

Letters

THE SEMIANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES



VOL. 9, NO. 2 • SPRING 2001 • VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Creating the Spanish American Literary Boom: The View from the U.S.

By Deborah N. Cohn

In the 1960s and 1970s, authors such as Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa rose to prominence on an international stage and drew attention to the burgeoning field of Spanish American letters. Until that point, Spanish American literature had not really existed as such, for there was no consciousness shared by the different nations of any overriding construct such as “Spanish America.” Authors reproduced this atomization in their works by writing in regionalist styles that focused on what was—in the words of Chilean author José Donoso—“unmistakably ours . . . all that which specifically makes us different [from] other countries of the continent.”

In the 1950s, however, and especially after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Spanish American nations came to see themselves as having a shared history of colonialism and exploitation, and facing similar postcolonial legacies of underdevelopment, as well as the common threat of the U.S. Gradually a collective consciousness began to emerge. The Cuban Revolution sparked the hope of change and self-determination throughout the region and ushered in a period of cultural effervescence.

Authors who had already been experimenting with Euro-American modernism as part of an effort to break free of the realism that still dominated the region's literary production now felt that their goals formed part of a larger

project, that they were working together as a group to assert Spanish America's cultural autonomy—a project that also entailed surmounting the cultural nationalism of the recent past and creating a pan-Spanish American cultural identity. García Márquez neatly summed this up in 1967 when he declared that “The group is writing one great novel. We're writing the first great novel of Latin American man. Fuentes is showing one side of the new Mexican bourgeoisie; Vargas Llosa, social aspects of Peru; Cortázar likewise, and so on. What's interesting to me is that we're writing several novels, but the outcome, I hope, will be a total vision of Latin America.... It's the first attempt to integrate this world.”

The group further sought to become part of “world” literature and gain a Western audience. In Luis Harss's words, they both composed a “cultural unit” working towards “the true birth of a Latin American novel” and considered themselves to be “part of the universe,” with Spanish America itself representing “the point of fusion where all trends meet.” Out of this confluence of interests and aspirations arose the so-called “Boom,” in which Spanish American literature essentially hit the international “mainstream,” reaching international and non-Spanish speaking audiences throughout the West and beyond.

The Boom was as much a literary movement as it was a marketing phenomenon charac-

terized by a dramatic increase in the publication, distribution, and translation of Spanish American works; it was also a critical construct rooted in the authors' conception of themselves as a group and the concomitant promotion of their work in popular and academic media. Authors and critics alike engaged in the invention of their own tradition, working to-



Deborah N. Cohn

gether to promote the movement in the critical and popular spheres, essentially consolidating its canonical status. While much work has been done on the Hispanic infrastructure supporting the Boom—for example, the Catalan publishers who published many works, the high-visibility Spanish and Spanish American prizes that brought the movement tremendous prestige,

and the journals such as *Casa de las Américas* (Cuba) and *Mundo Nuevo* (Paris) that disseminated new works—less attention has been paid to the promotion of the Boom in the U.S. The project that I am undertaking this year as the William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities explores the role of

scholars at U.S. universities, critical trends permeating the North American academy as a whole, and the U.S. publishing industry in the construction of the Boom's image, reputation, and literary history. In particular, I focus on: 1) the infrastructure through which the Boom was promoted in the U.S. (such as presses, journals, such philanthropic organizations as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, literary prizes, cultural centers, and the critical apparatus that grew up in the academy around the movement); and 2) the role of Cold War cultural

Inside

William Styron's Lecture Rescheduled	2
Interview with Lucius Outlaw and Arnold Rampersad	3
Breakfast with José Ramos-Horta	5
John Clarke to Present Inaugural Goldberg Lecture . .	6
Religion and Public Life: Is America God's Country? . .	7

COHN: Out of this confluence of interests and aspirations arose the so-called “Boom.”

politics in shaping the Boom in the U.S.

