



Faculty and students visit Cincinnati, known as the “London of the West” during the 1830s—1850s. The field trip was highlighted by visits to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and Harriet Beecher Stowe House. Read more on page 7 of this issue. Photo by Tiya Miles.

American Culture

Program in American Culture
at the University of Michigan

Spring 2006

IN THIS ISSUE:

Director's Letter

Alumni Profile: Martin Friedman

Recent Job Placements

Great Courses for Fall 2006

**Faculty Profile:
Matthew Countryman**

Faculty, Alumni, Student News

In Memoriam

Undergrad Filmmakers in Action

Recent Events

**American Culture on the Road:
National Underground Railroad
Freedom Center**

Visit us online at www.lsa.umich.edu/ac



Dear Friends, Graduates, Colleagues, and Students,

It's been a rainy winter in Ann Arbor—the jet stream, they tell us, and not global warming, but it is hard not to contemplate the possibilities. In the midst of this mist, however, have been more than a few warm, sunny days and those of us in the Program in American Culture have found much to smile about. Our grins begin with a huge batch of faculty and graduate student prizewinners: Assistant Professor Tiya Miles (Frederick Jackson Turner Prize of the Organization of American Historians), Associate Professor Matthew Countryman (Liberty Legacy Foundation Award of the Organization of American Historians), Assistant Professor Andrea Smith (Gustavus Myers Outstanding 2005 Book Award), Associate Professor Penny Von Eschen (runner-up for the John Hope

Franklin Prize of the American Studies Association), Graduate Student Dean Saranillio (Gene Wise-Warren Susman Prize of the American Studies Association), Assistant Professor Larry LaFountain-Stokes (Michigan Campus Compact award), Professor Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (Sarah Goddard Power Award), and Graduate Students Justine Pas (Outstanding GSI Award), Rachel Peterson (Rackham Pre-Doctoral and Susan Lipschutz Fellowship), and Anne Kustritz (Rackham fellowship to attend the Cornell School of Theory and Criticism). We have with us this semester a number of talented visitors, including Paul Kramer (joining us from Johns Hopkins), David Ricci (joining us for the year from Hebrew University in Jerusalem), Louise Cainkar (visiting from University of Illinois at Chicago), and Jason Wright, a gifted artist who is challenging our students in new ways.

Department Administrator Judy Gray has been working extremely hard to complete a makeover of the American Culture offices. Judy has reworked the “Rainbow M” color bars that have become our visual signature and put them in our halls, on our new letterhead, and on the new and already highly-coveted American Culture tee-shirt. We're close to completing a nearly full set of framed faculty book jackets and conference posters to grace our administrative offices and hallways. Things are looking up... just in time for the visit of our external review team later this month!

The faculty and staff of the program—and in particular, report writer Amy Stillman and staff members Judy Gray and Mary Freiman—worked incredibly hard in pulling together a self-study document that reveals just how far the Program in American Culture has come over the last several years... and, in a few instances, how much farther we have to go. Mary worked tirelessly over the weekend prior to turning in the report, and even pulled an all-nighter that Sunday. Our gratitude goes out to Mary, Judy, Amy, and everyone else who helped out with this most, umm... “interesting” task. We look forward to meeting with the reviewers and to implementing their suggestions.

Our undergraduate curriculum continues to get more interesting by the moment. This winter we have new courses on American Empire, American Twentieth-Century Politics, and American Humor, as well as a fantastic class on Canoe Culture (co-taught with graduate student John Low), the curricular fruits of Vince Diaz's innovative project linking Great Lakes canoe builders to those in the Pacific. I'll be taking another group this summer to the University's Camp Davis geology field site to study the environmental history and literature of the American West. The Program will continue to build an excellent and coherent curriculum for its undergraduate concentrators, one that trains students to thrive in a globally connected world that will require a thorough knowledge of the new culture industries, linked with a deep understanding of the movements, circuits, migrations, and social and cultural differences among peoples. American Culture continues to be a fantastic place to learn, to teach, to exchange ideas, and to produce new knowledge. And things are only getting better!

