

THE EASTERN VOICE

Eastern American Studies Organization

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**Q & A with EASA's new President:
Louise Stevenson: Pages 2-4**



From the Editor's Desk: Pages 5-6

Dr. Charles Kupfer's Top Five Favorite Political Novels: Pages 7-8



228 Earle Street: Page 9

The Ominous Past of Eastern State Penitentiary: Pages 10-11



Presidential monsters: Page 12

2017 Annual Conference of the Eastern American Studies Association Call for Papers



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Q & A with EASA's new President:

Louise Stevenson

Q: You have spent much of your career at Franklin & Marshall. Are you from Lancaster originally?

A: I came to Lancaster when F&M offered me the job. My husband and I moved from New Hampshire where I taught at UNH and he was curator of the Currier Gallery in Lancaster. We had a long-distance marriage during the first academic year. Then the York County Historical Society hired him as director. And by the way, I am a proud Buffalonian. Snow is of little consequence there, but a big deal here.

Q: You have served on the board of directors of the Lancaster County League of Woman voters for 22 years. What is the most rewarding aspect of this?

A: I most enjoyed going to the national convention several years ago in Portland. It was energizing to see how women across the country addressed issues, and Portland offered terrific twentieth-century architecture and natural scenery.

Q: Lincoln has attracted more scholarship than any other president. There may be more books and articles on him than on any other American topic! How was it that you were able to find a new pathway into the mind of our most researched figure?

A: I am amazed that I did so. The first step is get curious. Having just read a friend's new book collecting the letters that people wrote Mrs. Kennedy after her husband's death, I wondered if I could do something similar with Lincoln. I started with the question of what the people of the world thought about him and the U.S. after he died. Immediately, I found sources that no one had examined—ever. Then, I imagined the future president as a young man. What had he thought of world events during his youth? Again, no one had examined the impact on him of a famous Barbary pirate narrative or the revolutions of 1848.

Q: How do your findings of Lincoln's global vision change our current portrait of him? What do we now know that we didn't know before?

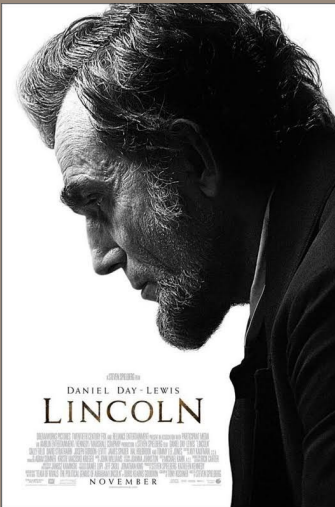


EASA President Louise Stevenson

A: We know to what extent he mattered to people of the Atlantic world. For example, Argentina immediately named a city after him, Italian cities built monuments, and France named streets. Second, we know that the backwoodsman-to-president image of him grossly mischaracterizes the breadth of his self-education. (See my next answer)

Q: Is there a connection between Lincoln's domestic policy and his global vision or did they operate on completely separate planes?

A: They were inextricably integrated. Lincoln and Atlantic world people of the mid-nineteenth century imagined that the world was getting better in the political sense that monarchy was disappearing and that republican government, or government by and of the people, was rising then you can see that the U.S. is a key player in this historical progression. Republican revolutions across Europe had failed in 1848. In 1861, if secession succeeded, the monarchies of the world could say that republicanism did not allow for stable, enduring national governments. In this sense, if the Union was not preserved, republicanism had no future. The progressive vision was proved false.



Q: What did you think of Spielberg's Lincoln?

A: I could write forever here. I would rather have people know what Spielberg shows about Lincoln, even if it's not entirely accurate, than know nothing about him. I thought Spielberg was trying to teach current presidential leaders and politicians that they can lead and compromise. Note Lincoln's politicking for the 13th amendment and how Thaddeus Stevens compromises. There are several parts of the film that made me steam. Lydia Hamilton Smith went to confession at St. Ann's Catholic Church every week and never did penance for sexual impropriety, and only one hearsay piece of evidence suggests that Lincoln threatened Mary with commitment to an asylum.