The first part of my project entails elucidating the mechanisms by which the Boom secured its own place in literary history in the U.S., focusing on how the academy, authors, and publishers coordinated efforts in order to bring knowledge of the movement to an English-speaking, U.S.-based reading public. While conversations with and between the authors were published in Spanish America, and authors such as Donoso and Fuentes wrote personal and literary histories of the period (all of which were quickly translated into English), in 1972, for example, Rita Guibert published a collection of interviews with prominent authors in English, in order “to give the American people a broader and deeper view of what’s going on in Latin America.” In other words, her work was designed to further promote knowledge of the Boom on the U.S. stage. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, a professor at Yale and one of the most prominent critics and Boom-supporters of this period, wrote the introduction to Guibert’s work; this collaboration serves as a representative example of the joint efforts involved in crafting the Boom’s reputation.

I further contextualize these strategies within the burgeoning institutional framework of journals, cultural centers, and funding programs through which the self-promotion was channeled. During

this period, organizations such as the Inter-American Foundation for the Arts ([IAFA] founded in 1962, which later became the Center for Inter-American Relations [CIAR] and, more recently, the Americas Society) proliferated. Such organizations opened doors for Spanish American literature in the U.S. by publishing journals on the subject, subsidizing translations so that publishers would be more willing to risk publishing these lesser-known authors, placing works with presses, and introducing Spanish American authors to one another and to U.S. writers, publishers, and agents through informal networking—as well as sponsoring conferences at which many of these activities were carried out. The Rockefeller Foundation and family alike were actively involved in this process: family members founded and directed the IAFA and CIAR, while the Foundation also provided translation subsidies and other grants. The Ford Foundation likewise was instrumental in promoting Spanish American literature in the U.S. (as well as abroad: it was one of the later sponsors of *Mundo Nuevo*, the Paris-based journal edited by Rodríguez Monegal that was critical in disseminating Boom works and criticism from 1966 to 1968). It patronized journals, launched an Intercultural Publications Program, and funded professorships at prestigious universities. Literary competitions of the early 1960s such as the *Premio Life en español* and the William Faulkner Foundation’s

Ibero-American Novel Award were similarly designed to encourage the production, translation, and visibility of Spanish American fiction in the U.S.

The interest of philanthropic foundations and other organizations was not, however, selfless in many cases: the Boom coincided with the height of the Cold War, when U.S. interest in Spanish America was heightened by the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro’s increasing rapprochement with the former Soviet Union. The anti-communism that dominated the international political scene gave rise to a Cold War cultural politics that promoted the value(s) of Western civilization. While the Fulbright Act (1946) and the U.S. Information Agency (created in 1953) played a general role in disseminating U.S. culture abroad, philanthropic agencies (including but not limited to the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, whose vigilant anti-communism and ties to the cultural Cold War machinery in the U.S. and abroad have been documented by Lawrence Schwartz and Francis Saunders, among others) and the newly-founded Central Intelligence Agency (1947) were extremely active in their overt and covert sponsorship of entities such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which funded and founded the aforementioned *Mundo Nuevo* (and numerous other journals worldwide, including its flagship, *Encounter*) and had chapters throughout Latin America whose

activities were devoted to the creation of an international intellectual community dedicated to the preservation of liberal democratic values. One of my goals, then, is to contextualize the Boom within these Cold War cultural politics and synthesize information on the efforts of the various U.S. government and philanthropic agencies in waging their battles.

The focus on cultural politics, however, should not be allowed to detract from the Boom’s literary and cultural significance throughout Spanish America and the West. While it is important for me to elucidate to what extent—if any—these politics influenced debates on Spanish American identity, such discussions are only meaningful within the broader context of constructions of Spanish American identity within the U.S. literary infrastructure in general, which must themselves be compared to those presented within the Spanish American media. Hence the question of identity politics—of self-assertion and self-determination—is at the heart of my study. In keeping with the theme of this year’s seminar at the Warren Center, I hope that, through my research, I will be able to delineate new “lines of contact among the Americas and within the United States.”

Deborah N. Cohn is the William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow at the Warren Center and visiting assistant professor of Spanish. She is assistant professor of Hispanic Studies at McGill University.

William Styron’s Robert Penn Warren Lecture on Southern Letters Rescheduled

The renowned Southern novelist William Styron will deliver the third annual Robert Penn Warren Lecture on Southern Letters on April 5, following a dinner at the Sheraton Nashville, 623 Union Street. His talk, which was originally scheduled to take place in October during the Tennessee Humanities Council’s Southern

Festival of Books, has been rescheduled due to illness.

