



COMMUNITY STUDIES CENTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2006

IT AIN'T OVER IN THE BIG EASY

BY LOLIS ERIC ELIE

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

On April 1, Dickinson hosted the 12th Annual Africana Studies Conference, sponsored by the Central Pennsylvania Consortium and the Community Studies Center. Featured speakers included photojournalist David Rae Morris; attorney Lolis Edward Elie; journalist Lolis Eric Elie; Robert Collins, professor of urban planning at Dillard University; Jerry Ward, Jr., English professor at Dillard; and Ronald Bechet, Art professor at Xavier University. The conference concluded with a student round table and a performance by poet Lenelle Moïse.

Lolis Eric Elie, award-winning columnist for the Times-Picayune, reflects on the conference, on Katrina, and on the rebuilding of New Orleans:

I don't remember the last time I saw Robert Collins. Our fathers had been partners in Collins, Douglas and Elie, the New Orleans law firm that defended civil rights workers in Louisiana and Mississippi. I was young when they formed and he wasn't born yet. In the years since, our families have all but lost touch.

You would assume that we'd all be talking these days. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the greatest engineering and design failure in the history of the United States, you'd figure that residents of New Orleans would be looking up old friends and clinging to them for collective comfort.

We did that in a way. Right after the storm, there was a great rush to find out where everyone was and how they fared. You started at the center of your circle—family members and close friends. Then you gradually moved your way out to folks who, though less close, were still important.

Those of us who lost no loved ones then changed course. We focused less on finding our friends than on finding our way, figuring out whether we would rebuild, how we would rebuild and where we would live in the interim.

The invitation from the Central Pennsylvania Consortium was a welcome opportunity to reconnect with old friends. Perhaps chief among those old friends was Kim Lacy Rogers, whose book *Righteous Lives* told our city's story of the civil rights movement. It was also a chance to address that most uncomfortable of American questions: "What role did race play in all of this?"

David Rae Morris set the scene. He has become the unofficial photographer of post-Katrina New Orleans. His pictures chronicle everything from the collective misery to one man's lonely effort to clean out his flooded home on Mardi Gras.

Robert Collins addressed the cold science of it. We New Orleanians have learned more about levees and floodwalls than we ever thought we'd need to know. We'd taken for granted that the system designed to protect us from flooding would protect us from flooding. It didn't. *(Continued on page 2)*

TMI ARCHIVES ON BBC RADIO 4

The BBC's Joanne Meek visited the Community Studies Center in April to gather materials for an upcoming radio documentary dedicated to Three Mile Island.

Meek, a producer for BBC Radio 4, spent the week of April 17-22 scouring through the Three Mile Island archives, collecting audio and paper transcripts for the documentary.

"They really wanted the program," Meek said. "When you say [TMI] in the UK, people know about it. People remember the broadcasts that [British reporter] Martin Bell gave outside the plant."

BBC Radio 4 broadcasts a variety of spoken-word programs, including news, drama, comedy, science and history. The one-hour documentary will be aired in June, on Saturday evening's Archive Hour. Look for it on www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/archivehour. Special thanks to Tom Smith of the Instructional Media Center for his tremendous help. **CSC**



BBC RADIO

4

92-95FM & 198LW

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So we now know that floodwalls are different from levees, and weaker. We know that there are certain conventions of design that, if honored, would have kept the city safe and dry. We know that the United States Army Corps of Engineers failed to follow these conventions.

But Robert is an urban planner, not an engineer. Much of what he said concerned the future. What neighborhoods could come back? Which ones should? Three neighborhoods were hit hardest: New Orleans East, the Lower 9th Ward and Lakeview. The first two are predominantly black. Robert stopped short of saying folks should be allowed to return, but he made clear that you can't collect enough taxes from 200,000 residents to support all the services that 450,000 people used to pay for. Many of those services are apt to be cut off in black neighborhoods.

My father and I focused on older history. Few remember that Homer Plessy and his 1896 challenge to legalized segregation originated in New Orleans. The nation seems shocked that large numbers of black people were too poor or too ill-equipped to evacuate even when their lives depended on it.

