



# PHI BETA KAPPA

THE KEY REPORTER

Winter 2006

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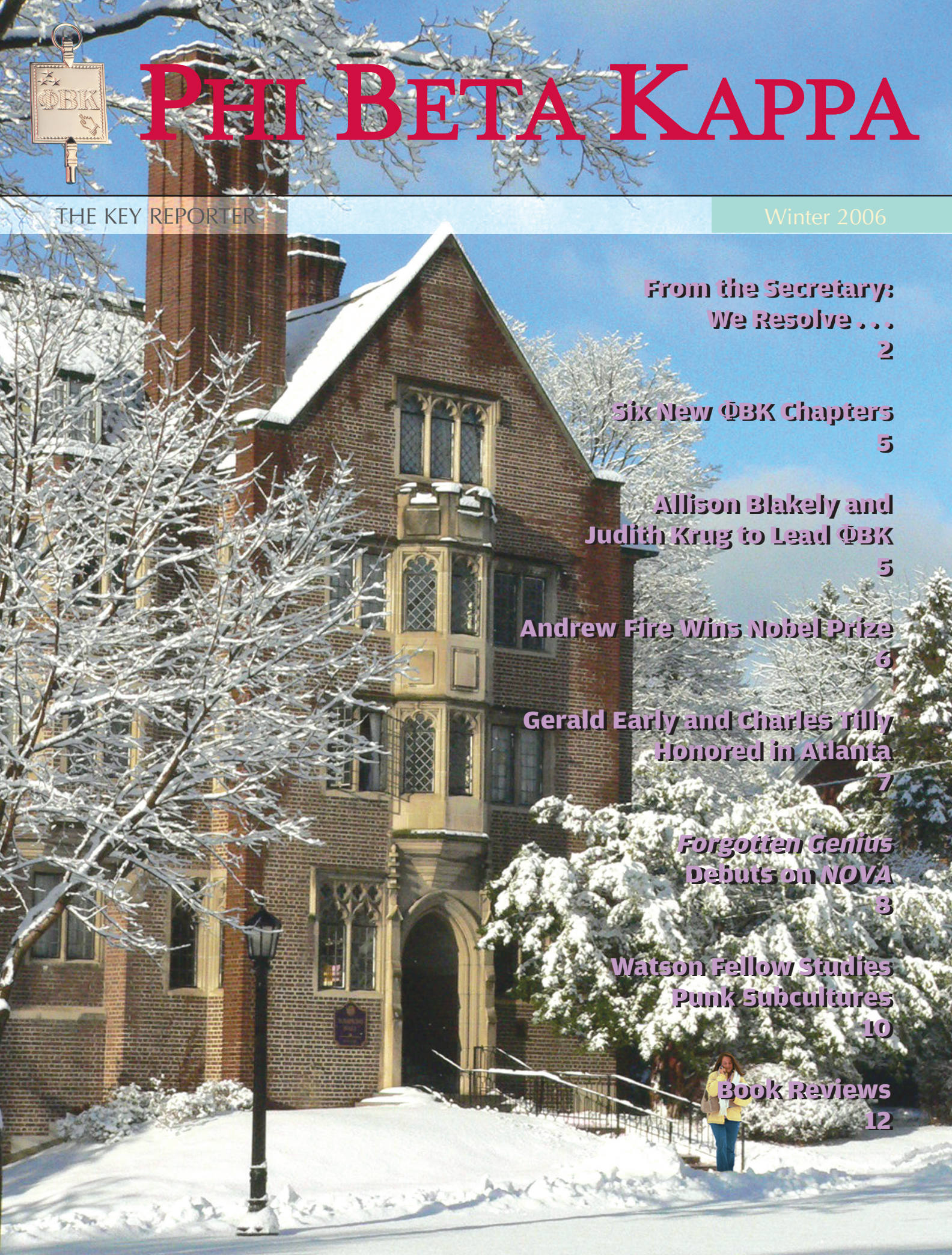
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## We Resolve . . .

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This issue of *The Key Reporter* contains a wealth of news from our recent 41st Council of Phi Beta Kappa in Atlanta. The Council was a great success, not least in electing to leadership positions distinguished people who will guide the Society's future. It was also a celebration of 50 years of our Visiting Scholars Program. How better to celebrate than by hearing from, and conversing with, some Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars themselves? In the midst of all this, we authorized six new chapters, and the Council took a major step toward fulfilling the first goal stated in the Society's strategic plan: to be a more effective advocate of the liberal arts and sciences on the national scene. That step was the adoption of a resolution, in plenary session, that places Phi Beta Kappa in the conversation about the future of American higher education.

In September of this year, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings accepted a report on that topic from a specially appointed commission, and she very quickly laid out an action plan to pursue its recommendations. The report and information about the commission are available on the Web at [ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html](http://ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html). In her action plan, located on the Web at [ed.gov/news/speeches/2006/09/09262006.html](http://ed.gov/news/speeches/2006/09/09262006.html), the secretary targets access, financial aid and affordability, and institutional accountability for student learning outcomes. These are important issues. They deserve our attention. But missing from the report and from the action plan is any mention of certain aspects of American higher education that have made it, in the commonly heard phrase, "the envy of the world." By an overwhelming voice vote, the Council endorsed the following statement as a basis for expressing Phi Beta Kappa's perspective:

*The U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education has issued, in September 2006, a report seriously flawed by omission of the role of the liberal arts and sciences in sustaining the excellence of American higher education.*

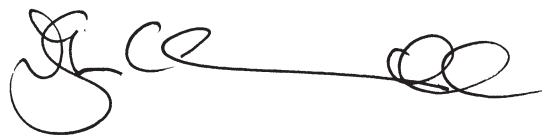
*Since 1776, the Phi Beta Kappa Society has upheld the conviction that broad undergraduate study in the liberal arts and sciences, by all students, conducted with rigor, is essential to the accomplishment of higher education's most important purposes. Phi Beta Kappa has honored outstanding achievement in the liberal arts and sciences and has elected as members many who have gone on to become the nation's most eminent leaders in government, the private sector, and academe.*

*The transformative and empowering consequences of higher education depend upon strong student engagement with the liberal arts and sciences. The Phi Beta Kappa Society, therefore, urges the nation's higher education leadership, in pursuing appropriate goals of increased access, affordability and accountability, to advance these studies as a wellspring of excellence in American higher education.*

Aid, access, and accountability need our best thought. But we must speak up when national policy initiatives are framed by the idea that higher education is no more than a service delivered to a consumer. That metaphor will obscure the most distinctive aspect of education that is truly "higher." Education in the liberal arts and sciences cannot be adequately captured in the language of consumerism: it specifically aims at the student's transformation and not at the gratification of pre-existing desires. Its real value may well be made invisible by the model of mass distribution of standardized goods and services.

So we need to talk about why it is a good thing to have thousands of faculties across the country striving for their own vision, why it is a good thing for society to cultivate persons of deliberation and reflection, rather than persons of didactic or apodictic habits. We need to talk about the importance of public understanding of the nature of science and the nature of civilizations and cultures across the globe. We need to talk about the value of a democratic society in which citizens have the help of learning to inform their choices.

In *The Washington Post* on September 4, Duke University President Richard Brodhead responded to a prepublication draft of the Spellings report. He wrote, in part, that "we need to promote everything in our system that breeds initiative, independence, resourcefulness, and collaboration. One of these is the liberal arts model of education." This is the conviction expressed in the Council's resolution, and we join President Brodhead, an initiate of Alpha of Connecticut, in the effort to place these values at the center of the nation's conversation about higher education.



John Churchill  
Secretary



*"The mission of NPR aligns with that of Phi Beta Kappa, to which I was elected in 1984: we embrace and encourage thought, inquiry, expression, and civil dialogue. Every day, we reach nearly 30 million people with a variety of programs that are unique yet have a common thread of powerful, direct, and personal storytelling. Since joining NPR, I have been fortunate to be part of the team that has grown the organization into a primary news provider and dominant force in American life, and I am committed to extending the goals and values of NPR, and Phi Beta Kappa, to future generations of citizens."*

— KEN STERN

**K**en Stern, who has played a key role in National Public Radio's (NPR) growth in audience, journalism and new media platforms over the past seven years, became chief executive officer of the organization in October 2006.

From 1996 to 1999, Stern worked with the U.S. International Broadcasting Bureau in Washington, D.C. He joined the organization as senior advisor and consultant to the director and was subsequently named director of affiliate relations in research and media training. In these positions, Stern supervised the bureau's offices of engineering, affiliate relations, research and media training, policy, business development, and external affairs.

