

Letters

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“Immigration and the American Experience”

An Interview with Daniel B. Cornfield and Gary Gerstle

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

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

CORNFIELD: It came about because we are friends and colleagues and we share a common interest in the topic, and although Gary is a historian and I am a sociologist, we have a tremendous amount of overlap in our substantive interests. Also, this seminar coincides with the recent growth of a critical mass of Vanderbilt faculty in several disciplines who have an interest in immigration, and we are very fortunate to have many of them in our seminar. But if I may just back up a century or so to talk about the timing of the issue of immigration—immigration as an issue tends to come in waves because immigration, at least to the United States, has come in waves, and we are presently in a big wave. The last big wave, when much scholarship, literature, poetry, and political conflict emerged,



Daniel Cornfield (left) and Gary Gerstle

occurred in the period of 1880–1924. Many of the debates that we are witnessing now in the United States, and elsewhere, regarding immigration, and immigration as a so-called national “wedge” issue, were partly defined in that previous era. To me as a sociologist, immigration as a historical, cyclical process poses enduring questions about community identity, about individual identity, about the nature of group relations in society, and about the mission and definition of the entire nation and its place in the world.

GERSTLE: One of my favorite passages from a work on immigration history is from Oscar

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Handlin's classic, *The Uprooted* (1951). At the beginning of the book he states, "once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history." That last line has long stuck with me. This country has always been a country of immigrants. To study immigration is not just to study those who came to the United States from elsewhere and made homes here. It is to study the very processes through which the United States constituted itself and reconstituted itself as a nation. As Dan suggested, we are in the midst of a major wave of immigration and, I would add, a major reconstitution of how we think about ourselves as a nation. Immigration density in America is approaching the all-time peak achieved early in the twentieth century (about fifteen percent of the total population). It seems, then, so important to understand this moment both on its own terms and in relation to earlier waves and reconstitutions. It seems important to assess how immigrants are experiencing this moment and how that experience is similar to, or different from, the experience of immigrants in earlier generations. We want to know what impact the immigrants are having on American society and what impact that society is having on them. We seek to understand this moment by drawing on, and drawing together, the various disciplines—history, sociology, anthropology, political science, literature and cultural studies—that have become interested in immigration and have contributed to a common fund of knowledge about it. It is that understanding and drawing together that we hope to achieve in this seminar.



Gerstle

CORNFIELD: The sociological and historical understanding of migration has been linked in part to labor issues. Many labor sociologists and labor historians would have had some connection to immigration because those two issues, theoretically and in practice, were tightly linked. When I was in graduate school as a labor sociologist in training, our chief nemesis in the interdisciplinary field of labor studies would have been economics. As labor sociologists, we were developing an institutional understanding of the pathways to the American dream—what do they look like? Was it individual choice, as the economists were arguing, that accounted for why some people attained the American dream more

rapidly and at a higher level than others, or was it the institutional opportunity structures—the kinds of workplaces, and labor markets, and the way we organize our communities, that made the American dream more accessible to some groups than to others?

In the process of developing an institutional approach to understanding social mobility and the pursuit of the American dream, sociologists began to query, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, a little bit more about how institutions matter, and where they come from. So that is when sociology as a discipline became much more comparative-historical in its approach, opening up, to me, the possibility of having even more dialogue with historians on the history of immigration, labor and the American dream, the impact on identity, the capacity to build new communities, and, not least of all, the capacity to build a dynamic labor movement.

In the late nineteenth century, immigrant labor intellectuals defined some of the parameters of our contemporary policy debates

about inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in society and in the labor movement. There are three immigrant labor intellectuals of the 1900-era who are illustrative, namely, Daniel De Leon from Venezuela, Morris Hillquit from Latvia, and Samuel Gompers from London, England. As labor leaders they were organizing immigrant and native workers to help them to accomplish the American dream, each with a different strategy and philosophy. De Leon represented the most inclusive, internationalist orientation toward immigration—he favored almost completely open borders and the inclusion of all workers regardless of ethnic background in the U.S. labor movement. Morris Hillquit was one of the co-founders with Eugene Victor Debs of the Socialist Party of the United States of America. Hillquit represented a middle ground between the completely inclusive approach and the completely exclusive approach. Samuel Gompers was the forty-year president of the American Federation of Labor, which is the forerunner organization of the AFL-CIO that plays a major role in contemporary labor and immigration policy debates. Gompers represented what was called the restrictionist approach, a very exclusive approach, and was one of the forces behind the famous 1924 federal legislation which curtailed immigration from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, effectively ending the previous wave of immigration to the U.S. Gompers

felt that immigrants from low-wage nations would undermine the wages and working conditions and bargaining strength of skilled, unionized U.S. workers—who, at that time, were not typically immigrants, and therefore he took an exclusive approach to both trade unionism and immigration. That whole debate had remained dormant for a while because immigration all but stopped for about the next forty to fifty years, except for the immigration of Mexican agricultural workers. Then with immigration reforms beginning around 1965, and then later in the 1980s and 1990s, many more immigrants started coming to the United States, this time from many different parts of the world, especially the global south, and, not least of all, Mexico.

