The 2009–2010 Fellows Program at the Warren Center, “Immigration and the American Experience,” will focus on the culture and politics of immigration as it relates primarily to the U.S. experience from the early American period to the present. Using a comparative-historical approach, the Fellows will draw on the humanities and social sciences, as well as studies in international human rights, transnationalism, and international migration in world regions other than North America. The co-directors are Daniel B. Cornfield, professor of sociology and political science, and Gary Gerstle, the James G. Stahlman Professor of American History. Letters met recently with Professors Cornfield and Gerstle at the Vaughn Home to discuss the program.

LETTERS: Could you talk about this project in terms of what you hope to achieve within the next year? How did the project come about?

CORNFIELD: It came about because we are friends and colleagues and we share a common interest in the topic, and although Gary is a historian and I am a sociologist, we have a tremendous amount of overlap in our substantive interests. Also, this seminar coincides with the recent growth of a critical mass of Vanderbilt faculty in several disciplines who have an interest in immigration, and we are very fortunate to have many of them in our seminar. But if I may just back up a century or so to talk about the timing of the issue of immigration—immigration as an issue tends to come in waves because immigration, at least to the United States, has come in waves, and we are presently in a big wave. The last big wave, when much scholarship, literature, poetry, and political conflict emerged, occurred in the period of 1880–1924. Many of the debates that we are witnessing now in the United States, and elsewhere, regarding immigration, and immigration as a so-called national “wedge” issue, were partly defined in that previous era. To me as a sociologist, immigration as a historical, cyclical process poses enduring questions about community identity, about individual identity, about the nature of group relations in society, and about the mission and definition of the entire nation and its place in the world.

GERSTLE: One of my favorite passages from a work on immigration history is from Oscar...
people attained the American dream more
Was it individual choice, as the economists
studies would have been economics. As labor
nemesis in the interdisciplinary field of labor
Cornfield: The sociological and historical
and drawing together that we hope to achieve
of knowledge about it. It is that understanding
and what impact that society is having on
the immigrants are having on American society
seems important to assess how
waves and reconstitutions. It
terms and in relation to earlier
century (about fifteen percent of
approaching the all-time peak
constitution of how we think about
of a major wave of immigration
began to query, especially in the 1980s and
period of time, absorption of newcomers from
Nashville was a very low 3.9 percent, so we
between assimilation and upward mobility.
recent rejection of the English-only law?
Nashville's relationship to immigration and
least of all, Mexico.
Letters: Could you discuss, on a local level,
before the American dream should be
had remained dormant for a while because
had remained dormant for a while because
Cornfield: Between 1990 and 2006 the average annual unemployment rate for
immigrants living in Nashville. Two and a half
period of time, absorption of newcomers from
any background was relatively smooth because
under those conditions individuals can picture
a pathway toward the American dream. As the
between assimilation and upward mobility.
immigrants, each new wave could be of
important piece of good news for the nation
of Nashvillians were "foreign-born,"
immigrants. Two and a half
percent of Nashvillians were "foreign-born,"
do not want to be assimilated into the
civilization of a major wave of immigration
were typically immigrants, and therefore
in the pursuit of happiness and self-
From this perspective, America was a place
where the poor could become prosperous,
and under those conditions individuals can
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The Humanities at Vanderbilt: Getting Them When You’re Young and Other Reflections

Edward H. Friedman

I came to Vanderbilt in the year 2000, after having taught for twenty-five years, at a small liberal arts college and two large universities. I had given freshman seminars and bogged down in the language courses, conversation and composition courses, and surveys and other undergraduate literature courses, along with the lower-division Spanish courses, with few of the students, in my view, getting a good grounding in literary and cultural analysis, and students, I thought that I had seen it all, but Vanderbilt had given me more opportunities than ever to teach a broad range of courses with a broad range of students, with results that I can only describe as thrilling for me. (My students would have to speak for themselves, needless to say.)

The Humanities at Vanderbilt: Getting Them When You’re Young and Other Reflections

Edward H. Friedman

I had heard that students at elite private institutions three decades tended to be more, than a bit haughty, and with negative attitudes and a strong sense of entitlement. Those comments scared me, because I had loved the students at my previous schools; my students always had given me great joy and contentment, and they had made me feel that my investment of time and energy in my career was fully worthwhile. I wondered if the Vanderbilt students would change that rope for the institution. Fortunately, the assistance by assorted colleagues in the profession has proven to be “not applicable” in my case. In the case of some extraordinary students, I had had exceptionally bright students who also had been respectful, courteous, and engaging human beings. I constantly feel intellectually stimulated and challenged, in the best sense of the term. Students impress me with their ability to master language, literature, and complex and often abstract concepts. The fact that, in the majority of instances, they are reading, writing, and analyzing literature in a language that is not their first is even more striking.