So in my talk I tried to demonstrate how, from the time of the Louisiana Purchase until the 1960s, the state of Louisiana did everything it could to

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ensure that the large black middle class that existed during slavery would cease to exist.

My father, Lolis Edward Elie, argued that the continuing effects of slavery were responsible for the misery we saw. Hurricane Katrina hit hardest the descendants of those who had been denied the right to vote, to earn a living wage and to petition their government for the redress of grievances.

All of the colleges and universities in New Orleans were damaged by the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina, but, as Jerry Ward pointed out, the black institutions were the hardest hit. They were located in low-lying areas and paid the price. These days his own institution, Dillard University, is temporarily housed at the Hilton Hotel—dorms, classrooms and all.

Xavier University, where Ron Bechet chairs the Art Department, has reopened on its own campus, but many of its professors are living in temporary trailers on the grounds. Artist by artist, institution by institution, Ron chronicled what happened to our cul-

tural community in the wake of the storm. Many artists lost everything, but the vibrancy of New Orleans’ visual arts community was chronicled in Ron’s slide show.

It’s difficult for those of us from New Orleans to gauge the impact of all this information on people outside the city. We live it and gain a certain amount of strength from reciting the facts of the storm. Talking may solve few problems, but the act can relieve much pain. Still, it was a relief that the conference ended on two high notes. Hearing the stories of the students who volunteered to gut houses rather than take real vacations was heartening. It was a reminder that, at a time when it seems our nation has abandoned us, the people still care.

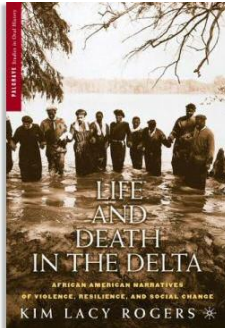
In her piece *Womb-Words Thirsting*, Lenelle Moise implicitly reminded us of the centuries of connections between Haiti and la Nouvelle Orleans. More importantly, she reminded us that ours is not the only struggle and our fellow New Orleanians are not our only allies. **CSC**



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BOOK TALK: *LIFE AND DEATH IN THE DELTA* BY KIM LACY ROGERS

BY KRISTINA
SMITH '06



Oral history is a method of gathering and preserving historical information through interviews concerning past events and ways of life. It is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, pre-dating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s.

“I knew I wanted to be an American oral historian by the time I was ten,” says Professor Kim Lacy Rogers. Growing up with a Southern family that loved to tell stories, she learned to appreciate their tradition of storytelling. To some, the Mississippi Delta is known as “the storied land,” and where there are stories, Professor Rogers is sure to follow.

In her recently released book, *Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change*, Rogers examines the aftermath of the civil rights move-



Kim Lacy Rogers

At the first Delta plantation to use a mechanical cotton-picker—
Coahoma County

ment in several Mississippi communities through oral histories from African-American activists and community leaders. In doing so, she reveals how terrorism, staggering poverty and economic exploitation led to the conditions of collective trauma and social suffering of black Mississippi Deltas. Rogers also traces the traditions of community service and leadership in the lives of community members who became civil activists. Arthur W. Frank, author of *The Wounded Storyteller* and *The Renewal of Generosity*, exclaimed that Rogers’ work “makes a major contribution to understanding social suffering. She uses narrative as a hinge connecting the personal to the social, telling a story that is moving, dark, and unforgettable.” What does it take to gather such stories and turn them into a book? Let’s go behind the scenes to find out.

The process began in the spring of 1994 after Professor Rogers completed *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement*. Rogers was searching for a new project. She was “carried up” (a southern phrase) to Jackson, Mississippi where she met up with Jerry Ward, an oral historian and professor at Tougaloo College, and Owen Brooks, civil rights movement veteran and continuing activist. Together, they brainstormed ideas of what to tackle next, and decided on rural black farmers in the Delta.

