



# Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies

## Program Newsletter

SPRING 2016

### Letter From the Chair

Dear WGSS Friends,

WGSS has had a busy and exciting year – full of wonderful events sponsored and co-sponsored by WGSS and other departments, programs, and student groups; and with more than 40 courses taught by faculty in 16 departments and programs. We look forward to next year, when we'll be offering an equally rich and varied curriculum – for details, see page 8 in the newsletter!

This newsletter – produced and edited by Abby Robinson '17 and Clara Pomi '17 – attests to the wide range of interests and commitments of current WGSS students, graduates, and faculty. My first year as chair was made far easier by the help of the wonderful Advisory Committee and our majors, and I am particularly grateful to the help from our administrative assistant Robin Keller. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with me if you have ideas

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for speakers and events as we begin planning for 2016-2017 and beyond. Congratulations and best wishes to our graduates in the class of 2016: Gerardo Garcia, Kaya Gingras, Olivia Polk, Evelyn Rojas, and Chienfa Wong. We look forward to reading about your adventures and accomplishments in future newsletters!

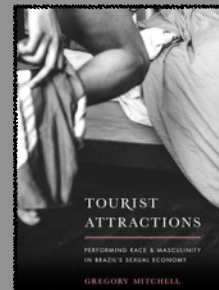
All best wishes,  
Sara Dubow  
Chair, WGSS



**RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN BRAZIL** Kaya Gingras '16 is interviewed by Gerardo García '16. Turn to page 3 to read up!



**REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND MANATEES** Turn to page 4 to hear from Elizabeth Curtis '17, founder of the Williams Doula Project, on her project, her feminism, and her hopes and dreams.



**GAY CONSUMERISM AND ITS CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY** Gerardo García '16 interviews Professor Greg Mitchell on his new book - check out page 5.

# RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN BRAZIL

by Gerardo Pelayo García

Kaya Gingras, a senior majoring in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, studied abroad in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during her junior year in the fall of 2014 while in pursuit of inspiration for her honors thesis. After completing her courses and exploring well beyond the borders of Rio, Gingras decided to base her work on racial construction and discrimination in Brazil, where notions of a shared ancestry have led to the denial racism's existence within the country.

"Brazilian racial constructs are built differently than those in the U.S. They are informed by the idea that because Brazil was founded out of miscegenation among indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and Portuguese colonizers and their descendants, everyone shares a racial background, despite their different physical characteristics and how they may be interpreted. The idea of a racial democracy implicates that there can be no discrimination on the basis of race because everyone shares the same background. There is a substantial literature—on which I am building my work—that argues that this is not the case. It's especially evident when looking at class disparities in Brazil and their correlation to color."

Her thesis, a Black feminist critique of Gilberto Freyre's *The Masters and the Slaves*, challenges the idea of racial harmony and democracy that was used to construct the Brazilian



Pelourinho, a district in Salvador de Bahia where Kaya researched during Winter Study



A statue of Yemanjá, an important deity in the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé



Kaya Gingras '16

national identity. Although nearly a century has passed since Freyre's book was published, with a good deal of empirical evidence disproving his theories since, its influence continues to be felt in Brazil today among those of African descent lacking the privilege of lighter skin.

"[The] idea of Brazil as a racial democracy is still prevalent. It's used to dismiss charges of racial discrimination and violence, under the pretext that there can't be racism because of this mixed history, and that those who suffer under poverty and its symptoms do so because of their own defects."

By minimizing implications and consequences, Brazilian society remains ignorant of racial difference, allowing violence and discrimination to terrorize its Black population. According to [Amnesty International](#), an organization dedicated to ending abuses of human rights, in 2015 approximately 77% of the 30,000 homicide victims

between the ages of 15 and 29 were Black, with 42,000 more adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 at risk for being murdered within 4 years.

With her thesis nearly complete and her senior year coming to an end, Gingras plans to eventually attend graduate school, but only after first taking a brief hiatus from academia and welcoming new experiences.

"I'm always thinking of my family and the fact that my ability to travel and to this sort of research is because of them. I can't name anyone in particular, but I am really inspired by Black female academics who dedicate their work and themselves to pushing and presenting the voices of Black people—and specifically Black women—as valid and valuable sources of knowledge. They remind me that my ideas are to be taken seriously, by myself and by those around me."

