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## Tidings Quarterly Reflection

### **'Canceling' Reality and Trust in Policy Discussion**

BY MAX STEPHENSON JR

Director, Institute for Policy and Governance

My colleagues and I at the Institute have accepted academic responsibility to analyze and to chart America's policy and democratic course. That mission has come to mind often as I continue to reflect on the implications of the January 6 Capitol Hill insurrection for this nation's policy making and democratic health. That event was inspired by former President Donald Trump who has refused to concede his election defeat and whose Big Lie concerning that November 2020 contest has persuaded millions of citizens that the present United States chief executive, Joseph Biden, Jr., is not legitimate. This assertion is extraordinary on its face, but all the more so since it is absolutely and unambiguously without foundation. Nonetheless, Trump and other representatives of his Party continue to embrace and press that claim in their efforts to play to the fears and anxieties of their supporters and to marshal anger to support their quest for power.

In this they are hardly alone. The Fox news/entertainment network and a number of aligned website businesses do the same daily. Together, these entities have helped to create a situation in which not only the national election, but even events such as the mass murders of school children, have been twisted via lies into supposed partisan conspiracies of various stripes. Everything for the GOP and its media allies, increasingly, is about gaining power and harming the supposed "enemy," understood as other U.S. citizens who disagree with whatever the Party or its leader's line may be at the moment. Many individuals who countenance or

otherwise apologize for this egregious situation often claim it to be merely the result of partisan differences. That view is a grievous misunderstanding of what is in play. This situation is not about honest good-faith disagreement about policy priorities or direction. Instead, it concerns whether a demagogue and his Party and allies can mobilize a sufficient number of citizens around lies and fabricated grievances to delegitimize the lawful outcome of a national election. Indeed, all who care about self-governance, irrespective of their partisanship, must now raise their voices to protect the political process that yielded that result and the quest for justice that must accompany it, or risk losing their democracy altogether.

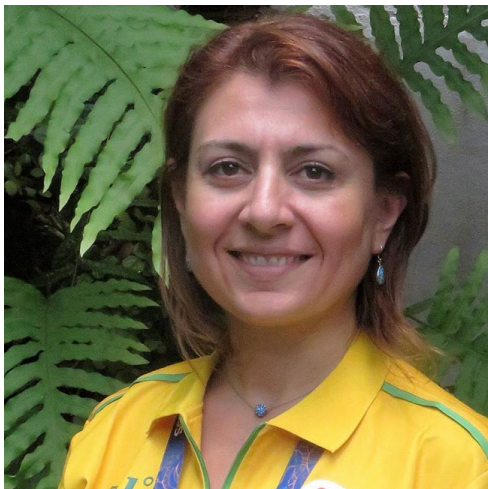
I want to say this as clearly as I can and so repeat: This country is not facing a partisan disagreement or even, as Trump often suggests in his wild rhetoric, catastrophe, because his reelection was stolen from him by some unnamed and vague “them,” for whom the “Dems” or the “Libs” were purportedly responsible. Instead, the nation now confronts a continuing and sustained attack on its efforts to ensure a democratic way of life by the very Party, the GOP, that is feigning outrage over something that never happened. This fact, an abiding and cynically pressed paradox, can be too readily missed because there are so many efforts afoot by the Republican Party and its allies to obscure and trivialize its significance.

[READ MORE](#)

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

IPG members **Mary Beth Dunkenberger**, **Neda Moayerian** and **Laura York** became aware of the **Virginia Medical Reserve Corps** (MRC) through the public health research and technical assistance work done by our institute and now are volunteering to help support personnel at vaccine clinics. To become a VA Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer, submit an application in the **Virginia Volunteer Health System**.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Senior Project Associate **Lyusyena Kirakosyan's** article, "**Media**



The Virginia Tech University  
Exemplary Department or Program

**Portrayal of the Rio 2016 Paralympics: Narrative Patterns in the Brazilian Online News Outlets**

was recently published in *The International Journal of Sport and Society*. This study sought to address the lack of research on the visibility of Paralympic sport and athletes in the Brazilian media and contribute to the scholarly debate concerning media framing of the Paralympic sport and athletes. Her article, "Journalistic Narratives about the Rio 2016 Paralympics: (Re)producing Cultural Values and Social Identities" was also recently published in *The Journal of Communication and Media Studies*. Congratulations, Lyusyena!

Awards committee selected the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) as a 2020 award recipient for the theme of developing and sustaining effective approaches to teaching with a global perspective at the graduate or undergraduate levels. A \$10,000 award will be transferred to the School from the Provost's office. We are happy to be part of this exemplary outfit, and special kudos to our teaching faculty, Professor **Max Stephenson, Jr.** who contributed to SPIA's proposal!



