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Fall 2008 Vol. XIX, No. 2

AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

By Charlotte Pierce-Baker—Interim-Director/Professor, Women's & Gender Studies & English

OUR WORD FOR THE MONTH IS **FUTURE**.

Wall Street is no more. WGS **futures**, however, are beginning to soar. We are daunted by the departure of Professor Monica Casper from our ranks. But at last consult, she assured us that she believes in Women's and Gender Studies and will remain an active investor in our program at Vanderbilt! To our credit, we still have on the floor here at Vanderbilt: Professors Shubhra Sharma (Associate Director), Rory Dicker, Julie Fesmire, and our incomparable Administrative Assistant, Gayle Parrott. Of course, we have our dedicated student workers. This is our "Team Future." We promise returns by the end of the year.

One initiative WGS is launching is an amazing undergraduate seminar, conceived by our associate director, which will encourage students to create and forward women-centered research. Our undergrads will share ideas and projects with one another in discussion format and then sound the closing bell for a larger faculty audience at the end of the trading day -- oops, I mean semester, of course. In WGS we believe in futures, especially where our undergraduates are concerned. We know they are our potential leaders and scholars in any new "wall street times."

Our **future** in WGS has a strong interdisciplinary bent. We strive to combine the diversity of scholars and researchers across Vanderbilt's campus. In the process, we attempt to provide opportunities for our faculty, across disciplines, to shape the university's mission and, in the process, strengthen our own in Women's and Gender Studies. Dividends? I heard one colleague suggest: "What if we try

to do something innovative with film and gender, not just a course?" My answer: "Bring me the idea. Let's see what we, together, can accomplish."

Our graduate students, who are always on the edge of change and shaping their unique futures, can look to WGS for the best new ways to approach teaching, learning, and scholarship in their chosen areas of discipline. Our ninety affiliates across campus offer a cornucopia. We have diversified stock! *The Center for Teaching* under the spectacular "floor leadership" of Allison Pingree, one of our affiliates, is always prepared to help young scholars, researchers, and corporate seekers find a way to pave feminist futures. She can be contacted at www.vanderbilt.edu/ct. Those grad students interested in combining their degrees with a Certificate in WGS should come by our offices for a discussion about how to proceed. After graduate school, there are many avenues for employment or further study.

We cannot forget our newest investors in Vanderbilt stock -- our first year students. Another initiative on the horizon is a WGS connection with the Commons and Peabody Campus. We plan to discover how our present stock-holders -- the affiliate faculty of WGS -- can offer their expertise in the form of seminars and pre-gateway courses for first-year students. As new students begin their careers at Vanderbilt, they need strong academic

advising to lead them to course offerings in WGS and related fields. Surely, embedded in this notion is a way to conceive a kind of "paying it forward" for first-years students who then will be able to mentor and advise the next Vanderbilt class. Finally, **future** is always about naming.

At WGS many of us desire a designation that signals **future**. A name such as Women/Gender/ Sexuality just might indicate more clearly and effectively who we are, what we do, and the issues we try to engage. We want to acknowledge the breadth of our interrogations. Our futures include all the parameters and permutations of discourse and study, including the boundaries, of our disciplines.

In an election year, everyone talks and thinks about **future**. I see Vanderbilt's future as intellectually

vibrant, multi-dimensional, diverse, challenging and invigorating. WGS shares in that excitement. We want to know your future-thinking ideas. Stop by Garland Hall, second floor, and let's talk **futures!** You can find us at womens-studies@vanderbilt.edu. Someone here will always be willing to share our excitement with you! ☑

From left to right: Sarah Hansen, Julie Fesmire, Gayle Parrott, Charlotte Pierce-Baker, Shubhra Sharma and Rory Dicker

WHAT'S INSIDE

- The Future of A Western Human Rights Discourse ... 2 & 3
- The Future of Freedom ... 4
- "Future Ain't Here Yet, Man" ... 5
- Goodbye & Good Luck ... 5
- Fear, Hope, and the Future ... 6
- Futures ... 6
- Perils of Panic, Futures of Thought ... 6
- Alumnae News ... 7
- Future ... 7
- My "Future" ... 8
- Changes in WGS Requirements ... 8
- Congratulations Graduate Certificate Recipients ... 9
- Vote ... 9
- Spring 2009 Class Schedule ... 9
- Affiliated Faculty Notes ... 9
- The Question of My Future ... 10
- My Future, My Choice ... 10
- Congratulations Julie and Rory ... 11



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By Shubhra Sharma—Associate Director, Senior Lecturer, Women's & Gender Studies & Anthropology

The recently concluded Beijing Olympic games heralded China's arrival to the world's mainstage. The Games were spectacular; not only for the venues (the Bird's Nest and the Cube were pieces of sheer architectural genius), but also for how precisely they were organized. Of course, the opening and the closing ceremonies, directed by the brilliant filmmaker Zhang Jimou of "House of Flying Daggers," and "The Curse of the Golden Flower" fame, were masterpieces of creativity. The performances left viewers gushing and at the same time at a loss for words. While the opening ceremony showcased ancient China (especially the "civilization's" gift of paper, printing, and the compass to the world), the closing ceremony showcased a modern China, technologically super-savvy.

I was glued to the TV for those two weeks in August, watching the world come together to play. I stood up and applauded American Michael Phelps every time he entered the pool and set it ablaze. I screamed with joy when Jamaica's Usain Bolt broke the 100m and 200m sprint records. I cried when India's Abhinav Bindra won the country's only gold medal ever and the tricolor was hoisted for the first time in the history of the games. In all of this, however, it was China I felt the most pride for. I couldn't help but applaud a country and its people for accomplishing a task of such magnitude with exquisite panache. I am neither from China nor have I ever visited the country—so I asked myself, where was all this pride flowing from? You feel proud of your children, your students, your friends, your city, your nation—things/people you have invested time and energy in and who in turn define you, your past, present, and future. The people of China, whether living in China or abroad, could take the Olympics as their shining hour and feel pride in their nation and themselves. But why was an Indian woman, now living and working



2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS AND

THE FUTURE OF

A WESTERN HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE

in America, rooting for China in its post-Olympics glory? This is even more curious if I consider my awareness of the "negative" image of China embedded in the discourse of nation/nationalism in India. In the US too, particularly in the media, the alleged violation of human rights, is the proverbial stick with which to beat China, again and again.

