

Letters

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From the Past Imperfect: Towards a Critical Trauma Theory

by Maurice Stevens

"no one wishes to be plunged head first into the things one does not remember and does not wish to remember."—James Baldwin

My current manuscript project *From the Past Imperfect: Towards a Critical Trauma Theory* examines institutional and discursive practices that depend upon and reproduce concepts of trauma critically restricted by classifications based on race, class, gender, sexuality and religion. It contributes to both humanities and social sciences scholarship as it takes shape in the tension between trauma studies, medical anthropology, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, critical legal studies, critical race theory, and performance studies.

Why Critical Trauma Theory?

As a concept, trauma has been around in one form or another since the late nineteenth century and from the start, its meanings, subject to ideological and fiduciary struggle, have shifted and transformed. As one might expect, trauma has also been racialized, sexualized, gendered and classed from its inception. In fact, from its first applications in the explanation of symptoms deriving from railway accidents, trauma has really never functioned transparently or equitably and has never been an unencumbered descriptive term. For as soon as victims began making claims on their injuries, as soon, that is, as the harm attending this particular form of industrial movement had its place in the lexicon of litigation, insurance agents working in the service of railway companies, and the physicians and psychiatric specialists in their employ, began defining who could and who could not be understood as having been traumatized. These were scientific determinations that fell then, as they do now, along axes marked by cultural categories of social differentiation; and that

rose, as they often do, buoyed on the thermals of emergent technologies.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the diagnostic category used to describe symptomatic responses to trauma in relation to mental health, and the clinical object that ascribed evidentiary value to the idea that an event actually took place, has itself existed as a distinct clinical disorder for more than 40 years and has seen the development of an extensive body of research and multiple clusters of investigation grow up around it. There are multiple professional societies and journals committed to the exploration and understanding of PTSD, for example. Literally thousands of scholarly and professional articles have been written on the topic and hundreds of symposia dedicated to discussing trauma and PTSD in disciplinary contexts from literature to social work and ethnic studies to psychiatry. I am interested in how this research has both provided frameworks that allow us to operate with very specific definitions of trauma, and has simultaneously presented a universal notion of trauma purporting to describe a very broad range of experiences.

Like many ideas having their roots in psychology and medicine that have made their way into popular exchange, we find ourselves using the language of trauma easily; and often with a very powerful and felt sense that we know what we mean when we do so. The use of this nomenclature also performs cultural work by identifying those of us who use it as psychologically savvy, as empathetic and as modern sentimental subjects. Surrounded as we are by mediated uses of signifiers like "trauma," "traumatic," "traumatizing" and "PTSD," we have come to learn that they relate to experiences that traverse the spectrum from simply anxiety-provoking to psy-



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chically overwhelming, or from merely physically trying to life-threatening. This is to say that while, in some ways, these terms appear to have become generally evacuated of their specific meanings, most of us believe, at base and instantly, that we know exactly what to

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look for when cued by these troubling signs. Neither indexical nor symbolic signifiers, trauma has taken on the logics of the icon. When we imagine we are “seeing” trauma or the signs of its passage, we know immediately that something spectacular and catastrophic has transpired and we fear, also with a sense of immediacy, that normal systems for understanding the event and any of its survivors will be overwhelmed and rendered incapable of adequately capturing its immensity or the subtlety of its sublime pervasiveness.

However, the simultaneous sense of “knowing” something has transpired, and the utter frustration of having our understanding overcome by trauma—of not being able to render that experience legible through representation—has made its clinical and theoretical application particularly vulnerable to the forces of social emplacement imbedded in the concept of “trauma” itself. Trauma, as a kind of situated knowledge that emerges from the specificities of the moment in which it is invoked as an appropriate or obvious label, bears, in rather remarkable ways, traces that reveal its cultural work. This level of vulnerability and its ramifications poses the central point of departure in *From the Past Imperfect* as it considers how racialization, sexualization and the tyranny of the visual shape what trauma can be, which subjects its signification hails, and which institutional practices it underwrites because they are understood as adequate to its amelioration. Indeed, my project does this by tracing how notions of trauma emerge as often very complex “sets of practice” in several cultural institutions: the clinic, academe, legal discourse, cyberspace and popular culture.

At stake in my concern that the concept of trauma developed around injury related to railway accidents, wartime wounding, or overwhelming natural catastrophe, is the centrality classifying systems have had in the formation of ideas about whose sensibilities can be disturbed by near-death experiences, whose civility can be upset by the horrific, and who can be overwhelmed by fear; who, in short, can be traumatized. Indeed, I concur with the increasing number of theorists growing critical of trauma, who have been arguing that many social actors are inadequately understood within its boundaries. For example, psychoanalysts might argue against the application of trauma theory in cultural study because of its misappropriation of Freud’s or Janet’s ideas about how traumatic memory works; or ethnic or cultural studies theorists may take trauma theory to task for its inability to recog-

nize traumatogenic institutions like enslavement, genocidal cultural contact, or the simple ubiquity of non-spectacular racial violence and micro-aggressions; or transnational critics might decry the European and American impulse to force diverse peoples into the culturally specific rubric of trauma, casting aside the authority of local knowledges. These are all important and truly useful critiques, to which any serious consideration of trauma theory must respond. However, they stop short of interrogating the concept of trauma itself, from submitting it to the analysis we might apply to other cultural objects.

Trauma: From What it “Describes” to What it “Makes”

Like most examples of “socially constructed” objects of knowledge, trauma’s force can be measured in the material effects it produces in social relations, institutional practices, and public policy. Here *From the Past Imperfect* extends current theorizing. While critics have called attention to the limitations of trauma theory, they have not closely examined how these limitations prove problematic in specific institutional locations that build specialized sets of practice around troubling ideas of trauma.

As a concept formed out of injury related to railway accidents, wartime wounding, or overwhelming natural catastrophe, notions of class, race, gender and sex have all been central to the formation of popular ideas about whose sensibilities can be disturbed by near-death experiences, whose civility can be upset by the horrific, and who can be overwhelmed by fear; who, in short, can be traumatized. And as an increasing number of theorists growing critical of trauma (as it is traditionally figured) have been arguing, not all social actors are adequately understood within its boundaries. Trauma and even PTSD do not simply describe subjects and/or their experiences, they also, and perhaps more accurately, create them.

At the same time that increasingly specific and rigidly defined parameters have defined its technical (and institutionally legible) boundaries, the idea that trauma is somehow universal seems ubiquitous. Daily we see it used to describe a very wide range of experiences. Trauma, it turns out, is quite flexible and adroit, and can pass from one context of expertise to another, slipping across borders to be readily recruited to new discourses and new contexts of explanation. On one hand, the ability to pinpoint the traumatic event or symptom with spatial and temporal coordi-

nates (necessarily past and completed) makes it particularly powerful in the clinical or diagnostic setting. The traumatic event possesses specificity, there is an agent and victim of injury, a place and time of occurrence, and a blooming narrative of accountability or innocence. On the other hand, its unknowability, that is, the degree to which trauma exceeds signification or eludes description, makes it particularly susceptible to becoming something else as well. The event is also enigmatic.

