

CCS NOTES

Official Newsletter of the Cultural & Critical Studies Division of AEJMC

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Forward: staying engaged amid a trying semester

A Note from Division Head Ruth DeFoster

Here in Minneapolis, the eyes of the country (and the world!) are upon us again as we await the outcome of the highly publicized trial of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer charged in the May 2020 death of George Floyd. The atmosphere in the Twin Cities is tense, to say the least, and at the end of a long year of the COVID-19 pandemic and the exigencies of online learning, many of our students at the University of Minnesota are understandably exhausted and on edge.

By the time you read this newsletter update, we may have answers regarding the outcome of the Chauvin trial. But regardless of the outcome of this singular case, those of us who work in cultural and critical studies fields know that this individual egregious case of police brutality is just one symptom of a much larger and more insidious constellation of systemic, institutional inequality in the United States.

My own research focuses on media coverage of crime, gun violence, terrorism and mass shootings. I have long been fascinated by the stories we tell about danger and violence, and the deeply racialized historical patterns in the way audiences perceive risk and fear.



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(continued on next page)

As a graduate student I was deeply influence by the work of cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall, Celia Lury, and Paul Gilroy. Later in my studies, excellent work from scholars like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Travis Dixon, Carol Stabile and Evelyn Alsultany helped me to formulate a more complete and nuanced understanding of the troubling ways that American mass media help to perpetuate racist and fear-based narratives about cultural “others” — narratives that help to maintain existing inequalities in policing, incarceration, education and housing.

I have continued to find this troubling trend in my own work, especially in media coverage of domestic terrorism in the United States. Over the past decade, I have consistently found that media coverage of mass shootings and terrorism overrepresent the “external” threat of Islamic or nonwhite violence or terror, while drastically under-representing or softening the threat of so-called “homegrown” extremism and far-right white supremacist violence.

I believe journalists and journalistic institutions are beginning to become more cognizant of these trends in reporting, and becoming more self-reflective about the use of terms like “terror,” and the dangers of glamorizing or sensationalizing mass shooters, especially in the wake of the two highly publicized and devastating mass shootings recently in Atlanta and Colorado. There are many encouraging signs that our media landscape and representation are slowly improving. However, we still have a long way to go.

Living in the Twin Cities for the past few years, I have had a front row seat to the civil unrest and racial tensions that have engulfed these cities after the killings of Jamar Clark, Marcus Golden, Philando Castile, George Floyd, and many more. As both a cultural studies scholar and as the mother of a black son, I worry for the future of my community and my country in an environment that is still fraught with racial inequalities — and media systems that too often help to perpetuate them.

I am encouraged, however, by the excellent work of our cultural and critical studies colleagues, who continue to do the hard work of unpacking systems of power, political economy, audience studies and representation in their work. For those of you who are currently teaching, I know how hard it can be to work

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through these issues with students, and to do the hard work of engendering open, respectful conversations about fraught cultural topics. But this work is so important — not just for the education of our students as well-rounded critical thinkers, but for the functioning of a healthy and robust democratic system.

We here in the Cultural and Critical Studies Division recognize and value this important work, and we hope that all of you are able to find some rest and calm amid the busyness of this spring semester. As the CCSD officers and I work to prepare for the 2021 AEJMC conference, we look forward very much to (virtually) re-connecting with all of you this summer!

Ruth DeFoster,

Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication

University of Minnesota

Head, Cultural & Critical Studies Division - AEJMC

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2021 Proposals: Building on Awards and Promoting the Division

Perry Parks, CCS Vice-Head and Program Chair

Well, here we are in April, and I'm thinking all the same things about the Cultural and Critical Studies Division that I was in August: Namely, that cultural and critical studies should be more prominent in both media scholarship and the broader discourse.

