

american studies column

Consisting of a Dialogue Among the Chapters of the American Studies Association, and a Semi-conducted Tour of Ideas, Conferences, Research Opportunities and Resources in Our Field

AMERICAN STUDIES FORUM: Our chapter was asked by the American Studies Association Council to stimulate creative dialogue among the chapters. We responded by opening our pages to such dialogue, asking only that items for this column be channeled through the officers of the several chapters, and that those officers give us a buzz to let us know when material was on its way. To tell the truth, Your Faithful Editor wondered how much would actually be generated. He still wonders about how much continuity there will be, but certainly the evidence of the current issue suggests that the chapters have ideas to share. In this column we carry first, an item about last spring's CASA meeting; second a description of inexpensive and productive workshop sessions which CASA has been running; and third, advance word on an important inter-chapter meeting. Elsewhere in the issue is an unusual piece on the intellectual origins of a kind of American Studies thinking which has been important for many of the fields' practitioners, Judith Modell's annotation of the correspondence between Richard Chase and Ruth Benedict on the issue of exactly what Chase's doctoral dissertation should mean by "culture."

SAM ADAMS, some wag suggested in response to a call for a chairperson for a "Committee of Correspondence" proposed at a California American Studies Association meeting. The committee would be charged with chapter-to-chapter communication in this column. A correspondent tells us that the association plans a mail ballot on a proposal "that would allow persons to join the CASA . . . without having to join the ASA." That has, we believe, been possible for a number of years in MASA, though MASA has made it a matter of policy to encourage membership in the national association, and, indeed, once ran a campaign on its own to increase membership in ASA.

HARD-CORE IN CALIFORNIA: Robin Brooks, president of the California American Studies Association, writes: For too long, American Studies has been a game that anybody could play: any theme, period or topic could generate papers vaguely related to the covering rubric.

Lot of fun, but when the meeting was over we hadn't moved forward in our scholarship or teaching or understanding of what it was, anyway, that American Studies was supposed to do. At least that's how it seemed to several of the hard-core American Studies activists out in California. Even before the Northern and Southern California chapters officially merged to form CASA (in May, 1982) we had begun to work out an alternative format in addition to our regular annual meeting.

Basically, our approach is a variation of the Workshop idea that was being pushed at national ASA conventions in the early '70s. The idea is to have a meeting that is tightly focused, intensive—and this is important—and cheap. We met in Santa Cruz in September, 1982, to discuss the uses of Clifford Geertz for American Studies. Michael Cowan of U.C.-Santa Cruz took the responsibility for coordinating the workshop: this means he got us a lounge on his campus before the school year began, provided cheap lunches, organized transportation and hospitality—which consisted in providing space on his and my living room floors for folks who brought their own sleeping bags and tooth-brushes. More important, he asked participants to do some reading of Geertz texts, posed some provocative questions in advance and kept the discussion moving for a day and a half.

This past September, I led a similar workshop on the historical materialism of E.P. Thompson at U.C.-Irvine, with Dickran Tashjian doing the arrangements. And early in October, 1983, Jay Mechling will host a workshop at U.C.-Davis, focusing on the symbolic anthropology of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner.

The two-day format seems very important to us; the first day seems to generate more heat than light, especially because some of the people attending haven't done their homework, but also because ideological and methodological commitments have to be brought out and worked through. The half-day session on Sunday, however, seems to really be productive—perhaps because people have had time to absorb the new ideas and to incorporate them into their personal style and interests—at least that's been our experience so far. (It also gives some people, especially students, a chance to get over shyness, etc.)

