Teaching the Holocaust

F ew events of the twentieth century pose more urgent questions than the Holocaust. Yet for many students in high schools and universities, the Holocaust is something that happened long ago and has little relevance to our lives in twenty-first century America. How should educators teach about the Holocaust? What is the proper focus of study, and what lessons should be drawn? This year, the Warren Center is hosting “The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Teaching of Ethical Values,” an initiative funded by the Zimmerman Foundation and the Tennessee Holocaust Commission. Scholars from six universities and two high schools meet regularly to discuss these questions and to develop curricula for secondary school education in Tennessee. Letters met recently with the program’s co-directors, Helmut Walser Smith, associate professor of history at Vanderbilt, and Peter Haaas, formerly of Vanderbilt, who has recently been named Abba Hillel Silver Professor of Jewish Studies and director of the Samuel Rosen-enthal Center for Judaic Studies at Case Western Reserve University. They were joined by John K. Roth, Russell K. Pitzer Professor of Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College, who is serving as a consultant to the program.

LETTERS: How did this program come about? What would you like for it to accomplish?

HELMUT WALSER SMITH: My understanding is that in large measure, this program was an initiative of the former University Chaplain, Beverly Asbury. He wanted not only to consider the Holocaust in relation to other genocides, but to develop guidelines for teaching about genocide and the questions that it raises in secondary schools throughout Tennessee. Our charge, as I understand it, is to spend a year discussing these matters, and to construct an actual product at the end—a tool that teachers can use to reflect on these questions with their students.

PETER HAAAS: I think we would also like to examine the Holocaust not as something entirely unique, but as a general human problem—a problem that has recurred in different forms throughout the twentieth century, most recently in such places as Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and perhaps East Timor. We need to find ways for the next generation to learn about the causes of these various genocides and about how we might prevent them.

JOHN ROTH: I was invited to participate in the seminar as a consultant. I was surprised to be asked but not surprised about the seminar itself. The surprise was that Peter, Helmut, and the others wanted my involvement, which was a great honor for me. I was not surprised, however, that at Vanderbilt there would be such a program. Vanderbilt has been at the forefront of issues relating to Holocaust education for a long time, and the Tennessee Holocaust Commission is well known as one of the first of its kind in the United States. The Warren Center’s initiative reflects a long-standing concern and commitment that are to the credit of Vanderbilt and the state of Tennessee.

Two aspects of this initiative make it distinctive. Other programs have focused on the Holocaust; still others have concentrated on what we might broadly call issues of human rights and respect. But insofar as this particular program calls attention to the comparative study of genocide, I think that makes it different and important—because my own hunch is that while the twentieth century has seen genocide after genocide, the twenty-first may see more rather than less.

The second point is that so many seminars of this kind do not envision a concrete result. This one does, and that makes it exciting.

LETTERS: Why are you own specific interests relating to the Holocaust and to this program?

HAAS: When I came to Vanderbilt nineteen years ago, I was not teaching the Holocaust or thinking much about it. My interest was in ethics—specifically, in how ethics and moral discourse come to be. It was Bev Asbury who provoked me into teaching a course on the Holocaust, and I would credit him with the inspiration behind my involvement here.

As I began to teach the Holocaust, I had to ask myself a number of basic questions. Why was I teaching it, and how did it connect with the students of a younger generation? Did I only want to teach them about Jewish victimhood, or was there a larger lesson? Then I considered why the students were there—what motivated them to take a course...
on the Holocaust, rather than something else. I concluded that the Holocaust’s lessons speak to everyone, not just Jews, Christians, or Westerners. I struggled in the courses I taught over the next decade or so as to what those lessons might be. I see this seminar as carrying forward that kind of work—trying to find a way to extract meaning from the Holocaust without relativizing it, finding its lessons and becoming able to express them to a broader audience and a different generation.

ROTH: I became interested in the Holocaust almost by accident. I find that instructive, because most of those who will study the Holocaust are not Jewish and may think that this history has little connection to their experience as Americans. Yet I have found that the Holocaust carries all kinds of resonances, implications, and imperatives.

I was trained as a philosopher. Like Peter, I developed an interest in the history of anti-Semitism in Germany. I have tried to find a way to work in the philosophy of religion on the question of how suffering and injustice in the world fit together with Jewish and Christian teachings about reality and God. While those interests remain, the history of the Holocaust became more compelling as I went along. I began to immerse myself in as much detail, as much particularity as possible. I found that sometimes the larger questions of ethics and religion take on specific textures. The responses that people have tended to give to these questions are often too abstract, not closely related enough to what actually took place to be helpful.

