

## American Studies Graduate Workshop and Conference 2009: Civil Rights and Questions of Legacy

by Vanessa Beasley, Associate Professor of Communication Studies

The rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s is well-known. Indeed, speeches such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" and Lyndon Baines Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" are frequently invoked as touchstones that stand apart from the rest of U.S. political oratory. Even if these texts are understood primarily as the compelling yet strategic responses of particular political leaders to moments ripe for social change, they can also be viewed as revealing something about an idealized vision of the American demos itself: a public that imagines itself as existing under a mythic banner of "equality for all."

But what happened after 1970? Where—and who—were the next set of voices? What did they say? And what was left unsaid or contested?

These were the central questions for the AMER 300 graduate workshop course during the spring semester of 2009. We discussed primary texts from the speeches and writings of prominent civil rights advocates from 1970-2000, with voices ranging from Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan to Harvey Milk and Larry Kramer. As these references suggest, we also traced the symbolic import and changing parameters of the phrase "civil rights." Although the phrase can be used to refer to a specific legal category, it can also be approached as an essentially contested ideograph whose meaning can change across time, circumstance, and motive. What "civil rights" signified in 1972, then, is not necessarily the same thing it did in 2002.

Moving chronologically through the texts, we also studied some instances of discourse that circulated among those who were not necessarily champions of civil rights. These voices too must be taken

seriously to understand important developments in U.S. political culture after 1970. For some supporters of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, for example, the civil rights legislation of the 1960s

and 1970s was a productive stimulus for political coalition-building that might not have been possible—or at least as robust—otherwise.

In addition to texts that came from U.S. electoral politics, we also examined selected legal debates as well as the language of federal civil rights legislation itself. After 1970, the term "civil rights" was increasingly likely to refer to cases involving public education and employment law. Likewise, we also attended to cultural rhetorics

of civil rights, including the discourse that surrounded the somewhat controversial creation of the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, partially housed within the Lorraine Motel. Thus public memory too was a frequent topic of discussion.

At the end of the semester, we prepared for the American Studies Spring Conference: "Questions of Legacy: Making Sense of the 2008 Campaign," held on April 17-18, 2009. By the time the conference was set to begin, we had a better understanding of both the obvious and less obvious discursive constraints that arguably paved the way for the historic presidential election of 2008. More to the point, we had cultivated a sense of the rhetorical history behind some of the more contemporary rhetorics of race, gender, and class that were so often invoked by the media as well

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Top: The Civil Rights March on Washington, DC, 1963. Right: Barack Obama is sworn in as the 44th president of the United States, Jan. 20, 2009.



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## Director's Note

During the spring semester of 2009, I had the opportunity to visit the University of Tampere in Finland as a Fulbright Senior Specialist. I taught a course on national memory, delivered lectures on my research, and consulted with graduate students and faculty on their research. As most Fulbrighters will tell you, it was an amazing experience. Working and living in a different culture made me a student again. It provided me a renewed sense of wonder about the world and about the work that I do. My remarkable students not only taught me much about Finland's national identity but also helped to defamiliarize U.S. national identity for me. The U.S. came to look strange—and, truth be told, quite odd—from their perspective. Looking at the U.S. from the outside in yields important and often self-revelatory knowledge and is the reason that the American Studies program requires all of its majors to go abroad or to take an international course. For accounts of two students' study abroad experiences in Copenhagen see page 4 in this issue.

Besides sending our students abroad to study, American Studies is developing the international aspects of our own curriculum and programming. The American Studies Program has recently been awarded a \$10,000 Curriculum Grant from the Vanderbilt International Office. This grant is directed by Professor Ifeoma Nwankwo (English; director, *Voices from Our America*<sup>TM</sup>), and will help to institute a new series of courses titled "Music City Perspectives." The courses will teach the international and local histories of the Nashville community through hands-on learning. The first course in this series, "Black (in) Nashville," taught by Professor Nwankwo, is being offered this fall as the American Studies junior workshop. Future courses will include "Latino/a Nashville" and "Nashville and the World." We are very excited about this curricular innovation.

