

# THE McNEIL CENTER FOR EARLY AMERICAN S T U D I E S

## ∞ Fourth Annual Consortium Undergraduate Research Workshop ∞ Spring 2012

### List of Participants and Project Abstracts

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#### Daniel Barlekamp, Ursinus College

Major: English      Minor: Art History

Adviser: Rebecca Jaroff, Associate Professor of English

Mentor: Mark Mattes, Mellon Early Amer. Lit. & Material Texts Diss. Fellow/Iowa

Edgar Allan Poe became a legendary figure immediately upon his death, garnering a reputation as an alcoholic, erratic, but nonetheless respected author. This description has permeated American popular culture for over a century, and continues to inform portrayals of the author for academic and entertainment purposes alike. While Poe's biography is indeed filled with tragedy, mental illness and substance abuse, I do not believe this description tells the whole story; his knack for the macabre and his meticulous control over literary language arose not so much from a disturbed psychological state, as from the times and culture in which he lived.

For this reason, in my honors thesis I adopt a new historicist approach to Poe's short Gothic fiction. In the first chapter, I connect the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century practice of bodysnatching with the tales "Berenice" and "Morella" (both 1835), arguing that the works have their origin in this bizarre social phenomenon. I examine several primary documents, such as the memoir of an actual "resurrectionist," to measure the impact the occurrences must have had on the public imagination. I then locate instances of bodysnatching in the stories, and comment on their remarkable historical accuracy.

I follow a similar procedure in the second chapter, this time focusing on mesmerism, a nineteenth-century quack medical theory which eventually developed into modern hypnosis. Again, through the use of primary sources (this time including medical treatises), I attempt to demonstrate the function of mesmerism in 1840s America. I compare these findings with Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," (1845), a piece in which he describes a mesmerism experiment so effectively that many readers initially accepted it as a true account.

Through historicizing Poe's tales, I hope to prove that although personally troubled, he was an astute observer who thoroughly understood the world in which he lived and wrote.

## **Caroline Marris, New York University**

Majors: English and History

Adviser: Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Professor of History

Mentor: Dael Norwood, MCEAS Consortium Fellow/Princeton

This thesis will examine the crux of military, economic, political and cultural factors which served to make privateering such a successful tool for the government of Elizabeth I. In the Spanish War of 1585-1604, these quasi-illegal forces turned up as everything from official naval participants to prosecuted diplomatic irritants. My project shall attempt to determine the legal status of English privateers in the period, or lack thereof; it will pick apart both the pros and the cons, from the government's perspective, of endorsing privateering voyages and examine the motives of the captains and merchant backers involved, which include financial and colonial considerations; and it will lay out, through a series of case studies, the vagaries of individual relationships between authorities and their 'pirates'. In this process, I hope to prove that privateers were the weaker partners in these relationships, and show through studies of the likes of John Hawkins, Walter Raleigh and (looking forward) Captain Kidd how the monarchy began to exert its control over its burgeoning naval assets in the years before its true establishment under the Commonwealth.

## **Hadley Nagel, Johns Hopkins University**

Majors: History and International Studies

Adviser: Toby L. Ditz, Professor of History

Mentor: Whitney Martinko, 2010/11 Barra FDN Fellow in Art & Material Culture/UVa

My senior honors thesis focuses on the friendship between James Madison and George Washington and its impact on the creation of a stronger central government in the critical period between the Annapolis Convention in 1786 and Washington's Inauguration in 1789. The historiography on their friendship is meager despite the availability of their correspondence (online since 2001 through the University of Virginia's Rotunda Project). In addition to the secondary literature on political events and the scholarly biographies of the two men, I rely on the literature on epistolary friendship to guide my research.

Trust and expectations of privacy formed the backbone of their friendship as each turned to the other for what he needed. Self-taught Washington valued university-educated Madison's mind, eloquence and unparalleled grasp of political philosophy. Madison, shy and physically weak, needed Washington's people skills, charisma, and prestige to achieve his own goals. Their affection toward one another was also apparent throughout their letters as was Madison's continuing deference towards Washington. Skeptical about the reliability of politically biased print media, they also relied on their letters and personal networks to convey information vital in determining their political strategies in the public sphere -- a public sphere that they pondered and questioned in their private domain of friendship.

The culmination of their political friendship was Washington's Inauguration. Madison not only drafted Washington's address but he also wrote the House of Representatives' response. Finally, Washington asked Madison, the man he believed to be the wisest political philosopher of his generation, to pen his response to Congress. Washington may have Commander-in-Chief, but Madison wielded the most powerful pen in the country.

## **Christopher Siuzdak, Catholic University**

Majors: History and Psychology Minors: Philosophy and Theology/Religious Studies

Adviser: Jason T. Sharples, Assistant Professor of History

Mentor: Seth Perry, Mellon Early Amer. Lit. & Material Texts Diss. Fellow/Chicago

Throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the rate of death in New England fluctuated unpredictably due to ever-present Indian raids and pathogens such as smallpox, measles, and diphtheria. The Puritans found religious meaning in the epidemics that besieged the people unexpectedly and formidably. The epidemics spawned a sense of insecurity. Cotton Mather, the preeminent Puritan minister and intellectual, concluded that a diabolical plot was afoot to destroy New England. Spiritual authorities, such as Cotton Mather, blamed the pestilence on religious impurity.