Warmly,
Phil Deloria
Director

American Culture News

Director: Philip Deloria

Ethnic Studies Directors:
Gustavo Verdesio, Interim Director
Native American Studies

Maria Montoya, Latina/o Studies

Amy Stillman, Asian/Pacific
Islander American Studies

Graphic Design and Layout:
Linda Weiss

Editor: Judith Gray

Please submit any changes, corrections, letters, updates and/or suggestions to Linda Weiss at lweiss@umich.edu.

The Program in American Culture promotes publicly engaged and socially committed scholarship and teaching aimed at understanding the struggles and creativity that have produced the societies and cultures of America.

In particular, we seek to illuminate the significance, the lived experience, and the relation among race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and class, both within and beyond national borders.

The Program brings the history and interpretive strategies of Ethnic Studies into conversation with critical approaches to Literature, History, Cultural Studies, and Social Sciences, as well as with knowledge produced outside the boundaries of the university.

Regents of the University of Michigan:

David A. Brandon
Laurence B. Deitch
Olivia P. Maynard
Rebecca McGowan
Andrea Fischer Newman
Andrew C. Richner

Alumni Profile: Martin Friedman



*Marty Friedman (B.A. 1982),
with son Jacob, future UofM
graduate—class of 2019*

I left Ann Arbor for New York City at the beginning of 1982, planning to work for a few years before returning to graduate school to study American history. Twenty-four years later, I am still engaged in step one of my two step plan.

Armed with little more than my honors degree from the Program in American Culture and the very limited business experience I had gained as a board member of the student housing coops at Michigan, after several months of temporary jobs, I was hired into a training program at Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company, which was one of the largest banks in U.S. For the next nine months, surrounded by the recently minted MBAs and BBAs who I had managed to avoid during my four years in Ann Arbor, I learned accounting, finance, economics and credit analysis. When I completed the coursework, the bank assigned me to work with small businesses. Over the next twenty years, through positions at four major financial institutions in three different cities (New York, Boston, Chicago and again New York), I worked with businesses of all sizes from newly formed startups to large national companies (in one case, I helped a newly formed startup grow into a large national company). Along the way, I increasingly focused on media and telecommunications companies. I had the opportunity to raise and invest funds (both debt and equity) in both the private and public

markets, and even got paid just for providing advice (hopefully good advice) to my clients. Three years ago, I left the large corporate world and, after taking some time off to be with my family, take guitar lessons, visit friends and do some volunteer work, I joined a small investment bank with seven partners (including me) and only one half-time employee, which has been a very welcome change from working for larger institutions.

Paralleling my professional career, I have had the good fortune to devote considerable time to several not-for-profit organizations. Most significantly, for the past fourteen years, I have served on the board of American Jewish World Service, a non-sectarian international development organization dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger and disease in the developing world; I have been Chair of AJWS for the past four years as it has grown its annual revenue from \$5 million to more than \$25 million. Today, AJWS supports more than 200 grassroots partner organizations in 35 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America providing funds, technical assistance and skilled volunteers. We also have domestic education and advocacy programs focusing on the issue of poverty in the developing world. Leading AJWS through this period of incredible growth has been a challenging and deeply rewarding experience.

So what does any of this have to do with the Program in American Culture? When I arrived in New York in 1982, I had never even heard of investment banking and I had no tangible business skills. Thanks to my education in the Program in American Culture (and at the University of Michigan in general), I did have several important assets: the ability to think about complex problems using a variety of different approaches; a broad interest in learning as much as I could about almost any new topic; a passion for ideas, argument and research (who knew a senior honors thesis about an obscure journalist from the 1930s would be good preparation for underwriting high yield bonds); and the ability to write well. I quickly discovered most of the technical skills were easy to learn (calculating the internal rate of return on an investment is quite simple if you have a couple of years of high school algebra and someone explains the basic concept to you – it became even easier after the introduction of Microsoft Excel). Far more difficult to develop are the ability to analyze problems, ask probing questions, speak with clients about a broad range of topics, argue a position convincingly, and communicate clearly; the Program in American Culture (particularly Alan Wald, John King and David Papke) helped me develop these critical skills.

I currently live in New York City with my wife (Sarah Allen, a painter and an alumna of the University of Michigan's History Department) and son (Jacob). I would welcome a chance to reconnect to my classmates from the Program in American Culture (I can be reached by e-mail at mfriedman@dhcapitalllc.com). Perhaps we can discuss how I can start working on step two of my long range plan.