Q: How did you first become interested in EASA?

A: When I started out, the regional associations were active within the national ASA. So going to regional doings was something one simply did.

Q: You are starting out on your two-year term as EASA's president. Haddad mostly held down the fort during his presidency. We saw little in the way of innovation. Do you have any plans or initiatives for your presidency? Are there any areas you believe could be developed further?

A: Doing things well is a positive good; innovation is not always a positive good. I'm hoping that this year in Harrisburg we will draw on local resources for our speaker and be able to learn about the relationship between state government and public culture and history. Next year, we will be

visiting a site in Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh (<http://oldeconomyvillage.org/history/>) that will show off the rich, diverse history of the state. The Harmonists founded an apocalyptic Christian communist community. We will hold our meeting in eighteenth-century buildings built by this utopian settlement.



Stevenson on Smart Talk

Q: These days, there are fewer majors in fields like History and American Studies. What can we do attract more young people?

A: I wish I knew. The training in research, analytical thinking, and writing that these majors offers prepares students for so many paths in life. Students from these majors have become movie makers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, bank executives, Wall St. executives, politicians, and great teachers. Btw, identify a U.S. president who didn't study history and he will not rank highly.

Q: You teach courses on gender and American history. In my mind, that prompts a question. What do you think of the American Girl Doll craze?

A: My daughters, who are now 30, liked the dolls, but I think more for the dolls giving them something that they could share with their friends, like Beanie Babies or nano-pets. Our adopted daughter is Latino in ethnicity and back then there was not a doll with her background. Now the company has responded to that absence. My daughters also liked Barbie. I don't worry about body image or the dolls pursuit of ever more accessories turning young women into mindless consumers. One daughter is a social worker with a clientele of addicts and the other writes for a think tank about Isis and Al Qaeda. Popular culture only tries to shape our lives.

Q: As someone who has had a long and successful career in the field of American Studies, what advice do you have for current students in the field?

A: Ask questions. Be brave. Follow your passion. In short, follow Emerson's advice in "The American Scholar." As he did, learn the established knowledge in your chosen field, but then go beyond. Pay attention to the people and not the as the educated elites define them.

**For more information on Louise Stevenson
please visit her website:
<http://www.fandm.edu/louise-stevenson>**

From the Editor's Desk

Unless you are new to EASA, you know that, twice each year, I introduce the EASA newsletter with a short column, "From the Editor's Desk." If you have been paying attention – and why wouldn't you? – you have probably remarked to yourself that these columns tend to follow the same pattern. That pattern goes something like this. I begin by noting the season (Autumn or Spring). I then discuss aspects of American culture that we associate with this season (holidays, political events, literary texts, sporting contests). Finally, I close by connecting all of this rich American culture to EASA. I understand what many of you are thinking right now: "He's getting too formulaic and predictable. Why doesn't he vary the format?" If this complaint echoes sentiment knocking about in your mind, then I owe you an explanation. You see, with "From the Editor's Desk," I am working with what is called a "fixed form." Though we see fixed forms all over our culture, they are most famous found in the world of poetry. Petrarch and Shakespeare, for instance, explored unrequited love in the sonnet – the most famous of all fixed poetical forms. Thanks to the sonnet's strict structure (14 lines of iambic pentameter that adhere to a fixed rhyme scheme), they enjoyed the challenge of expressing their profound meanings within a rigid space. That tension – between the poet's surging creativity and the sonnet's containment – yielded some of the greatest poetry the world has ever seen.



John Haddad, Penn State Harrisburg

Am I doing any less with "From the Editor's Desk"?