So I think that the stories of how people became interested in the Holocaust, and how the encounter with it changes them, are interesting and important. In my case, the encounter has made me more melancholy. I am much less optimistic than I once was. But I have also learned that out of melancholy, and even to some degree out of the despair that this study produces, can spring a determination to do what one can to forestall future disasters of this kind. SMITH: I teach German history at Vanderbilt, but I have never actually worked on the Holocaust in the sense of researching details directly associated with it. I have, however, been working for a number of years on a book about the history of anti-Semitism in Germany. For me, this is a historical problem of the first order. At the turn of the century, there was a society in many ways much like our own—a society of highly educated people, people who cultivated the arts and sciences. My first problem was to understand how this society became configured in such a way that the scapegoating of minorities emerged as an essential part of its apparatus. The second problem was to consider how this otherwise more or less agree about the origins of World War I or the American Revolution, or the collapse of the Weimar Republic. People do not, however, generally agree upon one reigning interpretation of the Holocaust—or even of the history of anti-Semitism in the modern nation. To be sure, some interpretations are better than others, and some are closer to the truth. But
no one believes that we can fully solve the interpretive problems posed by the Holocaust.

ROTH: Do you think that this difference is a function of lack of distance from the events? Will there be a reigniting interpretation in, say, fifty years?

SMITH: No, because at bottom one always comes around to the question of what it is to be human. There is no way around this. What does it mean to have a sense of right and wrong? These questions cannot be solved within a single disciplinary community.

LETTES: Could you perhaps give some examples of the different interpretations of the Holocaust that scholars now contest?

HAAS: The one that occurs to me immediately might be called the "intentionalist versus functionalist" debate. Was the destruction of European Jews something that was intended from the very beginning? Did the Nazis spend their entire twelve-year reign working through how to do it? Or was the Holocaust as such not particularly intended, but rather something that evolved into a genocide over that period? Was it programmed from the outset, or did the Nazis, as it were, back it into it?

ROTH: Everyone would agree that anti-Semitism was a necessary condition for the Holocaust. But in what sense was it, or how it worked—those issues are still, I think, very much open to debate.

HAAS: Before the Nazis came to power, there were countries that were much more anti-Semitic than Germany—countries in which Jews had a much more marginal position. Indeed, German Jews' life was pretty good. So why did this happen then?

ROTH: Perhaps another subject that remains to be explored has to do with what we call "bystanders" in the lexicon of Holocaust studies. What are we to make of those who were not doing the shooting, or forcing people onto trains, but whose presence still involved them somehow in the destruction? This question touches again the point that Helmuth was making, the problem that always swirls in the history of the Holocaust. What are human beings? Why do they do what they do?

HAAS: Here we might consider the diaries of some of the key players, such as Rudolf Höss, who was the commandant of Auschwitz. If you encounter a man directing the very workings of hell, then you expect to find a demonic character. Yet his diary is that of an ordinary person. It talks about his family, about what he should have known and did not know, about his struggles with his own inner turmoil, and about how he did not really like what was happening. He writes as if he were recording another business day. Is his response to the atrocities he directed seems to be, simply, "What can you do?" Is this really what he was thinking, or is this the man in prison after the war trying to justify himself? Are these people as normal as they sound?

ROTH: Another issue that is frequently debated is the fundamental question of what it is possible to know. For example, there have been voices, some of them coming from Holocaust survivors, who argue that only those who were "there"—in Auschwitz, for example, or as eyewitnesses to the Holocaust, can really understand such places and events. Others counter that if we accept that, then we take this event too much out of the realm of the human and place it into an area of incomprehensibility, which defeats utterly the purpose of studying it. This counter position includes people who think that at least in principle, the Holocaust is completely explainable. Some historians hold that view. And then there are many people in the middle. These debates are fundamentally epistemological. They sound more technical than they really are because the bottom line has to do with what human beings can comprehend.

HAAS: It is also disorienting that many of the perpetrators and bystanders and victims were very religious people, and speak of their experiences and actions in religious terms that resonate with us. We perceive a surprising lack of connection between their words and their deeds, but they did not seem to perceive it. And that raises all sorts of questions for people with strong ties to a religious tradition—for people who hear that tradition quoted by those responsible for Auschwitz.

