



# RICH *views*



an independent, not-for-profit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities Fall 2003

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR . . . . .

Dear Friends,  
I write this letter on the eve of my departure for Copenhagen. I am tremendously blessed to be one of the Rhode Island Foundation Fellows this year: this trip is the first part of a year-long journey to consider the connections between cultural policy and social change. This topic has preoccupied me for a long time, but I feel that this exciting opportunity to delve deeper into these connections could not have come at a more auspicious time.

Deep cuts to state and local agencies are matched by drops in foundation, corporate

and individual giving across the country. RICH is not immune to these conditions. I am sad to report that two of our signature programs, *Rhode Island Legacy* and *Rhode Island Dialogues* are currently on hiatus due to budgetary constraints. In the same breath, I am pleased to recognize the support we continue to receive for other programs such as *Literature and Medicine*, *EnRICHment Opportunities*, *Summer Book Club*, and most recently, *What is Freedom?*

As I was packing for my trip, I realized that I will be flying around the anniversary of the event we now know as 9/11. Since that day two years ago much has

happened, both here and abroad. In conversations with friends, colleagues, RICH grantees and program participants I often find myself sharing expressions of frustration and sadness about the world of fear and limitation we now live in. At those times I remain grateful for the work RICH does and for the honor of being part of the team of board members, staff and grantees that makes this work happen.

Our lives are truly enriched by the study of the humanities. We will continue to build vital community by following RICH's worthwhile mission of offering provocative dialogue and thoughtful

explorations of these critical and relevant issues.  
Please join us during National Arts and Humanities Month at our 30th anniversary subscriber series as we celebrate our history and award the 2003 Tom Roberts Prize. We have a lot to be proud of.

I look forward to sharing my Danish adventures with you later this year. Until then, *har det godt!*

*Drake Patten*  
Drake Patten  
Executive Director

## SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS TIES THAT BIND . . . . .

RICH is pleased that distinguished author Scott Russell Sanders will visit Rhode Island as part of our subscribers series. Risa Gilpin, RICH's new Program Director had the opportunity recently to pose several questions to the author.

1. In your book "Hunting for Hope" you thoughtfully identify qualities such as family, fidelity, simplicity, beauty, and wildness as the core elements that we can look to when searching for good reason to maintain the spirit of hope in our lives. Given the situation in the world today do you still think that these core reasons for hope continue to apply?

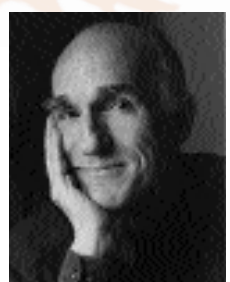
The American poet Theodore Roethke wrote that, "In a dark time, the eye begins to see." These are dark times,

because of the mean-spirited and short-sighted politics within our own country, and because of the widespread violence, poverty, and suffering around the world. But I believe that we can still draw strength and inspiration from the sources that have always nourished human beings. We are still capable of acting with compassion and generosity and wisdom. The powers of community, fidelity, simplicity, wildness, beauty, spirituality, and the other wellsprings of renewal that I write of in *Hunting for Hope* are just as fresh as ever.

2. How can we, as a people, work towards encouraging the idea of community through dialogue and discussion in our lives? How do we engage younger folks in this idea?

First of all, we need to spend less time staring at screens, listening to earphones, running around in our cars, and shopping, and we need to spend more time getting to know our neighbors, learning about the condition of our local schools and parks and landscapes, getting involved in the political and business decisions that shape our home grounds. We need to go outside, walk or bicycle through the neighborhood, talk with people about the places that we share. We need to support local merchants, local farmers, local artists and crafts people. Parents and other elders need to spend more time with children—walking, talking, making music, gardening, changing the oil in the car, building a woodshed.

If we expect young people to understand that their own health depends on the health of the communities in which they live, we'll have to demonstrate that connection in our own lives.



Scott Russell Sanders

3. Each state has a humanities council that attempts to bring the academy into the community. How critical is this work? How can we reach people who may not even know what the humanities are and how they apply to everyone's lives?