I want to explain my "pride" for a nation, not my own by birth or by choice, by showing how the Beijing Olympics rendered foggy the lens of human rights through which the western media, particularly the US media, has chosen to "represent" non-western countries, particularly China. I want to share the U.S. media's pursuit of "stories" that call attention to the persisting problem of human rights in communist China. In other words, the spectacle of the Olympics led the media to repackage the specter of human rights in China. Conversely, however, the spectacle rendered suspect such a repackaged specter. The Olympics, I argue, were China's opportunity to claim "freedom" from western definitions. China was there for the world to see and judge for itself. It was no longer a mediated category and as a nation, it was free to imagine itself anew. This freedom to be is what I want to celebrate and feel proud of, especially since I too belong(ed) to a post-colonial nation that still struggles to define itself in its own terms.

Through the course of the Olympics, the American media made just such an imagination difficult. Just before the start of the Games, the media was obsessed with the question of whether the President of United States should or should not go to the opening ceremonies in the wake of Chinese government's crackdown on Tibetan protesters. The President made the decision to go but Steven Spielberg, a member of the executive committee for the opening and closing ceremonies, resigned in protest. Pollution, however, dominated the media's coverage on the Games. The high levels of industrial pollution in the Beijing air, were discussed or brought up constantly in the news and even led some high profile Olympians to cancel their trip to Beijing. A Kenyan long distance runner decided to stay home because he feared that the bad Beijing air would exacerbate his bronchial condition. Later, he would realize his mistake of taking the media's word on the air, especially when their coverage of the Games showed incredibly blue and sunny skies—a perfect setting for an athlete to showcase his/her four-year training.

Then there was the earthquake that killed more than 100,000 people in China's Sichuan province—a "natural" tragedy unprecedented in China's history. The Olympics were forgotten as the media coverage of the tragedy brought home heart-breaking images from the region. This cast grave doubts on the start of the Games. However, at exactly eight minutes past eight on August 8, 2008, the Beijing Olympics got underway in style. It was interesting to observe how the same media that was "blasting" China about pollution and human rights before the onset of the Games, could not stop praising the opening ceremonies and was later forced to revise its strategy for the coverage of the Games and of China at large. The media toned down how it used the discourse of human rights to talk about and characterize China. Instead China instantly became the poster-child for all that was good about globalization. But the media also conducted this new "love affair" with China with an age-old degree of caution and even suspicion. It remained constantly vigilant for back stories on the opening ceremonies and soon enough it found some juicy ones. The first story to hit the airwaves was about the little girl who sang the Chinese national anthem at the ceremony. Apparently, there

was another little girl competing for the same honor but lost out in the "cuteness" scale (if not on the singing scale). The media called for righting the wrong, even to offer a singing contract to the "loser."

The second story was about the ethics of staging the "perfect" Games. The media spread concern about the thousands of participants in the opening and closing ceremonies who underwent rigorous, military style training for the purpose. The media alleged that the participants trained for 10 hours daily and often non-stop. Sometimes they went without water or food the whole day. Many of them fainted from heat and exhaustion. This story raised again the specter of human rights violations in China. The media took China to task about the ethics and the human costs of perfection. The irony, however, is that the same media also chooses to be silent about human rights violations in China's industries that produce everything that an average American uses in his/her daily life. Yet, it is quick to defend the rights of American consumers of Chinese products, especially when these products are anything less than perfect in terms of their make or quality. I guess the discourse of human rights is

a strategy that can and has been selectively used (or not) by the American media against others, especially China.

There were more stories to come from the Games themselves. The most prominent of these was about the ages of some Chinese women gymnasts. The American media persons covering gymnastics harped on how most of the Chinese gymnasts looked younger than 16 years—the legitimate age for participation. Bela Karolyi, coach of the legendary Nadia Comaneci of Romania and who now coaches the US national team, did not hide his anger regarding the age issue. He even alleged that the Chinese government might not be telling the entire truth about their gymnasts. While there was no proof of "fudging," the media kept the story alive by allowing coaches like Bela Karolyi to vent for their audiences and by bringing in other experts to comment on the ethics of such a situation. By doing so, the media forced a more formal investigation of the matter by the International Olympic Committee. The Committee has yet to report on its findings. Again, by taking on the age issue successfully juxtaposed the problem of human rights and lack of ethics in sports in China. Through the age question, the media tried again to characterize China as an authoritarian regime

where human rights and ethics in sports do not matter. What matters is national pride and what enhances national pride is the number of gold medals won in the Olympics. The media contended that success requires a price and China was ready to pay any price to achieve it like "forging" the age of its gymnasts.

But then we need to ask this very simple question: doesn't success come at a price, often a painful one, cultural idiosyncrasies notwithstanding? So how does this phrase become a stick to beat on one but serves as praise for another? When Tiger Woods won the 2008 US Open Golf Championship with a bad knee and a stress fracture in his toe, he became the greatest athlete ever to play a sport. When a petite 16-year or so old Chinese gymnast won her first individual and team gold medal, her age rather than her achievement became the object of scrutiny. So why is Woods' pain "real" and "legitimate" to grant him his success but the same is not true for the Chinese gymnast? Does context matter in how we evaluate and grant individuals their success? Obviously it does. In praising Woods, we assume that his pain and success is his choice alone. In not praising the Chinese athlete, we assume that her pain and success is imposed upon her. In characterizing Woods and the Chinese athlete in this way, we simultaneously talk about political cultures (democracy versus state authoritarianism) and the presence/absence of cultural freedoms/choice-making. But we also know that his father, a military man, coached Tiger Woods since he was two years old. His training regimen was nothing if not rigorous. His father would try all possible means to develop his mental toughness (like dropping a golf bag full of clubs just when Woods was teeing off or laughing out aloud when Woods was ready to putt). How then is Woods' pain different from that of a 3-year old in China who enters the gymnastics