Congratulations to **Carmen Boggs-Parker** of the SPIA Planning, Governance and Globalization PhD program! Carmen successfully defended her dissertation on February 10th, entitled, "Meeting the Self and the 'Other': Intercultural Learning During a Faculty-Led intensive Service Learning Course to Belize." Professor **Max Stephenson, Jr.**, SPIA and VTIPG Director, chaired Carmen's committee and Professor Yang Zhang, SPIA, Professor Dale Wimberley, Department of Sociology and Dr. Nicole Sanderlin, College of Engineering, served as additional committee members. Special thanks to each. Carmen is the 38th



Dr. Jake Keyel, a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in the Honors College and an alumnus of the SPIA PGG program who worked with Dr. Stephenson as he pursued his doctorate, recently had a piece published based on his dissertation, this time in the *Sociological Review* blog. The piece is called: "**How does it Feel to Be an Iraqi Refugee? Precarity, Uncertainty, and Resistance.**"

The *Sociological Review* has calls for 1,000-2,000 word essays quarterly on its website and this was for a migration-themed call, the substantive focus of Jake's research.

doctoral student closely affiliated with VTIPG to complete their degree since the Institute's founding on July 1, 2006. Warm congratulations Dr. Boggs-Parker!

Congratulations, Jake!



Vanessa Guerra, a long-time member of the Community Change Collaborative, investigator in the Institute's Mare research teams and Post-Doctoral Fellow and Acting Director of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies new Living Learning Community, recently published "Inclusive Public Space in Quito-Ecuador" as a chapter in Inter-American Development Bank's new book on "*Cities as Spaces for Opportunities for All: Building Public Spaces for People with Disabilities, Children and Elders.*" This chapter resulted from the pleasant collaboration she had with the Bank in 2019 and 2020. Her chapter appears as pages 202-228 of [this PDF](#).



Dr. Anna Erwin, a 2017 alumna of the School's Planning, Governance and Globalization PhD program and of the Institute's Community Change Collaborative as well as member of the prestigious Edward A. Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, is presently serving as a Postdoctoral Research Associate with Purdue University's Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. She recently co-authored two articles in the special issue "Challenges and Opportunities of International University Partnerships to Support Water Management," published in the *Journal of Contemporary Water Research and Education*.

These were "Creating a Collaborative Framework to Evaluate University-led Water Research Partnerships" and "Coproduct Challenges in the Context of Changing Rural Livelihoods." Dr. Erwin also co-authored a synthesis review entitled "Assessing the Impacts of Large-Scale Water Transfer Projects on Communities: Lessons Learned from a Systematic Literature Review" that was recently published in the journal, *Society and Natural Resources*. Finally, she also recently offered a research talk at the "Next Steps: Environmental Justice, Climate Change, and Racial Justice Research Symposium" at Purdue University.

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## PROJECT UPDATES

### Entangled Ontologies, Decoloniality and Decolonization Virtual Symposium

The Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and The Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance

THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2021 | 9 A.M. TO 1 P.M. EST

## ENTANGLED ONTOLOGIES, DECOLONIALITY AND DECOLONIZATION SYMPOSIUM

© VIRGINIA TECH, FEATURING VIRTUAL PRESENTATIONS BY:



**NORAH BOWMAN**  
English & Fine Arts  
Okanagan College



**NADINE VOELKNER**  
International Relations  
University of Groningen



**JEFF CORNTASSEL**  
Indigenous Studies  
University of Victoria



**LISA TILLEY**  
Politics  
University of London



**BIKUM SINGH GILL**  
Political Science  
Virginia Tech



**ZUBAIRU WAI**  
Political Science  
Lakehead University



**CARMEN MARTÍNEZ NOVO**  
Latin American Studies  
University of Florida



**ROBBIE SHILLIAM**  
Political Science  
Johns Hopkins

Guest Discussants:

What productive tensions and differences exist between ontological, epistemological, and material critiques of the (post)colonial? What possibilities are opened up when we place Decoloniality, as an onto-epistemological (and political) project, in conversation with Decolonization, as a reparative project? Collaborating scholars will explore these questions from Native American/Indigenous, Africanist, Third World Marxist, Quantum, Post-human and Political Ecological positions.