I don't really have a good handle on the state and strength of cultural and critical studies in academia right now (is our stock rising or falling, does anyone know?), but given the complex and perilous power relations of



Officer and Member News & Accomplishments

- Congratulations to Krishnan Vasudevan, who had a chapter accepted in an upcoming book edited by Linda Steiner and Kalyani Chadha. Here is the current citation: Vasudevan, K. "Dead on Arrival: Deadspin's Fight with its Private Equity Owner and the Rise of Defector." In Linda Steiner & Kalyani Chadha, *Newswork and Precarity*. Routledge. (accepted)
- Congratulations to Ted Gutsche, whose special issue, "Critical Theory in a Digital Age: Ways Forward," has been published at *Media & Communication*. All articles are Open Access and can be found here: <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication>. Ted is co-editing another special issue, this one of the *Journal of Environmental Media*, about inequalities in sustainability. The call can be found here: https://www.intellectbooks.com/asset/56582/1/JEM_CfP_march_21_2.pdf.
- Congratulations to Rebecca Kern on her promotion to full professor at Manhattan College this spring!
- Congratulations to Michael McDevitt on the publication of his book *Where Ideas Go to Die: The Fate of Intellect in American Journalism*, published by the Oxford University Press!

the current era, it feels like intellectual approaches that question, historicize, contextualize, and denaturalize prevailing structures and common-sense discourses are not as central to the discussion as they should be. Our task is to centralize them.

We have some panels slated for AEJMC in August that do some of this work, but my feeling is we've got more work to do. Here are three things I hope we can keep pursuing in the coming year:

— Do a better job promoting and amplifying CCSD members' scholarship. The division podcast, spearheaded by Bob Trumpbour and Ruth DeFoster and made available through our website by Ted Gutsche, has been a step in this direction. But we also need to be leveraging our social media accounts and other channels to get the word out when a member publishes an article, gives a talk, shows up in someone else's podcast, etc. I've been rather feebly managing our Twitter account – mostly working to build up influential followers and retweeting useful stuff from HQ. What I'd propose is that every time folks with Twitter accounts have something to announce, you mention our account (@aejmc_ccs) in that tweet. Then we can share it and get on the virality train. I also keep an eye on our Facebook account, but I'm not much of a Facebooker. If you've got news to share, you should pop right on there and make a post: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/513737665319124>. We've got 345 members, and if someone were to actively curate that page, we could make some little ripples in the public sphere.

— Do a better job promoting research in the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, our division-affiliated journal. This has been an ongoing leadership project since last fall, and we've had a couple of discussions with the journal's editorial leadership. I'm also running the journal's Twitter account (@CommInquiry) – equally feebly, but again trying to build up a following. The deadline has just passed for the journal's special issue "Considering Covid: Critical Media Scholarship in an Uncertain Time," edited by division stalwarts Katie Foss and Peter Glocviczki. We were able to promote that call through Twitter – but, again, we can do better.

— Inspire and encourage graduate students and early-career scholars to pursue cultural and critical work. As I mentioned above, I don't really have a sense of the overall energy within

Send us your news and accomplishments!

Your accomplishments and news are welcomed for future editions of CCS NOTES.

Please submit your updates to Scott Memmel (memm0005@umn.edu).

Attach text in MS Word doc or docx format. Send photos in jpeg format.

cultural and critical studies across the research landscape. Are there a lot of eager up-and-coming graduate students who are pursuing cultural-critical theories and related methodologies, or not? Are we gaining, losing, or standing still? Some senior scholars might have more perspective on this. Regardless, the division can do more to incentivize and reward cultural and critical scholarship among newer scholars. Toward that end, esteemed former division head Madeleine Esch has volunteered to lead a committee to establish a dissertation award. That work will begin this summer, with the aim of getting something ready so we can recognize award winners in 2022.

So, that's the view from my vice head perch. Please send me an email (parksp@msu.edu) if you'd like to work on anything noted above, or have ideas for something else to work on. Also, we need a TikTok account.

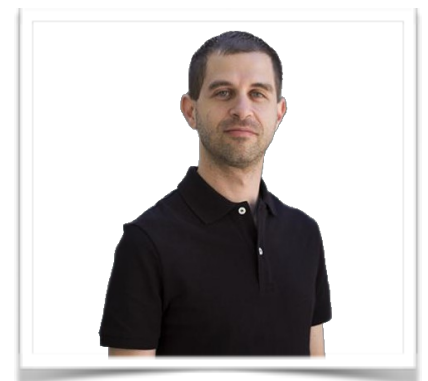
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AEJMC Midwinter Conference Moves Online Due to Covid-19

Errol Salamon, CCS Secretary

Colleagues in the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma hosted the AEJMC Midwinter Conference 2021. Like in previous years, Associate Professor Elanie Steyn led the conference team, with strong support from PhD student Imran Palash. Yet this year's conference was held exclusively online, from March 5-7, due to the Covid-19 pandemic for the first time in the 13 consecutive years that Gaylord College has hosted the conference.