Now that you understand what we are all about, let's return to the matter at hand. It is autumn: the leaves are turning brilliant oranges, yellows, and reds while the squirrels busy themselves stashing away acorns before brisk winter winds come. And though the Halloween decorations are starting to appear, I cannot help feeling a hint of melancholy. Somehow, Nature seems...vacated...in a way I struggle to describe. But why should I go to the trouble when a great poet, Longfellow, has already accomplished the heavy lifting in – what else? – a sonnet:

Harvest Moon

**It is the Harvest Moon! On gilded vanes
 And roofs of villages, on woodland crests
 And their aerial neighborhoods of nests
 Deserted, on the curtained window-panes
 Of rooms where children sleep, on country lanes
 And harvest-fields, its mystic splendor rests!
 Gone are the birds that were our summer guests,
 With the last sheaves return the laboring wains!
 All things are symbols: the external shows
 Of Nature have their image in the mind,
 As flowers and fruits and falling of the leaves;
 The song-birds leave us at the summer's close,
 Only the empty nests are left behind,
 And pipings of the quail among the sheaves.**

When Nature starts to seem absent, I turn my thoughts to happier things such as...the Eastern American Studies Association and its annual platter of rich cultural offerings! This promises to be a most exciting year. First of all, we have a new President (replacing yours truly): Louise Stevenson of Franklin and Marshall. Louise is a Lincoln scholar who has served as EASA's treasurer for a number of years. If you have not had the chance to meet her at a past conference, you can learn all about her simply by reading Jennifer Drissel's news-maker interview in this very issue. Speaking of Jen Drissel, she is our second new addition. A doctoral student in American Studies at Penn State Harrisburg, Jen is taking over as conference organizer and co-editor of the newsletter. I think you will really enjoy what she brings to newsletter. With her wonderfully Gothic imagination, you will find nothing drab or dry to read, I promise you that. Welcome aboard, Jen!

Finally, I want to direct your attention to the "Call for Papers." This year, we will be meeting in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's capital city. Along with being underrated in terms of its cultural offerings, Harrisburg is also highly accessible: a hub of transportation for those heading North, South, East, or West. This year, EASA will be co-hosting with two partners: the Middle Atlantic Folklife Association (MAFA) and the newly-formed Society of Americanists (SOA). So please read the Call, consider submitting a proposal, and book your room in advance! We look forward to seeing you this spring!

In closing, I urge you this year to accomplish three things: to create fresh knowledge, to learn about our storied past, and to never forget our stirring motto or fail to carry out its awesome mandate – *Enjoy Culture!*

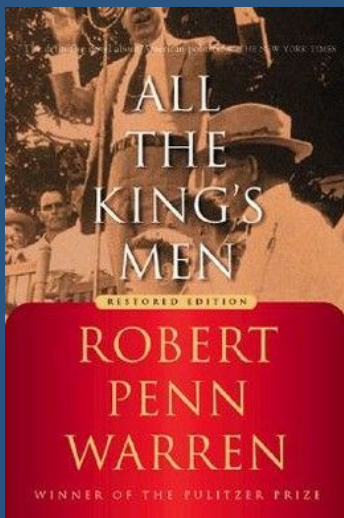
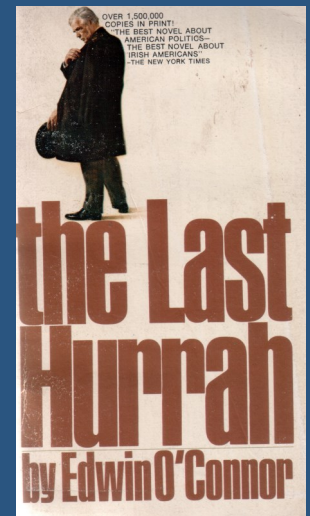
John Haddad

