HUMANITIES

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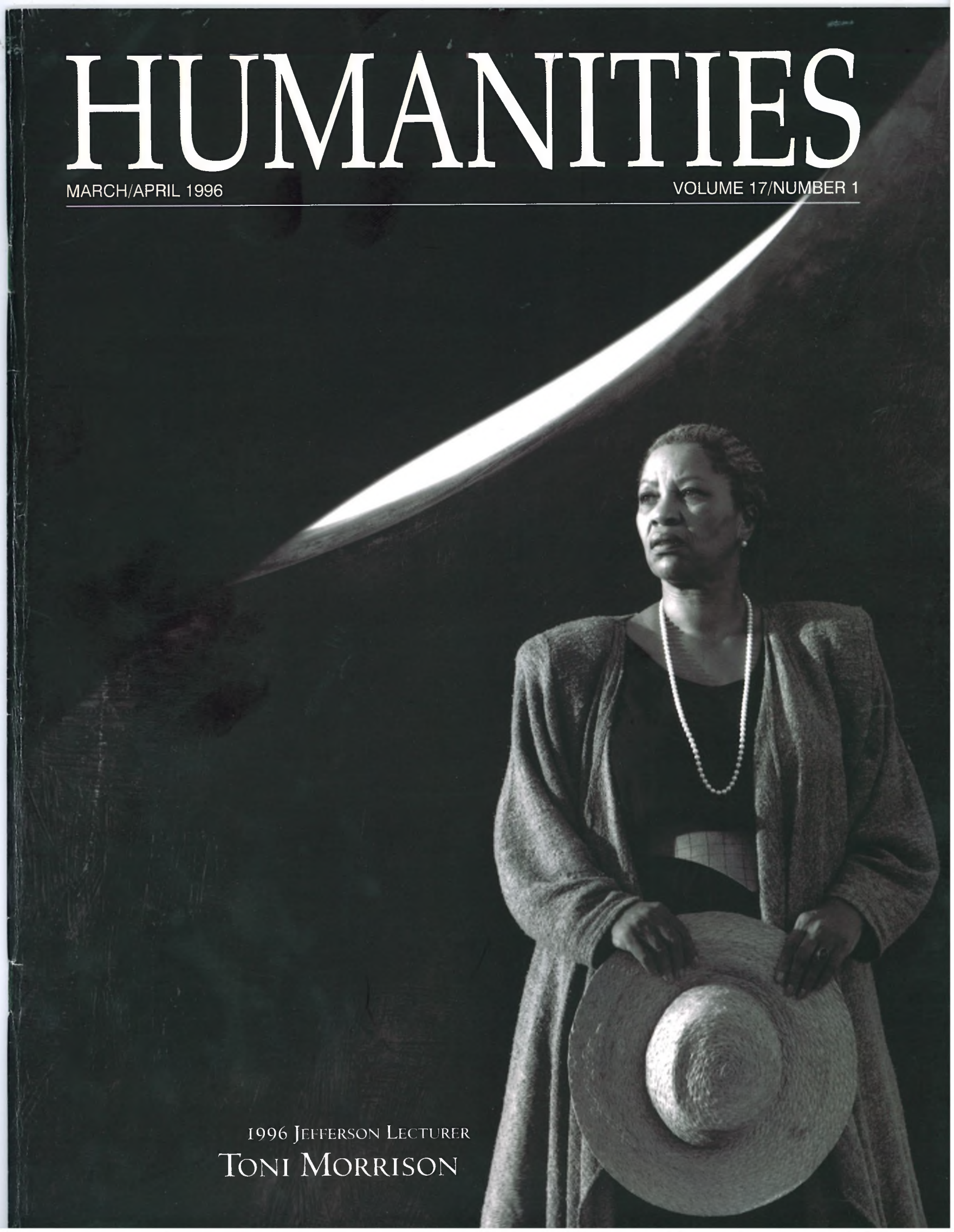
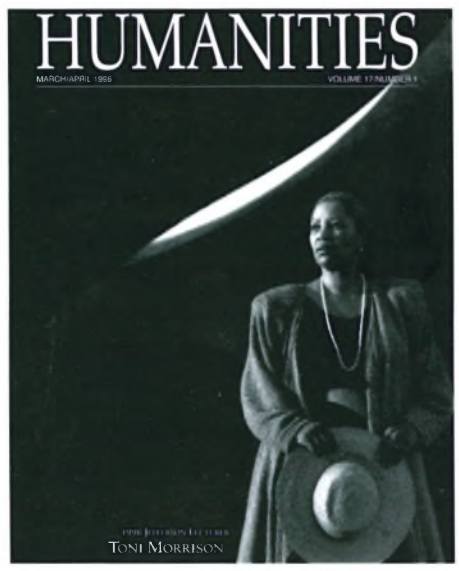


1996 JEFFERSON LECTURER

TONI MORRISON



Toni Morrison, 1996 Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities. —*Photo by Brian Lanker ©1992*

Humanities
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Toni Morrison

"We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives."

It is the voice of Toni Morrison, accepting the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 in Stockholm.

For the past twenty-five years, Morrison has been pursuing this elusive calling she calls "word-work," searching for the larger truth in the compelling stories of Sethe, who loves her child too much to let her live in slavery; of Eva, who the neighbors say put her leg in front of a train to collect the $10,000 insurance to support her family; of Jadine, whose beauty makes "those white girls disappear. Just disappear right off the page"; of Violet, who tries to kill a girl in her coffin.

The Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy said of Morrison: "She delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. And she addresses us with the luster of poetry."

In this issue of *Humanities*, we look at the work of Morrison, who has been chosen as the 1996 Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities. She is the twenty-fifth recipient of the honor, which is the highest award the federal government bestows in the humanities.

Morrison grew up in the Midwest, in Lorain, Ohio, and it was to serve as the setting for her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. The book appeared in 1970, followed by *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, which won the National Book Critics Award in 1977. Then came *Tar Baby* and *Beloved*, which won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize, and *Jazz*.

Morrison left the Midwest to attend Howard University and Cornell, where she earned her master's degree in 1955. She taught at a number of universities—Texas Southern, Howard, the State University of New York at Purchase and SUNY-Albany—before becoming the Robert F. Goheen Professor of Humanities at Princeton, where she has been since 1989. From 1965 to 1985 she was also a senior editor at Random House.

Along with the novels, there have been articles and essays and books of literary criticism. In a nonfiction work in 1992, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison explores the seemingly contradictory thesis that black stereotypes or even the nonpresence of blacks in books by white writers nevertheless has substantively shaped the national literature. Taking passages from Cather and Melville and Hemingway, she analyzes the shadings of language and relationships to bring to view the African presence.

Her work she sees as part of a continuum. At the Nobel ceremony she spoke of it. In entering the reception hall, she said that she felt "pleasantly haunted by those who have entered it before me. That company of laureates is both daunting and welcoming, for among its lists are names of persons whose work has made whole worlds available to me. . . ." She would leave it, she said, "with a new and much more delightful haunting than the one I felt upon entering: That is the company of laureates yet to come. Those who, even as I speak, are mining, sifting, and polishing languages for illuminations none of us has dreamed of."

—*Mary Lou Beatty*

HUMANITIES

The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities March/April 1996

THE 1996 JEFFERSON LECTURE

4 **A Conversation with . . .**
Writer Toni Morrison talks with Chairman Sheldon Hackney about her work and her life.

10 **Honors in Stockholm**
Text of Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize lecture.

14 **Toni Morrison: Writing above Ground**
Her art lies in translating matter into another medium, that of language.
By Claudia Brodsky Lacour

18 **Healer in the Village**
How Morrison's hometown of Lorain, Ohio, became the starting point of a larger vision.
By Maryemma Graham

DEPARTMENTS

26 **Around the Nation**
In Alabama, citizens record their history with disposable cameras. In Virginia, prominent writers gather for the second annual Festival of the Book.

51 **Noteworthy**

52 **Calendar**

54 **Deadlines**

Page 4

Page 22

Page 26

OTHER FEATURES

22 **The Real West**
Three of Colorado's cultural institutions collaborate on the first major exhibition about the American west to be mounted in the west.
By Andrew E. Masich

32 **Boss Daley**
A new film profiles the man who ruled Chicago for a quarter of a century.
By Nadine Ekrek

36 **Clio in Cyberspace**
The more than seventy listservs run by H-Net link scholars to developments in their fields.
By Meredith Hindley

42 **Testing the Airwaves**
Excerpts from a National Conversation project in Los Angeles. *By Amy Lifson*

TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS:

Much to our regret, the government shutdown in December forced the cancellation of the January-February issue of *Humanities*. We will extend your subscription to make up for the missing issue. Meanwhile, thank you for your patience.

—*Illustration of Toni Morrison by Jenny Powell, from* Women of Words, *©1994. Courtesy of Portal Publications Ltd. and The Artworks.*

"I COME FROM PEOPLE WHO SANG ALL THE TIME"

A CONVERSATION WITH TONI MORRISON

Endowment Chairman Sheldon Hackney spoke recently with writer Toni Morrison about her fictional characters and how they live with their choices and with the burdens of the past in such books as BELOVED, SONG OF SOLOMON, *and* JAZZ. *Morrison, winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993, is this year's Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities.*

SHELDON HACKNEY: I'd like to talk a bit about your view of life in the late twentieth century, basically as it comes out in your literature, which really fascinates me.

Let me ask you first, though—in *Jazz*, I take it the title comes from the structure of the narrative itself, from the way you tell the story.

TONI MORRISON: I was very deliberately trying to rest on what could be called generally agreed-upon characteristics of jazz. There are so many arguments going on about jazz: What it is, when it began, who are the authority figures and who is the best, who has debased *it*. There is however agreement about some things that have been true all along. One is that jazz is improvisational; that is to say, unanticipated things can happen while the performance is going on, and the

musicians have to be alert constantly. One of the reasons being that it isn't written and rehearsed for permanence on the page, and the other that there's a kind of egalitarianism in it, or meritocracy. One person doesn't dominate the whole performance—or if he or she does, he or she will have to take close, close notice of what another voice or instrument is doing or saying, and listening to the other voice may, and frequently does, affect or alter what the other voices might do or say.

HACKNEY: So you have various voices telling the story from different points of view.

MORRISON: Exactly. No one voice is the correct one, the dominant one, the one that has all of the truth, including the narrator, or especially the narrator. I wanted to get rid of that notion of the omniscient narrative voice.

HACKNEY: Is that why the narrator isn't even very definite at times about what happens or what a character feels or thinks?

MORRISON: I didn't want gender or age or even race or anything to be identified. I wrote it as though it were literally a book speaking, so that the verbs that I used in connection with the "I" voice would be only those things one could associate with the book. The book says things about its imagination, about its dreaming, about its yearnings and its assertion of knowledge, and then its admission at points that it was wrong. I wanted it very, very dissimilar to *Beloved*, which had a kind of classical, spiritual gospel feel, a largeness to it, which I think I could easily associate and did associate with the music during the late nineteenth century. But for the beginning of the twentieth century, I wanted that feeling of dislocation and inventiveness and startling change that was representative of those enormous migrations that were taking place among African Americans, and certainly is characteristic of the music.

HACKNEY: But I also notice that, as in jazz, there is a melody and there is a narrative here, a story.

MORRISON: When I listen, or as anyone does, to a jazz performance, whatever they're playing, you hear the melody and then it goes away or seems to, or they play against it or around it or take it off to another zone. Then sometimes it comes back and you can recognize it. I wanted that narrative line or melody to be established immediately in the first pages, and when the question becomes whether the narrator was right in his or her expectations of exactly what the story was, that is the "melody" being taken to another zone.

HACKNEY: But there are surprises all the way through.

MORRISON: All the way through.

SHELDON HACKNEY

HACKNEY: In *Jazz*, Joe and Violet do find some sort of happiness or satisfaction. I guess what the reader is called upon to do is to figure out how or why. Life is hard, as it is in all your books. Did Joe and Violet come to terms with life's imperfections?

MORRISON: I think so. I think so. It's not quite as tentative as some of the relationships that I've written about. These are older people who had powerful and grief-stricken losses as young people, and in their somewhat helpless adult life in the city, which is less about the city than it is about that sort of intensity where all of the unresolved problems of their personal histories are mangled in the city. They do terrible things because they haven't sorted it out yet. But they do sort it out. There is some redemption, in a way, for them. They are not guiltless. Who is? I was surprised myself a little bit that they could look forward to that shared experience, a real conversation, and holding on. That was a little surprising, although I sort of thought maybe . . .

HACKNEY: Did that surprise you when it came out that way?

MORRISON: Yes. I was not sure what their relationship would be. I had invented these people based on some anecdote I heard about a girl killed in 1926 at a party, who insisted on letting her ex-lover, the one who shot her, get away, and just wouldn't tell anybody who had done it, and bled to death. That seemed to me, when I heard it, since she was only eighteen years old, so romantic and so silly, but young, so young. It is that quality of romance, misguided but certainly intense, that seems to feed into the music of that period. I was convinced that that reckless romantic emotion was part and parcel of an opportunity snatched to erase the past in which one really didn't have all those choices, certainly not choices of love.

In *Beloved*, for example, or any books in that period that I make reference to, the people marry the people next door or the people on the farm or the people down the street, because they don't travel. But with the migration from the South or even to the West, one of the things that must have been an absolute thrill for the people in that period was to get somewhere where they

. . .a certain kind of amnesia is just intolerable. In personal life, you have to know what happened and why and figure it out, and then you can go on to another level freer, stronger, tempered in some way.

—MORRISON

could choose this illegal thing, which was falling in love. It meant so much because it was rare. The lyrics are all about that, the willingness to give up everything. Like the blues, too, although there are all sorts of themes and extremes in the blues.

What was interesting to me was the willingness to abandon everything for this chosen beloved. I wanted this young girl to have heard all that music, all the speakeasy music, and to be young and in the city and alive and daring and rebellious and, naturally, to get in trouble. The adults, however, have to come to terms with their own lives bereft of love.

HACKNEY: In that sense, Violet and Joe's being enmeshed in their own history and the problems of life stand in contrast to much of contemporary literature. In fact, they don't get away from their past, do they?

MORRISON: No, not at all.

HACKNEY: Do any of your characters get away from their past?

MORRISON: I hope not. No. I don't want anybody to get off scot-free.

I think what I want is not to reinvent the past as idyllic or to have the past as just a terrible palm or fist that pounds everybody to death, but to have happiness or growth represented in the way in which people deal with their past, which means they have to come to terms, confront it, sort it out, and then they can do that third thing. But denying it, avoiding it, and evading it is a sure way to have a truncated life, a life that has no possibilities in it, generally speaking.

HACKNEY: So even if it's problematic, your past is enriching.

MORRISON: Indeed. I think an individual or even a country needs that. I mean, a certain kind of amnesia is just intolerable. In personal life, you have to know what happened and why and figure it out, and then you can go on to another level freer, stronger, tempered in some way. Constantly burying it, distorting it, and pretending, I think, is unhealthy.

HACKNEY: In that sense, your characters really are existential in that their choices make a difference in their lives and they are made to seem responsible for themselves and for their lives. Is that a conscious thing?

MORRISON: Oh, yes. I sometimes think—I'm not quite sure—but I sometimes think that the experience, in large part, of African Americans in this country was classically existential. Coming here in that manner, being mixed up in that way—the deliberate putting together of people from different tribes and regions, the forbidding of marriage—all of that which was economically sound for slavocracy would dash certain traditional related cultures of their past. They're all just being thrown somewhere and having to make it up. And also, trying to hold on to those pieces that you do pass on, because there were large blocks, sections, of knowledge that were passed on, maintained, kept, and might disintegrate and then resurface. By and large, the desperate way in which that hanging on took shape meant that there was a lot of fragmentation. So here you are with certain kinds of choices, constantly fighting for more, and having to do it rather quickly.

HACKNEY: One of the other things that one notices in reading your work is that your characters do live with their past always. They live in history, but not in a self-conscious way, as Faulkner's characters frequently are quite self-conscious about history with a capital *H*. You know, Quentin Compson thinking about Pickett's charge.

MORRISON: Yes. They do historicize themselves.

HACKNEY: Yours don't, but clearly they're in the flow.

MORRISON: They play a very interesting power game, you know, Faulknerian characters, brilliantly intricate American forays into the past or the failed maintenance of the past.

The past for my characters, I believe, is—I was going to say more intimate, but I don't mean intimate. Why don't we put it this way: I understand that in many African languages there is an infinite past, and very few, if any, verbs for the future, and a major string of verbs for the continuous present. So that notion of its always being now, even though it is past, is what I wanted to incorporate into the text, because the past is never something you have to record, or go back to. Children can actually represent ancestors or grandmothers or grandfathers. It's a very

living-in-the-moment, living now with the past, so that it's never—calculated; it's effortless. Sometimes that causes a great deal of trouble to some of the characters.

HACKNEY: Part of the problematic in your stories is coming to terms with that.

MORRISON: Oh, exactly.

HACKNEY: Would you go so far as to say that that sense of the presence of the past is taken from black English's use of the present tense, frequently, for events in the past?

MORRISON: I've been told that, and I've read books on so-called black English in which children, for example, who come to the first grade are confused by standard English because it has only two present tenses. Whereas black English, I am told, has five or six present tenses, some of which involve space and time, some recent time, some longer time, and so on. It's a very interesting way in which the verbs are understood to be constructed. I am unwilling to commit on that because I don't trust people who talk about black English who don't know African languages.

HACKNEY: I share that.

MORRISON: It's a fascinating subject, but black English has along with it some devotees who I think are misguided because they want to teach it or make it a secondary language. I think all the people who speak it know it and don't need to be taught, and its formalization seems to me to have some other agenda.

What is certainly true is that the language we speak in this country and, I know, the language spoken where there are a large number of black people all over the world alters in some very fascinating, interesting ways. It was my intense desire to capture the vernacular, the lyric, the sermonic—all these layers of English that play about in the way African Americans speak.

Many people have tried to grasp that in literature, and usually they do it in a way that I find very offensive. They just make it ungrammatical, or earlier they used sight spelling, just changed the spelling to something nobody could possibly read at all. Remember George Bernard Shaw was trying to represent cockney for about two pages, and then he gave it up in *Pygmalion*—it was sort of like that, but I think writers understood there was something going on in the speech of black Americans. I know there's something going on, but I try to represent it in choice of metaphors, rhythm of the sentence, the kind of image that would surface in order to say something theatrically. For certain people with a certain kind of education, obviously the language would be nonstandard, but I try to blend colloquial vernacular and standard. Then, as in my family, when something terribly important was to be said, it was highly sermonic, highly formalized, biblical in a sense, and easily so. They could move easily into the language of the King James Bible and then back to standard English, and then segue into language that we would call street. It was seamless, and this was extremely attractive to me to hear. Just listening to my great-grandmother, whom I knew, and my grandparents and my uncles and my mother and father and all their friends, it was fascinating, and it was quite different from street language.

I became sensitive to languages very early, not just in school, but because I grew up in a steel town where there were so many immigrants, East European and Irish, European, Italian, all sorts. It was very much a mixed bag because it was in the thirties and because there was a steel mill there. It attracted all sorts of people. It's strange, but I take it for granted people now don't believe such places exist much.

I was in Barcelona two years ago and I met a man from Lorain, Ohio, who was in the diplomatic corps. We were at a party, and we were talking about the way things were back then. Nobody at the embassy—Americans or the people from Barcelona—understood what we were trying to say. I don't know if the experience is unusual or the representation is all that unusual, but the racial and ethnic mix was so tight and so unhostile, and there were no black neighborhoods. I mean there were wealthy neighborhoods but all of the poor people, which we were—the workers—lived next door to each other. Of course, they went to dif-

They could move easily into the language of the King James Bible and then back to standard English, and then segue into language that we would call street. It was seamless, and this was extremely attractive to me to hear.

MORRISON

ferent churches, and so on, as adults. Even now I think of the names of the people who live next door to my mother's house. It's quite different from the media stereotype. It's the way I thought New York City was, and it isn't.

HACKNEY: It is not. Right.

MORRISON: It is not.

HACKNEY: In Lorain, though, despite the great heterogeneity in the backgrounds, there was something that everyone shared, apparently.

MORRISON: There was. We all shared the small space, one high school, three junior high schools, these totally dedicated teachers, poverty, and that kind of life.

HACKNEY: Was the language part of that sharing? Language is very important to you.

MORRISON: I have to think about that a little bit, because there was a certain exchange of language also.

I remember being a reader in the sixth grade for what they called then "partially sighted," I guess, people who were blind. I used to read for one or two of those students after class, and I got very excited about the kinds of questions they asked.

Also, I used to be put next to children who couldn't speak English. I remember in the second grade, there were some children from Italy, and, of course, children pick up language very quickly. I would be selected frequently to read and talk to them. So when you say language sharing, that immediately came to my mind because of those exceptional circumstances in the classroom. At the same time, there was a lingua franca of the town.

However, groups did retreat socially, in terms of their family lives, into certain enclaves. But the public space of the schools, of the PTA, of the workplace, of the shopping place, of the neighborhood, of the streets, belonged to all of us.

HACKNEY: I'm going to leap a little bit now, because that strikes a familiar chord. One of the projects that I'm most interested in now is something we call the National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity, which is a project that's seeking to bring together millions of Americans to talk and to listen to each other about what they share amidst their heterogeneity. Are there any common commitments? One of the things that comes up in these discussions frequently in the small heterogeneous groups that get together and talk about this, is the notion of public and private—basically, that there is a public sphere, not just a governmental sphere, but a public sphere in which Americans seem to want to be able to come and be just American, in some sense, where everyone comes as an undifferentiated individual. But they also want this other sphere where they can honor their particular heritage, their particular identity, and they want both at the same time.