Prior to his tenure at the International Broadcasting Bureau, Stern was chief counsel for the 53rd Presidential Inaugural Committee, deputy general counsel for the Clinton-Gore 1996 campaign, and management and legal consultant for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Munich and Prague.

Stern holds a doctor of laws degree from Yale Law School and a bachelor's degree in political science from Haverford College, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Stern is also the recipient of the Harold Kurzman Prize in Political Science.

NPR is an internationally acclaimed producer and distributor of noncommercial news, talk and entertainment programming. A privately supported, not-for-

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## THE KEY REPORTER

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The spring and fall issues are mailed to every ΦBK member for whom the Membership Records office has an address. Newly initiated members receive all four issues for one year.

## On the Cover

Tompkins Hall, Elmira College  
Pi of New York, 1940

**I beg to differ!**

I enjoyed the article on Rev. Humphreys in the fall issue of *The Key Reporter* about his induction by the Bucknell chapter into Phi Beta Kappa on or near his 100th birthday. The article mentioned that he was the oldest ΦBK inductee on record.

I beg to differ! In June of 1983, I had the pleasure of conferring alumna membership on behalf of the McDaniel College chapter on Dr. Bessie Lee Gambrill, a *summa cum laude* graduate of the class of 1902, six months after her 100th birthday on January 30, making her the oldest inductee by at least six months.

Dr. Gambrill, who earned her doctorate at Columbia University, was the first woman on the graduate faculty of Yale University and the first woman to advise both male and female students in psychology and child development there. After the induction ceremony at the Whitney Center in Hampden, Conn., where she resided, a reception was held. Attending were two of her former students, both former U.S. secretaries of education. She retired from Yale in 1953.

That alumna membership meant a great deal to her, and she often spoke of it. Indeed, we learned after the

ceremony that she had postponed a bladder operation until after her induction, forthrightly telling her doctor that she did not want to take a chance on missing ΦBK membership!

She survived the operation and lived on until May 31, 1988, dying at the age of 105.

I think Dr. Gambrill was ΦBK's oldest inductee and a distinguished one at that.

*James E. Lightner  
McDaniel College Historian and  
newly elected ΦBK Senator*

**Where is your key?**

When I was about six years old, my mother saw something sparkling in the street in Richmond, Va. and brought it into our house. She said that she had just found a very important piece of jewelry, a lady's gold charm bracelet, and we should try to get it back to its rightful owner.

My mother, Rosa Utz Terrell, died a couple of months ago, and as I was going through the house to settle the estate, I came across the bracelet once again. I remembered the story from childhood of how my mother found it and how she had wanted to return it to its owner.

When I was a child, I knew the bracelet was beautiful, but I didn't know why it was so important. Of course, what stands out to me now is the Phi Beta Kappa key. On the reverse side, the key is engraved as follows:

Nancy Lee Boxley  
Radcliffe 1953

I feel sure this bracelet must have been very precious to Ms. Boxley. I know that both my mother and I would like to see this back on the arm of the rightful owner or a member of her family.

*Anita T. Perry  
College of William & Mary*



Our members and their families regard their ΦBK keys as valuable family heirlooms. Please contact the editor of *The Key Reporter* at [keyreporter@pbk.org](mailto:keyreporter@pbk.org) if you can help locate the owner of the item (above) described by Perry.

**ΦBK in the News**

♦ **Samuel Y. Gibbon, Jr.** (Princeton University, 1953) received the 2006 Fred Rogers Award from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Gibbon worked as a writer and associate producer for "Captain Kangaroo" before joining the Children's Television Workshop as one of the original producers of "Sesame Street." He later served as executive producer of "The Electric Company" and "3-2-1 Contact." Gibbon has previously won Emmy awards for "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company." ("CPB Presents 2006 Fred Rogers Award to Children's Television Pioneer Samuel Y. Gibbon, Jr." CPB 20 Oct. 2006.)

♦ **Steven R. Loranger** (University of Colorado, 1974), chairman, president and CEO of ITT Corp., was elected to the board of directors of FedEx Corp. in September 2006. ("FedEx Corp. Elects Steve Loranger, ITT Chairman, as New Director" Business Wire 25 Sept. 2006.)

♦ **Aaron T. Beck** (Brown University, 1942), professor emeritus of psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, was the recipient of the 2006 Albert Lasker Award for Clinical Medical Research for developing cognitive therapy, a form of psychotherapy which transformed the understanding and treatment of many psychiatric conditions, including depression and eating disorders. ("Penn. Professor Receives Lasker Award for Developing Cognitive Therapy" U.S. States News 18 Sept. 2006.)

♦ **Norman Augustine** (Princeton University, 1957), retired chairman and CEO of Lockheed Martin Corp., spoke in September at the National Science Foundation (NSF) on the impact of emerging trends in innovation and U.S. science technology sectors and the shifting funding for U.S. research and development. The lecture was part of the 2006 NSF Directorate for Engineering Distinguished Lecture Series. ("Meeting America's Competitive Challenge" Ascribe Newswire 7 Sept. 2006.)

♦ **Michelle P. Connolly** (Yale University, 1990) has been named chief economist of the Federal Communications Commission. A member of the economics faculty at Duke University, her research interests include the impact of technological progress and diffusion, international trade and human capital on growth and development. ("Michelle P. Connolly Named FCC Chief Economist" Federal Communications Commission News 21 Aug. 2006.)

♦ **Janet Dhillon** (Occidental College, 1984) was named senior vice president and general counsel of U.S. Airways. The recent merger with America West makes U.S. Airways the fifth largest domestic airline. (Karantzavelou, Vicky. "U.S. Airways Announces Management Appointment" *Travel News Daily.com* 18 Aug. 2006.)

♦ **Ronald S. Cooper** (University of Georgia, 1966) has been sworn in as general counsel of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for a term of four years. Cooper was nominated by President Bush on

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## Phi Beta Kappa Awards Six New Chapters

The Phi Beta Kappa Society has voted to establish new chapters at six American colleges and universities. The decision was made at the end of October at the Society's 41st Triennial Council in Atlanta.

The new chapters are at the following institutions: Clemson University, Clemson, S.C.; The College of New Jersey, Ewing, N.J.; The University of the Pacific, Stockton, Calif.; Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas; Washington College, Chestertown, Md.; Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

John Churchill, secretary and chief executive officer of the Society, said, "Phi Beta Kappa exists to honor students and to advocate for the liberal

arts and sciences both on campus and in the broader world. I am delighted to welcome these institutions to Phi Beta Kappa. The chartering of chapters on these campuses is a recognition of their excellence in the liberal arts and sciences."

"With the establishment of these chapters, we acknowledge the accomplishments of the six institutions in the field of liberal education, and we look forward to a lively partnership in advancing that cause," Churchill stated. "The Phi Beta Kappa members among the faculty and staff on each campus will organize their chapter in the weeks ahead, and we will present the charters and install the chapters in ceremonies during the 2006-2007 academic year." ■

## Phi Beta Kappa President Allison Blakely, Vice President Judith Krug Take Office

The Phi Beta Kappa Society elected new officers and senators at its 41st Triennial Council. Allison Blakely is the new president, and Judith Fingeret Krug is vice president. Both will serve three-year terms.

Blakely, a professor of European and comparative history at Boston University, past associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts and professor emeritus at Howard University, has served on Phi Beta Kappa's Visiting Scholars Committee and as a senator at large since 1994. Blakely comments, "There has never been a time in Phi Beta Kappa's history when its guiding principles celebrating the love of learning and excellence in the liberal arts and sciences have been more vital for American society than now."

Krug, who serves as the director of the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom and director of the Freedom to Read Foundation, regards her position with Phi Beta Kappa as a continuation of her work "to make information available and accessible for all," Krug said. "Excellence in education, one of Phi Beta Kappa's goals, demands access to the full spectrum of information and ideas."

John Churchill, secretary and chief executive officer of the Society, praised the election of Blakely and Krug. "These are two of our outstanding members," Churchill said, "and both

have distinguished records of service to Phi Beta Kappa. I look forward to working with them as they bring their wisdom and experience to the leadership of the Society."

### New Senators

The Society is also very pleased to announce the election of five new senators, each to serve a six-year term.

The new senators are Danielle S. Allen, professor of classics, political science, Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago; Susan K. Hagen, professor of English, Birmingham-Southern College; James E. Lightner, professor emeritus of mathematics and McDaniel College historian; Paul Lukacs, chair of the Department of English, Loyola College, Maryland; and Katherine R. Soule, director of Budget and Fiscal Affairs, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Dartmouth College.