*Continued on back*

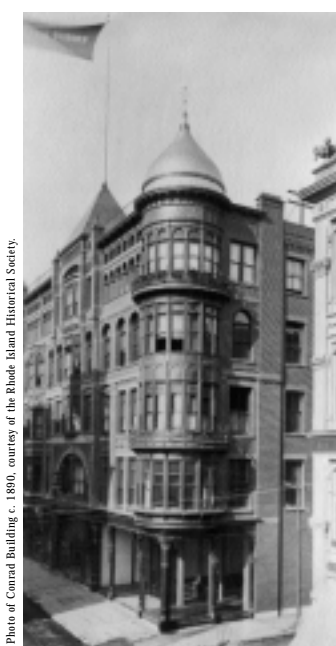


Photo of Conrad Building c. 1890, courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

RICH  
...inspiring and supporting intellectual curiosity and imagination in all Rhode Islanders...

## 30 YEARS, 3 EVENTS, 1 QUESTION WHAT IS FREEDOM?

*Celebrate National Arts & Humanities Month and join us in commemorating our 30th year!*

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS:  
TIES THAT BIND

September 29th, 6-9 p.m.  
Providence Journal Auditorium  
6 p.m. – Reception  
7 p.m. – Scott Russell Sanders

Scott Russell Sanders is the author of eighteen books, including *Staying Put*, *Hunting for Hope*, and *The Force of Spirit*. For his work in nonfiction, he has won the Lannan Literary Award and the John Burroughs Essay Award, as well as fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Lilly Endowment. In all of his books he is concerned with our place in nature, the pursuit of social justice, the character of the community, and the search for a spiritual path. He is Distinguished Professor of English at Indiana University.

A NIGHT OF INDEPENDENT FILM,  
LIVING IN AMERICA: STORIES  
OF CULTURE, CONFLICT AND  
IMMIGRATION

October 6th., 6-9 p.m.  
Columbus Theatre  
6 p.m. – Reception with filmmaker Shawn Hainsworth  
7 p.m. – A night of independent film

- In My Own Skin: The Complexity of Living as an Arab in America (Nikki Byrd and Jennifer Jajeh)
- I Call Myself Persian: Iranians in America (Tanaz Eshaghian and Sara Nodjourni)
- My American Father (Shawn Hainsworth)
- Days of Waiting (Steven Okazaki)

Post screening discussion: Filmmaker Shawn Hainsworth and Nasser Zawia, President of Masjid Alhoda (Muslim Community Center of Kingston)

JOHN R. MACARTHUR:  
DISREPUTABLE DEFENDERS  
OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT:  
FROM COLONEL MCCORMICK  
TO LARRY FLYNT

October 20th, 6-9 p.m.  
Providence Journal Auditorium  
6 p.m. – Reception  
7 p.m. – Awarding of the Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities  
7:30 p.m. – John R. MacArthur

John R. (Rick) MacArthur is an award-winning reporter and author, as well as the publisher of *Harper's Magazine*, a position he has held since 1983 – three years after he initiated the magazine's rescue with the formation of the Harper's Magazine Foundation. He writes a monthly column for the Providence Journal and for Canada's national newspaper, the *Globe & Mail*. Mr. MacArthur is the author of two books: *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* and, most recently, *The Selling of 'Free Trade': NAFTA, Washington and the Subversion of American Democracy*. His work has also appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, and many other newspapers and magazines.

Tickets are available in advance only. Please contact RICH at 401-273-2250  
This series is made possible, in part, through the support of The Providence Journal, Verizon, and Whole Foods.

## RECENT GRANT AWARDS

### EARLY RESPONSE GRANTS

#### NONFICTION RULES – A FORUM ON JOURNALISM, STORYTELLING AND ONLINE MAGAZINE SIX BILLION AS220 \$1,000

This event features a collection of work in a variety of media thematically linked by the authors' creation of an obituary. After the participating authors, journalists, and new media artists present their work, a panel of scholars critiques and contextualizes this collection of creative obituaries.

