

The Key Reporter

Your Link with
Phi Beta Kappa

Summer 2001 Volume 66, Number 4

Phi Beta Kappa Launches Honor Society Alliance

"American high schools and community colleges, as well as four-year institutions, are under pressure to train a workforce rather than to educate a community," said Douglas W. Foard, ΦBK national secretary, on April 25, in announcing a new partnership with the National Honor Society, for high school students, and Phi Theta Kappa, for community college students. The goal of the Alliance for Educational Excellence is to counter the increasing numbers of students who elect to enter career-training programs rather than pursue undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts. "We are concerned that education, because of the technology needs of this nation, is channeling more and more of our brightest students into the narrow field of technology," Foard said.

A key aim of the alliance is to work directly with high school students to encourage them to study broadly and graduate from a two- or four-year college, and to encourage two-year college students to continue their course of study.

For many years Phi Beta Kappa has been providing lecturers for the National Honor Society's annual student conference and has collaborated with Phi Theta Kappa to develop its Honors Study Program topic, a theme selected annually with multidisciplinary applications. The Honors Study topic developed for community colleges will now be the theme of the NHS conference as well. In addition, the alliance will be joined by the National Collegiate Honors Council in sponsoring an interactive satellite seminar series on the Honors Study Program topic.

Phi Beta Kappa is also seeking foundation support to sponsor summer teacher institutes for high school and community college faculty, to be held at leading liberal arts institutions and taught by ΦBK faculty, beginning in the summer of 2002. "The purpose," Foard said, "is to break down institutional barriers to improving courses and programs that emphasize the liberal arts. It's imperative to communicate to faculty and students alike that they must learn how to live a life, rather than simply have the skill to earn a living."



Partners in the Alliance for Educational Excellence are, from the left, David Cordts of the National Honor Society, Douglas W. Foard of Phi Beta Kappa, and Rod Risley of Phi Theta Kappa.

A Secretary's Reflections

By Douglas W. Foard

FOR NEARLY 12 YEARS I HAVE HAD THE HONOR of serving as Phi Beta Kappa's chief administrative officer, traditionally known as the Society's secretary. Some health considerations oblige me to conclude my tenure in that office; otherwise, I would have stayed on indefinitely because of the importance and real pleasure of the work.

In this transitional moment, as the Society seeks a new secretary, I find myself reflecting on what has been accomplished on my watch. These ruminations have only confirmed what I told the ΦBK Senate selection committee in 1989 when they asked me, "Why would you wish to be Phi Beta Kappa's secretary?" I told them, "For the honor of it." In all honesty, I can say now that I was right. It has been a singular honor to be the chief spokesperson for the Society.

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My distinguished predecessor, Kenneth Greene, served longer and fundamentally transformed the organization during his 15 years in office. He stabilized the Society's finances and fostered its growth while maintaining Phi Beta Kappa's reputation for high standards of scholarship. Just before he retired, the 35th triennial Council adopted a resolution that changed the organization's name from the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa to the Phi Beta Kappa Society. I think it is fair to say that my tenure as secretary has been spent primarily in implementing that mandate.

By admitting the associations to full partnership in the organization, Phi Beta Kappa was also embracing the concept that its institutional mission must extend beyond the confines of the academic campus.

Adoption of the resolution demonstrated the clear intention of the 1988 Council that our venerable organization, whose 225th anniversary we shall be celebrating in Williamsburg in December, should undergo yet another fundamental transformation. Phi Beta Kappa began as a secret debating society among students at the College of William and Mary during the formative years of the American republic. It remained a student-run operation until the 1830s, when John Quincy Adams and Daniel Webster took the lead in restructuring the Virginia model and transforming Phi Beta Kappa into the faculty-administered, academic honors organization with which we are all now familiar. What the 35th Council anticipated was that the organization would reconfigure itself once more, this time admitting its community-based Phi Beta Kappa associations into full partnership with the chapters.

The associations had been around a long time. In fact, one had been formed in New York before the United Chap-

ters came into existence in 1883; even though their numbers multiplied, however, the associations remained on the margins of the national organization. They were sanctioned as Phi Beta Kappa affiliates but were not really a part of the Society's structure of governance. The 36th (1991) and 39th (2000) Councils took major constitutional steps toward bringing the associations into full partnership with the chapters.

In my understanding there was more to the name change in 1988 than simply moving beyond the designation "United Chapters." By admitting the associations to full partnership in the organization, Phi Beta Kappa was also embracing the concept that its institutional mission must extend beyond the confines of the academic campus. It has always been understood that the associations' chief task was to represent Phi Beta Kappa in the community. By admitting these affiliates to full partnership, the 37th and subsequent Councils affirmed that the Society had undertaken an obligation to do more

Douglas W. Foard Fund

At a dinner following the ΦBK Senate meeting in June, Phi Beta Kappa's president, Joseph Gordon, announced the establishment of a fund, named in honor of the retiring national secretary, to support the high school and community college programs Foard initiated with the National Honor Society and Phi Theta Kappa, and other programs that foster liberal education in secondary schools. Gordon noted that these outreach programs have not only been important to Foard over the years but have also increased the Society's influence in secondary and higher education across the country.

Donations to the Douglas W. Foard Fund may be sent to the Development Office, Phi Beta Kappa Society, Fourth Floor, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

than simply serve its own members. It is now committed to extending its mission of academic excellence beyond the 500,000 living persons who have earned the right to wear its key.

That commitment, of course, comes with a price tag. One of the first and most costly steps taken by the Senate (the Society's 24-member governing board) to move beyond "the United Chapters" was its decision in the early 1990s to distribute the *Key Reporter* free of charge to all members of Phi Beta Kappa, regardless of whether those members choose to support the Society financially. The annual cost of this measure is about half a million dollars, but the Senate was convinced that Phi Beta Kappa could not hope to extend its mission unless all of its members had an opportunity to know exactly what programs the Society had in place and what its plans were for the future. The fact that this year (2000-01) a record number of members elected to donate to Phi Beta Kappa indicates the wisdom of the Senate's action.

Having decided to reach out beyond the campus, the Society's leaders then devoted considerable time to discussing the nature of Phi Beta Kappa's mission in the community. The 38th Council embraced the notion that Phi Beta Kappa should do more than simply recognize outstanding achievement in the liberal arts. Acting on a report from the Senate, the delegates to the 1997 triennial meeting endorsed the idea that the Society should be doing its utmost to foster or champion the liberal arts. Across the nation, enrollments in liberal arts courses were declining, and in too many instances entire academic departments in this arena were being shut down. While the Society has an annual operating budget of less than \$4 million, the Senate has moved dramatically to initiate programs designed to make the case for liberal education before key audiences.

The most important of these efforts is Phi Beta Kappa's newly established collaboration with the National Honor Society, the nation's oldest and largest academic honor society for secondary-school students. Founded by a member of Phi Beta Kappa more than 75 years

ago, the National Honor Society elects 250,000 students each year and encourages them not only to continue their academic pursuits but to take on leadership roles and service activities as well. After modest beginnings, Phi Beta Kappa's collaboration with the National Honor Society has now evolved into a permanent relationship that has ΦBK scholars presenting a major portion of the National Honor Society's annual meeting. These proceedings are then made available to NHS students throughout the United States by means of Phi Beta Kappa's Web site. Thus, tens of thousands of the nation's most promising secondary-school students are acquainted with Phi Beta Kappa and the 262 liberal arts institutions that shelter its chapters.

A similar program has recently evolved between Phi Beta Kappa and the U.S. Commission for Presidential Scholars. This "Great Society" program has for decades been bringing hundreds of the brightest of the nation's high school seniors to Washington for recognition by the U.S. President and a tour of the city to encourage them to consider public service as a career. For the past two years Phi Beta Kappa has been providing an academic program for these future leaders during their stay in the nation's capital, and there is

every indication that the Society's collaboration with the Presidential Scholars will be a permanent feature of that program.

For many of the nation's students, however, the decision about the ultimate focus of their undergraduate experience will not be made until they have completed the first two years of postsecondary studies. For that reason, Phi Beta Kappa has joined with Phi Theta Kappa, the nation's largest two-year-college honors organization, to foster liberal education. Phi Theta Kappa has for decades sponsored an honors study program for its members, encouraging them annually on each of its thousands of campuses to examine a major issue facing contemporary society. Phi Beta Kappa scholars have for years participated in that discussion. This year, however, the Phi Theta Kappa theme will be linked to the National Honor Society's annual-meeting subject; thus, all three organizations will be engaged in a nationwide exploration of a common topic. Having established this joint endeavor, the three organizations have since declared their intention to expand this collaboration in what is termed the Alliance for Educational Excellence, for the first time linking honors programs at sec-

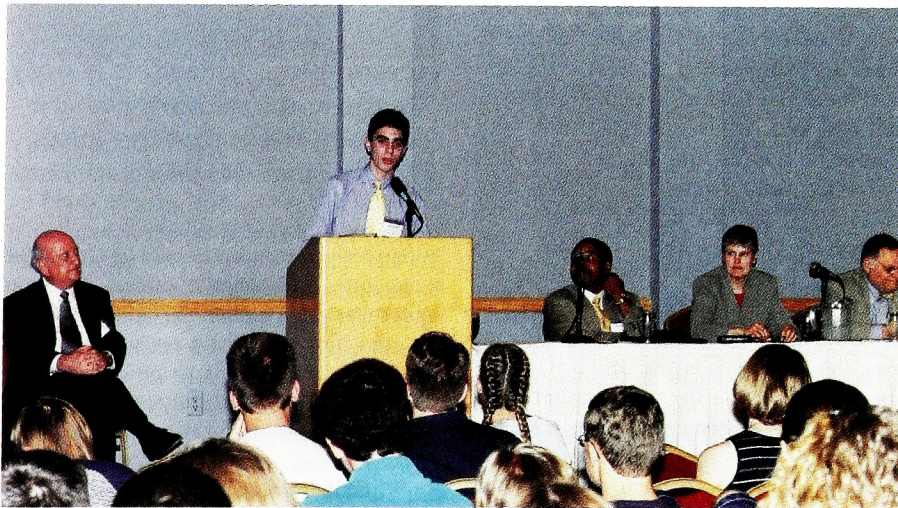
ondary schools, two-year colleges, and baccalaureate institutions.

