

Letters

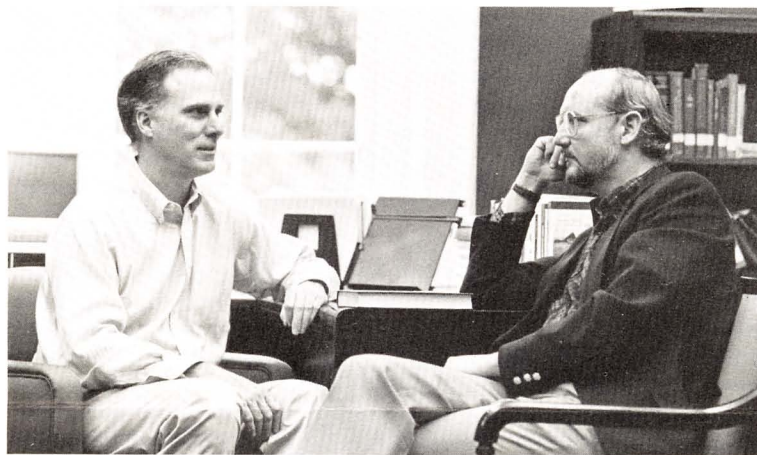
THE SEMIANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

VOL. 1, NO. 1 • FALL 1992 • VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

The South as an American Problem: *An Interview*

Though perceptions of the South, and the South itself, have changed in the last two decades, it still remains isolated from “American” consciousness, culture, and economy specifically as a “problem.” Don H. Doyle, Professor of History, and Larry J. Griffin, Professor of Sociology and Professor of Political Science, have organized the 1992/93 Fellows Program at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities around this notion of the “problem” South. They and their Vanderbilt colleagues from various disciplines, including English, law, economics, and political science, will spend the year at the Center holding weekly discussions and sponsoring lectures and colloquia investigating “The South as an American Problem.” *Letters* recently spoke with professors Doyle and Griffin about the origins of the topic and what they anticipate in the coming year.

DOYLE: When Larry and I first met and started talking about a year-long interdisciplinary examination of the South, it was Larry who first came up with the idea of posing the South as “a problem.” Together we cast that slightly differently by saying that it was an American problem, in other words, a problem that the United States had with this region within it. Then as we started talking about how the South has been a problem, our conversation unfolded in a combination of historical and thematic ways. For instance, the fact that the South once had a commitment to slavery and a certain system of labor posed a problem for Americans, and for Southerners as well. It was a specifically national problem in that it contradicted the basic commitments to liberalism,



Larry J. Griffin and Don H. Doyle, co-directors, 1992/93 Fellows Program

democracy, capitalism, and Christianity. We're interested in how the South as a problem gets defined by those outside the region, in particular but not exclusively, and then what kind of solutions they propose.

GRIFFIN: And we're interested in the defenses, that is, the reconceptualization by the South that it truly is not a problem. It's the natural order of things, or it's a function of misunderstanding. So there arises that kind of dialectic between problem definition, problem defusing, and then solution and counter solution. This is an historical dynamic; it takes place through time, quite literally and not in an idealized sequence. There are collective understandings which are then fought against or more broadly disseminated, from which proposals for solutions emanate which are countered in the South, etc.

DOYLE: America's problem with the South, oversimplified as slavery, becomes the South's problem with America. The North's solution to the problem of slavery was to mount growing public opinion to persuade and then to legislate

against it, first to restrict it and eventually to abolish it. The South's problem was to defend a vital institution, an economic institution but also a system of racial control. Their solution was to secede, to create a separate nation that would sanction this institution by law.

GRIFFIN: Which then created a problem for the Constitution.

DOYLE: So then you have another problem. Secession poses a problem for the United States, since according to some you cannot do that. So their definition of the problem was “this is rebellion, treason, and there is no legitimate Confederate States of America. This group has taken over the legitimate governments of South Carolina and other states and they must be defeated and the governments restored.” So it was for the North a civil war instigated by rebels. The South's position, of course, was that this was a war between states that had a legitimate right to withdraw. With the war the South presents an *obvious* problem, as the cause of the war. That too has evolving solutions: the Emancipation Proclamation, and

the escalating commitment to what becomes a total war. As you can see, this has been a kind of ongoing dialectic between North and South.

GRIFFIN: It really does play itself out, in fact so neatly that I'm personally afraid! It's too schematically neat. But still, the war, and slavery, was solved by Reconstruction, which Southerners then viewed as a problem which needed a solution. They thus acted on their perception of their interest to remove Reconstruction governments and military occupation, thereby creating a national problem, Jim Crow, which cried out for solutions, which created self-defenses, rationalities, and elaborate ideological justifications.

DOYLE: There is a sense too that the South as an American problem becomes a way of America defining its values, defining itself. So the South serves as what C. Vann Woodward calls an “American counterpoint,” something that is the opposite, or counter to what America wants to be, or is, or sees itself as.

