Letters

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Reflections on Memory, Identity, and Political Action

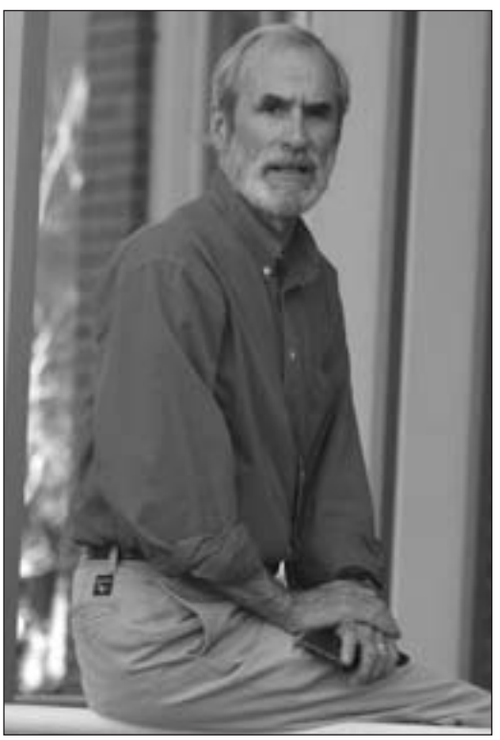
By Richard H. King

It is a puzzle why memory has become the central term in so much contemporary reflection about our common life. While much American writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, has traditionally taken "experience" as its central concern, the fiction of memory (e.g., Toni Morrison's *Beloved)* and other forms of representation of the past (one thinks of the work of the filmmaker, Ken Burns) seem to grip the contemporary imagination. How has this happened under the conditions of postmodernity in which, according to Fredric Jameson, the past becomes pastiche and commercialized production? However we attempt to answer such a question, it is clear that the meanings of terms such as memory, remembering, history, and experience are far from clear. It is with such issues, specifically with how the memory-experience "family" of terms relates to identity and political action, that this year's Warren Center faculty seminar has been, and will be, grappling throughout the year. The seminar, which meets for two hours each week, has so far been immensely stimulating to me, as the visiting fellow at the Warren Center this year. In the space allotted to me here, I want to explore some of the issues raised by the theme of the seminar. My purpose will be less to answer questions or arrive at conclusions, as it will be to muddy the waters a bit.

It is interesting to note that some of the difficulties with the term *memory* are paralleled by—and perhaps related to—the ambiguity in the term *history.* Every student of history soon realizes that "history" may refer to the actions, events, and forces of the past and/or to the written accounts of those actions, events, and forces. Indeed, there is a tradition of thought that suggests, wrongly I think, that without a written history, a people lack a history altogether. Analogously, memory refers to the contents of the past as they become present and to the process that brings the past into the present. Through the workings of memory we are confronted with memories from the past, often unbidden and unwanted.

Just to make things more complicated, one crucial distinction in recent discussions of these matters is between history and memory. Here history is generally taken to refer to written accounts of the past as produced by professionally trained historians, while memory denotes the past as it is articulated through myth and folk-tale, music, and popularly shared legends of a polity or a people. The historian is supposed to strive for objectivity, "that noble dream" in Peter Novick's terms, or at least for fairness, while the guardians of memory, a group's advocates before the bar of history, are concerned with preserving its values, its grievances, its demands, and, above all, its story of itself. In this view history is "cooked" memory, while memory is "raw" pre-history.

Not surprisingly, a state of mutual suspicion exists between the two. As Eva Hoffman has recently reminded us, where all history is regime-history in the service of the established order, as in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union up to the late 1980s, popular memory becomes a source of opposition to that order and on the side of human liberation. Yet, closer to home, we know from David Blight's recent *Race and Reunion* that popular forms of white southern memory were—and still are—grounded in white supremacy and a hostility to the rights of former slaves, hardly a vision in the service of human flourishing or freedom. It is never easy, though always a temptation, to place either memory or history on the moral high ground vis-à-vis the other.



Richard H. King

Less contentiously but still importantly, there is a distinction to be drawn between memory and remembering. In her *The Art of Memory,* Frances Yates notes that Aristotle first distinguished between memory, as

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something akin to an involuntary and sensory capacity, and remembering, as involving conscious, intellectual effort. Though this may seem literally like ancient history, it is a distinction that highlights some of the same differences that the memory/history distinction does. The resonant title of Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* conveys this subtle but important difference. Historians or psychoanalysts aid our capacity to remember and convey the results as lessons, precepts, warnings, and admonitions. But memory speaks through us, often against our will, as Freud, Proust, and Faulkner so powerfully tell us in their work. On occasion we are powerless to resist memory to the point that we may act irrationally or against our best interests. Or memory may open up new realms of possibility to us.

