

# Letters

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## Racial Americanization: Conceptualizing African Immigrants in the U.S.

*Jemima Pierre*

In October 2008, while in Washington, D.C., I attended a networking event sponsored by the group, African Diaspora for Obama (ADO). Billed as a “happy hour cocktail” party, it was a place for young African immigrants and “Diaspora Africans,” and presumably supporters of Barack Obama’s candidacy for president of the United States, to come together to meet, mingle, and learn more about the organization’s cultural and political goals. When I arrived at the venue—a restaurant-bar in the Northwest, D. C. area—I quickly found myself surrounded by a lively group of young professionals with culturally diverse backgrounds spanning histories from North America, the Caribbean, and Africa. This was modern-day African America: a group of Black people who self-identified simultaneously as native to the U.S., as second- and third- and first- generation immigrants, and as recent migrants. Yet, the diversity found in this type of gathering—a social networking event among young Black professionals in a large U.S. city—is not altogether remarkable, even while it is rarely acknowledged. Its recognition is crucial, I argue, when considering African immigrant community and identity formation in the U.S. Nevertheless, ADO’s self-conscious deployment of a particular African immigrant and diasporic condition in the U.S. as both identity and constituency for domestic political organizing is a significant development.

According to its website, ADO organizers considered African (immigrant) communities in the U.S. as a “unique and an important voting block,” and sought to tap its human resources through a series of programs and events that ranged from voter registration drives and community forums to campaign fundraisers. As citizens and residents, these young people made clear that their primary

loyalty is to domestic over foreign policy, insisting, as one woman did, that “a lot of us are African, but a lot of us are also Americans.” The duality of the “African” and “American” identities clearly emerges in the group’s recognition of its positioning alongside, and its overlapping experiences with, members of the broader U.S. Black community. For example, within its corpus of political activities are also cultural events dedicated to understanding the Black experience in the U.S., including celebrations of Black History Month, town hall conversations about African-African diaspora relations, and programs to address stereotypes about Africa and people of African descent in the U.S. In my research, I am interested in the implications of ADO’s activities for understanding the politics and dynamics of both African immigrant identity formations, and U.S. social, cultural, and political structures of incorporation.

While political organizing among immigrants is not new, ADO’s activities provide scholars with insights into a distinct, if unknown, world of postcolonial African immigrant communities in the U.S. To be sure, a look around U.S. public life and culture reveals the very bold if commonplace (albeit unacknowledged) presence of Black immigrants in U.S. society—from popular culture figures such as rap artists Akon, Chamillionaire, and Wale, to the growing number of prominent NCAA college athletes who are first generation immigrants, to well-known movie stars such as Idris Elba and Chiwetel Ejiofor, to politicians and even academics. Yet, I am suggesting that the experiences and activities of ADO and other organizations of young first- and second- generation African immigrants may offer a qualitative shift in the ways that scholars have understood the complex process of (Black) immigrant incorporation. Specifically, the key



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issues that emerge are not only on what it means to be simultaneously African, American, and immigrant in a race-conscious society, but also how young Black immigrants are deliberately constructing community and identity and, in

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turn, inevitably forcing the reshaping of the national and international terrain. For me, the starting point of any analysis of postcolonial African immigrants in the U.S. should begin with the following baseline understanding of: (1) the inextricable relationship between racialization and “Americanization”; and (2) the recognition that U.S. Black populations have always been ethnically and culturally diverse.

My book project, which is tentatively titled, “Racial Americanization: Conceptualizing African Immigrants in the U.S.,” is an ethnographic examination of how postcolonial Africans, as Black immigrants, are negotiating the dynamics of life in a society structured by changing processes of racialization. By racialization I mean the historical processes that give race its social, cultural, and political meaning and that determine how such meaning is deployed ideologically and through various practices and institutions. It is the ongoing (re)creation of new meanings, groupings and associations between a racial hierarchy and the categories it comprises, and an undeniable dimension of new immigrant experiences in the U.S. While it is true that racialization, though global, pervades U.S. society and shapes identities, contemporary research both on Sub-Saharan Africa and on Black immigrants suggests that racial identity is often tied, or subordinated to, other identifications such as nation, culture, and religion. How does migration to the U.S., then, impact postcolonial African identity formation? And, given the unrelenting diametric positioning of “whiteness” and “blackness” in the U.S.—manifest particularly through the unresolved and incomplete incorporation of formerly enslaved Africans against the consolidation of whiteness through absorption of early twentieth-century European migration—how does the racial structuring of these contemporary Black immigrants affect individual and collective ideas about citizenship and identity in this country? Moreover, how does the voluntary migration of Africans impact theorization of the African diaspora that place the Transatlantic Slave Trade at the center of Black diasporic identity? I contend that a multi-dimensional study of contemporary African immigrants provides an important case study for exploring both U.S. racial and cultural dynamics and the transnational politics of the African diaspora. Indeed, postcolonial African immigration into a society structured through the complex histories of race- and diaspora-formation presents new theoretical propositions for the ways we approach immigration and the American

experience. I am spending my residence year at the Robert Penn Warren Center engaging directly with these ongoing discussions of race, migration, (U.S.) national identity formation, and diasporic belonging.

This project provides an important response to the dearth of critical investigation into the experiences of postcolonial Africans in the U.S. who, along with Caribbean immigrants, currently constitutes the largest flow of foreign-born Blacks to the U.S. (Dodoo 1997; Dodoo and Takyi 2002). Although there has been voluntary migration of Black people to the U.S. since the end of the slave trade, Black immigrants have only recently begun to receive scholarly attention. I believe that this relative lack of attention has two sources. First, more than any other factor, there are the political and cultural contours of U.S. racial formations that prevent recognition of ethno-cultural diversity among the Black population. U.S. Blacks were (and are) primarily identified by their racial identity, an identity that is framed by the historical “one-drop rule” and maintained through various institutions and practices, including knowledge production. It is through this “racial knowledge production” (Goldberg 1994) that we find the second source of the difficulty is exploring Black immigrant experiences in the U.S.: the theoretical and epistemological framing of “immigration” studies where “Blackness” is taken as the particular (and peculiar) test case for new (primarily non-Black) immigrant incorporation.

