



FROM BA TO MA TO PhD

While the majority of undergraduates complete their studies with the BA (Hons) degree, some opt to continue their studies at the postgraduate level. One such was Jennie Chapman, who stayed on at Manchester for the American Studies MA programme, and is now working on her PhD. Natalie Zacek spoke with her about her journey through the programme.

Why did you choose American Studies at Manchester as an undergraduate?

I grew up in a small town in north Lancashire, so when I was a teenager Manchester came to represent everything that my hometown wasn't. The genuinely alternative cultural scene, the music, the diversity of people and events, the physical expansiveness -- and, it has to be said, the Curry Mile -- were enormously attractive to me, and I decided quite early on that, when I left home, Manchester was where I would head for. I had sound academic reasons for choosing Manchester too, of course! My inspirational English A-Level teacher, Mr. Rafferty studied in the English department at Manchester. As a result, Manchester was the only university at which I wanted to study, and the only one to which I applied -- it was Manchester or bust!

Why did you decide to go on to postgraduate study in AS? Why did you choose to stay on at Manchester to do so?

In my second year as an undergrad I began to seriously entertain the idea of pursuing a career as an academic. I loved studying, I loved the subject, and my grades had been good -- far better than I expected them to be. Although my degree was in 'English and American Literature', I had long been drawn to the American literature side, and this became my focus as my degree progressed. The American Cultural Studies MA seemed perfect, particularly given that my interests were becoming more interdisciplinary. When it came to deciding to continue with my PhD here, it was largely due to the expertise of the staff.

What is the topic of your PhD thesis, and why did you select that topic?

My title is something like "Apocalypse and Agency: Paradoxes of Power in Contemporary Prophecy Belief." I'm looking at a particular aspect of conservative evangelical belief in America, known as dispensationalism. Basically, it is a strand of belief which focuses and speculates upon the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. The project will use dispensational texts to look at how these doctrines have developed throughout the 20th century in response to socio-cultural factors, with a particular focus on how the concept and representation of human agency has changed and developed over time. During my MA I began to explore the religious, specifically conservative Christian expressions of the apocalyptic. It's an undoubtedly odd topic, and I have to be constantly vigilant against dismissing apocalyptic beliefs as simply bizarre and incredible, but it's also a very rich, potent and often fascinating subject to be working on.

What would you like to do after completing the PhD?

I hope to get an academic post! I'm just coming to the end of my first year so the pressure isn't on to be applying for jobs yet, but you undoubtedly bear the job market in mind in everything you do during the PhD.

What makes Manchester American Studies distinctive?

I think the staff here are great -- individually and as a unit. We have academics working on such a broad range of topics, from hip-hop culture, to Southern history, to conspiracy theories, to film and politics, gender and the body, colonialism, literary studies -- the list undoubtedly goes on -- that I think students here have the opportunity both to gain a really diverse knowledge of America and to pursue more specialist routes as they wish.

What advice would you give to potential Manchester AS undergraduates? Postgraduates?

Manchester is a great place to be, whatever you're studying, but I do think AS here is especially exciting. I'd advise undergrads to really take advantage of the broad knowledge of the staff here -- be open-minded and, if you can, take the opportunity to study lots of different subjects rather than sticking to what feels familiar or safe. You will be rewarded with an incredibly interesting education, and you may well be surprised at what fascinates you (I would never have thought when I started my undergrad degree that I'd end up researching evangelical apocalypticism!). As for postgrads, try not to get too stressed (easier said than done), do get to know your fellow postgrads and take advantage of social opportunities, and participate in the vibrant research culture we have here. There is a plethora of seminars, lectures, workshops and conferences you can attend, and the school is very supportive of postgrads who would like to organize their own academic events -- I'm organizing the British Association of American Studies annual postgraduate conference this year, with another AS PhD student, Jo Metcalf. There are so many opportunities on offer at Manchester -- it would be rude not to take advantage of them!

