

AMERICAN STUDIES

Vanderbilt University | Fall 2013

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“Think big, but be specific...

What do you *really* want to do with your life?”

Jobs That Change the World

Amanda Little

When 31-year-old keynote speaker Billy Parish came to Vanderbilt campus late last January, he had launched his company Mosaic just two weeks earlier. The start-up was already on a rapid ascent. He had founded Mosaic with the mission to catalyze a people-powered clean-energy revolution, offering an online platform for “crowdfunding” solar energy. Similar to Kickstarter, his model enables citizen investors to fund solar projects nationwide, chipping in anywhere from \$25 to tens of thousands of dollars each per project, and receiving roughly a 6 percent return on their investment.

Within two days of its launch, Mosaic had amassed more than \$350,000 in citizen funding, and *Forbes* had run a story on Billy’s breakthrough idea. A *New York Times* article on Mosaic ran soon thereafter proclaiming that “a generation and a half after the first Earth Day, we may be witnessing the coming of age of solar power.”

All of which is to say that when Billy came to Vandy to talk to students about finding meaningful, profitable careers, he was on fire—and fired up.

I had met Billy nearly a decade earlier, in his early 20s, when I was profiling him as a “Climate Hero” for *Rolling Stone* magazine. After his junior year at Yale University, Billy had dropped out to found *EnergyAction.org*, a website that seeded the youth climate movement. Parish thereafter helped launch dozens of clean energy, youth, and green jobs related companies and organizations including Campus Climate Challenge (climatechallenge.org) and Green For All (Greenforall.org). In 2011 he published *Making Good: Finding Meaning, Money and Community in a Changing World*—a guidebook for Millennials seeking to create a career of meaning.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

With great enthusiasm, I write this note as the new Director of American Studies. With great appreciation, I begin by thanking Professor Teresa Goddu, my predecessor. Under Professor Goddu's leadership, the Program in American Studies prospered, attracting students and faculty from multiple departments on campus. Their questions shared an Americanist context, and yet they also knew that their answers needed to come from more than one frame of reference or body of literature, which is to say, more than one discipline.

Professor Goddu cultivated an environment in which interdisciplinary thinking was not just welcomed; it was valued and, indeed, required. Under her guidance, the American Studies curriculum became more diverse and challenging for undergraduate and graduate students alike. The Program in American Studies was also able to offer opportunities that went far beyond the classroom, including most notably the Sustainability Project, featuring a wide variety of speakers and events to facilitate a campus-wide conversation. You can read several articles in this newsletter about the many fruits of the Sustainability Project during the last year. In each one, you will see the same results: the exciting sense of discovery that happened when people from inside and outside of Vanderbilt, each bringing unique areas of expertise and experience, came together to ask how they can—or, better, how *we* can—create a sustainable future.

Obviously this is a very complicated and difficult question. But not being afraid of asking the really big questions is a key requirement of interdisciplinary thinking. It is not just enough for us simply to come together as a diverse assortment of thinkers; we also have to share a commitment to both teaching and learning from each other, too. As incoming director of American Studies, I take that commitment seriously. Along with the other fine interdisciplinary programs in the College of Arts and Science, many of which are also housed in Buttrick Hall, American Studies is place where both our questions and our answers are larger than the sum of their parts.

My use of a cliché in that last sentence belies the fact that interdisciplinary thinking is harder than it looks. Faculty members are typically trained to be experts in one area, and as we teach our students what we've learned and discovered ourselves, it can be very tempting to stay within some of these same parameters. As you read this newsletter, however, I suspect you will get a good sense of how American Studies students and faculty resist this temptation. I bet you will also see why I feel such great enthusiasm about the coming year and the big questions—and interdisciplinary answers—we will consider together.

