

American Studies in Retrospect

American Studies As a Way of Life

**Albert E. Stone and Richard P. Horwitz¹
with Grace Stone, the American Studies Department,
and Friends
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Rich Horwitz

American studies at the University of Iowa dates from 1934. But I think—at least for some of us (no offense to those who preceded us)—American studies didn't really exist here as much until 1977 when John Raeburn had the good sense to bring in Al Stone as the Chair . . .

Al Stone

. . . . and you!

Rich Horwitz

But people may not know that Al had a very full life in a number of ways before 1977, when he came to Iowa. He taught high-school English and history in Oklahoma (Casady School) from 1949 to 1952; then taught English (we'll forgive you) at Yale. . . .

Al Stone

. . . and American studies!

Rich Horwitz

... from the mid-1950s until 1962, when he moved to Emory University as Professor and Chair of the English Department. After 1968, when his term as chair ended, his position at Emory became Professor of English and American Studies. (As best I can tell, that was the first time “American Studies” was officially in his title.)²

In 1977, at the age of 53, he moved from Emory to the University of Iowa. He also leapt from a distinguished background, established in private, elite, East-Coast institutions (both North and South), to a more humble, Midwestern public university. I think it took a bit of bravery as well as, I gather, the forbearance of family dragged to such places.³

Nearly every key component of American studies at Iowa, at least as I know it, is there mainly because of the leadership of Al Stone. In particular: a curriculum anchored in American studies “core” courses but also encompassing two or three custom-made “fields,” each assembled from several “cognate” academic disciplines; the nurturing of relations among the diverse people who taught and took those core and cognate courses; the hiring of faculty primarily dedicated to American studies; the inclusion of students in every level of departmental governance that the university would allow; the design of Ph.D. comprehensive exams, with a “position paper” that is both forward- and backward-looking, both methodological and autobiographical. In all, he set a tone of the department—with high standards and collegiality—that made me feel at home for the past 25 years. I think Al deserves the lion’s share of credit for all of that.

I also want to welcome back Grace Woodbury Stone,⁴ who long has been part of the extended family of the program, and acknowledge that, in addition to whatever Al and Grace have done for American studies, they also brought two children into this world. They can now boast of two “above-average” grandchildren.⁵ And I hope they continue to be a joy.

Al has also won a huge number of honors, and I won’t embarrass him . . .

Al Stone

Please don’t.

Rich Horwitz

... with a long list of them, except that I did want to mention at least a couple.

Of course, there’s a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star from World War II and then a host of teaching, mentoring, research, and writing awards that span the past half century.⁶ One that he ought to be especially proud of (and that he won’t tell you about) is the Bode-Pearson Prize that he won in 1988. He was the ninth person ever to be so honored. There have only been a couple of dozen people in our field ever to have received this recognition for extraordinary leadership over the course of a lifetime. The list includes people whose names you might immediately recognize: Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, Ralph Henry Gabriel,

Merle Curti, John Hope Franklin, Mary Turpie, Warren Sussman, Robert Spiller, Betty Ch'maj—the people who have done more than anyone else to advance our field.⁷ And we have one here.

I think Al has known nearly all of these people personally, but that he will also likely view it as “namedropping” to mention them. However, I hope to convince him to mention some of them to help us connect.

By the way—on the side, somewhere in there—he has also found time to publish extensively, including seven books on a wide range of topics: the Penguin edition of *Letters From an American Farmer* (Remember—“What then is the American, this new man?” Letter III?), a book on Twain, another on *The Ambassadors*, two books on autobiography, one on *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (the Styron work, its reception, and the events to which they allude), and then in 1994, *Literary Aftershocks*, which, I remind you, was published three years **after** his retirement.⁸

You can see how the word “retirement” in this case hardly fits. To call Al in any way “retired” is, in fact, a misnomer (unless, I suppose, we count his golf game, which seems to be a relentless reminder of mortality). He also has continued his scholarly engagement, publishing book reviews and articles, acting as a docent at the Maine Maritime Museum (where I was recently treated to one of his tours; it was wonderful), a promoter of the Genesis Fund (a Wiscasset organization that helps finance low-cost housing in Maine), a member of the Board of the Bath Public Library during its expansion as well as supporting the YMCA as it added new facilities, a leader in the local Episcopal church, and a tutor for Literacy Volunteers of America. Those are just a few of his ongoing activities. In fact, if you mention a day of the week and a time, I’m sure that Al could tell you which of the things I’ve mentioned and more he would be doing in so-called retirement.

Well, that was as short an introduction as I could possibly make it. I hope you forgive me.

What I was hoping for now is that I could just ask you, Al, a few questions. And I was hoping that folks in the audience might also have questions, particularly about things that we may just have read about or heard about but that Al has actually experienced in one way or another, including experience with other leaders of the field.

I want to start off talking just a little bit—surprise!—about you and American studies. How did you come to be connected to American studies? (I don’t actually know if it was called “American studies” when your connection began.) Is there some point when you became affiliated, thought of yourself as “doing American studies”?

Al Stone

Yes, as an undergraduate, just like you.⁹ I guess the reason I got into it was that I had been in the service and in a hospital and—just like a lot of you in this room, or some of you anyway—felt a personal sigh of relief, of gratitude but

also curiosity as to what it meant to be an ex-serviceman and to be an American. It occurred to me, when I got back to Yale after three and a half years in the service, that it would be worth exploring my relationship to the institutions, the values, and the practices of the culture in which I had survived, in which I live. I didn't think about it on any more sophisticated a level than that. (I'd never **heard** of Derrida at that time.¹⁰ But some of the distinguished guys and women, like Marie Borroff in the English Department at Yale, had not heard of Derrida, either.¹¹)

What made it a little bit easier for me is that Yale in the '40s and '50s was—and still is, in some basic ways—a fairly traditional place. They were prepared to introduce me into a relatively traditional concept of American studies. (You mentioned the term “American studies.” Yale had already adopted it.) They nodded briefly in the direction of the social sciences and of the popular arts but were pretty seriously committed to literature and history. And Yale had two of the best departments in those areas in the country. (Penn was, at least to my sophomore eyes, the other leading eastern American studies program, in the same way that Minnesota and Iowa were the two that I later came to see were the oldest and best in the Midwest.) And it seemed to me that Cleanth Brooks and a number of Yale historians (like David Potter and others) were people to be venerated.¹² The reason was that they already had started writing things, you know, like David Potter's *People of Plenty* [1958] (which was an important book, and I still think it is).

