Abolition democracy and global justice

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Abstract   As new social relations produce new kinds of social subjects, scholars in American Studies and Area Studies experience anxieties about disciplinary as well as geographic borders. The Civil Rights tradition of the 14th Amendment plays an important role within progressive American Studies scholarship, but in the course of seeking equality and exclusion within the USA, this tradition runs the risk of occluding the role of the nation in the world and its central role in creating and preserving inequality and injustice in other nations. An emerging emphasis on struggles for social justice without seeking state power encapsulates many of the most progressive impulses within Area Studies and trans-national studies, yet this perspective runs the risk of occluding the enduring importance of the nation-state in inflecting global developments with local histories and concerns. The present moment challenges us to draw on both traditions, and to use each to critique the shortcomings of the other, while at the same time promoting an inclusionary, nonsectarian, and mutually supportive dialogue about our differences.

In Jack Conroy's 1935 short story 'The Weed King', a stubborn Missouri farmer wages a one person war against the weeds that spring up in his fields. Believing that farming would be an easy job if it were not for the weeds, he dedicates himself to their eradication with a zeal that astounds his fellow workers. The 'weed king' embraces his war against weeds as his reason for being. 'His only vanity,' Conroy tells us, is his belief that he has 'put the quietus to more weeds than any man, woman, child or beast west of the Mississippi' (Conroy, 1985: 101). Even in the winter time

when snow covers the ground, the zealot worries night and day about the tiny seeds waiting to bloom in the spring. One of his neighbors points out that weeds have their uses too, that many of them have greatly-needed medicinal powers. However, the weed king is not deterred. He soon succeeds in suppressing most of the weeds on his property. His single-minded zealotry has its costs, however. The measures he takes to kill the weeds prove fatal to his crops as well.

At the present moment of tumultuous transformation and change, scholars in American Studies and Area Studies might be tempted to emulate the weed king, to keep a keen eye on our fields to protect what we have been cultivating for so many years, to view each other's work with trepidation and counter-insurgent zeal. American Studies scholars worry that the growing enthusiasm for transnational studies threatens to focus too much on exchanges across national boundaries, in the process occluding the unique, particular, and specific inflections given to those processes by distinct national histories, cultures, and politics. Area Studies specialists, many of whom have been part of a decades-long tradition dedicated to constructing epistemologies and ontologies that resist the hegemony of the monolingual, monocultural, and nationalist scholarship of the US academy, rightly fear that a transnational or post-national American Studies might simply project American Exceptionalism onto a broader geographic terrain. Outside the USA, specialists in both American Studies and Area Studies have reason to fear that (wittingly or unwittingly) scholars from the USA will use the power of US capital, communications media, and commerce to substitute a US-centric mono-logue masquerading as a dialogue for the greatly needed polylateral communication and collaboration that a transnational world requires.

At a time when substantive changes in social structures, technology, and politics are radically reconfiguring the relations linking culture, time, and place, policing the boundaries of disciplines speaks to deep desires for continuity and certainty. It is possible to look at the current ferment in our fields and see only what is being lost, to become subsumed with melancholy about lost conversations and conventions. Yet scholarly research should be conducted out of conviction, rather than out of habit. If we are not careful, our work can come to resemble Swedish anthro-pologist Ulf Hannerz's definition of Scandinavian cooking – something passed down from generation to generation for no apparent reason (Hannerz, 1992: 42). Like the weed king, we can worry night and day about the purity of our fields. As new social relations throw forth funda-mentally new social subjects with new epistemologies, ontologies, archives, and imaginaries, new patterns of scholarly inquiry will inevitably emerge. Will shallow forms of cultural and ideological critique eclipse the grounded insights produced by ethnography or social history? Will the fetishes of archival and ethnographic research methods produce empiricist and myopic work lacking in self-reflexivity? Will comparative work lack the cultural and linguistic depth traditionally produced by

primarily national studies? Will national studies ignore the ways in which nationalism itself is a transnational project? Will the proliferation of new social subjects and new objects of study come at the expense of marginalizing aggrieved social groups or will it teach us how social identities become conflated with power in richly generative and productive ways?