Sponsored by the VT Department of Political Science, VT Institute for Policy and Governance, & Community Change Collaborative at VT

**VERA SMIRNOVA**  
Geography  
Kansas State

Hosts: Desiree Poets, Laura Zanotti (Pol. Sci.) & Max Stephenson (IG/CCC)

RSVP to Attend via Zoom:  
<https://bit.ly/3qjFKUq>  
Questions: [lk4187@vt.edu](mailto:lk4187@vt.edu)

Graduate Research Presentations @ 2 p.m.  
Detailed Schedule and More Information:  
<https://ig.vt.edu/News/decolonialitysymposium030421.html>

(IPG) including Max Stephenson, Jr., Lara Nagle and Neda Moayerian, the Department of Political Science, including Desiree Poets, Laura Zanotti, and Athony Szczurek, and the Community Change Collaborative (CCC) including Zuleka Randell Woods and Molly Todd hosted the *Entangled Ontologies, Decoloniality and Decolonization Virtual Symposium* on March 4, 2021. Fifteen collaborating scholars from Native American/Indigenous, Africanist, Third World Marxist, Quantum, Post-human and Political Ecological positions explored the productive tensions and differences between ontological, epistemological, and material critiques of the (post)colonial and the emerging possibilities of

placing Decoloniality, as an onto-epistemological (and political) project, in conversation with Decolonization, as a reparative project. Several of the scholars are contributing to a special issue academic journal publication informed by the symposium, edited by Max Stephenson, Jr., Laura Zanotti and Desiree Poets.

The day long symposium had 126 unique attendees and a maximum of 71 attendees at any one time. Attendees joined from the US, UK, Poland, Canada, Germany, Morocco, Brazil, Austria, France, Spain, Algeria, Qatar, South Africa, Finland, Malta, the Netherlands, and Nigeria.

**[Click here for more.](#)**

## CCC Guest Speaker Series: Sage Crump

*Art, Creative Practice, and Social Transformation*



In February 2021, the Community Change Collaborative and the VT School of Performing Arts were proud to host a public talk with more than 100 participants featuring Ms. Sage Crump. Sage is an artist, culture strategist and facilitator who supports cultural workers/arts organizations involved in social justice to build social movements. Sage Crump believes in leveraging art, creative practice and the cultural sector to transform systemic oppressions. In her different roles, Sage supports local and translocal visionary organizing, examines the movement of Blackness through time and space, amplifies the leadership of arts and rural organizations of color organizations and helps to develop their ability to thrive in culturally authentic ways.

Watch the presentation and Q&A with Sage Crump **on YouTube**.

Listen to the **Trustees Without Borders podcast with Sage Crump here**, featuring graduate student interviewers Courtney Surmanek (MURP & MFA), Gabe Velazquez (MFA), and Molly Todd (ASPECT, Ph.D.).

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### **CCC Guest Speaker Series: Ramón Verdugo and Jessica Bauman**

*The Frontera Project: Experiences at the U.S./Mexico Border*

On April 13, the CCC will host members of the Frontera Project to share their experience in bringing Mexican and U.S. artists together to lift up the kinds of human stories that too often get lost in the noise of partisan agendas and media bubbles. This event will involve a Public Forum exploring the issues of borders, community and identity, centered on the work of The Frontera Project. Specifically focused on San Diego/Tijuana, one of their works includes a bilingual theatre piece exploring the varied experiences of people on both sides of the Border for audiences who may never have been there. Their work aims to build relationships and encourage communication across languages and national borders that otherwise formally divide individuals. During the Public Forum, Verdugo and Bauman will present parts of the project to both students and the larger community, engage in classroom visits and take part in a professionally-recorded, Trustees Without Borders podcast available to the public. The Women and Minority Artists and Scholars Lecture Series is co-sponsoring this event.

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### **CCC Guest Speaker Series: Documentarian Jiang Nengjie**

*Hunan-based documentary filmmaker Jiang Nengjie. Photo: Jiang Nengjie*



On April 29th, the CCC will host a podcast interview and public discussion with documentarian Jiang Nengjie about his work in China illuminating coal mining communities, children left behind in rural areas to be cared for by their grandparents when their parents migrate to urban areas for work and other social challenges. Mr. Jiang is passionate about highlighting the experiences of China's left-behind children and has made four documentaries on the subject. Several of his films, including *Groom in High Mountain* and *Road*, have been shortlisted at competitions and

festivals in China. CCC members watched two of Mr. Jiang's documentaries during the summer of 2020 in anticipation of a discussion co-hosted with the Science Policy Education and Advocacy Club (SPEAC) featuring Dr. Carl Zipper, Professor in Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech, to discuss the environmental and cultural parallels of coal mining and black lung disease in China and Appalachia.