GRIFFIN: It also allows America a chance to funnel its own understanding of its darker side to the South. At least it did function that way for a very long time until the sixties, when it was very clear that this darker side was not specific to

Contents

The South as an American Problem: <i>An Interview</i>	1
Changing Images of Columbus	4
“Transatlantic Encounters” Conference	5
1992/93 Center Programs	7
Director's Report	8
1992/93 Fellows	8

GRIFFIN: I grew up in Mississippi. But this is my first year back in the South.

a region. You could almost date it: 1965, with regard to race, with the Watts Rebellion.

DOYLE: Also with busing and the huge white backlash in Boston, Detroit, and elsewhere in the North.

GRIFFIN: The *de facto* segregation of the North as opposed to *de jure* segregation of the South, that is right. See, that is very interesting: the solution to America's problem with Jim Crow in the South was the emancipation, fully now, at least politically, of blacks. And thereby the problem of America *vis a vis* race was exposed. That is an interesting notion.

DOYLE: One strand of this dialectic after the Civil War remains focused on race relations. But then there are others that have a less continuous character. One is economic development. A number of us in the Fellows Program have an interest in the South as a problem in terms of economic development. The South remains a region that is notable for its poverty and for its lack of economic development within a prosperous industrial capitalist society. During the Depression, the South was identified as "America's number one economic problem."

GRIFFIN: And all these problems are very clearly related. The economic problem was part and parcel of the cause and consequence of the race problem and both in turn were deeply intertwined with the problem of politics: the one party South, disenfranchisement, the lack of effective political participation by the vast bulk even of whites in the South. They are all linked together in a very tightly interwoven nexus.

DOYLE: There is also this focus on the South, slightly different, as a region of not only economic poverty but of a poverty of the human condition. I was thinking of public health problems and educational backwardness. This is another aspect that was not as integrally related, but was a problem that intellectuals had in the South. Some of this is a problem that intellectuals in the South themselves

define, that there was no place in the South from which the intellectual could criticize their society. It was instead a place from which intellectuals had to flee, go into exile.

LETTERS: You mentioned that in your proposal for the fellow's program.

GRIFFIN: It's absolutely true, many did. Some explicitly in order to criticize the South. With others it was more subtle, about economic opportunities, for example.

And that is certainly continued right on through to today.

DOYLE: There is this theme that the South is a closed society that shuts out criticism. This goes back to Antebellum times when Hinton Rowan Halper was driven out of the South for proposing an end to slavery.

GRIFFIN: There is another great irony here. Many analysts of the South, both before W. J. Cash and after John Shelton Reed, emphasize that one of the very distinctive things about the South is its individualistic ethos. Southerners are highly individualistic, which is why we choose not to have big governments, why we don't like rules and regulations. And it is thought to explain partially our violence, our sense of frontier justice, etc. And yet, superimposed on that individualism, or undergirding it, is this really striking conformist ethic. So you can be individualistic as long as you conform to dominant norms and understandings.

LETTERS: Is this a Southern understanding of the South you are

reviewing?

GRIFFIN: Well, it's certainly developed by Southerners, and I don't know how it is with popular discourse or consciousness. I think that there is a fair sense among many Southerners that "we are less apt to put up with petty rules and regulations." Think about George Wallace's 1968 and 1972 campaigns as a reflection of that.

DOYLE: Southerners do not look to the state in the same

way that modern Americans outside the North

are supposed to. So that strain of individualism comes through more than a family-centered or individual-centered view of the world.

One of the people who exemplifies the intolerance of the South, or who was a victim of it, was James Silver.

GRIFFIN: He was a history professor at "Old Miss" who basically had to leave.

DOYLE: He was a graduate student here at Vanderbilt. He became a critic of the existing racial order in Mississippi.

GRIFFIN: . . . and at the University of Mississippi. Classrooms were being bugged by the administration to find out whether or not "atheistic communism" was being spread under the guise of modern race relations. And that was a generation ago. It was not the dark ages, at least chronologically.

DOYLE: Probably the Scopes trial was the best example of the intolerance of ideas which threaten in this case religious orthodoxy. And that was one of H. L. Menck-

en's targets as a benighted ignorant, but intolerant region. That would be a good example in which the South's intellectual intolerance became defined by outsiders as a problem.

LETTERS: Isn't there a way in which seeing this all as a problem almost prefigures what you are calling a dialectic, and prefigures that there has to be a solution? I'm thinking of Southern literature as a way of thinking outside that.

GRIFFIN: Yes, I totally agree with that. To me, that is a complete and direct consequence of everything we have been talking about. It's inconceivable that we would have had Faulkner anywhere but in the South.

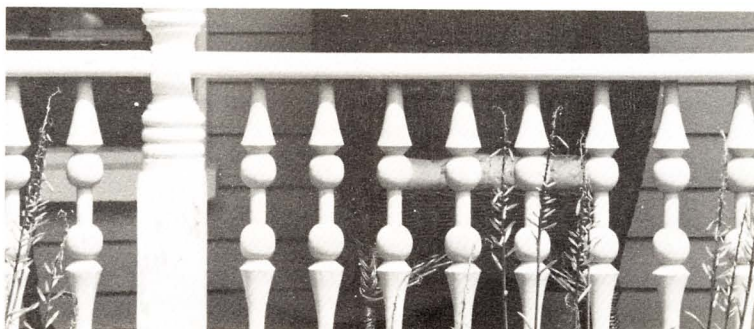
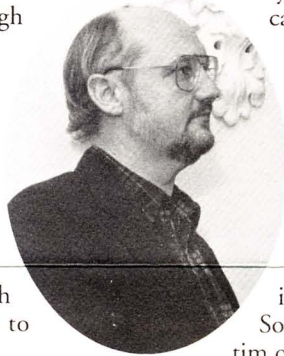
DOYLE: Faulkner always seemed to thrive on being an alienated intellectual observer within a society and culture that did not fully appreciate him. There is a kind of perverse creativity that comes out of that. So you might say that too much acceptance might destroy something, so that it's not always a problem.