Job Placement News from Recent Graduates

Cynthia Wu has accepted a position as Assistant Professor of English at Agnes Scott College.

Nick Syrett has accepted a position as Assistant Professor of History at the University of Northern Colorado.

Best Wishes, Cynthia and Nick, as you embark on your new careers!

Learn more about our graduates and their careers on our website at <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/ac/grad/placements>.

Great Classes for Fall 2006!

Just a sampling of the many wonderful courses offered by the Program in American Culture:

AC204: Spies, Shopping, Coups & Concerts: Cold War Culture At Home and Abroad

AC204: The History of College Athletics

AC226: The Latin Tinge: Latin Music in Latin America & U.S.

AC231: Sex on the Beach: American Film in/of the Pacific

AC301: Detroit Politics and Community Organizing

AC351: Race and American Cinema

AC498: Citizenship Roadshow: Place, Culture, Democracy

Faculty Profile: Interview



Matthew Countryman is an Associate Professor of American Culture and History. He joined our program in 1998 after completing his Ph.D. in History at Duke University. His first book, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2005), has won the 2006 Liberty Legacy Foundation Award for the best book on any historical aspect of the struggle for civil rights in the United States.

Recently, Assistant Professor Paul Anderson (AC/CAAS) spoke with Matthew about his work.

Anderson: Congratulations on a wonderful book. And congratulations for the book award you've already won. The book's only been out a few months and already it's been recognized as a major new work in civil rights history. Tell me a little about the title of your book. Where does the phrase "Up South" come from? Why did you name your book after it?

Countryman: "Up South" reflects the ironic experience of the African-American "great migration" to the urban North. As different as life was for African-Americans in the North--they were relatively free from the terrors of southern lynch law and de jure segregation and they were guaranteed (at least on paper) their rights as citizens—it was clearly not the promised land of the liberal imagination. To live "Up South" was to confront structures of racial inequality and exclusion on a daily basis. Personally, I can't remember the first time I heard someone use the phrase as the punch line to a story about the realities of racism in the North. Still, I wasn't sure I should use it as the title for the book until I was conducting one of my last interviews with Charyn Sutton, a Philadelphia-based 60s student activist who has since sadly passed

away. She was describing how racial segregation in the South-west Philadelphia neighborhood in which she grew up was enforced not by law, but by the unspoken rules that told you not to walk on that block or go to that public swimming pool, when she suddenly stopped and said, "you know, it was Up South." I immediately turned off the tape recorder to thank her for validating my title.

Anderson: You're a native Philadelphian. Do you have any family, church, or school connections to any of the civil rights movements that you write about so lucidly? Did these connections inspire you to learn more, to study this history as a scholar?

Countryman: Well, yes, I am very much a child of the movement that I am writing about. My parents met as student civil rights activists in the early 60s and were active in a number of groups that I discuss in the book, as were my grandparents and other relatives. In many ways, I first developed my passion for history at my grandparents' dining room table during family gatherings of the late 1960s and early 1970s as I listened to the adults interweave stories of the ancestors with contentious debates over the state of "the movement." Still, it would have never occurred to me to do a project on Philadelphia were it not for a family friend and veteran activist who asked me, if I was so interested in the study of the Black Power movement in a local community, why wasn't I working on Philly? By the time he had finished telling me a litany of stories that I had either never heard before or had long forgotten, there was no doubt in my mind that my dissertation would be a study of the Philadelphia movement.

Anderson: In a nutshell, can you tell us what was distinctive and what was typical about race relations and African American economic and living conditions in Philadelphia in the first half of the 20th-century?

Countryman: Race relations in Philadelphia were fairly typical for a northern city in the decades between World War I and the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. While the North was hardly free of racial violence, on a day-to-day basis life was significantly safer than in the rural South. By the 1940s, moreover, the growth of the black vote in northern cities led urban political machines to be more responsive to the needs of African-Americans, particularly in the area of government employment. Still, the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in employment, in housing, and even in hotels and restaurants (despite state laws banning discrimination in public accommodations) meant that northern cities were far from the promised land. There was nothing subtle about the discrimination that kept most working-class blacks locked out of all but the most menial of jobs and locked into the most overcrowded and least desirable residential neighborhoods.