I conclude my tenure as secretary just as the Society launches a joint program with the Kettering Foundation to make "the social value of liberal learning" a topic of public discussion during the 2002-03 academic year. Phi Beta Kappa will be spending much of the current academic year planning for this event, which we anticipate will involve nearly all of Phi Beta Kappa's affiliate organizations and many of Kettering's "National Issues Forum" discussion groups. We anticipate that the results of that year-long deliberation will inform the opening session of Phi Beta Kappa's 40th triennial Council, scheduled for August 2003.

I believe that the vitality of our democracy hinges on the public's appreciation of the connection between liberal education and the curriculum its children pursue.

In the months ahead, therefore, Phi Beta Kappa will be making the case for the liberal arts to tens of thousands of high school students, the best of the nation's community college students, and the general public. I believe that the vitality of our democracy hinges on the public's appreciation of the connection between liberal education and the curriculum its children pursue. Because Phi Beta Kappa had so much to do with the founding of the American republic, it seems to me entirely appropriate that the Society should now be expending its energies so vigorously to uphold the nation's traditions of self-government. In Williamsburg in December we will have much to celebrate about the Society's 225-year history. More important, there will be much more to consider about how the organization can invest its resources to assure that the democracy can survive another 225 years.

I wish to thank the entire membership for the opportunity they have given me to help shape that discussion and to help make the Society worthy of the inheritance it has received from its truly glorious past. ♦



Douglas Foard presides as Allison Blakely, Catherine Rudder, and Stephen Joel Trachtenberg listen to Dan Freilich at Phi Beta Kappa's symposium for the Presidential Scholars in June. The topic this year was "Are There Common Values in a Diverse Society?" Blakely is a ΦBK senator and professor of European history and African American studies at Boston University; Rudder is executive director, American Political Science Association; Trachtenberg is president of George Washington University; and Freilich is a high school junior who is also an editor and producer for Children's Express worldwide news organization.

Some Philosophical Thoughts about Jokes

Following the publication of the Spring 2001 issue of the Key Reporter, an alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania (1972) wrote:

“As a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Professor in a University School of Medicine and a practicing physician, I was distressed by the cartoon on page 16. This derogatory, abusive and near-slandorous depiction of the physician as buffoon is inexcusable and deserves an apology.”

Ted Cohen, professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago and a recipient of the university's award for excellence in undergraduate teaching, visited eight campuses last year as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar. One of the topics on which he lectured was “Jokes,” which is also the title of his latest book (University of Chicago Press, 1999; paper, 2001). This thought-provoking article is adapted from his lecture.

WHEN A JOKE IS TOLD, its audience is invited—or coerced—into supplying the background required for the joke to succeed. A joke can be very simple, or very complex. It can require a great deal to be understood, or it can require very little. But it will always require *something*, and the audience will have to supply that something if the joke is to get across. The very dynamics of joke telling and hearing require that these things be left unsaid, but that they be presupposed and that the audience supply them.

What are these things? Of course, you will have to understand the language in which the joke is told, and you may have to understand some other languages as well, if, for instance, the joke incorporates phrases in French or German or Yiddish. And if the joke makes references to certain kinds of people—say, astronauts, or Jews, or Republicans, or Poles—then you will have to be familiar with certain facts about these people and, perhaps, various stereotypes of such people. And you may have to know of certain locations and their characteristics.

In sum, there are a great many things you will have to know, or believe, or be familiar with, and possibly some prejudices you must entertain, in order for the joke to succeed with you. Some of these things you will have to supply just in order to understand the joke, and some will be required if you are to find the joke funny.

I will give just one example. It is a joke whose intricacies are rather simple but, in some respects, very complex.

Abe and his friend Sol are out for a walk together in a part of town they haven't been in. Passing a Christian church they notice a curious sign in front saying “\$1,000 to anyone who will convert.”

“I wonder what that's about,” says Abe. “I think I'll go in and have a look. I'll be back in a minute; just wait for me.”

Sol sits on a sidewalk bench and waits patiently for nearly half an hour, and then Abe reappears.

“Well,” asks Sol, “what are they up to? Who are they trying to convert? Why do they care? Did you get the \$1,000?”

Indignantly, Abe replies, “Money. That's all you people care about.”

I doubt that you have much trouble understanding this joke, but it is worth noting just how much you had to bring to the joke. In the first place, you have to recognize “Abe” and “Sol” as Jewish names. In the second place, you have to be familiar with a stereotype of Jews that assigns to them an overweening interest in money. And there is a further layer of complexity you may not yet have noticed. Just what stereotype is this? Does Abe, now that he's converted, hold a stereotype of Jews, that, presumably, he did not have before he converted? Or does Abe now think he is supposed to embrace a certain view because that is the view held by Gentiles, and he is now a Gentile? Understood in one way, the stereotype is one held by Gentiles about Jews, and in the other, rather more complicated understanding, it is a stereotype held by Jews about Gentiles (that is, it is a supposition Jews make to the effect that Gentiles have a stereotype about Jews).

However you understand the dynamics of this joke and however much you may like it (or not), you will agree, I hope, that a considerable background is required of all who get the joke, and that background is presupposed and invoked by whoever tells the joke.

One of the things accomplished when a joke succeeds is the creation of a community of people enough like one another to be laughing at the same thing.

If I am right about that, then it is not hard to argue that part of what happens when a joke succeeds is that its audience is brought to recognize that it shares certain things with the joke teller, and then indeed the teller and all who like the joke may be thought of as what I call “a community of intimacy.” And part of the kick in joke telling—a good part of the deep satisfaction available to people who traffic in jokes—is their implicit awareness that they are joined to one another.

This kind of communitarian response is scarcely the province only of jokes. It has a great deal to do with a number of human enterprises, conspicuous among which are religious occasions and the experience of works of art. Imagine yourself at the Lyric Opera, listening to Bryn Terfel sing Figaro in *The Marriage of Figaro* and thinking that you may be hearing the best performance ever of the best opera ever. It will mean a great deal to your sense of all this that you are aware of the rest of the audience as they join you in this unspoken response. Or think of the congregational responses and

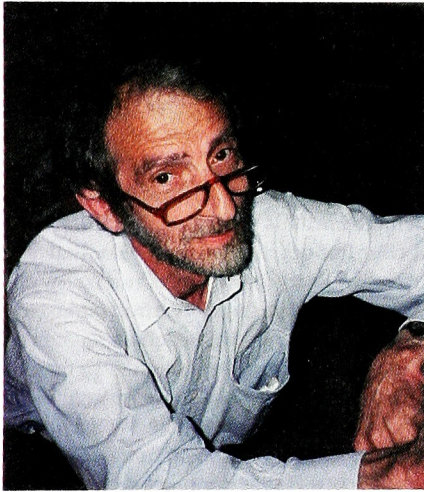
I'm not sure that jokes do anything to encourage stereotyping. Indeed, it is only because the stereotypes are already there that the jokes can succeed.

initiatives you may undertake in church or synagogue, and what it means that you undertake these recitations along with others, and how different it feels to be doing that from how it feels to be doing these things alone—not that solitary experiences are to be despised, but that they are different.

With jokes, this communitarian aspect is at the center of the dangers involved in joking. The two principal dangers are that (1) as a joke teller you may invite your audience to join you and they may not come in, and (2) as a joke hearer you may find yourself entering a community that you wish to remain outside. In the first case, it is instructive to ask just what is the signif-

icance of this kind of failure, the issuing of an invitation that is not accepted. In the second case, we find ourselves asking just what is wrong with jokes that are, as we say, in bad taste. The whole business of joking—the telling, the hearing, the creation of them, the performance of them—is very much like the whole business of art, where all these questions also arise.

To deal with the first danger, just what has happened when you tell a joke and it falls flat? Well, why have you expected the joke to succeed? Because it's funny, you say, but what can that mean except that you yourself find it funny, and even if it is supposed to mean more than that, say, that the joke truly is funny, what evidence do you have for that besides the fact that you and maybe some other people find it funny? The person you've just told it to doesn't laugh. What has happened, or not happened?



Ted Cohen

It must be this: You have presupposed something in that person on the strength of its being in you, and you've found that it isn't there. Is this like showing a red object to someone who is color blind? The red color was seen by you, but it isn't seen by that person. And that is because of a capacity you have that the other person doesn't have.

Of course in the case of seeing colors, we are prepared to say that it is in some sense right or normal to see red when presented with this object, and so this person's capacity is judged deficient. But what would justify ascribing a deficiency to someone just because the fellow didn't laugh at your joke? Perhaps you will say, "He has no sense of humor." But what makes you think so? Evidently he doesn't have *your* sense of humor, but so what?

