

American Studies Graduate Workshop and Conference 2010:

Social Movements and American Cultural Change

by Larry Isaac, Distinguished Professor of Sociology

Protest politics and social movements are recurring features of the historical and contemporary American and global landscapes. Social movements have been and continue to be potentially important forces in social, political, economic, and cultural change. Arguably, much of American institutional structure and culture has been shaped by a social movement or perhaps the social movement field more widely. However, in the social sciences, more scholarly attention has been paid to explaining the emergence of movements and their actions than to understanding when, how, and under what conditions movements generate change. Moreover, within the subfield of movement outcome studies, the lion's share of research has focused on political/policy outcomes of movements. While perhaps not as uneven in the humanities, the study of movement-induced cultural change in the social sciences has been relatively neglected until quite recently. It is this relative void coupled with the desire to think in an interdisciplinary environment that motivated our approach to the movement-cultural change relation in the workshop.

The central charge of the workshop was to work toward understanding (a) how social movements have shaped various features of American culture, and (b) how scholars from different key disciplines (American Studies, History, and Sociology) have attempted to analyze the movement-cultural change process. From the abolitionist movement to suffrage movement to workers' movements to civil rights and other movements of the 1960s wave (e.g., student, antiwar, feminist, counterculture) as well as more contemporary struggles, American culture has been repeatedly reconstituted, re-envisioned, reshaped, and remembered. To what extent can social movements be credited as collective agents in changing and augmenting American culture?



Diane Nash and Rev. Kelly Miller Smith in Nashville, 1960.

Under what conditions and in what ways do movements produce cultural change? The workshop addressed these and related questions for several different social movements—namely, abolition, labor, feminist, and civil rights—in a variety of historical contexts using research produced by both humanistic and social science scholars. We were particularly attentive to how this body of scholarship linked social movement activity to specific forms of cultural change—e.g., literary change, journalistic discourse, pictorial art, music, theater, poetry, fashion, architecture, and civic culture.

The last segment of the seminar examined these questions in the context of the Southern civil rights movement and Nashville in particular. This set the context and primed us for the American Studies Spring Conference: “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement Remembered: A Dialogue with Participants 50 Years Later,” held on April 30, 2010, at the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center. Civil rights veterans who participated in the conference included James M. Lawson, Jr., Dr. Bernard Lafayette, Diane Nash, Dr. E. Rip Patton, Leo Kwame Lillard, Matthew Walker, Charles Sherrod, and Joe Goldthreate. The conference was open to the Vanderbilt and broader Nashville communities. Civil rights veterans spoke about how they became part of the movement, the activities within which they were engaged, and importantly, how their experiences changed them individually, as well as Nashville, and America. The lively discussion—sometimes heated, sometimes tragically sad, sometimes humorous, always heroic—made for a truly memorable experience, one in which all gained insights into the movement-culture nexus from some of those brave individuals who helped shape it so significantly in Nashville 50 years ago.



James M. Lawson, Jr., and E. Rip Patton at Vanderbilt University, 2010.

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Director's Note

I write in the opening days of my work as interim director of American Studies, days I mostly spend marveling at all the exciting American Studies work underway at Vanderbilt. I'm stewarding a genuinely breathtaking spectrum of projects and initiatives that we mostly, as faculty and students, see only on a limited basis, through the classes and projects that we're immediately involved with. While it's daunting to be responsible this fall for keeping all these balls in the air, it's impossible not to be thrilled with the big picture: a growing and thriving program.

American Studies offers an array of exciting courses in U.S. music, dance, art and food traditions, on Southern culture, protest and social movements, and the environment. This spring (2011), we'll feature courses and programming that constellate a host of issues related to the Civil War to commemorate its 150th anniversary, including classes team taught by historians and literary critics on the Civil War, on Civil War monuments and memorials, on fictions about the Civil War, on slave revolts in the Americas. We'll feature a Maymester institute for graduate students, an interdisciplinary roundtable on Secession, library exhibits, visiting artists, student memorial installations and Civil War Road Trips.

Along with ongoing partnerships with the Warren Humanities Center and the public humanities consortium, Imagining America, we send graduate students to the annual Dartmouth American Studies Institute—this year Nicole Spigner (English) and Sarah Tyson (History). Megan Minarich reports on her experiences at the 2009 Institute in this issue. We continue working creatively to develop community partnerships in Nashville, as you'll see in Professor Nwankwo's report on her "Music City Perspectives" course, and in Larry Isaac's report on his social movements course, which included the American Studies Spring Conference: "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement Remembered."