US media in particular is left grappling with a dilemma—how to talk about China? Or rather, how to re-deploy the discourse of human rights to talk about China? I cannot predict how the media will deal with such a dilemma in the future. However, the dilemma itself will force the western media to reconsider simple equations and problematic characterizations. The Olympics certainly showed a super savvy China to the world. Some would argue that China's success represents the "good" in globalization. Others would give China agency in using globalization to recast itself anew—as a nation committed to liberalization but without necessarily abandoning state control and supervision of such processes. Rest assured the western media would harp on the apparent contradiction between liberalization and state control, in the hope that such a strategy will keep China uncomfortable about its cultural and political histories. However, the current US financial crisis only points to the problem of too little state control over important sectors of the market or to the lack of state supervision over financial practices that have brought the housing market down, for example, and with it banks and financial institutions who engaged in such practices. This is to say that as the control over economic and financial global processes moves hands, such ideological positions as "liberalization promotes democracy" and vice-versa will also undergo revisions. The discourse of human rights, especially as a strategy to be used against non-democratic nations in order to "shame" them to change their political practices at least, will need to be revised as well. What this discourse will morph into and how it will be used against other cultures in the future is anyone's guess. But it suffices for now to know that there is a stay order against it and the Beijing Olympics made this possible. ■

The Nashville *Tennessean* recently reported a story about a country music singer who caused a great deal of excitement by removing his clothing while going through airport security. It seems that he was unable to pass through the metal detector without setting it off. After his third unsuccessful trip, the TSA official told the singer to remove whatever was in his shorts. Since he had already removed his shoes, sweatshirt, and jewelry, and presumably emptied his pockets as we are all instructed to do, the somewhat jet-lagged singer decided he should simply remove his shorts and send those through the x-ray machine so that he could pass through the metal detector successfully. So there he was, standing in a t-shirt and boxers. The crowd went wild, but not in a good way. People screamed and the TSA officers rushed towards the singer, handcuffing him to a security gate (apparently still wearing only his boxers and a t-shirt).

The singer later joked about the confusion, good naturedly saying TSA was simply doing its job. Yet he also noted that he deliberately did not react: "you remain calm and you don't give them a reason to throw you on the floor." Only after a rigorous twenty-five-minute interrogation was the singer finally released.

Many of us can tell so-called amusing anecdotes like this one. Every time I hear one, lines from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* run through my head: *freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.*

Atwood's 1986 novel examines a number of trends and carries them to extreme but logical conclusions: the increased influence of fundamentalist religious groups, particularly in the political realm; declining birthrates among those of white European descent; the emergence of mutant diseases which cannot be contained; the

THE FUTURE OF FREEDOM

By Julie Fesmire—
Senior Lecturer,
Women's & Gender
Studies & Comparative
Literature



increased problem of nuclear and toxic wastes; the decline in support for and a direct backlash against the women's movement; advances in technology which make the use of cash antiquated (think Commodore Card). The emerging republic of Gilead plays on the fears of its citizens:

It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics, at the time.

Keep calm, they said on television. Everything is under control... That was when they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction. There wasn't even an enemy you could put your finger on.

Things continued in that state of suspended animation for weeks, although some things did happen. Newspapers were censored and some were closed down, for security reasons they said. The roadblocks began to appear, and

Identipasses. Everyone approved of that, since it was obvious you couldn't be too careful.

In an interview given shortly after her novel was published, Atwood, a Canadian writer, noted that she set the tale in the United States because Canadians would never react this way: "Canadians might do it after the States did it, in some sort of watered-down version... The States are more extreme in everything." She also noted "everyone watches the States to see what the country is doing and might be doing ten or fifteen years from now."

What we appear to have done in that interval is to use her novel as a to-do list rather than see it as the warning Atwood intended it to be. Is it acceptable to torture individuals (foreign nationals or U.S. citizens) to acquire information? Is it acceptable to try individuals (foreign nationals or U.S. citizens) without the protections of the Fifth Amendment? Is it acceptable to try individuals (foreign nationals or U.S. citizens) without review by the Federal Court System? Is it acceptable to wiretap telephonic

conversations of individuals (foreign nationals or U.S. citizens) without review by the Federal Court system?

In looking towards the future, we must look also to the past, remembering Benjamin Franklin's famous line, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." This quotation, slightly altered, is inscribed on a plaque in the stairwell of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, whose full name is "Liberty Enlightening the World." (The statue also bears a plaque with these lines from Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus": "Give me your tired, your poor/ Your huddled masses yearning to breath free..." But that is another essay.)

As Americans, we must seriously consider our position in global politics and the example we are setting. If you believe that the U.S. is a world leader that sets standards, then you must focus on what standards we are setting, what principles we adhere to, and what specifically we will support and defend. ■

"FUTURE AIN'T HERE YET, MAN"

By Zo Newell—Graduate Certificate Student in Women's & Gender Studies and Ph.D. Candidate, HACTOR

When I asked my brain to respond to the prompt, "Future," I heard the old Firesign Theater punchline, "Future ain't here yet, man." That line seemed terribly funny in the 1970s, when my high school buds and I were inordinately amused by things like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and the idea that it was *logically impossible* even to cross a room, let alone reach the future. To cross a room you would have to cross an infinite number of points in space-time to get there, and you *can't*, because *it's infinite!* Wow...

Twenty-five years ago, or whenever that was, I could not conceive of a future. The present was almost too complex to negotiate as well. That's why my friends and I spent so much time trying to be clever and escaping into our heads. I had no idea how complex and scary things could get. Now that they have, I find myself thinking of "future" more and more. But I have given myself permission to not worry about how to negotiate infinity, and that helps a lot.