Best,

Vanessa Beasley

Director of the Program in American Studies

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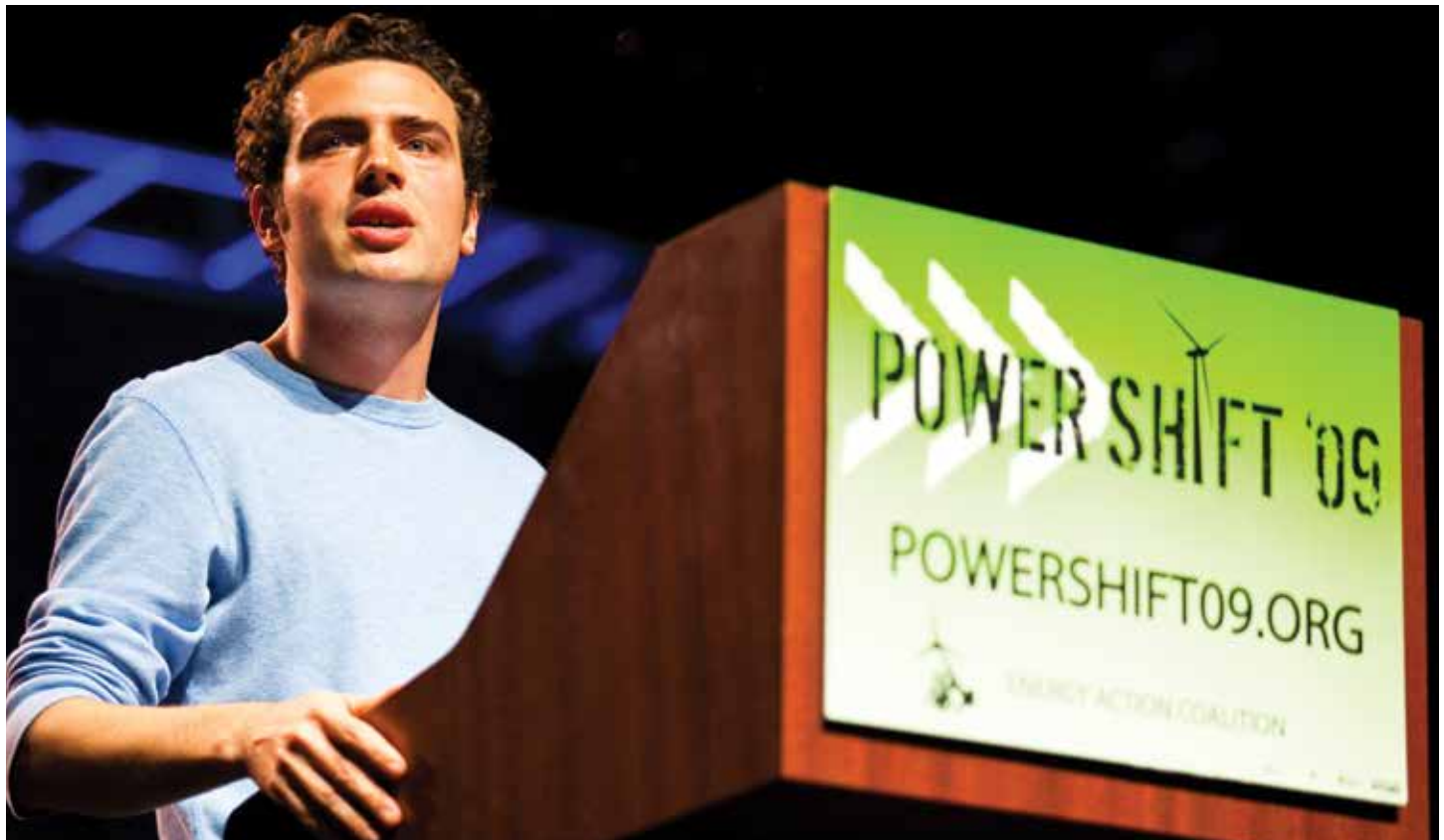
He shared lessons and stories from this book and his career in his keynote “Making Money, Doing Good,” which he delivered to a packed house in Buttrick 102. His visit was sponsored by the American Studies Sustainability Project. Billy opened his talk with a dramatic story about finding his life purpose, quite literally, on a mountaintop. As a college junior he had traveled to some Alaskan mountains where he saw how radically the glaciers had receded. At the time he was reading the novel *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit* by Daniel Quinn, which inspired in him the conviction that *he* could help rein in the juggernaut of climate change. When he came down from the mountain, that’s exactly what he set out to do.

About 20 minutes into his keynote, Billy distributed pens and index cards throughout the audience and asked us—professors and students alike—to write down our goals for our lives and careers. “Think big, but be specific,” he exhorted us, “What do you *really* want to do with your life?” Once we had written down

our goals in lofty but efficient terms (I personally had written: “Batman writer: I want to save the world with stories”) he then brazenly asked us to stand up and collectively shout our goals out into the room (“It makes it more real if you shout it out loud... on the count of three...”). A few nervous giggles could be heard throughout the room when he made this request, but there was resounding participation.

