

# M.A. in Liberal Studies Newsletter

Fall 2023

## Dr. Amanda Frisken Explores the Power of Images

Dr. Amanda Frisken joined the faculty at SUNY Old Westbury in 2000, as a member of the American Studies Department, after completing her PhD in History with a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies at Stony Brook University. Frisken was born in Montreal and grew up on Long Island (in Patchogue), in Cleveland, Ohio, and in Toronto, Canada. She completed a BA in History at McGill University in Montreal. After that, she spent several years at different jobs—working as a part-time teacher, doing Linotype work at an independent newspaper in Queens, NY, writing freelance articles for the Quebec Public Interest Research Group (back in Montreal), and for an educational software company in New York. Her dual status as an American and as a Canadian, and as an immigrant to the US, has shaped her ability to see American society and American history from multiple perspectives. These experiences led her to apply to a master's degree program in Stony Brook's History Department where she also joined the Women's Studies Program, working as a Teaching Assistant for its newly-minted Graduate Certificate program.



Dr. Amanda Frisken

At Stony Brook, Frisken studied with eminent faculty: Prof. Nancy Tomes (who won the Bancroft Prize in 2017 for her book, *Madison Avenue Turned Patients into Consumers*); Prof. Bill Taylor, whose groundbreaking work helped establish cultural history as a subfield; Prof.

Matt Jacobson, who is now the Sterling Professor of American Studies and History at Yale, and others including feminist historian Temma Kaplan, feminist philosopher Eva Kittay, and Nikhil Singh, a scholar of race in American culture, now at NYU.

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## Naiya Edwards Wins 2022-3 Graduate Diversity Fellowship

Naiya Edwards followed her sister to Old Westbury. She observed, “the Excelsior Scholarship incentivized her to stay locally, save money, and be close to home.” She thought she would be a Psychology major, but found that she had “always been a History person,” and was moved by courses with Professors Llana Barber and Jermaine Archer.

Edwards found herself being moved by multiple questions in her studies. The question of freedom, of what freedom means, especially for black

people was one she wanted to investigate. She wondered if there were more radical modes of freedom beyond assimilation. She was very interested in “solidarity movements within the African diaspora, and among people of color.” In the MALS program she has explored the ways in which people have resisted—even in the most injurious social circumstances. Edwards served as a Teaching Assistant for Prof. Keisha Goode (Sociology) in the fall of 2022, and there learned about indigenous

feminisms. She was struck by how indigenous women might choose not to have children, in response to the settler-colonialist society they lived within. Undergraduates found this hard to understand, but she appreciated being able to consider the means by which, even if apparently dark, that people choose to resist oppression.

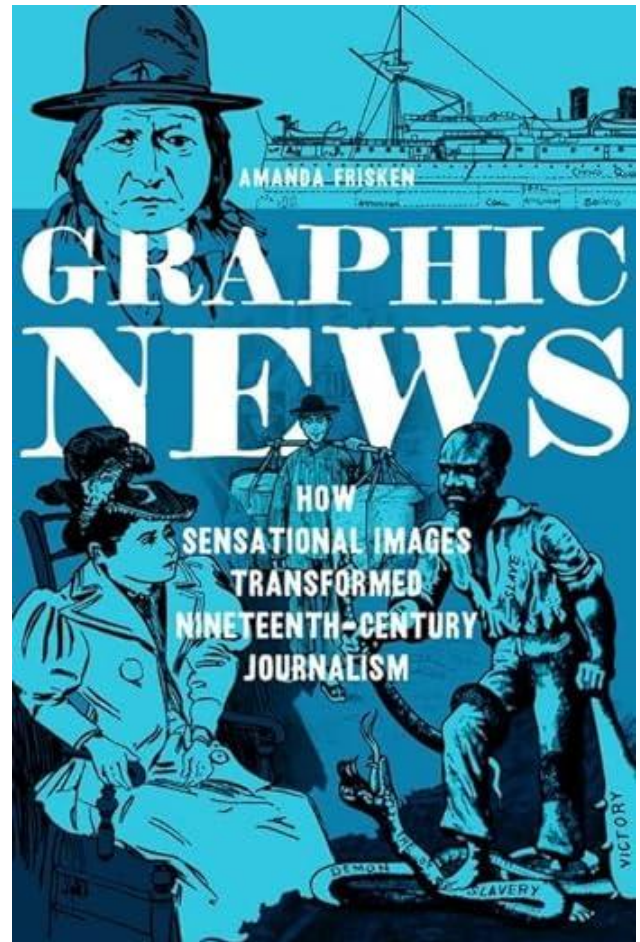
Old Westbury's MALS program seemed an obvious choice to Edwards given her interest in interdisciplinary

