

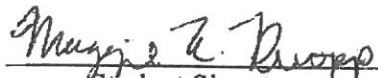
Cultural Studies: Gender, History and Media

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Graduation Contract
Johnston Center for Integrative Studies
University of Redlands

Class of 2016


Student Signature


Advisor Signature


Director Signature

In writing this narrative, I get to use the subject of study that is present in all areas of my life: language. During my four years I've used language to communicate, it's been the form through which I read, articulate and understand theories, and now I'm going to attempt to deploy it to capture the essence of my educational experience at the Johnston Center for Integrative studies. It will fail, as it always does, to fully encapsulate everything that I have learned, because I'm always thinking about my education and what it means to me, and that meaning changes every day. It's my hope that this narrative will only be one way in which I explain what I learned here; I want to continue thinking about the things I've studied throughout my life and come to new understandings and conclusions, better ones with more complexity and room for doubt, all the time. Here is how I understand my Johnston education at 26 years old after just completing it:

After taking many history courses in my four years here, I have decided that history is the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. More important to me than accuracy, it is the construction and interpretation of history that really matters. In *Historical Theories and Methods*, I learned about historiography, an important aspect of thinking critically about scholarship in the field. The past, the present and the future are always connected— if we learn something new about the past, it affects how we view the present and also how we extrapolate about the future. So in studying history, it became clear to me that I was not just learning about different time periods, events, people, cultures and societal structures, but I also had the opportunity to think about how the author's cultural context (time, place, identity) affected the meaning they constructed from their research. In the life of scholarship, secondary sources become primary sources when they become more beneficial to furthering our understanding of the time period in which they were written rather than their actual subject. I connected this to what I learned in *US History on Film*, which is that historical eras are constantly remediated for us over time. For example, I can tell that the meaning of the Civil War has changed since it occurred by looking at the films made about it. *Birth of Nation* (1915) is very different from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) which is different than *Glory* (1989). The Civil War as an event has not changed, it remains in the past. But history, in its essence, is about narrative. And there are so many moving pieces to the Civil War, it's easy to construct new meaning based upon a change in perspective, what is

included, and how authors translate information into understanding. While most of my study of history has been focused on modern America, two classes—*America and the Sea* and *Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade*—allowed me to widen my worldview, and learn about how countries and cultures are shaped and interact through sea travel. In studying Africa I've seen clearly the effect that a constructed master narrative can have on the ways in which we understand global history and how that impacts the ways in which cultures are represented and interpreted over time. Only recently have African societies regained their agency and important role in understanding and representing the Atlantic Slave Trade and the pre-modern Atlantic economy through historical scholarship, making our knowledge of the time period and place more complex and more complete.

My definition of feminism has changed throughout my four years as I've taken more classes that deal with issues of gender and sexuality (which are both very separate and best understood in tandem). Learning about Helen Gurley Brown in *Gender, Media and U.S. Culture* my freshmen year was a window for me to grasp two different approaches to defeating the patriarchy. There is activism that strives to create legal and societal changes, focusing on rights for groups that patriarchal structures discount and marginalize, and then there's Helen Gurley Brown, who played into and played up social norms for women in order to advance through the patriarchal structures she faced to live the life she wanted. Pure performance in high heels and makeup, she encouraged women (particularly through her work as the editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan* magazine) to do whatever they needed to succeed in the workplace, including sleeping with the boss. Instead of fighting the wage gap, close it yourself by making men buy you everything. Feminism may be easy to define, but it is practiced very differently by its believers. This distinction was important for me to understand, as it allowed nuance to begin to color my understanding of gender's role in the construction of history and the gender politics (or moral code) at play in different mediums I studied. In *Women of God* my sophomore year, I made another discovery that complicated feminism even more: agency. In considering the structures, like religion, that women find themselves in, it is essential to not assume that because an ideology is oppressive, all women within in it are (or feel) oppressed. Often in studying things

that are outside of my experience and understanding of the world, it's easy to simply take my viewpoint and impose it on others, showing me only the differences and leading me to believe that if the culture aligned with and behaved like mine, people within it would no longer be oppressed. This class made me realize that my understanding and definition of oppression is based on my cultural context. In my *Integrated Semester* project, I've been thinking a lot about mid-1990s Bill Cosby and his performance of masculinity (among many other things) on his sitcom *Cosby* in conjunction with his public persona during its airing. His character's focus on proving his virility is coded with sitcom innuendos, but undeniably present in almost every episode I watched. His public persona as a moral leader in the black community and America's Dad were on shaky ground during this period due to a drawn-out paternity case and heightened by his son's (highly publicized) murder. While the patriarchal structures may have advantaged Cosby, he didn't (and does not) exist freely within them, but rather was confined to certain roles and moral standards that he had to navigate. Masculinity, when defined as femininity's exact opposite, has clear guidelines that must be followed in order to retain power. The course of my education has led me to conclude that power is the most fragile thing that exists