Equally notable is that many of the texts studied date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I cannot help but think of their accomplishments as analogous to the oft-cited comparison to the Vanderbilt artist could play, might be called the "storyteller’s pot" in the dress of their native lands and traditions, on the one hand, and to fend off hostile receptions from the native community on the other, to try to maximize a mutually beneficial incorporation of newcomers in their new home.

LETTERS: Your plan for the upcoming year seems both thoughtful and clearly structured—surely there is anything you are excited about that you have not mentioned?

CORNFIELD: Are we going to do field trips? We should!

GERSTLE: I agree! My hope for the seminar is that it will remain intellectually the creativity that often results from many different immigrant groups coming together and interacting with each other. My hope is that the diverse disciplinary backgrounds and interests that seminar participants will bring to our discussion will yield new ways of thinking about the traditions on the one hand, and to find off hostile receptions from the native community on the other, to try to maximize a mutually beneficial incorporation of newcomers in their new home.

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Poet Rosanna Warren to Present

Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture

Rosanna Warren, University Professor, Emma Amor MacDuffie Mawlly Professor of the Humanities, and Professor of English and Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at Boston University, will present the Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture at 4:10 p.m. on Thursday, October 29, in the Moore Room on the second floor of the Vanderbilt Law School.

Professor Warren, a renowned poet and critic, and the daughter of the writers Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark, is the author most recently of a book of literary criticism, Fables of the Self: Studies in Lyric Poetry. Her books of poetry include Snow Day, Every Leaf (Liveright), and Sable. The Academy of American Poets, among others, has honored Professor Warren with several awards and honors for her work, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Award of Merit in Poetry and the Winter Bunting Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Mary satin Prize, the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Ingram Merrill Foundation Award, a Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Award, the “Discovery!” The Nation Award, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Mellon Foundation.

Professor Warren’s undergraduate students “have the chance to teach Cervantes’s novel on its own terms and their own.”

Beyond the outstanding students that I have had in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and in the Honors seminars for College Scholars (on “Don Quixote and the Experimental Novel”), I have had the opportunity to teach courses in the Master of Liberal Arts (MLAS) program and in the Programs for Talented Youth (PTY), both of which have had a lasting impact on me. While these groups are quite different in some ways, they are very much alike in others.

The term “working professionals” has been used to describe the participants in the PTY program. The students in my classes have included doctors, lawyers, businessmen and businesswomen, scientists, and educators, among others. A good percentage are Vanderbilt employees. Those in the program take courses on topics that encompass the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. They are free—and encouraged—to meet with me in a range of areas and to step out of their comfort zones. The program underscores learning for its own sake. The seminar that I have taught in the MLAS program is “Don Quixote and the Development of the Novel,” which begins in early modern Spain and ends in the U.S. and England in the new millennium. There has been an air of seriousness, excitement, and dedication in each of the classes. The students have responded with enthusiasm to the substantial amount of reading, and they have offered superb comments in group discussions and in weekly written exercises. My contact with these adult learners offers them as readers and as thinkers, energizing them imaginatively and, I believe, philosophically. Don Quixote is, in my opinion, most fascinating in its treatment of reality, which at times seems to reside in the margins of the novel but is actually nowhere for off. This reality of imagination, arguably, required us to contemplate and reassess their views of perspectives—realistic and otherwise—on their own. Don Quixote may be the ultimate work in-progress and self-referential object, and thus the reader can only help participate in the creative act. The undergraduate students who undertake this task are likely to be Spanish majors and even more likely to be double majors, combining literary studies with a remarkable variety of other disciplines, and, for many of these students, making their reading and reflection especially laudable.

Likewise, I am continually amazed by the thoughtfulness and curiosity that my students bring to the readings of Don Quixote by graduate students, who probably will have the chance to teach Cervantes’s novel on its own terms and their own terms.

As I reflect on my years at Vanderbilt, I see congratulations, a love of literature—and, as a result, they exist to “get them while they’re young”—and to win them over for life. This is good for them, good for the humanities and other disciplines, and, hardly unexpectedly, good for the instructor. In the words of Iris Grubshin, “nice work if you can get it.”
Black Europe: Diasporic Research in/on Europe

The Warren Center will sponsor two fellowship programs in the 2010–2011 academic year for doctoral students and one for Vanderbilt University graduate students.