This year, we're putting considerable effort into developing plans for our Sustainability Initiative in 2011-2012. Last year's Senior Project on the Kingston Coal Ash Spill primed the pump (see the student report, this issue), and Fall 2010 seminars taught by Cecelia Tichi (on water) and Amanda Hagood (on "going green") are offering a preview for an exciting year that will launch with a visit from 350.org founder, activist, and author Bill McKibben, on September 22, 2011. In partnership with the Center For Teaching, we'll be developing "The Cumberland Project," a curricular project that aims to foster intellectual and activist engagement with global and local environmental issues. We've started organizing an exciting set of courses for 2011-12, on ecology and pedagogy, on environmental and civic commons, on sustainability and activism, on religion and ecology, just to name a few. We're seeking to build a partnership with the Vanderbilt Commons and Visions programs, and we'll be partnering with the Art Department, the Program in Creative Writing, Film Studies and the International Lens program to feature an array of artists, performances, and films that will, in Director Goddu's words, "embolden Vanderbilt's efforts toward sustainability while deepening our understanding of what we are working towards."

— Dana Nelson

Social Movements and American Cultural Change *(continued from page 1)*

Larry Isaac is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Affiliate Professor of American Studies at Vanderbilt University. He teaches courses on social movements; methods for analyzing historical processes of social change; historical sociology of Gilded Age America; and social movements and social change in the Sixties. His research agenda is currently focused in three main arenas: (1) private elite militias as windows on class/status formation, gender repair, and state-building in Gilded Age America (two National Endowment for

the Humanities awards have supported this work); (2) the relationship between social movements and innovation in cultural genres (visual and literary forms); and (3) the early Nashville civil rights movement with colleagues Dan Cornfield, Dennis Dickerson, and James M. Lawson, Jr. (supported by Vanderbilt University Center for Nashville Studies and College of Arts & Science Interdisciplinary Research Grant). Isaac is currently editor of the American Sociological Review and the Southern Sociological Society's "Distinguished Lectureship Scholar."

American Studies Senior Project 2010: The Kingston Coal Ash Spill

*American
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In December 22, 2008, a storage dam in Kingston, Tennessee, collapsed and released 130 million tons of coal waste into the community. Rivers were polluted, homes were destroyed, the ecosystem was damaged, and the people of Kingston were left feeling fearful, confused, and angry.

Even though the spill was one of the largest environmental disasters in American history, and even though it happened just two hours away from Nashville, I never heard about it. I spent that day Christmas shopping. I didn't care about Kingston because I didn't know about Kingston.

This past January, when Professor Goddu informed our American Studies Senior Project class that we would be making a documentary about the Kingston spill, the eight of us stared back at her without much response. Her enthusiasm about coal, coal ash, and the TVA was lost on us. What was there to be excited about? The 2008 seniors made a controversial film about the Confederate legacy. The 2009 seniors made a film about the economic crisis. We were going to make a film about black rocks.

But as we delved into the intricacies of coal reliance in this country, as we read books and watched films about coal miner communities, as we started to familiarize ourselves with concepts like mountaintop removal, and as we reached out to the people of Kingston, something clicked into place and we fell under the magic power of coal. We became angry that the Kingston story had not been more widely circulated. We became frustrated with ourselves for our blissfully ignorant dependence on coal. We visited the Vanderbilt TV News Archives and watched every news clip that had ever been recorded about the Kingston spill (some of them were less than 30 seconds long). We invited environmental experts and journalists to our classroom to tell us everything they knew about Kingston and about coal. We toured the Vanderbilt coal plant, marveled at how our university was powered by the same fuel that damaged a few dozen homes in Kingston, and asked ourselves what our role was in all of it. We interviewed our fellow students and asked, Have you heard about the Kingston coal ash spill? Did you know that Vanderbilt gets 25% of its energy from coal? How do you feel about that? We went on spring break, came back a week later, and talked about how coal had, by this point, permeated every aspect of our lives: Melissa was distracted by the presence of smoke stacks on her cruise ship; I drove alongside a coal train on my way to South Carolina and wondered what its destination was. Coal was polluting our minds.