In strategies implicit and explicit, new immigrants in the U.S. are invariably compared to native Blacks—presented as the ever inassimilable Other—to determine capacity for “assimilation.” Under such circumstances, it becomes epistemologically and methodologically difficult to address both intra-racial Black diversity *and* explore Blacks as immigrants. This was exactly Roy Bryce-Laporte’s (1972) concern when he referred to Black immigrants as virtually “invisible” in U.S. society as well as in the migration and sociological scholarship. Thus, while the presence of Black immigrants has been well-known among U.S. Black communities over the past century, and even documented within early twentieth-century African American fictional and non-fiction texts (see Reid 1939; McKay 1928; Cox 1948), this historical and sociological fact remained unacknowledged within broader academic discussions.

Most of the social science interest on Black immigration came after the passage of the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act of 1965, which partially abolished the quota system that gave preferences to northern European

immigrants. This Act also numerically mitigated the flow of immigrants from North and South America and the Caribbean. In turn, preference was given to highly-skilled professionals primarily to Asia, but also to Africa. This change in U.S. immigration policy drastically shifted the racial and cultural composition of immigrants. African immigrants indeed benefited from this liberalization of U.S. immigration policy, although those from the Caribbean saw the largest increase in numbers beginning in the late 1970s because of natural growth and family reunification laws. In the past two decades, however, the number of postcolonial African immigrants has outpaced those from the Caribbean, growing exponentially with estimates in population now in the range of more than 1.4 million (Terrazas 2009). Significantly, African immigrants continue to make up the lowest number of immigrants allowed in the U.S. (3.7% of all immigrant groups in the country). At the same time, postcolonial African immigrants have been said to be distinct from all other immigrant groups—they are the most highly-educated group of immigrants, with two of every five adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher; yet, they have not generally followed the trajectory of “assimilation” as other (most notably early twentieth-century European) immigrants.

From the early 1980s, Black immigration research focused on the Caribbean population residing in major cities in the U.S. such as New York, Miami, and Boston. With Black immigrants, migration scholars had to contend directly with the significance of an explicit racialization (“Blackness”) for these groups. Earlier migration scholarship emphasized the assimilation options for new European immigrants in the U.S. For these early twentieth-century white European immigrants, this meant a spotlight on notions of “ethnicity,” where the concern with absorbing such immigrants into the “American” nation assumed the rearticulation of distinct immigrant cultures into a putatively integrated “American” society. This direction in research was buttressed by the broader social science deployment of “ethnicity” which emerged at the turn of the century to replace biological notions of race in the age of the scientific positivism and the eugenics movement. Ethnicity appealed to cultural and national differences among European immigrants, stressing the expressive, subjective, and internal cultural processes of group formation. Notably, the focus of ethnicity was to make everyone “ethnic” of some sort, homogenizing the ethnic identity processes and erasing the

structural and historical differences between subordinated racial groups and Euro-Americans. What was lost in the fray was the reality that European migration in the early 1900s could not compare to the forced migration through military conquest, violent enslavement, and the combined subjugation of people of color. The celebration of ethnicity blurred these crucial differences and entailed blindness to both structural racism and the reality that “ethnic” identity is circumscribed within processes of racial formation. Also missing in the explanations of immigrant incorporation was the recognition that the ability of European immigrants to become incorporated into United States society was directly linked to the group’s ability to “become white” (or assert whiteness) in a white supremacist society (Allen 1994; Ignatiev 1995; Lipsitz 1998; Roediger 1991; Brodtkin 1999).

By the mid-twentieth century, the European immigrant experience soon came to serve as the controlling model for understanding the incorporation of all groups into U.S. society, particularly non-white native-born groups. In this context, U.S.-born Blacks were often taken to be the limit of “Americanization”; as natives, their inability to be fully integrated into the nation was consistently linked to their perceived inability to absorb, as white immigrants did, “American culture.” Here Black Americans could hardly compete. They were considered not to possess the necessary cultural capital (ethnicity) for incorporation. What was often not considered, however, was the broader context of U.S. racial formations where racialization always already shape (indeed, flatten) immigrants’ sociopolitical reality. In other words, it is because options for assimilation are racially structured that different immigrant groups have different incorporation experiences.

Contemporary research and writing on Black immigrants has followed a similar trajectory to earlier migration scholarship with a focus on “assimilation” and incorporation that reflect the theoretical conclusions of that era. Because Black immigrants are “Black” in race-conscious U.S. society, most of the scholarly work on this population has focused on the formation and negotiation of immigrant racial, ethnic, and national identities in the new place of settlement, particularly stressing racial discrimination as a key aspect of life in the U.S. (Foner 1987; Halter 1993; Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999). Significantly, scholars who focus on Black immigrants do so in ways that generate a particular set of theoretical conclusions. First, there is a

tendency to compare Black immigrant groups solely to native Blacks, often with the suggestion that it is immigrants’ cultural distinctiveness—particularly their choice *not* to assimilate into African American culture—that determines economic success (Kasinitz 1992; Stafford 1987; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1994; 1999). A prominent feature of this scholarship is the comparison of Black immigrants and Black Americans often with the assumption that the relative educational and economic “success” of Black immigrants can be used to measure the significance of race in the U.S. In other words, if race is considered to be the great impediment to the full incorporation of native Blacks into the U.S. nation, then how do we explain the relative success of racialized Black immigrant? Following the logic of earlier scholarship on European migrants, success is often linked to the presumed social capital of the immigrant, the Black immigrant’s ability to maintain his/her cultural distinction against the homogenizing force of assimilation into Black America. Here, immigrant ethno-cultural identity—the cultural attributes brought to bear upon U.S. society—is praised because it prevents assimilation (since assimilation for a group racialized as Black, would have to mean assimilation into native Black America. My research project, however, begins with another question as a point of departure: In a context where to become “American” generally means to become “white”—and where Black immigrant experiences are positioned at the center of (white and non-white) immigrant assimilation and Black American exclusion—what options are available for racially Black immigrants for incorporation into U.S. society?