LETTERS: Could you discuss, on a local level, Nashville's relationship to immigration and the recent rejection of the English-only law? An off-shoot of that is the differentiation between assimilation and upward mobility. How do you differentiate between those two terms and how important is such a differentiation?

CORNFIELD: Between 1990 and 2006 the average annual unemployment rate for Nashville was a very low 3.9 percent, so we had full employment locally. During that period of time, absorption of newcomers from any background was relatively smooth because under those conditions individuals can picture a pathway toward the American dream. As the economy began to slow down in the early 2000s we started to see more evidence of what is called "nativism," the expression of anti-immigrant attitudes by some members of the local community who became less welcoming, and in some cases hostile, toward immigrants. The 2008–09 English-only mobilization that you are referring to occurred at a time when the economy was slowing down as the population was diversifying dramatically. In 1990, at the beginning of that full-employment period that I described before, there were hardly any immigrants living in Nashville. Two and a half percent of Nashvillians were "foreign-born," the expression of the U.S. Census. By 2007, that percentage had climbed to about twelve percent who were foreign-born. In sociological terms, and in everyday terms, that is considered dramatic social change.

As the economy worsened while this dramatic social change was occurring, for some Nashvillians, the American dream appeared to be increasingly opaque. So the English-only mobilization occurred at a time when that per-

ception of blocked mobility was presumably brewing in Nashville. But the coalition that mobilized to oppose English-only consisted of a wide range of segments of the community. It included a large group of people who philosophically took an inclusive approach to immigration—the same inclusive perspective that would have been taken in the nineteenth century that I described before. And there was another group, sometimes overlapping with the first, who were very concerned about the investment potential and economic future of Nashville as a city. These groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce, view anti-immigrant mobilizations as an ugly deterrent to new business investment in Nashville. From that perspective, and from a philosophical perspective, a fairly wide coalition of people that ordinarily would not coalesce on political issues came together on this issue to oppose English-only. The net result was fifty-seven percent of the voters opposing English-only as a way to define Nashville.

GERSTLE: The defeat of the English-only law was a great victory for Nashville, and an important piece of good news for the nation as a whole during a period marked by growing hostility toward the immigrants in our midst. Throughout American history two rival conceptions of what this nation should be have battled each other for supremacy. One conception put forward America as a refuge for the world's poor, persecuted, and dispossessed. This America welcomed newcomers, promising them the kind of opportunity and freedom denied them in the Old World. From this perspective, America was a place where the poor could become prosperous, where the religiously and politically persecuted could become free, and where the masses could become sovereign. America was a place, too, where any individual could reinvent him or herself in the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment. We should never underestimate the pull of this American dream, and its influence on generations of immigrants, including those who live among us today. At various moments (most of the nineteenth century, for example), too, the United States backed this vision of an inclusive and opportunity-filled America with one of the most liberal immigration policies of any nation in the world.

The other conception of America was radically different: this conception stressed Amer-

ica's exclusivity rather than its inclusivity. America, from this point of view, was a proper destination only for certain kinds of people—Protestants, Europeans, and whites—and should close its doors to other kinds of people—Catholics, Christian Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, Africans, Asians, and other nonwhites who, by reason of religion and race, were deemed unfit for life in America. From this perspective, the American "genius" for liberty, prosperity, and self-government was thought to be rooted either in religion (Protestantism) or in race (whiteness) or both. Groups whose religion or race put them at too great a distance from the Anglo-Saxon ideal were judged incapable of assimilation, of cher-



Cornfield

ishing or practicing American democracy, and of pursuing the American dream. Anti-immigration groups undertook major efforts to exclude these "inferior" and "un-American" peoples from entering the United States and they were frequently successful: The Congress passed laws that excluded East and South Asians from the 1880s to the 1960s, and Eastern and Southern Europeans and Africans from the 1920s to the 1960s. Meanwhile, an obscure naturalization law passed by the first U.S. Congress in 1790 limited citizenship to those immigrants who were "free and white." This law remained in effect for more than one hundred and fifty years, and was used at various times to exclude African, Asian, and Arab immigrants already resident on American soil from becoming citizens of the United States.

The Civil Rights Revolution of the 1960s did a great deal to affirm the universalist conception of America and to undermine the restrictive and racist conception. Indeed the Civil Rights Revolution triggered a remarkable rewriting of the country's immigration laws so as to open the United States to the peoples of the world in ways never accomplished before. The result has been a wave of immigration as significant as any in American history and unprecedented in its racial, religious, and geographic diversity. We are living through, as a result, a major moment of national reconstitution. Any such moment is bound to shake up older notions of national belonging, of what it means to be an American, and of what it is that binds together those who live alongside one another into one nation. These moments are both exciting and stressful times; they inspire hope and generate fear. It is not surprising that both the hope and fear are intense in the South,

a region that is rapidly changing but that still has less experience than many other parts of the country have had in terms of diverse groups of Americans learning to live among each other in conditions of equality. Hope and fear battled each other in the Nashville English-only referendum of January 2009, and hope won. It was a good day for Nashville. Perhaps we will one day look back on this moment, too, as putting efforts at immigration reform in the nation as a whole on a more positive foundation.

LETTERS: Are there any other foundational immigration laws established in the early American period that have changed drastically recently? Are there other laws that were amended or changed between immigration's first wave and the current wave?