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ington: The University of Kentucky Press. 1982. \$18.00. Short of funds and—curiously—short of good book manuscripts, university presses have turned to some odd publishing ventures. None odder than this memoir of a man who served in two armies, two air forces and four wars. The book looks like a boys' adventure book: the dust-jacket painting is a slick illustration of duelling planes; a Spitfire is pulling away from a burning Me. 109F. Turns out there is a good reason for the picture; Dunn painted it himself; it shows his fifth "victory" as an American volunteer with the RAF, the kill that made him an ace. The book is very good of kind: Dunn's rootless youth and cowboy adventures make later exploits and mistakes plausible, his fighting career is exciting; his fly-boy's perspective on bureaucracy and unfairness is instructive; his irresponsibility when not fighting is of a sort one thought Hollywood invented (though Dunn says the wartime film about his RAF squadron was stupid), and his brief accounts of the women he was close to are sad and moving—in them and in his versions of his treatment by military brass ("weenies") he reveals perhaps more than he intends. The distinctions Dunn makes or fails to make between friend and foe, his editorial opinions on decisions in Korea and Viet Nam, his ability to go on using the language of wartime hatreds ("Scratch one Hun"), his great courage, his obvious talent and his spiritual blindness connect to things we have learned and are still learning about Americans at war. His is a valuable "case history." But though there are things for a scholar to learn here, a tape in an oral history project or a manuscript in a one-ream paper carton would do as well as a book. Kentucky seems to have printed the thing to make money. I doubt that *Fighter Pilot* will; boys' books in this genre don't cost \$18.00 even now.

Not a lot of enthusiasm in Beth Schultz's report on a new reference work. She writes, AMERICAN STUDIES: A Guide to Information. Information Guide Library, vols. 10 and 13. Edited by David W. Marcell. Detroit: Gale

Research Company. 1981. \$34.00. These bibliographies would be useful primarily to the uninitiated student of American Studies and American literature; the entries on particular authors, e.g. Melville and James, and particular topics, e.g. Afro-American literature, American autobiography, American women writers, seem scant, and although well-known works are cited, others, indispensable for a full study of either author or subject, are omitted.

Francis Heller reports on THE DILEMMAS OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP: Of Caretakers and Kings. By Frank Kessler, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982. \$11.95, paper. Textbooks do not often make good reading but Frank Kessler has written one that is both constructive and enjoyable. He uses anecdotal material cheerfully and skillfully, and he does not hesitate to use a colloquial phrase where it fits. Kessler's approach reflects the pendulum swing that has characterized the literature on the presidency in the last two decades. But he ends on an optimistic note: our system may, after the extremes of Vietnam and Watergate, be "returning to the model that the founding fathers envisioned"—a president who would lead must also be truly accountable. Completed in January 1982, this book has the advantage that it can include pertinent aspects of the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Hurried production has, however, resulted in proofreading and other errors that mar what would otherwise have to be called one of the liveliest recent books on the American presidency.

Marshall Tymms has edited THE COLLECTED ESSAYS AND PROSE SKETCHES OF THOMAS COLE (St. Paul, Minnesota: The John Colet Press. 1980. \$13.50 by subscription). It contains published essays and letters, selections from unpublished material and "Emma Moreton, A West Indian Tale." Ken La Budde, formerly of our Editorial Board, did a study years ago of Cole's ideas; in these pieces Cole reveals his intellectual and aesthetic roots, so it's very good to have them available.

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Cheap lunches and free housing are another incentive in these days of financial stringency: people only have to fork out for travel and for a good dinner with new and old friends on Saturday night.

And, because these workshops are strictly for volunteers, we can still have our regular chapter and local meetings run in more traditional ways. However, there's some strong feeling, arising from the coherence and productivity of the workshops, that we need to focus our regular meetings more tightly, too, so there's some feedback that might lead to deeper changes. At

least it's undeniable that the participants come away with an enriched understanding of a particular strategy for doing American Studies that they may or may not wish to incorporate into their own scholarly experience.

A VARIANT PATTERN with which MASA has been successful, first at a number of sessions of the first national American Studies Association meeting in Kansas City in 1967, and subsequently at several of MASA's own regional conventions, works as follows: a problem area is defined and papers solicited through an announcement which makes clear that contributors are expected to deal with issues of more than

parochial importance. Papers are judged for quality and breadth. Those accepted are reproduced, together with comments and suggestions by the session chair and by such referees as he sees fit to use, and sent to the others on the session program, who are then required to modify their papers so that they "speak to" the presentations by the other members of the panel. Results have been very good, particularly when the panelists are people working in several different disciplines.