Perhaps the most powerful part of this project was its intrinsic human element. I truly "got" Kingston after I sent an interview request

to a Kingston resident and received this reply: "Thanks for the offer and I'm sorry to say no, but my husband has worked at that steam plant for over 30 years and we are having to be very careful about what we say and do.... We just cannot afford to upset TVA too much and have my husband somehow lose his job.... we can't afford to have TVA rip our livelihood out from under us. They've already ruined everything we owned, which was in this house." Our class drove out to Kingston



at the end of February and toured the plant there, and then Jonny and Nancy-Page talked to some Kingstonians at the local Walmart, where they heard about the residents' increased health issues and their confusion. And as we further explored all the connected pieces of this spill, three of us chose to focus on the inherent environmental racism—for we learned that the cleaned-up ash was being transported, by train, to an impoverished African-American town in Perry County, Alabama.

This documentary project gave us the opportunity to interview people all over our campus about everything from American regionalism to student awareness to racism to coal properties. We asked so many questions and generated so many answers, but we always seemed to come back to one key question: To what extent, if at all, were we implicated in this problem? We thought about Vanderbilt's relationship with coal and about our own relationships with coal. We never came to a conclusive answer, and I still don't have one, but I know we all walked away with a better understanding of our country's—and our campus's—complicated energy situation.

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Megan Minarich,
American Studies
Futures Fellow
(English)

Report from the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute

The Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute is an intensive week-long program geared toward graduate students and junior faculty from various departmental backgrounds who all share the common interest of immersing themselves in current discourses in the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. The Institute, which takes place annually in June, kicks off on Monday evening with the first round of lectures and a welcome reception; the basic schedule for the remainder of the week calls for morning lectures, afternoon seminar meetings, and evening lectures with mealtimes tucked in between and informal social gatherings after the last lecture of the night. The rigorous schedule is exhausting both intellectually and physically, and is not for the faint of heart. The professional and personal payoff for the dedicated, however, is huge. I cannot recommend Dartmouth strongly enough to any graduate student who hopes to do work in this field. But for those who I have not yet frightened off with the schedule, allow me to break it down.

The faculty lecture series is an unmatched opportunity to hear new work by dozens of the world's leading American Studies scholars. Lectures cover a wide range of topics, such as legal discourse in *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Caleb Smith); intuitionism (Lauren Berlant); sovereignty, community, and apiary colony collapse (Elizabeth Dillon); Karen Carpenter and the culture industry (Eric Lott). So many talks in a compressed time frame not only give depth and breadth to one's understanding of the possibilities afforded in American Studies, but they also provide different examples of successful lecture frameworks. For example, on the penultimate evening of the institute—when energy is flagging and attention can be hard to command—Eric Lott began his talk by donning his glasses and reading a longish Adorno passage while the Carpenters' "Close to You" provided the sweetly menacing soundtrack. This is just one example of the innovative, entertaining approaches some scholars took to presenting their work; I was impressed and inspired by the possibilities for what work in American Studies could look like. Also, as participating faculty are asked to attend the Institute for a minimum of two days, there exists the unique opportunity to invite a faculty member to one's seminar presentation and benefit from her or his feedback. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Seminars are composed of about a dozen participants ranging from master's students to doctoral students at various stages to junior faculty who hail from some of the nation's top universities; an Institute faculty member facilitates each seminar. Over the course of the seminar meetings, each participant is allotted one hour for her or his presentation and follow-up discussion, and many frame either the talk or the Q and A with particular project concerns. The cohesion and collegiality that characterized my seminar group led to productive

post-presentation discussions that didn't feel like standard Q and A sessions at all, but lively conversations where each individual took an active interest in others' projects. As a doctoral student who had just finished my first year, interacting with my seminar group proved an invaluable professional opportunity; it afforded me not only exposure to the thought processes of successful peers (both within and outside of my home discipline of English), but also the occasion to learn from



their experiences. For example, while my immediate professional concern—learning how to turn a seminar paper into a publishable article—differed from others' dissertation- and manuscript-related concerns, my colleagues were quick to offer helpful feedback about how I might reframe and tweak the focus of my work in order to transition from course paper to article. Likewise, my status as a pre-dissertation graduate student allowed me a fresh perspective on dissertators' work that was unencumbered by the trappings and snags of the dissertation process.

