



# The F WORD

Spring 2007 Vol. XVII, No 1

AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

FALL 2006:

## Rosemarie Garland-Thomson on "Disability Chic"

On September 29, 2006, Women's and Gender Studies sponsored a public lecture by renowned disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, titled "Can Disability be Chic?: High Fashion Images of Disability in Late Capitalism."



Rosemarie Garland-Thomson

Garland-Thomson is an associate professor of Women's Studies at Emory University and the author of *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature and Culture* (Columbia UP, 1997), editor of *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (NYU Press, 1996), and co-editor of

*Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities* (MLA Press, 2002). She is currently working on a book project that addresses the politics of staring.

Garland-Thomson's lecture chronicled the cultural politics of images of disabilities. As she explained, people with disabilities used to be stigmatized and pitied through visual venues like the "freak show" and the telethon. She argues that these representations have evolved in late capitalism, as images of people with disabilities have grown more prevalent in advertising and even fashion. But she cautioned that we still need to be skeptical. Recent images such as the Super Bowl ad in which a digitally altered Christopher Reeve rises from his wheelchair and walks are more glamorous than ever before, but Garland-Thomson argues that these images often rely on the exoticization of difference and on problematic narratives of "progress." And while provocative, they rarely address the complexities of disabilities.

—Heather Laine Talley



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## WHAT'S IN A WORD

By Monica J. Casper

### THE F WORD: FAMILY

Lately I have been thinking a lot about families: what they are, who values them, how society defines them, why they are so fragile. Many readers know that I am a harried but devoted mother to two beautiful little girls, Mason (5) and Delaney (3). Fewer of you know that I have been married more than once (gasp!). As my tolerant, witty spouse says, "Let's hope the third time's the charm."

My older sister, who is single after many years of marriage, is in the process of adopting a baby, probably from Guatemala. The politics of adoption, especially transnational adoption, are deeply compelling, and sometimes contested, and have only recently been given adequate attention by scholars. I am wholly supportive

of my only sister, who I love like crazy, but I am also trying to attend sociologically to the meanings this new child will bring to our extended family.

My best friend, also a sociologist, is currently experiencing a devastating breakup. She and her partner have been together over 11 years, and they have two gorgeous, smart daughters. But because my friend is a lesbian, she and her partner were not allowed legally to create a marriage. Thus, their custody arrangement looks quite different from, and is more precarious than, a "standard" legal agreement. My friend's marital dissolution is far messier than it should be given how little certain

relationships are valued in the United States.

These issues were much on my mind in mid-January as I participated in a terrific conference in Atlanta, Georgia, sponsored by New York-based National Advocates for Pregnant Women. Run by attorney and tireless advocate Lynn Paltrow,



CAPTAIN'S LOG:  
**On Helming *The Vagina Monologues* at Vanderbilt**

By Reagan Bush

I'll let you in on a little secret: I had never directed anything before in my life. Well, not an entire production at least! And most of the cast of the 2007 *Vagina Monologues* at Vanderbilt University had never acted either. So what made us qualified to present this powerful production? The fact that we were (and still are) brave and willing people who, for the most part, love our vaginas. And if not, then we are working on it!

To even be asked to direct the production by Vicky Basra and Kacy Silverstein, two of the remarkable activists who work tirelessly at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center, was an incredible honor. I thought that was as good as it gets. But then we had auditions. I was awed by the number of brilliant, strong women from the Vanderbilt and Nashville communities. Our first cast meeting in December was a wonderful gathering, when all of these women and their voices were finally united. After going over many logistics, including the grueling rehearsal schedule, we ended the meeting with a ceremonial lighting of tea lights, admiring how the light in the room grew brighter as our candles glowed collectively. We then went around the circle, each of us sharing why we were involved with the *Monologues*. Ranging from tragic personal experiences to a desire to finally have a chance to act at Vanderbilt (and not be judged by body type and size), the varying reasons only further bonded us. We realized that, whatever the reason, we were all on the same mission: to end violence against women. And to make people comfortable saying the word "vagina," of course.

Throughout our preparation, I continued to stress to the cast that they are actresses and activists. And they certainly stepped up to the task. Not only did they faithfully memorize their lines and show up for rehearsals, but they also promoted the production and raised awareness about violence against women wherever they possibly could. Many faced opposition from friends and family, while others found support. But all remarked that they always felt free and understood in the rehearsal room. What a beautiful thing.