This year marks the beginning of my second term as director of American Studies. I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue to work with all of you in building this remarkable interdisciplinary program.

—Teresa Goddu



Tampere, Finland:  
The memorial to  
Väinö Voionmaa, who  
served the University  
of Tampere as its  
Chancellor 1926-1931  
and 1945-1947 is  
nowadays prominently  
situated in front of the  
Main Building. Entitled  
Growth, this creation  
of the sculptor Kauko  
Räike was completed  
in 1965.  
(Photo: Erkki Karén)

## Civil Rights and Questions of Legacy *(continued from page 1)*

as by the campaigns themselves. We invited scholars from multiple disciplines to share their analysis of this discursive context and thus "make sense" of how civil rights in general and identity in particular can be discussed within contemporary U.S. politics. Featured speakers were James A. Aune, Texas A&M University; Houston Baker, Vanderbilt University; Tasha Dubriwny, Texas A&M University; and Keith Gilyard, Pennsylvania State University. The conference was open to the Vanderbilt community, and indeed, one of the

highlights of the year was listening to the lively discussions that ensued.

*Vanessa B. Beasley is author of You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric (2004) and editor of Who Belongs in America: Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration (2006). At Vanderbilt, she teaches classes in the history of U.S. public address as well as mass mediated politics for the Department of Communication Studies.*

# Re-imagining a “Beautiful, Yet Baneful Object”:

## Citizenship, Aesthetics, and Form in African American Writing, 1794-1865

Derrick Spires,  
American Studies  
Dissertation Fellow  
(English)

Through the generous assistance of the American Studies Dissertation Fellowship, the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, and the Department of English, I have spent the year engaging the dynamic between citizenship and aesthetics in early African-American political writing. Outside of anti-slavery efforts, citizenship was central to African-American political writing during the nineteenth century. David Walker famously addressed his Appeal (1829) to the “colored citizens of the world, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America”; Martin Delany addressed himself to the nation in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852) as their “Most Devout, and Patriotic Fellow Citizen,” and most black conventions issued addresses to the public saluting them as “fellow citizens.” These reiterative and performative speech acts became increasingly ironic as U.S. legal and social institutions continued to scale back the contours of citizenship for African Americans.

Walker was accurate insofar as African Americans were legally U.S. citizens, but citizenship is not simply a matter of legal status. Rather, my research has led me to see citizenship as a vexed confluence of formal membership within a political body that entitles members to certain rights and social recognition of this membership by other citizens. African Americans were caught in a no-win vise between the two. Institutionally, courts and legislative assemblies continually reemphasized the truncated and tenuous nature of black citizenship, citing “natural” incapacity or claiming that over a century of enslavement had rendered free African Americans “unfit” to vote, serve on juries, or assume other civic responsibilities. Popular sentiment sustained this belief that African Americans were irremediably different and incompatible with what was to be a white republic.

To the extent that my project tells a story, then, it is not about the steady march of democratic equality. Rather, it is a story about the tension between African Americans’ struggle for civic and social inclusion based on the promises they saw in representative governance on the one hand and the national tendency to foreclose those possibilities based on ideologies of white supremacy on the other. This foreclosure included increasingly restrictive legal and social practices like the disenfranchisement of most of the north’s black population in the 1820s and 1830s, rising labor segregation, the 1850 fugitive slave law, and the Dred Scott v. Sanford decision of 1857. By the 1860s, even Frederick Douglass, one of the staunchest advocates for remaining in the U.S., began to express interest in emigration.

