



# The University of Iowa American Studies Newsletter

May 2003



## “Catch Us If You Can”

I don't know why, at year's end, I'm courting the title of a bland Spielberg movie from last year. Perhaps, simple end-of-semester brain exhaustion has set in or, perhaps, the heading is a catch-y *double entendre* for our efforts to continually outpace ourselves as well as our constant hope that you will stay in touch and think of American Studies as a vital part of your life and activities.

Perhaps, it also signifies that it is a good moment to survey the “distance” over the year. Of course, the U.S. war against Iraq predominated. A department steeped in the examination of American culture, the processes and implications of social change, and the seamlessness of our culture produced in not just historical but in international manifestations could ill afford to ignore this cataclysmic event. The war entered into classroom discussions, and individuals participated in campus, city, and national events for analysis, opinions, and dissent. We maintained our collegiate role as an open place for the expression and exchange of ideas, insight, and critique.

I am happy to announce that it is in this spirit that American Studies will sponsor in 2003-04 a distinguished lecture series, “*Cultural Frameworks for Civil Liberties: Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Brown v. the Board of Education.*” With History, American Indian and Native Studies, and African American World Studies as co-sponsors, we will host eight public lectures by Iowa faculty and distinguished visitors – including Mary Dudziak (Professor of Law and History, USC), George Lipsitz (Professor of Ethnic Studies, UC San Diego), James Hall (Director of Humanities, University of Alabama) who will be our Albert E. Stone Distinguished Alumnus Speaker, David Wilkins (Associate Professor of Native American Studies and Political Science, University of Minnesota), and Kimberley Phillips (Associate Professor of History and African American Studies, College of William and Mary). We are especially proud to have received special funding from Iowa's Ida Beam Distinguished Visiting Professor program and from the College's Perry A. and Helen Judy Bond Fund for Interdisciplinary Interaction.

We prepared for the future in other ways: we undertook a self-study as part of a regular departmental periodic review. Suffice it to say for now that thinking about the investment and accomplishments of the program and the many individuals who have comprised it has been gratifying – we are a more energetic and intellectually satisfying community now than we were ten years ago, and that is due to many of you.

We are especially happy to announce that in Fall 2003, Dr. Nicholas Yablon will join the faculty as an Assistant Professor of American Studies. Dr. Yablon received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 2002, and his dissertation is entitled, “*Cities in Ruin: Urban Apocalypse in American Culture, 1790-1920.*” During this year, he has been an NEH Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society. During 2003-2004, he will teach the introductory American Values class, a course on the visual representations of American urban cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and a graduate seminar on the literature of the built and urban environment. Nick is an outstanding scholar, an original thinker, and such an exciting colleague that every time he and I get together, it gets harder to

put an end to the flow of topics and ideas – already making each of us late for subsequent appointments and him late for a plane! (With Nick around next year, I may have to give up meetings altogether for the pure joy of non-stop learning in conversations about ideas!)

In between looking outwardly and inwardly, we also had fun. We published *The American Studies Cookbook* (still available in its 3<sup>rd</sup> printing!). We welcomed David Hall, Professor of Religion and American Civilization at Harvard, as an Ida Beam Distinguished Visiting Professor. In addition to two public lectures, Prof. Hall met with several small groups for the best kind of intense intellectual exchanges. We hosted the annual conference for the Mid-America American Studies Association. Over the first sunny spring weekend of the season, Iowa students and faculty networked with 100 American Studies scholars from 18 states that stretch from Ohio to Kansas. Keynote speaker Eric Lott (Professor of English and Cultural Studies at University of Virginia) gave an iconoclastic, “anti-academic academic” address on Bill Clinton and George W. Bush as the first “boomer” presidencies.

The fun continues next year. In addition to the “Brown series,” we will welcome Eric Sandeen (Professor of American Studies, University of Wyoming) on September 11 to receive a College Alumnus Award. [If anyone wishes to cheer Eric on that weekend, please feel free to contact me for further details.] We will begin the new year “officially” on Friday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> with a graduate student workshop – covering such topics as leading discussions, stress management, and professionalization – and picnic. We expect to host two visiting foreign scholars in American Studies and to welcome a new cohort of eight graduate students.

We end this year saying congratulations and good-by to our graduating Class of 2003, and we offer both thanks and a special place in our hearts to Prof. Mary Ellen Lennon, who has been a Visiting Assistant Professor of American Studies for 2002-03. Mary Ellen’s enthusiasm and dedication to teaching have been both constants and a model to the rest of us.

Have a safe and wonderful summer.

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## *Congratulations*

**Deborah Lombard** passed her comprehensive exams, and **Sharon Romeo** and **Don Wright** held successful prospectus meetings.