Not to be underestimated is the third component of life at Futures: socializing. Whether it's the mid-week cookout, an impromptu dorm gathering, or something as innocuous as grabbing lunch, social interaction at the Institute is the tie that binds professional connections made through lectures and seminars. Participating in the Institute's social opportunities allows not only for networking beyond the seminar cohort, but also allows for the beginnings of friendships out of scholarly connections. And sometimes (embarrassingly) this informal social interaction helps to broaden the sense of community within one's own institution, as I learned when some students from Virginia introduced me to the other Vanderbilt attendee, whom I had not met prior to Futures. ("Hi, Mark. I'm Megan. I go to your school.") The wonders of modern technology—namely, Facebook—make it even easier to keep in touch with far-flung colleagues and remain plugged in to the dynamic, supportive Futures community.

Bottom line: When it comes to Futures, you'll get what you give. At the risk of sounding corny, I couldn't imagine my professional life without the strong connections I made with other young, talented scholars at Dartmouth. I feel that the best attributes of my home department at Vanderbilt apply equally to Futures: collegiality, open-mindedness, dedication, curiosity, scholarlychutzpah. I would be fortunate to return to Dartmouth once I've begun dissertating in order to gain a new perspective on my work and the Institute, visit with old friends and make new ones, and better understand how I might help shape the future of American Studies.

To learn more about the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute, visit www.dartmouth.edu/~futures.

An Exploration of Early 20th-Century American Fundamentalism

Patrick Jackson,
American Studies
Dissertation Fellow
(History)

Convictions that go more or less unchallenged deserve a little attention. In politics, they can be particularly poisonous, as Alexis de Tocqueville observed nearly two hundred years ago. “When an opinion has taken root in a democracy and established itself in the minds of the majority,” he wrote in the 1830s, “it afterward persists by itself, needing no effort to maintain it since no one attacks it.” Such ideas win converts slowly until “even those who still at the bottom of their hearts oppose [them]” keep quiet in the hope that they can steer themselves well clear of “a dangerous and futile contest.” Widespread beliefs are similarly inclined, and, so, my dissertation challenges a broadly held piece of conventional historical wisdom: that conservative, white, evangelical Protestants stopped participating in American politics after achieving notoriety during the 1920s Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy and that this loss of interest marked a decisive, decades-long retreat from the public sphere. According to the prevailing narrative, Fundamentalists stormed back into the political fray in response to the sixties’ counterculture, but only after a half-century’s absence—a period, most observers have agreed, they spent in self-righteous isolation, snugly burrowed deep inside of the various heaven-focused “subcultures” they had designed to keep worldliness at bay, one hopeful eye always kept out for signs of Jesus’s imminent return. This is a deeply dismissive way of approaching this story, and it has skewed our perspective on twentieth-century American political history in much the same way that a too-sharp focus on liberalism and consensus once did.

Following the First World War, evangelical Christians of all kinds found themselves in a country that was considerably less religious than it had been in the nineteenth century, a state of affairs that undermined what many saw as America’s biblical foundations. A sizable portion of them responded by becoming Fundamentalists, militantly opposed to the type of moderate Protestantism then on the ascendency. Theological liberals—Fundamentalists called them Modernists—were willing to accept many of the tenets of Darwinism, which Fundamentalists abhorred. They were also content to treat the Bible like any other piece of ancient literature: open to various interpretations, its stories occurring within and stemming from a historical context. Fundamentalists were having none of this, either. Billy Sunday—perhaps the most colorful character in the movement—concluded that when academics and the bible disagreed, scholarship could “go to hell.”

The conflict reached its boiling point at the 1925 trial of John Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee. The question at hand was whether Scopes had taught evolution in a Tennessee public school in contravention of the Butler Act, and since he did not deny that he had done so, the young teacher was duly convicted and fined. The trial, however,

was widely seen among the cognoscenti as a resounding defeat for Fundamentalism, a debacle even. Anti-Darwinist crusader William Jennings Bryan’s performance as an “expert witness” was almost certainly ill-advised; he was neither an ordained minister nor a scholar, and defense attorney Clarence Darrow often made him look like a dullard. The semi-rural setting, along with the general poverty and simplicity of many of the local observers, were taken as confirmation

of the least considerate stereotypes about Fundamentalism. Sinclair Lewis’s 1927 book *Elmer Gantry*—about a fabulously corrupt and sin-soaked Fundamentalist charlatan—iced the cake; the movement seemed finished.