But I was so taken up in mastering the things that the people in the English Department or in the History Department were concentrating in that I was always off balance—feeling a little bit nervous because I didn't want to commit myself to any one particular discipline. I was really drawn to American studies for the reason that probably most of you are—whether you're in American studies or women's studies or Afro-American studies or teaching English in the cultural context: thinking about American studies and even “American civilization” as being inclusive and multicultural, democratic and holistic.

Therefore increasingly over the last thirty or forty years that I've been practicing it, I've come to see that it really is a way of life. It requires a kind of moral, political, and social commitment: to think of your studies—the issues you try to bring up to freshmen or to graduate students, the interactions between individuals and institutions. It is really anchored in a way of life which should be profoundly democratic and profoundly inclusive. Therefore, over the years (even in New Haven!) I've seen more and more awareness of other cultures. The fact that American studies has an “s” on the end of it while American civilization didn't have an “s”—that was a step in the right direction. It now is very clear that there are so many different cultures in America that are worthy of attention.

One of the things that I'd like to bring up today is a way in which I came to realize these facts—that it's a multicultural world that we're living in, and that we should become increasingly aware of our responsibility for it. I think the

word “responsibility” is okay. It doesn’t put a great load of guilt on people. But I think it lends our awareness a respectability that, frankly, Derrida and Foucault have never shown me. Theirs is a kind of intellectual allegiance to things of Western Europe and a sophistication that are very valuable, but for me there is also an American-ness that deserves attention.

In fact, one of the courses that I really liked at Yale had the nickname of “Pots and Pans.” It was taught by John Phillips. And we studied pots and pans; we studied all kinds of artifacts that later become more popular and respectable. And I think American studies had something to do with that.

Rich Horwitz

You mentioned that there was a connection you saw between serving in the military and then studying at Yale, the “American” part of it. And I know that you lived a considerable part of your life outside the U.S., in primary grades even before you went to school in the U.S.¹³ So I am led to wonder about the connection between identifying with “America” and with American studies.

Part of the folk history of the field hinges on understandings of that moment, that is, the immediate post-World War II period. An interest in the U.S. is, (sometimes crudely, I think) portrayed as a consolidating nationalist vision, as a “patriotic,” potentially mono-cultural impulse. So I wonder.

I know that, for example, when you received the Bode-Pearson Prize, the presenters talked about the syllabi that you taught back in 1957, which included several black authors.

Al Stone

...even women authors!

Rich Horwitz

Nevertheless people still often speak of the origins of the field as generally elitist, patriotic, patriarchal, and otherwise exclusionary—as “bad old days” overlapping the period that you here recall. You talked, for example, about America and democracy as being central to a vision that you pursued at Yale from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. But I wonder: to what extent would you say that the folk history—the view of American studies coming out of a post-World-War-II, “consensus”-concocting moment—is right? How does it fit or not fit your experience?

Al Stone

I think that McCarthyism and chauvinism and some of our behavior now—as basically a “war culture”—are aspects of American studies that do not please me. And I think a lot of people see them developing in the immediate post-War era for a whole lot of reasons, having to do with Communism and the war, with England and other phenomena which unfortunately, I think, have become rather built into our culture. It does seem to me that our culture is even more of a war

culture than it was when Harry Truman first took over and led us into the Korean War. It's been: the second World War and then the Korean War; then skirmishes like Santa Domingo, Panama and lots of other places; then the Cold War, the Vietnam war; then the Gulf War . . . and now Afghanistan. For all of us living in this room, the last fifty years must make you aware of the fact that the accusation—that ours is “a war culture”—is unfortunately true.

Though I must say, I was awfully innocent. (I was voted “the most gullible guy” in my class in school.) I have always been very late-coming. And I realize, one of the good things that I learned at Yale and then Emory and then Iowa (especially at Iowa) is that women's studies and Afro-American studies are central. That feature of graduate training is still important to me. But I have not always realized it in time. I realized it after the fact. And of course that's what history is: it's learning what something means after it happened.

You have to do a lot of interpreting, because the records and the archives never cover everything, and you've got to make up something in between. That mixture has served me well, especially in my work with the Maine Maritime Museum where I have a very mixed reputation for “lying.” I assert that it's just following the lead of Mark Twain. He talks about Huckleberry Finn or Tom Sawyer as “stretchers.” And I admit frankly that I do a lot of stretching that some of the other tour guides at the Maine Maritime Museum think they can't get away with. They aren't really happy with it, and they know a heck of a lot more than I did about how they built wooden sailing vessels, and how they made a small corner of the United States into one of the essential sources for the materials that characterized the blossoming of the United States from the Civil War to the First World War. A lot of the guides that are aware of that think that I get carried away. It becomes “an excuse” for me to do all kinds of things that are “not in the library of the Maine Maritime Museum.”

I've always been perfectly willing to make up stories. I tell the visitors at the beginning and in the middle and at the end: “If you believe about 75 percent,” then I go to 66 percent, and then in the end I usually go to 50 percent. That's enough to satisfy me, and I hope enough for them, too. But I don't know if it always works out. It's a way of doing American studies that I have come to do and that I should have learned from Rich or from students for generations.

But it never occurred to me, until I finally ended up in Maine and started doing this volunteering phase of my career: the kinds of things that were important to the culture and to the coast of Maine had to do with lumber, and with stone, and with limestone, and with hay, and with ice, and with salt-dried fish. These are all commodities that the coast of Maine, the Maine economy, and the culture of New England provided to a country that was burgeoning from 1865 to about 1920.

For 300 years the town of Bath, Maine (which is the town nearest where Grace and I live) has been a place for shipbuilding. 7,000 ships have been built there, and up until the middle of the 19th century most of them were made out of wood. And they were moved by the wind. People that come to the museum—

from foreign countries, from Oklahoma or wherever—they are not aware that America is as much a seafaring country, turned toward the ocean and the world (of course, Europe more than other places), as it is a place of westward movement.