"Members of our senate serve as the directors who guide the national office on policy matters and set the direction for the Society's future. This group of senators brings deep understanding of education in the liberal arts and sciences, and a variety of perspectives for assessing the best ways to advance the values of liberal education in American society. I look forward to working with them," Churchill said. ■

## New *ΦBK* Chapters

CHI OF CALIFORNIA  
UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
**PACIFIC**

DELTA OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
CLEMSON UNIVERSITY



EPSILON OF NEW JERSEY  
THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY



LAMBDA OF TEXAS  
TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

PI OF OHIO  
XAVIER UNIVERSITY



THETA OF MARYLAND  
WASHINGTON COLLEGE



WASHINGTON COLLEGE

## Stanford University Professor and ΦBK Member Andrew Fire Wins Nobel Prize for Discovering How Double-Stranded RNA Can Switch Off Genes

Andrew Fire took his first look around at Stanford and started screaming. His response wasn't unusual — for a newborn, that is. The molecular biologist was born at Stanford Hospital, attended public schools in Sunnyvale, Calif., and graduated ΦBK from the University of California-Berkeley, after being turned down by his only other college choice: Stanford University.

All pretty normal, he hastens to point out — not mentioning that he completed high school at age 15 and college at age 19. But, as of 2:30 a.m. October 2, the quiet Stanford medical school professor with the self-deprecating air will have to work a little harder to convince the world that he's nothing special. He won this year's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, and it will be a long time before he sees "normal" again.

Andrew Fire, Ph.D., shares the prize with Craig Mello, Ph.D., of the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The announcement from the Nobel Assembly at *Karolinska*

*Institutet* came a mere eight years after they published their breakthrough discovery of RNA interference. The relatively rapid recognition is unusual in the Nobel world, which often rewards researchers decades after their initial findings.

"I was very surprised," said Fire, professor of pathology and of genetics, about the early morning phone call from the committee. "At first I thought that maybe they had a wrong number, or that I was dreaming. But I guess it's real." Such prompt accolades are one indication of how Fire and Mello's work has turned the field of molecular biology on its head.

"This is an extraordinary achievement for Andy Fire and Craig Mello, for science and for Stanford," said Philip Pizzo, M.D., dean of the School of Medicine. "It affirms the importance

of basic, fundamental research, which often yields new insights into human biology. Their discovery is already unfolding in new directions that may translate into discoveries of new diagnostic and therapeutic approaches for a variety of human disorders."

Fire and Mello are part of a team of researchers credited with recognizing that certain RNA molecules can be used to turn off specific genes in animal cells. The discovery, made while Fire was at the Carnegie Institution's Department of Embryology in

that with science. Without a fuss, it just happens."

Before the discovery, the only method of removing a gene's influence from a population of cells involved a laborious and time-consuming series of experiments with no guarantee of success. It was virtually impossible to knock out even a small fraction of genetic suspects in a particular pathway. Now researchers around the world are using RNAi techniques to quickly and randomly silence one gene at a time in swaths of cells. By plucking out

those that act abnormally with regard to the pathway in question, they are able to identify even previously unknown genes involved in the pathway.

The technique has also shown remarkable clinical promise. RNAi-based treatments are being tested in many animal models of disease — high cholesterol, HIV, cancer, and hepatitis, among others — and clinical trials have been launched in humans with specific types of macular degeneration and pneumonia. The potential applications of the research are vast.

Despite some intriguing hints that RNA was more than just an assembly manual for proteins, much of this process remained a mystery until Fire and Mello published their findings in the nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans*, a tiny worm about the width of a No. 2 pencil. But Fire emphasizes that much of the preliminary legwork had already been done by other plant and animal researchers.

"We came into a field where a lot was already known," said Fire. "It was a complex jigsaw puzzle, and we were able to contribute one piece. Fortunately, for us, it was a very nice piece, but it would be really disingenuous to say we did the whole puzzle."

Such demurring is standard for Fire; colleagues often describe him as remarkably modest. On October 2, Fire lived up to that reputation. After reluctantly agreeing to participate in numer-



Nobel laureate Andrew Fire fields questions from the press after the announcement.

Photo Credit: Linda A. Cicero / Stanford News Services

Baltimore, marked the first time that biologists were able to selectively "silence" the voice of one gene in the cacophony of the tens of thousands that give a cell its marching orders from development to death. Their description of the process, called RNA interference or RNAi, in *Nature* in 1998, jump-started a new biological field by opening up previously inaccessible areas of research.

"It was clear from the first week that I met Andy that he was destined to do something great," said a longtime friend and Carnegie Institution colleague, David Schwartz, Ph.D., professor of genetics and of chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "He was just such a natural about it. There are people who are excellent at sports. You just put a baseball bat in their hands and the ball flies. Andy is like

*Continued on 11*

**Phi Beta Kappa Honors Gerald Early with 2006 Award for Service to the Humanities; Charles Tilly Receives Sidney Hook Memorial Award at 41st Triennial Council in Atlanta**

The Phi Beta Kappa Society presented awards in late October to two outstanding leaders in their fields: Gerald Early and Charles Tilly. The presentations were made at the Society's 41st Triennial Council in Atlanta.

Early received the 2006 Award for Distinguished Service to the Humanities. Given in recognition of significant contributions in the humanities, this award is funded by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. William Jaffe.

Tilly is the winner of the 2006 Sidney Hook Memorial Award. Made possible by a grant from the John Dewey Foundation, this award recognizes national distinction by a single scholar in each of three endeavors — scholarship, undergraduate teaching, and leadership — in the cause of liberal arts education.

**Gerald Early**

An acclaimed essayist and American culture critic, Early is the author of *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting; Literature and Modern American Culture*, which won the 1994 National Book Critics Circle Award for criticism; *One Nation under a Groove: Motown and American Culture*; and *Daughters: On Family and Fatherhood*.

Works edited by Early include *Body Language: Writers on Sports*, *The Muhammad Ali Reader*, and *Miles Davis and American Culture*. *How the War in the Streets Is Won: Poems on the Quest of Love and Faith* was his first book of poetry.

With nominations for two Grammy Awards in the category of Best Album Notes for *Yes I Can: The Sammy Davis, Jr. Story* and *Rhapsodies in Black: Music and Words from the Harlem Renaissance*, Early shows his dexterity and the breadth of his influence upon the perception of American culture and history in diverse media. He has also served as a consultant on Ken Burns' PBS documentaries on baseball and jazz.

Early is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Charles Tilly**

Tilly, Joseph L. Bottenwieser Professor of Social Science at Columbia University, is an internationally recognized authority on long-term social processes. He has examined military, demographic, economic, urban, and political change in Europe and North America from the Middle Ages to the present.

A past Guggenheim fellow and a fellow of the German Marshall Fund, Tilly is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a *Chavalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques*.

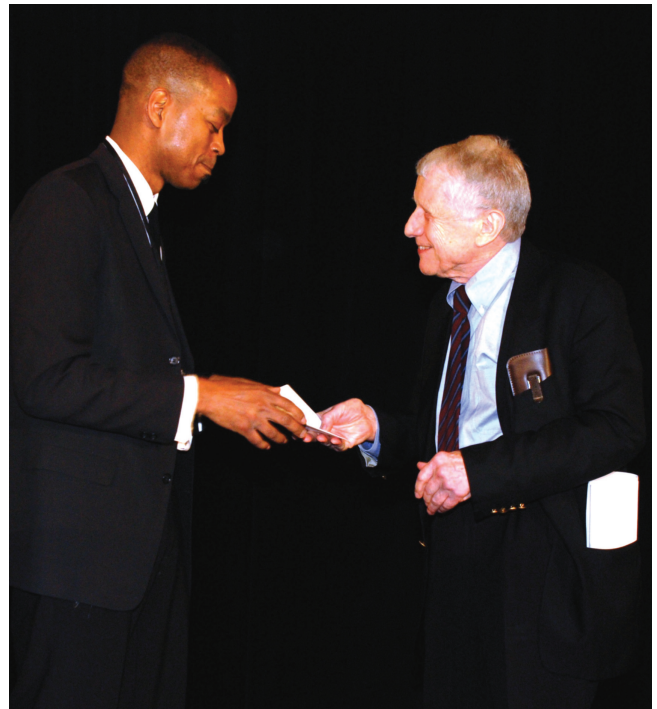
Tilly is the author or co-author of more than 20 books, including *The Politics of Collective Violence; Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000; Social Movements, 1768-2004; and Economic and Political Contention in Comparative*.