CASA's feelings about cost are shared by MASA, which has since the '60s tried to provide cheap food and accommodations; at several conventions, we've managed to offer free pads for graduate students. All registrants at the spring '82 MASA rally (see the last issue for details) were also issued a guide to acceptable dirt-cheap restaurants.

INTER-CHAPTER COMMUNICATION will take place in a big way April 15, 16 and 17, 1983, at the University of Iowa and the Amana Colonies when the North Central American Studies Association and the Midcontinent American Studies Association convene jointly. "Community and Communities in American Culture" is the theme; the topics will be interpreted in terms broad enough so that people in diverse disciplines should be interested. There will be field trips and, invariably, extremely good and plentiful food. Albert E. Stone, American Studies, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242, is the guy to contact.

GREAT LAKES ASA has big plans for April 8-10 at Miami University: "Material Culture and Folk Life of the Ohio River Valley." GLASA meets jointly (see our last issue for a discussion of jointness) with the American Society for Environmental History. For details, *nudje* Eugene Metcalf or Peter Williams of Miami's American Studies operation. Miami is in Oxford, Ohio (45056); phone 513-529-4827 or 6992.

BANFF FUTUROLOGY: The Canadian Association for American Studies has a *Newsletter* which runs brief accounts of sessions of its conferences. The May 18, 1982 number summarizes the October 1981 sessions on myth in America, and bears news of the conference on "Futurology and Prophetic Fiction" planned for Banff in late October, 1983. You contact John Marin, English, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4.

THE LOVE OF LEARNING must be alive and well despite all, for scholars are still willing to help us review manuscripts, and material rewards there are none. Here are those who helped recently: John Braeman, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Joseph Cady, New York, New York; Dominick Cavallo, Adelphi University; J. Bunker Clark, University of Kansas; Jeffrey Copeland, University of Northern Iowa; Daniel Czitrom, Mount Holyoke College; John

Farragher, Mount Holyoke College; Robert Fogarty, Antioch College; Shelley Foote, Smithsonian Institute; Edward Grier, University of Kansas; Chad Hansen, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle; Bud Hirsch, University of Kansas; Leigh Holmes, Lawton, Oklahoma; Grace Ann Hovet, University of Northern Iowa; Robert McColley, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Stow Persons, University of Iowa; George Rawick, University of Missouri-St. Louis; Stitt Robinson, University of Kansas; Beth Schultz, University of Kansas; James Scott, St. Louis University; Robert Sears, Stanford University; S. Samuel Shermis, Purdue University; Dan Spencer, University of Kansas; Haskell Springer, University of Kansas; Geoffrey Steere, University of Kansas; Eckard Toy, University of Oregon; Nancy Walker, Stephens College; Richard Wang, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle; Richard Wright, University of Kansas.

HELP WANTED in a worthy reference project. *The Historical Atlas of Political Party Representation in the United States Congress: 1789-1987* intends to identify by political party everyone "who ever served in the United States Congress." Scholars who have expertise in such matters should contact Kenneth Martis, Geology and Geography, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506, or give him a buzz at 304-293-5603.

INDIANA GRANT MONEY is available for doctoral students doing theses on appropriate topics. Information from Gayle Thornbrough, Indiana Historical Society, 315 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202.

ROCKEFELLER MONEY is available to scholars who want to work in the Rockefeller Archives Center; the guide to what's there has been enlarged and revised. You can get one from the center, Pocantico Hills, North Tarryton, New York 10591. Same address for grant forms.

PERSPECTIVES On the American South is now edited at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi 38677. Interdisciplinary papers are solicited.

MAPPING THE PLAINS of North America is the subject of a conference in Lincoln, Nebraska, April 28-29, 1983. Papers on eighteenth and nineteenth century mapping should go to the Program Committee, Center for Great Plains Studies, Oldfather Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588-0314.

JAMES J. HILL (1838-1916) was an important railway entrepreneur. His papers, closed since his death, are now open and available at the James Jerome Hill Reference Library, 4th and Market Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102. You contact Robert M. Frame, III, at 612-227-3339.