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How the Field's Leading Journal Has Embraced a Worldview as Slanted as Donald Trump's

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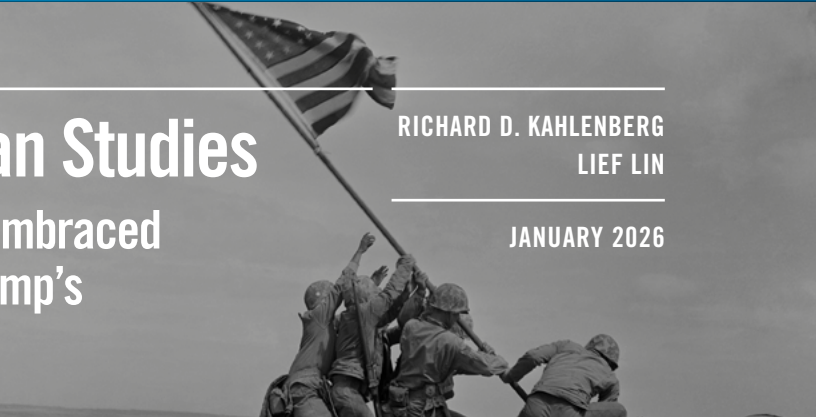
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INTRODUCTION

The American story is extraordinary. The United States is the wealthiest and most powerful nation on the planet and the number one destination of immigrants from across the world. Its founders created what is now the globe's longest-lasting liberal democratic constitution. At the same time, the American experience contains numerous dark chapters: the conquest and decimation of Native American populations; the enslavement of Black people, followed by decades of Jim Crow; and the internment of Japanese Americans. America's rates of gun violence and incarceration, and its level of economic inequality, are among the highest in the developed world today.

President Donald Trump has notoriously sought to erase the negative components of American history. *The Washington Post* found, for example, that since Trump's inauguration, the National Park Service has "softened descriptions of some of the most shameful moments of the nation's past. Some were edited to remove references to slavery. On other pages, statements on the historic struggle of Black Americans for their rights were cut or softened."¹ Trump's one-sided approach should be, and has been, widely denounced.² His critics are right to ask: How can he tell only half the story?

While Trump is a politician who often engages in demagoguery, one would expect serious scholars who study America — its history, literature, and culture — would provide a much more balanced and nuanced approach. To assess that hypothesis, we examined almost 100 articles over a three-year period in *American Quarterly*, the flagship journal of the American Studies Association. Published by Johns Hopkins University, *American Quarterly* is considered the country's premier journal of American studies, the publication in which the nation's top scholars vie to have their work appear. Disappointingly, we find that the scholarship in the journal, as a whole, engages

in the same sort of distortion as Trump does, only in reverse. If Trump erases the negative chapters in American history and takes a boastful stand about America today under his leadership, *American Quarterly* essentially erases virtually anything positive about the American experience. Instead of providing a rich and varied collection of positive, critical, and mixed accounts of America's history, literature, and culture, *American Quarterly* paints a one-sided and unrelentingly negative portrait.

In this report, we begin with background on the history and purpose of American studies and outline some ideas about the types of questions and observations a fair-minded account of American studies might entail. In the second section, we outline our methodology for coding articles in *American Quarterly* as positive, critical, or neutral. In the third section, we present our findings about the mix of stories found in the journal. We also outline the varying prevalence of different types of critiques of America; recount the critical key words that appear most frequently; and discuss the type of prose that is found in *American Quarterly*'s pages. In the fourth section, we outline areas for future research; and in the fifth section, we conclude with suggestions for internal reforms to fend off the threat of government interference. The paper also includes an appendix of abstracts of the articles we reviewed (where available) and representative quotations from those articles.

I. THE QUESTIONS AMERICAN STUDIES SHOULD ASK

American studies is a field of academic inquiry which, as one leading university described it, asks: "What is America? What does it mean to be an American? What has it meant in the past? What might it mean now and in the future?"³ The field takes an interdisciplinary approach to

studying America, primarily through the lenses of history, literature, and culture.

Founded in the early twentieth century, the central question of American studies has historically been: what, if anything, is distinctive about American culture, its customs, norms, history, and literature?⁴

More than 150 U.S. colleges offer a major in American studies.⁵ American studies classes are also taught in many U.S. high schools. For students who are beginning to think about the issues raised in American studies, a series of simple questions can be asked. When one travels abroad, apart from language and accent, what is it about an individual's manner or attitude that makes one suspect they are American? What are the best texts from American literature that capture the culture and help inform the creation of an American identity that students of all races, creeds, and colors can appreciate as their own?

Although the idea of American Exceptionalism — that America is unique and exceptional in important ways — has become unfashionable among academics, as part of the inquiry, students should debate the great thinkers who have pondered this question, from Alexis de Tocqueville and Seymour Martin Lipset to Bernard Bailyn.

Outside of academia, modern political thinkers on the right and left point to the immigrant story of America as central to the country's distinctiveness. Conservative Marc Thiessen argues: "The reason we can make the audacious claim that we are an 'exceptional' nation is because we are the first in human history not built on blood and soil but on an idea: the idea

of human freedom.”⁶ Meanwhile, on the left, Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) made essentially the same point: “What makes America exceptional is that we are a nation not founded on blood, not founded on creed.”⁷

As a nation of immigrants, the question then becomes, as de Crevecoeur’s Letters from an American Farmer famously asked: “What then is the American, this new man?”⁸ The question continues to fascinate contemporary writers and journalists.

- Humorist David Sedaris turns serious when he defines hope as a particular form of “American privilege” that Americans don’t necessarily recognize at home, but do when they travel to foreign lands. Romanian women, he writes, may not be particularly well off, but “they never look particularly disappointed, as if they never dare get disappointed.” He says: “In America, the talk now is all about white privilege, but regardless of race, there’s American privilege as well, or at least Western privilege.” It comes down to “That spark you feel when an idea comes to you — This could work. I can actually make this happen!” It’s no guarantee of success, he says, but there are plenty of places in the world “where nobody has it.”⁹
- Journalist George Packer points to the ethos of equality, “the first truth of our founding document, the one that leads to all the others,” which is manifested in everything from an insistence on one person one vote to the American instinct to call others by their first names, a custom unusual for citizens in many other countries.¹⁰

- In a similar vein, writer Fareed Zakaria focuses on a rebellious spirit. “The United States’ core character remains one that encourages attacks on power and hierarchy, celebrates the upstarts and cares little for tradition and established practice... Somewhere in there is the country’s secret sauce for enduring success.”¹¹
- Columnist David Von Drehle marvels at America’s success in exporting its music, television, and films. What makes “America exceptional is its irresistible pop culture, which has saturated the world so completely that it seems at this point almost unremarkable.”¹² Students should ask: What about America makes this possible?

Of course, students should also explore the dark side of American culture. Why do we have so many guns, such high incarceration rates, such high levels of segregation, and low levels of social mobility? Why, according to a 2025 report of a politically diverse group of scholars, does the U.S. have relatively high rates of depression and anxiety, suicide, murder, income inequality, and political polarization compared with other relatively wealthy nations?¹³

As part of a study of the American experience, students should examine American literature, from Herman Melville and Mark Twain to Toni Morrison and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Why are *Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Beloved*, and *The Great Gatsby* considered iconic American texts? What do they tell students about what makes the United States distinctive?¹⁴

American studies would presumably want to explore the distinguishing aspects of America’s

political system. Before the Declaration of Independence, historian Robert Kagan notes, there had never been a government that had declared that all men had natural rights as individuals.¹⁵ As Fareed Zakaria writes, "It is astonishing to remember that when America's Founding Fathers were constructing their experiment in government, they were virtually alone in a world of monarchies."¹⁶ Students will want to understand why America developed a system of rights that allows a citizen to criticize the government, a privilege that four-fifths of the world's population lacks.¹⁷

More remarkable still, students should comprehend that America's experiment in democratic self-governance faces an extra challenge not faced to the same degree by most other countries: creating a multiracial and multiethnic democracy among what author Heather McGee calls "ancestral strangers."¹⁸ This has not been easy. As the University of Virginia's E.D. Hirsch notes, "The American experiment, which now seems so natural to us, is a thoroughly artificial device designed to counterbalance the natural impulses of group suspicions and hatreds."¹⁹

Ideally, American studies would teach an honest and hopeful account of American history. It would frankly acknowledge America's sins but also the ways in which liberal democratic norms made redemption possible. As the Albert Shanker Institute noted in one report: students should learn of America's warts — slavery, the disenfranchisement of women, Black people and those without property, the Triangle Shirt Waist fire, Japanese internment, the persecution of gays, and McCarthyism, among others — but also discuss the movements to abolish slavery, to gain women's suffrage, to establish worker

safety, and to promote civil rights and civil liberties. The Shanker Institute report observed: "From the accounts of these transformations — and of the individuals, the organizations, the movements that fought for them — students will recognize the genius of democracy: When people are free to dissent, to criticize, to protest and publish, to join together in common cause, to hold their elected officials accountable, democracy's magnificent capacity for self-correction is manifest."²⁰

A discussion of contemporary race relations in America would acknowledge both the additional progress required to form a more perfect union and the remarkable gains that have been made in recent decades. As President Barack Obama declared in a 2015 speech in Selma, Alabama, "we do a disservice to the cause of justice by intimating that bias and discrimination are immutable, that racial division is inherent to America. If you think nothing's changed in the past 50 years, ask somebody who lived through the Selma or Chicago or Los Angeles of the 1950s. Ask the female CEO who once might have been assigned to the secretarial pool if nothing's changed. Ask your gay friend if it's easier to be out and proud in America now than it was thirty years ago. To deny this progress, this hard-won progress — our progress — would be to rob us of our own agency, our own capacity, our responsibility to do what we can to make America better."²¹

Finally, in thinking about what makes America distinctive, students should engage in a thought exercise. If the United States came under military attack, what key symbols and monuments would deserve special protection in order to preserve an understanding of America? The Statue of Liberty? The National Archives

housing the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence? Blocks used to auction off enslaved people? Skyscrapers as monuments to commerce?