JENNIE CHAPMAN



MA IN AMERICAN STUDIES

Manchester now offers two dedicated pathways on the MA in American Studies, one in Literature and Culture and the other in History. Both these pathways offer an in-depth and interdisciplinary exploration of the American experience, past and present.

Students take a core course, a research methods course and two options from the range of American Studies courses (or from relevant options in fields of Latin American studies, critical theory, and postcolonial studies). Students then go on to write a supervised dissertation of 15,000 words. The MA can be taken full-time or part-time.

Manchester has accumulated excellent primary and secondary library holdings in the John Rylands University Library and the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resources Centre, which offers outstanding resources for research in African American history and culture. The subject area has its own film library, with particular strengths in American politics, the African American experience, and the American South. American Studies runs a dedicated research seminar series, Critical MASS, and an annual postgraduate mini-conference. The MA provides a strong foundation for students wanting to learn more about the historical and cultural dimensions of the American experience, as well as for those wishing to proceed to doctoral study.

For further information please see: www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/englishamericanstudies/
Or contact: michael.bibler@manchester.ac.uk

MEET THE CURRENT STAFF



MICHAEL BIBLER will join Manchester American Studies in January 2008. His work focuses on the literature and culture of the American South. He is the co-editor of *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South* (University of Virginia, 2007), has just completed a book manuscript about same-sex relationships in southern plantation literature, and is currently working on a project dealing with sexuality and gender relations in the nineteenth-century South.

DAVID BROWN's research centres upon slavery, race, the American South, and the Civil War. His first monograph, an intellectual biography of the abolitionist Hinton Rowan Helper, was published in 2006 (Louisiana State University Press). This year he published *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights*, co-authored with Clive Webb, (Edinburgh University Press). David is book review editor for *American Nineteenth-Century History*. He is now working on a project on non-slaveholding whites in the antebellum South.

MARTIN FRADLEY joined the team in 2006 on a temporary lectureship. He received his PhD from the University of East Anglia, with a thesis on representations of masculinity in contemporary Hollywood film. He is the author of a number of articles relating to film, masculinity, and popular culture.

GODFREY KEARNS: see extended interview inside.

PETER KNIGHT's primary area of published research is conspiracy culture: he is the author of *Conspiracy Culture: From the Kennedy Assassination to 'The X Files'* (Routledge, 2000) and the editor of *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Postwar American Paranoia* (New York University Press, 2002) and of the three-volume encyclopaedia *Conspiracy Theories in American History* (ABC-CLIO, 2004). This year sees the publication of his monograph on the Kennedy assassination (Edinburgh University Press). His new project examines ideas about credit, confidence men, corporations, currency, and conspiracy in the post-Civil War U.S.

IAN MCGUIRE has taught American literature and creative writing at Manchester since 1996, and currently co-directs the University's MA in Creative Writing. In addition to academic journal articles on Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and William Dean Howells, he is the author of short stories in the *Paris Review* and the *Chicago Review*, and of a novel, *Incredible Bodies* (Bloomsbury, 2006), which was described as "hugely entertaining" by the *Times* and as "refreshing" by the *New Statesman*. He is working on a second novel for Bloomsbury.

MONICA PEARL specializes in twentieth-century American literature and film, particularly life-writing and cultural representations of AIDS, and she has published articles in *Textual Practice*, the *Journal of European Studies*, and the *Journal of American Studies*, as well as in a number of essay collections. She is currently working on a study of twentieth-century American literary correspondence.

EITHNE QUINN received her BA in American Studies from Manchester in 1993, returning in 2003 as a lecturer. Her research focuses on African American popular culture, race relations, and the cultural industries since 1960. In 2005 Columbia University Press published her first monograph, *Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*. Her current project examines race politics and industry relations in the 'blaxploitation' film cycle.

IAN SCOTT is, after Godfrey, the longest-serving member of the team, having joined in 1994. His primary interests are in Hollywood screenwriting and filmic representations of American politics. He is the author of *American Politics in Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000) and *In Capra's Shadow* (University of Kentucky, 2006), a study of screenwriter Robert Riskin. He is working on a new monograph, *From Pinewood to Hollywood*, which examines the influence of British directors and screenwriters in the 'studio era.' Ian sits on the Executive Committee of the British Association for American Studies.