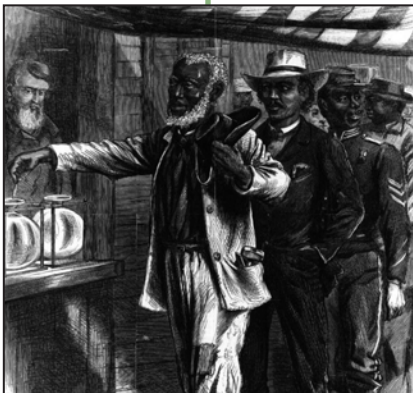
The increasing conflation of citizenship with white identity led many African-American activists to look to more participatory and performative models. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen’s 1794 yellow fever narrative, for instance, offers a political and economic

critique of a republican citizenship grounded in an understanding of civic responsibility based on the Christian ethics of neighborliness and common labor. Over sixty years later, James McCune Smith (the first university-trained African-American physician) takes up this same line to argue that the laboring classes, rather than the elite, create progress in a civilization. With obvious reference to enslaved people, he suggested that creating “castes” that permanently separated and depressed the common people could cause a nation to atrophy and die.

One of the most fascinating responses to the piecemeal stripping of African-American rights was the black state convention movement. Initially organized around states’ restricting the suffrage to white men, these conventions present a participatory model of citizenship that they leverage in print as a circulating performance of citizenship and justification for unrestricted franchise. Some conventions allowed participants to sign in on site; others required delegates to submit credentials proving their participation in local nomination processes. During the conventions, delegates nominated officers, selected committees, and commissioned county and city committees to develop the conventions’ programs including petition drives and providing support for former slaves. They issued addresses that index the growing importance of voting as the unifying symbol of citizenship. An 1840 convention called the franchise the “life blood of political existence,” without which communities stagnate and die. This reasoning reversed conventional wisdom that citizens had to either prove themselves sufficiently worthy or responsible to vote, or that white skin signified civic responsibility. Instead, they suggest that the responsibility of voting created good citizens who were invested in their communities.

Despite inimical public sentiment and governmental policies, African-American writers maintained a deep and abiding hope for a country that, however hostile, they called home. As Henry Highland Garnet put it in *The Past and the Present Condition, and the Destiny, of the Colored Race* (1848): “America is my home, my country, and I have no other. I love whatever good there may be in her institutions. I hate her sins. I loathe her slavery, and I pray Heaven that ere long she may wash away her guilt in tears of repentance.” This same love/hate relationship led Smith to look upon the U.S. flag as a “beautiful, yet baneful object,” at once heralding the potential of democratic institutions and at the same time presiding over slave markets.

Perhaps this is a fitting description of my own experience this year, seeing the election of the first African-American president of the United States even as I’ve lived with Smith’s words. Smith, Garnet, and others remind us to never get so consumed with the potential beauty of democratic citizenship that we lose sight of the hard work yet to be done.



Engraving by Alfred Rudolph Waud, from the pamphlet, “A constitutional defense of the Negro: by Algernon Sidney Crapsey; delivered at a mass meeting of citizens in the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, Washington, D.C., December 15, 1901.”

# Lessons from Abroad: American Studies Students Gain New Perspective



## My Study Abroad *by Kelly Ann Quindlen*

**O**n each one of my weekly Undergraduate Admissions campus tours, I pause inside of Buttrick Hall to discuss Vanderbilt's study abroad options with my tour groups. The prospective students sometimes ask me how receiving academic credit works when an undergraduate studies abroad. I tell them that Vanderbilt makes it easy to receive credit for your major. Then I use my go-to joke: "I mean come on, I'm an American Studies major, and I got credit for leaving America!"

They laugh at the irony, and I smile at it, but in reality I believe there's nothing oxymoronic about that statement: I actually think it makes perfect sense. I never knew so much about America, and about what it means to apply the discipline of American Studies, until I left the States to study abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark, last semester.

I did not take any traditional American Studies courses while I was abroad, but I did study International Law from a European perspective and thereby learned how to see America with European eyes. We talked about the European Union, about the United Nations, and about Iraq, and suddenly America became an entity that was removed from me, a specimen which I was able to better understand and to analyze because I was outside of it. I learned to see America not for what it meant to me (my home, my identity), but rather for what it meant to the rest of the world. I learned how to think even more critically about American foreign policy and international relations.

