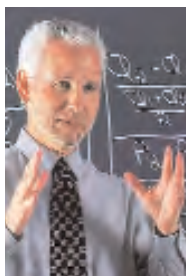


P R E S I D E N T ' S V I E W



Deep Roots

As with most adages, there's truth in the encouragement to "bloom where you're planted." This phrase is usually meant to discourage the seeking of greener pastures, but it also applies to an institution like Williams, which isn't moving anywhere. My predecessor Zephaniah Swift Moore tried that experiment 180 years ago, and it obviously hasn't worked. (Just joking, of course.)

For Williams the saying reminds us that the College's growth depends significantly on the health of the local community in which it's so deeply rooted.

Alumni instinctively know this. Few things warm the heart more than seeing—at the end of a long journey (and, yes, it's usually quite a long journey)—the sign announcing arrival in Williamstown. An increasing number of alumni are even finding ways to make the Berkshires their permanent home. Williams would be a very different college in any other location; our identity is forever bound with this wonderful place.

Many colleges are set atop a hill or walled off from their neighbors, but not ours. We've always resided at the geographic center of the community, even when agriculture dominated the economy. And now the College finds itself the largest employer throughout the whole north Berkshire region.

Perhaps because of this geography, Williams long has engaged with the community. College officials have played prominent roles in local affairs as far back as the 19th century. That involvement has mushroomed in recent years, however, as Williams has more clearly realized the responsibilities and opportunities of community engagement.

The amount and types of College involvement have grown far too long for me to list here. Students, faculty and staff contribute to the community in so many ways. College events and, often, College facilities are open to local residents. Most interactions focus on education, as they should, and the benefits flow both ways. Our neighbors learn from attending lectures and using the library, while our students grow by practice teaching at the elementary school and performing environmental planning analysis for local governments.

For two entities whose futures are so closely entwined, the College and the community traditionally have used remarkably separate processes for long-range planning. No more. Thanks to the efforts of Vice President for Administration and Treasurer Helen Ouellette, joint planning now gives both entities a clearer view of the future.

In addition to all this personal interaction with the College's neighbors, Williams has an important financial stake in the community. As a nonprofit institution, we are stewards of the resources entrusted to us by fee-payers and donors and are bound by honor to devote those resources to the education of current and future Williams students. Room still exists, though, for College financial investment in the local community.

The logic is as follows. Williams exists to educate students. The greatest determinant of the quality of their education is the quality of faculty and staff. We can only recruit and retain the best if the local community is healthy. So when the College, after careful consideration, invests in the local infrastructure, especially in public education and healthcare, every dollar benefits our current and future students. This includes the pledges we're paying over several years toward the construction of a new Williamstown Elementary School building and to the capital campaign of North Adams Regional Hospital as well as a cash infusion to forestall a potentially disastrous budget crisis at Mt. Greylock Regional High School. That the whole community also benefits from these investments is a very happy and healthy convergence.

This new, more active relationship with the community is still developing. In time it should include less reaction to dire situations and more active involvement in advancing the region's well-being.

The College is so fortunate in its location. I'm proud that, going forward, Williams' engagement with Williamstown and the Berkshires—with the soil that enriches both town and gown—will be more vigorous and intentional.

—Morty Schapiro

EPH'S BOOKSHELF

When Someone You Love Abuses Alcohol or Drugs: A Guide for Kids (Wellness Institute, 2003. 112 pp. \$12.95) and **What to do When You're Scared and Worried: A Guide for Kids** (Free Spirit Publishing, 2004. 128 pp. \$9.95). By James J. Crist '83. Two guides aimed at children facing difficult issues in their lives.

Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens and Doyle. By Lawrence Frank '55. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 272 pp. \$69.95. A study of the genre's response to 19th century scientific developments and its role in promoting a naturalistic, secular world view.

Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy. By Patrick R. Frierson '95. Cambridge University Press, 2003. 222 pp. \$55. The first comprehensive account integrating Kant's moral anthropology with his theory of freedom.

Manuel Alvarez Bravo: Nudes: The Blue House. Ariadne Kimberly-Huque '90, editor. Distributed Art Publishers, 2002. 96 pp. \$40. A collection of artistic work by Mexico's most celebrated living photographer.

Gardens of the Istana. By Tan Wee Kiat '65 et al. Singapore National Parks Board, 2003. 204 pp. \$22. A horticultural tour of the Istana estate, a garden sanctuary in the business district of Singapore. Includes a history of the gardens since 1869, photographs and descriptions of the area's abundant plant and animal life.

The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut: Imagining Being an American. By Donald E. Morse '58. Praeger Publishers, 2003. 232 pp. \$64.95. A scholarly study of Vonnegut's novels in the context of American literature and events of the 20th century.

Putting Investors First: Real Solutions for Better Corporate Governance. By Scott C. Newquist '71 et al. Bloomberg Press, 2003. 240 pp. \$39.95. An exploration of why the system of corporate checks and balances has failed and solutions for regaining investors' trust.

The Souvenir Countess and The Souvenir of Love. By Joanna Novins '82. Berkeley Publishing Group, 2004. 336 pp. each. \$5.99 each. Two historical romance novels are set against the backdrop of the French Revolution.

Bill Barrett: Evolution of a Sculptor. By Philip F. Palmedo '56. Hudson Hills Press, 2003. 144 pp. \$50. An illustrated monograph describes the artistic development of an American metal sculptor in the context of his personal experiences, the modernist tradition in which he worked and the artistic world of which he was a part.

My Cold War. By Tom Piazza '76. Regan Books, 2003. 245 pp. \$24.95. The story of a college professor in Connecticut who, after his father's death, scraps the Cold War book he's writing in favor of a memoir of his family's reunion.

International Financial History in the Twentieth Century. F. Taylor Ostrander '32, contributor. German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003. 288 pp. \$60. A history of the international financial system presented in the context of current debate about globalization.

Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology, Vol. 20-A: A Research Annual. F. Taylor Ostrander '32, contributor. JAI Press, 2002. 326 pp. \$105. Contains articles on Adam Smith, Antonio Horta Ororio and John Maynard Keynes as well as on methodological, interpretive and policy issues of economic development in Ghana.



Edwin J. Cohn and the Development of Protein Chemistry. By Douglas M. Surgenor '39. Harvard University Press, 2002. 415 pp. \$34.95. A detailed account of the scientist's research during and after World War II into the fractionation of blood and the impact of his discoveries on modern medicine.

FACULTY IN FOCUS

Beyond the Basics

When Cornelius Kubler began developing a new basic Chinese language course shortly after his arrival at Williams in 1991, he had no idea the project would entail over a decade of work, more than a dozen trips to Asia and getting arrested by the Chinese secret police on suspicion of espionage.



Cornelius Kubler

Today, with a Faculty World Fellowship helping to fund completion of the project, the Stanfield Professor of Asian Studies says the time, travel and run-ins with the police were worth it. "My hope is that the course will make the learning of this important language—spoken by more people than any other—more efficient and more interesting," Kubler says.

The college-level course consists of five books with accompanying audiotapes, videotapes, CD-ROMs and a Web site—media that match the various ways in which students learn languages. Using the technology, students can study grammar or participate in a vocabulary drill session on their own, allowing the instructor to focus on conversation and usage during class time, Kubler says.

Because "Basic Chinese" emphasizes oral over written skills, Kubler's Web site, developed at the College's Center for Technology in the Arts and Humanities, includes dozens of video clips of conversations between Chinese speakers in Beijing and Taipei.

"Language learning in general is pretty monotonous," says Hoyoon Nam '01, a native Korean speaker who took his first Chinese class as a Williams sophomore. "Memorizing vocabulary, working on your pronunciation and learning

the grammar structure takes a lot of time and patience."

But the videos in Kubler's course help to make learning a new language more engaging, says Nam, who later honed his language skills editing video clips as Kubler's research assistant.

The videos also offer lessons in Chinese culture, which, Kubler says, is just as important as grammar and pronunciation when learning a new language. Filming the hundreds of hours worth of video was itself a lesson in culture and diplomacy. On one trip to China, airport security officials took apart Kubler's recording equipment. He also was arrested by Chinese secret police for unauthorized videotaping and had to call the U.S. embassy to get him out. During another visit, he rented a hotel room to serve as a recording studio and scheduled a day's worth of interviews with young men and women. Thinking he was operating a house of ill repute, detectives questioned Kubler about his activities.