With Dickinson’s help, Ward and Rogers applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant between July and October of 1994. It was awarded in 1995. This led Professor Rogers on a great adventure that would put 20,000 miles on her car. With Ward and Owen, she spent six months interviewing in Jackson and

four months interviewing in Cleveland, Mississippi. Each of the 100-plus interviews were transcribed, totaling about 70,000 pages. Rogers decided to focus her book on the black sharecroppers. “I was fond of the farmers” she says. Three years of drafting and re-writing later, her book was finished.

Rogers reveals how terrorism, staggering poverty and economic exploitation led to the conditions of collective trauma and social suffering of black Mississippi Deltas.

After receiving her Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, Rogers joined Dickinson in the fall of 1983. Her teaching interests center on recent U.S. history, urban America, and gender and family history. Her research interests include biography and autobiography, oral history, and life-course analysis.

In 1997, Professor Rogers helped found the Community Studies Center, and became its first Director. She and her colleagues wanted to create “a place that would serve as a kind of coordinating institution ... for faculty to collaborate on teaching” and for student-faculty research.

An oral historian’s job is never ending, for there are always stories to be told. Rogers looks forward to her next tale, an exploration of death and aging. “As a friend always told me: ask for long projects, so that you get to be with them for a while,” she says. “May you all have long projects.” **CSC**

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STUDENT ACTIVIST DELEGATION IN VENEZUELA

BY CAITLIN CONYNGHAM '08

This January, I had the opportunity to travel with a delegation of students to Venezuela for two weeks. The program, sponsored by the Venezuelan Information Office, Lara State Governor and Chicago Consulate, was made up of student activists from around the country. We'd come to Venezuela to learn more about the Bolivarian Process and the changes occurring in the country. In addition to the delegation, I also attended the Fourth World Social Forum held in Caracas. The WSF consisted of four days of speakers, presentations, open meetings and cultural presentations, all designed to show that "another world is possible."

Since returning from Venezuela, I

Maggie Stonecash have been particularly struck by its portrayal in the US media. As president, Hugo Chávez has made great strides through various social programs and changes in the government to give power back to the people.

Our delegation traveled around Lara State, Venezuela to visit the social missions and experience the Bolivarian Process firsthand. The social missions were created by Chávez using wealth from the oil companies, and they range from programs about medicine, housing and food to education, literacy and support for single mothers. Each mission is designed to decrease poverty, which stood at 80% when Chávez took on the presidency in 1998. Since its inception, Mission Robinson, a mission created to increase literacy throughout the country, has helped over 1.4 million Venezuelans become literate.

Mission Ribas, another mission focusing on education, has encouraged Venezuelans to return to school to finish their high school education. Our delegation had the opportunity to visit a school that was teaching night classes for Venezuelans who were finishing their secondary education.

What struck me most was the age



Waterfall of Wine
Lara State, Venezuela

Maggie Stonecash range of the students. The classroom was filled with men and women ranging in age from early 20s to late 70s, yet all of them shared the same goal: to finish high school and receive a degree. One of the members of my delegation asked the oldest member of the class what motivated her to join Mission Ribas if she did not intend to use the high school degree to help her land a job. Her response was that she had never gone to high school; when she was younger, her family needed her to work, and then she had children. She never thought she'd have

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—Lei Escobar, Activist



Caracas, Venezuela — World Social Forum

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Houses built by community volunteers using a government grant

the chance to return to school, but now Chávez and the missions will allow her to finally get her degree. This was something she was doing completely for herself.

Mission Ribas was only one of the missions we visited with the delegation, but each mission we visited brought stories like the one just mentioned. I talked to many Venezuelans who felt their country was changing for the better with the presidency of Chávez, and who truly felt that for the first time in their country's history, they had a leader who took into account the needs of the people. Lei Escobar, a young Venezuelan activist, told me, "The fundamental change I see in my country with the leadership of President Chávez is that now there is a true focus on improving the lives of Venezuelans, *all* Venezuelans, not only the upper class. Now there are social programs, like medical care and education, which reach all parts of the country, not just the cities."

In the coming year, more Dickinson students will have the chance to visit Venezuela with Professor Susan Rose and Professor Sinan Koont. The two will be conducting a half-credit course in the fall, a three-week January-term trip to Sanare, Venezuela, and a final half-credit course in the spring. The

Maggie Stonecash

courses will focus on democracy in Latin America and allow students to talk to Venezuelans both in support of Chávez and in opposition.