## NUMBERS

WGSS Majors in the  
Class of 2016

5

WGSS Majors in the  
Class of 2017

12

WGSS Majors in the  
Class of 2018

12

WGSS-Related Courses  
for Fall 2016

21

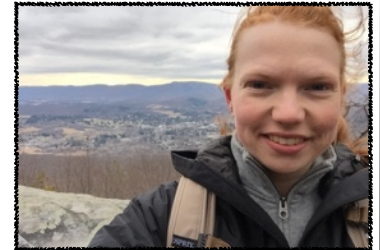


## Junior Year as a WGSS Major

JUNIOR YEAR AT WILLIAMS REPRESENTS ANOTHER YEAR OF WGSS MAJORS CARVING OUT THEIR OWN PATHS – WE REACHED OUT TO OUR CLASSMATES TO SEE WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN UP TO, AND WHAT'S GOT THEM EXCITED FOR THE FUTURE. HERE ARE THEIR RESPONSES:

### May Congdon:

"I chose not to go abroad as a junior after coming to the WGSS major fairly late in my Williams career. I've had an awesome time this year as "just a" junior (i.e. not abroad, not JA) because I've been able to commit more to my a cappella group (the Accidentals) and to Peer Health as co-president. I hope to help more Williams students access Peer Health to get stuff for safer, better sexual experiences, and to feel more emotionally supported on campus. Outside of school, I trained as a Gynecologic Teaching Associate last August, which taught me about "radical gynecology" and the ways in which pelvic and breast self-exams can be incredibly empowering and effective for women's health. This summer, I plan to travel to Eastern Kentucky for an internship with Frontier Nursing University and learn more about health issues in rural Appalachia. Thanks, and go WGSS!"



### Audrey Thomas:

"I am currently in Buenos Aires, Argentina studying transnationalism, development, and social change. The program covers a lot related to gender and sexuality and I will be doing my independent research on something WGSS related, likely female access to youth sports as a social development strategy. I got involved with an organization that is fighting to legalize abortion and prevent domestic violence in Argentina and I'm loving it! After spending a wonderful fall full of soccer and RASAN training responsibilities, I am enjoying the South American version of autumn and would highly recommend taking a break from Williams to all who are even considering it."



### Elizabeth Curtis:

"I am so grateful I found the WGSS major. Before college, I never realized that I could major in a subject that not only allows me to explore every facet of my intersectional interests, but encourages and requires me to do so. Along with my Concentration in Public Health, my main field of study is reproductive health and the influence of gender, race, and class on access to safe, comfortable, and empowering care. The two highlights of my WGSS experience thus far would have to be working closely with my advisor, Kim Gutschow, to do a 99 which involved me becoming trained as a doula and learning more about supportive birth and abortion practices in the Berkshires, and studying abroad in India, researching maternal health access and attitudes for WGSS credit. These experiences excited a passion in me to study and engage with the reproductive health of Williams and our surrounding Berkshires community. I started the Williams Doula Project, which seeks to provide free full-spectrum doula care and serve as a reproductive justice collective in the Berkshires. After Williams, I plan on becoming a nurse midwife in order to continue my passion for supporting uteruses and crushing the white-supremacist, capitalist, cis-heteronormative patriarchy that oppresses them forever."





# Reproductive Justice, The Williams Doula Project, and Manatees: An Interview With Elizabeth Curtis '17

What was the first WGSS class you took?

WGSS 101 my freshman spring. I was interested in the scope of it and I was just starting to be interested in baby feminism and wanted to learn more. It was the course that changed my Williams trajectory. I knew right away that I was going to major in WGSS.. I only recently got to apologize to Professor Cowden, my WGSS 101 prof, for being such a white liberal feminist freshman year, now that I've come into my intersectional feminist mentality. She was very gracious about it.

So, you've started the Williams Doula Project. What is a Doula?

A Doula is a person who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to a person throughout any point of their reproductive lives.

How did you find out what a Doula was?