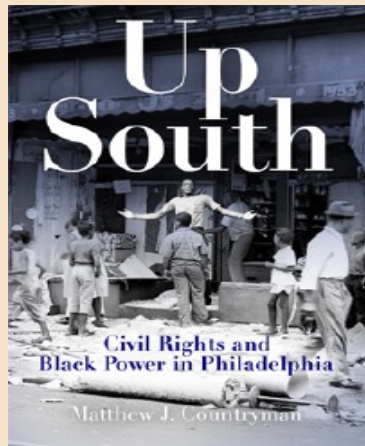
What made Philadelphia distinctive among northern cities was the emergence in the post-World War II years of a biracial liberal reform movement that managed to wrest control over City Hall from the Republican machine that had long dominated city politics. By the early 1950s, these liberal activists had succeeded in enacting a series of government reforms, including the passage of a Fair Employment

with Matthew Countryman

Practices law and the establishment of a Commission on Human Relations to enforce the city's new commitment to colorblindness. *Up South* is the story of what happened when this liberal reform coalition proved unable to deliver on its promise of equal opportunity for all Philadelphians irrespective of race.

Anderson: Your book argues that civil rights protest against racist conditions in housing and employment and education can be seen as having gone through three phases between the late 1940s and the early 1970s: elite-dominated and interracial civil rights liberalism, a more dramatic mode of black protest politics similar to the Southern movement against segregation and, finally, a Black Power movement politics. What were the highlights of each of these phases? In your telling, each phase seemed to run its course after failing to meet various grassroots expectations for concrete change.

Countryman: That's very nicely-put. At the same time, each of these three phases was linked by a deep engagement with the liberal program of overcoming racial inequality through the protection of individual rights. As I've said, African-American optimism about this liberal program was crucial to the success of the reform movement that remade Philadelphia politics in the aftermath of World War II. By 1963, however, black frustration with the pace of racial change in the city had erupted into massive protests against those same reform politicians for failing to address racial discrimination in the local construction industry. But as significant as these early 60s protests were, Black Power activists rightly saw their achievements as largely symbolic. As Malcolm X argued, there was something unseemly about blacks having to ask for things that should have been their due as citizens. Thus, Black Power activists in Philadelphia and elsewhere shifted their focus from protest to organizing black communities to take control over the politicians and public institutions (schools, etc.) that did so much to shape daily life in black neighborhoods.



Anderson: I think readers will find your treatment of Black Power politics especially eye-opening. Your book goes far in correcting some quite serious misinterpretations of what Black Power was. Why do you think so many people continue to have such limited and, often, demonizing interpretations of Black Power?

Countryman: This, it seems to me, is the great paradox of Black Power. On the one hand, much of the Black Power activism I described in my book differs little from the ethnic and cultural politics practiced by a broad range of religious and ethnic minorities over the

course of U.S. history. And yet, while Black Power's political strategies were rarely as revolutionary as the rhetoric of some its best-known advocates would have us believe, its emphasis on black self-love over colorblind integration and group advancement over individual achievement did represent a fundamental challenge to the postwar liberal consensus about the superiority of the American way. In that sense, the horrified reaction to Black Power of everyone from J. Edgar Hoover to the NAACP's Roy Wilkins reflected, I think, a deep-seated fear of the revolutionary potential of black anger.

Anderson: I found your chapter on the role of women in Black Power politics in Philadelphia really powerful. Were you surprised to learn what a major role so many women played during a phase of black protest that conventional wisdom tells us was especially patriarchal and even misogynist?

Countryman: I wouldn't say I was surprised. That chapter really builds on the work of activist-scholars like Toni Cade Bambara and Frances Beal, who did so much to explore the contradictory nature of the Black Power moment for black women. In a sense, mine is a "glass half-full" view of the tension between the Black Power's masculinism and its commitment to democratizing black leadership by promoting the leadership of working-class community-based activists - activists who more often than not happened to be women. But that should never distract us from the damage caused to progressive movements by sexist (as well as classist and racist) assumptions about who makes the best leader.

Anderson: What are a few lessons or warnings your book offers for thinking about possible strategies for anti-racist activism and progressive coalition-building in the twentieth-first century Philadelphia or the USA in general?