He serves on the editorial boards of two dozen journals in history, political science, and sociology, is a deputy editor of *American Sociological Review* and edits book series for Blackwell Publishers, Harvard University Press, and Westview Press.

Tilly's latest book, *Why?*, published earlier this year by Princeton University Press, is an analysis of the reasons people use to explain events and behavior and how their choices are driven by social relationships. ■



Gerald Early addresses the 41st Council of Phi Beta Kappa at the closing banquet in Atlanta.



Charles Tilly (right) is greeted on the dais by Don Wyatt, chair of the awards committee, at the closing banquet for the 41st Council of Phi Beta Kappa in Atlanta.

*Photos from these and other events from the 41st Council of Phi Beta Kappa in Atlanta are available on the Web at [www.pbk.org](http://www.pbk.org).*

# Percy Julian

## *Forgotten Genius*

A new documentary from the public television series *NOVA*

by STEPHEN LYONS, PRODUCER



**Edward Alexander Bouchet**  
1852–1918

In 1874, only 10 years after the end of the American Civil War, Edward Alexander Bouchet became the first African-American graduate of Yale College. He ranked sixth in a class of 124 students and was the first African-American elected to membership in the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Bouchet continued to study physics at Yale, and in 1876, he became the first African-American to earn a Ph.D.

To recognize outstanding scholarly achievement and promote diversity and excellence in doctoral education and the professoriate, Yale University and Howard University created the Edward A. Bouchet Graduate Honor Society in September 2005.

The Bouchet Society seeks to develop a network of preeminent scholars who exemplify academic and personal excellence, foster environments of support, and serve as examples of scholarship, leadership, character, service, and advocacy for students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the academy.

For more information about the Bouchet Society, visit them on the Web at [www.yale.edu/graduateschool/diversity/bouchet.html](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/diversity/bouchet.html)

On Sept. 14, 1916, Percy Julian boarded the Jim Crow car of the L&N Railroad, bound for Indiana. He was off to become the first member of his family to go to college. There at the Montgomery, Ala., train station to send him off were his parents, his father's parents, and his 99-year-old great grandmother. As he gazed out the train window, Julian noticed his grandfather's hand. It was missing two fingers — a slave's punishment for having learned to write.

Years later, Julian would recall, "There they were, three generations of hope and prayer, waving to a fourth generation that was going off to college! And why? Because they had the simple faith that the last best hope of Earth is education for all the people."

Julian was unquestionably one of the most accomplished African-American scientists of the 20th century — the first chemist ever elected to the National Academy of Sciences. Yet, for all his achievements, he has never been the subject of a book-length biography, and few people outside Chicago know who he was or what he did. The goal of *NOVA's* Percy Julian biography, *Forgotten Genius*, is to change that.

Julian was born in 1899 into a family of modest means and a Southern community that offered black children no public education beyond the eighth grade. Yet this grandson of slaves overcame the racism of the early 1900s to earn advanced degrees at Harvard University and the University of Vienna, won worldwide acclaim for his work in organic chemistry — and broke the color barrier in American industrial science more than a decade before Jackie Robinson did so in baseball.

In 1936, at a time when most African Americans with chemical degrees were restricted to teaching jobs in high schools or black colleges, Julian became the director of research at the Glidden Company's Chicago-based Soya Products Division. Over the next 18 years, he and his staff of

chemists found innumerable uses for the soybean, helping to trigger the explosive growth of the American soybean industry. Not content with paper coatings, food additives, and latex paint, Julian pushed the company into areas he considered important. Early on, he discovered that some of the "useless" by-products of Glidden's soybean processing could be used as chemical building blocks for a whole class of natural substances called steroids. Julian and his team of chemists were soon brewing up batches of progesterone and other artificial sex hormones, making them available to American patients at a fraction of their cost a few years earlier.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Julian and Glidden were key players in what chemical historians called the Great Steroid Wars. After the dramatic 1949 discovery that cortisone relieved the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, Julian joined a worldwide race to find a way to produce this latest "wonder drug" at an affordable price. His synthesis of Compound S, a steroid just one step removed from cortisone, helped lead to dramatically lower prices — and relief for millions of arthritis sufferers.

When Glidden executives, ignoring Julian's protests, bowed out of the steroid field in 1953, the 54-year-old chemist walked away from the job into which he had put the best years of his career, risking everything to form his own company and continue his work in steroids. He proved to be as talented an entrepreneur as he was a chemist. By the time he died two decades later, he was a millionaire several times over.

Fired by racist attacks on his home and family, Julian also became a prominent civic leader, making frequent speeches on racial issues, lending his support to civil rights organizations, and leading a national effort to raise funds for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.

But Julian's greatest contribution may have been as a mentor to other



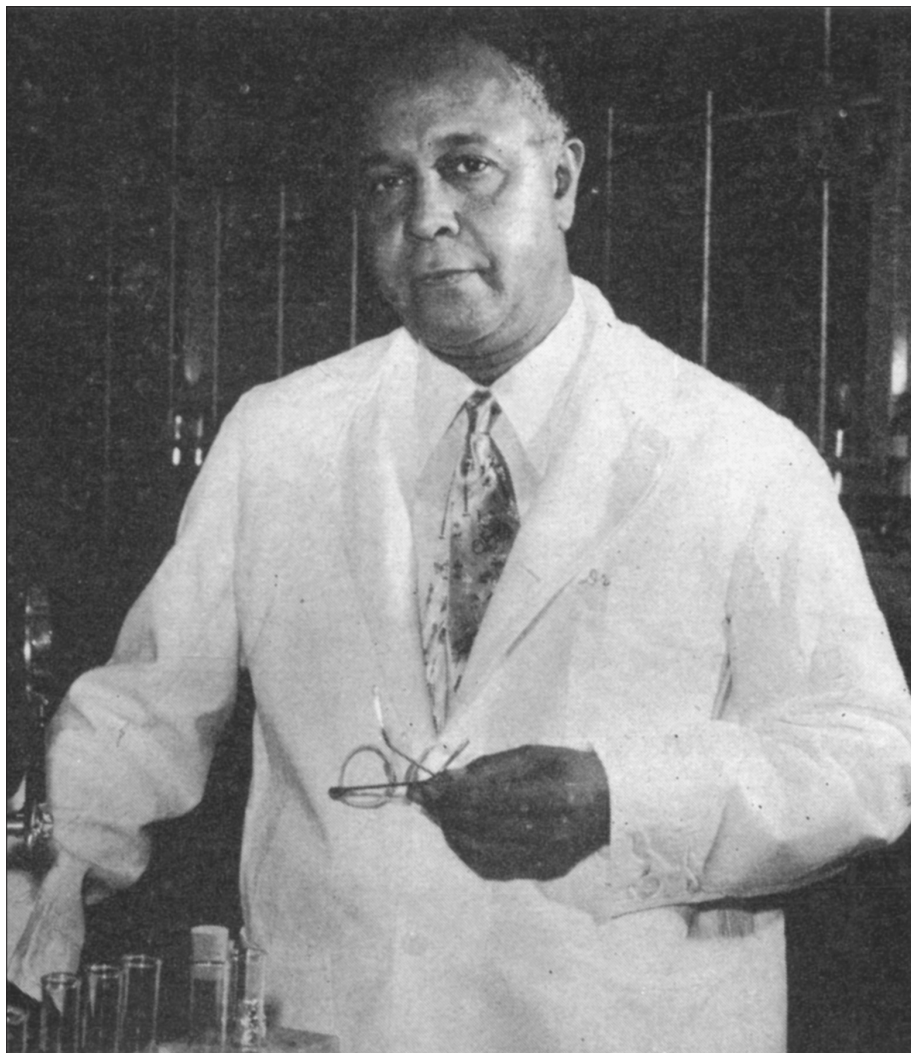
black chemists. As late as the mid-1950s, young black chemists who aspired to a career in industry could look for years without finding an opportunity anywhere in America. Many of them gave up and went into teaching or other lines of work. But Julian, relying on the network of connections he'd made during his early years of teaching at Southern black colleges, sent out the word that there were opportunities in Chicago. Over a period of four decades, from his arrival at Glidden in 1936 to his death in 1975, Julian's labs served as a training ground for dozens of promising young black chemists, many of whom used their Julian years as a springboard to distinguished careers in industry, government, medicine, and academia.

For much of his career, Julian was an "applied scientist" whose work was intended to have a direct impact on society — and did. As Max Tishler, former president of the American Chemical Society, put it in a 1964 tribute, "Percy Julian . . . has not only contributed to chemistry as a scientist but, of equal importance, he has put chemistry to work for society. . . . The utility of soya meal as a source of many chemicals and drugs came largely from the imagination and labors of Percy Julian. The impact this development has had on the economy of food, animal feed, and drugs has been enormous."