This question insinuates two specific

questions, the first of which has already arisen. It is, Why do you expect us to laugh at what you laugh at? The other question is, Why do you care that we laugh when you laugh? The more general versions of these two questions are, Why do you expect anyone to feel about things the way you feel? And, Why do you care that others feel as you do?

It is not so hard to say why you expect others to feel as you do. It must be because you think that, at least in the relevant respects, the others are like you. When something funny or entertaining comes on television, you call to others to come and watch because you think that they will

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enjoy it just as you do. Why do you expect that? Because you think that they are like you, or at least enough like you to respond as you do to this bit of television.

It is harder to say why you care that others share your responses. It is extremely important to recognize that if they do not share your responses, you will not be able to indict them for some error. They will not have made a mistake. They would have made a mistake if, for instance, you had presented them with a sound argument and they had not acceded to your conclusion. But it is not like that with these affective responses to the world. People are not wrong because they don't swoon, as you do, at a beautiful sunset. But then, to return to the question, why do you care whether they swoon? Why do you care whether they like the television program you've called them in to watch?

I have a guess: I think you want and need them to respond as you do because you need them to be like you, and you need that because you need some reassurance that your humanity is shared and not just an eccentricity of yours. One of the things accomplished when a joke succeeds is the creation of a community of people enough like one another to be laughing at the same thing. That is a precious achievement, certainly not to be despised, and miraculously available in such a small matter as the telling of a joke.

The second question is what to make of it when a joke invites you into a community you do not wish to join. It seems to me very difficult to say just what is wrong with such

jokes. The standard explanations of what is wrong seem utterly unconvincing. The first is the complaint that such a joke says that Poles are stupid, or that Jews are immoral, or that black men are sex-crazy, or something like that; and the problem with this complaint is that it is false. It is false because the joke doesn't *say* any of those things. It can't, because a joke is a fiction, a very, very short story, and the competent reader (or hearer) of a fiction does not suppose that its sentences are meant to be—or pretend to be—true.

It would be an almost unaccountable conceptual error to object, say, to *Moby Dick* on the ground that there never was a man named Ishmael who went to sea on a whaling ship called the *Pequod*. And surely this would be the same kind of error as it would be to blame a joke for saying that last

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year in Warsaw a Polish doctor performed an appendix transplant.

The other standard explanation complains that jokes purvey and perpetuate stereotypes that are harmful to the people so stereotyped. This is a slightly more plausible explanation, but I find it unconvincing for two reasons: First, I'm not sure that the jokes do anything to encourage stereotyping. Indeed, it is only because the stereotypes are already there that the jokes can succeed. And second, it is not at all clear to me what is wrong with having these stereotypes exploited.

I myself am neither anti-Semitic nor anti-Polish, and yet I am fully capable of appreciating these jokes. You must be familiar with the stereotypes if you are to understand the jokes, but you don't have to believe anything. I am familiar with dozens of stereotypes—of Jews, of Germans, of French intellectuals, of British left-wingers, of American Irish, of Asian Indians, of American Southerners, of Southern Californians, and on and on—without believing any of them if they are taken as general propositions, which is virtually never how a stereotype is taken.

And yet there is something to the idea that the joke is somehow "anti-Polish," as there is something to the idea that Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* is "anti-Jewish." But what is there to these ideas? What is there to the idea—right or wrong—that it is somehow disagreeable to find the Polish joke funny, or to be moved by Shakespeare's play?

I think that this is a way to begin to understand these ideas. There is something to the idea that a suitable audience for *The Merchant of Venice* would be people who think that Jews hate Christians, that Jews want to harm Christians, and that Jews are revenge-minded beyond all reason. And there is something to the idea that a suitable audience for that Polish joke would be people who believe that Poles are intellectually so misguided that one of them might think that the entire point in organ transplant is simply to substitute a healthy organ for a defective one, without regard to what good it might do the patient to receive the new organ.

So here I am, neither anti-Semitic nor possessed of a poor opinion of Poles, somehow feeling that in liking *The Merchant of Venice* or in laughing at that joke, I am joining a community made up of anti-Semites and anti-Poles. I do not belong in

such a community, and I do not want to be there. Thus I find it unsettling to appreciate this play and this joke, because in doing so I am, seemingly perforce, joining these communities. Politics, they say, makes strange bedfellows. So do jokes. And there are people one would rather not be in bed with.

Sometimes you know exactly how the bed is made. I have friends who are strongly committed antiracists, who are fair-minded and generous people, and who have optimistic views of all kinds of people, of all races and ethnicities. And yet some of those friends and I do, from time to time, enjoy racist jokes, anti-Semitic jokes, jokes about women, and many other dangerous kinds of jokes. When we laugh together, there is no doubt that we are not a community of racists: We are just enjoying the wit and cleverness of the joke. But the same joke, with other audiences, may leave us feeling

There is a real delight in joke telling, and the rich reward of uncovering a common humanity; but there is always the chance that things will go wrong.

uneasy, because we are not so sure of just what the others are bringing to the joke, and what it may suggest about us that we are joining them.

This sort of possibility exists with regard to things besides jokes. For example, I am one of those who are sick and tired of all the loving attention lavished on the Notre Dame football team, and I very much enjoy seeing the Fighting Irish lose football games. And I'm glad to watch those losses in the company of others who want Notre Dame to lose. But what if some people in the company are viciously anti-Catholic, and enjoy Notre Dame's defeat because they hate those mackerel-snapping, Pope-loving idolators? What then? Well, it may make me quite uneasy to suppose that I am being taken to be like those other fellows just because, like them, I want Notre Dame to lose.

And that's the way it is—dangerous, without guarantees. You can offer a joke as a way of creating a community, or evincing one, that includes your audience and you, but there may well be the chance that the community has a foundation you don't share. There is real delight in joke telling, and the rich reward of uncovering a common humanity; but there is always the chance that things will go wrong.

There is one final aspect of this topic I'd

like to introduce: Someone who is upset by a joke, say even deeply offended, may well complain, "That's not funny." The question is, Is that true? Surely there are lame attempts at joking that result in things that just aren't funny, but the case I have in mind is not like that. I'm thinking of some particularly vicious joke, say a racist joke, or a very unkind joke about women. Suppose that joke strikes someone so negatively that he or she is moved to say that it isn't funny.

The first point to make is simply this: If the joke isn't funny, then why do some people laugh at it? There seems to me no doubt that those people, at least, find it funny. Are they mistaken? How can people be mistaken about whether they find something funny? Is it, perhaps, wrong to find some things funny? Is it taking something that isn't funny to be funny? This would be like taking something to be, say, red, when the thing really isn't red. Then a person who finds the wrong things funny is like a person whose color vision is defective. I find it very hard to credit this.

There certainly are cases in which I am prepared to say that there is something pathological in someone's sense of humor. Think of someone who finds it funny when others are in pain. Such a person is indeed defective.

But I'm not at all sure it's like that with offensive jokes. Now this is not to say that you must tolerate jokes you find offensive—that you should think it a defect of yours not to be able to stand them. But neither should you be so quick to condemn someone who gets a kick out of such jokes. Why not just say that the joke is indeed funny, or at least it's funny to some people, and indeed you may yourself be able to find the fun in it, but it also disturbs and distresses you, so much that you would rather not hear it and you certainly won't tell it. It is, then, no more or less than a funny thing you don't like.

This seems a little messy, and one might have wished for a sharper distinction, some mark that separates the funny from the not-funny, with the funny consisting of jokes we all like. One might wish for that, but, I think, one can't have it. It just is messy: There are funny things we don't all like, just as there are appreciable works of art we don't all appreciate, and decent people some of us can't stand. Messy, that's what it is. And that's what it should be, because it is part of life, and life is messy—messy, difficult, and dangerous. Find your fun where you can, and hope to be joined in the fun by others. I know of no better place to look than to jokes. A joke is a small kind of thing that stands for a very great deal. ♦

A Non-Phi Bete's Comments on Higher Education in America

By Ted Cohen

Editor's note: *In the course of his year as a Visiting Scholar for Phi Beta Kappa, Ted Cohen was called upon to make some informal remarks at Phi Beta Kappa initiations at Lewis and Clark College and Centre College. His ruminations, here abbreviated, seemed especially appropriate to include for prospective college students and their parents as the academic year opens.*

I WAS NOT ELECTED to Phi Beta Kappa when I was in college. I do not know that I could have won election had I tried, but the reason I do not know is that I did not try. I graduated from the University of Chicago almost 40 years ago, during the early years of what is now called "the Beat generation." I came from a very small, rural village in the Midwest, and I was exceptionally impressionable. Early on I was won over by the romance of the Beats, and by the seductions of far-left-wing politics. Both allegiances seemed to me to require that I shun academic study and devote myself instead to hitchhiking, going to poetry readings, reading a lot of Marx and Lenin, engaging in political demonstrations, and trying to become some kind of Bolshevik-artist-bum.

Indeed, I'm not sure that I would have succeeded in graduating at all if I had not had the entirely unearned good luck to be at a university where all the courses were a year long, with a grade determined by performance on a single six-hour examination given at the end of the year. By the time I had become a reasonably serious student, it was far too late for significant academic honors, and if it were not for the informal procedures governing graduate school admissions, I might well not have gotten a graduate education.