This presents us with a kind of dilemma: trauma is both specific and enigmatic, both discursive and material. Similarly, the broad set of neurobiological responses to traumatic events (the psycho-physiological threat responses that seem, again, universally evident), and the multiple variations in the phenomenological or expressive response to trauma across groups defined in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class and even sexuality, also obtain a tension. While we may all develop “startle” responses in the aftermath of trauma, for example, the intensity of those responses can be shown to vary dramatically in correspondence to differences in one’s cultural or social positioning. The fact that trauma has been a highly racialized and sexualized concept dependent on visual metaphors for its description and models of the spectacular for its rendering, strains claims on its universal applicability. As a result, various traumatic experiences are not adequately addressed in clinical settings working with a PTSD model.

The basically arbitrary and, in some ways, theoretically counterintuitive requirement that the traumatic event have specific spatial and temporal coordinates, has primarily to do with the fact that limits to its application typically emerge in relation to where or when the “trauma” actually emerged. For example, the location of trauma’s origin can make it inaccessible to the PTSD model. This is apparent in the case of acute traumatic episodes originating in sociocultural structures where the traumatogenic agent is not readily discernable. Critical race and critical legal theorists in the United States and Europe have usefully analyzed the specific damages produced in relation to the law, prison industry and immigration policy, for example. Likewise, the case of trauma that exceeds individual experience is also difficult to localize and thereby normalize. Categories like ongoing or repeated trauma, multigenerational institutional relations, or even the sense of impending trauma that can produce PTSD symptoms, are all types of trauma that fall outside

temporal parameters of conventionally applied PTSD models.

Rather than thinking of trauma as an identifiable and discrete event that must have occurred at some specific point in time and place, it can be more usefully understood as a

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cultural object whose meanings far exceed the boundaries of any particular shock or disruption; rather than being restricted by the common sense ideas we possess that allow us to think of trauma as authentic evidence of something “having happened there,” a snapshot whose silver plate and photon are analogues to the psyche and impressions fixed in embodied symptoms, the real force of trauma flowers in disparate and unexpected places. And, like most cultural objects, trauma, too, circulates among various social contexts that give it differing meanings and co-produce its multiple social effects. Like most cultural objects, trauma’s component memes, those pivotal conceptualizations that tailor its function, have origins that can be traced to coordinates that vary in time, space and semiosis; coordinates whose ideological concerns come to refract or anchor trauma’s meanings simply by occupying the same temporo-spatio-semiotic location.

History & Memory: A Tale for Times of Trauma

Like trauma and memory itself, the study of memory and the formation of the memory sciences have a milieu, and have taken their shape and cue from social contexts that, over the course of modern industrialization’s inexorable cultural speedup, have come to privilege the production of history over the production of memory. Spaces of history like the archive, the memorial or the “official story,” are often figured in binary opposition to spaces considered the purview of memory: the performance, the repertoire or the ephemera of public culture and spaces. Moreover, through the rhetorics of provenance, authenticity, and the originality of the record, institutions that manage memory increasingly wear the robes of truth’s arbiters. Repositories of facts, conglomerates of evidence, memory

management takes place while historicity is conferred by the archive and through its objects. While they are posed in opposition, both memory and history contribute to a regime of remembrance whose logics and functions are familiar and, in some ways,

comforting. Its logics, the arcs of its movement, are those of the photograph or the gene or the eyewitness testimony; its functions converge to convey truth, to represent the Real and to reproduce the Same. Thus, one need not accept the opposition between history and memory to appreciate the effects produced by the solidification of their polar relation. History posed against memory works. It works like science against culture or data against interpretation, its cultural work deriving not simply from their binary opposition, but from the meanings ascribed to those oppositions and the material relations those meanings justify, the ideology they reproduce and the incommensurability they convey.

The science of memory has shifted from conceiving of its object, memory, as an evolving entity open to processes of contestation, reframing, appropriation, diffraction or simple dissolution, and has moved, again, with seeming inexorability, toward a focus on history as the fraught and always problematic recording of what has “gone on,” as the recitation of actions and events contained within the past-perfect grammar of description. There and then was an event, it occurred in a place and at a time that are, by definition, distanced from here, from now; and the historian heroically does the work of salvage, approaching the event through documents, artifacts, and corroborating testimony believed to shed evidentiary light on the always-already past event, to link it through an ideal provenance of its traces to the present. The historian’s labor, and the measure of his agency or ability, lies in determining what should be memorialized in objects of historical inscription. Unlike history, as the story goes, memory exists continually, inscribed in the ongoing production of a narrativized self or community of practice or affiliation. The muscle remembers, the space is haunted, the landscape is scarred,

always, with memory, a trace remains. A trace remains, defiantly, sometimes hinting, sometimes pressing, sometimes roaring, but always insisting in its ubiquitous return. History, which requires sifting through remnants instead of traces, speaks the past differently. Events captured in history are located in the mythos of temporal progressions, in the relative relation between moments and events; the distance imagined between here/now and there/then is history’s necessary condition. Indeed, history, as a trope with rhetorical force, is memory’s nemesis, pushing it ever flatter, out of the flesh of bodies, gestures, objects and spaces, and into the amber of dominant signs and symbols, or the architecture of archives, or the ash or bones carefully catalogued there; in history, the past becomes an imaginary occupant of the symbolic, and provenance its genomic real. And yet history is haunted by stories that have gone un-included in the realm of historiography, history grows gaunt and distracted in its confrontation with events that test its ability to represent, to inscribe with any accuracy at all. Hunched over and squinting, it worries at the frayed ends of incomplete narratives and hidden transcripts. Still, we see that when and where history struggles, when and where it collapses in the face of the absolute truth of having pain or being harmed, and the inexorable suspicion that accompanies documenting it, we see, in fact, the memory sciences providing support. The variously institutionalized science of memory smoothes over history’s lacunae, its impotencies, by abjecting the possibility that specifically racialized violence endured by racialized communities might also be understood within the rubric of trauma; or that the rubric of trauma may secret within its necessary logics.

Just as the invisible genome vouches for the validity of phenotype, or the effaced technologies of the photo argue the “fact” of its real representation, the past and completed unrepresentable trauma supports claims about the coherent subject of history. It says, “You see, there once was a whole, seamless and modern subject. Our effort to repair it, by making legible its injury, is proof enough of its having been there at one time, whole (read: vulnerable), pure (read: violable) and mature. Trauma has rendered this particular example of proper subjectivity damaged, where once, in a moment of innocent possibility, it was not...” Of course, the wholeness, purity, and propriety of this subject have been built on the very particular ways it has always-already been gendered, sexed, and, of course, raced.

Race: The Repudiated Mote

Through its enigmatic signification, race has played a pivotal role in the formation of contemporary notions of memory, identity, and trauma that are based on interior experiences of overwhelming exterior events. From Freud, Darwin, and the scientific racisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the post-pleasurable traumas of WWII and the recuperative practices of American clinical psychology and neurobiology, psychoanalytic theories and psychotherapeutic practices have been unable to take up racialization as a social process that produces some subjects as vulnerable to traumatogenic injury, and others as not. Indeed, the “Others” to this village of the traumatizable, because they are the ultimate source of phobia and, therefore, cannot be overwhelmed by it, are not imagined to possess the psychic interiority necessary for identification and institutional legibility. Indeed, as phobic object, the Other portends both the need and possibility for cathexis. Ironically, the racialization of these others both produces and is reinscribed by the fact that the subject of psychoanalysis and recuperative treatment remains a de-racialized, thoroughly modern subject, imagined through universal (read: identical) mechanisms and structures understood to work within particular psyches. In this way, the Other stands in as the constitutive outside that vouches for the uniformity of a self that possesses an unconscious composed of properly repressed drives, and a social presentation replete with appropriately sublimated libidinal urges.