It is understandable that these kinds of questions arise when we try to do our work. Anything worth doing can nonetheless be done badly, and principled questions from colleagues protect our interests as well as theirs. Yet counter-insurgency is a poor model for scholarly work, and too much attention to pulling out weeds can kill the crops. Even more important, weeds can have curative powers if we learn to use them correctly. The author of 'The Weed King' confided to his biographer that his mother believed that 'weeds' were simply plants for which no use had yet been found (Wixon, 1994: 32). The 'weeds' that invade a field can also inform it in crucially important ways if we learn to recognize their curative powers.

Within American Studies, the tradition of 14th Amendment Americanism may seem like the quintessential expression of American exceptionalism. Forged from the freedom dreams and collective struggles of an enslaved people, the 14th Amendment stands as an enduring symbol of the accomplishments of the abolition democracy that ended slavery in the wake of the Civil War. More than a specific Constitutional provision promising equal treatment under law, the 14th Amendment has functioned as a widely shared social warrant authoring and authorizing new ways of knowing and new ways of being. In his indispensable work, *Black Reconstruction in America*, W.E.B. Du Bois demonstrated how slaves fighting for their freedom soon realized that it would not be enough to be merely 'free' in a society premised on their exclusion. In the course of staging a general strike in the fields, running away from slavery to swell the ranks of the Union army, and joining together to work land liberated by military force, they formulated a political perspective that Du Bois named 'abolition democracy' (Du Bois, 1995). They fought for the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. At the Charleston Black Convention in 1865 they called for more than nominal freedom, for the development of their full being as humans. Between 1865 and 1877 they fashioned alliances with poor whites to elect progressive majorities to office, and their successes led to the first universal public education systems in the South, to governments that subsidized the general economic infrastructure rather than just the privileges and property of the elite. Although betrayed by the Compromise of 1877, by the removal of federal troops from the South, by the legal consolidation of the combination of sharecropping and Jim Crow Segregation, and by Supreme Court decisions that took protections away from black people and extended them to corporations, abolition democracy and the 14th Amendment successfully challenged the hegemony of white male Protestant propertied power. It opened the door for subsequent claims for social justice by immigrants and their children, religious minorities, women, workers and

people with disabilities. From voting rights to affirmative action, from fair housing to fair hiring, the 14th Amendment is an enduring and abiding force for social justice in US society.

Yet American Studies scholarship that subsumes social justice under the rubric of the 14th Amendment runs the risk of ignoring the position of the USA in the world. Celebrating struggles for citizenship inside the USA can work to strengthen the distinctions between citizens and aliens, providing legitimation for nationalist and nativist policies that impose enormous suffering on humans precisely because they are not US citizens. The legacy of the 14th Amendment has not prevented women and blacks in contemporary California from supporting anti-immigrant nativism through Proposition 187, aimed at denying immigrants and their children needed state services, or through Proposition 227, banning bilingual education in the state's classrooms. Post-1965 immigrants from Asia, who owe their entry into to the USA to the civil rights movement and its exposure of previous national origin quotas as racist, have not been immune to pursuing the privileges of whiteness for themselves by opposing affirmative action and school desegregation policies vital to the well-being of blacks and Latinos. At the same time, the power inequalities that separate even the most aggrieved US citizens from the masses of poor and working people around the world can render struggles for full 14th Amendment rights by US citizens to be little more than what Martin Luther King, Jr used to describe as 'an equal right to do wrong'. Certainly the prominence of Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice in forging the rationale for the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq demonstrates the limits of this form of inclusion.