#### SACCO AND VANZETTI New York Foundation for the Arts \$2,000

This documentary film seeks to expose the political unrest, ethnic conflict, and government suppression of radical organizations that shaped American culture during the time of the Sacco and Vanzetti conviction and trial.

#### HONG IMMIGRANTS: A GENERATION LATER Rhode Island School of Design \$2,000

This documentary film looks at change over time in the lives of Southeast Asian refugees resettled in the United States, after the American withdrawal from the wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Specifically, it will look at the experiences of several Hmong families who were settled originally in Providence, RI in 1976 and where their lives have taken them.

#### GILBERT STUART: A PORTRAIT FROM LIFE

*Gilbert Stuart Memorial, Inc. \$2,000*  
This documentary project examines the life, times, and work of Rhode Island portrait artist Gilbert Stuart. The film considers Stuart's extraordinary life story and highlights the role of visual artists as chroniclers of history in an era before the advent of photography.

#### GRAY PANTHERS' SUMMER PROWL Gray Panthers of Rhode Island \$1,570

This series of film and discussion events bring seniors together at five locations throughout the state to learn about Gray Panther founder Maggie Kuhn. A scholar will lead post-screening discussions and provide contextual information to the audience regarding the history of the Gray Panther movement and the political and social climate of the era during which the Gray Panthers formed.

#### PRESERVING PAWTUCKET'S HISTORICAL HERITAGE: "WEAVING THE FABRIC FROM PAST TO PRESENT"

*Preservation Society of Pawtucket \$1,280*  
This project, involving a partnership between the Preservation Society of Pawtucket and the Boys and Girls Club of Pawtucket, enables elementary students the opportunity to gain an understanding and appreciation of the historical significance of both the people and places of Pawtucket, RI.

#### ART ACROSS BORDERS AS220 \$1,825

This panel discussion and public exhibition features the artwork and experience of Iraqi and Palestinian artists, explores the rich cultural tradition of the arts in the Middle East, and investigates the violence and upheaval contemporary artists face in their struggle to create.

#### DEMOCRACY AND CAPTIVITY Brown University, Department of Theatre, Speech, and Dance \$2,000

This series of lectures is a part of a year-long collaborative faculty project across humanities disciplines, which aims to critically explore the topic of "Incarceration, Narrative, and Performance." The Democracy and Captivity lecture series presents six public lectures by leading scholars, writers, and thinkers and offers opportunities for discussion.

#### HUMANITIES RESOURCE GRANTS

#### NATHANAEEL GREENE HERRESHOFF ARCHIVAL COLLECTION

*Herreshoff Marine Museum \$2,000*  
This project seeks to upgrade the Herreshoff Marine Museum library in order to preserve and protect materials and make holdings more accessible to researchers and the public.

#### THE RHODE ISLAND STATE HOME AND SCHOOL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT Rhode Island College \$7,760

This project documents the lives of former residents and staff of the Rhode Island State Home and School for Neglected and Dependent Children and the Dr. Patrick O'Rourke Children's Center. Through interviews, an oral history archive, workshops, and other public activities, this project will document and publicize the experiences of children who lived in Rhode Island's first public institution for destitute children.

### INDEPENDENT RESEARCH GRANTS

#### EVERLASTING Ann Fessler \$1960

This project documents the experiences of women who became pregnant outside of marriage and surrendered their newborns for adoption between 1945 (the end of World War II) and 1973 (Roe v. Wade). Excerpts from the interviews are being used in multi-media gallery installations and for the soundtrack of a film. At the conclusion of the project, the original interview tapes and transcripts become part of the permanent collection of the Schlesinger Library's oral history archive at Harvard University.

#### SITUATIONIST INTERVENTIONS Miranda Mellis \$2000

This project researches the aesthetic and political theories and projects of the Situationists, a European art movement most active in France between 1957 and 1972, and their relevance to the post-modern city. The research project culminates in a public program, including a presentation and reading, the screening of three short Situationist films, a post-viewing Q&A discussion, and a workshop at The People's School.