And I think I learned even more about American Studies when I was away from the classroom. I remember sitting in a café in central Copenhagen with my friend Lucy, who is also American, and discussing what the South meant to us. Lucy is from San Francisco and studies at Brown University. She's never been to the South. As we talked, her preconceptions of the South became very clear to me, and they bothered me, but they also rallied the American Studies scholar in me. I tapped into the knowledge I've gleaned in my American Studies courses at Vanderbilt and shared with her my thoughts on the role of the South relative to the rest of the United States. But what was thrilling for me was that I wasn't just pulling up memories of old classes: I was articulating, for the first time, my own thoughts on this

aspect of American Studies—a combination of what I had learned, what I had lived, and what I was currently discovering in the course of my study abroad experience.

If I could impart any wisdom to younger American Studies students, it is this tidbit: Leave the country. Go to Denmark, or to Latin America, or to the Middle East. You won't know what it means to be American until you're outside of America. Leave, and then you'll understand that to be an American means to live with privilege but also with accountability. You'll fully understand the ramifications of Obama's presidency when you're sitting in a Copenhagen café and staring up at a Pop art version of his face with the caption "Mr. Obama, you and your family are hereby invited to a congratulatory meal on the house." Leave America, and then you'll feel the criticism of foreigners, will learn how to healthily examine the character of your own nation, while you're walking the streets of Paris. You'll see how the different regions of the United States fit together when you're sitting in classes with students from Northeastern liberal arts colleges and Western state schools in one giant "American" study abroad program. Leave, and you'll feel your American-ness more acutely than ever before. You'll no longer be just a student of American Studies: you will become a teacher, a critic, a disciple, and a contributor to this discipline. You'll feel the same thrill that I did when I realized that I was finally applying the lessons of my major to my life.

## My Study Abroad *by Benjamin Popper*

**T**hree years ago, I decided to major in American Studies with the desire to immerse myself in the culture, history, and different perspectives of American life. At the time, I had no idea that one of the most meaningful and lifelong experiences of my major would be the one that took me out of the United States and landed me on a small island in Scandinavia. Last semester, I was fortunate enough to pack my bags and spend five months studying abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark, with the Danish Institute for Study Abroad (DIS). Living, studying, and playing in Copenhagen and Europe introduced me to new cultures and new friends, and has enhanced my appreciation, understanding, and perspective of American society.

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# Recognizing the *American South* in Photographs

*American  
Studies 100W,  
Spring 2009*

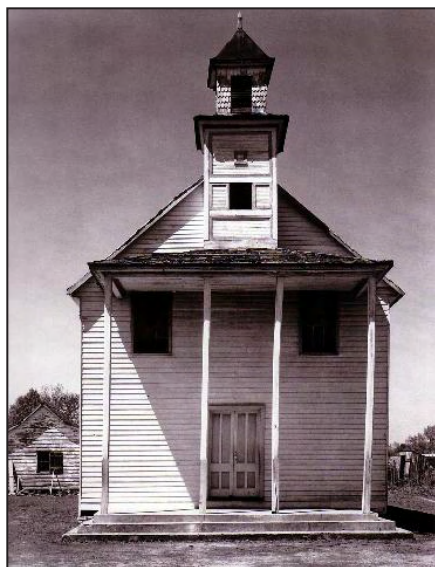
by Michael Kreyling, Professor of English

*A*merican Studies 100W-01 came about, as most American Studies courses do, because of a convergence of events beyond the University, beyond the covers of a textbook. And, some might add: beyond the expertise of the teacher. I've been exploring the influence photographic portraits of authors exercise on the kinds of meanings we think we get out of their works, but I would have to stretch that narrow connection with photography to make AMER 100W-01 work.