And almost all of the courses that I had as a student stressed the way in which racism, war, and other things in our culture were all to be grouped under the historical rubric of the “westward movement”—of our culture stretching across one continent, all the way from one ocean to the other. That was a basic feature of it, but hardly all of it.

It seems to me that it’s worth learning from the people that you deal with, from the kind of questions they ask, and to see America and its regions in the basic ways that a museum makes possible for people. A museum should not be ashamed of telling people (even though my fellow colleagues think I stretch the truth) about hay and ice.

The people that I lead there are very pleased for me to point out, for example, that about half way through this period (1865-1920—the period that I try to concentrate on and open people’s eyes about and about which they know relatively little) the American population almost doubled. 35 million people during this period came from Europe alone. That is the sort of experience that is . . . really . . . (I’m casting around for words that sometimes escape me.) I think it’s an experience in recognizing, for example, that (also half way through this period) the Pope in Rome decreed that all faithful Catholics should fast more seriously on Friday than they had been doing for maybe hundreds of years. That act absolutely transformed the culture and the economy of Maine because, of course, salt-dried fish was one of the major commodities Maine produced and exported in these sailing ships (because salt-dried fish doesn’t have to be refrigerated) to the rest of the country. Things like that are little . . . “minutiae.”

But in American studies—when I was teaching it at Emory or at Yale or even here—there was not enough time in a course for these minutiae. Or when reading a book like *Childhood and Society* by Erik Erikson or any of the other books that have made a lot of difference to me, there was not much attention to lumber and granite and limestone and hay and ice and salt fish.¹⁴ I mean, those don’t sound like very “respectable” American studies graduate teaching subjects. But I’ve learned that that is more than a little bit shortsighted.

Rich Horwitz

You’ve mentioned some things that sound like continuities to me: about responsibility, democracy, humble objects teaching you great lessons, and the ways their value was confirmed in your experience, especially after you left the academy. But I’m also interested in discontinuities.

For example, a lot of your teaching and your writing which is affecting a larger audience has dealt with books. I’m thinking in particular of Twain, though you’ve also written about *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, and . . . You’ve written about a lot of very important texts, books that were widely read not just in

the United States but also around the world. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about ways that your perspective on one or two books—ones that have been very important to you—might also be changing. In addition to thinking, “While I was teaching those books, I wasn’t able to talk about some important, humble objects,” are there ways your relationship to those books—the authors or the words on the pages, their subject or the objects that they were—seem different by virtue of the different life you’ve been leading since leaving here?

Al Stone

I think one of the things that immediately comes to my mind is the way in which I discovered autobiography. The last thing I did at Yale was to read Bob Sayre’s dissertation and to be on his committee.¹⁵ (I had never been given that honor before, and I never was given it afterwards; so, naturally I remember that.) That’s when I came here and started teaching autobiography. All of a sudden a whole range of new examples of what you’re talking about came into my ken. It would usually be around a year later that I came to a connection with these books and to assign some of them.

It came to me at Iowa, especially being here in the ‘70s and ‘80s and getting the honor of editing the series at the University of Iowa Press called “Singular Lives.” (When Horace Porter’s book comes out in that series, it will include twenty volumes.) It occurred to me that there are books, that are **not** like *Letters From an American Farmer* or *Sons and Lovers* or *Henry IV, Part One* or other great works, but that are very revealing. They reveal not only the connection between the individual and the culture but also between little tiny things and larger things.

Teaching at Yale or Emory or abroad in Prague and Montpellier, I don’t think that I ever would have had the experience of encouraging, reading, and then helping to publish a book like *Tight Spaces*. *Tight Spaces* is written by three black women from Detroit, all of whom had taken my course in autobiography here at Iowa.¹⁶ It was a triptych, which is, I think, a fairly unusual form of autobiography. I learned so much more about Detroit and growing up black there, being a woman and getting divorced, and many of the things that appear in the book. These are not little tiny things. Some of them were obviously significant—like Motown Records and things of that sort. But that’s an example of what I didn’t know in 1977 (when you and I came here), but that became acceptable, one of the marks of these programs that wasn’t true then but that became then true.

There are all kinds of things in my life (except my wife!) that are post-actively significant. In other words, they were not true at the time when I started to encounter them, but they became true. And they became more and more true . . . and then they became truisms. People would start to yawn if you were enthusiastic about your discovery of A or B or C. But I think that’s the thing to do. Like I do in my tours at the Maine Maritime Museum—tell your students

and your readers in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end that you're telling about half of the truth and that sometimes it's the "little minutiae" half and sometimes it's the "great big generalization" half.

Rich Horwitz

I remember your mentioning to me a couple of days ago (when we roomed together down in Saint Louis for the MAASA meeting) that among the delights you've gained is reading whatever you **feel** like reading.

Al Stone

Oh, yes!

Rich Horwitz

And I wonder if you could talk about some of the continuities and discontinuities there. That is, how are we to understand the difference between reading what you're supposed to read and reading what you want to read? Are there some things you've read that have grown even better for you? Or have they been replaced by other works? Are there things that survive, not only because they deserve critical acclaim, but also because of your particular experience?

Al Stone

Yes. A lot of them, I think, are books that I should have read 25 years ago.

I mentioned Erikson's *Childhood and Society*, for example. That's a book that came out in the '50s. I wrote my dissertation on Mark Twain and childhood, and earlier I wrote a master's essay at Columbia on Stephen Crane and childhood, but I had never read *Childhood and Society*. And my professors—including David Potter and other people that I respected very much—it never reached their minds (or my mind, anyway) to suggest that psychology was as important to American studies or to cultural studies as art or architecture or even the general subject of anthropology. I thought, "Wow, these three A's really suggest a breadth I have over some other people with Yale Ph.D.s" (although one of them here [Jane Desmond], anyway, might resent that).

So, besides literature and history, I became interested in the three A's. And especially in retirement, I began reading both at random (including detective stories by P. D. James¹⁷ and other works) and in the whole field dealing with the way we use language and the way we think, the process of consciousness that is both culturally conditioned and pushed in certain specific ways by the creativity of individual people. That is an important aspect that I came to very late. I thought it was great, you know, talking about Sigmund Freud or people like his daughter (even though some of the students were turned off).