MORRISON: They should have both.

HACKNEY: I believe that also.

One of the tasks is getting to "us" somehow. That comes back to your sense of community, which is there in the novels.

— HACKNEY

MORRISON: I think that's very important. You said not necessarily government space, but what shot up in my mind was that monument down there, the Vietnam veterans' wall.

HACKNEY: Yes, yes. Terribly moving.

MORRISON: But there's a serious problem about public space that seems recent to me. It's as though our public space is being privatized so quickly. Here we have—here meaning New York City—there are fights about the parks, there are fights about the streets, there are fights about all sorts of public spaces. These are class problems.

HACKNEY: Right.

MORRISON: Severe class problems. And because there are so many dispossessed homeless and itinerant people, it fosters grave, truly grave problems.

I find architects to be particularly annoying these days, well, I don't mean annoying. In trying to develop public space, they think of it as an enclave for a certain kind of public person. I say—I have a son who's an architect—I say, "You know, if you were given all the time and all the money, could you design a city that could accommodate the poor people?"

HACKNEY: That's a wonderful challenge.

MORRISON: They can't even think of what it would look like, except as in Paris—where all the Algerians and poor people live outside the city in tenements hidden behind the trees. It leaves a city without any sense of being urbane, because you don't confront anybody. You don't see anybody. You don't mix in that sense. Now, it's true, the crowd's flow in New York is like that, but it's so unusual to share public space without hostility. Bryant Park, next to the New York Public Library, is a sensation because it was redesigned to do precisely that: offer beautiful unhostile space to all sectors of the public.

Continued on page 48

Toni Morrison descends staircase on arm of King Carl Gustaf of Sweden. In her Nobel acceptance speech she presented a modern-day fable.

—*Photo by Jan Collsioo. © Pressens Bild AB, Sweden.*

THE 1993 NOBEL PRIZE LECTURE

Honor

MEMBERS OF THE SWEDISH ACADEMY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

NARRATIVE HAS NEVER BEEN MERELY ENTERTAINMENT FOR ME. IT IS, I BELIEVE, ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL WAYS IN WHICH WE ABSORB KNOWLEDGE. I HOPE YOU WILL UNDERSTAND, THEN, WHY I BEGIN THESE REMARKS WITH THE OPENING PHRASE OF WHAT MUST BE THE OLDEST SENTENCE IN THE WORLD, AND THE EARLIEST ONE WE REMEMBER FROM CHILDHOOD: "ONCE UPON A TIME. . ."

ONCE UPON A TIME there was an old woman. Blind but wise." Or was it an old man? A guru, perhaps. Or a griot soothing restless children. I have heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures.

"Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind. Wise."

In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.

One day the woman is visited by some young people who seem to be bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is.

Stockholm

Their plan is simple: they enter her house and ask the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability: her blindness. They stand before her, and one of them says, "Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead. She does not answer, and the question is repeated. "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?"

Still she does not answer. She is blind and cannot see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She does not know their color, gender or homeland. She only knows their motive.

The old woman's silence is so long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter.

Finally she speaks, and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know," she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."

Her answer can be taken to mean: if it is dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive is your decision. Whatever the case, it is your responsibility.

For parading their power and her helplessness, the young visitors are reprimanded, told they are responsible not only for the act of mockery but also for the small bundle of life sacrificed to achieve its aims. The blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised.

Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird in the hand might signify has always been attractive to me, but especially so now, thinking as I have been about the work I do that has brought me to this company. So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer, she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency—as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her, "Is it living or dead?," is not unreal, because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead, the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than to maintain the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However, moribund, it is not without effect, for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smitheried to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor, polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is; dumb, predatory, sentimental. Exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference, and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself but all users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the void of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts, for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties, replacing them with menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity-driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek—it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language—all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not, permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.

The old woman is keenly aware that no intellectual mercenary or insatiable dictator, no paid-for politician or demagogue, no counterfeit journalist would be persuaded by her thoughts. There is and will be rousing language to keep citizens armed and arming; slaughtered and slaughtering in the malls, courthouses, post offices, playgrounds, bedrooms and boulevards; stirring, memorializing language to mask the pity and waste of needless death. There will be more diplomatic language to countenance rape, torture, assassination. There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to throttle women, to pack their throats like pâté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness.

Underneath the eloquence, the glamour, the scholarly associations, however stirring or seductive, the heart of such language is languishing, or perhaps not beating at all—if the bird is already dead.

She has thought about what could have been the intellectual history of any discipline if it had

not insisted upon, or been forced into, the waste of time and life that rationalizations for and representations of dominance required—lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded.

The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction or the weight of many languages that precipitated the tower's failed architecture. That one monolithic language would have expedited the building, and heaven would have been reached. Whose heaven, she wonders? And what kind? Perhaps the achievement of Paradise was premature, a little hasty if no one could take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives. Had they, the heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet. Complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of Heaven as life; not heaven as post-life.

She would not want to leave her young visitors with the impression that language should be forced to stay alive merely to be. The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience, it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie. When a President of the United States thought about the graveyard his country had become, and said, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here. But it will never forget what they did here," his simple words were exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties because they refused to encapsulate the reality of 600,000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the "final word," the precise "summing up," acknowledging their "poor power to add or detract," his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns. It is the deference that moves her, that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never "pin down" slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity, is in its reach toward the ineffable.

Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word or the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction. But who does not know of literature banned because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate? And how many are outraged by the thought of a self-ravaged tongue?

Word-work is sublime, she thinks, because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference—the way in which we are like no other life.

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we *do* language. That may be the measure of our lives.

"Once upon a time . . ." Visitors ask an old woman a question. Who are they, these children? What did they make of that encounter? What did they hear in those final words: "The bird is in your hands"? A sentence that gestures toward possibility, or one that drops a latch? Perhaps what the children heard was, "It is not my problem. I am old, female, black, blind. What wisdom I have now is in knowing I cannot help you. The future of language is yours."

They stand there. Suppose nothing was in their hands. Suppose the visit was only a ruse, a trick to get to be spoken to, taken seriously as they have not been before. A chance to interrupt, to violate the adult world, its miasma of discourse about them. Urgent questions are at stake, including the one they have asked: "Is the bird we hold living or dead?" Perhaps the question meant: "Could someone tell us what life is? What is death?" No trick at all; no silliness. A straightforward question worthy of the attention of a wise one. An old one. And if the old and wise who have lived life and faced death cannot describe either, who can?

But she does not; she keeps her secret, her good opinion of herself, her gnomic pronouncements, her art without commitment. She keeps her distance, enforces it and retreats into the singularity of isolation, in sophisticated, privileged space.

Nothing, no word follows her declaration of transfer. That silence is deep, deeper than the meaning available in the words she has spoken. It shivers, this silence, and the children, annoyed, fill it with language invented on the spot.

"Is there no speech," they ask her, "no words you can give us that help us break through your dossier of failures? through the education you have just given us that is no education at all because we are paying close attention to what you have done as well as to what you have said? to the barrier you have erected between generosity and wisdom?

"We have no bird in our hands, living or dead. We have only you and our important question. Is the nothing in our hands something you could not bear to contemplate, to even guess? Don't you remember being young, when language was magic without meaning? When what you could say, could not mean? When the invisible was what imagination strove to see? When questions and demands for answers burned so brightly you trembled with fury at not knowing?

"Do we have to begin consciousness with a battle heroes and heroines like you have already fought and lost, leaving us with nothing in our hands except what you have imagined is there? Your answer is artful, but its artfulness embarrasses us and ought to embarrass you. Your answer is indecent in its self-congratulation. A made-for-television script that makes no sense if there is nothing in our hands.

"Why didn't you reach out, touch us with your soft fingers, delay the sound bite, the lesson, until you knew who we were? Did you so despise our trick, our modus operandi, that you could not see that we were baffled about how to get your attention? We are young. Unripe. We have heard all our short lives that we have to be responsible. What could that possibly mean in the catastrophe this world has become; where, as a poet said, "nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced"? Our inheritance is an affront. You want us to have your old, blank eyes and see only cruelty and mediocrity. Do you think we are stupid enough to perjure ourselves again and again with the fiction of nationhood? How dare you talk to us of duty when we stand waist deep in the toxin of your past?

"You trivialize us and trivialize the bird that is not in our hands. Is there no context for our lives? No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong? You are an adult. The old one, the wise one. Stop thinking about saving your face. Think of our lives and

Be it grand or slender, burrowing, lasting or refusing to sanctify, whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction.

tell us your particularized world. Make up a story. Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp; if love so ignites your words that they go down in flames and nothing is left but their scald. Or if, with the reticence of a surgeon's hands, your words suture only the places where blood might flow. We know you can never do it properly—once and for all. Passion is never enough; neither is skill. But try. For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don't tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief's wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear's caul. You, old woman, blessed with blindness, can speak the language that tells us what only language can: how to see without pictures. Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation.

"Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company.

"Tell us about ships turned away from shorelines at Easter, placenta in a field. Tell us about a wagonload of slaves, how they sang so softly their breath was indistinguishable from the falling snow. How they knew from the hunch of the nearest shoulder that the next stop would be their last. How, with hands prayered in their sex, they thought of heat, then sun. Lifting their faces as though it was there for the taking. Turning as though there for the taking. They stop at an inn. The driver and his mate go in with the lamp, leaving them humming in the dark. The horse's void steams into the snow beneath its hooves and the hiss and melt are the envy of the freezing slaves.

"The inn door opens: a girl and a boy step away from its light. They climb into the wagon bed. The boy will have a gun in three years, but now he carries a lamp and a jug of warm cider. They pass it from mouth to mouth. The girl offers bread, pieces of meat and something more: a glance into the eyes of the one she serves. One helping for each man, two for each woman. And a look. They look back. The next stop will be their last. But not this one. This one is warmed."

It's quiet again when the children finish speaking, until the woman breaks into the silence.

"Finally," she says. "I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done—together." □

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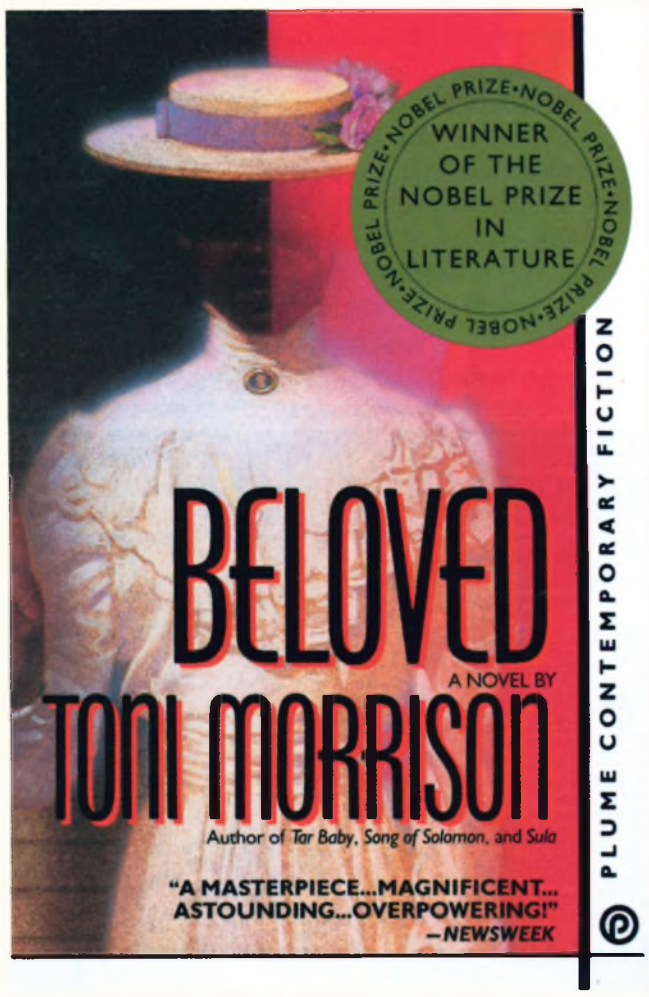
Toni Morrison accepts the Nobel Prize from King Carl Gustaf.



IN AN EFFORT SO GREAT IT MADE HER SICK TO HER STOMACH, SETHE TURNED ONTO HER RIGHT SIDE. AMY UNFASTENED THE BACK OF HER DRESS AND SAID, "COME HERE, JESUS," WHEN SHE SAW. . . . AMY SPOKE AT LAST IN HER DREAMWALKER'S VOICE.

"IT'S A TREE, LU. A CHOKECHERRY TREE. SEE, HERE'S THE TRUNK—IT'S RED AND SPLIT WIDE OPEN, FULL OF SAP, AND THIS HERE'S THE PARTING FOR THE BRANCHES. YOU GOT A MIGHTY LOT OF BRANCHES. LEAVES, TOO, LOOK LIKE, AND DERN IF THESE AIN'T BLOSSOMS. TINY LITTLE CHERRY BLOSSOMS, JUST AS WHITE. YOUR BACK GOT A WHOLE TREE ON IT. IN BLOOM. WHAT GOD HAVE IN MIND, I WONDER. I HAD ME SOME WHIPPINGS, BUT I DON'T REMEMBER NOTHING LIKE THIS". . . .

THEN THE BABY WHIMPERED AND SETHE LOOKED. TWENTY INCHES OF CORD HUNG FROM ITS BELLY AND IT TREMBLED IN THE COOLING EVENING AIR. AMY WRAPPED HER SKIRT AROUND IT AND THE WET STICKY WOMEN CLAMBERED ASHORE TO SEE WHAT, INDEED, GOD HAD IN MIND.

—*BELOVED*

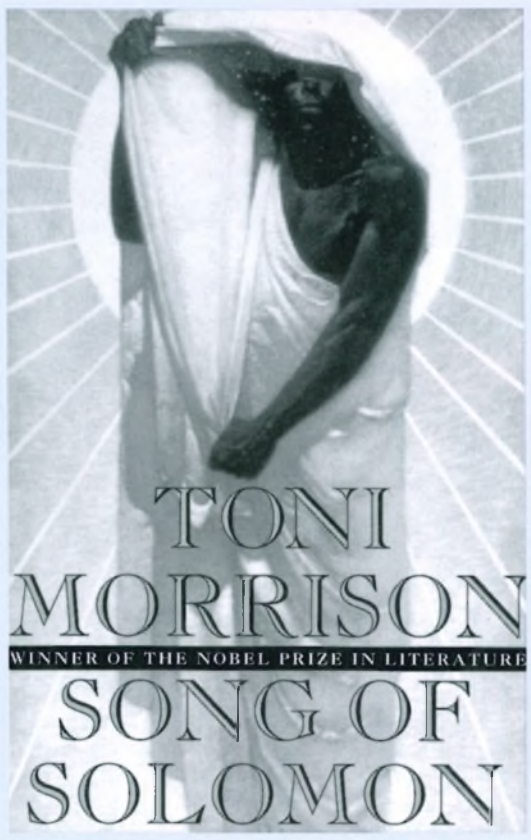
TONI MORRISON

Writing Above Ground

BY CLAUDIA BRODSKY LACOUR

IN THIS SEQUENCE FROM Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, Amy, a teenage, indentured laborer whose mother, indentured before her, has died, leaves her boss's beatings in Kentucky in search of velvet in Boston and finds Sethe, a mother in search of her children whose own milk had been stolen from her in slavery. She tells Sethe, six months pregnant and close to death, what she cannot see—not there, lying among wild onion weeds along the Ohio River, not eighteen years later, when Sethe explains why she stays on in a house with a "haint" in it to Paul D., not when Paul D., embracing her, touches that scarred back, not ever. The "tree" Sethe can never see, the living effulgence of violence she carries with her, both part of her and literally, physically, behind her, is seen and described to her by a stranger to whom, in caution, she gives a false name ("Lu"), a "whitegirl" who works unsentimentally to "repair" her beaten body with whatever is at hand—her own "good good hands," a poultice of spiders' webs, shoes of leaves wound in cloth—and just as unsentimentally delivers the baby that will live and bear her last name, Denver. Amy Denver is good with her hands, and at finding what is there for them to work with, but she is at least as good with words, at finding a way to say what is and is not there. Morrison's Amy says precisely, unsentimentally, what she sees. That others do not see what she sees, or, even worse, cannot—as it is both behind them and part of them; as, in living, they must carry it with them—only loads her translation of the visible with greater freedom and greater responsibility.

For all the times Toni Morrison has been asked point blank, by professional interviewers and nonprofessional questioners alike, if she herself would do what Sethe in the novel does, which is to say, as a black woman and also a mother, whether she herself is Sethe rather than her *author*—for all the times the inescapable power of her fiction has met the counterpunch of knee-jerk literalism, the reduction of the work of her imagination to a single, racially and sexually defined identification (reminding us that identity politics—and certainly not greatness—is most often thrust upon us), perhaps it could be imagined instead that Morrison the author most resembles Amy, a character whose ability to see and to say marks the whole of the novel in which she figures briefly. For this "marginal" character introduced in transit not only keeps life going in the novel by aiding Sethe, performing and changing the roles traditionally reserved for black and white helpers in other, more familiar fictions. Motivated by neither the credited superiority nor, according



"THE PRIDE, THE CONCEIT OF THESE DOORMAT WOMEN AMAZED HIM. THEY WERE ALWAYS WOMEN WHO HAD BEEN SPOILED CHILDREN. WHOSE WHIMS HAD BEEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY ADULTS AND WHO GREW UP TO BE THE STINGIEST, GREEDIEST PEOPLE ON EARTH AND OUT OF THEIR STINGINESS GREW THEIR STINGY LITTLE LOVE THAT ATE EVERYTHING IN SIGHT."

—*SONG OF SOLOMON*

to the less densely populated wing of that tradition, the credited inferiority of their object, Amy's actions give us an unfamiliar—historically and narratologically "unmotivated"—version of giving. But, in addition, Amy's words show Sethe's *readers* how to keep life going in the face of the familiar by seeing things differently—things including immutable, lifelong scars, signs of wounds that make you wonder what indeed God had in mind.

If there is a single pervading image in it, it is not that of Sethe's unimaginable deed, a real, historical act that is in fact never imaged in the novel, nor even that of herself, real ghost or imagined daughter, but rather that of Sethe's defaced back as seen by "the fugitive eyes" of a passing stranger. Using the principles of graphic correspondence and emotive distance typical of Homeric simile, Amy's unassuming "chokecherry tree" brings us closer to the violent deformation it stands for by coolly describing its unspeakable appearance in terms of something else. Her image renders Sethe's gruesome scars visible, the pain of their origin palpable, by redrawing them for us as a natural thing that knows no pain, now inscribed incongruously in human flesh. Like the comparison of Ajax slain on the battlefield to a poplar felled deep in a forest, or the fallen head of a Trojan youth to a poppy bowed by rainfall upon its stalk, Amy's sensuous image provides graspable, visual detail and untenable, mental discrepancy in a single stroke: its appropriateness and inappropriateness are one. Seen as if by someone who saw and remembered all things with enduring, ocular innocence, generous, humane to Sethe within the novel, such a vision has the larger effect of making latter-day aestheticizations of history impossible by already fusing beauty with deformation, lie with truth. The branching, blossoming tree Morrison has Amy see and describe to Sethe makes the scars of the pregnant woman gestate, bringing a barely survivable past into the present and the future, both of action and of reading. No longer part of history but part of what we see, Amy's image describes to the subject who cannot see it, and to a reader who cannot have experienced it, an impossible surface: *how history looks*.

Any reader of world fiction will recognize the works implied in a description of Toni Morrison's fiction (and criticism) as "writing above ground": Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Ellison acknowledged the influence of Dostoyevsky's novel upon his own (see his 1981 introduction to the re-edition of *Invisible Man*, and 1969 address at West Point, republished in *Going to the Territory* [1986]), and indeed it is not explicit content but the notion of a "disembodied voice" ascribed to himself by Ellison's narrator that the two works significantly share, suggesting that disembodiment is fundamental to the very act of narrating. Dostoyevsky's underground man is a prototype of "modern" consciousness, a mind skeptical of the value of experience whose truest if least immediately apparent antecedent is Descartes. The right to narrate in this tradition—which includes such dissimilar voices as those of James, Eliot, Stevens, Sartre, and Beckett—is earned by a testing and rejection of the corporeal world, an engagement with experience pushed to its limit in both the physical and moral sense in order to allow a voice to emerge despite it; in order to prove, once again, the dispensability of body to mind, of visibility to the invisible.

Toni Morrison's writing is the writing of the visible: it is writing specifically above ground, a new moment in a different tradition of modernity which, without retreating into sensualism, challenges the equation of the workings of mind with immateriality. Baudelaire, Proust, Yeats, Stein, and Woolf; Dickens, Melville, Joyce, Broch,

and Faulkner make no attempt to write matter away, to describe it in order to do without it. They describe it so as to translate it into another medium, language, knowing that in translation matter becomes visible to the mind for the first time. And if Morrison, as made clear, is Faulkner's first real successor anywhere, it is not only because of the depth of language at which she aims, mining words for hidden substance and weight, the facets obscured by their inattentive exchange, nor for her purposeful inclusion of the vernacular, the changing patterns people impress upon the planes of their linguistic landscape. Nor is it for her knowledge and intimation of the abyss of racialist madness—the seductively compulsive confusion of substance with surface, and surface with immeasurable depth—although Morrison's demonstrations of what Baudelaire called "the attraction of abysses" ("*l'attirance du gouffre*" [*Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*]) is also part of her writing's vertiginous effect. Rather, like Faulkner's, Morrison's modernity lies in the *goal* she sets for language and for herself: to walk, as a writer, the toughest tightrope in fiction, the high wire of the visible, without falling into either cliché or solipsistic reverie. The originality of Morrison's stories owes to the drama she finds where few have looked before. But in order to tell those stories in such a way that they become—as they have become—part of the lexicon of world literature, Morrison enacts their drama first on the level of language, in the close inspection and connection of words. In her fiction dramatic tension depends first upon the tension of the tightrope she extends and crosses as a writer, that thin, taut line of syllables strung above and between doxa and recalcitrant fact; between the oblivion of visual familiarity and the oblivion of overwhelming strangeness; between what we already think we know and name and what we can never know or name. Morrison's writing strides this tightrope, the most difficult for any representational writer, and makes it appear as deep, as wide, as infinitely and individually discoverable as an ocean.

