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Five Questions with First Years: The Kate Grover Edition!

by American Studies

AMS :: ATX is a blog dedicated to representing the many activities and interests of the department of American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Together with the department's Twitter feed, this blog exists to serve the AMS and Austin communities by acting as a hub for up-to-date information on events and opportunities at UT and beyond.





As we wrap up this academic year, we want to feature one more member of the 2016-17 incoming class: Kate Grover! Kate comes to UT by way of many an American city, but most recently Philadelphia, and before that several years in New Orleans, where she did a B.A. in American Studies, English, and Gender and Sexuality Studies at Tulane University (working with an esteemed graduate of UT's AMS PhD program, Joel Dinerstein).

Kate's scholarly interests include rock stardom, feminist rock music, and the concept of cool—so you'll probably want to read this interview. Here they are: five questions with Kate Grover!

1) What is your background, academic or otherwise, and how does it motivate your teaching and



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research?

Well I was born in Michigan, moved to Ohio and then California, grew up in Phoenix, and then went to college in New Orleans—and I would definitely say that my experiences in these places sparked my interest in the diversity of American life and culture. I'm also an only child who spent a lot of her free time nerding out over books, albums, and TV shows, so I've always been fascinated by pop culture and what it means to various people. This translated into my undergraduate studies at Tulane University where I graduated with a B.A. in American Studies, a B.A. in English, and a Minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies in 2015. I was living and working outside of Philadelphia before moving to Austin this past fall (and I miss Wawa everyday).

2) Why did you decide to come to AMS at UT for your graduate work?

The sense of community in the AMS department was what initially drew me to UT. I remember visiting as a prospective student and seeing that the faculty and graduate students were invested in each other's work and wanted their colleagues to succeed in their goals. That really made an impression on me. Plus, as someone who studies music and musical culture, I couldn't pass up living in the live music capital of the world.

3) What projects or people have inspired your work?

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I'm heavily indebted to the Newcomb College Institute at Tulane and the Newcomb Scholars Program in which I was lucky enough to participate as an undergrad. Being in this community of women cultivated my interest in gender-focused research, and the Newcomb Scholars seminars were where I first realized that I wanted to study women in rock music. The NCI also supported me through several crucial stages of my undergraduate thesis, including a trip to the Fales Library at NYU to research at their Riot Grrrl Collection. It's safe to say that I wouldn't be in the American Studies program at UT without the resources, sponsorship, mentorship, and friendship I received from this great group of folks.

I'm also grateful to Joel Dinerstein—for the opportunity to study with him, and for the opportunity to do American Studies as an undergraduate. When I was at Tulane, the university was planning to phase out the American Studies major by 2014, the year before I was supposed to graduate. Joel not only allowed me to close out the major a year later than scheduled, he advised my capstone project and undergraduate thesis—two projects that were instrumental in my development as an American Studies scholar. From Joel's teaching and mentorship I learned the value of interdisciplinary research, the necessity for empathy in one's writing and analysis, and the importance of letting your material cover you rather than you covering it. I also

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got a crash course in cool, and this inescapable concept is shaping my work more and more.

4) What projects do you see yourself working on at UT?

I definitely want to continue my undergraduate research on women in rock music, but I'm contemplating various ways of exploring and focusing this topic. The concept of "rock stardom" intrigues me (this semester I'm in an excellent course in the RTF department about stardom and celebrity), and I'm curious about what rock stardom means to various groups of people and how this meaning has shifted over time—not to mention the ways constructions of rock stardom themselves are racialized, classed, and gendered. I've also been thinking a lot about taste lately and how the things we like (or find cool/uncool) shape our identities. Ellen Willis's writing on rock music and her personal relationship to it as a fan, critic, woman, and feminist has been extremely influential in this regard.

I'd also be interested in working on a project historicizing feminist rock music. When we think of feminist rock, we often think of riot grrrl and the punk rock feminism that gained recognition in the 1990s. But the story of feminist rock starts much earlier (see the Chicago and New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Bands), and we can also locate feminist rock outside of our traditional conception of "the feminist movement." Looking at why and

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how people created feminist rock music can tell us so much about music's impact on people's lives and the meaning they make of it.

5) What are your goals for graduate school? What do you see yourself doing after you graduate?

In addition to building my own research and knowledge, I'm excited to work with the undergraduates at UT as a teaching assistant and later as an assistant instructor. I'm not sure what I'll be doing after I graduate from UT, but helping students make new connections and grow as writers and scholars seems incredibly rewarding. I also hope to learn more about public scholarship and ways to reach various audiences outside of academia. I'm constantly impressed and intrigued by the work my colleagues are doing, and it would be fabulous to be to share this work with as many people as possible.

Bonus: How would you define American Studies?

What isn't American Studies? I'm joking, but in reality that's what makes this field special. I see American Studies as a home for academic weirdoes (I say this with love) who take on unique projects and ask fresh, provocative questions. American Studies makes unforeseen connections visible and tells the stories of people who may not otherwise have those stories told.

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