GRIFFIN: But he always came back from his alienation. He and other writers left for Hollywood, but always came back. Lots of people did that.

DOYLE: So, somehow out of this "Sahara of the Bozart," as Mencken called the South, came a terrific amount of creativity, particularly in literature.

GRIFFIN: Even as the condemnations were being levied at the South, they were being contradicted in that very way.

DOYLE: I thought that Mencken inspired some of that! "We'll show him!" But I think his point was not that they were incapable, but it was not a culture or society that supported creativity. The Agrarians and the Fugitives were responding to some of that ridicule by cultivating something uniquely Southern. The poet Donald Davidson, who stayed here at Vanderbilt, was very interested in showing that only an agrarian society like the South could support artists who were really in connection with their society.



DOYLE:
This is great,
a Southern exile
and a
carpetbagger!

GRIFFIN: Sort of "organic" in a way that a mechanized, industrialized society could not have. That is a very old argument, one which monarchists and reactionaries, real reactionaries, have used for centuries.

LETTERS: What other problems are you taking up as American problems? Race, of course, and the civil rights movement . . .

GRIFFIN: Well, to a degree, the nature of Southern politics. For an extremely long time there really was, with the exception of eastern Tennessee, just one party. That was a problem for the national Republican party, and it was certainly a problem for Southerners, even though many of them appeared not to recognize it. And that too had its own kind of dialectic in terms of how national political processes responded to, modified, or adapted to the "solid South." There is an excellent book called *The Vital South* by Earl Black and Merle Black. They try and explain why it is that the South is now solidly Republican, more or less, with isolated pockets of Democratic support. We have seen a true transformation of the nature of politics in the South, from solidly Democratic to solidly Republican in a generation.

DOYLE: So the South has presented a problem to the national Democratic party, which had a deep tie and commitment to white and black support since the 1930s, and has had to cater to this divided constituency in the South. They keep coming up with Southern candidates who do not often play well in the North, and who themselves have to straddle this black and white constituency.

DOYLE: It's really been a national problem for the Democrats, but it's been the South, and the Democratic party's commitment to the civil rights movement and its aftermath, that has been a great boon to the Republican party.

GRIFFIN: That is Black and Black's point, that having the South solidly in the presidential Republican camp means that they need marginal support everywhere

else, just a few states and they can pull it off. So the Democrats somehow have to work twice as hard everywhere else, because they can almost count on the South going Republican.

LETTERS: What do you see now, with the South in a period of economic growth, for example in Charlotte, Atlanta, or here in Nashville? Will the Fellows Group be considering contemporary issues in the South?

DOYLE: To a large extent, the changes that have swept over the South, outside of the political process that we were talking about, have ended the South's status as an American problem. I mean, we do not talk about the nation's number one economic problem, we talk about the "Sun Belt," while the "Rust Belt" is now the problem. And no Northerner or outsider would talk about the race problem as being a Southern problem. That illusion has been destroyed. John Egerton has a book called *The Americanization of Dixie*, with the subtitle *The Southernization of America*, in which he looks at things like the race problem. He shows that it was always present in the North. It was exported from the South to some extent, with the black migration, but the ethnic and racial tensions were always there. It was partly a matter of how the problem was perceived.

So that idea of the South as a special problem for America has receded in the American mind in a lot of ways. I think this political problem we are talking about is

still an issue.

GRIFFIN: And there is still cultural stereotyping of Southerners from the outside. Someone, I think Roy Blount, Jr., a Southerner living in Manhattan, wrote that no other ethnic group in America would be receiving the kinds of slurs that Southerners routinely do in polite conversation. So I do think there is still a perception of Southern backwardness and intolerance. But I think Don is right. It would be very naive to talk about "the South's" race problem these days.

LETTERS: I know people from Boston who have moved here and are relieved at the sense of racial harmony. It's relative, of course.

Now, Professor Doyle, you grew up in the west?

DOYLE: Yes, the San Francisco Bay area.

GRIFFIN: I grew up in Mississippi. But this is my first year back in the South.

DOYLE: This is great, a Southern exile and a carpetbagger! So we can see it from all different angles, inside and out. And that is what this program is about. Not just to look at the South and its special characteristics, but to look at the South as a special problem for America. . . . In the reality of contemporary America, the issues that define the South as a problem—race relations, economic underdevelopment, and the repression of intellectual and cultural life—they do not define a national problem.

LETTERS: You mentioned a Southern Studies program in your proposal.

