



De Ideis

The newsletter of the Core Curriculum at Boston University

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In This Issue:

- Perceptions of America Abroad
- Fond Memories of Living on the Core Floor
- Understanding Professor Tom Glick
- 10 Cheap Things to Do in Boston . . . And They're Core Related, too!
- Professor Fredriksen Weighs in on Studying God
- Core Humor
- And a Few Good Quotes

"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education."
- Mark Twain

View from Over There: World Opinions of U.S.

The following is excerpted from remarks given by Diana Wylie on the occasion of the Core Current Affairs Association panel discussion *America Abroad: Is America an Empire?*

How is America seen abroad? Seeking an answer, I reread journals written during my ten years in Africa and Europe. They yielded vignettes revealing that ordinary people overseas commonly find our shadow both menacing and delightful.

What are we to make of an assemblage of stories as diverse as the following? In Britain people joked, "the United States is the only empire that rose and declined without an intervening

period of greatness." A South African friend wrote after our bombs started falling on Afghanistan, "Now I have the real sense of a great power entering a state of decline." Recently, I heard a Palestinian boy tell a video-maker, "America is magic. No one can tell an American what to do." A former member of a left-wing youth movement in Mali told me, "We were stifled by socialist ideology but now our energies have been liberated, *as yours are in the U. S.*" This summer a Moroccan woman proudly noted Bill Clinton's presence at the wedding of "his friend" King Mohammed VI, a few months after she had joined a massive



Professor Diana Wylie specializes in African affairs and teaches in both the History Department and the Core Curriculum

Continued Wylie pg. 5

Reflections on the Core Floor by Matt Kasper

I never chose to live on the Core floor. When I found I was going to live there my freshman year I was highly suspicious.

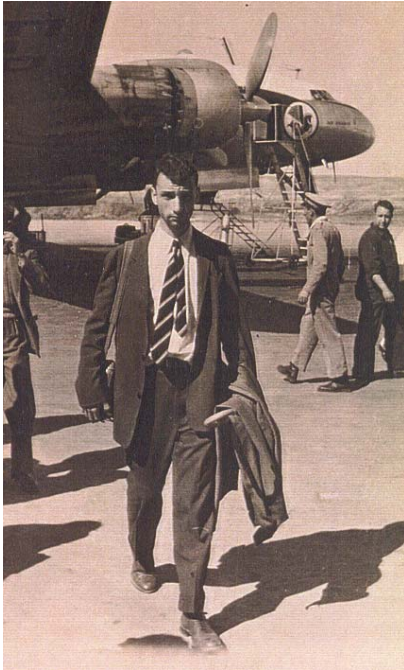
I'm already going to be in class with these nerds, I thought to myself as I unpacked my boxes and hung my clothes in the closet. I shouldn't have to brush my teeth alongside them as well.

I vaguely recall reading a red pamphlet in the mail the spring of my senior year of high school after I had already chosen to go to BU. The pamphlet advertised the great classes the Core Curriculum offered students, fulfilling divisional math and science requirements while also leaving them with plenty of fodder for conversations about

the great literary works they would be studying. The program sounded overly ambitious.

My reservations about living on the Core floor disappeared when I learned my floor mate down the hall wrestled in high school, the girls across the hall made everyone a customized T-shirt to wear for the mid-term,

Continued Reflections pg. 4



An 18 year-old Professor Glick disembarks in Barcelona to pursue adventure, academics, and the finest tapas available.

the Core Current Affairs Association

The second Core Current Affairs Association event will be entitled "**Iraq: America's Dilemma**" and will focus on the current situation in Iraq, possible solutions to that situation, and the role of the international community. The event, sponsored by the CAS Core Curriculum, will be held on **November 4th, 2002**, in SMG 105 at 5 PM. A question-and-answer period will follow the speakers' presentations.