What it means in critical terms to write the visible, to write above ground, may become clearer in comparison with Ellison's landmark *Invisible Man*—a comparison that, even when unstated, has, I think, subtended the reception of Morrison's writing in the U.S. Along with, and perhaps because of, the enormous and steadily growing popularity of Morrison's difficult (read: non-"popular") novels—an appreciation so widespread across the populace that one must look to the nineteenth-century to find comparable literary phenomena—there have been the occasional, professional Morrison detractors. Their comments, meant to provoke as well as deter, tend to bellow both defensive and self-righteous, sounding proprietorial pronouncements made in the name of all fiction, and especially—explicitly or implicitly—fiction written by African Americans. For some reason such naysayings neither discuss the novels directly, in the stylistic and analytic terms of literary criticism and theory, nor do they treat them instead as a matter of taste, aesthetic problems to be entrusted directly to the judgments of individual readers. Popularity earned in any serious endeavour always carries with it an unearned price, and the pricetags or stickers attached to them are generally not worth rehearsing. What is noteworthy, however, in the case of Morrison's following, is the positive viewpoint its penalizations share: an unbounded admiration for the novel

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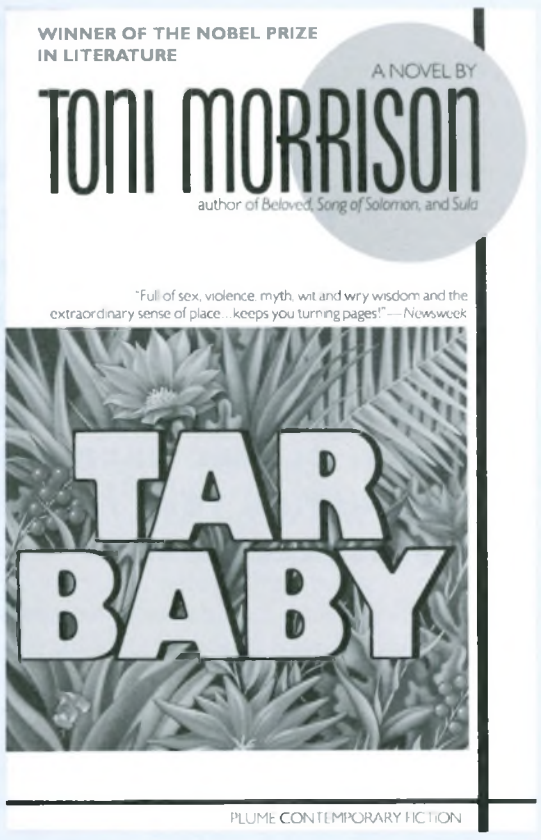


"AT SOME POINT IN LIFE THE WORLD'S BEAUTY BECOMES ENOUGH. YOU DON'T NEED TO PHOTOGRAPH, PAINT OR EVEN REMEMBER IT. IT IS ENOUGH. NO RECORD OF IT NEEDS TO BE KEPT AND YOU DON'T NEED SOMEONE TO SHARE IT WITH OR TELL IT TO. WHEN THAT HAPPENS—THAT LETTING GO—YOU LET GO BECAUSE YOU CAN."

—*TAR BABY*

Lorain, Ohio, in the 1950s.

HEALER

"I WRITE...VILLAG LITERATURE, FICTIO THAT IS REALLY FO THE VILLAGE, FOR TH TRIBE...IF ANYTHING I D IN THE WAY OF WRITIN NOVELS ISN'T ABOUT TH VILLAGE OR THE COMMUNIT THEN IT'S NOT ABOUT AN THING. I AM NOT INTERESTED I INDULGING MYSELF IN SOME PR VATE, CLOSED EXERCISE OF M IMAGINATION THAT FULFILLS ONL MY PERSONAL DREAMS."

—*Toni Morrison, 1981* Newsweek *intervi*

IN THE VILLAGE

An Appreciation

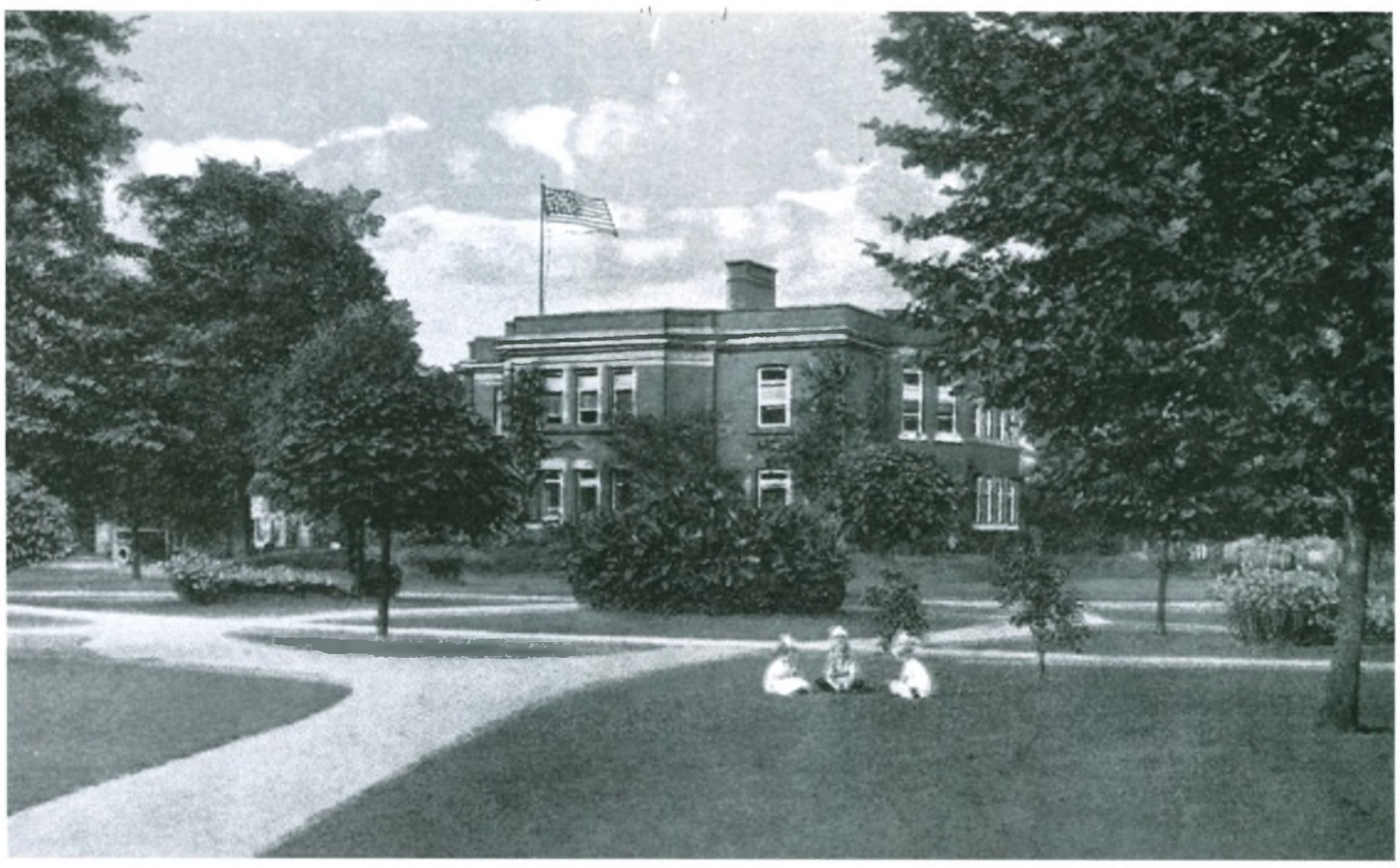
HOW DID THE VILLAGE come to claim such an important part of Morrison's vision? Part of the answer may lie in her own village of Lorain, Ohio, where she was born in 1931. Both her mother and father were migrants from the South; her mother from Greenville, Alabama, and her father from Georgia. They had ended up in the Midwest in their flight from the racial horrors and economic devastation confronting so many African Americans. Because the household included Morrison's maternal grandparents as well, the intergenerational connections were very strong as were core black cultural values, which they nurtured.

In first grade, Toni Morrison was the only African American child in the class—as well as the only child who could already read.

Being singular was to become a habit for young Chloe, as she was called then. By the time she had published *Jazz*, her sixth novel, she had won every major literary prize. Indeed, she would become the only writer to win both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize for literature. Her works—*The Bluest Eye* (1970),

By Maryemma Graham

Courtesy of the Black River Historical Society.



Courtesy of the Black River Historical Society.

Lorain's main library, where there is now a Toni Morrison reading room.

Sula (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), and *Jazz* (1992)—form an American canon of incomparable richness and value.

There were also those days before becoming the famous author that are part of her cultural gestation period. At thirteen, for example, Morrison did the customary domestic work for white families after school to bring in extra money. Although her father worked three jobs, there were four children in the family, and it was expected that each one would go as far in school as ability permitted. Her father's tenacity—and his hatred for whites—were to be important factors in Morrison's own conceptual development.

When Morrison moved to Washington, D.C., in 1949 to attend Howard University, she entered another village, this time the historically black college. Chloe became Toni. She majored in English, minored in the classics, did experimental writing with a writers group and joined the Howard Repertory Theater. When the theater group toured the South, Morrison got her first chance to visit the part of the country her father had so despised. Morrison went on to complete her master's in English from Cornell, did a teaching stint at Texas Southern, and then returned to Howard to teach. By 1964, Morrison had married Harold Morrison, given birth to two sons, Slade Kevin and Harold Ford, and divorced. The tenacity she inherited from her father soon became apparent. After the divorce, with two young children and no job, she went home to Lorain to get back on her feet.

When Morrison ventured out a second time from her native village, it was to Syracuse where as a single mother she accepted a job as a textbook editor for a publishing company. Through it all, she retained her vision of the village that would materialize in her fictions. It was during this time that the story of Pecola Breedlove, the little girl who wanted blue eyes, re-emerged in her mind. Morrison had conceived of the idea while in her writers' group at Howard. For the first time away from any familiar village, Morrison had to use her writing to reconstruct the village of her childhood, the village of her memory, and the village of an African American culture rife with conflict but capable of seeking its own salvation. That first village story became *The Bluest Eye*, and it was published just before Morrison moved to New York to become a senior editor at Random House.

For the next twenty years, Morrison would grow increasingly at ease in the village of her literary imagination. During her early years at Random House, she brought out numbers of African American writers, among them Angela Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gayl Jones. As an editor, she did much to midwife a new African American literary renaissance into existence, a renaissance that she herself began to redefine with her own novels.

In each of these books, from *The Bluest Eye* through the strikingly episodic *Jazz*, Morrison has retained a village conception—a definable culture and physical

space within which her characters live, from which they are ostracized, and to which they return. With each novel, Morrison has expanded her landscape but retained the defining features of the village motif.

While she relied on her own personal background in Lorain for both *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, Morrison made the village the site of an epic narrative in *Song of Solomon*. Milkman Dread pieces together the fragments of a story that aids in his transformation and transcendence. He moves in and out of villages in his search for his family history, for knowledge that will help to transform him. In *Tar Baby* the U.S. village is exchanged for the Isle des Chevaliers, a fictional Caribbean community where a middle-class, well-educated black woman struggles for self-definition. This is also the first time that Morrison allows whites to enter her expanding village narrative in any significant way. By the time Morrison has conceived *Beloved*, she is ready to move to an even more experimental form and to leave the contemporary historical settings that had become familiar territory for her. But the village is still there and Morrison allows the many voices and stories to enter the text of *Beloved*, an African American epic romance for all times. *Jazz* is set in New York's Harlem, the quintessential black urban village, as the title echoes the improvisational love story that ends/begins with death.

To see Morrison as a village writer might make her tribal links clearer to us, but it does not necessarily make her work easier to comprehend. Even her most favorably disposed critics acknowledge that her prose is rich and allusive, multi-vocal and multi-layered, so much so that the weaving in and out of stories, moving back and forth between the various characters' lives, can easily meet with an all-too-resistant reader. And she loves to push metaphors a little further than we are accustomed to in the much contemporary fiction. Morrison is not a popular writer in the sense of accessibility. Carolyn Denard, who founded and now serves as president of the Toni Morrison Society, based in Atlanta, calls Morrison a "painstaking wordsmith," whose "concern with the accuracy of the language is not a private indulgence . . .but an effort to restore and validate the oratory of the black community."

Her penchant for odd characters, her sharpness of ear and eye, her acute sensitivity to the lives of African American women of all ages and eras typify a Morrison novel. A Morrison world is one where nature and reality coincide; there is realism and the surreal, complete with ghosts, conjurers, and flying Africans. This makes a Morrison read "thick" and "dense," two words often used to describe her work. On the other hand, Morrison embraces that which is essential in both literate and oral traditions: a refined use of language, emotive experience, and lyrical excursions alongside an improvisational framework, nonlinear, with circular narrative structures, and the familiar call-and-response motifs.

In teaching the work of Morrison, as I did these last two summers at NEH-sponsored institutes in Boston, I knew that I was entering a cultural minefield and a linguistic playground. Morrison doesn't give us nice stories: The horrible realities that she exposes are intended to open our eyes as a society. She shows us the part of us that we fear the most, hate even—that which we don't wish to admit. These are the "unspeakable things unspoken" which have become her signature. Morrison forces us to confront a common historical past and to articulate our collective unconscious. Because Morrison has accurately assessed our human need for psychological wholeness, each of her novels is an exposé. All her novels are rooted in the historical experiences of African Americans, especially in the oral folk traditions, but she does more than transcribe, translate, or fictionalize historical and contemporary events. Pecola, Sula, Nel, Milkman, Jadine, and Sethe all represent to one degree or another different ways for us as onlookers to confront these events psychologically and experientially. When we enter a Morrison novel, we are participating in a narrative of community, complete with the rituals and cultural baggage that compel the reader's complete engagement. We incur disintegration, violence, self-destruction and self-negation, but we also find closure as we are presented with the possibility of healing. We are trapped within the texts' dramatic events: Eva's murder of her son Plum in *Sula*; the rape of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* by her own father, whose humiliation by racist whites has paralyzed him emotionally; the theft of Sethe's breast milk and the murder of her own child in *Beloved*. But we are allowed to emerge from these experiences with some sense of wholeness. There is always space created for spiritual renewal. Morrison, in other words, is the consummate humanist, feeding our nation's spiritual and physical hunger with stories hidden from us by our silent accommodations and conscious distortions. Her stories are African American history writ large in metaphors that are sufficiently inclusive and shockingly real.

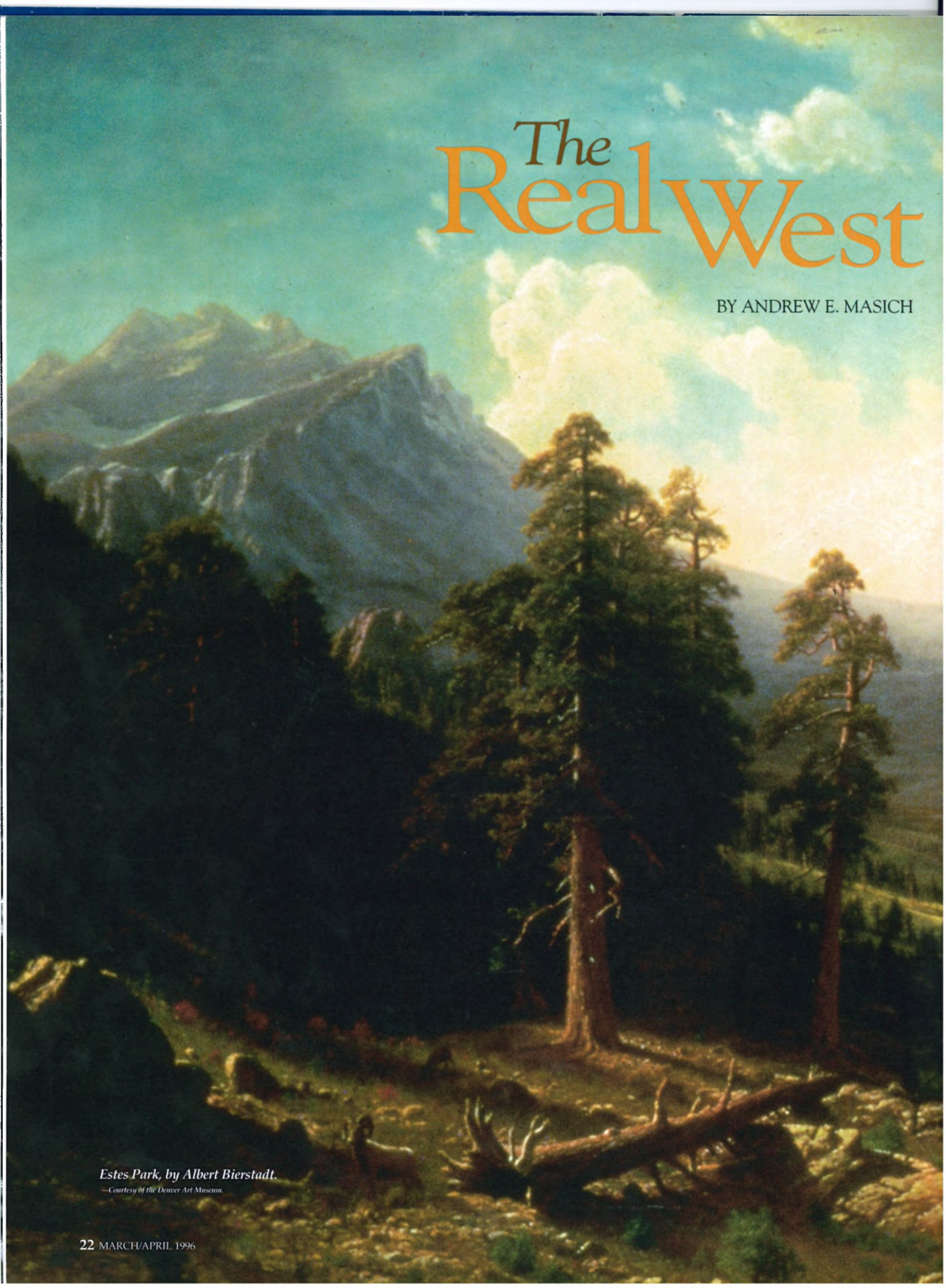
As my own generation nears the mid-century point, Morrison's vision becomes both affirming and exacting at the same time it reminds us of the work that remains to be done. As one of the teachers in a Northeastern University institute pointed out, "Pecola is a dirty, unloved, unattractive, dark-skinned little girl, arousing in us a sense of shame in remembrance of some little 'Pecola' that we probably all helped to create . . .Worse, the Pecolas of the world actually believe they are what we make them out to be." As long as we create and accept such images, our resistance to oppression, both psychological and physical, and our resistance to the conditions that create it—poverty, homelessness, illiteracy—will be minimized.

Morrison's message, neither muted nor apolitical, hits us where it hurts, holding us when we want to let go. Even if the resolution to the central conflicts in her novels grants us some psychological immunity, the social conditions that have been exposed remain. Hers is a voice from the village that the world has dared to listen to. □

Maryemma Graham teaches American and African American literature at Northeastern University in Boston; she is currently scholar in residence at the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History in Washington, D.C.