In *Television, History and Culture* my freshmen year, I learned how to read TV. Not just content, but also context. How a show is watched is incredibly important: is it live? Are there commercials? Is it a syndicated rerun edited from its original format? Did you binge a whole season in a row or do you watch it weekly in a string of other shows? All of these things affect how content is read and meaning is made. Watching *Cosby* now, in 2016, instead of when it aired in 1996, matters. The way I read the show is affected by watching in without commercials, taken out of its Monday night CBS comedy lineup, skipping around in the episode order, and Bill Cosby's current cultural positioning and predicament. This knowledge, which includes considering where shows take place and the types of people they represent, has allowed me to constantly learn and think critically about the television I watch, a pastime at which I excel outside the classroom. It has made watching anything, from *The Bachelor* to *Transparent*, an educational experience. In *Theories of Visual and Media Culture*, a treasure trove of a class filled with intellectual gold that I collected with pleasure throughout the semester, one realization I had

stands out. We read *Chromophobia* by David Batchelor and he makes the observation that dividing 'color' into 'colors' is futile. There will always be more colors, another line to draw between slight changes in shade. Color is continuous, it's fluid. 'Colors' is an attempt to freeze the movement of color, to make it stop bleeding. Indeed, in attempting to separate parts of any *thing* to comprehend how it works, we create infinite spaces between definitions and borders, an endless parade of slight differences. This concept has translated into my understanding history and humanity's construction of time, and the terminology of identity, particularly the way that individual intersectionality can divide a person into so many small parts in the same body. In the first year seminar *Gossip! Gender, Media and U.S. Culture*, for which I was a peer advisor my senior year, I learned along side the whole class and worked hard to facilitate conversations that would help the students (and me) consider how gossip is mediated for its audience across different platforms (orally, in print, in images) and how the audience constructs meaning based on interpretation and interaction. Gossip is not served to us objectively; it is not simply information—it has a moral questioning attached to it, one that is framed by its transition from private to public, one that happens again and again as it is recedes from being secret and towards being solidified in collective memory. The media through which we transmit gossip acts as a frame as well, turning rumor into recorded history.

For my cross-cultural experience I chose to do an interdisciplinary ocean studies program through Williams College at the Mystic Seaport and Museum in Mystic, Connecticut. I took four subjects—literature, law, history and science—all focused on the sea and intermixed with three field seminars: one out on a ship around the Catalina Islands, one on the coast of northern California and one on the Gulf Coast of Louisiana. I chose the program because I love the ocean and it was my childhood dream to sail to a place where I could no longer see land, only sky and sea. I wanted to do a more immersive maritime experience, but my rheumatologist advised against it; it turned out ten days on the water was just enough for my body. I managed to be the only non-crew member to not get sea sick, I learned how to tack and jibe and haul lines and tie knots and so many new vocabulary words and even succeed in climbing the rigging. We stood watch at all hours of the day, time becoming both essential and meaningless. My favorite thing to