But the end of the Fundamentalist movement to ban Darwinism did not spell the end of Fundamentalism. Fundamentalists were no more accepting of updated views on science and the Bible in 1950 than they had been in 1915. Fundamentalism’s form changed moderately in the decades after 1925, but its function did not; it remained a concerted

effort to overthrow the intellectual and cultural changes of the teens and twenties.

Most scholars give up on Fundamentalists after they encounter Bryan’s rather embarrassing performance at the Scopes Trial. At the time, however, many people actually thought Bryan had bested Darrow. In fact, when he died (only a few days after the trial ended) Bryan was engaged in what amounted to a high-spirited, public continuation of his testimony, often to considerable crowds. My project picks up here, precisely where most investigations leave off. I also take a much broader view of political involvement than previous studies of Fundamentalists have allowed for. Political theorists—from Plato to John Rawls—have long understood that there is much more to “politics” than just the day-to-day workings of a society’s political processes (however simple or complex they may be). Political history is, on the one hand, the chronicling of “who gets what, when, and how” as Harold Laswell’s famous definition would have it, but it’s also the story of how competing ideals vie for influence, of people’s public and often very sincere striving to create a virtuous social order. In short: it’s the story of the push and pull of one group of citizens’ wishes against another’s. Instead of taking the standard approach and discussing Fundamentalists in isolation from the socio-political culture surrounding them, my project examines their place within mid-twentieth-century American society, paying special attention to the ways in which they dialogued with and even engaged the culture-at-large.



Attorneys Clarence Darrow (left) and William Jennings Bryan (right) during the Scopes “Monkey” Trial

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American
Studies 294,
Fall 2009

American Studies Pilot Course:

Music City Perspectives

by Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, Professor of English

When I first came to Nashville four years ago, I was immediately intrigued by the city's ethnic, racial, and class-based complexities and contradictions. It's a city that is home to a Steeplechase, an African Street Festival, Dave Ramsey, and one of the largest Kurdish populations outside of the Middle East. It is the home of two of the most storied historically black institutions of higher education—Meharry and Fisk—in addition to being a core site of the Civil Rights Movement. Of course, as someone who was born and grew up in Jamaica, I was especially pleased to find out that not only is there a Jamaican restaurant (Jamaicaway Restaurant in the Farmers' Market), but also that there are West Indian organizations in town, including Caribbean Connection and the Jamaican Diaspora. The more I learned about the city, the more drawn in I became. I found that each drive down Jefferson, Nolensville, Franklin Road, or lower Broadway, or conversation with a cab driver on my way from the airport always yields yet another enlightening piece of information about the city.

In 2007 I had the opportunity to experience one of Dr. Tommie Morton-Young's Historic Black Nashville tours. It introduced me to aspects of the city about which I was not aware or that could not see because they had been razed, buried, or left in such a state of disrepair that they were virtually unrecognizable. Among the many historical facts Dr. Morton-Young, the first black graduate of Peabody College, winner of the 2010 Peabody Distinguished Alumna award and 2010 Commencement speaker, shared was that the Brentwood-Cool Springs area had actually been primarily populated by Black farmers before the new Brentwood-Cool Springs, the one with which we are more familiar, was born.

Since my days as a graduate student instructor at Duke, I have been interested in teaching courses and having students undertake research projects on the city in which their university sits. All of my experiences in Nashville, and with my community-engaged project in Panama, led me to decide that it was time to turn that interest into a tangible opportunity for students. In 2008, I applied for a Venture Fund Grant for Curricular and Pedagogical Initiatives. That application was successful. As a result, Fall 2009 saw the beginning of a new course series entitled "Music City Perspectives."

The first core goal of the series is to connect Vanderbilt students directly with longtime residents, scholars, writers, nonprofit and community leaders, archivists, and other history-makers in the city. Through these engagements, students will come to view their fellow residents as critical interlocutors and as founts of invaluable knowledge. Understanding themselves more than ever as part of a vibrant civic body, they will desire to become more active participants in the life of the city, beyond the walls of the university.