Countryman: I wish that the story I tell in *Up South* was more hopeful in its implications. There is, of course, something very hopeful in telling the stories of activists who believed so fervently that racial and social justice could be achieved and who gave so much to that belief. In the end, though, I think *Up South* is the tragic story of people struggling to improve their communities only to run up against powerful structures of racial and economic inequality. And, sadly, the array of forces that are lined up against those who would struggle for racial and economic justice have only grown stronger in the decades since.

Anderson: Thanks Matthew, for providing this window into your absorbing new book.

Interview by:

Paul A. Anderson, Assistant Professor
Program in American Culture and
Center for Afroamerican and African Studies

Faculty News

Catherine Benamou has been invited to participate in an interdisciplinary workshop, scheduled for this August, on Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940-1946) at the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York, where a working group was formed on U.S. cultural policy during World War II.

Matthew Countryman's book Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia has been selected as winner of the 2006 Liberty Legacy Foundation Award! Awarded annually by the Organization of American Historians, is given for the best book on any historical aspect of the struggle for civil rights in the United States from the nation's founding to the present.

Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof has been awarded an LSA Information Technology Committee Grant to develop his course, "The Latin Tinge," incorporating the latest technology – podcasting!

Larry La Fountain-Stokes (Romance Languages & Literatures/Spanish) is this year's recipient of a MCC Faculty/Staff Community Service-Learning Award. Michigan Campus Compact is a state-level non-profit organization that promotes the education and commitment of Michigan college students to be civically engaged citizens, through creating and expanding academic, co-curricular and campus-wide opportunities for community service, service-learning and civic engagement. This prestigious annual award is the highest MCC bestows on faculty and staff in the state of Michigan! Dr. La Fountain-Stokes fosters student engagement with Latino communities in Michigan to facilitate their deepening awareness of issues of language, bilingualism, migration, and pedagogy. He coordinates community-based learning amongst a number of faculty, involving their students with local Spanish-speaking schoolchildren, migrant workers and their families, and with the southwest Detroit Latino population.

Tiya Miles' Ties That Bind has been awarded the Frederick Jackson Turner Prize by the Organization of American Historians! The OAH has made this award annually since 1959 for an author's first book on a significant phase of American history.

Andy Smith (Women's Studies) is the recipient of the Gustavus Myers Outstanding 2005 Book Award on Human Rights and Bigotry for her book, Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide (South End Press), an "analysis linking sexual violence in various forms to state colonial oppression of people of color and the genocide of native peoples." In observance of United Nations Human Rights Day world-wide, this award is made in honor of books that advance our journeys away from bigotry.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has been selected by the Academic Women's Caucus of the University of Michigan to receive the Sarah Goddard Power Award for her outstanding professional achievements and support of women.

Amy Stillman has been elected to serve on the Nominating Committee of the American Studies Association for a three-year term.

Magdalena Zaborowska (with Coleman Jordan/Architecture) was a keynote speaker at a February conference on Black History Month. Her address, entitled "African Americans in Unexpected Places: James Baldwin's Turkish Decade," was delivered at a conference in Poland, "Bridges across the Nations: African American Culture in the 21st Century."

Alumni News

Karen Majewski (Ph.D., 1998) has received the 2005 Waclaw Lednicki Prize from the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America for her book, Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish American Identity, 1880-1939. After serving two years as Hamtramck, Michigan's City Council President, Karen was elected last fall as the city's first woman mayor and took office in January 2006.

Student News

Joanne Hsu was a finalist in the selection process for a Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans. This fellowship was established in recognition of the contributions New Americans have made to American life. It is intended to provide opportunities for continuing generations of able and accomplished New Americans to achieve leadership in their chosen fields.

Anne Kustritz has just won a Rackham fellowship to attend the Cornell School of Theory and Criticism this summer.

John Low, has been chosen to participate in the 2006 Spring Graduate Seminar, "Encountering Encounters: Cultural, Historical, and Material Perspectives on Native American and European Contacts" at Chicago's Newberry Library, one of the world's premier repositories for photographs, books, and manuscripts relating to the American Indian.

Justine Pas has received this year's Rackham Outstanding Graduate Student Award. This is the third year in a row that one of American Culture's talented graduate students has been selected for this highly competitive award. Congratulations, Justine!

