

LITHUANIAN AND NORWEGIAN AMERICAN STUDIES:
AMERICAN STUDIES OR DIASPORA STUDIES?

Rector, Chairwoman of the University Senate, my sponsors, colleagues, and friends.

I am honored, indeed overwhelmed, by the attention I have been given and the honorary degree that has been bestowed upon me. I am also greatly moved. My relationship with Vytautas Magnus University has been a reward in itself.

My first visit to Vytautas Magnus University was in May 1994. On September 22, 1992 the rectors of the University of Bergen and Vytautas Magnus University had signed an agreement of cooperation between our two universities. As we know, all universities have an abundance of such agreements signed by rectors. Most of these agreements, however, do not lead to much beyond the initial statements of good intentions. One small item made this particular agreement different. It made specific mention of English as a subject that needed to be academically strengthened at Vytautas Magnus University. I was then chair of the Department of English in Bergen and when we were informed about this new agreement, I decided that we should act upon it as an invitation and take an initiative. From the outset our work had the full support of the University of Bergen and its Faculty of Arts.

My visit to Kaunas was planned and I was welcomed at the airport in Vilnius by Professor Milda Danyte, then chair of the Department of English Philology here. I soon came to know and appreciate Milda Danyte, a returned second-generation immigrant from Canada, for her dedication to the development of a strong English Department. Without her many years of selfless service as chair, this department would not have had its present strength and academic excellence. She could have focused her attention on furthering her own academic career; instead, she devoted herself to building her department and developing its students as well as its teachers.

At the very center of my first visit were friendly and informative negotiations with Professor Bronius Vaskelis, then rector of this university and the person who was responsible for giving English specific mention in the agreement with the University of Bergen. Bronius Vaskelis, a returned immigrant from the United States, kindly and patiently dealt with my ignorance of the realities of academic life in Lithuania in the early years after independence. Together we worked out the basic structure of the University of Bergen doctoral program for members of the Vytautas Magnus Department of English Philology – a program that now is about to be successfully concluded.

Without the vision and dedication of these two returned immigrants, Professor Milda Danyte and Professor Bronius Vaskelis, the doctoral program at the University of Bergen for members of the Department of English Philology at Vytautas Magnus

University would never have been established. My gratitude to them is both personal and on behalf of my university.

For my presentation today I have decided on a topic close to my heart: my own field of American Studies, in particular American immigration studies, as it relates to your country and to mine. I dedicate this presentation to the two returned immigrants I first met here in 1994, one from the US, the other from Canada, who played such important roles in launching and shaping the doctoral program that is also celebrated here today.

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The similarities between the emigration histories of our two countries are obvious: few countries have had so large a percentage of their people emigrate to the United States as have Norway and Lithuania. Both immigrant groups were relatively small, but because they both developed concentrated settlements, for instance in Chicago, they could be the dominant groups in their own neighborhoods. They both used the languages from their home countries, not only in their daily lives, but in a wide range of publications in the United States: newspapers, periodicals and books of fiction and poetry as well as non-fiction. Indeed, for a time the two publications in Lithuanian and Norwegian with the largest circulations, *Lietuva* and *Skandinaven*, were both published in Chicago, a city where a majority of the population spoke languages other than English in the years around 1900. For immigrants from Lithuania there was a special motivation for writing and publication in Lithuanian. During much of the first period of Lithuanian emigration there was a ban (1864–1904) on publications in Lithuanian in the home country and in the second period Soviet censorship placed severe limits on what could be expressed in Lithuanian publications in Lithuania. In a sense, the Lithuanian language itself has been in exile for two long periods.¹ Nothing even faintly similar was part of the Norwegian experience during the major period of emigration. Nevertheless, one reason why there was so great an interest in literary expression among Norwegian immigrants was their growing sense of an ethnic identity throughout the nineteenth century. After the experience of a few weeks of independence in the spring of 1814, after several centuries as a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway became the weaker partner in a union with Sweden that lasted until 1905. So in both immigrant groups the American experience was also an experience of a developing ethnic identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Some may rather wish to speak of a developing national identity, but my choice of the word ethnic is deliberate. Central to the immigrant experience in the United

¹ Only the exile of the language can explain the sacrifice and dedication involved in the production of the thirty-six volumes of the *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, published in Boston in the 1950s and 1960s.

