Dear Students, Alumni, and Friends of American Studies,

Welcome to the second edition of our annual newsletter, “Main Currents.”

As I write in April, spring is in full color here with drifts of Texas bluebonnet, paintbrush, desert primrose, and coreopsis blazing the hillsides.

Austin—as you all know—is perhaps the prettiest place in the world at this time of year.

We’ve had an exciting and fruitful year in the department. In conjunction with the Center for Mexican American Studies, we have successfully recruited Dr. Deborah Vargas to join our faculty in Fall 2008. An alumna of UT for her undergrad-uate degrees in Advertising and Ethnic Studies, Dr. Vargas has written widely on Latina cultural pro-duction, popular culture, queer theory, feminist theory, and music. She is currently preparing her book manuscript on Tejana singers for publication.

We are delighted to welcome Dr. Vargas to the department. I am also happy to report that there will be additional hiring initiatives in the next academic year.

During the past year, we have expanded the scope of our departmental community on campus by creating an affiliated faculty. Comprised of interdis-ciplinary scholars and teachers from departments across the University, our affiliated faculty serves as a generous resource for our students. All have worked with our students as committee members and/or teachers. In conjunction with our affiliated faculty, we have launched a new “Friends of American Studies” luncheon series, in which an affiliated faculty member presents her/his work to American Studies students and faculty in a relaxing, inti-mate, and conversational setting each month.

Despite a volatile economy and budget crunches of our own, our graduate students continue to do well on the academic job market. At my annual meeting with the deans in the College of Liberal Arts earlier this month, I was pleased to learn that our placement record compares very favor-ably with other departments around the College.

Lastly, I bid you all a fond administrative farewell. After four-and-a-half years as department chair, I will pass the baton to Steve Hoelscher at mid-night on September 1, 2008. Please join me in welcoming Steve. He will be a superb leader. As for myself, I will be on leave until Spring 2010, busyly making sense of my research and writing a book on the cultural and social meanings of the U.S. animal welfare movement, from 1866-1940. Thanks to everyone for all of your support over the years.

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Janet M. Davis
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Stephen Marshall
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Mark C. Smith
Shirley Thompson

Carolyn de la Peña
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Steven Hoelscher
Associate Professor of American Studies and Geography

A mentor of mine from graduate school once told me that second books are often harder to write than the first. Although this struck me as counterintuitive at the time, it sure makes sense to me now, more than a dozen years after I completed my Ph.D. For one thing, in a 300-page dissertation, you’ve got the first draft of the book already completed. Sure, it will need revisions—often substantial revisions in the form of brand new chapters and reconceptualized theories. Still, a first draft is a first draft and that helps a lot. Not so with the second book, in which you usually begin from scratch. Moreover, writing now comes at a time when you’re exhausted by the tenure process and by taking on new responsibilities from which your department— if it’s been kind—has protected you during those stormy pre-tenure years. But pretty soon it becomes equally exhausting to half-heartedly attempt to friends and family that, yes, THE BOOK will be completed “soon.”

What a relief, then, when you can say this honestly. For me, the relief was magnified by the very long time I’ve been working on this project. Although I only began to write systematically after tenure, six years ago, I’ve been working on it piecemeal for much longer. The project has morphed dramatically—since I first conceptualized it and I believe that these changes reflect my own development as an American Studies scholar. I also believe it’s a better book for having gestated slowly as I’ve tried to acquire expertise in a wide range of subject matters, from visual culture studies and postcolonial theory to Native American history.

The resulting book, titled “Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters and Tourist Fantasies in the Wisconsin Dells,” will be published in summer 2008 by the University of Wisconsin Press. In it I explore the complex relationship between photographic images, tourism, and Native Americans in U.S. culture. Entwined in remarkable and enduring ways, Indians and photography appear inseparable: for many non-Native people, photographs represent what is seen to be essentially Indian; while for many Native Americans, getting over the century-old legacy of having their picture taken and used by outsiders for purposes they did not intend is an ongoing struggle. Such photographic encounters can be vividly alive in this rather strange place: the Dells of the Wisconsin River. Long the busiest tourist attraction in the Midwest, the Dells were also the home to generations of Native people, especially the Ho-Chunks (formerly called the Winnebago). There, from the end of the Civil War through the earliest years of the twentieth century, a small-town photographer named H.H. Bennett pictured members of Ho-Chunk in a range of settings. The resulting images have come to define Ho-Chunk culture for many non-Native people, most notably the hundreds of thousands of tourists who annually visit this region.

