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BY THE BOOK

In recently published new works, UNLV faculty authors examine the century-long struggle to preserve America's national parks, college students as taste-making fashionistas, the movement for understanding and acceptance of those born intersex, and the cultural legacy of post-9/11 literature.

BY DAN MICHALSKI

Conserving America's National Parks: 1916-2016, Celebrating 100 Years of Conservation, Commitment, and Care

Scott Abella
CreateSpace

Scott Abella, an assistant professor in the School of Life Sciences at UNLV, is quickly becoming one of the nation's foremost authorities on the National Park Service (NPS) and the many challenges it faces in protecting and maintaining America's "crown jewels." His first book, *Conserving America's National Parks*, draws from his extensive research background to examine the history of conservation and restoration in the park system, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in August 2016.

When President Woodrow Wilson signed legislation creating the agency that became the National Park Service a century ago, there were nine national parks. Today the NPS manages 59 national parks and hundreds of other important



publically owned treasures—among them national recreation areas, seashores, monuments, scenic highways, scenic riverways, historic sites, prehistoric sites, battlefields, and other federally protected parcels. From the beginning, the Park Service’s mission has been “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” Fulfilling this mandate has never been easy, but today’s challenges seem particularly daunting: overcrowding, climate change, invasive non-native plant species, fires, flooding, and disparities between predators and prey.

To tell the story, Abella parsed through thousands of academic papers and documents, conducted interviews with park rangers and staff, and rummaged through old files of different park properties. The book includes more than 250 photos and dozens of maps, charts, graphs, and tables.

Abella says his aim was to help readers see how conservation and restoration work has

continually assisted in the maintenance of parks’ wild and scenic character. He includes examples from the very earliest of projects to the front lines of today’s work, such as the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone, the intentional removal of non-native plants and python snakes in the Florida Everglades, and the dismantling of Washington State’s Elwha Dam to restore natural water flow. That last project, Abella points out, was the world’s largest dam removal project and took nearly 20 years of planning. “You can’t just blow up something like that,” Abella says.

Abella also provides a compelling picture of what state-of-the-art conservation has to offer. He shows, for example, what Glacier National Park reveals through its disappearing ice sheet. He explains how tree rings from a fallen sequoia in its namesake national park provided hard data on more than 500 years of regional climate history. And he details how satellite imagery of Lake Mead can tell a 30-year story of an entire region’s water struggles.

The threats our national parks face can

sometimes seem overwhelming, Abella says. But there is reason for optimism.

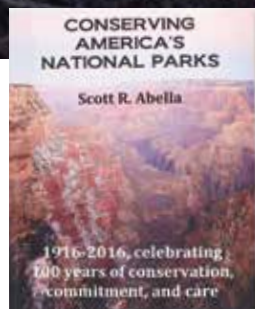
“The permanency of these parks is pretty amazing,” Abella says. “There’s been tremendous political turnover in the last century—44 changes of Congress and 27 presidents with some very different ideologies—but these parks are stable. If there’s one area in which there’s been national consensus, it’s in preserving these special places.”

Abella’s first job at UNLV began in 2006. Through independent grant funding, he worked for six years as an associate professor conducting studies funded by several conservation organizations. When the economy turned and funding began to dry up, he left the university to become an ecologist with the National Park Service. His time away would be short-lived, however, as grant funding from the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research program (EPSCoR) allowed Abella to rejoin the UNLV faculty in 2015.

Abella’s specializations in restoration ecology and fire ecology are high-demand research areas.

ADVENTURES PAST THE PAGE

In addition to writing his book on national parks, Scott Abella has been giving talks to raise the public's awareness about current conservation issues.



The National Park Service has previously funded Abella to plan, write, and execute plant-management restoration plans for park service lands in Texas and New Mexico. More recently, he received funds from the California State Office of

the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to lead a collaboration with the U.S. Geological Survey and University of California, Riverside. In total, his research team has been funded through 2019 with awards totaling \$700,000.

Abella's work extends beyond the borders of the protected lands he researches. A project in Glen Canyon, for example, includes support for a graduate student of Hualapai ancestry whose role involves identifying native plants that appear in the oral histories of her tribe.

"I really try to bring research into the classes I teach," Abella says. "The more we can do that, the more we open doors for UNLV along with the minds and eyes of our students."

