.umass.edu/wgss) and click the GIVE button on the top right. Or go old school and send us a check.

In addition to our window project, our regular and new donors enable us to help students, do programming, give T-shirts to grads and more. Thank you once again.

This newsletter is produced semi-annually, funds permitting. It is written and edited by Karen Lederer, and designed and produced by Linda Hillenbrand. Thanks to Laura Briggs, Lezlie Frye, Linda Hillenbrand, and Elizabeth Williams for their contributions. Alums: Send us your news by August 1 for the fall edition! This publication is online at [www.umass.edu/wgss](http://www.umass.edu/wgss).