DOYLE: Yes, one of the legacies of this Fellows Program will be, we hope, an academic program at Vanderbilt where we would offer graduate students an interdisciplinary concentration in Southern Studies that would draw from diverse disciplines.

GRIFFIN: There is a fairly large number of faculty here, more here than there would be at other, even Southern, universities, whose teaching and research has focused on things Southern.

DOYLE: And they are in all corners of the University. Economics, the Law School, the Divinity School. At least since the time of the Agrarians, and earlier in the century, the South has been part of Vanderbilt's mission. I think of Edwin Mims's book *The Advancing South*. He was very much conscious of the South as a problem, and he wanted to transcend it. I always remember that in the aftermath of the Scopes trial, Chancellor Kirkland said that Vanderbilt's answer to the trial was to build more laboratories. They actually used the embarrassment and ridicule of the Scopes trial for a fundraising campaign in the North. The Agrarians, on the other hand, really answered this whole notion that the South was a problem by saying that the problem was the North; the South was an American problem because the industrial North was trying to destroy the agrarian South, and we must "take our stand" here and develop an alternative to urban, industrial society. This view was at the time an embarrassment to Vanderbilt, though you would never know it now. The Agrarians pulled together a large number of people at Vanderbilt who had an interest in the South.

GRIFFIN: Yes, people from political science, literature. I think even philosophy.

DOYLE: There were a lot of people who were Southerners, who thought a lot about the South, whose intellectual identity was shaped within this region.

GRIFFIN: Including Robert Penn Warren!



Changing Images of Columbus

William R. Fowler, Jr.

From the time of the earliest writings about Columbus he has been revered as a hero of mythic proportions. Columbus was an unabashed self-promoter who sincerely believed that God had chosen him to bear the light of Christianity to unknown corners of the world. In a flourish of pretentious mysticism, Columbus adopted the name "Christo Ferens" ("Bearer of Christ") and compiled a book of biblical prophecies about his discoveries. Contemporary historians accepted the propaganda. The history attributed to Columbus's son Ferdinand is nothing short of a hagiography. To Peter Martyr D'Anghera, the great Renaissance humanist and preceptor to the court of Castille, Columbus was "the sort of whom the ancients made gods." Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Dominican defender of the Indians against Spanish abuses, was, in a delicious historical irony, Columbus's first editor and historian of the 1492–93 voyage. Although he condemned the abuses of the Indians committed by Columbus and his followers, Las Casas held the Admiral of the Ocean Sea in high esteem for conveying Christianity to the New World. Francisco López de Gómara, the chaplain and personal secretary of Hernán Cortés, called the Discovery "the greatest event since the creation of the world (excluding the incarnation and death of Him who created it)." There is much in these attitudes and assessments that survives today.

In contemporary American political rhetoric, Christopher Columbus is regarded as the skilled and courageous navigator who discovered the Americas and, in so doing, brought to our ancestors the promise of the New World. This image can be traced to the very beginnings of the United States as an independent nation. Illogically, Americans adopted a fifteenth-century Genoese merchant mariner sailing for Spain as the paragon of all-American virtues: extraordinary vision, deep inner strength combined with physical endurance, unending perseverance, fierce

individuality, tenacity in the face of adversity. This is the image of Columbus portrayed by Joel Barlow's epic poem, *The Vision of Columbus*, which appeared in 1787. The first Columbian celebrations in America marked the third centenary in 1792 with events in Baltimore, Boston, and New York that hailed a glorious past and a promising future. As the new republic expanded westward in the nineteenth century, Ameri-

nary in 1892, cracks were beginning to appear in the facade of Columbian heroism. Chauncey M. Depew, the president of the New York Central Railroad and attorney for Cornelius Vanderbilt, commented at a quadricentenary celebration held at Carnegie Hall, "If there's anything I detest more than another, it is that spirit of historical inquiry which doubts everything, that modern spirit which destroys all the illusions and all the

appraised in light of his failings as well as his achievements, a man whose uncommon ability in seafaring was matched only by his utter incompetence in colonial administration. They pointed out that Columbus inflicted death and misery on the native inhabitants of the islands that he claimed for the kings of Castille and Aragon. By the turn of the century, professional historians offered a more balanced portrayal of Columbus, yet the heroic image persisted with little change in popular culture as it does even today.

The heroic image may have been tarnished by the dedicated work of impassionate historians, but it was cleaned and polished to a high sheen by the organizers of the World Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. If Columbus had personified the frontier and its challenge in the early nineteenth century, now he was the national symbol of a robust, expansionistic, capitalist power. Prominent attractions of the Chicago fair included a replica of the monastery at La Rábida, where Columbus sought refuge after his failure to secure support in Portugal for his proposed voyage. Native Americans took center stage in the newly-installed ethnographic exhibits as well as on the fairgrounds. Three anthropology exhibitions, two on the exposition grounds and the third on the tawdry Midway Plaisance, juxtaposed extinction against assimilation. Exhibits featured living villages with Indians demonstrating traditional lifeways. A model Indian school illustrated Native American progress, measured in terms of Western values. Delegations of Indian students from government and religious schools were recruited to attend the fair. In addition, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, installed on a large lot not far from the Midway, included about 200 Indians, mostly Oglala Sioux. As far as anyone can determine from surviving records, the Indians were not particularly concerned about the implications of participating in a celebration of the

(Continued, p. 6)



1519



1670



1794



1829

cans interpreted Columbus as a heroic individual standing alone in the wilderness, struggling against ignorance and skepticism, and overcoming incredible odds. Washington Irving's reverential *History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, published in 1828, was couched in this heroic vein. This is the image of Columbus that was prevalent among scholars until the end of the nineteenth century.