Abella says he's also excited to see that his book is making its way into parks' visitor centers and gift shops. *Conserving America's National Parks* appears in eight shops already, including those at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and Great Basin National Park in Nevada. It is also under review for inclusion on the shelves of several other shops.

As one can imagine, there's no shortage of beautiful books about our national parks. But few aim to do what Abella has accomplished.

"I tried to make this book an educational reference that both enlightens and entertains," Abella says, "with real examples of projects from national parks that help readers understand the issues defining contemporary conservation."

Dress Casual: How College Students Redefined American Style

Deirdre Clemente
University of North Carolina Press

Long before casual Fridays were even a concept, the United States was ready to loosen its tie. A new book by Deirdre Clemente, associate professor of history at UNLV, argues that America's path toward more versatile fashion and relaxed clothing styles began taking place more than a century ago—with college students leading the cultural charge.

"Casual dress is the uniform of the American middle class," Clemente says. "On a global scale, casual dress is American dress. T-shirts, jeans, tennis shoes, sweaters—American college students popularized these styles now worn around the world."

In *Dress Casual: How College Students Redefined American Style*, Clemente recounts the sartorial history of upwardly mobile youth in institutions of higher learning—specifically that of students enrolled between the years of 1900 and 1970. Clemente's research specialty is the 20th century, but her expertise has given her a prominent voice on all eras of fashion. In the pages of publications such as *The Atlantic*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*, she has weighed in on everything from period attire to Marco Rubio's high-heeled boots and has served as a go-to media source for others whenever a fashion trend finds its way into the news.

"I'm not a fashion historian," she specifies. "I'm a cultural historian who studies fashion. I probably care the least about the

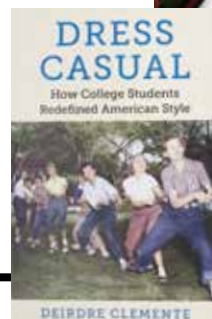
clothing itself. I care about the people in the clothing, and it's a different set of documents that tells that story."

Clemente is also associate director of UNLV's Public History program, an initiative aimed at providing students with a background in the practical application of historical research. Among her responsibilities is setting up partnerships within the Las Vegas community that allow program participants to integrate coursework with real-world "applied-history" opportunities, typically with groups such as Preserve Nevada, a UNLV-affiliated nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of state historic and cultural sites.

Dress Casual highlights a convergence of fashion and consumerism at six universities that served as Clemente's case studies: Princeton, Radcliffe, Penn State, Spelman, Morehouse, and the University of California at Berkeley. This sample, she says, provided a broad perspective for analysis of the roles of race, class, and gender. Collectively, it's a story of how changing student demographics began to alter the culture of higher education, a change that soon came to influence the taste and cultural practices of America's burgeoning middle class. In many ways, she argues, it was a transition reflected in and driven by the advent of casual clothing.

FASHION BACKWARD

Deirdre Clemente took a look back in time at college students' apparel to decipher how we arrived at today's fashion trends.



In the early to mid-20th century, with higher education opening doors to students other than white elites, clothing manufacturers sent “trend scouts” to college campuses to figure out what the younger generation was into. This marketing research produced a trove of documents that provided the bulk of her source material—order forms, trip reports, internal memos, design sketches—as textile capitalists attempted to profit from those who would later be labeled as the Greatest Generation, and then the Baby Boomers.

Complementing these documents were personal letters. An early example is one from a Cal Berkeley student at the beginning of the 20th century, a young woman writing to her mom saying her “patent kid leather” shoes weren’t rugged enough to handle Berkeley’s hills and unpaved streets. Another student, this one a Princeton undergraduate on a tight budget, wrote to his mother almost daily about his fashion anxieties.

“These student letters were so valuable. They showed the real personal side of these clothes, and they help us understand the real and practical use of clothes that would spark the casual fashion trends,” Clemente says.

American casualness came from necessity, she contends, as students sought more control of their time. This led to the adoption of sportswear—sport coats, tennis shoes, cardigan sweaters, and eventually shorts—allowing students to go from one activity to the next without having to change clothes or, in the case of sweaters, identify with a particular sports club. The trends started with the moneyed elites, who were more comfortable snubbing authority (wearing golf knickers in the dining hall, for example).

