



Gay pride parade in Provincetown.

blend of diverse elements, well documented here as a contributing factor in the process. The growing gay, lesbian, transgendered and bisexual population drives change, but never a festering conflict. History alone, however, is not the linchpin in this story.

Economic transition is a vital force carefully analyzed here. Its significance leaves open an important question: was the combination of a fishing industry crisis in the 1980s coupled with the increasing influx of primarily queer outsiders the event that made it possible to avoid an antagonistic situation? Did the growth of the gay and lesbian community and the celebration of their presence that expanded the tourist economy—done in a way that apparently did not feel threatening to the extant populace—signal a way toward cooperation and mutual embrace? Many factors played into this crucial transition: tourism, AIDS, identity, zoning and local politics all contributed to this complex and potentially volatile mix. Why did it never explode? The more recent appearance of service-sector workers challenges the balance that allows Provincetown to work.

This ethnography demonstrates that “queer” is much more than being a member of one or two “niches.” What is embraced is not just gay or lesbian, but alterity proper, an acceptance of difference. This works in wonderful ways. Provincetown offers many ways to cross what Faiman-Silva calls the “sexual divide.” Notwithstanding the tensions inevitably arising from, for example, bar patrons anywhere, annual events such as Carnival or Fantasia Fair suggest this divide is at best a blurred boundary.

The Provincetown story offers us a vibrant example of the strength of community. The lesson of diversity here is exemplary, and it reaches well beyond the simple claim to “being diverse” that is pervasive in politically correct times. In an age of war and conflict, the pendulums of belief often resemble well-sharpened axes. Faiman-Silva has applied Knauft’s “critically humanist sensibilities” to her work and produced a well-balanced account of change at work, change that succeeds. Provincetown is a *lived* diversity. A fascinating question remains: recent changes in Massachusetts law permitting same-sex marriage will inevitably alter the landscape of Provincetown as formerly marginalized groups find a new place in their community not as alteric malcontents but as legally qualified citizens and community members. Will the strength

of the town embrace these new families, as it has in the past?

There is precious little peace in the world. At a time of year when some honor it through faith, peace seems hard to find. There is no shortage of pontificators or politicians authoring a roadmap for change. Sometimes we must look beyond the usual. This book offers an excellent start.

Please send any comments, suggestions, ideas for new columns or other material to David Houston at dlrh+an@uvm.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Language and Politics Revisited: The Anti-Chomsky Views

By James Stanlaw

In our October column we reported on a Noam Chomsky press conference we covered for *Anthropology News*, and discussed some of his views on the language of politics and dissent. In an attempt to be fair and balanced (“You decide!”), this month we will report on some recent challenges to his positions.

To be sure, there are many who take exception both to Chomsky’s politics and linguistics. A recent book—*The Anti-Chomsky Reader* (2004) edited by Peter Collier and David Horowitz—covers the gamut from his alleged “anti-American obsession” to his “whitewashing” of various communist dictatorships. This volume also contains two pieces that specifically criticize his approach to the analysis of language, particularly in light of current political events.

Paul Postal and Robert Levine, linguists at NYU and Ohio State respectively, say that Chomsky is accepted as an important intellectual because it is commonly believed by non-professionals that his linguistics is “brilliant, revolutionary and widely accepted—in all, a massive scientific contribution.” They claim, however, that many critics of Chomsky make a common error in believing that Chomsky’s popularity is simply due to the public’s mistaking his linguistic expertise as qualification for his radical commentary on foreign affairs, social issues and economics. But they question even the first premise, saying Chomsky’s linguistic ideas are intellectually “corrupted” with a “deep disregard and contempt for the truth.” And there is a “marked similarity in the way he disseminates his linguistic and his political ideas: often in off-the-cuff, independently unsupported remarks in interviews and lectures, or anecdotal comments embedded in articles . . .” (all quotes on p 204).