The Warren Center Faculty Fellows Program will be co-directed by Bonnie D. Bow (Communication Studies) and Laura M. Carpenter (Sociology) and will focus on the topic "Representation and Social Change." The seminar will explore the complex and multidirectional relationship between representation and social change. In our current globalized and mediated culture, experiences of social change are commonly communicated through a variety of representational means, and the reach and influence of mass communication increases the possibility that representations can be used to create social change as well as to reflect it. For today's conditions are not unique—historical examples abound of instances in which representations of circumstances and events, once publicly circulated, have both communicated and facilitated social change.

The seminar will include participants who study a broad range of topics, including verbal, visual, and other material means. These categories could stretch from literature to music, both moving and still (including technological representations such as magnetic resonance imaging, sonograms, as well as digital media), and also to material culture (such as sculpture, pottery, graffiti, etc.). "Social change" is likewise understood broadly. It may manifest in activism, policy, or politics, but it could also be evident in "the possibility that representations can be used to create social change as well as to reflect it."

Fall 2009 Fall 2009

2010–2011 Warren Center Fellowship Opportunities

DANIEL B. CORNFIELD is a professor in the department of political science whose research interests include race, ethnicity, and anti-immigrant opinion. He has most recently co-authored the chapter "Rebuilding Black Voting Rights Before the Voting Rights Act" in The Voting Rights Act: Securing the Ballot (Congressional Quarterly Press, 2007) and is currently working on several papers and articles on this topic.

JONATHAN T. HICKS is an associate professor in the department of political science. He has published, edited, and co-edited several articles and books including "Immigrant Arts Participation: A Pilot Study of Nashville Artists" in Engaging Arts: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life (Boulevard, 2008), and "From the New Urban Battlefields: Local Solidarity in a Global Economy" in Latin American Research Review (2005). He has co-edited, with Katherine Donato, a forthcoming issue of Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Sciences, which explores migration patterns across Latin America.

ERÉN O. PÉREZ is an assistant professor in the department of political science whose research interests include race, ethnicity, and anti-immigrant opinion. He has most recently co-authored the chapter "Rebuilding Black Voting Rights Before the Voting Rights Act" in The Voting Rights Act: Securing the Ballot (Congressional Quarterly Press, 2007) and is currently working on several papers and articles on this topic.

JEMIMA PIERRE is an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. She has published several articles, including "The Re union of Hope for the Black Race" in Cultural Dynamics (2009), and "‘I Like Your Color!’ The Local (and Global) Geography of Race in Urban Ghana" in the Feminist Review (2008). Her research interests include social and cultural anthropology in West Africa and the United States, as well as diasporic belonging and national identity formation of postcolonial African immigrants to the United States. She is this year’s William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow.

NINA WARNKE is an assistant professor of European Studies in the Max Kade Center for European and German Studies. Her current book project, tentatively entitled ‘From Nostalgia: Early American Yiddish Theater and the Cultural Politics of the Jewish Immigrant Press’ examines nineteenth and twentieth century immigrant Yiddish theater and press and how it negotiates and redefines itself through American culture. She has published several articles, including “Theater as Educational Institution: Jewish Immigrant Folklorism and Yiddish Theater Reform” in The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
2009–2010 Warren Center Graduate Student Fellows

ELENA DEANDA-CAMACHO, the Mary and Joe Harper Fellow, is a doctoral candidate in Spanish, writing her dissertation on the inquisitorial censorship of discourses perceived as obscene in Spain and New Spain during the eighteenth century. Her dissertation, “Te Puso Eso: Poetics and Politics of Obscenity in Inquisition Spain during the Enlightenment,” proposes a political reading of literature that was considered “obscene,” as well as a poetics of reading of inquisitorial censorship to show how these seemingly opposite discourses can be suspended and converged. She investigates how issues such as colonial difference, gender, or race, helped to delimit what should be called obscene and thus what should beensored.

GESA FROMMING is a doctoral candidate in German whose dissertation, “The Musical Moment,” is an exploration of how the ancient trope of melancholy's musical redemption is re-inscribed into late eighteenth-century thought. Her work examines how, in an age that increasingly locates melancholy's causes in the defects of social and political life, a phantasmagoric male subject emerges to express the knowledge of his social and political life, and marriage. Through readings of British poetry from the mid-nineteenth century through the fin de siècle, she draws connections between the strict formalism of the sonnet and the strict bond of Victorian marriage so as to problematize both the poetic form and the legal institution. Prior to being named a Robert Penn Warren Fellow, Sarah received funding for graduate school through the Jacob K. Javits Foundation.