Rehearsals were further enhanced by the addition of a little "series" lovingly called "Vagina Talk." Each time, we focused on just one or two of the monologues and discussed the opinions, feelings, and emotions that it evoked. You wouldn't believe some of the directions this took us! Although extremely popular, we were forced to eventually limit these talks to 20 minutes because, after all, there was that tiny matter of an entire production to prepare. Nonetheless, we are still threatening to create a Vagina Group that meets regularly on campus to discuss, well, vaginas. Keep your calendars clear!

From trying to teach my male physical therapist how to say the word "patriarchy" (which he had never heard and still claims I made up), to encountering friends who can barely say the name of the production without their cheeks burning, nearly every day of my life I experience a moment that reaffirms why I spent my time, effort, and love on *The Vagina Monologues*. I don't plan to let our message end on the stage, and I hope others feel the same. Individually, and collectively, we must stand up for an end to violence.



WHAT'S IN A WORD?

By Monica J. Casper

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NAPW works to protect the rights and well-being of all pregnant and birthing women. The conference brought together scholars, activists, health care providers, and others working to forge a complex, diverse movement for reproductive freedom beyond the simplistic concept of "choice."

There were many stories told at the conference, many of which moved me and others to tears.

We heard from mothers who struggled with crack cocaine, were imprisoned and lost their children, overcame addiction, and are now working hard to be present for their families.

We heard from a pro-life mother of eight who was forced to undergo a cesarean section against her will – an armed sheriff came into her bedroom as she was laboring – because she attempted to have a VBAC (vaginal birth after c-section) against the wishes of her doctor.

We heard from midwives who were harassed and prosecuted for attempting to ensure safe at-home deliveries for birthing women. We heard about African women who have endured obstetric fistula, a hole between the vagina and rectum or bladder that can result from difficult childbirth. Women with weeping fistula suffer serious bodily damage and are often ostracized by their communities. Repairing the condition is extremely difficult in

poor countries with insufficient prenatal and postpartum care.

We also heard, horribly, about pregnant women in U.S. prisons being forced to labor in shackles, strapped down and surrounded by guards. Twenty-three states allow the use of such restraints, which I suppose are designed to prevent exhausted women in excruciating pain from busting out of jail when nobody is looking.

So I ask this: What is the meaning of family without corresponding notions of freedom? Can women be good mothers – for certainly we are expected and even compelled by law and public opinion to be nothing but "good mothers" – without possessing the necessary autonomy? Can we expect families to survive, much less thrive, without enhancing the rights of the women who create and sustain them and the rights of the children who live in them?

I admit I do not have all the answers to these questions. But I do know that if we as a society are committed to progress and human rights, then we should embrace love and freedom wherever they may blossom. A "focus on the family" – all families, however defined – should not be forged in hate and intolerance but rather in compassion and an ethics of justice. ■



## A Page from a Travel Diary:

The sun in the Mayan Riviera once again beat down relentlessly. The air-conditioning in the tour bus felt weak and ineffective. I wasn't looking forward to getting off the bus. I had sweated enough while climbing the Mayan pyramid in Coba, a favorite tourist site. The lunch after the climb was settling into my stomach and making me sleepy. But I also knew that I was making excuses to not do what was next on the tour: a visit to a "real Mayan village." As an anthropologist, I was already critical of the "real" in the "Mayan village." But more than that, I felt almost embarrassed about being a tourist and walking through the streets of a village and into people's houses to supposedly see their everyday life.

I was happy to visit the Mayan ruins of Coba and imagine a civilization with all its eccentricities through a tour guide's stories about it. I wasn't happy, however, to superimpose an imagined past on a set of people in the present and expect them to be and behave in certain ways. To put this differently, would I be happy if my neighborhood and home were stops on a tourist's journey through Nashville? How would I react if a group of tourists walked through my house inspecting my space and belongings in order to identify my "real lineage" within Nashville's history, past and present? No manner of presents would make the experience acceptable. But in the "Mayan village" a bag of assorted candies was expected to suffice as payment to the children and their mothers for the tour of their homes and for disrupting their afternoon siesta. If the village was meant to be the present face of a grand civilization of the past, then such a paltry offering is an insult to that civilization and to its descendants.

But this is part of the twisted logic of tourism. Cancún's economy is based on tourism, meaning that everyone who is

a "belonger" must, in order to survive, participate in the tourist industry. Most people work in the resorts and hotels that dot the shores of the Mayan Riviera. They earn a mere \$50 dollars per month. They supplement their income through tips, but offering gratuities is neither culturally nor legally compulsory. This means tourist largesse is the only way a bartender can make some extra money (or not) during the month. Poverty, therefore, makes tourism seem essential for the region, but tourism is also what keeps the region poor and dependent on it.