BRIAN WARD, the first Professor of American Studies at Manchester in over a decade, arrived in 2006, having been professor and chair of the History Department at the University of Florida. His main research interests are the modern American South, the Civil Rights movement, and music and mass media in America and the Atlantic world. He is the author of *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (University of California Press, 1998), which won half a dozen awards, including the James A. Rawley Prize of the Organization of American Historians, and of *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* (University of Florida, 2004). He is now working on several projects, including a study of the historical links, real and imagined, between the American South and British popular music in the postwar era.

NATALIE ZACEK is a joint appointment in American Studies and History. Her primary research area is colonial America, and she has published articles in *Slavery and Abolition* and *Journal of Peasant Studies*. She has just completed her first book manuscript, *Dangerous Tenants: Conflict and Community in a Colonial British American World, 1670-1776*. She is working on a new project on the social and cultural meaning of the thoroughbred in colonial and antebellum Virginia. She sits on the executive committee of the British Group in Early American History.

PLEASE STAY IN TOUCH!

We hope that you have enjoyed this inaugural issue of our newsletter. If you would like to receive subsequent editions of MAST electronically, please let us have your current email address and we will send you a copy. Please drop us a line at: mast@manchester.ac.uk

We would also like to know what you've been up to since leaving Manchester and give you the opportunity to share any ideas, memories, incriminating photographs, or questions you may have about Manchester American Studies, possibly for inclusion in a later issue of MAST.

MANCHESTER AMERICAN STUDIES NETWORK

If you are interested in joining a social network of people associated with American Studies at Manchester, please get in touch with us. We are in the early stages of trying to establish an informal network of former faculty and students that will meet periodically in Manchester. Again, the email address is: mast@manchester.ac.uk

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Manchester American Studies Times

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YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW



Jones, and Bob Burchell were all seminal figures in the emergence of American Studies as a serious academic discipline in this country and all occupied professorial chairs at Manchester. Similarly, Godfrey Kearns, on the verge of retirement after some 40 years of service -- and the subject of a fascinating interview in this edition of MAST -- embodies the commitment to teaching excellence that has characterized American Studies at Manchester since its inception.

Equally important, MAST provides a welcome opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of our students. We are very proud of our alumni - the 3,000 or so students who have passed through American Studies programmes of one sort or another at Manchester. Many have gone on to excel in their chosen careers and we can boast important academics, authors, business leaders, editors, educators, lawyers, musicians, and even members of the FBI's most wanted list among our most eminent graduates. In each issue of the newsletter we hope to feature at least one interview with a former student, asking them to reflect on their experience of doing American Studies at Manchester. This edition features Alison Pressley, author of several books about growing up in Britain during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Elsewhere in the Newsletter there is information on how you might get in touch with us - and each other -- to reminisce on your time as students and share information about your post-Manchester lives and careers.

MAST will also provide updates on the state of the American Studies programme from current undergraduate and graduate students at Manchester. In this edition we have comments from Rob Butler, fresh from his time as an exchange student at Berkeley; Laura Schweitzer, who explains why she came all the way from Chicago to study for her MA at Manchester; and Jennie Chapman, who has all the inside scoop on the programme having earned her BA and MA at Manchester before embarking on a PhD in American Studies.

Each of these students testifies to the vibrancy and ambition of American Studies at Manchester. As you can judge from the Faculty Profiles in this Newsletter, we are now strong - stronger than we have been for more than a generation -- in terms of both the number and the calibre of the faculty working in the subject area, as well as in terms of the range and quality of research and teaching we do. We continue to attract enormous numbers of good applicants at undergraduate level and have in recent years significantly expanded our postgraduate community - a trend which we hope will continue with the re-branding of our MA to include both 'history' and 'literature and culture' pathways. At the same time, we have managed to preserve the commitment to interdisciplinarity that has always been a hallmark of Manchester's approach to American Studies.