Penn State Harrisburg

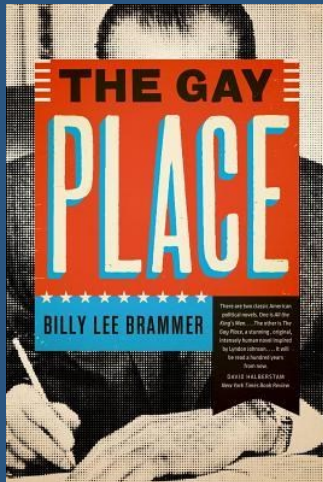
Dr. Charles Kupfer's Top Five Favorite Political Novels

Since it is an election year, the EASA Newsletter staff thought it would be fun to explore the intersection of politics and literature. We sat down with Dr. Charles Kupfer, who covers politics in several of his courses, including Cold War America and Twentieth Century America. We asked Dr. Kupfer to list his top five political novels, and he responded with the following ranking:

A) My favorite is *THE LAST HURRAH*, by Edwin O'Connor. O'Connor is one of my favorite writers, and I've used the book in class, finding that students enjoy it. O'Connor was a Boston writer during the Fifties & early Sixties, part of the literati who revolved (at a distance) around the rising Junior Senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy. The novel has an array of memorable characters, including a great bunch of comic grotesques, who revolve around Frank Skeffington, last of the old time pols, who is making one last run for office. He's an old school patronage/machine pol trying -- without too much success -- to adjust to a world where TV dominates politics. He champions his base, the blue-collar Irish, and takes real pleasure in bugging the displaced WASP establishment, but he's unsure how to handle a handsome, charismatic, younger foe who utilizes TV to create a modern image. Frank brings along his nephew for a look at how he runs, and the story is at turns wildly funny, terribly sad, and superbly written, like everything from O'Connor's pen.

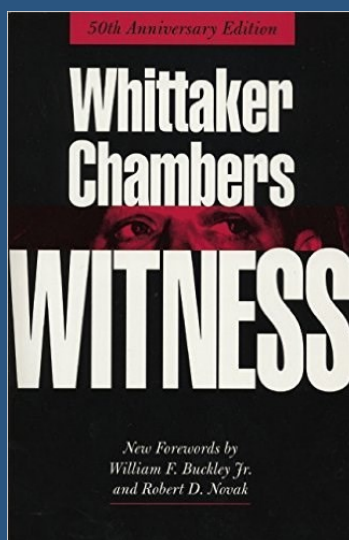
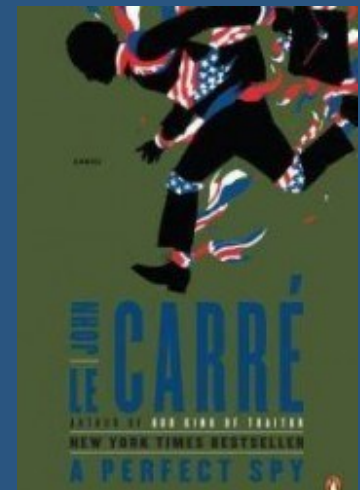


B) *ALL THE KING'S MEN*, by Robert Penn Warren, just might be the best on this list. Warren was a Poe-level triple threat: poet/novelist/critic. I first read his poetry as an undergraduate and admired its lapidary brightness. This sweeping novel, set in the Thirties, provides a fictionalized version of a Huey Long-like figure. If they remember Long today, people often mistake him as some kind of right-wing demagogue. Demagogue he was, but a populist leftist who argued that FDR's New Deal was a sham. The Long-like figure is Willie Stark, and, like Skeffington above, he's got a long list of eccentrics who revolve around him, held in orbit by the power of his gravitational pull, and an even longer list of enemies who'd like to see him buried. Warren is too wise to actually think that politics leads to transcendence, which might frustrate some of those in academe today who seek to rise above the toils of this world by putting their trust in princes, or princesses.



C) *THE GAY PLACE*, by Billy Lee Brammer, is a Texas novella in three parts, which answers the question: What would it have been like if Lyndon B. Johnson had become Governor of the Lone Star state instead of President? The book is deeply embedded in Central Texas, and since I went to UT for graduate school and loved every minute of it, I can't get enough of this incredible, too-little-known masterpiece.