Kubler has taught "Basic Chinese" in draft form at Williams for several years, revising it with



Kubler leads a videotaping session in Taipei with Deborah Hsu '00 (right) and a friend in front of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial.

the help of students who later became his research assistants. An earlier version of the curriculum received a \$5,000 grand prize from the Tuttle Language Grant competition for new Asian textbooks in 1999.

Before coming to Williams, Kubler, who has a master's and doctorate in linguistics from Cornell and a master's in Chinese literature from National Taiwan University, was chair of Asian and African languages at the U.S. State Department Foreign Service Institute. He has taught at the National Taiwan Normal University, was principal of the American Institute in Taiwan Chinese Language and Area Studies School and worked as a scientific linguist in Mandarin, Cantonese and Mongolian for the Foreign Service Institute. He has written or co-written seven books and approximately 40 articles on linguistics and foreign language pedagogy.

To see video clips that accompany "Basic Chinese," visit www.williams.edu/Asian/chinese.

Every Fossil Tells A Story

Imagine a fossil so tiny that to the naked eye it is smaller than a grain of sand. But magnified 1,000 times it tells the story of the history of the relationship between the oceans and the earth's climate. It's a story that Heather Stoll '94, assistant professor of geosciences, is working to unravel.

Unlike many geologists, whose research tends to focus on a specific region or time period, Stoll's research on climate change has her analyzing marine samples ranging from 8,000 to 55 million years old and from

locations as varied as the Pacific Ocean, Mediterranean Sea and Weddell Sea in Antarctica. And while most of the earth

science community has focused on the changes in species of fossils through time, Stoll has found that useful information can be gleaned from studying their chemistry as well.

During the past five years, Stoll has developed a way to measure how fossilized marine algae



Heather Stoll

Teacher Training

Many recent Williams graduates have chosen to work for a few years in private schools or to take assignments with Teach for America before going on to pursue graduate degrees or jobs in other fields. But in an effort to guide more students into long-term careers in education, the College created the program in teaching in 1996. Under the direction of director Susan Engel, students can experience teaching in a variety of ways, depending on their interests. Graduates who participated in program offerings have gone on to earn advanced degrees in education and become classroom teachers. They also have chosen education-related careers in government, public policy and administration, and one even founded an independent school.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: Every September Engel organizes an informational teaching lunch for students interested in the program. About 50 new students attend each year. She also publishes a booklet for Williams students, faculty and the College community that includes suggested coursework for students interested in careers as teachers as well as educational opportunities, such as supervising after-school study halls or volunteering as adult literacy tutors in the community. Engel also organizes a speaker series, which is open to the public. In February *New Yorker* magazine contributing writer Louis Menand, was to discuss the importance of liberal arts education.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS: This spring Engel is teaching "Psychology of Education," a new 200-level course of about 55 students. Psychology 101 is the only prerequisite. Students from all academic backgrounds are exposed to

basic ideas of teaching, and their assignments include reflecting on their best and worst educational experiences, teaching a skill and designing a school. The course prepares them for Engel's 300-level advanced seminar in teaching, which introduces students to ideas and methods in education and gives them the opportunity to student teach in area schools.

THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE: Engel believes there's more to becoming a teacher than having expertise in the subject matter. Great teachers, she says, need to know how to share their knowledge with others. Engel hopes to convey to Williams students that there is no better time to begin thinking and learning about teaching than when they are committed to the liberal arts. She also wants them to understand that focused graduate work is crucial to understanding the process of education and to becoming a great teacher.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY: Engel attended Sarah Lawrence College and received a doctorate from City University of New York. She came to Williams in 1991 as a professor of developmental psychology. After leaving the College to pursue other opportunities, she returned in 1996 to help develop and direct the program in teaching. Engel is educational advisor and co-founder of the Hayground School in Bridgehampton, N.Y. She is the author of *The Stories Children Tell: Making Sense of the Narratives of Childhood* and *Context is Everything: The Nature of Memory* and is working on her third book.



Susan Engel

responded to climate change in the past. By examining the chemical makeup of the fossils, she can determine how fast the organisms were growing during their lifetimes and how each responded to changing levels of carbon dioxide in the air.

Stoll hopes to learn how algae in the oceans may help keep the climate system balanced. Her research so far points to the fact that algae may help us by absorbing excess carbon dioxide.

Two years ago Stoll designed a course on climate change. Though most of her students

typically have no prior knowledge of geological systems, they use her method of examining the makeup of fossils for their final projects. Stoll also speaks around the world at geological conferences, teaching her method to other scientists interested in studying climate changes at other times in the earth's history.

A geology major at Williams, Stoll earned a doctorate from Princeton and spent three years in Spain doing postdoctoral research, teaching and developing her method of using chemistry to study fossils. Six years after leaving the Purple



Detail of 55-million-year-old coccolith fossils.

Valley, she was back in town to have lunch with her former thesis advisor Paul Karabinos, who told her of an opening in his department and encouraged her to apply. She joined the geology department as a visiting professor in fall 2001 and was named assistant professor in 2002.

THE ART OF PROVOCATION



BY TIMOTHY CAHILL

Kara Walker's art defies easy explanation. Her oversized murals—silhouetted figures cut from black paper and affixed to the gallery wall—are “a nightmare view of antebellum life that sets off sparks,” according to *The New York Times*. Peopled with a surreal cast of mammies and overseers, pickaninnies and plantation belles, her work brims with brutality, injustice, subjugation and sex.

But to Mark Reinhardt, Williams professor of American studies and political science, Walker's controversial images were the perfect vehicle to get his students to explore race, identity and the links between art, politics and power.

“Walker's art is an art of provocation,” he says. “I wanted students to think about those provocations.”

As he helped to prepare a mid-career survey of Walker's work—which opened in January 2003 at Skidmore's Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery and then moved to the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) last fall—Reinhardt designed an interdisciplinary course exposing students to past and present representations of slavery. At the suggestion of WCMA collections curator Vivian Patterson '77 (MA '80), students also studied works of art from the museum's permanent collection for a companion exhibition to “Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress.”

“Mark was attracted to the idea of putting students out there to test their perceptions and opinions,” says WCMA's Stefanie Spray Jandl (MA '93), who works with professors to integrate museum collections and shows into coursework. “This was a great opportunity to get students looking at art and connecting it to ideas they were exploring in class.”

The ideas they explored in the spring 2003 course “Representing Slavery” included those of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Charles Johnson, Toni Morrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Among the visual artists represented was Glenn Ligon, who in 1993 created a series of posters mimicking 19th century runaway-slave notices, replacing traditional text with descriptions of Ligon written by his friends.

The course also examined works of art such as Winslow Homer's “Our Jolly Cook” (an 1863 lithograph of a pop-eyed “darkie” dancing for Union troops), cartoonist Thomas Nast's unpublished drawings for an 1867 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a dozen new watercolors by Walker from the series “Negress Notes (Slavery Reparations Act).”

A primary objective of the course was for students to extend lessons they learned in the classroom into the public sphere. Students discussed the politics of museum display as they worked during the semester on the brochure for the exhibition “Representing Slavery,” which opened in September 2003 and featured more than two dozen pieces from WCMA's collection. A jury of Williams American studies faculty and museum staff selected essays by 13 of the seminar's 23 students for the catalog.

Opposite: Kara Walker's *George W.*, 2003, from “Negress Notes (Slavery Reparations Act),” WCMA purchase, Kathryn Hurd Fund.

"It's the epitome of what we want to do as a teaching museum," said WCMA curator Vivian Patterson '77 (MA '80). "Representing Slavery" and "Narratives of a Negress" packed a "one-two punch" for viewers, one that would "please some, confound some, insult and infuriate others."

Below: Thomas Nast's drawings for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ca. 1867, gift of Mabel Nast Crawford and Cyril Nast.

Because only a few of the students had any experience with art history and criticism, "some of them were rather traumatized to have to write about visual art," says Reinhardt.

"Representing Slavery," which closed this past December, turned out to be a solid show in its own right, giving valuable context to Walker's art and amplifying its impact.

"It's the epitome of what we want to do as a teaching museum," Patterson observed this past summer, as the two shows were about to open. "Representing Slavery" and "Narratives of a Negress," she said, packed a "one-two punch" for viewers, one that would "please some, confound some, insult and infuriate others."