States is the growth of an American national identity. The loyalty of most immigrants was to the United States and it was as Americans that they were Norwegians and Lithuanians.² And ethnic identities remain strong in the United States quite independently of the changed political situations in Europe. One of my cd's with music by Čiurlionis was recorded and produced in 1998 by the Lithuanian American Fine Arts Association in Chicago, long a center of Lithuanian American culture. Several American colleges still honor their Norwegian immigrant origins. Lithuanian and Norwegian ethnic societies still thrive in the United States. In both Lithuania and Norway many of us have active family ties with the United States. And to both our countries Americans come seeking their roots.

The differences between our two countries with respect to emigration, however, are significant. Norwegian emigration began in the 1820s and 1830s at a time when increasing areas of arable land previously held by the native inhabitants were made available to immigrants, and relatively many Norwegian immigrants became farmers or settled in small prairie towns in what is now the Upper Midwest. Lithuanian emigration began in the late nineteenth century. By then the best farmland has been taken and Lithuanians mainly settled in in Chicago and other industrial and mining urban communities. In Norway emigration may have been frowned upon by officialdom but all emigrants were free to leave and there was a free flow of letters and publications from the United States to Norway. Tsarist repression was one emigration motivation shared by both Catholic and Jewish emigrants from Lithuania. And Tsarist barriers to emigration had to be negotiated by members of both groups. Such barriers were even more solid in the Soviet period and the censorship more effective.

By the time of the second wave of Lithuanian emigration after the DP experience following the Second World War, rather few Norwegians emigrated to the United States. Those who did had much the same motivation as the young people who now leave Lithuania for better material conditions.³ Norway has had nothing similar to the second wave of Lithuanian migration.⁴ The Cold War setting of Lithuanian American culture in the second half of the twentieth century also makes it somewhat but not entirely different from the nineteenth and early twentieth century Lithuanian immigrant culture. However, we still know far too little about these differences and similarities.

² It may be necessary to observe that Norway as well as Lithuania have difficulties in adjusting to a multiethnic concept of nationality. In the United States *ius soli* is the natural and accepted basis for both citizenship and nationality while Norwegians and Lithuanians tend to define their nationality on the basis of *ius sanguinis*.

³ It may still be too early to characterize the present emigration from Lithuania as a "third wave." But even though we cannot yet know the duration or the impact of this emigration, it certainly should be studied and records should be kept.

⁴ There were, of course, Norwegian exiles in the United States during the Second World War. The Norwegian government in exile was in London, but many Norwegians were also politically active in the United States. Nobel Prize winner Sigrid Undset spent the war years there and published memoirs and fiction in English translation and played an important role in promoting the cause of her country. The political and cultural work of these exiles may be compared with that of the Lithuanian exiles of the Cold War period, but the impact of five years cannot be compared to the impact that five decades had on the identity of Lithuanian Americans.

I am sure that the main point I wish to make on this occasion will not be controversial: that there has been far too little academic interest in Lithuania in all aspects of Lithuanian American history from its early beginnings to its present manifestations. Lithuanian American history and culture as academic fields of research and study still need to be developed. Whether my views on how such study and research should be conducted are controversial or not remains to be seen. Let me use myself and my career as an illustration.

Three of my grandparents emigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century and then returned to Norway after some years. Other emigrant relatives remained and become Americans. As a child during the Second World War I was in exile in Canada. When I as a young man decided to make American Studies my academic specialization, however, I had no sense of a relationship to my studies created by my country's as well as my family's history of emigration. But at that time immigrant America was not of much interest to American academics either. When I entered the doctoral program at Yale University in 1963, I asked the chair of the Program in American Studies for permission to use Norwegian as one of the two required foreign languages. This was denied because, I was told, Norwegian was not a language relevant for American Studies.⁵ Ironically, many of my scholarly books and articles in recent decades have been about an American culture that was expressed in the Norwegian language. But as a young man in 1963 I did not question the view of my professors. I too was interested in "real" Americans, not in Norwegian or other immigrants. Moreover, American Studies, as taught in English Departments in Norway when I was a student, paid no attention to the existence of Norwegian Americans. Indeed, in this respect, Norwegian English departments have not undergone radical change.⁶