D) *THE PERFECT SPY*, by John Le Carre. Not traditional electoral politics, and not set in the United States, but it handles with professional-level psychological insight the motivations -- personal/professional/ideological -- that can make someone turn traitor. So profound in its understanding as to be startling and upsetting, which is a good idea for those who grow sanctimonious in their political righteousness.



E) *WITNESS*, by Whittaker Chambers. Not a novel, but a memoir. For years, how one stood on the Chambers-Alger Hiss case determined which cocktail parties one could or could not attend; it was that kind of polarizer. One of the many 'trials of the century.' But the important part is, as with the Le Carre work, Chambers' painful blend of psychological complexes and political blind spots and moments of clear vision. He was a Soviet spy in the United States, defected and exposed the inner workings of Stalin's networks, and for his trouble was labelled the worst man in the world by the bien-pensants who controlled media's commanding heights. In the end, archives proved that Hiss was a liar and Chambers, while troubled, told the truth. Shows how ideology warps even those with good intentions. Beware of the true believers when it comes to politics!

228 Earle Street

By Jennifer Drissel

A demented elderly woman roams the house with a knife in her hand, fearful of an imaginary assailant. A mother sleeps with an axe under her pillow, anticipating the dreaded return of her estranged husband. Two brothers attempt suicide after their lives are filled with humiliation and poverty. Although these events sound like the plots of a mediocre horror movie, they are all true accounts of the childhood of author Whittaker Chambers.

Chambers is most notably known for his 1952 New York Times best-selling memoir *Witness*. Although much of the memoir describes how Chambers got involved in the Communist party and why he eventually testified against government official Alger Hiss, it is clear that the town of Lynbrook, New York, played a huge role in Chambers's life.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Chambers moved to 228 Earle Street in Lynbrook, New York, in 1904 when he was just three years old. Although Chambers felt socially excluded in the small, middle-class town of Lynbrook, his writing often described how the beauty of Long Island would comfort him during difficult times. The quiet, quaint woods and farmlands that Chambers cherished so dearly were destroyed throughout his childhood as suburban homes engulfed the land. The soothing sound of the stream that ran behind Chambers's house as a child disappeared as it now a major four-lane highway that spans across Long Island. The slow strut of the horse-drawn carriages that once traversed the main road closest to Chambers's home, Merrick Road, has now turned into revving engines, nosy honks, and the sounds of car bases blasting music. Ironically, 228 Earle Avenue is now completely surrounded by modernity, with natural beauty being confined to a small front yard and a couple of trees.



228 Earle Street Lynbrook, New York

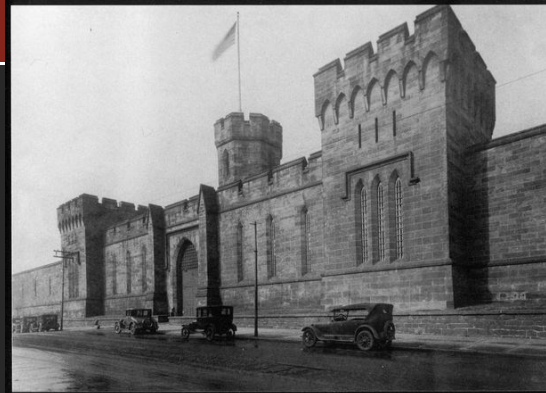


Whittaker Chambers

But is the place haunted? Former owners of 228 Earle Avenue, Rodney and Diane Dawnkawski, reported strange occurrences in while living in Chamber's childhood home. The Dawnkawski's claim that objects would frequently go missing, that mysterious sounds were heard in the middle of the night, that chairs would rock on their own, and that they even found a rusty axe buried in their backyard. Although the Dawnkawskis state that the dark history of the home did not disrupt the happiness of their family life, one must wonder if the property's former inhabitants were lashing out in a jealous rage. Does the spirit of Whittaker Chambers haunt the Lynbrook home? Or has industrialization and suburban life driven Chambers away forever? Those are questions best left for another time.

