

The banner features a teal and green geometric collage background. It includes images of a person's face, a dinosaur, a globe, and a sign that says "Black Lives Matter".

AMST ANNOUNCEMENTS

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American Studies Newsletter

Check out what's happening at the American Studies Department!

Spring 2026

A Message From Department Chair, Dr. Tamara Bhalla:

The Department of American Studies is excited to share our latest news and events. In this issue of our spring newsletter, you'll find faculty updates, URCAD student spotlights, advising information, and course highlights, and information on upcoming events. Please be sure to follow us on our myUMBC pages for [American Studies](#) and [Public Humanities](#). Also, look out for exciting information and programming from the [Global Asias Initiative](#).

These updates reflect the work and commitments of our department. The Department of American studies takes a transnational and locally-grounded approach to examine American culture. In today's rapidly changing and often contentious social and political climate, our courses help students critically analyze race, ethnicity, class, gender, and place in both local and global contexts. Through coursework on immigration, race and racialization, sound studies, queer and feminist disability studies, food and social justice, histories of urban development, and policing and prisons, students gain analytical skills and hands-on experience in community-engaged research and public humanities.



Faculty Updates

Tamara Bhalla

Prof. Tamara Bhalla is finishing work on her second monograph *Race and Reading in America* which is under contract with the University of Massachusetts Press. She continues work as co-PI on the Global Asias Initiative Mellon grant, which is a project to build up the study of Asia and in its diasporas on our campus, with particular focus on growing Asian American studies on our campus. She has just had an article, reflecting on this work, co-authored with multiple members of the Global Asias Initiative Team, (Priya Bhayana (Global Asias Initiative), Meredith Oyen (HIST), Mika Thornburg (AMST and ASIA), Fan Yang (MCS and ASIA), and Emily Yoon (ENGL), accepted for publication with the *Asia Shorts: Institutional Forms of Global Asias Writing*. Professor Bhalla will attend the Association for Asian American Studies in Honolulu, HI in April 2026 where she will conduct a site visit at University of Hawaii at Manoa for the grant, and where she has organized a workshop bringing together senior and emerging scholars in South Asian American Studies to advance work on an anthology examining power and privilege in the field.

Iris Blake

Prof. Iris Blake has been working on revisions to her first book manuscript, *Undisciplining the Voice*, while finding academic community during her first full year at UMBC, including through participating in the Dresher Center Global Ethnic Studies Faculty Working Group. In November 2025, they presented their work on listening, echo, and Deaf time at the National Women's Studies Association Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Drawing on her research interests in interdisciplinary approaches to sound studies, Prof. Blake will be offering a new 400-level course this fall 2026 semester on "Sound and American Culture," where students will collaboratively design and create a sound installation as a part of the class.

Michael Casiano

Prof. Michael Casiano has been promoting his new book [Let Us Alone: The Origins of Baltimore's Police State](#). He has participated in public promotional events at the Baltimore Book Festival, Red Emma's, and the University of Maryland, College Park with more to come. He was interviewed by [the New Books Network podcast](#) where he discussed the book's key methods, interventions, and sources. Additionally, he published an article in the *Journal of Urban History* entitled, "[Dragging the Waters: Pestilence, Policing, and the Public Good in Postbellum Baltimore](#)," which serves as the foundation for his next book project. Relatedly, Prof. Casiano has created a new course entitled, "Capitalism and American Society," which he will offer for the first time in the spring semester of 2027.

Sarah Fouts

Back from fall sabbatical, Prof. Fouts has continued advancing research and teaching in food studies and community engagement. In New Orleans, she conducted 11 oral history interviews with vendors across Louisiana and Mississippi as part of the Crescent City Farmers Market Project. These interviews will be archived with the Southern Foodways Alliance at the University of Mississippi and are being integrated as a mapping project in her AMST 372 American Food course this semester. In December, Fouts completed a five-week artist residency at A Studio in the Woods (Louisiana), where she worked with a team to develop a film project exploring connections between New Orleans and Honduras through food and migration. In March 2026, Fouts traveled to the University of Porto through the Erasmus MOBILE Program to discuss her scholarship. She has also begun preliminary research on her next book project, *Disaster Foods*, supported by a UMBC START grant, with archival research underway and fieldwork planned in Appalachia and New Orleans this summer. Additional highlights include participation in the Food Studies Caucus as part of the ASA meeting in San Juan and invited book talks at Wesleyan, Louisiana Cabildo Museum, Davidson, Tulane, University of New Orleans, and Johns Hopkins. Fouts was interviewed on ethics and research methodology as part of a scholarly roundtable in [US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal](#). Fouts's work with the Black-led labor history project was mentioned in *LABOR Journal* and she was quoted on Christmas Day in the [Washington Post](#) in an article on Honduran immigration in New Orleans. Fouts is co-coordinating the [Homage to Baltimore Quilting Competition](#) with two UMBC alums (Monique Crabb and Mimi Dietrich) and UMBC student, Kat Gill. The project is sponsored by Maryland Folklife Network and the Mayor's Office.