If abolition democracy emblematizes the emancipatory tradition within American Studies, the idea of collective and linked struggles for change without aiming for control over any one state expresses the uniquely generative stance within transnational social movements and transnational scholarship. Articulated in the form of a manifesto in John Holloway's *Change the World Without Taking Power*, this sensibility has taken on activist form in the work of the EZLN in Mexico, the Gabriela Network in the Philippines, and the Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence in that Japanese prefecture (Holloway, 2002). These movements make demands on the state and recognize the specificity of national histories, cultures and politics, but their aspirations and activities cannot be contained with any single national context.

The activities of the Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence (OWAAMV) demonstrate the importance of a transnational perspective that goes beyond the history, culture, and politics of any single nation state (Fukumura and Matsuoka, 2002). Coming from a country that has been serially colonized since the 17th century and occupied militarily by both the USA and Japan, OWAAMV activists cannot solve their problems within a single national context. Disadvantaged by colonial status, race, and gender, they cannot turn to national liberation, anti-racism or

feminism as their sole context for struggle. Coming from a small island with a limited population in a corner of the world far removed from metropolitan centers of power, they must forge alliances with outsiders based on political affinities and identifications, rather than counting on the solidarities of sameness that sustain most social movements. As eyewitnesses to brutal combat on the island in 1945 that killed more than 130,000 Okinawan civilians (one-third of the local population) and tens of thousands of Japanese and US military personnel, they find it impossible to celebrate organized violence and masculinist militarism (Hein and Selden, 2003: 13). As women confronted with the pervasive presence of commercial sex establishments, sex tourism and rapes of civilian women and girls by military personnel, they see gender as a central axis of power and struggle.

The complicated history that brought the OWAAMV into existence, and which vexes them in so many ways, has produced new ways of being and new ways of knowing that contain enormous generative power for scholars in Ethnic Studies and American Studies. They do not seek to make their nation militarily superior to others. Instead, they argue that massive preparation for war increases rather than decreases the likelihood of violence. Moreover, they argue that military spending creates security for states and financial institutions but not for people. They charge that expenditures on war serve to contain and control people like themselves who oppose the global economic system, who challenge neoliberal policies designed to privatize state assets, lower barriers to trade and limit the power of local entities to regulate the environment. Perhaps most important, they call for a new definition of 'security', one that places the security of women, children and ordinary people before the security of the state and financial institutions. They 'queer' the nation – not because they take an explicit position on the rights of gays and lesbians, but because they interrupt and contest the narrative of patriarchal protection upon which the nation-state so often rests.

By necessity, the OWAAMV go beyond the categories and cognitive mappings of area studies. They are citizens of Japan, but also victims of Japanese and US colonialism. On most issues, they feel more in solidarity with the indigenous Sovereignty Movement in Hawai'i or the Gabriela network mobilizing against sex tourism and sex work near military bases than they do with their fellow citizens of Japan. The nature of US imperialism forces them to seek alliances with pacifists and feminists in the USA, with Puerto Rican activists fighting against US military exercises on the island of Vieques, and with the Okinawans transported to Bolivia during the Cold War era when the Japanese and US governments relocated them in that South American nation so their land could be appropriated for military uses. They feel solidarity with witnesses to war and empire everywhere, recognizing that the things that have happened in their part of the Pacific cannot be contained within any one 'area' of study.

Transnational organizing of mobilizations for change, without directly seeking to take state power, speak directly to the new circuits and networks of power emerging from new forms of production, consumption, communication and repression. They often display brilliant ingenuity in fashioning seemingly unlikely short-term alliances, affinities and identifications with people across class, gender, race and national lines. Yet this very tactical dexterity makes it difficult to turn temporary victories into long-term institutional changes. Strategies that manifest the mobility and dynamism required for challenging transnational corporations and financial institutions often lack the concentrated power needed to challenge the enduring power of the state and its control over the prisons, armies and police agencies deployed in support of private power everywhere. Even more important, flexible, fluid and dynamic coalitions often lack both the organic solidarity and the connecting ideology that make movements successful. Groups engaged in this kind of struggle can become unexpected allies in each other's struggles, but they can also easily be manipulated into fighting against each other if they do not develop a systemic analysis of global power.