Julian's story, therefore, gives us an opportunity to explore critical humanities issues such as the emergence of the industrial research laboratory as a force in America, the growth of the chemical industry in the early 20th century, and the tremendous impact the chemical industry has had on the fabric of American life.

At the same time, the *NOVA* documentary will allow us to look closely at the issue of race in science — not only raising public awareness of the significant contributions African-Americans have made to the science community but also calling attention to the hurdles they've faced in trying to make their way in this important part of American society.

Many of the film's details about Julian's life and career will be based on original research by the *NOVA* production team and our partners at the Chemical Heritage Foundation. In tying Julian's story to broader social and historical themes, we've been able to draw on a wide range of scholarship in the humanities, including books on the history of black education, the



Percy Julian at Julian Laboratories, Inc., 1954. Image courtesy of DePauw University Archives and Special Collections.

institution of Jim Crow segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, the experiences of African-American scientists, and the history of the American chemical industry.

To guide us in our presentation of the Julian story, we've also recruited a distinguished group of humanities scholars: Willie Pearson Jr., Georgia Institute of Technology; James Anderson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Evelynn Hammonds, Harvard University; Darlene Clark Hine, Michigan State University; Kenneth Manning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Christopher Reed, Roosevelt University, Chicago; Leo Slater, Johns Hopkins University; and John Kenly Smith Jr., Lehigh University.

Together, these scholars have expertise in nearly every humanities discipline that bears on the Julian story, including American history, African-American history, the history of

Southern education, the Civil Rights Movement, the history of the chemical industry, the impact of science on society, the sociology of science, and the African-American scientific experience.

*NOVA is the longest running science program on American television and one of the most decorated programs in all of broadcast journalism. This article was extracted from an overview of the documentary *Forgotten Genius* prepared by producer Stephen Lyons. It is printed here with the permission of *NOVA* and *Dera, Roslan & Champion Public Relations*. To learn more about this and other *NOVA* projects, visit [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/).*

*Forgotten Genius* will air on public television February 6, 2007, during Black History Month. Check local stations for updated listings.

## Head of the Clash: Noah Eber-Schmid Wins \$25,000 Fellowship to Study Punkology



Noah Eber-Schmid

Photo Credit: Felix Bryant

A Mohawked New Jersey rocker received a \$25,000 fellowship to conduct an intensive academic study of punks in Europe — and flew to London in August to start his year-long project.

Noah Eber-Schmid, 21, of Livingston, N.J., graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Union College in Schenectady, N.Y., in June and was one of 50 winners nationally of a Thomas J. Watson fellowship.

His study, which will also take him to Germany and Scandinavia, is titled “The Kids Are Alright? Punk Subcultures as Community and Movement.”

“The aim of my project is to be able to explain punk as a positive

cultural movement,” said Eber-Schmid, who plays in a punk band himself and wears studded leather. “Punk is a lot more than image.”

He intends to write magazine-style essays shining light on punk culture for those who don’t know a thing about it and even those turned off by it.

“My grandfather still asks me, ‘What is punk? I don’t understand it,’” Eber-Schmid said. “I want him and others to read about it and get a better insight into it.” ■

*This story by Dan Kadison originally appeared in The New York Post on Aug. 1, 2006 and is reprinted here with the permission of The New York Post.*

### ΦBK IN THE NEWS

*Continued from 5*

March 27 and unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate on July 26. (“Ronald Cooper Sworn in as EEOC General Counsel” U.S. Fed News 11 Aug. 2006.)

♦ **Joseph M. Torsella** (University of Pennsylvania, 1987) became the chief executive of the National Constitution Center in August 2006. The National Constitution Center, located in Philadelphia, is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of and appreciation for the Constitution, its history and its contemporary relevance. (Panepento, Peter. “A Civic Leader Works to Protect Nation’s Constitution” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* 3 Aug. 2006: 42.)

### ΦBK in Popular Culture

♦ **Mia Riverton** (Radcliffe College, 1998) is the co-star and producer of the independent film *Red Doors*, a comedy-drama about the tribulations of a Chinese-American family. The film has won numerous awards, including one for Best Narrative Feature at the 2005 Tribeca Film Festival. For more, visit [www.reddoorsthemovie.com](http://www.reddoorsthemovie.com). (“Win a Star for a Night” *New York Post* 1 Sept. 2006: 11.)

♦ **Alexandra Reeve** (Yale University, 2005), daughter of the late actor

Christopher Reeve, is now serving on the board of directors for the Christopher Reeve Foundation, which endeavors to find cures and treatments for spinal cord injury and improve the lives of people living with paralysis. Academy Award-winning actor Robin Williams; Jeff Pfeifle, president of J. Crew; and Diana Taylor, New York state superintendent of banks, also serve on the 25-member board. (“Christopher Reeve Foundation Expands Board of Directors with Five New Members” *Pharma Business Week* 21 Aug. 2006: 183.)

♦ **Janet Jeppson Asimov’s** (Stanford University, 1948) new book *Notes for a Memoir: On Isaac Asimov, Life and Writing* (Prometheus Books, 2006) records the pleasure she took in sharing her life with the famous science-fiction writer and her lingering sadness following her husband’s death in 1992. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa at Stanford University, Janet Asimov became a doctor, a psychoanalyst, a science columnist, and a fiction writer under the name J.O. Jeppson. (Wells, Tish. “Asimov’s Widow Shares Her Joy, Grief in Memoir” *Chicago Tribune* 4 Aug. 2006: 5.)

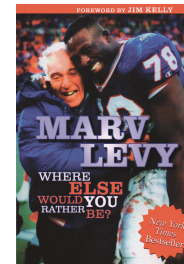
♦ Novelist Horace McCoy was recently noted in the book section of *The Boston Globe* as a great American writer, well known in his time, whose work is now neglected. In particular, McCoy’s book *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (Random House, 1948) was described as “the tale of a Phi Beta Kappa university graduate turned hard-case criminal.” The 1950 film based on the novel stars James Cagney. (Sallis, James. “Great Unknowns” *The Boston Globe* 20 Aug. 2006: D5.)

♦ **Marv Levy’s** (Coe College, 1950) book *Where Else Would You Rather Be?* (Sports Publishing, 2004) made the *New York Times* best-sellers list in early 2005.

Levy, celebrated Buffalo Bills coach, was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2001. (“New York Times Best Sellers List” 20 Oct. 2006 [hawes.com/pastlist.htm](http://hawes.com/pastlist.htm).)

♦ **Dennis Denenberg** (College of William & Mary, 1969), speaker, educator and co-author of *50 American Heroes Every Kid Should Meet* (Lerner Publications, 2005), was inter-

viewed on CNN about his efforts to bring real-life American heroes, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Helen Keller, and more recent figures like Christopher Reeve to the forefront for today’s children. Denenberg observed, “We wanted kids to appreciate any kind of positive contribution that you can make in any field. Christopher Reeve, for example, went from being a celebrity to being a real hero in terms of fighting for a cause when he suffered that tragedy. We say in the book he went from Superman with a capital ‘S’ to being a super man. A lot of the heroes in our book challenge kids to think of what can they do in their lives that might imitate some of these heroes.” For more, [www.heroes4us.com](http://www.heroes4us.com). (CNN 3:00 p.m. EST 5 April 2006.) ■



ANDREW FIRE *Continued from 6*  
ous media interviews and press conferences, he made sure to credit “insightful and dedicated colleagues and students” with whom he has worked and “whose ideas and efforts are very much the subject of the prize.” And he noted that scientists have a responsibility to society at large. “All of us in science look forward to sharing with the public both the responsibilities and opportunities that arise as we understand more about the human body,” he said.

Fire added, “For me personally, the occasion of such an award is an opportunity to thank the many patient teachers and mentors who have opened doors to science and research, and especially my family, who have made everything possible.”

“This day is a wonderful chance to acknowledge that science is a group effort,” Fire continued. “The advances cited in the Nobel award grew from original scientific inquiry from numerous research groups throughout the world.” He also thanked the National Institute of General Medical Sciences for providing the grants that made the research possible and continues to support both scientists.

Fire will officially receive the award on December 10 in Stockholm, and he and Mello will share the \$1.4 million prize. He is Stanford medical school’s third Nobel laureate, joining emeritus professors Paul Berg, Ph.D., and Arthur Kornberg, M.D.