But such distinctions are not entirely the province of high modernist novelists and thinkers. Something similar is at issue in the tense relationship between professional, i.e., academic, and popular historians. The nature of the dispute usually involves charges by the latter that academics simply don't know how to tell a good story, either in the sense of identifying or of creating one, while academic historians charge popular historians with superficiality and being parasites on academic research. David McCulloch's recent, best-selling biography of John Adams is suspected of paying insufficient attention to complexity; of describing, not explaining; of narrating, not analyzing, the life and times of the second President. At least these are some of the standard charges raised against history done outside the academy or aimed at an audience beyond the confines of the university library and seminar room.

And then there is oral history, the supreme practitioner of which has been Studs Terkel. A radical journalist and media personality in Chicago, Terkel has chronicled some of the seminal experiences of twentieth-century America by placing a tape recorder in front of various individuals and letting them talk, then collecting those memories—and undoubtedly shaping them—into a single volume about, say, the Depression *(Hard Times)* or World War II *(The Good War)*. Since the 1960s, oral history has proven an immensely popular form of public memory. Again, professional historians can raise disturbing questions about oral history if it claims to be an account of "how the past really was," as opposed to how the past has been remembered and shaped, long after it was originally experienced. Oral history conveys a truth but not necessarily *the* truth about the past. That aside, since the 1960s, the voices of participants in every political movement in America have been preserved on tape and/or transcribed for use by historians of all types. This is an unparalleled resource, though it is not so "raw" a source as is sometimes thought.

Finally, there is a real problem with drawing too sharp a distinction between memory and experience, the dichotomy with which I began. As one participant in the faculty seminar on "Memory, Identity, and Political Action" at the Warren Center asked quite early: "Isn't it all memory anyway?" This is a difficult question to answer. Much recent theory has pretty convincingly called into question the idea that there is something called "experience" that comes to us, or which we undergo, immediately and without filters or preconceptions or frames of reference. Experience is itself such a basic term that it is hard to define what it means, but philosopher Thomas Nagel once suggested that it involves answering the question of "what it is like to be…." That is, it involves a comparison with someone else's experience or with our own experience at some other, previous, time. In other words, it is doubtful whether there is any experience that doesn't "always already" depend upon a comparison with a previous experience and thus involve memory. But the reverse is also arguably true: to have a memory is to re-experience some past event or feeling or complex of things. This suggests that all memories are preserved experiences, whether those experiences refer to something that really happened or happened in fantasy.

If we shift our focus to the issue of identity, things that seemed simple suddenly emerge as more complex. Because of the dominant position now occupied by memory, it is tempting to assume that identity is a function of memory. And there is, of course, much truth to this claim. Yet there are traditions in which group identity is based on a rejection of a shared past or a received tradition of thinking, feeling, and acting. The theorist of colonial liberation, Frantz Fanon, was deeply skeptical of the importance of a subjugated people's rediscovery of some glorious past. For Fanon, it was a matter of relative indifference whether people of African descent could claim that Egypt had been the source of African and European thought and tradition. Rather, he insisted that a common culture, a group identity, should be forged in the shared experience of revolutionary action, including violence.

Whether or not we agree with Fanon, it should also be remembered that for the cultural "founding fathers" of America, and one thinks of Emerson and Whitman here, the condition for American identity lay in a rejection of the European past. As Emerson urged in the 1830s, the American "scholar" must leave off attending to "the courtly muses of Europe." And of course, for the modern revolutionary tradition that links 1789 (France) to 1917 (Russia) to 1959 (Cuba), the successful revolution wipes the slate clean and marks "year zero" as the commencement of a new history and a new tradition. Who "we" are in this tradition depends on what we make of ourselves. The past is not prologue, as the old saw has it; it is a dead-end.

There is another sense in which identity may override, rather than be subordinate to, the workings of memory. On most accounts we remember most vividly what is most traumatic or momentous. But such a claim begs the question of how "we" decide what is momentous or traumatic. Black and white Southerners occupied the same place and time circa 1865. Yet because of the radically different bases of each group's identity, what was traumatic for one was experienced as a matter of triumph for the other—and vice versa. How African Americans remember(ed) the War (positively) and Reconstruction (as an overall failure) differs radically from the way many white Southerners remember(ed) those two processes. In this respect, who "we" are determines "what" of the past we incorporate into our group narratives. This isn't to say that memories are fabricated out of whole cloth; rather, different identity groups will inflect, arrange, interpret, the same past events and actions in quite different ways.

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teraction between memory and identity can be seen in the re-writing of history. As one member of the faculty seminar made clear to the group, immediate post-World War II Japanese identity was organized around a narrative of the near past and present which re-wrote the history of the country and culture, including the role of the emperor in the origins and conclusion of World War II. Both collective memory and identity were impressed into the service of Japanese political imperatives as dictated by United States occupation policies. Since the 1960s, the story of America has undergone some radical revisions as first, African Americans, then women, gays, and various ethnic minorities "rediscovered" pasts that had been submerged in the dominant American/white/male/heterosexual narratives. It has become fashionable to sneer at multiculturalism and identity politics in recent years, but the positive role identity groups have played in a much needed re-thinking and re-narrating of American history is undeniable. In each of these cases, the emergence of a self-conscious group identity has forced a re-configuration of its past and the past of the nation. For instance, as a foundational act of political resistance, the Stonewall Riot of June 28, 1969, generated a new group consciousness among gays. This has had numerous ramifications, among them the unearthing or creation of an alternative gay past as part of the national narrative. In posing new questions of the past or in asking old questions from new identity perspectives, the gay movement has forced that past into new shapes and forms.

