

From November 14 to 17, 2024, I had the privilege of attending the American Studies Association Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, thanks to the travel grant provided by the Japanese Association for American Studies and the American Studies Association. Over four days, I immersed myself in the vibrant academic discussions.

One panel I found particularly engaging was “Racial Capitalism, Gender, and Sexuality,” which explored how capitalism is shaped by normative conceptions and practices of gender, sexuality, kinship, as well as racial ideologies. The panel examined how these intersecting structures influence labor, property, and health systems. Key discussions included the historical exploitation of Black and Native women’s labor in educational institutions and how contemporary cultural productions by marginalized groups challenge the racialized and gendered forces of capitalism. Another inspiring session was the roundtable on “Archiving Incarceration in the U.S.,” which delved into community-led archival efforts documenting the lived experiences of those impacted by incarceration. The presenters emphasized the importance of self-representation for marginalized communities—particularly Black, Indigenous, and other people of color—who have endured state repression. The projects highlighted during this session aimed to resist the erasure of these communities from mainstream narratives, create space for survivors and advocates, and build collective knowledge. They underscored the potential of archives to offer alternatives to the violence of the carceral state and contribute to collective healing.

Baltimore itself offered a vibrant setting for these discussions on social justice. As a graduate student studying the history of the Black Freedom Movement, I took the opportunity to visit several local museums dedicated to African American history. At the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, I explored the African American experience in Maryland and engaged in a meaningful conversation with a museum staff member about teaching history. The museum shop featured the *March* graphic novel series by John Lewis, which I had recently discussed with my students in class in Alabama. At the Lillie Carroll Jackson Civil Rights Museum, I gained deeper insights into the life of Dr. Jackson, a pivotal leader in Baltimore’s civil rights movement. Her leadership in the NAACP and grassroots organizing efforts were brought to life through personal artifacts and compelling exhibits. My journey through Baltimore’s Black history concluded at the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum, where life-sized wax figures creatively depicted the struggles and achievements of Black leaders and movements across centuries. This immersive experience vividly illustrated the enduring legacy of the Black Freedom Movement and its relevance today.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to attend the ASA Annual Meeting in Baltimore. The knowledge and connections I gained will undoubtedly inform my future research and teaching.

ASA Attendance Report

Kei Kato

Attending an ASA annual meeting was an intellectually enriching experience. Throughout my Ph.D. journey, I have been interested in US racial and colonial dynamics both within and beyond its borders. Currently, my research investigates how climate programs focusing on the ocean contribute to the reproduction of US global hegemony. However, while I engaged with American studies during my college years, my recent involvement with the field has been limited. Although I continue to read works by American Studies scholars such as J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Iyko Day, I have not consistently kept up with the latest developments in the field or extensively integrated its theoretical frameworks into my research. Attending ASA reminded me of the critical and rigorous insights American studies offers, encouraging me to renew my commitment to integrating its perspectives into my work.

One key takeaway from attending ASA was realizing how interconnected American studies and my home discipline, geography, are. When reviewing the meeting's program on my way to Baltimore, I was surprised and excited to see so many human geographers' names. Once there, it quickly became apparent why, as I observed numerous conversations closely aligned with geographic theories and concepts, including discussions on environmental and climate justice, the spatiality of racial capitalism, and infrastructure politics. I firmly believe that continuing to cultivate and expand this cross-disciplinary engagement between the fields will unlock exciting opportunities and perspectives. I am eager to contribute to and learn from these intellectual endeavors.

Community engagement is one area of inquiry and practice where I believe the two disciplines can learn significantly from one another. During the ASA-JAAS luncheon and business meeting, I was fortunate to witness Americanists discuss how American studies can/should collaborate with communities. In parallel, there are many critical discussions on this topic within human geography. By enriching the dialogue between these historically interconnected fields, we can cultivate more transformative approaches to engaged scholarship.

The most impactful panel I attended was *Grounding Caring Relations in the Face of Dispossession*. Reflecting on their personal experiences and emotions in research, teaching, and other spheres, the panelists discussed how care is feminist decolonial praxis as a way of grieving, healing, resisting, and refusing. I was deeply moved by Magie Ramírez's reflection on her grieving process since Trump's election. In response, I asked the panel how they situate hope within care, as I have struggled to hold onto hope since that Tuesday. Sofia Zaragocin's response resonated profoundly: "Hope is not dependable. It comes and goes. What we can depend on is care and the networks of care." This very short but powerful statement is now tattooed in my heart.

In closing, I would like to thank ASA-JAAS for awarding me this travel grant. None of these fantastic experiences would have been real without it. I am incredibly grateful to Erwin Mendoza, Jolie Sheffer, Rachel Morse, and everyone else involved in organizing the logistics behind this opportunity. Once again, thank you for making this invaluable experience a reality.