Even though the Puritans migrated to New England because of an intolerance of religious heterodoxy in England, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Plantation did not enshrine religious liberty in their law or culture. Even more curious is the fact that a prominent Puritan minister, Cotton Mather, preached anti-Catholic sermons. Though separated geographically and temporally, Catholics remained at the forefront of Puritan consciousness. The paper will explore how epidemics modulated the religious climate of Colonial New England. The paper will use primary sources, such as Cotton Mather's Diary and his work on religious history entitled *Magnalia Christi Americana*. The paper uses numerous secondary sources, such as biographies of Cotton Mather, works on the religious climate of the period, and frontier relations, and health epidemics in Colonial New England.

## **Andrew Smith, Gettysburg College**

Majors: History and Political Science

Adviser: Timothy J. Shannon, Professor of History

Mentor: Jennifer Elliott, Barra FDN Fellow in Art & Material Culture/UVA

In fall 2011, I completed my senior research thesis on the internment of the Moravian Indians in the Philadelphia barracks during the Paxton Boys crisis. Now, with the encouragement of Professor Shannon, I am revising my thesis and planning to submit it to a scholarly journal in June 2012.

The Moravian Indians were mostly Delawares and Mahicans converted by Moravian missionaries working in northeastern Pennsylvania. After the Paxton Boys massacred the Conestoga Indians in December 1763, the Pennsylvania government confined the Moravian Indians to the military barracks in Philadelphia, to protect them from a similar assault by armed frontiersmen. As a result, the historical research done on the Moravian Indians' internment has focused on the Paxton Boys crisis, but has overlooked the fact that these Indians remained in Philadelphia for thirteen months after the crisis ended in February 1764. My thesis focuses on this prolonged period of contact and exchange between the Moravian Indians and the soldiers and civilians they encountered in Philadelphia.

The Moravian Indians' internment throws interesting light on the collision of Indian and European cultures in an urban environment during Pontiac's Rebellion, a time when warfare and violence hardened the racial boundaries in colonial society. The Moravian Indians' internment also bears comparison to the experience of New England's Praying Indians during King Philip's War. My

revised paper will develop these themes by examining relationships that developed between the Moravian Indians and their colonial neighbors during their prolonged confinement to the Philadelphia barracks. My research thus far has focused almost exclusively on primary sources found in printed sources and the Bethlehem Digital History Project. Access to archives in Philadelphia will enable me to learn more about those colonists who had first hand experience dealing with the Moravian Indians during their internment.

## **Brady Sullivan, University of Pennsylvania**

Major: History

Adviser: Daniel K. Richter, Professor of History & Director of MCEAS

Mentor: Nenette Luarca-Shoaf, MCEAS Consortium Fellow/Delaware

For my honors thesis I intend to explore the responses of representative U.S. newspapers to the Polk Administration's initiation of war against Mexico in 1846. My foundational secondary source will be Tom Reilly, *War with Mexico: America's Reporters Cover the Battlefield* (University Press of Kansas, 2010). But whereas Reilly focused on the war correspondents, I want to concentrate on the war editors who presumably chose the words, phrases, and rhetorical devices used either to cheer or denounce the controversial war. Ultimately, I plan to analyze this rhetoric used by northern and southern publications in order to gauge contemporary sentiments pertaining to the role of government in foreign affairs and American expansionism, specifically the notion of Manifest Destiny. I believe that studying newspapers of the period can help pinpoint exactly the type of language that underpinned the American Civil Religion as well as how the north and south differed in their expressions thereof.

## **Ed Wiest, Richard Stockton College**

Major: History      Minor: Political Science

Adviser: Laura Zucconi, Associate Professor of History

Mentor: Martin Öhman, Program in Early American Econ. & Soc. Post-Doctoral Fellow, LCP

Most historical analyses into Congressional discussions about the role of religion in early American public life center on the famous "wall of separation" between church and state articulated by Thomas Jefferson in his letter to the Danbury Baptists in 1802. The establishment clause of the First Amendment has consequently been interpreted to prohibit: 1) the establishment of a national religion by Congress; or 2) the preference by the U.S. government of one religion over another. The Supreme Court subsequently applied this metaphor to the religion clauses of the First Amendment in *Everson v. Board of Education* and it has dominated debates about the proper role of religion in government ever since. However, the significance of the religion clauses is not fully captured by Jefferson's analogy. Conversations that occurred as the Bill of Rights was written and ratified provide a richer understanding about why the religion clauses are phrased as they are. Federalists brokered a deal with Anti-Federalists, who agreed to support the newly written Constitution on the condition that an explicit Bill of Rights be added soon after ratification. Federalists, however, subsequently dominated authorship of the Bill of Rights—including the religion clauses—as they achieved a majority of Congressional seats in the first elections after

1787. This large Federalist influence has not been fully explored, and this thesis contends that the religion clauses were left intentionally vague and barely palatable to Anti-Federalists. To demonstrate this argument, chapters will focus on the individual congressmen who shaped the religion clauses, from future president James Madison to the man whose proposal became the final wording of the clauses, Fisher Ames. It will also explore the influence of political pressures from fellow politicians and constituencies back home on politicians' negotiations. These various internal and external pressures tell a much more complex and compelling story about the religion clauses than one quote from Thomas Jefferson ever could.