By the time middle-class students at state universities began adopting a casual approach, however, a backlash from school administrators ensued. This only served, Clemente writes, to inject a spirit of rebellion in some fashion choices.

Regional differences existed as well, Clemente says; for example, “the sartorial proprieties of Eastern society, such as wearing an evening coat with formal wear, never traveled far.”

At the historically black colleges Clemente examined, African-American students experienced a much different dynamic. “Proper dress” was deeply ingrained in the academic culture of these institutions, with more advanced students tending to enforce a strict dress code. It took years before casualness found its way into dorm rooms.

For Clemente, it was a passion for F. Scott Fitzgerald that sparked her initial interest in early 20th-century history and the related styles. Since arriving in Las Vegas, Clemente has been a

sought-after consultant on historical projects, including the Oscar-winning film *The Great Gatsby*. She also wrote text for a Sinatra exhibit at the Las Vegas Convention Center, consulted on a display of Liberace’s most flamboyant costumes, and has helped set up exhibits and student projects with the Nevada State Museum.

Clemente’s most recent project involves an exhibition at the Mob Museum in downtown Las Vegas. “Ready to Roar: Women’s Evening Wear in the Prohibition Era,” opened in November and runs through January 2017. It presents pre-flapper fashions from the 1920s that include hats, pins, scarves, skirts with (slowly) rising hemlines, and the stylistic metal accessories of Art Deco.

During the previous year, UNLV students played a key role in making the exhibit a reality. They used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media to crowdsource authentic items for display. In the spring, they worked to research the history of the period. During the summer, they held museum internships. In the fall, they teamed up with Mob Museum curators to bring the exhibition to life.

“Las Vegas is such a dynamic place without a lot of roadblocks getting in your way when you have a good idea,” Clemente says. “I have more people who want exhibitions than I am able to fill.”

Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis

Georgiann Davis
New York University Press

When UNLV sociology professor Georgiann Davis began hearing political debate about “bathroom bills,” she couldn’t help but shake her head.

New legislation recently introduced in several states has sought to require students in public schools to use gender-specific facilities, with gender determined by their chromosomes and external anatomy at birth. For Davis, who is intersex, abiding by such statutes would prove impossible.

“The idea that my body can be neatly categorized into one sex or another is flat out illogical,” Davis says, adding that many of these bathroom laws fail to take into account the complexities of sex and gender. Because of their wording and the way she was born—with anatomical traits that don’t fit in a traditional male-female binary—the laws would prohibit her from using either restroom.

While she finds the intense national focus on bathrooms a bit absurd, she adds that the debate does point to the work ahead for the intersex

advocacy community, which is striving to find its voice in social and political discourse.

Davis seeks to inform this discourse with her recent book, *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis*, which describes the circumstances of people born “intersex”—with traits that are neither exclusively male nor female.

In *Contesting Intersex*, Davis introduces some of the key intersex issues through personal narrative; her own journey provides an effective framework for discussing the medical history of intersex. But the book goes well beyond her own experiences to tell the stories of others also living with intersex as well as the unfolding history of an emergent group of activists attempting to define a community that is larger than many once believed.

Davis began researching the subject of intersex in 2008 for her doctoral dissertation, which she eventually transformed into the book. She conducted in-depth interviews with 65 research subjects—intersex people, their families, advocates, and medical experts. Through the interview, she began to glean a more thorough understanding of issues at play as well as the commonalities and differences among intersex individuals.

By definition, intersex includes up to 30 conditions related to sex “ambiguity.” Davis has Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, which for her meant being born with external female genitalia as well as typically male XY chromosomes and undescended testes. Many other intersex variations exist, determined at birth by either genital, chromosomal, or hormonal characteristics that fall somewhere on a spectrum biologically between male and female. By contrast, transgender refers to people who are born with typical male or female anatomies but feel limited by the sex binary, and, in some cases, elect to alter their bodies through hormone therapies or gender confirmation surgeries.

Davis hesitates to quantify the occurrence of intersex traits—data are still too incomplete to be scientifically valid—but currently accepted conservative estimates suggest that at least one in 2,000 people are born with an intersex trait, some of which don’t become apparent until puberty.

What is certain is that intersex individuals, archaically known as hermaphrodites, are far more prevalent in society than previously recognized, she says.