Rachel Peterson is the recipient of two important fellowships—a Rackham Pre-Doctoral Fellowship, a 12-month fellowship to continue primary work on her dissertation and a Susan Lipschutz Fellowship, awarded annually to promising women scholars.

Nick Syrett's dissertation, "The Company He Keeps: White College Fraternities, Masculinity, and Power, 1825-1975" received Honorable Mention in this year's Rackham Distinguished Dissertation Awards.

Congratulations!

Please join us in congratulating AC Faculty, students, and alumni on their fine achievements!

In Memoriam

Bazel Allen 1942—2005

Bazel Allen, one of the most prominent graduate students in the Program in American Culture during the late 1970s and 1980s, died in his home town of Chillicothe, Missouri, on August 25th of last year. Bazel had left Ann Arbor in 1994, due to ensuing complications from multiple sclerosis; the cause of death was a heart attack. Bazel is survived by his daughter, mother, and his sister. His father was killed in World War II, and his former wife, Nancy Sue Palchik, died of cancer in 1991.

Following his graduation from Chillicothe high school in 1960, Bazel received a BA in English from the University of Missouri in Kansas City in 1970. In 1972, Bazel came to the University of Michigan for graduate work, earning his MA in American Culture in 1974 and his admission to Ph D. candidacy in 1976. While pursuing research for a dissertation on Ralph Ellison, Bazel taught as an English Composition Instructor in the English Department and the Coalition for the Use of Learning Skills (CULS), and also took administrative posts in the Medical School, Honors Program, and LSA Academic Counseling. He worked for the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies for 1980-86 as a concentration advisor, staff and research assistant to the Academic Committee, and editor (as well as contributor) for the [CAAS Newsletter](#).

Although Bazel never completed the dissertation, he was one of a brilliant cohort of graduate students who played a decisive role in that era in giving American Culture its broad multicultural and interdisciplinary orientation. His friend Ralph Story, currently director of the Comprehensive Studies Program, reminisced that "I've never met anyone who loved books and loved intellectual discourse as much as Bazel." William Wu, a member of Bazel's cohort who is now a fiction writer, vividly recalled Bazel's "great sense of humor and hearty laugh." Even in his final, bed-ridden years, Bazel contributed guest editorials to the [Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune](#) during Black History Month, and organized monthly discussion groups on current events.

- Alan Wald

Undergrad Filmmakers in Action

Six undergraduate student documentaries produced in connection with AC351: "Race and American Cinema" (Benamou; Fall, 2005) have been selected for screening as part of the Dean of Students' initiative to raise awareness regarding hate crimes and racial and ethnic bias on campus. The films, the result of collaborations among diverse groups of students, cover a broad range of topics – "self-segregation" by ethnic groups on campus, colorism within the African-American community, shifting perceptions of the United States and its citizens post 9-11, "white face" as contrasted with screen images of "black face," and the historically awkward relationship between Jews and Hollywood cinema. DVDs of these films will be available for viewing in the American Culture archive.

Recent Events

New Orleans-based (and recently evacuated) performing artist José Torres Tama visited our campus for one week (October 21-27) during the celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. Mr. Torres Tama participated in a series of workshops with faculty and students, presented a solo performance "Between the Pen and the Sword" preceded by a salon of short faculty-student performances by Prof. Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes and Residential College student, Elizabeth Schwartz. Mr. Torres Tama also made presentations to classes; gave an illustrated lecture on "Performance Art as a Tool for Social Change," which featured Mr. Torres Tama's group collaborations with youth-at-risk; street performances foregrounding suppressed experiences of slaves and free people of color in Louisiana state history; and a public premiere of a new film, *Old Orleans*, documenting the devastation of Hurricane Katrina by Afro-Cuban director William Sabourin O'Reilly.

During the Winter 2006 semester, Latino/a Studies is co-sponsoring a "Queer Latina/o America Speakers Series" and a film series to accompany the course "Queer Culture of the Hispanic Caribbean and Its Diaspora." All events are free and open to the public.