As interesting as the images are and what they say about the nineteenth-century white culture that produced them, I was even more intrigued with the circumstances surrounding their creation, circulation, and subsequent interpretation. I wanted to know, as the visual archivist Paul Vanderbilt once wrote, about the “life of the pictures: their networks, their adventures, their careers.” Such a perspective meant that I couldn’t rely solely on iconography, or symbolic interpretation, as a method. Much to my good fortune, the heirs to H.H. Bennett maintained voluminous manuscript materials to supplement the more than 7,000 glass plate photographic negatives. By combing through personal correspondence, diaries, financial records, and guidebook publications collected and preserved from the 1860s through the first decade of the twentieth century, I found a window into the production and use of these visually striking images.

That window, though incredibly useful, remained opaque. Written as they were from a non-Native photographer’s point of view naturally make such print sources far from unproblematic. Acknowledging the incomplete nature of written materials thus lead me to a second critical source for my research: the readings of and responses to Bennett’s photographs by contemporary Ho-Chunk elders, language experts, anthropologists, journalists, artists, and historians. Informal and semi-structured interviews conducted over a course of five years and ranging in length from an hour to all day significantly shaped my understanding of these important images, and this book. In the end, Picturing Indians is my attempt to amend the imbalance that has long
characterized the photographic encounter between Native American subjects and white picture-makers. My research demonstrates that, while photography has indeed long served as a technology of domination to subdue indigenous people the world over, it has also worked to provide those very peoples a medium for their own culture's resistance, survival, and renewal.

Recently, I've expanded my interest in race formation and photography to a larger geographic, transnational sphere. This past year, I published an essay on the "color line," a problem that W.E.B. DuBois would later identify as the principal problem of the twentieth century. In thinking through racial legacies of New Orleans, I found that I was drawing on sources that had a lot to do with safeguarding property under duress and maintaining ownership—a sense of belonging—across generations. Contested wills and probate court records; the particularly Gothic inflections of New Orleans literature; and the "(still) haunted aspects of its urban terrain conveyed a powerful sense that, in societies built on slavery, ownership practices and notions of property necessarily become quite gruesome.

In my next project, "Claiming Ownership," I have begun to confront slavery: what I consider to be the most bone-chilling fact of United States history. I am especially interested in the

Shirley Thompson
Assistant Professor of American Studies and African American Studies

This spring finds me in a particularly transitional space. I have recently completed "Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans"—a project that took root in the winter of 1993. On a road trip to San Francisco where I lived at the time, I stopped in New Orleans—a city I remembered vaguely but fondly from family trips taken during my youth. This time—perhaps because I had recently graduated from college and reached what I thought to be the "end of school"—New Orleans seemed to epitomize a feeling of limitless freedom and possibility. However, like the characters in "Easy Rider" (other expectant road-trippers to New Orleans), I soon recognized (though, for me, in a less catastrophic fashion) that this sense of freedom had all limits and costs. Well before Katrina hit in 2005, it was clear that a tourist economy and gentrification had exacerbated the enduring legacies of slavery and white supremacy for New Orleans and its people. New Orleans was hardly the utopia I and other outsiders made it out to be. But still: there was something...

When I returned to graduate school and searched for a suitable dissertation topic, I found it in the richly convoluted archives and literary culture of nineteenth-century New Orleans. There, I could mull over the great American themes that reached an apex in that era: America's rivalry with Europe; the quest for political and racial equality; the challenge of immigration and pluralism; the centrality of self-making; and nature's powerful role in shaping collective identity. I began to realize that New Orleans—far from being merely a "place apart"—served as a testing ground for America's highest aspirations toward justice and equality as well as a laboratory for its most pernicious experiments in injustice and inequality.

New Orleans' Creoles of color, a French-speaking people of African descent, took center stage in my study. In many respects, the shaping American law and culture would take were bound up with the responses of this group to a series of migrations; and to my surprise, it was revealed that the 1860s and the 1870s witnessed a wave of Creoles of color engaged in the Reconstruction and the emergence of de jure segregation. By passing as white, a number of Creoles of color grasped after equality and opportunity on an individual basis. By
Carolyn de la Peña
Associate Professor of American Studies
Director, Program in American Studies
Director, Davis Humanities Institute
University of California Davis

I finished my PhD in 2001 and had the good fortune to be hired at UC Davis as an assistant professor of American Studies. I’m certain that my graduate training was key in securing this job. UT’s AMS has a reputation for broad-based American studies inquiry deeply grounded in American history. Both areas were priorities for the committee hiring me. There was, however, quite a bit of luck in it as well. The committee was looking for an AMS scholar who worked on material culture and technology—just my area of research. It was, in fact, the only job I applied for since few that year fit my area of expertise. Instead, I found a job working as a branding/marketing consultant in Boulder, and was looking forward to using my cultural and historical training to research product innovations and consumer behavior. The Davis interview took place with a three-month-old baby and husband in tow. I was not the only candidate. After going through the rigorous process, we were offered the job. I started the following summer of 2001.