Davis grew up as a typical kid in the Chicago-land area in the 1980s and ’90s. As a child, she played teacher to a classroom of Cabbage Patch dolls and stuffed animals; in kindergarten, she dressed up as a football player for Halloween. Punky Brewster was her preteen TV hero.

EDUCATING, ADVOCATING

In addition to her book on the subject, Georgiann Davis delivered a TEDx talk at UNLV on the subject of intersex, sharing her story through a presentation titled "This Girl Has Balls."



Davis had no particular medical issues until age 13, when she experienced unrelated abdominal pain that left her mother slightly concerned that she hadn't started menstruating. That's when doctors would learn that she was intersex, as X-rays revealed a lack of ovaries, uterus, and fallopian tubes, and genetic tests found a chromosomal makeup that was XY, not XX. But she would know none of this before having a surgery that she believed at the time was for removing dangerously precancerous ovaries. A few years later, however, when moving across town to be nearer to a boyfriend, a routine process of transferring medical records revealed the truth: What the doctors really removed were testes.

"It scared me to death," she says. "I threw those records away. I never wanted to see them again or talk about them with anyone. I felt abnormal, like a freak."

At the time, she never could've imagined she'd spend so much time talking about her genetic makeup later in life. She has written about the subject extensively in *Contesting Intersex* and delivered a TEDx talk at UNLV, in which she shared her story via a presentation titled "This Girl Has Balls."

A key focus of her book is on the role of the pediatric medical establishment. References to intersex traits in medical journals date back to the 1800s. By the 1950s, leading doctors from Johns Hopkins were beginning to routinely perform medical procedures to quickly "correct" intersex traits. Surgical and hormonal interventions became standard treatment, with parents and

doctors agreeing to keep diagnoses secret, believing doing so had psychological benefits. These practices have persisted.

"It's happening today. There are intersex kids getting surgeries to 'fix' something that they are not even aware of," she says. "The practice of forced surgeries is something we need to stop, especially when the diagnosis isn't completely disclosed."

What made the real change for Davis came not from her surgery but from the discovery that as an intersex person, she was not alone. Carrying her own secret quietly, Davis was in a feminist theory class as a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago when she learned there was an active and welcoming intersex community.

One commonality she found among intersex people was being lied to by doctors and parents about medically unnecessary, irreversible surgeries.

Now as an adult and professor, Davis sees herself as uniquely positioned to bridge the gaps among the intersex and medical communities and the public. In addition to writing the book, she has penned op-eds and other articles about intersex people and intersex lives. She served as president of the Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome – Differences of Sex Development Support Group from 2014-2015 and is currently a board member of interACT Advocates for Intersex Youth.

In her book, Davis argues that influencing change starts with language use.

"The intersex experience shows how rhetoric can influence actions," she says. "It makes a difference. It determines how people see it, how

they treat it, and how society constructs itself around the term."

For instance, doctors no longer "fix" intersex; they now "treat" disorders of sex development. But by calling it a disorder, doctors still give the impression that intersex is an abnormality that can be medically corrected.

"Too often a diagnosis of intersex traits is presented as an emergency, a problem—a problem we can fix with a scalpel," she says. What's important, she adds, is assuring that intersex youth can make informed decisions about their own bodies, which in many cases involves refusing surgeries that have proved to be medically unnecessary.

"I can't go back in time and know how I would've handled learning about being intersex [before the surgery]. But I do know how kids today are handling it," Davis says. "Almost all say they are OK with being intersex. Most embrace their uniqueness. I ask, 'If you could, would you change your intersex trait?' And overwhelmingly they say no, it's who they are."

Davis continues her research on intersex, authoring scholarly articles on a wide range of related subjects. Recently, *Contesting Intersex* was named the 2016 winner of the American Sociological Association's Donald W. Light Award for the Applied or Public Practice of Medical Sociology.

9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness

Tim Gauthier
Lexington Books

Like just about everyone, Tim Gauthier remembers exactly where he was on September 11, 2001. He was at home in Las Vegas, working on the dissertation he would submit to complete his doctorate in contemporary British fiction.

"I pretty much watched TV for the next 10 days straight," recalls Gauthier, now an associate professor in the College of Liberal Arts. His most recent book, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness*, examines novels published after that terrible day—fiction that aims to reveal deeper truths about America's psyche at the start of the 21st century.