Understanding Professor Tom Glick

by Jason Cammarata

Students of Professor Thomas Glick may remember him for his personable teaching style, astounding knowledge, homemade bread, and—for certain Core alums—his loose teeth. But whether he's baking bread the Medieval way or conducting live Goffmanian research with his students, Professor Glick is always active in his scholarly pursuits. We caught up with Glick, who teaches Medieval history and Core social science, to ask him about life, Core, the universe, and everything else.

How did you become interested in Medieval science and history, and how did you decide to become a professor?

I was an undergraduate history of science major at Harvard. Then in a summer school course in Madrid after my sophomore year, I heard lectures by two great Spanish medieval historians of science which completely fascinated me. After graduation I went to study with one of them in Barcelona. I didn't consciously decide to become a professor. It went along with the passion for the subject.

How have your experiences teaching at other universities differed from your experiences

teaching at BU?

I've taught at BU since 1972. Before that, five years at the University of Texas at Austin, a great state University, and for the past ten years, a course at Harvard Summer school. Students at Texas were smart, but passive—something about the role of deference in southern culture. Here the students are much more voluble, excitable, engaged, and involved.

How did you become involved in the Core?

Three months before the second year of the Core began, there was still no plan for what the social science sequence should be. The plan on the table looked to me like a bad world regional geography course. A meeting was called and I said, "This course is about social theory, or I'm out of here." At the next meeting, no one showed up but Barfield, Lindholm, and myself, and we got down to business.

What are your favorite Core works to teach/read and why?

Goffman, because the book provides a context within which students, by doing a Goffmanian study of Boston University, can get a very good feel for what it is like to

do social science. Durkheim, for the pure insight he has. Hobbes and Locke for the building blocks of American political culture.

What has been the most rewarding experience you've had as a Core professor?

A certain section of CC204 that became very confessional, where we, in a sense lived out, or through, Jamesian, Freudian, and (a series of) Goffmanian scenarios and were all changed by the experience. That kind of course happens once in a career, if at all. I felt greatly privileged by it.

Do you have any advice for current and former Core students?

High achievement in academics involves the ability to take risks but always within the framework of the received structure of knowledge. In the Core, we try to provide the map of that structure while encouraging further exploration.

I should add that, as a historian I'd never had a chance to teach social theory, even though I had read a lot of it. So, teach Core Social Science has been a kind of wonderful fantasy for me. Where else would I have gotten the chance to do that?*

Building a Newsletter and a Community that are "Of Ideas"

In the Core Curriculum we study ideas. The ideas that make us human and the ideas that make up life—the "core" ideas. Our texts present these ideas to us through some of the best rhetoric and storytelling ever produced. But it is our Core

community that breathes life and possibility into these ideas, empowering each of us to consider their truth.

With *De Ideis*, we hope to strengthen that community by providing an additional forum for

the exchange and interaction of those ideas. And to draw upon both the knowledge of the professors and the creative fire of the students. And to toss a little fun into the mix. Hope you enjoy it, hard core.