Billy then asked us to drill down into the details of our dreams, creating a plan of action on our index cards that included specific steps we could take to achieve our goals, and specific people we could seek out to help us achieve them. “When you leave this room, start connecting with those people,” he urged.

I overheard one student, a senior, approach Billy after his keynote and say, “I put you on my list of people to connect with.” Two months later, he had offered her a job at Mosaic after graduation.



Report on The Sustainability Project

The 2012-2013 school year marked the final iteration of Sustainability Project programming. We aimed to continue the discourse that began in 2011: to heighten the atmosphere of environmental awareness on Vanderbilt's campus. The ultimate goal for these two years of programming was to create a campus-wide conversation that would embolden Vanderbilt's efforts toward sustainability while deepening our understanding of what we are working toward.

While the bulk of Sustainability Project programming occurred during the 2011-2012 school year, this year consisted of a robust schedule that focused on tangible ways for students to work towards a sustainable future; a continued conversation on climate change with experts in the field; and visions of Vanderbilt as a university progressing towards the future. Speakers included **Chuck Redman**, the founding director of Arizona State University's School of Sustainability, who discussed his current work at ASU's Global Institute of Sustainability and teaching in the School of Sustainability in a keynote talk entitled "**Transforming the Silos: Creating a School of Sustainability**" and **Billy Parish**, the founder of Energy Action Coalition and the solar company Solar Mosaic, and co-author of *Making Good: Finding Meaning, Money & Community in a Changing World*. Additionally, our spring conference entitled, "**Climate Change, Anti-Environmentalism, and American Politics**," brought in professors specializing in climate change from all over the country:

- **Bill Ruddiman**, University of Virginia, "**Climate Science and Climate Skeptics**."
- **Anthony Leiserowitz**, Yale University, "**Climate Change Skepticism, Climategate, and Public Opinion**."
- **Aaron M. McCright**, Michigan State University, "**The Conservative Movement and Climate Politics**."
- **Timmons Roberts**, Brown University, "**No Talk but Some Walk: Obama Administration Rhetoric on Climate Change and International Climate Spending**."

Student-oriented projects continued this year with the start of the newly-created minor in Environmental and Sustainability

Studies, an outcome of the 2011-2012 Sustainability Programming. The course offerings coordinated by the Sustainability Project and developed within the Cumberland Project (see page 8 for more information) served as the core curriculum for this new minor. In addition to building the curriculum, the Environmental and Sustainability Studies minor also held a speaker series for students. At the end of this inaugural year, there are 13 students enrolled in this minor. By developing the Sustainability Project into an academic minor (and in time a major or program), we see the project as having a long-term institutional impact.

American Studies majors also focused on sustainability as the theme for their senior project. This interdisciplinary project resulted in a collaboratively-created website called "Vanderbilt the Possible: Imagining a Sustainable Campus." In this project, students researched sustainability on other campuses to create a pragmatic vision of where Vanderbilt currently stands on issues of sustainability and how it could improve. By examining such topics as energy, transportation, food, and housing, the students created an engaging and detailed vision for how Vanderbilt could become a sustainable campus by their 25th reunion. The seniors presented this website to a large gathering of professors and students and have posted it on both the American Studies website and the Environmental and Sustainability Studies website.

This fall, Teresa Goddu, Director of the Sustainability Project; Joe Bandy, Assistant Director of the Center for Teaching; and David Hess, Director of the Environmental and Sustainability Studies minor will present at the 2013 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education conference. Their panel, entitled "**Teaching Sustainability & Fostering Change at Vanderbilt University**," will discuss the Sustainability Project, the Cumberland Project and the development on the minor in Environmental and Sustainability Studies.

The American Studies Sustainability Project was directed by Teresa A. Goddu, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Program in American Studies, and coordinated by Derrick R. Spires, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of English. The Sustainability Project was generously funded by the Vanderbilt College of Arts and Science Fant Fund.

AMERICAN STUDIES

Sustainability Project



Workshop on Climate Change, Anti-Environmentalism, and American Politics

David Hess, Professor of Sociology

On February 8, 2013, American Studies hosted a workshop on Climate Change, Anti-Environmentalism, and American Politics. The event included an open public lecture by William Ruddiman, a leading climate scientist, and a workshop for Vanderbilt faculty and students led by three experts on American politics, public opinion, and climate change.