Scholars can be pitted against each other as easily as aggrieved communities can. In an era of carefully orchestrated challenges to public education, scholarly independence and critical thinking, it is likely in the near future that every department, discipline and field will be encouraged to defend its own worth by belittling others, to compete for scarce and declining resources by inflating its own achievements at the expense of others. A losing proposition in politics, this 'race to the bottom' would be even more disastrous for scholarship because it encourages parochialism and defensive localism at precisely the moment when we most need dialogue, generosity and cosmopolitanism. It is important in this context to identify and learn from scholarly works that offer models of principled and productive synthesis between American Studies and Area Studies. Fortunately, both well established classics and promising new work in both American Studies and Area Studies contain this generative potential. The scholarly works of W.E.B. Du Bois and Walter Rodney provide especially useful and generative models from the past, while recent studies by Melani McAlister, Lise Waxer, Roderick Ferguson and Clyde Woods pose bold and exciting challenges in the present (Ferguson, 2004; McAlister, 2001; Waxer, 2002; Woods, 1998).

As early as the 1930s, W.E.B. Du Bois clearly recognized the connections that linked the struggle for abolition democracy at home to the emergence of US imperialism abroad. Du Bois describes the great loss suffered by the US nation and the world as a result of the betrayal of Radical Reconstruction policies in the years immediately after the Civil War. By withdrawing federal troops from the South and failing to enforce the letter and spirit of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, the US government deprived freed slaves of the full emancipation they had helped secure for themselves. African Americans remained nominally

free, but the restoration to power of the white southern planter class and their allies led to the consolidation of an openly and explicitly white supremacist tyranny that deprived African Americans of political power, civil rights, the ability to bargain about the costs and conditions of their labor, as well as of opportunities for land ownership and asset accumulation. But by betraying the Negro, Du Bois noted, white Americans betrayed themselves as well, because they destroyed the most democratic and egalitarian force in their national politics, while strengthening the power of the most elitist, plutocratic and undemocratic elements in their country.

Government spending for military procurement during the Civil War created the infrastructure for an industrializing America. Savage and brutal warfare and its attendant health consequences (epidemics, malnutrition, diversion of health care resources to the military) left more than 600,000 dead in a nation of some 30 million people, but the simultaneous growth of the state and the national economy during the conflict also set the stage for the exploitation and inequality of a mature industrial society. Du Bois viewed Radical Reconstruction as 'the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen', and when it failed, any hope for genuine democracy in the USA died as well (Du Bois, 1995; Sundquist, 1996). By disarming black people (literally by confiscating their firearms after military service and figuratively by withdrawing federal support for inter-racial governments that provided education, healthcare, and transportation to poor and working class people) the federal government constrained popular power and tipped the scales in favor of the planter elite in the South and the financiers and manufacturers in the North.

Yet Du Bois did not confine the damage done by the victory of 'the South' through the betrayal of Radical Reconstruction to the US nation-state. 'The South is not interested in freedom for dark India. It has no sympathy with the oppressed of Africa or Asia', he argued (Du Bois, 1995: 704). Writing at a time when global total war had already begun, even though the USA did not formally enter into the hostilities for another six years, Du Bois clearly believed in a causal link between the outcome of the 1861–5 war and the outbreak of war in Ethiopia and Manchuria in the 1930s. He saw that the USA was on the wrong side in the emerging anti-colonial struggle that would play such an important role in global politics in the years ahead.