—Aaron Devine, *De Ideis* Editor

Core Recommends: Ten Inexpensive Activities to Do in Boston

compiled by *Natalie Loconto*

- If you can't get enough of Rabelais' bathroom humor, attend an **Improv Asylum** show! The troupe not only performs hilarious (and sometimes extremely bawdy) sketch comedy routines, but they also encourage audience participation. Call 617-727-7676 for information. Discounts are available with your Terrier Card.
- Is Core not giving you enough to read? Go visit the **Boston Public Library** in Copley Square, the first **free** city library in the U. S. If you don't feel like checking out a book, you can take a **free** art and architecture tour. Call 617-563-5400 for information.
- Inspired by Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* to make your own beautiful music? Visit **Do Re Me** in Allston for a night of karaoke with your friends. You can even record your musical endeavors. Call 617-783-8900 for information.
- Forget reality! Follow the lead of Don Quixote and use your imagination. Relive the wonders of childhood at the **Children's Museum** near the South Station T stop. Tickets are **only \$7!** Call 617-426-8855 for information.
- Are you a second year Core student who desperately misses those fascinating science lectures from freshman year? If so, visit the world of artificial intelligence at MIT's **Robots and Beyond** museum in Cambridge. Admission is **only \$2** with your Terrier Card. Call 617-253-4444.
- Are you an aspiring poet looking for some inspiration? Follow Wordsworth's example and let nature be your muse. Stroll along the **Emerald Necklace** while the weather is still nice. It is a scenic seven-mile stretch of green (yes there is grass!) connecting nine Boston parks. Plus, it's **free!**
- Has reading Petrarch and Dante made you hungry for a taste of Italy? If so, indulge in a delicious dessert at **Mike's Pastry** at 300 Hanover Street in the North End.
- Go to the **Museum of Science!** You can check out an **IMAX** film or watch a laser show set to the sounds of one of your favorite bands, not to mention spend some time under the stars in the planetarium. Call 617-723-2500 for schedules and ticket prices.
- If you have not been to the **Museum of Fine Arts** you should be absolutely ashamed to call yourself a Core student! The world-renowned **MFA** is guaranteed to be both an educational and an enjoyable experience! Plus, it's **free** with your Terrier Card!
- Explore the world through music: **Jordan Hall** has weekday evening performances that spotlight the talents of students at the New England Conservatory of Music. The shows are **cheap-to-free**; call for information and schedules. **New England Conservatory:** 290 Huntington Avenue, Boston, 617-585-1100. ■

Quick Wit © 2002 Zachary Bos



Core Concerts by Candlelight

The Core Curriculum presents an evening of European Song with performances by Core students and friends.. Music by Schubert, Schumann, Faure, Vaughan Williams. Monday, October 28th, 7 PM Marsh Chapel, BU

Be a part of *The Core Journal*

The Journal of the Core Curriculum is now accepting submissions for Volume XII.

In addition, there are still opportunities to be a part of the editorial board. Contact core@bu.edu for more information.

"Verbosity leads to unclear, inarticulate things."

-George W. Bush, Jr.

Auditions! *Core Talent Review*

The first ever CAS talent review will be holding auditions: October 29 in CAS 314 and October 30 in CAS 315 from 7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. The review will take place on **November 14** at the Tsai performance Center.

Core Film Series

Films are screened in Stone B-50, in the basement of the College of Arts and Sciences, unless otherwise noted.

Wed. Oct. 23, at 6:30 PM:

Contempt, with Prof. Stuart Kendall, in SCI 107

Wed. Oct. 30, at 6:30 PM:

Dead Man Walking, with Prof. Stephanie Nelson

Wed. Nov. 13, at 6:30 PM:

2001: A Space Odyssey, with Prof. Jim Jackson

Wed. Dec. 4, at 6:30 PM:

On the Waterfront, with Prof. Richard Oxenberg

Reflections, from 1

and the guys living next to me invented an 'ass to ceiling' contest in which the only prize for who crawled highest was the glory of winning. It was an awesome experience living on the Core floor because you experienced learning and lunacy all in the same day.

In all seriousness, there actually was a lot of discussion about Clytaemnestra's justification of killing Agamemnon, God's test of Job, Aristotle's philosophy of morality, and why Tao called Tao is not Tao. But almost all of these conversations were at 3:00 in the morning, and the arbitrator was a kid who loved to run around in his boxers chastising everyone for being a Liberal Socialist.

The best part of living on the Core floor wasn't only that I got the chance to celebrate everything I liked about the Core Curriculum. It was the chance to bond about all the frustrating and bad parts, as well. "What the hell is a neutrino?!" I could scream and receive a sympathetic nod. "Why do we have to know the name of Moses's long lost cousin?" I could say when we were packed into a room

cramping for exams.

There were superficial things, as well.

"Did you hear that woman talk in lecture today? She sounded like a gerbil."

"I loved it when he started screaming at the top of his lungs and banging on the podium— what a nut!"

When I think about my experiences in the Core Curriculum now, I'm happy I went through with it because it was different. I've taken a lot of

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material; the material just explained their interests best.