"I come at this from a New Historicist's perspective," says Gauthier, referring to a school of literary theory that came to prominence in the 1990s, one characterized by its ecumenical approach to assembling and interpreting historical



writings. New Historicism, he says, has shaped his approach to analysis, if not his outlook on life. “You can look at documents from a period that reflect something about the time they were written. But when you place them side by side—it doesn’t matter if it’s fiction, journalism, or government documents—you get a circulation of social energy that affects how the different texts speak about each other.”

According to Gauthier, literature hasn’t changed a great deal in recent years, but the way scholars study it has. Today’s “postmodern” approach to literary analysis requires knowledge across multiple subject areas. “The study of literature itself has become more multidisciplinary,” he says. Gauthier’s book relies on previous insights from philosophy, history, and cultural studies for its foundation—a pluralistic outlook that transcends the research itself.

9/11 Fiction is not about debunking conspiracy theories. It is instead an exploration of how a selection of post-9/11 authors used fiction to explore the ways in which the attacks have altered our cultural landscape. Gauthier’s book examines 17 novels that weave the events of that fateful day into their storyline. He analyzes these fictional representations as a means of bringing into focus how cultural contexts affect individuals’ perceptions of the day’s events. This includes a subset of French literature and describing how graphic novels provided a unique perspective from Ground

Zero, including one witness account from a woman whose husband started his new job at the World Trade Center on September 10.

“These texts allow us to bring up ideas that, otherwise, we could hardly talk about,” Gauthier says. “The official narratives tend to be constant. But there is always a strand of literature questioning these narratives from different perspectives.”

Gauthier examines the role empathy does or does not play in the construction of these narratives as well as the degree to which the event and its aftermath led to unity or division. The novels he explores reveal the obstacles that often prevent people from acting upon their empathetic impulses. One chapter, for instance, presents narratives written from the perspective of a terrorist. Such texts can be troubling, Gauthier says: “If you can give a reason for why the terrorists did what they did, you can be accused of excusing them.”

Gauthier joined UNLV’s faculty in 2003. An early assignment involved helping launch University College, now the Academic Success Center, an office that connects students with success-promoting resources across campus. He then served as director of Interdisciplinary Degree Programs before transitioning to his current work as director of Multidisciplinary Studies and Social Science Studies.

A belief in the value of multidisciplinary schooling has been rising in academic programming over

the past 10 years, and Gauthier has played a role in promoting these concepts at UNLV. Through interdisciplinary studies, students in the College of Liberal Arts can earn a degree for work that “cannot reasonably be met through existing majors and minors.” These programs allow students to customize their major by combining work from two or more departments—an option, he says, that has appealed to many serious students over the past 10 years. There are nearly 400 students now enrolled in these programs.

“This is more than a double minor,” he insists. “I tell students, ‘You are creating a third thing,’ You are studying ‘philosophy,’ or ‘marketing,’” he says, referring to capstone projects combining math and philosophy or history and marketing, respectively.

The list of possible combinations for scholarly research is virtually endless. To earn a degree, students must immerse themselves in the theoretical models necessary to tie the different disciplines together, then complete a “capstone” project comprised of original research. Gesturing toward a stack of these projects on his desk, Gauthier says, “No two are alike.”

Gauthier currently finds his research pulling him in two different directions. One path is continuing his 9/11-related studies, this time examining literature not included in the *9/11 Fiction*

book that addresses the ongoing “war on terror” as well as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“The story of 9/11 is not over,” he says.

His other interest revolves around a course he introduced in the Honors College this fall, “The Discourse of Contagion.” The class explores the ways in which fears about contamination, immigration, and terrorism are refracted through the lens of contemporary fiction—including stories about zombies.

“The zombie trope challenges notions of purity and embodies our fears of being turned into something ‘other.’ It begins to explain why some believe we need to build walls to keep us safe from invaders, and to root out those others already among us,” says Gauthier, who recently presented a paper on the comic series *The Walking Dead*.

Both interests center around how fiction articulates contemporary anxieties, often unearthing ideas and feelings too easily repressed. “I’m not sure where I’m going with all this, but I am certainly seeing something worth examining,” he adds. “I’m just beginning to flesh it out.”



FACT FROM FICTION Tim Gauthier explored post-9/11 fiction to determine what these stories say about how this tragedy changed us.