GERSTLE: There have been two foundational changes in American immigration law. The first I have already addressed: the elimination of racial restrictions on naturalization and immigration that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s and the consequent reaffirmation of America as a universal nation, welcoming people of every race and nationality. The second has been the abandonment of an almost completely "open borders" approach to immigration and the embrace instead of an immigration regime grounded in restriction. For much of the nineteenth century the United States, then a labor-hungry nation (its economic and political systems still unproven) pursued an open borders approach: the government placed no limits on the number of immigrants who could enter the United States in any given year, and barred almost no groups from immigrating. Quotas did not exist; the illegal alien problem did not exist. In fact, the very category of the "illegal alien" had yet to be invented. That began to change with Chinese Exclusion in 1882, a movement culminating in what Dan has referred to as the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, which limited the number of immigrants outside the western hemisphere who could come to the United States to one hundred and fifty thousand per year, an eighty-five percent reduction in the numbers who had been arriving annually until that time. Those one hundred and fifty thousand slots were distributed among the various nations of the world, with most slots being reserved for the "racially superior" peoples of northwest and northern Europe.

By the 1960s, this "racial quota" system had come to be despised and was scuttled in favor of a system that gave each nation the same number of slots, with preference going to those

who had skills that the United States needed or family members in the United States with whom they wished to be reunited. However, the 1960s reformers gave no thought to returning to the open borders approach of the nineteenth century. They remained committed to the principle of restricting entry; and while they doubled the number of immigrants who could legally enter each year, they put enormous pressure on the available slots by bringing western hemispheric nations under the umbrella of restriction for the first time. Latin American peoples now found their entry into the United States restricted; in some countries, such as Mexico, those desiring to come to the United States from the start vastly exceeded the quota allotted to them. They came anyway, giving rise to the problem of the illegal alien. Today the presence of an estimated ten to twelve million illegal aliens on U.S. soil reveals how much our immigration system has failed; solving the illegal alien problem presents the greatest challenge to U.S. policymakers. The problem emerged as a result of the United States embracing, almost a hundred years ago, an immigration policy grounded in the principle of restriction, meaning that the U.S. would admit only a small portion of those desiring to come to America. In restricting immigration in this way the United States departed in a fundamental way from the open borders policy it pursued for much of the nineteenth century.

One law that profoundly affects the immigrant families in the United States has not changed since its inception. This is the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, passed by Congress in 1866 and ratified by the states in 1868. Section one of that Amendment states that “all persons born...in the United States...are citizens of the United States.” Soon after this amendment passed, this question arose: if an immigrant mother who was barred from becoming a citizen by reason of race or illegal entry to the United States gave birth to a child on U.S. soil, was this child nevertheless a citizen of the United States by the terms of the Fourteenth Amendment? In the 1890s the Supreme Court answered this question with a resounding yes. Since that time groups of immigration critics have often protested this Supreme Court decision and the language of the fourteenth Amendment on which it is based. One hears this criticism today when a Pat Buchanan or Lou Dobbs talks about a Mexican mother illegally entering the United States simply to give birth to a child on U.S. soil, thus giving that child U.S. citizenship—and the family a lasting claim on America. But I think we are actu-

ally much better off having had that law on the books, because over time it has been a spur toward integration and belonging, toward making Americans out of groups whose initial arrival was greeted with suspicion and disdain. It has certainly been preferable to the situation that prevailed in several European countries across the middle and late decades of the twentieth century, where groups of non-European immigrants (such as Turks in Germany) were barred from citizenship and belonging across generations. There the children and grandchildren of immigrants had no more chance of becoming citizens than the original immigrants themselves. The creation of a caste-like group of perpetual outsiders generates deep alienation and rancor over the long term, to the detriment not simply of the ethnic population, but of the entire society in which they reside. The Fourteenth Amendment has made it possible for the United States, for the most part, to escape this “perpetual outsider” phenomenon.

Permit me, if I may, to use the reference to integration and belonging to return to a question you presented to us early on about how to understand the relationship of assimilation and upward mobility. To rephrase that question: is assimilation necessary to upward mobility? In other words, must one conform fully to the culture that one, as an immigrant, finds in America in order to enjoy the fruits of America—first and foremost, economic prosperity and security, and second, a satisfying sense of belonging? Immigrants have always understood that to make it in America, one needed a certain amount of assimilation, especially fluency in English. That is why America has long been the place where foreign languages go to die, making America more of a monolingual society than almost any society on the face of the earth. Ethnic groups have only rarely carried their Old World languages into the third generation. The pattern of striking gains in English fluency and loss of one’s mother tongue is even apparent among Hispanic immigrant communities today, if we measure these patterns across generations.

But if immigrants in past generations were willing to assimilate up to a point, they often resented the heavy-handed assimilationist pressures brought to bear on them by the native-born: Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century hated Protestants for trying to force their children to learn from the King James Bible in public schools. Theodore Roosevelt believed that the celebration of St. Patrick’s Day was an unacceptable affront to American patriotism. Immigrants were pressured to

change their names; to hide their religious practices or else make them conform to the traditions of American Protestantism; to abandon ethnic and food cultures to which they were deeply committed; to conform to images of beauty and comportment that blond-haired, blue-eyed Anglo Saxon Americans were thought to embody. A hundred years ago Henry Ford dramatized the transformation expected of immigrants by staging theatre shows in Dearborn, Michigan, in which his immigrant workers would enter a huge melting pot in the dress of their native lands and emerge at the other end dressed and looking the part of one hundred percent Americans.