One final issue involving memory and identity concerns the concept of collective memory. Though recent theories of the self have made the concept of individual identity problematic, we still use (and assume) some sort of continuity over time to our individual selves. Otherwise, crucial notions such as responsibility, innocence, and guilt would be incoherent, even untenable. But the concepts of collective identity and memory are much more problematic. This is so, perhaps, because collective identity has been so closely associated historically with notions of racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes; moreover, the notion of collective guilt seems intuitively unfair and/or dangerous, somewhat akin to the notion of guilt by association. Collective memory is perhaps even harder to make sense of. Yet any notion of group identity would seem, on the analogy with individual identity, to assume some sort of social shaping and hence of group memory; yet we lack a way of talking very clearly about the processes, mechanisms, or outcomes of group memory. Where does it reside and who is in charge—the State? The media and Hollywood? Professional guardians of memory? Historians? Who authorizes whom to speak for the collective? Who is the "we" who is remembering and "how wide," as David Hollinger has asked, is the circle of "we"?

The final term in our thematic triumvirate, political action, adds complexity to complexities. Again, the conventional wisdom assumes that we can only act, or can act most wisely, if we know where we, as a group, have been and who we are. But, again, as we have seen with Fanon, it is not clear that an individual or group that is firmly ensconced in, and proud of, its past is best situated to act effectively. Indeed, in the 1870s, Friedrich Nietzsche suggested, provocatively as always, that a prime requisite for effective action is to "learn to forget." Learning to forget is a quite complicated, even paradoxical notion. But, if we bring Nietzsche's injunction closer to the present, we might want to claim that the effectiveness of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s depended on its leaders and its foot soldiers learning to forget, as it were, the odds against their success, since little or nothing in 1950s America suggested a readiness to respond positively, even to the extent it did, to the forms of action hazarded by leaders of the nascent Movement. Similarly, but less happily, the bitter Israeli-Palestine conflict might seem to an outsider as a case where effective action to resolve the conflict might be furthered by some heavy doses of historical amnesia on both sides. On this view, then, the old saw about "Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it" should be modified to read, "Those who forget the past are granted leave to act." Of course, it is never that easy, either. But group action may just as often precede as it follows from group identity and thus a group's memory.

Finally, it is most striking to me that all three terms—memory, identity, and political action—can be—and have been—used for good and bad, beneficent and evil purposes. If much of our "progressive" politics over the last several decades has been linked with identity politics—finding a way to give formerly submerged groups a voice and power—identity politics itself has a very checkered history. In nineteenth century Europe, the politics of race and ethnicity, however defined, fed into the traditions of exclusionary nationalism and "reactionary modernism" (to use Geoffrey Herf's phrase) in Europe and in the southern United States. Action as a concept and as a value has as often been associated with the right as with the left. And memory, of course, has most often been pressed into the service of the forces of conservatism and reaction. Emerson himself contrasted the "party of hope" with the "party of memory;" and there is something about the fetishizing of memory that, however intellectually appealing, remains disturbing.

And yet, I can think of no more fascinating or encouraging "new" form of political thought/action linked with identity and memory than the various forms of the "truth and reconciliation" process that have been initiated on three continents—Europe, Africa, and Latin America—over the last decade or so. An intriguing thought presents itself: could or should the United States have had such a truth and reconciliation process in the late 1860s or in the early 1970s? Whatever the answer to that question, it is clear that the model of revolution as the vehicle for radical change has been replaced by a model of political transformation in which a democratic polity begins to reconstitute itself through a public process of testifying to, and thereby illuminating, a troubled past. Ideally, in this process, the recognition and re-incorporation of formerly excluded groups and individuals will take place. Finally, it is hard to think of any other contemporary phenomenon that more clearly illustrates the crucial nature of the interaction between memory, identity, and political action.

Richard H. King is William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow and visiting professor of history for 2001/2002. He is professor of American intellectual history at the University of Not-

Creamed and Molded

by Nancy A. Walker

Nancy A. Walker, professor of English and the first director of Women's Studies at Vanderbilt University, died December 12, 2000. Walker first joined Vanderbilt as director of women's studies in the summer of 1989, a post she held for seven years. During that time she served as an associate professor of English and attained full professorship in English in 1992. She is the author of more than ten books on women's literature and women's humor, as well as the editor of more than a dozen books on issues in women's fiction and journalism. Her last book examines the ways American women's lives of the 1940s and 1950s were shaped by such mainstream magazines as *Good Housekeeping* and *The Ladies Home Journal.* Walker's "Creamed and Molded," reprinted with the permission of the *Santa Barbara Review* (Winter/Spring 1996) exemplifies Professor Walker's own sense of humor as well as her contributions to the effort to recover how women's humor shapes and is shaped by American culture.