Now, if I had to list the last four or five books I've read, it would include Oliver Sacks and Antonio Damasio, Martha Nussbaum, and several other people who are talking about the way in which the mind works and the really, very

specific, little events or relationships that are revealing of much larger things that I've had to come to (when I got anywhere near them) from a rather stiff literary or intellectual approach. And I think that's been a blessing for me.

I should have read *Childhood and Society* in 1952! I should have read it then! I don't even know when I read it for the first time, but I read it too late. And the same thing is true about *Awakenings*, or *A Leg to Stand On*, or some of the other works of Oliver Sacks that are helping me now to think about things that I should have thought about a long time ago.¹⁸

Rich Horwitz

You say "stiff" literary training. (Too bad this comes right after a reference to Freud.)

Could you talk a little about your cohort at Yale, how true they were to type?

I think one of the ways we often differed from each other, for example, is in your emphasis on the individual and my emphasis on the social, right?

Al Stone

No, I thought you were more interested and able to talk to individual people and generalize from them than I ever did.

Rich Horwitz

It's kind of you to say so.

However, I was thinking of the people who were your peers—not necessarily around your chronological age (though probably that, too)—people who might have had similar experiences, say, in graduate school in the early '50s, getting a first job in the mid-'50s to early '60s, starting out during the civil rights movement, getting established later in the '60s. Are there some ways you'd generalize about that cohort, the one in which you might find yourself placed? Were you "like" your colleagues? Were many of you at Yale, for example, rebelling together from a tradition of literary training? Or was that a subset of people? How should we understand the way you compare with those who occupied "the same" place and period in the academy?

Al Stone

If you want to base all this in the 1950s—in the time I was teaching at Yale and getting my degree there—then I would emphasize the fact that my cohorts (at least my American studies cohorts) were a tiny number of people who probably felt intimidated by their more traditionally trained and traditionally conscious colleagues—like Harold Bloom, for example. Harold Bloom had published three books by the time I finished my thesis.¹⁹ And yet I did not feel drawn to imitating him. I think American studies people are almost always feeling inferior in some people's eyes.

See, I grew up in the Navy. My father was a Navy chaplain. And I went to both a boarding school and a public high school.²⁰ I've always felt myself to be on the margins of respectability, out on the margins of the central activities of the place where I find myself. I think this was something I was ashamed of. Therefore, for example, I would not even tell people that, when I was at Yale, the guy who stood up next to me to get his Ph.D. in 1957 was Tom Wolfe. Because that was not academically kosher. There was a sense of cohort-ism that I have since acquired because I was in some classes with him (and I remember how he used his ironic wit in ways the teachers did not always appreciate), but he was not one of my cohorts.

And I don't know whether I can even think of "cohorts," because some of the guys and women who finished graduate school at the same time that I did had to go somewhere else. There were not very many academic jobs at that time.²¹ For example, one of my colleagues and cohort members was Otis Pease, who is a very respected historian. And he was selling vacuum cleaners when I got my appointment to teach at Yale.

David Potter called me up one night and said, "We'd like for you to teach next year." That was the beginning of my career, and I've never been without a job.

But a large number of my colleagues had to go into all kinds of other things, like museum work, which I now see is at least as important, if not more important, than the rather straight line of Yale, Emory, Iowa, Charles University at Prague, and Université Paul Valéry in France. These are all "respectable" places, you know. But in American studies, these are particular or exclusive institutions and have built-in constraints. And to get away from these blinders—to get out into another social setting or in another relationship with people, especially one-on-one relationships—is at least as important as being identified as a "member of a cohort" at a respectable Ivy League school and having published a first book at an Ivy League press. Those are the kinds of things that gradually, in my career anyway, became less important, even though they obviously opened doors.

Rich Horwitz

Would you talk a little bit about the teaching side of things? You spent an awful lot of years teaching in a university, and you've also taught for quite a few years now outside of a university. Right? And Grace does too, right? Could you talk a little bit about, say, how teaching inside- and outside-university compare?

Al Stone

There's all kinds of teaching, you know.

Certainly the one that I am most proud of now and the one that takes up more of my time than anything else is in Literacy Volunteers.²² Among the things I have come to recognize rather late is that—like that list of commodities that New England provided in the late 19th century—one of the basic ingredients of all cultures and of our WASP culture is language and literacy. And one of the

things that has led me to work at several different levels and in several different situations now is to recognize that language is so basic and varied that it gets overlooked by a lot of people in American studies. There are people in literary departments who are paying more attention because, of course, language is then usually “a text.” But what is at least as important to me now is the way in which literacy is a fundamental activity that motivates and structures our culture, as it does any other culture. Think of the ways in which money and travel and jobs and housing and culture and politics and a whole range of other phenomena are all built on people knowing how to read and knowing how to speak in ways that—Literacy Volunteers has taught me, anyway—are only half of the whole realm of language. They are what’s called “formal, standard English” or sometimes (when they feel particularly generous) “standard, formal American English.”

But that is not the way that many of the people whom I have to deal with now are practicing American language. What they are hoping for and gradually teaching me to recognize is that everybody in our culture needs to be bilingual . . . and is bilingual. Especially where I live in Maine, there is a colloquial level (say, working at Bath Iron Works) in which the word “fucking” is used in every other sentence. It’s an all-purpose noun/verb/adjective/adverb. That’s just one little example.

But the idea is that there is a colloquial component that allows all kinds of creativity, all kinds of democratic communication, that is completely lost if you get into Literacy Volunteers the way most people do—as middle-aged, middle-class, well-educated female teachers that want to help people get a GED or read the Bible or do other very “respectable” things. That has, in my experience, turned out to be **marginally** relevant, but it’s not as relevant as coming to be at ease in being bilingual. We struggle with English grammar and struggle with “there, their, they’re” and with “rain, rein, reign” and all of the other things we try to deal with in Literacy Volunteers. And at the same time we try to keep their grasp on “lobstah” as, not a joke that’s on the license plate, but a living part of Downeast language that they used when they were fishermen. Now they work in the Bath Iron Works, but they still use the language that I just illustrated.