Postal and Levine make four arguments in their critique. First, they are troubled by Chomsky’s “deliberate deception” (p 205) in the generalities he makes about language. They say, for instance, that Chomsky argues that every

transitive sentence has a corresponding passive (“The ocean liner neared the iceberg” vs the questionable “The iceberg was neared by the ocean liner”), even though he knows this is false. They also accuse Chomsky of “bluffing” (p 207) in making some claims. For example, a rule in English says that phrases in a sentence can often be moved to the front, as in “I would never tell Robin nasty stories about your cousin” becoming “Nasty stories about your cousin, I would never tell Robin.” However, we need a constraint to prevent us from making a poorly-formed sentence like “Nasty stories I would never tell Robin about your cousin.” Chomsky’s so-called *a-over-a principle* basically states that you have to move the whole phrase (“nasty stories about your cousin”) and not just part of it (“nasty stories”). Postal and Levine, however, say this principle is wrong—and Chomsky knows it—but has nonetheless never abandoned it.

Postal and Levine also accuse Chomsky of “ripping off other’s ideas,” an “especially reprehensible feature of Chomsky’s linguistics” (p 214). Basically, they suggest that because Chomsky has changed his position regarding several key features of his theories over the course of several decades (such as the elimination *transformations* or the abandonment of *deep structure*) he is somehow guilty of plagiarism. They criticize him for not often citing others who advocated such action years earlier. This may be a case of his not recognizing an “I told you so!” but I am not certain this constitutes academic thievery (in spite of their quotes from policies of the American Historical Association).

The last attack Postal and Levine make is that Chomsky is constantly “denigrating other fields” (p 217). They say that Chomsky’s view of science is that no results are sacrosanct: that is, all results are provisional. They then cite some half-dozen advanced textbooks in classical and quantum mechanics they interpret as showing the opposite: that is, there are real unquestioned results in physics.

The second attack is an odd piece by amateur linguist John Williamson who relates a series of email exchanges he had with Chomsky last year from May to October. The debates seemed to have been



Linguist Noam Chomsky attracts both praises and criticism in print.

prompted by Williamson's comments on reading an interview in the *New Yorker* where Chomsky alleged that the American army at the end of the Second World War sometimes gave at least tacit support to German forces as the Russians rushed westward. From this, the discussion wandered into the old transitive-intransitive gerunds bugaboo (for example, the ambiguity of phrases like "The shooting of the hunters . . ."). Williams' main argument seems to be that because Chomsky can't account for *all* uses of such forms, his linguistics is suspect (which therefore casts doubt on all his political pronouncements: he must not be so smart after all). This is an interesting twist on the usual connection made between Chomsky's politics and linguistics.

But I think readers of these critiques will remain unconvinced. To be sure, there are probably many SLA column readers who have their own bones to pick with Chomsky. For example, linguistic anthropologists are often troubled by the emphasis on formal code over social context that is usually found in the transformational, generative, move-alpha, minimalist projects. But these legitimate intellectual disagreements are qualitatively different than the attacks seen here. One is left feeling like "If this is the best they've got, Chomsky has little to worry about." Postal and Levine end their piece by saying (p 219) Chomsky's "irresponsible distortion is yet another proper measure of his intellectual corruption." I myself would use care in tossing out such cavalier claims lest readers think I am making a self-referential statement.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw at stanlaw@ilstu.edu or Mark Peterson at petersm2@muohio.edu.

Society for Medical Anthropology

NANCY VUCKOVIC AND JANELLE TAYLOR,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

SMA Graduate Student Mentor Awards

By Catherine Timura (Yale)

The SMA Student Affairs Committee is pleased to announce the awarding of the First Annual SMA



Joan Ablon, winner of the First Annual SMA Graduate Student Mentor Award

Graduate Student Mentor Award to Joan Ablon, professor emerita in the department of anthropology, history and social medicine in the School of Medicine, UC San Francisco. The award was developed to recognize excellence in graduate student mentorship and acknowledge the important contribu-

tions of medical anthropologists who have provided exceptional guidance and outstanding support to graduate students in this field. The award is aimed at senior or mid-career scholars who have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to teaching and mentorship throughout their careers, particularly those who have taken the time to thoughtfully and successfully guide their MA and PhD students through their field work experience, the thesis/dissertation-writing process and beyond.