After Hurricane Wilma devastated the entire region of the Mayan Riviera in 2005 and, with it, tourism, local people faced extreme destitution. Their survival then became contingent upon how quickly the tourist industry was rebuilt in the region. This kind of economic dependence (of the local people/economy on tourists/tourism) has the potential to foster cultural over-generalizations and stereotyping on both sides of such a relationship. Tourists pay money to view "native" people in their "original habitat" because the tourist brochure sells it precisely in this language. Even the tour guide, himself a Mayan descendent, deems such a visit to "real native-style living" a necessary part of the tourist experience.

However, the guide is also all too aware of the falseness of an essential Mayan nativity. For such an identity and space to exist, it would have to be unavailable to tourism. However, everyone in that Mayan village works for the tourist industry in different capacities. Tourism is their livelihood, yet tourism is also what essentializes them as "poor" and "native." For

the sake of tourism, then, the "natives" have to perform their authenticity when the tourists descend into their home space. A "Mayan" mother of six children has to give up her siesta time and weave a hammock instead. She also has to make sure that all her modern possessions like the radio and TV are well-hidden from the voyeuristic eyes of the affluent tourist. The woman's children have become so used to the tourists that they need no invitation to pose for photographs or to demand candies of us. It was distressing to see a group of children and young women line up at the side of the bus, their palms open and arms outstretched. Tourists have made beggars of the poor.

As the bus headed back to the hotel, our tour guide continued his chatter. He thanked everyone aboard for joining his tour and asked us all to fill out an evaluation form for him. He then turned to his driver and said, "okay, Speedy Gonzalez, let's get these good people back to the hotel safe and well." Everyone laughed. Obviously, the use of the name "Speedy Gonzalez" was familiar and funny. I was reminded of a Pat Boone song of the same name from the 1950s.

I don't remember thinking that the lyrics of the song were funny. Even though I had smiled at the reference, I didn't think it merited a round of laughter from the rest of the audience. So I looked up on it on the Web. Speedy Gonzalez is an animated mouse from the Warner Brothers' Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies series of cartoons. His stereotypical traits are his ability to run extremely fast, his "Mexican" accent, and his oversized yellow sombrero.

The cartoon is racist in the way it naturalizes the cultural and physical traits of a particular community of people. The disturbing thing, however, is the way in which the term was appropriated and used in casual conversation by the tour guide, who can make the claim to belong to the community that the animated character stereotypes. Even if the tour guide understood the racial import of the name, his job as the guide is not to enlighten his tourists. His job is to connect with them in a language that they understand and feel comfortable with, even if that comfort rests on a history of "racializing" a group of people. This exemplifies then the twisted logic of global tourism in its localized relationships.

— Shubhra Sharma

The Cancún-  
Mayan Riviera



# GLOBAL FEMINISMS: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE EXPERTISE AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

## INTRODUCTION TO AN EMERGING FIELD

By Brooke Ackerly

**G**lobal feminisms is a burgeoning field of scholarship struggling to catch up with a century of feminist and women's activism and interests. Global feminisms is an important area of inquiry in all disciplines where feminism has a presence. Why "feminismS"? Global feminisms is the study of feminisms from around the world, of local feminisms, of feminisms transnationally, and of global politics through feminist lenses. Some feminisms defy geography; some are hyperconscious of geopolitics. The field is dynamic and, at its best, transdisciplinary. But it is a field with its own history of power. By referring to "feminismS," we mean to be committed to noting the potential for power to obfuscate diversity and silence difference. Global feminists not only study the power of power, we also use our critical tools to reflect on the ways in which we practice that which we study. Global feminisms is at once a field of study and a process of study.

Global feminisms is an ethical perspective, too. Global feminisms perceives of ethics as a collective project, attentive to the possibilities for alliance-building. It expects self-reflection at all stages of the research project, from epistemology to publication. Methodologically, it expects an inclusive understanding of the research subject, and to both educate and be educated about intersectional experiences of oppression. It is attentive to power and to diasporic and marginalized people. In short, global feminist research practices are ethical practices, and they are themselves practices that require ethical reflection.

Global feminisms scholars are engaged in the study of boundaries associated with sex, gender, sexuality, class, race, ability, ethnicity, geography, identity, and membership – using both theoretical and empirical lenses. They are attentive to silences and marginalization, to citizenship politics (including issues of migration, refugees, rights, and participation), to political economy (formal and informal), to society and culture, and to the



*Global Feminisms collaborative at the World Social Forum in Kenya, January 2007.*

environment (understood as the places where we live, work, play, and pray). Global feminist scholarship is making important contributions to many fields of study and to many ways of living.