I’ve been exceptionally fortunate at Davis to have found a program, colleagues, administrators, and a broader campus that have valued my academic training and scholarly priorities. My book came out in 2003. I was tenured in 2005. I worked hard, and was helped enormously by supportive senior colleagues. This year I became department chair. I was also appointed, at the same time, director of the Davis Humanities Institute. Instead of teaching I am, for the next three years, “matchmaking” between individual humanities faculty to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and advocating for the humanities on our campus and with outside funding agencies. My American Studies training at UT Austin prepared me to succeed within the numerous contexts of a large public university. I learned how to find my own scholarly voice, how to work across multiple disciplines, how to creatively take advantage of opportunities available, and how to encourage my students to ask and answer the “so what” question.

It’s no accident that I’m doing these jobs fairly early in my career. After all, I was trained at UT, at which scholars are forced to be quick on their feet. I TA’d and RA’d in three departments because I came in without funding (note: this did not please me at the time). I read 350 books in four areas for my oral (again, not a fan at the time). Because there weren’t always courses I wanted to take in AMS, I learned from historians, literary scholars, anthropologists, RTF theory heads. (Or I should say I learned by venturing out into these courses and then critiquing them with my AMS cohort.) As a result, it’s been easy here at Davis to collaborate with historians of science and technology across anthropology, sociology, history and the arts. And these collaborations have frequently led me to pitch the value of a cultural approach to science and technology beyond the humanities on campus. And after pitching for long enough, to enough people, I’ve ended up directing a major institute with not insignificant resources.

American Studies at UT has served me well thus far because of what it did and did not give me. I remember as a first year grad student in the mid 1990s lamenting that I wasn’t getting more theory. I wanted...
But sitting from the vantage point of the Davis Humanities Institute I see now that by not telling me who I should be in American Studies the program forced me to find my own answers—and constantly keep them in conversation with others. Both are essential for humanities scholars in public universities today. Because I assumed it would be hard to find a job, and the answers wouldn’t come by osmosis, I looked around at the ASA, at other disciplines, at what was out there at all sorts of conferences. I learned how to fit in multiple contexts: how to tell people why the questions we’re trained to ask matter. So did others: my cohort members are today in departments as diverse as Gender Studies, Art History, English, Communication and American Studies. We’ve done innovative work, and we’ve pushed our field to take more seriously the things we care about because we know it matters. We figured it out the hard way. I couldn’t be more thankful for what UT did and didn’t do for me. And I couldn’t have more admiration for the scholars those in my cohort have become. I’m reminded every time we close down the lobby bar at ASA, after a night of whip-smart, hilarious, soul-enriching hang time, that we all got precisely what we needed at UT. 75

Benita Heiskanen
American Studies Ph.D. Alumna
Assistant Professor
Center for American Studies,
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“Benita Heiskanen
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For the next four years, my life revolved around boxing. I was either at the gym...or transcribing interviews.”

Benita Heiskanen
American Studies Ph.D. Alumna
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For the next four years, my life revolved entirely around boxing. I was either at the gym, at boxing shows or on road-trips, interviewing and transcribing interviews; or at the library scanning newspaper articles, or doing research in archives; or at the gym, skimming through the fight newspapers, or at the gym writing. This gave me the discipline I needed for my dissertation. I stumbled upon my dissertation topic by accident. Looking back on it in hindsight, the project was anything but an accident; it was a product of consistent dialogue with faculty and other graduate students. On my Fulbright application to UT, I had proposed to write my dissertation on the late Tejano singer Selena Quintanilla Perez, but from early on, my coursework seemed to be steering toward other directions. My second semester, I took Bill Stott and J.B. Colson’s “Documentary Explorations,” where American Studies and Photojournalism students teamed up to do fieldwork together; that is where I was first introduced to ethnography as a research method. My side-kick Jorge Sanhueza-Lyon and I chose to do our fieldwork on boxing after we found out that there was a boxing show coming up in town. I had not been involved with boxing for some time, but I knew the sport well from my childhood, as I grew up on fight circles in Finland, following my brother’s amateur and professional career in the 1970s and 1980s. With a background in martial arts, I soon started working out at a local gym, still unaware that I would end up writing my dissertation on boxing. In point of fact, when I was contemplating a topic for Janet Davis’s “U.S. Popular Culture and Empire,” I proposed to write my paper on Muhammad Ali’s racial rhetoric in the “Rumble in the Jungle” fight with George Foreman in 1974 thinking that “this could be the last time I’ll get to do anything fun before the dissertation.” The conference presentation that resulted from that paper prompted some encouraging signals from members of the faculty—in particular Jeff Melnik and John Park—but it was Neil Foley’s remark that was the ultimate eye-opener for me: “You know so much more about boxing than you know about Tejano music.”