Another quotation comes to mind. This is Gandhi's famous exhortation: "be the change you hope to see in the world." This calls for a commitment to live fully in the present, without worrying about the future, whether there will be one, or what my present actions may "lead to." If the future can never arrive, then all I have is the present – and, paradoxically, the more I live in the present, the more I find that the present is less like a geometric point, or series of points, which can never be negotiated. If I keep being in the present, the time or state as "the future" continually arrives without my having to micromanage it or do anything to make sure it happens. It keeps happening, with or without my conscious participation or intervention. Or does it?

A couple of weeks ago I watched "Divided We Fall," a documentary on hate crimes directed against the American-Sikh community in the immediate wake of 9/11. It's a powerful film, well worth seeing; but I am most impressed by the film's director, Valerie Kaur, a twenty year old student, who decided one day to take a road trip across America with a video camera. She wanted to hear real people tell their stories about living in America. Most importantly, she was interested in what diversity means to Americans, especially the idea of belongingness (who belongs and who doesn't; who decides who does and doesn't belong to a community or nation writ large). In getting people to tell their stories of belongingness, Valerie told her own story of being a third generation America-Sikh. So what I am saying is this: to create a certain kind of future (for a community or a nation) sometimes requires an intervention like Valerie Kaur's in the present. At the most basic level, future of a nation is tied to how the idea of nation as an imagined community lives in the hearts and minds of people at the grassroots. The world today is far more complex than it was when I was in college, and in many ways much scarier. In the face of all that's out there, I feel more deeply than ever about living life in the moment and making that extra effort to connect with people that I never either paid attention to or assumed things about. ■

Goodbye & Good Luck!



Dan Morrison and Arlene Tuchman joined the WGS department in wishing Monica and Mason Casper great success in Arizona.

We bid farewell to Professor Monica Casper as she leaves WGS and Vanderbilt University after five years. Professor Casper is moving to Tempe, Arizona to begin her new life and her new job as Professor of Social & Behavioral Sciences and Women's Studies and Director, Division of Humanities, Arts, & Cultural Studies (HArCS). While we are sad to see her leave, we wish her all best for the future. Thank you, Monica, for ably directing WGS and making it the vibrant program that it is today. Most of all, thank you for your friendship.



Gay Welch and Monica Casper share farewells at the going away party.

As we say goodbye to Professor Casper, we welcome our new interim director, Professor Charlotte Pierce-Baker (WGS and English). Professor Pierce-Baker has already moved into her new role with great ease and panache. We, in WGS, look forward to working with her in building the program further this year. ■



Fear, Hope, and the Future

By Rory Dicker—Senior Lecturer, Women's & Gender Studies & English

When I started contemplating writing this piece about the future, my mind drew a blank. I am no fortune-teller, and these days in my life as a teacher, partner, and mother, I am caught in the moment. I tend to trudge through each day, perhaps with vague plans for the weekend, but rarely with a sense of "the future" in any grand or even real sense. I scarcely have time to do what needs to be done, much less conceptualize an imaginary future.

Lately, though, because of the constant news of home foreclosures, bank failures, and federal bailouts of the financial industry, not to mention the ongoing war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the word "future" conjures up something bleak. My fears tend to take precedence over anything else I might think. On a personal level, I wonder if I will be working until I'm 75, unable to afford to retire in a nation that has pushed the burden of financial planning for retirement onto a populace that knows very little about investment. In a more public sense, I wonder if the United States is beginning its decline; all signs indicate that this nation, led by the hubris of an administration that would admit no wrong, is on the brink of collapse.

And yet, perhaps because we are in the midst of an election year and perhaps because I am the mother of a small child, I find myself having flashes of hope. A new president with vision may be able to change the way the people of this country think about issues that really matter: access to health care and education, care for the environment, unequal distribution of wealth. Just as important, this new president may actually be able to do something about these issues. The election itself has felt historic and important as well. During the



Democratic primaries, for instance, voters chose between a black man and a white woman, candidates who represented groups that had never been the nominee of any major party. I admit that I wanted to see a female president elected in 2008, but I am hopeful that the election has united people around a belief in the need for change.

Now that I've given myself this small space to think about the future, my mind's eye jumps forward more than a decade. The year is 2024, and my daughter is voting in her first presidential election. I would love to imagine that she is choosing between two female candidates, but I recognize the unlikelihood of this scenario. More important, though, I start considering the world that her generation will inherit. What will the United States be like in 2024? Which issues will be central in that election? Again, while I cannot forecast the future, I realize that I can't let the fears, worries, and despair I've felt in the last months overwhelm me. Instead, I need to remain active in every way; I must be vocal in my critiques, challenge the status quo, and show the next generation that the current one cares about the future. ■

FUTURES

By Wynne Duong—Majors: General Psychology & Women's & Gender Studies

As this is my last year in college, I am looking forward to taking a break from my scholastic endeavors. However, I am also nervous about what the next few years will hold for me. My goal is eventually to attend graduate school to get a Masters in Public Health, with an emphasis on Maternal and Child Health Care. I want to work in clinic settings where I can help new and expectant mothers as well as children of lower socio-economic status. I would like to implement programs where new and expecting mothers can learn about what to expect or how to care for their newborns. I especially want to help adolescent mothers with their new transformation in life. My ultimate career goal is to work for the Center for Disease Control (CDC) under the Office of Women's Health to do research or to implement programs towards giving women information about their health choices and how women's health choices affect them.

I want to travel around the world. I started saving my money for a world trip a few months ago. I think that traveling and seeing different cultures will open my eyes to different life-worlds. Traveling will also make me more conscious of how my decisions could impact others and help me make more informed decisions rather



than jumping to conclusions. I may also decide to do volunteer work in another country or to work with global projects helping others around the world.