Various theorists have traced how ideas about memory and its technologies changed dramatically from the mid-1800s through the early twentieth century, when memory shifted from being primarily an activity useful in oral and religious traditions, to an art to be cultivated through specific practices and training; from the archival location of culture, to the engine of its production. Once a notion standing in for the soul in an increasingly secular world described by science, memory has more recently evolved into a trope often invoked in the service of identity discourses. Whether read in relation to the supplanting of quasi-religious mythologies, or as the inadvertent byproduct of a technocratic focus on the future, the valuation of what was once called the “art of memory” has altered dramatically. The production of history (marked by selective forgetting through the erection of monuments and disciplined remembering inherent to archival practice or historical preservation) became the sign of civilized advancement and

literacy. The privileging of memory, on the other hand, came to be constructed as inversely related to civilized culture and intelligence. The 1860s, 70s and 80s also saw the instantiation of the memory sciences in educational institutions. It was in Paris in 1870 that Ebbinghaus established the “memory laboratory” in 1879 and planted the roots of psychometric approaches to memory measurement that are today central in cognitive models of memory processing. Moreover, four years later, in 1883 Ribot wrote the first text on memory problems and soon became the first psychology professor at the College of Paris. In his *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in the Positive Psychology* Ribot posits his conception of the two features of self. *Le moi* has a loosely held together synchronic aspect that is formed by the constant process of memory and impressions at the center of consciousness being replaced by more fresh memories, with the older ones being pushed to the periphery and de-privileged. The center of attention and recent memory material becomes that ongoing piece of *le moi* that constitutes the diachronic ego formation of the self as the subject of its own history (Ribot, 108-112). There are resonances here with Freud’s notion of the psychic systems Conscious, Preconscious, and Unconscious. There is also the implication (reproduced in Freud as well) that forgetting is a necessary part of ego formation, which Freud considers a kind of adaptive amnesia.

This period also saw the emergence of a widespread acceptance of biologicist notions of race and difference buttressed in the United States and Europe with scientific theories and epistemologies informed, at base, by a notion of incommensurable difference. This incommensurability or failure of recognition derived from and reproduced racial logics that found easy expression through the visual technologies associated with eugenics, criminology and psychoanalysis. As a result, the convergence of Social Darwinism, emerging photographic technologies, and a fledgling psychoanalysis naturalized ideas of racialized peoples as lacking the psychic interiority that could make psychic trauma, or even basic suffering, a social possibility. This is particularly significant because, following Erichsen’s early work with railroad-related traumatic injury—what he called “railway spine”—theorists of non-physical “hysterical” trauma like Charcot, Janet, and Freud were building their paradigms on these epistemologies of difference. As a result, the taxonomies they developed, because informed by racialized notions of other and the self, could only reproduce those

formations in their work; intellectual formations along which the memory/history binary was also mapped. Ultimately, the convergence of these ideas conspired to exclude the experiences of racialized ethnic communities from the category of catastrophe that could be called traumatogenic, the typology of experience that could be called history, and from the practices of its collection and discipline necessary to narrating and archiving the nation.

Because the traumatized subject has been one constructed through medical, psychological, legal, academic and cultural institutions that are themselves based on racially unmarked subjects (that is, racialized as essentially and putatively white), it makes sense to understand both the subject of trauma and trauma itself to be similarly unmarked and essentially white. The question is, how does this marking mean in spatio-temporal-semiotic locations that produce constellations of practice like PTSD and its enabling agents (clinics, clinicians, psychotropics, therapies, institutional recognitions, etc.)? If we accept that PTSD is a bundle of social practices that reflect how trauma is invoked in the clinical/medical institution, and that that institutional formation produces legible subjects—that is, he or she who has been traumatized and is exhibiting symptoms which warrant the diagnostic categorization of PTSD and the disciplinary practices that spring into action in the application of the diagnosis—then the what and how of this marking’s meaning is reflected in the subjectivity produced by the diagnosis. The injured/traumatized subject is both the constitutive inside and outside by which all proper citizen-subjects can know themselves...whole, coherent, seamless, healed and modern. These are the ephemeral traces to which we must attend, these ideal imaginings of ourselves as whole, wounded, or mended.

The enigmatic signifier, Laplanche tells us, wishes to be translated. That is, its signifi-ance is driven by the desire to be exposed, refashioned, and represented. Because its consideration of representability is constrained by culture, its signifying path always-already provoked by the classifying systems that order the differences through which its legibility emerges, because the systems of classification already possess a symbolic valence and are already related one to another; because of these factors the enigmatic signifier speaks in names that are familiar: gender, sexuality, race. While reconfiguring our understanding of trauma and the logics that inform memory cannot remove the repudiated mote from the

eye of the memory sciences, that which remains its enigmatic yet powerful metaphORIZOR; a trauma differently understood, and a memory whose racial logics are acknowledged can certainly render its material effects transparent even if its signification remains opaque.

From the Past Imperfect to . . .

Examining institutions of practice like clinical service provision, legal language and action, professional training pedagogy, cyberspace memorializing, and popular media representation of terrorism and catastrophe, my work considers what it means that experiences of trauma, diagnoses of PTSD, easy memorializing, social instruction, and even legal framings of unacceptable harm are not, even now, available to, or inclusive of, everyone. *From the Past Imperfect* shows how the work of trauma in one institutional location feeds into and draws upon its iterations in other institutions. How, for example, legal definitions of the tortured body rely on limiting concepts of physical and mental traumatic injury, which in turn, supply the logics and just cause to training institutions, cyberspatial sites of memorialization, and representations of terrorism and its effects. It examines the links between contemporary representations of terrorism and the temporality of trauma, suggesting that even the democratizing of suffering that contemporary terrorism discourse offers, might function to ameliorate the requirement that traumatic events be restricted to a spatially and temporally distant location. The project also argues that rather than mere legal categories, the peculiar legal objects hate crime and genocide in domestic and international law are actually complicated sets of practice that reflect struggles over the status of the legal subject in the context of harm. This predicament, I argue, finds its most recent and alarming manifestation in the jurisprudential resurrection of the tortured body. In addition to exploring traumatic iconography and representations of terrorism, torture-related jurisprudence, and contestations over the definition of genocide as sets of practice that exceed the parameters we might normally expect in investigations of the law or the media, *From the Past Imperfect* analyzes

trauma's manifestation in clinical settings by focusing on PTSD as a set of practices that include service utilization, diagnosis, psychotropic medicating, hospitalization and revisioning of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. At base, *From the Past Imperfect* traces how limited conceptions of trauma have shaped the basic assumptions and material activities attending notions of harm, injury, and their subjects in significant social institutions while proposing alternative approaches to assessing and responding to our social suffering.

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Lecture Series Explores Election

The Warren Center, in conjunction with the Communication Studies Department, has organized a lecture series designed to provide depth and context to discussions of the historic 2008 presidential campaign.

The series is entitled "Realities and Representations: The 2008 U.S. Presidential Campaign" and it explores the dynamics of race and gender, as well as the effects of media and technology on recent events.