**Katie Hrdina**, undergraduate major, has been invited to accept membership in Phi Beta Kappa.

## **RECENT AMERICAN STUDIES HONORS**

Professor **Susan Birrell** received **The Michael J. Brody Award for Distinguished University Service**.

Professor **Lauren Rabinovitz** received the **May Brodbeck Humanities Fellowship for 2003-2004**.

Professor **Eric Sandeen** (PhD, 1977), Director of American Studies, University of Wyoming, has been named a **University of Iowa College of Liberal Arts and Science Alumni Fellow** and will be honored on September 12, 2003 at a luncheon in honor of the 2003 College Alumni Fellows.

**Barbara Shubinski** has received a **2003-2004 Ballard-Seashore Dissertation Fellowship**.

**Kristin Solli** has been awarded a **T. Anne Cleary International Research Fellowship for 2003-2004**.



## STUDENT NEWS

**Eleanor McConnell** will be presenting a paper at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture 9th Annual Conference, which will be held in New Orleans this June. Her paper, entitled "Shifting Structures of Empire: Legal, Economic, and Racial Identities in the Transitional Period of Louisiana Territory, 1800-1830," is part of a panel examining Legal Identities on the Post Purchase Frontier.

**Barbara Shubinski** is so pleased and excited to have received a Seashore Dissertation-Year Fellowship for 2003-2004. She will home-base in Iowa City, and use the year to complete interviews, write-up and finish. Her dissertation examines Project DOCUMERICA, a documentary photography initiative run by the Environmental Protection Agency in the 1970s. DOCUMERICA was modeled on the work of the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s, and attempted to show the environmental crisis as a national emergency on par with the Dust Bowl of the Great Depression. It was also the last major federally-sponsored photography initiative. Photographers were commissioned broadly to record environmental threats, the interactions of the American people with their environment, and "any beauty worth saving." The result is a comprehensive photographic file depicting American life in the 1970s, with subjects ranging from mining communities in Appalachia to Indian reservations, small town life, suburbia, urban renewal, solar energy homes, Main Street parades, stock car racing and cattle drives. From 1971-1976, the project employed approximately 70 photographers, many of them well-known, and produced over 22,000 images. No significant scholarly work has yet been done on DOCUMERICA, and Barb has a fresh opportunity to examine some key moments in American cultural history, including photography's ascendance as a popular art form and the beginnings of the contemporary environmental movement. And because the project took place as late as the 1970s, she is able to use interviews with

some of the project staff and photographers as well as archival records and photographs as her source material.



**Sarah Fields** will be in Madison, Wisconsin for two weeks in June as a fellow in the J. Willard Hurst Summer Institute in Legal History at the University of Wisconsin Law School. While the institute

should be interesting, more importantly she's looking forward to escaping Georgia for a few weeks and returning to the Midwest.

**Michael Lewis's** book, "Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Biodiversity Ideal in India, 1945-1997," has been released by Orient Longman in India - this Asian version is also available in Europe. A separate North American version will be released by Ohio University Press in their "Ecology and History" series this coming winter - until then, only "black market" copies of the Indian version are available here! No reviews are out yet in India, but the national English language newspaper, "The Hindu," published excerpts from the book on the front page of their Sunday Magazine.

This fall, **Allison McCracken** will be starting a (tenure-track) position as Assistant Professor of American Studies at DePaul University in Chicago. She has enjoyed this past year teaching American Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, and very much hopes this will be her last move for a while!

**Jane Simonsen** and **Mike Augspurger** are excited that they're going to be able to meet up with some folks from the department this June when Jane Desmond, Virginia Dominguez, and others come to Germany.



**Jane Desmond** "There's been a lot of action on the international front this semester with more scheduled for the summer. A new article of mine, "Transnational American Studies and the Limits to Collaboration," is just out in the latest issue of American Studies

International. This is a special double issue on American Studies in Post-Soviet Russia with Russian and U.S. contributors. It looks like a great issue!

I am initiating a new project through the International Forum for U.S. Studies, with the goal of forming multi-national collaborative research teams to investigate public discourses of "Americanization" and "Anti-Americanism." A recent trip to South Africa in March (see Brian and Charlie's piece elsewhere in this issue) helped us begin to set the intellectual agenda, and we will follow that up with a three-week research trip in Germany right after classes end. Graduate students Amy Spellacy (English), and Patrick Oray, Ulli Adelt, and Kristin Solli (all of American Studies) will all be part of that team. After spending time at the Kennedy Institute in Berlin, we will consult with colleagues at the University of Bremen and end up at the German American Studies Association meetings in Munich. These two trips will prepare me to mount a fund-raising initiative to put the whole plan into action, uniting scholars from South Africa, Germany, and the U.S. in a multi-year research project. Wish me luck with extensive grant-writing!