Styron is best known for a series of novels that includes *Lie Down in Darkness*, which won the American Academy of Arts and Letters’ Prix de Rome; *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which won the Pulitzer Prize; and *Sophie’s Choice*, which was awarded the

National Book Award. Styron also received the National Medal of Arts. His most recent work is *A Tidewater Morning* (1993).

The Robert Penn Warren Lecture on Southern Letters was founded in 1998 as a collaborative project between the Warren Center and the Tennessee Humanities Council. It is intended

to provide a public forum for the exploration of topics related to Southern writing. Previous lecturers have included Elizabeth Spencer and Reynolds Price. For tickets and further information regarding the lecture, please contact the Tennessee Humanities Council at (615) 320-7001 or www.tn-humanities.org.

An Interview with Lucius Outlaw and Arnold Rampersad

On October 19, 2000, Arnold Rampersad, Sara Hart Kimball Professor of the Humanities at Stanford University, delivered the fourth annual Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture, "Biography and African American Lives," at Vanderbilt. The author



Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr.

of critically admired biographies of W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Jackie Robinson, Rampersad is also a respected critic of African American literature.

While in Nashville, Rampersad was interviewed by Anne Marie Deer Owens of Vanderbilt's WRVU radio. Joining him in the interview was Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr., professor of philosophy and director of the African American Studies program at Vanderbilt. Outlaw, who attended Fisk University as an undergraduate and received his Ph.D. from Boston College, recently came to Vanderbilt from Haverford College. His primary interests are in African philosophy, African American philosophy, and the history of philosophy in the West. His current research project, a book with the working title *Race, Reason, and Order*, explores the conceptions of race that several major Western philosophers held.

What follows is a transcript of the radio interview that aired on

WRVU's program "InterVU" on October 21, 2000. "InterVU," a weekly hour-long program, presents conversations with Vanderbilt faculty members and visiting scholars.

OWENS: Would you say that reading each other's work has propelled some of your ideas and interests?

OUTLAW: Yes. The crossing of paths happened for me when I read one of Arnold's earlier works, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*. As a philosopher, I have come to have tremendous respect for biographers because they help to overcome a deformation that professional philosophers often suffer from—namely, the tendency to concentrate wholly on ideas and to consider most other aspects of a philosopher's life as extraneous. Arnold's work on Du Bois allowed me

to gain a perspective that I lacked. As a result, I found that I had to rethink how I should situate myself professionally in conversations regarding Du Bois. I might add that during a conference, Arnold confronted me with an important critique of my work, and I had to contend with it. He sets high standards, both in scholarship and in personal integrity.

RAMPERSAD: I have great respect for the investigations of philosophers, and I think that Lucius takes on extremely important questions about the relationship between Western philosophy and African American philosophers—the significance of such figures as Alain Locke, for instance. I learn a great deal from his work.

Of course, philosophy is much more honored as a field and has a much more ancient intellectual heritage than does biography. In some sense, what I and other bi-

ographers do is highly journalistic. So I find it a tremendous compliment that my work can be of use to a philosopher. Even though we biographers sometimes fall down on the job and resort to too much gossip, we do have something to offer because we make human beings come alive—we put them in a broader social context.

OWENS: Professor Rampersad, what motivated you to begin writing biographies?

RAMPERSAD: As a student, I was always interested in literature, but I was also interested in history and in fiction writing. I discovered that the one field that combined all these interests—English, history, a little bit of psychology, and the business of constructing a narrative—was biography. My first study was intellectual biography. I remembered being deeply, deeply moved by W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, which was published in 1903 and probably had more of an impact on African American intellectual life than any other single book. Then when I looked at what other people had written about Du Bois, I came to suspect that he was not being properly understood. How did this rather severely trained historian and sociologist come to write these fantastically artistic and human essays about black life? It was my search for answers to this question that launched me into biography.

OWENS: Does it seem that Americans have become more interested in biography recently?