After I realized that I wanted to be a midwife, someone suggested that I look into becoming a Doula and I loved it. Then I found the radical Doula and the Doula Project. The radical Doula comes from the understanding that Doulas are very helpful during labor and delivery and can significantly improve outcomes, but they are only available to upper class white women, because they usually have to charge for their services. So the people who need them the most, people of color, low income groups, etc. are the ones who are left out of Doula's services. The radical Doula tries to subvert this by making themselves most available to the people who need them the most by volunteering their services. Then I found the Doula Project, which is the first organization to coin the term Full Spectrum Doula or Abortion Doula. Their idea is that the people who need support during pregnancy, in addition to being disenfranchised by society, are also people tending to seek abortions because those are people who are stigmatized by society. The Doula Project provides full spectrum Doula services, not only to those going through labor, so including abortions, birth and post-partum support. So, learning about Doulas was my radical introduction to learning about reproductive justice and it kind of changed my life.

But you already knew you wanted to be a midwife?

Yes, this changed my focus from reproductive health to include reproductive justice, to say that it's not just about choice it's about access. It's about making sure that resources are accessible to the people who need them most. So now I hope to be a radical midwife, too.

What is the current form of the Williams Doula Project?

It's in its beginning stages. It's going to be a big part of my thesis, because Doula projects have only been done in urban areas. I'm planning on turning my thesis into fieldwork examining reproductive health in a rural environment. I think a lot of the support here in the Berkshires will be informational support, as well as making sure that services are near and accessible. But also educating the community about reproductive justice. In May, we're bringing the new film Trapped next Friday and we'll be bringing a workshop by the Boston Doula Project.

What are your hopes and dreams?

My dream someday would be to have birth centers across the US. Those should be the primary entrance for pregnant people in determining their risk, because they're much less expensive and much more effective in terms of support. Birth centers everywhere.

Also to turn the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the US Department of Health and Human Services into the Reproductive and Child Health Bureau, to include family planning. Preventing unwanted pregnancies is the key to securing maternal and women's health.

Essentially, I want to provide direct service care while also addressing policy and demolishing the white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal health policy laws that are currently in place.

And I would really like to have cows and manatees as pets (but like actually that's goal #1).



Want to get involved? Email: [efc2@williams.edu](mailto:efc2@williams.edu)

- Clara Pomi '17

# Gay Consumerism and its Construction of Sexuality, an Interview with Professor Greg Mitchell

by Gerardo Pelayo García

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This past year, Professor Gregory Mitchell from Williams College published his new book *Tourist Attractions: Performing Race and Masculinity in Brazil's Sexual Economy*. An ethnography of gay sex tourism in Brazil, it explores the personal lives and identities of male sex workers occupying a number of roles within the country's sexual economy.

According to Mitchell, Brazil's travel industry antagonized LGBT travelers before they became a coveted consumer demographic, as "a certain class of bougie gay white men [were] allowed to stand in for the broader community." With the demographic now perceived as having high disposable income and time for leisure, the industry quickly ceased to burn its blankets in fear of HIV contamination and instead embraced gay consumerism.

"Brazilians have their own ideas about race and sexuality, their own identity models even, and these don't always match those of foreign travelers. Yet they have to make racialized sexuality intelligible across cultures for a living and I want readers to understand how that happens because it reveals a lot about the cultural specificity of race, sexuality, and affects," said Mitchell.

Thus, Mitchell is interested in both critiquing gay consumerism and examining the construction of sexuality through the travel industry, guided through formal and informal exchange and undergirding the broader economy. With Brazil at the top of the gay travel lists, he was also able to explore interactions between

non White sex tourists and their partners—a topic not covered by existing literature.

Writing this book was not without its own challenges, however. "The hardest part of writing the book was getting over my own initial prejudices and assumptions about who purchases sex. This is not a book about neocolonial consumers with fetishes exploiting poor victims. The relationships, the various axes on which power differentials play out, are very complicated and I split my time in the book between the point of view of the supply and demand side." In this way, *Tourist Attractions* explores the lives of Brazilian sex workers alongside the clients who purchase their services, often times through complex interactions and relationships.

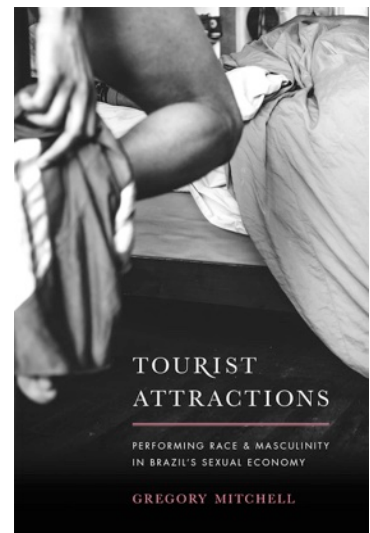
Leading authors in this area boast of Mitchell's work. Don Kulick, author of *Travesti*, has reviewed *Tourist Attractions* as, "A valuable and insightful book about how sex works to both frame encounters between foreign tourists and Brazilian sex workers, and also to complicate and extend the impressions and the relationships that result from those encounters. The focus on male sex workers is welcome and overdue, and the attention to eco-tourism, African American 'roots tourism,' and the way that some client-sex worker relationships develop into transnational queer families is eye opening, fresh, and fascinating."