Nomination letters in support of Ablon were submitted by her former students. Her nominators acclaimed her ability to simultaneously provide excellent professional guidance and develop close supportive relationships with her students. One letter described her as, "in equal measures, (com)passionate ethnographer, path-breaking scholar of stigma and disability, committed action anthropologist, and mentor to generations of medical anthropology students, many of whom are now her colleagues in the discipline." Another letter emphasized that she is, "a great friend, a role model: warm, supportive, caring, motherly, a good listener, generous, funny, down to earth, colorful, and with great stories." Hearty congratulations to Joan Ablon for her significant achievement as a mentor in the field of medical anthropology.

For more information and details about the award, please visit: www.medanthro.net/awards/mentoring.html.

Informed Consent and Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health

By Janelle Taylor (U Washington)

In late June, the Office of Minority Health, an office of the federal Department of Health and Human Services, convened a conference at Tuskegee University on "Strengthening the Process of Informed Consent to Address Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care and Research."

The conference was organized on the understanding that the history of unethical research in the context of inequalities and oppression, most powerfully symbolized in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, has bequeathed US society a legacy of mistrust of medicine that has far-reaching implications for medical research and the health of minority communities. Some of these implications include: difficulty in recruiting minorities as participants in clinical trials; reluctance by minorities to go to doctors or authorize surgery and other treatments; and low participation by minorities in organ donation efforts.

The question that the conference posed was how to not only *build trust* in medicine in minority communities, but also how to *improve the trustworthiness* of medical providers and researchers. Thus framed, the project of strengthening "informed consent" in research and health care poses the challenge of how to protect and promote what organizers termed a "culture of trust" between health researchers and research volunteers, between health care providers and patients, and between research institutions/health care organizations and communities from

which prospective research subjects and patients originate.

This invitational conference featured presentations by a strikingly diverse range of voices, including not only bioethicists, leading figures within DHHS and OMH, and scholars addressing relevant topics from within a variety of disciplines, but also family members of people harmed through participation in unethical research, service providers working in a variety of specific minority communities, historian James H Jones, novelist and filmmaker Sherman Alexie, poet Lucille Clifton and more. This event was part of a project whose ultimate goal is to formulate federal policy recommendations.

While I found the conference very interesting and fruitful, I was surprised and dismayed that I was the only medical anthropologist present. So many medical anthropologists have researched and written on issues relevant to health disparities and informed consent, that I am left wondering how to interpret the relative absence of our work from this discussion. What might we need to do to ensure that the perspectives, questions and insights of medical anthropology have as wide a reach and impact as possible?

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to the SMA Contributing Editors Nancy Vuckovic at nancy.vuckovic@kpchr.org or Janelle Taylor at jstaylor@u.washington.edu.

Society for Psychological Anthropology

Please see column for American Ethnological Society, p 43.—Ed.

Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology

ELZBIETA M GOZDZIAK, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

New Listserv Coordinators

By Robert Rotenbers, SUNTA President

After many years of service to the society, Rae Bridgman is stepping down as coordinator of Urbanth-L, the society's moderated email discussion list. Perhaps it is a compliment to Rea's efforts that the SUNTA board saw fit to replace her with two coordinators. Angela Jancius, a post-doc at Youngstown State University, will serve as the lead coordinator of the list. She brings considerable listserv experience to the position, having worked as a moderator on several H-Net operations, including managing H-Net, Humanities and Social Sciences Online, and as program coordinator for both H-Review listserv (1996-1999) and H-Net's Central Europe Project (1999-present).