By the time of the fourth cente-

heroes which have been the inspiration of patriotism through all the centuries."

Perhaps Depew had just read the very sober biography of Columbus by Justin Winsor, published in 1892. Another realistic assessment of Columbus, by Henry Harisse, had been issued in 1884; a third, by John Boyd Thatcher, followed in 1904. These histories debunked the heroic vision of Columbus and developed a view of him as a very complex man whose life must be

Transatlantic Encounters: The "Discovery" of the New World and the Old

The conference entitled "Transatlantic Encounters" was organized by the 1991/92 Fellows. The Fellows Program, co-directed by Marshall C. Eakin, Associate Professor of History, and Vivien Green Fryd, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, was dedicated to the study of the "discovery" of the Americas as seen through the writings of European explorers, Native Americans, and Africans. This conference is the culmination of the work of last year's Fellows.

Sessions I–III: Three Worlds Collide

Thursday, October 8, 1992

SESSION I: NATIVE AMERICANS: "VISION OF THE VANQUISHED"

9:15 "Native Reactions to the Invasion of America"

JAMES AXTELL, Department of History, College of William and Mary
"Native Perceptions of the Conquest: Patterns of Assimilation and Resistance in Mesoamerica"

STEPHEN D. HOUSTON, Department of Anthropology, Vanderbilt University
"Inca and Indian Ideologies in the Making of the Colonial Andean World"

IRENE SILVERBLATT, Department of Cultural Anthropology, Duke University
Panel Moderator: HOWARD HARROD, Divinity School, Vanderbilt University

SESSION II: EUROPEANS: "CONFRONTING THE OTHER"

1:30 "Textual Confrontations with 1492: Las Casas's 'Prologue' vs. Columbus's 'Letter of 1492'"

MARGARITA ZAMORA, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of Wisconsin, Madison

"The *Naufraios* of Cabeza de Vaca: The Problematics of Narratives of Discovery and Exploration in the Sixteenth Century"

ENRIQUE PUPO-WALKER, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Vanderbilt University

"The Meaning of America for Early Modern England"

KAREN KUPPERMAN, Department of History, University of Connecticut

Panel Moderator: PAUL H. FREEDMAN, Department of History, Vanderbilt University

Friday, October 9

SESSION III: AFRICANS: "UNWILLING IMMIGRANTS"

9:15 "Remembering Africa"

JAMES OLNEY, Department of English, Louisiana State University
"African Ethnicity in Africa and the Americas"

JOHN K. THORNTON, Department of History, Millersville University of Pennsylvania

"The Secret of Joy Possessed"

MARGARET KENT BASS, Department of English, Vanderbilt University

Panel Moderator: WILLIAM LUIS, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Vanderbilt University

Sessions IV–VI: Reinterpreting the Collision

SESSION IV: EUROPE: "MAKING SENSE OF THE OTHER"

1:30 "Making Sense of the Caribbean"

PETER HULME, Department of Literature, University of Essex

"Becoming the Other: Power and Creole Identity in British North America"

JOYCE E. CHAPLIN, Department of History, Vanderbilt University



The 1991/92 Fellows were (L. to R.) Stephen D. Houston, William Luis, William R. Fowler, Jr., Joel F. Harrington, Vivien Green Fryd, Paul H. Freedman, Marshall C. Eakin, Howard L. Harrod. Not pictured: Margaret Kent Bass and Cecilia Tichi.

"Spanish Poetry and the New World: The Renaissance Poetics of the Marvelous"

CHRISTOPHER H. MAURER, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Vanderbilt University

Panel Moderator: JOEL F. HARRINGTON, Department of History, Vanderbilt University

Saturday, October 10

SESSION V: NORTH AMERICA: "INVENTING AND REINVENTING COLUMBUS"

9:15 "Inventing Columbus"

CECELIA TICHI, Department of English, Vanderbilt University

"History Before the Fact; or, Captain John Smith's Unfinished Symphony"

MYRA JEHLLEN, Department of English, Rutgers

"Trauma"

FRANCIS JENNINGS, Senior Research Fellow, Newberry Library

Panel Moderator: VIVIEN GREEN FRYD, Department of Fine Arts, Vanderbilt University

SESSION VI: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: "NEW SOCIETIES, NEW IDENTITIES"

1:30 "Strategies for Survival: The Native Response in Mesoamerica"

WILLIAM R. FOWLER, Jr., Department of Anthropology, Vanderbilt University

"The African Diaspora and the African Discovery of the New World"

COLIN PALMER, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

"Borges, the Encounter, and the Other: Blacks and the Monstrous Races"

WILLIAM LUIS, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Vanderbilt University

"Creole Perspectives on the Spanish Conquests in America"

SIMON COLLIER, Department of History, Vanderbilt University

Panel Moderator: MARSHALL C. EAKIN, Department of History, Vanderbilt University

Something happened to the heroic image of Columbus on the way to the postmodern world.

four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's arrival and the advent of European domination over the world.