The Real West

BY ANDREW E. MASICH



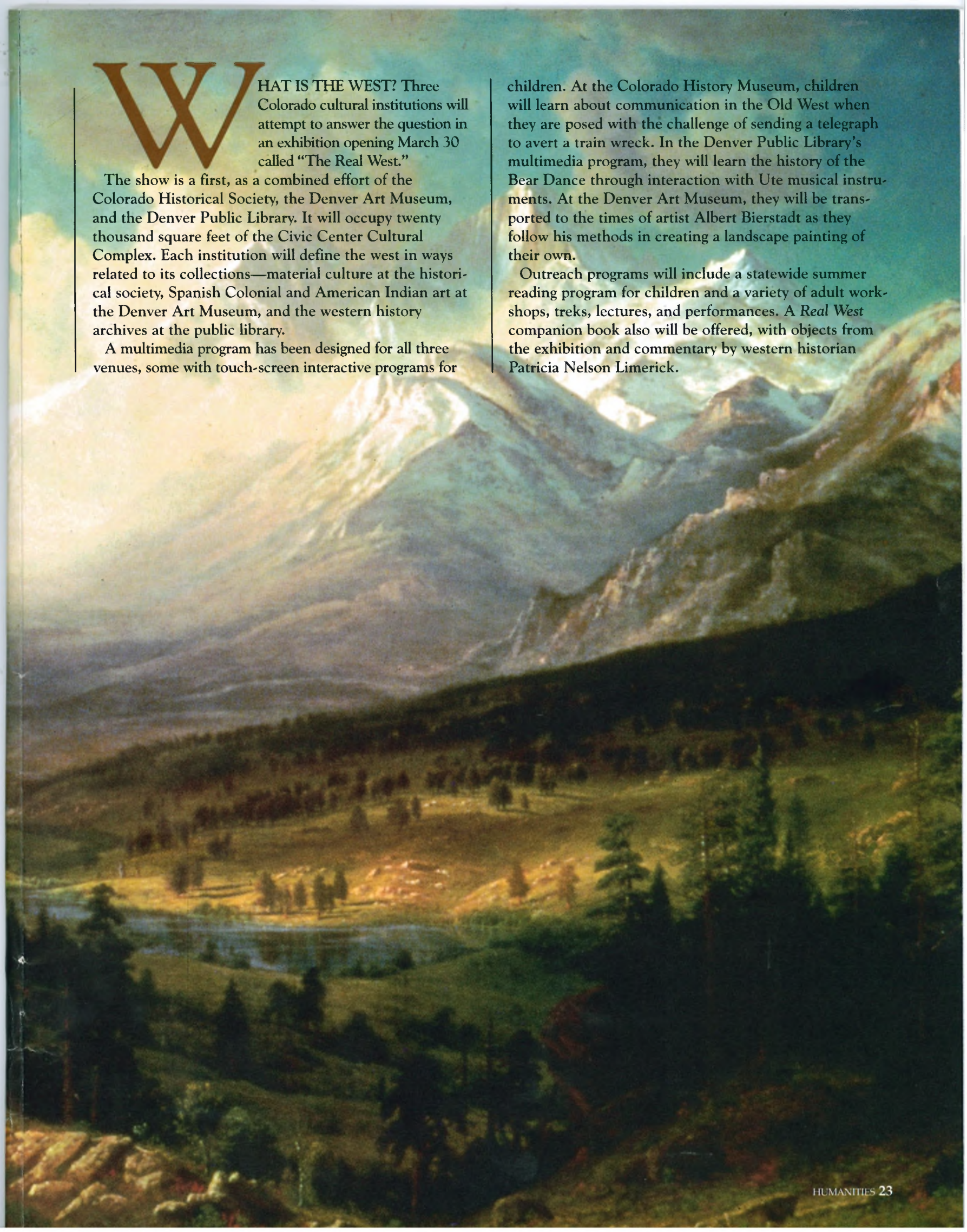
Estes Park, by Albert Bierstadt.
—Courtesy of the Denver Art Museum.

WHAT IS THE WEST? Three Colorado cultural institutions will attempt to answer the question in an exhibition opening March 30 called "The Real West."

The show is a first, as a combined effort of the Colorado Historical Society, the Denver Art Museum, and the Denver Public Library. It will occupy twenty thousand square feet of the Civic Center Cultural Complex. Each institution will define the west in ways related to its collections—material culture at the historical society, Spanish Colonial and American Indian art at the Denver Art Museum, and the western history archives at the public library.

A multimedia program has been designed for all three venues, some with touch-screen interactive programs for children. At the Colorado History Museum, children will learn about communication in the Old West when they are posed with the challenge of sending a telegraph to avert a train wreck. In the Denver Public Library's multimedia program, they will learn the history of the Bear Dance through interaction with Ute musical instruments. At the Denver Art Museum, they will be transported to the times of artist Albert Bierstadt as they follow his methods in creating a landscape painting of their own.

Outreach programs will include a statewide summer reading program for children and a variety of adult workshops, treks, lectures, and performances. A *Real West* companion book also will be offered, with objects from the exhibition and commentary by western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick.



Colorado Historical Society: "The Search for Wealth and Community"

Over the past two hundred years, many groups have laid claim to the land now called Colorado. Whether following herds of buffalo, searching for precious metals, grazing cattle, or plowing the soil, emigrants shared the hope for a better life. Human adaptation here has taken many forms from buffalo hunting to livestock production, family farms to agribusiness, mining towns to cities connected by highways.

Today the **Cowboy** icon is a dominant symbol of the American west. Free, alone, and tall in the saddle, the cowboy built a culture on horseback, a new mythology, and a new environment. This section of the exhibition examines the use of natural resources and the transformation of the land itself in the search for wealth, identity, and community. As the roaming herds of bison that had sustained the native populations were replaced by sheep and cattle, men and women staked claim to the mountain and prairie grasslands to feed the herds and provide food for the growing settlements. Cowboy skills, garb, and manners—the practical tools of the trade—were transformed in the popular imagination to the romantic hero of literature and western drama. From wide-brimmed sombrero and yellow slicker to the silver-trimmed *charro* outfit and satin rodeo shirt, the cowboy is a combination of guts and glitz in the contemporary world.

The abundance of **Gold** in the west lured explorers and miners with visions of easy wealth. The story of gold includes Spanish and British mining traditions, the evolution of mining law, and the development of mercantile communities that not only served the mining population but offered the stability of family and community life. While the seldom-realized hopes of the placer miner are well documented in letters and photographs, the upward mobility of twentieth-century miners is demonstrated through the life and times of the Croatian immigrant Andrew Milosevich. The story highlights the tensions between western labor and eastern investors, the fortunes associated with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century railroad magnates, and the aftermath of modern-day oil shale exploration with remnants associated with the Ludlow and Forbes tent cities, rare silver railroad passes, and materials documenting Colorado's "Black Sunday."

The **Windmill** is the symbol of the semi-arid climate of the west, and water is the key to survival and growth. The diverse meanings, uses, and management traditions used by the Hispanic, Indian, and white populations are demonstrated through artifacts pertinent to the religious and political institutions of these cultural groups. The importance of the economics and traditions of the family farm, comparisons among the lifestyles of immigrant farm workers, and the competition for diminishing water resources are interpreted with agricultural implements, religious artifacts, and artworks by Thomas Hart Benton and Chuck Forsman.

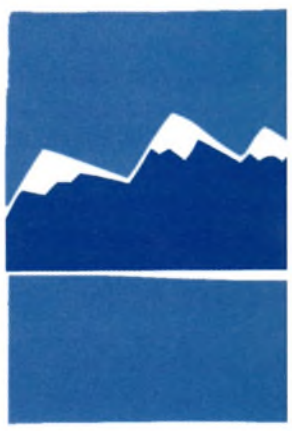
In the **Main Street** section the visitor learns that while Colorado is perceived as a land of open spaces and few people, most Coloradans are urbanites, with Denver being the most densely populated city in the Rocky Mountain west. Founded to provide goods and services for the surrounding mining and agricultural districts, the settlement offered the promise of economic gain for entrepreneurs of all nationalities and races.

The struggle to balance human values with economic opportunity is told through engravings, contemporary posters, and a rare graphic in which the people of 1895 take a look at their city's future in 1995.

Today people still journey to Colorado and the west in search of a better life. The salient issues have not changed, that is, water and land use, community building, crime and violence. Newcomers and long-time residents grapple with common issues and the inevitability of change.

Denver Art Museum: "Colorado: Visions of the Land"

The **Rocky Mountains** dominate the landscape and are an important part of regional identity. Adopted and used by the earliest immigrants, this symbol continues to be widely used today by advertisers, sports teams, and even in the new Denver International Airport with its peaked-roof tent symbolizing the mountains. People have claimed the Rocky Mountains as a homeland, a mecca, and a source of identity and pride.



The Ute Indians have called the Rocky Mountains home longer than any other people. Other tribes and Spanish explorers followed in the eighteenth century. Ute tools and art are contrasted with Spanish maps and land grants in this section of the exhibition.

Zebulon Pike's sword, as well as maps and diaries, reflect the explorations following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Other artifacts tell the story of the trailblazers for U.S. government surveying parties commissioned to discover railroad routes through the mountainous barrier.

Early images of the mountains are explored in photographs, lithographs, and paintings by artists such as William Henry Jackson, Thomas Moran, and Thomas Worthington Whittredge. Albert Bierstadt's *Longs Peak, Estes Park, Colorado* occupies a velvet-draped nineteenth-century gallery setting. Jackson's hand-tinted and enhanced photograph of the *Mount of the Holy Cross* serves as a study on the popularization and mass dissemination of images, especially in the last one hundred years. Works by Herbert Bayer and Ansel Adams give way to contemporary interpretations by James Rosenquist and Christo. A work by Gary Sweeney reads: "Colorado: the state that keeps Nebraska from bumping into Utah."

Denver Public Library: "Values in Conflict"

Before the population explosion of the last two hundred years, the Rocky Mountain west was homeland to generations of American Indian and Hispano people possessing rich cultures and traditions. Citizens of the United States, encouraged by the government, moved into the vast "vacant" lands of present-day Colorado, bringing with them sweeping changes. This portion of the exhibition is organized around three icons, **Tipi**, **Adobe Church**, **Fort**. All three elements focus on encounters of the U.S. government and its citizens with the Indian and Hispano residents of Colorado. In each case there ensued a struggle over land use, conflicting values, and self-determination. The exhibit will detail who won and lost, and how winners and losers occasionally accommodated one another in the struggle for survival.

The exhibit at the library opens with three artifacts—a Ute Indian dress, a Hispano death cart, and a howitzer cannon, representing Native Americans, Hispanos, and the U.S. government. One historic and one contemporary quote from each group is heard, giving voice to the disparate views. In the next section, a John Gast lithograph depicting Manifest Destiny appears in stark contrast to Cheyenne artist Jesse Cooday's painting *Wayne's World*, showing an Indian face accompanied by a quote from John Wayne, "Indians weren't really using the land and were just trying to selfishly keep it for themselves." Maps and photographs representing fourteen Colorado tribes establish the fact that the supposedly unclaimed lands were very much occupied.

Traditional Cheyenne skin sewers have recreated a buffalo hide tipi which will serve as a focal point. The story of the Sand Creek Massacre is told through the videotaped reminiscences of the descendants of Cheyenne survivors. Laird Cometsevah recalls his great-grandfather's words, "At the end of the day when I went back to my lodge to look for my sister and my children, all that I found was ashes and my pipe. Women, babies, and the elderly people and children all lay dead at Sand Creek. The Cheyenne earth was all bloody, and when I rode off, all that I could offer was a prayer." Cometsevah's pipe will be exhibited near the 1865 Treaty of the Little Arkansas in which the government acknowledged responsibility and agreed to pay reparations.

Ute culture is represented with a wickiup and accompanying camp scene. Through maps, photographs, and artifacts, the visitor will see the Ute lands diminish over time, until the battle at Milk Creek leads to the removal of the northern bands from Colorado. Featured in this section is the plow that Indian agent Nathan Meeker used in an ill-fated attempt to make farmers of the nomadic Ute people.

The **Adobe Church** icon represents the Hispano presence in the west. Though early arrivals, this group has struggled in the twentieth century to reclaim self-determination. This section will open with artifacts attributed to the era of Spanish exploration. The changing role of the urban and rural church is examined in a recreated chapel filled with folk art.

The impact of the war with Mexico in 1846 will include lost land claims and the conflicting laws and values of the conqueror and the conquered. Issues of displacement, industrialization, and labor activities follow, along with the new era of immigration in the twentieth century, and with it, the insistent voice of the Chicano rights movement. Contemporary issues are addressed, such as land claims and use as reflected in the ongoing San Luis Valley Taylor Ranch debate.

The **Fort** icon symbolizes the protection offered by the federal government. While the west itself has long symbolized personal freedom and unlimited economic opportunity, at the outset American settlers demanded government protection while they moved to explore the west's resources. By the close of the nineteenth century, Coloradans looked to Washington not just for protection from the land's original inhabitants but for economic benefits. The persuasive abilities of state officials and businessmen is reflected in such federal military facilities as Fort Logan, Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center, and the U.S. Air Force Academy. □

Andrew E. Masich is vice president of the Colorado Historical Society and project director of "The Real West." *The exhibition has received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, U S WEST, the Denver Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.*

Around the Nation

A roundup of activities by state humanities councils during March and April

Compiled by Mary Lou Beatty

ALABAMA—A rusting railroad car silhouetted against a modern building. . .mist hovering over a lake on a brisk fall morning. . .litter on a pristine beach. . .These and sixty other photographic images of Alabama can be seen in the new exhibition, "Glimpses of Community," which is on view in March at the Tuscaloosa Public Library and in April at the Birmingham Public Library.

The show, which will circulate to eight public libraries during the year, was developed by the Alabama Humanities Foundation. The project began a year ago at the foundation's annual awards luncheon, at which the five hundred people in attendance were given disposable cameras and asked to photograph images of things they liked and disliked about their communities or their state. One hundred participated and submitted nearly 1,400 photographs, from which sixty-three were selected for exhibition.

At the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham libraries, citizens will examine these photographic pluses and minuses in two public discussion programs, using the exhibition as a "text." Humanities scholars, planning professionals, and community leaders will lead conversations about what is needed to make these communities stronger in the future.

Some of the photographs are ambiguous. Joe C. P. Turner of Demopolis photographed a graffiti-covered building in his town. He titles his picture *Small Town Markings* and

Courtesy of the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

comments: "Graffiti is an ugliness anywhere, in any town—large or small." He explains a particular quotation: "The 'Gray Ward, we miss you' statement is a message to a young Demopolis teenager, who died by his own hand, not long ago."

While many may agree with Turner's evaluation of graffiti as an eyesore, others are certain to take the view that graffiti is a vehicle for meaningful expression. Like the other images, the photograph is intended to stimulate dialogue about community values.

"Glimpses of Community" was developed by the foundation with major funding from the Southern Progress Corporation. It is part of the NEH special initiative, National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity.

—Kyle Irvin

ALASKA—Lael Morgan will discuss "Good Time Girls of the Gold Rush: A New Look" at 7 p.m. March 24 at the Ketchikan Public Library; Ellen Bielawski will talk about "How We Know What We Know: Knowledge and Reality in Native Cultures and Western Scientific Culture" at 7 p.m. March 25 at the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus, and Gordon L. Pullar will discuss "The History of the Alaska Native Organizations" at 7:30 p.m. April 1 at the Anchorage Museum of History & Art. An exhibition on the Kachemak Bay and its people, "Images and Voices of the Community," will be on display March 29 through June 23 at the Pratt Museum in Homer; continuing, "The Living Tradition of Yup'ik Masks" at the Bethel Yupit Piciryarait Cultural Center and Museum.

ARIZONA—Juliet Schor, author of *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, will speak at 7:30 p.m. March 15 at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale in a bimonthly series on community values. Dr. Schor, an associate professor of economics at Harvard University, offers advice on how government, corporate America, and private citizens can become more productive in the workplace, spend fewer hours on the job, and effectively "exit the squirrel cage." Meanwhile, residents in five Arizona communities—Chandler, Flagstaff, Sierra Vista, Tuba City, and Tucson—are discussing "Immigrant Culture, Values, and Identity" as part of an NEH-supported National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity project. A survey already has been mailed to a random selection of five hundred people in each community, designed to ascertain community attitudes. The culminating event will be a public lecture and discussion in May by political scientist Benjamin Barber, linking all the participating communities through an interactive TV network.

ARKANSAS—Two new acquisitions for the collection of the Arkansas Humanities Resource Center include the videocassette *The Keetoowahs Come Home*, which tells the saga of Indian relocation from Arkansas to Oklahoma in the 1820s, and a presentation of the Arkansas Archeological Survey and Arkansas Archeological Society, *Arkansas: Crossroads of the Past*, a reformatted video version of a slide show on Native American life throughout prehistory and history with graphics, maps, and excavation footage. Videos, exhibits, books, and other humanities materials are available by calling the center at 501/221-0093.

D.C.—Humanities Awareness Week is March 24-31, with the eighth annual public humanities awards program taking place at 6:30 p.m. March 27 at the Sumner School Museum and Archives. The program will honor poet Grace Cavalieri, host of the radio program *The Poet and the Poem*, and Meridian International Center, an organization promoting international understanding through cultural exchange.

FLORIDA—The Florida Humanities Council will assemble writers, historians, anthropologists, and community residents along the shores of Lake Okeechobee as part of its first annual Florida Gathering. The March 22-24 event will explore the environment, literature, and history of the region, and will include a boat tour of the Audubon sanctuary and a visit to the Seminole reservation. For additional information, call 813/272-3473, or e-mail FHC@acomp.usf.edu.

SMALL TOWN MARKINGS, below, by Joe C.P. Turner, is featured in the Alabama Humanities Foundation exhibition, "Glimpses of Community."

GEORGIA—The Dougherty Public Library in Albany is hosting a traveling exhibition, "The Many Realms of King Arthur," March 8 through April 18. In conjunction with the exhibition, the library will offer a series of public programs about history, literature, and films associated with the Arthur legend. Lynn Kennedy of Darton College will discuss Arthur from a literary and folkloric perspective on March 12; Vuela Rhodes of Albany State College will examine the legend from a historical perspective on March 26.

Elaine: Lily Maid of Astolat, by Howard Pyle.
—Courtesy of The American Library Association.

Sandy Cohen of Albany State will lead a book discussion on *King Arthur: The True Story* on March 19; Mark Costello of Theatre Albany will lead a film discussion on *Camelot* on March 25; Mary Lawson of Albany State will lead a book discussion on *The Mists of Avalon* on April 9 and Ulf Kirchdorder of Darton College on *The Book of Merlyn* on April 16. A children's writing workshop and the building of a model castle by artist Steve Felmet are also part of the project.

DeKalb College in Dunwoody will hold an interdisciplinary conference, "The Latin Deli: A Celebration of Latino Arts and Culture," April 9 through 13. A number of authors will read from their works, among them Abraham Rodriguez, Jr., Sandra Benitez, and Judith Ortiz Cofer. Critic Norma Alarcon will discuss the literature of women, and David Carrasco will present a multimedia event, "From Carlos Fuentes to Dr. Loco," which will explore how selected artists represent Latino identity. George Emilio Sanchez will present his play, *Chief Half-Breed in the Land of In-Between.*

Valdosta State University will be the site of a four-day conference starting April 28 on "Land Use in the Twenty-First Century." Through lectures, panel discussions, workshops, video presentations, and tours of the Okefenokee Swamp, participants will be introduced to different perspectives on the ethical, social, aesthetic, historical, and scientific values of wetlands to southeast Georgia. Humanities scholars, developers, government officials, ethicists, industrialists, and property owners will make presentations.

IDAHO—Linda Morton-Keithley will lead a series of slide presentations and panel discussions on "Women and Political Activism in Idaho, 1945-1980" at the Idaho Historical Museum in Boise on March 8, 12, and 26, and at the Twin Falls Public Library on March 28. A second series, "Journey through Time: Conversations with the World's Great Women/Men," includes a public television appearance and a response panel at North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene. Clay Jenkinson will appear as Thomas Jefferson on March 25, Melinda Strobel as Susan B. Anthony on March 26, and George Frein as Mark Twain on March 29. Strobel will be taking "Susan B. Anthony: The Napoleon of the Movement" on the road in March, with stops in ten cities: March 11 Garden Valley, 12 Twin Falls, 13 Idaho Falls, 14 Caldwell, 15 Boise, 25 Sandpoint, 26 Hayden, 27 Moscow, 28 Lewiston, and 29, Orofino. In April, Tom Blanchard will make a presentation on "Mining in Idaho Territory" on the 16th at the Bannock County Historical Museum in Pocatello.

INDIANA—"Voices," an exhibition about African American women of Floyd County who helped enrich their communities, is on display during March in the lobby of the Indiana State House. The exhibition will then go to the Indiana Humanities Council Resource Center, where it may be borrowed by organizations throughout the state.

MAINE—A three-week festival April 23 through May 12 will explore the life and work of photographer Todd Webb. It will include a photographic retrospective in Westbrook College Gallery, a film premiere at the Portland Museum of Art of *Honest Vision: A Portrait of Todd Webb,* and a symposium on the Westbrook campus that will include Terence Pitts of the University of Arizona, who will speak on "Signs and Symbols of the People: Todd Webb and American Photography at Mid-Century," and Keith F. Davis, author of a book on the photographer, who will speak on "The Art of the City: Todd Webb in Contest." Throughout April, the Maine Humanities Council will sponsor "The International Women's Film Festival: Focus on the Former Soviet Union." Seven of the latest films selected for showing at the Moscow and Sochi international film festivals will be brought to three public theaters in Maine. Several journalists from the former republics and from New England will participate in public forums after each showing.

Meanwhile, a reading and discussion series on turn-of-the-century issues winds up with *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis on March 5 and *As the Earth Turns* by Gladys Hasty Carroll on March 19 at Huntington Common.

MINNESOTA—"The Statues of Easter Island" will be the topic of a lecture-discussion on March 21 at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. In a program sponsored by the Minnesota chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America, JoAnne Van Tilburg of UCLA will explore the significance of the gigantic *moai,* the monolithic statues populating the island. On April 11, Guy S. Gibbon, director of interdisciplinary archaeological studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, will describe the progress of a long-term analysis of several sites in the state.

The humanities commission is also conducting residential humanities seminars for Minnesota K-12 teachers: "Spirituals, Blues, and Gospel" March 3-8, "Origins of the Universe" March 17-22, "From Margin to Center: African American Women in Literature and History" April 14 -19, and "In the

Beginning: Myths of Creation and the World Around Us" April 28-May 3. The principal scholars are Ron McCurdy, Roger Jones, Jackson P. Hershbell of the University of Minnesota, and Ruth Elizabeth Burks of Macalester College.

MISSOURI—A traveling photographic exhibition titled "Teamwork to the Finish: Professional Development and Health Care for Women in Osteopathic Medicine" focuses on the history of women in medicine in rural Missouri during the period 1890-1930. The exhibition explores the ways in which perceptions of the human body influenced the practice of women's health care and shows how osteopathy provided professional opportunities for women in the early twentieth century. The exhibition is at the Grunddy County Historical Museum in Trenton through March 14, with a lecture and discussion program on March 10 at the Jewitt Norris Library. The exhibition will be at the Northpark Mall in Joplin April 18-21, with a lecture and discussion planned for April 14 at the Holiday Inn-Hammons Hall. The project is sponsored by the Still National Osteopathic Museum in Kirksville and funded by the Missouri Humanities Council.