The second core goal of the series is to arm the students with critical

reading and research methodologies, tools, and materials that will help them interpret the world around them and produce quality research projects on distinctive aspects of Nashville's past and present.

The pilot course for the Music City Perspectives series was entitled "Black (in) Nashville," and I taught it as AMER 294, the American Studies Junior Workshop. The first part of the semester was dedicated to providing students with a solid background on key histories, personas, organizations, and communities. It includes framing readings, among them chapters from our central course text *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* by Professor Bobby Lovett (TSU). I consulted with Professor Lovett about the course from very early on in the planning process. His enthusiasm, extensive knowledge of the Nashville history, and suggestions proved invaluable. He even made himself available to meet with students as they were working on their research projects.

The background section also featured visits by Nashville scholars, community leaders, and archivists/bibliographers, including the aforementioned Dr. Morton-Young; Linda Wynn of the Tennessee Historical Commission, who is known for her work on the historical markers across the region and the annual Nashville Conference of African American History and Culture; Ed Hamlett, a prolific and deeply engaged Civil Rights advocate who was gracious and excited enough about the course to work with a number of students researching areas he knew well, and whose papers are housed in Vanderbilt's Special Collections; LaToyur Tisdale, editor of *Yur Magazine*, "an online publication created to promote independent artists (musicians, singers, poets, spoken word artists, film, literary) while educating, informing, and enlightening its readers"; Cynthia Harris, founding director of Healing Waters Productions, created "to merge public health theory and practice with the creative arts for the purpose of liberating the voices, bodies and spirits of all women"; acclaimed poet and Vanderbilt MFA Stephanie M. Pruitt; and Kwame Leo Lillard, civil rights movement veteran and founder of the African American Cultural Alliance and the African Street Festival. By far, the most powerful visiting speaker was August "Ace" Johnson, former Negro League player and one of the, if not the, longest serving employee at Vanderbilt. The students and I deeply appreciated Mr. Johnson's sharing his time and life story with us. There was not a dry eye in the room by the time his visit ended. It will stay with all of us for years to come.

Key assignments included journals, primary source presentations, a photo essay, community outreach at one of four designated sites/events, and a final research project. Journaling proved especially valuable in the early part of the semester as it provided a way for students to reflect on the speakers' presentations, the readings, and their expanding view of Nashville. As part of the process of developing

their final projects, students were required to do archival research at Nashville Public Library, Meharry, Fisk, or Vanderbilt Special Collections, in addition to conducting interviews with “living primary sources.”

The final projects included:

- A short film by Ashley Zeiger and Rob Munro on the bombing of the home of Nashville Civil Rights leader Z. Alexander Looby and its impact on the movement in Nashville. Linda Wynn is featured.
- An in-depth explication of the history of the relationship between Nashville and Meharry by Katie Des Prez, based on archival research conducted with the guidance of Meharry archivist Christyne Douglas and featuring interviews with Dr. Clifton Meador and Dr. James E. Lawson, Director and Deputy Director of the Meharry-Vanderbilt Alliance, respectively.
- A history of the 1978 Davis Cup controversy in Nashville, sparked by Vanderbilt’s decision to host the South African tennis team even though Apartheid was still law in South Africa, drawing fierce opposition from students and community members. This project by Terica Stanley features an interview with Rev. Paul Slentz, who was a Vanderbilt Divinity student leader opposed to the university’s decision. His papers are housed in Vanderbilt Special Collections.
- A multi-faceted history of the Edgehill neighborhood by Lori T. Murphy, undergirded by interviews with Mrs. Beverly Townsend, Director of the Edgehill Branch of the Nashville Public Library, and the aforementioned Ed Hamlett, among others.
- A project on school desegregation in Nashville by Lisa Pollack, anchored, in part, by Pollack’s own interview with writer/researcher John Egerton, who has written extensively on the movement and the community’s responses to it, among others.
- A distinctive history of the Black press in Nashville by Allie Diffendal that included, among other elements, an extensive detailing of the history of the *Tennessee Tribune*, based on interviews with the founder and publisher, Ms. Rosetta Miller-Perry; Janice Malone, entertainment editor; and Steven Benson, business and advertising manager. Attorney, civil rights activist, and *Tribune*

writer Howard Romaine was an invaluable resource for Allie, and for the class in general over the course of the semester.