II. ANALYZING *AMERICAN QUARTERLY*: METHODOLOGY

American Quarterly, founded in 1949, calls itself “the preeminent guide to American studies.”²² On the American Studies Association website, it says the *American Quarterly* covers “the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural formations of the United States and the Americas, broadly construed, as well as the histories and ongoing effects of indigenous dispossession upon which the U.S. nation stands, the roles of diverse subjects and institutions in and outside those formations, and the United States’ relations with the world. The journal engages both traditional and emerging fields and disciplines, including but not limited to critical race studies, digital culture, ethnography, gender studies, history, literature, material culture, performance studies, sexuality studies, religion, and visual culture.”²³

We coded 96 stories from regular issues of *American Quarterly* for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024 as critical, neutral, or positive.²⁴

We use the terms “critical, neutral, or positive” rather than more value-laden terms like “pro-American” or “anti-American” or “balanced” because we are being descriptive. In coding a story as critical, neutral, or positive, we make no judgment as to the accuracy of the article. When writing about slavery, to take one obvious example, it is entirely appropriate that the article be highly critical of the United States. Instead, we are trying to assess whether the *collection* of articles provides an accurate sense of American history, literature, and culture.

The coding involved a three-step process.

We began by conducting a word search of terms that are associated with standard critiques of America in the academy. We began with a list employed by Harry Lewis, the former dean of Harvard College, in his analysis of Harvard College’s online course catalog. The list included words or phrases such as: “decolonize,” “oppression,” “liberation,” “social justice,” “white supremacy,” and “intersectionality.”²⁵ In addition to Lewis’s six words, we added nine others that came up repeatedly in *American Quarterly*: “imperial,” “patriarchal,” American “empire,” “hegemonic,” “xenophobic,” “racialization,” “racial capitalism,” “settler colonialism,” and “carceral.”²⁶

The word search was only the first step. We did not simply assume that if a critical word (say “imperial”) showed up in a word search that the story was critical. After all, an article that celebrated America for its *lack* of imperialistic ambition would show up as employing that word (as would a word search of the report you are reading). The word search provided a hint of the likely leaning of the article, but further investigation was necessary to make a final determination on coding. (Indeed, as discussed below, it turned out that all of the articles we coded as “neutral” also contained the critical words).

The second crucial step involved a content analysis of the articles. We examined the titles, abstracts, and the articles themselves and provided an initial coding.

Third, before providing a final coding for each article, we sought to identify a representative quotation to help ensure that our categorization was correct.

Essays tagged “critical” were those that focus on a historical or contemporary negative event, idea, moment, or time. To justify the label of “critical,” we provide a short explanation in the appendix to this report that encapsulates the article’s central focus (e.g., American racism, sexism, imperialism, classism, xenophobia, or homophobia/transphobia.) An article could have one or more of these critical categories attached to it. To simplify matters, we categorized ethnic discrimination as “racism.” “Classism” was defined to include both “prejudice or discrimination based on class” and “the systemic oppression of lower class and middle class to the advantage of the upper class.”²⁷ Xenophobia was distinguished from racism because a white immigrant group could also face xenophobia. Finally, imperialism could include not only American conquest abroad but “domestic imperialism” by white Americans against Native Americans.

An essay was coded as “positive” if it focused on a positive historical or contemporary event, idea, moment, or time in America (such as the American victory over Nazi Germany).

Lastly, essays were coded “neutral” if they provided a mixed picture of America, both the good and the bad. In the process, we tried to bend over backwards to find articles that were “neutral” rather than “critical.” As discussed below, many of the “neutral” articles were highly critical of American society as a whole for being racist, sexist, and the like, but then typically highlighted the work of a member of a marginalized community (a Black person, an Indigenous person, a gay person, a woman) who overcame odds and exposed the society

for what it was. One could make an argument for coding such articles as “critical,” but in our analysis, we coded them “neutral” because a fair-minded reader might conclude that the ability of individuals or groups to transcend negative qualities about America suggests that there may be a kernel of something good about a country in which marginalized groups and individuals can, at least on occasion, transcend fundamental problems of discrimination.

In order to help readers make their own judgements about whether we coded the articles correctly, we provide, in the appendix: 1) the title of each of the 96 articles; 2) the rationale for the coding (e.g. American racism); 3) the article abstract (where available); and 4) a representative quotation from the article that illustrates the author’s thesis.

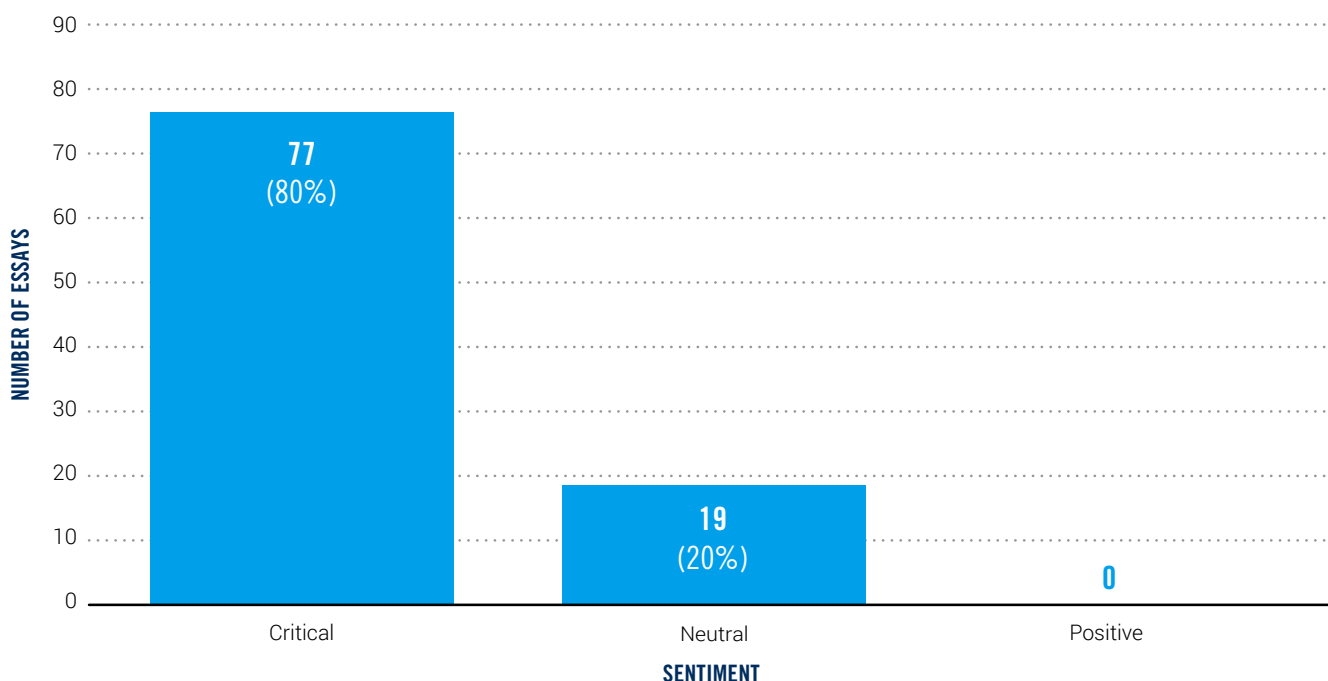
III. FINDINGS

A. Share Critical, Positive, Neutral

Of the 96 essays, 77 essays were coded critical, 19 essays were coded neutral, and 0 essays were coded positive. In percentage terms, 80% of the essays were describing a negative event, idea, moment, or time in America, 20% of the essays were neutral, and 0% were positive.