Prior to the Germany trip, I'll be participating in the first meetings of the International American Studies Association, to be held in Leiden, the Netherlands. As a member of the Executive Board of that organization, I'll be working to plan the future of the organization, and will speak on a panel organized by colleagues from Duke University about conceptualizing "the Americas." Finally, in my role as North American Editor of the brand new Comparative American Studies Journal I'll take part in a panel discussion of journal editors from around the world. While I'm at it, let me put in a plug for the new journal--the publisher Sage has done a great job on this first issue, which includes articles by Hazel Carby, Rob Nixon, Winnifred Fluck, Sonia Torres (whom some of you know from her recent IFUSS residency) and several others. Check it out! It should be in the library now."

**Rich Horwitz** reports that he's "doing pretty well. At the moment, my typing is handicapped because I'm

in a sling. I'm recovering from surgery to repair the rotator cuff in my right shoulder. (I tore it at the end of sailboat racing season. It was blowing 25-30 knots with decent sized seas, and I was working the deck on a spinnaker run for one of the 45' sloops that I have been crewing on. I guess I pulled the shute up a little slowly (and it didn't help that we were short-handed; so nobody on deck to tail on a winch). Anyway, it filled before reaching the top of the mast and just about yanked my arm off . . .and I'm still paying the price. But the healing is going pretty well. I expect to be back up to racing form for the beginning of the new season.

I do have a couple of straight, American-Studies style activities to report. I recently (Feb 22- March 7) spent two weeks in Moldova, where I visited four universities, lecturing and consulting on the development of American Studies, courtesy of a grant from the U.S. State Dept. (I normally would bore you to death with observations, but I still can only type slowly and for very short periods.) Folks might also be pleased to hear that a print rendering of Al Stone's return interview is in galleys, soon to hit the *American Studies* newsstand. I'm pleased with the way it came out (with thanks again to Lauren for the arrangements and Ulrich Adelt for helping).

I recently participated in the annual meeting of the American Society for Environmental History. (I was on the local arrangements committee, mainly writing a successful grant to help fund the meeting.) I was pleased there to run into some old American Studies friends, including Mike Lewis, who gave a stellar paper. (Actually he, Cassie, and their tike, Simon, stayed at our house for a couple of days. Great fun... and Simon is certainly above average in every respect.)

My contract work continues apace -- busy researching public awareness of the health hazards of cigarette smoking and nearing completion of the Emergency Response Plan for the RI Department of Environmental Management, with the Oil Spill Science Plan still barely off the ground. It's been very tough around here since "The Station" fire that left about a hundred dead and hundreds injured. Since I

work most days with the folks who actually responded to the mayhem and still deal with the consequences, it all feels close, making it somewhat more possible to imagine life in Iraq these days. Hardly cheery, but I'm glad to feel a little more connected to reality."

## JEAN KERN REMEMBERED

*John Raeburn*

The American Studies community mourns the death of Jean Kern on March 9, 2003 in Roanoke, Virginia. She was 89. Jean was the wife of Alex Kern, who taught in the American Civilization Program at Iowa (as American Studies was then known) from 1936 until his retirement in 1975. She and Alex met at the University of Wisconsin in the 1930s, where both were pursuing their doctorates, she in English and he in history, and were married in 1936. She was a scholar of 18<sup>th</sup> century English literature who taught at Grinnell and Coe Colleges and at the latter was chair of its English Department, until she too retired in 1975. After their retirement, the Kerns continued to live in Iowa City until 1995, when they moved to Virginia to be closer to their son and grandchildren. Alex Kern died in 1997. Despite the fact that Jean's relationship to American Studies was a collateral one, it was also intimate, as Jean and Alex were devoted participants in intellectual and social occasions involving the American Studies community and generous in opening their home to students and younger colleagues. Her hospitality is warmly remembered by several generations of those in the American Studies community.

## IFUSS TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA

*By Brian Hallstoos and Charlie Williams*

From April 13<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> Jane Desmond, Virginia Dominguez, Brian Hallstoos, and Charles Williams traveled to the Republic of South Africa under the auspices of the International Forum for U.S. Studies (IFUSS) to lay the preliminary groundwork for a new initiative, tentatively entitled "Images of America:

Americanization and Anti-American Sentiment." They spent a week engaging in critical dialogue with scholars at The University of South Africa (UNISA), The University of Witwatersrand, and The University of Pretoria. In addition to these formal roundtables,



Uncle Sam, located outside of the "Star Diner" (formerly known as "Yankee's") in Hatfield, Pretoria's college town neighborhood, near the University of Pretoria

the group conducted extensive fieldwork in Pretoria, Johannesburg, and various cultural sites, including the Apartheid Museum, a diamond mine, the Vortrekker Monument, a game preserve, and several townships.