#### THE WILCOXES OF WESTERLY Sandra Laub \$2000

The project director, in consultation with a scholar, researches and develops a script for a play based on historical records of the lives of two prominent Rhode Island citizens, Mr. Stephen Wilcox and Mrs. Harriet Wilcox. Through the story of the Wilcoxes, audiences learn about this unique philanthropic partnership and their far-sighted civic-planning. The play is performed at the conclusion of script development and each performance is followed by a moderated discussion.

#### FIVE YEARS, EIGHT MILLS Scott Lapham \$2000

This project documents eight industrial mill buildings in Providence slated for demolition through photography and oral history. An exhibition and exhibition catalog with reproduced photographs and transcribed oral histories are planned to bring this work to the public.

#### SISSIERETTA JONES, "BLACK PATTI" Carol Landau \$2000

This project seeks to research and develop a biography for Providence performer Sissieretta Jones, also known as "Black Patti." Through the development of a

Power Point presentation and discussion materials for youth, this project also seeks to use this narrative to help children understand local history, women's issues and race issues.

### PUBLIC PROJECT GRANTS

#### INTERNATIONAL FEST 2004 Johnson & Wales University \$2,612

This series of events aims to investigate the links between culture and food. Scholars, students, and community members gather for a film and discussion series, a gallery night exhibition and panel discussion, and an international food festival, educating the public on the role of food in many cultural traditions.

#### EDUCATION, ARTS, AND FREEDOM: AN EXPLORATION OF PEDAGOGY AND PHILOSOPHY Community MusicWorks \$4,865

This project involves a public lecture, a teachers' workshop, and a series of facilitated dialogues with youth in exploring the history of educational philosopher Paola Freire's work in an effort to inspire dialogue about freedom, oppression, and the arts.

#### PRESERVATION PRIORITIES: CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY IN RHODE ISLAND

*Preserve Rhode Island \$4,400*  
This series of public presentations bring scholars and communities together to discuss community development, the preservation of community and neighborhood character, and Rhode Island's historic and natural resources. The presentations are designed to address issues that are identified by each community as most urgent and to relate those to broader social themes such as gentrification and sense of place.

#### SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

#### BUDDY CIANCI, FLAWED HERO Documentary Education Resources \$5000

Project director Cherry Arnold is producing a film exploring Buddy Cianci's political career in Providence. The film will study Buddy Cianci's story as a story of the "Flawed Hero."



A group of RICH board and staff members enjoying a break from the June board meeting.

### ADIOS Y BUENA SUERTE...

RICH bids a fond farewell to Ingrid Ahlgren, our Program Officer, who left RICH this summer to attend graduate school at the University of Missouri.

### RICH IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE

that a new roster of speakers and presentations are now available through our Speakers Bureau. To obtain a copy of the *Resource Guide to Public Speakers 2003 Addendum*, please contact RICH at 273-2250. (Copies of our original book are available as well.)

## RISA GILPIN JOINS RICH AS PROGRAM DIRECTOR . . . . .

Risa Gilpin, a RICH Board member for the past 6 years and formerly at the Providence Athenaeum, recently joined the RICH staff as Program Director. She has settled in to the "fishbowl" corner office at 385 Westminster and is quickly becoming a vital part of the energized staff.

*Q: What are your thoughts Risa as you prepare to take on a new role with RICH?*

My 22 years at the Athenaeum as Director of Programming and Membership gave me a truly diverse skill-set, mostly based on quick and creative problem solving. A library, and particularly the collection of a 250-year-old institution, is the greatest repository of the concrete works of the inquisitive mind. I have always approached my job with this in mind. Ideas are only dead or irretrievably captive if they are allowed to just sit on the shelves. It is part of the work of public programming in the humanities to bring the ideas contained in these books to life. This work never ceases to thrill and amaze me for the very infinite variety that is in its nature. I never tire of this pursuit which encourages the retention of the important information we all need in order to piece together a more complete understanding of the puzzle that is life and human experience.