The enduring image of Columbus as hero was celebrated at succeeding world's fairs in the early twentieth century. Meanwhile, modern historians, especially Samuel Eliot Morison, perpetuated the sanitized, romantic portrayal. First published in 1942, Morison's partisan biography of Columbus concentrated on "what he did, where he went, and what sort of seaman he was." With the subject thus defined, Morison conveniently avoided the most obvious unpleasant aspects of first contact. "Never again may mortal men hope to recapture the amazement, the wonder, the delight of those October days in 1492 when the New World gracefully yielded her virginity to the conquering Castilians," Morison effused. While this book punctured many Columbian myths, Morison ignored or only cursorily mentioned the atrocities committed against the Indians.

Something happened to the heroic image of Columbus on the way to the postmodern world. The advent of social history in the 1930s shifted scholarly attention away from the deeds of individuals to patterns and process in whole societies. The Civil Rights Movement brought renewed awareness of the moral problems surrounding slavery. The American Indian Movement reminded us of our own history of internal colonialism. The powerful impact of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970) and Vine Deloria, Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) made the reading public aware that America was fully populated at the time of the Europeans' arrival and that European expansion into the Americas was an act of unmasked aggression against native peoples. The growth of anthropology in the twentieth century made it possible to demonstrate the diversity depth of American Indian culture. Archaeologists have established that the New World was discovered, not by Europeans, but by Asians who

crossed the Bering Strait at least 12,000 years ago. These considerations are now part of the popular and scholarly psyche, and they influence the way that we think about Columbus.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the past decade, and especially the past few years leading up to the commemoration of the quincentenary, have seen the publication of a spate of new books that treat Columbus as a villain.

Columbus is denounced as a genocidal megalomaniac; he has even been compared with Adolph Hitler, and the word "holocaust" is sometimes used when referring to Columbian encounters. The legacy of the Discovery is seen as "ecocide." Many of the charges are difficult to refute. Columbus is now widely, and properly, regarded as the first European slave trader in the Western Hemisphere. He brought disease, starvation, forced labor, and death to millions of Native Americans. He and his brother were directly responsible for at least 50,000 deaths (perhaps several times that many) in the punitive campaigns in the interior of Hispaniola in 1495-96.

Two recent books have been especially influential in fostering negative images of Columbus. Hans Koning's *Columbus: His Enterprise*, first published in 1976, treats Columbus as a racist, full of premeditated malice and cruelty towards the Indians. Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Conquest of Paradise*, published in 1990, is a radical environmental interpretation of Columbus as a rootless adventurer representative of a modern Europe that had become alienated from the natural world, a civilization that had lost its bearings.

While these thoughtful and provocative books will undoubtedly challenge many readers to reconsider the heroic image of Columbus, other writers have altered the image with more balanced, less impassioned scholarship focusing on the broader impact of the contact between the Old World and the New. Particularly stimulating in this regard has been Alfred

W. Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, published in 1972, which examines the impact in terms of the exchange of disease, plants, animals, and peoples. This is the same approach taken by *Seeds of Change*, published in 1991 to accompany the Smithsonian Institution's exhibition by the same name.

Other changes in the image are occurring as a result of recent archaeological research on the first settlements in the New World. José Cruxent, Kathleen A. Deagan, Charles R. Ewen, and others have brought the methods of historical archaeology to the first settlements established by Columbus on the island of Hispaniola. Their discoveries help us to put Columbus and his men into context as real people facing a very difficult challenge. Archaeological studies of Spanish-Indian interaction in the early contact period offer a perspective on events not found in the historical documents, which in turn helps put Columbus into perspective.

Columbus the visionary, the explorer, the Christ-bearer, is joined at the helm of the Santa María by Columbus the racist slave trader, the genocidal murderer, the incompetent administrator. Is it possible to seek a synthesis of these competing images? Or should we conclude that every generation, or every Columbian centenary, will develop its own image of Columbus? Archaeologist David Hurst Thomas, the curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History who has directed excavations of a Spanish colonial mission on St. Catherine's Island, Georgia, has suggested that we apply a cubist analogy to enhance our perspective of the European "discovery" of the New World. Thomas developed this analogy with reference to Spanish Borderlands research, but he would agree that it applies equally well to interpretations of Columbus. Like the cubist artists in early twentieth-century Paris, we should be willing to shift perspective at will. Thomas encourages us to abandon the attempt to find "truth" in history as

revealed by a single perspective. Once we rid ourselves of the notion that only one perspective is possible, we can entertain multiple, simultaneous views of the subject. Instead of a single, all-encompassing view of Columbus and the Discovery, we should seek to develop a multidimensional view in order to articulate the disparate and often conflicting histories and the different versions of reality that they contain.