I hope that you will enjoy the contents of this, the inaugural edition of MAST.

Brian Ward
Professor of American Studies

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AMERICAN STUDIES PRIZES

Thanks to the generosity of the Kaiser Trust, for most of the past decade we have been able to award the annual A&M Kaiser prize, worth £500, for outstanding undergraduate project work in American History. We are very pleased to announce that the Trust has recently agreed to fund this award for a further five years.

We also have two other prizes at our disposal to reward outstanding undergraduate achievement in the American Studies degree programme. In 2007, the Kandel Prize, named for Isaac Kandel, the very first holder of a Chair in American Studies at Manchester - indeed the first professor of American Studies in Great Britain - was awarded to Mariel Croft. The Welland Prize is named for Dennis Welland, who between 1965 and 1983 was Manchester's first Professor of American Literature. It was awarded in 2007 to Emma McMurray.



GODFREY (‘THE GODFATHER’) KEARNS LOOKS BACK ON HIS VENERABLE CAREER

GODFREY KEARNS is by far the longest-serving member of American Studies staff. His courses in twentieth-century American literature, drama, and culture have proved enormously popular over the years. Here, Eithne Quinn interviews him about his experiences at Manchester.

When did you first become a lecturer at Manchester?

I started lecturing in American Studies in 1966, following my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in English Literature here at Manchester. It was only a couple of years after the Department of American Studies was launched.

Why did you choose to specialize in American Studies?

I had always read American literature and liked it. There wasn't much potential to take American lit courses back then, beyond a very generalized survey course. From 1964, the year I graduated, all that changed with the arrival of a cluster of senior Americanists. So I decided to pursue my interests in the comic hero in recent American fiction.

How did you find your first year of teaching?

Frightening! I was only a couple of years older than them, and they seemed very bright. Actually, I happened to have Pete Messent and Phil Melling in my very first year, who have both gone on to be leading American Studies academics in the UK. It was an exciting challenge.

What was the model of American Studies when it was launched at Manchester?

Really, it was American Studies in a traditional sense. There were appointments in US history, literature, and political science, and students would take courses in each of these separate disciplines. Then, in the final year, there was an interdisciplinary course called Thought and Society that brought it all together. Ethnicity and immigration were seen as big parts of American Studies in the early years, but not so much since.

Part of what made America exceptional?

That's right.

Did you find students more radical in the late 1960s?

There seemed to be more of a drive to change things in students back then -- particularly in the early Seventies. One American Studies graduate actually became one of the most wanted Weathermen. I think the political feeling was a knock-on effect of radicalization elsewhere -- more resistance to ideas of American empire, what with Vietnam and so on. It reminds me of the statement made around that time: we were doing less American Studies than Anti-American Studies. But even then, American Studies students were

hard to categorize, politically or any other way. Some were in it for the popular culture, particularly film, some for the literature, some for history. So it's hard to generalize about their political leanings. That's the beauty of American Studies.

And were you yourself radicalized by events of the 1960s? Did it inform your perspective on America?

The Vietnam War always intrigued me. Not so much the right and wrong of it, but the war literature and anti-war literature it produced. People might see me as conservative (with a small 'c', I hasten to add!) because my attitudes were often driven by the literature. But there were certain specific events that had a very strong influence. In terms of sheer awfulness, I would say the secret bombing of Cambodia, ordered by Nixon in 1969. To my mind that was the worst crime of American foreign policy of the last fifty years. I was fascinated by the literary and sociological interpretations of that event.

What do you consider to be the most influential novel of post-war America?

If I had to choose one, it would be Catch 22 (Joseph Heller). It was very influential -- it reflected and actually foretold, in many ways, the world as we know it. It provides a script for the Vietnam War and ultimately the war in Iraq. Its vision was very prescient in terms of the abuse of language, dangers of bureaucracy, absurdity of society, and so on. Some may now see it as dated, but it was an absolute original. Any book title that goes into the language is clearly significant -- even people who haven't read it know what 'catch 22' means.