RAMPERSAD: Americans have always been interested in biography, from the eighteenth century to the present. Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, for instance, was a major text in America during the revolutionary era, and subsequent generations, having an undecided sense of who they were and how they constituted a nation, also looked back to this and other classical texts to see how men and women led exem-

plary lives. Even so, I think that there is a real revival of interest in biography today. Biographies do not sell enormous quantities compared to novels or self-help books, but they sell respectably. And there is even a biography channel on cable television that has become popular.

OWENS: Would it be fair to say that your experience growing up in the United States as an African American has contributed to the direction you have taken in your books?

RAMPERSAD: Actually, I grew up in Trinidad—but I came here many years ago, in 1965. We had a not entirely dissimilar social and political situation in Trinidad, and I became interested in writing books about groups of people who had not been adequately represented or understood. I decided that the best contribution that I could make to the movement for social change was to be a historian and biographer of African American life. Although I also teach American literature more generally, I have always maintained my interest in what I see as a neglected area, African American culture.

OWENS: Professor Outlaw, has there been something similar in your past experience that compelled you to study race and philosophy?

OUTLAW: Yes. Growing up in Mississippi and coming to Fisk University as an undergraduate in the 1960s played tremendous roles in my intellectual development. I was utterly perplexed by the racial ordering of the society that I knew, and I set about trying to find a particular set of reasons for it—first as a philosophy and religion major, and then later as a philosophy major (forsaking the study of religion) when I realized that I preferred, so to speak, the broad and crooked to the straight and narrow. I find what Arnold just offered to be very moving, because I came to almost exactly the same conclusion about what my contribution to the

RAMPERSAD:

I decided that the best contribution I could make . . . was to be a historian and biographer of African American life.

movement, to the struggle, should be. My teaching and scholarship have revolved around exploring questions that were not being explored, making room for people who had not been included—or were even explicitly excluded—before. I try to keep faith with this commitment even today.

RAMPERSAD: I find it wonderful that someone could connect the political struggles of the 1960s to philosophy. It is important, I think, for those of us who believe in universities and believe in education to assert that we, as teachers, play an important role in social change in our lives—an honorable and efficacious role.

OWENS: Professor Rampersad, how did you come to write your biography of Jackie Robinson?

RAMPERSAD: Mrs. Robinson, Rachel Robinson, asked me to do it. At first I thought that someone else should write it, someone who had grown up playing baseball. But she emphasized that she wanted it to be about more than baseball—about her husband's life before baseball and the fifteen years after baseball, until he died in 1972. So I tried to write a comprehensive biography. I took him as seriously as I would any other subject, and that is how he deserved to be approached.

OWENS: What was your final conclusion about him?

RAMPERSAD: I ended up with a great deal of esteem for him. Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, chose Jackie Robinson very carefully—he chose someone who was well educated, morally upright, and religious. Even more remarkably, he chose someone who had a record of standing up to racism. And Jackie continued to be true to his standards, throughout his career and afterwards. I think that he is one of our sporting figures to whom we can turn for an example of how one can live in the spotlight of athletic fame—and with the

money that comes with that fame—and yet not be distracted from much more profound human concerns. He was strongly opposed to those in the 1960s who urged racial separation—he rejected violence and threats of violent revolution completely.

OWENS: So he would have been opposed to what Malcolm X, for instance, was espousing.

RAMPERSAD: Jackie respected Malcolm X's intelligence, as we all should, but he did not subscribe either to his belief in racial separation or to the slogan "by any means necessary."

OWENS: Professor Outlaw, can you talk a little about what your vision will be for the African American Studies program at Vanderbilt?

OUTLAW: In general terms, yes. I have a vision, but I want to proceed carefully, as I think it would be presumptuous, problematic, and disrespectful to arrive with a fully articulated vision to be imposed upon an institution at which I have spent only a few months. I need to come to an understanding with all the relevant persons about what might be the best possible venture in African American Studies here at Vanderbilt. It is an extremely challenging venture, this business called African American Studies, because it focuses upon a complicated set of people whose points of cultural reference include the African continent, the Caribbean, and the Americas. To study these people requires the services and expertise of scholars from every possible discipline devoted to the production of human knowledge. How to pursue these studies in a coherent and comprehensive fashion is for me an extremely challenging question. For instance, there are long tradi-

OUTLAW:

I believe strongly that all in the University must appreciate fully the value of African American Studies.