For the next four years, my life revolved entirely around boxing. I was either at the gym, at boxing shows or on road-trips, interviewing and transcribing interviews; or at the library scanning newspaper articles, or doing research in archives; or at the gym, skimming through the fight newspapers, or at the gym writing. This gave me the discipline I needed for my dissertation.
fieldwork and life-story interviews with a community of Latino boxers who grew up and began their careers in East Austin. Their life stories were situated within the sport's everyday culture—such as the bars, boxing gyms, and fight venues—as sites of being and becoming. My point was to discuss how boxing identities were formed in the research to the everyday locations where the sport is organized, while situating the ongoing Latinization of boxing within the ethnic-cultural history of U.S. prizefighting at large. However, conducting research within the world of professional boxing, infamous for its questionable everyday maneuverings, brought up some unavoidable ethical challenges: how to deal with the business side of the sport; how to represent one’s sources accurately and fairly; and how to operate within the social power plays? Nevertheless, despite all these challenges, the real-life interactions were key to pointing out the complexity of boxing: that it is not just a professional sport but also a form of racialized bodily labor, a lucrative business, an instrument politics, and an ideological tool—a starting point for my book manuscript, “Tie-to-Toe: The Bodily Labor of Boxing.”

Eight years after Bill Stott’s class, then, I am still working on boxing. By accident? I don’t think so. Steve Pyne
American Studies Ph.D Alumnus Regents’ Professor of Life Science Arizona State University

The first thing to know is that I decided to apply the training I received to the subject that most intrigued me, fire.

The second point may be equally illuminative. I didn’t know what I was doing. What became “Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildfire in the West” was a sullen sort of an afterthought; it was something that mattered less in its own right than in its place as the book’s second in a trilogy, a trilogy hinging on the axial theme of fire packs and pulexias. But it did two things that were striking. One was the (pardon the breast-beating) Promethean task of bringing fire to history, in retrospect it’s weird that no one had written at length about our species monopoly over flame, a unique power that speaks to who we are as few things can.

The other oddity was making fire an active presence. I tried to animate fire without anthropomorphizing it. I determined not to use fire as a case study for one historiographical thesis or another, but to allow it to be an organizing presence throughout the text. In effect, I would make fire as central to the long chronicle of humanity as it was to the seasonal lives of the Longshots. There was no one to tell me I couldn’t do it.

If you want a third factor (fire guys like to think in terms of triangles), that may be it. I never got properly socialized. I struggled to get into grad school, and then to get a job. My American Studies Program didn’t domesticate me, it did educate me. There was not much of what today might be termed close mentoring but there was enormous enthusiasm for ideas and scholarship, which proved highly infectious, and there was a preference for loose herding that let me range where my interests lay, and thus kept my passion high. Paradoxically perhaps I’ve found that laissez-faire strategy less damaging than meticulous supervision that intends to forestall failure and instead works to prevent success. I’ve always been grateful to William Goetzmann in particular for kindling that spark and leaving it some space in which to spread.

Still, the one real continuity through all this time was life on the Rim. By the time I was hired at the University of Iowa, I was headed to Antarctica for an exciting summer. But if the American Studies Program didn’t domesticate me, it did instruct me. There was n’t much of what today might be termed close mentoring but there was enormous enthusiasm for
What you probably want to know, though, is how I got a MacArthur Fellowship in 1988. I don’t know. I only know that a Coke bottle fell out of the sky one day, and I spent five years wandering around trying to do something with it. Basically, I took the money and ran. I conceived the idea of writing a suite of books that would survey the history of fire on Earth, what I call Cycle of Fire. That series now runs to seven volumes. The world became my finicky. There are a dozen other books outside the Cycle proper, and for the moment, I’ve decided I need to get off the planet. (I’m on enough no-fly lists as it) and I am writing about the Voyager mission through the solar system. Any advice? Course? Warnings? As someone feeling the early terrors of gezeness, I’m wary about haranguing the young. I can only tell you what worked for me: Follow your heart but use your head.

For more information, check out Steve’s website at: http://www.public.asuedu/~ spyne, and for an self-inquiry into what he thinks he does, click the link, “Explain- ing Myself” under Commentaries.

Amy Ware
Doctoral Candidate in American Studies
The University of Texas at Austin

Though I treasure my chosen career, I am equally thankful that it is not American Studies, for it offers a reliable respite from the sometimes-awful social encounters I experience at conferences and other academically charged events. Our department is comprised of easygoing people who wear gracefully between intriguing academic discussion and comfortable conversation, a reminder that one of our department’s greatest strengths is the ability of its faculty, students, and alums.