Ruddiman's talk, "Climate Science and Climate Skeptics," was attended by about 100 members of the Vanderbilt community. He provided a background on the anthropogenic causes of global warming as well as an introduction to his own early anthropocene theory, which argues that human activity has affected the climate for about 8,000 years. He then discussed the problems that climate scientists face due to the rise of organized climate-science skepticism and denialism, and he described the role of fossil-fuel industry funding in making it difficult for scientists to gain a hearing with policymakers. The talk was introduced by George Hornberger, Director of the Vanderbilt Institute for Energy and Environment and the University Distinguished Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Earth and Environmental Science. Jonathan Gilligan, Associate Professor of Earth and Environmental Science and an expert on climate science, moderated the discussion.

The event then shifted into a workshop for the afternoon, which was attended by about 30 faculty and students from Vanderbilt and area universities. Students included undergraduates who are pursuing the new minor in Environmental and Sustainability Studies, which was developed from the Sustainability Project of American Studies.

The afternoon workshop took place in "slow conference" format, with about 15 minutes of opening comments from the guest speaker, a discussion by a Vanderbilt faculty member, and then a general discussion. Conference attendees had received a packet of readings that included articles by each of the guest speakers.

Anthony Leiserowitz, a research scientist at the Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Director of the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, spoke on "Climate Change Skepticism, Climategate, and Public Opinion." Nationally known for his work on public opinion and environmental issues, he provided an overview of the different categories of public opinion with respect to anthropogenic global warming, and he also discussed the factors behind the general decline after 2008, then slight increase after 2010, in belief among Americans that anthropogenic greenhouse gases cause global warming in the U.S.

Aaron McCright, Associate Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Lyman Briggs College at Michigan State University, spoke on "The Conservative Movement and Climate Politics." His research with sociologist Riley Dunlap has shown the organizational networks associated with the climate denial "machinery" in the U.S. Of special interest to educators, they have also studied the effects of a college education on climate-related beliefs.

Timmons Roberts, Ittleson Professor of Environmental Studies and Sociology at Brown University, spoke on "No Talk but Some Walk: Obama Administration Rhetoric on Climate Change and International Climate Spending." He discussed the Obama administration's rhetoric and policy with respect to climate change, including the administration's position in global climate negotiations and the decline in its references to climate change in domestic politics.

The discussions were introduced and moderated by Joe Bandy (Associate Director, Center for Teaching and Learning, and Lecturer, Sociology), Amanda Carrico (Research Assistant Professor, Vanderbilt Institute for Energy and Environment), Jim Fraser (Associate Professor, Human and Organizational Development), and David Hess (Professor, Sociology; Associate Director, Vanderbilt Institute for Energy and Environment; and Director, Program in Environmental and Sustainability Studies). The conference was organized by David Hess and Gabriela Luis (Program Administrator, American Studies).

Report for the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute

Jessica Burch, *American Studies Futures Fellow, History*

Alexander Jacobs, *American Studies Futures Fellow, History*

The Futures of American Studies Institute, a week-long event held at Dartmouth College each summer, opened on June 18th with a series of talks ranging in topic from *Moby Dick* and globalization to conceptions of the will in the American novel to white antiracist protest in *The Help*. Exemplifying what the Institute does best, these talks brought together scholarship that crossed temporal, thematic, and disciplinary lines in ways that enabled participants to think anew about the contours of American Studies as an intellectual project.

A rigorous American Studies boot camp of sorts, participants attended more than thirty talks over the course of the week. Though they ranged widely in topic, many of the talks shared an interest in interrogating the conception of the nation state, in assessing the state of American Studies as a field, and in contemplating the lessons the academy can offer to contemporary political issues such as the Great Recession or the War on Terror.

In between the morning and evening plenary sessions, Institute participants also attended a series of “work-in-progress” seminars. Composed of graduate students and junior faculty, and led by senior figures in American Literature and American Studies, each seminar provided participants the opportunity to present material from their current projects, and to give and receive feedback in a collaborative, interdisciplinary setting. Most graduate students presented a conference paper or work-shopped dissertation chapter excerpts, and several junior faculty discussed their ongoing book projects. In many cases, participants were able to arrange for additional faculty with shared research interests to attend their presentations. The seminars thus provided not only a forum to discuss the daily lectures, but also allowed the participants to develop working relationships, draw connections between each others’ research, push each other to expand their thinking beyond the boundaries of their home discipline, and to appreciate the value of interdisciplinary engagement.