The work is best and most valuable when the goal is to present the humanities in a forum that is smart, welcoming, and available to all. It can be as simple as creating the forum for a good conversation,

or as complicated as putting together an intense series of orchestrated theme-based programs. At this moment RICH is truly poised to move ahead on this path. The challenge of welcoming new and underserved communities into the fold also offers great potential. I look forward to exploring the opportunities inherent in all and any of these givens.

I have had a life-long interest in the arts and while working at the RISD library I was able to read and absorb so much lasting knowledge and take many continuing classes in the arts and crafts, while at the same time learning all aspects of library work, including reference. It was this very style of on-the-job training that has continuously informed my ability to know how to find the right resources in the right places using the right contacts. My ever-present quest for knowledge has been my own personal version of a classical education.

*Q: How do you spend time away from your job?*

I am definitely a voracious reader (the Athenaeum has set up "The Risa Gilpin Book Fund" to buy contemporary fiction) and it's hard to choose a #1 book, although I do seem to return to "Water Music" by T.C. Boyle and "Winters Tale" by Mark Helprin. I belong to the most wonderful book discussion group - we've been together 3 years, a great diverse group of talented women who range in age from 30's to 50's - and the last two books we've read were "A Fine

Balance" by Rohinton Mistry (India in the 1970's) and "A Map of Love" by A. Soueif (Egypt from turn of century to contemporary), both good and highly informative putting into perspective multiple world views.

I love going to the movies and live performance. Another one of my passions is world music - my kids always say no one would steal my cd's because they've never heard of any of the artists that I really like. I love to dance - latin, ballroom, folk. Travel can also be added to my interests - particularly to France and Italy. What I enjoy about travel is the opportunity to experience different cultures, cuisines and reap the benefits of exposure to new sights and sounds. Right after high school I lived in Mexico for a year and I feel that that experience has shaped my life - not only did I learn Spanish, I also understood, early in my life, that I could shape my own destiny by plunging head-first into new experiences.

My children, Mikaela and Willie, are my greatest treasures - Mik just graduated from Wheelock College, in Boston, where she created her own major in Visual Arts; Willie will be a sophomore at Dean College in Franklin, Mass. where he plays football.

My board work at RICH has given me a clear understanding of the role of public humanities - its mission, goals, inner workings, relationship to the National Endowment, and most of all, its impact. That impact is truly the compelling work



Risa Gilpin, New Program Director for RICH

of the organization. Our recent retreat and the continuing work of the Strategic Planning Committee make me certain that we can accomplish unprecedented achievements that will have true value for our society. I have admired the accomplishments of the "What is Freedom" initiative, have experienced first-hand the phenomenal "Literature and Medicine" program, and just generally have come to realize how these initiatives truly build community and add to the heart and soul of our world.

RICH is an organization I already know and love. Joining the staff offers me an opportunity of doing the work that I know and love, with the people I know and love. The match is perfect and the outcome hopefully the fulfillment of a life long dream. I am looking forward to the challenge of working in that broad context and working for the entire population of Rhode Islanders.

## RICH PRESENTS "WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO US?" . . . . .

*This series of talks and public events has been developed in conjunction with a RICH funded special grants initiative that asked for projects that creatively examine the question "What is Freedom?"*

### GRANTEES PROJECTS

*For specific information regarding time, date, and location, please visit the RICH website at [www.uri.edu/rich](http://www.uri.edu/rich) or contact the sponsoring organization.*

*Creating Postcards from the Past. Sending Postcards into the Future: A dialogue about freedom as we lived and live it in Pawtuxet Village*

Cranston Public Library with folklorist Michael Bell, and community volunteers combine the efforts of youth, scholars, artists, educators, and residents of all ages in an investigation of various conceptions of freedom as reflected in folk expressions, with special focus on Pawtuxet Village. Events occur on Saturdays throughout the fall.

After the workshops end in December, students, parents, scholars, and artists will create a set of "freedom" postcards. These postcards will be sent to area residents. In March '04, there will be a public convening of participants and the general public to consider the meaning of the postcards in the context of past and current events around Pawtuxet Village and in the world today. The mounting and display of the postcards into a travelling exhibit of a Pawtuxet Wall of Freedom, supported by a grant from RISCA, is planned for the Spring '04.