(See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1: STANCE OF THE ESSAYS IN *AMERICAN QUARTERLY* FROM 2022-2024



1. Critical articles: 77 of 96

Overwhelmingly, critical articles predominated. Below are some illustrative examples of essays in *American Quarterly* that took the United States to task.

- In “Weaponized Study in a Moment of (Counter) Insurgency: The Gathering Anti-‘American’ of American Studies,” the author declares: “i want to celebrate as i participate with many of you in what i have named, in a spirit of radical confidence (and maybe a little bravado), a gathering anti-‘American’ force.”
- One essay analyzes the call of Dylan Rodriguez, the president of the American Studies Association from 2020-21, to counter “police terror” through “a complex and militant ‘anti-American’ dissent.” The author approvingly notes that Rodriguez “highlights

Black study as a source of abolitionist praxis but also indigenous, anticolonial, feminist, and queer thought as part of a culture war that operates through ‘counterinsurgency.’”²⁸

- One essay says advocates of “defunding the police” do not go far enough. The author writes: “Some defund-the-police protesters recommended diverting resources from police departments to health and human service agencies that handle child protection. These proposals ignored how the family policing system surveils and represses Black and other marginalized communities in ways similar to, and coordinated with, the law enforcement systems condemned by the protesters.”²⁹
- One essay derides the National Football League as racist. “Football players, like minstrelsy performers before them, are

required to entertain white folk while ensuring that preexisting racial hierarchies remain unscathed.”³⁰

- One essay criticized Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as xenophobic for drawing a distinction between immigrants who enter the country legally from those who do so illegally. “Throughout her speech, Harris tapped into xenophobic ideologies that criminalized undocumented immigrants in contrast to immigrants who enter the U.S. through legal pathways, a foreshadowing of the Biden administration’s discriminatory political strategies toward undocumented immigration at the U.S./Mexico border.”³¹
- One essay posits that thermodynamics — which Britannica defines as the “science of the relationship between heat, work, temperature, and energy”³² — as deeply problematic. The essay claims, “Thermodynamics itself is an abstract settler-capitalist theory that influenced the plunder of Indigenous lands and lives.”³³
- One essay criticizes the American academy as too focused on linear thinking and suggests “decolonizing our writing practice”. In order to do so, an Indigenous scientist mentioned in the essay purposefully “disorders” her desktop.³⁴

2. Neutral Articles: 19 of 96

We coded 19 articles (20% of the total) as neutral. Virtually all 19 describe the broader American society in a negative light, but they simultaneously highlight the positive story of a marginalized individual or group who overcomes odds.

We coded as neutral, for example, an article in which the Black American journalist Ida B. Wells fought back against “narratives of black criminality, sexual aggression, and amorality [that] would be reanimated over and again to motivate racial and gender solidarity among whites and sanction white supremacist violence.”³⁵

Another article we coded as neutral was an essay that showcased Native American culture and performance in the film, “Buffalo Dance” as contrasted with the broader society in which Native people suffered under the “genocidal conditions caused by U.S. colonization, including cultural prohibitions, imprisonment, and starvation.”³⁶

3. 0% positive

Astonishingly, over a three-year period of *American Quarterly*, not a single one of the 96 articles could be coded as positive. There was, for example, not a single article on American ingenuity. Readers would not come to understand why the U.S., with 4% of the world’s population, won 42% of the individual Nobel prizes between 1901-2020.³⁷ Or why the U.S. was the first country to land a person on the moon.

Not a single article about the heroic defeat of fascism in Nazi Germany and the victory in the Cold War over a totalitarian Soviet Union. No articles exploring why the U.S. is rated as the most desirable destination for immigrants across the world.³⁸

In a 2007 speech, President Obama outlined the remarkable feats America had achieved over its history. “In the face of tyranny, a band of patriots brought an empire to its knees. In the

face of secession, we unified a nation and set the captives free. In the face of Depression, we put people back to work and lifted millions out of poverty. We welcomed immigrants to our shores, we opened railroads to the West, we landed a man on the moon, and we heard a King's call to let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."³⁹ This subset of history is just as real as the dark chapters, yet it is essentially absent in the recent years of *American Quarterly*.

Ideally, one would want leading scholars of American studies to seek to capture the whole of America: the challenges alongside the heroism; the slavery and segregation, but also freedoms and values that gave rise to the civil rights movement; an acknowledgement of economic inequality with an understanding of how the country came to have the world's most vibrant economy; a discussion of the poor treatment of immigrant groups coupled with why people from all over the world nevertheless want to come here.

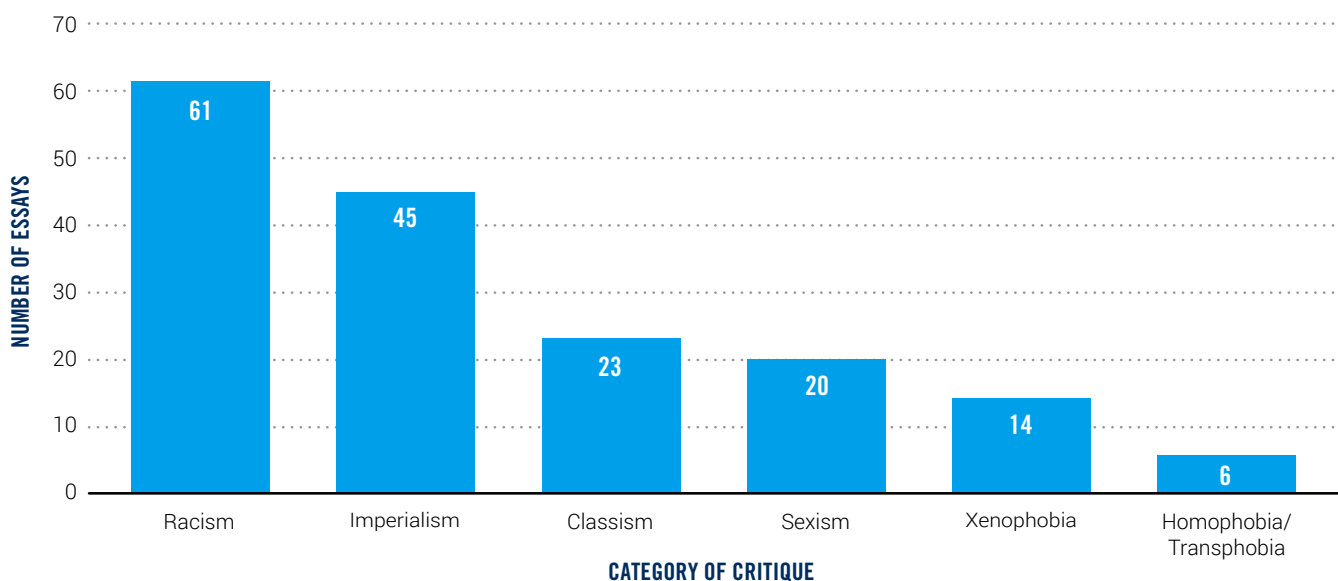
That full picture could be painted either by articles that *themselves* include the negative and positive of America, or by the *collection* of articles including some critical and some positive. That is not what *American Quarterly* provides.

B. Data on Categories of Critiques of America

We next present data on how many articles fell into the key critique categories, discussing American racism; sexism, imperialism; classism; xenophobia; and homophobia/transphobia. We begin with the 77 articles that were coded as critical of America, and then proceed to the 19 articles that were coded as neutral.

Note that a single article can have several critiques (e.g. racism and sexism), so the numbers in the critical category do not add up to 77. As the data show in Figure 2, the most common critique of America in the critical articles involved racism.