SMITH: Yes, sometimes we have to understand that the words we read do not have the meanings or the resonance that we associate with them, that our categories in social science do not have the same kind of applicability that they did in the midst of this event. Again, we need to be interdisciplinary, because we come up against the limits of our ordinary ways of thinking.

ROTH: We come up against the limits of language, which affect all disciplines. Even the survivors who have tried to communicate through oral histories or memoirs are wrestling with the same problem. How can words begin to express what they have experienced?

SMITH: This problem also affects how we teach, because we are also faced with the difficulties of words. To write, after all, is to address the question of what is behind silence. Elie Wiesel's Night, for instance, is not just another book. We cannot simply extract its thesis, or ask a series of basic ques-
tions about it, or make a list of its fundamental points. A work, it is tremendously difficult to discuss. Sometimes I tell students to go somewhere, to cut themselves a block of five or six hours, and do nothing but read the text. Even if we do not discuss the book in class, I want the students to have that time with it, because the silence after reading may be more important than any discussion generated by it.

**LETTERS:** Some people have argued that the attempt to explain the Holocaust, to draw lessons from it, will result in justifications for it. Is this a reasonable fear?

**HAAS:** It is a problem. Once, when I was teaching the Holocaust, I began by saying that the Holocaust did not happen a long time ago in a country populated by strange people, but in a place very much like our own society. The Germans were not from Mars. If we approach the Holocaust simply as a historical problem, then there are many possible paths to pursue, but this approach tends to disconnect it from our experience and to foreclose the moral lessons that one might draw. But on the other hand, if we want to emphasize how human and ordinary it was, how much it connects to our lives, then we relativize it, and take away some of its uniqueness and impact. As a teacher, I feel myself caught between those two poles of trying to make it familiar and yet to preserve it as some kind of awesome event.

**ROTH:** There is also the fear that we might trivialize the Holocaust, so that all kinds of specious analogies between its events and what happens in our ordinary lives appear. But then if the Holocaust becomes too unique, too special, it moves towards in-comprehensibility—and the reasons for studying it become harder to identify.

The question, though, focused on another area of concern. Would it be dangerous to understand or explain the perpetrators? Would doing so suggest some kind of sympathy or empathy for them? This question is debated back and forth. One of the books we will read in this seminar is Reading the Holocaust, by the Australian scholar Inga Caidin-nen. She makes a strong and per-suasive argument that one should distinguish between understanding and condoning, or even understanding and sympathizing. She maintains that we should try to understand the perpetrators as much as we can, because otherwise we will lose some of the greatest insight that a study of genocide ought to give to us. I think that she is right: we must press for as much understanding as we can get, while underscoring that doing so does not even implicitly condone what took place.

**SMITH:** At some level I have never really understood this problem. Those who maintain that the perpetrators are demons beyond understanding take an extremely comfortable position. It separates them from having to think that they or their loved ones could ever be involved in something like this. Here I am a partisan of Christopher Brown'in, a historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who has written on this subject in a book called Ordinary Men. To understand the perpetrators as all too human is not to exonerate them. In fact, I think that doing so makes the Holocaust still more unsettling.

In the 1950s and the early 1960s, relatively little was known about the Holocaust in scholarly work. The explosion of scholarship is really a product of the 1970s and the 1980s. In the earlier decades, people were much more comfortable arguing what might be called the "radical evil" thesis. Since the explosion of research on the Holocaust has rendered those questions infinitely more complex, the drive to understand has become much more evident, and the lessons offered have also become more complex.

In university classrooms, the situation has changed dramatically. **LETTERS:** Any students today absorb much of what they know about the Holocaust from popular culture—for example, through films such as Schindler's List or Life is Beautiful. How do these representations affect the way you teach the subject?

**ROTH:** This will be an issue that the seminar must confront. When Helmut, says that our knowledge of the Holocaust has expanded, one of those changes is that for good or ill, the Holocaust has entered popular culture in ways that would have been unthinkable in the 1950s or even the 1960s. It has found its way there not just through film, but also through institutionalized memory in the form of memorials and museums, and publica-tion—even Art Spiegelman's comic book format. I used to have students who knew very little about this history. Now I have students who still know relatively little about it, but think that they know more than they actually do.