### *What Does Freedom Mean?*

Oasis International working with Professor Daniel Scott has developed a series of public forums asking what

freedom means to youth and immigrant communities of color. Events will be held in October, December, and April.

### *The Freedom Program*

The RISD Museum with English Professor Mairéad Byrne will involve the public in a series of programs that examine freedom in the context of American slavery. In addition to an exhibition of Glenn Ligon's *Runaways* and Freedom Tours led by Community Prep students, the RISD Museum will offer an "Interview with Frederick Douglass" about his lecture tour during the Great Famine in Ireland 1845-6 while still a fugitive slave, co-scripted by English scholar Mairéad Byrne and scholar Charles Pace, reflecting upon variations in freedom as defined by law, literacy and literature. Events will take place at the RISD Museum and January-February '04.

### *Unheard Voices*

The Institute for Labor Studies and Research, Political Scientist Lawrence Rothstein, and Professor of Social Work Daniel Weisman will ask a diverse sample of workers in Rhode Island "What does freedom mean to workers?"; and they will produce videos and television programs, and adult workshops and public forums, and exploring how experience exercising rights and liberties informs the learning of democratic values in the workplace and how access and perceptions of economic and political systems shape personal freedom. Events will take place in October and November. Airdates TBA.

### *American Democracy Under Siege*

Hera Gallery and American Civilization scholar Paul Buhle will develop an art exhibition and a series of panel discussions, that examine the role of artistic expression, its freedoms, and the threats against those freedoms, by looking at local history, national trends, and cultural diversity in the arts. Events will take place throughout October.

### *Rhode Island Slavery and Its Legacies*

Historian Joanne Pope Melish will work with sponsoring organizations Smith's Castle, the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, and the Newport Historical Society; the group will develop a historical dramatization and curriculum materials for young children and adults to examine American freedom in the context of race, racial ideologies, and the history of slavery and emancipation in Rhode Island. Events will take place in February '04.

### OCTOBER RICH FREEDOM TALKS

*Work and Freedom: Learning by Doing.* Lawrence E. Rothstein  
*Expanding the Limits of Self Determination.* Daniel Weisman  
October 15th, 7pm  
Institute for Labor Studies, Cranston.  
Contact: 463-9900

*Culture or Censorship? Freedom and the Avante-Garde in Rhode Island.* Paul Buhle  
October 16th, 7pm  
Monhasset Mills, Providence.  
Contact: 789-1488

*The Lion & The Tiger: Frederick Douglass in Ireland, 1845-1846.* Mairéad Byrne  
October 19th, 2:30pm  
RISD Museum, Providence.  
Contact: 331-3511

*Stories of Freedom* Daniel Scott  
October 23rd, 6pm  
Rhode Island Foundation, Providence.  
Contact: 421-1252

*Rhode Island Slavery and its Legacies.* Joanne Pope Melish  
October 26th, 2pm  
Kingston Congregational Church, Kingston.  
Contact: 783-5330

*Freedom as a Folk Idea in Pawtuxet Village.* Michael Bell  
October 28th, 7pm  
Location: William Hall Library, Cranston.  
Contact: 943-9080

## IT'S TIME AGAIN FOR ACTION SPEAKS!



This year's 'Action Speaks', Significant Yet Underappreciated Dates of the Twentieth Century, looks at issues having to do with the continual tension between free speech, security and democracy. Covering issues such as the Sacco and Vanzetti case, Graffiti, and the Port Huron Statement (the ideological 'touchstone' of early 1960s student radicalism), Action Speaks will engage the Rhode Island Community in a dialogue very much at the forefront of our national conversation, as it brings in such speakers as Patricia Williams, Bernardine Dohrn, Mayor David Cicilline and Paul Buhle.