For more information, visit: www.venezuelanalysis.com or www.rethinkvenezuela.com. **CSC**

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT COURSE FOCUSES ON LETORT WATERSHED

BY AUDREY FISHER '07

Saturday had finally come and I was eager to get outside and enjoy the spring sunshine. Yet when I looked out the window I saw nothing but rainy skies. So I pulled on my galoshes, popped open my umbrella and set out to investigate the flow of stormwater throughout the town. You might be wondering, "Stormwater? What's the big deal with stormwater?" Well, let me tell you.

This spring, the Community Studies Center offered its first course, entitled Community and Environment. The course focused on the specific environmental topic of stormwater in the LeTort watershed. Few may realize it, but all the water that washes over the streets and parking lots actually poses a major threat to the health of our streams.

As the water flows over impervious surfaces such as rooftops and pavement, it collects pollutants and debris. It then flows through the storm drains and right into the LeTort Spring Run, a world-



View of the Letort Watershed

renowned trout fishery that flows through Carlisle. During a particularly heavy rain, it is not only the quality of the water, but also the quantity that creates a problem. Too much stormwater can cause flooding as well as erosion, which disturbs the habitat of all the plants and animals that live there. To make matters worse, dirt and sediment from new housing developments and commercial developments—such as Target or Home Depot—can also wash into the waterways.

Knowing that stormwater is a pressing environmental issue in communities like Carlisle, James Ellison—Assistant Professor of Anthropology—and Lauren Imgrund—Director of the Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM)—teamed up to design a course that would address this issue while also educating students about ethnographic research methods. Similar to Mosaic semesters and other ser-



Students present research at a poster session

Jenson Gelfond

Jessica Bylander

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vice-learning courses, the Community and Environment course combines student learning with community engagement in projects that have a real-world application. The course proved a great way to get an in-depth understanding of a problem, while at the same time contributing to solutions. The class involved a variety of activities, including a trip to the Mully Grub wetland (built to filter pollutants out of the stormwater), a visit to the water treatment plant, and discussions with volunteers and employees from environmental groups that are working to protect the local watershed.

After seeing a bit of the community, meeting with local residents, and reading extensively on the science of stormwater management and methods of anthropological research, the time came to design and implement our own projects. Through interviews, participant observation, and other ethnographic means, each student explored a unique aspect of community/environment interaction. The various topics we examined included: lawn care practices at homes and institutions; stormwater education in primary and secondary schools; and citizens' values with respect to the Le-Tort Spring Run.

Although our research was conducted independently, the final presentations represented the collective efforts of four students with a similar project focus. Working in groups, each student synthesized his or her findings into a larger understanding of what was happening in the community. Our final papers represent the culmination of a semester's worth of study on environmental topics and research methods. More importantly, though, they are stepping stones for the next set of Community and Environment stu-

dents, who will build upon our work and make further contributions toward the building of community relationships and the resolution of environmental problems. **CSC**

CODE OF THE STREET: ELIJAH ANDERSON ON INNER-CITY STREET JUSTICE

BY DAVID HEATH, MATT HOLT &
RYAN HOLT

CLARKE CENTER HIGH SCHOOL
MENTOR PROGRAM

Imagine this scenario: A young man has a bad reputation in high school. This prevents him from obtaining a decent, well-paying job. With no income, he might turn to other means—such as drug dealing—to bring in money. Eventually, because of the risky nature of the work, he would have to equip himself and his partners with guns and weapons for protection.

This makes up a small part of what is termed the “code of the street.” On March 23, Elijah Anderson, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, visited Dickinson College to share his research on the topic. He blamed the breakdown of civil law in the most distressed inner-city communities on lack of education, lack of monetary relief, and lack of morality in law enforcement. As a result, a survival strategy of local public order has emerged—a “code of the street.” This code extends beyond the bounds of civil law, and helps residents gain a sense of security and belonging. Often termed “street justice,” the code allows individuals to command respect in society and alleviates the problems of inner-city violence by relying on a strategy of deterrence.