do on the ship was stand at the helm and steer. I could do it for three hours without stopping to take a break, constantly readjusting the wheel just inches to the right or left to see if I could keep us exactly on course, and then breaking away from the plan to catch the shifting wind. Everything on board had a particular place and procedure; keeping things tidy and secure is paramount to be able to manage the chaos the ocean can make manifest on board. The field seminars provided me with insight into how geography and climate affect the structures of a culture: economy, rituals and traditions, architecture, government, and community. For example, in southern Louisiana, we spent a day on Grand Isle, a barrier island that faces fairly complex environmental issues, everything from hurricanes to enormous amounts of seaweed washed up on their beaches to the disastrous BP oil spill (and that ever present fear of another occurring). The people of Grand Isle, similarly to the rest of Louisiana, are a conglomeration of Creole, Spanish, French, and Cajun heritage. They practice their cultures through dance, music, language, and their interaction with the ocean, specifically fishing. My class met with the mayor of the city, as well as their main community organizer. Both of their families had lived on the isle for generations, even as climate change made it riskier through repeated destruction of property and resources. Neither of them expressed any desire to move, but rather to adapt to the new challenges they face in sustaining life on the island and preserving their culture. This led me to start thinking more critically about how cultures change when people are forced out of their native geographic spaces, and whether or not it is ethical to ask people to move as their communities become more expensive to rebuild and maintain and their ocean resources are no longer a reliable source of capital. Our field seminar to northern California opened my eyes to two powerful things: seaports historically as centers of cultural exchange and their growth into what are now major cities, and the concept of deep time. Unlike the physical land of southern Louisiana, most of which is made of soil deposits from the Mississippi River delta over the last 1500 years, northern California's coast is made of rocks that are billions of years old; we encountered a cliff face made of pillow basalt, a rock that started as lava from a sea volcano, and I wondered at how something so old could still be standing. But here's the catch—the California coast, and all rock and land formations in their own way, is also constantly eroding. Those pillow basalts, which are still a cliff on the side of Highway 1, will eventually be gone,

broken up by rain, wind, human interaction, and slowly washed back to the sea. And as much as humanity (and the academy in particular) tries to construct time in a linear pattern, with clear lines and defined eras, time never stops moving. The structures we create for it cannot contain it.

One of the best integrative moments in my Johnston education was during the spring semester of my junior year. I took four classes: *Narratives of Addiction*, *Theories of Visual and Media Culture*, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, and *Non-Fiction II*. I chose these classes almost entirely for the professors, not necessarily thinking they would relate at all. And then death arrived, and I was swept up in connections like I had never experienced before. In all four of these classes, I wrote papers that were influenced by concepts I learned in the other three. My final paper on the Civil War focused how the chaos surrounding the mass death produced by the war led to the creation of the modern American museum, a showcase for human (Western) progress that downplayed the horrors of the past (slavery, the war itself) as acts of a primitive nation that had come through the war (Reconstruction written off as a loss by this point) and emerged as advanced, industrial, new (modern), and how Civil War museums exist in a strange space of intersecting nostalgia and progress that traps the Civil War dead in the objects used to construct their stories within the fabric of a larger Civil War narrative. That paper would not have been possible without the other three classes to guide me through thinking about theory, narrative construction and interpretation, and the practice of writing about my own experience with death. I continued to encounter death in my May term class, *Depicting the Marginal Self*, a class on coming-of-age, autobiographical graphic novels. Each novel we read had death throughout it, and I studied how the each comic's frame either contained death within its borders or let it seep out onto the rest of the page and into the rest of the narrative. Death followed me into my senior year, where in my *Pregnancy and Power* class I realized that the definition of 'life' and the moment of its beginning was just as blurred as my understanding of death and its definitive end— there is no clear truth to when life starts and when complete death happens but rather an ever-shifting collection of subjective definitions that all try to structure something that is unable to be pinned down precisely: the start and end of a self in the flow of time. I struggled with this in my level-three non-fiction writing workshop in my senior fall as I attempted to

articulate my own brush with death, as well as watching a close friend of mine die in a hospital room. As a writer, I got to construct how death would enter each story and the role it would play. In my own way, I attempted to control death on the page even though I knew it couldn't be controlled in life.

Performance has been an important part of how I practice my academics for my entire college experience. During my freshmen year in the seminar *Women in Comedy*, I started doing stand-up routines at open mics, which led me to incorporate one into several of my classes. I see comedy as an exceptional learning tool, as it offers a way to demonstrate common understandings (being in on the joke) while also being a device for critique (the joke's on you). One triumph I had in the classroom was in *Depicting the Marginal Self*, where I focused on connecting two definitions of 'comic'—the cartoon strips and me on stage doing stand-up. I crafted a final project that was a ten-minute set in which I would have to define myself for the crowd and help the audience construct my meaning through making them laugh. As a stand-up comic, I have to decide how I'm going to frame my 'self' for each audience so they can relate to me (finding humor in common experiences) and also see my difference (finding humor in my 'otherness'). This is a thin line to walk, and since I prefer to improvise my sets (all you need is the first joke and the rest is timing), it can end in failure as often as success. I continued to practice my stand up in various areas on campus, including Johnston, variety nights with the theater students and even at the annual Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Conference. Each had a different audience that needed a different set of material (a frame) in order to laugh. I also had to perform in the classroom, as I was lucky enough to get to teach several class sessions of the Gossip first year seminar on my own. Getting freshmen to speak up in class while wrestling with complex material was a challenge and it required me to have a persona that was non-threatening, slightly inappropriate, and probing in the right moments. Teaching was one of the greatest joys of my time here, and I felt like I learned the material deeply even though the level of discourse was much lower than in the classes in which I was just a student. In contrast to performing as myself on public stages, my experience with theater at the university has always been backstage. Being a stage manager has allowed me to see the ways in which theater, which is always live, strives to rehearse itself into control of time. It is all about structure: the script, the