*All panel discussions are held at AS220 (115 Empire St., Providence) beginning at 5:30 p.m.*

### OCTOBER 7TH PANEL

1946: Postwar U.S. Occupation of Japan  
*Can Democracy be "Imposed"?*

*THE OCT. 14TH PANEL HAS BEEN MOVED TO URI'S PAFF AUDITORIUM DOWNTOWN. THE TIME HAS ALSO BEEN CHANGED TO BEGIN AT 7PM!!!! THESE CHANGES ONLY AFFECT THIS PANEL.*

### OCTOBER 14TH PANEL

1965: Immigrant and Nationality Act America's "Complexion"  
*Changed Forever*

### OCTOBER 21ST PANEL

1988: Indian Gaming Law  
*A Chance to Take a Chance...*

### OCTOBER 28TH PANEL:

1962: Port Huron Statement Written Students for a Democratic Society is created and 1960's Student Radicalism has its "Constitution"

### NOVEMBER 4TH PANEL

1920: Sacco and Vanzetti Arrested!  
*Terrorism, Racial Profiling and Restrictions on Personal Liberties!*

### NOVEMBER 11TH PANEL

1973: United Graffiti Artists (UGA) coin the term "Graffiti Artists".  
*"It's Our City and We'll Paint Where We Want to."*

The Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University will sponsor a debate entitled "Spray this! The Ethics of Graffiti" between 4 and 5pm, featuring accomplished high school debaters from the Rhode Island Debate League.

**RICH HAS CAMERAS** that are available **TO LEND**

out to groups for various projects. Please contact the Program Director at 273-2250 for more information.

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THE  
RHODE ISLAND  
COUNCIL  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES

## SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS *Continued*

The "humanities" include all those fields of study and practice that help us understand what it means to be human. They help us answer the central questions: How have people lived, in various times and places? How have our ancestors made sense of the world? How has our present world come to be this way, and how might it be made better? How should we lead our lives? I can't imagine any knowledge that is more vital. Our society is obsessed with getting and spending, and so we reward those disciplines that point directly to money. But if we gain riches and lose our souls, how have we profited? What could be more foolish than to cause suffering and to destroy the Earth while chasing money? The humanities put us in touch with our own depths. They help us think about the meaning of life. People trained in the humanities—scholars, artists, lifelong readers—can demonstrate the value of their knowledge not merely by writing or speaking but by leading their lives in responsible, thoughtful, and becoming ways.

*4. How has television, with its "dumbing down" effects (read reality tv), influenced our society? How can we counteract the power of this strongly embraced medium?*

I hope it goes without saying that some television programs are informing, uplifting, even inspiring. At their best, TV dramas can move us in ways analogous to the best of theater and film; and the best TV documentaries can show us worthy aspects of the world that we might not be able to witness in any other way. But most of what appears on TV steals our time, numbs us to violence, distracts our minds and hearts from the real questions and real pleasures of living. Much of what passes for "news" on TV is a sales

pitch for an ideology or a product. TV offers a surrogate "reality" that is almost entirely inferior to the actual world. It exploits what we value—sexuality, family, community, beauty, solidarity, nature, skillful work—in order to sell us things that by and large we don't need. TV is a kind of drug, one that is more dangerous to our society and to the planet than most of the drugs for sale on our streets. It is a seductive medium because it appeals to our shallowest and laziest impulses; it makes no demands on us except to sit with our eyes open and to crave the products, fashions, and services that stream across the screen. The kindest thing we can do for our children is to get rid of our televisions, or to severely restrict the programs that we allow to enter our houses and minds.

*5. Are you currently working on a new book, and if so, what is the focus?*

I've just begun writing a book called *A Private History of Awe*. This will be a spiritual autobiography, with an emphasis on "spirit" rather than "auto-". I'm interested in tracing my own encounters with the ground of being—that nameless power from which all life flows. Everything I care about, all of my fundamental values and delights, my concerns about the welfare of people and planet, my sense of how to live arise from these encounters with the force of spirit. At age 57, I feel ready to recount this history, to understand what I can of the source of things. (Readers who might wish to sample this book-in-progress could look at an essay of mine, also entitled "A Private History of Awe," in the Jan/Feb 2003 issue of *Orion* magazine.)

— Scott Russell Sanders  
22 August 2003

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