'We ought to emphasize this lesson of the past,' he wrote in respect to the immorality and economic irrationality of the slave system, because of 'the face of new slavery established elsewhere in the world under other names and guises' (Du Bois, in Sundquist, 1996: 441). The entire world paid a price for the defeat of Radical Reconstruction in Du Bois's view, because 'Imperialism, the exploitation of colored labor throughout the world, thrives upon the approval of the United States, and the United States gives that approval because of the South' (Du Bois, 1995: 706). At

the conclusion of a lengthy treatise about events in the USA between 1860 and 1880, Du Bois directs his readers' attention to the world of 1935. His penultimate paragraph reads:

> Immediately in Africa, a black back runs red with the blood of the lash; in India, a brown girl is raped; in China, a coolie starves; in Alabama, seven darkies are more than lynched; while in London, the white limbs of a prostitute are hung with jewels and silk. Flames of jealous murder sweep the earth, while brains of little children smear the hills. (p. 728)

Du Bois was prophetic about the ways in which the impending total world war and its aftermath would revolve around questions of colonial rivalries, anti-colonial liberation movements and the links between colonialism, class oppression and racism in the imperial countries. The triumph of white supremacy within the continental USA served as a building block for imperialism abroad, and conversely the racial dimensions of the imperialist project subsequently strengthened white supremacy at home. Du Bois argued that the fight against white supremacy required an international as well as a national frame, and we see around us today the ineluctable wisdom of that position.

Walter Rodney's scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s exemplified the highest achievements of area studies and transnational studies. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney explained how exploitation of African resources and the slave trade fueled the industrialization of Europe (Rodney, 1974). As a diasporic African born in Guyana, Rodney grew up in a society populated by blacks, Asian Indians, Chinese, Portuguese and indigenous people. His father had worked in Curacao and the Dominican Republic and spoke English, Spanish, Portuguese and Papiamento. Rodney attended primary school in Guyana, college in Jamaica, and did his graduate work at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He secured teaching jobs at universities in Tanzania and Jamaica before returning to Guyana where he died at the age of 38 in 1980, murdered by government agents for his political work against the Forbes Burnham dictatorship (Lewis, 1998).

Rodney's life history, scholarly research and activism led him to see the links between regions as well as their local specificities. He championed anti-colonial national liberation movements but exposed and critiqued the limits of state-based nationalism. Rodney embraced the transnational Black Power movement, but warned that relying on race alone was the road to ruin. He produced sophisticated Marxist scholarship delineating the ways in which racism, capitalism and imperialism emerged together as mutually constitutive forces in the world, while at the same time praising the Rastafarians for what he viewed as their sophisticated understanding of the links connecting culture, economics and politics. He shunned material possessions for himself, in part as a critique of contemporary capitalism but also in recognition of the role that the love of material goods played in leading Africans to sell other

Africans into slavery in the early years of the slave trade. While recognizing and honoring the differences in the diverse nationalisms of small Caribbean states, he also emphasized that European powers succeeded in imposing the slave trade on Africa in part because political units on the continent were too small to combat the concerted and coordinated efforts of capitalist nation-states. Eloquent in his support of Black Power, his scholarship and activism called for alliances between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese, for building alliances based on politics rather than on identities, and he died fighting against the corruption of a leader who commanded the allegiance of Guyanese blacks by appealing to them in specifically racial terms.

Nearly a quarter century after his death, Rodney's scholarship speaks to today's national and transnational realities with astounding prescience. Like the work of Du Bois, it compels us to honor the particularities of place without becoming subsumed in them, to look for unexpected alliances and affiliations across and within national boundaries without losing sight of the systemic, integrated and fully linked economic, political and ideological practices that shape exploitation, hierarchy and oppression everywhere

Scholars in American Studies need to reckon with the ways in which present patterns of migration, trade, investment and military intervention overseas influence every aspect of life in the USA, from the national origins of babies available for adoption to the identities of clerks in convenience stores, from the ownership of downtown sky-scrapers to the price of drugs on the streets. The export of industrial production to low-wage countries overseas, the influx of immigrant low-wage workers into the domestic service sector and the restructuring of the social wage have transformed the nature of wages and working conditions at home and abroad. Structural adjustment policies imposed on nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America by the international Monetary Fund and the World Bank for the benefit of transnational corporations exacerbate the inequalities of imperialism and neo-colonialism on those continents and force workers to migrate to North America and Europe. In the USA, more than half of the work force in the textile and apparel industries consists of Asian American women, many of them recent immigrants. Working in essentially unregulated small shops for low wages, they contract respiratory illnesses at high rates because of repeated exposure to fiber particles, dyes, formaldehydes and arsenic. Forty-three percent of the production workers on the assembly lines of the computer industry in California's Silicon Valley are Asian Americans. In the entire industry, Asian and Latina women contract illnesses approximately three times as often as workers in general manufacturing, and their illnesses often entail permanent damage to their reproductive and central nervous systems (Sze, 1997: 92).