**HAAS:** What struck me when you mentioned those two films is that they reflect the change we have been discussing. Unlike earlier films, they do not represent the Holocaust in black and white terms; they capture more of the complex way we look at the Holocaust now. But I also agree with what John said about students who come to class with certain images of the Holocaust. People come in more informed, and therefore less informed.

**SMITH:** Around both Schindler's List and Life is Beautiful there has been a great deal of scholarly controversy. Schindler's List may have won many awards and much popular acclaim, but among scholars it has provoked heavy criticism. This criticism is fine, but it raises the issue of how to promote interest in the Holocaust most effectively. After all, these films are not about the Holocaust per se, but about the lives of people during the time frame of the Holocaust.

**ROTH:** The popularization of the Holocaust is also evident in teaching about the Holocaust. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were relatively few courses taught in American colleges and universities; there probably was not a Tennessee Holocaust Commission; and there would have been few incentives to discuss Holocaust education in secondary schools. But partly because of this popularization, some people have become skeptical about whether all this attention is a good thing. Some would argue that this seminar is a dubious enterprise. In the Jewish community there are voices saying that the future of Jewish identity is not well served by dwelling on this subject too much. Others—most notably Peter Novick, who has published...
HAAS:
The Holocaust did not happen a long time ago in a country populated by strange people.

Smith: I think that American involvement in Kosovo— and to some extent in Bosnia— was provoked by awareness of the Holocaust. Whatever his flaws may be, I think that Bill Clinton has taken to heart the notion that what happened in the Third Reich cannot be repeated, and that it involves responsibility on the part of the United States to do what can be done. But then what we find in that intervention is the messiness— to use Peter's phrase— of the decision: which policies, how to act upon them, what the ambiguous implications of almost any course of action would be. I do not really think that one could extract a set of definite foreign policy applications from the study of the Holocaust, as if it were a map or a recipe.

Smith: Then there is the problem that many people in the Holocaust who were good-hearted and had the right intentions ended up becoming collaborators in the very process of trying to do the right thing and to mitigate what was taking place. On the other hand, many people who effected great deeds of rescue and became heroes were working out of very ambiguous, even selfish motivations. This makes it much harder to say: here is the lesson. It also makes it harder not to promote a kind of fatalism, so you become caught in a dilemma.

Smith: Yes, it is difficult to talk about specific lessons, because if we want students to come away with a deeper, more discriminating sensitivity to others, then it is not clear how we can lay that out in a lesson plan. My own view is that promoting this sensitivity, this awareness, is more central to what I am doing than a set of specific lessons.

Roth: I think, though, that we can articulate to some extent what the lessons might be. But when we simply state them, they seem either commonplace or not particularly insightful. What we must do is draw them so that they are richly infused with context and history. Then what might seem like clichés gain a depth of meaning, I would submit that after you study Primo Levi or Charlotte Delbo or read Chris Browning's book about murderous policy actions in Poland, phrases that appear to be platitudes— for instance, never take anything good for granted— take on nuance and coloration, depth and intensity.

I would also emphasize that there must be commitment to study with some seriousness and some length of time. I am skeptical about how much moral capital is produced by a brief visit to a museum, or even by a couple of classes in a secondary school devoted to the Holocaust. This issue will certainly come up in the course of the seminar. And I would argue that teaching the Holocaust must involve more than a quick exposure.
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Patterns for America: M od-

erism and the Concept of C ulture

(Princeton Unive rsity Press,

1999) traces a number of shifts

in meaning of the word “cul-

ture” that took place between

900 and 1950. It argues first

that during this period, “ culture”

changed from a term used pri-

marily by anthropologists to a

common word that denoted the

whole range of a people’s beliefs

and practices. At the same time,

culture came to be understood in

comparative rather than evolu-

tory terms. Whereas earlier

thinks culture had been a yard-

stick for measuring the “advance-

ment” of different peoples along a single axis of development (and thus for making judgments about

es’ superiority or infe-

rity), the newer conception of

the word was more relativistic,

and emphasized the fundamental

difference of individual cultures. D ifferences among cultur es were

enalyzed in geographic and spatial terms, so that given

places–the United States as a

hole, or more specific locales

such as Chicago or the lands of

the Zuñi–came to signify not just

the places themselves, but a set of

actices and beliefs. Thus, when

people in the mid-twentieth cen-

tury spoke of an “American” cul-

ture or way of life, their

nderstanding of the term con-

veyed geographical particularity,

distinctness from other cultures,

and self-estrangement in ways

that earlier uses of the term had

not. In Hegeman’s words, “cul-

ture may have hit home to many

Americans, but it left them

inking about themselves and

their alliances in a newly rela-

tional, contextual, and often cr-

ical way.”