The Ominous Past of Eastern State Penitentiary

By Jennifer Drissel



If you're looking for some seasonal scares this October, Eastern State Penitentiary is a must visit destination. Located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Eastern State Penitentiary is infamous for both its history of paranormal activity as well as its astonishing, decaying infrastructure. Opening in 1829, Eastern State Penitentiary was founded on ideals that were in stark contrast with other prisons of the time. Whereas most criminal facilities advocated corporal punishment and the ill treatment of prisoners, the founders of Eastern



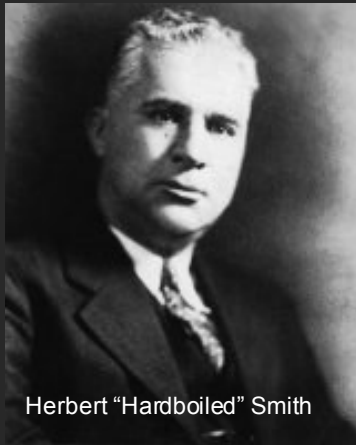
Masks worn by prisoners

State Penitentiary were inspired by Enlightenment thinking and designed the prison with the idea that solitary confinement would lead prisoners to repent their actions. This system of solitary confinement required prisoners to

wear masks that prohibited communication to ensure that they were both physically and mentally isolated. The lack of human interaction often drove prisoners to the brink of insanity, and resulted in high suicide rates at Eastern State. In 1913, the penitentiary abandoned this system due to overcrowding and critique that this system was immoral. After visiting the prison in 1842, author Charles Dickens wrote a chapter in his travel journal, titled, "Philadelphia and its Solitary Prison." In it, he expresses his distaste of solitary confinement: **"I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body... therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment in which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay."**

Although Eastern State Penitentiary abandoned the practice of solitary confinement, the conventions that they adopted once prisoners were celled together were not much better. One of the

prisons most infamously cruel wardens, Herbert Smith, is known for punishing prisoners by submerging them in ice baths and hanging them outside during the winter. He would also restrain prisoners in the "mad chair," for days without food. Warden Smith ran the prison throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

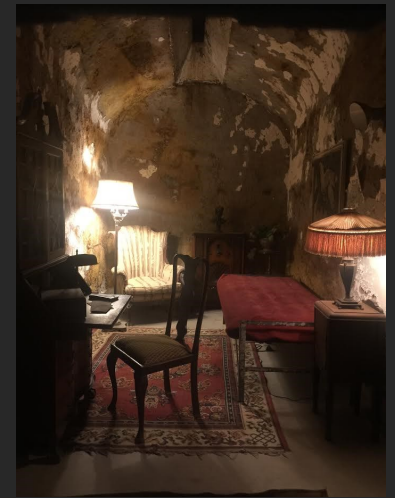


Herbert "Hardboiled" Smith

Given this, it is not surprising that reports of paranormal activity began to surface as early as the 1940s as inmates and guards reported unusual experiences. Today, the Eastern State Penitentiary is regarded as one of the most haunted places in the United States and has been investigated by the Travel Channel's paranormal television show "Ghost Adventures," as well as the SyFy Channel's "Ghost Hunters."

Throughout October, the Penitentiary not only offers its regular, daytime tours of the facility, but also embraces its paranormal history at night with a six-attraction haunted house. Although the fast-pace of the haunted house does not allow visitors to truly absorb history and infrastructure of the facility. That said, a special attraction for visitors 21 and over operates at a much slower pace and highlights one of the penitentiary's most infamous prisoners. The Speakeasy at Al Capone's cell is a 1920s-themed bar that features an array of characters and events leading up to Capone's cell. There is a tarot card reader that waits for custom-

ers in a gypsy-themed cell, a cell that hosts a game of poker for visitors to partake in, and even a jazz band that performs front of Capone's cell. Although visitors cannot physically enter Capone's cell, they are able to look through the steel bars of the prison door, just as prisoners and guards would have done when the facility was still functioning. In viewing Capone's cell, which has been decked out to replicate how it appeared during his occupancy, it is clear that Capone was not subjected to the cruelties that other inmates were during his occupancy. Capone's his cell is garnished with antique furniture, rugs, and oil paintings, which leads one to question if this luxurious imprisonment was enough to draw the spirit of Al Capone back to it.