Support the American Culture Strategic Fund

Program in American Culture Strategic Fund (308216)

Enclosed is my gift of:

\$30 \$90 \$180 \$300 \$600 _____ Other

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

- My check is made payable to the **University of Michigan**.
 I have enclosed a Matching Gift Form.
 Charge my gift to MasterCard VISA AMEX Discover

Account Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

(Required)

Mail to: The Program in American Culture, University of Michigan,
3700 Haven Hall, 505 South State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045

You may also make your gift online at www.giving.umich.edu

EID#

308216

AGA

BAA06

LS35

Program in American Culture

University of Michigan
505 South State Street
3700 Haven Hall
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045

American Culture On the Road: Faculty and Students Visit the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and Harriet Beecher Stowe House

This academic year students enrolled in Re-envisioning American Slavery (CAAS 495.02); Blacks, Indians, and the Making of America (AC 301.08 / CAAS 333.01); and the American Culture doctoral program traveled by bus to the “Queen City” of the Midwest, otherwise known as Cincinnati, Ohio, to visit two museums. Cincinnati has a unique place in African American and U.S. slavery history because of its intermediate location on the Ohio River, which marked the boundary between the slave state of Kentucky and the free state of Ohio. Amidst contemporary controversy over police brutality against young black men, Cincinnati’s rich history of free black community-building and abolitionist activism is being recalled and adopted as a hallmark of civic identity. This current political and cultural moment illustrates once again that the past matters for the present.

Thus, in the weeks before Thanksgiving, twenty-nine students, two AC/CAAS professors (Tiya Miles and Lori Brooks), and one determined bus driver (Felicia Turman of Getaway Tours) set out to explore slavery and abolitionism in the “London of the West,” as Cincinnati was described in the 1830s-1850s -- a period of intense immigration, urban development, anti-slavery activism, and anti-black mob violence. In this quest we were generously supported by funds from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, the Arts at Michigan Course Connections program, the American Culture and Afroamerican & African Studies departments, and Services for Students with Disabilities.

Our approach to the city from the north was marked by the view of rolling hills, still green in the golden light of mid-autumn. Once we had reached downtown, our primary stop of the first day -- Cincinnati’s newly founded National Underground Railroad Freedom Center -- took us all by surprise. We were impressed by the architectural grandeur of the building itself (an experience that some students later analyzed in their assigned museum reviews), and by the lovely scene that unfolded as we neared entry doors that fronted



Students Ashley Harris and Rachael Howery in front of exhibit at the Freedom Center

a sky blue bridge spanning the Ohio River. Once inside the museum, students who had been reading studies in class of black slavery, Native American enslavement and slaveholding, museums as culture-making institutions, and the black heritage industry, set about their tasks – not only of gleaning all they could from the museum’s docents, exhibits, and films, but also of critically assessing the museum’s representation of its chosen subject matter.

Later, after checking into our historic 1930s-era hotel, (which one student and faculty member agreed was reminiscent of the set in the movie, *The Shining*), students sighted a famous singer, went out on the town for dinner, and returned to the Hilton-Netherland Plaza for an evening class session. Our two-hour roundtable discussion and evaluation of the day’s events was engrossing for everyone, despite the late hour. Many students commented on the strong emotional impact the Freedom Center had had on them and expressed a conviction to remember the history of slavery as they went about their daily lives and chose career and community service paths. Others brought a critical lens to their assessment of the Freedom Center and made connections between the Center’s desire to draw in and entertain diverse audiences, the financial constraints faced by museums, and the erasure of historical realities and complexities in the resulting exhibits. On day two our primary stop was the Harriet Beecher Stowe House, the former nineteenth-century home of the eminent preacher and seminary president, Lyman Beecher, his famous-author daughter, and his activist family. The house museum, located in an economically-challenged African American neighborhood, is currently in a state of disrepair and under-use. Members of various local community organizations have launched a campaign to save and transform the museum and are the recent recipients of a sizeable city grant. Prior to our trip, students in CAAS 495 had studied Harriet Beecher Stowe’s life, the neighborhood of Walnut Hills where the house is located, and the free black community in Cincinnati. They therefore had probing questions that took our tour guide quite by surprise, but yielded fascinating proposals for the future of the Stowe House – the final assignment for students in this class.

At the end of our trip, as we gathered our belongings from beneath the bus, said goodbye, waited for rides, and lamented the loss of the unseasonably warm southern Ohio weather, we reserved a space in our memories for this special outing. A second Cincinnati trip, as well as a tour of Ann Arbor’s Underground Railroad sites, are in the works for future joint CAAS/AC courses.