And in terms of more recent US fiction, what do you consider influential?

Probably, I would have to say that the best novel since 1980 is Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian. I thought it was stunning. Stylistically, it was a tour de force. Thematically, a penetrating examination of the West. It's the nearest contemporary thing to Faulkner and Melville. There is all this influence behind it and yet it manages to convert it in an individual direction. Simultaneously, I like the sheer pizzazz of Middlesex (Jeffrey Eugenides) and The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay (Michael Chabon). There's been a strong return of narrative, I think.

Some of those novels featured on your immensely popular 'decades' courses. As an ex-student myself, I loved your 'America in the 1960s and 1970s' course. How did those courses materialize?

I first started the 'decades' courses in the early 1970s, together with Dennis Cashman, with a course called 'America in the 1960s', which was essentially an interdisciplinary course about what was then contemporary America. The idea was always to start with the text and move outwards to the contexts. To my mind, theory-based courses often do the opposite, moving from general to specific. But my courses were always text to social context, which I felt opened things up in imaginative ways. The class discussions were often fun because the political crosscurrents added resonance to the literary ideas.

What would you say was the biggest change in the culture of tutorials over the course of your 41 years teaching?

Don't know about the biggest, but the smoking ban in seminars and lectures had a big impact. One lecturer in the Department used to smoke four cigarettes in each lecture! When the university went smoke free, around the year 2000, I came to realize that the place stank!

What was the wackiest encounter you ever had with a student?!

There have certainly been some weird moments. I remember one crazy guy. Big, funny, rugby-type bloke from Wallasey. We were out on his stag night, and when the bar closed at the night's end, he punched the metal grill of the bar, putting his fist almost through it. Then he jumped on the bar, jumped down again, and bit me on the ankle!

Did he draw blood?!

I can't quite remember, but it was a proper bite. It hurt. The next morning I had to give a lecture on The Iceman Cometh. In the middle of the lecture I had one of those surreal moments when it occurred to me that I'd been bitten on the ankle by a student. Hell of a nice guy!

And who was your closest colleague over the years?

That would be Richard Francis -- a great colleague. We taught together for many years. We would not take the rules too seriously! We shared a similar sense of the absurd.

Thanks, Godfrey.



MY YEAR IN SANTA CRUZ

Each year, second-year American Studies students head off to the US on exchange. Our partner institutions include the Universities of California, Massachusetts, Maryland, Illinois, Tennessee, and Missouri. Rob Butler, who graduated in 2006 with First Class Honours, went on a year-long exchange to the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2004-2005. He spoke with Eithne Quinn about his experiences.

Why did you choose to do American Studies?

People are constantly nonplussed when you say you're reading American Studies. They assume it to be a celebration of the US when actually it enables a critical analysis of the most influential country in the world. Maybe that's a cliché, but that's how I saw my course. What appealed to me about American Studies was the range of approaches and perspectives that we could use to look at the US. Like every other English kid, I grew up listening to American music and watching American films and TV shows. It made me want to study America and to go there. With American Studies, I was able to do both.

Did your time on exchange meet your expectations?

I'd been to the US before, so thought I knew what to expect. But it's very different when you're immersed in a culture.

Did you find American students to be very different from your UK peers?

I lived in halls both in the UK and US and found that, emotionally, the American students I lived with tended to be less mature and worldly than at Manchester. Most of them hadn't travelled outside the US, so they saw me as quite different and exotic - "Rob, the crazy English dude!"

What struck you as most different in terms of teaching and learning?

Assessment! At Santa Cruz, we would have what seemed like constant assessment. There was a test in the second week of my California History class. That came as quite a shock after the focus on essays and final exams at Manchester.

Was it a life-changing experience?

Definitely. On a personal level, I'm still with the girlfriend I met there, who is now here on exchange. Intellectually, there is no doubt that I grew during the year. I was able to bring new knowledge and perspectives to my final year of study.

Would you recommend the exchange?