Indeed, Walker has been one of the more controversial artists of her generation. In 1994, at the age of 24, she debuted in a new-talent group show at the Drawing Center in Manhattan with her 50-foot mural *Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and her Heart*, based on the motion picture *Gone with the Wind*. By 1997, the year she received a MacArthur Fellowship, Walker had become the focus of a letter-writing campaign protesting her paper cutouts (a maelstrom that culminated in a Harvard symposium addressing stereotypical representations of race in contemporary culture).

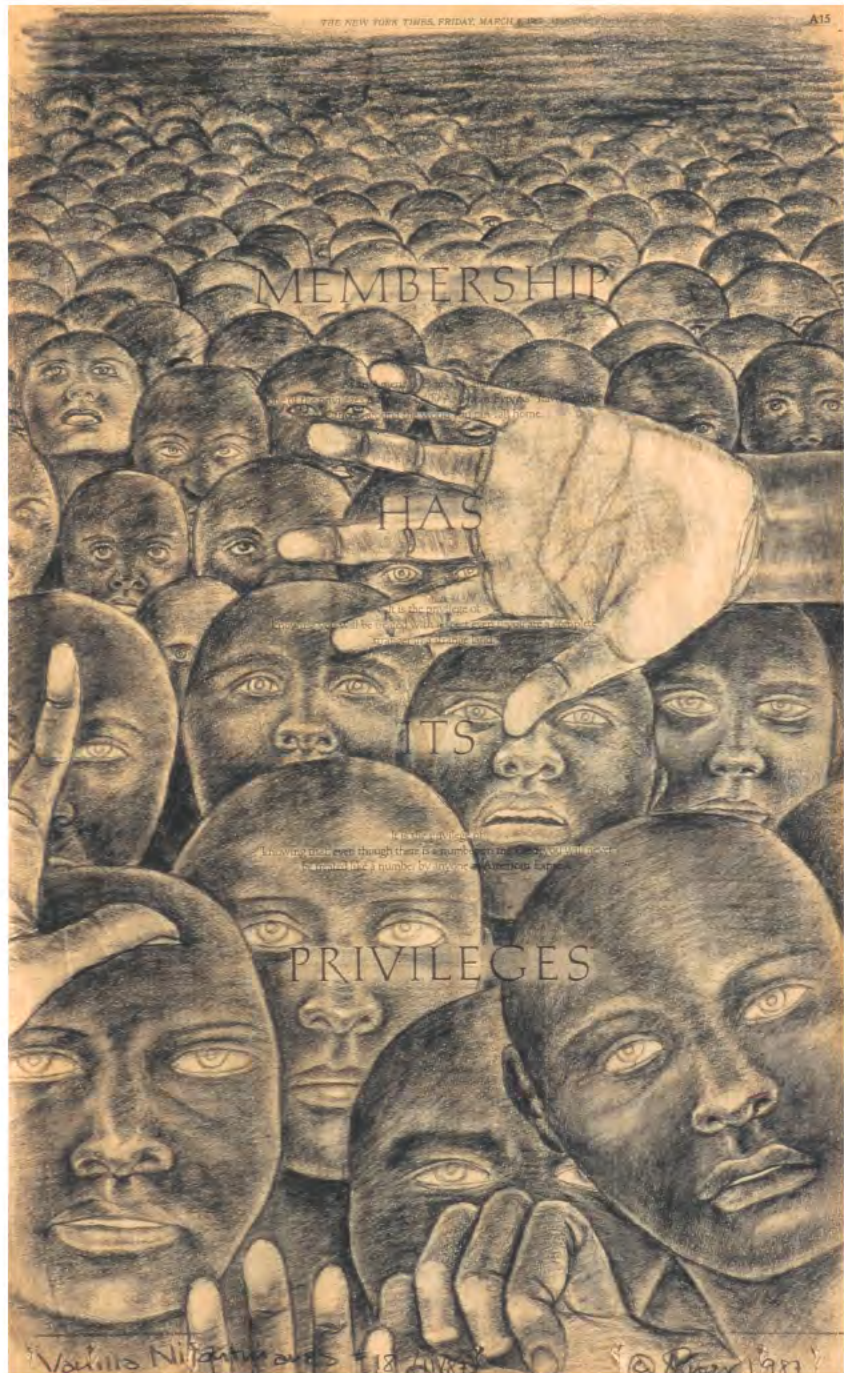
Black artists of an older generation, among them Betye Saar, objected to what they viewed as Walker's "pernicious revival of racist caricatures," according to *The New York Times*. At the time, Saar, whose work during the Civil Rights movement included an image of Aunt Jemima holding a rifle, called Walker "young and foolish" and likened her to a Jewish artist satirizing the Holocaust.

But Walker insists on her prerogative to explore racial issues in her own voice. Her work, she says, reflects "a black experience that's my own rather than the black experience I'm expected to have."

"Representing Slavery" was designed to place Walker's work within a larger cultural and visual context. "I wanted to remind people of the visual history she's responding to" and to provide them with "a sense of the uniqueness of her reply," Reinhardt says.

"The word 'representation' has an artistic definition, in the sense of producing an image depicting or symbolizing something," he adds. "And it has political meaning, to decide or legislate actions in the name of others. I was interested in where the two ideas come together, and who has the power to 'represent' someone else, in both those senses."

In their essays, the students wrestled with this very notion. Describing one of Walker's new watercolors, George W., Timothy Austin '03 writes that the artist "presents a reversal of the way in which slavery has been traditionally represented." As Austin explains:



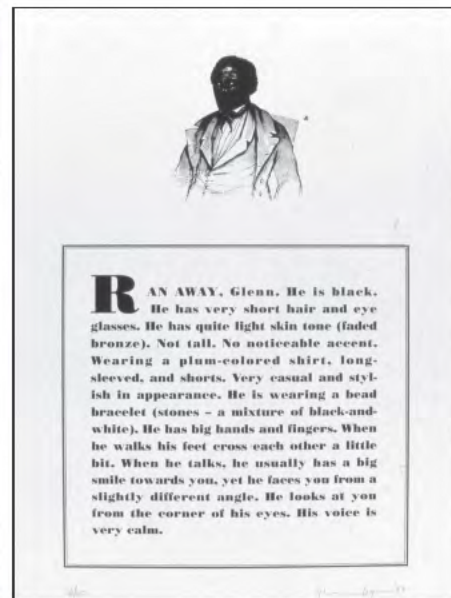
Above: Adrian Piper's *Vanilla Nightmares #18*, 1987, gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York; Hassam, Speicher, Betts and Symons funds.



At Left: Tim Rollins and the Kids of Survival's *Diary of a Slave Girl (After Harriet Jacobs)*, 1998, WCMA purchase, Kathryn Hurd and Miscellaneous Gifts funds.

At Right: Glenn Ligon's *Runaways*, 1993, courtesy of the artist and D'Amelio Terras, New York, WCMA purchase, Kathryn Hurd Fund.

Below: Winslow Homer's *Our Jolly Cook*, 1863, from "Campagne Sketches," on extended loan from Eileen and Andrew Smith '57.




"An aristocratic gentleman sits calm and composed as his slave butler serves what appears to be George Washington's severed head on a plate. While the master possesses all things material—jacket, vest, trousers, fancy shoes, even a fluffy bow and powdered wig—he lacks a face by which he might be identified as an individual. ... The institution that systematically stripped its victims of their personal identities here shows us a master who ... holds no identity while the slave holds it all."

Glenn Ligon's *Runaways*, meanwhile, "takes on the politics of representation and identity," Jasmine Mitchell '03 writes in an essay on the lithographs. Daniel Healey '03 adds that the artist casts himself as a "timeless, two-dimensional representative of his race's past and present ... free of slavery's legal status but not its legacy."

Bethany Sayles '03 seems to capture the essence of "Narratives of a Negress" and "Representing Slavery" best in her essay regarding Winslow Homer's *Our Jolly Cook*. "African-American artists, though no longer coerced into minstrelsy, are seen to produce 'black art,' regardless of its racial content," she writes. "Are we then, as museum-goers, not also performers in America's ongoing racialized spectacle?" ■

Timothy Cahill is an arts writer and arts critic for the Times-Union in Albany.

A woman in a white dress stands in a room, looking out a large window at a sunset. The room is dimly lit, with the warm light from the window illuminating the scene. The woman's back is to the camera as she gazes out at the horizon.