GAIL MCCONNELL is a doctoral candidate in English literature at Queen's University, Belfast, who will be affiliated with the Warren Center's Graduate Student Fellows Program for the 2009–2010 academic year. Her thesis examines religion and theology in contemporary northern Irish poetry. Drawing on theology and critical theory, her thesis seeks to critique sectarian and secular investigations of the relationship of poetry and religion, within Irish literary criticism in particular. It develops a theological critical perspective with which to read the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, and Derek Mahon, and examines the significance of New Critical, Cassirian, and Cixian ideas and theories in their work.

ELIZABETH S. MEADOWS is a doctoral candidate in English. She studies Victorian literature and culture, visual culture, and theories of gender and sexuality. She has received the Robert Manson Myers Graduate Award in the department of English. In her dissertation, “Morbid Strains: Obscenity and Spectacle in Victorian Literature from A Memoir to The Picture of Dorian Gray,” she argues that an important group of Victorian authors use morbid themes and forms to work out the relation between the aesthetic and the social in a culture increasingly dominated by new forms of production, reproduction, and circulation.

RACHEL NISSELLSON is a doctoral candidate in French literature. Her dissertation, entitled “Forgotten the Future: Memory and the Future of Israel/Palestine in 20th- and 21st-Century Francophone Literature,” focuses on the works of several French-speaking authors who treat the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rachel's project seeks to demonstrate that by highlighting the dissonances between memory and history, as well as between personal and societal narratives, these texts convincingly argue against one-sided historical accounts in favor of the recognition of a multiplicity of narratives of the Middle East region.

MATT WHITT, George J. Graham Jr. Fellow, is a doctoral candidate in philosophy. His dissertation rethinks the importance of geographical territory to modern ideals and contemporary practices of sovereign statehood. In it, he argues that territoriality has long facilitated sovereignty by excluding and stabilizing essential ambiguities in the relations between political authorities and their subjects. As contemporary forms of globalization destabilize territorial criteria of political belonging and subjectivity, these ambiguities become increas-ingly legible and offer new possibilities for the democractic self-constitution of political communities. In addition to his work in philosophy, Whitt holds an M.A. degree in Interdisciplinary Social and Political Thought.

The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities

Warren Center Staff

Eduard H. Friedman, Director
Mona C. Fodor, Executive Director
Phillip Cave, Associate Curator
Katherine Newman, Administrative Assistant
Jesse Hayes, ELIZABETH S. MEADOWS

LETTERS: This has been a fascinating look into what your seminar will feature. Thank you for your time and best wishes for your seminar in the coming academic year.

Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1987 and renamed the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989 in honor of Robert Penn Warren, Van- derbilt alumnus class of 1925, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and, when appropriate, natural sciences. Members of the Vanderbilt community representing a wide variety of specialties take part in the Warren Center's pro-grams, which are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary dialogue of academic, social, and cultural issues.

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

Published by Vanderbilt University Center Services

Photos by Steve Green; Warren photo by Mike Minehan.

Warren Center Staff Change

Sarah Harper Nobles, who has been on the staff of the Warren Center since December 2006, left Vanderbilt late this summer to enroll in graduate school at the University of Michigan, where she will be pursuing a Ph.D. in American history. All of us who have worked with Sarah over the years will miss her extraordinary administrative abilities, her grace-ful style, and her wry sense of humor. She has made numerous and significant contributions to the intellectual life of the Warren Center, and for that, and much more, we will remain ever grateful. We all wish her the best of luck in graduate school.

Our new administrative assistant at the Warren Center is Katherine Newman. A native of Nashville, Katherine is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, and has a Mas-ter of Science in Teaching from Fordham Uni-versity and an MFA from Emerson College. Katherine has spent the last several years in elementary and middle school education, most recently as a fifth grade writing teacher at the KIPP Academy in Nashville. We warmly welcome Katherine to the Vanderbilt community and look forward to working with her in the years ahead.

“Immigration and the American Experience” continued from page 5

immigration in the past and in the present, and in the United States as well as other parts of the world.

CORNFIELD: I look forward to a sponta-neous, dynamic interchange. I have a fascina-tion with the intellectual history of different disciplines because to me each discipline rep-resents a way of thinking, and what better way to try to discern that, even to assimilate it to some degree, than through a discussion of immigration?

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