I am not proud of my college experience, but it did help me to learn some things about the experience of American college students—some things that have helped me enormously in my career as a teacher and as a kind of professional intellectual. Two of the things I've learned seem to me as true now as they were in my student days.

When I speak to the parents of students at my university, as I do from time to time, especially the parents of first-year students, I say to them, "You may not realize this yet, but your child has left home, and although your child may still spend vacation times with you, he or she is no longer a member of your household. That is sad, and that is wonderful."

The reason why this is worth saying is that here in America most college students are truly living away from home for the first time. These students do not yet know what

they will do with their lives. In fact they do not yet know just what kind of people they are and will become. They are as occupied with discovering those things as they are with their studies. They are busy testing themselves, measuring themselves, learning what they can be and do. The influence upon them of their teachers and of their fellow students is immense.

At Chicago, it is typical for a student who thinks that he has real talent in mathematics, say, to meet, in class, the students who do have this talent, and to realize that although he is bright and able in mathematics, he will never be a creative mathematician. He must then discover what his own talents are, and his loves, and he must hope to find that he has talent for something he loves.

Keep an open mind, but, as the invaluable saying goes, "Let us not keep our minds so open that our brains fall out."

Have you ever been in love? I hope so. Do you remember the first time? The first time in love brings a double ecstasy. There is, of course, the brilliance of the person you love. But there is also the realization that this is a possibility in your life, that there is an experience you cannot previously have known was a possibility for you.

In college, many students do fall in love: They fall in love with other people, and they fall in love with the studies and activities they find in college; and these are both often first loves. Delight in your loves. And be tolerant of those who have not yet found a love, and especially of those who have found loves different from yours.

The second thing I've learned is that Americans are often skeptical about intellectuals, academics, and other would-be experts. Many American academic philosophers, for instance, lament the general absence of philosophers in our public life. Now there is some truth in the idea that Americans as a people harbor a strain of what might be called anti-intellectualism, and some versions of this have been part of

this country's thought for about as long as this has been a country. As Thomas Jefferson said in a letter to a young friend: "State a moral case to a plowman and a professor. The former will decide it well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules."

Many of my American acquaintances are not particularly impressed by my postgraduate degrees and my position at a famous university. I have learned not to regret this, or to wish for things to be different. Of course I am dismayed when people of stunning ignorance decide certain political and social matters, and I wish they had at least some respect for the value in really learning what one is talking about. But on balance I do not think that disrespect for degrees is such a bad thing, and I think that for two reasons:

There are Western countries—including Germany and France—in which professional intellectuals in general and philosophers in particular have played and still do play roles in public and political life. It is my view that the great disaster of German politics in the 20th century and the disgraceful performance of French politics especially since just before World War I owe something to the influence of certain allegedly profound intellectuals' making pronouncements in those countries.

America often goes wrong, but it seldom falls for grand schemes and pompous-sounding declarations. If America lost something by not paying more attention to John Dewey, then it is equally true that Germany lost something by paying serious attention to Martin Heidegger. I, for one, would rather take the loss than pay the price.

My other reason is less contentious. I think it is a very good thing, if exhausting, that people of intellectual distinction—people like you—should be called on to talk to your fellow-citizens and join them in political and social organizations, showing that you are worth listening to, and profitable to join. They will not bow down before your Phi Beta Kappa key, or to my parchment Ph.D. Good. If we are worthy of our credentials, then our fellows will realize that, and we don't need or want them to take it on faith.

But, finally, do by all means take pride in what you have achieved, and go on to do more. It really does mean something, and all you will have to do is to show that it means something without expecting that it be taken for granted. So, be good-hearted skeptics, and people who use their minds. Pursue what you love, and try to appreciate those who don't love your things but have beloveds of their own. Keep an open mind, but, as the invaluable saying goes, "Let us not keep our minds so open that our brains fall out." ♦

Teaching for America Revisited

By Molly Ness

Editor's note: Last summer, the Key Reporter published a short article by this 1999 ΦBK graduate of Johns Hopkins University about her first, difficult year of teaching English and social studies to sixth-graders in Oakland, Calif., under the Teach for America program. She wrote this follow-up after she completed her two-year commitment.

AT 3:15 ON THE AFTERNOON of June 15 a bell rang, and for a few chaotic moments the hallways of Roosevelt Middle School were flooded with a thousand Asian, African American, and Latino students. They sprinted out of classrooms and stampeded onto the streets of East Oakland to kick off their summer vacation. Marcelina, from my second-period reading class, and Alen, from third-period social studies, popped into my room with "Bye, Ms. Ness. See you next September." But for me there will be no new school year in Oakland. At the age of 24, after only two years as a teacher, I am leaving my classroom.

Like all Teach for America recruits, I came to my school straight out of college, with no previous teaching experience and no teaching credential. I was a stranger also to Oakland and the surrounding urban community. I knew nothing of gang wars, the Krips, or the Murder Dubbs. I knew nothing about children who had lived in Bosnian refugee camps, of Mien children whose parents had fled Laos during the Vietnam War, of Mexican children whose parents had crossed the border illegally to find migrant farm work. I knew nothing of how to teach English as a second language, how to modify techniques for students with learning disabilities, or how to discipline disruptive students.

I arrived with boundless idealism and a belief that our nation's school districts with the fewest resources need energetic youthful volunteers to oversee classrooms. I thought that my college degree would provide adequate training for the task. I was convinced that every child was capable of success in the classroom, and that I could teach my students conflict resolution, civility, self-respect, and the value of education as a way out of poverty.

After two short years, the insurmountable challenges here have taken their toll: teaching 43 students in one classroom, never having enough desks or textbooks to go around, being sworn at by students, observing countless gang fights, having personal property stolen and vandalized on campus, and teaching through rolling power blackouts.

The school administrators placed me in one of the most difficult classrooms with no mentor teacher, no coaching, no effective strategies to implement in the classroom, and



Molly Ness

no observation to provide me with feedback. The school district changed leadership and policies so quickly that my head spun. And although society in theory values its teachers, in reality my salary was so meager that finding affordable housing was nearly impossible.

After two short years the insurmountable challenges here have taken their toll.

I am leaving Roosevelt before I have truly started to achieve success, discouraged by a system that takes young teachers committed to educational reform and in two years makes them so jaded and exhausted that leaving seems the solution. I wanted to be one of the survivors in a system that desperately needs help. I feel guilty about abandoning children who deserve dedicated teachers. How can I simply pack up my desk and move on while my students continue to live in poverty?

However, I am also thankful that in two short years I learned invaluable life lessons. I worked with children who daily handle life's greatest obstacles with courage, grace, and dignity. I saw Jason refuse to be defeated by a profound learning disability as he completed a five-paragraph essay. I admired Juan's ability to focus on classwork only a week after a house fire killed his baby brother. I watched Tae come to school from

Korea with no English skills and leave with the ability to comprehend a chapter book.

As I leave the classroom I am outraged that our nation's public school system provides such inadequate education to minority students that the cycle of poverty seems impossible to break. I couldn't help thinking, "Rich kids in Marin County don't attend schools like this." Yet despite the conditions in their schools, I am optimistic about the resilience of children and confident that my fellow teachers, volunteers, parents, tutors, social workers, and community leaders will persevere in their struggle to bring about social change through education. Although the battle for educational equity has yet to be won, I will remember the lessons of hope, inspiration, and achievement where success seemed unlikely.

There may be a time years hence when I will want to return to the classroom armed with renewed energy and dedication. Until then, I will carry with me the addresses of Juan Pablo, Kim, and Rene; the snapshot of Cindy's smiling face; the Valentine's Day card Chris drew; and the stuffed giraffe John gave me for Christmas. These mementos will remind me of my two years in the classroom and the work yet to be done to improve American public schools. ♦

Molly Ness enrolled in the Columbia School of Journalism last June.

ΦBK Poetry Prize Winner To Be Announced Nov. 16

The first winner of the Phi Beta Kappa Poetry Award of \$10,000, established last year by a grant from the Joseph and May Winston Foundation, will be announced on November 16.

On the evening before the announcement, November 15, the finalists will read their poetry in the Montpelier Room of the Madison Building, Library of Congress, the cosponsor of the event. John Ashbery, the judge for the 2000-01 competition, will attend. The poetry reading, which begins at 7 p.m., is open to the public.

The competition for 2001-02 is open to poets whose books of poetry are published in English in the United States between June 1, 2001, and May 31, 2002. The poets must be American citizens or legal resident aliens in this country. Two copies of the work may be submitted by the poet or by a publisher, an agent, or another representative, with the poet's consent, on or before June 30, 2002, to the Phi Beta Kappa Poetry Award, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036.

'Finding Time to Write'

Peter Davison's article in the spring *Key Reporter* is interesting, and the accompanying poem and note about his father, Edward, evoke memories. But perhaps the reference to his father should be fleshed out a little.

Edward Davison taught at the University of Colorado when I was there, in 1938-42. He was an excellent poet, a superb teacher, and an unusually good administrator. For many years he directed the Writers Conference held each summer.

I recall particularly his Tuesday afternoon lectures in Old Main, on various authors or on various literary themes—sometimes out-of-the-way, spiced with wit, and delivered with a full English accent.

Probably there is no gene for poetry, but as Peter Davison writes, he had "the liberty of breathing easy."

Arthur L. Bronstein, Boulder, Colo.