Pregnant Pause

For many, the story of Andrea Yates—who made headlines after drowning her five young children in 2001—is a bewildering tragedy. For reproductive psychiatrist Shari Lusskin '82, it's one more reason doctors and the public need to be educated about the diagnosis and treatment of pregnancy-related mental health disorders.

BY DENISE DIFULCO

Shari Lusskin '82 was a third-year medical student working in the psychiatry unit at Bellevue Hospital in New York when a young woman with long, unkempt hair and a faraway look in her eyes was admitted. It was clear the woman was expecting a baby. But when doctors asked her about her pregnancy, she gave a different explanation for the size of her stomach: There were snakes in her belly.

The attending physicians, whom Lusskin was observing, diagnosed the woman as schizophrenic and chronically psychotic, and they hospitalized her for the last three months of her pregnancy. No further treatment was offered.

"We didn't give her any medicine because we were afraid of harming the baby," recalls Lusskin. "I look back on that case now, and I hope people know that they can treat these women rather than letting them suffer like that."

That early encounter with pregnancy-related psychosis was formative for Lusskin, who today

is one of only a few dozen doctors across the country specializing exclusively in reproductive psychiatry. The specialty treats women from the time they are adolescents experiencing their first period, and possibly suffering from premenstrual syndrome or the more severe and disabling premenstrual dysphoric disorder, to the onset of menopause, when they might have mood changes that require professional counseling or medication. The most vulnerable patients, however, tend to be at the peak of their reproductive lives—pregnant women and new mothers who face the possibility of severe depression or psychosis.

"Our society has an expectation that everything should be fine during pregnancy," Lusskin says. "That your mood will be good, that you'll feel good throughout the whole thing and that anybody who doesn't must be a bad mother."

But in fact, the hormonal shifts women experience both before and after giving birth have a greater impact on a woman's mental state than



Shari Lusskin '82 is one of only a few dozen doctors across the country specializing exclusively in reproductive psychiatry.

most people realize. More than 50 percent of women experience postpartum mood changes known as “baby blues,” which can last from a few days to two weeks. Ten to 25 percent of new mothers develop postpartum depression—a longer-term, more disabling condition characterized by crying spells, irritability, sadness and fatigue—though researchers suspect that number might be even higher, since many cases are unreported.

Postpartum psychosis is far more serious but far more rare. About one out of every 1,000 new moms develops the condition, in which they can experience delusions and hallucinations, along with severe insomnia, anxiety and delirium.

Doctors are uncertain of the causes of postpartum depression and psychosis, but the women at greatest risk have a personal or family history of depression or stopped taking medication for mood disorders

when they became pregnant, Lusskin says. The condition can be aggravated by psychosocial factors, including an unsupportive partner, ambivalence about the pregnancy or any stressful life event.

Few of Lusskin's patients seek psychiatric help on their own. Most often, they are ashamed of their illness—aware of its stigma—and aren't treated until someone close to them intervenes, Lusskin says. Research has shown that fewer than 20 percent of women diagnosed with postpartum depression eight weeks after giving birth had previously told any health care professional about their symptoms. In addition, only 12 percent of obstetricians in the United States inquire about a woman's mental health during pregnancy.

In the most extreme scenario, an untreated woman with postpartum depression or psychosis could attempt to hurt herself or her child. Andrea Yates, the

Texas mother who drowned her five young children and made international news headlines in 2001, was convinced she was being tormented by Satan and told investigators that she drowned her children so they could be safe with God.

Mental illness also can have more subtle, long-term effects. Research shows that depression during pregnancy negatively affects both fetuses and newborns, with the impact lasting into childhood. During pregnancy, depression has been associated with low birth weight and premature labor, as well as a mother's cigarette, alcohol or drug abuse; postpartum, it can prevent a woman from bonding with her baby. Other studies link mothers' untreated mental illness to their children's behavioral disturbances, as well as negative changes in IQ.

Reproductive psychiatry has come a long way since Lusskin's Bellevue days. Back then, she says, “We were completely unappreciative of the effects of persistent psychosis on the developing baby and the impairment of maternal-fetal bonding that goes with that.”

Today, a woman like the one Lusskin encountered at Bellevue would receive medication and then counseling as she improved.

“It's inadvisable to leave somebody who is medication-responsive without that treatment and safety net,” Lusskin says. “Our job is to find the safest medication they can take during pregnancy.”

Prescribing drugs for pregnant women is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Lusskin's job, as many obstetricians argue that no drug is entirely safe during pregnancy. But she and her colleagues say—and new research supports the idea—that a woman's untreated mental illness is a

greater threat to the child's development than *in utero* exposure to drugs.

While there are no double-blind, placebo-controlled, long-term studies of the effects of medications—simply because it would be unethical to not treat some of the depressed mothers or expose the fetus to the effects of untreated illness—researchers have followed the development of children exposed to antidepressants both in the womb and while nursing. One report, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1997, followed children up to age 6 and found no difference in IQ, language development and other developmental milestones between children exposed to antidepressants and those whose mothers were not on medication.

For many of Lusskin's patients, medication is a necessity, but positive results aren't guaranteed. Marcy Levine, a New York City resident who has struggled with depression and bipolar disorder since her teens, says she feared spiraling out of control during her pregnancy if she stopped taking medication. She decided to forego her usual regimen of Depakote, a drug that had been linked to autism and spina bifida, in favor of older, better-researched medications.

Still, Levine became severely depressed during her pregnancy. She recovered postpartum, when she restarted the Depakote.

"What I chose to take was the best-case scenario," says Levine, whose son Benjamin is now 3. "It was the safest we could do under the circumstances."

On a dreary November afternoon Lusskin is spouting acronyms rapid-fire as she lectures a group of second-year residents at Bellevue

Hospital Center about which antidepressants are safe to use during pregnancy. As an assistant professor at New York University School of Medicine, which runs the academic program at Bellevue, Lusskin is educating the next generation of practitioners in both psychiatry and obstetrics and gynecology in the treatment of mental illness related to the reproductive cycle.

At NYU Lusskin has been a force behind many recent developments in the field. She convinced the School of Medicine to establish a discipline in reproductive psychiatry—one of only a few in the country—and was named its first director. Shaila Misri, a clinical professor of psychiatry at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, says the program's creation is a milestone. "Starting anything new is fraught with many roadblocks," Misri says. "Shari has been persistent and committed to achieving this."

Lusskin also founded the NYU Medical Center Annual Symposium on Women's Reproductive Mental Health.

The symposium is unique in that it's geared toward educating the public, though medical professionals often attend. In its third year in 2003, the conference drew more than 200 doctors, nurses and lay people from as far away as Israel, Belgium and Guyana.

"The public drives physicians to learn more," Lusskin says. "The idea is to have a grass-roots movement in women's mental health, as opposed to a top-down, medically driven specialty."

Lusskin hopes that through public education, more women and doctors will become aware of these conditions and realize that there are safe and effective ways to treat them.

"The good news," she says, "is more and more people are getting interested in [reproductive psychiatry]. It's the kind of specialty that I hope one day will not be a specialty." ■

Denise DiFulco is a free-lance writer based in Cranford, N.J.

ONLINE RESOURCES

New York University School of Medicine

A search of "Shari Lusskin" on the faculty bibliography page returns articles on reproductive psychiatry. Lusskin also maintains a page with links to the 2003 Symposium on Women's Reproductive Mental Health. library.med.nyu.edu/FacBib and www.med.nyu.edu/people/lussks01.html

The Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Women's Mental Health

The latest information and studies on how certain medications affect fetal and infant health. www.womensmentalhealth.org

Online PPD Support Group

Forums, research and tips on postpartum depression. www.ppdsupportpage.com

Depression After Delivery Inc.

A national nonprofit offering support to women suffering from prenatal and postpartum depression. www.depressionafterdelivery.com

Pregnancy and Depression

Research and articles include the latest medical findings about specific antidepressants and their safety. www.pregnancyanddepression.com



Sate and

**MORE THAN 50 YEARS AFTER HIS FATHER'S LIBERATION FROM A CONCENTRATION CAMP,
DAVID MEISELS '88 SHARES THE STORY OF HIS SEARCH FOR HIS FATHER'S SAVIOR—
A MAN CALLED FRITZ.**

In April 1944, three months after his 11th birthday, my father and his family were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau from their village in Hungary. One year later, having endured the death of my grandfather, vicious beatings, death marches and starvation, my father was liberated from Wöbbelin, his fifth and final camp. He was among the youngest to survive Auschwitz.