### GLOBAL FEMINISMS COLLABORATION AT VANDERBILT

The purpose of the Global Feminisms Collaboration at Vanderbilt is to develop and institutionalize a transinstitutional strength in the field of global feminisms in research, teaching, and service. The core of the project is a research group supported by the Center for Ethics. Members of the group with an existing expertise in global feminisms or

with a research or teaching strength in an area important to the purpose of the project have been developing the Global Feminisms Collaborative through three primary activities. The first is a research group which provides critical feedback on

members' scholarship. The second is an exploration of what it means to enhance Global Feminisms as a field of study throughout the curriculum in the undergraduate, professional, and Ph.D. contexts. The third is an attempt to develop the implications of feminist theory and feminist ethics for research, focusing on research that works explicitly in collaboration with actors in feminist practice and politics in local and transnational spaces – Vanderbilt, Nashville, and the rest of the world.

Participants include faculty and graduate students from across campus. As the collaboration grows, we invite others interested in these issues to join us in conversation. Please email [brooke.ackerly@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:brooke.ackerly@vanderbilt.edu) for more information.



WGS GRAD  
CERTIFICATE  
STUDENT  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Alyson Dickson** presented a paper, "Framing the Relationship between Feminism and Religion: Origins of the Enemy Perception," at the American Society of Church History Annual Meeting on January 6, 2007.

**Darcy Freedman** presented a paper titled "How Participatory is Participatory Action Research? Reflection Tools for Exploring Participant Involvement in Qualitative Data Collection" at the Conference of Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies in Athens, Georgia on January 7, 2007.

She also received a \$100,000 grant from the LifeWorks Foundation in January 2007 to coordinate the formation of the Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee, a coalition comprised of people and organizations representing all parts of the food system, from farm to fork, who are working to create and sustain a secure and healthy food system for Middle Tennessee.

**Monique Moultrie** was awarded the Women's and Gender Studies' Susan Ford Wiltshire Graduate Student Essay Prize in April 2006.

She also presented a paper titled "Between the Sheets": The Black Church and Black Women's Sexuality" at the Sisters of African Descent: Connecting Spirituality, Religion, and Vocation Conference in Atlanta, Georgia on September 22, 2006.

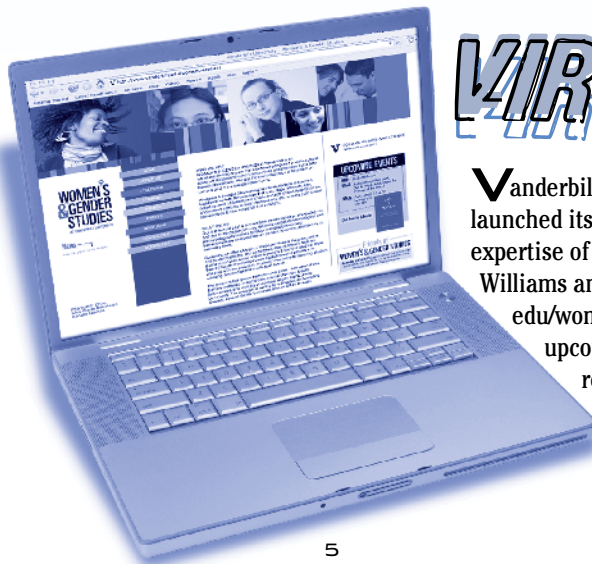
She is thrilled that her first publication, "In the World to Come, God Will Sign: Challenges to Feminist Theologies of Embodiment and Wholeness and a Model of Inclusivity for Persons with Disabilities," will appear in the Fall 2007 *Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health*.

**Nicole Seymour** presented a paper titled "Visual Literacy and Abolitionist Fiction," on Frederick Douglass's deployment of the language of photography, at the Midwest Modern Language Association conference in November 2006.

Her article, "The Interests of Full Disclosure: Agenda-Setting and the Practical Initiation of the Feminist Classroom," will be published in volume 17, issue 3 of *Feminist Teacher* later this year. □

WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES  
FALL 2007 COURSE SCHEDULE