“Professor Fire’s contributions to his field have been of enormous importance, and the recognition by the Nobel committee is a remarkable achievement at this early point in his career,” said Stanford President John Hennessy. “The RNA research of professors Fire and Mello represents the very best of the collaborative nature of university scholarship. The fact that this basic discovery is already impacting the development of new therapies is a wonderful reminder of the importance of fundamental research.”

As any graduate student can attest, fundamental research often means long hours of tedium. Although Fire is careful to credit others, he’s no stranger to such drudgery. “I’d be working in the middle of the night,” recalled Schwartz, “and Andy would be hunched over his microscope next door, feeding his worms. They had a mutation that made them so uncoordinated that he had to push food their way with a tiny brush.” But the work paid off. “This is just gorgeous work that stands a chance to really change medicine, as well as being a remark-

able tool for biology,” Schwartz said. “Anyone who knows him will not be surprised that he won.”

After Fire received his Ph.D. from MIT, he was accepted as a Helen Hay Whitney Postdoctoral Fellow in Cambridge, England, in a laboratory headed by Nobel laureate Sydney Brenner, Ph.D. He conducted his initial work on gene silencing by double-stranded RNA between 1986 and 2003 while at the Carnegie Institution. He was an adjunct professor in the Department of Biology at Johns Hopkins University starting in 1989 and joined the Stanford faculty in 2003. Throughout his career, all of the major work in Fire’s lab has been supported by research grants from the National Institutes of Health.

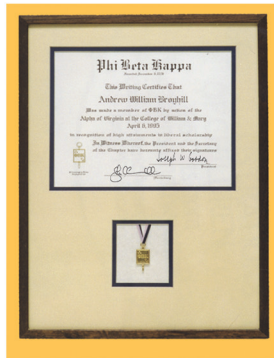
Fire is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. He serves on the Board of Scientific Counselors and the NIH’s National Center for Biotechnology. He has received and shared numerous awards, including the Maryland Distinguished Young Scientist Award, Meyenburg Prize, Genetics Society of

America Medal, National Academy of Sciences Award in Molecular Biology, Passano Family Foundation Award, Wiley Prize, H.P. Heineken Prize in Biochemistry and Biophysics, Warren Triennial Prize, Rosensiel Award, Gairdner Award, Massry Prize, and Ehrlich/Darmstaedter Prize.

None of this has gone to Fire’s head — and the Nobel Prize doesn’t appear to have either. “I like what I do,” he said when asked how the Nobel might affect his life. “I like teaching, I like research, and I like talking to colleagues. This brings another dimension: an opportunity to have a voice beyond my own lab and field. That’s a big responsibility, and I look forward to using that voice as needed. At the same time, I still want to do interesting and unusual experiments, while also making sure I don’t get too much credit.” Now that’s normal — at least for Fire. ■

*This article was composed by Krista Conger, senior science writer, Stanford University School of Medicine, Office of Communications and Public Affairs.*

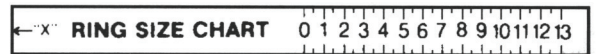
## Phi Beta Kappa Items for Members



Members of Phi Beta Kappa may order insignia items including the handsome tie, signet rings and the popular wall display shown here. The Phi Beta Kappa necktie is made of 100% silk, burgundy in color, and woven with the key insignia in gold. The 10-karat gold signet rings are available in two styles. The ring gauge printed below can be cut out and wrapped around the finger you wish to measure. The wall display combines a membership certificate and a large gold-plated key in a 12 x 16 inch walnut frame.

To order, complete the form below and mail it with your payment and a copy of your mailing label from the back cover showing your  $\Phi$ BK membership number to Hand & Hammer, 2610 Morse Lane, Woodbridge, VA 22192. You may place an order or request the complete product brochure by calling (703) 491-4866 or by faxing (703) 491-2031. You may also order online at [www.hand-hammer.com](http://www.hand-hammer.com). A three dollar shipping and handling fee is added to each order.

- \_\_\_ Phi Beta Kappa necktie (100% silk, burgundy).....\$39
- \_\_\_ Large Signet Ring (available only in sizes 8, 9, 10, 11)....\$195
- \_\_\_ Small Signet Ring (available only in sizes 4, 5, 6, 7).....\$150
- \_\_\_ Custom half sizing.....\$25
- \_\_\_ Wall display (key and certificate framed 12" x 16").....\$85

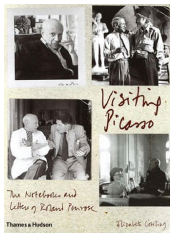


Ring size \_\_\_\_\_ Initials for ring \_\_\_\_\_  
Name, chapter and date for personalization \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Check payable to Hand & Hammer is enclosed  
Charge my \_\_\_ Visa \_\_\_ MasterCard (VA residents add 5%)  
Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_

# From Our Book Critics

By Svetlana Alpers



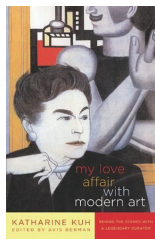
**Visiting Picasso: The Notebooks and Letters of Roland Penrose.** Elizabeth Cowling. Thames and Hudson, 2006. \$40.00

For better or for worse, though the art is the real interest, publications about the lives of artists keep coming out. This one is very good.

Edited by a leading Picasso scholar and critic, the papers of Roland Penrose (1900-1984) record the friendship (1954-1972) between Picasso and Penrose, a wealthy British artist, critic, and curator. Penrose arranged to exhibit Picasso in England, wrote the first biography of the artist, and evidently adored him even more than he did his own beautiful and talented wife, the legendary American-born photographer Lee Miller. The edition elegantly combines notebooks (in pale print) with Elizabeth Cowling's connective commentary (in bold).

The book is an informative and entertaining account of Picasso in the entourage that was essential to his well being. There are some 200 letters from Penrose to Picasso, and the responses were few. But the notebooks are an on-the-spot record of visits to the master. The textual immediacy is complimented and even surpassed by Miller's photographic accompaniment. It is astonishing to see Picasso captured in profile, robbed of the black eyes that stared everyone down, cigarette to hand and mouth, looking like an ordinary Spanish workman. There is a photo of a car window reflecting Penrose's loving glance at Picasso turned, adoringly, to Miller and her camera. Or a fine shot made in 1954 of a visiting Georges Braque seated and tentative, touching a pottery dove offered him by Picasso, or Gary Cooper and his daughter admiring the artist turning a pot.

Given his need for such constant, and often abrasive, sociability, it is remarkable that Picasso had the time and energy to make the art that he did.



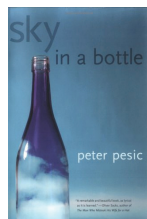
**My Love Affair with Modern Art: Behind the Scenes with a Legendary Curator.** Katherine Kuh. Edited and completed by Avis Berman. Arcade, 2006. \$27.50; paper \$15.99

Katherine Kuh (1904-1994) was a formidable woman who had a remarkably diverse life in the American art world. After opening a pioneering gallery in Chicago in 1935 — showing Kandinsky, Klee, Albers, Calder, Weston, and more — she moved to the Chicago Art Institute in 1943. From 1954 she was their first curator of modern painting and sculpture until she moved to New York, where she wrote for the *Saturday Review*.

An introduction and some discrete filling in by her friend Avis Berman has made possible the publication of Kuh's memoirs of her life in art.

Kuh is thoughtful and critical about collecting and collectors (Walter Arensberg), art historians and the market (Bernard Berenson), and about the practices and policies of art museums (Alfred Barr at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Danial Catton Rich in Chicago). The issues she considers are still alive today.

But the heart of the book, and its real interest, is Kuh's account of artists whose studios she frequented. She traveled to Japan and Europe, pulling herself up many flights of stairs to Leger's studio in Paris on a leg crippled by polio. Most memorable is her account of American artists, in particular of the intertwined works, lives, and deaths of Mark Rothko, Alfred Jensen, and Clyfford Still. Read about now in the early 21st century, their ambitions, accomplishments, and lonely despair belong to another age.



**Sky in a Bottle.** Peter Pesic. The MIT Press, 2005. \$24.95; paper \$12.95

The title is a playful way of putting the child's question, "Why is the sky blue?" The book is the latest in a remarkable series of concise, elegant studies in which Pesic gives an account of complex scientific pursuits while teasing out their broader interest. The elegance is that Pesic's account of the

interest does not compromise the science. It serves to remind us that science and art were once high intellectual skills that were in touch with each other.

The sky has not always been described as blue. Greece and China did not speak of the sky as blue because its color was not of interest. Aristotle, though, thought that the surrounding darkness — some referred to it as black — made it seem almost dark blue.