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# COMMUNITY CHANGE

The *Community Change Journal* is currently seeking dedicated graduate student editors for its editorial board. The board is responsible for crafting calls for papers, soliciting manuscripts, and reviewing submissions. All editors work with peer-reviewers and authors to select manuscripts, provide substantive and constructive feedback and revise submitted work. A rotating Executive Editor is responsible for facilitating meetings and overall issue flow and a Managing Editor coordinates the journal email and website, informs the board about submissions and ensures that authors and peer-reviewers meet deadlines.

***Community Change*** is an online, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal that seeks to explore multiple approaches to democratic community development and change. This interdisciplinary journal examines the practices, processes and individual and collective struggles that produce change at all levels of society. *Community Change* has adopted a broad definition of community development that includes issues relating to public policy, democratization, collective action, physical and social infrastructure developments, agency and efficacy. *Community Change* aims to provide opportunities for graduate students from all related disciplines to become acquainted with academic publication processes.

Students with editing and publishing experience are preferred, and/or those who can commit a minimum of two academic years. If you have questions or are interested to apply, please contact Lara Nagle: [lkn4187@vt.edu](mailto:lkn4187@vt.edu).

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## Evaluating the TAP RESTORE Program



***Photo Credit: TAP RESTORE***

**Mary Beth Dunkenberger** (PI) and **Lara Nagle** of VTIPG are conducting a program evaluation for Total Action for Progress (TAP)'s RESTORE or Re-employment, Support and Training for the Opioid Related Epidemic program. The initiative serves women primarily in the Roanoke Valley who have been directly or indirectly affected by the opioid crisis by providing access to job training and career development services for high demand fields, such as healthcare. TAP will track longer-term outcomes for

participants, such as retention in employment and changes in income, in order to determine success rates beyond the program period. The Institute will analyze this data along with insights from interviews with program staff, participants and training providers to evaluate the program's efficacy.

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Our very own **Laura York**, IPG Graduate Assistant, has joined with some fellow Master of Public Health students to start a fantastic program in the New River Valley called COVID Companions. The program provides outreach to isolated older adults in the area, providing social interaction during the COVID19 pandemic. Each program participant is paired with a "buddy" who calls at least once a week just to chat, see how things are going, connect them to any local resources they might need and provide some companionship. Volunteers also give out free tablets and teach participants how to use them so that they can use telehealth medicine, zoom with friends and family members, read, play games and more! We are proud of you, Laura!

## Federal Reimbursement Unit (FRU)



### Love is in the Air!

This Valentine's Day was a special one for **Brian Salazar Zamora**, a Case Analyst for the Federal Reimbursement Unit (FRU) in the Greater Washington DC Metro area. In February, while Brian was on vacation attending his childhood best friend's wedding, he proposed to the woman of his dreams! His fiancé, originally from Peru, is studying in

Bolivia where she finished her doctorate in General medicine. She is now working in the COVID-19 section of a hospital in that nation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the great news was shared with both families via video calls and everyone is very excited! The couple plans a destination wedding next year. They have not decided on a location as yet, but it will be somewhere warm and tropical! Antoanet will be moving to the United States as soon as her visa is finalized. Congratulations to Brian and Antoanet! Antoanet, the FRU team looks forward to meeting you soon!

## Conference and Print

**Exploring the Ethical Politics of Storytelling in Communities of**



## **Struggle for Social Change**

Virtual Learning Circle

April 7, 2021, 5-6:30 pm EDT

*Part of the First Annual Virginia Tech Ethics Week*

Join Shannon Turner of StoryMuse, Kim Niewolny of the VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, **Max Stephenson** and **Neda Moayerian** of the VT Institute of the Policy and Governance and the Community Change Collaborative, and Bob Leonard with the School of Performing Arts for an evening of engaged dialogue on ethical praxis of storytelling for social change. In this virtual Learning Circle event, we seek to engage with individuals who are interested in the generative quality of narratives and storytelling, as a form of cultural work for social change in communities of struggle. This would include sharing and exploring examples of community cultural development in communities that have experienced social, cultural, and/or environmental distress, transition, or conflict rooted in historical inequities and injustices. Doing so opens up a critical space about the ethics and ethical praxis of storytelling and related forms of community cultural development.