In Norway there was for a long time little interest in the study of emigration. Most emigrants were common people – peasants and laborers – and it is only in fairly recent times that academic historians have demonstrated much interest in common people. In the United States the study of immigration history began in the 1920s, at a time when it seemed that the period of immigration was coming to an end. The major figures in the opening up of a new field of historical research had themselves grown up in immigrant families.⁷

⁵ Had I been a Lithuanian and asked to have Lithuanian accepted as one of my required foreign languages, I would have received the same answer – in spite of the considerable American political and cultural activities then being conducted in the Lithuanian language.

⁶ For a more fully developed account of the interaction of personal experience and academic scholarship see Orm Øverland, "Studying Myself in the United States – Studying the United States in Myself," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 37:2 (2005), 1-24.

⁷ Among the pioneer immigration historians in the United States who did important work in the 1920s were Swedish American George Stephenson, Danish American Marcus Lee Hansen, and Norwegian American Theodore Blegen. In Norway, Ingrid Semmingsen (1910-1995) was the first prominent historian to have emigration as one of her main areas of research.

Since the late 1980s I have been engaged in editing a large collection in our National Archives of letters from Norwegian immigrants in the United States. The project of collecting these letters began relatively early – in the 1920s. The initiative, however, was not taken by Norwegian historians but by some Norwegian Americans, who in 1925 founded the Norwegian-American Historical Association.⁸ There was little interest among Norwegian professional historians in immigration in general and in the letters of ignorant peasants in particular, and without this American initiative, there would have been no large public collection of emigrant letters in Norway. There can be no doubt that Norwegian American Studies was pioneered by American scholars. And for them such study was – obviously and naturally – the study of an American ethnic group. Norwegian American history was a branch of American history.

My edition of immigrant letters will be in seven large volumes.⁹ The letters are – for the most part – by people with no prior experience in writing. And yet they make up a literature of immense value, not merely as so-called historical sources but as literary documents of human endeavor. I read them as American letters, as texts that document the making of America and the making of Americans.

Letters from America did not come as freely into Tsarist Russia as into Norway; but they came. There is a fascinating literary treasure in Lithuania to be collected, studied and made available. And yet, as the American Lithuanian scholar Daiva Markelis notes in her recent article, “‘Every Person Like a Letter’: The Importance of Correspondence in Lithuanian Immigrant Life,” “... there have been no major campaigns [in Lithuania], either on an individual, community, or government level, to gather immigrant letters, which is how many of the primary collections of other immigrant groups got their start.”¹⁰ The creation of such a unique collection of letters sent to Lithuania by immigrants in other countries (including of course letters and e-mails from present-day emigrants) is a task that should be given the highest priority by Vytautas Magnus University.¹¹ Such a collection would be a major contribution to our understanding of Lithuanian emigration as well as of the processes by which Lithuanian emigrants became ethnic Americans.

⁸ For an account of how this collection of letters was created see Orm Øverland, “Recovering Memories of the Migration: NAHA and the Making of a Collection of Immigrant Letters in the Norwegian National Archives, 1923-1929” in Øyvind Gulliksen, ed., *Norwegian-American Essays 2006* (Oslo: NAHA-Norway, forthcoming).

⁹ They are published with the title *Fra Amerika til Norge* – From America to Norway – and publication began with the first two volumes in 1992. The concluding seventh volume is planned published by 1910. I have also been asked to edit a two-volume American edition in English translation.

¹⁰ Daiva Markelis, “‘Every Person Like a Letter’: The Importance of Correspondence in Lithuanian Immigrant Life,” in Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 122. She also points to the low rate of literacy in the nineteenth century as well as Soviet suppression as reasons why so few Lithuanian letters have been preserved compared to those from other immigrant groups.

¹¹ Immigrant letters often had photographs enclosed. These should also be included in any effort to collect and preserve letters.

