

Fall 1999

An Interview with James Davison Hunter

James Davison Hunter, the Kenan Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, is the Executive Director of the Institute.

The Post-Modernity Project has become the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Why the name change?



The Post-Modernity Project was an experiment of sorts, a trial run at starting a small, strategic, university-based think-tank. In some respects, the name reflected its purpose. It was a “project” with a specific organizational purpose. That purpose accomplished, we felt it was time to move on.

But wasn't there a conceptual problem, too, with the word “post-modernity”?

The concept of “post-modernity” in our name was useful for a time. It identified the specific nature of the inquiry we had undertaken. The problem now is not that post-modernity does not exist or is not worthy of inquiry. Rather the problem is how the term is to be understood. In this sense, the philosopher Richard Rorty is right when he says that the idea of postmodernism is one of those terms “that has been used so much that nobody has the foggiest idea of what it means.” Among scholars its meaning is constantly contested and politicized; among non-scholars its meaning is needlessly esoteric.

Does the name change mean a change in focus?

Though our name has changed, our schol-

arly interest remains largely the same. The cultural shifts to which postmodernism referred continue unabated, generating sweeping and profound challenges to the ordering of individual and collective life. Our goal is to understand these shifts and the changing frameworks of meaning and moral order within which individual life, institutional change, and political conflict in our society unfold.

What about programmatically? What can we expect?

We're continuing with many of our past initiatives and starting some new ones. For the past 4 years, we've sponsored a colloquium series featuring 6-8 speakers annually. That series will continue this year with a powerful lineup of scholars considering the intellectual, cultural, and moral purposes of the university [see p. 3]. We have funded on an ongoing basis a number of doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships, launching the careers of a number of promising young scholars. This program continues, with 3 fellows in residence this year, along with 5 associate fellows who are in earlier stages of their graduate training. The scholarly research of our permanent fellows, of course, continues with several books due to be published in the coming year. In addition, we have also recently established a new Fall lecture series [see p. 3], a new interdisciplinary journal, *The Hedgehog Review* [see p. 6], and, of course, this newsletter, *InSight*. So, we're staying busy.

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Speakers Reconsider Diversity



Sociologist Adam Seligman at this year's Colloquium Series

For its fourth annual colloquium series, held this past Spring semester, the Institute brought distinguished scholars from around the country to reassess the much-discussed and often conflictive issue of diversity. The broad agenda of the series was two-fold: first, to go beyond the popular sloganeering that all too often characterizes public discussion of diversity and to complexify the political clichés that hinder serious reflection on its nature and consequences; and second, to reexamine the meaning of diversity in American society at the end of the twentieth century by exploring afresh the relationship

of diversity to the ordering of public life.

The concept of diversity is a point of pride in American social and political traditions. The image of America as a rich mosaic—comprised of a myriad of social groups all distinguished by various social, cultural, and political commitments—not only describes social life but defines much of our democratic experience. It is an enduring national legacy, both as a social reality and as a political achievement.

In our own time, diversity has become, perhaps as never before, a multidimensional, overlapping, and ever-expanding phenomenon. It cuts along very different lines—not only along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and age, but also along lines of social class, political conviction, moral community, and religious tradition—and at every point these lines crisscross. Moreover, some of the lines of diversity are sharper and deeper than others, suggesting that certain distinctions in social life and public discourse dominate other distinctions in ways that marginalize the visibility of particular communities and minimize the significance of their voice. At every level, diversity has implications for the ordering of society. It was these implications that the Colloquium speakers explored.



Adam Seligman

(Boston University)
“Trust, Sociability, and Solidarity”

Andrew Sullivan

“The Politics of Sexual Orientation”

Paul Lichterman

(University of Wisconsin)
“From Tribalism to Translation: Diversity, Community Building Customs, and Civic Renewal”

Dennis Wrong

(New York University)
“What Limits Are There to Diversity?”