Hegeman argues that these

shifts coincided with the rise of

ers that Hegeman examines—the

“culture critics” who included

aldo Frank, Randolph Bourne, and

Van Wyck Brooks—at-

empted, in ways often reminis-

cent of Matthew Arnold’s

famous promotion of culture as a

means to “sweetness and light,”
to define a national culture, di-

agone its problems and contra-

dictions, and resolve them. In

some cases, a previous moral

standard of culture was replaced

by an aesthetic standard. Thus,

Hegeman’s later chapters point

to the way that the dichotomy

between modern centers and

“primitive” peripheries helped to

establish not only the notion of a

pecifically “American” culture,

but also the division of culture

into the aesthetically defined cat-

gories of highbrow, middle-

brow, and lowbrow. The

fascination with the regional and

the middlesbrow evinced by some

leading modernists gave way in

the years after the Second World

War to a new “highbrow” assault

on what was seen as a degraded

culture, described by such terms

“kitsch,” “masscult,” and

“Kultur.” At this point, literary

and anthropological definitions

of culture diverged sharply. The

ensuing confusion as to what

stitutes culture—which con-

tinues in our current debates sur-

rounding the uses, viability, and

uture of the term—can be traced

to this point in time.

Jay Clayton, professor of Eng-

lish at Vanderbilt and a co-dir-

ctor of the 1996/97 Fellows

Program, says of Hegeman,

“Susan was the ideal visiting fel-

low—a dream seminar partici-

ant! She has marvelously

broad-ranging interests and an

engaging, even vivacious mind. I

miss the lively give-and-take of

tose afternoons very much, but

having Susan’s book in hand

helps to restore some of what we

lost when our Fellows’ year came
to an end.”

— By Thomas H addox.
The Reproduction of Nature: Cultural Origins of America’s National Parks

What do we think of when we think of America’s national parks? Most of us, I imagine, would think of large tracts of unspoiled wilderness—majestic mountains, spectacular waterfalls, or undisturbed forests. If asked, many of us would describe the goal of our national parks in terms not very different from those adopted in 1963 by the National Park Service, which insisted that “the biotic associations within each park be maintained, or where necessary recreated, as nearly as possible in the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man.” In other words, the origins of America’s national parks are generally thought to consist in the desire to withdraw or preserve particularly spectacular natural areas from social, political, and economic development. For most of us, national parks are natural parks.

The construction of American national identity has always been inseparable from nature. Unlike European nations, whose identity derived from a common language, ethnic or racial heritage, religion, or cultural history, the identity of the United States of America as “nature’s nation” was grounded in American landscape painting. For both Cole and Durand, although America’s native resources were to be exploited, untouched wilderness offered the opportunity for a distinctly American landscape painting, the westward “progress” of civilization across the continent ensures that this opportunity will not last forever.

At the end of the twentieth century, the idea of untouched wilderness advocated by Cole and Durand has been reconsidered. Environmental historians and ecocritics now generally agree that nature and wilderness are cultural constructions. For environmental historian William Cronon, wilderness reproduces the cultural values its advocates seek to escape: there is “nothing natural about the concept of wilderness.” As ecocritic Lawrence Buell has noted, it has become almost a truism that the nineteenth-century American romantic representation of the West was built on an ideology of conquest.

For these scholars, as for environmental history and ecocriticism more generally, the American cultural ideal of nature or wilderness preservation has been demystified, has been revealed to harbor within it the very will to power it would set out to escape. Recent work in environmental history disputes a less critical body of scholarship that often took at face value the claims of early preservationists that nature offered an escape from the cultural ideologies of progress and development that fueled American expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This reconsideration of the origins of environmentalism in America has been motivated largely by the widespread acceptance of arguments for the social or cultural construction of knowledge. Historians have thus begun to rewrite the history of American environmentalism, rejecting the received account in which Americans are seen to recognize the intrinsic value of nature or wilderness in the face of its increasing destruction. Instead, environmental historians and ecocritics have begun to tell a different story—of the increased use of the idea of nature’s intrinsic value to further the social, cultural, or political interests of a dominant race, class, gender, or institutional formation.