NEBRASKA—Generation X will be the topic March 12 and 13 at Hastings College, in a joint program with the Artist Lecture Series Student Committee. Whether the film portrayal of the X-ers as unmotivated and unresolved is a justified one will be discussed by generational biographer William Strauss, advertiser A. David Jones, and cartoonist/critic Jeff Shesol. In other March activities, "The Changing Face of Canadian Cinema" will be the topic in a joint program of the Council and Friends of Mary Riepma Ross. For more information call 402/472-9100.

The Nebraska Humanities Council and the John G. Neihardt Foundation will sponsor a daylong conference April 13 in Bancroft on Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*. Esther De Sersa and Olivia Pourier, granddaughters of Black Elk, and Hilda Neihardt, daughter of the poet, will share their personal insights into the relationship between the two men.

NEVADA—A new catalog, *Humanities on the Road*, has been issued by the Nevada Humanities Resource Center, giving the particulars on its lending library of exhibitions, films, slide shows, audiocassettes and curriculum materials on a variety of humanities topics, along with self-help categories on how to do a chautauqua, or how to do History Day. For additional information call 702/784-6587 or 800/382-5023.

NEW HAMPSHIRE—"Sport and the American Experience" is the theme for the second year of the state initiative, "What Is New Hampshire Reading This Month?" In March, groups around the state will be discussing an anthology titled *Uncommon Waters: Women Write about Fishing* in which thirty-four women anglers write about bracing adventure and meditative moments in stories, poems, memoirs, and essays. In April, the book to be read and discussed will be *The Natural*, Bernard Malamud's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about baseball. The common thread is how sport serves as a metaphor for the American experience, as a mirror of American ideals and beliefs.

NEW JERSEY—A three-year initiative is under way called "Telling Our Stories," designed to encourage reading, especially in families. The project will eventually encompass

A three-year storytelling program is under way in New Jersey.

—Courtesy of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

myths, movies, and historical narratives, and their role in exploring the human condition.

In March, meanwhile, a new series of radio call-in programs called *American Alternatives* is being aired on WBGO and other public radio stations throughout New Jersey. Each hour-long program will address one of four topics: the individual and community, diversity, violence, and tolerance. Each program will begin with a short reading on the topic and brief comments by a panel; the program will then be opened to phone callers. The New Jersey Council for the Humanities is developing the project in cooperation with the New Jersey secretary of State's office, which has been structuring Governor Christine Todd Whitman's "Many Faces, One Family" initiative.

NEW YORK—"Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History," demonstrating the formation and development of kingship in one of the most historically significant ethnic groups in Africa, is presently on view at the Museum for African Art in New York City. Luba sculpture is considered one of the continent's major artistic traditions, known for its refined aesthetic appeal, proliferation of forms, and its reflection of a complex kingdom that flourished across a vast region of central Africa from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. After completing its run at the Museum for African Art in the fall, the exhibition will travel to the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., where it will be on view through January 1997. It will tour nationally through the spring of 1998.

STOOL, a wooden sculpture from Luba, Zaire.

—*Courtesy of The Museum for African Art.*

"Memory" documents the relationship of visual representation and memory in the production of historical thought. Works of art have been a primary vehicle for the production of Luba histories of kingship, and history a highly valued form of intellectual activity. For example, Luba oral traditions most closely associated with the history of kings and chiefs are dependent on a memory device called a lukasa, a small wooden object studded with beads and pins or covered with incised ideograms. Codes of kingship are indicated on the lukasa by different colors, configurations of beads, and ideograms, which are used to teach sacred lore about cultural heroes, clan migrations, and the introduction of sacred rule. Essential to Luba royal history and rule, the lukasa serves as a mnemonic guide to the range of imagery addressed in "Memory."

The project is funded in part by the New York Council for the Humanities and by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

OHIO—In celebration of the bicentennial of Dayton, the Montgomery County Historical Society is conducting a project that examines cultural plurality and commonality in the twentieth century. A traveling exhibition focusing on the role of newspapers in building ties between diverse groups of people will serve as a backdrop for a series of eight community forums involving the public in NEH's special initiative, a National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity. A tabloid publication will extend the reach of the project to the *Dayton Daily News* readership. The historical society will also produce a "Letters to the Editor" Readers' Theater, which will feature a wide variety of letters to the editor written as far back as 1896.

OREGON—"The Challenge of the American Experiment" has been chosen as the theme for the next three years of the Oregon Council for the Humanities. The program will examine the effects of social and cultural changes, of technological and scientific advances, of polarization inside and outside of government, and asks, among other questions, Do we still agree on underlying principles? Do they still seem viable? For more information, call 800-735-0543.

PENNSYLVANIA—A pilot program on "Technology, Communications, and Community" is under way in four pilot locations: Hill House Association in Pittsburgh, the West Philadelphia Regional Library, the Allentown School District, and the Women's Community Learning Coalition/Wilkes University. On Mondays in March and April, reading and discussion sessions are scheduled at Dieruff High School in Allentown, with Internet training March 25; on Tuesdays the discussion sessions are at the West Philadelphia Regional Library with Internet training on April 2. A legislative breakfast is slated in April in Harrisburg to discuss issues of technological access and democracy.

RHODE ISLAND—The fourth "Our Essence" Festival of Latin American Cinema will be held April 19 through 26 at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. The festival, the only juried competition for Hispanic films in the United States, has several components, including an open competition for new films and a series of exhibition films. This year's festival will focus on films based on the novels, stories, and screenplays of Nobel Laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Nine films based on his work will be screened; the directors of all nine will be present to take part in discussions with the audience. In addition to the post-screening forums, the festival will feature roundtable discussions on the literature as well as public lectures by Garcia Marquez scholars Jorge Ruffinelli of Stanford University and Julio Ortega of Brown University.

VERMONT— "Italian Renaissance" reading and discussion series on the birth of humanism continues at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library 802-223-3338.

VIRGINIA—An original poem and remarks by former Poet Laureate Rita Dove will open the second annual Virginia Festival of the Book March 28 in Charlottesville.

Like last year, the three-day event will offer poetry and fiction readings, lectures, exhibits, panel discussions, and children's programs, with opportunities for direct participation by audiences at more than seventy-five separate events, most of them free. More than one hundred writers, among then *Truman* biographer David McCullough, will take part.

Along with a retrospective on William Faulkner's days at the University of Virginia, there will be an evening with Southern writers George Garrett, Lewis Rubin, Clyde Edgerton, Richard Bausch, William Hoffman, Doris Betts, and Mary Lee Settle; a poetry reading with Dove and Henry Taylor; and a fiction-writers panel focusing on new works by John Casey and Howard Norman. Still other programs will focus on mystery writing, humor and fiction, historical fiction, trends in publishing, literary journals, and strategies for self-publishing. An electronic book demonstration and a book arts workshop will be included.

The program will feature scores of authors, scholars, teachers, and book industry professionals. Book fairs of new and antiquarian works will give local and regional publishers an opportunity to display their titles and to offer book-signing appearances by their authors.

—Courtesy of Library of Congress.

VIRGINIA FESTIVAL OF THE BOOK

Rita Dove, former poet laureate of the United States, will speak at the opening of the second annual Virginia Festival of the Book.

The festival, which last year attracted four thousand people, will once again include a benefit reception and a benefit luncheon at the Omni Hotel on Friday—both featuring well-known authors—to raise money for future humanities activities.

The final event on Sunday afternoon is being planned specifically for children and families.

WISCONSIN—"Common Ground: Diversity and Unity in Sherman Park" brings together Milwaukee's Sherman Park Community Association and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee public history program in an effort to address questions of economic and social inequality within its boundaries. Participants will collect oral histories and photographs from neighborhood residents who have lived through the neighborhood's many changes. An exhibition and booklet are planned, along with a public forum featuring the residents whose oral histories were collected; the forum will be moderated by historian and neighborhood resident Michael Gordon. □

B

TO UNDERSTAND RICHARD J. DALEY AN

Daley

BY NADINE EKREK

SS

Daley looking over the Chicago skyline.
—*Chicago Tribune*

D HIS IMPACT ON THE CITY OF CHICAGO IS TO APPRECIATE THE MADNESS OF CONTRADICTION.

A man who rose to power himself from immigrant poverty, Daley was unable to understand the new wave of immigrants seeking power in the 1960s. And while the skyscrapers grew more and more magnificent over his city, the ghettos beneath rankled and unraveled. In the twenty-two years he served as the city's mayor, for most voters Daley remained a father figure embodying traditional working-class values. For others, he was a dinosaur, the last of the urban bosses, a man who had issued "shoot to kill" orders against residents in his own city in the rioting and looting that followed the killing of Martin Luther King.

The views of his political career are as ambiguous as the views of the machine politics through which he achieved his political strength. Some scholars have described the machine as a political system based on valuing loyalty above competence. Others offer a revised view, rejecting the image of the machine as a corrupt entity and characterizing it instead as a democratic agency that reconciled the interests of the weak and powerful alike, making no distinction between ethnicity or race.

The contradictions help to illustrate the complexity faced by director/producer Barak Goodman in his new film, *Richard J. Daley: The Last Boss*, which is part of the PBS *American Experience* series. Within the context of Daley's story, the film examines the larger history of the city as it was shaped by immigration, industrialization, and racial upheaval over the course of a century. Through archival footage, photographs, and a wide range of interviews with political allies, opponents, historians, and Chicagoans, the film documents the story of Daley's life, from his Irish working-class upbringing to his long career in city politics. Daley held office for so long that schoolchildren grew up believing his first name to be "Mayor," yet he was a deeply private man who grew increasingly isolated as his political control faltered.

"Daley was much more complicated than his public perception, which was really like a cardboard caricature," says Goodman, who did extensive research on Daley to write the script for the film. "Yet his was the story of the American city—its rise to greatness and its tragic conflicts."

Daley's upbringing in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood personified the immigrant experience in America. (Daley lived in Bridgeport his entire life, where he and his wife Eleanor raised five children.)

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the influx of European immigration into American cities was the force behind developing political systems. By 1930 two-thirds of the city's population was foreign-born. As Al Capone's crime syndicate came to exploit the city's poor and unstable population, politics became an attractive means of escaping poverty and achieving wealth and power. According to historian Richard Wade, Daley and others like him grew up frustrated by the obstacles to upward mobility. They had no money, no education. But they did have numbers and the right to vote. Only in politics did these numbers translate into power.

Political aspirations were clearly evidenced in Daley's boyhood, as he presided over the ethnic gang clubs that produced some of the most powerful Irish politicians in the city. By the time he had risen through the ranks of Chicago's city council and ward politics to become mayor in 1955, the Chicago machine had come into being, built out of a need to unite the sprawling populations under a single party. Daley would emerge as a political figure imbued with machine-like notions of how to run a political organization.

The most important characteristic of the political machine, according to urban historians, was its "high degree of control over primaries by means of its ability to slate candidates, its use of patronage to reward electoral support, and its strict, hierarchical organization, from the street level precinct workers through the ward bosses to the ultimate heads of the machine." The foundation of the machine was the relationship between the machine and the voter, and the voter who was ignorant of or indifferent to the issues was easiest to draw into the system.

"Although it appeared to be clannish and exclusionary," says Goodman, "the Chicago Democratic organization included many ethnic groups, often vying with each other, but nevertheless sharing a stake in its reelection." When Daley first took office, he tried to balance these ethnic and racial factions in the interest of electoral dominance, but the machine he inherited had experienced significant decline. The machine had become extinct in most other American cities by that time, but Daley quickly strengthened his electoral control by "separating the realms of the political and governmental, while maintaining tight control over both," as Goodman describes it. Daley reneged on his campaign promise to give up his party chairmanship, but continued to hold both the highest political office in Chicago—the chairmanship of the Cook County Democratic Party—and the highest governmental office, the mayoralty.

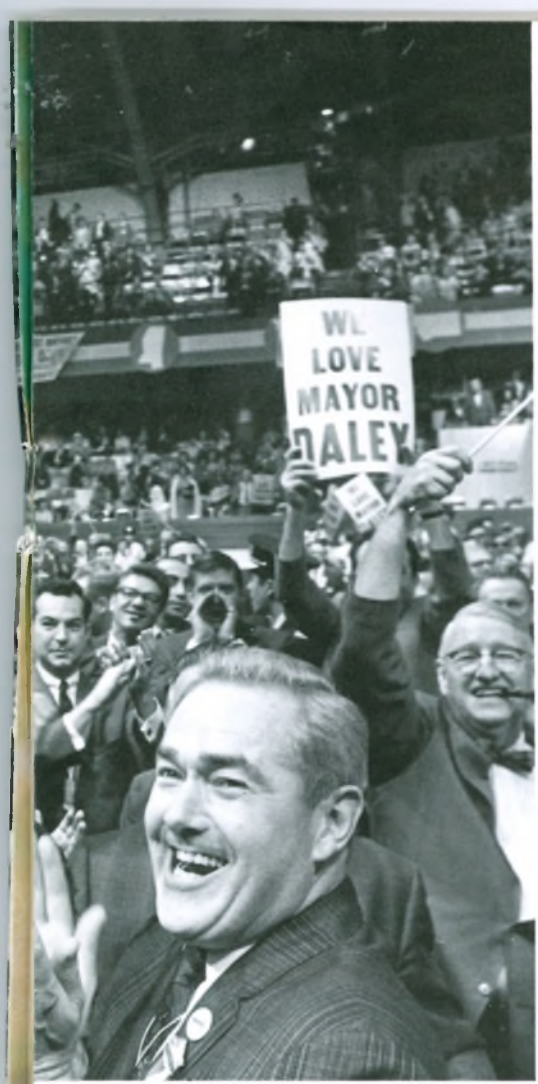
By keeping the offices separate, Daley consolidated power. Where his predecessors had parlayed the economic vulnerability of the Irish into political power, Daley benefited from the newest group of disadvantaged immigrants in the city, Southern blacks. In fact, black votes were most responsible for Daley's first few electoral successes. This support would prove transitory as Daley increasingly ignored the racial issues that encroached on his system of balance.

—AP/World Wide Photo

Daley's first two terms in office were among the most dynamic periods in mayoral history. With control over the city council budget, Daley created an ambitious building program that influenced municipal governments across the nation by employing the most advanced urban developers he could find. He built O'Hare Airport, the Dan Ryan Expressway, and a new campus for the University of Illinois. He enlisted architects to build many of the structures in the present-day Chicago skyline (although this expansive construction was to cause disastrous relocation and crowding in black ghettos). He made deals on city construction projects and gained the support of unions. He centralized control of federal poverty programs.

Daley was gruff and sometimes short-tempered; his diction was clumsy. Perhaps to offset his lack of formal education, Daley strove to project an image of power. He wore expensive suits and always traveled in a black limousine; a police car provided twenty-four-hour surveillance outside his home. Daley wielded his power with tight control, rewarding friends and punishing enemies, but never ceasing to evaluate, says Goodman, "who could still deliver the vote and who couldn't." Daley disdained the press, one time announcing he could "spit on them" from where he stood at a press conference.

Daley's tough public persona belied his private side. He was described by those who knew him as a man of untold secrets, who had a warm spirit and an infectious laugh. He went to church and took communion every morning and often worked eighteen-hour days—and the people of Chicago adored him. "When I see my neighborhood, I see all the neighborhoods of Chicago," Daley once said. "When I see our home and family, I see everyone's home and family. And that's what counts in Chicago."



1968 Democratic Convention

Inevitably, and as it did for all of urban America, increasing racial division became a crucial issue. In the second half of his political career, the rising aspirations of blacks and the antiwar protests were to contribute to the disintegration of Daley's power and the demise of the political machine in Chicago.

By 1960 Chicago's South Side had the largest concentration of blacks in the nation. As a means of addressing the city's critical housing shortage, Daley used federal money filtered through the Chicago Housing Authority to build a series of public housing projects, with high rises relegated to black neighborhoods. In 1962, the Housing Authority opened the famous Robert Taylor homes, which spanned two miles of city property and accommodated a 40,000-tenant population. What had appeared to some as an optimistic solution did more to segregate the city than ever before. Overcrowding and interracial violence within the black neighborhoods continued to escalate. Competition for jobs and housing grew fierce as whites resented the introduction of blacks into their districts.

The city's bristling racial tension climaxed with the arrival of Martin Luther King's freedom movement in 1966. "The Negroes of Chicago have a greater feeling of powerlessness than I've ever seen," King spoke out. "They don't participate in the governmental process because they are beaten down psychologically."As he criticized the machine's control over Chicago's black population, King challenged Daley to enact social reform. Yet for all his belief in the assimilation and balance of immigrant populations, Daley was unable to acknowledge the plight of blacks in the city. The summit agreement King and Daley signed did little to enforce its pledge to open up residential housing.

Disturbances ensued over the next few years, culminating in Daley's famous "shoot to kill" order against black looters in the wake of the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King. Hundreds of buildings were burned, and a section of the city destroyed. Daley's worst fear had become a reality: He had lost control over the city. The 1970s saw a significant decline in black votes for Daley; antimachine black leaders such as Harold Washington emerged. Daley's downfall as mayor, as Goodman sees it, was the false assumption that his own experiences with white immigrant assimilation also applied to those of blacks. In order to improve the condition of blacks, one scholar wrote, "Daley's machine would have had to sacrifice short-term support from white voters for the long-term good of the city. This was antithetical to a system that maximized its support at every moment. It would have required the machine to expend its capital in a disproportional way to its own disadvantage."

Daley's loosening grip on the city did not end with the unrest in black neighborhoods. His power was to be challenged at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Although Daley's role at the convention in handling protestors against the Vietnam War incurred the wrath of millions of Americans who supported the withdrawal of troops, few knew that Daley himself was opposed to the war and had expressed his concerns privately to President Lyndon Johnson.

On Sunday, August 25, Daley opened the convention while crowds of antiwar protestors swelled in nearby Lincoln Park. The city had become a battleground between demonstrators and law enforcement officials, and police reaction grew increasingly violent as the convention proceedings continued. When Democratic officials—many of them antiwar sympathizers—learned of the hostilities taking place outside the hall, the convention exploded. Hostile shouting and accusation broke out. The pivotal moment arrived when Connecticut senator Abraham Ribicoff rose from the delegates to nominate antiwar candidate George McGovern for president and scathingly declared, "If we had McGovern we would not have gestapo tactics in the streets of Chicago." Ribicoff paused and stared straight at Mayor Daley. Daley mouthed an epithet and the uproar continued. The world watched as images of violence in the city streets were inexorably linked with Daley's enraged figure in the convention hall.

The event haunted Daley throughout the rest of his career. He grew increasingly isolated and distrustful. In 1974, a series of indictments on charges of corruption and bribery came down on some of Daley's closest allies. Although Daley was never directly linked to the scandals, many believed he willingly allowed them to continue. "He has done more to hurt the reputation of this city," wrote the *Chicago Tribune*, "than anyone since Al Capone." Despite this, Daley won election to a sixth term in 1975 with an overwhelming 70 percent of the vote.

Could Daley have recognized his limitations? He was a product of a system that did not address the more abstract, ideological concerns of its people: The Democratic machine could pave a street, one scholar wrote, but it could not integrate a neighborhood. Daley certainly had his weaknesses, but although there was much he did not understand, he was a leader to whom the city looked to make decisions, and he made these decisions based upon what he felt was for the good of his people.

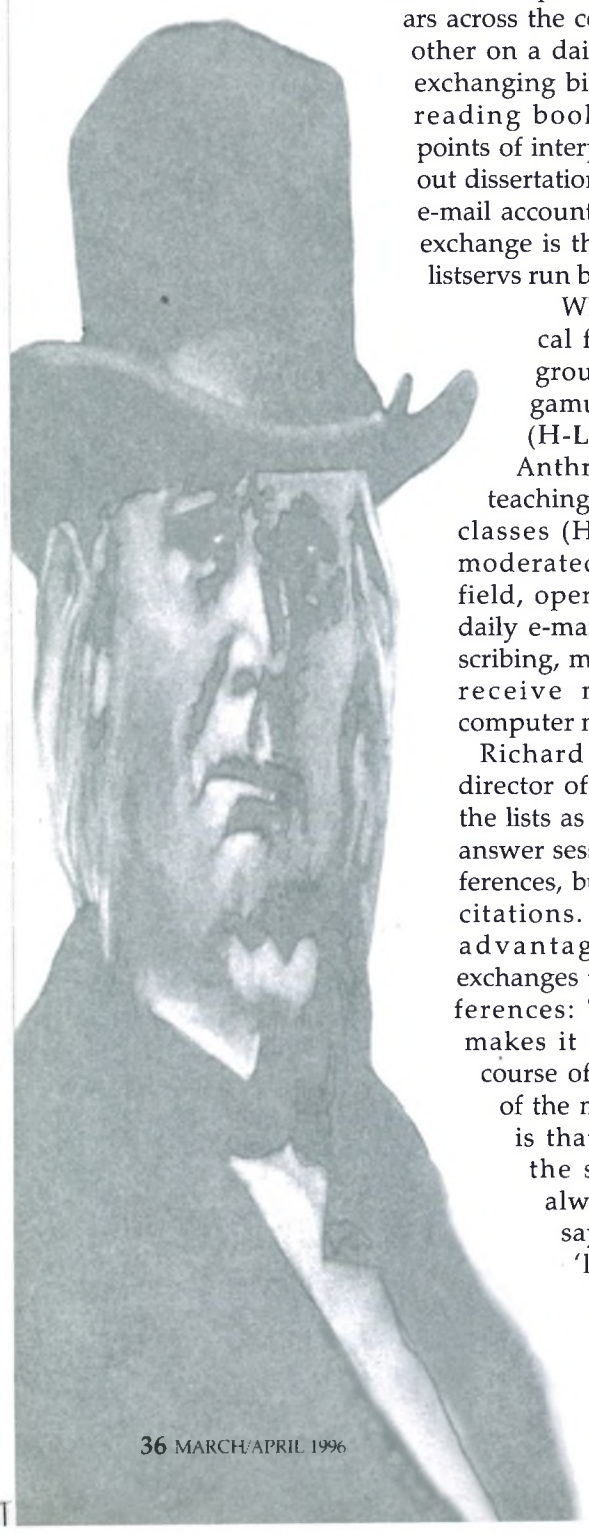
Daley possessed a deeper connection with the working-class people of Chicago than any other politician of his time. When he died in December of 1976, more than 100,000 people stood in line in freezing weather to walk past his casket. He had been many things—admired, reviled, worshiped, and criticized—but the legacy he was leaving could not be denied. □

Nadine Ekrek is a writer in Chicago.