One who read letters from emigrants in America in Vilnius, his hometown, was Abraham Cohen, who after his own emigration became a prominent American author and journalist, both in his mother tongue, Yiddish, and in English. In his best known novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) his fictional main character says, “Letters full of wonders from emigrants already there went the rounds of eager readers and listeners until they were worn to shreds in the process. I succumbed to the spreading fever. It was one of those letters from America in fact, which put the notion of emigrating to the New World definitely in my mind”¹².

Another contemporary account of the impact of both letters and newspapers from the United States on people in Lithuania is in “The Life Story of a Lithuanian,” first published in 1906. Here a worker in the stockyards of Chicago explains how he came to know about America and decided to go there through the American newspapers in Lithuanian and letters from America that were read to his family by an itinerant shoemaker on his visits.¹³ Most of the letters sent to Lithuania from the United States have probably been lost. To collect, preserve, and study those that still remain should be considered an enterprise of the first importance – for American Studies as well as for Lithuanian diaspora studies.

Surely, an American history where the participants were people from our own countries should have special interest for us. Since 1984, conferences on Norwegian American history and culture have been held regularly in Norway with participants from Norway and the United States – and, increasingly, from other countries as well.¹⁴ A large number of the Norwegian participants have been educated in English departments at Norwegian universities. The reason is that it is in English departments rather than in History departments that there has been the most focus on the study of the United States – and the study of Norwegian Americans cannot be done in isolation from the study of their country, the United States.

For obvious reasons there were no conferences on Lithuanian American studies in this country in 1984. But what is the situation now and how may the situation become different in the future? The best starting point is probably here in Kaunas, at Vytautas Magnus University where there is a great archival treasure in the Lithuanian Emigration Institute (Lietuvių išėivijos institutas). The first international conference on emigration studies in this country was hosted by the Emigration Institute in 2001. Its remarkable archives will surely play a central role in any further development of Lithuanian American studies. There are, however, some major issues that must be

¹² Abraham Cohen, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 61.

¹³ Hamilton Holt, *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans as Told by Themselves* (1906). Expanded edition with a new introduction by Werner Sollors (New York and London: Routledge, 2000). “The Life Story of a Lithuanian,” 6-20. One of the items the shoemaker reads to them from a Chicago newspaper is a Lithuanian translation of the American Declaration of Independence.

¹⁴ Volumes with articles based on papers presented at these conferences have been published regularly. The most recent is Orm Øverland ed., *Norwegian-American Essays 2004* (Oslo: NAHA-Norway, 2005).

considered and openly dealt with in order to establish such studies at an international level of excellence.

There are, of course, some American books on Lithuanian American history.¹⁵ Much of this literature, however, belongs to the filiopietistic branch of history, the kind of history written to demonstrate the excellence of one's own nationality. Becoming academic historians was not an obvious career path for the sons and daughters of early immigrants and the beginning of history writing in most immigrant groups was the work of well-intentioned amateurs. So although these writings in themselves are interesting historical documents, they may nevertheless not be good starting points or models for young aspiring professional scholars in this country. I say "this country" deliberately, because a serious study of Lithuanian American history and culture must depend to a large degree on scholars from Lithuania. Not many prominent American historians are familiar with the Lithuanian language. Since the source material is mainly in Lithuanian, knowledge of the language is a requirement. But then, how many prominent Lithuanian historians have an expertise in American history and are as familiar with English as with Lithuanian? So on the one hand there are American historians who are not familiar with the Lithuanian language nor with Lithuanian history and on the other there are Lithuanian historians who have no expertise in American Studies. This is of course equally true of the other academic disciplines needed for a full study of this fascinating field. Few if any specialists in Lithuanian literature have the knowledge and insight necessary for a study of Lithuanian American literature in an American context. On the other hand, few if any of my colleagues in Lithuanian Departments of English have devoted themselves to the study of American literature in the Lithuanian language. An interesting illustration of the kind of work that may be done is the above mentioned article by Daiva Markelis, who has applied her academic expertise in writing and composition theory to a study of the letter writing practices of Lithuanian immigrants in the United States.¹⁶

A full utilization of the treasures of the Emigration Institute awaits the coming of a generation of American and Lithuanian scholars who are as much at home in America as in Lithuania. But even when they arrive at the Lithuanian Emigration Institute eager to begin work on doctoral dissertations, books and articles, there will still be some issues that must be dealt with.