Nancy A. Walker

Suddenly masked hombres seized
Petunia Pig
And
Made her into a sort of dense
Jell-O

—Jack Collom

Even as I was doing research in—and on—American women's magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, the Hormel company produced the five billionth can of Spam, an event noted by no less than the *New York Times* (3 July 1994). I was already thinking about Spam—and lime Jell-O, and cream of mushroom soup. Thinking about how, growing up in the very decades I was researching, I had survived it all. There, in the basement of the Ben West Public Library in downtown Nashville, they leap out at me, these casseroles and stiff shiny salads, and the women making them invariably look happy and fulfilled (and aproned and high heeled). I look for articles about women working in munitions factories during World War II, and what draws my attention is an illustrated guide to spreading deviled ham on toast, topping it with cunningly-arranged strips of processed cheese, and popping it into the oven for a real luncheon treat. Oh, the fat, the salt, the *white* bread.

But there seems, in retrospect, something wonderful about those days, when America emerged, hungry, from the wartime rationing of meat, butter, and sugar, from tomatoes canned from the Victory Garden, to the glories of frozen French-cut green beans (shown in the ad held aloft, steaming, on a platter by the housewife who accepts the adoring looks of her family—including the dog). Not a flake of oat bran nor a teaspoon of yogurt intrudes on these idyllic scenes, where vegetable shortening is magically transformed into "butter" with a little packet of yellow food coloring (I did this in my grandmother's kitchen, in a blue bowl, and the experience created in me such a craving for real butter that my adult self now buys butter for that kid with the blue bowl.)

The *New York Times* and I are not alone in musing about Spam. Writing in the *Nashville Scene,* John Bridges speculates that Spam "must have been invented to feed soldiers in trenches. I figure it is one of the benefits of living in a nation with a large defense budget." John's close. Spam was first manufactured in 1937, but it did become a wartime staple, both here and in Europe. In fact, the experience of feeding thousands of soldiers during World War II had numerous effects on how Americans cooked and ate in the post-war years. A 1946 *Redbook* article informs me that advancements in food packaging were the result of having to drop food supplies from airplanes, which makes me wonder about the velocity of a Lean Cuisine frozen dinner dropped from 2000 feet. The same article reveals that the better-tasting canned orange juice available in 1946 was the result of applying a process used to preserve blood plasma. (I'm not going to think real hard about that one.) Some of the exciting innovations about which *Redbook* gushes did not exactly become household staples—for example, dehydrated corned-beef hash, which tasted "remarkably like the genuine article." And nowhere on my supermarket shelves is the pre-packaged vegetable salad touted in a 1941 *Parents* magazine. The housewife who has misplaced her knife need only open a can, pull up two "parchment tabs," and behold layers of diced green beans, carrots, beets, celery—"salad architecture."

But it is canned soup and gelatine which are most ubiquitous in the pages of the women's magazines—Campbell's soup and Knox gelatine. (These brand names must have seeped deeply into the consciousness of one Richard Yates, who in 1961 published a novel about 1950s suburbia in which the main character works at Knox Business Machines and has friends named Campbell.) Anything, it seems, could be molded into gelatine: meats, poultry, seafood, vegetables, fruits, olives, nuts. I carry with me from my childhood the truth that something in fresh pineapple counteracts gelatine's ability to make liquid stiff, whereas canned pineapple works fine. I have never needed this fact, but there it is. "Mrs. Knox's Sunset Salad" (*was* there a Mrs. Knox?) featured shredded cabbage and canned pineapple; her "Complexion Salad" added chopped parsley. In her "May-Day Salad," the cabbage has been replaced by rhubarb, but the pineapple is still there. A can of mixed vegetable juice, a few cooked shrimp, some gelatine—lunch for the bridge club, quivering but contained.

As were the women themselves, for underneath the apron, underneath the skirt and sweater, was the GIRDLE. As *Mademoiselle* announced rather sternly in 1952, "a body is what you've been given, a figure is what you make out of it," with "a girdle that gives you a firm pat on the back of hips." A pat not unlike the one that causes the pineapple-laden gelatin to drop from its mold onto the platter. The rhetoric of girdle advertisements went beyond the coyness of the "firm pat" to deny all images of bodily containment. Who can forget the Playtex "Living Bra" and "Living Girdle"? This was no undergarment, it was a sentient being, made of "tree-grown latex." In fact, the word most commonly used in ads for "foundation garments" was "freedom," although freedom from what was never quite specified.