However, home will still be east of the Mississippi River in the southeastern corner of the United States. I was born in Tennessee and of course I am attending Vanderbilt, which is not far from my hometown. I want to attend graduate school at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Then of course the headquarters of the CDC is in Atlanta, Georgia. Although I want to see the world, home for me will always remain in the South. ■

PERILS OF PANIC, FUTURES OF THOUGHT

By Sarah Hansen—Graduate Certificate Student in Women's & Gender Studies & Ph.D. Candidate, Philosophy

When I think about the future I feel anxious, worried. Sure, it's not a surprising feeling to find in a graduate student. We manage to be stressed out no matter what's going on. But these days, I think it is safe to say that there's a *lot* going on and the future feels more uncertain than usual. The American stock market is crashing, imperiling global economies as well as our own. Food shortages have driven prices up, further threatening the lives of the world's poor. Apparently, massive amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas, have been discovered leaking out of the Arctic seabed, potentially accelerating climate change beyond scientists' worst predictions...

I could go on and work myself into a panic but I'd rather not. The mass media already does an excellent job stoking panic around uncertain futures. And, most of the time, fear works to cut off rather than open up

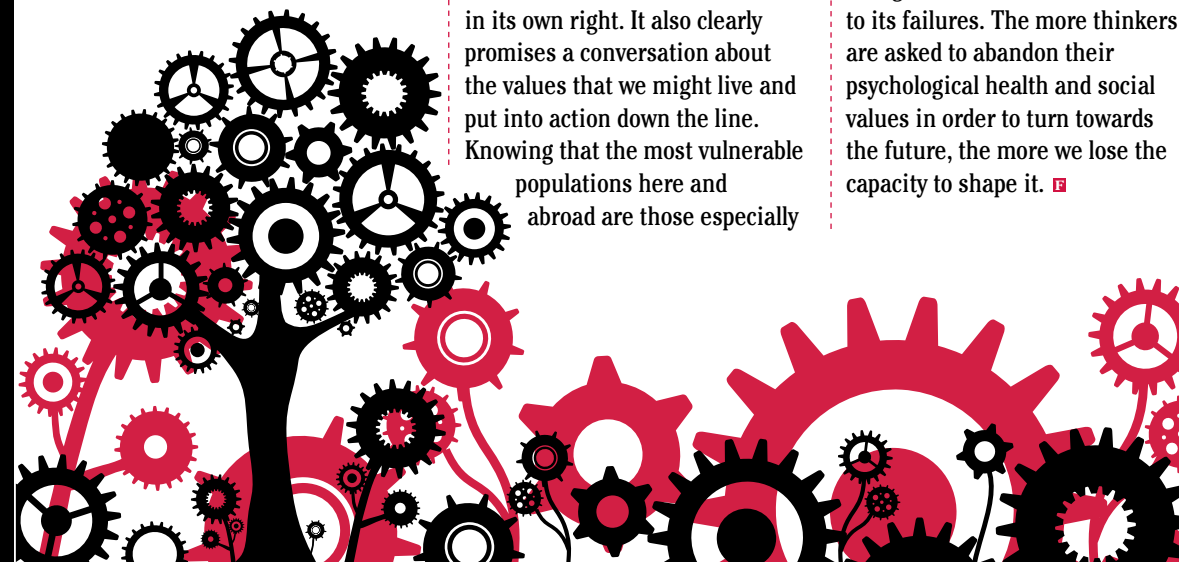
avenues of reflection and action. There is something intoxicating and disorienting about the apocalypses by which the media markets the future today. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that so many (and I'm not excluding myself) are at times paralyzed or short-sighted with respect to it. But in response to concerns about resources—economic, environmental—why would we take on a posture that bears so few resources of its own?

I am not suggesting that fears should be repressed or disavowed, that the fate of our environment and economy could or should be faced with indifference or blind faith. Rather I'm wondering about the activity of *thinking about and for the future* and the conditions that support that activity. In public discourse it is very easy to find a space in which you are invited to panic and bite your nails about the future but it is much harder to find a space to think and work on it.

No doubt this activity of thought can be understood as valuable in its own right. It also clearly promises a conversation about the values that we might live and put into action down the line. Knowing that the most vulnerable populations here and abroad are those especially

threatened by the current financial and ecological crises, these conversations should not be sacrificed. If women, especially women of color, bore the brunt of downsizing, outsourcing, low-paying jobs during recent periods of economic *growth* in America, what will follow from "total economic collapse"? At present, politicians struggle to recognize the difference between "Wall Street" and "Main Street," but vulnerability is lived differentially across Main Street as well. When panic forecloses these attentions no one wins, but some lose more deeply than others.

In having turned the invitation to think about the future into a piece about *thinking about* the future, it may be that I continue to betray my graduate student constitution. (I should disclose: graduate student in *philosophy*). Nevertheless, the increasing suggestion that if you're not paralyzed by panic, you're not paying attention does not serve thought or those most vulnerable to its failures. The more thinkers are asked to abandon their psychological health and social values in order to turn towards the future, the more we lose the capacity to shape it. ■



ALUMNAE NEWS

Sarah Dean (2007) is still working away at law school in Hawaii and staying active with Hawaii Women Lawyers. She has worked for the Family Court in Honolulu over the summer and is now getting ready to start interning with the Domestic Violence Action Center. She is very excited about the internship and is looking forward to doing more in the community on women's issues.

Julie Park (2004) published her Women's Studies senior thesis on Asian American women and sororities this year. Starting her fifth year of graduate school at UCLA, she is currently writing her dissertation on student engagement in multi-ethnic communities and attempting to find an academic job that will give her health insurance.

Joy Evans (2001) has recently taken a position as the Assistant Director of the Women's Resources & Research Center at the University of California, Davis (www.wrrc.ucdavis.edu). She is very excited about the new position and living in California. She would love to connect with Vandymoms in the area and would like to remind students that following your passion is good for the soul and can lead to a good job too!

Rachel Koppa (2000) is currently working on a dissertation in Family Therapy while working full time at Children's Medical Center of Dallas. She is a family therapist in an inpatient psychiatric unit that specializes in eating disorders.