Within days of his arrival at Auschwitz, and one or two days after being separated from my grandfather, a man named Fritz came to my father and asked, "Are you Gene Meisels?" When my father responded, "Yes," Fritz handed him a piece of bread and told him, "From now on, I'll protect you." A Viennese Jew who had spent several years at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Fritz was a member of the Canada Commando, a group of prisoners responsible for unloading new prisoners' belongings from the trains. Because of his position, Fritz moved with relative freedom through the camp. My grandmother had met Fritz at Auschwitz and begged him to protect her son.

Fritz kept his promise. Over the next six months, every time my father was selected for the gas chambers, Fritz learned of it and bartered for my father's life, giving guards jewels and valuables that he found in the luggage he removed from the boxcars.

In December 1944, Fritz told my father that he would not be able to protect him any longer. Fritz arranged for my father to be placed on a transport to a work camp in Braunschweig, Germany, where his odds of survival would be higher. The two never saw each other again.

Saith

BY DAVID MASON MEISELS '88

Ever since my father first told me about Auschwitz and about Fritz, the Holocaust has had an enormous impact on my life. My father spared few details, and though stories of heroes like Fritz were a source of inspiration, I was plagued by thoughts of my father's suffering.

When I looked at my father, I saw a man who, at the age of 11, was savagely whipped for throwing a piece of bread to his mother; who was beaten by a guard in a truck factory because he was not separating nuts and bolts fast enough.

I assumed the burden of the Holocaust, and one thought seemed to pervade everything I did: "My father suffered enough." So I did what he wanted of me, and I did not complain, because none of my complaints was legitimate when measured against what he had endured. The utter improbability of my father's survival (and of my own existence) made me feel that his happiness was my responsibility.

Thirteen years ago my father died of cancer. In the process of adjusting to his absence, I grew detached from his experience at Auschwitz, and the burden of the Holocaust seemed to lessen. I went about my life and thought little of Fritz.

That changed about three years ago. I was visiting my aunt (my father's sister, who also survived Auschwitz), whose daughter had just died. The living room was filled with people from my father's hometown, Tisza Vilock. One woman, Tsili, saw me, and the color drained from her face. She pointed to my eyes and whispered, "Gene's son. Gene's son. Your eyes look just like your father's."

She began to sob, saying that the last time she saw my father was in Auschwitz in 1944. She told me her brother, who also was named Gene, was my father's best friend, and that the "two Genes," as they were known in Tisza Vilock, were in the same barrack in the camp.

Tsili continued: "On the evening of Yom Kippur in 1944, Mengele ordered

that all the children remaining in Camp D in Birkenau, maybe 500 children, be sent to the gas chambers. While the boys were in the barrack waiting to be gassed, a man rescued your father. My brother and the other children were killed."

This was a story I had heard only from my father, who told me how, as Fritz pulled him out of the barrack, Tsili's brother grabbed my father around the ankles and begged for his friend to save his life. His grip was so strong that he pulled off my father's shoes.

"The morning after my brother was killed," Tsili told me, "your father came to the fence that separated his camp from mine. He knew that every day, whenever I had the chance, I walked near the fence, trying to catch a glimpse of my brother. As soon as I saw him, I could tell something had happened."

My father had a note in his hand, which he wrapped around a rock and threw across the road between the camps. The note explained what had happened to

Gene. My father had written it while hiding in Fritz's barrack the previous night.

Tsili made me see that my father's burden did not consist simply of the memories of the atrocities he witnessed. He felt guilty, I now understood, because he survived, and his best friend Gene and so many others did not.

The horror of the Holocaust had never before felt as immediate. My life seemed inexplicable, and I felt that I had no right to be there, sitting next to Tsili. I found myself trying to think of a way to apologize to her. But no words came to me.

My experience with Tsili left me determined to find Fritz, or, if he were not alive, his family.

Only Fritz, it seemed, would be able to offer any comfort or resolution.

According to my father, Fritz returned to Vienna after the war. In 1949, my father was smuggled into Austria from then Communist Hungary, spending several weeks in Vienna at a displaced persons camp called Camp Rothschild. Though he never saw or spoke with Fritz in Vienna, they exchanged letters after my father was transferred to another camp, the Hellbrunn Youth Center in Salzburg, Austria.

I didn't even know Fritz's last name, so my mother suggested I look through some papers that my father had kept in his nightstand. The documents were fascinating: There were descriptions of his four-year recovery from tuberculosis in a Hungarian hospital, medical records, immigration papers—even

postcards—documenting his journey via Hungary, Austria, Italy and Australia to America.

And then I came to a letter postmarked Nov. 12, 1949. Written in German and addressed to my father at the Hellbrunn Youth Center, it was from Fritz. The next morning, a friend translated the letter, which read:

"Dearest Gene! My Bubi! I have received your letter of Oct. 4 and your second letter. Can you imagine my joy when I suddenly got news from you, when I was already thinking you might not be alive anymore? Now, I am happy from all my heart that Bubi is alive and now is already a grown man. Dear Gene! I would have answered right away but I wanted to surprise you and come to

Salzburg. Now things happened differently, and time has not permitted me to go to Salzburg. So I am writing a few lines to tell you that I am the real Fritz who was with Bubi. I will be in Salzburg in November and will visit you. I will write you again this week and will send you a picture of me. If you are still in Salzburg in December, I will pick you up and you will come spend a few weeks with me in Vienna. Dear Gene! My real name is Simon Umschweif—Wien 19th District—only everyone knows me by the name of Fritz. Now, I send my warmest regards. From your good friend, Fritz."

Until this point, I had only known of Fritz as the mythic figure in my father's stories. Reading his words for the first time made him human to me. I became obsessed with finding Fritz and searched the Vienna telephone directory via the Internet. I found three Umschweifs—Erwin, Irmgard and Erna—and wrote a letter to each of them.

Several weeks later, I received a response: "Dear Mr. Meisels: I'm the daughter of Ms. Erna Umschweif. My mother got your letter. She is the sister-in-law of Fritz Umschweif. He is dead since 14 years. He was my uncle and sometimes he told us about the time in Birkenau. He died with 83 years in Vienna, where he was living his whole life. Where is your father now living and why do you contact my mother after so many years? I hope my english (sic) is OK and you do understand it. If you have questions more, write again. Sincerely, Lucie Auweck."



Fritz (second from left) with his siblings in 1915.

Although I was happy to have made contact with his family, I was disappointed to learn that Fritz was dead. But I continued my correspondence, hoping to learn more about him.

"Fritz had two brothers," Lucie later wrote, "my father, Max, and my uncle, Herrmann. My father and Fritz both died in 1985. Herrmann died long before, though not in concentration camp. ... My father was in Dachau and Buchenwald, and he and Fritz spoke about their terrible time in the concentration camps."

Lucie added that Fritz's second wife, Irmgard, was alive but "doesn't know anything about the time in Birkenau." His first wife, who died 30 years ago, "knew more." According to Lucie, Fritz had run a women's clothing boutique since 1957. She added, "It was very difficult for the brothers to deal with the time they spent in the camps."

Not content with what I learned through Lucie's letters, I arranged to meet with the Umschweifs in Vienna. On my way there, I stopped at Auschwitz.

Wandering along the train track that took my father into the camp, I imagined the fear and confusion he experienced when he emerged from the train to row after row of barbed wire. I tried to picture Mengele standing on the platform, playing God, and my father defying Mengele's wave of the hand, running for his life.

Next I entered Camp D, walking the length of the camp before arriving at the remains of my father's barrack, D20. I walked to a spot near the fence separating my father's camp from Tsili's and imagined that this was where my father stood when he threw the note to Tsili informing her of her brother's death.



(Left) Gene Meisels (back row, fourth from left) was the only member of his Hebrew class, photographed in 1943, to survive the Holocaust. His best friend Gene is in the back row, eighth from right.



Gene Meisels (back, at left, wearing a cap with a scarf around his neck) and other survivors at Wobbelin in a photograph taken by the 82nd Airborne Division.

Then I made my way to the part of the camp that housed the members of the Canada Commando, to which Fritz belonged. It was at least a half-mile from my father's barrack, and I was baffled by Fritz's ability to keep track of him from such a distance.