Nor was a gelatine salad the only foodstuff to be molded. In a 1941 *Woman's Home Companion,* clever "Mrs. T." nestles halves of

Creamed and molded, the women become indistinguishable from the food they prepare and serve.

hardboiled eggs in muffin tins and molds ham loaf around them for baking into "wee loaves." In the same month Mrs. T has baked lamb loaf in a ring mold studded with sliced stuffed olives. Pudding is molded into custard cups, to be unmolded for serving (that firm pat again). And what was not molded tended to be otherwise contained in pastry shells, for instance. Our same Mrs. T. serves her family vegetables in cream sauce in pastry shells.

If Mrs. T. had just followed the advice of the Director of Home Economics for the Campbell's Soup Company, she would have had a well-stocked "Soup Shelf" in her pantry and wouldn't have had to make a cream sauce at all, for she would have had CREAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP. With this miracle, the Director of Home Economics tells me, I can make quick creamed chicken, to be served in a "crusty biscuit ring"—-containment again. Now I'm here to tell you that I have committed a number of mushroom-soup tuna casseroles in my day, but I *never ever* put crushed potato chips on top, nor did I make macaroni and cheese using a can of tomato soup, and I promise to go to my grave without spreading hot Cheez Whiz on a waffle and serving it "with crisp bacon for brunch or supper," as a 1954 Kraft ad advises me to do.

Actually, the popularity of creamed and molded food can be traced back to the 1890s when things culinary succumbed to high Victorianism, as Laura Shapiro reminds us in her delightful book *Perfection Salad.* Both trends, encouraged by popular cooking schools, sprang from the era's obsession with masking and taming whatever threatened to be naked or unruly. Thus, cream sauce, called "white sauce" (butter, flour, milk) became, as Shapiro writes, "as basic to cooking-school cookery as the stove itself . . . among scientific cooks it became the most popular solution to the discomforting problem of undressed food." Not only vegetables, but fish, poultry, and even hot dogs were drenched in largely tasteless white sauce. And lest a salad be a messy affair of dangling and sprawling vegetables, there was the miracle of gelatine to shape them into "Perfection Salad," which, Shapiro writes, was "the very image of a salad at last in control of itself."

By the post-World War II years, two things had changed. One, of course, was the introduction of myriad prepared foods—not merely Spam, canned soups, and frozen vegetables, but dehydrated potatoes, pudding and cake mixes, canned grated Parmesan cheese, brown-and-serve rolls, salad dressing mixes. So the housewife was relieved of the necessity to actually cook, right? *Au contraire.* Because alongside the advertisers who wanted to sell her instant rice and canned frosting were those who wanted to sell her electric ranges, mixers, blenders, and Pyrex baking dishes. So in the magazines, convenience foods were not foods at all, but ingredients. Who ever just sat down and ate a bowl of cream of mushroom soup? If anything, the availability of ready-to-eat food only increased the pressure of women to be creative, to *do* something with prepared foods other than merely serving them. (A fashion note in *Harper's Bazaar* is ambiguous: an apron-like flounce on a cocktail dress. Does this mean that the apron has lost its utility, or that it now follows a woman everywhere?) Some people have wondered why, with all the convenience foods available, Peg Bracken published *The I Hate to Cook Book* in 1960. Not me.

Take canned spaghetti with meatballs. You would think you would heat this and feed it to your five-year-old for lunch. Wrong. You make for the family dinner something called "Spaghetti Scandinavian," which involves layering the canned spaghetti with cottage cheese (!) in a casserole, topping it with garlic-flavored breadcrumbs, and baking until bubbly. Got a jar of hot tamales? You're on your way to an appetizer, made by wrapping pieces of tamale in bacon and baking until the bacon is crisp (my arteries slowed down a bit just reading that one). If you must have soup, get the cream of mushroom from your Soup Shelf, dilute it with milk, and add a can of deviled ham and a jar of baby-food strained peas.

Recipes such as these come from the no-nonsense pages of *Redbook* and *Good Housekeeping.* Somewhat more upscale concoctions appeared in magazines such as *Mademoiselle,* which was aimed at the college-educated, upwardly mobile young career woman. In these pages, instant custard mix is not, of course, an end in itself, but instead of being told to add to it, say, strained prunes, the reader is instructed to make a *zuppa inglese.* Cream of Wheat is used to make a version of *gnocchi,* and canned tomatoes are heated with vinegar, raisins, sugar, and ginger to accompany curry. Spam is not once mentioned, nor is mushroom soup, but the pressure to get in there and *cook* is, if anything, much greater.

The other notable features of the post-war creamed-and-molded phase is that what was done to food was also done to women's bodies—or should be. If the analogue to gelatine is the girdle, the analogue to white sauce is face cream. Early in my research, a full page ad in a 1941 *Ladies' Home Journal* stopped me in my tracks. Superimposed on the image of a *huge* carrot with three tiny women standing around it in postures of alarm (the phallic reference was unmistakable) was the line "Women and carrots have one enemy in common." It seems that a tendency to *dry out* is the bond between women and carrots: the ad was for an "ice refrigerator"—the now-old-fashioned icebox. The icebox could solve the problem for the carrot, but the woman had only to go to another page in the magazine to find Jergen's, or Pond's, or some other cream with which to forestall inevitable desiccation. An oft-appearing Pond's ad of the period bore the three-part text "She's engaged! She's beautiful! She uses Pond's!" (The casual sequence reads in reverse order, of course), and readers were encouraged to purchase the largest available jar so they could get both hands into it at once.