Elizabeth Bernstein and Richard Parker, author of *Temporarily Yours* and director of Columbia's Center for the Study of Culture, respectively, have described it as offering "bold and fresh insights into a range of contemporary touristic cultures in

Brazil" as well as "rare insight into the context of commercial sex, [giving] readers the lived experience of a social system in all its richness and complexity."

With his book published, Mitchell has now begun researching the violence faced by female sex workers during the 2014 World Cup and upcoming 2016 Olympic Games, where police violence often leads to the "clean up" and gentrification of red light districts in preparation for the events. The patterns of violence can be found in Brazil and the host cities of both recent and upcoming events and will be the focus of his next project.

Ignoring the existence of sexual economies or trying to erase them on the grounds of morality has endangered millions of lives. Understanding the stigma and violence experienced within this economy domestically and abroad is critical if the desired goal is to ultimately protect both the sex worker and the client. As the leader of the Brazilian sex worker rights movement once said, "If you want to support sex workers, you have to also support clients. They are stigmatized too."



# WGSS Fall 2016 Course Previews

CHOOSING WHAT TO TAKE THIS FALL? WGSS PROFESSORS SUBMITTED A FEW SENTENCES OF THE COURSES THEY ARE TEACHING.

## Seminars and Lectures

WGSS/AMST/ENGL 105

### **American Girlhoods**

Katherine Kent

The image of the girl has captivated North American writers, commentators, artists, and creators of popular culture for at least the last two centuries. What metaphors, styles of writing, ideas of "manners and morals" does literature about girls explore? What larger cultural and aesthetic concerns are girls made to represent? And how is girlhood articulated alongside and/or intertwined with other identities and identifications, such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality?

WGSS 255/CHIN 253/COMP 254

### **"Disease" in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture**

Man He

This course examines how Chinese literature in the 20th and 21st centuries writes and visualizes "disease"--a universal human experience that is nevertheless heavily bounded by culture and history.

Key words:

- Tuberculosis: Aesthetic Consumption or Harbinger of Social Chaos?
- Blood: Carrier of Family Lineage or Commodity to be Sold?
- Melancholy: Psychological Abnormality or Iconoclastic Self-Assertion?

WGSS 279/REL 271/ASST271/COMP279

### **Erotic, Grotesque, Sublime: Ghosts and Monsters in East Asian Religion and Popular Culture**

Jason Josephson

The opening contention of this course is that ghosts and monsters signify deviancies from "the normal" as it is constructed in a given culture and time period--they often come to represent transgressions of nature, gender, sexuality, race, morality, or to subvert distinctions such as those between human and animal, man and woman, animate and inanimate, present and past, or living and dead. This course will analyze East Asian ghosts and monsters in their historical cultural context, thinking about how they come to embody particular cultural fears and desires.

WGSS 301

### **Sexual Economies**

Gregory Mitchell

This course examines various forms of sexual labor around the world in order to better understand how gendered and sexual performances are used in a variety of cultures and contexts for material benefit. Our topics include "traditional" forms of sex work such as street prostitution, pornography, and escorting as well as other forms of sexualized performances for benefit such as stripping or camming. We also discuss current issues and debates about discourses of "sex trafficking."

## Tutorials

WGSS/REL/ANTH/ASST 246T

### **India's Identities: Religion, Caste, and Gender**

Kim Gutschow

We examine India's contradictory legacy as a booming Asian democracy and fragile society built upon deep and enduring divisions. We explore social practices that produce critical axes of difference around religion, gender, and sexuality using key moments (Partition, communal riots in Gujarat, Hyderabad, Delhi) as points of departure. We are also interested in the discourses that reproduce binaries as well as the 'middle paths' that attempt to transcend binaries of religion, gender, & class.