Jessica Burch:

I presented a paper entitled, “‘Mommy, here comes Amway!’: Marriage, Family, and the Gender Politics of Direct Sales Work in the Amway Corporation, 1960-1975.” Taken from a chapter of my dissertation on the history of direct sales work since 1945, the paper argues that Amway mobilized specific conceptions of gender, marriage, and family in order to frame direct sales work as a family business and as an extension of one’s family life. More specifically, I argue that the model of a family business headed by



an entrepreneurial husband allowed for women’s participation in Amway but reframed it as something that occurred within, rather than outside, the boundaries of familial patriarchy. By constructing an image of the Amway distributorship as a practice that was as much about marital bonding and family togetherness as it was commerce, Amway reassured both male and female participants that their Amway work fit within, rather than challenged, the postwar ideal of the nuclear family in which the father was the sole economic supporter. At the same time, the very need for supplemental income through Amway suggested the impracticability of that model, especially by the 1970s. Thus, Amway’s framing of a distributorship as compatible with the patriarchal family exposed the tenuousness of the postwar nuclear family as an ideal at the same time that it tried to protect it. The working-group format of the daily seminars encouraged valuable interdisciplinary exchange. My fellow participants introduced me to new bodies of literature and to new ways of thinking about my project, sources, and historical method.

Alex Jacobs:

In my Futures seminar, I presented a portion of my dissertation’s fifth chapter, titled “‘A Longed-for Resumption of the Enlightenment Faith’: The Age of Reason in Recent American Political Thought.” The chapter as a whole tries to make sense of various polemical invocations of the Enlightenment before and after 9/11. This excerpt, which focuses on the writings of sociologist Todd Gitlin and journalist Michael Tomasky, explains the emergence of “Enlightenment Values” as a staple of progressive political thinking during the 1990s. Following the disastrous 1994 midterm elections, frustrated liberal intellectuals turned to the Enlightenment to provide an effective counter to the right’s free market nationalism and a postmodern “identity politics” that they believed had rendered the left ineffective and unappealing. A side effect of these efforts at ideological renovation, I contend, was that many progressive intellectuals inadvertently came to mimic both the rhetorical style and underlying philosophical assumptions of their conservative opponents. That is, like their counterparts on the right, many American liberals came to see post-sixties America as beset by cultural chaos and in desperate need of moral and epistemic reformation. I received a great deal of helpful and generous feedback from my seminar leader and fellow participants. I found the Institute a congenial interdisciplinary forum, useful both for sharpening my own work as well as getting a better sense of the intellectual contours of the wider community of “Americanists.”

Aboriginal Issues: Indianism And The Modernist Literary Field

Elizabeth Barnett, American Studies Dissertation Fellow, English

It's no secret that U.S. American literary modernism is veined with racism. When we teach it, and teach its achievements, we do so with the careful caveat that these achievements are "in spite of" Pound's or Eliot's or Stevens's hatred of Jews or Blacks or Indians. But what if the hallmarks of modernist poetic innovation were actually predicated on racism and its correlate, racial appropriation? In the 1910s and '20s the U.S. government was still waging war on Indian cultures by breaking up tribally held lands and forcibly reeducating Native children. And yet, in the literary field, "the Indian," in all the ambiguity that term implies, was having a moment, evidenced by the "Aboriginal" issues of various little magazines. I name this modernist relation to "the Indian" Indianism and argue that it provides a different lens through which to view U.S. American literary modernism.

Indianism encompassed white appropriative practices, the entry of traditional Native American songs and ceremonies into the literary field, and Native writers navigating that field. As Indianism affected the whole field of modernist literary production, studying it prompts surprising discoveries. There is Alice Corbin, whose Indianism deforms her lyric voice, inadvertently contributing to the development of literary collage. There is the Cherokee poet Lynn Riggs, who works within Indianism to critique it, simultaneously making a place for himself in modernist culture. And there is Wallace Stevens, whose collection of bloody captivity narratives instructs him on how he might respond to the formal and emotional threats of Indian influence and pathos. Each of these studies in some sense springs from the intersection of traditional Native American songs and modernist periodical culture, the immediate origin of Indianism.