As powerful as these revisionist narratives are, however, they run the risk of stripping nature of any specificity whatsoever—of transforming nature as completely into culture that the preservation of nature is a natural park, for example, becomes indistinguishable from its transformation into a ranch or a mine or a private resort. In making this claim about the particularity of nature, however, I would not propose that we undo the hard-earned insights offered by proponents of the cultural construction of knowledge, but that we undertake the challenging task of pursuing these insights more fully. Granted that nature is culturally constructed, we need to ask how the cultural construction of nature differs from (and intersects with) other culturally constructed entities. Further, we need to ask how the cultural construction of nature varies historically and how it remains constant both through time and across different geographical locations. In other words, we need to pursue locally the more global insights of the cultural construction of nature. We need a truly ecological criticism, one which understands that the cultural construction of nature circulates within what we could call a discursive ecosystem. The task of such criticism would be to trace the connections among the scientific, technological, and cultural networks within which both American environmentalism and the national parks idea emerge, for it is through such interrelations...
that the particularity of nature can be understood.

In the project which I am undertaking this year as the William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, I am trying to exemplify such a critical practice. I set out to understand the origins of America's national parks not simply as instances of the preservation of nature, but rather as complex cultural representations or reproductions of nature according to the cultural assumptions, beliefs, and practices of mid-nineteenth century America. To do so is not to deny the matter-of-fact sense in which establishing a national park involves preserving an area of land as "natural" as opposed to developing it as a farm, a ranch, a mine, a subdivision, a shopping mall, or an amusement park. Rather, it is to insist that the particularity of nature can be understood as the preservation of nature entailed in the cultural practices, beliefs, and practices of mid-nineteenth century America. Each of my project's three main sections traces out a particular cultural logic that enabled our nation to think through the creation of national parks as representations or reproductions of nature. In the first section I look at the preservation of nature entailed in establishing Yellowstone as the world's first national park, for example, by understanding the preservation of culture as well—more specifically as the preservation of a complex set of scientific, technological, aesthetic, social, economic and other practices that makes up what we call "culture" at any particular moment. From this perspective, the origins of America's national parks not only define America's culture at a particular historical moment, but also make visible aspects of that culture and its ideas of nature that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Consequently, my project takes up the origins of our three "major" national parks—Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon—at sites whose particularity and specificity emerge from the diverse cultural practices and beliefs of nineteenth-century America. Each of my project's three main sections traces out a particular cultural logic that enabled our nation to think through the creation of national parks as representations or reproductions of nature. In the first section I look at the preservation of nature entailed in establishing Yellowstone as a national park in terms of the notion of fidelity to nature as it manifested itself in nineteenth-century geology, cartography, painting, photography, ethnography, and aesthetics. In the final section I ask why it took until 1919 to make the Grand Canyon a national park, focusing on the way in which the sublimity of the canyon's scenery generates a proliferation of attempts to comprehend the canyon, each of which dramatizes the inadequacy of any single scientific, technological, or cultural mode of representation to depict it.

My project is not in any strict sense composed of essays in the history of ideas of conservation, preservation, environmentalism, or biocentrism; the history of landscape art and aesthetics; or the history of the social, technological, economic, or political development of the American West. Rather, it is made up of interdisciplinary essays in what I have elsewhere called cultural historicism. The project operates from the assumption that science and technology need to be understood not simply by explaining how they are culturally constructed, but also by looking at how certain fundamental ideas or metaphors about nature are worked out at the same historical moment in different cultural practices. In taking up the idea of America as it both defines and is defined by the relations among science, technology, and culture, I will trace certain myths of American environmentalist origins as they are played out across a number of diverse discourses and different technologies of representation and reproduction. In so doing, I hope to illuminate the way in which American cultural origins are simultaneously constructed and destabilized through the "construction, destruction, and deconstruction of nature"—the theme of this year's seminar at the Warren Center.

— By Richard Grunin

Richard Grunin is William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow at the Warren Center, visiting associate professor of English at Vanderbilt, and associate professor of the School of Literature, Communication, and Culture at the Georgia Institute of Technology.