

Editor's Note

IN 1975, when the first issue of *Prospects* was published, I wrote a brief "Editor's Note," in which I pointed out that in the section of "Nature" titled "Prospects, Emerson wrote that "there are far more excellent qualities in the student than preciseness and infallibility; that a guess is often more fruitful than an indisputable affirmation, and that a dream may let us deeper into the secret of nature than a hundred concerted experiments." It was in this spirit, I wrote thirty years ago, that *Prospects* was conceived. Now, thirty years later, as I announce that this will be the last issue of the annual, I am more than a little pleased to see how often *Prospects* lived up to the spirit in which it was conceived.

Endings almost always make us wonder about beginnings, and this is as appropriate an occasion as I will have to tell of *Prospects*' origins. It is an unusual story, and one I hope worth telling. In the early months of 1975 I was introduced to a young book publisher, Tom Franklin. Tom was the son of Burt Franklin, who had established an important reprint house. Although he had inherited his father's business, Tom did not want to limit the publications of Burt Franklin and Company to reprints. During lunch he asked what at first seemed a strange question: "If you could publish any kind of work you wanted to, what would it be? Can you name a few things off the top of your head?" I no longer remember exactly what I said, but I did say I'd like to begin a new journal. When he asked why a journal, I told him I found most of the scholarly journals I had to read uninteresting. Amazingly, he told me to call him in two days and he'd give me an answer. "An answer to what?" I asked. "Which work I'd like to publish," he told me.

So I called Tom two days later and to my amazement he told me he was interested in the idea of starting a journal. There were two conditions: he wanted the work to be an annual and he wanted to publish the first number before the year was out. I said sure – how could I not? Then I began to worry. I had less than half a year to put together a manuscript and I really didn't know what to do. And then I got lucky. I called Ray Browne, the editor of the *Journal of Popular Culture*, and asked if he had any manuscripts he might consider letting me have for a new journal. He didn't, he said, but he knew that his friend Russell Nye had a piece on the Jean Goldkette Orchestra that Nye wanted to see published sooner than Browne could publish it. I called Nye and, with a promise that I would include a photograph of the Goldkette orchestra, I had my first manuscript. That allowed me to write to friends and strangers and announce the upcoming publication of an annual called *Prospects*, which would include an article by the Pulitzer Prize historian, Russell Nye, and "others." It wasn't too long before the "others" were fact rather than wishful thinking, and in December 1975 the first number of *Prospects* was published.

What most distinguished *Prospects* upon its publication was its appearance: its 445 pages were bound in dark blue cloth with gold lettering. When

Prospects 3 was published in 1977 it appeared both in cloth and paper, but that experiment lasted only for the one issue. The following year *Prospects* again appeared only in its cloth binding. But permanent change was not too far away. At the beginning of the 1980s, at a meeting in Philadelphia of the American Studies Association, Cambridge University Press expressed interest in publishing *Prospects*. In 1983 the first issue of *Prospects* was published under the Cambridge imprint. My discussions with Tom Franklin gave way to discussions with Barbara Colson and Andrew Brown. Eventually, Barbara would leave her position at the CUP, but Andy Brown has remained one of my truest friends for more than twenty years. It was, in fact, because of Andy that I took on the editorship of what became the three volume *American Studies: An Annotated Bibliography*. At that point in my life I was Director of the Center for American Culture Studies at Columbia University. As such, I worked on a daily basis with some really smart and enthusiastic students. Andy thought an annotated bibliography of books in the field of American cultural studies would be of value, and so another venture was launched. In 1986 Cambridge published the *Bibliography*, which was more than 2,000 pages long and contained annotations of almost 6,500 books. For two years – 1987 and 1988 – *Prospects* was published in two volumes: one devoted to the essays and the other to an update of the *Bibliography*. The following year *Prospects* reverted to its original format: a single volume devoted to interesting scholarship. It has continued in that format to the present. Even the cover has remained constant: on the front there is an engraving by A. Kollner and on the back encomiums from Russell Nye, Kai Erickson, Daniel Aaron, Warren Susman, and an anonymous writer at *Choice* (“One of the most exciting anthologies of intellectual research in the last decade.”)

As I said in the Editor’s Note to the first volume, I wanted *Prospects* to “move counter to the increasingly doctrinaire and computer-oriented approach to scholarship that has become so dominant in recent years.” I have little interest in “cutting-edge” scholarship or writers who feel compelled to use the latest academic jargon. I wanted *Prospects* to offer its readers “exceptional works of criticism and scholarship.” It has been a great pleasure for me to publish works by well-known scholars as well as younger people just beginning their careers. It has also given me great pleasure to be able to include essays in this final volume of some of the people I knew as graduate students at the Center for American Culture Studies, as well as scholars whose work I have published more than once in *Prospects*. I thank them all for the pleasure they have given me as editor of *Prospects*. I would be remiss if I did not also thank Tom Franklin, Barbara Colson, Ed Carey, Ed Barnas, John Flukas, and especially Andrew Brown for their help and support. At Hunter College, I want to thank Jennifer Raab, Judith Friedlander, and especially Barbara Welter, Chair of the History Department, for giving me an opportunity to return to the place I enjoy above all: the classroom. And because I have always done with *Prospects* as I have thought best, I want to end with an expression of love and gratitude to those who matter most: in West Hartford, Ellie, Doug, Becca, and Libby; in Ridgewood, Linda, Danny, Phoebe, and Jonah. In me and always with me, there is Cecily, who for almost fifty years has made all our prospects seem possible. It is only fitting that the final words of thanks and love go to her.

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October 2005