Is it my imagination (I don't think so) or is there poetry even in Davison's prose? What a choice and juxtaposition of just the right words—even to the point of resurrecting "diamantine" adequately to compliment Porter's short stories!

Bernard S. Krause, Camarillo, Calif.

Stewart's Life Outside Academe

As a 1997 ΦBK music-major graduate of Saint Olaf College, I was delighted to read Jane Bowyer Stewart's article in "Life Outside Academe" (Winter 2000-01). I am now singing for an opera company in Germany and enjoy reading the *Reporter* to stay in touch with happenings in the United States. However, I often feel that my "job" doesn't have much to do with ΦBK. How refreshing to hear the story of another ΦBK musician!

Lea-ann Dunbar, via the Internet

Mailing Books Abroad

In regard to the appeal of Jessica Jackson to send books that would be useful for students in Uzbekistan, and cultural exchange in general [*Key Reporter*, Spring 2001], readers may not be aware that the cheapest way to send books and printed matter abroad is M-bags, provided by the post office. ("M" is for mail.) There are size and weight restrictions for boxes that fit inside the bag, so call your post office for details before you package your books.

Paul F. Schippnick, Lynn Haven, Fla.

A Key Story

I have enjoyed your series on what Phi Beta Kappa has meant to members. I was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa [Wofford College, 1943] just a few months before I was called into the service. Although selected for Officer Candidate School, I failed the physical because I was underweight. After taking basic training, I was sent to Italy as an infantry replacement; I was assigned to an infantry company while it was out of the lines for a few weeks. About 10 days later, I was called up to regimental headquarters. The soldier keeping the Regimental Journal had taken ill. My qualification record showed that I had an A.B. degree with a major in English. The operations officer wanted additional information, because the job required judgment as to what to enter. I said, "Well, I don't know if this will mean anything to you, but I am Phi Beta Kappa." He said, "You are! So am I. You have the job."

A few weeks later, the infantry company I had been in was virtually annihilated in the Rapido River crossing. So you see why I highly value my membership in this august organization.

Harry L. Harvin Jr., Carrboro, N.C.

Query re ΦBK Siblings

My mother, Frances Cordelia Senter, and her brother, James C. Senter, graduated from Newcomb College and Tulane University on the same day in 1940, and both were elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She died seven years ago, but James is still living. Mother had always said that as far as she knew they were the only brother and sister ΦBK members to graduate from the same school on the same day. Can this be confirmed?

Robert R. Barkerding Jr., Covington, La.

Editor's note: Phi Beta Kappa doesn't keep records on siblings, but if there are other siblings among our membership who also graduated from the same institution on the same day, we'd be glad to hear from them.

Correction

The name of the winner of Phi Beta Kappa's Sibley award, announced in the Spring 2001 *Key Reporter*, was misspelled. The correct spelling is Melissa Yin Mueller.

More ΦBK Members of Congress Turn Up

To the list of Phi Beta Kappa members of Congress published in the Winter 2000-01 issue, three more names should be added: Robert E. Andrews, ΦBK, Bucknell University, 1978 (D-New Jersey); J. Stephen Horn, ΦBK, Stanford University, 1953 (R-California); and Douglas Carmichael "Mike" McIntyre II, ΦBK, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1977 (D-North Carolina).

These additions—plus that of Vernon Ehlers, ΦBK, University of California, Berkeley, 1960 (R-Michigan), mentioned in the Spring 2001 issue—bring the totals by party affiliation to 20 Democrats and 9 Republicans in the House of Representatives. The breakdown in the Senate remains 8 Democrats and 4 Republicans.

Editor's note: These additions to our list were submitted by e-mail from Michael S. Davis, a Navy vet, age 32, who just transferred to the University of Massachusetts from a community college and learned about Phi Beta Kappa from reading biographies. "It seemed that many famous public personalities of the past were members," he says, and so, "in my own research, I came across members of ΦBK in Congress and compiled a list." He adds that one of his high school teachers was a Presbyterian minister who "would lecture us in history with his key dangling from his vest. I want excellence in myself, and my studies are just an aspect of that."

From Our E-Mail

A nonmember writes:

My Name is [withheld]. I have a sister that will be graduating high school in may of this year. She will also be leaving for the Military August 20, 2001. I want this party to go out with a bang. My sister Lynnette has always admired the Phi Beta sorority sisters for a long time, what I want to ask is, will it be possible for some members of the Phi Beta Sorrority organization to perform at her party? And if so how can we set up arrangements? I hope to hear a response from you soon.

In *Murder on Gramercy Park*, by Victoria Thompson (Berkeley Publishing Group, 2001), a Phi Beta Kappa key provides the final, surprising clue to the murder. The key holder is introduced like this:

“He was fingering the watch fob again, and Sarah couldn’t help but notice that it appeared to be a Phi Beta Kappa key. Perhaps he was more important than she had assumed at first glance.”

Contributed by former ΦBK senator Judith Sebesta, Vermillion, S.D.



From an essay titled “Clubland,” in *Readings: Essays and Literary Entertainments*, by Michael Dirda (Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 138–39:

“Recently I was an overnight guest at the Yale Club in New York. . . . I proceeded to wander into a large common room where I immediately paused in silent wonder, dumbfounded. For there they all were, the living descendants of Mervyn Keen, Club-

man. At the center of the room loomed a vast table, barely suitable for the wedding feast at Cana; upon its polished brown surface lay folded newspapers from around the world. Nearby, stuffed deep in armchairs or half-reclining on leather sofas, there relaxed more than a dozen substantial men in soft gray suits, their stomachs valiantly supporting watch chains and Phi Beta Kappa keys; several were smoking cigars of a fragrance that even Fidel would envy, while others sipped thoughtfully from tumblers of single-malt scotch or brandy. A few spoke in hushed tones with companions, no doubt discussing the fate of the Dow or the finer points of a newly acquired spaniel, and one looked like George Will. For all I know, it might have been George Will”



From *A Few Corrections: A Novel*, by Brad Leithauser (Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 134:

“He was always on about how smart and well-educated and everything you were.”

This comes from Tiffany, who returns not with food but with a lit pair of scented candles, which she sets on the white plastic table between us.

“I don’t know about that”

“First in your class—weren’t you first in your class at college?”

“Heavens no. Nothing like.”

Absurd as it might sound, potent feelings of shame well up inside me. I see the two women once again glancing at each other, and their faces in the candlelight share a look of knowing cynicism. It seems they both feel taken in: Once again, once again they’ve caught Wes Sultan in a bald-faced lie.

So it isn’t an urge to defend my own academic prowess, Lord knows, but to refurbish my father’s deservedly shaky reputation for accuracy, that inspires me to boast, pathetically, “But I did graduate Phi Beta Kappa. As a math major. And I did graduate first in my high school class.” I add, “That must have been what Wes was thinking.” ◆

New England District Seeks More ΦBK Associations

Noting that there is only one Phi Beta Kappa association—the relatively small Greater Hartford group—in all of New England, compared with 31 chapters in the region, Don J. Wyatt, professor of history at Middlebury College, has announced an effort to encourage the formation of additional ΦBK associations throughout the region. Wyatt was elected to represent the New England District on the ΦBK Senate last October.

The Executive Committee of the New England District has targeted Boston, the Pioneer Valley (Amherst-Holyoke) region, Worcester, Rhode Island (especially Providence), and southern Maine as areas where the formation of new associations would seem most feasible. Organization of an association in Maine is in fact already under way, Wyatt reports.

Phi Beta Kappa members who live in any of these areas or elsewhere in the region and wish to find out what is

involved in establishing a recognized association are encouraged to contact Wyatt or either of the other two officers of the Executive Committee of the New England District—Peter Grant, chairman, or Katherine Soule, secretary. Their addresses are:

- Don J. Wyatt, Department of History, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT 05753, or wyatt@middlebury.edu.
- Peter Grant, 17 Billow Road, Old Saybrook CT 06475, or pgrant@ctbar.org.
- Katherine R. Soule, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, Dartmouth College, 6045 Wentworth Hall, Room 311, Hanover, NH 03755, or kate.r.soule@dartmouth.edu.

Members outside New England who wish to inquire about how to form an association in their area may contact Barbara Ryan at the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036, or bryan@pbk.org.



American Scholar editor Anne Fadiman, right, holds “Ellie,” a reproduction of Alexander Calder’s stabile, “Elephant,” the symbol of the award for general excellence for magazines under 100,000 circulation, presented to the Scholar by the American Society of Magazine Editors last May. With her is Christina Ferrari, former managing editor of *Teen People*, which received the ASME award for magazines over 1 million circulation.

B O O K C O M M I T T E E

Humanities: Svetlana Alpers, Michael Griffith,

Robert P. Sonkowsky, Eugen Weber

Social Sciences: Thomas McNaugber, Josephine Pacheco,

Anna J. Schwartz, Larry J. Zimmerman

Natural Sciences: Germaine Cornélissen, Jay M. Pasachoff

Michael Griffith

Poachers: Stories. *Tom Franklin. Harper Perennial, 2000. \$12.*

This dark, harrowing debut collection, set in a bleak south Alabama full of brutality and violence, heralds the arrival of a gifted young writer. Franklin's characters tend to be down at the heels, down in the mouth, down for the count; they include a crooked gas-station inspector who's willing to trade a false report for a stuffed rhinoceros ("Dinosaurs"); a hapless slag-factory foreman who gets suckered into allowing, and then covering up for, an off-the-record night shift run by a vicious bookie; and the three semi-feral brothers in the amazing title novella, lords of the swamp who take catfish by delivering electric shocks into the murk with an ancient telephone magnet and who kill anything and everything that crosses their path. Franklin neither whitewashes his characters nor swaddles them in the falsities of irony; his gaze is unflinching, and his prose never falters into sentimentality. He simply, powerfully lays these people bare.