Yet the influx of immigrants into the USA from Asia, Africa and Latin America is rarely perceived by the public at large as a consequence of

their nation's efforts to secure markets, raw materials, labor and sources of investment overseas. Instead, these immigrants inherit the history of battles over 14th Amendment Americanism. They enter a country with a racialized history and for better or worse participate in that racialization. What Ghassan Hage (2000: 9) rightly calls the 'psychopathology of white decline' draws on old and new forms of racism to portray hard-working and exploited immigrant workers as parasites and to present the pampered consumers who profit from their exploitation as heroic producers besieged by an immigrant invasion. Yet at the same time, these immigrants are enticed to seek 'honorary whiteness' for themselves at the expense of other communities of color, while African Americans are recruited to a nativist politics of anti-immigrant hatred and exclusion. Middle- and upper-class consumers are triply subsidized by the exploitation of immigrants and other low-wage workers: the products and personal services they consume cost less, they acquire more time for leisure activities by assigning housework and other chores to easily affordable service workers, and their returns on investments are enhanced because US corporations pay workers overseas less money knowing that their families are to some degree subsidized by remittances sent home by family members performing service work in metropolitan centers.

As the population of the USA becomes less white, the psychopathology of white decline obscures the class dimensions of racial exploitation as well as the racial and imperial dimensions of class inequality. US citizens committed to a view of their country as essentially European and white face a daunting demographic challenge. The national population now includes 30 million Latinos and 10 million Asian Americans (Martin and Midgeley, 1999: 14; del Pinal and Singer, 1999: 15). New York is now the largest city in the Caribbean, even though it is not in the Caribbean. More Caribbeans live in New York than in Kingston (Jamaica), San Juan (Puerto Rico) and Port-of-Spain (Trinidad) *combined*. New York has the second largest Guyanese, Haitian and Jamaican populations anywhere; more people from the island of Nevis live in New York than on Nevis itself (Manuel, 1995: 241). The population of Los Angeles includes 1.3 million people of Asian ancestry and 3.7 million people of Mexican ancestry, and the city is now the second largest Mexican, Guatemalan and Salvadoran population centers, as well as the third largest concentration of Canadians anywhere in the world (Cheng and Yang, 1996: 308; Lopez et al., 1996: 281; Naficy, 1993: 5).

Inequalities within and across national boundaries compel workers to migrate from low- to high-wage countries. The subsistence wage for fulltime workers in the USA was four times the wage that prevailed in the Dominican Republic in 1980. It grew to six times the Dominican wage by 1987 and to 13 times higher by 1991 (Pessar, 1995: 5). More than 125 million people live outside their countries of birth or citizenship, and another 2 to 4 million join their ranks every year (Martin and Widgren,

1996: 2). Remittances sent home by overseas workers make up crucial components of the national economies of many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The exploitation and indignities suffered by immigrant low-wage workers in Europe and North America subsidize the standard of living enjoyed by educated urban professionals on those continents by providing them with low-cost goods and personal services. The remittances immigrant workers send home then subsidize the interests of transnational corporations by softening the impact of the devastation engendered by the low wages and low taxes that those firms enjoy in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

While some people find themselves forced to move, others discover that their immobility creates profit-making opportunities for transnational corporations. As the Dominican Republic became the chief apparel exporting nation in the Caribbean by 1990, real hourly wages fell to only 62.3 percent of what they had been in 1984 (Safa, 1994: 225). Sixty percent of the 4.4 billion people in the poorest countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America lack basic sanitation facilities. One billion do not have access to safe and uncontaminated water. Eight hundred and twenty-eight million people in the world are chronically undernourished. Nearly a third of them will die before their 40th birthday (Schoepf et al., 2001: 120–1). Yet African countries spend four times as much on debt payments to financial institutions in Europe and North America than they spend on the health and education needs of Africans (Gershman and Irwin, 2000: 13, 14, 25).