Creamed and molded, the women become indistinguishable from the food they prepare and serve. My local newspaper is currently running a series of recipes to advertise the *Miss America Cookbook,* and when one recipe called for both canned cream of mushroom and cream of chicken soup, I looked to see when its author was Miss America. 1955. Figures.

Nancy A. Walker Lecture and Humor Symposium

Regina Barreca, professor of English literature and feminist theory at the University of Connecticut, will present the Nancy A. Walker Lecture to be held on April 4th, 2002, at 7:00 p.m. Location to be announced. Professor Barreca is the author of numerous books, monographs, and articles on women's humor. Her most recent books and collections include *Too Much of a Good Thing is Wonderful* (a collection of 120 columns first appearing in *The Chicago Tribune, The Hartford Courant, The Orlando Sentinel* and *The Cleveland Plain Dealer,* published by Biblipola Press/UPNE, 2000), *Sweet Revenge: The Wicked Delights of Getting Even* (Harmony/Crown,1995), *Perfect Husbands and Other Fairy Tales: Demystifying Marriage, Men and Romance* (Harmony,1993), *Untamed and Unabashed: Essays on Women and Comedy in Literature* (Wayne State University Press, 1993), and *They Used to Call Me Snow White, But I Drifted: Women's Strategic Uses of Humor* (Viking/Penguin,1991). Professor Barreca is also the editor of *The Signet Book of American Humor* (1999), *The Erotics of Instruction* (University Press of New England, 1997) and *The Penguin Book of Women's Humor* (Penguin,1996). She is the founder and editor of *LIT,* a critical journal published by Gordon and Breach, and the founding co-editor (with Nancy Walker), of the book series *Humor & Gender* (also Gordon and Breach).

On Friday, April 5th, members of Vanderbilt's faculty will give presentations on their own work as it relates to humor. Among the presenters will be Sam Girgus (English), Barbara Bowen (French and Italian), and Elizabeth Barnes (English).

Race and Wealth Disparity in 21st Century America

The Warren Center and the Vanderbilt Law School are cosponsoring a research circle entitled "Race and Wealth Disparity in 21st Century America." This year-long project is funded by the Ford Foundation to help build interdisciplinary connections throughout the University. Members of the Vanderbilt faculty from throughout the University and representing a broad range of disciplines will produce a series of public lectures and a set of edited teaching materials on how various disciplines look at race and wealth disparities in the United States. The project will begin in January 2002 and run through December 2002.

The program is directed by Professor of Law Beverly Moran, who is a tax scholar and has also worked in comparative law and law and society. She joined Vanderbilt in 2001, having previously taught at the University of Wisconsin Law School where she directed the Center for Law and Africa. Her most recent publications include an edited set of essays on the Clinton scandal for the New York University Press, and a series of publications on the racial implications of the U.S. income tax system in the *University of Wisconsin Law Review,* the *University of North Carolina Law Review,* and the *University of Arkansas Little Rock Law Review.*

Participants in the program include Bruce Barry, associate professor of management and associate professor of sociology; Tony Brown, assistant professor of sociology; Dan Cornfield, professor of sociology; Edward Fischer, assistant professor of anthropology; James Foster, professor of economics; Dennis Kezar, assistant professor of English; Benjamin Radcliff, associate professor of political science; Cecelia Tichi, William B. Kenan, Jr., Professor of English; and Kenneth Wong, professor of public policy and education and professor of political science.

Robert Penn Warren Lecture on Southern Letters: David Levering Lewis

Two-time Pulitzer Prize winning historian David Levering Lewis will present the fourth annual Robert Penn Warren Lecture on Southern Letters on Saturday, April 27th following a dinner. (The time and location are soon to be announced.) Tickets for the event are $50.00 and will go on sale February 1, 2002.

David Levering Lewis, Martin Luther King, Jr. University Professor at Rutgers University, won the Pulitzer Prize in Biography in 1994 for the first volume of his two part biography, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919.* The second volume, *W .E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963,* was awarded the 2001 Pulitzer Prize, making Lewis the first biographer in Pulitzer history to win for back-to-back volumes. In addition to the Pulitzers, Professor Lewis's work has won many other awards, including the J. E. K. Agreey Medal of the Phelps Stokes Fund, Phi Beta Kappa Ralph Waldo Emerson Award, Frances Parkman Prize in History, and the Bancroft Prize in American History and Diplomacy. Lewis has also received many fellowships, including a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1999 as well as fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the National Humanities Center, and the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences.