Karlmarx.com. *Susan Coll. Simon & Schuster, 2001. \$23.*

Coll's first novel begins with a delightful premise—Ella Kennedy, Ph.D. student in socialist theory and daughter of a retail magnate, finds herself drafted (or perhaps drifted) into a bewildering job setting up a souvenir catalog of Marxiana—T-shirts, coffee mugs—at a fledgling think-tank called the Institute of Thought. She is meanwhile beginning work, after much casting about for a subject, on a dissertation about Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor. Her research takes on more and more urgency as Ella becomes entangled in a love affair that eerily parallels the one that unhinged Eleanor Marx. The novel's action is intercut with excerpts from Ella's writing, including forays into amusing arcana like the story of Karl Marx's carbuncles. Although Coll's tone sometimes careens wildly and disorientingly, this is smart, wry, sharply observed romantic comedy.

Norwood. *Charles Portis. Overlook Press, 2000. \$13.95.*

I might have chosen for review any of the odd, rambunctious, hilarious novels by the sadly underappreciated Portis; his books *Masters of Atlantis*, *The Dog of the South*, and *Gringos* also have been ushered back into print by Overlook in the past two years. Portis's fictions defy summary; they are bizarre picaresques that tend to portray con men, poseurs, and religious seekers, and they're always laugh-out-loud funny. In this book (which I've chosen mainly because, as Portis's first, it seems a logical starting point), Norwood Pratt, newly discharged from the Marines, finds himself dispatched on a shady mission to New York by Grady Fring, the Kredit King. By journey's end, his traveling party includes a newfound fiancée, a retired fortune-telling chicken, and his new friend Edmund B. Ratner, the second-shortest midget in show business. *Norwood* is not a book of grand scope or ambition, but it's a lively and delightful lark.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay. *Michael Chabon. Random House, 2000. \$26.95.*

Chabon's sprawling novel is a richly deserving winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize. Stylish, subtle, and intricately plotted, it tells the story of a remarkable collaboration between cousins: Sammy Clay, a dreamer who's looking for a way out of his claustrophobic home life in Brooklyn, and Joe Kavalier, an amateur escape artist who's just been smuggled out of Nazi-occupied Prague. Together they conceive of a superhero, the Escapist, and begin to make their way in the rough-and-tumble new world of comic books. Chabon's evocations of the period (mainly the late 1930s and the 1940s) are astonishingly vivid, and he provides fascinatingly detailed digressions into New York City architecture, escape artistry, and the history of comics. Along the way we encounter a golem, Houdini in extremis, Salvador Dali drowning in a diving suit at a

cocktail party, and much more. Chabon is a magnificently gifted writer, and *Kavalier & Clay* is an old-fashioned everything-but-the-kitchen-sink wonder.

Girl Talk. *Julianna Baggott. Pocket Books, 2001. \$23.95.*

Baggott's sprightly and winning debut novel tells the story of Lissy Jablonski, who was 15 when her father, a stolid gynecologist, suddenly decamped with a red-headed bank teller. In the aftermath of his leaving, Lissy's mother divulges that the doctor is not her real father, and mother and daughter hit the road on a panicky, meandering voyage of discovery on which they encounter several crucial figures from Mrs. Jablonski's past: her aristocratic friend Juniper Fiske (and Juniper's lovably wayward son, Church); the grandmother Lissy had thought long dead; and Lissy's biological grandfather, a sweet-tempered mobster. Baggott has a light and easy touch with this material, and Lissy's voice in particular—exasperated but tender, tartly witty but capable of poignancy—is a triumph. This is a book whose frothy good cheer and humor conceal surprising depths.

Robert Sonkowsky

The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy. *Yuri Stoyanov. Yale, 2000. \$14.95.*

This book is dense with facts, yet clearly written, deeply scholarly, and, in view of its subject, remarkably free of bias. Although the first two chapters on the earliest Egyptian, Near Eastern, and Greek trends toward religious dualism are absorbing enough for the patient and increasingly hungry reader, excitement picks up even further in chapter 3, which presents the first threads of that formulation of cosmogonic and cosmocratic dualist thinking that led to the Great Heresy. From here, we are led into the secret theologies of the medieval pagans, the Zoroastrians, the Manichaeans, the beginnings of the great Christian heresies, Bogomilism, and, as we go West, Catharism, and to the schism between the dualists and the monists. The religiocidal decisions of the popes and other leaders in these conflicts are treated with richly detailed, delicious detachment. The last chapter divulges legends, parables, and "secret myths" of the dualist religions. The epilogue is a crowning jewel but might be read first, for it explains the author's principled attempt to stay away from confessional and ideological exposition, despite his need to use admittedly problematic labels such as "heresy" and "heretic." For scholars and students the book concludes with abundant notes and bibliography.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Larry J. Zimmerman

Iowa's Archaeological Past. Lynn M. Alex. *Univ. of Iowa*, 2000. \$49.95; paper, \$29.95.

Alex does a fine job of translating archaeological jargon into terms nonspecialists can understand, setting a fine example for writing about the pre-Euroamerican past of the states. Iowa's archaeology is complex, with cultures on the border between the Eastern Woodlands and the Plains, and much movement throughout the area. More than 18,000 known sites document the richness of Native American adaptation to these zones, as densely populated villages appeared within the past thousand years.

Alex also examines a wide range of techniques for the recovery and interpretation of archaeological remains, allowing readers to understand how archaeologists work. The many illustrations, including numerous color photographs, give readers a far better understanding of artifacts and excavations than most archaeology books provide.

The Sokal Hoax: The Sham That Shook the Academy. Editors of *Lingua Franca*. *Univ. of Nebraska*, 2000. \$20.

This collection of delightful essays about physicist Alan Sokal's recent publication of a hoax article in the journal *Social Text* points up the problems of the field of cultural studies, in which scholars often argue by authority, criticize science, and write in nearly unreadable prose. Although these criticisms may be valid, scholars siding with Sokal risk throwing out the baby with the bathwater, missing the core message that scientific studies are themselves cultural constructs.

Ethics for Adversaries: The Mortality of Roles in Public and Professional Life. Arthur Isak Applbaum. *Princeton*, 1999. \$29.95.

Certain professions, including law, politics, business, and sometimes medicine, are structured to use adversarial processes to bring about what is assumed to be a larger good. Acting against something, however, often harms individuals in ways that would in other circumstances seem morally wrong. The approach is protected by the professional role as part of "necessary offices." Applbaum examines the arguments raised to defend what seem to be wrongful actions. Using fascinating examples, beginning with professional detach-

ment (and the worst possible pun discussing the career of a Paris executioner), Applbaum works through issues of fair play, consent, equilibrium of good outcomes, and the question of whether violations of rights are ever right. He concludes that defenses of adversarial processes raised by professionals and public officials are weak and do not justify most actions that would otherwise be morally prohibited. Every citizen should read this fascinating and useful book!

Life and Death on Mount Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering. Sherry B. Ortner. *Princeton*, 1999. \$26.95.

The same week that news media reported with fanfare the oldest person and the first blind person to scale Mount Everest, the North Side ascent by the youngest person, 16-year-old Temba Tsheri Sherpa, was barely mentioned. Sherpas, a northeastern Nepalese ethnic group, have been part of Everest expeditions support teams since the early 20th century. In an absorbing ethnography, Ortner documents their role in international mountaineering, pointing out how other mountaineers have seldom understood the Sherpas at the same time that they utterly depended on them. What makes Ortner's study complete is the look at Sherpas in their cultural contexts of villages, cities, and religious life.

The Primate Anthology: Essays on Primate Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation from Natural History. Edited by Russell Ciochon and Richard Nisbett. *Prentice-Hall*, 1998. \$27.

Covering 20 years of field studies of primates, this volume reprints 33 very readable essays in four categories: Social Behavior, Cognition, and Intelligence; Community Ecology; Diet and Reproduction; Human/Nonhuman Primate Interactions and Conservation. A well-written introduction accompanies each section.

Riddle of the Bones: Politics, Science, Race and the Story of Kennewick Man. Roger Downey. *Copernicus*, 2000. \$25.

A journalist looks at the controversy surrounding the 1996 discovery of an ancient skeleton along the Columbia River. Scientists, American Indians, and politicians remain in a fight over the ultimate disposition of the remains. Downey's solid account should be read along with archaeologist David Thomas's book *Skull Wars* (Basic Books, 2000).

Wrongs of Passage: Fraternities, Sororities, Hazing, and Binge Drinking. Hank Nuwer. *Indiana Univ. Press*, 1999. \$27.95.

Nuwer examines the legal and historical roots of hazing. He gives numerous exam-

ples of the abuse and even criminal behaviors involved with hazing that can be found on many campuses. He also provides detailed suggestions on how universities, police, parents, and the fraternities themselves can curtail abusive and often dangerous practices.

Josephine Pacheco

Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America. Edwin Danson. *John Wiley & Sons*, 2001. \$24.95.