My final stop was the crematorium, which had been left in ruins by the fleeing Nazis. I pictured mothers walking down the steps and along the narrow path that led to the gas chambers, their children clinging to them. I even imagined my wife and daughter among the condemned.

In Vienna I met Lucie and her husband at the airport, and during the next five days I questioned them and the rest of Fritz's family relentlessly. I learned that Fritz, like my father, had been born in Hungary, and that when he was a young boy the family moved to Vienna, where he, his parents, two brothers and a sister shared a two-room apartment.

By the time the Germans invaded Austria, Fritz was 36 years old and married to Lotte, a non-Jewish woman seven years his senior who had given him his nickname. Erna, Lucie's mother and Fritz's sister-in-law, told me that her



Fritz in 1950.

husband, Max, and Fritz had been deported to Dachau. The other siblings had emigrated earlier and avoided deportation, but Fritz's parents were sent to Theresienstadt and died in the camp.

From Dachau, Fritz was transferred to Auschwitz, and Max was sent to Buchenwald. Neither brother shared details about their time in the camps, Erna said, but she remembered Fritz telling her that he tried to save three children while in Auschwitz.

The next evening, Fritz's second wife, Irmgard, shared several photographs of him—one on his beloved Harley Davidson, one with his siblings and one after his liberation from Buchenwald.



Fritz (left) and his brother Max (right) stand with a friend several weeks after they were liberated from Buchenwald.



Fritz on his Harley Davidson in 1922.

I peppered Irmgard with questions. How did he survive? Did he talk about my father? What happened to him after he sent my father to Braunschweig? But Irmgard claimed that Fritz “wanted to put his experience behind him and did not speak much about his time in the camps.” She did, however, remember the number that was tattooed on Fritz's arm in Birkenau—85075.

Before we parted, I asked Irmgard how she would describe Fritz. She said he was “serious,” a hard worker. She told me he “was haunted by the war” and that it was difficult for him to be happy. But he had a special place in his heart for children. “Sometimes,” Irmgard recalled, “if Fritz saw a child standing on the street, he would walk into a store, buy candy and give it to the child.”

Still one question went unanswered: How and why did Fritz save my father? Shortly after I returned from Vienna, I sent a letter to the Archives at Auschwitz, requesting information about Fritz and including the number on his arm. I was surprised, months later, to receive in the mail a statement prepared by Fritz himself. It was an affidavit he submitted in 1958 to a commission investigating Auschwitz.

Contrary to what Erna had told me, Fritz had never been to Dachau. His statement explains that in 1938, shortly after German troops invaded Austria, he “thought it better to go abroad” and crossed the border illegally into Belgium. Because he did not have a residence permit, the Belgian authorities arrested Fritz numerous times and released him at the German border. Each time, he simply returned to Belgium, where authorities eventually imprisoned him.

Fritz was transferred to a prison in France at the beginning of the war and remained there until the Germans invaded. “Because the Germans had a sheet containing my photo,” Fritz said, “they were able to identify me, and they sent me to the Gestapo Central Prison in Vienna at the Morsinplatz. I stayed there for 13 weeks. The time was terrible. I received more beatings than food.”

In 1942 he was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was assigned to the “Bauhof Kommando” responsible for unloading rail cars and moving building materials within the camp. Fritz subsequently was transferred to the camp laundry and later was assigned to the Crematorium Kommando in Birkenau, where “all the members ... were gassed after about three months.”

Fritz said of his work at the Crematorium Kommando: “While the prisoners were being gassed, we had to collect the belongings and clothing of the victims and sort them and carry them away. Then came the worst part. We had to take the corpses out of the gas chamber. Often they were so entangled with each other, especially children with their mothers, that we had to separate them with a hoe. Our command also had to break the gold and silver teeth from the victim’s mouths and to cut their hair.”

Fritz would have died there, too, had it not been for the intervention of “prisoners who had influence and who were [his] friends.” These prisoners arranged for Fritz’s transfer to the Canada Kommando, where “day and night, on two rail tracks, transports arrived. We had to open the closed rail cars and to empty them. Those who could still walk walked. The sick and dead had to be carried out by us. Then we had to disinfect the rail cars. Ninety percent of those who arrived were selected to be killed at the first selection.”

Though Fritz did not mention my father in his statement, he offered insight into the way in which he likely saved him. Referring to a “resistance movement,” Fritz explained that certain people held positions enabling them “to strike the names of prisoners who had been selected for gassing from the lists.” The members of this resistance movement “organized food for especially needy prisoners” and “were able to get medical attention for prisoners who were sick. In this way it was possible to save many lives that otherwise certainly would have ended.”

In searching for Fritz, I had hoped, naively so, that I would find answers to questions that themselves seem to defy adequate explanation—questions that I’m sure haunted my father. Why did Fritz risk his own life to save my father? And why did he choose my father and not another child?

Though I know I will never learn their answers, finding Fritz has taught me to stop asking such questions. His legacy has shown me that I can neither justify my father’s survival nor redeem him. Instead, I must take comfort in the ability of my father and Fritz to maintain their humanity, despite the Nazis’ attempts to destroy it.

Now when I think of my father’s survival, I try to think of the goodness he encountered. I think about Fritz—his affection for my father, his “Bubi.” I think about my father—a brave, tenacious little boy who, despite (or perhaps because of) his experience, became a devoted, loving father. And I take comfort in the final comments Fritz made to the Auschwitz Commission: “The human drive for self-preservation totally covers up these terrible memories. If it were not so, one could hardly find his way back into a normal life. I noticed it about myself: As soon as we were 10 kilometers away from Buchenwald and I was coming towards home, my whole heart turned to beautiful things and to the future.” ■

David M. Meisels ’88 lives in Maplewood, N.J., with his wife and two children. He is a partner with the law firm of Herrick, Feinstein. David’s father, Gene, first shared his Holocaust stories publicly during a talk at Williams in 1985.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

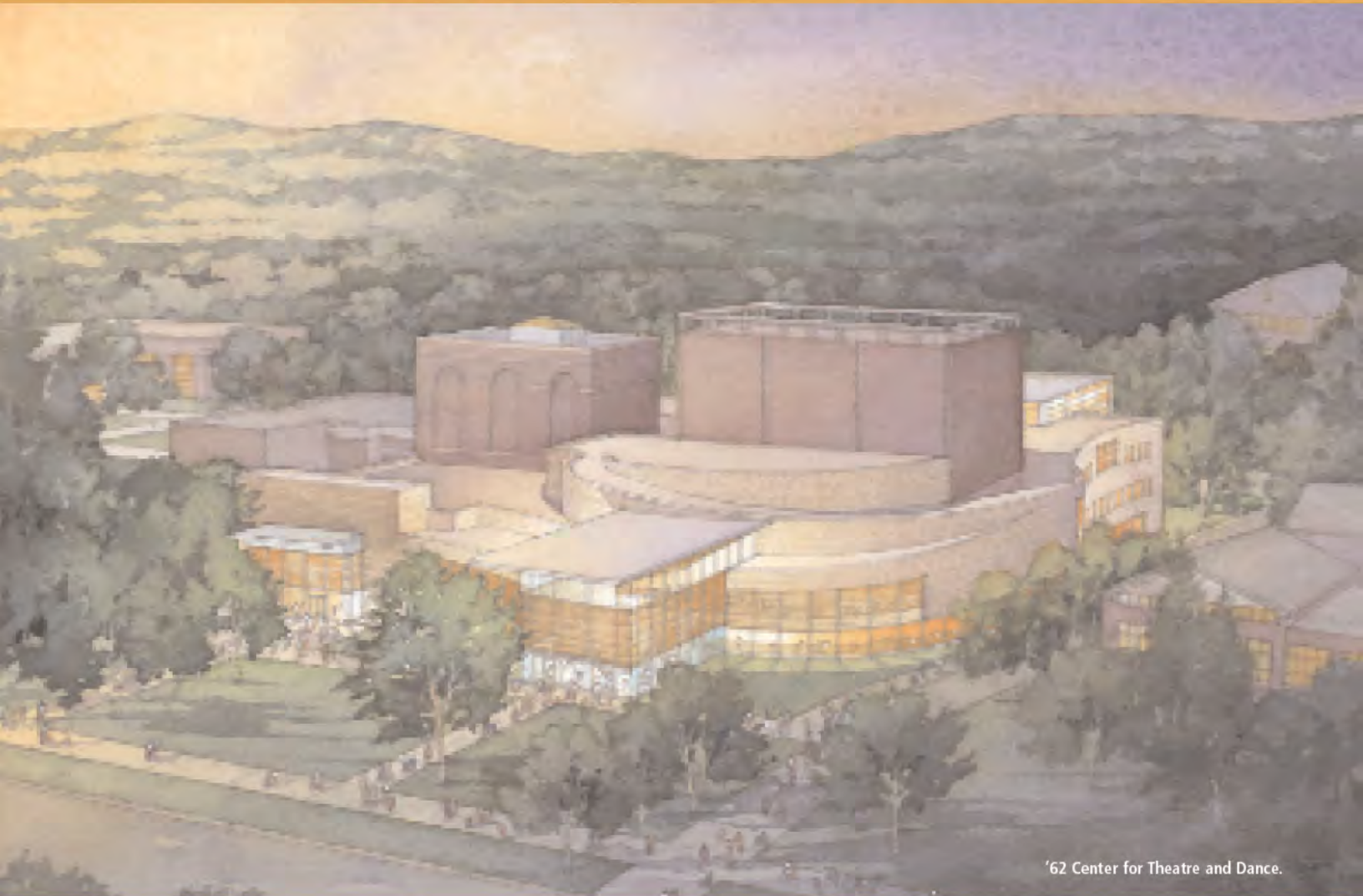
Before the College even broke ground for the '62 Center for Theatre and Dance last April, acoustics expert Ron Eligator '77 was on hand to ensure that the \$50 million building would be designed and constructed with an ear toward how performances there will sound. **BY KATE STONE LOMBARDI '78**