Nathan Glazer

(Harvard University)
“Diversity and the University”

Laurence Thomas

(Syracuse University)
“The Winds of Diversity and the Claims of Gratitude”

Jonathan Rieder

(Barnard College)
“Elusive Difference and Interpretive Error: Making Sense of Fragile Pluralism in Crown Heights”



Cambridge Scholar to Address “The Ends of Man”

The Institute and the Department of Sociology have established an annual Fall Lecture in Culture and Social Theory. We are pleased to announce that Bryan S. Turner, Professor of Sociology and Head of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Cambridge University, will be our inaugural speaker. On Thursday afternoon, November 11, Dr. Turner will present a paper

tentatively entitled “The Ends of Man: Embodiment, Medicine, and Technology.” A panel discussion will follow the next morning, with responses to Professor Turner’s talk from three distinguished UVA faculty members.

Professor Turner has long been concerned with placing the notion of embodiment at the center of any picture of social life. In this address, he will outline

a general sociological theory that connects our embodiment to the building of social institutions and social interdependency. He will then consider the far-reaching implications of new medical technologies for our experience of embodiment and commonality, centering on the ramifications of these technologies for sexual identity and for religious understandings of *communitas* as a shared set of bodily experiences (e.g., birth, procreation, death).

Professor Turner’s research interests cover a wide spectrum, including studies of religion, the body, citizenship, social change, and social theory. Among his many books are *Max Weber: From History to Modernity*; *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*; and *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*. Professor Turner also edits two

Lecture Time: 3:30 p.m., Thursday, February 10, 2000

Location: Dome Room, The Rotunda

Panel discussion: 10:00 a.m., Friday, February 11, 2000

Location: Lower West Oval Room, The Rotunda



Spring 2000 Colloquium Series

The theme for the Spring 2000 Colloquium Series is “What’s the University For?” Topics to be addressed are the ways in which changes in the broader

culture are affecting the culture of the university; the role of university and public intellectuals; and the moral purposes of the university. At this

time, speakers include: Mark Edmundson (Virginia), Gerald Graff (Chicago), Russell Jacoby (UCLA), T.J. Jackson Lears (Rutgers), George Marsden (Notre Dame), Julie Reuben (Harvard), and Richard Rorty (Stanford). Departing from the format of previous years, the Spring 2000 colloquium will consist of three one-day conferences, each including three lectures and a panel discussion. Further details will be forthcoming in the next *InSight*.

The conferences dates and themes are:

March 2: The Culture of the University

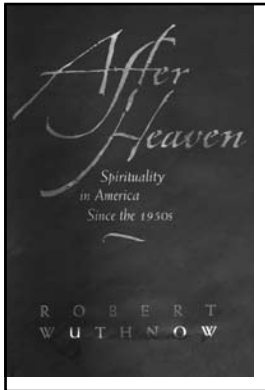
March 30: The University, Public Intellectuals, and the Life of the Mind

April 13: The Moral Purposes of the University

Recommended Books

After Heaven

Robert Wuthnow—Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 277 pp.



Robert Wuthnow examines American spirituality in his recent volume, *After Heaven*, carefully exploring the main themes and myriad nooks of post-war religious activity. Wuthnow asks: How have Americans conceived of spirituality? How might a new conception of spirituality address deeply rooted problems in the broader culture? In the course of addressing these questions, Wuthnow's

own concern for the possibilities of moral community comes to the fore. The two principal conceptions of spirituality that Wuthnow observes are a spirituality of dwelling and a spirituality of seeking. If the 1950s exhibited the dwelling type, with the sacred identified with local congregations, the 1960s witnessed the transition to the spirituality of seeking. Amid cultural tumult, Americans