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF CRITICAL ESSAYS IN EACH CATEGORY OF CRITIQUES



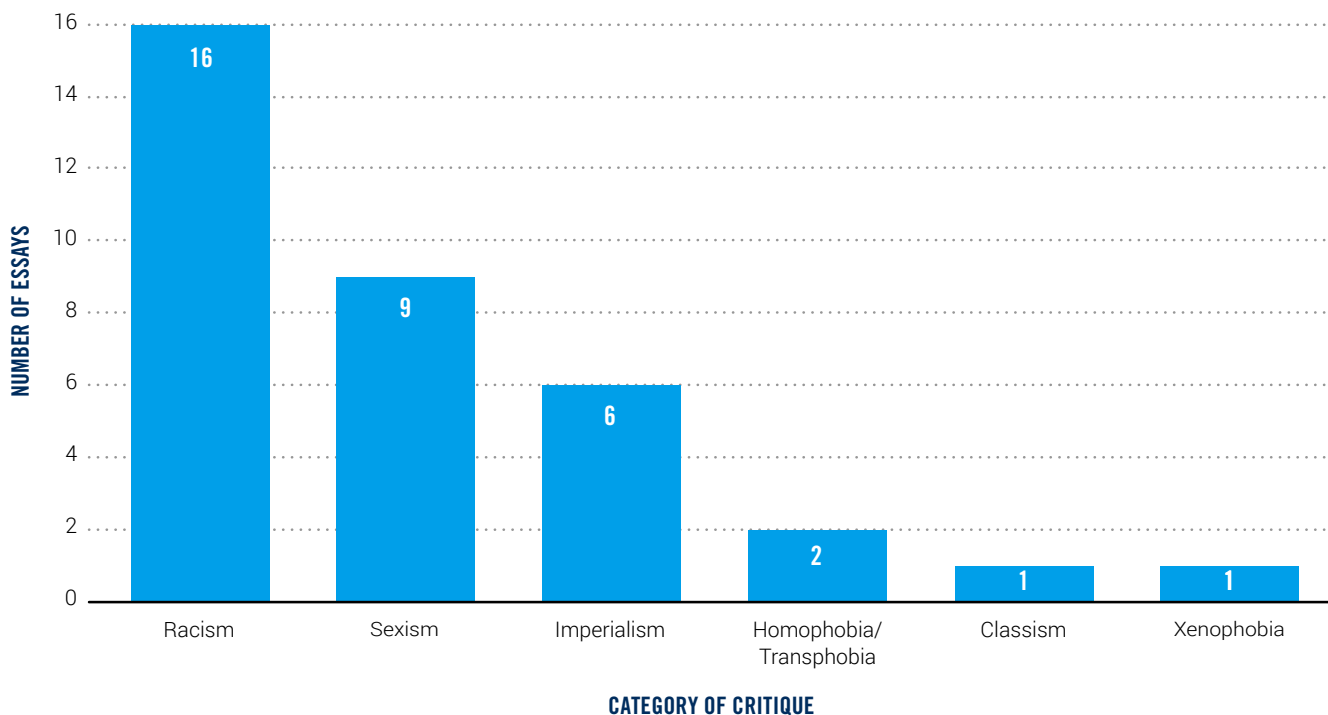
One essay, "Against Inevitability," for example, critiques the modern prison system as fundamentally racist. The author, reflecting on the work of City University of New York scholar and prison abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore, writes: "The U.S. carceral state exists through a historical and entrenched will to subjugate black people specifically, and, therefore, black people are targeted by the brunt of its violence, *and* the antiblack system of power that animates carceral violence also devastates communities across different racialized contexts of punitivity."

Oftentimes, racism is among several critiques explored. In one essay on the treatment of indigenous peoples in the United States, the author argues: "The impacts of settler colonialism, and its tentacles of white supremacy, settler masculinity, and

heteronormative patriarchy, are far-reaching and multifarious."⁴⁰ In another article, on the treatment of transgender Americans of color, the author applauds a book which "demonstrates how contemporary racial-gender exclusions of trans of color subjects are not new but rooted in long histories of the intertwining of cis-hetero-patriarchy with settler colonialism, racial capitalism, anti-immigration regimes, and global imperialist processes."⁴¹

As noted above, all of the articles coded as "neutral" also identified America's sins in terms of racism, sexism, and the like before typically noting that some members of marginalized communities transcend the obstacles American society lays in their way. Figure 3 shows the prevalence of the key catalog of America's deficiencies in these "neutral" articles. Racism, sexism, and imperialism top the list.

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF NEUTRAL ESSAYS IN EACH CATEGORY OF CRITIQUES



In one essay, for example, the author focused on American racism and imperialism against Native communities, but then showed how one group of Native Americans transcended stereotypes of their community as “pre-modern” by helping to build skyscrapers in New York City. The essay argues that despite the treatment of Native peoples in American culture as “little more than the collateral damage of settler colonialism: as husks, shells, ghosts, and otherwise inauthentic manifestation of some lost past,” in fact indigenous people in New York City “were at the center of building these iconic symbols and sites of a supposed ‘modernity.’”⁴²

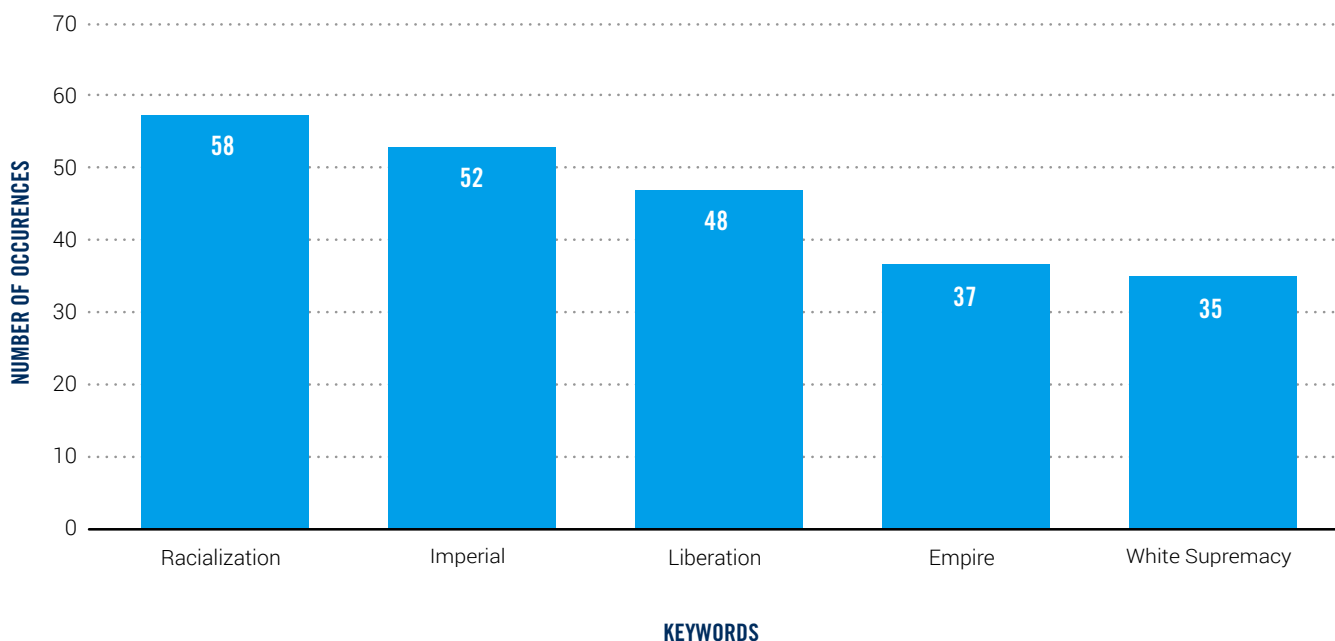
C. Data on Critical Word Searches

As noted above, as part of the coding process, we searched for 15 key words or phrases used that criticize America, such as “settler colonialism.” Figure 4 presents the findings, noting the number of articles that employ particular words.

An astonishing 95 of 96 essays included one or more keywords or phrases. The one exception was an essay titled “Sweet Home: Writing from a Known Space,” which was quite critical of America for promoting “the atomization of society along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability to levels once thought ‘unimaginable.’”

Which were among the most common key terms among the 96 articles? (These searches involved the entire text of the article, not just the abstract.) Figure 4 shows the results.

FIGURE 4: KEYWORDS THAT APPEAR MOST



D. Accessibility

Professors teach students, so presumably they are capable of communicating with their pupils in a clear fashion when they want to. But one striking aspect of the *American Quarterly* is its painfully opaque use of language that appears designed for a very specialized audience.

An academic journal is entitled to assume an educated reader, but on large numbers of occasions, authors in *American Quarterly* employed language that is so obscure and at times impenetrable that it appears to serve a "gatekeeping" function. For a set of authors who are admirably concerned about the ways in which racial and ethnic minorities are marginalized, the irony is that their use of jargon serves to exclude the uninitiated.

Consider this passage from an article entitled "Bodies in Transit: Speculation and the Biopolitical Imaginary," an archive which tracked the transit of every corpse that moved through Manhattan from 1859 to 1894:

"The speculative grammar of statecraft still relies on a field of vision predicated on surveillance, abstraction, and the categorization and construction of social difference. As I have shown, the production of social difference, as codified in the lines of ledgers or the policing of cultural traditions, also renders surplus populations that are politically marginalized. This economy of knowledge, a critical component of biopolitics, today more clearly reflects the necropolitical valence of the state's actuarial calculus: the sublimation of surplus life to the reproduction of capital."