Utilizing a sociological, bibliographic, and biographical approach, I focus on sites of Indianist intertextuality. Poems do the work of affiliation or the resistance to it, and this work has formal markers and formal consequences. How, for instance, does Corbin, a white poet, align herself with the Indian? She becomes a "translator" and "interpreter" of Chippewa songs, which she quotes and presents under a title of her choosing and under her own name. By "discovering" the poems in anthropological journals and re-presenting them in the aesthetic space of the little magazine, Corbin uses periodical culture to claim the songs as her own. Stevens, aghast at this abdication of originality but intrigued by the poetry itself, responds by representing, and so distancing himself from, what he depicts as the feminized practice of indigenous masquerade, even as he makes his own oblique efforts

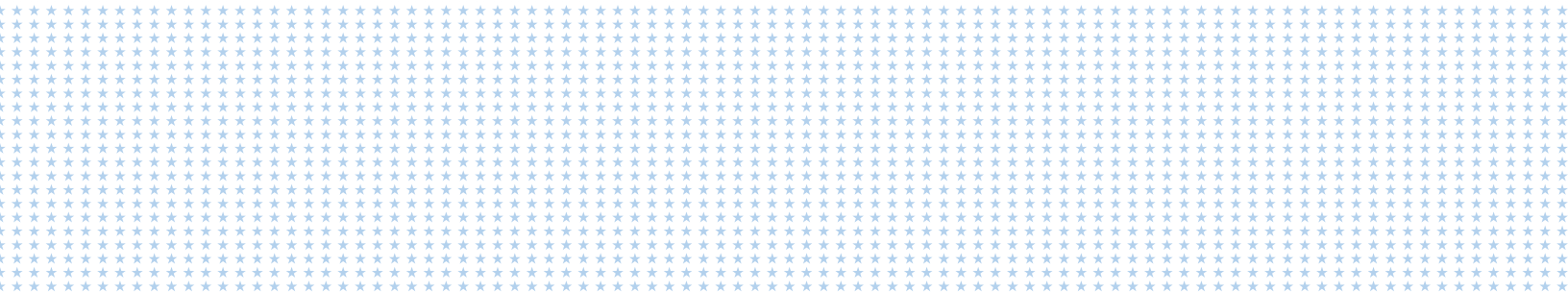
to "assimilate" the Indian. Meanwhile, Riggs writes poems that reverse the power relations implicit in Corbin's appropriation. He treats white modernists ethnographically and symbolizes the refusal of indigenous subjectivities to be "absorbed" by a modernist aestheticization of them in the figures of a skull and a garden. If intertextuality is always at play in modernist poetry, that play becomes both subject and repressed object in Indianism.

Indianism is all over the magazines and books of the 1910s and '20s, but we seldom talk about it because it is ethically questionable and seemingly lacks aesthetic value, because it deserves to be forgotten. These matters of taste and value support a narrative of a meritocratic canon organized by aesthetic worth. By identifying Indianism as a quintessential modernist "ism," I question that canon. Focusing on a prototypical Indianist modernist, a Native American poet pursuing modernist recognition, and a canonical modernist poet, I explore how Indianism fundamentally affected all of their work. Though we now localize Indianism as an embarrassing blip in literary culture, I suggest that it offers a secret history of modernism.





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The 2013 Cumberland Project

Joe Bandy, Assistant Director, Center for Teaching

On April 23rd, thirteen faculty met to participate in the third year of the Cumberland Project, a workshop supported by the American Studies Sustainability Project and the Center for Teaching that is designed to assist faculty in developing courses that address some dimension of environmental and social sustainability. In the 2011 and 2012 workshops, participants took part in a series of experiences that involved critical dialogue about sustainability as a concept, as a set of social and environmental problems, and as a pedagogy that comes with various challenges.

In this year's iteration, the Cumberland Project invited past participants to return for a more practical workshop focused on further improvements of their ongoing courses and teaching practices. Thirteen were willing to join in conversation about the two themes of problem- and project-based learning as they may be applied to their course designs. These two pedagogies, when done well, involve high impact teaching practices with particular usefulness for students as they struggle to understand and solve the many complex, interdisciplinary problems of achieving environmental and social sustainability. This and past years' workshops have resulted in growing interest and expertise in teaching sustainability. If you have an interest in following up on these or related issues regarding the pedagogies of sustainability and resilience, please contact the Center for Teaching at (615) 322-7290.

AMERICAN STUDIES
Sustainability
Project

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