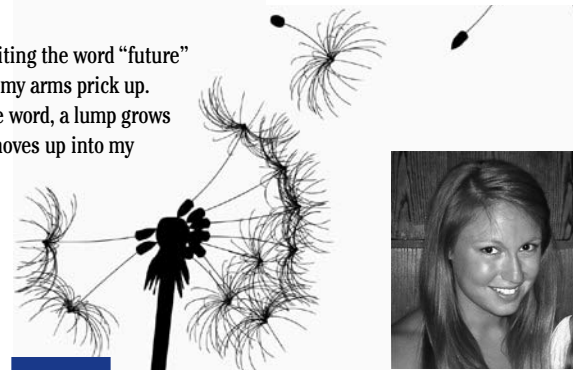
Even simply writing the word "future" made the hairs on my arms prick up. Thinking about the word, a lump grows in my throat and moves up into my brain until my eyes blur and my mind becomes blank. I quickly grab the closest pen, paper, or computer keyboard and begin to furiously make lists. If none of those are handy, I pick up my cell phone and begin to dictate these same anxieties

to whoever will listen. These lists are sticky noted, folded, rewritten four and five times in the same notebook—their creation momentarily relieving the future's influence on my mind, while their existence prolongs and strengthens the effect that 'future' has on my self.

The future has not always had this effect on me. In my past it, the idea of the future was so tangible. I could tell anyone who asked what my future would hold for me. At fifteen, if asked what the future was for me I would have very quickly responded: "in one year, I will be driving." When I was seventeen, I watched from the sidelines as the United States went through the motions of the 2004 election. If you had asked me then to tell you about my future, I would have said: "In the next election, I will be voting."

Until the present, I have been able to fix on at least one event or landmark to call my future. Get a drivers license, be a senior in High School, graduate from High School, go to college, turn eighteen, turn twenty-one, be a senior in college. These landmarks of 'future' have now become my past. And as I near the last landmark—college graduation—the idea of future is much more daunting. It spreads over such an extensive amount of time and space that simply trying to wrap my mind around the concept becomes inhibitory.

Instead I think in "little futures." I reduce the future down to a size I can easily swallow. I think about tomorrow as the limit to the future, because if I go beyond that the future becomes big again. Tomorrow I have an exam. The day after tomorrow I have another



By Callie Traver—
Majors: Cognitive Studies &
Women's & Gender Studies

exam. The day after that, an application is due for a graduate program that could span the next two years of my life. And now, by thinking beyond tomorrow, I have ended up thinking about two whole years of future. I have to keep future restrained, confined to a specific, measurable event. The future conceptualized in such a broad way becomes an immeasurable abyss of infinity. It does not give me my agency over it. I have no way of knowing if I am making progress towards the future, or if I am simply floating through time. When will I know that I have arrived in the "future"?

This spring I will become a college graduate, the last of the landmarks that, in my past, defined the future. It is becoming more apparent the closer I get to this "future" that it is not a future at all but a past that has not happened yet. This landmark has been in my consciousness for a long time—as a goal, an ending point. When asked about "my future" now, I immediately assume that the future is somewhere, in time and space, beyond graduation. In a sense, the future is that which has yet to be conceived within my conscious mind, it is buried and hidden in a kind of Freudian "unconscious." It is revealed through the passage of time and movement through space. No matter how many times I crease my brow, squint my eyes, and release words on to paper in my multitudes of lists, I will not be able to bring "future" in to my consciousness. I can only realize "tomorrow." When tomorrow becomes the past, then I can think about the next day- the future. ■

MY "FUTURE"

By Travis Williams—Majors: Anthropology & History; Minor, Women's & Gender Studies

The meanings of some words in the English language become worn down through excessive use. They

become cliché, almost boring. Any emotion evoked by and through such words diminishes with the march of time. Ironically, "future" is one such word. Ask someone (including myself) what "future" means to them, and they might babble some reply about the upcoming presidential election or global warming; they might even decide to turn the question on the questioner who may not have the answer, either, and answer with an equally faded concept, like "hope."

Even so, recently I have been thinking a lot about "future" and what it holds for me. Recent events in my life have given "future" a new meaning, one both tangible and malleable. I now feel that my future is happening, and I have a stake in shaping it.

Since the second semester of my freshman year (I am now a senior), I have known that I wanted to be an archaeologist. So, for the past three years I've been trying to make good on that knowledge. I'm majoring in Anthropology and History and minoring in Women's and Gender Studies. The classes that I have taken so far have given me a solid background in anthropological and feminist methods and theories. I have been involved in archaeological "digs" over the past three summers. On my most recent dig, I was the leader of an excavation crew and unit. I will be writing an honor's thesis based on the research I did this past summer at a site in southern Peru that spans both the Inka and Spanish conquests. I have presented (and will be presenting again in April) my collaborative research with Professor Steven Wernke at the national conference for the Society of American Archaeology. I have great teachers, who are also great mentors inside and outside the field of archaeology. But what has it all added up to? Have my efforts to mold my future paid off?

Currently, I am applying to graduate schools. Until I hear back from them in early spring, I can't answer those questions for sure. However, I do know this: I am defining a shape to my future. I firmly believe our futures are in our own hands. I know that I wouldn't trade a second or a penny of my education thus far for something else. No matter whether my education pays off in the end, and I get to enjoy a rewarding career, I know that it has already paid off in terms of shaping who I am. Even so, I am confident that in the not-too-distant future I will be graduating (knock on wood), and after that I will begin life again as a graduate student of anthropology at some top graduate school (another knock, harder this time).