eschewed authoritative religious institutions for the freedom to pursue the sacred in more negotiated terms. Wuthnow shows how this emphasis tended to elevate the self and erode communal ties. Wuthnow's alternative, drawing heavily on Alasdair MacIntyre and Jeffrey Stout, is a spirituality of practice. Wuthnow urges practice as a means of imparting moral wisdom and also as a means of creating and sustaining personal identity. While spirituality of practice is not without flaws, Wuthnow makes a solid case for it being a viable option that retains hope for creating moral community. *After Heaven* evinces a deft interweaving of Wuthnow's findings from interviews and dozens of opinion surveys, resulting in a highly nuanced depiction. In the process, the object of study, spirituality, becomes a lens through which to examine the broader culture. *Glenn Lucke, an Associate Fellow, is a doctoral student in sociology. He is interested in religion, social change, and politics.*

The Last Word

Thomas Nagel—New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 160 pp.



In today's intellectual climate, attempts to argue that Reason can provide universally valid and objective conclusions seem hopelessly out of step with the times, even from a philosopher as respected as Thomas Nagel. After all, subjectivism is the new orthodoxy: What might be good or true for you, might not necessarily be so for me, especially if we are of a different ethnicity, gender, social class, culture, or sexual orientation.

Despite the pervasiveness of subjectivism, Nagel argues that attempts to show that nothing is ever true or right run into a kind of paradox. As he says, "The claim 'Everything is subjective' must be nonsense," for if it is subjective, we needn't necessarily heed it, and if it is objective, then it refutes itself. Subjectivist arguments usually attempt to take a view of ourselves from the outside,

as creatures whose patterns of thought are only rationalizations driven by our social or cultural perspective. But, of course, such an external perspective itself needs justification. Why should we take it seriously? Why isn't it just another rationalization driven by some parochial prejudice? It is not that such attempts at getting an external view are never helpful. Indeed, they help to refine our understanding of reason, but whenever they attempt to undermine the authority of reason altogether, they become incoherent. Reason in the final analysis must offer principles of thought which aspire to objectivity and universality. It can be no other way. Nagel goes on to discuss how this kind of argument can apply to subjectivist theories of language, logic, science and ethics. But what is most valuable about this book is the cogency of his arguments and his recognition that the objectivity of reason is something we simply cannot escape. *Ed Song, an Associate Fellow, has recently begun his doctoral work in ethics and political philosophy.*

Examining the Cultural Consequences of Globalization

The term “globalization,” as an economic concept, has spread like wildfire since the mid-1970s. At first, it was mainly a topic of the business and financial press and concerned the deregulation of financial markets and the consequent loss of governmental power to regulate the flow of capital. Since then, it has come to mean many additional things. Among other ideas, these include the advance of information/communication technologies (i.e., the democratization of information), the mobility of peoples through transportation technologies (i.e., diaspora, tourism, migrant labor), and the uncoupling of economic and military power. In these uses of the term, globalization refers to a complex and far-reaching economic transformation. Clearly this transformation has cultural consequences, but what are they and how are they playing out in countries around the world?

In 1998, the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University initiated a large-scale research project in 10 countries aimed at addressing the substantial but largely unexamined cultural effects of economic globalization. The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture is directing the U.S. component of this Cultural Globalization Project. James Davison Hunter, Director of the Institute, together with Associate Fellow Joshua Yates, are conducting the research.

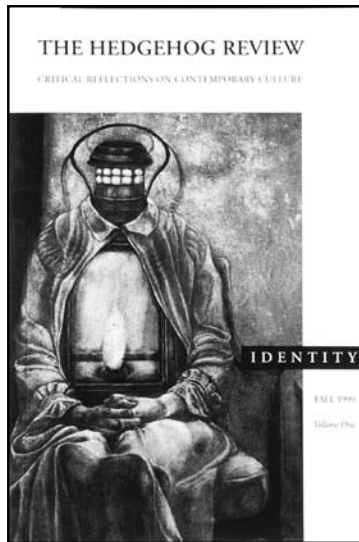
The American case is of special interest, as America is, arguably, both the main source and primary symbol of our globalizing culture. Many dominant icons of this emerging culture—McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, CNN, Hollywood, and so on—are American companies. McDonald’s alone serves 20 million people a day worldwide, while two-thirds of Coke’s yearly revenue comes from foreign sales. American movies dominate the cinema throughout the world, and MTV has a global viewership of over half a billion people.