COURSE #	COURSE TITLE	CREDIT HRS.	DAY/TIME	INSTRUCTOR
WGS 115F-01FYS	Women in Law & Literature	3	MWF 1:10-2:00	Fesmire, J.
WGS 150W-01	Sex & Gender in Everyday Life	3	TR 9:35-10:50	Sharma, S.
WGS 150-01	Sex & Gender in Everyday Life	3	TR 11-12:15	Stahl, S.
<i>NOTE: Service Learning</i>				
WGS 150-02	Sex & Gender in Everyday Life	3	MWF 3:10-4:00	Fesmire, J.
WGS 240-01	Introduction to Women's Health	3	TR 2:35-3:50	Salisbury, M.
WGS 250-01	Third Wave Feminism	3	TR 1:10-2:25	Dicker, R.
WGS 259W-01	Reading & Writing Lives	3	TR 11-12:15	Dicker, R.
WGS 273-01	Psychoanalysis and Feminism	3	TR 1:10-2:25	Lunbeck, E.
WGS 280-01	Colonial Governmentality & Education	3	W 3:10-5:30	Sharma, S.
WGS 281-01	Globalization and Policy-Making	3	TR 2:35-3:50	Sharma, S.
WGS 291-01	Senior Research Seminar	3	W 1:10-3:00	Casper, M.
WGS 294A-01	SpTp: Trauma, Lit., & Women Writing	3	M 1:10-3:00	Pierce-Baker, C.
<i>NOTE: Limited to Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors</i>				
WGS 288A	Internship Training			
WGS 288B	Internship Research			
WGS 288C	Internship Readings			
WGS 289	Independent Study			
WGS 298	Honors Research			
WGS 299	Honors Thesis			
WGS 389	Independent Study			



VIRTUAL WGS

Vanderbilt Women's and Gender Studies recently launched its brand-new Web site, redesigned with the expertise of Community Advisory Board member Leigh Williams and John Williams. Visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/womens-studies](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/womens-studies) to browse our calendar of upcoming events, get quick access to our program requirements and course offerings, download digital versions of previous newsletters, and more!

## ALUMNAE NEWS

This past summer, **Katharyn "Kat" Christian '05** transferred from the University of Florida Levin College of Law to the University of Alabama School of Law, where she will receive her degree in May 2008. This summer she will be working for the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, and is ecstatic about the opportunity. She is getting married on August 4, 2007 to Dillon Barker (A&S '05) at her home church in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

In May 2006, **Melody Crowder-Meyer '04** received her Master's degree in Politics from Princeton University. She is currently working toward her Ph.D., writing her dissertation on how political recruitment processes affect the sex of candidates who run for and attain political office in the U.S.

**Jacqueline LaPan Edgerton '98** gave birth to a baby girl, Caroline LaPan Edgerton, on January 20, 2006. Jacqueline and her husband, Colin Edgerton, relocated this past summer to Augusta, Georgia. She practices law part-time and enjoys raising her daughter.

**Stacie R. Furia '03** is in her fourth year of graduate school, pursuing her Ph.D. in Sociology with a doctoral emphasis in Women's Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She will complete her field work for her dissertation in the coming year, bringing her into the homestretch of her degree.

**Sarah Graham '04** is applying to law schools while working as a probation officer. She was recently elected Chair of the Nashville Coalition Against Domestic Violence. She has enjoyed still being able to participate in Vanderbilt's Take Back the Night march for the past two years, and was honored to be asked to present for Project Safe's Hand in Hand Training. She claims that "a week doesn't go by where I don't realize what a difference the Women's Studies program has made in my life! Thanks."

**Jennifer Howard '02** (M.A. Women's Studies, George Washington University '04) is currently working at the Center for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame, coordinating service learning opportunities for students. She plans to start a Master's degree in Nonprofit Administration this summer. Jen still serves on the Board of Directors for SAFER (Students Active for Ending Rape) and is a member of the National Campus Steering Committee for Grants to Reduce Violent

Crimes Against Women on Campus for the Department of Justice. Only 1.5 years left until her boyfriend finishes law school, at which time they plan to move to New York City.

**Deepalie Milie Joshi '06** is in her second semester of law school in San Diego, California. Over the holidays, she went to India for three weeks. Her visit reaffirmed her desire to fulfill a long-term goal of establishing a self-sustaining women's shelter in the state of Orissa in India.

**Lindsay Kee '98** will complete her first novel and the Master of Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles this coming spring. She looks forward to moving back to Nashville in May 2007 to be with her new husband, songwriter Fred Wilhelm.

**Katie Protos '06** is now working as an Advocates Program Coordinator at the Diana B. Torrey '82 Health and Counseling Center at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York. She was recently chosen from a pool of national applicants to conduct two workshops for attendees of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault's annual conference. Her workshop designs were based on her senior honors research. She wants current WGS students to know that a lot can come from doing a thesis – as she says, "if you're willing to take the risk, to travel that extra mile ... a lot can happen. A lot can change."