blocking, the light cues, even the stage itself creates a frame. But I've learned that no matter how much you practice a show and what will happen in each moment, a live theater performance is unreproducible— different things happen every time the curtain opens. It is this failure to perfectly copy the moments of production again that gives theater its magic. It is the only medium in which the actors remain hand-in-hand with the audience in constructing new insights and meanings for the material.

The last piece of my integrative education I want to touch on is the Johnston community. All of the growth that I have done personally and academically could not have been achieved without the students, faculty and staff who constitute Johnston and have come to be home for me. In my time here, I've served the community in official ways: as a community assistant; in the university's student government as the "Johnston facilitator of ASUR relations"; as a member of sophomore contract committees and graduation reviews; as a representative to the board of trustees, prospective students, and high school college counselors; as a member of the search committee for the new Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. These positions have brought me tremendous happiness, even if they place me within structures by which I would rather not be confined. They have allowed me to practice embodying the ideals of a Johnston education and that has helped me think more pointedly about my own educational path and how I experience learning. The real crowning achievement of my education has been my work as the Community Director in my senior year. This position was a dream for me, both because I get to do good work for Johnston in the wider university (while always analyzing the tension between the two, and how our intertwining narratives are being formed through gossip in spaces all over campus) and because it allows me to help my fellow community members to see themselves as individuals within a whole. Living in an intentional community means sacrificing personal freedom and that is a hard thing for students to realize and do with consistency. I think it's worth it though. Learning how to live with others in a space in which everyone has the option to participate in the creation of the structures we need to make our chaos manageable is an invaluable skill and one I see manifested every day in the conversations in community meeting and on the porch and in the study nooks in Holt. What I find, and have always found, remarkable is the amount of kindness the people in this community show one another. There is also anger and avoidance and disrespect

and isolation, but, always at the end of the day, there is kindness. That is what allows this community to survive. It is kindness that allows us to move on from our missteps and grow, it is kindness that makes us show up and support one another in times of pain and celebration. It is kindness that has allowed me to do my job well, because I live in a community I trust to care for itself as much as I care for it. My reward is seeing all of my peers and colleagues triumph in the face of adversity, display their talents, and produce educations of which they are proud. It is an honor to think that I have played a part in the successes of those I love and respect and I am never prouder than when I'm watching someone from my community shine, and never more filled with gratitude than when my community reflects that love back to me. There will never be the right language to express what Johnston has meant and means and will mean to me, so I will say simply: it has meant everything.

Chronological Course List

Spring 2011

CHHTR-002: U.S. History 1929-1969

CUGTR-002: Beginning Photography

CUGTR-002: Intermediate Photography

Fall 2012

FS-100: The Johnston Experience

HIST-328-01: Gender, Media and U.S. Culture

JNST-000F-01: Image and Text

MUS-231-01: Jazz History to the 1940s

JNST-000M-01: GYST

PEAC-0LS-01: Swimming

Spring 2013

CRWR-104-02: Non-Fiction Workshop I

JNST-000F-01: Women in Comedy

JNST-000G-01: Television, History and Culture

MUS-232-01: Jazz History 1940s to Present

JNST-000J-01: Buffalo Food Collective

PEAC-0FE-01: Dynamic Fitness: Strength and Power

May 2013

HIST-229-01: U.S. History on Film

Fall 2013

ECON-250-01: Principles of Microeconomics

ENGL-221-01: Shakespeare to 1600

HIST-260-03: Historical Theories and Methods

REL-260-01: Women of God: Empowered or Oppressed?