One thing is certain, regardless of the image that one contemplates: Columbus's first voyage and the fateful landing on a Caribbean shore in 1492 changed our world forever. It is essential that we study this event and its impact in all its complexity and assist students in gaining a sophisticated understanding of Columbus and his legacy in creating the modern world.

William R. Fowler, Jr., Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Latin American Studies, is a specialist in ancient North and Central American anthropology.

Bibliographical Note

The Worlds of Christopher Columbus by William D. Phillips, Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips (Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *Columbus* by Felipe Fernández-Armesto (Oxford University Press, 1991) are very balanced and contextualized accounts of Columbus and his world. *Confronting Columbus*, edited by John Yewell, Chris Dodge, and Jan DeSirey (McFarland, 1992), is a useful collection of antiheroic essays. Raymond D. Fogelson describes the 1893 Chicago World Columbian Exposition in "The Red Man in the White City," in *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 3: *The Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American Perspective*, David Hurst Thomas, ed., pp. 73-90 (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). Samuel M. Wilson correlates archaeological and historical data on the contact period in the Caribbean in *Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus* (University of Alabama Press, 1990). Kathleen A. Deagan, Charles R. Ewen, and others discuss archaeological perspectives on first contact in their papers in *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 2, David Hurst Thomas, ed. (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990). David Hurst Thomas describes the cubist analogy in the introduction to *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 1, David Hurst Thomas, ed. (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

1992/93 Center Programs

The Humanities Center is sponsoring a wide variety of programs for the 1992/93 year. As the Center's fall newsletter goes to press, the following programs are either in place or are in planning stages.

Seminars

Concepts of the Enlightenment. This seminar will focus on German efforts to explain the essence and goals of the Enlightenment. The seminar will meet on September 14 and 21 and October 5 and 12 at 4 p.m. in the Center's conference room. On October 12, visiting speaker WERNER SCHNEIDERS, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Center for Research on the Enlightenment at the University of Munster, will give a seminar presentation. Seminar coordinator: JOHN MCCARTHY, Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages.

The Cutting Edge: Explorations in Interdisciplinary Scholarship. Introductory sessions for the College of Arts and Science's new graduate program in Social and Political Thought. Meeting dates and times to be announced. Seminar coordinator: JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, Department of Political Science.

Great Works Series. The Center will continue to host Friday brown-bag luncheons to learn about and discuss landmark works of literature. September 25 and October 2: EMERSON BROWN will lead a discussion of the *Canterbury Tales*. October 30 and November 6 MILAN MIHAL will lead a discussion of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*. Further programs will be announced. Seminar coordinator: JAMES LANG, Department of Sociology.

Faculty Luncheon Seminars. On Mondays at noon, faculty members are invited to meet at the Center for work-in-progress presentations. Fall semester dates and speakers: August 31, MARGARET KENT BASS; September 14, GARY JENSEN; September 28, PAUL CONKIN; October 12, JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN; October 26, RICHARD HAGLUND, JR.;

November 9 and November 30, speakers to be announced. Seminar coordinator: BEVERLY ASBURY, University Chaplain.

Industrial Policy. This seminar will meet at 4 p.m. on Tuesday afternoons, beginning September 29 and concluding on October 27. Seminar coordinator: HUGH GRAHAM, Department of History. Following is a list of the seminar presentations:

September 29: OTIS GRAHAM, Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara; director of the graduate program in Public History; and editor of *The Public Historian*.

October 6: DAVID SCHEFFMAN, Justin Potter Professor of American Competitive Enterprise at the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt.

October 13: GERALD SULLIVAN, Fellow at Vanderbilt's U.S.-Japan Center.

October 20: DONALD HANCOCK, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for European Studies at Vanderbilt.

October 27: TOSHINARI ISHII, vice-president at Northern Telecom, U.S.A.

Psychoanalysis and Culture. Currently in the planning stages. Seminar coordinator: THOMAS GREGOR, Department of Anthropology.

Latin Reading Group. The reading group is scheduled to meet several times in the spring semester. Seminar coordinator: THOMAS MCGINN, Department of Classical Studies.

Special Programs

AIDS and Public Policy. The Center will sponsor a lecture series on this topic.

First Amendment History. In conjunction with the First Amend-

ment Center, the Center is planning a spring semester program on a topic related to the first amendment.

Public Lecture. HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR. Co-sponsored by the Bishop Johnson Black Cultural Center. Professor Gates is the chair of the Afro-American Studies Department, Director of the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research, and Professor of English and of Afro-American Studies at Harvard University. Thursday, December 3 at 4 p.m. in Wilson Hall, room 103.

NEH Visitor. In conjunction with the Office of Sponsored Research, KENNETH COLSON, Deputy to the Director in the Division of Research Programs at the National Endowment for the Humanities, will be on campus to give a presentation and to meet with interested faculty members. December 10 and 11.