Giotto di Bondone, in the Arena Chapel at Padua (1305-1306), was one of the first artists to paint the sky blue. The availability but also the value of blue pigment was a factor. Leonardo da Vinci suggested that the blue is due to particles suspended in the air. He was also the first to try to reproduce the effect in a bottle.

There were thought to be two possibilities. Either blue is the air (then why is it not blue all around us?), or it is particles suspended in the air (then what are they and how are they suspended?).

During the next four centuries, the blueness of the sky was a concern secondary to other inquiries on which Kepler, Descartes, Newton, Goethe, and the Swiss mountaineer and scientist Horace-Bénédict de Saussure all had views. It is only in the 19th century that the problem of the blue of the sky becomes defined as such. John Ruskin and John Tyndall, art critic and scientist, meet over it. The breakthrough was a by-product of Albert Einstein's work on atomic theory. It turns out that the sky we see is due to the scattering of light by molecules in the air, and the color blue is due to the spectral sensitivity of our eyes that are far less sensitive to violet, the color that actually has the highest peak in the brightness of scattered sunlight. Finally, then, it is our brain that is the bottle in which the sky is blue.

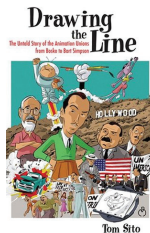


**Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America.** Stephen E. Kercher. University of Chicago Press, 2006. \$35.00

The 1950s and 1960s were truly a golden age of American satire, more often than not of the liberal persuasion. Just to mention people like Mort Sahl, Lenny Bruce, or Bob Newhart doing stand-up; Sid Caesar, Jack Paar, or Steve Allen on television; Henry Morgan, Stan Freberg, or Bob and Ray on radio; or Walt Kelly, Jules Feiffer, or the “usual gang of idiots” at *MAD* magazine drawing comics, is barely to make a beginning. Irreverence, irony, and subversion were the order of the day among comedians who held nothing sacred and left no conservative icon unturned, if not overturned.

The era has long needed a carefully researched, richly informed, and intelligently argued history of the people, events, and issues by someone who can combine facts, politics, and culture into a seamless and informative narrative. The task has found that person in Stephen E. Kercher, a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Without the jargon of academic prose, Kercher has produced a straightforward text that specialists and general readers alike will enjoy.

The author moves through chapters focused on editorial cartoons, comic strips, humor periodicals, improvisational theater groups, stand-up comedy, radio, television, and film, mainly non-literary forms of comedy in popular culture. He finds that their intent was to “reveal through humor the *truth* behind the politics, religion, social mores, and culture of the day,” in order to “help destroy the suffocating banality, artifice, and hypocrisy infiltrating American life and culture.” By illuminating the political and social bent of their criticism, Kercher effectively supports and confirms his belief that satire by its very nature is intended “to criticize vice and raise awareness.” The appreciations of Walt Kelly’s *Pogo*, *MAD* magazine, Bill Mauldin, Al Capp, Jules Feiffer, Paul Krassner, Lenny Bruce, and Ollie Harrington are especially welcome.



**Drawing the Line: The Untold Story of the Animation Unions from Bosko to Bart Simpson.** Tom Sito. University Press of Kentucky, 2006. \$32.00

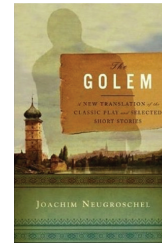
Although today animation is more popular than ever, especially of the computer generated variety, it has always had an ambiguous and uncertain place in cultural history. Sometimes viewed as a development out of comic strips, it has suffered from the reputation of the comics as light-hearted and inconsequential entertainment, thus the name “cartoons” still applied to animated films. Obviously a part of film history, purists in the field tend to see animation as an illegitimate stepchild of the industry, meant to amuse the audience a few minutes before the feature film.

Recent historians and critics who have specialized in animation, Donald Crafton, Michael Barrier, John Canemaker, and Leonard Maltin among them, have amply demonstrated in ground breaking studies that not only is animation an art form as capable of profound commentary and technical accomplishment as any other, but it has the added advantage of a visual appeal that can make icons such as Mickey Mouse, Betty Boop, or Popeye known anywhere in the world.

An unwritten chapter in animation history, until now, has been the place and importance of unionization in the industry, which Tom Sito has happily supplied. Himself an animator, a director, and former union president, Sito covers the entire history of labor unions in the industry, from the Fleischer Studio strike of 1937 to recent altercations between labor and management. The most fascinating chapter may be “The Great Disney Studio Strike” of 1941, called “The Civil War of Animation,” because of its consequences, which would change the world of animation forever. With expertise and insight, he carries the story into the Communist witch hunt years and Disney’s regrettable testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

“This book,” Sito says, “is a history, a memoir, and in part a personal reflection on my specialized field,” which is why it will engage readers of all varieties. In an area where politics, economics, and aesthetics meet, Sito sorts out and makes

sense out of a much misunderstood chapter in the story of Hollywood.



**The Golem.** Edited and translated by Joachim Neugroschel. W. W. Norton, 2006. \$25.95

The Golem may be one of the most influential but little-known figures in world culture.

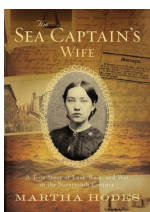
Inspired by passages in the Old Testament and the Talmud, and numerous folk tales, the most important version has to do with Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel of 16th century Prague, who created a figure out of clay capable of protecting the threatened Jewish community of that ancient city, probably founded by Jews. The creature got out of hand, by some accounts, turned against its master, and had to be destroyed. In its wake have come robots, androids, humanoids, and automatons, or any creation invested with life but which protects or threatens its human creators.

The story inspired “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” by Goethe, set to music by Paul Dukas and animated by Walt Disney. The young Mary Shelley may have heard the story while writing her horror masterpiece *Frankenstein* in 1818. James Whale’s 1931 film version of her novel was itself inspired in imagery and style by a 1920 German expressionist film by Paul Wegener, *The Golem*. Two Jewish high school students in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1938, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, remembered this figure of super human strength in creating the legendary Superman. Michael Chabon’s novel based on that event, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), begins with a story about moving the remains of the Golem from Prague, which are said even to this day to reside there in the attic of the Old-New Synagogue. Thus the legend has permeated our culture in unsuspected ways.

A masterful and accomplished translator of German and Yiddish literature, Joachim Neugroschel brings here into English fresh and fluent versions of short stories by Yudi Rosenberg from 1904 and David Frischmann from 1922, a folk tale recorded by S. Bastomski in 1923, and a powerful verse drama from 1921 by H. Leivick, all devoted to variations on the origins and adventures of the Golem. Living in an age of man-made

technology, which often threatens to turn against us, as well as a continuing search for ways to extend and even create life, these early 20th century texts gain new relevance and immediacy for all readers.

By Jan Lewis



**The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century.** Martha Hodes. W.W. Norton, 2006. \$24.95

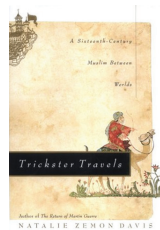
Working from a small cache of family letters, Martha Hodes has pieced together a life at once extraordinary and utterly mundane. Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly was the kind of person who usually slips through the cracks of history. One of eight children born to a New England family in declining circumstances, Eunice probably entered the mills when she turned 14. When she married four years later, in 1849, she may have thought that she was escaping the humiliation of wage labor. Her husband, however, was a poor provider, and not even a move to Mobile, Ala., on the eve of the Civil War could rescue his fortunes. After war broke out, he joined the Confederate army, effectively estranging Eunice from her Union-soldier brothers and most of her family. Her husband's death in the war left her a widow with two small children and pitched her back into the demeaning world of New England wage labor — and the depths of despair. Thus far, the contours of Eunice's life were all too typical of women in her time and place.

But then she did something remarkable: she married a mulatto sea captain and moved with him to Grand Cayman Island. Her favorite brother, a Union veteran on the path toward respectability, erased her from the family history, although the women in the family continued an intermittent correspondence until Eunice and her entire family perished in a hurricane at sea. Eunice was reluctant to let her husband sail alone, and so, she and the children, including the two born to her and her new husband, went with him. She was only 46 when she died.

Hodes tells Eunice's story so expertly that we can only hope that Eunice — like Hodes, we cannot help thinking of her familiarly — enjoyed some measure of happiness before the

hurricane swept her and those she loved most into the sea. The most affecting section of the book, however, is the chapter in which Hodes describes her efforts to track down the descendants of Eunice and Smiley Connolly, her Caribbean husband. The book concludes with the unveiling of a monument on Grand Cayman to all the mariners lost at sea. "On Grand Cayman Island," Hodes writes, "Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly, born white and poor in New England, found an interval of happiness as a member of an elite family of color living in a community of former slaves, and it is there that her name will be engraved in granite."