Few immigrants became the one hundred percent Americans of Henry Ford’s imagination. Most found ways of maintaining treasured aspects of their ethnic cultures. But most had to do so quietly; few felt able to escape the judgment that somehow they were lesser Americans. Among them resentment at the harshness of the assimilatory pressures directed at them smoldered.

That resentment helps to explain the big cultural change that the civil rights revolution set in motion in the 1960s and the 1970s. The impact of the slogan “Black is Beautiful” was huge, not simply among African Americans but among all Americans whose skin color, religion, or national origins marked them as different from the mainstream. If the group in America that had suffered the worst discrimination and cultural denigration could declare its beauty to the nation, then why could not Latinos, Asians, Italians, Poles, Jews, and others do the same? And if one’s culture was beautiful and valuable, then why should it be scrapped? Should not aspects of it be preserved and melded with the broader American culture? Or perhaps the broader mass culture should be resisted in favor of cultural particularity and diversity? Out of these questions emerged a deep and wide-ranging conversation about the proper relationship between immigrant cultures and national culture, about the virtues and vices of assimilation, about the value of homogeneity versus multiculturalism. The conversation sometimes became angry, even rancorous, but it was never dull, and out of it across the last forty years has emerged a superior understanding of the value of cultural diversity and a belief that America can accommodate a variety of cultures, and indeed, is a richer nation when a variety of cultures flourish within it. Diversity is not a substitute for assimilation; there must be common political principles and a shared culture that bind us together as Americans.

But the space for particularity and difference is much greater than previous generations of Americans thought it could be, and our expectations for how immigrants should and will assimilate have correspondingly changed.

CORNFIELD: The individual and group struggle about identity and how far to assimilate, versus retaining one’s traditional cultural identity and traditions, is like the “fiddler on the roof.” In Nashville, we not only have many fiddlers in the music industry, we have many fiddlers on roofs in the Nashville immigrant communities, who are basically playing the role of defining social identities. My department colleague Professor Jennifer Lena and I have done some local research on the role of immigrant artists in this very process that Gary is talking about, dual identities. We have found that there are two types of immigrant artists’ roles—performing and visual artists. Some immigrant artists are *cultural preservationists*. For these immigrant artists and groups, the threat to immigrant identity is

hyper-assimilation into the U.S. pop culture by the youth of that immigrant group. In this case, the older generation of the immigrant group plays a role of imparting to the younger generation of that immigrant community some of the cultural traditions—language, religion, and food—of the homeland culture. That is the immigrant artist’s cultural-preservationist role.

The other role that the same immigrant artist could play, might be called the *cultural ambassador*, in which case the immigrant artist displays, with great dignity, the cultural traditions of his or her ethnic group in venues of the so-called native or mainstream community. Basically, the ambassador role becomes important to those immigrant groups who experience the most hostile reception from natives, in which case the immigrant artist assuages the hostile native community in order to improve the comfort level and incorporation of the immigrant group in their new home. The immigrant artist is a way for an immigrant community to empower itself and

to fend off either hyperassimilation and loss of the traditions on the one hand, and to fend off hostile receptions from the native community on the other, to try to maximize a mutually beneficial incorporation of newcomers in their new home.

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

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

GERSTLE: I agree! My hope for the seminar is that it will reenact intellectually the creativity that often results from many different immigrant groups coming together and interacting with each other. My hope is that the diverse disciplinary backgrounds and interests that seminar participants will bring to our discussion will yield new ways of thinking about

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

Edward H. Friedman

“A mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled.”—Plutarch

“I had a terrible education. I attended a school for emotionally disturbed teachers.”

—Woody Allen

I came to Vanderbilt in the year 2000, after having taught for twenty-five years, at a small liberal arts college and two large state universities. I had given freshman seminars and beginning and intermediate Spanish language courses, conversation and composition courses, and surveys and other undergraduate literature courses, along with doctoral seminars in the humanities, comparative literature, and Spanish literature, from medieval to postmodern. I thought that I had seen it all, but Vanderbilt has given me more opportunities than ever to teach a broad range of courses with a broad range of students, with results that I can only describe as thrilling for me. (My students would have to speak for themselves, needless to say.)

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

writing, and analyzing literature in a language that is not their first is even more striking. Equally notable is that many of the texts studied date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I cannot help but think of their accomplishments as analogous to the oft-cited allusion to Ginger Rogers as dancing backwards and in high heels.