Nicole King

Prof. Nicole King presented research "Grassroots Organizing in West Baltimore: Historic Preservation from the 1970s to Today" at the 2025 Urban History Association meeting in Los Angeles. The *Journal of Urban History* published her article "A Place Called Poppleton: Investigating the Slow Violence of Redevelopment in West Baltimore," which presents the displacement of residents and the long-stalled redevelopment of Poppleton as a case study of both the harms of extractive redevelopment and the long history of residents' resistance to slow violence through collective narrative investigations. This research is part of a larger book project *Save Our Block: Resisting the Developer Delusion on Baltimore's Westside, 1975-2025* that centers the history of the Poppleton neighborhood as a case study to grapple with the failures of redevelopment as part of envisioning a more equitable way forward. She is working with residents on a community-led plan for the Katie R. Williams History and Cultural Center of West Baltimore that will document, preserve, and celebrate the rich Black History of West Baltimore. She received the 2026 [Award for Leadership in the Public Humanities](#) from the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI) Public Humanities Network, a global community of humanities centers and institutes working with community partners committed to building research and leadership capacity and outcomes in collaborative research through public partnerships



2026 Student Awards

Outstanding Achievement in American Studies

Awarded to students who have demonstrated superior academic performance and significant contributions to the enrichment of university and community life.



Laura Schweinfurth

Laura is a graduating senior from Frederick, Maryland, majoring in American Studies. After graduation Laura intends to pursue graduate studies in library science and food studies in the hopes of working as an archivist.



Andrea Quispe

Andrea Quispe is a Sondheim Public Affairs scholar majoring in American Studies and Economics. After graduating, she plans to work full-time while applying to graduate school.

Joe Tobesman Award

Recognizes students who demonstrate enthusiasm for learning, a mature ability to connect learning with life experience, persistent application to the learning enterprise, and a generous and humane spirit.



Finley Bandy

Finley is a graduating senior in the Historical Studies program and a Public Humanities minor.

This fall, he will be starting the Public History Graduate Program to continue pursuing an interest in archival and museum studies. His research areas follow transportation infrastructure and urban history.



Bryan Castro-Velez

As a first-generation student of Honduran-descent, I have dedicated my studies in Geography and Environmental Systems in interdisciplinary, participatory, and anti-colonial practices. I am especially passionate in understanding critical intersections between land relationality, justice, and sovereignty in conversation with (but certainly not limited to) migration and subsistence living throughout Abiyala/Latin America. After graduation I intend to dedicate time towards family, work, and community organizing/service before applying to graduate critical geography programs in Abiyala/Latin America!



URCAD Spotlight

Visualizing Enforcement: ICE Activity and Community Response in Maryland

Andrea Quispe Majors: American Studies, Economics;
Minor: Public Humanities

Tamara Bhalla, American Studies, Mentor



My capstone research and public humanities project in American Studies examines the chronological escalation of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in Maryland through the creation of a digital timeline. The digital timeline visualizes how enforcement has heightened over the past two years using two forms of public recording: social media and mainstream news media. This presentation examines how social media functions as an information network for the Maryland Latinx community compared to mainstream media news coverage to understand how different platforms decide what counts as urgent and shareable. While mainstream media prioritize large-scale enforcement stories, social media circulates localized warnings and “know your rights” resources. Using content analysis of ten Maryland-based Facebook group posts and three mainstream news coverage sites, this project will uncover the differing criteria and purposes that go into publishing community encounters with ICE. This digital visualization not only brings attention to the ongoing realities of enforcement, but also demonstrates how Maryland communities have responded by creating rapid communication networks to protect one another.