After graduating from Vanderbilt, **Courtney Richardson '04** moved to St. Petersburg, Florida and began working for an IndyCar Race team, Andretti Green Racing. She was responsible for marketing and promotions for the Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. After that race, she went on the road with the race team to all of

the events, doing client services. In November 2006, she resigned and relocated to Indiana, where she and her now-fiancé bought a house. They met at work, as he is one of the owners of the race team (the "Green" in Andretti Green). The couple live in Carmel, a suburb of Indianapolis, and got engaged on New Year's Eve. They will be married in Savannah, Georgia on November 9, 2007. Courtney is no longer working, but busy getting the house together and preparing to travel to all the races. She says, "life is very good and I am extremely happy!" In her free time, she has become heavily involved in charity and volunteer work.

Attorney **Arrianna Sales Sacks '00** was made a magistrate for a trial court in Ohio last September.

This spring, **Heather Souder '04** will graduate from Harvard Law School. Next fall, she will move to Washington, DC to begin working at the law firm of Baker Botts LLP in the litigation practice group.

This past year, **Rachel Wagner Koppa '00** married Lance Koppa in Tuscany, Italy. She says, "it was a blessing to be surrounded by those we love," including Ronnie Steinberg (past director of WGS). The couple currently lives in Dallas. Rachel recently finished all of her coursework and passed the comprehensive exams for her Ph.D. in Family Therapy from Texas Woman's University. She will spend this year working on her dissertation and trying to start a private practice.

**Pamela Williams '04** is currently working at the University of Illinois for the Human Resources Front End project and loving it. She and her husband, James Cheers, are still in Urbana, Illinois and doing well – "cold, but well!" She wishes the program, faculty, and students continued growth and success.



## Children of Men

When Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón made *Y Tu Mamá También*, critics exalted his deft conversion of an adolescent genre picture into a movie with social relevance. Those same critics became rapturous once again when they saw an adolescent genre picture of no social relevance, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, with his name in the director's credit. This time out, with *Children of Men*, he tries science fiction, or apocalyptic futurism. And he shows himself to be both a master genre filmmaker and one still interested in advancing social critique: adapting P.D. James's novel of the same name (along with several co-screenwriters, who have collectively earned an Oscar nod), his film invokes the critical concerns of postcolonialism and reproductive freedom.

The gist of the film is that in 2027, by whatever unremarkable epidemic, humans can no longer reproduce. At the movie's beginning, everyone's attention is absorbed by the death of the youngest member of the race, "Baby Diego." Britain, serving somewhat anachronistically as the center of empire, uses police-state violence against all the illegal immigrants hoping for refuge there. But, as irony has it, it's an illegal woman, the West African Kee (Claire-Hope Ashitey), who becomes pregnant against all odds and, thus, represents the future: while the first human race began in East Africa, the second one begins in West Africa. Clive Owen, slouchingly handsome Brit, plays



the reluctant hero charged with shepherding Kee to the safety of the "human project," which appears to be located offshore. Julianne Moore plays his ex-wife who has cast her lot with the terrorists opposed to the police state.

Considering the mainstream appeal of the film – and its employment of the aforementioned beautiful people – we might wonder: in a year when Mexican directors ruled the Oscar nominations, has Cuarón abandoned the particular concerns of his nationality for Hollywood? In short, no. The *cause célèbre* at the movie's core is the immigration forced by the neoliberal revolution. And as each revolution eats its children, the story makes it plain that, if the children are the future (to paraphrase newly-free-from-Bobby Whitney Houston), there will be none if Empire doesn't authorize these "illegals" as full citizens.

– Constance Watts



## The Queen

Stephen Frears's Golden-Globe winning film *The Queen* often feels, and looks, like a made-for-TV movie – but perhaps with good reason. Its subject, the aftermath of Princess Diana's death in 1995, appeals to the Lifetime ("Television for Women") addict in many of us. Indeed, Diana was dubbed "The People's Princess" for her ability to elicit sympathy from so-called commoners, including American women. Even with her immense privilege, the high-profile royal suffered the most mundane of indignities: an unfaithful husband, an eating disorder, a cold and disapproving mother-in-law.

But it's that mother-in-law, Elizabeth II (played by an almost-unrecognizable, uncannily precise Helen Mirren), who is the real star of this film. And Frears in part seeks to humanize that aloof figure, painting her as a concerned grandmother who wanted to protect Princes Harry and William from the same limelight that ostensibly killed their mother. *The Queen* trains its eye on the agonizing 72 hours after that terrible moment, when sentiment turned against the monarchy for its sluggish public response and its reluctance to change royal protocol for the princess's funeral.

At the film's heart, then, is the story of a woman torn between history and duty on the one hand – a duty she has performed since she was a young woman of 25 – and personal emotions and public opinion on the other. (Tony Blair's wife becomes a prominent emblem for the latter; Helen McCrory plays Cherie Blair as a witty, irreverent woman who believes that monarchism should die a quiet death.)