Jochen Wierich, curator of art at Cheekwood Museum, approached American Studies in October 2007 with visions of doing something with an upcoming exhibit of work by William Christenberry booked for the spring of 2009. Jochen had been a visiting professor in Fine Arts (as it was then) a couple of years ago, so he knew the territory. At first, we talked only about lectures or special gallery tours, maybe training students to be docents or interns. Soon, however, the multiple opportunities became a course.

Cheekwood was not the only Nashville venue for American photography in the spring of 2009. The Frist Center for the Visual Arts was hosting a traveling exhibit of the "greatest hits" of photography from the George Eastman House. It was to close in late January, but we thought we could get the students a few blocks down Broadway for a tour. We were lucky to have Katie Delmez, who curated the show for The Frist, to lead us through the galleries and explain what a curator sees when she looks at a collection of photographs.

There was a hidden design. AMER 100W-01 fulfills the college AXLE writing (W) requirement, and we thought it might be effective to



*Negro church, South Carolina, 1936.  
(Photo by Walker Evans)*

have the students write as curators rather than as random, sensitive voyagers. We estimated the benefits: practice in a range of writing word-counts, from 200w label copy up through 1000w catalogue essay; a range of audiences from gallery-goers strolling by the images on the way to the gift shop to more curious patrons reading a longer critical essay at home; and a variety of formal skills from the near-telegraphic factual writing of the label copy to the management of a longer essay seasoned



*Sharecropper Family, 1930s. (Photo by Walker Evans)*

with theoretical and historical perspectives. One of the obstacles to teaching W courses is getting the students to believe in living and breathing subject matter that a living and breathing audience needs to read about. We thought we had both.

At the other end of the semester, Cheekwood would sponsor an exhibit of works by Alabama-native William Christenberry, most well-known for his color photographs of the same terrain in Hale County, Alabama, that James Agee and Walker Evans haunted for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).

There was the general framework of the history of photography, the South, the South in photography (Evans), and a strong southern writer (Agee). To make myself a little more comfortable, I added Eudora Welty, a southern writer who early in her career played seriously with the idea of becoming a professional photographer. Spring 2009 was her centennial, and I knew that a reconstruction of an exhibit of photographs she had assembled in the mid-1930s for showing in New York City would be in the news. Since I know those images pretty well, and have some ideas about the ways her photographer's eye and her writer's vision work together, I thought I could see room for her in a course designed around the concepts of region, the artist's personal eye, and the meshed "technologies" of photographing and writing.

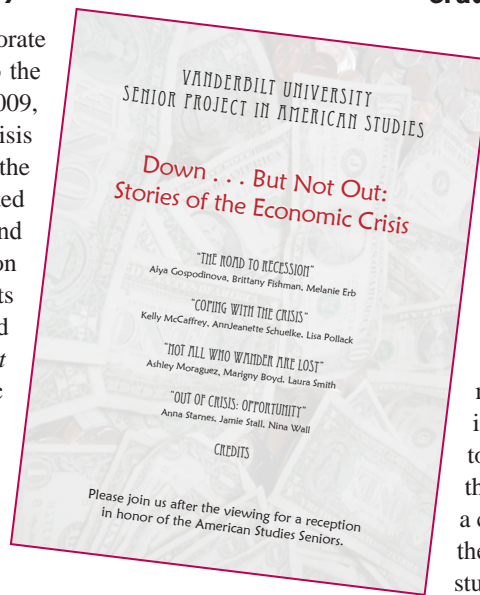
Coming up with a workable design for the fourteen weeks was not so easy. It was clear from the start that the students (myself included) would need a common ground in the basic history of photography as a technology and an art form. We spent the first half of the semester following the history of photography from the daguerreotype to the social documentary photography of the 1930s. It was a stroke of good fortune to have the Eastman show at the Frist; we could see "in person" many of the works we would have otherwise have seen only reproduced in a textbook.