**Register at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/13modb1k>**

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## **Vibrant Virginia Book Webinar - April 26, 2021**

Join **Mary Beth Dunkenberger** and Sophie Wenzel, Vibrant Virginia book authors, and discussant, Beth O'Connor, Executive Director of the Virginia Rural Health Association for an interactive discussion about the importance of enabling a coordinated response to the addiction crisis, helping communities to advance social and economic vitality for all citizens. The event will consist of the authors and discussant answering pre-submitted questions as well as live questions from audience members and discussing the answers amongst themselves. The audience will include government officials, professors, practitioners, and community leaders. For examples of previous Vibrant Virginia events, please visit this page: <https://econdev.vt.edu/VibrantVirginia/VVConferenceSeries.html>

We invite audience members to submit questions on Dunkenberger and Wenzel's chapter, Supporting Rural and Urban Communities Through Boundary Spanning Actions: Responding to the Addiction Crisis Through University and Community Collaborations on our Discourse board, found at this link: <https://vibrantvirginiadiscourse.econdev.vt.edu/>

The Vibrant Virginia book covers topics including economic and workforce development, placemaking and public engagement, public health and social services, and infrastructure. The book will take a deeper look into how individuals in Virginia's communities and regions are working together to create a strong, vibrant, and inclusive economy in the Commonwealth.

[Register here](#)

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## **COMMENTARIES & ESSAYS**

SOUNDINGS

A commentary series authored by VTIPG Director Max Stephenson

March 22: [Ventriloquism Appalachian Style](#)

March 8: [Redeeming Democratic Possibility](#)

February 22: [On Incitement to Hatred, Sediton and the Way Forward](#)

February 8: [Sliding Toward Post-Truth and Pre-Fascism\\*](#)

January 25: [Democratic Governance Rests on a Shared Civil Religion](#)

January 11: [Reflections on Sediton, Political Courage and Self-Governance](#)

## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



**Laura Zanotti** is a Professor of Political Science at Virginia Tech. Her research and teaching include critical political theory as well as international organizations, UN peacekeeping, democratization and the role of NGOs in post-conflict governance. Professor Zanotti's most recent book, entitled *Ontological Entanglements, Agency and Ethics in International Relations - Exploring the Crossroads* (Routledge Interventions, 2019) addresses the implications of embracing quantum physics' entangled ontology for International Relations' conceptualization of agency and ethics. The book argues that an entangled ontological imaginary opens the way for re-imagining how as humans we inhabit the world. It nurtures an ethos of responsibility and it raises the bar for adjudicating the ethical validity of political initiatives beyond abstract principles.

In her previous monograph, entitled *Governing Disorder: United Nations Peace Operations, International Security, and Democratization in the Post-Cold War Era*, (Penn State University Press, 2011), Zanotti used Foucauldian theoretical tools to address the political imaginary and unintended consequences of peacekeeping in Haiti and in Croatia. Her work has appeared in numerous peer reviewed journals. She is also the co-author and the co-editor of two additional books with Institute Director Max Stephenson, Jr.

Since 2013, Zanotti has been serving as a member of the U.S. governing Board of the University of Fondwa (Haiti). Prior to joining Virginia Tech, Zanotti was a Jean Monnet

Fellow at the European University Institute in San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy and a Visiting Professor at the School of International Relations, Trento University, Italy. Before becoming an academic, Zanotti worked at the United Nations, both in administration and as a political officer for Peacekeeping Operations. She spent several years in the field, in Haiti and in Croatia, where she performed the functions of the Deputy to the Head of the United Nations Liaison Office in Zagreb.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

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**Dr. Nada Berrada** recently completed her Ph.D. in Political Sociology in ASPECT (Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought) under the supervision of Dr. Max Stephenson as her Committee Chair. She also has an M.A. in Public and International Affairs from Virginia Tech. Nada's dissertation sought to unravel the coming of age experiences of a sample of young Moroccans as they navigated the political, social and economic contexts in which they found themselves entangled. She was interested in exploring how those factors shaped their exercise of agency in their family, school and work within the layered contexts of a dominant public philosophy of neoliberalism and the continuing import of their nation's colonial legacy.

Nada has taught and mentored hundreds of young students at both Virginia Tech in the Department of Political Science and in her native Morocco. She has also served as President of the Community Change Collaborative and as a board member of the International Student Advisory Board (ISAB) at Virginia Tech. In addition, Dr. Berrada has assisted a donor-funded multi-sector team working to establish a workforce development initiative intended to improve vocational education and jobs skills of young people; worked to establish a UNDP youth volunteer policy in Morocco; and served as one of the first youth delegates from the

Middle East and North Africa region to the UN General Assembly.

Having earned her Ph.D. in a unique cross-disciplinary program, Nada now hopes to work professionally in an interdisciplinary environment in which she can continue contributing to youth rights, education and justice issues.

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**Institute for Policy and Governance**

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