The Illinois State Historical Society received $700,174 from the Division of Public Programs for planning and production of Richard J. Daley: The Last Boss.

CLIO IN CYBERSPACE

By Meredith Hindley



COMPUTERS HAVE ALTERED THE WAY scholars practice their craft. Beyond using them for word processing and archival research, computers are allowing scholars across the country to talk to each other on a daily basis. Scholars are exchanging bibliographic citations, reading book reviews, arguing points of interpretation, and staking out dissertation topics, all from their e-mail accounts. The forum for this exchange is the more than seventy listservs run by H-Net.

While having a historical focus, the discussion groups or "lists" run the gamut from labor history (H-Labor) to European Anthropology (H-SAE) to teaching Western Civilization classes (H-W-Civ). Each list, moderated by scholars in the field, operates essentially as a daily e-mail newsletter. By subscribing, members automatically receive messages in their computer mailboxes.

Richard Jensen, executive director of H-Net, characterizes the lists as akin to question-and-answer sessions at scholarly conferences, but with more detailed citations. The lists have one advantage over the verbal exchanges that take place at conferences: The written format makes it easier to follow the course of the discussion. "One of the major assets of H-NET is that it gives subscribers the sense that they can always have their say," says Jensen. "Even the 'lurkers' (Those who listen in but don't participate) have a sense of being part of the ongoing conversation." And like conferences, the exchange of ideas sometimes overflows into the hallways. "It's like having a buzz of private conversations going on," says Jensen. Sometimes subscribers open private e-mail discussions with scholars they first met on a list.

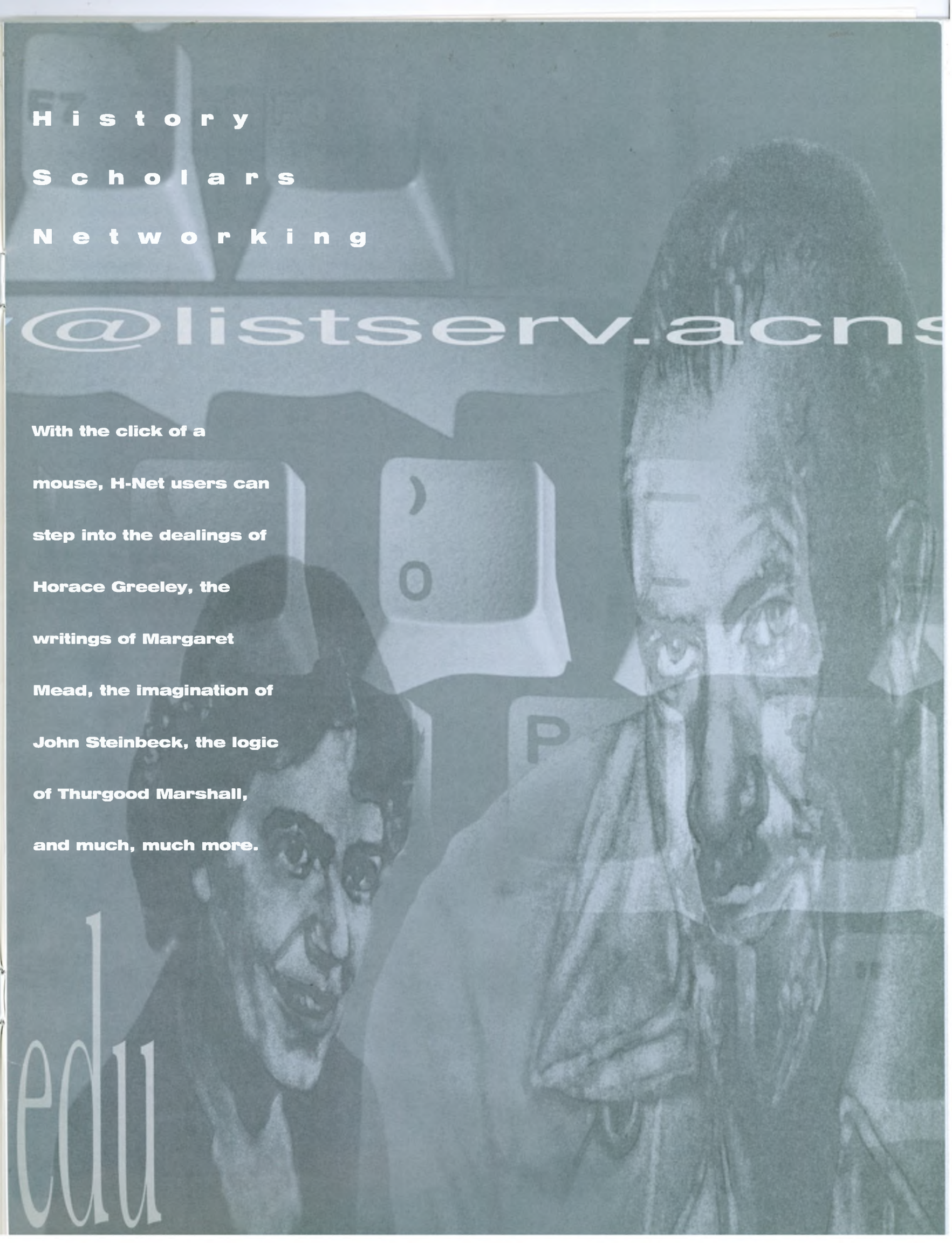
The conversational buzz is growing. In September 1995, H-Net had more than 30,000 subscribers from sixty-five countries; it continues to grow at more than 10 percent a month. The six largest, with more than a thousand subscribers each, are H-AmStdy (American Studies), H-Teach (teaching college history), H-Women (women's history), H-Asia (Asian studies and history), H-Film (scholarly studies of cinema), and H-Rhetor (history of rhetoric and communications).

Subscription to H-Net is currently free; it is limited to those individuals expressing a scholarly interest in a field. The lists have latitude in deciding subscription policies and have experimented with different approaches. Two of them, H-Teach and H-Film, are open to automatic subscription. Most lists require applicants to fill out a subscription form. The procedure helps to filter out people who don't have a real interest; they rarely take the time to return the form.

While H-Net is geared towards history scholars, half of the subscribers are not in history departments, but come from other disciplines such as literature, law, journalism, political science, art history, economics, and anthropology. Another large segment is librarians, as information providers for campuses, along with high school teachers, curators of museums, directors of local historical societies, and professionals in state and federal agencies. A number of journalists subscribe to H-Pol (American politics), and both active and retired diplomats have logged on to H-Diplo (international affairs).

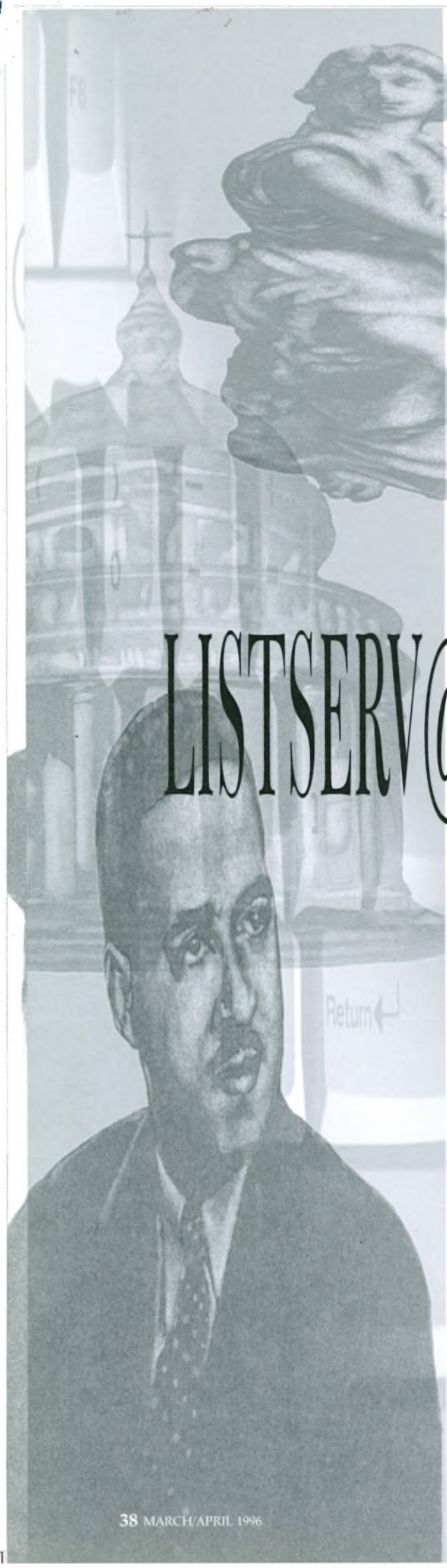
H-Net is slowly carving out a niche. "What it does," says John Lewis Gaddis, an H-Diplo editor, "is give us a new level of scholarly exchange, somewhere in between scholarly publications, on the one hand, and our annual scholarly conventions and other forms of meeting on the other." It also, says Gaddis, who is a professor at Ohio University's Contemporary History Institute, keeps scholars from being isolated.

Often the smaller history departments have only one Latin Americanist or one Asian history professor, making consulting with colleagues in their field on a



History Scholars Networking

With the click of a mouse, H-Net users can step into the dealings of Horace Greeley, the writings of Margaret Mead, the imagination of John Steinbeck, the logic of Thurgood Marshall, and much, much more.



LISTSERV@

daily basis difficult. H-Net provides an opportunity.

The networking is also important for scholars isolated geographically. Australian Paul Turnbull comments: "This is a big country in which airfares are expensive." Turnbull is a senior lecturer at James Cook University in North Queensland and editor of H-NZ-OZ (New Zealand and Australian history). "Most of us who are in provincial centers do not get to talk with colleagues at conferences more than once or twice a year. H-NZ-OZ gives us an ongoing conference, which I think gives intellectual stimulation many of us would otherwise not have."

The system also offers greater access to the graduate student by provided a quick and inexpensive way to network in the academic community. "It gives them a chance to float dissertation ideas in order to determine whether other graduate students or established academics are already working on that topic," observes David Broscious, a list moderator for H-Diplo and Ph.D. candidate in history at Ohio University.

H-Net also breaks down degree barriers that might exist. "E-mail does away with grand titles and impressive letterheads," says Gaddis, a senior scholar himself. Graduate students who post to the lists offering well-formulated opinions can easily be mistaken for professors and have a chance to be heard in the historical fray.

The H-Net lists are also intended to help scholars become more adept at using computer technology, Jensen says. He estimates that 5 percent of professors are on-line, most of them younger associate professors and graduate students.

So what is on H-Net? The content varies from list to list, but there is a general pattern. Subscribers receive twenty or thirty messages a week: information on grant opportunities, calls for papers and upcoming conferences, news on developments in Washington that affect the historical community, research queries, book reviews, and the chance to participate in discussions. Postings can run from four lines to mini-essays of a page or two.

The lists are frequently used for queries—scholars with a question ask the other list members for assistance. Most are focused on research or teaching problems, from something as simple as locating a citation to requesting suggestions on books to use in teaching a class. H-German (German history) asks its members to query the list only after other easily available sources of information have been exhausted. When they do query the list, subscribers are asked to write the posting in such a way that everyone can benefit. "Medieval scholars," say the H-German policy guidelines, "should be able to read a query about the Nazi era and learn something; so should social historians be able to learn from queries by military historians."

Broscious describes the process: "If someone has a question concerning available archival materials or methodology, he or she can send a message to the list. Within hours, the message will be posted. And, before a day is gone, it is likely that other subscribers will have responded either on-list or off-list with answers."

Queries often serve as starters for what are called discussion "threads." A daily discussion builds as subscribers write in to question, agree, or offer alternative evidence. For example, H-Diplo list members grappled with the controversy over the Smithsonian's *Enola Gay* exhibition and the dropping of the atomic bomb. Subscribers hashed out disputes over the predicted invasion casualty figures, alternatives to dropping the bomb, the impact of how veterans remember the Second World War, and the information available to decision makers in August 1945.

The types of discussion threads are specific to the interest of the list members. H-German has discussed in detail the lack of postmodern theory in the writing of German history. H-War (military history) subscribers questioned the public's tolerance of casualties in armed conflict. H-AmStdy discussed the home front culture of World War II and how to develop new American studies programs.

Scholars also receive book reviews geared specifically to their interests.

H-Net reviews, which run from 1200 to 2000 words, are longer then those featured in many print journals. The reviews can be more timely because of their electronic format; generally, in print it takes eighteenth months to get from publication date to the first journal review. H-Net's goal for H-Review is one hundred book reviews a month for its subscribers.

The H-Net book review system is organized along the lines of print, with titles and reviewers selected by the list's editors or by special book review editors. For major books, several reviews are commissioned, and when possible, the book will be announced ahead of time, and the reviewer, author, and list members will be invited to comment.

The word "democratic" has been applied to H-Net and its operations—and not always with positive connotations. In a July 1995 *Lingua Franca* article, members of the editorial staff of the *American Historical Review* charged that H-Net book reviews were not being done by qualified scholars.

Jensen, naturally, disagrees. He sees such criticism as coming from those who believe that only established scholars should have a voice. "This is the way that scholarly associations work," he says. "You have to be approved by a program committee before you can get on the American Historical Association program and many historians grumble about the 'political correctness' factor that enters into program decisions."

H-Net remains a fairly loose organization. Jensen, who started the project in December 1992, serves as its executive director. His actions are guided by 130 list editors, who serve on a volunteer basis. They come from ninety-nine institutions in the United States and eight other countries. These editors annually elect officers and an executive committee, which monitors the quality of the lists and shapes policy on copyright and other issues.

Each individual list can have anywhere from two to eight editors. They control the flow of messages, posting those that are appropriate and rejecting "flames" (messages which are malicious or mean spirited).

What can be posted to the list by its subscribers can be become a point of contention. The editors can find themselves dealing with First Amendment issues—but in cyberspace.

Rules of the Road on H-Diplo

hdiplo@ouvaxa.cats.ohiou.edu

1. H-DIPLO is an electronic forum for discussing the history of international relations, broadly defined. It encourages scholarly exchanges on all aspects of this subject, regardless of the countries or periods involved. It particularly welcomes the exploration of new interdisciplinary and methodological approaches, the evaluation of new archival sources, and contributions from scholars outside the United States.

2. H-DIPLO operates in the manner of scholarly journals, the program committees of professional organizations, or indeed anyone conducting a seminar—which is to say that the editors and moderators reserve the right to keep the discussion on the subject, free from ad hominem attacks or other arguments that go beyond the limits of accepted professional discourse.

3. H-DIPLO is nonpartisan, and hence will not lend itself to specifically targeted lobbying or other organizational efforts. It will run information about the status of current controversies or policy debates that might affect the interests of our subscribers, though, and it welcomes frank and open discussions about their implications.

4. H-DIPLO does not run advertisements. It welcomes information about new books, new journals, new sources, fellowship and scholarship opportunities, proposed conferences, and—through H-NET—job listings. But it will not run solicitations to purchase books, or to subscribe to journals, or to apply for admission to particular academic programs.

5. H-DIPLO will post book reviews it has commissioned through the H-NET book review project, and it will encourage discussion of these once they appear. The moderators will also, from time to time, post reviews forwarded from other lists if in their judgment these may be of interest to subscribers. H-DIPLO will not, however, post unsolicited book reviews.

6. H-DIPLO will post abstracts of articles appearing in scholarly journals or of papers presented at scholarly conferences, as well as items from other discussion lists, if in the judgment of the moderators these relate to subscribers' interests and are not of excessive length.

7. H-DIPLO will regularly post information about new discussion lists or other resources on the Internet that might be of interest.

8. H-DIPLO will not provide e-mail addresses beyond those listed on communications addressed to the list as a whole. The moderators will, however, refer subscribers to directories where such information is usually available.

9. H-DIPLO welcomes requests for information from subscribers for whom standard reference sources have proven inadequate, but it discourages—and may not run—inquiries easily answerable from such sources. It encourages potential authors of theses and dissertations, as well as articles and books, to use its facilities as a way of determining who else may be working on particular topics; but the moderators ask those responding to such inquiries to consider whether their reply will be of general interest to everyone on the list, or might better be sent directly to the subscriber making the inquiry.

10. H-DIPLO seeks to promote discussion among as wide and diverse a group of its subscribers as care to participate. The editors and moderators recognize, though, that too many e-mail messages—especially if they seem to come, repeatedly, from the same individuals—can cause other subscribers to "tune out." Accordingly, the moderators may, from time to time, ask frequent contributors to delay, consolidate, or even withhold messages when the prospect of "overexposure" seems imminent. They will not apply this rule, though, where substantive exchanges on issues of broad interest are taking place.

11. H-DIPLO reserves the right to reject any subscriber's message that does not fall within the guidelines, or to ask that it be modified to comport with them. In all such cases, the moderators will contact the contributor to explain why the message is being handled in the way that it is. The moderators will not always assume this obligation when nonsubscribers forward messages originating on other lists.

12. H-DIPLO has an appeal mechanism in case objections to these procedures arise. Moderators will first refer unresolved disputes to the co-editors, John Gaddis and Chester Pach. If the editors are unable to resolve them to the satisfaction of the subscriber in question, they will then refer the issue to the Editorial Board, whose collective decision will be final.

13. H-DIPLO is still very much a "work in progress." Accordingly, the moderators, the editors, and the Editorial Board all strongly encourage suggestions from subscribers as to how the list might be improved.

The co-editors of H-Diplo are John Gaddis and Chester Pach; the co-moderators are David Broscious, Jeff Woods, and Michael Ruhl.

When they subscribe to a list, scholars receive the policy on allowable communications. Consider, however, what can happen when individuals sure of their knowledge debate controversial issues. Tensions can and do flare, even on e-mail.

"People, sometimes, shoot from the hip in a way that they would never consider doing if they were writing for a print journal," says Broscious. "This, I think, is a temporary problem and not a very large one at that. As academics become more comfortable communicating in cyberspace and as the Net becomes a more widely accepted professional forum, this should diminish."

H-Net has been criticized for not posting "flames" or personal attacks. Those who have found themselves censored by list editors have cried foul and claimed First Amendment rights of free speech. "Whether on the printed page or in cyberspace, people do not like to be edited or rejected," says Broscious.

H-Net, however, reserves the right not to post such entries. "Throughout academe, the gatekeeper function is accepted," says Jensen. "Students have to meet standards to be admitted, and journal editors reject articles that are not good enough or often ask that articles be rewritten."

The gatekeeping function that keeps the atmosphere friendly also helps maintain quality. Gaddis sees the moderating process as no different from that of a newspaper editor with letters to the editor. "The single most favorable comment that we get from our subscribers has to do with the fact that we do insist on this very general form of quality control."

The problem isn't as widespread as it could be. H-Ethnic reviewed its files and discovered that of the 1,500 submissions in 1994, only four were returned to the author with the request that they be rewritten to remove "flaming." In three cases, the author immediately complied; the fourth refused, protesting unconstitutional censorship.

While the daily give-and-take between scholars is its most visible accomplishment, H-Net is also interested in becoming a long-term resource. Most of the lists currently have "gopher" sites storing back files, bibliographies, syllabi, and other

H-Net Lists

For these lists, send subscribe message to:
LISTSERV@uicvm.uic.edu

1. H-Antis	antisemitism
2. H-Ideas	intellectual history
3. H-Italy	Italian history and culture
4. H-Urban	urban history
5. HOLOCAUS	Holocaust studies
6. IEAHCnet	colonial; 17th-18th century Americas

For these lists, send subscribe message to:
LISTSERV@msu.edu

7. H-Africa	African history
8. H-Albion	British and Irish history
9. H-AmRel	American religious history
10. H-AmStdy	American studies
11. H-Asia	Asian studies & history
12. H-Canada	Canadian history & studies
13. H-CivWar	US Civil War
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teaching materials of interest. Some are already putting primary documents on-line. For example, H-German recently started an archive containing translated and annotated documents from the Kaiserreich period (1871-1918). H-Diplo has been working with the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), which works to gain access to documents from the former Soviet-bloc, and the National Security Archive, which works to secure access to classified U.S. records.

"Our hope is that once the gopher/web sites are operational and scanning technology improves a bit more," says Broscious, "we will be able to collect U.S. and foreign archival sources that they have collected and place them on the gopher/web sites so that scholars will have direct access to them."

In a complementary project, H-Net is bringing multimedia to the classroom. H-Net and Michigan State University have received an Endowment grant to launch "Creating the History Classroom of the 21st Century," a project designed to help history faculty nationwide incorporate multimedia technology. As part of the grant, a new list, H-MMedia, has been created to provide scholars with a forum to discuss their practical experiences and keep abreast of new developments. A national center for organizing multimedia teaching initiatives in the humanities has been established at Michigan State University, with seven regional centers at Austin Peay State University in Tennessee, the Chicago Historical Society, the University of Houston, Michigan State University, the University of Texas at San Antonio, the University of California-Los Angeles, the University of Virginia, and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

With more scholars subscribing daily, Jensen and the H-Net editors seem to have found a formula that works: limited subscriptions, edited content, and scholarly focus. Eight new lists are in the planning stages.