Lewis graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Fisk University and received his M.A. in U.S. History from Columbia University. He earned his doctorate from the London School of Economics and Political Science. In addition to the two-volume biography of Du Bois, he is the author of numerous books and articles, including most recently *W .E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (Henry Holt & Co., 1995), *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* (Viking, 1994), and *The Race to Fashoda: European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988; reissued by Henry Holt &Co., 1994). Lewis has been teaching at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey since 1985.

The Robert Penn Warren Lecture on Southern Letters was founded in 1998 as a collaborative project between the Warren Center and Humanities Tennessee. It is intended to provide a public forum for the exploration of topics related to Southern writing. Previous lectures have been delivered by Elizabeth Spencer, Reynolds Price, and William Styron. For tickets or further information, please contact Humanities Tennessee at (615) 320-7001 or *www.tn-humanities.org.*

Gender and Sexuality Lecture Series

The Warren Center's lecture series on "Gender and Sexuality" continues in the spring term with lectures by Jennifer Terry, associate professor of comparative cultural studies at Ohio State and Lisa Duggan, associate professor of history and American studies at New York University.

Professor Terry will give a lecture entitled "Homoerotic Flows: Sexuality Studies in Transnational Perspective" on Thursday, March 14th at 4:10 p.m. (location to be announced). She is the author of *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1999) and is co-author (with Jacqueline Urla) of *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1995) and *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life* (Routledge, 1997). Terry is now working on two projects, one tracing the origins of the concept of sexual rights in international human rights organizing and another tentatively titled "Sentiments in Transit." She is currently visiting associate professor of women's studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

Professor Duggan's public lecture will be held Monday, April 15th at 4:10 p.m. (location to be announced). Her lecture is entitled "The Incredible Shrinking Public: the Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism." Duggan is the author of *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2000), and co-editor (with Lauren Berlant) of *Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and National Interest* (New York University Press, 2001). Her book *The Incredible Shrinking Public: Sexual Politics and the Decline of Democracy* is forthcoming from Beacon Press. She is co-author with Nan D. Hunter of *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture (*Routledge, 1995).

Deirdre McCloskey, Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and Science at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Tinbergen Professor of Economics, Philosophy, and Art and Cultural Studies at Erasmusuniversiteit Rotterdam, spoke on September 24th and 25th at Vanderbilt as a part of the "Gender and Sexuality" lecture series.

Rethinking the Americas: Crossing Borders and Disciplines

The 2000/01 Warren Center Fellows are hosting a conference April 4th through April 6th at Vanderbilt University entitled "Rethinking the Americas: Crossing Borders and Disciplines." The program will be the culminating activity of their fellows program year, during which the participants examined the theme "Rediscovering the New World: Exploring Lines of Contact among the Americas and within the United States." Fellows met weekly at the Warren Center and considered the various ways in which the cultures of North, Central, and South America have been defined, particularly since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their cross-disciplinary deliberations considered the Americas as a single entity, identifying different cultural formations that have taken shape and considering their social and political implications for the present and future. The 2000/01 Fellows Program was co-directed by Earl E. Fitz, professor of Spanish and Portuguese and director of the program in comparative literature; Cathy L. Jrade, professor and chair of Spanish and Portuguese; and William Luis, professor of Spanish and professor of English.

Conference participants include members of the 2000/01 Fellows Program, as well as additional members of the Vanderbilt University faculty and guest speakers from other institutions. All sessions of the conference will be held in room 189 of the Sarratt Student Center. More detailed information about the program will be distributed later in the semester.

Schedule of Events

Thursday, April 4th, 4:00–6:00 p.m.
Crossing Disciplines: The Theory and Practice of Inter-American Studies
Panel Members:
Earl E. Fitz (Professor of Spanish & Portuguese, Director of Comparative Literature Program, and 2000/01 Jacque Voegeli Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)
Marshall C. Eakin (Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of History and 2000/01 Warren Center Fellow, Vanderbilt University)
Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. (Professor of Philosophy and Director, African American Studies Program, and 2001/02 Warren Center Fellow, Vanderbilt University)
Panel Moderator:
Cathy L. Jrade (Professor and Chair, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and 2000/01 Spence Wilson Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)

Friday, April 5th, 9:00–11:00 a.m.
Redefining Literary Boundaries: Writing the Americas
Panel Members:
William Luis (Professor of Spanish, Professor of English, and 2000/01 Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)
Cathy L. Jrade (Professor and Chair, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and 2000/01 Spence Wilson Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)
Michael Kreyling (Professor of English and 2001/02 Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)
Deborah N. Cohn (Assistant Professor of Spanish, Indiana University, & 2000/01 William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)
Panel Moderator:
Earl E. Fitz (Professor of Spanish & Portuguese, Director of Comparative Literature Program, and 2000/01 Jacque Voegeli Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)

1:00–3:00 p.m.
Defining and Redefining Identities: What History and Anthropology Make of the Americas
Panel Members:
Jane Gilmer Landers (Associate Professor of History, Director of Latin American Studies Program, Associate Dean, and 2000/01 Warren Center Fellow, Vanderbilt University)
Edward Fischer (Assistant Professor of Anthropology and 2000/01 Warren Center Fellow, Vanderbilt University)
Philip Howard (Associate Professor of Latin American and Caribbean History, University of Akron)
Gordon Brotherston (Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, Stanford University)
Panel Moderator:
William Luis (Professor of Spanish and Professor of English, and 2000/01 Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)