At noon on January 28, 2009, Iqbal Shah, the Louis A. and Mary E. Maier-Bascom Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, will discuss "Network Nation: How Campaign Ads and the Internet Shape Participation." The campaigns' use of technology such as text messaging and social networking has been credited with drawing younger voters into the process. Shah will explore how the medium expanded upon the candidates' messages.

John M. Murphy, Associate Professor of Speech Communication at the University of Illinois, will participate in the series on February 16, 2009. Details will be posted on the Warren Center website.

Stacy J. Carroll, Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University and an authority on women's politics, delivered the first lecture on September 22, 2008. Entitled "Gender and Hillary Clinton's Campaign: The Good, the Bad, and the Misogynic," Carroll discussed gender issues and politics.

Peter Applebome, writer and editor for *The New York Times*, discussed the pros and cons of the campaign coverage on newspapers, television, and blogs in his lecture "All the News That's Fit to Blog: Old Media, New Media, and the Brave New World of Election 2008" on October 13, 2008.

The Warren Center website links to video-casts of the talks after each event: www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center/podcasts.htm.

Putting It Together: Creative Humanities

Edward H. Friedman

"A man only learns in two ways, one by reading, and the other by association with smarter people." — Will Rogers

From the mid-1960s forward, an exciting trend began to influence literary studies: the rise of theory. Literary theory is, of course, hardly new. The concept of a poetics, which could be both prescriptive and descriptive, dates from classical antiquity. Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example, uses audience reaction to Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* and other plays to formulate the basis of catharsis, the purging of the emotions of fear and pity produced by tragic drama. At the same time, one can go back to classical antiquity for the foundations of rhetoric, initially the art of persuasion. Orators developed certain skills and strategies for emphasizing their major points—for influencing their listeners—and these elements evolved into the tropes and figures of poetry. Rhetoric becomes the base for argumentation and for linguistic embellishment, for language that can be stirring, enlightening, forceful, and beautiful, at the service of poets and of spin doctors. The interplay of poetics and rhetoric serves to unite old theory with new, and similitude with difference. Equally significant, a shared commitment to theory, which in its most recent manifestations has dropped the adjective literary, can unite disciplines.

Theory has become a type of lingua franca among academic fields, so that, for example, historians have been able to interact more fruitfully, and less territorially, with specialists in literature, or anthropologists with researchers of popular culture, and the list could go on and on. Theory fosters interdisciplinarity, and, as would follow, interdisciplinarity encourages dialogue among scholars whose paths have not regularly converged. The first decade of the twenty-first century is a good moment for the humanities, because it is a good moment for the exchange of ideas and ideologies, for collaborative ventures.

When he delivered a Chancellor's Lecture at Vanderbilt on September 5, 2008, Bruce Cole, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, addressed the role—and the fate—of the humanities in colleges and universities. Dr. Cole recognized the need to promote the humanities curriculum and humanities programs, which have faced some decline, but he also noted, if not exactly in these words, that the humanities are alive and well at Vanderbilt. We are fortunate that this is the case; it is not just good luck, but hard work on the part of faculty, students, and administrators, that has allowed the humanities to thrive. The wide-ranging and diverse interests of the faculty and a willingness to cross, or elide, traditional disciplinary boundaries assure that students have an exceptional range of offerings. By the same token, Vanderbilt students at all levels opt to explore multiple areas of the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Our undergraduates often select double, and even triple, majors, and the combinations can be most impressive. I take delight in knowing that future doctors, lawyers, social workers, and entrepreneurs who have taken Spanish literature courses with me will approach their careers with a knowledge of language and culture and with an eye on diversity. The more students branch out, and the more critical and theoretical models to which they have been exposed, the more prepared they will be for their professional and personal lives.

In the last three or four decades, theory has taught us to be more self-conscious, to acknowledge the models that we use and the strengths and limits of our work. This shift generally makes its way into the classroom, where we may be more inclined to share with students our objectives and the tools of our trade, as it were. We can be unapologetic for not having all the answers or for not providing "definitive" solutions to the problems raised by our inquiries, but the ceding of authority can be paradoxically empowering, given that

we are in the business of encouraging analytical thinking. We are not so much deconstructing the operating premises of our disciplines as demonstrating that the acquisition of knowledge is an ongoing process, constantly subject to reassessment and change. While the boom in theory may have served to shake the foundations of the humanities, the results have been strikingly positive, pushing us to seek greater depth and breadth in our academic endeavors. We can let students in on our uncertainties as we impart our discoveries and our hypotheses. In turn, classes can focus simultaneously on a specific topic and on the broader implications of a particular approach. This phenomenon also affects the ways in which we describe our work to scholars in other disciplines and helps to bring us together intellectually and in a comfortable space. The Warren Center faculty seminars have done precisely that for many years, as do formal and informal study groups for faculty and graduate students, conferences, invited speakers, and other Center-sponsored activities. Now in its third year, the Graduate Student Fellows Program builds on the Center's role in facilitating individual development and partnerships in research.

The Warren Center has celebrated twenty years of serving Vanderbilt University, and the welcome mat at the Vaughn Home in the heart of the campus has seen considerable traffic over that period of time. The Center has become—and wants to continue to be—a comfort zone for the humanities at Vanderbilt, and a site for lively discussion and debate. The executive director Mona Frederick, staff members Sarah Harper Nobles and Polly Case, and I extend an invitation to the university community and to our neighbors to visit the Center and to become involved in its programs, to partake in a tradition of excellence, and to contribute to new projects and to traditions-in-the-making.

New Directions in Trauma Studies

An Interview with Vivien Green Fryd

The 2008-2009 Warren Center Fellows' Program, "New Directions in Trauma Studies," will examine the emerging field of trauma studies and will work to define its boundaries and enhance the field through interdisciplinary discussion. The Fellows believe that by addressing the lived experiences of trauma through an interdisciplinary humanistic lens, their work will augment the theoretical understanding of individual and collective experiences of trauma, will intervene in the suffering that results from trauma, and will assist in trauma prevention. The program's director is Vivien Green Fryd, professor of history of art. *Letters* recently joined Professor Fryd at the Vaughn Home to discuss the ongoing seminar.



Vivien Green Fryd

LETTERS: In your proposal, you assert that we're living in "an age of trauma that [...] deserves further attention." For the purposes of your study, what constitutes trauma?

FRYD: In 1980, the American Psychiatric Medical Association had come up with the term Posttraumatic Stress Disorder for the first time. It was a result of people returning from the Vietnam War and experiencing what they identified as PTSD—which involves anxiety, disassociation, depression, and flashbacks. The list of symptoms goes on. At the same time, feminists began to argue that women who had experienced sexual trauma were also experiencing PTSD. Thus, trauma is a clinical, psychological problem that individuals experience when there's an extreme incident and rupture in their lives that creates so many problems that they have difficulty engaging in normal day-to-day activities. Today, 9/11 is a perfect example, as are the earthquake in China and the cyclone in Myanmar. These are all examples of people who've had an extreme experience that causes these various symptoms—and it's something that can still go unrecognized as a clinical problem. Watching the news yesterday, I heard that the Veterans' Administration is talking about the fact that Iraqi vets need additional help, and it seems like a no-brainer; hadn't they already figured this out with the Vietnam War? It's an issue that keeps recurring. Trauma can be individual or it can be collective—that is, that more than one person experiences it at the same time. You do not have to have lived in New York during 9/11; you can live in Nashville,

Tennessee and have posttraumatic stress experiences about being afraid to fly. Sometimes I get on a subway somewhere, and I will think, "boy, this would be a great place for somebody to bomb"; that would be an example of cultural trauma. Then there are generational examples where trauma gets passed down from one generation to the next—and it can also be transgenerational, in particular among African Americans having to do with the residue of slavery and how it affects their current lives.