“Racial Americanization” is based on ongoing ethnographic research and data collected over five years among multi-generational African immigrant groups in Washington, D. C. and Houston, Texas. In addition to participant observation in various community organizations, my research also covers a range of institutional activities—from the Smithsonian Institution’s Folklife Festival on African immigrants and its “Africa Hall,” to local city politics that incorporate immigrants into discussions of such issues as urban racial and economic segregation. I use a multi-method approach to data collecting—including participant observation, open-ended and semi-structured interviews, and archival research—and my research questions incorporated both intra-racial comparisons and immigrant negotiations with broader social and political structures. I structure the research around a set of

questions that aim to explore the issues of immigrant incorporation vivid in the migration scholarship: How and when do African immigrants become aware of the assimilation or incorporation “options” available to them? Do African immigrants have differing conceptions of race and identity? How do Black immigrant experiences with race interact with other identities such as nation, gender, class, and sexuality? How do we compare the migration experiences of continental Africans and other Blacks from the Caribbean? How do the children of these migrants negotiate life as both “Black American” and second- and third- generation Black immigrant? Given the racial categorization of Africans as “Black,” how do we analyze the ways this categorization comes into dialogue with the national and cultural diversity of such immigrants? What impact does African immigrant experience have on U.S. processes of racialization? How would such analysis help us better understand U.S. racial processes, as well as the ways those categorized as “Black” respond to such processes? These set of questions rests on the well-known reality that post-1965 African immigrants are the most highly educated group in the U.S. (they are more educated than both White and non-White U.S.-born groups and other immigrant groups) and yet have not received the comparable level of income, nor the social or political capital that would ensure the similar trajectories of “assimilation” as other (most notably early twentieth-century European) immigrants (Cross 1994; Dodoo and Takyi 2002; Pierre 2004; Speer 1995; Takougang 2002).

I hope to provide a critical detailed analysis of the lived experiences of postcolonial Africans that explores quotidian social processes while keeping front and center the structures of racial Americanization. A most important aspect of the project is the attempt to develop analysis of African immigrant experience in the U.S. that both shifts the discussion from the assimilation logic of earlier migration research and moves beyond cultural comparisons of this group solely with Black American identities. This has entailed a different scholarly perspective, one that forces concrete engagement with U.S. racial formations, particularly exploring the contours of “Americanization” for non-white immigrants. My research so far has demonstrated that scholars have to pay detailed attention to the often unequal ways that immigrants, who are seen as “Black” (and non-white, more generally) are inserted into the U.S. racial system. As well, I contend that we need to have a more in-depth



exploration of how differences in “racial” and “ethnic” identity interact to impact the experiences of immigrants who are seen—and often treated—as racially similar to African Americans, but are culturally (ethnically) distinct (Pierre 2004). Because African immigrants are assigned a racial identity as “Black,” which places them in direct relation—and sometimes in competition—with U.S.-born Blacks, research on this group needs to move beyond the one-way and narrow *intra-racial* comparisons to broader issues of immigrant challenge and negotiation of social and political constraints.

I am arguing that contemporary African immigrants to the U.S. provide an important case study for understanding how race—along with its relationship to gender, class, sexuality, and nationality—remains one of the key determinants of immigrant incorporation in this society. My book project explores various levels of African immigrant engagement with U.S. society. This includes, but is not limited to, relationships with African Americans, with state and federal actors and institutions, with

other immigrant and native communities, and most importantly within the community itself. Overall, this kind of focus on Black immigrants should allow us to bring together discussions on racial formation, the special positions of Blackness (in relation to whiteness and Americanization), and immigration.

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A young Ghanaian immigrant recently told a reporter that Obama “is the bridge because [he] combines the immigrant experience—his father was Kenyan, part of the vanguard of a burgeoning African immigration in the last 30 years—and the American black experience” (Braun 2009). How do migration scholars engage such currently popular sentiment? And what can we learn about exploring its historical and contemporary meanings? My personal experiences as a Haitian immigrant, and my ongoing research, have thus far shown me that understanding Black immigrant identity formation within larger contexts creates the space for a more dynamic discussion of both U.S.

race relations in general, and U.S. (and global) Black populations in particular. U.S. Black populations have never been homogeneous and the rise in the number of Black immigrants should no doubt affect the nature of research, particularly as race remains one of the most (if not the most) important aspect of social relations in this country—relations that postcolonial African immigrants have no choice but to confront. How they do so, and the effects of such confrontation, are important issues for migration studies. As one of few detailed ethnographic studies of postcolonial African immigrants in the U.S., “Racial Americanization: Conceptualizing African Immigrants in the U.S.” aims to contribute to the growing scholarship on immigrant confrontation with national and global economic, cultural, and social processes.

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## Warren Center Graduate Student Fellows Program Expands to Include Visiting Student from Belfast

The Warren Center’s annual Graduate Student Fellows Program awards support to seven Vanderbilt graduate students from various disciplines in the humanities and qualitative social sciences, enabling them to focus on completing their dissertations during the year without the need for employment. One afternoon a week the nascent scholars—armed with dissertation excerpts and a pot of coffee—meet at the Warren Center both to critique and support each others’ research and writing.

The Warren Center has recently entered a new three-year agreement with Queen’s University in Belfast to expand the seminar to include one graduate student in the humanities or qualitative social sciences from Queen’s in the annual program. The selection process for the visiting graduate student fellow includes a committee from Queen’s University in addition to the Warren Center’s Executive Committee. The participation of a student from Queen’s will give the young scholars the opportunity to create scholarly global connections at an early point in their careers.

Gail McConnell has joined the Graduate Student Fellows Program this year as the first visitor from Queen’s University. McConnell is a

doctoral student in English literature; her dissertation examines religion and theology in contemporary northern Irish poetry. McConnell is very grateful for the receipt of the fellowship and for her time at the Warren Center. “You’re exposed to interdisciplinary perspectives that enrich the way you read and write,” she commented. The Warren Center looks forward to a fruitful partnership with Queen’s University, Belfast, and the trans-Atlantic collaboration that will ensue.

The Warren Center’s Graduate Student Fellows Program, now in its fourth year, has been a tremendous success and is one of the most sought-after fellowships in the humanities and the qualitative social sciences in the College of Arts and Science. “Dissertation writing can be a very lonely process,” says Gesa Frömmling, a 2009-10 graduate student fellow and a doctoral candidate in German. “You are alone with your thoughts, with your adviser as your only reader. As a fellow, you have to be comfortable making your work clear to others, which is a huge help in clarifying what you are thinking.”

Immersion in the center’s larger interdisciplinary scholarly community is also an integral part of the fellowship: graduate students may co-direct or join seminars, study groups, and



*Gail McConnell*

workshops with faculty members in multiple fields of study. The fellowship program concludes with a valuable professional experience as each Graduate Student Fellow presents a widely-advertised public lecture during the spring term.