IV. THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICA

American Quarterly is just one journal, but what is found in its pages matters. To begin with, the journal has the largest impact of any in the field, as measured by citations, and has no national domestic rival.⁴³ The next most influential journal is the *Journal of American Studies*, which is not itself American. It is the publication of the British Association of American Studies and is housed at Cambridge University.⁴⁴ The *American Studies Journal* is published by the German Association of American Studies.⁴⁵ And the *European Journal of American Studies* is published by the European Association of American Studies.⁴⁶ A regional journal, *American Studies*, is published by the Mid-America Studies Association and the University of Kansas.⁴⁷

The approach taken by *American Quarterly* typifies the direction of American studies, according to experts in the arena. University of Texas at Austin historian Steven Mintz, who has analyzed the field of American studies, notes, "A field that once asked, 'What is America?' — exploring its myths, music, monuments, and contradictions — now too often narrows its focus to a different question: 'Whom has America silenced, failed, or harmed?'"⁴⁸

A. Higher Education

In higher education, *American Quarterly* appears to set the template for research among the next generation of scholars. The American Studies Association website provides a sampling of dissertations in the field, and the titles include references to themes that are prevalent in *American Quarterly*, such as "White Masculinity," "Sex Trafficking, U.S. Evangelicals, and the Promise of Rescue," "Pedagogies of the 'Formerly' Oppressed," "Queer Cultural

Productions," "American Nativism," "Neo-Queer Families and Transmasculine Resistance," and "the Cisgender Gaze."⁴⁹

The worldview articulated in *American Quarterly* is also felt in undergraduate instruction. Mintz reports that *American Quarterly's* thinking is mimicked in the curricula of some leading colleges, though not all of them. He says, for example: "The *American Quarterly* version of American studies is taught at places like the University of Michigan and Columbia, but not at places like the University of Texas at Austin."⁵⁰

The American Studies Association website includes a sampling of syllabi and curricula, including those from Amherst College, where one representative seminar focuses on the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and another on "Rethinking Pocahontas."⁵¹ Harvard's American Studies website describes its approach in broad strokes and then homes in on themes that would be very familiar to readers of *American Quarterly*. American Studies at Harvard grapples "with the big issues: environment and climate, labor, democracy, colonialism and empire, religion, capitalism, carcerality, indigeneity and migration, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and much more."⁵²

Looking beyond just American studies classes, researchers have found that the deeply skeptical worldview of America typified in journals like *American Quarterly* finds purchase in a broad range of college classes. A recent study by Jon A. Shields, Yuval Avnir, and Stephanie Muravchik analyzing 27 million syllabi from universities in the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Australia, is illustrative. The authors found that Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass*

Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, which draws parallels between the war on drugs and southern segregationist practices, was routinely taught (more often than *Hamlet* in the U.S.), whereas her critic, James Foreman Jr.'s *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*, was paired with Alexander just 4 percent of the time. In Middle East classes, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which denounces Israel in virulent terms, is widely assigned, while a prominent response, historian Bernard Lewis's *Islam and the West*, is paired with Said less than 1% of the time.⁵³ Harvard professor Steven Pinker noted that at U.S. colleges, the Open Syllabus data show, "Judith Butler [is assigned] more than Plato, Edward Said more than Kant, and Foucault more than everybody."⁵⁴ Frantz Fanon outranked Niccolò Machiavelli and David Hume.⁵⁵

B. K-12 Education

There is also reason to believe that what is written in the rarefied journals of academics often makes its way down to instruction in K-12 schools. Observers ranging from the early 20th-century Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci to the contemporary right-wing activist Christopher Rufo have recognized that what happens in academia matters because it helps shape the larger culture.⁵⁶ We've seen, for example, the ways in which obscure academic ideas like critical race theory and anti-racism, over a few short years, came to influence K-12 education and even corporate America – and became so prominent that it generated a powerful backlash that conservative politicians campaigned on.⁵⁷ As *The New Republic* observed, the Trump administration is focused so intently on attacking higher education not only because it wants to quash political dissent, but also because colleges are "gatekeeping institutions"

whose graduates have a profound impact on shaping the larger society.⁵⁸

Evidence suggests that the type of thinking found in *American Quarterly* is felt in K-12 education, though it is less pronounced than in higher education. The caricature advanced by President Donald Trump, that “our children are taught in school to hate their own country and to believe that the men and women who built it were not heroes but that [they] were villains,”⁵⁹ is not grounded in evidence. The American Historical Association’s 2024 Survey of 3,000 middle and high school teachers in nine states found that most teachers relied on mainstream interpretations of American history as “a complex mix of accomplishments and setbacks.”⁶⁰

Having said that, the report did raise concerns that some progressive school districts were relying on “moralistic” approaches that emphasized an unending string of injustices. Some 17%, for example, taught the widely criticized 1619 Project.⁶¹ Published in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2019 and then expanded into a book and other products, the 1619 Project takes the same sort of unbalanced approach found in *American Quarterly*.⁶²

While the 1619 Project includes some research that is illuminating and helps broaden an understanding of the past, there is also a great deal that is inaccurate and driven by a larger political agenda. The brutal history of American slavery and segregation is horrific by any measure — and needs to be taught. There is no need to exaggerate the history. But the 1619 Project did so time and again. The project was widely debunked by mainstream historians and

by numerous critics.⁶³ Many on the right called out the exaggerations, but so did liberal outlets such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* itself. Four mistakes in particular stand out.

First, the original magazine article claimed 1619 rather than 1776 represented America’s “true founding.”⁶⁴ The author, Nikole Hannah-Jones, did not say 1619 was “an additional founding” date, as some have persuasively argued that Reconstruction represents; it was the “true” founding. Slavery, rather than the Declaration of Independence, was claimed to be at the very center of the American story, because 1619 provided “the seed of so much of what has made us unique.”

What was the logic? Was it because the U.S. invented a system of slavery? No. The *New York Times Book Review*’s analysis of the 1619 Project, by Adam Hochschild, noted that the book could leave readers “with the impression that the heritage of slavery is uniquely American. It is not...From ancient Egypt to czarist Russia, from sub-Saharan Africa to the Aztecs, forms of slavery have blighted nearly every continent.”⁶⁵ The displacement of 1776 with 1619 as the “true founding” was also astonishing given that the Declaration of Independence, issued in a world ruled by kings and queens, was such a pivot point in world history.⁶⁶

Second, to diminish the miracle of 1776, the 1619 Project falsely claimed that the preservation of slavery was a primary impetus for declaring independence from England. Mainstream historians denounced this fallacy. Historian Leslie Harris, who helped fact-check the 1619 article, pointed out the error to the *New*

York Times in advance but was ignored.⁶⁷

Third, the *New York Times*' 1619 Project felt the need to falsely claim that Black people were "for the most part...alone" in their fight for civil rights. This error neatly erased the reality that white people allied with Black people in the abolition movement, fought for the Union in the Civil War that liberated enslaved people, and played an important role in the Civil Rights movement.⁶⁸

Fourth, the 1619 essay concluded by saying that Black people who descended from slavery are "the most American of all."⁶⁹ The essay did not make the entirely justified claim that Black Americans, by fighting for all Americans to live up to American ideals, contributed enormously to making America a better country, as they surely have. Instead, it felt the need to rank Black people as "the most American." Saying some are more American than others is, of course, the language of the right-wing. Imagine how a young Hispanic or Asian American child would react to reading that they are less American than Black Americans.

At bottom, critics note, the 1619 Project was not a detached historical analysis. Carlos Lozada (now a *New York Times* columnist) noted in his *Washington Post* review of the book version of the 1619 Project that the author had a very clear political goal: cash reparations for Black people. Lozada wrote: "*The New York Times*'s 1619 Project is now enlisted in the service of a policy agenda and a political worldview." He quoted author Nikole Hannah Jones's concluding chapter. "It is one thing to say you do not support reparations because you did not know the history, that you did not understand how things done long ago helped create the

conditions in which millions of Black Americans live today," she wrote. "But you now have reached the end of the book, and nationalized amnesia can no longer provide the excuse."⁷⁰

The ethos of *American Quarterly* has also seeped into Advanced Placement (AP) classes in American history. In 2014, the College Board announced a new framework for AP U.S. history. Many complained that it painted an overly negative view of America. The section on World War II, for example, focused on the U.S. internment of the Japanese and the dropping of the atomic bomb, but neglected to mention the Holocaust. The College Board made a number of changes and in 2015 announced what it called "a clearer and more balanced approach."⁷¹

While many critics applauded the changes, others noted that the revised AP framework continued to emphasize "global citizenship in place of the more usual focus on national identity." Particularly telling, these critics said, was the College Board's use of the term "migration" rather than "immigration," which implies that people move from one place to another rather than becoming members of a new nation.⁷² This is consistent with the themes found in *American Quarterly*. A call for papers to be published in 2026, for example, seeks those that "recognize the abolition of borders as the work of decolonization."⁷³

The allergy to instilling national pride has also infiltrated thinking about the very purpose of public education among those who run the biggest American school districts. In one analysis, Robert Pondiscio reviewed the mission statements of the nation's 100 largest school districts and found the words "patriotic,"

"patriotism," "America," and "American" didn't appear in any of them.⁷⁴

This omission matters because leading Americans have long understood that what is taught in the classroom has a profound impact on society's future.