Since independence from the Soviet Union there has been an ideologically and nationalistically inspired tendency to focus on the second wave of emigrants and, moreover, to see them as exiles rather than as American immigrants, to see them as members of a Lithuanian diaspora rather than as ethnic Americans. The Lithuanians who emigrated before the First World War were largely rural, poor, and uneducated.

¹⁵ Two are: Antanas Kučas, *Lithuanians in America* (Boston, 1975, originally published in Lithuanian) and David Fainhauz, *Lithuanians in Multi-Ethnic Chicago until World War II* (Chicago, 1977),

¹⁶ See note 10, above.

It has been a cliché to speak of the immigrants from Finland in that period as either Church Finns or Labor Finns and we may make a similarly inaccurate division of the early Lithuanian immigrants. The one group may seem of little interest to secularly minded academic scholars while the other is problematic for a generation that cannot see socialism as liberation. Indeed, Lithuanian American accounts of the early period of immigration tend to pay more attention to the church-going middle class than to the often radicalized working class immigrants. Highly visible in the second wave of emigration, however, are middle-class professionals, students, academics, artists, and businessmen – nationalists and anti-communists – people it may be easier for present-day Lithuanian scholars to relate to than to the nineteenth century peasants and laborers of the early period of emigration.

But both periods of emigration must be studied, as well as the historical, social, and cultural connections between them. This is no simple matter, but some interesting beginnings have been made.¹⁷ One difficulty may be the perception that one group consists of immigrants and the other of exiles. Of course people fled from Lithuania as the Second World War came to an end, and of course those who then came to the United States arrived as exiles. However, the history of these exiles and their descendants is the history of a people entering the United States and becoming American. In this major historical theme there is no difference between the two waves of Lithuanian immigrants in America. From an American point of view, they are all immigrants.

Whether they came as immigrants in the 1890s or as exiles in the 1940s, these people were at first Lithuanians in the United States and then, gradually and unavoidably, they became Americans of a Lithuanian ethnicity. It is important to remember that the political, social, and cultural activity reflected in the archives of the Lithuanian Emigration Institute is as much a documentation of a developing American ethnicity as it is of a Lithuanian diaspora. To be Lithuanian or Norwegian in the United States is a way of being American. Lithuanian and Norwegian are American ethnicities. If the researchers in the archives of the Emigration Institute do not understand that all of this material in the Lithuanian language documents the American activities of American ethnics, they will misread the sources. The archives of the Emigration Institute of course also document the work done by Lithuanian Americans for their vision of an independent Lithuania.

Another issue is the question of who were the Lithuanian emigrants? Should research focus only on Catholics or should the emigration of Jews also be included?

¹⁷ One example of recent work is Daiva K. Kuzmickaitė's study of the interplay of recent immigration from Lithuania with the established societies of the descendants of both first and second wave Lithuanian immigrants in Chicago. See her "Recent Lithuanian Immigrants in Chicago: Gendered Strategies in Pursuit of a Legal Status or *Barakudos*, *Kobietos*, and *Alfonsai*" in Dalia Kuiziniene, *Beginnings and Ends of Emigration: Life without Borders in the Contemporary World* (Kaunas: Versus Aureus, 2005), 157-172. This book has articles based on presentations at the conference on migration studies here in 2001.

This is surely a complex issue, involving religious and cultural identities as well as language. Nationalism is so involved in both history and literary history that it goes without saying that this may also be a touchy issue. And yet, the question of who were the people who emigrated from the present Lithuania cannot be disregarded by historians. Indeed, not until 1910 did the United States Bureau of the Census cease to register Lithuanians as either Russian or Polish and begin to recognize them as a distinct national group. Since neither the immigration records nor the census recorded religion, Jews were not counted except as immigrants from, say, Russia or Poland.