But *The Queen* is not unwavering in its sympathy for the embattled monarch: it features many strikingly ambiguous moments that reveal not only a complex woman, but a film with similarly mixed emotions. In one scene, a solo Elizabeth encounters a magnificent buck, the quarry of the princes and her husband who are on a hunting expedition near their Scottish estate. The queen and the animal lock eyes, and what seems an almost laughable instance of heavy-handed symbolism becomes something more difficult to read. Mournfully visiting the buck's corpse a day later, as it hangs in an abattoir being drained of blood, we wonder: is Elizabeth finally mourning the daughter-in-law who was cut down just as she was making a life for herself, or does she see herself in the eviscerated animal – tossed aside by a modern public with waning respect for tradition? Or could it be both?

– Nicole Seymour



# Family

**T**wenty years ago, Judith Lorber wrote an essay titled “Dismantling Noah’s Ark,” in which she argued that it is impossible to end gender inequality without first eliminating gender as an organizing principle in society. She is particularly insistent about “de-gendering” families.

Students who read her essay in my classes struggle mightily with the notion of a society sans gender – or at least one in which gender is no more central than whether you are left- or right-handed. I admit to my own resistance to Lorber’s vision, but there is something very appealing in her notion that we should redefine the basic building block of family as the relationship between an adult and one or more children for whom s/he is responsible. As I point out to students in our discussions, in the U.S. we already have families that are not centered on adult heterosexual couples: unmarried women or men with dependent children and same-sex couples with children, to take just two examples. This is a roundabout way of saying that, to me, a whole host of relationships can be seen as “family,” and that some of that diversity is instrumental to challenging women’s and men’s traditional roles in marriage and family.

Most of my research has to do, in one way or another, with gender inequality in the U.S. I have studied women’s and men’s job searches; gender differences in neighborhood networks; women’s entry into medicine; the regulation of nurse practitioners; and, with Holly McCammon, state women’s suffrage movements in the U.S. It seems to me virtually impossible to study gender inequality without taking into account, somehow, the role of family and the ways in which gendered family roles circumscribe women’s roles beyond the family. And that recognition is further evidence of the link that Lorber sees between gender as an organizing principle in society and the stubborn persistence of gender inequality.

–Karen Campbell, Sociology





One of my haunting academic memories is a class session that took place after the entry of high theory into the hands of the many. I was extolling the merits of “family” as a model for “community.” A keen-eyed participant in the discussion raised his hand and asked, “Are you suggesting that the patriarchal heteronormativity of the sign ‘family’ in all its problematizing hegemony is a model on which to base ideas of a new inclusiveness?”

Well, as the novelist Ralph Ellison phrases one of his responses to the ambush of interrogation: “Cut off my legs, and call me Shorty.” That was what I thought. I don’t remember what I said, but I

know, even at this moment, that it was lame.

So, of course, what do academics do when they have been thoroughly caught out? Read. Going through theory texts almost convinced me that it would have been better not to have been born into, well, a “family.” The notion

– the notion in operation for hegemony, mind you – can be, in layman’s terms, “bogus” as all get out. I mean, work with me here: the royal “family,” the “patriarchal” privileges assumed by the post-colonial leader, the “insiderism” of even my favorite Sly and the Family Stone nationalism: “We are a family!”

However, when I looked around

at the people I loved, from whom I had learned, who had loaned me compassion and money, and who made up my most immediate field of responsibilities and, yes, my past and unfolding HISTORY ... who were they? My family, to be certain.

I am a Black American man who grew up in a segregated South protected by a father who was my similar in temperament and inclination. He saved my life more than once. Who, then, would be a model if not him?

And today, as an academic, I find great joy in my collaboration with my wife and the mother of our only son, Dr. Charlotte Pierce-Baker, and we both take great joy in our son, daughter-in-law, and three grandsons.

There is, I know, a way of what I call “autobiographical critique” and of theorization that moves not against or in interrogation of “family,” but, let us say, via family. I have had one or two seriously Freudian-oriented spears cast at my work by very

smart writers who suggest that I have not eradicated the Oedipal miasma from my scholarly work. One has the feeling that they are a paraphrase of the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century white critic who suggested that Charles Chesnutt’s prose would have been better had he not been “so bitter.” Translation: I would be better if I were not “so Oedipal.”

What to do?

There is, of course, much more to say about “family.” But I cannot do it here. I do, however, take pride in my Oxford University Press book which will appear in summer 2007 – a hopeless commercial plug! – titled *I Don’t Hate the South: Reflections on Faulkner, Family, and the South*. I might caution all high-theory partisans that my dad plays a fine role in the prose.