Currently, three of the Graduate Student Fellowships are named: the Mary and Joe Harper Fellow; the American Studies Fellow; and the George J. Graham Jr. Fellow.

## Representing the United States: A Transatlantic Journey

*Edward H. Friedman*

If all goes according to schedule, I will spend the spring semester of 2010 in Madrid, where I will conduct research and teach in the department of English Philology at the University of Madrid. My focus will be on twentieth-century American literature and culture. Planning the course and some lectures in conjunction with my stay, I have had to consider a perspective that is somewhat new to me: describing the United States to Spaniards. I have decided to work with the concept of *culture from the margins*. What follows is part of one manifestation of this project, selections from a paper entitled “The Margin as Center in U.S. Theater: A View from Left Field,” for a Madrid audience.

If specialists in theater were requested to name the masterworks produced in the United States in the twentieth century, it is highly likely that Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* would be at the top of the list, along with—or followed closely by—Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* These are particularly “American” plays, each offering a distinct view of family life and a unique and powerful dramatic discourse. Their underlying themes are universal, but their idiom—in a multiple sense of the term—has a national inflection. Theater depends on *conflict*, of course, and the default position, as it were, of the great American plays is the *dysfunctional* family, as the characters deal with alcoholism, drug addiction, career failure, infidelity, and deception, to consider the Tyrones and the Lomans alone. The blending of Dubois and Kowalski blood in *Streetcar* pairs Southern aristocracy with peasant stock, a decaying feeling of entitlement with the Napoleonic code, the source of Stanley’s paean to democracy. Albee names his characters George and Martha, evoking President and Mrs. Washington. Analogously, the protagonists of *Sticks and Bones*, David Rabe’s shattering drama about a blinded veteran of the Vietnam War, are named Ozzie, Harriet, David, and Ricky, after the Nelsons, one of the first families of television situation comedy. A significant number of plays about strongly dysfunctional American families, including, for example, Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child* of 1978 and Tracy Letts’s *August: Osage County* of 2007, have won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Playwrights such as Lorraine Hansberry, Lanford Wilson, Marsha Norman, Beth Henley, August Wilson, Donald Margulies, and David Lindsay-Abaire, among many others and in radically different contexts, have shown families in various degrees of crisis and essentially have redefined or deconstructed the myth of familial

bonds. Ironically, perhaps, a predecessor to all these plays—and, arguably, the American play most read in U.S. schools—is Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, first produced in 1938, which takes place in the wholesome, if not excessively idealized, setting of middle America. The close-knit and stable Webb and Gibbs families live, die, and teach the audience lessons about the beauty and the precariousness of existence. Their moderation is frequently “undone” by their successors.

One could trace, then, a history of dysfunctional families at the core of American drama. What I want to look at here is another phenomenon that affects the creation of theater in the United States: plays that move away from the traditional family to reflect an alternate dynamics, outside of marriage. One object of this transfer is the gay community, wherein familial relations are replaced by something like—yet unlike—the intimacies and the dissensions of earlier plays. Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band*, of 1968, brings together—for a birthday celebration—a representative group, or what some might call a rogue’s gallery, of homosexual men. The work is daring in its content and in its language, and it helps to open the space of U.S. theater at a time in which the subject of alterity, in its countless manifestations, holds enormous interest to scholars of culture. That momentous shift is an offshoot of the repeal of laws in which “sex perversion,” of which homosexuality was regarded to be a part, could not be portrayed on stage. Sadly, one must distinguish between pre-AIDS and post-AIDS drama, with plays such as Harvey Fierstein’s *Torch Song Trilogy* and William Finn and James Lapine’s musical *Fabstos* in the first category, and William Hoffman’s *As Is* and Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* at the forefront of the second. If I were asked to name the single most outstanding play of the last forty years, my choice would be Tony Kushner’s two-part *Angels in America*, which, to my mind, captures the spirit of the United States as it approached the new millennium, in a way that is remarkably comprehensive and idiosyncratic, that both fits with a brand of poststructuralist decentering and recognizes old values with new, as it posits the authority of government, religion, law, the medical establishment, and, last but hardly least, the family.

*Angels in America* is a virtual roadmap of American society. Two key characters—one on the far left and the other on the far right—suffer from AIDS. Protestants, including Mormons, merge with Jews, closeted gays with those who are “out” and proud. A major player—the clearest antagonist, and the embodiment of

hypocrisy—is a historical figure, the lawyer Roy Cohn, associate of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee and a prosecutor of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for treason. (Ethel Rosenberg appears in Part II: *Perestroika*.) At the other end are a caring and confused mother from the state of Utah and an angel who juxtaposes the events onstage with the beyond. Seemingly disparate lives and circumstances intersect and produce change. The protagonist is Prior Walter, brought down by AIDS and by the rejection of his partner Louis Ironson, who cannot deal with the effects of the illness. It is Prior who sees the angel and who fights on. *Angels in America* has substance in every facet. The panoramic vision encompasses the temperament of the nation from the vantage point of the margins. The guiding sensibility is a conscious “deviation” from the mainstream, but as the title of Part I suggests, the *Millennium Approaches* for all. Kushner mixes the dire consequences of the epidemic with an emphasis on something more than justice and something less than poetic justice, and with humor as ingenious as it is dark. In the plays—like *Don Quixote*, two texts often thought of as one—the life force battles death and wins.

The operating premise of looking at culture from the margins, borrowed from poststructuralism and appropriated by theory in the aftermath of poststructuralism, is that (1) distance allows for an invigorated perspectivism and for the inclusion of those perspectives that have, whether consciously or unconsciously, been elided from the public record; (2) elaboration of the underlying rhetoric of any phenomenon displays its *constructedness*, its internal and inevitable ideological base; and (3) analysis permits one to note the dialectical exchange between a stable text and shifting, or unstable, interpretations. Texts such as Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and *Angels in America*—unequivocally revisionist texts—present a *whole* through a redistribution of the *parts*. They depict America. Discrimination, distorted judgments, and disease may have been omitted from—or underestimated in—a majority of historical and literary documents, but they are fundamental to a complete history of the United States, and writers such as Morrison and Kushner recognize the importance of the *graffi*, the *supplement*.