It’s a world of so-called instruction. But (especially not coming from Maine) I am learning as much, especially about bilingualism and colloquialism, as I am helping the people that I deal with to communicate in more formal ways. I keep trying to remind them and to remind ourselves that literacy is both of these things at once. This is sometimes not widely practiced by some of the other people in Literacy Volunteers.

The other activity I have there is dealing with eight people. (I would like Grace, if she’s willing, to say something about it as an example of what we’re doing with eight so-called handicapped people from the Elmhurst program in Bath, Maine.²³) We meet with them every Wednesday afternoon. Two of them are brain-damaged, and two or three have Down’s syndrome, and one has infantile meningitis, and two or three have other kinds of handicaps, but the aides

will not tell us what they are. So we have to go in the dark. But we know perfectly well that these people are really, profoundly handicapped in using the language—in reading, writing and speaking, or even listening and observing—things that are, we are officially committed to say, “basic to being a citizen and a member of our culture.” They are in many ways ill-equipped to do so.

But then on the other hand there are insights, and there are surprises and recognitions from these so-called handicapped people that are constantly bringing me back to, you know, silence—to shut up and to listen to them in ways Grace might be willing to illustrate. Would you want to say something about that, Grace? Give an example?

Grace Stone

These are wonderful people, and they’re lots of fun to work with . . . If you can take enough jokes on yourself.

We took them to see *Peter Pan* in Bath. None of the cast was over 16, and they did a wonderful job. It was absolutely marvelous. The boy who played Captain Hook wore 18th-century costume lace and had this tremendous hook. Most of the time we all could laugh at it. Even the guy who was sitting next to me (who has won a couple of gold medals in the national Special Olympics in skiing and things like that—a very strong young man), he was laughing. But there comes a time in *Peter Pan* when Captain Hook becomes menacing, and he’s going to kill the lost boys. Captain Hook was close, right here, and Dana and I were right there. Dana puts his arm around me, grabs me tight and says, “I can handle this.”

Al Stone

That’s one of our mottos!

Grace Stone

And you’ve got to remember that: these people **can** handle things in different ways than you’d think.

We have one man who can’t speak. He has a box, and he can’t really learn “the box.” But he can match things that a man who can speak—who will never learn to read, I think, but who can remember and talk in sentences—he can’t do. But this guy who will never speak can do things (in terms of “finding the mitten with the red thumb,” things like this).

Every day we go in; we don’t know what’s going to happen; and yet we have a wonderful time. Then we go home, and Al and I talk about it.

For quite a long time now, Al has been asking, “What’s going on? What’s going on?” And we hope that we’re accomplishing something. The parents and friends of these people say we’re probably not teaching them to read (some of them actually can read), but we are making a difference in their lives.

Al Stone

Let me segue from what Grace just said into another example, because I think telling stories works at almost every level. And it certainly seems to me that my marginal status at the Maine Maritime Museum among my fellow guides really turns on the fact that they are a little bit ashamed of having to tell stories (because they are not in the records), and I am not in the least ashamed (and I don't even look at the records). I mean, there's a great big book that tells all about the building of wooden sailing vessels from the 18th right up into the 20th century. They've all read it, and the guy in the library (who's a historian with a Master's degree from Harvard or something like that) keeps praising them because they stick to that book. And I do all kinds of deviations.

One of the things that I like to do is make these connections with American culture—like the fact that many of that 35 million people who came to the United States, 1865-1920, were Roman Catholics and had to start eating fish again on Fridays because of what happened 3,000 or 4,000 miles away.

I have to keep reminding them that the museum is there to illuminate what was going on in Bath—constantly playing the historical, backward-looking impetus (that museums really have) off what's going on right there.

Fortunately, our Maine Maritime Museum is on the banks of the Kennebec River, and it's just to the south of the Bath Iron Works (where the workers use the language that I told you about and that Grace well knows), where they build AEGIS-class destroyers.²⁴ And therefore we are a Navy town. (In hindsight, that's probably one of the reasons why I settled there.) So the contrast between the present and the past is constantly there: building wooden ships and going out on the Grand Banks and catching ground fish (cod, hake, haddock, and halibut), and lobstering.

So, the last thing I mention in my tour is that, "If we were standing here and the wind was coming straight down the Kennebec River, you would all smell what I'm going to mention as the fourth maritime activity here—which has roots in the past but is going on right now, as we smell." And I say, "It is the Stinson Seafood factory, which is two miles up the river from us. They can sardines, and every year they produce the largest number in the whole United States."²⁵ I say, "You can smell that factory when the wind is right. And it is a very smelly way of earning a living. And it is one of the places you need to know about, even though we can't visit it."

And once a woman standing in the corner was having real problems, because the whole of this enterprise is very male. Most of the activities that I've mentioned are made up of men. She spoke up and said, "Wait a minute! You use the word 'smell,' and I think you don't know how to use the English language properly."

And I said, "What?!" I was sort of taken aback. I thought I was supposed to be "an expert," and they were supposed to praise my command of English. I said, "What in the world do you mean?"

And she said, “‘Smell’ is not the word. The right word is in the dictionary, and it has four letters, and it is the word ‘reek.’ R-E-E-K.” She says, “I know that the word ‘reek’ is the right word to apply to the Stinson sardine factory because I worked there for eight and a half years. And when I came home from eight hours at the seafood factory, canning sardines, I would go directly to the bathroom. And I would take off all my clothes. And I would put the clothes down in the basement (where the washing machine was). And I would take a bath. When I came out, there would be clean clothes there for me to put on. And my husband would be standing right next to the door to the bathroom. And he would smell me. And if I passed the ‘smell test,’ it was all right. But most of the time I didn’t. And he would say, ‘Sorry, honey. You’ve got to go back in there.’ And I would go back into the bathroom—take off all those clothes and put them down in the basement and take another bath and put on a third set of clothes and come out. And he would be standing there. And he would smell me. And he would say, ‘Honey, that’s all right. Now you can go in the kitchen and fix my supper.’”