C. Society At Large

When Yale University first founded its American studies program in 1950, the larger purpose was to instill an understanding of the American system as a way of preserving liberty. Yale's president Charles Seymour said the "best safeguard against totalitarian developments in our society is an understanding of our own cultural heritage and an affirmative belief in the validity of our institutions of freedom, enterprise, and individual liberty."⁷⁵

Once it became faddish for educators to focus relentlessly on America's sins, the danger of this approach became apparent. Speaking at the Council of Foreign Relations in 2022, for example, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger remarked: "A minimum condition for great achievement for a society is to believe in its purposes and in its historical record. And if the educational system of a country becomes increasingly focused on the shortcomings of its history, and less on the purposes of the society, then its capacity to act internationally will be diverted into its internal struggles."⁷⁶

Political liberals have voiced the same concern. When students receive an overly negative view of their homeland, the bonds that sustain progress are weakened. Many of the great American movements for social progress, from labor rights to civil rights, have appealed to a profound sense of patriotism that suggests our

fellow Americans deserve to be treated with dignity.⁷⁷ More fundamentally, as Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-N.Y.) argues, no civilization can survive for long if it teaches its children to loathe their country.⁷⁸

The distorted view of America that is articulated by members of the American Studies Association in *American Quarterly* provides fertile soil from which illiberalism of both the left and right can sprout.

The academy has long recognized that learning requires the exchange of ideas between scholars of different backgrounds and different nations. And yet in 2013, the American Studies Association became one of the first academic organizations to call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. More than 80 college presidents objected. Harvard president Drew Gilpin Faust, for example, argued, "Academic boycotts subvert the academic freedoms and values necessary to the free flow of ideas, which is the lifeblood of the worldwide community of scholars." At the time, the ASA had more than 100 institutional members, though some withdrew support.⁷⁹ (In response to a request for a list of the current institutional members in September 2025, an official from ASA responded, "Due to the current climate in academia, we are not able to provide a member list of institutions.")⁸⁰

Simultaneously, a failure to adequately tell America's story can feed illiberalism of the right. Harvard historian Jill Lepore, writing for *Foreign Affairs*, explains "why a nation needs a story." Because too many American historians were fearful of stoking nationalism, she says, they neglected to tell the national story. Right-wing demagogues stepped in and filled the vacuum.

She writes: "When historians abandon the study of the nation, when scholars stop trying to write a common history for a people, nationalism doesn't die. Instead, it eats liberalism."⁸¹

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. has aspects of its history and ongoing realities that are and should be sources of shame. It also has numerous accomplishments of which Americans can be enormously proud. It's deeply disappointing that the president of the United States champions a distorted history, but it is also enormously troubling that leading scholars of American studies do the same. Academics have a primary obligation to seek the truth, and *American Quarterly* is not telling the whole truth.

There is no easy policy solution to reforming American studies. Government intervention should be reserved for instances when universities violate civil rights or civil liberties. But academia must reflect upon whether it is guilty of erasing discussion of what is right about America, just as surely as the Trump administration is seeking to erase discussion about what is wrong about America. American studies should reform itself not because forces on the right threaten intervention, but because failing to tell half of America's story constitutes educational malpractice.

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VI. Appendix

This appendix includes description of all 96 essays in *American Quarterly* regular issues for the years 2022-2024, including the month and year the article was published; the article title; the coding we gave the article (critical, neutral or positive); its critique categories (racism, sexism, etc.); its abstract (when provided); and at least one representative quotation.

March 2022

DELIVERANCE IN THREE ACTS

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay examines an unusual entry in a late eighteenth-century prison register of the Berkshire County Gaol. The column labeled “crime” tells us that a person named “Deliverance Jason” was jailed “for want of surety for her good behavior.” While Deliverance’s “crime” has legal precedent, understanding its implications requires contextualization and analysis. The essay proceeds in a fashion inspired by Saidiya Hartman’s method of “critical fabulation.” With a praxis of curiosity and care, it connects findings from the penal log to historiography and social theory on the early American republic, early prison, indigent transiency, slavery, and emancipatory religious politics. It draws from feminist, Afropessimist, womanist, and religious historical scholarship to elaborate the worlds in which Deliverance may have lived. It joins conversation with postcolonial critiques of the archive to interrogate the ethics of searching for Deliverance and her “crime” at all. The essay demonstrates that while the early encoding of crime may have supported the social entrapment of Deliverance, her entry reveals instabilities as well. In fact, the case of Deliverance Jason suggests ways that she herself may have confounded local authorities’ attempts to “fix” her—legally, racially, sexually, geographically, and even temporally.

Representative Quotation In this way, the early carceral space both sexualized women by exposing them to gender violence and painting them as inherently tarnished. It simultaneously disavowed gender separation by housing women with men. This was especially true for Black women who were often still incarcerated in custodial prisons while the reformatory movement grew.

WRITING OMAHA CHILDREN: SUSETTE LA FLESCHÉ AND THE POLITICS OF AMERICAN INDIAN GUARDIANSHIP

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

Abstract This essay explores the depiction of Indigenous children in the early writings of the Omaha author Susette La Flesché. An organizer in the late nineteenth-century Indian reform movement, La Flesché recognized that colonial images of the American Indian as a figural child provided a discursive framework for debates on Indigenous futures, as the ideological linkage between Native people and children served as a vehicle for rationalizing colonization. La Flesché’s writings from 1876 to 1881 suggest an Omaha framework for reconsidering the figural role of Native children in debates about race, belonging, and American citizenship. Her contributions to the children’s magazine *St. Nicholas* validate the roles of Native children and parents alike as responsible caregivers, tracing relational and reciprocal forms of guardianship that articulate a future-oriented commitment to Omaha community, centered on kinship relations and responsibilities. In her refusal to stereotype Native children as beneficiaries of White paternalism, La Flesché resists the construct of neglectful parent-child relations that justified the concept of Indigenous wardship and curtailed the sovereignty of

Indian nations. Through didactic scenes of daily life on the Omaha reservation, she claims parental and guardianship relations as a key signifier of Indigenous cultural and political self-determination in the assimilation era.

Representative Quotation Ever since Chief Justice John Marshall's decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), the status of American Indians under US law has been defined as "domestic dependent nations," in which the relationship between the US government and Indian nations "resembles that of a ward to his guardian." Mark C. Jerng argues that this hierarchy reflects how in a settler colonial society, racialized ideas about parent-child relations reproduce ideologies in which White paternalism stands opposite "the infantilization of minoritized subjects."

AN AMERICAN MUSICAL IN RED AND BLACK

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract The pathbreaking 1908 musical *The Red Moon*, written by J. Rosamond Johnson and Bob Cole, with contributions from James Weldon Johnson and James Reese Europe, was a landmark in Black musical history, albeit one whose exploration of Indigeneity and racial uplift presents a more complicated legacy than scholars have previously recognized. Proceeding from an archival reconstruction of the theatrical production and its reception, this essay offers a reconsideration of the musical's significance that stresses two particularly salient contexts: contemporary debates on the racial character of nationalist aesthetics and the function of the "vanishing Indian" trope in Black expressive culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It concludes by considering the issues raised by the musical in light of recent theoretical and methodological debates regarding the respective projects of Black, Native, and settler colonial critique.

Representative Quotation Yet even as the historical scholarship has yielded immensely richer and more detailed narratives, the theoretical and methodological problems they raise about the structural relationship between the ongoing legacies of racial slavery and settler colonial conquest—and thus between the formation and function of Blackness and North American Indigeneity as such—have become increasingly intractable.

QUOTIDIAN EXPENSES: RESIDENTIAL REPERTOIRES AND DOMESTIC PEDAGOGIES IN GREAT MIGRATION CHICAGO'S KITCHENETTES

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay analyzes subdivided apartments known as "kitchenettes" that Black migrants to Chicago inhabited during the Great Migration era. By examining the interiors of kitchenette buildings as presented in archival photographs and literary fiction, the author locates sites at which Black Chicagoans developed distinctive residential repertoires and domestic pedagogies, drawing attention to the quotidian expenses of these embodied practices. Further, the author offers that interrogating domestic repertoires through analysis

of the built environment has the potential to yield powerful insights into the quotidian workings of urban racial capitalism in space and place in the mid-twentieth century.

Representative Quotation While racial capitalism-at-work is unique neither to the kitchenette nor to mid-twentieth-century Chicago, elucidating the shape of its insidiousness and its embeddedness in everyday space and place in this case study exposes not simply that racial capitalism was operating but *how* it operated, *what* it looked like when it did, the requisite labor and knowledge Black residents acquired in and for its negotiation, and just how subtle and mundane its expenses were.