Arnold Rampersad

tions of African American literature, art, and music, as well as traditions of scholarship regarding these forms of endeavor, but there has been less attention to African American contributions in fields such as philosophy. Moreover, we need to recognize that institutions that have been predominantly white sometimes have tremendous inertia. Vanderbilt's association with the conservative Agrarian tradition, for example, suggests that developing a program in African American Studies with a national and international profile will require reworking Vanderbilt's identity in some ways. That will take courage and will as well as substantial resources.

OWENS: Professor Rampersad, you also served as the head of an African American Studies program. Do you have any thoughts?

RAMPERSAD: Yes, I served for three years as the head of an African American Studies program. I would say that even though you, as a director, have multiple obligations, the bottom line is to teach students as much as possible about your subject. Many people do not realize that in many universities, the primary constituency for African Ameri-

can Studies is the white student. One has to see African American Studies as a field no different from English or biology—as something of value for all the undergraduates who wish to become involved in the process.

OUTLAW: I would agree. Having begun my career in historically black institutions, I found the decision to make the move into historically and predominantly white institutions difficult. But I believe strongly that everyone must come to realize the value of African American Studies—the learning must be there for all to pursue. The most fundamental need is to have an impact upon the production, the mediation, and the validation of knowledge itself. What passes for knowledge? On what terms do we settle whether something is appropriately "knowledge"? Who are appropriate figures to be studied? These questions need to be addressed.

RAMPERSAD: And when you attempt to answer these questions honestly, you ensure that African American Studies will not become a propaganda program. Students do not want to be converted; they can smell attempts to convert them a mile off and they do not come to college for that. What they want is for information and knowledge to be brought to them by highly disciplined instructors and in innovative ways so that they too can enter into the discussion with an open spirit and take away what they deem valuable.

OUTLAW: Indeed. These are the ongoing challenges—and responsibilities—to be met in developing and maintaining a truly first-class program of studies—of teaching, research, and scholarship; creative production and performance—devoted to studies of African and African-descended peoples. These studies must play a substantial role in educating Vanderbilt students for an increasingly racially and ethnically complex and just society.

Breakfast with José Ramos-Horta

By Brent V. Savoie

On October 4, 2000, the College of Arts and Sciences hosted José Ramos-Horta, 1996 Nobel Peace Laureate. After addressing the Vanderbilt community on the subject of "Peacemaking: The Power of Nonviolence," Ramos-Horta was invited to the Warren Center the following day to have breakfast with a group of Vanderbilt undergraduates and to discuss the role that nonviolent strategies play in the protection and advancement of human rights. The following essay, written by Brent V. Savoie, presents one undergraduate's response to the experience. Mr. Savoie is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences.

On December 7, 1975, Indonesia invaded East Timor, initiating a mass killing that would claim the lives of over 200,000 East Timorese by 1979. As Indonesian troops spilled into East Timor, José Ramos-Horta was on a plane bound for New York, where he was to plead East Timor's case before the United Nations Security Council. He would remain in exile for the next twenty-four years struggling to gain support for the independence of East Timor. In 1996, in recognition of

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Four years later, East Timor achieved its independence.

The recognition of East Timor's independence has not stopped José Ramos-Horta's efforts to promote the interests of his people. Recognizing the intimate link between development and stability, Ramos-Horta continues to press for the global community's assistance in East Timor's economic and political development. Vanderbilt University was honored to take part in Ramos-Horta's efforts to promote East Timor's development to the American people. After speaking to a large audience at Langford Auditorium, the Nobel Laureate chose to speak to a small group of Vanderbilt students over breakfast the following day.

