are pleased to present the

Sixth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies

7:30 p.m., April 7th, 2008
Frangipani Room
Indiana Memorial Union

“Dialogues in the Vernacular: A Pragmatic Approach to Muslim-Non-Muslim Relations”

Presented by

Professor Vincent Cornell
Emory University

Introductory Remarks Presented by
Mrs. Lucy Khairy

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*Thank you!*
Vincent Cornell is a summa cum laude graduate of the University of California, Berkeley. He received his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1989. Professor Cornell has taught at Northwestern University, the University of Georgia, Duke University, and most recently the University of Arkansas, where he served as Professor of History and Director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies. He lived and worked in Morocco for nearly six years, and has spent considerable time both teaching and doing research in Egypt, Tunisia, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Professor Cornell's pre-modern interests cover the entire spectrum of Islamic thought from Sufism to philosophy and Islamic law. He has published several books: The Book of the Glory of the Black Race: al-Jahiz's Kitab Fakhr as-Sudan 'ala al-Bidan (Waddington, New York: The Phyllis Preston Collection, 1981), a translation of a short treatise on the virtues of the blacks over the whites by the premier Arabic literary figure of the ninth century C. E.; The Way of Abu Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ansari (ca. 509/1115-16—594/1198) (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1996), the first detailed study of a highly influential Sufi of the western Islamic mystical tradition; Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998), the first study of Muslim sainthood utilizing the methodology of the sociology of sainthood, and the first detailed historical study of the Moroccan Sufi tradition; Voices of Islam, a five volume set which he edited for Praeger Press, as well as a book length monograph of the North African Sufi Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, a work on Hermetic philosophy in Islamic Spain, and a history of Islamic moral philosophy.

This lecture will explore the anthropological notion of "vernacular religion" as an approach to interreligious understanding. The social and political contextualization of Muslim approaches to other religions and their adherents, including legal and scriptural interpretations, serves to "vernacularize" virtually all such encounters in actual practice. Examples of religious vernaculars will be drawn from Islamic history and will include ritual practices, political accommodations, cultural analyses, and legal and theological debates. The lecture will conclude with general observations on the prospects of vernacular religion as a pragmatic aid to Muslim-Non-Muslim understanding.
Professor Victor Danner was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico to Arthur James and Maria Lopez Danner. As a young man, he served his country during WWII. After the war he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. magna cum laude in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah’s Sufi Aphorisms (1973); Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah: The Book of Wisdom, (1978); and The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews.

One of his students, Lauri King Irani, captured his essence: “As a teacher, Victor Danner had few equals. He taught Arabic, classical Arabic literature, Islam, Sufism, the Qur’an, comparative religion, comparative mysticism, and Eastern religions. His dignified bearing, elegant gestures, and verbal eloquence transformed his lectures into performances which had the power to captivate and inspire his students, whether he was discussing Arabic grammar or Islamic theology. His concern for and encouragement of his students, coupled with his understated sense of humor, earned him a well-deserved reputation as a caring and committed educator who taught not only when behind the classroom lectern, but also by example.”

_He who is illumined at the beginning is illumined at the end._

—from the _Sufi Aphorisms_ by Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah (d.1309)
Transmuted by Victor Danner