The expanded online format created the potential for more researchers to submit abstracts and for the Cultural and Critical Studies Division (CCSD) to accept more submissions.



AJEMC Midwinter Conference Note

Congratulations to Megan Cox, who was awarded CCSD's top abstract for her AEJMC Midwinter Conference 2021 submission.

Annual CCSD Business Meeting Update

This year, our annual CCSD members/business meeting will be held the week BEFORE the AEJMC Conference, on Friday, July 30, at 2 PM (CST).

Information about a Zoom link will be forthcoming as we approach the date of the meeting.

The lead organizers intended to hold the conference in person, but the pandemic derailed those plans due to health, safety, financial and travel concerns. The organizers and chairs of the sponsoring AEJMC divisions, interest groups and commissions voted in December 2020 to move the event online (disclosure: I was CCSD's Midwinter Chair).

Steyn and Palash led the initiative to quickly build an impressive conference website from scratch. Conference participants had the opportunity to interact with each other and view the schedule on the website. All panel sessions were held on Zoom.

CCSD received 19 abstracts and one pre-constituted panel submission. At least two faculty colleagues blind peer-reviewed each submission. Based on the reviewers' reports, the Division accepted 14 rigorous abstracts and the one well thought-out panel. Unfortunately, the conference team had to reject two submissions for displaying author-identifying information. By comparison, the Division received 11 abstracts and accepted eight of them in 2020.

Megan Cox won CCSD's 2021 top abstract for her research project titled "Cultural Continuance and Agency in Biographical Digital Storytelling: A Case Study Approach." Cox is a tenure-track instructor at the University of Central Oklahoma and a Ph.D. student in strategic communication at the University of Oklahoma. In her paper, Cox conducted a case study of the Cherokee Nation's digital media, exploring what elements of cultural continuance and cultural agency are found in biographical digital storytelling. She presented on one of CCSD's four panels, "Alternative Media, Counter-Narratives, and Social Justice."



Megan Cox was awarded CCSD's top abstract for her Midwinter Conference 2021 submission. (professorcox.com)

CCSD's panels represented a wide array of cultural-critical studies research topics and a diverse group of researchers who

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Have any **announcements** you'd like shared in the newsletter? Email newsletter editor Scott Memmel at memm0005@umn.edu

participated from locations across the US and beyond. Other panels included “Critical Approaches to Journalism,” “Interpreting Cultural Meaning in and Through Popular Media” and “The Mediated Other: Media’s Hegemonized Cultural Resonance to Exoticize and Ostracize Immigrants and Sojourners.” Three discussants provided presenters with constructive and supportive feedback: Ana Garner of Marquette University, Kalen Churcher of Wilkes University, and AEJMC President-elect Susan Keith of Rutgers University.



Midwinter Conference presenters and attendees participated in CCSD's panel "Alternative Media, Counter-Narratives, and Social Justice."

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Enriching Visual Journalism Through Explorations of W.E.B. Du Bois’s Data Visualizations

Krishnan Vasudevan, CCS Lead Research Chair

The only time I remember learning about W.E.B. Du Bois in grade school, he was described simply as an “agitator” and his contributions were presented as transgressive to the American project. It was not until I began working on my dissertation study, nearly two decades later, that I began to understand the true breadth of Du Bois’s contributions to grassroots organizing, literature,



We need reviewers!

Curious about upcoming research in the division? Need to bolster your CV? Do all that when you volunteer to be a reviewer for the AEJMC 2021 conference.

To sign up to be a reviewer for the Annual Conference, please visit:

[2021 AEJMC CCSD Reviewer Sign Up \(Annual Meeting\)](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18x3nb8YmfQSo4qSwq2mrbhlgwntF7RNwnYSgCt6axx8/edit)

(<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18x3nb8YmfQSo4qSwq2mrbhlgwntF7RNwnYSgCt6axx8/edit>)

journalism and often overlooked, visual communication. During this exploration, I was particularly drawn to a collaborative project he led titled “[W.E.B. Du Bois’s Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America](#).” From my first read, I kept thinking about how Du Bois’s work would enrich the teaching of data visualization and motion graphics, as he and his team used cutting edge, innovative designs to tell important stories about racism and the broken promise of Reconstruction.