For me, the height of this occasional professional awkwardness comes after I introduce my dissertation topic. Listeners’ common response—“Who was Will Rogers?”—makes me feel, to say the least, uneasy. In fact, over time I generated a brief biography of the man who stands at the center of my current project. I issue the descriptive disclaimer during conference presentations and conversations with most people—except members of the Western Cherokee Nation, who know my subject quite well. Here is my standard line: Will Rogers was a political pundit and comedian; he was a major force on the vaudeville circuit; he wrote six books and four-thousand newspaper editorials; he hosted a radio show; he starred in seventy-two movies; and he was considered a possible candidate for the presidency in 1924, 1928, and 1932, a movement that was the butt of endless jokes from the entertainer. He was, without a doubt, one of the most influential people of the early twentieth century. And, most important for my purposes, he was a Cherokeee. It’s a mouthful, but it generally sparks interest.

My dissertation integrates Rogers’ cultural contributions to the United States and Cherokee tribal history. In it, I argue that the case of Will Rogers counters scholarly assumptions that Native peoples were largely victims of a popular culture that misrepresented them during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The Western film, Wild West shows, and non-Indian social clubs (such as the Boy Scouts) organized themselves around a generic Indianness that flattened the true diversity and modernity of Native America, which Rogers and Cherokee identity distinguished each of his varied and influential contributions during an era tumultuous for both Natives and Americans.

While my master’s degree in American Indian studies insists that I foreground distinct tribal experiences when studying Native America, my training in American Studies teaches me to interrogate American political, cultural, and artistic trends. The confluence of these approaches molds what to me is an ideal lens through which to study a character such as Will Rogers, who carried tribal traditions into nearly all media outlets of his day. I hope that my project will offer a fresh analysis of an era as seen through the work of one of its most influential—and Native—players. The result is the study of an era articulated through both Cherokee and American experiences.

My research has taken me to various sites and archives in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and California, where I have devoured nineteenth-century tribal newspapers, presidential and congressional papers, Cherokee governmental documents, and the material belongings and cultural possessions of Rogers himself and his homes in Oklahoma and Southern California. Perhaps most influential, however, have been the frequent appearances to the Cherokee Nation, where I year priceless gossip about a man that Americans know.
only as a character. I also listen to the details of Rogers’s family history, as well as the tribal controversies and distinct cultural life of the Indian Territory during the late nineteenth century, when Rogers was just another Cherokees kid in the Territory. Tribal specialists both correct and enhance my work; their input is invaluable and reinforces my belief that history remains both real and essential to many Americans.

Were it not for the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies, my project would be impossible to accomplish with the academic scrutiny it deserves. The diversity of experts represented on my committee, which includes a geographer, a historian, an anthropologist, a sociologist, and an ethnic-studies scholar, demands that I answer to a variety of academic subjects. The limitless scholarly possibilities presented by American Studies will contribute to my future work. The field’s multi-disciplinary approach most accurately represents the varied experiences of U.S. residents of all sorts.

Amy Ware is a Ph.D. candidate in American Studies. Her dissertation is entitled “The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers and the Tribal Genealogies of American Indian.”

Every time I’ve tried to reflect and write about my journey to Vienna this past summer, I’ve been stumped and forced to put it off for another day. How do I even begin to describe the experience? When I first mentioned to my father the idea of traveling with Professor Hoelscher to Vienna, I never thought it would become a reality, and I never thought that the experience would be so rich and memorable that I have thought about that great city everyday since my return. Many people ask me now I could study American Studies in Vienna and before I left, I didn’t really have an answer for them. Studying in Vienna not only opened my eyes to a great culture, but it also opened my eyes to flexibility of the American Studies way of learning. American Studies is not just about learning American History; it is about looking at history through the eyes of the culture and the people involved in the history, not through historians who analyze events with the clear 20/20 vision of hindsight. In Vienna, Professor Hoelscher gave us the ability to apply the principles of American Studies, to the wonderful, diverse cultural history of Vienna. I didn’t know much about Vienna or its history when I arrived, but I was eager to learn everything that I could and soak up as much of its rich culture as possible.

Our class, Vienna: Memory and the City, focused on the way people of Vienna have remembered their history and important historical events, and the way in which that memory has lived on today. Our class studied many different aspects of the Viennese culture from classical music, to architecture, to art, to politics, and to even the layout of the city. In every lecture, we asked ourselves “why?,” so that maybe we could better understand how this city came to be as it is now.