HIST-180-01: Kimberly Crest Internship

Spring 2014

JNST-000J-01: Henry James

JNST-000K-01: Jazz & Blues Literature

THA-230-01: Theatre Management

WGST-232-01: History of Sexuality in the U.S.

May 2014

JNST-000H-01: Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships

Fall 2014

SPRO-300-01: Oceanographic Processes

SPRO-301-01: Literature of the Sea

SPRO-302-01: Marine Policy

SPRO-303-01: America and the Sea: 1600-present

Spring 2015

CRWR-204-01: Non-Fiction Workshop II

HIST-321-01: Civil War and Reconstruction

JNST-000I-01: Narratives of Addiction

VMS-301-01: Theories of Media and Visual Culture

THA-105-02: Production Credit-Production Staff

May 2015

JNST-000F-01: Depicting the Marginal Self

SSRV-201-01: Community Leadership

Fall 2015

JNST-000D-01: Millennials

JNST-085-26: Independent Study: Gossip! Gender, Media and U.S. Culture

JNST-085-27: Independent Study: Thesis Research

WGST-333-01: Pregnancy and Power: Reproductive Politics

CRWR-304-01: Non-Fiction Workshop III

Spring 2016

HIST-352-01: Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade

JNST-000C-01: Integrated Semester

JNST-000P-01: Decadence and Its Rubble

May 2016

JNST-000A-01: Race on Campus Student Conference

Course List by Subject/Type

Gender and Sexuality

WGST-333-01: Pregnancy and Power: Reproductive Politics
JNST-085-26: Independent Study: Gossip! Gender, Media and U.S. Culture
WGST-232-01: History of Sexuality in the U.S.
REL-260-01: Women of God: Empowered or Oppressed?
JNST-000F-01: Women in Comedy
HIST-328-01: Gender, Media and U.S. Culture

Media

JNST-000C-01: Integrated Semester
JNST-000D-01: Millennials
JNST-085-26: Independent Study: Gossip! Gender, Media and U.S. Culture
JNST-085-27: Independent Study: Thesis Research
VMS-301-01: Theories of Media and Visual Culture
HIST-229-01: U.S. History on Film
JNST-000G-01: Television, History and Culture
HIST-328-01: Gender, Media and U.S. Culture
JNST-000F-01: Image and Text
CUGTR-002: Beginning Photography
CUGTR-002: Intermediate Photography

History

HIST-352-01: Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade
HIST-321-01: Civil War and Reconstruction
SPRO-303-01: America and the Sea: 1600-present
JNST-085-26: Independent Study: Gossip! Gender, Media and U.S. Culture
WGST-232-01: History of Sexuality in the U.S.
HIST-260-03: Historical Theories and Methods
HIST-229-01: U.S. History on Film
JNST-000G-01: Television, History and Culture
MUS-232-01: Jazz History 1940s to Present
MUS-231-01: Jazz History to the 1940s
HIST-328-01: Gender, Media and U.S. Culture
CHHTR-002: U.S. History 1929-1969

Literature and Aesthetics

JNST-000P-01: Decadence and Its Rubble
JNST-000D-01: Millennials
JNST-000F-01: Depicting the Marginal Self
JNST-000I-01: Narratives of Addiction
SPRO-301-01: Literature of the Sea
JNST-000J-01: Henry James
JNST-000K-01: Jazz & Blues Literature
ENGL-221-01: Shakespeare to 1600
JNST-000F-01: Image and Text

Writing

CRWR-304-01: Non-Fiction Workshop III
CRWR-204-01: Non-Fiction Workshop II
CRWR-104-02: Non-Fiction Workshop I

Experiential

JNST-000A-01: Race on Campus Student Conference
SSRV-201-01: Community Leadership
THA-105-02: Production Credit-Production Staff
THA-230-01: Theatre Management
JNST-000H-01: Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships
JNST-000J-01: Buffalo Food Collective
PEAC-0FE-01: Dynamic Fitness: Strength and Power
JNST-000M-01: GYST
PEAC-0LS-01: Swimming
FS-100: The Johnston Experience

Law

SPRO-302-01: Marine Policy
WGST-333-01: Pregnancy and Power: Reproductive Politics

Quantitative Reasoning

ECON-250-01: Principles of Microeconomics

Natural Science

SPRO-300-01: Oceanographic Processes