Al Capone's Cell

If you are not able to visit Eastern State Penitentiary during the month of October, the facility also offers a four-hour long, nighttime paranormal investigation from April through August. This investigation allows those who are brave enough to traverse the facility by flashlight, and encourages participants to bring their own paranormal equipment to communicate with the spirits that are eternally imprisoned at Eastern State. Now that's a chilling idea!

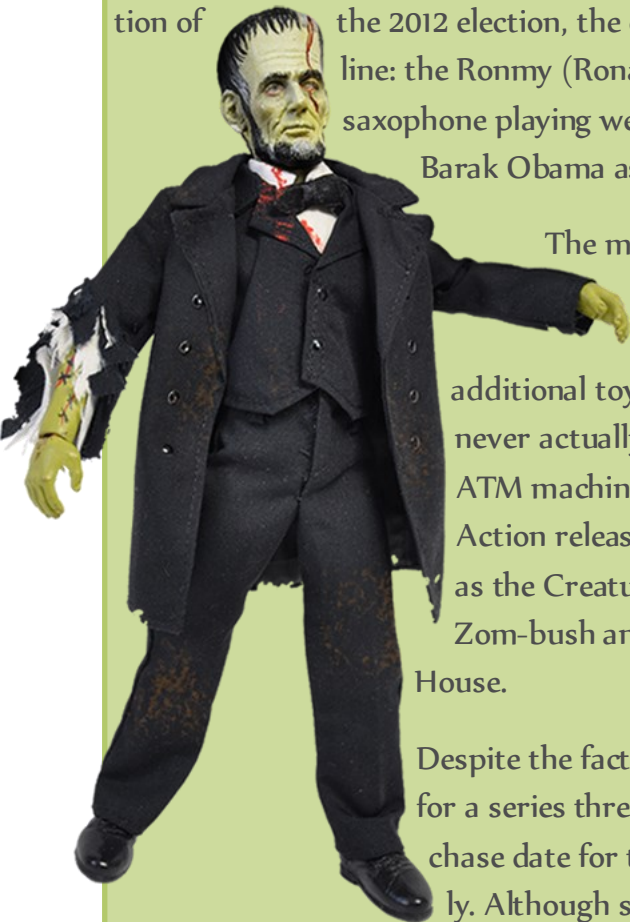
Presidential Monsters

By Jennifer Drissel



Series One and Two

In 2011 the company Heroes in Action released a new line of action figures that appealed to both horror junkies and political nerds alike – the Presidential Monsters series. The line debuted that year featuring Lincolnstein, an Abraham Lincoln-Frankenstein mash-up, as its first monster. Shortly after, in anticipation of the 2012 election, the company added three more monsters to its series one line: the Ronmy (Ronald Regan as a Mummy), Wolfman Bill (Bill Clinton as a saxophone playing werewolf), and Baracula (then presidential candidate Barak Obama as a Dracula hybrid).



The monsters gained heightened attention when they appeared on AMC's show *Comic Book Men*. On national television, the company showcased additional toy design ideas, including a figurine that was never actually launched: Romney the Robot, a solid gold ATM machine. Realizing the success of series one, Heroes in Action released series two shortly after, featuring Richard Nixon as the Creature from the Watergate Lagoon, George W. Bush as Zom-bush and John F. Kennedy as the Phantom of the White House.