That is the kind of unusual thing in a tour that is very respectable. Talking about the sea—maritime activities, shipbuilding, catching lobsters and all that stuff—is so utterly male, but about two-thirds of the people on the tour are women. (In fact there are not many blacks. So I constantly have to mention that the crews of these sailing ships, especially after the year 1900, were made up almost entirely of African Americans and Norwegians. But they are still males.) And for me to come across a story like that, you know—which finally shows that women know how to call a spade a spade—is really as important as any of the other so-called historical information that gets communicated to a general public.

And it is done by telling stories. Grace told a story about *Peter Pan*, and mine is a story of the museum. If I were to organize all of my volunteering activities—such as working on affordable housing, which is the other important thing in my life—I would try to do it in terms of stories that would capture an essence of what is talked about in more formal language under more formal circumstances.

Rich Horwitz

Thanks, Al. In the little bit of time left, I was hoping people might have some questions or comments for Al.

Linda Yanney²⁶

Al, a lot of people—and some people in this room—have been involved in certain conflicts that the United States is engaged in and carry those experiences with them. But not everybody carries a constant, physical representation of what they’ve been through. Do you have any sense of what difference it may

or may not have made in your life to have that constant, physical reminder of the war experience? Of a physical wound?

Al Stone

Well, I don't know about that.

But certainly I didn't recognize the significance of the fact that—right outside of where I go every week to lead these tours—there is another AEGIS-class destroyer going down the ways of the Bath Iron Works. And I realize more and more that each one of these vessels is loaded with nuclear weapons or guided missiles and torpedoes. Now they are 9,000 tons, though when I was a kid growing up in the Navy, a destroyer was 1,800 or maybe 2,000 tons. And the difference is in the lethal power that each one of these ships has and that is being deployed in the Persian Gulf.

They are buoying up our economy, because of the cost of each one of these AEGIS-class destroyers. The last one—I remember from the newspaper report, and Grace will back me up on this—was named for the first woman who has ever had her name attached to a warship, and her name was. . . . (Grace, what was her last name? Yes, Grace Murray Hopper.) Anyway, the paper said the next day, “You taxpayers will be interested to know how much the *Hopper* cost us.” And it was 800 million dollars! For one destroyer!²⁷

This contrast between the past and the present, between sailing ships and war ships, is basic to my tour. The biggest wooden sailing ship that was ever built in the United States and that went to sea was built right there on the grounds of our museum. (There will be a kind of a stylized mockup of it on the grounds; so people can at least see the six masts and things like that in the future.) And it cost \$190,000 to build. And it was launched as late as 1909—which is not very far in the past. And to make that contrast between \$190,000 in 1909 and \$800 million in 1997 is to make one of the points that I make with snide comments all the way along, you know?

And visitors have become more curious themselves. Many of them look out there on the river. As I'm talking about these sailing vessels—dilating on their importance in the 19th century and right up until the first World War—they keep asking, “Can we get into Bath Iron Works?” And “What kind of ship is that?”

All of these things make me aware that some of the people in the audience really do want to know the answer to your question, because they sense more and more clearly—especially now with our present president and what's going on in the light of “terrorism”—our whole culture has been really rooted in killing.

So there's one answer, and it's pretty hard to avoid it, Linda. It really is.

And of course I grew up, in the Navy. And my whole childhood, I remember, how innocent I was about the whole process.

And my father was a chaplain. You know, to be a chaplain in the service . . . I mean, in warfare it's a little bit more noble. But even in peacetime it is such a

mixed blessing—to have divine services and to bless people, to hear their confessions, and to do that kind of thing, when you are perfectly aware they're there to kill, if necessary. That's an irony I have lived with all my life without recognizing it (well, not "all of my life" but all my childhood). But now the propinquity and the presence of the United States Navy in Bath, and the Maine Maritime Museum, and my vocation and my values are just absolutely revealing themselves in ways that I was just too innocent to see—and that I should have known about.

My father was in Nicaragua; he was in Panama; we lived in Haiti. All these countries were involved with the United Fruit Company.

When Grace and I were in Costa Rica and went down one of the rivers, the guide said, "Look to the right. The jungle trees are only 75 yards wide. Right behind it are cattle ranches, and every one of those cattle has been contracted to McDonald's. Look to the left. 75 yards of trees cover the reality behind it: banana plantations. And every one of those bananas are going either to Chiquita Banana in the United States (if they are without spots on them) or to Western Europe (where Europeans don't mind having bananas that have some spots on them). But every one of those is going to one of the privileged countries. And the next time you come back," this man said—and he was a tour guide who he was trying to get his answer to your question—"the next time you come back, those 75 yards of protecting screen of trees there with the howler monkeys that are in them are going to be gone. And the canopy will come right down to the edge of the river, and the banana plantations will come right down to the edge of the river, and the river will become even more polluted than it is now." Because we were all Americans on this tour, he left unsaid, "That's what your country has done" or "is doing for us."

Lauren Rabinovitz²⁸

I like this tour of Costa Rica. Now we've been there, second-hand. You've been telling stories and your feelings about them.

I've been to Maine several times but you're revealing facets of Maine that I never could have discovered on my own. I'm curious and a little at a disadvantage.

I'm wondering, when you're in Maine, are there occasions where people ask you about Iowa.

Al Stone

Yes, and they think it's Idaho.

Lauren Rabinovitz

And do you set them straight?

I mean, are there some occasions—not necessarily at the museum, but when you're with your friends or people who you're working with, as a tour guide or

not—where you’re trying to teach them about Iowa, even though it might be a past or distant place?

Al Stone

There are a lot of provincialisms, and New England is as provincial as any other place. Therefore they frequently are not very conscious of exactly where Iowa is. They know something about corn and hogs and soy beans, but their notion of the educational system, of the cultural sophistication—or some of the other things about this state that I’m aware of—come to them as pretty much of a surprise. And of course they discount it heavily. Because “It can’t be as sophisticated as we are.”

But I’ve also noticed it here in Iowa. In fact, some of our friends here are of the same attitude (I mean, in reverse) about Maine. They didn’t know much about the state, and if they did, they thought of “a bunch of lumberjacks or lobster fishermen. . . . But it’s a nice place for rich folks to go in the summertime,” you know? But they didn’t make very much of a contrast between the workers and the summer people here, which is absolutely basic to Maine.