"Good acoustics, like a good haircut, go unnoticed," *New York Times* music critic Bernard Holland once wrote. The words bring an amused smile to the face of Ronald Eligator '77. The chief acoustical consultant for the Williams '62 Center for Theatre and Dance is well aware that once the building opens in 2005 folks attending a Sankofa performance in the dance studio will be more attuned to the step team's stomps, claps and snaps than to the soundproofing material hidden beneath the floor. As long as audience members seated in the last row of the 550-seat Main Stage are able to hear Romeo and Juliet's dialogue during the balcony scene, they won't give a second thought to the panels hidden in the back wall to ensure that the actors' voices resonate perfectly. And that's how good acoustic design should be, Eligator says.

Long before construction of the center began last April, Eligator and his firm Acoustic Dimensions began collaborating with Boston architects William Rawn Associates and other consultants to ensure that the \$50 million building—home of Williams' theater department and dance program and host to the Williamstown Theatre Festival and a variety of visiting artists—was designed with an ear toward how performances there will sound.

Though little can be done about the chronic cough of the man seated in the front row or the woman in the balcony who insists on unwrapping cellophane-covered candy during a performance, Eligator and the team had a laundry list of other issues to consider in designing the new center—from the density of the carpets to the foam used in seat cushions; and from the hum of lighting fixtures to the clangs and bangs of the heating and cooling systems. Even the height of the ceilings came into play, as did the fact that plans for the two-story dance studio included two smooth, glass walls overlooking the mountains.

Renderings by Al Forster/William Rawn Associates, Architects Inc.



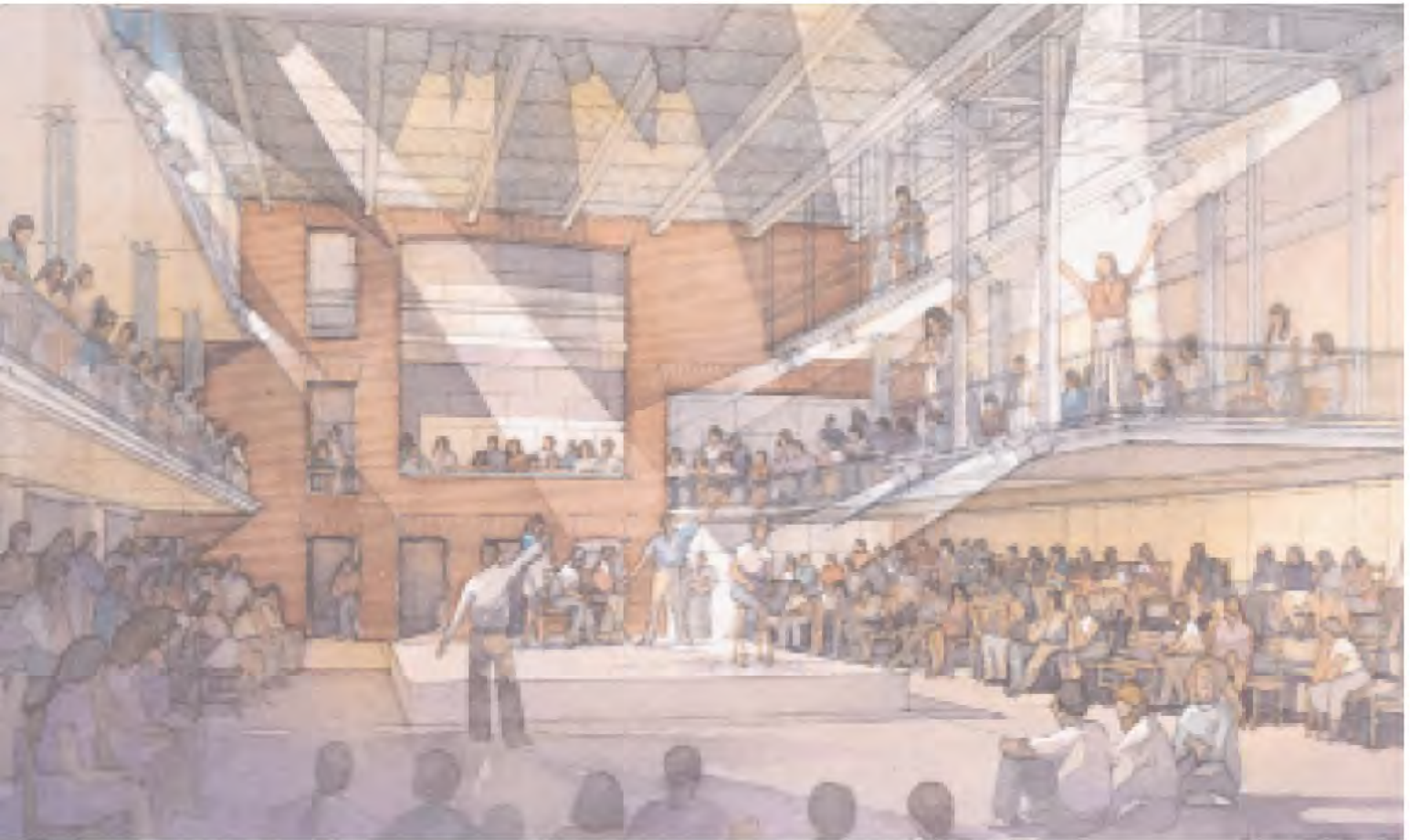
'62 Center for Theatre and Dance.

Sure, the views from the dance studio will be lovely. But the reflective glass surfaces, compounded by a third mirrored wall, create the potential for sound to literally bounce off the walls, Eligator says. To address this acoustical challenge, he worked with the architects to angle the glass at the edges of the room so that the sound would be directed out over the seating area. He also designed a curtain that can be drawn in front of the mirrored wall to prevent reverberation.

Much of Eligator's design work so far has involved poring over blueprints and crunching numbers in complex, mathematical formulas—some of which date to the 19th century, when Harvard physicist Wallace Sabine was laying the groundwork for what would become the science of architectural acoustics. Sabine spent years measuring sound reverberations in various rooms across Harvard's campus, borrowing hundreds of seat cushions in the dead of night from Sanders Theater

to see what impact placing them in the rooms had on his calculations.

Sabine's work became the basis of a formula that explains why, if a person shouts the "Pledge of Allegiance" in a large, empty room, for example, it might take several seconds for the echo to dissipate, making it difficult for listeners to understand the words. Yet if the floors, walls and ceilings are covered in plush carpet and the room is filled with thick cushions, a person can shout the pledge



In addition to designing acoustics for each of the three new performance spaces—the Main Stage, the dance studio and the flexible, 200-seat CenterStage (shown here), Eligator has spent countless hours examining how these spaces will live comfortably alongside each other and the various rehearsal and directing studios, media and costume design labs and classrooms.

as loud as he or she wants, but the words would sound muffled to listeners.