There are several texts that remain most prominent in my teaching. One is an introduction to Hispanic literature titled, in its short form, *Aproximaciones*, or approaches, which I coauthored with two colleagues from Arizona State University and which is now in its sixth edition. The book likely has influenced (or at least reached) more readers than all my other publications combined. Another is an anthology of Spanish and Spanish-American short stories, called *El cuento: Arte y análisis (The Short Story: Art and Analysis)*, which I have used in class as recently as the spring semester of 2009. In 2006, Jeffrey Ullom of the Department of Theatre at Vanderbilt, who

now teaches at Case Western Reserve University, directed a production of *Wit's End*, my adaptation of *La dama boba* (*The Lady Simpleton*), a play by the brilliant and prolific seventeenth-century Spanish dramatist and poet Lope de Vega and one of the staples of my courses on early modern Spanish theater. It was a privilege to see Professor Ullom's consummate skills at work in showcasing the play and the talents of the actors, who together discovered the heart of the play. (I have published an essay on the process, titled "Wit's Friend; Or, Collaborating with Lope de Vega," but it was the collaboration with colleagues and students at Vanderbilt that truly moved me.)

If I had had to choose a signature text, as it were, that would be Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, published in two parts in 1605 and 1615. At Vanderbilt, I have taught the novel in Spanish and in English, to undergraduate and graduate students. Those who perhaps have astounded me most are the advanced undergraduate students who read the 1000 pages of the narrative in Spanish, together with other literary, critical, and theoretical materials, and who discuss the readings and write about them in Spanish. By the end of the semester, they are—as they always share with me—completely worn out but invigorated by their efforts. I am the facilitator, but they are the achievers, and I feel that what can be considered an ordeal affects them as readers and as thinkers, energizing them imaginatively and, I believe, philosophically. *Don Quixote* is, in my opinion, most fascinating in its treatment of reality, which at times seems to reside in the margins of the novel but is really never far off-center. Readers are, arguably, required to contemplate and reassess their views of perspective, perception, truth, history, and art itself. *Don Quixote* may be the ultimate work-in-progress and self-referential object, and thus the reader cannot help but participate in the creative act. The undergraduate students who undertake this task are likely to be Spanish majors and even more likely to be double majors, combining literary studies with a remarkable variety of other disciplines, and, for me, this diversity of interests makes their reading and reflection especially laudable. Likewise, I am continually amazed by the thoughtful and innovative readings of *Don Quixote* by graduate students, who probably will have the chance to teach Cervantes's novel in one context or another.

Beyond the outstanding students that I have had in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and in the Honors seminars for College Scholars (on "*Don Quixote* and the

Experimental Novel"), I have had the opportunity to teach courses in the Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences (MLAS) program and in the Programs for Talented Youth (PTY), both of which have had a lasting impact on me. While the two groups are radically different in some ways, they are very much alike in others.

The term "working professionals" has been used to describe the participants in the MLAS program. The students in my classes have included doctors, lawyers, businessmen and businesswomen, scientists, and educators, among others. A good percentage are Vanderbilt employees. Those in the program take courses on topics that encompass the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. They are free—and encouraged—to explore a range of areas and to step out of their comfort zones. The program underscores learning for its own sake. The seminar that I have taught in the MLAS program is "*Don Quixote* and the Development of the Novel," which begins in early modern Spain and ends in the U.S. and England in the new millennium. There has been an air of seriousness, excitement, and dedication in each of the classes. The students have responded with enthusiasm to the substantial amount of reading, and they have offered superb comments in group discussions and in weekly written exercises. My contact with these adult learners has given me great faith in—and admiration for—what universities tend to label as "continuing education." It also has given me, as a Hispanist, or specialist in Hispanic studies, the chance to plug my wares, so to speak, by building the course around *Don Quixote*, the novel that best exemplifies my particular strategies for advocating the study, analysis, and appreciation of literature and culture. And, I might add, I have maintained ties with a number of my MLAS colleagues.

My first exposure to the Programs for Talented Youth was a three-week course on *Don Quixote* in the 2008 Vanderbilt Summer Academy. I had a group of seven students from fourteen to sixteen-years-old, each a high achiever and a solid reader. The VSA offers courses for students from middle school through high school, with sessions of from one to three weeks. It was my goal to "move and shake" my band of talented youths, to provide them at this early stage in their academic careers with a taste of literature and literary analysis like nothing they had ever experienced. I had spent a good deal of time on the course design, and I had my favorite novel as the focal text. I had a seminar-sized group and the able assistance of Antón García, a doctoral student

specializing in Renaissance and baroque Spanish literature. I was a man with a plan, an ambitious but doable plan, which included the reading and discussion of about seventy-five pages of *Don Quixote* per day, complemented by a wide-ranging introduction and a selection of short stories, films, and literary concepts. Accustomed to (and certainly spoiled by) motivated students, I was not as fully prepared as I should have been for teenagers to act like teenagers. Four of the students read *Don Quixote* and turned in the daily written assignments according to schedule. Three read more sporadically and did not deliver the written exercises on the due dates. This kept Antón and me on our pedagogical toes and in a state of anxiety. Who was shaking whose world here? We tried to make sure that we filled our many hours of class per day with productive discussion and exercises. We were aided by those students who had accepted the challenge, including several brilliant readers. Each student worked on a final project: an original short story, play, or critical commentary. One student read a story by a contemporary Spanish author and wrote an analysis in Spanish. I must admit that I felt slightly disappointed at the end of the session. I had, of course, wanted to reach everyone, but that had not happened. Still, according to the evaluations, the students had all loved being at Vanderbilt. Not surprisingly, life at the Commons and the social possibilities were able to trump coursework, particularly homework. Still, I got the students through *Don Quixote* without resorting to force—which obviously is not the way to promote a love of literature—and, as a result, they are conversant with the novel and with sophisticated concepts such as metafiction, intertextuality, the implied author, and deconstruction, to name but a few. And they rewarded me with an advanced course in teenage psychology.