LETTERS: What issues do you hope this seminar will develop or seek to answer?

FRYD: When I was talking about PTSD first being defined, I left out the Holocaust. But it was the Holocaust and the Vietnam War that were the two big events that led to the Psychiatric Association defining it as a disorder. It was in 1980 that feminists came on board, and in the 1970s that the rape crisis movement came about with Susan Brownmiller's book *Against Our Will* and with feminists in the arts and literature ending the silence about rape and sexual violence in American culture, raising questions about rape as an exercise of power and domination rather than sex. Trauma studies began with Freud, who was the first one to talk about trauma, although he initially talked about it as female hysteria—and he saw it in a number of his female patients. What's interesting is that so many people have problems with his talking about female hysteria—which today we now identify as trauma—which usually is linked to sexual abuse—incest, rape, things linked with childhood events—but he then came up with his theory of the Oedipal complex that replaced hysteria as a "woman's problem." It wasn't until World War I that he returned to accepting the idea of trauma—men returning from war with trauma, which he saw in relation to the trauma of his female patients. He was the first to talk about it; again, though, a lot of people were rejecting what he was saying. One of his students even delivered a paper rejecting everything that Freud said about trauma. So it's very contentious. There's actually an organization—which started in the 1992—called the False Memory Association, which emerged from two particular cases. One involved a grown woman who had memories of her father committing incest. Her mother, Pamela Freyd, started the association. The other was

the very famous case of children in the McMartin Preschool who had reported abuse; the False Memory Association argued that therapists had planted false memories. It's a contentious issue, and some people have problems accepting the fact that trauma can, in fact, occur.

LETTERS: What do current scientific studies say about trauma and how do you approach that information from your discipline?

FRYD: The way in which my brain functions is to look at how trauma and representation intersect—visual intersections in high art and popular culture, in movies and pornography, in comic books or in literature—and I'm interested in the ways in which works of art can act as testimonies giving voice to that which is silenced. I'm interested in how trauma is silenced. The Holocaust is a great example in a family with Holocaust survivors—I talk about this having read about it and having lived it because my mother was a Holocaust survivor herself. Anytime the Holocaust came up when I was a child, it was "shh, don't talk about it." And the same thing happens, I think, with incest in a lot of families. I'm interested in how viewers and readers bear witness and acknowledge the reality of such traumas.

LETTERS: Are there any specific results you hope the group's work will produce?

FRYD: I'm really interested in whether trauma can be healed. Is it possible for psychotherapy to heal trauma? I believe that it can, but healing doesn't mean you're free of it. Trauma stays with you—it always comes back. But is it possible for a work of art to heal a trauma—or to stimulate a trauma? Can it work as a visual cue that can resurrect a past trauma? I have been reading about ways in which neuropsychologists have studied the brain to understand trauma-effects, then I met with a colleague, David Zald, from the psychology department; it turns out that he does studies on the brain and he talked about how the amygdala—which modulates memory and controls responses linked to fear—is triggered during experiences of trauma. It enhances memory and coding, and trauma affects the cortex so that you can't access those memories. Clearly it's more complex than this. I'm fascinated by the fact that scientists are using MRIs and other equipment to look at the brain and are realizing that PTSD literally codes itself within brain activity. Someone's inability to remember—a survivor of Viet-

nam, the Holocaust, incest—emerges out of an extreme experience that causes a rupture that prevents access to what particularly happened. And one may never be able to remember it again. It's fascinating. I'm a little disappointed that we don't have a participant in the sciences who's doing this kind of work, but I'm hoping to bring in outside speakers on the issue.

LETTERS: You mentioned war and its effects on PTSD. You also mentioned the effects of natural disasters in China and Myanmar as factors affecting trauma. Are there clear differences between the trauma civilians experience and the type that soldiers experience? Is it a difference of degree rather than kind?

FRYD: It makes me think of [Hurricane] Katrina and something my daughter said yesterday. I was invited to present a paper at a conference in New Orleans, and I asked her if she'd like to come down with me and look at schools like Tulane. And her response was, "Mom, I wouldn't want to live down there because there's going to be another Katrina." And I thought, this was *her* response to trauma, and it reminds me of my own experience. Because my mom was a survivor of the Holocaust, as a child I believed that if I told people I was Jewish, I could be rounded up and taken off to a concentration camp; so I hid my Judaism as a child. It was so alarming to hear my daughter say that, and I had to acknowledge that this was her response to trauma. I don't watch the news a lot—I mean I listen to NPR—but I don't watch a lot of TV, so she wasn't inundated with it. So this is an example of how trauma becomes culturally ingrained, a social dynamic. Race is also such an issue, and Katrina is your basic example as far as what happened to minorities who were living there.

LETTERS: It seems that a host of socioeconomic factors come into play in trauma studies. To follow up on China and Myanmar, does nationality and how certain populations interact with disasters have a major effect on trauma? To what extent does a person's nationality inform how she will deal with her experiences?

FRYD: It makes me think about the Lost Boys [of Sudan] who settled here in Nashville. They've opened up an art exhibit in town; it would be fascinating to go and talk to them about their art and about how they deal with

their memories of their trauma. What happens to the people who've had continuous traumatic experiences like these and have moved to the U.S. to begin what we consider a normal life? The Lost Boys, Vietnam and Iraqi vets, incest and Holocaust survivors—how are they affected upon entering into normal life? Survivors of trauma always have that residue that affects them emotionally and physically.

LETTERS: You mention in your proposal that this seminar differs from other trauma theory groups in that it takes an interdisciplinary approach. How do you see the field benefiting from the contributions not only from medicine and law, but also the humanities and social sciences?

FRYD: The strength of anything that takes place at the humanities center is that you have people coming together to talk about the issue. Trauma studies is not usually discussed from an interdisciplinary point of view. There are many, many wonderful books on trauma studies—some on Holocaust survivors, some on Vietnam Vets, some, although fewer, on visual representations of trauma—and what we're trying to do is bring it all together. What's fascinating is that it turns out there's going to be conference in Australia in December 2008 that will deal with trauma from an interdisciplinary point of view. It's fascinating that it takes place at exactly the same time as our seminar, and that we didn't know about it, and they didn't know about us. I think that what we're proposing to do is really *new*—and that the people in Australia are on board with us!

LETTERS: How do other factors such as age and gender factor into the group's work on trauma studies? How essential are they to your own work?