In the theater and dance center's large Main Stage, planners designed two levels of balconies that wrap around the stage to create a sense of intimacy. The balconies will help to reflect sound out into the rows of seats directly in front of the stage, which, from an acoustical perspective, is good. But left alone, sound projected from the stage also would hit the curved back wall of the horseshoe-shaped theater and bounce back into the center rows. That means Romeo and Juliet's balcony scene would be jarringly loud for audience members seated in the middle of the theater.

Eligator addressed the problem in the Main Stage by designing a slatted surface for the curved back wall. Inside the slats are large, flat surfaces that will redirect the sound evenly across all the seats. He also built a retractable curtain into the walls on either side of the stage. During an acoustic event, the curtain could be pulled back to expose the walls, allowing more warm, natural-sounding reverberation. But during an amplified event, such as a lecture or movie, the curtain could be extended to absorb excess reverberation.

In addition to designing acoustics for each of the three new performance spaces—the Main Stage, the dance studio

and the flexible, 200-seat CenterStage—Eligator has spent countless hours examining how these spaces will live comfortably with each other and the various rehearsal and directing studios, media and costume design labs and classrooms. Indeed, one of the advantages of the theater and dance center is that it will enable several activities to go on simultaneously, without disturbing one another.

In the theater department's current home, Adams Memorial Theatre, "there is significant [sound] leakage from the DownStage to the MainStage," says Bernie Bucky, the College's William Dwight Whitney Professor of Arts.

"When we perform now, everyone else has to be quiet, which means not much goes on in the building."

In the new building, sound will be isolated. Though the dance studio is located on top of the directing studio, soundproofing material between the two will help contain the thump of leaping feet above aspiring directors' heads. Large, soundproof doors will separate the scene shop from the theater spaces, so that sawing and hammering can take place during a rehearsal. Everything, from the fiberglass batting in the walls (to further isolate sound from classroom and studio spaces) to the scale of the performance spaces themselves, is designed to enhance the learning environment.

"The size of the spaces is not overwhelming to the students, and that has a lot to do with how they're going to sound," says Robert Baker-White '80,

chairman of the theater department. Students, he says, "are very smart, and they are very talented. They have a great deal of ingenuity, and they are able to give great performances. But they have relatively young, relatively untrained student voices. So you want a comfortable space where students are going to be able to work, where their voices won't be swallowed up."

Adds Eligator, who has worked on performance spaces designed for students and professionals alike since 1982: "Students really need to have a high-quality acoustic environment so they can learn to act, direct and dance in a space that doesn't hobble them, and they can concentrate on learning the skills that they need to develop."

Eligator joined Acoustic Dimensions, based in New Rochelle, N.Y., in 1993 and has designed

acoustics for projects such as Sony Music Studios in Manhattan and Hartshorn Theater at University of Delaware. At Williams, he'll work on the theater and dance center through its construction, making sure that the concrete is poured properly, sound barriers are built as planned and installation of the mechanical equipment and duct work follow design specifications.

He says it's particularly gratifying to design acoustics for his alma mater. At Williams he majored in music and had nearly enough credits for a second major in physics, focusing his studies on music theory, history and composition as well as mathematics and piano technology. After graduation, he began singing with the New Haven Chorale and earned a master's degree at Yale, developing a custom curriculum focusing on acoustics and mechanical and electrical engineering.

Yet for all the science that accompanies acoustical design, Eligator admits there's also an art to it—as well as an intangible element to each new performance space.

"The art comes in knowing how all the elements will come together," he says. "It's looking at the drawings, understanding the volume, the dimensions, the finishes—and then having the ability to walk in that room in your imagination and have a feel for what it is going to sound like when it's built." ■

Kate Stone Lombardi is a free-lance writer based in Chappaqua, N.Y., and a regular contributor to The New York Times.

In the Main Stage, two levels of balconies wrap around the stage to create a sense of intimacy. Left alone, sound projected from the stage would hit the curved back wall of the theater and bounce back into the center rows, making Romeo and Juliet's balcony scene jarringly loud for audience members seated there. Eligator designed a surface for the back walls (inset) that would redirect sound evenly across all the seats.



Lessons from an African Village

It's senior year, 1963. Williamstown in January is cold. A Peace Corps recruiter visits the campus and makes a pitch: "This is where campus activism leads," and "It'll be like two years of graduate study in yourself." For a number of us who have discovered campus activism through the Civil Rights movement, this is heady stuff. We sign on and wind up in places like Ecuador, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Turkey.

For me, it's Senegal, a country whose name I misspell for the first month I'm there but turns out to be a good match. The Peace Corps is in its second year of existence, Senegal in its second year as an independent country, and I'm 20. None of us really knows what we're doing, but in the best tradition of youth, we don't realize that. We muddle through, and things work out. I never dream that, over the course of the next 40 years, I'll wind up in Senegal four more times and that they'll be some of the most intensely alive times of my life.

Roll the tape forward to January 2003. My wife Carole and I are volunteers again, this time with the Jewish Volunteer Corps (JVC), a small organization that sends 50 to 60 people per year on short-term assignments to work with non-governmental organizations throughout the developing world.

Our one-month assignment is with ASREAD, an African NGO whose full name, in French, means the Senegalese Association for Research, Study and Support of Development. We will use our management consulting background to help the ASREAD staff come up with a strategic plan for the next five years.

ASREAD's small complex of offices, where every day we lug our laptop in its Sahara-proof case, is a dusty compound of cinder block buildings in the medium-sized village of Keur Momar

Sarr, on the edge of the encroaching desert. We live in one bedroom of a house we share with several other ASREAD staff. In our room there's a mosquito-netted bed, a table, two chairs and a solitary light bulb. For lunch, the main meal of the day, we eat à l'africaine with a dozen people around a communal bowl of tjebou djinn, the delicious national dish of fish and rice. Life is pretty much reduced to its basics.

We start by visiting some of ASREAD's projects in surrounding Wolof and Peulh. In these small villages, we see green irrigated fields standing in stark contrast to the surrounding desert. We see village women making good money selling fruits and vegetables they've grown. And we hear villagers talking about the way their lives have changed—they have steady income, ASREAD has taught them to read, write and run small businesses, and they are buying mosquito nets and school supplies for their families. We understand that ASREAD is making a huge difference—quietly, dramatically, permanently and relatively inexpensively. For roughly \$30,000 spread over three years, ASREAD can "launch" 50 villagers as self-sustaining entrepreneurs who grow and sell fruits and vegetables. Their livelihood is no longer at the mercy of the fickle annual rainfall.

Over the next three weeks, we organize a series of all-team meetings, the first ASREAD has ever had. The Senegalese tradition of "palaver and disputation" ensures that the sessions are animated, impassioned, productive and very long. Slowly but surely, the group answers the key strategic planning questions: Who are we? What do we do well? What do we want to continue to do? And what should we stop doing? What's standing in our way? What are our specific goals, and how are we going to reach them?

The meetings are hard but stimulating work, and the blossoming camaraderie is gratifying.

At the end of the process, the ASREAD staffers feel not only that they have gained greater clarity and direction but also that they "own" a process and a plan that is theirs. Equally important, they now have a document that will be useful in explaining and "marketing" ASREAD's success to the world of international development. And we feel that in some small way, we've contributed to an ongoing process that is changing lives for the better.

Taking a wide-angle look at all the good things that are starting to take hold as a result of ASREAD's work—what economists would call "sustainable, integrated development"—there's one more element that needs underscoring: ASREAD is a Moslem organization serving Moslem villages in a country that is 90 percent Moslem. Yet the financing for ASREAD's work comes primarily from two American organizations: Church World Service and American Jewish World Service. In a nutshell, American Protestants and Jews are helping to improve the lives of African Moslems. Today, we don't get to hear success stories like that nearly often enough.

It's a long way from Williamstown in 1963 to Keur Momar Sarr 40 years later, but the Peace Corps recruiters' words about learning new things about ourselves still ring true. Carole and I have found that while we are not as young as we were, we are definitely not as old as we feared. It has been important, too, for us to find that, despite the grim headlines in the daily papers, other things are going on, quiet things, in which people help each other and lives wind up changed for the better.

Geoff Howard and his wife Carole are semi-retired and divide their time between Warwick, N.Y., and Paris. They planned another volunteer stint with the JVC in January 2004.