The plays that I chose for my courses have clearly American settings and focal points. To give several examples: Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* revolves around an African-American family’s version of an American dream—to buy a home in the suburbs—when



the prospective neighbors fear that their property values and the “complexion” of the area will suffer. Alfred Uhry’s *Driving Miss Daisy* puts forward another, more intimate portrait of race relations between an elderly Southern Jewish lady and her paid chauffeur, a black man of wisdom and quiet dignity. The title character of Wendy Wasserstein’s *The Heidi Chronicles* is an independent professional woman caught in the glory, the anguish, and the skirmishes of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Rebecca Gilman’s *Spinning into Butter* takes place on a college campus and interrogates the program of Affirmative Action. John Patrick Shanley’s *Doubt* examines the Catholic Church’s attitude toward priests accused of child-molesting.

These plays are aesthetic objects, to be sure, and worthy of study as such, but in the age of Barack Obama, Sarah Palin, Sonia Sotomayor, economic woes, continued setbacks for minorities, the swine flu, etc., etc., they are, by all means, relevant as cultural artifacts.

I would like to focus on two plays that I believe are exceptional works for the stage, shining examples of U.S. culture “from the margins” (which, of course, must be deemed *margins transformed into centers*), and, I would submit, fitting heirs to *Angels in America* and to the playwrights who influenced Tony Kushner. They are *The Laramie Project*, of 2001, credited to Moisés Kaufman and the Members of Tectonic Theater Project, and *Take Me Out*, of 2002, by Richard Greenberg.

*The Laramie Project* is a drama based on a real event, the slaying of Matthew Shepard, a twenty-one-year-old gay student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie by two men who offered him a ride in their vehicle after meeting him in a bar. They beat him, tied him to a fence, and abandoned him. He was discovered the next day and rushed to a hospital, where he died a few days later. Moisés Kaufman, who was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela and has lived in the United States since 1987, traveled with members of the Tectonic Theater Project to Laramie—starting in November of 1998, one month after the incident—to interview people and to attend the trial of the men accused of the kidnapping, the attack, and the death of the young victim. They spent well over a year on the task. The murder—obviously a hate crime—received a tremendous amount of attention in the national media. The situation placed the quiet and modestly populated city of Laramie under scrutiny and led to self-examination and accusations. It must be noted that, despite a considerable outcry against the perpetrators, public sympathy was not exclusively on the side of Matthew Shepard. There will always be those who want to blame the queer, the “faggot” who cannot keep his sexual preferences to himself, who likely provoked two heterosexuals to do violence to him. There is even a name for this: gay panic. Kaufman and his colleagues entered into this terrain, literally and figuratively speaking, to cover the story from its diverse angles.

Not only is this a crucial and intriguing story—a story of several margins, geographical and political, and of margins within margins—but it unites dramatic invention with the gathering of data, reporting, giving voice to individuals who are not usually newsmakers, and the mixing of residents of Laramie with—and I use the term in a generic or metonymical way—“New Yorkers,” with all the implications thereof. The interconnected narrators and narratives are highlighted and supporting actors, linked *by* and *to* Matthew Shepard the man, the symbol, the absence, the presence. The speakers are townspeople, students, teachers, members of the clergy, medical personnel, officers of the law, friends of Matthew Shepard and friends of his attackers, gay, lesbian, straight, pro-gay, anti-gay, open-minded, closed-minded, and Matthew Shepard’s father Dennis, who in the play’s climax reads an eloquent statement at the sentencing against capital punishment for Aaron McKinney, who was found guilty of first-degree felony murder. The dramatis personae of *The Laramie Project* also include Moisés Kaufman and his collaborators, so that the finished product joins stark realism and unmediated dis-

course with a technique that accentuates *process*, the making of the play. The writers shape—or reshape—the story events, through a practice that the historian Hayden White designates as *emplotment* (83). The raw material (from over two-hundred interviews, journals, and other sources) is converted into dramatic form, developed into a plot that is simultaneously true and fabricated, documentable and artistically premeditated, with a theater audience in mind. There is astonishing depth to the play, which takes into account a range of viewpoints and demonstrates that the periphery can contain invaluable clues to the heart of America and that very little in life is unpolemical.

Built to coincide with railroad stops, the towns in Wyoming generally are far apart, so within a given locale there is a certain familiarity. As the home of the University of Wyoming, Laramie has a combination of ranchers, workers, students, faculty, and staff. The population of the city is, at present, between 27,000 and 28,000, and the university has about 12,000 full-time and part-time students. Long-term residents cross with faculty who come from a variety of backgrounds and with students who are, by the nature of their stay, transient. Laramie is, by no means, a hub of diversity, but it is not homogeneous, and the interviewees address the questions raised from liberal to reactionary extremes, and from an array of points in-between. Some are clearly pro-gay, some *are* gays and lesbians, others adhere to a policy of “live and let live,” still others seem to prefer to be kept in the dark about homosexuality, and there are those who argue that religious doctrine condemns such sinful practices, an argument that at times genuinely stems from theology and at times employs theology to condone hatred. The play underscores the motif—and the convention—of *associations*, strongly felt in the United States. One can have a large set of affiliations, classified by ethnicity, religion, age, gender, place of birth, region, sexual orientation, political party, and positions on social matters, as well as by sports, hobbies, schools or colleges, or even tastes in music and the arts. *The Laramie Project* is about identity, real and perceived, about the justice system, and about how people react when pushed out their comfort zone. Some respond actively, heroically; others, as cowards. Dennis Shepard proclaims his son to be a hero, a “winner,” and it is because of Matthew’s character that he seeks mercy for the killer. Kaufman and his team guide the spectator through the events, as gentle and committed intruders in a city that ceases to lie in the margins.

One of the many extraordinarily striking anecdotes of *The Laramie Project* is the account

of the student Jedediah Schultz, a life-long resident of Wyoming. Schultz wanted to study theater, but his parents could not afford to finance his college education without a scholarship. He decided to enter a competition, and he needed what he describes as a “killer scene.” He consulted with a professor, who recommended a scene from *Angels in America*. When Jedediah—who is not gay—gave his parents the details of the competition, they refused to sanction his choice, and stayed away. His performance received a standing ovation, and he won the scholarship. At the conclusion of the play, it is revealed that one of the interviewees, a drama professor at the University of Wyoming, would be producing *Angels in America*, and, in the epilogue, that Jedediah Schultz was cast in the role of Prior Walter. Some of the team members saw the play on their last trip to Laramie. This convergence of life and art becomes a microcosm of the play as a whole, as things come full circle but do not end.

