Diana Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies and Chair of the Committee on the Study of Religion, Harvard University, gave the keynote address at the ASIANetwork Conference dinner, April 25, 1998, at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, Illinois.

The Editor thanks Cathy Benton, Religion, Lake Forest College and Beloit College, for writing the synopsis of Professor Eck's address. Benton teaches courses in Asian religions and Asian literature. Her research interests include Hindu mythological texts, the culture and literature of the Roman Catholic community in India, and the cross-cultural communication issues that emerge in the context of international business.

In his introduction of Professor Eck, Thomas B. Coburn, St. Lawrence University, noted that Eck's writings have broken new ground in different ways. Among them is a teaching book, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India, 1985, which has become standard fare in college courses on India. Banaras, City of Light, 1983, has been called "the best book ever written on Banaras," and has earned Eck accolades both in the West and in the Indian subcontinent Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras, 1993, is Eck's highly readable autobiography.

**Educom Medal**

The focus of her ASIANetwork conference address was a recently produced teaching tool of the Pluralism Project, the CD-ROM, On Common Ground: World Religions in America. This fall EDUCAUSE granted one of its Educom Medal awards to Diana Eck for the CD-ROM. The awards are made "to recognize and reward faculty members and developers whose applications exemplify the best in instructional effectiveness." The citation noted, "An extraordinary resource for the teaching of undergraduate classes in the history of religions in America, religious diversity, cultural studies, and world religions, the CD-ROM is supported and enhanced by the Pluralism Project Website, www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism."

Diana Eck inaugurated the Pluralism Project in 1989 to map the changing face of religion in America. The Pluralism Project asks the question, "What are the imperatives of living together with those who are not like ourselves?" and provides a myriad of multi-layered responses. Eck explained the beginnings of the Pluralism Project and its on-going research findings, and she demonstrated the multi-media presentation of the research in a CD-ROM package, On Common Ground: World Religions in America.

While Eck was teaching classes examining twentieth century religious traditions, she realized that questions of difference and diversity continually became central. "How does each see the other?" She designed a fieldwork seminar called "Religious Traditions of Boston," and charged her students to go into the field to learn about the variety of traditions practiced in the Boston area. From the subsequent field research and discussions grew a book on world religions in Boston that gained the attention of The Eli Lilly Foundation. Subsequently, The Eli Lilly Foundation funded similar research into the diverse religious communities found throughout America. Thus began the Pluralism Project.

**American History**

The Pluralism Project documents the diversity of religious practices not only in contemporary settings, for it also delves into the issues sparked by religious pluralism throughout American history. While recent events such as chanting from the Rig Veda and the Quran at Harvard's commencement are certainly newsworthy, the American populace with its broad immigrant foundations has always contended with a variety of religious beliefs and traditions.

We academics tend to isolate and compartmentalize our studies of different cultural groups and religious traditions. For example, in Asian-American Studies programs, there is little recognition of religious practices at all, and Americans who study Asian religions rarely examine Asian religious traditions found in the United States. Among them is a teaching book, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India, 1985, which has become standard fare in college courses on India. Banaras, City of Light, 1983, has been called "the best book ever written on Banaras," and has earned Eck accolades both in the West and in the Indian subcontinent. Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras, 1993, is Eck's highly readable autobiography.

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States. American religionists do not consider studying Islam or Buddhism as it is practiced within our borders, or of teaching our students how to learn from Muslims and Buddhists living in our hometowns.

In 1893, the World Parliament of Religions invited people from other parts of the world to come to Chicago to share perspectives and practices. By 1993, these guests had themselves become the hosts to the Second World Parliament of Religions. Only one hundred years later, fourteen host committees representing particular religious traditions had developed strong bases in the United States.

Using the CD-ROM, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, we can click on "Chicago" to learn about the history and diversity of religious communities in this city. The "Chicago" click brings numerous possibilities to the screen such as the Midwest Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temple built after World War II by Japanese-Americans released from internment camps; the first mosque built in the United States in nearby Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and in a suburb of Chicago, Bartlett, Illinois, the world headquarters of the Jains.

*On Common Ground* provides access to entire historical documents, quick-time movies exploring the perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds and connections to related websites and e-mail addresses.

**Immigration**

Integral to much of the information presented is the history of immigration in America. For example, if we set out to learn about Chinese and Indian religions in America, we might learn that 10% of the population in Montana in the 1890s was Chinese; that the large Sikh population in the Pacific Northwest is descended from railroad and lumber mill workers; and that there is a community of Mexican Hindus north of Fresno, California. These facts which provide a context for understanding the religious traditions also draw us into the history of the Asian communities as they settled into life in America.

In exploring the history of religious diversity in the United States, we learn that one way of dealing with diversity was "exclusion." While Americans publicly espoused the "melting pot" metaphor, various groups were in effect excluded from the "pot." *On Common Ground* provides access to a copy of The Exclusionary Act of 1882, along with other documents that chronicle the debate's history. Moving into current venues for this discussion, the program directs us to court cases, issues facing today's zoning boards, and incidents of violence and racism. Or we can follow the progress of local and regional interfaith councils as they address issues of diversity among their own groups. One complex but urgent social problem that is creating common ground among religious groups is the need to deal cooperatively with HIV/AIDS within their communities. As a result "serving the dying" has become an interfaith issue.

*On Common Ground* and the continuing research of the Pluralism Project offer instructive and fascinating tools for educating students, interested community groups, and us. The interactive multi-media approach allows us to examine the issues of religious pluralism at our own pace, and offers the opportunity to pursue these issues through different angles and to varying depths.

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**CORRESPONDENCE**

Sean Bell, CET Academic Programs

I just wanted to drop you a note and thank the ASIANetwork again for hosting such a great conference. Having been four years in a row, I'm constantly impressed by the quality of the discussions I encounter at ASIANetwork and the active interest in study abroad as an essential component to any good Asian Studies curriculum.

I've just modified our website's information for faculty and administrators to include a link to <www.asianetwork.org> for those teachers interested in strengthening their institutions' Asian Studies programs.

*Editor's note:* This fall, Bell is continuing his graduate studies at the University of Washington.

Karl Fields, University of Puget Sound

Let me commend all involved for the fine 1998 ASIANetwork Conference. It was my first, and it was very good.

**Contact:** Karl Fields, Politics and Government, Director, Asian Studies Program, University of Puget Sound, 1500 N. Warner, Tacoma, WA 98416; Tel.: 253/756-1307; <kfields@ups.edu>; http://www.ups.edu/faculty/kfields/home.htm