Yet another issue is the question of one or several Lithuanian literatures. There are two histories of Lithuanian literature in the Soviet period; one of them is a history of a literature in exile. While it is a major task for literary scholars to write these two literatures into one national literature, it may be an equally important task to study the American literature in Lithuanian as an American literature. And this may probably best be done in English departments where American literature is studied.¹⁸ Two of my recent books with American academic publishers are English translations of American novels originally written in Norwegian.¹⁹ A recent anthology of American literary texts in languages other than English, however, does not include texts in Lithuanian.²⁰ American literature is studied in Departments of English and it is important that Lithuanian Departments of English open for the study of Lithuanian American literature, just as it is necessary that American texts in Lithuanian be translated into English and so that they may be studied as a part of American literature in the United States.

To bring a diaspora literature home, means putting an end to exile and thus closing this chapter of a divided literary history. This is an important and complex task.²¹ To study American literature in the Lithuanian language is to place it in its American context and consider how it is at home in the United States. This is also an important task.

¹⁸ Long traditions and prejudices, however, are effective barriers to the study of the literature of emigration in Departments of English. Young scholars must think of their academic careers and a dissertation on, for instance, the Chicago newspaper *Lietuva* would in all likelihood not be accepted as a qualification for a position in American or English literature in Lithuania. My own work on Norwegian American literature and history has been done in a late phase of my career when I no longer had to think of the views and reactions of appointment committees.

¹⁹ *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* by Drude Krog Janson. Translated by Gerald Thorson. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes by Orm Øverland (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) and *The Rise of Jonas Olsen: A Norwegian Immigrant's Saga. A Trilogy* by Johannes B. Wist. Translated and with an introduction by Orm Øverland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

²⁰ Marc Shell and Werner Sollors, eds., *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

²¹ An example of an American presentation of Lithuanian literature in exile is Rimvydas Šilbajoris, *Perfection of Exile: Fourteen Contemporary Lithuanian Writers* (Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1970). An illustration of how both branches of recent Lithuanian literature may be presented as canonical is a book by the Lithuanian American scholar, poet and translator Laima Sruoginis, *Lithuania: In Her Own Words. An Anthology of Contemporary Lithuanian Writing* (Vilnius, 1997).

In 1996 I published a book called *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*.²² I began this book rather bombastically with the sentence: “This is a history of American literature.” It presented the history of a literature that began with letters and immigrant guides and showed how immigrants had used Norwegian as a literary language in the United States for a period of about a hundred years. Since this was a literature that was based on the writers’ American immigrant experience, it had always seemed foreign and irrelevant in Norway. In the United States, however, it was hardly even noticed because it was in a foreign language and, consequently, not American. Nevertheless it was a literature by and about and addressed to Americans. As is the case in all cultures, most of what was written and published by Norwegian immigrants in the United States was not of lasting literary value. Only a few of the texts that are valuable contributions to American literature, however, are available in English translation.

A theme in some of this Norwegian American literature is the excellence of all things Norwegian and the importance of maintaining Norwegian culture in the New World. I must admit that I was somewhat uncomfortable with the rather blatant nationalism I found expressed in so many novels, stories and poems. When I later turned to a study of the self-image of European immigrants in general, however, I realized that such self-promotion of ethnic excellence was typical of all immigrant communities in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, I realized that an insistence on the value of a particular heritage, be it Lithuanian or Norwegian, was a response to a shared experience of being excluded from the closed society of Americans, of being labeled foreigners. I wrote about this in a book called *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home*.²³

Here I tried to explain that when first-wave Lithuanian Americans argued with Polish Americans about whether Thaddeus Kosciuszko, as this hero of the American Revolution is known in the United States, was Polish or Lithuanian, this may seem an expression of Old World nationalism but was more importantly an expression of the Lithuanian and Polish immigrants’ need to have American stories and American heroes. Through Kosciuszko they had participated in the American Revolution and had strong roots in America (2000, 96-97).²⁴ In the first wave of Lithuanian immigration, too, the identity of many of the leaders was that of exiles: one of their aims was the restoration of Lithuania as a sovereign nation. In this there is an obvious

²² Orm Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1996).