Tony Kushner subtitles *Angels in America* “A Gay Fantasia on National Themes.” *The Laramie Project* and *Take Me Out* explore national themes, as well, but each is a different story altogether. Richard Greenberg sets *Take Me Out* in an all-American territory, that of baseball, known as the *national pastime*. Baseball players are national heroes: Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, Jackie Robinson, Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Cal Ripken, Jr., Derek Jeter, and on, and on. Football and basketball have dimmed some of the special light of baseball, but the sport still has its fans, its “fanatics,” and much of its former luster. Baseball is a manly sport. Women and girls play softball; men play hardball. The playing field and the locker room are sites of exclusivity, of companionship, of male bonding. Baseball is a favorite subject of fiction and nonfiction. There are a good many films about baseball, from biographies to dramas and comedies. Kevin Costner alone stars in *Bull Durham* and *Field of Dreams*, Robert De Niro in *Bang the Drum Slowly*, and Robert Redford in *The Natural*, to name but a few. Baseball is far less prevalent in the theater. Perhaps the most famous Broadway treatment of baseball in the twentieth century is the musical comedy *Damn Yankees* (by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop, with music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross), from 1955, a retelling of the Faust legend set in the realm of major league baseball and the World Series. Incredible, but true. You might be familiar with the most famous song from the show, “Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets.” Greenberg has in mind another song, “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” a classic from 1908, with lyrics by Jack Norworth and music

by Albert Von Tilzer. The title *Take Me Out* evokes the song, and *out*, as in “out of the closet,” alludes to the decision to no longer hide one’s sexual orientation. That “contamination” is the starting point of Greenberg’s play, which places the sanctity of the American ideal against, euphemistically stated, a major-league distraction. As its title implies, *Take Me Out* derives strength from mixed metaphors (or maybe mixed metonyms). Like *Angels in America* and *The Laramie Project*, *Take Me Out* scrutinizes the myths of America through a course of demystification. To his credit, Greenberg—whose concept may have been inspired, in part, by Finn’s *Falsettos*—does not pamper his audience, nor does he tender ready-made answers to the questions that he poses, questions that seem to strive to keep one off-balance.

The protagonist of *Take Me Out* is Darren Lemming, a star center fielder for the fictional New York Empires. Not only does the position relate him to stars such as Tris Speaker, Ty Cobb, Earle Combs, Joe DiMaggio, Duke Snider, Mickey Mantle, and Willie Mays, but center field is emblematic of Lemming’s heroic status, the adoration that greets him, and the ease with which he achieves greatness. He has a white father and a black mother, a middle-class background, and a résumé that does not include the suffering of African American players who preceded him. He is handsome, virile, triumphant, eminently confident, and, ultimately, over-confident. The play is about the consequences of a *decentering* statement, Darren Lemming’s comment to the press that he is gay, a comment that sets into motion a string of events that affect him and those around him. The manly sport is disrupted by the intrusion of the unmanly; the legacy of original sin enters the locker room, and the center fielder, to his surprise, finds himself in the margins. Lemming is so secure in his celebrity and in his fans’ devotion—his air of invincibility—that he cannot fathom a decline in his popularity. He feels safe to say whatever he chooses. As the play opens, he has just committed the public relations error, and the three acts treat reactions on all sides.

A fellow ballplayer, Kippy Sunderstrom, a Stanford graduate known as the smartest man in baseball, becomes a choral presence, delivering exposition and commentary on what he repeatedly calls “the mess,” and interacting with Lemming. Sunderstrom ponders the irony of the dilemma: Lemming was under no threat; he “wasn’t on the verge of being outed” (*Take Me Out* 20), but—ignoring the fundamental law of superstardom—he somehow feels that he should be able to keep his public and private lives separate, that he should be able to “just play ball” (9).

## “Between Word and Image”



The 2006/2007 Warren Center Fellows, who examined the theme “Between Word and Image,” invited artist Erika Johnson to join them in their weekly seminar meetings. Based on her experiences with the interdisciplinary conversations, she created a piece of art that is her visual representation of the group’s scholarly work. Above are images from her Warren Center installation, which is entitled “Between Image and Word.” Johnson described the piece as “a visual engagement of texts and ideas circulated among scholars in the 2006/2007 Warren Center fellows’ seminar.”





That is not going to happen, however. Jealousy rears its ugly head. So does heterosexual anxiety. Players are naked in the locker room, and they now fear the predatory nature of the homosexual. They are made vulnerable, their own sexuality jeopardized. Although Lemming at first appears to be unphased by the commotion, his miscalculation has a domino effect that begets tragedy. His *hubris* is evident from beginning to end. He simply does not know when to shut up, and, yet, one may wonder, why should he have to remain silent? (There are echoes of the U.S. military's rule of "Don't ask, don't tell" in the play.)

Darren Lemming's weapon of choice is a sharp tongue, and he is more than willing to annoy, provoke, and alienate his teammates. When the champions begin to lose games, the Empires call up a pitcher named Shane Mungitt from the minor leagues. A highly gifted athlete, Mungitt is conspicuously inarticulate, but when a television reporter asks him about his fellow players, words do not fail him: "A pretty funny buncha guys. Now, don't get me wrong. I don't mind the colored people—the gooks an' the spics and' the coons an' like that. But every night to have to take a shower with a faggot? Do ya know what I'm sayin'? Do ya get me?" (45). Everyone gets him, and the problem of damage control intensifies to the maximum. Mungitt is suspended for a time, but when the team begins to lose again, he is reinstated. As we know, money speaks. Mungitt proffers a letter of apology in which he accepts full responsibility, but it turns out that he has had a ghostwriter.

Darren Lemming has a close friend, Davey Battle, an African American player on another team, a married man with three children. One week before Lemming's announcement, Battle tries to convince him to love, to go beyond his "charm" in order to know his "true nature." The dialogue is ambiguous, replete with sexual tension, or perhaps not, but it seems to have an impact on Lemming. The first time Lemming and Battle speak after "the thing" is in the Empires' locker room before a game—a violation of protocol—and they are seen by the other players. This is the same day that Mungitt's suspension is over, and he will be pitching. Lemming gets Mungitt alone in the shower, baits him, "embraces him from behind," kisses him, and calls the episode "our little secret" (78). The first batter that Mungitt faces is Davey Battle. The first pitch hits Battle, who never gets up. Mungitt—banished forever from baseball—lands in jail for another offense, and the Empires win the World Series for the third year in a row, in what fans lovingly call a "three-peat."