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# what's new in American Studies at Vanderbilt

## American Studies Senior Seminar 2009

Each year, American Studies seniors collaborate on a final project that is then presented to the wider American Studies community. In 2009, students researched the current U.S. economic crisis and examined how other such crises (such as the Great Depression) were recorded. They conducted fieldwork by talking with friends, family, and others about the impact of the downturn on individuals and communities. Groups of students then created digital stories that were combined to form the short film *Down But Not Out . . . Stories of the Economic Crisis*. A public reception and film screening were held at the end of the semester. The 2009 video project can be viewed at the new American Studies digital archive: <http://discoverarchive.vanderbilt.edu/handle/1803/3383>, or visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/americanstudies](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/americanstudies) for a link.



## Graduate Certificate Now Available

The Program in American Studies is happy to announce a certificate in American Studies for students enrolled in graduate study at Vanderbilt. Designed to complement students' disciplinary training, expose them to interdisciplinary trends in the academy, and broaden their career possibilities, the American Studies Certificate provides training across an array of American Studies disciplines as well as in interdisciplinary methodology. It teaches students to do innovative and original research as well as to produce scholarship that can reach outside the boundaries of the University and make a contribution to the communities in which they work and live. The certificate provides students with a valuable professional credential and strengthens their ability to compete for

jobs as well as national fellowships and postdoctoral awards. For more information, contact Teresa Goddu at 615-343-8725 or [teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu).

## American Studies Faculty Member Wins VIO Grant

In conjunction with the American Studies Program, Professor Ifeoma Nwankwo has been awarded a \$10,000 curriculum grant from the Vanderbilt International Office. "Internationalizing American Studies at Vanderbilt" will introduce students to the international perspectives and histories of the Nashville community. In addressing both student learning and Vanderbilt's engagement with Nashville, it will serve as a model for other academic programs and courses at Vanderbilt.

## Voices of Democracy Project

American Studies Advisory Board member Vanessa Beasley (Communication Studies) also serves on the board of the Voices of Democracy project, and provides the following information:

From [www.voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu](http://www.voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu): "The Voices of Democracy project is designed to promote the study of great speeches and public debates. The emphasis of the project is on the actual words of those who, throughout American history, have defined the country's guiding principles, debated the great social and political controversies of the nation's history, and shaped the identity and character of the American people. In the process of reinvigorating the humanistic study of U.S. oratory, the Voices of Democracy project aims to foster understanding of the nation's principles and history and to promote civic engagement among humanities students, teachers, and scholars."

## Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life

As members of the national organization Imagining America—a consortium of colleges and universities committed to public scholarship in the arts, humanities, and design—the American Studies Program and the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities co-sponsor a monthly seminar to provide opportunities for exchange among faculty members who are interested in or who are currently involved in projects that engage public scholarship. For more information, contact Teresa Goddu (615-343-8725; [teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu)) or visit [www.imaginingamerica.org](http://www.imaginingamerica.org).

## American Studies Road Trips

Each year, the American Studies Program sponsors a series of road trips that introduces Vanderbilt students to the rich cultural resources and pressing issues of our city and region. Road trips for 2008-2009 included the following:

### September 13, 2008: A Tour of the Hermitage

The historic plantation of President Andrew Jackson. (Facilitated by Jane Landers, Associate Professor of History)

### September 27, 2008: Pleasant Hill Shaker Village

A nineteenth-century Shaker community in southern Kentucky. (Facilitated by Roger Moore, Senior Lecturer, English)

### October 28, 2008: Highlander Research and Education Center

Since 1932, Highlander has gathered workers, grassroots leaders, educators, and researchers to address the most pressing social, environmental, and economic problems facing the people of the South. (Facilitated by Gary Gerstle, James Stahlman Professor of History)

For more information about the Vanderbilt American Studies Program, visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/americanstudies](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/americanstudies)

# Recognizing the American South in Photographs

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Any more time on the history, and we would not have time for the close focus on the South and its circulation through writing and photography. So, coming back from spring break we put aside the history and took up *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*, and photographs by Walker Evans, Welty, and, of course, William Christenberry. Jochen Wierich, Cheekwood's curator of art, visited the class and delivered a lecture on Christenberry in March.