Although our class met everyday, we were all encouraged to use our spare time to explore the city on our own and create our own impression and our own unique “memory of the city.” The most moving and emotional experience I had was my first visit to the Vienna Philharmonic. The splendor of the venue and the amazing ability of the performers moved me to tears as I was reminded of my grandfather who used to be a violinist for the New York Philharmonic. This is a memory that will always come to mind when I think of my time in Vienna.

Hilary Lane
Undergraduate Major in American Studies
The University of Texas at Austin

“My memory of Vienna is something that I can carry around forever, it is like a secret that no one knows about”

Hilary Lane

Undergraduate Student

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Robert Abzug was appointed Director of the new Schusterman Center of Jewish Studies at the University, a major research and curriculum initiative that will involve the integration of Jewish Studies courses and schools across the disciplines in the College of Liberal Arts and the University. Abzug envisions a major focus of the Center to be on Jewish history, life, and culture in the Americas—the United States, Canada, and Latin America—an emphasis that has already attracted national attention. On the scholarly side, he hopes to put the final touches on a biography of Rollo May, the American psychologist, within the year. He is also well into the creation of an annotated and abridged edition of William James’ “The Varieties of Religious Experience”, under contract to Bedford/St. Martin’s Press.


Other memories were not so joyous. Our trip to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp near Linz, Austria was just as emotional as my experience at the Philharmonic, but in a different way. I have studied World War II and knew all about what happened behind the walls of a Concentration Camp, but actually being there, inside the gas chamber where people were packed in to be killed, walking the infamous 186 stairs the prisoners had to climb with a 150 pound block of stone on their backs, all made me fully realize the extent of the suffering undergone by the prisoners. The entire time I was at Mauthausen I felt like a cloud of dread was filling my head with sorrow and I felt like I would never smile again, even though the backdrop of the concentration camp was a breathtaking Austrian countryside on a sunny afternoon.

From the Vienna Philharmonic, to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp, the range of emotions I felt while in Austria reflected the emotions of the Austrians through their triumphs and tragedies during their long and extensive history.

But, what is my memory of the city of Vienna? I don’t believe I will ever really have a complete answer to that question. This is what I do know: as I walk around The University of Texas campus, one of my favorite places in the world, I tend to look at everything differently. I look at the Tower, the beacon of The University, and compare it to Stephansdom in the heart of Vienna as the city’s icon. As I walk through the South Mall, I sometimes imagine that I am walking down Kämmererstraße on my way to German class in the baroque palace that houses the Institut für Europäischen Studien (IES), our academic base in Vienna. Most of all, as I look at the passing students, I realize how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to study and live in Vienna. My memory of Vienna is something that I get to carry around with me forever; it is like a secret that no one knows about. Some people say that they study abroad to “find themselves.” I don’t think that I found myself in Vienna, but what I did discover is a culture unlike anything that I have ever experienced, one that is definitely not American. It...
Elizabeth Engelhardt, along with graduate students Marsha Abrahams, Marvin C. Bendele, Gavin Benke, Andrew M. Busch, Eric Covey, Dave Croke, Melanie Haupert, Carly A. Kocurek, Rebecca Orion, Lisa Powell, and Remy Ramirez, completed the manuscript for Stories Beyond the Brisket: The Life and Times of Central Texas Barbecue, forthcoming from University of Texas Press (2009). She is currently at work on A Mess of Greens: Gender and Food in the US South.

Steven Hoelscher has completed his book, Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters and Tourist Fantasies in H. H. Bennett’s Wisconsin Dells (University Wisconsin Press, 2008.) In addition, Professor Hoelscher has been swept up by the “transnational turn” in American Studies. He was a Plenary Keynote Speaker at the 2007 symposium, Beyond the Nation: U.S. History in Transnational Perspective Conference, sponsored by the German Historical Institute. During May and June, he led 16 students—most of whom were American Studies majors—to Vienna, Austria, where he taught a course on historical memory in that city. And in September, he presented lectures at the Museo de Arte in San Salvador, El Salvador, and at the Centro Cultural de España, Guatemala, on the theme of Historical Memory and Photography in Post-War Central America. His essay on this topic, “Photography, Urban Space, and the Historical Memory of Atrocities,” was published in So That All Shall Know: Para que todos lo sepan: Photographs of Daniel Hernandez Salazar (University of Texas Press, 2007).


Jeff Meikle served as an external doctoral examiner at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim in November 2007. Continuing in this Nordic vein, in May 2008 he will present papers at the biannual conference of the European Association for American Studies in Oslo and at the biannual Maple Leaf & Eagle conference in Helsinki. His article “From Kevorkian to Kaurismäki: Defining a Transatlantic neo-Beat Aesthetic” has just been published in an anthology by the Remwall Institute in Helsinki. He is currently writing a book on the cultural significance of American landscape view postcards published during the 1930s and 1940s.