Without doubt.



EXCHANGE IN REVERSE: AN AMERICAN STUDENT ON THE MA

Laura Schweitzer, a native of St. Louis and a graduate of Chicago's Loyola University, came to Manchester in 2006 to enrol on the American Studies MA programme, which she will complete this autumn. She spoke with Natalie Zacek about her experience of studying her own culture from a transatlantic perspective.

How did you hear about the Manchester AS MA? What made you decide to enrol?

In my senior year at Loyola University Chicago I asked my dissertation supervisor and tutors where I should study if interested in cultural theory. Not knowing exactly what department it belonged to, let alone what universities specialised in it, I trusted their judgment and did some online research. After engaging in correspondence with a few of my favourites of the bunch I found that Manchester was the best option for me. Not only was the professor I was in contact with interesting to me, Prof. Ward seemed genuinely interested in what I wanted to do as well. That, combined with the reputation of the University, made me sure there was no place I'd rather go.

How would you describe the American Studies MA?

It was striking to all of us how interesting and passionate the faculty is, but how different everyone's interests and backgrounds are, even within the same specialised subject. There was a great emphasis on reading the most important writers on the subject, not only for information but for gathering styles, approaches, and methods. It all was geared to turn us into mini-academics ourselves, not readers who regurgitate what we think will please our readers. Dolly Parton songs, gay graphic novels, Michael Moore films, Raymond Williams and Gramscian theory, Herman Melville and Flannery O'Connor short stories, analysis of the rhetoric of anti-terrorism speeches and legislation, as well as pictures of civil rights clashes in Alabama are just a few of the texts we use for analysis. The variety of sources and the blending of 'high' and 'low' culture could be mind-boggling if it wasn't so compelling!

What is the topic of your MA thesis?

I'm examining a blues exhibition held at the US Embassy in London in 1963 and sponsored by the US Information Agency, and the role American cultural products have had in spreading and reinforcing American political influence, especially during de-colonization and the Cold War.

What do you see yourself doing after completing the MA?

I'd love to study for my PhD with the University, though I need to take some time off to apply for scholarships/earn money! Once I've completed my work I'd like to work in the music industry, either as an artist/record company liaison, scouting, or related to touring and promotion. I think I've fallen a little bit in love with this city, so I'd like to stay put if I am able to.

What advice would you have to Americans considering AS post grad study in the UK?

The most interesting and rewarding parts of my life have come when I've suspended my sense of comfort for the possibility of greater things to come. England's not that scary and there's a lot to learn here. It's also not so silly to move to Britain to study America! Being in another country offers physical and mental distance and therefore a different perspective on the subject.



ALISON PRESSLEY REMEMBERS MANCHESTER IN THE 1960s

Alison Pressley is the editor of *Good Reading Magazine*, based in Sydney, Australia. After completing her degree in American Studies at Manchester (where her name was Alison Smith) she did a typing course in London as that was the only way women could get into publishing at the time. In 1973 she set off around the world on the Hippie Trail with four friends in a clapped-out old Kombi van. They made it as far as Australia where she built a successful career in book publishing as an editor and publisher with Hamlyn, Methuen, Reader's Digest, Weldon Owen, HarperCollins and Hodder Headline (now Hachette). She has also published four books, and reports she's "now much happier but a lot poorer as a magazine editor." Divorced with one adult daughter, Alison fondly remembers her time doing American Studies at Manchester in the late 1960s. "As I get older I get more and more homesick," she admits. "I will be returning to England for good within the next year, I'm sure."

I'd wanted to study American history and literature for a long time - ever since, I have to admit, my father got me interested in the American West, particularly American Indians, when I was a child. Cowboys and Indians, essentially. In my early teens I used to save pocket money to go into Foyle's bookshop in London and buy the University of Oklahoma Press's books on American Indians by such writers as George Bird Grinnell, Helen Hunt Jackson and Vine Deloria Junior. I lost the lot when I left them with a teacher friend when I set off around the world in 1973 and he magnanimously gave them out to a sixth-form group doing a project on American Indians and never got them back.