When I received the invitation to attend the Warren Center's breakfast with José Ramos-Horta, I expected to learn more about his life and East Timor's struggle for independence. I did not expect to change my definition of a hero—nor did I expect a personal challenge to lead a heroic life. Over coffee and bagels, José Ramos-Horta not only personalized East

I arrived early for breakfast. Across the small room, José Ramos-Horta stood in a black suit, his serious, dark eyes peering out from behind a pair of circular lenses. His stern visage and thin-rimmed glasses were familiar from photos in newspapers and web pages. As I paused in the doorway, the statistics from the articles that accompanied his photos sped through my mind: twenty four years of exile, 200,000 countrymen killed in civil war, four siblings killed by Indonesian military forces. These numbers took form in the set of serious eyes that stared at me.

I entered the room, grabbed my nametag, and introduced myself to José Ramos-Horta with a trembling handshake. I stood humbled and awestruck in front of the small man in a black suit. Suddenly, all the questions I had wanted to ask vanished. Faced with the vacancy of my mind, I asked him how he liked Nashville. He made a few jokes about Elvis Presley and we laughed. In his chuckle I saw the humanity of a hero, and the wall I had built between heroes and humans began to crumble.

As we continued our conversation, other students began to file into a conference room for breakfast. At breakfast, the small group of students listened intently while Ramos-Horta spoke about his twenty-four years in exile. At nine in the morning his words captured the full attention of the small group of tired college students. Bagels and cups of coffee lay untouched.

Without a hint of self-pity he described the daunting obstacles that had faced him in his efforts to

struggle for an independent East Timor. From indifferent bureaucrats who avoided him in the corridors of the United Nations to the hostility of Indonesian security agents, a host of adversaries confronted him in New York. Moreover, he faced the opposition of the most formidable of adversaries: the American government.

America endorsed Indonesia's genocidal acts not only through its silence, but also through direct military support of the Suharto dictatorship. Despite the Carter administration's public claims that human rights were "the soul of our foreign policy," it arranged an immediate, large-scale arms package for Indonesia in the wake of its invasion of East Timor. Eleven OV-10 "Bronco" counter-insurgency aircraft, built by American hands, arrived in Jakarta within eight months of the Indonesian invasion. They expedited Indonesia's genocidal task, bombing the rural East Timorese strongholds. One of these pro-independence strongholds was Lakubar, José Ramos-Horta's hometown. In 1978, an American-made "Bronco" fired a salvo of rockets into a Lakubar neighborhood, killing José Ramos-Horta's sister, Mariazinha. She was the first of four of José Ramos-Horta's siblings killed by Indonesian military forces.

During his twenty years of lobbying for East Timor in the United States, Indonesian security agents attempted to silence him through intimidation and bribes. He withstood the economic and psychological pressures to submit to their demands, even during the darkest times of East Timor's struggle for independence. His unwavering resistance to their temptations reveals the depth of his selflessness. Even when his cause seemed destined to failure, he resisted the promise of an easy life.

Loyalty to the people of East Timor served as the foundation to his selfless devotion to his nation's struggle for independence. When a student asked if he ever considered giving up, he replied: "Never." He



José Ramos-Horta (at right, foreground) and Earl E. Fitz, professor of Portuguese and Spanish (second from left, background) discuss heroism with students from Vanderbilt's College Scholars program (Brent V. Savoie is fifth from left, background).

his efforts to achieve a just and peaceful resolution to the crisis in East Timor, José Ramos-Horta was

Timor's struggle, but also changed my understanding of heroism and its relevance to my life.

SAVOIE:

He invited those gathered . . . to leave the comfortable confines of their lives.

believed that giving up would have been equivalent to taking a bribe from the Indonesian government. Either way he would have betrayed the trust of the people of East Timor. Furthermore, he would have disgraced the memories of his brothers and sisters who died in their nation's struggle for independence.

Despite his international recognition as a hero, José Ramos-



José Ramos-Horta

Horta repeatedly denied his status as such. Rather, he pointed to the poor of East Timor as the true heroes of the nation's struggle for independence. He confronted those gathered for breakfast with his definition of heroism, based on character, not on accomplishments. For him the poor of East Timor embodied the defining characteristics of a hero: selflessness, sacrifice, loyalty, and humility. He simply strove to emulate their heroic stance in recognition of the tremendous sacrifices they had made for their nation.