I keep trying to point out that these particular kinds of contrasts—between rich and poor, or black and white, or male and female—are in Iowa but they are also in Maine. They are basic in our culture.

We frequently ignore them or we impute their significance and their presence to “other” places—for example, Detroit. I mentioned how much I learned from *Tight Spaces*. One of the most misunderstood cities in America probably is Detroit. It is a very sophisticated and cultured city in a lot of ways, but many white people (and other people too) are, frankly, suspicious or ignorant of that.

Jane Desmond²⁹

I have been struck by how rich your variety of experience is now, after you “retired.” And I’m thinking about our graduate students who are poised to choose a career inside or outside the academy. And there are those of us reaching middle-age who are choosing a career inside or outside the academy, as a second or third career.

Would you compare your pleasures in the work you’ve accomplished in the academy and the work you’re now accomplishing outside?

Al Stone

Goodness!

Rich Horwitz

In 30 seconds or less!

Al Stone

I wouldn’t give up either one of them. I really wouldn’t!

When I first realized that teaching was my calling, I didn't even think about it. Potter called me up and offered me a job at Yale. Of course I said, "Yes." I didn't think about it. And I'm not ashamed of that.

But every day and every way I realize that there are other things—in a museum, a Literacy Volunteer program, or affordable housing program, or any of the other ones I've mentioned. Even they are themselves rather structured, institutional frameworks. What is really common to them is the one-on-one relationship between a teacher and a student and learning as much from the student as the teacher is imparting to the student.

And that is basic to our profession. But the way it's organized, it doesn't show up in people's resumé's, and it is not really recognized or valued. In a few places—Evergreen, Bard—it is valued. But in many cases they are not really valuing the emphasis upon individual human beings interacting with other individual human beings.

I really think that one of the things that I would like—if any of the younger or middle-aged people here are thinking about it—is just to keep in mind the line from *Death of a Salesman* that occurs to me just about every week. After the death of Willy Loman, his wife Linda says, "Attention must be paid!"³⁰ And I think that very simple aphorism has profound implications of both separating some of our activities (making us ashamed of being academics, because we don't really attend) and on the other hand, making it just as relevant to the lives of people outside of academe—because they aren't interested in that either, you know. They are usually interested in getting a canned summary about the significance of something, which is almost always at odds with the experiences of individual people who are closer to that generalization than they are or than I am.

And I think, therefore, that there are some real differences and contradictions that I'd just as soon be caught between. Because I think American studies, when you come right down to it, is a "both-and" enterprise; it is not an "either-or" enterprise.

As far as I'm concerned, everybody in the world is either a "both-and" or an "either-or" person.

Rich Horwitz

I'll watch my step!

I want to make sure, too, you have had a chance to speak, without my orchestrating things. Before we started, you mentioned some things you wanted to say. OK? Are there some things we should have gotten to?

Al Stone

No. This is plenty.

Notes

1. The following is a lightly edited transcript of the tape-recorded conversation held April 9, 2002 as part of the "Floating Friday" series at the University of Iowa. It was a special occasion both because of Stone's return and Horwitz's imminent departure from the university. Horwitz's editing entailed adding punctuation and—in a very small number of cases—shifting the position of modifying clauses within a sentence, omitting false starts and a few "you knows" or surplus conjunctions. Stone reviewed the edited transcript, revised some sentences for clarity, and approved the edited version. Thanks are also due Ulrich Adelt for providing the first-draft transcription and to the editors of *American Studies* for copyediting.

2. Stone was actually an instructor and assistant professor in the English Department and the American Studies Program at Yale University, 1955-62.

3. With the exception of an M.A. from Columbia University (1955), the bulk of Stone's higher education was also at Yale, where he earned a B.A. (1949) and a Ph.D. (1957). His international experience included terms as a Fulbright Lecturer at Charles University in Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1968-69 (in time to witness Soviets storm Wenceslas Square, crushing the reform movement, "Prague Spring") and as a Visiting Professor at Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier, France, 1986-87. Since retiring (sic) Al and Grace Stone have also been regular participants in Elderhostel programs around the world, most recently in South Africa, Costa Rica, and Peru.

4. Grace Stone, a social activist and equestrian, wed Al Stone on July 5, 1954.

5. Their two children are Ned Stone and Rebecca Rollins Stone-Miller.

6. Stone was a Master Sergeant in a military intelligence unit of the U.S. Army in the Southwest Pacific, 1943-46. Academic honors that he has received include: a Yale University Morse Fellowship (1960-61), an E. Harris Harbison Award for distinguished teaching (1965-66), a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellowship (1976-77), and a *Choice Award* (1983).

7. Since 1975 the American Studies Association (U.S.) has awarded "The Carl Bode—Norman Holmes Pearson Prize for Outstanding Contributions to American Studies"—probably the oldest and most prestigious award in the field. For details and a list of winners, see: <<http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads/AmericanStudiesAssn/about/prizes.htm#bode>>.

8. Stone's major publications include: *The Innocent Eye: Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961); (Editor) *Letters From an American Farmer* (New York: New American Library/Penguin, 1963/1988); (Editor) *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of "The Ambassadors"* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969); (Editor) *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981); *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); *The Return of Nat Turner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); and *Literary Aftershocks: American Writers, Readers, and the Bomb* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1994). Since 1988 he has also been series editor of "Singular Lives: The Iowa Series in North American Autobiography" (now 19 volumes) and a contributor to the *Oxford Companion to African American Literature*.

9. Horwitz earned a B.A. with a major in American Civilization from the University of Pennsylvania in 1971. Stone was an undergraduate student at Yale from 1945 to 1949. For a photo of the 1999 reunion of the Yale Class of '49, see <<http://www.photog.com/y49cpic.htm>>.

10. Jacques Derrida is the Algeria-born, French scholar who is often credited with developing a "deconstructionist" approach to philosophy, law, architecture, language, and especially literature.

11. Marie Borroff is Sterling Professor Emeritus of English at Yale. She is most often cited for interpretations of 20th-century and Middle English poetry.