My year on the Core floor ended with my hauling boxes down to the car on a Saturday in May while my father yelled at me for getting him a ticket. But my fondest memory of my last days in the Core was sitting with friends from the Core floor at the Core banquet listening to the former head of the Core Brian Jorgensen weave all that we had learned over four semesters into one speech. The writing was poetic, but not self indulgent—

". . . he started screaming at the top of his lungs and banging on the podium."

classes and read a lot of books, but the material isn't what I remember. The classes I remember are the ones in which the teachers weren't just content to examine the work and get student feedback—they considered how it contributed to their lives and weren't afraid to talk about pop-culture. Their interests in life were not in the

beautiful in its brevity. The glow of the moment still lasts.

Hot Damn, I thought to myself walking home that night in the rain, with chicken sauce still staining my tie. *I learned a lot from those nerds.* ■

Wylie, from 1

street demonstration against the U. S. bombing of Afghanistan.

These five vignettes suggest that the British weekly *The Economist* got it wrong when it depicted attitudes to the U. S. in the following vein: "There may come a time when Americans will be more willing to listen to why their country continues to terrify and infuriate so many people." If my stories don't reveal simple "terror" and "fury," what do they tell us?

In global terms our country is the object of intense ambivalence, not of simple hatred. Most non-Americans at this moment love *and* hate the United States. I have found this ambivalence even in the Arab world, a place where the tension between these two sentiments is particularly acute.

The U. S. is implicated in the rising tide of hatred, not simply an innocent victim of it. Whenever our politicians present complicated political problems in terms of good and evil, they are fueling the tensions that fuel enmity... Did we start this escalation of moral rhetoric? Not at all. I recently heard Prince Hassan of Jordan say he blames Iran for calling the United States "The Great Satan" in the late 1970s. We may not have started this ahistorical and apolitical name-calling, but by engaging in it, we are contributing to the spread of hatred. Why do we

call the current campaign a war against terrorism, implying this war has no limits, rather than more simply a war against Al Qaeda, the group that did attack us?

Do Core readings help us understand our current dilemma? Three authors come particularly to mind. Frantz Fanon can lead us to appreciate the power and appeal of anti-imperial sentiment in the formerly colonized parts of the world. The U.S. may not have had a formal empire as the British and French did until the

point that Fanon wouldn't have raised, because his perspective was so resolutely from the side of the oppressed: social engineering has limits. If we look at the way the British and French tried to mold colonized societies in their own image, we see that they instead littered the landscape with unintended consequences - like multiple Nigerian constitutions that didn't prevent, and may have contributed to, civil war. Knowing that history, can we honestly expect to execute "regime change" more

whether certain religions are prone to violence.

Finally, when we read de Tocqueville and the Federalist Papers, we are reminded that there is indeed a great deal to defend in "American values." (Sometimes I worry that the phrase has been hijacked by people who suppose it means cheap gas and grotesquely inflated executive salaries.) We should feel pride in our values of self-help, civil liberty, and the separation of church and state, as articulated so passionately by our founding fathers. We must defend them in the face of cynics and of people who want to champion our group whatever its leaders do.

"What can we do to bring about a middle road between loathing and adoration for our country?"

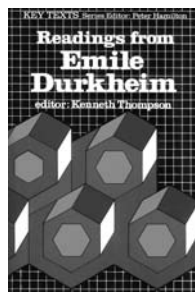
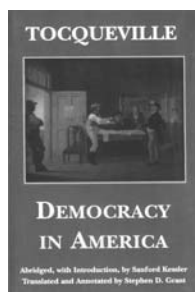
1960s, but it is seen to be their inheritor, and so becomes a lightning rod for international resentment, especially when it behaves unilaterally. Foreigners, even our allies, frequently criticize the U. S. for refusing to sign the Kyoto protocol on global warming and to participate in the International Criminal Court. Fanon won't guide us toward a finer appreciation of such legal issues, but he alerts us to the psychology of the "wretched of the earth" as a wellspring for the hatred that can sometimes focus on the U. S.