In recognizing the poor as the true heroes of East Timor's struggle for independence, Ramos-Horta called the students gathered for breakfast to a radical redefinition of heroism. His definition, based on virtue rather than achievement, forces one to look for the unrecognized heroes. Ramos-Horta's understanding of a hero demands that we support those who struggle nobly against the impossible in their daily lives.

As I silently criticized the United Nations bureaucrats who failed to recognize Ramos-Horta's heroism, I came to question my own notion of heroism. Would I have considered him a hero had East Timor not achieved independence in his lifetime? Did I, like José Ramos-Horta, recognize the heroism of those who struggled without recognition or reward? Reflecting on the words of Ramos-Horta, I began to see that heroism is an attitude, not an accomplishment.

All are called to this heroic attitude. While we cannot all win Nobel Peace Prizes or assist nations in their quest for independence, we can all choose to lead lives as ordinary heroes. José Ramos-Horta's definition of heroism gives us this choice and this challenge. We can all integrate loyalty, honesty, selflessness, and humility into our lives. We can all struggle against the impossible instead of living within the narrow confines of practicality.

Ramos-Horta did not leave the students assembled for breakfast without means to reply to their revised understanding of heroism.

He invited those gathered over bagels and coffee to leave the comfortable confines of their lives and join him in his struggle to build a new, dramatic nation. Several students approached him afterwards to get more information on how to help the development effort in East Timor. The sight of privileged college students contemplating volunteering in a war-torn land inspired me to approach him as well. He scribbled his e-mail address on the back of a business card and told me that if I wanted to teach English in East Timor I should write him. I slipped the thin card into my back pocket and shook his hand.

In my black wallet, a battered business card with José Ramos-Horta's e-mail address lies wedged between my driver's license and my credit card. The thin card weighs heavy in my wallet. The call to heroism lies there, pressed between my license to drink and my ticket to the garden of consumerism. At least once a week it falls out, reminding me of the choice that lies before me, the only choice that matters: the choice to be a hero.

John Clarke to Present Inaugural Goldberg Lecture

The inaugural Norman L. and Roselea J. Goldberg Annual Lecture in Fine Arts will be presented on Thursday, March 15, 2001 at 4:10 p.m. (campus location to be announced). The speaker will be John Clarke, Annie Laurie Howard Regents Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Clarke's lecture is entitled "Visual Representation, Sexual Cultures, and Viewers in Ancient Rome."

Professor Clarke received his Ph.D. from Yale University. His first book, *Roman Black-and-*

White Figural Mosaics, appeared in 1979. In 1980, he began teaching at the University of Texas at Austin, where his teaching, research, and publications focus on ancient Roman art, art-historical methodology, and contemporary art. In 1991, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* was published by the University of California Press. The fruit of ten years of on-site research at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia Antica, the book analyzes the imagery of wall painting and mosaics in seventeen

houses to gain an understanding of the owners' tastes and beliefs. *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250*, a study of how erotic art can reveal ancient Roman attitudes toward love, gender, and race, followed in 1998. He recently completed the manuscript for his latest book, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 315*, to be published by the University of California Press. In it, Clarke investigates how art made by or for the lower

strata of Roman society encodes individuals' identity and acculturation.

Clarke serves on the Board of Directors of the College Art Association (1991-2001), and was President from 1998-2000. He was recently elected to serve on the Board of Directors of the American Council of Learned Societies (2000-2004). He served as a consultant to the television documentary *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization*, produced by World of Wonder (London) for Britain's Channel 4. This six-part series first aired in September 1999.

Religion and Public Life: Is America God's Country?

The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, in conjunction with the Vanderbilt University Divinity School and the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, is hosting a panel discussion entitled "Religion and Public Life: Is America God's Country?" on Friday afternoon, April 6, 2001 at the First Amendment Center, 1207 18th Avenue South. The panel will involve a variety of speakers representing diverse academic disciplines and professional backgrounds and will be open to the general public. The discussion will also be videotaped for broadcast on eighty community access stations in thirty states. The dialogue will offer an opportunity to cultivate greater public awareness of the influence of theology and religious history on American political and civic life. On Saturday, April 7, the Warren Center will host smaller seminar sessions with the visiting speakers, involving faculty members and graduate students with research interests in these areas.