The summer course made me want to try again, and the PTY invited me to teach a course in the Weekend at Vanderbilt University (WAVU) program in late March of 2009. The two-day intensive course brings together advanced seventh and eighth graders. I planned a course on the short story. I can only describe the two days as awe-inspiring. The students, aged eleven to thirteen, were unimpressed by the complicated readings, which included stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Guy DeMaupassant, Kate Chopin, and several Spanish and Spanish-American writers, among them Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Ana María Matute, Juan Rulfo, and Rosario Ferré. They had no qualms about articulating their views, and they proceeded with enthusi-

asm, good spirits, and compelling arguments. We read ten stories and saw a film (Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*), and each student wrote an original short story. The students' analyses were nothing short of brilliant, and the combination of dynamism, humor, and intelligence absolutely won me over.

With WAVU under my belt, I eagerly awaited my second VSA session and my course on "Analyzing Fiction: From the Short Story to the Novel" in June of 2009. The group was the same age (twelve to thirteen-year-olds) and the reading selections and film would be repeated, but the course would be a week in length, would feature five additional short stories and a novel (Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*), and all fifteen of those who enrolled were young women. Once more, I ended up having great fun, and I was again enlightened in the tastes and opinions of teens (and tweens). The readings included stories by four women writers—Chopin, Matute, Ferré, and Nella Larsen—chosen before I received the class roster. I was pleased by the critical and original writing and by the academic and personal gifts

of the students. One of my favorite discussions was the half-hour or so in which the students talked about their own reading and film preferences. Besides excelling in their classes, these young women are voracious readers, and they like to choose books that make them feel unique, whether this means books that project worlds and situations similar to their own or entirely different models. The teaching assistant Anna-Lisa Halling, a doctoral student in Spanish, helped me fill in some (wide) gaps in my knowledge of teen topics, specifically those with a feminine twist.

One common feature of the MLAS and PTY options is a broad group of humanities topics: literature, theater, film, art history, philosophy, and on and on. The Masters of Liberal Arts and Science allows mature students to pursue knowledge, to keep learning across the board. The Programs for Talented Youth offer lessons in robotics, forensic anthropology, law, medicine, mathematics, and scientific research on one end of the spectrum and existentialism, the Western canon, creative writing, and the graphic novel on the other. The youthful scholars are able to embark on

academic ventures in an atmosphere that highlights dialogue, the sharing of ideas, and an unapologetic attitude toward the pursuit of excellence. Importantly, the programs convey the message that the humanities play a crucial role in the curriculum and in the choices available. The message that the humanities count may be subliminal, but it is there, at the point at which the older students recognize the advantages of a liberal education on their own and the young students are, conceivably, most impressionable.

As I review my years at Vanderbilt, I see my classes in Spanish and comparative literature as a center of sorts, with MLAS and PTY as concentric circles that enhance and enrich my teaching and learning curves. These programs broaden the bases of the Vanderbilt community. On one level is renewal through continuing education. On the other is an effort to "get them while they're young" and to win them over for life. This is good for them, good for the humanities and other disciplines, and, hardly unexpectedly, good for the instructor. In the words of Ira Gershwin, "nice work if you can get it."

Poet Rosanna Warren to Present Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture

Rosanna Warren, University Professor, Emma Ann MacLachlan Metcalf Professor of the Humanities, and Professor of English and Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at Boston University, will present this year's Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture at 4:10 p.m. on Thursday, October 29th in the Moore Room on the second floor of the Vanderbilt Law School.

Professor Warren, a renowned poet and critic, and the daughter of the writers Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark, is the author most recently of a book of literary criticism, *Fables of the Self: Studies in Lyric Poetry*. Her books of poetry include *Snow Day*, *Each Leaf Shines Separate*, *Stained Glass*, and *Departure*. Professor Warren has received several awards and honors for her work, including the Pushcart Prize, the Award of Merit in Poetry and the Witter Bynner Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the May Sarton Prize, the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Ingram Merrill

Foundation Award, a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, the "Discovery" *The Nation* Award, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies. Most recently, she was a fellow at the New York Public Library's Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers. Professor Warren served as Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1999–2005. In 1997 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2005 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

The Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture Series was established in 1994 through the endowment of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Nash, Jr., and Mr. and Mrs. George D. Renfro, all of Asheville, North Carolina. The lecture honors Harry C. Howard Jr. (B.A., 1951) and allows the Warren Center to bring an outstanding scholar to Vanderbilt annually to deliver a lecture on a significant topic in the humanities.