As for those who regard the lists reluctantly, Turnbull only offers a shrug: "I don't think that anyone should join H-NZ-OZ. If people like what we do and find that it enhances their scholarly practice, then that's good enough." □

IN CALIFORNIA:

Testing the Airwaves

As part of the continuing NEH initiative on "A National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity," residents of southern California took part a few months ago in nine call-in radio shows on KPCC. In the first show, the question was "Who are we as Angelenos?" Here are excerpts:

Ed, an audience member: "I'm a first-generation Filipino immigrant. Most Filipinos in southern California came directly from Manila, but I grew up in the Philadelphia-New Jersey area. I came here to find a little more of the Filipino culture in order to raise my family in a more diverse culture where we could actually find the Filipino culture promoted and preserved. I think Filipino culture has something to contribute to the tapestry of American society."

Host Larry Mantle: "Have you gotten what you wanted?"

Ed: "When I came out here I thought I'd find the Filipino American culture stronger. L.A. has the largest population of Filipinos outside of Manila. We're the number one Asian American group in the state of California. Filipino immigration came here very early—there are reports that there were Filipino members of the founding expedition of L.A."

Dave, another audience member: "I was born and raised here in southern California. I think it's positive that I can go on the same street and I can get Korean food and I can get Mexican food and I can get Armenian food or whatever else I want all in the same neighborhood. I think these are positive changes.

"Some things haven't changed. For example, my grandparents were here during the Watts riots, and I was here for the latest round of riots. I think that's something that obviously we would all want to change. I think there is more tension today than there was fifteen years ago."

Mantle: "Do you have a take on why that is?"

Dave: "I think a lot of the things we've tried to do to bring people closer together has had an opposite effect. For example, when I was in junior high and high school, we had mandatory busing in the Los Angeles school district. The result for myself was a bitterness about having to travel thirty miles to a school where we were unfamiliar with the neighborhood and the people."

Wayne, another audience member: "I'd like to comment on busing from another perspective. I was bused for six years, and I think it had a tremendously positive impact on my life—being exposed to other cultures and actually going to a much better school than the one that was down my street."

Mantle: "As you were growing up as a black youth, would you not have been exposed to other groups had you gone to your neighborhood school?"

Wayne: "Absolutely not. I would not have been exposed to other ethnic groups."

Mantle: "Do you feel like you understand members of other ethnic groups better as a result of the experience?"

Wayne: "Certainly as a young person, being exposed to individuals whose parents had been in internment camps gave me a much better sense of the oppression they felt as well as the oppression that my family and people of my culture have felt."

Mantle: "Are you optimistic about Los Angeles?"

Wayne: "Sometimes. I think we're fighting a battle and we're fighting shadows."

Mantle: "Who are the shadows?"

Wayne: "Fear, prejudice."

Roberta, a caller: "I came here from Canada, and one of the first things I was astonished by is the educational system here. I realized there were many different levels of education depending on where you lived, and I couldn't comprehend that. This gentleman said that he had been bused, and how great it was that he was able to get a chance to have better schooling. But, if he'd been left in his neighborhood he would not have gotten that kind of an education. I think this is an area that really needs to be addressed in this country."

Mantle: "Let me ask, how many of you would say you live today in an integrated neighborhood? We hear about greater Los Angeles, that it's a segregated area, that we don't tend to live around people that are from different groups."

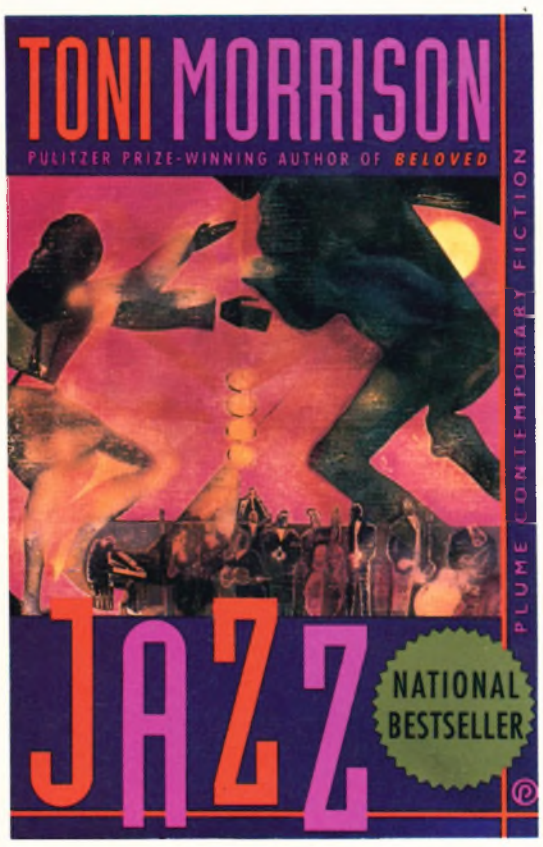
Sharon, an audience member: "I bought my house about five years ago in Victoria Park Circle. For those of you who don't know Los Angeles really well, it was a originally a white middle-class neighborhood and is now a predominantly black middle-class neighborhood. I wanted to be in that diverse community. I chose to move to Los Angeles originally, because it was diverse. I grew up in Minnesota and I wanted a large city that was diverse—and Los Angeles is that." □

Continued from page 17

of Ralph Ellison. Whenever *Invisible Man*, an extraordinary novel in its own right, is posed against the entire oeuvre of Morrison, one feels compelled to question why this odd but persistent maneuver is happening. Can anyone seriously imagine raising Dostoyevsky as a talisman *against* Tolstoy; holding up Hemingway against Fitzgerald; using Balzac to *belittle* Flaubert? But in addition to noting the conspicuous inappropriateness of pitching an either/or battle of the authors—a notion which, incidentally, these two particular authors would find hilarious—one begins to wonder precisely what it is such comments are praising. What is it about *Invisible Man* (as in Irving Howe's early rejection of Ellison, on the same either/or model, in favor of Richard Wright) that now makes it appear *in retrospect* in the role of the only authentic African American novel?

In the context of its comparison with Morrison's works, we should note, in the first place, the significance of its title to the whole fabric of Ellison's novel. Begun, according to Ellison, as a war narrative, *Invisible Man* maintains a double commitment to masculinity and invisibility. Its "disembodied voice" is as much a man's—as women in the novel are overwhelmingly bodies, an alienation and dehumanization of the feminine which mirrors, and sometimes intersects violently with, that of the narrator himself. For even his invisibility is not "his": The telling absence of an article not only distinguishes Ellison's title from H. G. Wells's, but identifies invisibility with all men everywhere, an idea famously conveyed in the novel's closing, rhetorical question ("Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"). The "task" of the novel, as Ellison explained, was to reveal "human universals" by way of one black American's "contact with a variety of American types," including "most of all" his contact with "racial stereotypes," that is, types that are not people but solidified or reified images to which people are actually subordinated, fantasms more fantastic than those of any ghost story, in that they allow one to see not the dead but rather not to see the living. It is this dreamed world of nonbeings, this blind world of hypertrophied imaginings, that renders the narrator invisible to himself, and drives him from it "underground."

Now such an understanding of fictive representation, by which the universal potential of the particular is revealed through its external and, ultimately, internal negation—the progression from conflict with the other, as impervious type, to conflict within the self, as invaded by unyielding stereotype—is authentically and fruitfully Hegelian. Ellison's novel never indeed borrows power from a single, nondialectical source; of all the positively and negatively charged names currently in circulation for such a monological source or authority, none improves upon Ellison's own "Monopolated Light and Power." The opening and closing image of current siphoned from that controlling company to light more bulbs in an unknown basement than on Broadway is one of Ellison's most surreal, and not only because it forces us to accept the unbelievable as concrete fact (precisely "1,369" bulbs). In its bragging attempt to light an unnatural darkness, to steal, like an anti-Prometheus, a thoroughly commercialized, already stolen fire, it also represents the narrator's and, most importantly, Ellison's own self-conscious irony, about the entire project of pronouncing oneself, as a lover of light—underground.

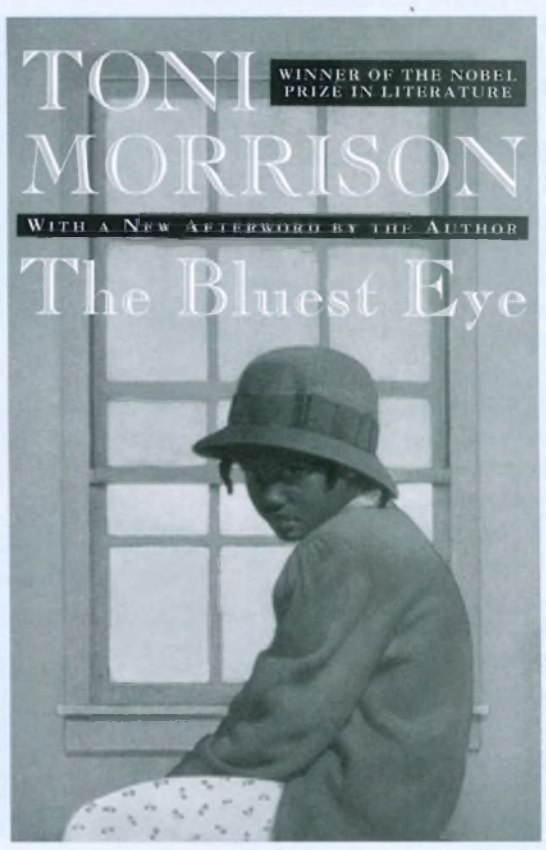


"THE RIGHT RECORD IS ON THE TURNTABLE NOW; SHE CAN HEAR ITS PREPARATORY HISS AS THE NEEDLE SLIDES TOWARD ITS FIRST GROOVE. THE BROTHERS SMILE BRILLIANTLY; ONE LEANS A FRACTION OF AN INCH TOWARD THE OTHER, AND, NEVER LOSING EYE CONTACT WITH DORCAS, WHISPERS SOMETHING."

—*JAZZ*

Yet the novel's claim to represent human universals remains wedded to this subterranean voice, its dedication to "hibernation" in face of overground violence of every kind. And the specific grotesqueness of that violence, as narrated, remains linked stylistically to invisibility. Although part of real experience, rather than a hallucinatory illustration of irony, such violence, too, strikes the reader as surreal because the experience it marks is recorded in a radically disconnected manner, as if undergone solely from the inside. If invisible man is not seen, neither does he see outside himself. The blindfolded boxers of the battle royal; the dazed patient submitted to electric shock (as scientific alternative to blithely suggested "castration"); the victim, and victim as violent actor, whose acts and reactions take on an additionally disjointed quality due to the blank wall of projected "invisibility" they hit—such events and the language that conveys them impose a sense of blocked vision as human universal, the narrator's and the reader's alienation from historical action. When, in the prologue, the narrator recounts the uncontrollable violence triggered in him by the insults of a man on the street, it is still the inside—the inside of that man's mind—which, divorced from the narrator, is said to commit the narrated action: "Something in this man's thick head had sprung out and beaten him within an inch of his life." As represented in the blood that repeatedly fills the struck narrator's mouth, or, covering his eyes, veils his vision, the body is so close to body in *Invisible Man* as to be too close, to be inside itself, its own cover, and thus utterly dross—like uncontrollable sexual desire, unsubordinated to anything and thus unyielding in every way to mind. With a closeness and economy of physical description more reminiscent of Hemingway than Dostoyevsky, *Invisible Man* makes man (like woman), as nexus of mind and body, in a strange way, unimaginable. That Ellison's thus necessarily "disembodied voice" did not emerge into the "light" he "love[s]" in another novel, into a new visibility, served to make the achievement of *Invisible Man* both worthy of celebration and impossible to succeed.

In stating this I am not critiquing *Invisible Man* for what it did not do but describing what it did, and what, historically, did and did not happen to Ellison's formidable writing. One needs very little vision to imagine the contradictory forces contained within the pressure upon that author to succeed himself while in the particular spotlight into which he was thrust, the eye of the cultural division of "Monopolated Power and Light" trained paradoxically on the promise of the writing of invisibility. An articulate analyst of the essential diversity of American culture long before the notion began to serve both as flashpoint and fashion; an author who already suggested in the forties that, rather than viewing diversity as a kind of seasoning to be added to life in America at one's own discretion, "we view the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant, who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the action unfolds" ("Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" [1946], republished in *Shadow and Act*, [1964]), Ellison stated of the experience of all AfricanAmericans in a multi-racial society defined by the contradiction between "democratic beliefs" and "certain antidemocratic practices" of whites that "despite the bland assertions of sociologists, 'high visibility' actually rendered one *un*-visible" (Introduction, *Invisible Man*). What then could it be like to have instead achieved, to be singled out for high visibility, but on the basis of understanding and representing invisibility?



"OF ALL THE WISHES PEOPLE HAD BROUGHT HIM—MONEY, LOVE, REVENGE—THIS SEEMED TO HIM THE MOST POIGNANT AND THE ONE MOST DESERVING OF FULFILLMENT. A LITTLE BLACK GIRL WHO WANTED TO RISE UP OUT OF THE PIT OF HER BLACKNESS AND SEE THE WORLD WITH BLUE EYES. HIS OUTRAGE GREW AND FELT LIKE POWER."

—*THE BLUEST EYE*

If Ellison, whose long, unfinished second novel remained unpublished, were to have succeeded himself in both the literal and the figurative sense of the word, by which the act of coming after is itself an achievement, it might have been in the mode glimpsed once and unforgettably in *Invisible Man*, when the narrator says he was "suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of freedom—simply because I was eating while walking along the street." The event that provokes this feeling is the consumption of a baked yam, an experience as banal as Proust's narrator's downing of a soggy madeleine. What makes it "exhilarating," however, is that unlike Marcel's private taste of a buried, personal past, with his past Ellison's narrator regains both his private and his public self: "I no longer had to worry about who saw me or about what was proper . . . and as sweet as the yam actually was, it became like nectar with the thought." The freedom to be, to connect to one's self through what is outside of one's self, without seeing that self immediately as the "improper" object of someone else's glance, or one's "own"—to see outside one's self without becoming an outsider to one's self, is to exit from hibernation, to join, rather than sever, the power of experience and the power of representation.

In comparing visibility with invisibility as historically divergent principles of modernity, as in stating Morrison succeeds Faulkner, this analysis, of course, crosses the color line—as real in the reception of authors as anywhere in their fiction. Yet a comparison of Morrison with Ellison in analytic rather than polemical terms suggests that, in literary history, rather than a supposed contest, she succeeds Ellison as well, in that she has managed to come after and go beyond invisibility as the principle of greatness in African American fiction. Had this happened once, in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison's vision of Ellison's invisible—her representation of the inner and outer lives of subjects who come to identify beauty and inalienable value with its representation elsewhere—something would have already changed in the history of modern American fiction. But, like Faulkner, Morrison has consciously and consistently succeeded herself, altering her fiction, its form and contents, on principle—the principle that the writing of the visible cannot both repeat itself and be itself, a challenge to what language can do.

With all the tenderness and terror of those who, Orpheus-like, are compelled to look at the dead they retrieve even while bringing them into form-giving light, Morrison's narrative looks in language at subjects and places conventionally translated, if at all, into nonlinguistic, statistical figures. In imagining the life and will of Pecola, a subject bereft of all the accoutrements of identity, she sees and represents the wish to have not vision but the absolute thing of visibility, the pure objectification of its socially aestheticized source, "the bluest eye." Writing within and thereby changing the western tradition in fiction that warns we behold beauty at our own peril—the tales of Helen's captors, Psyche's looking, and Faust's "verweile doch, du bist so schön"—Morrison looks at nontraditional beauty, the traditionally *nonbeautiful, and lingers.*

Still, it was lovely up in the Bottom. After the town grew and the farm land turned into a village and the village into a town and the streets of Medallion were hot and dusty with progress, those heavy trees that sheltered the shacks up in the Bottom were wonderful to see. And the hunters who went there sometimes wondered in private if maybe the white farmer was right after all. Maybe it was the bottom of heaven . . . .

In a way, her strangeness, her naiveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous.

—*Sula*

The spare, eloquent description in *Sula* (1973) of the hillside community named "Bottom," because that was the name given the land by a farmer who promised it to a freed slave for extra labor, after having redefined the word not to mean fertile valley land but a piece of the rocky hills ("the bottom of heaven"), yields the question of whether the farmer's lie was not proved truth by nature and time. The definition of Sula's individuality not in terms of conventions of "character" (good or bad, respectable or unrespectable, etc.) but unapplied imagination yields a reflection on the relation between aesthetic creation, sexuality, and friendship. These questions, these reflections arise out of descriptions and definitions of the particular and give the reader the thrill of new knowledge that each rereading of Proust and Faulkner gives. In its approach to cognition, its grounding and embedding of speculation in examination of the fine print of experience, their composition, both revelatory and ironic, stands squarely in the stylistic tradition of those individually inimitable novelists. Such questions, such reflections are part of stories in which the value and visibility of each agent are beyond question, stories which resemble only in their unstinting attention to possibility the tale of flowers that do not grow in *The Bluest Eye.*

A street the people call "Not Doctor Street," thereby indicating and undoing the official annulment of its naming for the doctor who lives on it; a daughter named for letters whose shapes look "strong and handsome" to a father who cannot read them, "Pilate," first in a series of a "blind selection of names from the Bible" whose meaning their bearers may or may not embody, like allegories that remain open to interpretation; sons discovering grandfathers and great-grandfathers; grandmothers burying granddaughters and fathers; men who will fly, and do, in the song of popular mythology; men who learn from women to fly in life, to kill killing, in *Song of Solomon* (1977); beauty that one cultivates in a greenhouse and "the world's beauty," in itself, "enough"—"You don't need to photograph, paint, or even remember it . . . No record of it needs to be kept and you don't need someone to share it with or tell it to"; beauty one cannot cultivate, or let be enough, or ignore: an island's, a wife's, an infant's, a stranger's; wealth, more insulating than an island, whose easy power obstructs knowledge, making advantage a weakness, need unacceptable, and love estranging, in *Tar Baby* (1981); love that, killing to save, to free, also kills what it itself is; which must then free itself, become its own "best thing," in order to live in (1987); love which, for a while, seems too much for life to bear, in a place all are finally free to live in, to make their story and understand their history in, a city that "can't hurt you," or a novel that makes itself with them, in *Jazz* (1992): these briefest glimpses of Morrison's novels can give no indication of the quality of

what she sees, as only a full encounter with their language can. But they indicate the changing sites upon which Morrison trains her imagination, and that imagination equals seeing things differently—not moralistically but morally—or signifies its own death, in her fiction. The fact that she, and many of the persons she authors, are African American means both everything and nothing in this equation.

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison critiques the crafted invisibility of black figures in American fiction and culture, their service as essential and unseen backdrop in both the stories of particular authors and the history of a nation. With the candor that marks every feature of her fiction, she writes of her own persuasion by other Americans' fictional art:

> My early assumptions as a reader were that black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers. Other than as the objects of an occasional bout of jungle fever, other than to provide local color or to lend some touch of verisimilitude or to supply a needed moral gesture, humor, or bit of pathos, blacks made no appearance at all. This was a reflection, I thought, of the marginal impact that blacks had on the lives of the characters in the

"THE MIRROR BY THE DOOR WAS NOT A MIRROR BY THE DOOR, IT WAS AN ALTAR WHERE HE STOOD FOR ONLY A MOMENT TO PUT ON HIS CAP BEFORE GOING OUT. THE RED ROCKING CHAIR WAS A ROCKING OF HIS OWN HIPS AS HE SAT IN THE KITCHEN. STILL, THERE WAS NOTHING OF HIS—HIS OWN—THAT SHE COULD FIND. IT WAS AS IF SHE WERE AFRAID SHE HAD HALLUCINATED HIM AND NEEDED PROOF TO THE CONTRARY. HIS ABSENCE WAS EVERYWHERE, STINGING EVERYTHING, GIVING THE FURNISHINGS PRIMARY COLORS, OUTLINES TO THE CORNERS OF ROOMS AND GOLD LIGHT TO THE DUST COLLECTING ON TABLE TOPS. WHEN HE WAS THERE HE PULLED EVERYTHING TOWARD HIMSELF. NOT ONLY HER EYES AND ALL HER SENSES BUT ALSO INANIMATE THINGS SEEMED TO EXIST BECAUSE OF HIM, BACKDROPS TO HIS PRESENCE. NOW THAT HE HAD GONE, THESE THINGS, SO LONG SUBDUED BY HIS PRESENCE, WERE GLAMORIZED IN HIS WAKE."

—*SULA*

work as well as the creative imagination of the author.

Morrison's apparently casual admission here is already formally framed. Every author is by trade an analyst of reading, just as every painter is an analyst of seeing. When Morrison the author rereads the absences, or marginal presences, that she had taken for signs of insignificance, she predicates the recognition of their fundamental significance upon a change in herself:

> But then I stopped reading as a reader and began to read as a writer. . . . As a writer reading I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self, a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. . . It is as if I had been looking at a fishbowl—the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills; the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny, intricate fronds of green; the barely disturbed water, the flecks of waste and food, the tranquil bubbles traveling to the surface—and suddenly I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world. In other words, I began to rely on my knowledge of how books get written, how language arrives. . . I began to rely on my understanding of what the linguistic struggle requires of writers and what they make of the surprise that is the inevitable concomitant of the act of creation.