Which reminds me – what happened to the student who posed the theoretical question about my use of “family”? He is today a very important public figure ... with a large family.

–Houston A. Baker, Jr., *English*



## PROFESSORS' REFLECTIONS

The word “family” is a term of ambivalence for me – and while this term as such does not directly influence my research and teaching, the ambivalence represents a larger question that motivates much of my work in Communication Studies.

I often use “family” to refer to the small group of people to whom I am related by birth and with whom I maintain, not always without challenge, meaningful relationships of mutual support and care. I also sometimes use “family” to make reference to my wonderful partner of 12 years and our two adorable kitties. I am motivated to use “family” in this latter way when I

feel a profound sense of gratitude for the companionship, pleasures, complexity, and overall meaning that my partner and cats bring to my life.

Yet it is difficult for me to contemplate my relationship to “family” without noting that the term has been publicly used to unreflectively demarcate and denounce certain forms of intimate relationship for crass political gain. And the context of difficulty is not solely political for me. My partner’s siblings use “family” as a term of unqualified exclusion that casts me outside their intimate sphere of recognition, simply because my

partner and I are women. Worse, they disavow their share of responsibility for the exclusionary definition by attributing its existence to “the word of God.” So, for me, the term “family” generally represents experiences both pleasurable and painful.

The influence of this particular ambivalence on my work is not, in itself, significant. But the opposing meanings signify definitional controversy, which is one communication problem that I take up in my research, and one that I invite students to think



Lynn Clarke, in black blazer, with her Communication Studies colleagues.

about in their study of rhetoric, deliberative politics, and civic life.

–Lynn Clarke,  
*Communication Studies*

## SAVE THE DATE

**THURSDAY, MARCH 15<sup>TH</sup>, 5 P.M.  
LOCATION: STEVENSON 4309**

WGS HOSTS LINDA HIRSHMAN, AUTHOR OF *GET TO WORK: A MANIFESTO FOR WOMEN OF THE WORLD*, AS OUR SPRING GUEST SPEAKER.

Ms. Hirshman, a former professor of philosophy and labor attorney, is the talk of the blog circuit for her views on women, work, and motherhood. She is controversial, lively, smart, and an avowed feminist critic of what she calls "family injustice," in which women bear a disproportionate share of responsibility for child rearing and housework. For more information, see [www.gettoworkmanifesto.com](http://www.gettoworkmanifesto.com).

**THURSDAY, APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>, 10 A.M.-4 P.M.  
LOCATION: STUDENT LIFE CENTER**

THE CUNINGGIM WOMEN'S CENTER, THE VANDERBILT POLICE DEPARTMENT, AND THE WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM PRESENT A ONE-DAY SYMPOSIUM: "THE HEALING JOURNEY: SURVIVING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN."

The symposium will bring together faculty whose work focuses on violence against women, and students who have either experienced violence or are searching for ways and means to challenge violence as a practice in their everyday life on campus. The morning session will feature two prominent speakers, and the afternoon will feature break-out sessions where students will interact directly with members of the faculty, Women's Center representatives, members of the Vanderbilt police, and community healers.

*Students need to register for this event. Email Kacy Silverstein at [kacy.silverstein@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kacy.silverstein@vanderbilt.edu). Deadline for registration is March 20.*

## Women's & Gender Studies Photo Album

WGS graduate certificate Priebe (middle) and Darcy a break from dissertation fellow Community Research student Carrie Hanlin.

Darcy Freedman (far right) the community advisory coordinated The RiverWest action research project. Wakefield, Richard Winsa Stribling PhD, Frasier B Ronnie Simmons.





... poses with members of  
... team with whom she  
... Produce Stand participatory  
... from left to right are Mary  
... tom, Bola Toyinka, Finis  
... everly, and Eldridge



Newsletter co-editor Nicole Seymour  
and WGS' office manager Gayle  
Parrott celebrate WGS director Monica  
Casper's birthday in Nashville.

Gay Welch, University Chaplain and WGS affiliated faculty member, visits an ecovillage in Denmark (left) and an ecology project called Il Rocha in France (above). These visits were part of her research for the Ecology and Spirituality group at The Center for the Study of Religion and Culture. Such research informs the first-year writing seminars she has taught for the past two years, and the course in Ecology and Ethics - which will include ecofeminist theory - that she is proposing for Spring of 2008.

Corey Henning, Darcy Freedman, Damonique Moore, and Caitlin Skinner show off the RiverWest Produce Stand they managed last summer. The stand operated for 10 Saturdays in a vacant lot near the Preston Taylor Hope RV Housing Development.





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AND **Shubhra Sharma**

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