In 2020, I began teaching a course I developed called “Designing Stories with Motion Graphics.” In the course, students learn how to create compelling animated journalism stories, grounded in strong design and animation principles in confluence with fact-based reporting. During the first few weeks of the course, students learn about design principles such as gestalt, framing and typography. Last fall, during one of these early lessons, we examined a data visualization titled “City and Rural Population, 1890,” from Du Bois’s Data Portraits collection. We examined the innovative usage of a spiral shape, color, lines, and framing to show the stark difference in the number of Black Americans living in rural versus urban Georgia. As [Hua Hsu of *The New Yorker* noted](#), a large amount of open space surrounds the centrally framed graphic, “as though viewers are being asked to fill in the history and context that hasn’t been spelled out for them.” Examining the graphic’s compelling visual communication to reveal the realities facing Black Southerners after Reconstruction, provided an opportunity to discuss how visualizations have the power to distill complicated social issues such as structural racism and the impacts of climate change.

As journalism instructors seek to create more inclusive curricula, I hope this short piece gives you some ideas of how to seamlessly integrate the contributions of BIPOC storytellers that often are overlooked. Additionally, as was the case in my own early education about W.E.B. Du Bois, stereotyped portrayals like erasure harm our understanding of the truth. Du Bois’s Data Portraits, along with his countless other projects, were truly innovative and including their significance serves to enrich journalism education.

Don't Forget About Our Podcast — Media and Culture!

Available at: <https://aejmc.us/ccs/podcast/>



Zoom Gloom: Reflecting on a Year of Online Teaching

Chelsea Reynolds, CCS Teaching Chair

As of March 11, it has been a year since my home institution, California State University - Fullerton, went virtual.

Back in February 2020, I remember sneaking around Orange County Home Depot aisles after my night classes, hoping to snag packs of N-95 masks. Within weeks, they were impossible to find.

Today, that early pandemic anxiety feels lifetimes away. More than 52 weeks later, teaching faculty have eased into the drudgery of our “new normal” without necessary emotional resources or additional compensation from our universities. We’ve all been traumatized.



In order to cope, I’ve been streamlining my workflow to conserve energy and create some semblance of work-life balance. Here are three tips you can incorporate into your online teaching repertoire so you can support your students and yourself.

Group Students to Limit Grading

Group assignments have been my saving grace, because they demand less grading attention and because they allow students to build community in a depersonalized online environment. Rather than grading 25 weekly assignments in each class, I grade five low-stakes writing activities per course. (Students work in groups of five). What will you do with all that spare time? Personally, I exercise, cook, and nap.

Set Office Hour Boundaries

If your students are anything like mine, they’re itching for opportunities to connect and kvetch. I’m happy to do that, but my research and teaching requirements haven’t change despite the increased emotional labor. So I’ve added language to my syllabi indicating that I “see” students for office hours in 15-minute

Thank you!

Many thanks to everyone who reviewed for our division this year. Our division would not be where it is without your hard work!

chunks. If there's an extenuating circumstance, students can ask for more time in advance. But my office hour policy means I'm able to excuse myself when a Zoom call starts to feel more like a therapy session.

Re-Claim Evenings and Weekends

Time off is essential to quality digital pedagogy. Not only do blue screens interrupt your sleep and cause ocular fatigue, but without strong work-life separation, a laptop can hold you hostage in your own home. To keep virtual classrooms from feeling like house arrest, I spend all weekend and most evenings away from my computer. When I show up to teach, I'm excited to engage. And I feel good modeling a healthy lifestyle for my students. Right now, we need to remind ourselves that there's more to life than Zoom!

* * *

Podcast Takeover: The (Not New) Digital Phenomena

Robert (Ted) Gutsche, Jr., Digital Editor

Podcasts once went the way of the newsletter. They both returned. And while digital newsletters might be on their way out again, that doesn't seem the case for podcasts.

Influenced largely by the stay-at-homeness for many — especially academics and media professionals — the itch to create and to express led to the rise of several scholarly podcasts (<https://www.poynter.org/educators-students/2020/are-journalism-academics-worth-a-listen-this-new-podcast-says-yes/>), especially in the field of journalism and mass communications.