Stephen Marshall’s current research focuses on the role of American Jeremiad within African American political thought by exploring the creative appropriations and reformulations of this idea by African American activists, artists, and philosophers addressing the legacies of slavery, segregation, and its aftermath. This project grew out of a larger study of the problem of political evil as it is formulated by writers within the canon of western political philosophy. He is presently completing the two manuscripts that correspond to these two projects. Both of these projects informed the symposium Dr. Marshall organized in late February dealing with the cultural and political significance of the candidacy of Barack Obama.

In the past year, Julia Mickenberg has given talks at the annual meetings of the Organization of American Historians, the Children’s Literature Association, and the American Studies Association, and also as an invited lecturer at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center and Syracuse University. She is currently writing the “Children’s Literature” entry for the Cambridge History of the American Novel, and has just agreed to co-edit “with Lynne Vallone” the “Oxford Handbook of Children’s Literature”, which will be published in 2010. Taking things in a very different direction, Julia is also studying the Russian language for a book project underway on the “New Woman” and the “New Russia.” In conjunction with that project she will be a fellow in the Humanities Institute 2008-2009 seminar on Ethical Life in a Global Society. Her “Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children’s Literature,” which she is editing with Philip Nel, will be published this fall. Julia has also taken over the job of Graduate Advisor in the department.

Mark Smith has been giving lectures on drug policy and reform for One Day University, an adult education organization giving sessions in the Northeast. He is one of the few non-Ivy League professors and the only one west of Philadelphia to participate. Princeton published his article “A Tale of Two Charities: Political Science, History, and Civic Reform, 1890-1940” in the anthology Modern Political Science. His essay “The Uncivilized Nature of Pain: Twilight Sleep in Childbirth and the Treatment of Addiction” given at the
Fourth International Conference on History of Drugs and Alcohol should be published soon. This semester he has been teaching a new graduate seminar reflecting his shift of interest into an earlier period, “The End of American Innocence: Americans Face Modernity, 1890-1920.”

Shirley Thompson’s book “Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans” is due out this fall from Harvard University Press. She is also in the midst of teaching two new courses that will help her conceptualize her new project on property in African American culture: a graduate course entitled “Race, Law, and U.S. Society” and an undergraduate course entitled “People, Places, and Things: Property in American Culture.”


Andrew Busch passed his oral exam, defended his prospectus, and was part of the barbecue project, which recently submitted a manuscript to the University of Texas Press. He will hopefully be teaching an urban history class next year and is beginning research on his dissertation, which focuses on urban growth within a global, postindustrial framework.

Eric Covey is currently finishing his Master’s project on In-N-Out Burger. He will present his report at the California American Studies Association Conference in Aliso Viejo, California in April 2008. In the past year he wrote entries for Greenwood Publishing Group’s Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage and The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food Industry and helped collect oral histories for The Southern BBQ Trail, a Southern Foodways Alliance project.

Rebecca D’Orsogna received one of the UT Liberal Arts Graduate Research Fellowships. This award will fund archival research at The King Center for Non-Violence in Atlanta, GA, where she hopes to find pamphlets and newsletters from various Civil Rights organizations that explain Gandhian principles of non-violence to members of the community. She will also be presenting a paper on the work of Frances Hodgson Burnet at the 2008 CEA meeting.

Irene Garza presented her paper, “Por La Paz y La Justicia: La Placita, Sanctuary, and the Politics of Faith in Los Angeles, 1981-2007” at the annual National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) conference held in March 2008. In addition to her duties on the American Studies Graduate Student Committee, Irene has been volunteering at Casa Marianela—an Austin based non-profit that works with immigrants from Central America. This summer, she will continue her work as a legislative consultant to the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles (CHIRLA).

John Gronbeck-Tedesco is a recipient of the 2007-2008 Donald D. Harrington Dissertation Fellowship. His dissertation, “Reading Revolution: Cuban Politics in the American Cultural Imagination, 1930-1970,” addresses the impact of the 1933 and 1959 Cuban revolutions on U.S. culture in the fields of foreign policy, social movements, and civil rights during this period. His work draws upon both U.S. and Cuban sources, including those culled from research trips to Havana, Cuba.

Andi Gustavson is currently finishing her Master’s project on Studs Terkel. She is a member of the American Studies Graduate Student committee and is just beginning a oral history research project centered on the amateur photography of veterans from the Vietnam War.

Vicky Hill will present a paper titled “Postwar Psychology, Class, and ‘Middle Classlessness’” this June at the biannual conference hosted by the Center for Study of Working Class Life. She also published three encyclopedia entries, “Conspicuous Consumption,” “Contradictory Class Location,” and “Loved Milwauked” in The Historical Encyclopedia of Class in America, edited by Robert E. Weir (Greenwood Press, 2007).