The only serious glitch that semester was in scheduling. Christenberry came to Cheekwood in April to give a gallery talk the same week I had to be in Jackson, Mississippi, for a conference celebrating the Welty centennial. If Eudora had just not been born in April . . . Most of the class was able to get to Cheekwood for the Christenberry exhibit the final week of class—the semester was bookended, then, by gallery visits.



*Plantation overseer and field hands, 1936. (Photo by Dorothea Lange)*

## Lessons from Abroad *(continued from page 4)*

An extremely important part of our time at DIS was field study. Every Wednesday we would join one of our professors for instruction outside the classroom—for example, we visited the Scandinavian headquarters of Mattel Toys to discuss International Advertising strategies. In addition, each program at DIS—as every student must identify a focus, mine being Communication and Mass Media—is accompanied by two study tours: a short one in Denmark lasting a weekend and a long tour, lasting a week, somewhere else in Europe. Our short tour took us to Jutland, the Danish peninsula where we went to media institutions, newspapers, news agencies, and advertising companies in order to get hands-on understanding of current issues facing the Danish communication landscape. Our long tour brought us to London and Oxford where we visited among others, the Daily Telegraph, the Guardian in order to talk about the tension between public service broadcasting and commercial interests.

Our classes and trips allowed me to get a look at American Studies with a comparative lens as our classes constantly compared Denmark and Europe with America. We studied differences in advertising strategies with regards to views of power hierarchies, gender, freedom of expression and how the Danish style of advertising was often much different than that of the American style. In International Law, we examined the different ways the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union operated in the arena of international law with a focus on current events—particularly the past presidential election, the ongoing war in Iraq, and issues of torture that were constantly coming up. We spoke about different leadership techniques in Denmark and the United States with a focus on the Danish culture of “Jante’s Law”—an unofficial law that says, “Don’t think you’re anyone special or that you’re better than us”—meaning that no one is to be looked down upon, power and wealth are not to be flaunted, and that social equality is valued above all else. Finally, our News Media class looked into the ways that both the American and Danish news industries are faltering and the ways in which mass media are changing across the world. We ended that class with a discussion of

the ways in which both the American and Danish media responded to the Muhammad cartoons controversy of 2005, a result of the Danish belief in freedom of the press and of expression.

The Danish culture was an equally important part of my time abroad. I have never met a group of people more punctual and literal—if you say to a Dane (in what you think is just passing), “Oh, let’s get lunch!” you can be sure he or she will pull out the date book and pencil you in. Modesty as it relates to Jante’s Law is respected above all else. Flashy Americans stick out like sore thumbs because Danes hate when you attempt to show yourself off or stand out; be proud of who you are, but don’t flaunt it because not everyone is so lucky. However, the part of Danish culture that has come back with me and that I miss the most is “hygge”—a word synonymous with Denmark and Danish culture. With no actual translation, hygge is basically the idea of being cozy, peaceful and relaxing—think couches, candles, coffee or tea and nothing at all to take away from that feeling of being at ease. Hygge is about family and friendship and that closeness that they provide. When making plans and picking out a spot to go, a question that almost always is asked is, “Er det hygge?” meaning “Is it hygge?”

From an academic perspective, studying abroad is one of the most important components of the American Studies curriculum. When learning firsthand about the attitudes and perceptions of the United States by those of other nations, it is impossible not to have your own perspective of the United States changed by the environment you are surrounded by. Often I found myself challenging ideas, news stories, and values I had always assumed to just be a normal part of life. However, at the same time I would find myself appreciating other aspects of life back home that I simply could not find in Denmark or elsewhere in my travels (which, thanks to a three-week spring break, included Sweden, Germany, Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, Czech Republic, Netherlands, and Austria). I think about Copenhagen every single day and I can not recommend highly enough the study abroad experience for each and every American Studies major.