"THE SPECIAL BEAT OF CHICAGO": DESEGREGATION, ANTIBLACK NOISE, AND THE SOUND OF RESISTANCE IN FRANK LONDON BROWN'S *TRUMBULL PARK*

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

Abstract In African American fiction, racial segregation is usually understood in terms of an exclusionary spatial dynamic. Rights to space are vehemently disputed, and setting assumes the power to regulate the movement of racialized bodies. This essay, by contrast, approaches mid-twentieth-century (de)segregation fiction through its sonic manifestations. Frank London Brown's *Trumbull Park* (1959) has been hailed as the fullest literary account we possess of involvement in a desegregation campaign, yet the overwhelming aural patterns of (de)segregation in Brown's novel have never been explored. As theorized in this essay, an aural pattern of (de)segregation involves a dynamic of sound impacted by racially restrictive spatial practices. The essay argues that the intertwining of these two strands—the aural and the spatial—is essential to a more expansive understanding of Brown's literary work, African American (de)segregation fiction, and, more generally, the audible archive of segregation-era expressive culture.

Representative Quotation In attending to such questions, my essay heeds Black sound studies' recent calls to center listening practices in African American literary criticism, not only to deconstruct the troubling persistence of normative white listening protocols but also to reimagine Black futures free from the strains—and strain—of white supremacy.

WAR IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: ANTI-DRUG ORGANIZING, "CRACK HOUSES," AND MUNICIPAL AUSTERITY IN PHILADELPHIA

AMERICAN RACISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract In 1988, anti-drug activist Herman Wrice raided a Philadelphia "crack house," an event that precipitated a citywide anti-drug movement. This essay explores how these activists sought to close the crack houses across the city. An object of social regulation and legal prohibition, the crack house was also a commonsense marker of racialized drug users' sensationalized failures to comport with the dominant moral strictures of middle-class domesticity. However, the campaign against crack houses in Philadelphia was led by a grassroots movement composed of Black and Latinx residents. This essay

explores the history of an individual and an organization that emerged as leaders of this movement and national models for community policing of the drug trade: Herman Wrice and United Neighbors Against Drugs. I show how these activists engaged with the carceral state and negotiated a politics of municipal austerity to expel illicit economies from their neighborhoods and seek structural solutions to persistent racial inequality. The new public investment they won was channeled through the carceral state and facilitated what I call the "carceral redevelopment" of their neighborhoods. The history of their agitation against crack houses also draws into focus the political conflict that existed between these activists and their neighbors who participated in the drug economy.

Representative Quotation The history of the crack house in Philadelphia thus illustrates the devil's bargain implicit in the American dream of homeownership. In the context of the drug war, inclusion in a safe and stable middle-class community was contingent on the pursuit of a much wider exclusion. The war on the crack house provided an intensification rather than a remedy to the systematic racial and class inequality that had fueled the expansion of the drug economy in the first place.

DIGITIZING THE "IDEAL" LATINA INFORMATION WORKER

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract Recent examples of virtual assistant technologies designed as Latina information service workers are noteworthy objects of study for their potential to bridge analyses of Latinas' labor history and information technology. Latinas in the United States have traditionally worked in blue-collar information technology sectors characterized by repetitive labor and low wages, such as electronics manufacturing and customer service. Latina information service workers, though fundamental to technoscience, have been largely *invisible* in histories of computing. Latina virtual assistants mark a shift in this labor history by relying on the strategic *visibility* of Latina identity in/as the technology interface. Our research explores Latina virtual assistants designed by Airus Media and installed as airport workers in airports along the southwestern border of the United States. We situate the technocultural narratives present in the design and marketing of these technologies within the broader histories of invisible Latina information labor in the United States. We find continuities between the ways Latinas have historically been positioned as "ideal" information workers and the use of Latina identity in the design of virtual assistants. We argue that the strategic visibility of Latina virtual assistants is linked to the oppressive structures of invisibility that have traditionally organized Latina information service workers.

Representative Quotation These stereotypes persist in modern US media representations of Latinas, whose bodies occupy the "center stage in the often vitriolic public debate over the causes and meanings of demographic change." The preoccupation with controlling Latinas' bodies, sexuality, and reproduction operates as a form of biopolitics that are embedded in xenophobic immigration policy and the maintenance of a white-supremacist nation-state.

THEORIZING AGENCY: NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ON HIV/AIDS ACTIVISM AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM/HOMOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation These books illustrate that AIDS is a disease as well as a social, political, and cultural reality with a trajectory that is shaped by state violence and structural forces—racism, homophobia, class oppression, gender discrimination, and so forth.

POLICE AND THIEVES: ON POLICING, COUNTERINSURGENCY, AND RACIAL CAPITALISM AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The books under review demonstrate that global, racial capitalism and imperialist plunder structurally rely on policing as a counterinsurgent force. They show and argue that only strong organization can challenge this. In a moment where abolition is being organized, debated, and co-opted, we must remember that the struggle for abolition must be part of our larger struggle for socialism and communism.

June 2022

WEAPONIZED STUDY IN A MOMENT OF (COUNTER)INSURGENCY: THE GATHERING ANTI-"AMERICAN" OF AMERICAN STUDIES AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA/HOMOPHOBIA/TRANSPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Consider this an invitation to the best kind of party, the kind that never really ends, because it constantly spreads—I want to celebrate as I participate with many of you in what I have named, in a spirit of radical confidence (and maybe a little bravado), a gathering anti-"American" force. A long archive of Black, Indigenous, and anticolonial thinkers, that is, feminist, queer, alter- and otherworldly artists, teachers, and makers, have often identified this hostile totality of oppressive violence as the project of Civilization, if not "American" Civilization.

THINKING RESISTANCE, "EMERGENCY," AND KISMET: A RESPONSE TO DYLAN RODRÍGUEZ'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA/HOMOPHOBIA/TRANSPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation In his brilliant analysis, the work of American studies is defined in relation to the imperial state's need for "infiltration of ideas" as well as pedagogy in order to reform, rather than radically transform, the state apparatus, thus the need for a complex and militant "anti-'American'" dissent. He highlights Black study as a source of abolitionist praxis but also indigenous, anticolonial, feminist, and queer thought as part of a culture war that operates through "counterinsurgency."

FAMILY POLICING AS COUNTERINSURGENCY AND THE GATHERING ABOLITIONIST FORCE

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation I would add that nonreformist reforms must further abolition of the entire carceral apparatus. They should not manage casualties in one part of the carceral regime by increasing those in another. Because of a lack of knowledge or political analysis of family policing, some defund-the-police protesters recommended diverting resources from police departments to health and human service agencies that handle child protection. These proposals ignored how the family policing system surveils and represses Black and other marginalized communities in ways similar to, and coordinated with, the law enforcement systems condemned by the protesters.

LOVE AND RESISTANCE IN A TIME OF COVID: AMERICAN STUDIES AND UTOPIC CRITIQUE

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation While I acknowledge the incontrovertible uniqueness of this contemporary public health crisis, I maintain that there is also a distinct déjà vu with regard to notions of social distancing, practices of quarantining, and acts of self-isolation. For those on the proverbial margins, these "distanced" protocols take shape in legislated dictates such as Jim Crow segregation and assume form in interventionist "nation-building" and bellicose US foreign policy. To more clearly synopsise, those who exist on what has been historically, politically, and socially designated as "on the margins" have involuntarily participated in a long-standing, settler colonial project of "social distancing." As the sociologist Karl Mannheim noted in 1957, "The inhibition of free expression can also serve as a means of social distancing [allowing those who exist in] the higher ranks" the ability "to constrain themselves to preserve a certain kind of deportment or dignity." It is precisely those who—

due to exclusionary hierarchies organized according to simultaneous devaluations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class—have been forced into a supremacist project that has, despite its hateful agendas, prepared them to see hope in the face of unspeakable violation and destruction.

SWEET HOME: WRITING FROM A KNOWN SPACE

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Indeed, Schlund-Vials points to the fact that our seemingly misfit group of academics has known well this feeling of alienation by revisiting past presidential addresses, in particular George Sanchez's 2001 address about the "social distancing" imposed on society in the wake of Pearl Harbor and September 11, resulting in greater levels of incarceration, surveillance, and policing. Schlund-Vials notes Sanchez's address is significant in that it represents just one of the association's many attempts to turn away from its once previous obsession in exceptionalist narratives bound to the idea of an "American Civilization." Returning to a twenty-year-old address thus not only points to our field's attention to tracing the profound dimensions of "social distancing" long before the phrase became popular but also points to how certain aspects of this moment are not "unprecedented and unparalleled" but push farther and further the atomization of society along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability to levels once thought "unimaginable."

PREPARING TO SEE HOPE: ON THE UTOPIC POTENTIALITY OF THE STORIES WE SHARE

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation This letter, then, might be read as a yearning for social and intellectual associations that have been made dangerous, not least by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by the increased policing of our work as scholars and teachers in a nation and within institutions organized around the violences of settler colonialism and white supremacist politics hostile to the flourishing of minoritized life and knowledges.