In the 18th century the surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon drew the Mason-Dixon line to clarify English proprietors' claims to American colonies. At that time it had nothing to do with slavery, but in the next century their work came to mark the division between slave states and those that had ended human bondage. For this reason it may be the most famous border in America. Even if you are like this reviewer and remember little of mathematics, you will still enjoy reading about the skill of the surveyors, their pride in their beautiful instruments, and especially their willingness to endure great hardship in order to draw the line. In the 18th century, surveying was dangerous work.

Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation. Joseph H. Ellis. *Alfred A. Knopf*, 2001. \$26.

Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans. Joyce Appleby. *Belknap/Harvard*, 2000. \$26.

Historians enjoy discussing such hard questions as why the American Revolution succeeded, whereas most other revolutions failed. Both Ellis and Appleby provide partial answers as they examine the United States in the years after the ratification of the Constitution of 1787, a time crucial to the survival of a republic.

Ellis examines the revolutionary fathers—Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, Burr, and Madison—and concludes that they were brothers in their commitment to the new government, though he has his doubts about Burr. They did not always agree on how to ensure that a republic would be successful, and at times they were as quarrelsome as real brothers can be. Despite controversies, they did not lose sight of the real goal: a workable representative government that tied together all the states regardless of widely disparate interests.

Underlying Appleby's study of the first generation of Americans is the confidence that the experiment in self-government

would work. The Revolution had freed Americans from aristocratic restraints and tyrannical governments. Citizens of the new nation could get rich, settle the West, start factories, move from church to church, agitate for reform, or generally do whatever they wanted, secure in the conviction that their government would not fail.

But the tragedy of American history is clear in these fine studies: Slavery did not disappear but increased in strength in the South. And nobody, however optimistic about the experiment in self-government, knew what to do about it. Southerners, having been leaders in the struggle for independence and the design of the new constitution, lost interest in innovation as they concentrated on developing a defense of the indefensible, human bondage.

To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells. *Linda O. McMurry. Oxford, 2000. \$18.95.*

The more we learn about the important part that women and African Americans played in American history, the more we understand the richness of our past. With this in mind, allow yourself the pleasure of getting to know Ida B. Wells, a woman who sought all her life "to keep the waters troubled." She fought Jim Crow in the South, struggled against male prejudice as she worked as a journalist, and devoted most of her life to exposing the horrors of the lynching of African Americans. She was especially effective in proving that white Southerners' justification for such crimes—protecting Southern womanhood—had nothing to do with the truth. As a crusader, Wells was hard to work with, but she never relented in her search for justice for blacks in America.

Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720–1870. *Lisa Norling. Univ. of North Carolina, 2000. \$45; paper, \$19.95.*

When men searching for whales were at sea for three, four, or even five years, who kept the home fires burning? The wives, of course. Nineteenth-century books and magazines might advise women to yield decisions to their men, but if the men were off in the Pacific Ocean looking for riches in whale oil, such advice could not apply. The correspondence of whalers and their wives has proved a rich source for Norling's important book in which she tells us just how the women at home struggled to maintain themselves and their families. The extent of the letter writing is a surprise, and although it is generally known that passing ships exchanged mail, you may be as

amazed as this reviewer was to learn that "Santa Maria, an uninhabited island in the Galapagos . . . boasted a container, covered with a giant tortoise shell and nailed to a post at the head of a cove called Post Office Bay, where mail was dropped off and picked up by passing vessels" (p. 150).

Editor's note: The "Post Office" is still there, and tourists still leave stampless postcards to be picked up by other tourists and hand-delivered all over the world.

Germaine Cornélissen

Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience. *Edited by Tim W. Clark, A. Peyton Curlee, Steven C. Minta, and Peter M. Kareiva. Yale, 1999. \$37.50.*

This book addresses the problem of carnivore management and preservation in the modern world in the light of the experience gained at the Yellowstone National Park with bears, cougars, coyotes, the re-introduction of wolves and the ecology of small carnivores (foxes, badgers), the population control of ungulates (elks, deer) by predators, and the ecology of the smaller preys (squirrels, mice). The book also presents an interesting historical perspective on the predator management policy from the politically correct systematic destruction of the pre-Yellowstone age in the 19th century to the conservationist present, and answers questions about the effects the large 1988 fire, the consequences of the garbage-dump closing on the bear population, and the impact of the controversial restoration of the wolves on the elk population.

Dark Remedy: The Impact of Thalidomide and Its Revival as a Vital Medicine. *Trent Stephens and Rock Brynner. Perseus, 2001. \$26.*

In the past couple of years, there have been an increasing number of articles and seminars on thalidomide, the drug that caused so many birth defects outside the United States in the early 1960s. This book vividly recounts how the drug came to be manufactured in Germany shortly after World War II and how it was first linked to the incidence of birth defects. The book also describes developments in pharmacology—where things went wrong and why—and developments in drug regulations, from the different steps leading to the approval for a drug to be placed on the market to the precautions of labeling and the mechanisms used to track down the patients to whom a drug is prescribed. The authors also discuss how developmental biology progressed during the search for a mechanism responsible for the birth defects.

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The AMERICAN SCHOLAR



LXX

OUR AUTUMN ISSUE will mark the seventieth anniversary of the founding of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

Launched on the ebb tide of the Depression by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa in September 1931, the SCHOLAR has received steadfast support from its sponsoring institution. Contributions from the best essayists, poets, and critics of their day have graced its pages. Could a septuagenarian magazine ask for anything more?

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The book describes the courage of the people born with deformities as they participated in discussions with the Food and Drug Administration that led to the 1998 approval of thalidomide for use in leprosy. This is also the story of how new uses for such an infamous drug were found, leading to the unexpected cooperation between the Israeli doctor who made the discovery and the German manufacturers. It is the story of the drug's effect on the immune system and its inhibition of TNF- α , with implications for other uses of the drug to treat conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, tuberculosis, and AIDS. And it is the account of a patient with *pyoderma gangrenosum*, a rare crippling disease cured by thalidomide. The book ends on a note of hope: A safe variant of thalidomide is on the way—a promising new compound, tested in rabbits, that produces no birth defects and is much more effective than thalidomide at inhibiting TNF- α —the result of everything that was learned from thalidomide, but at what price?

Life under the Sun. *Peter A. Ensminger.* Yale, 2001. \$26.95.

This book addresses different aspects of the effect of sunlight on biota. One can learn about the amount of light that is needed to see, about vision in different life forms (including archaeobacteria, slime molds, fungi, plants, insects, and humans), about harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation on human health, about the relationship between sunshine duration and mood, and about the “purple disease” (a metabolic disorder that increases sensitivity to light so much that even brief exposures to sunlight can be dangerous and that is believed to have been responsible for the bouts of madness experienced by King George III of England). One also learns about photosynthesis and phototropism, and about some interesting applications, such as when it is the best time to plow the fields for weed control, and why beer is best kept in dark glass bottles.

One chapter deals with behavioral responses to light by microorganisms, and with the mechanisms through which they use light to move. A chapter dealing with bioluminescence briefly outlines circadian rhythms, but contains some inaccuracies and provides only a very partial view of the field. Also lacking in a book titled *Life under the Sun* is a discussion of effects related to the solar activity cycle, which may act by mechanisms other than light.

Transmitting Culture. *Regis Debray.* Trans. by Eric Rauth. Columbia Univ., 2000. \$29.50.

This is a philosophical book written by one of France's most provocative intellectuals, a former aide to President Mitterrand, who introduces us to “mediology,” the science of communication as the transmission of cultural forms (representing civilization's meanings and messages) by means of technologies. Debray distinguishes between communication and transmission in this way: Communication transports essentially through space, whereas transmission transports essentially through time. Transmission linking the living to the dead changes with time. In addition, communication operates on the scale of days, minutes, and seconds, whereas transmission operates on the scale of centuries and millennia. The book also distinguishes between communication and mediation, the latter term emphasizing meaning and messengers, beyond the mere relay from sender to receiver. Because the text emphasizes the technologies and the institutions that are instrumental in passing the messages from generation to generation, the book is also a new approach to the cultural history of communication. Some of the appeal of this book stems from the richness of the vocabulary and semantics, the subtleties and the logic of the arguments presented, and the humanistic French tradition that permeates it. The translation reads smoothly in English while retaining the essence of the original French text.

Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond. *Ullica Segerstråle.* Oxford, 2000. \$35.

This book analyzes the debate stimulated by the publication of *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* by E. O. Wilson, which introduced sociobiology as a new discipline devoted to “the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior.” What primarily provoked the debate was the last chapter of Wilson's book, which suggested that many human behaviors such as aggressiveness, as well as religious beliefs and moral concerns, have a genetic basis. The author interviewed the chief advocates of sociobiology in the United States (E. O. Wilson, B. Davis, R. Trivers) and Britain (R. Dawkins, W. D. Hamilton, J. Maynard Smith) and their opponents, notably S. J. Gould and R. Lewontin in the United States, and P. Bateson and S. Rose in Britain. The book illustrates the difficulty of scientific objectivity, untainted by preconceived scientific, moral, and political ideas. As the

author points out, “The characters in my story are all defenders of the truth—it is just that they have different conceptions of where the truth lies.”

Jay M. Pasachoff

Revealing the Universe: The Making of the Chandra X-ray Observatory. *Wallace Tucker and Karen Tucker.* Harvard, 2001. \$27.95.