Bay Shore Amusement Park: A Forgotten History Of Sparrows Point

Sophia Crowell, Biological Sciences major,
Public Humanities minor

Michael Casiano, American Studies, Mentor



Bay Shore Amusement Park, once located where North Point State Park stands today in Sparrows Point, Maryland, was a hub for recreation and community life from 1906 until 1947. My digital history project aims to preserve and share its story through an interactive story map, engaging the Sparrows Point community with their place-based history. By collaborating with key stakeholders, I plan to bring archival materials out of “archival isolation,” highlighting landmarks such as the trolley station and fountain that were central to community building. The park’s popularity stemmed from its accessibility via the “Red Rocket” United Railways’ streetcar system, which brought visitors from Baltimore directly to its sandy beaches, amusement rides, bowling alley, dance pavilion, live music venues, and restaurants serving Maryland seafood favorites. However, the park’s decline began in 1935 when United Railways went bankrupt and a devastating fire in the 1940s further hastened its downfall. By 1947, Bethlehem Steel acquired the land for industrial expansion, ending an era of local leisure and community recreation. My project seeks to answer how this landscape transformed from a thriving amusement park to its current identity as North Point State Park, examining themes of historical preservation, community memory, and land use changes.

This work was funded, in part, through an Undergraduate Research Award from the UMBC Division of Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

Our City Is A City Without An Expressway: A Historical Review Of Transportation Injustice In Baltimore City

Finley Bandy, History major, Public History and Public Humanities minor

Michael Casiano, American Studies, Mentor



Like many American cities throughout the post-war period, urban renewal policies swept through Baltimore in an attempt to revitalize the “blighted slums” of the city, which disproportionately targeted Black and working class neighborhoods. One such project was the construction of an east-west expressway that would have cut through the heart of the city, destroying several historic neighborhoods in its wake. In

response, a number of neighborhood organizations throughout the city came together to protest the highway’s construction. While some of the neighborhoods slated for destruction were spared, a segment of the highway was still constructed, resulting in the displacement and destruction of an entire neighborhood along the Franklin-Mulberry corridor. Decades later, the city identified the continued need for efficient transportation across the city from east to west. A public transportation initiative, now known as the “Red Line” was proposed to address this need. However, 20 years have passed since this original proposal, and despite extensive planning phases, the Red Line has yet to come to fruition. Through historical and archival research, this project investigates the history of the Red Line in comparison to the Highway to Nowhere. This comparative analysis reveals a historic trend of transportation injustice in Baltimore City.

The Case For A Public Internet

Kat Gill, American Studies and English double major, Public Humanities minor

Michael Casiano, American Studies, Mentor



How do we conceptualize a world with an Internet that serves the public good? For a large portion of its existence, the Internet has been a place optimized for the extraction of data and capital from its users. Today, this has resulted in a digital environment that blurs the lines between entertainment and fact, generating an ecosystem of populism and political extremism. This correlates directly with the rise of fascism in the US, as political leaders such as Donald Trump have harnessed privatized social media for their own political gain. However, public stores of information, such as the Internet Archive, have proved to be invaluable in preserving data deleted by the government. Through conducting oral histories with five college students concerning their experiences with public and private internet spaces, my research uncovered how this technology can be reimagined to help us move towards a healthier digital landscape through the promotion of more nuanced thinking. Ultimately, the public nature of these resources can work to redefine how we position ourselves as individuals on the Internet and help conceptualize a niche of digital public resources governed by individual and community needs.

Museo Garifuna Sawaina In Context: Honduran Neoliberalism, Anti-Colonial Ethnographies & Garifuna Celebrations Of Life

Bryan Castro-Velez, GES Major, Public Humanities minor

Sarah Fouts, Public Humanities, Mentor



A modest community museum on the northeastern coast of Honduras works beyond preservation and instead actively nurtures Afro-Indigenous cultures, realities, and celebrations of life. Contrasting western institutions, Museo Garifuna Sawaina exhibits transformational conceptions of cultural institutions and ethnographic practices led by Afro-Indigenous people in rejection of appropriation, extraction, and taxidermy. My research ultimately reflects upon mestizaje concealing neocolonial developments through the privatization and censorship of public institutions and education. This is a collaborative project that centers and contextualizes Museo Garifuna Sawaina's community-centric model within its sociopolitical and economic environment, exploring Museo Sawaina as a

transformative Honduran institution, with Director Bernardo Guerrero as a co-facilitator. Critical participatory action research, accompaniment and formation analysis will be the primary methodologies to prioritize intellectual ownership to the Garifuna pueblo of Limon, Honduras. I will directly assist in a community-developed project in this contextualization, including subsets, and co-produce a storytelling deliverable (ie. Story/Map, Storytelling Circle). This public-facing component ultimately connects Museo Garifuna Sawaina with the growing international presence of community museums and their efforts to ensure Afro-Indigenous communities remain the rightful stewards of their (hi)stories, traditions, and land.

This project was funded by the Public Stories Lab Scholarship and The Orser Center for Public Humanities.