FRYD: That's something of interest in my work—I'm finding that women and children are not the only victims of rape. Men can be victims in rape, and it doesn't have to be in prisons, where we're familiar with it, or in churches—and it doesn't have to be male-on-male. It can be female-on-male. There are some people who've written on male rape, but it's largely an issue that doesn't enter into the larger American culture. This became a topic that emerged from the women's movement, when some men involved in anti-rape crisis approaches in the 1980s uncovered that not only are women socially constructed, but so are men, and not only are women raped, but

so are men. The issue of gender becomes interesting. Trauma studies is a very difficult topic; how do you deal with trauma studies when you've experienced trauma, and how do you approach it from an intellectual, detached point of view—and does it have to be a detached point of view if it's personal? When is it personal? It's fascinating. I'm writing a book titled *Representing Sexual Trauma in Contemporary American Art*. The number of people who respond to this topic is amazing; I wish I had a video. Because most people show incredible surprise and shock, and I get the question, "what got you interested in that?" It puzzles them. Other work I've done, people want to hear more—but with trauma studies, people can't understand *why* you work on this and they can only joke, "oh, a light topic, haha." Why would you choose something so difficult? There are a group of us who do it, and we own up that it's difficult.

LETTERS: You mentioned before that trauma is a timely issue. At what point did you begin to work on trauma, and what inspired you to propose this seminar?

FRYD: My interest in trauma studies really came from my decision to write about the representation of rape and sexual violence in American visual art. I wrote a rough draft and sent it to readers; and when I got comments back, the readers skirted around the issue that I needed to conceptualize trauma studies. So I realized I wanted to do more reading, and not only would I never turn down a chance to work at the Warren Center, I also thought it was right up my alley. What I didn't realize when I decided to get on board was how invested I'd become. Even though my book manuscript will be done in the fall, I'll still be able to refine my ideas. My next project will also be on a photographer who's a Holocaust survivor—my uncle—so it's not surprising that I'm engaged in trauma studies right now. It's timely in my personal life as well as historically.

LETTERS: Thank you for sharing insight into the discussions that have shaped the seminar so far. The project has great potential not only for shaping an important emergent field, but also for shaping how we deal with trauma outside of the humanities.

The State of the Humanities

by Bruce Cole, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities

Chairman Cole spoke at Vanderbilt University on September 5, 2008, as part of the Chancellor's Lecture Series. His talk was also the final in a series of events marking the twentieth anniversary of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities. We are grateful to Chairman Cole for allowing us to reprint his remarks in Letters.

Good evening. Thank you, Chancellor Zeppos, for your kind introduction.

I am delighted to be in Nashville at this outstanding university. I am very pleased to join the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in celebrating its twentieth anniversary—and I am proud of the role the National Endowment for the Humanities played in helping to launch the Center two decades ago.

In 1989, the NEH awarded the Center a \$480,000 Challenge Grant to help establish a permanent endowment for the program. As the current NEH Chairman, I am thrilled to come here and see the results of that initial investment: a thriving center for humanities learning and research at one of our nation's finest universities. I admire the Center's variety of excellent programs—and I very much appreciate your emphasis on promoting interdisciplinary learning and research among Vanderbilt's students and faculty.

On this happy anniversary for the Robert Penn Warren Center, we celebrate the past—yet we must also look forward. In the years to come, the humanities will face exciting opportunities—and some serious challenges.

I am no seer or prophet, but as NEH Chairman I do see trends in our grant applications, and my job gives me a good overarching perspective on what is happening in the humanities. I want to offer my take on the state of the humanities today, focusing on three major areas.

One development that is having a tremendous impact on the humanities is the rise of the digital age. When I arrived at the Endowment in 2001, I had no idea that terms like “petabytes” and “interoperability” would become part of my everyday vocabulary. But it soon became clear to me that digital technology will revolutionize the humanities in three key ways.

First, digitization will foster increased collaboration in the humanities disciplines. Until recently, the hard sciences and social sciences have been far ahead of the humanities in this regard. Those disciplines embrace collaborative work—yet the humanities disciplines tend to prize individual scholarship. Our ideal is still the lone scholar poring through archives,

or hunching over a desk, writing feverishly.

This model has certainly produced much brilliant scholarship. Many humanities scholars will continue to work this way and the NEH will continue to support them. Yet a significant part of the humanities' future lies in the type of collaborative scholarship that digital technology makes possible.

An imperfect but valuable example of this is the “wiki” tool, which demonstrates the remarkable results possible when we tap into the shared knowledge of enthusiastic communities. Wikis are also showing us the future of reference works. In the digital age, reference works can be “dynamic.” They can be constantly updated; created and edited in collaboration with users from around the globe; and remarkably adept at policing themselves to maintain accuracy, balance, and quality.

The second key change is that “data-driven” scholarship will allow humanists to ask new questions and create new knowledge. The “core dataset” for humanities scholars consists of objects like books, documents, journals, paintings, newspapers, film and audio recordings, sculpture—these are the things we humanists study. In the past, these objects were read and searched on a small scale; no one scholar could research or study more than a subset of the works in his field.

But in the digital age, the scale of available materials has exploded. In just the past few years, massive amounts of cultural heritage materials have been digitized. Scholars now have access to millions of digitized books, journals, and recordings. In the sciences, the data-driven approach to knowledge made possible by supercomputing has produced incredible breakthroughs like the Human Genome Project. Now humanities scholars are exploring how this approach can benefit their disciplines.

The third key change is that digitizing allows us to greatly increase public access to humanities resources. Digital archiving and search tools are making primary documents, scholarship, and other humanities resources much more portable and more broadly available.

These changes, while exciting, also raise serious questions. How will the digital age transform the ways in which we read, write, think, and learn? Exactly what kinds of new knowledge might humanities scholars acquire? What new questions might all this data compel them to ask? What content tools do we need to develop to help scholars turn this tidal wave of information into wisdom? And how can humanists take advantage of



Left: Bruce Cole, NEH Chairman, at a luncheon for public humanities leaders in Nashville.

digital technology without changing what is fundamentally meaningful and unique about the humanities?

At the NEH we are taking a leadership role in exploring these questions, and in promoting the application of digital technology to humanities scholarship, teaching, and access. In 2006 we launched our Digital Humanities Initiative, and this past April, we transformed it into a permanent Office of Digital Humanities, or ODH. This Office works with other NEH staff and scholars, and with other funding bodies both in the United States and abroad, to pursue the great opportunities offered by the digital humanities.

Let me give you a few examples of the types of projects we are pursuing through the Office of Digital Humanities: One of our goals is to start a conversation about how supercomputers can be used for humanities research. This past spring, we announced our new Humanities High Performance Computing initiative—HHPC for short. ODH is working with our colleagues at the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation to show humanities scholars how high-performance computing and data storage might be used for their work. We also recently announced a new grant competition with the Department of Energy to award time and training on their supercomputers.

Another ODH program is our Digital Humanities Start-up Grants. These grants are encouraging scholars with bright new ideas, and providing the “seed money” to help promising digital humanities projects get off the ground.

Another program is our Digital Humanities Workshops, which help K-12 educators learn how to use digital resources to strengthen the

teaching of the humanities in our schools. And our Digital Humanities Challenge Grants are helping endow digital humanities centers and other large-scale projects.

Now, let me reassure you: while the NEH is embracing a digital future for the humanities, this does not mean that we will end our support for print projects and other traditional forms of scholarship—far from it.

But it does mean that we recognize and welcome the far-reaching potential of this new frontier in the humanities. As a federal agency, the Endowment's mission is to bring the humanities to every American—so we seek to harness the power of digital technology to preserve humanities resources and scholarship, and make the humanities more accessible to everyone.