Greenberg introduces another prominent character in *Take Me Out*, notable because he has no ties with baseball: the accountant Mason Marzac, who becomes Darren Lemming's money manager. Marzac—a gay man—initially has little knowledge of the sport, but he is delighted to have a superstar as a client and, little by little, he becomes a fan. Marzac allows the audience to see another side of Lemming, who is both at ease and ready with a quip as the two enter into dialogue. Marzac himself entertains

through his growing enthusiasm for the science, statistics, and suspense of baseball, which he begins to think about on metaphysical, theological, and existential planes. Baseball becomes, improbably, his obsession, his essence. He declares, "Baseball is ... unrelentingly meaningful" (68). The play opened on Broadway in February of 2003 to critical acclaim. The actors were praised, individually and collectively, but the lion's share of tributes (and a Tony Award for Best Featured Actor) went to Denis O'Hare in the role of Mason Marzac, who comes to fit indelibly into the fiber of the play. (Daniel Sunjata, as Darren Lemming, was also nominated for the featured actor award. Additionally, *Take Me Out* won Tony Awards for Best Play and for Best Director, Joe Mantello, who played Louis Ironson on Broadway and in the world premieres of the two parts of *Angels in America*.)

*Take Me Out* gained a bit of notoriety for the male frontal nudity of its shower scenes. Greenberg and Mantello may have had "a gay fantasia on national themes" in the back of their minds. Still, it is the *verbal* rather than the *visual* aspect of the play that stands out. The lead characters are accomplished and clever—often overly clever—wordsmiths. Words are, alternately, signs of mental dexterity and defense mechanisms. Lemming resorts to irony, sarcasm, and verbal pyrotechnics to guard his true feelings, which he never quite discloses. Sonderstrom fancies himself as the resident intellectual, whose commentary can take detours in the following mode: "So here we start the Kafkaesque portion of the evening. Well, Kafka lite, anyway ... Dekaf-ka" (95). Marzac likewise relies on a protective shield to screen his innermost thoughts. And, in his exploration of identity, the playwright himself teases the audience, not only with exposed body parts but with the calculated manipulation of time and with ambiguous and confusing statements.

Baseball is more than a backdrop or motif in *Take Me Out*. The team becomes a substitute for the dysfunctional families of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams: an all-male environment in which manhood itself is under investigation. In this setting, homosexuality can signify the tarnishing of an American ideal or the disputation or deconstruction—be it positive or negative—of that ideal. Can it be determined, by fair criteria, that Darren Lemming is wrong to publicize his homosexuality? Is his flaw the flaunting of his "queerness" to his colleagues and the unwanted advances toward an acknowledged bigot? One can imagine a defense lawyer naming Shane Mungitt's attitude toward Davey Battle a transference of gay panic, but Mungitt is banned from baseball, not from society, for his

## 2009–2010 Harry C. Howard, Jr., Lecture



From left: Mr. and Mrs. Harry C. Howard, Jr., and Professor Rosanna Warren after Warren's poetry reading at the Howard Lecture on October 29, 2009. Warren is University Professor, Emma Ann MacLachlan Metcalf Professor of the Humanities at Boston University.

## 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' 2009 publications. Their answers give us a glimpse into an active and diverse scholarly community.

**Jeremy Atack** and Larry Neal, editors. *The Origins and Development of Financial Markets and Institutions*. Cambridge University Press.

**Beth Bachmann**. *Temper*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

**Susan Berk-Seligson**. *Coerced Confessions: The Discourse of Bilingual Police Interrogations*. Mouton de Gruyter.

**Nathalie Debrauwere-Miller**. *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Francophone World*. Routledge.

**Lenn Goodman** and **Richard McGregor**. *The Case of the Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*. Oxford University Press.

**Joel Harrington**. *The Unwanted Child: The Fate of Foundlings, Orphans, and Juvenile Criminals in Early Modern Germany*. University of Chicago Press.

**Robin Jensen** and Kimberley Vrudney, editors. *Visual Theology*. Liturgical Press.

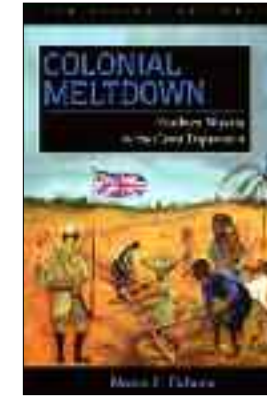
**Jonathan Lamb**. *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Pickering & Chatto.

**Lorraine Lopez**. *Homicide Survivors Picnic and Other Stories*. BkMk Press.

John Webster. *The Duchess of Malfi*, edited by **Leah Marcus**. A&C Black Publishers.

Jeff Brown and **Larry May**, co-editors. *Philosophy of Law*. Blackwell Publishers.

Zachary Hoskins and **Larry May**, co-editors. *International Criminal Law and Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.



**Moses Ochonu**. *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression*. Ohio University Press.

**Kelly Oliver**. *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*. Columbia University Press.

**Alice Randall**. *Rebel Yell*. Bloomsbury USA Publishing.

**Mark Schoenfield**. *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Matthias Schulz and **Thomas Schwartz**, editors. *The Strained Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*. Cambridge University Press.

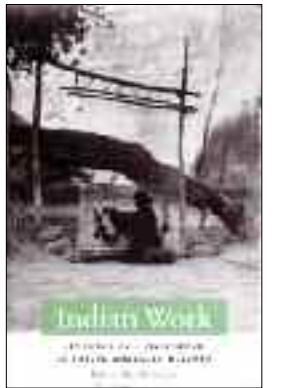
Christopher Connery and **Hortense Spillers**, co-editors. *The Sixties and the World Event*. Duke University Press.