WGSS 250/THEA 250/COMP 247/ENGL 253 T

### **Gender, Sexuality and Modern Performance**

Amy Holzapfel

This interdisciplinary tutorial explores aspects of gender, sexuality, performativity, race, class, and representations of the body in modern theatre and performance. While attention will be given to the still understudied role of women in the arts, we will focus primarily on the transeccionalities of social identities under interrelated systems of oppression.

\* For a full list of classes offered in Fall 2016, check out page 8 \*



# Alumni Updates

## Maya Harakawa, '12

Maya Harakawa ('12) is a second year PhD student in the Art History department at the CUNY Graduate Center, where she studies the relationship between art and feminism in the post-war period. As present, she is hoping to develop her undergraduate WGSS thesis on the feminist art collective/magazine *Heresies* into a dissertation. The project would expand upon the foundational, historical work that she began at Williams and explore how publications serve as political, artistic, and media based tools for feminist action. Maya is an active member of the Professional Staff Congress, CUNY's union of faculty, staff, and graduate employees. She enthusiastically organizes fellow community members in her department, at the Graduate Center, and at City College, where she teaches architecture history

## Haley Eagon, '13

It's great to hear from you and the WGSS department! I am finishing up my first year at Boston University School of Law. Before moving to Boston, I worked for a year as a hotline counselor at the National Abortion Federation in Washington DC. This year I've also been active in BU's chapter of Law Students for Reproductive Justice. My thoughts on being a WGSS major: It helped me immensely in connecting with and understanding the needs of clients in my work at NAF. For those WGSS majors who may be interested in law school: For better or worse, a WGSS background will make you pretty unique in the law school universe. It can be nice to have this knowledge base, as there are so many areas of law that could really use reform from a WGSS perspective. As an aside, if there are any current students who are interested in any of these areas, I would love to connect with them! I know as a WGSS major I found it initially challenging to bridge my studies with a tangible job opportunity (especially as a new graduate). It's hard, but it's possible!

## Kim Holocek, '13.

I graduated from Columbia University with my Master's in Social Work in May '15 and am now working as an Egg Donor Coordinator at California Cryobank. I recently saw the Broadway production of *Fun Home*, which has been a favorite since I was introduced to it in my first WGSS class with Professor Katie Kent, and it was amazing!

## Min Joo Lee, '14

I graduated from Williams in 2014 as a Comparative Literature and WGSS major. I have gone straight from Williams to graduate school, so now I am a second year graduate student at UCLA in Gender Studies. For me, this year has mostly been about learning how to teach and to develop one's own research. I have been TA-ing for the Introduction to Gender Studies for the past few quarters as well as writing a dissertation prospectus. My research will be on Korean television dramas and how they inspire virtual and physical travel for their largely female audience-base. More broadly speaking, I will be looking at how transnational media impacts individual (romantic) imagination and vice versa. I haven't entered Williams College as a first year student thinking I will be a WGSS major, but I am glad I did end up majoring in it because it provides insight into the intersection of multiple systems of power. I am very much biased, but I think being a WGSS major and learning about different issues helps you think about the complex nuances of things from your own everyday experiences to music videos and politics. For anyone who is interested or curious about life as a gender studies graduate student, or about UCLA, feel free to contact me at [leemj308@gmail.com](mailto:leemj308@gmail.com)

# WGSS COURSES FALL 2016

101 - Intro to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies	Mitchell/Honderich/Cowden
105 - American Girlhoods	Kent
205 - Gender and Economics	Schmidt
207 T - She Speaks in Color: Examining the "Color Complex" in Toni Morrison's Writings	Ford
219 T - Women in National Politics	James
228 - Feminist Bioethics	Pedroni
231 - Sexuality and Imperialism	Cowden
246 T - India's Identities: Religion, Caste, and Gender	Gutschow
250 T - Gender, Sexuality and Modern Performance	Holzapfel
254 - Manet to Matisse	Ockman
255 - "Disease" in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture	He
268 - Caribbean Women Writers	Josephs
279 - Ghosts & Monsters in East Asia	Josephson
301 - Sexual Economies	Mitchell
317 - New Women in Weimar Culture	Kone
333 - Sex and Politics	Vandiver
353 - The Brontës	Case
361 T - Writing About Bodies	Ockman
376 - Sex, Gender, and the Law in U.S. History	Dubow
389 - Fiction of Virginia Woolf	Case
409 - Transnationalism	Cepeda