This brings me to another important challenge we face: the need to democratize the humanities. The NEH's founding legislation declares that "democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." The Endowment fosters this wisdom and vision by bringing the insights of the humanities to as many citizens as possible.

We are pursuing this goal in several ways. Through our We the People program, now almost six years old, the NEH supports projects that promote the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture. These include documentary films, museum and library exhibitions and other public programs, and workshops for teachers at American historic sites such as Ellis Island, Mount Vernon, and Pearl Harbor. Since its inception, We the People has received \$66 million in funding from Congress and the President, and has used that funding to support over 1,500 projects in every state of the Union.

One We the People project that takes advantage of digital technology is our National Digital Newspaper Program. With our partners at the Library of Congress, we are working to make available online, fully searchable, digital files of historic newspapers from every American state and territory—the first great draft of our history.

Last year we unveiled the first results of our labors—the *Chronicling America* page on the Library of Congress's Web site. This site now contains over 600,000 pages of public domain newspapers. Students, teachers, scholars, and history buffs can now, at the click of a mouse, get immediate and searchable access to this incredible resource. Ultimately, *Chronicling America* will make more than 30 million pages of historic American newspapers avail-

able to the public for free, and forever.

In February, the NEH launched the newest element of We the People, an initiative called *Picturing America*. This initiative brings high-quality reproductions of great American art to classrooms and public libraries nationwide, where they can help citizens of all ages connect to the people, places, and ideas that have shaped our country. *Picturing America* uses art in a unique way to engage students in the humanities—including history, literature, social studies, civics, and much more.

The response to *Picturing America* has been amazing. During a short, three-month application window this past spring, nearly one-fifth of all the schools and public libraries in the United States applied for *Picturing America* awards. Later this month, over 26,000 schools and libraries will receive *Picturing America* sets, including 504 recipients in Tennessee and 32 here in Nashville.

Picturing America might not seem immediately relevant to the concerns of most humanities scholars. But I hope you see how effectively this initiative will promote public engagement with the humanities, and raise awareness of the NEH and its activities among our citizens. *Picturing America* is extending the Endowment's reach exponentially—and I think you will agree that is a good thing.

Through We the People, *Picturing America*, and many other programs, the NEH ensures that the humanities continue to make a vital contribution to our civic life. But the Endowment cannot do it all alone. Those of you who teach and research in the humanities must also make the argument for the importance of your disciplines.

That brings me to the final challenge that I want to discuss: the need to restore the humanities to a central place in higher education and in public discourse.

At their best, the humanities help us carry on the rich traditions of our civilization, and help us seek answers to the enduring questions that we ask as human beings: What is the good life? What is justice? Is there a human nature, and if so, what is it? What is good government? Is there such a thing as right and wrong, good and evil?

Most serious students begin college excited about the possibility of exploring such questions. Yet too often these days, humanities teachers and departments avoid them—either because there is simply no room for them in the curriculum; or because humanities teachers have greater interest in more specialized topics or problems; or because they do not believe it is even possible to answer

these questions.

Indeed, the humanities today suffer from a crisis of confidence—an uncertainty about what role they should play on our campuses, or in the intellectual life of our nation as a whole. Humanities scholars and teachers know their disciplines are important—but they often have trouble making the case to their colleagues or to the larger public.

There are several reasons for this. First, on many campuses today, a rising tide of vocationalism threatens to drown any area of study that does not promise maximum return on the dollar. Second, too many humanists have succumbed to the temptation of self-marginalization in their fields by channeling their work into narrow specialties defined by technical, jargon-filled writing. When taken to an extreme, this temptation denies public access to scholarly discourse.

Third, we now have celebrity humanities professors claiming that, unlike the natural and social sciences, the humanities have no real positive effect on the world beyond the pleasure they give to those who enjoy them. To this way of thinking, the humanities have no broader public role to play; instead, the most they can offer us is an insular, self-satisfied feeling, similar to the pleasure we might get from playing sports, or solving a puzzle. In this view, the humanities are at best a sort of highfalutin version of sudoku.

As scholars and teachers, we have an obligation not merely to claim, but to demonstrate, that the humanities are not merely a playground for nihilism, or barnacles clinging for survival on the supposedly more "practical" areas of study at our universities. Nor are the humanities mere luxuries, or amusements for idle moments. They are ever-renewing gifts that enlighten and enrich the lives of every citizen.

At the Endowment, we are working to address valid concerns about the state of the humanities on our campuses. For example: the NEH continues its efforts to improve undergraduate education. There is an old saying I am fond of: "Teaching is to research like sin is to confession—without one, you do not have the other." I love that line, because I happen to believe it is true.

So I am very excited about a new grant category the NEH is now offering, called Teaching Development Fellowships. These fellowships will support college and university teachers pursuing research aimed specifically at deepening their core knowledge in the humanities, in order to improve their undergraduate teaching.

We are also working on another new grant program, one that I think will excite all those who believe that undergraduate humanities courses should help students and scholars tackle the enduring questions I mentioned a moment ago. The NEH will soon announce the guidelines for this grant program, so stay tuned.

As scholars and teachers, you also have a vital part to play in restoring the humanities to their rightful place on campus and in our intellectual life. So let me once again encour-

age the scholars in this audience to use simple, clear language, and to think about how you can address the broader public, and not just your colleagues in a particular sub-field. I am not advocating the “dumbing down” of professional articles and books. Rather, I am encouraging humanities scholars to make a sincere effort to make complex ideas understandable to the intelligent and curious lay reader.

By making academic thought more accessible to the public, we ensure that the wisdom

of the humanities spreads wider and sinks deeper into the fabric of American thought. Not every scholar should address a broader public, but more of us can do so, and we should welcome that opportunity.

Humanities teachers and scholars should not be content with just talking to each other. Let us show our students and our fellow citizens that the humanities have something vital to add to our national life, to our quest for truth, and to the great conversation of our civilization.

Graduate Student Research Symposium

On Monday, March 30, the Graduate School and the Graduate Student Council will present the annual Graduate Student Research Symposium, co-sponsored by the Warren Center. This day-long interdisciplinary conference—featuring public lectures, panels, and poster sessions by Vanderbilt’s diverse graduate student body—ends with a keynote address at 4:10 p.m. by Susan Basalla, author with Maggie Debelius of “*So What Are You Going to Do with That?*”: *Finding Careers Outside Academia*. Graduate students from all departments of the university are encouraged to submit presentations and attend

the symposium.

The Warren Center serves as a partner to the Graduate Student Research Symposium planning committee, and in that role has helped to create and host a new faculty advisory panel for the yearly event. The advisory panel will support the planning and increase awareness of the symposium across campus. The advisory panel members for the 2008-2009 academic year are: Yi Cui (Electrical Engineering/Computer Science), Mona Frederick (Warren Center), Marc Hetherington (Political Science/A&S Dean’s Office), Anita Mahadevan-Jansen (Biomedical

Engineering), Kathryn Schwarz (English), John Thatamanil (Divinity), Terri Urbano (Pediatrics, Kennedy Center), and Donna Webb (Biological Sciences). The president of the Graduate Student Council, Jon Ahlbin, and the chair of the Graduate Student Research Symposium committee, Molly Brown, represent the GSC on the panel. More information about the symposium and the keynote address by Susan Basalla can be found at the Graduate Student Council website: <http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/gsc/researchsymposium/>



Left: Senator Lamar Alexander, B.A., VU’62. Right: 2008 Howard lecture Roy Blount Jr., B.A., VU’63, following Blount’s talk on October 30, 2008.