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**Frisken, cont'd from p. 1** Frisken's interest in visual imagery grew out of her work as a Teaching Assistant in History and in Women's Studies, where she first came across Victoria Woodhull, in the famous Thomas Nast representation of Woodhull, known as "Mrs. Satan." Fascinated by the idea of Woodhull, and the power of this single, infamous image, Frisken became intrigued by the ability of images to convey not just meaning, but entire narratives about a particular morality. She realized that a single image can be far more persuasive, and, because it offers a visual version of reality, can effectively change history.

Frisken's interest in Woodhull, based on the power of that one image, led her to place Woodhull at the center of her doctoral dissertation. Woodhull became a way to analyze the 1870s through sources from American media: reputable newspapers, high-status weekly journals, and also working-class "sporting papers" that featured salacious stories and, most importantly, images. Then, as now, concerns with "obscenity" and social class permeated the American media landscape. Woodhull, who was the first woman to run for President in the US, was at the nexus of many of the controversies of the time. Frisken connected Woodhull's roles in the American labor movement, the suffragist movement, in the business world (she ran a Brokerage House on Wall Street), and in her advocacy of "Free Love" by a close analysis of the public media representations of Woodhull, women, workers, and sexual mores. A revised version of that dissertation was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2004 as *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America*.

Frisken's second book, *Graphic News: How Sensational Images Transformed 19<sup>th</sup> Century Journalism* (University of Illinois Press, 2020), expanded her investigations of how specific imagery (often highly objectionable to polite society at the time) transformed how Americans have come to see, read—to "consume"—images and therefore how readers understand the news. Again, taking a thematic approach, Frisken analyzed how "sensationalism" played out in the realms of race, ethnicity, crime, genocide, and domestic violence. Her research uncovered the early role of sensationalist imagery in the creation of publishing empires of the Pulitzer and Hearst papers. Sensationalist images not only distorted and stereotyped women, Italians, Chinese immigrants, and Native Americans, but also used images of violent assaults, lynchings, murders, and honor killings to further political goals. Newspapers hired famous artists to transform the peaceful Ghost Dance of the northern Paiute people to appear as a war dance, ultimately being used to justify the massacre at Wounded Knee. Images also were available to



create counter-narratives, as African American newspapers strove to use wholesome, positive imagery to counteract pervasive lynching imagery.

Frisken's teaching is directly connected to her research, and MALS students taking Frisken's Spring 2024 course, *AS 6331 Media as History*, will learn through primary source materials how critical understanding the history of media is to, as Frisken put it, "how democracy works, and how we interact socially, politically, culturally." The course will examine how emerging technologies in each historical period have influenced how we understand the news, and also how longstanding practices continue to be relevant, despite new technologies. Though a scholar of print media, Frisken will also introduce students to a wide range of media forms. Radio, for example, "had a power that is insidious, and yet it's a friendly source," bringing the world into seemingly homelike environments. The course will look at Spanish community radio, and the infamous instance of Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* broadcast, in which listeners became convinced that a Martian invasion of Earth was underway.

Prof. Frisken founded the MALS program, which began to enroll students in 2015, in part because of her own