Despite the fact that Heroes in Action released the prototypes for a series three and four line in late 2013, the available purchase date for the new series has been pushed back repeatedly. Although series four features current presidential candidate Hillary Clinton as a vampire (giving her the clever name Hilvira), it is unclear if the company plans to continue its journey linking the political to the monstrous, or if they will transform fellow presidential candidate, Donald Trump, into a ghoul as well. Don't change that dial!



2017 Annual Conference of the Eastern American Studies Association (EASA)

**Theme: “Milestones, Markers, and Moments: Turning
Points in American Experience and Tradition”**

Date: March 31-April 1, 2017

Venue: Harrisburg Hilton, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

In the upcoming year, Americans might reflect on several critical moments of the nation’s past and anticipate markers of the future that will define its experience and tradition. One hundred years ago in April 2017, the United States entered World War I to make the world “safe for democracy,” according to President Woodrow Wilson. Fifty years ago in January 1967, the Green Bay Packers and Kansas City Chiefs competed in the first Super Bowl in Los Angeles. That spring, urban racial violence erupted, and by June and July it would reach significant magnitude in Boston, Tampa, and Newark. By summer’s end, over 150 cities had exploded. The year wound to its end with over 100,000 people marching on Washington to protest their country’s prosecution of the Vietnam War.

The year 1967 also saw turning points in the academic world. Responding to the racial unrest of the late sixties, the American Studies Association executive committee had elected the distinguished African-American scholar John Hope Franklin as its president. He would preside at the association’s first national convention in October. At Penn State Harrisburg, for the first time the graduating class included American Studies majors. Twenty years before that, Franklin & Marshall College had created the first folklore department in the state, and a public state folklorist position with an Americanist focus was created.

At both the national and local level, these events rank as milestones for the country and its study.

This year, EASA, in partnership with the Middle Atlantic Folklife Association and the incipient Society of Americanists, a coalition of persons and organizations devoted to the study of American culture, invites proposals for papers, panels, forums, and workshops related to the broad theme of turning points in American history, folklife, education, cultural conservation, heritage, and society. The program committee is particularly interested in examples of public memory and memorialization that have played notable roles in American culture and its global reach. Closer to the present, we also invite analyses of the presidential election of 2016 as a milestone event, already distinguished historically by the first woman to run for president as candidate of a major party.

The EASA hopes for presentations suggested by the conference theme and its discussion. As well, we welcome panels on topics of significance to scholars engaged in the practice of American Studies that

the conference theme otherwise might exclude. We are, in other words, open to proposals that fall outside the conference theme.

Submission Guidelines:

For Individual Presenters: Send a short abstract (no more than 200 words) and a brief CV or resume (no more than two pages). Place your name and email address on both documents.

For Pre-formed Panels: Send a cover sheet with the title of the panel, the names of each participant, and the titles of their presentations. Include a short abstract of each paper (no more than 200 words each) as well as a brief CV or resume for each panel participant (no longer than two pages).

All materials should be sent to Jennifer Drissel (jzd5551@psu.edu) before Monday, January 16, 2017. Those affiliated with either MAFA or SOA should also send proposals/CVs to Jennifer Drissel and should indicate their organizational affiliation in their submission. In some cases, a submitter may indicate more than one affiliation.

Graduate students whose proposals are accepted will be encouraged to submit their final papers electronically several weeks prior to the conference to be considered for the Simon J. Bronner Award for the outstanding graduate paper in American Studies. The conference will also host an Undergraduate Roundtable. Faculty members interested in having their undergraduate students present research at the conference should contact Dr. Francis Ryan of La Salle University (ryan@lasalle.edu). Roundtable participants will compete for the Francis Ryan Award, awarded annually to the outstanding undergraduate paper.

Any general questions can be directed to John Haddad of Penn State Harrisburg (jrh36@psu.edu).

For more information, including our downloadable newsletter, see the EASA website: <http://harrisburg.psu.edu/eastern-american-studies-association>