Saturday, April 6th, 9:00–11:00 a.m.
Crossing Borders: Discourse and Diffusion
Panel Members:
Anne Demo (Assistant Professor of Communication Studies and 2000/01 Warren Center Fellow, Vanderbilt University)
J. Michael Dash (Professor of French Literature, New York University)
Barbara Godard (Associate Professor of English, York University [Canada])
Panel Moderator:
Cathy L. Jrade (Professor and Chair, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and 2000/01 Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow, Warren Center, Vanderbilt University)

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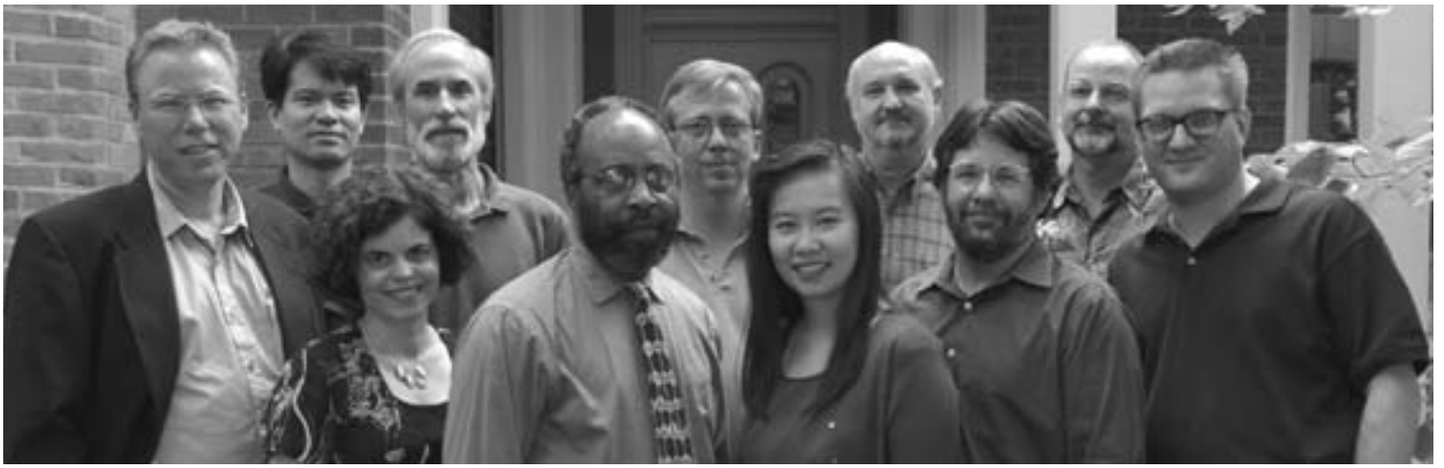
Limits of the Past, an Interdisciplinary Graduate Colloquium

The Warren Center, the Graduate School, the College of Arts and Science, the Department of History (Gertrude Casebier Endowment), and the American and Southern Studies Program are sponsoring an interdisciplinary graduate colloquium entitled "Limits of the Past: The Turn to Memory and the Human Sciences." The program, directed by graduate students David Karr (history) and Edward Harcourt (history) will be held April 19th–20th at the Wyatt Center on Vanderbilt's Peabody campus. The program is designed to complement this year's faculty fellows program, "Memory, Identity, and Political Action," and will feature keynote addresses by Professor Richard H. King, the center's visiting fellow from the University of Nottingham (U.K.) and Lilliane Weissberg, Joseph B. Glossberg Term Professor of the Humanities, University of Pennsylvania.

Since the cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences, the place of memory in shaping cultural meaning and collective and individual action has been a focus of scholars from a wide range of fields. This colloquium will explore the borders of the turn to memory to examine how memory liberates, constrains, or otherwise affects social and political possibilities. The purpose of the colloquium is less to highlight the dominance of memory in culture than to come to terms with the implications of the turn of memory for interpreting social practice.



The 2001/02 Warren Center Fellows. Front row: Gregory F. Barz, Amy Helene Kirschke, Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr., Tina Y. Chen, David M. Bloome, and Charles E. Morris III. Back row: Yoshikuni Igarashi, Richard H. King, William James Booth, Larry J. Griffin, and Michael Kreyling
Not pictured: Thomas A. Schwartz

The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities

Warren Center Staff

Letters is the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, Box 1534 Station B, Nashville, Tennessee 37235. (615) 343-6060 Fax (615) 343-2248. For more information concerning the Center or its programs, please contact the above address or visit our web site at *www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center.*

Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1987 and renamed the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Members of the Vanderbilt community representing a wide variety of specializations take part in the Warren Center's programs, which are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues.

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