Another motivating factor was my feeling that literature has to be read in the context of the society that inspires it: you have to study history to appreciate literature. The American Studies programme at Manchester neatly married these two disciplines.

And, of course, Manchester was very appealing as a place to study. It was considered to offer the best American Studies course; I wanted to return to the north of England (my family had moved down from South Shields to London when I was 13 or so); and I was impressed by the two Professors Dennis Welland and Maldwyn Allen Jones, having read some of their work.

Once I arrived, I became very much enamoured of the literary side of the programme. I have a vivid memory of sitting there being absolutely mesmerised by one tutor talking about William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. There we were, in a Manchester lecture hall, it was probably raining and/or cold outside, and I was totally transported to the languid, drowsy, heat-soaked, heavy atmosphere of the Deep South. It was an extraordinary experience, and it has stayed in my mind for 40 years.

Of the many faculty whose courses I enjoyed, first and foremost was Dennis Welland. He was fabulous, and I was very sad to hear of his death. He treated me as an intelligent adult when I was in fact a callow youth. His wife, also, was a wonderful support. Then there was Godfrey Kearns. He wasn't much older than we were, and we often repaired to the local pub after tutorials for a jar or three. He was such fun. I remember that he was obsessed by *Catch-22*.

Of course, this being the 1960s, we were all caught up to some extent in the tumultuous political and social events that rocked America, though in my case, alas, to a shamefully low extent. I remember how hilarious we all found it that at the height of the Cold War the American Studies and Russian Studies faculties shared a corridor. A contemporary of mine, Pete Messent, went to the Grosvenor Square anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, but I didn't. Pete, who subsequently became a distinguished scholar of American Literature, also became the envy of everyone on the programme when he returned from a summer holiday in America clutching a slew of amazing new albums by bands like Big Brother and the Holding Company and the Mothers of Invention. Great Stuff!

Looking back, I wasn't daft, and I was aware of things like Vietnam, the civil rights and black power struggles, and the urban riots. But I was also so caught up in the reality of being a privileged 1960s student that I spent an awful lot of my time in Manchester stoned out of my tree. Sad but true. That said, I do remember where I was in June 1968 when I heard about the assassination of Robert Kennedy -- in a basement flat in Didsbury -- just as I remember where I was when his older brother was assassinated in 1963. Interestingly, I really wasn't all that aware of the women's liberation movement then - that only hit home for me in the early 1970s, with the publication of *The Female Eunuch*.

Studying the history, literature and culture of a country is one thing; experiencing it first-hand is often quite different. I first visited the US and Canada the year before I went to Manchester. I went as the daughter of cartoonist Doug Smith, then with the *London Evening News* in a contingent of the Cartoonists' Club of Great Britain. It was fantastic fun. We were invited to all kinds of special events, such as a lunch with Henry Heinz IV, a dinner dance with the UK ambassador in Washington, and press parties in New York, Philadelphia and Toronto.

Mostly, I was in awe of the States - finally being where I'd dreamed about all my life. In particular, I loved Philadelphia and New York. But I was also a bit disillusioned by the people, who were nowhere near as friendly as I'd expected. Still, I loved the museums and the buildings and just the very fact of being there.

All in all, I owe a huge debt to my time as an American Studies student. My BA led directly to my first career job, as a book editor employed by the new publishing house Allison & Busby. Because Margaret Busby was black, they published a list of African American books, including Julius Lester's *Look Out Whitey! Black Power Gonna Get Your Mama!* I also remember squiring Seymour Krim around London in the early 1970s to publicise *Shake it for the World*, which we were publishing in England.

Throughout my subsequent career, that grounding in American literature, coupled with my school grounding in English literature, has stood me in such good stead. I am eternally grateful. And, given the enormous influence the US still exerts on the culture, economics, ecology and security of the world, American Studies is becoming more and more relevant, rewarding and essential. More power to Manchester's elbow!

ALISON PRESSLEY