Rosanna Warren

Black Europe: Diasporic Research in/on Europe

The Warren Center is pleased to announce that the capstone project of the 2007–2008 Faculty Fellows Program is a twelve minute documentary film highlighting their topic of study, “Black Europe: Diasporic Research in/on Europe.” The film, written and produced by Lyle Jackson, encapsulates the group’s year-long examination of the newly emergent study of the unique experience of people of African descent in Europe. Entitled “Black Europe: African Presence in the Formation of Europe,” the piece demonstrates the group’s diverse academic fields and approaches to the study of Black Europe, and vibrantly depicts current and historical representations of race, identity, and origins. The debut film screening was held at the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center on March 18, 2009.

Furthermore, the Warren Center and the Program in African American and Diaspora Studies are very pleased to note that we will be distributing copies of the path-breaking documentary this fall to all high schools in the state of Tennessee, both public and private. We are

working closely with Brenda Ables, the Director of Social Studies Support Services at the Tennessee Department of Education, to make this contribution possible. Each school will receive a DVD, as well as access to the film on the state-wide digital library. The film will be made available on Vanderbilt University’s iTunes U as well. This contribution to the students and teachers of Tennessee is made possible through the combined resources of the Warren Center and the Program in African American and Diaspora Studies. This has been a rewarding educational collaboration between our two programs and we look forward to future successful collaborations as well.

The 2007–2008 Fellows Program was co-directed by Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. (philosophy and African American and diaspora studies)



Giulia de Medici

and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (African American and diaspora studies, women’s studies and French). Participants in the 2007–2008 Faculty Fellows group were Devin Ferguson (history), Kathryn T. Gines (philosophy and African American and diasporic studies), Catherine A.J. Molineux (history), Ifeoma C.K. Nwankwo (English), and Hortense Spillers (English). The William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow for the year was Tina Campt (women’s studies, Duke University). Visiting speakers who are also featured in the film include Alison Blakely (African American studies, Brown University), Perry Brug (psychology, Saint Mary’s University College), Angela Y.

Davis (history of consciousness and feminist studies, University of California, Santa Cruz), Trica Keaton (American studies, University of Minnesota), and Jemima Pierre (African American studies, University of Texas).

2010–2011 Warren Center Fellowship Opportunities

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

The 2010–2011 Faculty Fellows Program will be co-directed by Bonnie J. Dow (Communication Studies) and Laura M. Carpenter (Sociology) and will focus on the topic “Representation and Social Change.” The seminar will explore the complex and multidirectional relationship between representation and social change. In our current globalized and mediated culture, experiences of social change are commonly communicated through a variety of representational means, and the reach and influence of mass communication increases the possibility that representations can be used to create social change as well as to reflect it. Yet today’s conditions are not unique—historical examples abound of instances in which representations of circumstances and events, once disseminated, have both communicated and facilitated social change.

The seminar will include participants who study a broad range of representation, including verbal, visual, and other material means.

These categories could stretch from literature to music to images, both moving and still (including technological representations such as magnetic resonance imaging, sonograms, as well as digital media), and also to material culture (sculpture, pottery, grave goods). “Social change” is likewise understood broadly. It may manifest in activism, policy, or politics, but it also operates at the level of identity, lifestyle, and culture. While emphasizing participants’ concrete research projects that focus on the relationship between representation and social change, the seminar also will encourage interrogations of the meaning and nature of representation and of social change as contested concepts in and of themselves.

The Warren Center will sponsor a Visiting Fellow with expertise in the area of study, in addition to selected members of the Vanderbilt faculty. Information regarding the internal and external application process can be obtained from the Warren Center or its website, www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center.

The Warren Center will also sponsor an interdisciplinary year-long Graduate Student Fellows Program. Vanderbilt University graduate students in the traditional humanities

departments or those whose work is of a humanistic nature are invited to apply for the seven dissertation-completion fellowships. The fellowship provides a stipend as well as a modest research fund. Students are not allowed to hold any other form of employment during the term of the fellowship. Graduate Student Fellows are expected to complete and defend their dissertations before the start of the next academic year.

The Graduate Student Fellows will meet in weekly seminars at the Warren Center, giving presentations from their work to the seminar and discussing texts of common interest. The Warren Center will also arrange for a number of visiting speakers to meet with the seminar during the year to provide opportunities for discussion of issues pertinent to scholarly life, such as the art of writing, successful strategies for publication, funding opportunities, grant writing, and workshops on delivering academic presentations. Each Warren Center Graduate Student Fellow will give a public lecture in the spring term. Fellows will also be expected to be active participants in the life of the Warren Center during their fellowship year.

Immigration and the American Experience: 2009–2010 Warren Center Faculty Fellows

DANIEL B. CORNFIELD is a professor in the sociology and political science departments. He has published, edited and co-edited several articles and books including “Immigrant Arts Participation: A Pilot Study of Nashville Artists” in *Engaging Arts: The Next Great Transformation of America’s Cultural Life* (Routledge, 2008), and *Labor in the New Urban Battlegrounds: Local Solidarity in a Global Economy* (Cornell University Press, 2007). He is a commissioner on the Metro Nashville Human Relations Commission. He is the Spence and Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow and will co-direct the Warren Center Fellows Program.

KATHERINE M. DONATO is the chair of the department of sociology and the director of the Program in Medicine, Health, and Society. Her research interests include migration between Mexico and the United States, immigrants in the U.S. economy, and ethnic and gender stratification. She has authored and co-authored numerous articles including “The Cat and Mouse Game at the Mexico-U.S. Border: Gendered Patterns and Recent Shifts” in *International Migration Review* (2008) and “Shifts in the Employment Conditions of Mexican Migrant Men and Women: The Effect of U.S. Immigration Policy” in *Work and Occupations* (2008).