The rising pattern of inequality in the world affects rich nations as well as poor nations. Since 1980, the wealthiest fifth of the US population has enjoyed a 21 percent growth in its income while those in the poorest three fifths have seen their wages, working conditions and living standards stagnate or fall (Tabb, 2001: 21). Nearly 85 percent of the $3 trillion increase in stock market valuation between 1989 and 1997 went to the richest 10 percent of US families (p. 21). Nearly one-half of the nation's income now goes to the wealthiest fifth of households (Miller, 2000: 17, 18). The wealthiest 10 percent of families in the US own 94 percent of the business assets, 90 percent of the bonds, 89 percent of the corporate stock and 78 percent of the nation's real estate (Plotkin and Scheurman, 1994: 29). US consumers enjoy lower prices because of the exploitation of workers in the rest of the world.

The export of production to low-wage countries overseas has a decided impact on wages and working conditions in the USA as well. Structural adjustment policies imposed on people in Asia, Africa and Latin America by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank exacerbate inequalities on those continents and provoke people to migrate to higher wage countries like the USA.

Immigration has increased the non-white population of the USA, but it has also diversified and internationalized domestic communities of color. More than 1.5 million African Americans are Caribbean immigrants,

including native speakers of English, French, Spanish, Dutch and indigenous languages such as Garifuna and Kreyol. Six hundred thousand Latinos have some Asian ancestry; while black Latinos number more than 1.7 million (Pollard and O'Hare, 1999: 11, 14). Under these conditions, any anti-racist struggle has to be transnational as well as national, inter-ethnic as well as pan-ethnic.

Racialization in the USA has not been an aberration in an otherwise fair society, but rather, racialization has been a key site where inequality and exploitation have been learned and legitimated. Colonialism did not occur during an aberrant moment in the nation's history during the 1890s, but rather, colonialism was both a key cause and a key consequence of racialization and white supremacist practices from the age of 'discovery' to the present. The present moment requires us to move the relationships between racism and colonialism from the margins to the center and to use them to help us understand the price we have paid as a people for the hegemony they helped construct.

The warfare state, the racial state and the colonial state have been great successes for what Randolph Bourne (1964) described as 'the significant classes' at the upper strata of society. Yet they have enacted terrible costs on the vast majority of the population, not just aggrieved racialized minorities. By devoting such a large proportion of its resources to domination and destruction, the US state has paid inadequate attention to the social infrastructure vital to the health and well-being of the populace. By placing the state on a permanent wartime footing, the state has made counter-subversion rather than governance the central concern of the nation's political life. Citizenship itself has suffered from this process, even though patriotic display and a kind of idolatry of the state and its military apparatus has become compulsory. Citizens need to be responsible and adult decision makers, but the imperial warfare state encourages instead a kind of infantile narcissism and dependency. As Randolph Bourne noted more than 80 years ago,

> A people at war have become in the most literal sense obedient, respectful, trustful children again, full of that naive faith in the all-wisdom and all-power of the adult who takes care of them, imposes his mild but necessary rule upon them and in whom they lose their responsibility and anxieties. (Bourne, 1964: 74)

At the start of a new century, the chickens have come home to roost. The empire is 'in here' as well as 'out there'. White supremacy is a global as well as a national project. The end of the Cold War, the rise of flexible accumulation, production and consumption, and the emergence of transnational cultures, communities and collectivities all require new ways of being and new ways of knowing, but also a renewed engagement with the old ways and their enduring influence on the present. Some scholars may still have the luxury of thinking in exclusively national terms, but most workers, consumers, migrants, activists, artists and intellectuals do

not. For us today, as for W.E.B. Du Bois and Walter Rodney in the past, there can be no reckoning with race that does not include a fully theorized understanding of imperialism, and concomitantly no analysis of imperialism that does not recognize the constitutive role of racial supremacy within the warfare state.