**Robert Talisse**. *Democracy and Moral Conflict*. Cambridge University Press.

**Rachel Teukolsky**. *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics*. Oxford University Press.

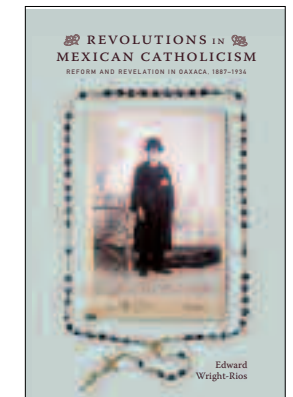
**Cecelia Tichi**. *Civic Passions: Seven Who Launched Progressive America (And What They Teach Us)*. University of North Carolina Press.

**Daniel Usner**. *Indian Work: Language and Livelihood in Native American History*. Harvard University Press.



H.M. Cotton, R.G. Hoyland, J.J. Price, and **David Wasserstein**, editors. *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*. Cambridge University Press.

**Edward Wright-Rios**. *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Reform and Revelation in Oaxaca, 1887-1934*. Duke University Press.



wild pitch. The play may leave the audience with some ambivalence, but life and baseball will move on. Baseball players and other professional athletes have, in fact, come out, but more frequently after retirement than during their active years, when fan bases, team owners, and lucrative endorsement deals must be factored into decisions. In *Take Me Out*, Richard Greenberg throws a lot at the audience, and where the pieces fall depends on directorial decisions, on the disposition of the individual theatergoer, and on the mutability wrought by time.

The United States is a "melting pot," but all ingredients do not have equal weight, equal validity, in the scheme of things. The associations by which people define and categorize themselves, and others, are hierarchical in scope. The democratic spirit—which can never be absolute—has changed over time, as perceptions and civil rights have changed. Women and minorities enjoy greater freedom now than in the past, but the struggle *is* and *will be* ongoing. The best plays of the American theater have historically tackled social issues through family dra-

mas, but as society refashions the family, playwrights regularly have turned to improvised, ad-hoc, or de facto "families," such as enclaves of friends, support groups, partnerships among gays and lesbians, sports teams, and other sources of camaraderie. There is an expression "as American as motherhood and apple pie." Sometimes "baseball" is added to the list. And I would like to think that a commitment to justice and a conception of the arts as a forum for debate always will be identified with what is truly, and positively, American.



## 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 2008 calendar year.

We rely on departments to provide us with this information.

### Celso Castillo

American Historical Association/Conference for Latin American History  
Lewis Hanke Research Award  
*Remaking Nation and Citizenship in Northeastern Brazil: The Politics of Antislavery in Pernambuco, 1866-1893*

### Lauren Clay

Newberry Library/American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies  
Short-term Fellowship  
*The Culture of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century France*

### Julia Cohen

UCLA Maurice Amado Program Faculty Incentive Grant  
*Fashioning Imperial Citizens: Sephardic Jews and the Ottoman State, 1856-1912*

### Kate Daniels

Lannan Foundation  
Writing Residency at Marfa, TX

### Arthur Demarest

National Geographic Society  
*Interregional Exchange and Hegemony in the Development and Apogee of Ancient Maya Civilization*

### Marshall Eakin

U.S. Department of Education  
Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad Fellowship  
*Becoming Brazilians: Making a Nation and a People, 1930-1992*

### Edward H. Friedman

Council for International Exchange of Scholars  
U.S. Culture through Literature and Theater  
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

### John Geer

Harvard University, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy  
Residential Fellowship  
*The Rise of Negativity: Why David Broder May Be More Responsible than Karl Rove*

### Lesley Gill

National Science Foundation  
*Political Violence, Globalization, and Transnational Activism*

### Teresa Goddu

Council for International Exchange of Scholars  
Senior Specialist Fulbright Award  
North American Studies Program  
University of Tampere, Finland

### Joel Harrington

American Academy in Berlin  
Residential Fellowship  
*God's Executioner: Meister Frantz Schmidt of Nuremberg (ca. 1555-1634)*

### Rick Hilles

Camargo Foundation  
Writer's Residency in Cassis, France  
Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation  
2008 Whiting Writers' Award  
Ragsdale Foundation  
Writing Residency  
Spiro Arts Foundation  
Writing Residency

### Shaul Kelner

AVI CHAI Foundation  
*Young Leadership Development Initiatives in the Jewish Communal Sector*

### Jinah Kim

Institute for Advanced Studies School of Historical Research  
Mellon Fellowship  
*Receptacle of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book-Cult in South Asia*

### Paul Kramer

Harvard University, Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History  
Residential Fellowship  
*An Imperial Polity: Racial Regimes and U.S. Globality in the Long Twentieth Century*

### Jonathan Lamb

King's College, Cambridge University  
Visiting Fellowship  
*The Things Things Say: The Agency of Things in the Eighteenth Century*

### Jane Landers

Historic St. Augustine Research Institute  
Research Grant  
*In Search of Mose: Tracking St. Augustine's Free Black Community in Exile in Cuba*

### Tracy Miller

Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts Travel Fellowship  
National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship  
*Regional Style in China's Monumental Timber Architecture, 900-1200*

### Catherine Molineux

The Huntington Library  
Residential Fellowship  
*The Peripheries Within: Race, Slavery, and Empire in Early Modern England*

### Moses Ochonu

Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation  
Research Grant  
*History, Politics, and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Nigerian Middle Belt*

### David Petrain

Institute for Advanced Studies School of Historical Research Mellon Fellowship  
National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship  
*The Tabulae Iliacae and the Development of Visual Storytelling in the Early Roman Empire*

### Nancy Reisman

Ragsdale Foundation  
Writing Residency  
Spiro Arts Foundation  
Writing Residency

### W. Frank Robinson

National Endowment for the Humanities  
Summer Institute Participant  
Johns Hopkins University  
*Slaves, Soldiers, Rebels: Currents of Black Resistance in the Tropical Atlantic, 1760-1888*

### Robert Talisse

Philosophy Department of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York  
Visiting Scholar  
*Against Pluralism*

### Cecelia Tichi

The Huntington Library  
Andrew W. Mellon Residential Fellowship  
*Jack London and the Making of Modern America*

## 2009–2010 Robert Penn Warren Graduate Student Fellows



Front row, from left: Elizabeth S. Meadows, Sarah E. Kersh, Rachel Nisselson, Elena Deanda-Camacho; Back row, from left: Patrick Jackson, Matt Whitt, Gail McConnell, Gesa Frömming

## 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](http://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.

If you would like to receive weekly emails listing Warren Center events, please email Katherine Newman at [katherine.newman@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:katherine.newman@vanderbilt.edu).

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