²³ Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

²⁴ I have called such stories “homemaking myths” because they were told as part of an argument that a particular immigrant group had a right to a home in America. As Lithuanian Americans pointed to Kosciuszko to argue that they had taken an important part in the American Revolution, Norwegian Americans pointed to Leif Erikson to argue that they had discovered America.

similarity with the leaders of the Lithuanian American community in the Cold War period. But as one American historian has observed, the nineteenth century nationalism of Lithuanian Americans was as much about their status as Americans as about European politics (2000, 26). It should be asked whether this may also be a way of understanding the expressions of Lithuanian nationalism in the Cold War period.

This and many other questions, however, can only be properly addressed by scholars who are familiar with the Lithuanian language. It is a sad fact that the collective memories of human cultures are easily lost in the course of two or three generations. One of the central tasks of scholars in the humanities and the social sciences is to preserve and improve our memory of the past. Indeed, our study of the past may often not only preserve but actually change our understanding and thus our memory. The perhaps unavoidable loss of cultural memory, however, is far more radical and has a far greater effect in immigrant cultures than in cultures that have developed in a homeland. Language is itself central to our memory and language loss is central to the development of immigrant groups in a land that has been characterized as a graveyard of languages. The American newspapers and magazines that were read by immigrants from Lithuania or Norway can no longer be read by the descendants of these immigrants, whose language now has become English. To most Lithuanian Americans today their past is a closed or at least unreadable book. Sadly, many of the publications in the many American immigrant languages may not even have been preserved. Libraries have the function of preserving publications as well as manuscripts in the United States as in Europe. The publications and manuscripts by immigrants in their own languages, however, were regarded as “foreign” and were not collected and preserved by American public libraries and archives as was material in English. This is only one reason why the Lithuanian Emigration Institute in Kaunas is so important: it is actually a unique repository of sources for American history.²⁵ Its importance will be even greater if it also becomes the home of the immigrant correspondence that may still be preserved by families on both sides of the Atlantic.

I set out with the question whether Lithuanian and Norwegian American Studies should be American Studies or European diaspora studies. In my own work my perspective has been that of an Americanist. I came to the field of immigration studies from the academic field known as American Studies. To me, Norwegian American history is part of American history. However, it should be clear from my remarks that my answer to my question is that both perspectives, the American and the European, may be necessary for a better understanding of the history and culture of all European

²⁵ Valuable archives are often far too little known and therefore under-used. One great way for wealthy Lithuanian Americans to make good use of their money would be the establishment of a scholarship for American scholars to do research in the Lithuanian Emigration Institute. Another and perhaps more realistic way of making the archives here more accessible would be to exchange its catalogue of holdings with the catalogue of Lithuanian American material at the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota.

immigrant groups in the United States. Indeed, one fascinating issue that needs to be studied is the very interplay between the American and the European developments of peoples that have been divided by the great overseas migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How, for instance, have the ideological and cultural relations between Lithuanians and Lithuanian Americans developed in the course of the long period of emigration. The exploration of this history certainly needs scholars equally familiar with the American and the European contexts. An illustration of how a study of the interplay between those who stayed and those who left may be done is the fine book by the American historian H. Arnold Barton, *A Folk Divided: Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840–1940*.²⁶

In my presentation I have spoken of emigration as well as immigration, two words that reflect the two perspectives.²⁷ American historians speak exclusively of immigration; European historians tend to speak of emigration. For the full picture, both terms need to be kept in mind. However, whether our academic fields are political science, sociology, history, or literary history, it is important to keep in mind that most Lithuanians in America, regardless of time or motivation, have eventually – as have most Norwegians in America – become Americans. The story of how they became Americans needs to be told.

Órm Øverlánd

²⁶ H. Arnold Barton, *A Folk Divided: Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

²⁷ A discussion of the terms exile, emigration, and immigration is in Órm Øverland, “Identities of Exile, Emigration and Immigration.” Dalia Kuizinienė, ed., *Beginnings and Ends of Emigration: Life without Borders in the Contemporary World*, 9-25 (Kaunas, Lithuania: Versus Aureus, 2005).