The global economic system is a class system, but it is also a racial system. Structural adjustment policies, mass migration and the global assault on social institutions that encourage equality and expand opportunities all function together to make 'whiteness' a global as well as a national project. New economic, political and social relations require the permanent supremacy of the global North over the global South and the permanent supremacy within the South of educated light-skinned leaders over dark-skinned masses.[1] The racisms that shape social relations around the globe are remnants of previous systems of servitude and segregation, to be sure, but they are also products of contemporary capitalism's ability to profit from new forms of differentiation that permit the exploitation of gendered and racialized labor within and across regional and national sites (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997: 20).

It is in this context that new scholarship in American Studies and transnational Area Studies takes on such great importance. In *Epic Encounters*, Melani McAlister presents a cultural history of North American fascination with the Middle East from the 19th century through the present. She shows how diverse and antagonistic sectors of US society have formed their own identities through powerful identifications with widely differing understandings of the symbolic significance of that region of the world. Valuable in itself as a powerful demonstration of how the national 'inside' is always constructed against an imagined 'outside', McAlister's book also presents the best single demonstration of how US policy in the Middle East has huge cultural as well as economic and geopolitical stakes. Similarly, Lise Waxer's *The City of Musical Memory* delineates how local identity in Cali, Colombia is constructed in opposition to other regions in that nation through identification with *salsa* music – an essentially Afro-Cuban music mastered by Puerto Ricans on their island and on the US mainland. Waxer explains how the commodification of culture and its consumption outside the fabric of tradition that originally produced it can have unexpected consequences with powerful effects on politics, economics, and culture.

Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* warns that post-nationalist American Studies runs the risk of collaborating with the regimes of domination it intends to contest by drawing on the legacies of racial nationalist movements which in Ferguson's view share the sexism and homophobia of the liberal state He calls for a post-nationalist American Studies that can address the complex formations that emanate from engagements with normativity rather than from appeals to it (Ferguson, 2004: 146, 48).

In *Development Arrested*, Clyde Woods offers us a new way to think

about time, place and power. His study of the power wielded by plantation owners in the Mississippi Delta helps us see how history literally 'takes place'. Woods shows how the unresolved contradictions of local power in small counties in Mississippi have had global effects, influencing everything from federal welfare policy to the music of the Beatles, from practices in state prisons to agricultural practices in Africa. He demonstrates the literal truth of what Martin Luther King, Jr meant metaphorically when he said that an injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere, because all places are intersections, crossroads and nodes in a network (Woods, 1998).

Like Rodney and Du Bois, McAlister, Waxer, Ferguson and Woods combine areas of study that previous disciplinary conventions kept separate. They move beyond their home disciplines and trespass in other fields. Their ideas and evidence might be unwelcome to some, as unwelcome as the weeds that occupied the attention of Conroy's Missouri farmer. They manifest in small ways the massive shake-up in social life, social relations and scholarship characteristic of this historical time of tumult, transformation, and change. But weeds are hardy and hard to stop. 'I can take you and show you weeds that has growed up through a rock and split it apart same as you would a sledgehammer', one of Conroy's characters claims (Conroy, 1985: 113).

The best way to kill a weed is by pulling it out by the roots. The very act of removing it from the ground, however, causes seeds from the bursting pods to scatter in all directions, producing new plants somewhere else. We can indulge in melancholia for lost objects and mourn the things that appear to be dying if we choose, but it would be so much more productive to recognize instead what is emerging in their place, and to see if what is being born will kill us or cure us.

Note

1 'Through the manipulation of this media of education and communication, white people have produced black people who administer the system and perpetuate the white values – "white hearted black men", as they are called by conscious elements' (Rodney, 1996: 33).

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