The second week was spent in Cape Town, where they initiated discussions with scholars at both The University of the Western Cape and The University of Cape Town. Additional fieldwork was pursued in several of the region's commercial centers. The delegation met with several representatives of the U.S. Consular Office as well as with members of groups vehemently opposed to the conflict in Iraq, which began while they were in South Africa. The smashing success of this trip bodes well for the upcoming IFUSS trip to Germany in June.

## MLA GRADUATE STUDENT TRAVEL GRANT

Each year the MLA offers its Graduate Student Travel Grant to qualified PhD candidates for travel to the MLA convention. The \$100 grant is given to advanced graduate students as partial reimbursement of expenses for travel to the convention, this year in San Diego. Students must be 2003 members of the MLA (the deadline to join is 30 June 2003) and must have met all the requirements for the PhD except the dissertation. For additional information, please refer to the MLA's website at [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org) under Prizes and Awards, or email [awards@mla.org](mailto:awards@mla.org)



**Diversity Conference 2003**  
**Iowa's Mosaic: Families, Workers & Neighbors**  
**Discovering Our Hidden Assets**  
 September 29, 2003  
 Iowa State University, Scheman Center, Ames, Iowa

The Iowa Committee on Diversity has sponsored a statewide diversity conference in Des Moines for several years. Recently, the Friends of Iowa Civil Rights, Inc. ("Friends"), an independent non-profit corporation, has taken over the responsibility for planning and implementation of the statewide diversity conference. The Iowa Committee on Diversity wholeheartedly supports this new evolution of the statewide diversity project. Iowa State University Extension to Communities has committed to host this year's conference. The 2003 Diversity Conference will provide all participants unique opportunities to not only learn more about the wealth of diversity that exists in Iowa, but also to learn how to benefit through diversity in their personal lives, work and communities. An exhibition hall will provide participants the chance to learn more about businesses, organizations, agencies and others advocating and embracing the benefits of diversity.

Experts in a broad range of disciplines are encouraged to submit workshop proposals. The topic of each workshop should be consistent with one of the following theme elements: Business, Community, Family, or Youth.

Name  
 Title / Organization  
 Address  
 City, State, Zip  
 Phone      Fax      E-mail  
 Title of Workshop  
 Maximum Number of Participants

Target Audience  
 Workshop Length \_\_\_ 1 hour \_\_\_ 2 hours  
 Equipment Needs  
 Overview (50 words or less for conference program)  
 Outline of Presentation (format, etc.)

Separately attach biography or resume that reflects expertise relative to workshop topic.

Please return this form to Alice Vinsand, Conference Coordinator, 10927 Lincoln, Des Moines, IA 50225

**Deadline for submission is May 23, 2003.** The Planning Committee will evaluate proposals and notifications will be made by June 20, 2003.

All presenters, panelists and facilitators are expected to register for the conference separately. Registration fees (excluding meals and lodging) will be waived for those presenters whose proposals are accepted.

For more information, call 515-225-1051 or e-mail <alice@avinsandinc.com>.

**American Studies Department**

|                              |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Faculty:</i>              | <i>Staff:</i>                     |
| Lauren Rabinovitz, Chair     | Carrie Louvar                     |
| Susan Birrell                | Laura Kastens                     |
| Jane Desmond                 | (newsletter editor)               |
| Richard Horwitz (on leave)   | <b>The University of Iowa</b>     |
| Rob Latham                   | <b>701 Jefferson Building</b>     |
| Mary Ellen Lennon (visiting) | <b>Iowa City, Iowa 52242</b>      |
| Kim Marra                    | <b>319-335-0320</b>               |
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[laura-kastens@uiowa.edu](mailto:laura-kastens@uiowa.edu)

Each issue will also be available at our website

[www.uiowa.edu/~amstud](http://www.uiowa.edu/~amstud)  
(beginning this issue)

*American Studies Alumni*

*We'd love to hear what you're doing, where you're living/teaching, what you're publishing and/or writing, interesting events in your life. Please take a moment to drop us an email ([laura-kastens@uiowa.edu](mailto:laura-kastens@uiowa.edu)) and we'll include your news in the September newsletter.*

*Also, please let us know if it's OK to give your email address to old friends who may ask for it. We've had some requests!*

visit the newly designed American Studies website at  
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~amstud/>

Among the new features are links to American Studies newsletters, course information, updated faculty information, news and events, and undergraduate internships. Check it out!

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