The English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley once wrote, "Fear not for the future; weep not for the past." As an aspiring archaeologist, I cannot help but to do both. I fear for my own future because a successful career in archaeology is not a given. Even so, I have done what I can to ensure that I achieve my goals. I "weep" for the past because it is my passion. History drives me, not because I do not wish to deal with the present, but because I believe what we learn about the past can help us shape the future. A certain Mayan elder once said, "Don't forget the teachings of the ancestors. In their paths, we will find hope for the future." (Victor D. Montejo (1997), "The Pan-Mayan Movement..." *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 21(2):28). I couldn't agree more. As for the future, I don't know where the world will be a year from now. I do know this: if I have any say over it, my future is in ruins, literally. After all, I am going to be an archaeologist. ■



HAVE YOU HEARD? The Women's and Gender Studies Major and Minor Requirements have changed!

To major in Women's and Gender Studies, students need 33 hours, 12 hours in WGS courses and 21 hours of electives. To minor in Women's and Gender Studies, students need 18 hours, 12 hours in WGS courses and 6 hours of electives.

Majors and Minors take the same core courses: WGS 150: Sex and Gender in Everyday Life, WGS 201: Women and Gender in Transnational Contexts, WGS 205: U.S. Feminisms and WGS 291: Senior Seminar.

Please note that: Elective hours may be earned through any department at Vanderbilt, provided that the course has a gender component. The WGS program provides a thesis option for Honors students.

If you have any questions about majoring or minoring in Women's and Gender Studies, please email us at womens-studies@vanderbilt.edu or call 615-343-7808.



The next President of the United States will significantly shape all of our futures. The Women's and Gender Studies Program encourages everyone to vote in the upcoming election. Here are some important voting dates:

**General Election Day:
November 4, 2008**

**Last date to register to vote:
October 5, 2008**

**Early voting dates:
October 15 through
October 30, 2008.**

*To find more information, see the Tennessee Division of Elections website:
<http://state.tn.us/sos/e>*

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2008 RECIPIENTS OF THE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN GENDER STUDIES:

Rebecca Chapman (English)

Darcy Freedman (Community Research and Action)

Sarah Hansen (Philosophy)

Lyndi Hewitt (Sociology)

Leah Payne (Religious Studies)

Heather Talley (Sociology)

To find out how to begin earning your certificate, email the Women's and Gender Studies Program at womens-studies@vanderbilt.edu.

WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES SPRING 2009 COURSE SCHEDULE

COURSE #	COURSE TITLE	CREDIT HOURS	DAY/TIME	INSTRUCTOR
WGS 150-01	Sex & Gender in Everyday Life	3	TR 9:35-10:50	Sharma, S.
WGS 150-02	Sex & Gender in Everyday Life	3	MWF 11:10-12:00	Dicker, R.
WGS150W-01	Sex & Gender in Everyday Life:	3	MWF 10:10-11:00	Seymour, N.
WGS 201-01	Women & Gender in Transnational Context	3	TR 1:10-2:25	Sharma, S.
WGS 242-01	Women Who Kill	3	TR 2:35-3:50	Fesmire, J.
WGS 248-01	Fannie Flagg: Feminist & Humorist	3	T 1:10-3:50	Stahl, S.
WGS 271-01	Feminist Legal Theory	3	W 1:10-4:00	Fesmire, J.
WGS 288A-01	Internship Training	1-3		Sharma, S.
WGS 288B-01	Internship Training	1-3		Sharma, S.
WGS 288C-01	Internship Readings	1-3		Sharma, S.
WGS 289-01	Independent Study	1-3		Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 298-01	Honors Research	3-6		Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 299-01	Honors Thesis	3-6		Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 301-01	Gender & Sexuality	3	T 3:10-5:00	Oliver, K.
WGS 302-01	Gender & Pedagogy	1	W 1:10-3:00	Dicker, R.
WGS 389-01	Independent Study	1-3		Pierce-Baker, C.

AFFILIATED FACULTY NOTES

Brooke Ackerly's (Political Science) book *Universal Rights in a World of Difference* (Cambridge University Press) came out this year. She and the Global Feminisms Collaborative have organized a conference "Human Rights Without Freedom" to take place on Thursday October 23, 2008.

Anastasia Curwood (African American and Diaspora Studies) won a Career Enhancement Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship foundation for a leave this year. She is also expecting an article out this winter: "A Fresh Look at E. Franklin Frazier's Sexual Politics," in the *Du Bois Review*.

Nathalie Debrauwere-Miller's (French and Italian) book *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Francophone World* is forthcoming from Routledge in Winter 2009. She has several articles forthcoming on French feminists Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous in the journals *MLN*, *Studies in 20 and 21st Century Literature and Dalhousie French Studies*. She will also give a talk on "History of French Feminism" at the International Conference on "Intellectual Women in France from 1986 to the Present" at the *Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies* (IGRS) in London, England, June 11-12, 2009.

Rory Dicker (WGS) just published *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (Seal, 2008), which tells the story of the women's movement in the United States. Beginning in the nineteenth century and ending today, the book examines the goals of and challenges faced by the individuals who sought equality and liberation for all women.

Vivien Green Fryd (Art History/American Studies) is now the chair of Fellows Seminar "Trauma Studies" at the Robert Penn Warren Center. She also published "Suzanne Lacy's Three Weeks in May: Performance Art as "Expanded Public Pedagogy," *National Women's Studies Association Journal 19* (special issue, Spring 2007). She will be presenting a paper, "The Trauma of Slavery in Kara Walker's Eight Possible Beginnings," for "Interrogating Trauma: Art and Media Responses to Collective Suffering," in Perth, Western Australia, December 2008.

Leah Marcus (English/Jewish Studies) has been appointed Director of the Program in Jewish Studies. She has an edition of John Webster's play, *The Duchess of Malfi* forthcoming from Arden. This will be the first full-dress edition of the play in forty years and will depart from previous editions in terms of gender assumptions.

Kelly Oliver's (Philosophy/WGS) book *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex and the Media* (Columbia University Press) came out last fall. An Arabic translation is forthcoming. This summer she finished a book manuscript *Biting the Hand that Feeds You: Animal Pedagogy and the Science of Kinship*, which should be out next year from Columbia University Press. She has started research for her next project on images of pregnancy in popular culture and film, tentatively titled *Knock me up, Knock me down*.