Director's Report

Dean Jacque Voegeli in consultation with an advisory committee in 1986 defined the Humanities Center at Vanderbilt as one dedicated to the research and teaching interests and needs of the faculty of the College of Arts and Science. Among the Center's goals is facilitation of scholarly exchange between Arts and Science faculty members and those in all segments of the University as well as among members of the faculty in the College who are outside of our own departments. The Center has developed its identity during its first five years by means of Fellows Programs, seminars, lectures, and conferences, most of which were initiated by members of the faculty. During the last four years approximately two hundred people each

year have participated in the Center's programs in addition to those who have attended the Center-sponsored conferences. Initiative by faculty members and strong support by the College and University administrations have allowed the Center to play a significant role in many of our professional lives.

We have worked together during the last five years to develop a wide range of topics for study and discussion. Titles for some of the Center's seminars include: "Truth and Metaphor," "Chaos and Causality," "Ivory Towers and Women Scholars," "American Cultures," "Translations and Theories of Translation," "Witch Hunts," and "Theoretical Problems in Biography."

Some of you have spoken of the value of finding areas of common interests with colleagues whom you

have come to know in the Center for the first time. Others of you enjoy occasions to hear colleagues speak of their disciplines and research and to discuss your own work with them. Mona and I often hear that a given lunch discussion or a particular seminar provided an exceptional moment of exploratory conversation that seldom occurs in our normal routines. Several of you have modified courses or offered new courses because of your experiences in seminars or Fellows Programs.

This year we will assess our programs and agenda during the Center's first five years. We would like to know of possibilities that we have overlooked and programmatic directions that we should consider. What are topics that you would like to see explored? What would you like for the Center to do more

of or to do better or to undertake for the first time? Are there issues of special relevance that we should explore in the near future? We have concentrated on seminars of ten to twenty participants. Should we concentrate on larger programs which thus far we have limited to three or four a year? Do the forty-five of you who have been Fellows have suggestions for future Fellows Programs?

We are approaching the last year of a four-year endowment fund drive that was initiated by an NEH matching grant. The Center's programs have been supported by time-limited funds but will soon be able to draw from its own endowment and expand the range of what it can offer.

Mona, Ben, and I look forward to hearing your ideas and to seeing you at the Center.

1992/93 Fellows

The function of the Fellows Program is to provide an environment in which ideas and discussions which arise in relative isolation can interact and transform one another. The success of such an interaction depends on the participation by faculty representing a wide range of disciplines and interests. As our interview suggests, the South provides a unique focus for this kind of interaction. The following professors at Vanderbilt have been selected through a campus-wide application process for participation in the 1992/93 Fellows Program.

DAVID LEE CARLTON, Associate Professor of History, teaches the history of the South. He is currently working on a study of economic development in North Carolina in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

JOYCE E. CHAPLIN, Assistant Professor of History, specializes in colonial American history with a particular interest in the South. She is currently working on English natural histories of America and the influence of scientific theory on English views of the New World and is particularly concerned

with interpretations of the "exotic" South.

DON H. DOYLE, Professor of History, teaches American social history. He is currently working on a history of Lafayette County, Mississippi, the basis for William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga.

JAMES W. ELY, Professor of Law and Professor of History, teaches in the School of Law and has a special interest in the legal history of the South. He is currently studying the U.S. Supreme Court in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

TERESA A. GODDU, Assistant Professor of English, is working on a book dealing with American Gothic literature before 1865, which will include the work of southern writer Edgar Allan Poe and African-American literature.

LARRY J. GRIFFIN, Professor of Sociology and Professor of Political Science, is currently engaged in a historical study of lynching and averted lynching in the South and is working on a history of a union local in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

MICHAEL KREYLING, Professor of English, teaches southern literature. He is currently focusing on southern literary culture after World War II.

ROBERT A. MARGO, Professor of Economics, teaches American economic history. He is currently working on "The Decline in Black Teenage

Labor Force Participation in the South, 1900-1970" and a book dealing with teaching and gender in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

RICHARD A. PRIDE, Associate Professor of Political Science and Alexander Heard Distinguished Service Professor, has interests in southern public policy. He is currently involved in a biographical study of social activist Dorothy Danner and a study of school desegregation and voting rights in Mobile, Alabama.

ERIC J. SUNDQUIST, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of English, teaches southern literature. He is currently investigating the literature and other cultural expressions of the modern civil rights movement.

Jay Clayton
Associate Professor of English
Paul K. Conkin
Distinguished Professor of History
Margaret Anne Doody
Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities; Professor of English; Director, Program in Comparative Literature
Jean Bethke Elshtain
Centennial Professor of Political Science; Professor of Philosophy; Director, Program in Social and Political Thought
Russell G. Hamilton
Dean for Graduate Studies and Research; Professor of Spanish and Portuguese
William H. Race
Professor of Classics
John Sallis
W. Alton Jones Professor of Philosophy
Charles E. Scott
Professor of Philosophy; Director, Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities

Advisory Committee and Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1988 and renamed the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Members of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities' Advisory Committee for the 1992/93 academic year are:

LETTERS is the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, Box 1534 Station B, Nashville, Tennessee 37235, (615) 343-6060.

Director: Charles E. Scott
Assistant Director: Mona C. Frederick
Secretary, Editor: Benjamin S. Pryor
For more information concerning the Center or any of its programs, please contact the above address.

Vanderbilt University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action university.
Photographs by Gerald Holly and Gary Gore
Published by University Publications & Design, 1992