But the appeal of American products and the American image does not stop with fast food, soft drinks, and popular culture. It also includes political ideology, scholarship, religion, philanthropy, and, of course, technology. In 1994 alone, for instance, American foundations gave \$1 billion to philanthropic, educational, and other causes beyond the borders of the U.S. In light of this global reach, it is small wonder that “Americanization” is commonly considered synonymous with the processes of globalization.

The focus of the U.S. project is a study of the worldviews of those elites and quasi-elites on the front lines of American-based globalization. What are some of the defining characteristics of their worldviews? What moral terms do “globalizers” use to make sense of their latent role in the globalizing process? And in what ways do the globalizers regard their cultural products as beneficial, humanitarian, or liberating? In addressing these questions, the research will examine the various strategies key actors employ in conducting and legitimating their initiatives in the globalization process.

To date, interviews have been conducted with high-level officers from a number of global organizations. These include the Vice President for Global Brand Management at Nike, the President of International Networks and Global Newsgathering for CNN, the Vice President and Director of Communications Strategy for Coca-Cola, the Program Director for Media and Education at the Ford Foundation, the President of 20th Century Fox International, and others. Many more interviews will be conducted in the months ahead. In August, James Hunter presented a report of preliminary findings to the 10-country team of scholars gathered in Bellagio, Italy. Look for highlights from this report in the next issue of *InSight*.

The Hedgehog Review



The fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing.
—Archilocus

The Institute has recently published the first issue of its new, interdisciplinary journal *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*. The title of the journal is inspired by the Greek lyricist Archilocus' observation, made famous by the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin, that "the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Published three times a year, this new journal explores contemporary

culture by focusing each issue on "one big thing" of particular importance to our historical moment. Whether the problems of identity, the future of democracy, the question of evil, or the purposes of the university—themes that will be pursued in its early issues—*The Hedgehog Review* will pose hard questions, pursue knotty controversies, and push current discussions forward. The format will include original essays from across the disciplines by prominent figures in their fields, focused interviews with leading scholars, review essays of important new books, and annotated bibliographies on each topic—all contributing to making this publication a unique resource for those concerned with making sense of the puzzles, perplexities, and promises of our time.

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Response
Form

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Introducing InSight

Welcome to the first issue of *InSight*, the newsletter for the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. We have created *InSight* with two goals in mind.

The first is to keep you, our colleagues, friends, and supporters, appraised of the program and progress of the Institute. Published twice during the academic year, in September and January, each issue will provide highlights of the past semester as well as announcements

In addition to information about who we are and what we're doing, **InSight** will convey, in brief compass, something of the substance of our work.

of forthcoming lectures, conferences, publications, and so on. In addition, and to let you know more about who we are, *InSight* will include an interview with one of our fellows,

touching on both their background and current research efforts. Beyond information about our program and undertakings, a second aim of *InSight* is to convey, in brief compass, something of the substance of our work. In each issue, we'll recommend books, summarize research initiatives and findings, and share insights from our publications, colloquia, and lectures. In this way, we hope *InSight* will also serve our broader educational purposes. We hope you find *InSight* both informative and useful. We welcome your feedback.

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If you would like to continue receiving *InSight*, we need to hear from you. Given our infrequent mailings in the recent past, we fear that our mailing list is badly out of date. Therefore, we are starting afresh and ask that you let us know if you are interested in receiving further issues. You can contact us by: (1) sending in the response form on the preceding page; (2) calling our office; or (3) even easier, sending us an e-mail. When contacting us, please be sure to provide your full name and current mailing address so that our records can be properly updated. Thank you. We look forward to hearing from you!

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