Even AEJMC's CCS Division got in on the frenzy. [The Media and Culture Podcast](#), produced by former Head of CCSD and Professor of Communications at Penn State Altoona, Bob Trumbour, has



featured episodes on Donald Trump and journalism, an episode with Robert W. McChesney on political economy, epidemics and media, and terrorism in media.

My own foray into podcasting started last summer. The J Word: A Podcast by Journalism Practice (<https://thejword.buzzsprout.com/>) tries not just to feature articles from the journal Journalism Practice, but also to put a critical and cultural studies twist on the scholarship. As the host and producer, I've found it stimulating and challenging to step back into media production. It's not always as easy as remembering to ride a bike, but close.

Podcasting is likely to stay around a bit longer — at least as long as it remains profitable thanks to the (unfortunate) changing culture of life during COVID (<https://digiday.com/media/publisher-podcasts-coronavirus-coverage>). But for those of us who podcast without the purpose of making any money, we hope the genre sticks around even after profits dry up.

* * *

Intersectional Coalition for Queer Health Equity

Steven Wang, CCS Graduate Student Outreach Chair

The idea started with my dissertation fieldwork in Madison, Wisconsin. Talking with people and organizations representing different sections of the local LGBTQ communities, I kept hearing about the fragmentation of the community and the lack of understanding across lines of race, class, ableness, gender, and sexuality. Madison is not a big city, with a giant campus sitting at its heart. The city's population is packed into demographic and geographic boxes that do not overlap much. In my community partners' words, the queer social scene in Madison is rather insular and siloed.



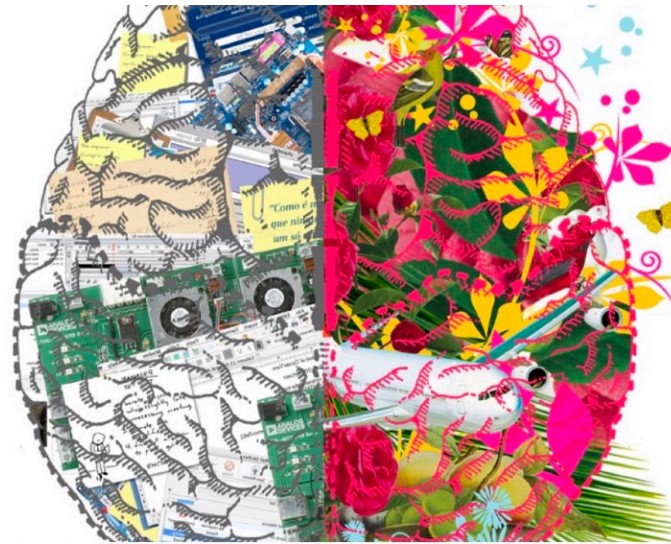
This has a material impact on community life. Despite the

prevalence of liberal progressive politics, Madison sees the largest racial disparities in the country. The downturn in resource coordination and social mobility has further consolidated existing hierarchies of privilege. Queer people of color, disability, and nonbinary genders experience more difficulties obtaining access to affordable housing, employment opportunities, medical support, and safe social spaces. Particularly, the intersectional nature of marginalization was made visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. The global public health crisis exposed structural issues hurting the capacity of LGBTQ and other minority communities to achieve their full potential of wellness.

I decided to explore how to apply my research on communication ecology to fostering intersectional collaborations among LGBTQ communities. I convened a coalition of local LGBTQ organizations, and together we established a platform to host difficult conversations and find sparks that turned our differences into a power source for healing. It took everyone on the coalition a lot of humility, patience, and determination to reach a delicate point where trust could be nurtured. As a capstone for this coalition, we launched a campaign named “Queer We Are, Together We Heal.” This campaign documented how the community networks combatted the pandemic and reached out to a wide audience through such networks. *Our Lives*, the Madison-based LGBTQ magazine, [published a feature article about the campaign](#).

This work has received financial and organizational support from various sources. The Center for Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison helped me to build the foundation for this project. With the Center’s Humanities Responders program, I was able to initiate contact with community partners, compensate their work, and recruited media manager assistants for the campaign. I recently received a \$5,000 research grant from the Morgridge Center for Public Service to continue this project. The next steps will be expanding the focus of the campaign from the pandemic to broader health equity issues and using the platform of intersectional coalition to influence other areas of Wisconsin.

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Media and Culture
An AEJMC Cultural & Critical Studies Division
Podcast



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