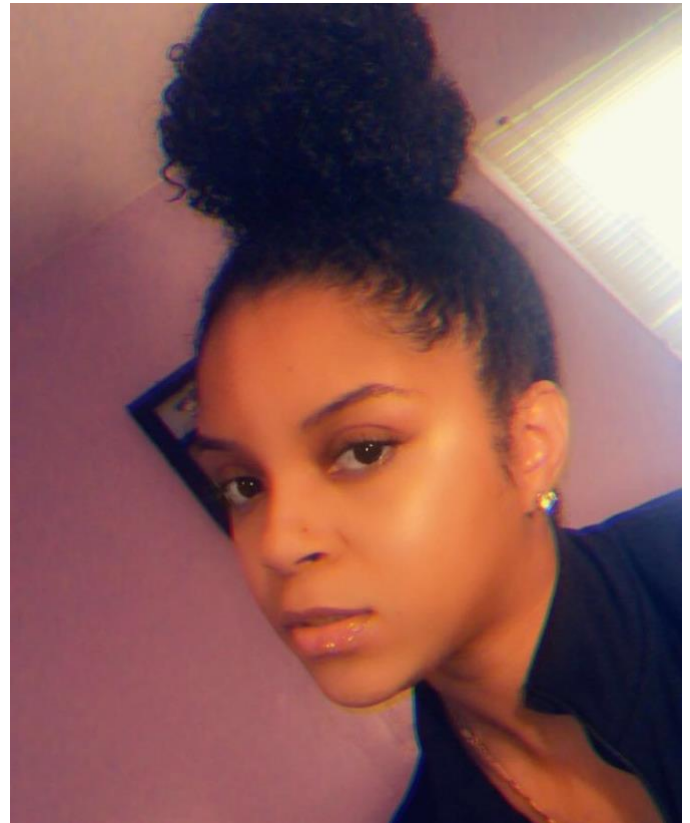
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## Edwards Awarded Graduate Diversity Fellowship Cont'd from p. 1

scholarship. She knew professors pushed her thinking, and she loves Old Westbury's small classes, which allow for more of a dialogue than in a typical undergraduate course. Working on a thesis has really helped Edwards hone her research skills. She sees that writing is rewriting—as an undergraduate “your first draft is often your last.” For her thesis she is writing multiple drafts

Haitian refugee struggles motivate Edwards's thesis, which she is writing under the supervision of Dr. Llana Barber. She narrowed her subject down to African-American solidarity with Haitians, specifically how African Americans opposed racist immigration policies. She said, “There are a lot of diaspora wars between ethnic groups. It's heart breaking, ridiculous. We're bickering, yes, but I'm trying to push back against the myth that we can never be united.” Edwards is looking at African-American newspapers from the 1970s through the 1990s, focusing upon national campaigns and the Congressional Black Caucus. She's done archival research as well—visiting the Schomburg Library in Harlem. She said the archivists there “are very strict, you can't hold [papers] up, you have to keep [them] on the table.” At the Schomburg she reviewed asylum claims from Haitians who had been interdicted by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The real challenge in writing her thesis is dealing with “so much information. What's important to keep, what to discard?” Edwards has loved learning that “the diaspora wars,” are not a new problem, but a concern that stretches back decades. She loves discovering how the African American community has explored questions of what role they should play in standing up for others' freedom, but also misconceptions, such as Haitian



**Naiya Edwards,**  
**Graduate Diversity Fellowship Winner**

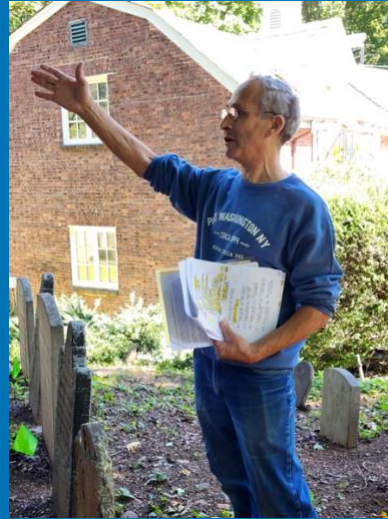
immigrants might “take jobs, or further push African Americans down the economic ladder.”

Edwards hopes to use her thesis to propel her into a doctoral program in African American studies, and is currently exploring programs at Northwestern, Brown, Cornell, Rutgers, and the University of Massachusetts. In acknowledgement of Edwards's excellence as a MALS student, she received the Graduate Diversity Fellowship in 2022-2023.

## Friskin Explores the Power of Images Cont'd from p. 2

experience of making the decision to go to graduate school. Despite encouragement from her family, the possibility of sampling graduate study without committing to a pre-conceived idea about a career was challenging. The MALS degree program offers something that she wishes had existed for her. She designed the program to be the kind where you “could on a casual basis take a degree, where you don't have cast-iron interests” up front. As she sees it, “MALS is a good program for adult students because it was designed that way.” For her, the favorite aspect of the program is the “flexibility of being able to take what you want.”