It may be the unwritten law of "the act of creation" that the only true recognitions we attain are not of people or things, but of the "structure" that holds them together, positions and relates them, making them not what they are—about which very little of meaning can be said—but the way that they are—about which everything needs to be said. Morrison, the writer as reader, identifies the "linguistic struggle," upon which writing, like knowledge, depends, and in writing as critic makes it visible for the reader. She represents what, when looking as a writer, she saw differently: the change that fiction itself constitutes, and which, precisely because it does not mirror the real, "permits" us to see critically.

For Morrison's criticism makes clear that the truly invisible subjects of fiction need not be invented; they are in fact already there, represented. Her examinations of the American literary tradition work to render visible not (or not only) the "transparent" container of its myriad contents, the unseen men and women that delimit its overreaching figures, the unspoken tales that permeate its narrative core. Writing as critic, Morrison does not identify what is missing in fiction and then attempt to fill in, and so disguise, the blank. Rather, just as writing made her own reading visible to her, her criticism makes what is written visible to us. The subtitle of *Playing in the Dark* states this unexpected subject: not "blackness," and not "invisibility," but "whiteness and the literary imagination." Under Morrison's critical eye the invisible turn out to be those who, taking their own visibility for granted, neither see themselves nor imagine someone else is looking. The "dream" at the origin of our nation, she writes, may have been of a "young America . . . pressing toward a future of freedom, a kind of human dignity believed unprecedented in the world. A whole tradition of 'universal' yearning collapsed into that well-fondled phrase, 'the American Dream.'" Yet, like any sublime project that would be carried out in the world, the dream of complete freedom, the extravagant desire to trade one world for another, carries with it a knowledge of the unknown, its own sense of negation. With that intellectual honesty so hard to achieve, and only achievable in art, Morrison describes an arrival in the New World akin to "how language arrives," a profoundly disorienting experience of "specific, quite understandably human, fears" that accompany conscious risk: "Americans' fear of being outcast, of failing, of powerlessness; their fear of boundarylessness, of Nature unbridled and crouched for attack; their fear of the absence of so-called civilization; their fear of loneliness, of aggression both external and internal. In short, the terror of human freedom—the thing they coveted most of all."

When the dreamer does not know himself the subject of his dream, Morrison suggests, he will make that dream another's nightmare. The terror both produced and repressed by a dream of freedom from history produces a history of repression, the containment of one's own terror in others' enslavement and enforced invisibility. In making visible the change in her own reading, Morrison's criticism of fiction thus changes our national vision, not of "the American dream," but of what *dreaming America* felt like. The "darkness" of the dreaming of absolutely free dominion that would repeat itself, over and over, and repeats among us still; the darkness of "'universal' yearning" conveyed historically through the muted ventriloquy of "conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies"; the darkness of a desired "whiteness," pure of all particular refraction of light, and, ultimately, of all life—these contradictions *within the visible*, these doublings linked from the beginning of our culture in the pairing Ellison called "shadow and act," are seen by Morrison to resurface in "literary imagination" as the return (the representation) not of the repressed but of the repressor. And that return, she shows us as critic, needs to be read.

Of the authors whose American dreams of freedom she reads, whose instructive works of imagination she admires, studies, and teaches, she writes the following: "For them, as for me, imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*." Through that work, and that work alone, Toni Morrison has achieved her own measure of visibility and made visible a certain change in literary history: Her changing oeuvre and transformative criticism ensure she will remain visible, altering the future of writing—her own and others'—in ways we cannot foresee. For the writing of visibility or, as Morrison writes, "*becoming*," redefines the imaginative grounds upon which individuals and nations are founded: a tree for scars, a way to see what we have not seen; words that exchange, and so change, the strange and the familiar. □

Claudia Brodsky Lacour is Professor of Comparative Literature at Princeton University and author of THE IMPOSITION OF FORM: STUDIES IN NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION AND KNOWLEDGE, *and* LINES OF THOUGHT: DISCOURSE, ARCHITECTONICS, AND THE ORIGIN OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY.

Communities offer some very positive things and they offer negative things. The tension is between the community and the individual always.

—MORRISON

Continued from page 9

HACKNEY: I saw you quoted somewhere saying that as long as the children of poor people are thought of as "them," we would have a problem in this society.

MORRISON: Very much.

HACKNEY: I believe that also. One of the tasks is getting to "us" somehow. That comes back to your sense of community, which is there in the novels. Is that consciously a big part of your view of life?

MORRISON: Oh, yes. Being one of "them" for the first twenty years of my life, I'm very, very conscious of all—not upward mobility, but gestures of separation in terms of class. Community, for me, is extremely important, not in the sense of there is a community that has to be maintained at all costs the way it is or was, but that communities offer some very positive things and they offer negative things. The tension is between the community and the individual always. It seems to me that one builds a community, also.

When I first moved to New York, my family was alarmed because they said I had no family here, meaning there was no one who felt responsible for me here. They were very upset with my coming here.

HACKNEY: Is that your definition of community, people who feel responsible?

MORRISON: Exactly. When I walked down the streets of Lorain, any adult could stop me or tell me, "Take that lipstick off"—and I would have to respond.

HACKNEY: Yes, yes, right.

MORRISON: So even though I was in my thirties, my mother was alarmed. I said, "Let me have this one year, and if I can't do it, I'll come home." But she did find somebody, a very, very ancient man who was like a tenth cousin. He could hardly walk. She felt relieved that he was here. I was so tickled with that.

But here, I found what she said was true: I needed people who felt responsible. So what I had to do, along with some other people, was make a community. Now, that meant not the people on my street necessarily or on my block, but the people nationally, if not globally, the people that you could count on. If a friend's child was in trouble, I could say, "Send her to me." Or if my children needed respite from me, somebody would say, "Send them to me for a week," or a summer, or what have you. Or they would just appear under times of stress and clean house and go to the market. I relied heavily, of course, on my family. I went home a lot, and my children spent the summers there. It always amuses me a little bit when people say, "You reared your children alone," meaning you were separated or divorced, because I don't know many women who really do that if they have a family.

HACKNEY: No one rears a child alone.

MORRISON: No. It's just not possible. Even two parents isn't enough.

HACKNEY: You need a village, as the saying goes.

MORRISON: That's right.

HACKNEY: Going back to your statement just a second ago about the tension always between the community and the individual—it must be true. What the community gives the individual is an identity, a place, a certainty. What it sometimes demands is a loss of choice, though.

MORRISON: Oh, yes. Their demands are sometimes repressive.

I remember, as a teenager, walking down the street in Lorain, and somebody came up to me and said, "Are you a Willis?" which is my mother's maiden name. And I said, "Yes." And he said, "I thought so. You walk like one."

Now, when I moved to New York...

HACKNEY: Nobody said that.

MORRISON: People said, "What do you do? What job do you have?" But the place where somebody has some notion of what a Willis female walks like is entirely different. That kind of comfort of being recognized for those things that are—you know, I didn't even know what a Willis walk was—but it's a kind of comfort that I wish everybody had.

At the same time, I was very, very interested in getting out of there.

HACKNEY: Opportunity was elsewhere.

MORRISON: Was someplace else, right. Also, how could I know what that community was and how valuable it was if I had not left it?

HACKNEY: So, as modern men and women, as we make the trade-off between a community in which you're known for who you are, and in a modern community where you're known for what you do, is our fantasy

replacing that sense of community where you are, who you are, rather than what you do?

MORRISON: I think we have settled and resigned ourselves, in large part, to the latter so that people want to be known for what they do, and that becomes their only identity. That is who they are. You are your job, you are your position, or you are your clothes. If it's not possible in very poor communities for this to exist, then they feel that isolation or that absence so profoundly that people do unbelievable things. When you hear about young people stealing icons—I call them icons, you know, jackets or shoes.

HACKNEY: Right. Nike shoes.

MORRISON: Yes. What on earth is that about? It really is a symbolical acquisition of "I am this" in a country that, on the one hand, offers wide, inconceivable freedoms, but at the same time seems to be training consumers rather than citizens, so that we are asked to value ourselves, certainly in the media, by what one can accumulate or what one can show. In order to do that, one's interior life must be hollow, truly frail.

HACKNEY: These attempts to buy an identity are acts against being made anonymous—aren't they?—being just shoved into the mass. Maybe that's also American individualism demanding that we be individual somehow.

MORRISON: Both things, actually. The public persona. . .Having a public self first before you have a private self is what is alarming, although it is true that the people who came voluntarily to this country were trying to forge a new identity, erase all the terrible things of the so-called corrupt, classbound life of the Europeans. This was a clean slate, as it were. The only thing that mattered was one's back and one's inventiveness and opportunity seized. That is part of the national characteristic. Now it's exacerbated, I think, by a reluctance to believe that anything is real if it's not publicly stamped. Therefore, the easy purchase of an identity has wended its way through all strata of the population.

HACKNEY: That's true.

I saw also somewhere in one of your interviews that you made an interesting distinction between creativity and entertainment; it sounds like it's connected here.

MORRISON: It seems very obvious to me which is which, but it's hard to articulate it. I think something that is created, that is either intentionally or consequentially created, is something you can find new things in the second, third, or fourth time around.

With entertainment, you can repeat that performance or repeat one's access to it, but it closes at a certain point. It closes and leaves no echoes. It moves along in that context I was talking about, dance and music among African Americans. The singing and the dancing that I remembered was not limited to entertainment; it was a kind of meditation. I know that it's true in my own family because I come from people who sang all the time. It was a kind of talking to oneself musically.

HACKNEY: Sustenance for the mind and spirit.

MORRISON: Yes. I could even hear the different ways that my mother would sing a song, whether it was classical or spirituals or whatever, depending upon what was on her mind. It wasn't just to make herself feel better. It was also a kind of probing into something and then working it out in addition to whatever release it provided. It had a great deal to do, actually, with my feeling that writing for me is an enormous act of discovery. I have all these problems that are perhaps a little weary and general and well-worked-over that I want to domesticate and conquer. Then I can sort of figure out what I think about all this or get a little further along.

These attempts to buy an identity are acts against being made anonymous—aren't they?—being just shoved into the mass. Maybe that's also American individualism demanding that we be individual somehow.

HACKNEY

But the mind is designed for that alone—problem solving, the acquisition of knowledge. That's all it does. And if we don't acquire healthy knowledge, we acquire some other kind.

—MORRISON

HACKNEY: You don't know what you think until you've written it.

MORRISON: Right. You know, when you bring the dramatis personae into it, all sorts of debates and arguments and positions and stages of growth come into play. I sometimes am surprised. It's a way of sustained problematizing for me, writing novels.

HACKNEY: Well, have you discovered the meaning of life? What is the meaning of life?

MORRISON: I think only one thing about life; it is certainly original. That's about all I know about it.

HACKNEY: The life of your characters is always full of problems.

MORRISON: Oh, yes.

HACKNEY: So, life is tough, but redemption is to love and nurture. I'm inferring from your characters.

MORRISON: I regard the problems as part of the excitement of living that original life, which is not to discredit grief. But the mind is designed for that alone—problem solving, the acquisition of knowledge. That's all it does. And if we don't acquire healthy knowledge, we acquire some other kind. But the brain is never not doing something. Our instinct should be and is to find out about the unproblematic life, which I suppose is in some ways desirable when you think of what the nature of certain problems can be but it is not food for a novelist, not worth talking about.

The man who goes back and forth across the lake every day without consequence is lucky. But it's when he sinks that the novelist steps in.

HACKNEY: Ah, yes. Fortunately, reality is on the novelist's side here. There are very few lives that are unproblematic at some level.

MORRISON: At some level. That's true.

HACKNEY: But yours are problematic in history, which is why they're so gripping.

MORRISON: I'm glad to hear you say that—gripping—because I want the narrative to be compelling. People who don't like what I write are frequently depressed by all these hard-going situations in them and complain bitterly about the tests to which my characters are put. I keep saying over and over again, "No, I'm not saying my work is representative of one's typical life, but it is about something that is serious." I hope there is some humor.

I am interested in who survives, what form redemption takes, and I'm very open in the endings because I don't like the closure that means I, as a writer, know all the answers, even though I certainly do. But I like the reader to participate in this debate, in this dialogue.

HACKNEY: Yes. Fill in the blanks.

MORRISON: Yes. Fill them in. What do you think? What would you like? Of course, if it's worth reading again, you might want something else later.

HACKNEY: That's right. But even the reader then is, when filling in the blank at the end, constrained by what you've already written.

MORRISON: By what I've written and what I've left out. Also, the reader's baggage, what we bring to a book.

I love reading some books over and over and over again at different times. I change, they change. Nothing remains constant in those extraordinary books that you know you would never like to be without. I wanted that to be a bit more deliberate.

Again, what you mentioned earlier is very much to the forefront in *Jazz*; that is, in forcing the reader to like the music, the music of jazz itself. If you're listening to it, it forces you to appreciate its artifice and to linger on its invention and to recognize how well practiced the performer is. It doesn't wholly satisfy; it kind of leaves you a little bit on edge at the end, a little hungry.

HACKNEY: It certainly does.

MORRISON: That sort of absence of tying every final knot—I mean, I'd like to tie all the narrative knots, but there's a quality of mystery in the books that I recognize and underscore.

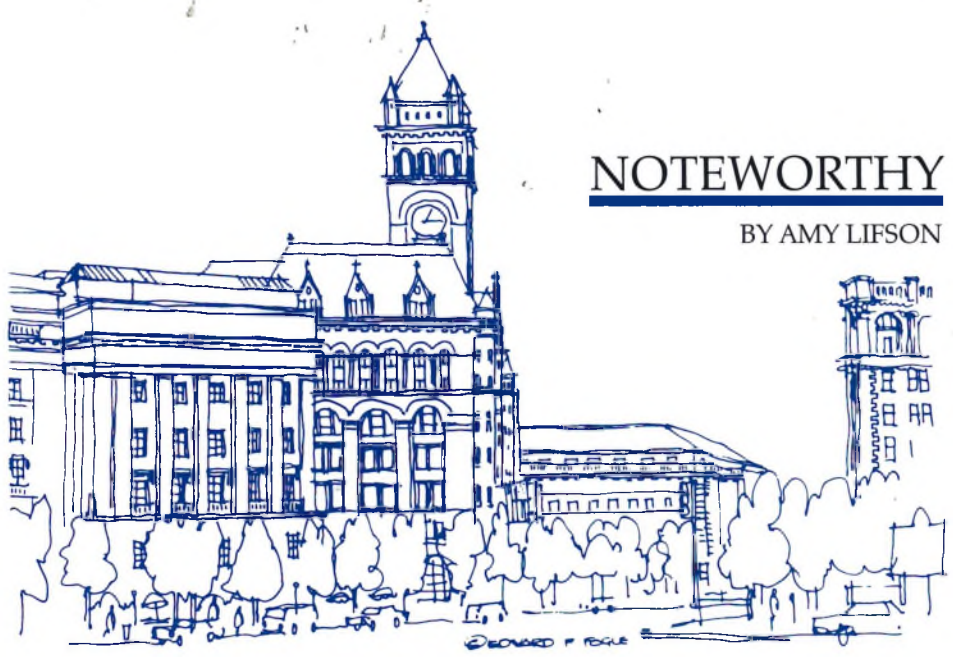
HACKNEY: And you leave the possibilities there.

MORRISON: Very much so.

HACKNEY: Well, thank you very much for such a fascinating glimpse of the artist in search of redemption amidst the realities of life. □

NOTEWORTHY

BY AMY LIFSON



Adams Family Valued

Editors of the Adams Papers have been awarded the 1995 J. Franklin Jameson Prize from the American Historical Association. The prize, given once every five years for editorial achievement, went to Richard Ryerson, Joanna M. Revelas, Celeste Walker, Gregg Lint, and Humphrey Costello for their work on volumes 5 and 6 of the *Adams Family Correspondence* published in 1994.

Volumes 5 and 6 cover the years 1782 through 1785 when the Adams family traveled frequently between the United States, Holland, France, and Russia. The *Correspondence* includes letters between family members as well as letters written from Abigail to political figures such as Thomas Jefferson that would not be included in the other Adams Papers series, the diaries and the papers. Volumes 9 and 10 of the *Papers of John Adams* are due out this year.

A Pat on the Back

Forgive us for tooting our own horn, but *Humanities* magazine has taken three first prizes in a national government competition. The January/February 1994 immigration issue was named best magazine in its category by the National Association of Government Communicators. "Out of Ireland" won first place for visual design and "Paper Sons" on Chinese immigration to America won a first for best feature article.

Two other issues, Gwendolyn Brooks in May/June 1994 and Baseball in July/August 1994, tied each other for third place.

Meanwhile, archival articles from *Humanities* will be a little easier to search in the future. Eleven of them are being put on SIRS Renaissance, a CD-ROM database of articles on the arts, literature, and humanities.

Articles from more than 400 international magazines, newspapers, journals, and government documents are to be included in the database. The database is produced by Social Issues Resources Series, Inc.

Revisiting Chopin

"Part of *The Awakening's* remarkableness is its concentration. It's like an extract—as if you placed a batch of blackberries in a cheesecloth and squeezed the juice out of them." So Lucille McDowell describes the once-rejected novel by Kate Chopin, which is now the focus of a documentary on Chopin planned by Louisiana Public Broadcasting.

When *The Awakening* was first published in 1899, it was condemned for delving into taboo social issues such as adultery and suicide. In the last thirty years, with the rise of the feminist movement, Chopin's book has experienced a revival which, according to some authorities, has placed it in the top five American novels read on college campuses.

According to McDowell, the issues of self-discovery in the novel are as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century. "*The Awakening* is a little book ahead of its time. It was one of the earliest explorations of the real nature of a woman," says McDowell.

The documentary, *Kate Chopin: A Re-awakening*, will explore the life of this independent woman, from her schooling at a French convent in St. Louis through her marriage and early widowhood, when she left Louisiana with her six children and began writing. The film will address the cultural climate which rejected her novel and explore the surge in her popularity sixty years later.

"Before *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, before the feminist movement, before almost anyone, Kate Chopin was looking differently at the role of women in marriage and society," says McDowell. □

—Mildred McCoy Collection courtesy of the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana.

Kate Chopin in 1870.

Calendar

MARCH ◆ APRIL

BY STEVEN SNODGRASS

—National Portrait Gallery, London

William Hoare, *Christopher Anstey with His Daughter Mary*

Organized by the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, "The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730-1830" opens March 9 at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum. Included are works by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, William Hogarth, and Sir Thomas Lawrence.

Peoples and natural history are explored in "Traveling the Pacific." "Pacific Spirits: Life, Death, and the Supernatural" focuses on the ritual, spiritual, and artistic life of Pacific islanders. Both are long-term exhibitions at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History.

—Field Museum of Natural History

—Lee Brauer Photography, courtesy of Virginia Historical Society

Opportunity, wealth, freedom—these are some of the reasons one million Virginians headed west between 1780 and 1860. "Away, I'm Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement" explores the exodus. Featured are this 1830s Conestoga wagon and other artifacts. Produced by the Virginia Historical Society, the traveling exhibition is at the Fredericksburg Area Museum.

—New York State Museum

This elder clan mother tells stories to her extended family in a life-sized, sixty-foot longhouse in the New York State Museum's "A Mohawk Iroquois Village," portraying life four hundred years ago in Upstate New York's Mohawk Valley.

—Susan Tobin, Walters Art Gallery

Evoking the home of a wealthy late-nineteenth-century Oriental art collector, Hackerman House, Baltimore's Walters Art Gallery Museum of Asian Art, displays Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Southeast Asian art in a historic Greek revival mansion.

DEADLINES ❖ DEADLINES ❖ DEADLINES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION *James Herbert, Director • 202-606-8373*

e-mail addresses: research@neh.fed.us, education@neh.fed.us

	Deadline	Projects beginning
Fellowships and Stipends • *606-8466*		
Fellowships for University and College Teachers and Independent Scholars	*May 1, 1996*	*January 1, 1997*
Faculty Graduate Study Program for Historically Black Colleges and Universities	*March 15, 1996*	*September 1,1997*
Summer Stipends	*October 1, 1996*	*May 1997*
Education Development and Demonstration • *606-8380*		
Teaching with Technology Initiative	*April 5, 1996*	*August 1996*
Humanities Focus Grants	*January 15, 1996*	*May 1996*
	September 16, 1996	*December 1996*
Other Development and Demonstration Projects	*October 1, 1996*	*May 1997*
Research • *606-8210*		
Collaborative Research	*September 2, 1996*	*May 1, 1997*
Centers for Advanced Study and International Research	*October 1, 1995*	*September 1, 1997*
Seminars and Institutes • *606-8463*		
National Summer Institutes	*March 1, 1996*	*August 1996*
Summer Seminars		
Participants	*March 1, 1996*	*Summer 1996*
Directors	*March 1, 1996*	*Summer 1997*

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Each state humanities council establishes its own grant guidelines and application deadlines.

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DIVISION OF PRESERVATION AND ACCESS *George F. Farr , Jr., Director • 202-606-8570*

e-mail address: preservation@neh.fed.us	Deadline	Projects beginning
All applications for preservation and access projects	*July 1, 1996*	*May 1997*

DIVISION OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS *Nancy Rogers, Acting Director • 202-606-8267*

e-mail address: publicpgms@neh.fed.us	Deadline	Projects beginning
All applications for public programs (planning and implementation)	*September 16, 1996*	*June 1997*

OFFICE OF CHALLENGE GRANTS *Stephen M. Ross, Director • 202-606-8309*

e-mail address: challenge@neh.fed.us	Deadline	Projects beginning
All applications should be submitted to the Office of Challenge Grants	*May 1, 1996*	*December 1996*

World Wide Web Home Page: http://www.neh.fed.us

To receive guidelines for any NEH program, contact the Office of Publications and Public Affairs at 202-606-8400 or by e-mail at info@neh.fed.us. Guidelines are available at least two months in advance of application deadlines.

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