Hodes' book, too, is a monument, both to a woman who otherwise would have been utterly lost to history and to the historian's ability to do justice to the dead. Reminiscent of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale*, *The Sea Captain's Wife* shows us how powerful an ordinary life can be in the hands of an extraordinary storyteller.



**Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds.** Natalie Zemon Davis. Hill and Wang, 2006. \$30.00

Those in the West know him as Leo Africanus, but Natalie Davis more often calls the 16th-century Arab author by the name he was given at birth, al-Hasan al-Wazzan, or Yuhanna al-Asad, the name he took after his conversion to Christianity. The latter name was an Arabic rendering of Johannes Leo (or Giovanni Leone), the name given to him by Pope Leo X when he baptized him. This profusion of names can be confusing, as can be Davis' practice of using both the Islamic and Christian calendars for rendering dates. Thus, she tells us that al-Hasan al-Wazzan was born in Granada, about 891-93/1486-88. Trying to translate all the names and dates makes the head spin. That seems to be Davis' point: If we are confused, imagine the plight of al-Hasan al-Wazzan/Yuhanna al-Asad, etc., as he tried to figure out who he was at any moment in his remarkable life.

After his Muslim family was exiled from Spain during the Reconquista, they took up residence in Fez, like Granada, a multi-ethnic, multi-religion city. Al-Hasan al-Wazzan grew up to be a scholar and a

diplomat. His travels took him far and wide, from sub-Saharan Africa to Istanbul and then Cairo, which he saw pillaged by its Ottoman enemy in 923/1517. Returning by boat from that trip, he was captured by Christian pirates and imprisoned in the Vatican. His prominence as a diplomat drew the attention of the pope and several prominent cardinals. Soon he was free, converted, and meeting with other scholars, both Christians and Jews, writing his own books and collaborating with a Jewish scholar on an Arabic-Hebrew-Latin dictionary. Ten years later, when Rome was sacked by soldiers of the Holy Roman Empire, al-Wazzan saw "killing, torturing, raping, kidnapping . . . and looting on a scale that must have gone beyond" even what he had witnessed in Cairo. In the chaos, al-Wazzan seems to have made his escape. Somehow — many details of his life are obscure — he made it back to North Africa. One report has him in Tunis in 1532, and if he was there three years later, he would have witnessed the sacking of that city by the troops of the Holy Roman Empire. If so, al-Wazzan "could put Tunis next to Rome and Cairo as places where he had witnessed horrendous violence across shifting religious lines."

As filled with drama as al-Wazzan's life was, Davis might have written an adventure story. Instead, she has focused her attention on al-Wazzan the scholar, and she teases out of his texts his accomplishments at translation not just of words but of cultures. Lest anyone miss the moral of this story, Davis makes it explicit: Al-Wazzan's most famous book, *Description of Africa*, has "been used for many purposes, but for the myriad educated readers it reached over the centuries, it bore witness to the possibility of communication in a world divided by violence." This, too, is the legacy of Natalie Davis, one of our most accomplished historians, and at this moment in history, it could not be more welcome.



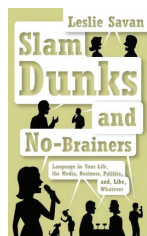
**The Brambles.** Eliza Minot. Knopf, 2006. \$23.95; paper \$13.95

Recently *The New York Times Book Review* surveyed prominent American writers to determine which is the best American novel written in the past quarter-century. In assessing the results, A. O. Scott notes that almost all

of those whose books received multiple votes were born before World War II. He surmises that the younger generation has not yet written a recognizably “great novel” because their best books are “careful, small and precise. They do not generalize; they document.” That description characterizes almost perfectly Eliza Minot’s new novel, and even if it is not one of the best books written by the younger generation of novelists, it is very good indeed.

To the extent that *The Brambles* has a plot, it’s half utterly conventional and half wildly implausible. The conventional part has to do with a family of three siblings, grown but more or less at loose ends, coping with the decline of their aged father. The implausible part has to do with the revelation of a big family secret. It is almost as if Minot thinks that she could not explain her characters’ difficulty in moving on with their lives without there being a huge secret holding them back. She should have believed more deeply in her characters. They are terrific, each one of them rendered with so much precision that to describe them by their most prominent characteristics — for example, the super-responsible oldest Bramble child, the conflicted middle child, the unhappy youngest one — risks making them caricatures.

It is the specificity of each of these characters and especially the children of the oldest, Margaret, that makes this novel luminous. Minot can make a child come wholly alive in only a word or two — the way little Sarah calls out to her mother, “Ma-uhm,” or the way her older brother Stephen reacts to his mother’s sharp words by yelling, “Bad Mama!” These children’s voices echo in our ears, as they do also in Margaret’s. With three pre-schoolers at home and the thought of a fourth child beginning to dance in her head, Margaret is at once “worn-to-the-bone numb” and “enraptured by her kids.” She thinks sometimes that “her life is made up of snippets, a connect-the-dots of moments of clarity, of instants, big and small, where life explodes in her head . . .” Other times, she wonders what she’s doing, what difference she’s making. “Wasn’t it good enough . . . to be immersed in her abundance of children, allowing them to take over?” Minot raises the biggest possible questions about life and death, but indirectly. Nor does she give us any answers, just moments of beautiful and startling clarity.

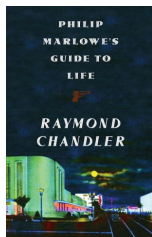


**Slam Dunks and No-Brainers: Language in Your Life, the Media, Business, Politics, and, Like, Whatever.** Leslie Savan. Knopf, 2005. \$23.95; paper \$14.00

Hello? Earth to readers. You just don’t get it. Old-fashioned English sucks: it’s sooo 20th century. Traditional usage is lame. Duh! Grammar is toast. You know what I’m sayin’? It’s time to get a life, go for it, go with the real dealio, prepare for crunchtime, whatever. Yesss! It’s the buzzwords, stupid! Still better, the buzz-phrases. Is that a no-brainer, or what? It’s showtime for Savan. Like, you know, an in-your-face wake-up-and-smell-the-java look at why gazillions of talkmeisters and wannabes are talking the talk big time.

Here’s the deal. Savan challenges us to think out of the box, go for the phrase from hell, the term that swings (sorry: passé!), the term that rocks. She wants us to dig the *mot juste*: a *mot* with attitude, perhaps with platitude, that packs more punch than conventional clichés. From coast to coast, she tells us, “an army of brave new words has moved in on us.” Catchphrases, pop phrases, pulsing with “in”ness, with coolness, with “with it”ness: bad hair day, senior moment, bling bling, don’t go there, no way José, I’m outta here! Whatever. They give us a kick, they give us a rush, they bob and they pop, they are fun, and they help us connect. Nor do we have to think 24/7 or feel dumbed down or pry for the beef.

Smart, snappy Savan serves up all the breaks you want and disses no one. She gives its due to Yiddish, to bad (meaning good) black talk otherwise known as African-American vernacular, to jazz, to jive, to the fly slangs of yesteryear, and to contemporary girlie men, to hip and hep and losers, TV commercials (been there, done that), and other groovy gigs. All schmucks will find it cool. All freaks will find it funky. So did I.



**Philip Marlowe’s Guide to Life.** Raymond Chandler. Edited by Marty Asher. Knopf, 2005. \$14.95

Wystan Hugh Auden once wrote that Chandler’s thrillers

should be read and judged not as escape literature but as works of art. Works of art, yes, but they are also troves of social history, thick with atmosphere, chock-full of suspense, raw dialogue, and stylish writing, mostly sardonic. Nothing that I write can convey the flow and trim of Chandler’s craft. So here are some quotations from Asher’s collection, picked at random but in alphabetical order.

“Americans will eat anything if it is toasted, held together with a couple of toothpicks, and has lettuce sticking out of the sides.” “Houses too often look like lunch boxes.” “Music can sound like a loose fan belt” (and he hadn’t heard of the discords of today!). Smiles cozy, acid or empty as a head waiter’s greeting. Hard, hollow stares, not quite cruel and a thousand miles from kind. Women whose laughter sounds like “a hen having hiccups.” Chandler never called Los Angeles a neon-lighted slum; rather, he denied that it was one. He did, however, describe it as a “hard-boiled city with no more personality than a paper cup.”

Take your pick of these exhibits. There are lots more like them, all different, all fun. As the Michelin guides say, it’s worth the detour.

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KEN STERN *Continued from 3*

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