The story of how the Chandra X-ray Observatory was made is a thriller, filled with scientific and political infighting. Chandra, until shortly before launch the Advanced X-ray Facility (Congress was, correctly, thought more likely to buy into a “Facility” than a second space “Telescope”), is one of NASA's four major missions that are sensitive to radiation across the spectrum. The Compton Gamma Ray Observatory, purposely burned up in Earth's atmosphere last year, the Hubble Space Telescope, Chandra, and the Space Infrared Telescope Facility to be launched within months have lived up to the high hopes of astronomers.

Wallace Tucker, an x-ray astronomer, and Karen Tucker, a science writer, know all the principals of the Chandra story and the science as well, and they clearly describe what the stakes were—the survival of the project—and how the problems were dealt with. They explain how, given that we now think that the ordinary matter that you and I are made of constitutes only 10 percent of the universe's mass, intrepid x-ray astronomers set out to build incredibly precise and strangely shaped cylindrical mirrors to search for dark matter in the outer parts of galaxies and clusters of galaxies. The mirrors are so smooth that “if the mountains of Colorado were to be ground down in the same proportion” as the mirrors' bumps, they would be only centimeters high. The mirrors, coated with a uniform layer of iridium a millionth of an inch thick, are at the heart of the story.

Chandra was launched, after about 30 years of gestation, in 1999. The final chapter is a knowledgeable survey of the first results, including useful explanations of the dozen color images that are now finding their way into textbooks. For the science, the political infighting, and the story of dedicated fighters for truth and knowledge, readers will enjoy this book.

Flatterland: Like Flatland, Only More So. *Ian Stewart.* Perseus Books, 2001. \$25.

Many readers with a mathematical bent will recall a Victorian mathematics book, *Flatland*, written by Edwin A. Abbott in



1884 under the pseudonym of A. Square. Mathematician Stewart brilliantly brings us into the present (and future) with *Flatland*, in which we follow Mr. Square's great-great-granddaughter Vikki Line (short for Victoria Line, one of various names taken from the London Underground and street map) as she is taken on a tour of the Mathiverse. Able to jump from dimension to dimension and around in space, Victoria and her companion, the Space Hopper, reveal what is or might be in a wide range of math and physics.

The delight of reading this book comes from understanding the puns and the descriptions and names of phenomena. In mathematics, we learn not only about topology but also about maps, fractals, and even coding theory. We meet a cow named Moobius whose milk comes in Klein bottles. We learn, from characters transformed from *Alice in Wonderland*, about how the Doughmouse (who falls asleep regularly) transforms a two-holed doughnut into a teapot.

In quantum mechanics and relativity, we meet quarks and photons and have a long

conversation with Schrodinger's cat, who is in a "superpawssition" of dead and alive. We meet the Paradox Twins, who have different ages and travel, in the lair of the Hawk King, into a black hole, barely escaping. The book, breezy and informal, puts us "Planiturthians" in our places.

Stewart's book isn't quite up-to-date with the measurements reported this spring from an Antarctic balloon and telescope showing that our universe is flat, and we will have to wait for a sequel to learn about our universe's inflation, its cosmological constant, or the acceleration in its expansion that has recently been measured. But in this survey of 20th-century math and physics, knowledgeable readers will have fun as they worry about whether Vikki will return home safely to her loving parents in Flatland.

The Little Prince. *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Trans. by Richard Howard. Harcourt, 2000. \$18.*

Many of us know this classic in its 1943 English translation by Katherine Woods. We can be grateful that the Pulitzer Prize-

winning poet Howard has taken on the task of updating the language to our times, because, as his translator's note says, "Ms. Woods's pioneer endeavors [fell] back on period makeshifts rather than confronting the often radical outrage of what the author, in his incomparable originality, ventures to say."

As I read this new felicitous translation, page after page gave me insights into the way the world works. The king who rules over no subjects will command the sun to set, after consulting a calendar, "tonight around seven-forty! And you'll see how well I am obeyed." The businessman counts stars because "I am a serious man," and he says that he owns them, which to him is better than being a king who merely reigns over them. The lamplighter who lights and puts out his lamp every minute, to match the rotation speed of his asteroid, reminded me of the NEAR Shoemaker spacecraft, which orbited the asteroid Eros, only about 30 km above its surface.

Eugene Weber

Journal 1935–1944: The Fascist Years. *Mibail Sebastian. Trans. by Patrick Camiller. Ivan R. Dee, 2001. \$36.*

This moving, vital, private diary shows what life was like for a talented, active, introspective, insecure young man in a traditionally anti-Semitic country—Romania—in years when the rabid racism of a few went side by side with the benevolent indifference of many. There are embarrassments when friends sympathize with the feral fascistoid Iron Guard. But friendship knows how to skirt prejudice, and the distracting preoccupations of youth leapfrog over barmy theories of national salvation. Lawyer, journalist, novelist, and successful playwright, Sebastian (who died in 1945, aged 38) travels a lot on a free railway pass; dines, skis, parties, and holidays often; talks interminably in excellent company; wails about work; and finds suffering, solace, and exhilaration in multiple, often simultaneous affairs.

His *Journal* makes depressing but rewarding reading for the perspective it opens on the everyday problems and pleasures of a reflective, susceptible intellectual—and for its demonstration that, in some societies at least, bloody-minded politics did not exhaust the menu.

The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America. *John E. Crowley. Johns Hopkins, 2001. \$42.*

Access to warmth, light, ease, cleanliness, and privacy are recent aspirations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16



Phi Beta Kappa Letter Opener

A handsome new brass letter opener is now available for the Society's members. Each letter opener is seven inches long and is engraved with the member's name, chapter, and year of election.

Gift-boxed keys and key pins are also available. Pictured here is the popular medium-size key (1¾ inches high), but other sizes—as well as rings, pens, and other membership items—are available too.

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How did the idea of *comfort* shift from an earlier sense of consolation and encouragement to more material levels? How natural is the desire for physical comfort, and how is comfort conceived in different times and places? Crowley provides a masterly search and survey that no historian of material culture should miss, and every curious reader should consider.

Troublemaker: The Life and History of A. J. P. Taylor. *Kathleen Burk. Yale, 2001. \$35.*

AJPT was arguably the most famous diplomatic historian of the 20th century. He was also a successful freelance journalist and broadcaster, a television star, and a self-defined Plain Man's Historian enthusiastically bringing history to the masses.

Curious, hardworking, thoughtful, fiercely intelligent, productive, pithy, provocative, articulate, accessible, arresting, he was also aggressive, conceited, self-righteous, self-absorbed, insensitive, prickly, often superficial or wrong-headed, yet wildly readable and highly stimulating.

His version of the origins of World War II (less interested in Hitler's wickedness, which he stipulated, than in Hitler's perception and exploitation of possibilities his opponents created) got him into professional hot water. So did his view of history, from which, he thought, we learn nothing. "We study it, as we listen to music or read poetry, for pleasure not instruction." Altogether, as the editor of a London Sunday paper observed, "rather a terrible little man [he was 5 foot 6], although brilliant."

Burk, Taylor's last graduate student, now herself a professor of history, has pulled off a tour de force. The maddening, fascinating iconoclast whom she describes in many contexts would have been great to dine with, provided one kept one's peace and let him talk.

An Editor's Farewell

After 18 years as editor of the Key Reporter, I have decided to retire from Phi Beta Kappa and wish to say good-bye to our readers. I have wanted my product—the newsletter—to speak for itself (which must help explain why so many of the letters addressed to the editor start out "Sirs"). At the same time, I would like to describe my view of the newsletter's mission.

Last fall, when we decided to redesign the Key Reporter, the designer began by saying that every newsletter should have a motto. My pick, "Your Link with Phi Beta Kappa," appears at the top of page 1. My chief goal as editor has been to make our readers feel interested in Phi Beta Kappa—to produce an inviting publication that will make readers feel glad they belong to the organization that sponsors it.



When I took over the newsletter it consisted of eight tightly packed pages, half of which were printed in 8-point type, and it was mailed only to members who had once donated to the Society (about 170,000 at the time). The cost to compose, print, and mail the newsletter was just over 25 cents a copy. Now, with 16 pages and distribution to all 470,000 members for whom we have good addresses, the newsletter contains features that are designed to appeal to our general readers as well as to those particularly interested in the Society's various programs. And because of our printer's

economies of scale, the cost is just under 25 cents per copy.

Through the newsletter I've tried to put a personal face on what can seem to be a rather remote organization. Life Outside Academe, begun with a contribution from James Michener in 1994, has proved to be our most popular innovation, but from the volume of mail we receive, we know that readers also enjoy the Phi Beta Kappa in History, Literature, and Popular Culture snippets; the Letters to the Editor, particularly the never-ending "Key Stories"; and Recommended Reading, which has a large and devoted following. An important part of my job has been responding to mail from our sharp-eyed, thoughtful readers.

Throughout my tenure I have had no staff (other than our unpaid book reviewers), but I have enjoyed the support and friendship of many wonderful people at Phi Beta Kappa. Both of the national secretaries under whom I have served, Kenneth M. Greene and Douglas W. Foard, gave me an entirely free hand to produce the newsletter. And for the past eight years, Cadmus Professional Communications/CadmusMack in Richmond has expertly composed, printed, and mailed the Key Reporter.

I look forward to seeing the newsletter continue to evolve and flourish as an editor with a fresh perspective succeeds me.

Priscilla S. Taylor (ΦBK, Agnes Scott College, 1953)

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