GARY GERSTLE is the James G. Stahlman Professor of American History. His research interests include immigration, nationality and race, and the role of class in social and political life. He has authored and co-authored several books including *Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy* (Harvard, 2005), and *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 2001), which won the 2001 Saloutos Prize for outstanding work in immigration and ethnic history. He is the Jacque Voegeli Fellow and will co-direct the Warren Center Fellows’ Program.

JONATHAN T. HISKEY is an associate professor in the department of political science. His research includes studies in high migration communities in Oaxaca, Mexico and Cochabamba, Bolivia. His most recent articles include “Exit Without Leaving: Political Disengagement in High Migration Municipalities in Mexico” in *Comparative Politics* (2008) and “The Political Economy of Subnational Economic Recovery in Mexico” in *Latin American Research Review* (2005). He has co-edited, with Katharine Donato, a forthcoming issue of *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Sciences*, which explores migration patterns across Latin America.

KEVIN M. LEANDER is an associate professor of language and literacy in the department of teaching and learning at Peabody College. His research interests include immigration and its relationship to new media including the relationship between online and offline social practices, human geography, and social practices with digital literacies and new media. He has authored and co-authored several articles including “They Took out the Wrong Context: Uses of Time-Space in the Practice of Positioning” (2008), and has co-edited *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2004).

IFEOMA C.K. NWANKWO is an associate professor of English. Her books include *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), and the forthcoming *Rhythms of the Atlantic World: Rituals, Remembrances, and Revisions* (Michigan, 2009). In her current project “Voices from Our America: African American Worldviews” she examines the interactions of Latin American, Caribbean, and African immigrant populations.

EFREN O. PÉREZ is an assistant professor in the department of political science whose research interests include race, ethnicity, and anti-immigrant opinion. He has most recently co-authored the chapter “Rebuilding Black Voting Rights Before the Voting Rights Act” in *The Voting Rights Act: Securing the Ballot* (Congressional Quarterly Press, 2005). He has several articles under review, and is working on an article titled “Juan for All: Implicit Attitudes and Public Opposition to Immigration.”

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

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

2009–2010 Warren Center Graduate Student Fellows

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

GESA FRÖMMING is a doctoral candidate in German whose dissertation, “The Musical Moment,” is an exploration of how the ancient trope of melancholy’s musical redemption is re-inscribed into late eighteenth-century thought. Her work examines how, in an age that increasingly locates melancholy’s causes in the defects of social and political life, a phantasmagoric male subject emerges to which the hope for melancholy’s political overcoming is bound. Analyzing moments of musical catharsis in a variety of works, she argues that this anti-melancholic sovereignty reveals itself in the very moment of its musical overcoming to be inseparably blended with ideals of rigid self-control that themselves prove to be responsible for the melancholic malady in question.

PATRICK JACKSON, American Studies Fellow, is a doctoral candidate in history whose dissertation is entitled “Evangelicals and American Political Culture, 1925–1978.” He is interested in the interchange where philosophy, religion, and politics meet, and his dissertation investigates American conservative evangelical political thought and action in the years between the Scopes Trial in 1925 and the elec-

tion of Jimmy Carter as U.S. President. Jackson presented a talk entitled “Martin Luther King Jr. and the ‘Stonewall’ of Presuppositionalism: The Historical Imagination of the Religious Right” at the 2008 American Historical Association annual meeting.

SARAH E. KERSH is currently a doctoral student in English. Her dissertation, “Naked Novels: Victorian Amatory Sonnet Sequences and the Problem of Marriage,” examines the ways nineteenth-century sonnet sequences reshape expectations of Victorian desire, love, and marriage. Through readings of British poetry from the mid-nineteenth century through the *fin de siècle*, she draws connections between the strict formula of the sonnet and the strict bond of Victorian marriage so as to problematize both the poetic form and the legal institution. Prior to being named a Robert Penn Warren Fellow, Sarah received funding for graduate school through the Jacob K. Javits Foundation.

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

ELIZABETH S. MEADOWS is a doctoral candidate in English. She studies Victorian literature and culture, visual culture, and the-

ories of gender and sexuality. She has received the Robert Manson Myers Graduate Award in the department of English. In her dissertation, “Morbid Strains: Obsession and Spectacle in Victorian Literature from *In Memoriam* to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” she argues that an important grouping of Victorian authors use morbid themes and forms to work out the relation between the aesthetic and the social in a culture increasingly dominated by new forms of production, reproduction, and circulation.

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

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

THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

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For a listing of Warren Center programs and activities, please contact the above address or visit our Web site at www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center.

Statement of Purpose

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

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

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Warren Center Staff Change

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

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

“Immigration and the American Experience”

continued from page 5

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

CORNFIELD: I look forward to a spontaneous, dynamic interchange. I have a fascination with the intellectual history of different disciplines because to me each discipline represents a way of thinking, and what better way

to try to discern that, even to assimilate it to some degree, than through a discussion of immigration?

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



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