Joshua Perry's (Biomedical Ethics) article "Partial Birth Biopolitics" will be published in the *DePaul Journal of Health Care Law* and reprinted for a global audience in a forthcoming volume of *The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India* (ICFAI) *Journal of Health Care Law*. The article explores the implications of the Supreme Court decision *Gonzales v. Carhart* for the future of reproductive freedoms and the exercise of clinical medical judgment. ■

THE QUESTION OF MY FUTURE

By Amy-Lee Gillard—Majors: Sociology & Women's & Gender Studies

As a child everything seems so simple. No dream can be too big or complex. Training for the Olympic Equestrian Team while attending law school seems completely feasible; and I guarantee that if you could talk to the nine year old version of me, I would say that is what I would be doing at age twenty-one. Yes, I was the crazy little kid who dreamed of being a defense attorney who only took clients that were actually innocent. But today, for the moment at least, law school is on hold. I do ride fairly often but I won't be competing at the 2012 London Olympic Games.



The future I look to now is much more uncertain than the future I looked to as a nine year old girl. My generation faces an economy weaker than that of our parents, global warming becoming more and more real every day, and it is possible that social security may run out by the time we reach retirement age. The idealistic fantasies I held in my adolescence seem irresponsible now. Thus my goals for the future have shifted and become more practical.

The state of the world right now is far from perfect; however I'm attempting to view things as they could be; not as they are. Since sitting back and complaining won't bring change of any form, I've decided I want to become pro-active. My main problem seems to be figuring out how exactly to go about this and picking a cause on which to focus my attention. I passionately want to combat injustice and I know that only focused efforts will prove effective in bringing about real change. Hopefully there are enough passionate people in this world to organize around any issue, even ones that may at first appear small, and bring their cause the attention it deserves.

The future I face now holds many questions. Should I focus on bringing awareness to domestic violence which occurs within the borders of my own country? Does my love of animals and the outdoors mean I would be best at fighting for environmental rights? Or would my passions be better suited to putting a stop to the genocide occurring in Darfur? It's an intimidating feeling, not knowing where exactly one belongs in the world. To be honest, I am extremely scared that I will choose the wrong path. But the most frightening question lurks in the back of my mind: Am I being naive to think that I could make a significant difference in ANY of the causes that matter to me?

Growing up in America has entitled me to privileges which, I'm sorry to say, I have often taken advantage of without even being aware of it. As Americans, we have taken a lot from this world and it is our responsibility to give back. One day perhaps I can make a real difference and perhaps even inspire others the same way I have been.

To pretend that my future plans are perfectly laid out in front of me would be a lie. I do somewhat envy my fellow seniors who seem to have entirely worked out their life plans, but I also feel excited about the future and discovering my place in it. In a way, I guess I'm still a little like that nine year old girl who used to dream so big. I see too many possibilities, but, at least, now I know that I have to narrow them down. Ideally, within a few year's time I will find myself working at an organization like Amnesty International, perhaps lobbying the rights of the disenfranchised. I hope to find a place to help me hone my interests and also lead me to where I am most needed. ■

When I think about my future, many hopes and possibilities come to mind. For me, life has always been a progression of moving from one clearly defined goal to another. I spent my years of junior high and high school trying to make good grades so that I could go to the college of my choice. Although I had to narrow down the choices of which college to attend, I knew that a degree from an acclaimed college or university was essential to the plans I had for my life.

As I anticipate my upcoming graduation this December, it seems that the options available to me after Vanderbilt have been far more difficult to sort through than those I faced when I graduated high school. I always knew that I would continue my education immediately after Vanderbilt, but it took me a while to decide that law school would be the best choice. Whether or not I end up practicing law, I believe that a law degree would be extremely beneficial to my plans for the future.

When I think about my future, I think of all the things I want in my life. In chronological order, I want a fulfilling

My Future, My Choice

Amy P. Roebuck—Majors: English & Women's & Gender Studies

career, a happy marriage, and at least two children. In a broader sense, I want to use my talents and abilities to make the world

a better place, particularly striving toward the creation of a more feminist world.

I know that my future will hold many concerns about the management and balance of my career ambitions with my family commitments. My affiliation with the Women's and Gender Studies program at Vanderbilt and my involvement with the Vanderbilt

Feminists have given me a much greater understanding of the conflicts today's women face and the choices they must make in the areas of work and family. I plan to work outside the home before and after my children are born because it is important to me to remain financially independent. I want to be able to support my children financially as well as emotionally, dedicating myself to providing for their future while devoting

myself to their present.

I hope that the coming years will bring a decrease in the pressure that women feel about the choices they must make regarding their families and careers. While I expect to encounter some criticism for my decision not to stay at home with my children in their early years, I hope that someday mothers can make choices about their career paths and childrearing plans with the same ease that fathers always have.

My interest in law, specifically family law, springs from my desire to make the world a more equitable place for women and men. I am particularly interested in issues involving children, such as divorce, child custody, and domestic violence. Although I do not know exactly what career I would like to pursue, I would like to work with children in some way, possibly as a lawyer, a social worker, or a teacher.

After graduating law school, I will once again find myself at a stepping off point; there will be many options for what to do next. When I face the decision of selecting and beginning a career or continuing my education further, I hope that I will continue to progress in my effort to

better myself and the world around me. Whatever career I undertake, however I choose to marry, and however I choose to raise my children, I take comfort in the fact that even though my future is full of many choices, they are mine to make. ■

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Julie Fesmire, Senior Lecturer, WGS, for getting the Alumni Outstanding Freshman Advising Award at the recent faculty meeting of the College of Arts and Science. We are very proud, Julie, and thank you for all your hard work and dedication to WGS and its students.



Congratulations to Rory Dicker, Senior Lecturer WGS & English, for earning accolades in the *Nashville Scene's*

"Best of Nashville" competition! Dicker was deemed "Best User of the F-Word" in recognition of her readable and inspiring new book *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (Seal Press).