Joshua Holland has just finished with coursework and is reading for his comprehensive examinations. At the same time, he is refining his masters work for potential publication. His MA
Jacqueline Smith received a 2007 American Historical Association (AHA) Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is currently co-authoring an essay on Oprah Winfrey. She also co-facilitated the faculty roundtable discussion for the annual American Studies Graduate Student Conference and worked to bring keynote speaker, Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Jacqueline was awarded the Liberal Arts Graduate Research Fellowship for upcoming archival work on African-American women entrepreneurs and visual documentarians. In addition to preparing for her oral exams this summer, Jacqueline plans to conduct preliminary research for her dissertation at Duke University and the University of California Berkeley’s Bancroft Library.

Rebecca Onion received a 2007 Liberal Arts Graduate Research Fellowship and plans to visit the Keats Family YMCA Archives at the University of Minnesota this summer. Her project is titled “Chira and the YMCA: Technology, Environment, Public Health, and the Civil War.” She presented a paper at the Winterthur Program’s Material Culture Symposium for Emerging Scholars at the University of Delaware this April. In May, she won the Best Thesis/Report Award from the Graduate School and University Cooperative Society for her MA Report, “Shed Dog Stories: Domestication, Masculinity, and Nationhood in Alaska, 1898-1925.”

Graduate Student Job Update

Angie Maxwell has accepted a position as Visiting Assistant Professor with the Diane D. Blair Center for Southern Politics and Society at the University of Arkansas.

Jessica Swigger has accepted a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of History at Western Carolina University.

Allison Perlman has accepted a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of History at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

William Bush has accepted a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of History at Texas A&M University in Galveston.

Matthew Hedstrom has accepted a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of American Studies and History at Roger Williams University.

On my first day of graduate school in the fall of 2000, I walked into the classroom of Elspeth Davies Rostow. She wore a tailored suit and lectured for three hours, without the aid of notes, on the defining features of the modern American presidency. I confess that I did not know her reputation as a formidable scholar, a political insider, or an unmatchable wit, nor did I know the significant role she would play in my life in the years to come. I knew only that on a request from an unknown graduate student, she had contacted the Harry S. Truman scholarship foundation and assured them that the pursuit of an academic degree in American Studies and the anticipated role of a university teacher should indeed be considered public service, a stipulation of the award. It is only because of her persuasive and generous call on my behalf that my scholarship funding was released and I was able to attend graduate school. One generous act seemed to follow another as Professor Rostow invited her students to dinner at her home where Lady Bird Johnson arrived as the surprise guest of honor, giving her students the experience of a personal conversation with a former First Lady. Her kindness, however, did not restrain her red pen, and she was known to be an uncompromising editor, deducting a full letter grade from any paper that contained a split infinitive or requiring of her students a polish rarely equalled in graduate education. And to students who submitted excessively lengthy essays, she memorably quipped: “Woodrow Wilson only proposed fourteen points to achieve world peace—why do you presume to need more?”

When fellow students asked me, on occasion, to describe Professor Rostow, I would often joke that similar to the fictional character Forrest Gump, she seemed to have been at the center of every significant event in American history. She crossed paths with Galbraith, Schlesinger, Lippmann, Arthur Miller—even Leadbelly (or so it is rumored). And she was pursued as a young co-ed at Barnard by an infatuated John Berryman, who composed several sonnets in her honor and with whom she attended at least one formal dance. She had personal letters from Jacqueline Kennedy that she sometimes brought to seminars; and once when I discussed the Brown v. Board decision with her, she casually revealed that Governor Myrdal had been staying with her and her beloved husband, Walt, when the Warren Court ruled. They read the headlines together in the morning paper.

She will be remembered for her public accomplishments: she served on the President’s Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations and the President’s Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties; she chaired the United States Institute of Peace; and she lectured in thirty-four countries on behalf of the Fulbright Program and the U. S. Information Agency. In addition to her Deanship of the L. B. J. School of Public Affairs here at the University of Texas, Austin, she taught at Barnard, Sarah Lawrence, MIT, Georgetown, American University, and the University of Cambridge, and she is credited with teaching some of the earliest American Studies classes in the country in the late 1930s and early 1940s. But for all of us who had the great fortune to work under her watchful eye, she will also be remembered as the gold standard, the ultimate approval that we sought both intellectually and personally. For me specifically, she represented the kind of female role model that I never had, devoted to academics yet wholly conscious of the world around her—unlimited by gender and unrestrained by circumstance. There are those teachers whose book knowledge seems boundless, and there are those who have witnessed history and lived to tell about it. Professor Rostow was both, and I do not expect to see her likeness again.

Angie Maxwell
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