Because I'm a historian of empires, I can't help but add a

successfully and create a new political culture in Iraq?

Emile Durkheim, too, furthers understanding of our dilemma by illuminating the ways enemies help groups define themselves. Enemies help forge group solidarity, and we are all subject to this process, no matter what the mobilizing ideology. Using his insights, we can draw closer to understanding the roots of "radical Islam" which lie in anomie and frustration among people who feel oppressed by their governments and estranged from modernity. Durkheim helps turn our eyes away from unproductive speculations

What can we do to bring about a middle road between loathing and adoration for our country? First, I hope we will resist, and argue against, the escalation of theological rhetoric in politics. We can do this by asking what the politics and history of crisis situations *really* are. That means reading good journalism closely and critically, and striving to broaden our understanding of "over there." Secondly, we can resolve not to retreat into a good "us" versus evil "them" dichotomy, because there is an ever-increasing danger that this bellicose language can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. How can we help stop the transmutation of ambivalence toward the U. S. into hate? By being clear about what our values --the rule of law, freedom of speech, right to trial by jury --really are, and by defending them. ■



Good God!

by Paula Fredriksen

This is my first time teaching the first semester of the Core. Thus, it's also my first time reading *Gilgamesh* and the Bible together with a roomful of smart, sensitive, alert, already over-worked freshmen. And, accordingly, it's also my first time reading twenty-two three-page papers comparing these two ancient collections of stories. I've enjoyed the experience tremendously, but nonetheless, I must say: it's hard not to feel sorry for God in the Core.

The Core provides most students' first encounter with Ea, Enlil, Shamash, Ishtar, and the whole immortal Mesopotamian crew. Divine behavior shines in all its baffling variety, moving the epic plot (such as it is) from one episode to the next. These gods are so idiosyncratic, their motives and activities so highly-

charged. Students can see the poet's skill at characterization and appreciate his creation. These literary personalities leave vivid impressions. Who can forget Ea's ignoble sneakiness – whispering to his (arbitrarily?) chosen human about the coming Flood, counseling deceit as he coaches Utnapishtim's escape. What is Enlil's issue: whence his destructive rage? And who can ever forget Ishtar – seductive, sexual, shameless – hungry for Gilgamesh, glorious in her beauty, furious when rejected, yet weeping for drowned humanity? Outsized personalities, beautifully realized. Good storytelling, and my students knew it.

What about the divine personality who stars in Genesis, Exodus, Job? What a character! Whom is he speaking with, when he seems to be talking (to himself?) about making humans, male and female, in his image? How can he not know where

Adam is, and what he's done? What does God look like? Does he have feet? (Adam and Eve hear him walking in the Garden, once the day has cooled down, and know enough to hide.) Why does he wrestle with Jacob, and champion this liar and thief? What's with the mind-games with Pharaoh – making demands, then making Pharaoh deaf to them, and yet holding Pharaoh accountable nonetheless?

"A mild and just God."
"Unlike the gods in *Gilgamesh*, the Hebrew God is loving and kind." "God in Genesis is like a loving father." I began to suspect that perhaps I had read the wrong assignment.

Millennia of piety stand between my students and these Biblical stories. It blocks the book's literary vitality and complexity; it bleaches all the color from these characters. It prevents many of my freshman,

indeed, from being able to *read* the Bible at all: they settle for assuming that they already know what it says, and then can't even describe accurately what they've read. They thereby lose the chance to savor an encounter with what is the single most important literary character of Western letters, namely God 'himself.'

I want my students to be able to read the Bible with the same degree of intelligent appreciation that they take to *Gilgamesh* and to Homer. Thanks to the Core, I have the chance to teach them, and they to learn. I'm glad. The Bible is much too good a book to be missed.

PAULA FREDRIKSEN is the Aurelio Professor of the Appreciation of Scripture at Boston University. She teaches in the Department of Religion, as well as in the Core. ■



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