Advising

Advising season has arrived. The course schedule goes live on Monday, March 23, 2026. Please look over the exciting courses in American Studies and Public Humanities below. American Studies majors and Public Humanities minors will be contacted by their advisors before spring break with a reminder to schedule an appointment to set their schedules for the Fall 2026 semester.



Upcoming Courses

Attached to this email are complete lists of AMST and PUBH Spring 2026 courses

AMST 356 - Special Topics: Multiracial Identity

Instructor: Mika Thornburg

Mon / Wed 4:00-5:15 p.m.

What is race? There are a multitude of answers to this question and they are incredibly complex, spanning the multiple levels of the individual identity, community and nation and various institutions from the law, social movements, and culture. One territory in which the contested and slippery nature of race has been made most evident is the negotiation of multiracial peoples and identities. In this class, students will examine the histories of how different racial categories have been constructed in the US, paying close attention to both the commonalities and specific particularities of different groups. However, students also will reflect and think critically about the porousness and incompleteness of racial categories as well as other categories by learning to analyze through a critical multiracial analytic. They will engage with scholarship, memoirs, and art about multiracial experiences to understand the meanings given to multiraciality, hybridity, and multiracial people, and what they have been used to signify, leading to deeper explorations of how we understand our social world.

AMST 375 - Studies in Asian American Culture [AH or C]

Instructor: Tamara Bhalla

Mon / Wed, 1:00-2:15 p.m.

This course is a survey of salient topics and debates in Asian American cultural studies. We will learn about the origins of the field, the current demographics of Asian Americans, early histories of Asian migration to the U.S., the theory of Orientalism, Asian American racialization, civil rights, and the model minority paradigm. We'll conclude with an exploration of Asian Americans' cultural influence, in food, politics, music, literature, and film.

AMST 380 - Community in America [AH]

Instructor: Nicole King

Tue / Thurs, 2:30-3:45 p.m.

This course explores the concept of community in America, examining dimensions of place, social structure, and cultural identity from a public humanities framework. Class texts draw upon examples from the Baltimore metropolitan region and employ community studies from a range of fields—literary, historical, and spatial. Course materials present an overview of the literature on community, its main themes, its insights into culture and identity, and its shortcomings as a concept. We will explore how neighborhoods, cities, and borders shape cultural identity and social interactions over time. For the second part of the semester, we will work on collecting and analyzing materials from a community archiving project based in West Baltimore. Students will gain insight into how cities have been built and redeveloped over time and the social inequities embedded in that history.

AMST 411 / 630 - Sound and American Culture

Not yet listed in course schedule

Instructor: Iris Blake

Wed, 4:30-7:00

This course introduces students to the field of sound studies, from an interdisciplinary American Studies perspective. Students will examine how race, indigeneity, class, gender, and disability impact the study of sound in American culture. Through a combination of project-based learning and writing assignments, students will reflect on their own relationship to listening, power, and sound. Students will learn about linkages between colonialism and sound recording technologies, create a soundscape recording, learn to listen to archival images, and engage d/Deaf and disability studies approaches to sound. This course also introduces the concept of “sound art” in preparation for a collaboratively produced sound installation project. Prior background in the study of music or sound is not required or expected.



News and Events

Wed, April 15, 5:00-6:00pm

Essential Storytelling:

[Watercress and Writing Your own Story with Newbery Award Honor Author Andrea](#)

[Wang-winning author](#). Supported by a Global Asias Initiative Course Expansion Grant awarded to Dr. Shuling Yang, Education.

Thurs, April 16, 4:30-6:30pm

Manil Suri Book Event

[A Room in Bombay](#); in conversation with English/MCS alumnus [Aditya Desai](#)

Monday, May 4, 11:00am-6:30pm

Global Asias Symposium & Celebration

Save the Date!! This event will showcase and celebrate the work of the Mellon-funded Global Asias Initiative, a three-year initiative closing Sept 2026 that has been housed between Asian American Studies minor (in AMST) and the Asian Studies Program.

Saturday, June 6, 6:00-9:00pm

Homage to Baltimore Quilting Exhibition

Save the date! This event will showcase the quilting competition at Current Space in Baltimore.

The event is sponsored by the Orser Center for Public Humanities, Maryland Traditions, the Mayor's Office, and MOACE.

These events are open for full participation by all individuals regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or any other protected category under applicable federal law, state law, and the University's [nondiscrimination policy](#).



Find more updates and resources

on the [AMST website](#)

and Instagram page!

Check out our LinkTree!

AMST
Fine Arts Building Room 545A

If you prefer not to receive these updates, please email morgando@umbc.edu