- A project on the Fisk Jubilee Singers, in general, and Ella Sheppard, in particular, by Brittany Chase, made even more unique by an interview with Ms. Sheppard’s descendant, Beth Howse, the Special Collections archivist at Fisk.

The students and I are tremendously grateful to everyone who helped to make these projects possible—who gave guidance, encouragement, contact lists, and historical information. I also wish to express my appreciation to the students in the class. It was a pilot course, and certainly not perfect.

There were many rewarding aspects of the course, among them seeing the students’ listening to and learning from Dr. Morton-Young during her visit to and over the course of the Black Nashville tour; Mr. Johnson’s visit and the students’ responses to it; the aforementioned final projects; seeing and reading about the extent to which a particular speaker, text, or part of class discussion inspired a student to think differently.

I learned many lessons through this pilot course that I plan to take into consideration in future iterations of the course. One revelation was how little flexibility many of our undergraduate students have to explore, whether in terms of thinking, research, coursework, or geography—to be able to do archival research at libraries around the city, take a class because it is interesting yet unfamiliar, visit different communities in the city, or see the other university campuses in Nashville. For this reason, I have

considered whether the course may work better as either an honors or a graduate course.

I believe strongly, however, that it is vital that undergraduates have the chance to benefit from an educational experience that positions Nashvillians as critical interlocutors and educators rather than simply as objects of study or benevolence. I will make adjustments. Our fellow Nashvillians do and will appreciate the opportunity for critical engagement as much as our students. Thanks to a grant from the Vanderbilt International Office, the next “Music City Perspectives” course is scheduled for Spring 2011, and will focus on Nashville’s Immigrant (Hi)stories.

minority VOICE
Black Nashville
Vol. 04 No. 01
Dec 15, 2009

Too long have others spoken for us.

Black Nashville Speaks Through Print Medium
Allie Diffendal Interviews Tennessee Tribune's Associate Publisher and Entertainment Editor

Inside:
What is the role of the black press in Nashville?

Reclaiming Our Print History
The Historical Context of the African American Press

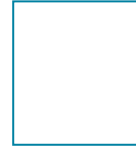
Tennessee Tribune Documents Diverse Community
Allie Diffendal Conducts Case Study of Tennessee Tribune Interviews, Associate Publisher and Entertainment Editor

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American Studies major Allie Diffendal's final project for "Music City Perspectives" examined the history of Nashville's Black press.

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Fundamentalism *(continued from page 5)*

I doubt very seriously that the dissolution of the broad Fundamentalist coalition that fought Modernism so tenaciously in the 1920s represents the kind of complete turn away from politics that many scholars have suggested. Let us make no mistake, culturally conservative Christians in America were less politically powerful after the Scopes Trial debacle, but I propose that Fundamentalist efforts to build an evangelical subculture are better thought of as a tactical or strategic change rather than a complete withdrawal from political engagement. Their ultimate goal has remained largely the same even up to the present.

We know the story of the Black Church's prophetic tradition and are well aware of its political consequences due to an outpouring of excellent scholarship on the subject in the last 10 years. We now need to assemble a comparable literature on the white church. Otherwise, we miss a key component in the history of evangelicalism's "return" to politics post-1976. A fuller understanding of evangelical politics is a prerequisite to a better understanding of twentieth-century American politics. For most of their history, evangelicals have been a political force too powerful to be ignored. We do ourselves a great disservice if we continue to allow their moment of relative weakness to remain a historical blind spot.

Senior Project *(continued from page 3)*

When we had our film screening at the end of April, the response from our audience was incredible. They asked us so many questions that we had to cut them off in order to end our event on time. And when I ate dinner later that night with two of my friends who had attended our premiere, we discussed the Kingston spill for the duration of our meal. They had so many questions they wanted answered. They wanted to know all about environmental racism and the people of Kingston. And though I did not have perfect answers to give, I was able to engage with their questions because of everything I had learned and internalized about Kingston and coal.

This project gave my classmates and me the chance to dive into a deep-seated American issue. We meshed together the puzzle pieces of our American Studies education: some Southern studies here, some environmental studies there, politics and structural racism along the edges, and multiple other disciplines filling in the holes. We read, we watched, we listened, we examined, we synthesized, we generated our own opinions, and we created an original film. We became true contributors to the field of American Studies.