What We Are Writing

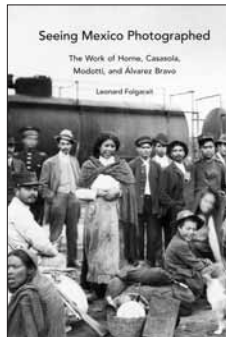
What books are our colleagues in the College of Arts and Science writing and editing? *Letters* has asked Vanderbilt University's humanities and social sciences departments to share their faculty members' 2008 publications. Their answers give us a glimpse into an active and diverse scholarly community.

Brooke A. Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference.* Cambridge University Press.

Houston A. Baker, Jr. *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era.* Columbia University Press.

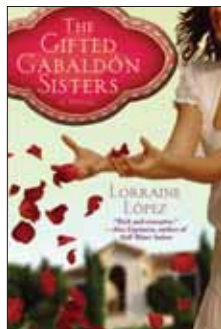
Paul K. Conkin. *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929.* University Press of Kentucky.

Leonard Folgarait. *Seeing Mexico Photographed: The Work of Horne, Casasola, Modotti, and Alvarez Bravo.* Yale University Press.



Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter, editors. Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800.* Broadview Press.

Lorraine López. *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters.* Grand Central Publishing.



Peter Lorge. *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb.* Cambridge University Press.

Dana D. Nelson. *Bad for Democracy: How the Presidency Undermines the Power of the People.* University of Minnesota Press.



Morna O'Neill. *"Art and Labour's Cause is One": Walter Crane and Manchester, 1880-1915.* Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester.

Helmut Walser Smith. *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race Across the Long Nineteenth Century.* Cambridge University Press.

Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin. *Pragmatism: A Guide for the Perplexed.* Continuum International Publishing Group.

Staff Changes

GALYN GLICK MARTIN, the Warren Center's Activities Coordinator since 2002, has accepted the position of Program Coordinator with the Vanderbilt Medical Center's Department of Nursing Education and Development. We all miss Galyn here at the Warren Center, but we are very glad she is with us at Vanderbilt! We are grateful for the many contributions Galyn made to the life of the Warren Center during the past six years and wish her well in her new position.

Our new Activities Coordinator at the Warren Center is **POLLY CASE**. Polly has been in Vanderbilt's English Department for the past two years as assistant to the associate chair and assistant to the director of undergraduate studies. Prior to her work in the English Department, she spent eight years in the world of corporate banking. Polly earned a B.A. in comparative religion from Indiana University and has a deep and abiding interest in the humanities. We welcome Polly to the Warren Center and look forward to working with her in the years ahead.

We also say farewell to English department graduate student **MIRANDA GARNO NESLER**, who has been a terrific editor of *Letters* since the fall of 2006. Miranda is co-editing this issue of *Letters* with our new editor, **JUSTIN HAYNES**, who is also a graduate student in the English department. We are indeed thankful for the extraordinary skills Miranda brought to the position of newsletter editor, and we wish her all the best as she completes her dissertation and moves ahead in her career. At the same time, we are thrilled to have Justin join our staff, and appreciate greatly his commitment to the Warren Center.

Please drop by the center and welcome our new staff members!

External Grants and Fellowships

We extend congratulations to our colleagues in the humanities and social sciences in the College of Arts and Science for receiving the following external grants and fellowships for their scholarly research as a result of applications submitted in the 2007 calendar year.

We rely on departments to provide us with this information.

Michael Bess

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship
American Council of Learned Societies Research Fellowship
Icarus 2.0: A Historian's Perspective on Human Biological Enhancement

James Bloom

American Council of Learned Societies Research Fellowship
The Birth of the Middle Class and the Rise of Painting in Early Modern Flanders

Joy Calico

American Council of Learned Societies Frederick Burkhardt Fellowship
A Musical Remigration: Schoenberg's "A Survivor from Warsaw" in Postwar Europe

Laura Carpenter

National Science Foundation
News Media Coverage and the Construction of Public Health Problems

Lauren Clay

National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowship
Theatre in France and the Colonies, 1680–1789

Anastasia Curwood

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation Career Enhancement Fellowship for Junior Faculty
A Catalyst for Change: The Life of Shirley Chisholm

Katharine Donato

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health
Migration and Access to Care: An Innovative Population-Based Sampling Strategy

Leonard Folgarait

Getty Research Institute Scholar Research Grant
Pablo Picasso, Henri Bergson, Gertrude Stein, and the Turn to Cubism, 1909

Lisa Guenther

McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women Fellowship
Singularity and Feminist Philosophy

Barbara Hahn

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship
Hannah Arendt's Literature

Rick Hilles

American Academy in Rome Visiting Artist in Residence
The James Merrill Writer-in-Residence Program

Larry Isaac

National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowship
Elite Paramilitaries in the Gilded Age: Private Militias in Cleveland, Ohio

John Janusek

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection Fellowship
in Pre-Columbian Studies

Pre-Columbian Urbanism in Comparative Perspective: Space, Society, and Long-Term Human-Landscape Relations

Curtiss T. & Mary G. Brennan Foundation Research Grant
Sunken Basins (Qochas) in the Southern Lake Titicaca Basin: An Ethno-archaeological Investigation

Jonathan Lamb

Cambridge University Centre for Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Fellowship

The Evolution of Sympathy

King's College, Cambridge University Visiting Research Fellowship
The Things Things Say – A Study of First Person Narratives of Things in the Eighteenth Century

Mireille Lee

American Council of Learned Societies Research Fellowship
Kalos Kosmos: The Body, Dress and Identity in Early Greece

Nancy Reisman

American Academy in Rome Visiting Artist in Residence
The James Merrill Writer-in-Residence Program

Norbert Ross

National Science Foundation

Language and Conceptual Development: Role of Language Differences and Bilingualism in the Development of Spatial Concepts Among Tzotzil Maya & Spanish-Speaking Adults and Children

Allison Schachter

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend
Geographies of Jewish Culture: Hebrew and Yiddish Modernism in New York

Mitchell Seligson

Inter-American Development Bank

Democratic Indicators Monitoring Surveys in Chile, Venezuela, and Argentina

United States Agency for International Development

Defending Our Understanding of the Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building

United States Agency for International Development

Latin American Democratic Indicators Monitoring System (18 Latin American Nations)

2008–2009 Robert Penn Warren Center Faculty Fellows



From left to right: Claire Sisco King, Maurice Stevens, Christina Karageorgou-Bastea, Charlotte Pierce-Baker, Vivien Green Fryd, Jon Ebert, Laura Carpenter. Not pictured: Kate Daniels and Linda Manning

2008–2009 Robert Penn Warren Graduate Student Fellows



From left to right: Sonalini Sapra, Laura Taylor, David Wheat, Jeffrey Edmonds, Derrick Spires, Donald Jellerson, and Jonathan Wade

THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

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For a listing of Warren Center programs and activities, 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 in honor of Robert Penn Warren, Vanderbilt alumnus class of 1925, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and, when appropriate, 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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