Pierce Bounds

Dr. Elijah Anderson

Dr. Anderson's visit included a public lecture and book signing, a radio interview at the Clarke Center and in-class lectures. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Anderson's talk was that he was able to conduct his research without being a native of an inner-city area. Born in the Midwest, Anderson later moved to inner-city Chicago, where he spent endless hours on the street corners talking to the people who lived there.

Anderson's lecture, titled “Code of the Street,” was sponsored by the Clarke Center, Community Studies Center, Dean of Students Office, Office of Diversity Initiatives, History and Sociology Departments, and the Clarke Center High School Mentoring Program.

For more information on the topic, see Dr. Anderson's book, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. **CSC**

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE CLASSROOM

BY MARA WALDHORN '06

On March 3, I sat in a room full of distinguished professors to learn about the progress of service-learning at Dickinson. Service-learning is defined by the National Youth Leadership Council as “a teaching method that enriches learning by engaging students in meaningful service to their schools and communities.” As I found out during the meeting, the technique is being implemented at Dickinson in a number of academic departments such as Sociology, Psychology, Education, Russian and Physics.

The central topic of discussion around the table concerned how politically unengaged college students are in the United States. I have to admit, I shifted in my chair as the professors debated this student *disengagement*. I began to feel more at ease, though, when the group agreed that the implementation of service-learning in schools is a great way to get students more politically and academically engaged. Having participated in the Mexican Mosaic—a transnational service-learning program dedicated to studying migration between Peribán de Ramos, Michoacán, Mexico and Adams County, Pennsylvania—I too believe that going out into the community and providing service through academic means helps engage students during their college careers.

Shalom Staub, the Academic Affairs Fellow at Dickinson, has been active in helping different faculty members develop ideas that will engage students to make an impact in their surrounding communities. Staub, with Professor Barry Checkaway, Founding Director of the Ginsberg Center for Community

Service and Learning at the University of Michigan, moderated the meeting. They emphasized the specific roles professors must play on college campuses in order to motivate the student body to become more socially conscious. Staub believes that students who participate in service-learning courses will be more likely to spark social change in their communities, well beyond their years at Dickinson.

This spring, a number of service-learning designated courses were offered: Community Studies 225: *Community and Environment*; Economics 496B: Urban Policy in Central Pennsylvania; Education 121: Social Foundations of Education; English 214B: Writing in the Schools; English 349Q: Representations of Bodily Difference; and International Business & Management 300: Fundamentals of Nonprofit Management.

Checkaway’s talk was presented by the Community Studies Center, Campus Academic Life and Teaching Center Without Walls. **CSC**

THE WAY WE WERE? ‘MEMORIES’ OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

BY TARA SLEMMER '06

On February 23, Stephanie Coontz presented her current research on the topic of marriage at Dickinson’s Common Hour. Her most recent publication, *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage*, discusses the changes occurring within the institution of marriage in American society. During her presentation, Coontz remarked that the institution of marriage has changed more in the last 30 years than in the last 5,000. So what does all this mean? Coontz traces the history of



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Stephanie Coontz at Common Hour

marriage from Paleolithic times to present. In the past, the concept of marriage was based on the needs and functions of society, on obedience, and not on feelings. Romantic love, according to Coontz, did not develop until the 18th century. Around this time, love became the basis for marriage decisions, changing the idea of marriage and its customs. Now our society struggles with divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births, premarital sex, and the rising debate on homosexual unions.

But marriage based on romantic love has led to a plethora of benefits including a stronger relationship between partners, more rights for women, an increase in stay-at-home fathers, and better healthcare. Coontz concludes that we, as Americans, need to figure out how to minimize the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of this modern institution and decide how to build on its strengths. After all, “It helps no one to wage futile culture wars to return to a tradition that wasn’t half as clear-cut or advantageous as many people believe.” Coontz is a faculty member at Evergreen State College in Olympia, and the director of research and public education for the Council on Contemporary Families. **CSC**



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