12. Cleanth Brooks was an eminent Southern literary critic, one of the "Fugitives" from Vanderbilt who along with Robert Penn Warren developed "the New Criticism." David Potter, a star student of Ulrich B. Phillips, was Coe Professor of History and Editor of the *Yale Review*.

13. Stone's father (also Albert E. Stone) was a career chaplain in the Navy, a position that took him to many ports. Hence, among the sites of Al's early schooling was Chefoo in China.

14. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950).

15. The Ph.D. dissertation that Robert Sayre completed at Yale in 1962 was entitled "The Examined Self: Henry Adams and Henry James and American Autobiography." In 1977 when Stone gained a joint appointment in the English Department at the University of Iowa, Sayre was among the members of the department.

16. Kesho Scott, Cherry Muhanji, and Egyirba High, *Tight Spaces* (San Francisco: Spinners/Aunt Lute, 1987). See also the expanded edition with a foreword by Albert E. Stone (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

17. P. D. James is the short, gender-neutral name preferred by the British writer, Phyllis Dorothy James White.

18. Oliver W. Sacks, *Awakenings*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) and *A Leg to Stand On* (London: Duckworth, 1984).

19. Harold Bloom got his Ph.D. from Yale in 1955, two years before Stone earned his. So, I think Bloom had an earlier start and published his first books a little later than Stone recalls. *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959); *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, (New York: Doubleday 1961), and *Blake's Apocalypse*, (New York: Doubleday, 1963). During this time Bloom also edited *English Romantic Poetry. An Anthology*. (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

20. Stone was a scholarship student at Phillips Academy in Andover, MA (also known as, Andover Academy), where his classmates included George H. W. Bush, and William Sloan Coffin.

21. Although Yale was not officially coeducational until 1968, it began awarding Ph.D.s to women in 1894 and law degrees in 1920. Nevertheless, no women received tenure in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences until 1959, two years after Stone received his Ph.D. Judith Ann Schiff, "Milestones in the Education of Women at Yale" <http://www.yale.edu/oir/book_numbers_updated/A9_Milestones_for_Yale_Women.pdf>.

22. Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) "is a fully integrated national network of local, state, and regional literacy providers that give adults and their families the opportunity to acquire skills to be effective in their roles as members of their families, communities, and workplaces." See: <<http://www.literacyvolunteers.org>>.

23. Elmhurst Inc. "provides residential, employment, advocacy and individualized support services to individuals with developmental disabilities in the mid coast area" and is affiliated with United Way Agencies of Mid-Coast Maine. See: <<http://www.uwmc.org>>.

24. Bath Iron Works (BIW) is best known for building complex, technologically advanced naval ships. It is the largest private employer in the state of Maine. Its main rival is Ingalls Shipbuilding of Mississippi. In the early 1990s, when BIW was failing to pay its debts, it became the property of Prudential Insurance Co. In 1995 General Dynamics purchased BIW for half of what Prudential paid for it. Since 1997, GD has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to modernize BIW and won large contracts from the U.S. Navy for the development, design, construction and life-cycle support of its ships. GD highlights BIW's main distinction: "Bath Iron Works today is the lead designer and builder of the Arleigh Burke Class AEGIS guided missile destroyer, the most technologically advanced surface combatant in the world." These destroyers are 505 feet in overall length, accommodate more than 340 crew, and weigh 8,315 tons. Each is armed with "Harpoon, Tomahawk and Standard missiles, 90 VLS cells, two Phalanx CIWS mounts, one 5 inch/54 caliber gun forward, and two triple torpedo tubes." See: <<http://www.gdbiw.com/>>.

25. Bath is home to one of two canning facilities of the Stinson Seafood Company, which began in Prospect Harbor in 1927. Employing about 400 people, Stinson "is vertically integrated, from its fishing fleet to processing plants, to an automated factory that produces cans." See: <<http://www.ibgm.com/stinson/index.html>>.

26. Linda Yanney, one of Horwitz's and Stone's former students, was awarded a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Iowa in 1991. She currently works as an Editorial Assistant at the university and for progressive social and political change at-large. In her question she refers to the wound that Stone suffered during World War II, resulting in military honors and a disability pension but also persistent leg and hip problems, a lift in one shoe, and a slight limp.

27. There is an editorial correction here. At the time of this First Friday, the Stones were unsure of the ship's name and its namesake. For discussion purposes, they used approximations: "Cooper" and "Grace Cooper." No doubt, though, they were actually referring to the guided missile destroyer *Hopper* that BIW built, 1995-96, and that was commissioned in San Francisco on September 6, 1997. The ship was named after Rear Admiral Grace Murray Hopper (retired in 1986) whose computer expertise earned her the nickname "Amazing Grace," "Grand Lady of Software." U.S. Navy, "Navy commissions USS *Hopper* (DDG 70) in San Francisco" (1997) <<http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/ships/destroyers/hopper/hoprcom.html>>. See also: <<http://usmilitary.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.hopper.navy.mil/>>. I believe, though, that *Hopper* is the first U.S. Navy warship named for a woman, only if the counting begins with World War II. Certainly earlier was the *Higbee*-class destroyer, named in 1945 for Lenah S. Higbee, Superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps, 1911-1922. Other candidates for this honor include *Lady Washington* (a gun boat built to defend New York in 1776), *Harriet Lane* (an armed cutter named in 1858 for a niece of President James Buchanan), and no fewer than eight other naval ships, all built in 1942, more than a half century before *Hopper*: *Sacagawea*, *Elizabeth C. Stanton*, *Pochantas*, *Florence Nightingale*, *Mary Lyon*, *Dix* (for Dorothea Dix), *Susan B. Anthony*, and *Watsaka*. Barbara A. Wilson, "Ships Named For Women and Other 'Firsts'" (1996) <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/ships.html>>.

28. Lauren Rabinovitz is Professor of American Studies and Cinema as well as Chair of the American Studies Department at the University of Iowa.

29. Jane Desmond is Associate Professor of American Studies and Co-Director of the International Forum for United States Studies (IFUSS) at the University of Iowa.

30. Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversation in Two Acts and a Requiem* (New York: Vintage Press, 1949), Act 1, Part 8, pg. 40.