This program grows out of a belief on the part of the Warren Center's Executive Committee that a discussion of the influence of various religious beliefs on U.S. history will appeal to a broad constituency. The program will be a catalyst for bringing together faculty and graduate students representing multiple disciplines in the College of Arts and Science, as well as from the Divinity School, the Law School, the First Amendment Center, and the Nashville community. It is the hope of the Executive Committee that the program will serve as a model for annual programs on broad topics involving numerous schools in the University that will bring to campus distin-

guished speakers who will appeal to a large academic and public audience.

Invited participants for the program include:

Jean Bethke Elshtain, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics, The Divinity School, the Department of Political Science, and the Committee on International Relations at the University of Chicago. Elshtain is a political philosopher whose task has been to show the connections between our political and ethical convictions. Her books include *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in*

the Board of Trustees of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University and the National Humanities Center.

Floyd Flake, Senior Pastor of the 10,000 member Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church in Jamaica, Queens, and former U.S. Representative. In the U.S. Congress, Reverend Flake established a reputation for bipartisan, innovative initiatives to revitalize urban commercial and residential communities. In addition to sponsoring the Community Development Financial Institutions Act of 1993, Reverend Flake became one of the strongest Democratic con-

Raboteau is a specialist in American religious history. His research and teaching have focused on American Catholic history and African American religious movements. He has written *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* and *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History*; he has also co-edited *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*. He is currently co-director of a documentary history of African American religion and was a coordinator of the former Center for the Study of American Religion. He has been at Princeton since 1982; prior to that time, he held faculty posts at the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University, and Yale University. He is a member of the American Academy of Religion, the American Historical Association and the American Studies Association.

Peggy

Wehmeyer, ABC News correspondent.

When Peggy Wehmeyer joined ABC News in January 1994, she became the first correspondent to report for a network on religious and spiritual issues. Based in the Dallas bureau, Wehmeyer reports for *World News Tonight* with Peter Jennings, *20/20*, and *Prime Time Thursday*. Before joining ABC News, she had for more than ten years covered religious and social issues for the ABC affiliate in Dallas. Previously, she served as Director of Public Information for Dallas Theological Seminar, where she also studied. Wehmeyer has received numerous awards for her work, most recently two Cine Golden Eagle Awards, an International Film and Video Festival Award, a Covenant Award from the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, and a



Social Thought; The Family in Political Thought; Meditations on Modern Political Thought; Women and War; Democracy on Trial; Augustine and the Limits of Politics; Real Politics: At the Center of Everyday Life; New Wine in Old Bottles: Politics and Ethical Discourse; and Who Are We?: Critical Reflections, Hopeful Possibilities. Professor Elshtain writes widely for journals of civic opinion and lectures, both in the United States and abroad, on whether democracy will prove sufficiently robust and resilient to survive. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; Chair of the Council on Civil Society; and a member of

gressional voices for parental choice in education. As a pastor, he has used his commitment for free-market principles to under take expansive commercial and residential development and to create a 500-student private school. With an annual budget of nearly \$24 million, Reverend Flake's church has become one of the nation's most productive religious and urban development organizations. Pastor Flake is the author of *The Way of the Bootstrapper: Nine Action Steps for Achieving Your Dreams*, with an introduction by William J. Bennett.

Albert J. Raboteau, Professor of Religion, Princeton University.



The Warren Center is located in the Vaughn Home, pictured above.

THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

Warren Center Staff

Mona C. Frederick,
Executive Director
Thomas Haddox, *Editor*
Paul W. Burch, Jr.,
Office Assistant

Letters is the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, Box 1534 Station B, Nashville, Tennessee 37235. (615) 343-6060 Fax (615) 343-2248.

For more information concerning the Center or its programs, please contact the above address or visit our web site at www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center.

Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1987 and renamed the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Members of the Vanderbilt community representing 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.

Vanderbilt University is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.

Published by University Publications & Design
Photographs by Neil Brake, except photo of Deborah Cohn, used courtesy of Professor Cohn; photo of Arnold Rampersad, used courtesy of Stanford University; and photo of José Ramos-Horta, by Humberto Salgado.