Friskin also feels the MALS degree offers something that wasn't previously available at Old Westbury; in MALS students take graduate seminar coursework with stellar faculty “who people might not even know are nationally recognized scholars.” But she believes the students to be the most important ingredient of the MALS program: “the students are amazing—every seminar [is] filled with wonderful, diverse people, from many careers, perspectives. They live in the city, they live on Long Island, they have deep conversations; they're the best feature of the program.”



## MALS Student Glen DeSalvo Offers Tour of Sand Family Burial Ground for Local Historical Society

Glen DeSalvo, lifelong resident of Port Washington, serves as the treasurer of the Cow Neck Peninsula Historical Society. He has conducted research on those buried at the Sands Family Burial Ground; Revolutionary-era war soldiers, farmers, and the founder of Brooks Brothers are interred within the cemetery. DeSalvo gave the tour for members of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Access to the burial ground is only available through the Historical Society.

**If you have completed 15 credits towards your MALS degree, please speak with the Graduate Director, Prof. Carol Quirke, [quirkec@oldwestbury.edu](mailto:quirkec@oldwestbury.edu) to discuss an internship or a thesis.**



## MALS Alumnus Kevin Horton '22, Adjunct Faculty at New York Institute of Technology

Kevin Horton began his graduate career at SUNY Old Westbury “on a whim.” He had been teaching at New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) and thought the master’s credential would help secure his job prospects. Horton was the editor and publisher of the former local paper, the *Gold Coast Gazette*. He teaches *Fundamentals of Composition*, and courses supporting the Institute’s newspapers, initially *The Campus Slate*, and now *The Manhattan Globe*. Describing himself as “a typical Long Islander,” he was loathe to drive to NYIT’s New York City campus where he advises the *Globe*, but has enjoyed the city’s vibrancy. Old Westbury’s MALS program provided him courses to support him in his role. He states the electives, “courses that I never really thought of taking” such as VA6330 *Curating* or AS6370 *Monsters Below the Border* and the teaching he witnessed made Old Westbury’s MALS program a standout.

# MALS Graduates—2023



**Sudha Begari,  
Imani Johnson, and  
Imani Newman during the  
2023 graduation ceremony**



**President Sams with Sudha Begari (Above)**

**Imani Newman walks the stage while Imani Johnson  
receives her diploma from Pres. Sams (Right)**



**Prof. Barber with Sudha Begari**



**Profs. Quirke & Frisken with Imani Johnson & Sudha Begari**

# Spring 2024 MALS Classes

Classes in Yellow are MALS specific courses

## Monday, 4:30-7 p.m.

Prof. Deepa Jani, *EL6540 Topics in World Literature*, CRN #41147

Prof. Chelsea Shields-Mas, *HI 6540 Topics in European History*, CRN #41149

## Tuesday 4:30-7 p.m.

Prof. Kyle Anderson, *HI6540 Topics in Islamic Civilization*, CRN #41604

Prof. Fernando Guerrero *ML6530 Cervantes and the Golden Age*, CRN #41143

## Wednesday, 4:30-7 p.m.

Prof. Christopher Hobson, *EL6530 Topics in Multicultural Literature*, CRN #41146 (online course)

Prof. Caroline Cocca, *HI6520 US Constitutional and Political History* CRN #41148

## Thursday, 5:15-7:15 p.m.

Prof. Amanda Frisken, *AS6331 Media as History* CRN #41605

## Fully Online-Asynchronous Internet courses

Prof. Ruben Gonzalez *ML6540 Points of Contact: US and Latin America*, CRN #41144



**Incoming 2023 Masters of Liberal Studies (MALS) students:** Back, L-R, Joshua Piche, Xiaocheng Zhou, Glen DeSalvo, Lillian Horn, Maria Palmer, Chethzain Smith, Maria Liotino. Front, L-R, Joseph Higgins, Christian Sandoval, Lily Mancini, Gianna DeLillo. The MALS program boasts students who have just graduated, students working in real estate, teaching, and health care, and even students who have retired.