RACE AND THE POWER OF POPULAR CENSUS READING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

AMERICAN RACISM BUT THE GROUP TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

Abstract This essay examines the challenge that census data represented to the Black press as both critical information and intrusive surveillance of minoritized people. Studying the United States Census in the nineteenth century as a history of popular reading reveals that

census reading—either in the form of reading the census directly or reading about the census in the periodical press—provided its own form of nationalism, but it could be one based on a feeling of personal connection to its crowds or on fantasies of surveillance and voyeurism of its outliers. This split provided very different experiences of census data for white and Black readers. The essay tracks this split in three approaches: the widely circulated and controversial publication of the 1850 Census, newspapers written by predominantly white journalists aimed at predominantly white audiences, and the Black press. All offer reading strategies for the census focused on how readers imaginatively place themselves within its numbers. However, while official census publications and majority-white newspapers emphasize the census as an opportunity for “data tourism,” or an imaginative experience of seeing marginalized lives through the eyes of government workers, Black periodical writings created their own form of census reading focused on registering citizenship, nongovernmental authority, and collective survival.

Representative Quotation I argue that the census and the writing around the census proposed two primary modes of reading: immersive data reading and expulsive data reading. In the former, readers can sink into the large numbers of the census, feeling their own information to be represented abstractly in the collective but impossible to disaggregate. For readers whose demographic information aligned with the crowd, that very multiplicity created privacy; this blurring of individual details into a larger aggregate, in turn, trains readers in an imaginative model for communal identity. Expulsive data reading, on the other hand, isolates certain individuals as singular, outstanding data points, marked as objects of spectacle and surveillance for readers. In other words, the census was an asymmetrical object that could be used to reinforce minoritization along the multiple axes of identity that it measured, among them race, ethnicity, class, and disability.

WHO COUNTS? URGENT LESSONS FROM IDA B. WELLS'S RADICAL STATISTICS AMERICAN RACISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

Abstract This essay focuses on Ida B. Wells's rarely analyzed application of statistical thinking in her anti-lynching pamphlets. I show how assumptions about the self-evident nature of data diminish the significance of Wells's hidden calculations. My essay contextualizes her methods in the larger history of social quantification and scientific racism to underscore the urgency and novelty of her use of statistics. Wells not only reframes existing lynching records to show Black Americans as victims of racial terrorism but develops a critical framework for analyzing and humanizing the data. By more closely examining her use of empirical and quantitative methods to study the sociocultural underpinnings of lynching, we can recognize more fully her significant contributions to sociological research on Black life and to intersectional social activism and resistance. Her work contains urgent lessons for our contemporary moment: a blueprint for a more just approach to racial data collection and analysis, or what we would today call “data justice.”

Representative Quotation Beyond these interpersonal conflicts, however, were larger forces tempering white women's support of anti-lynching measures. While Wells confronted the racialized sexual politics of lynching head-on, many women reformers were hesitant to engage the subject of rape and consensual interracial relationships, fearing backlash to

their campaigns for suffrage, temperance, and social welfare. Conversely, prominent white suffragists such as Rebecca Felton used protection against sexual violence as a rallying cry among southern white women. As Feimster shows, Felton strategically deployed the image of the “black rapist” to argue for white women’s rights. Many southern white women supported and participated in lynching, Feimster argues, in a perverse attempt to elevate their own political power, gain the right to vote, and enter the public sphere freely. Despite evidence to disprove the charge of rape as a justification for lynching, narratives of black criminality, sexual aggression, and amorality would be reanimated over and again to motivate racial and gender solidarity among whites and sanction white supremacist violence. These recycled myths exemplify Ruha Benjamin’s point that racism *constructs*: “Racism is productive. Not in the sense of being good, but in the literal capacity of racism to produce things of value to some, even as it wreaks havoc on others.”

OTHERWISE CHARISMA: JAMES BALDWIN AND THE BLACK QUEER ARCHIVE OF CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORIOGRAPHY

NEUTRAL

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/HOMOPHOBIA/TRANSPHOBIA, BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

Abstract Throughout the 1960s, *charisma* emerged as a keyword in US racial and sexual discourse, connoting the dazzling personality of the straight, macho head men who ruled white politics, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Black Power. In this essay, I argue that James Baldwin’s oeuvre proffers a contemporaneous body of radical black queer thought that theorizes charisma *otherwise*. Deploying close readings of Baldwin’s profile of Martin Luther King Jr. (1961) as well as *Just above My Head* (1978) and an essay on Lorraine Hansberry (1979), I show how Baldwin’s writing pivots from the trope of the charismatic leader to a theory of the charismatic group, withholding a singular central figure in favor of a horizontal vision of charisma as communal affect. I suggest that Baldwin’s archive strategically rethinks and queers black charismatic leadership at a time when the white mainstream hoped for the demise of black charisma, and when the Black Power movement expected a certain level of straightness from its members. I situate the later Baldwin as a writer who queers the historiography of the (post)–civil rights era years before queer studies takes up this task. In so doing, I suggest, Baldwin remakes the civil rights era into an alternative usable past, one that has been widely taken up within the antiracist and abolitionist activism of the Black Lives Matter era.

Representative Quotation In this essay, I ask how Baldwin, targeted as a charisma-peddler but rarely understood as its theorist, narrates and describes the idea of charisma throughout his oeuvre. To do so requires attending to his work as a journalist, novelist, and essayist—and paying attention to his queering of genre, including the normative genres of history.

CITIZENS BAND: SURVEILLANCE, DARK SOUSVEILLANCE, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM, BUT THE GROUP TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

Abstract This essay argues that technology, specifically sound reproduction, was a crucial terrain of struggles for civil rights, farmworkers' rights, and Indigenous self-determination in the 1960s. Two-way radiotelephony including citizens band (CB) mediated the civil rights movement's development and formative connections with the Black Power, Chicana and Filipinx farmworker, and American Indian movements. Through archival research of movement records and media, I show that a goal of the civil rights movement was to develop grassroots technopolitical agency through CB communications, self-defense, and movement building. Part of the "Southern diaspora" (Donna Murch) of people, organizations, and ideas, rural African American CB activism shaped West Coast farmworkers' and urban social movements in the mid-1960s. I further demonstrate that Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous adaptations of CB constitute important, overlooked acts of technopolitical "reconception": "the active redefinition of a technology that transgresses that technology's designed function and dominant meaning" (Rayvon Fouché). While associated with freewheeling truckers, two-way radio emerged from and proliferated military and police violence. However, Black, Latinx, Filipinx, and Indigenous organizers reconceived two-way radio's criminalizing technology of surveillant citizenship to create networks of "dark sousveillant" solidarity (Simone Browne). This media history from below expands conceptions of historical and contemporary social movements, surveillance, and media.

Representative Quotation Scholars of race and technology have shown how seemingly neutral or beneficial digital technologies reproduce the slow violence of discriminatory and criminalizing surveillance. But as Browne shows, racializing surveillance and dark sousveillance extends from the era of slavery when the policing, immobilization, and exploitation of Black bodies required their hyper- and in-visibility.

AT THE BORDER OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: SAN JOSÉ UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND EVANGELINA VIGIL-PIÑON'S *THE COMPUTER IS DOWN* AMERICAN RACISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay clarifies the political stakes of digital humanistic scholarship through an analysis of the *digital divide*, a term that emerged in the 1990s to characterize the widening gap between the United States' information "haves" and information "have-nots." The first half of the essay addresses the shortcomings of the digital divide concept, employing a case study of San José Unified School District—the largest school district in Silicon Valley—to show how this concept disregarded the very same Latino students it was intended to help. The second half proposes a counterlexical concept derived from the Chicana poet Evangelina Vigil-Piñon's collection *The Computer Is Down* (1987), which, unlike the digital divide, can address digital culture in its historical, racial, and economic complexity. By theorizing the digital divide from below, I show how the ostensibly "nondigital" fields of critical race and multiethnic American studies can challenge the digital divisions—the perceived gap between information haves and information have-nots—that currently structure humanistic inquiry.

Representative Quotation Twenty years ago scholars such as Jennifer Light, Alondra Nelson, and David Gunkel had already outlined the fissures that I take as my starting point for this essay. Their critiques were conceptual; while they did not deny the manifest asymmetries circumscribing computer ownership and internet access, they questioned whether the “digital divide,” as a concept, was a useful tool for addressing these asymmetries. They concluded that this concept was too normative, too simplistic, and too deterministic. It assembled a heterogeneous bouquet of practices and injustices and then boiled them down into a single, ill-defined binary: digital or nondigital. It ascribed undue agency to technology itself, downplaying the political and historical contexts that invest digital devices with power. Although the potent link between technology and inequity certainly posed—and still poses—urgent political questions, the digital divide provided an antipolitical framework for answering them. It replaced controversial and potentially intractable issues of social and economic injustice with the innocuous and ostensibly soluble issue of access to technology, enabling critics to expose the dark side of techno-evangelism while nonetheless embracing its underlying premise: that computers set us free.

DAIRY TALES: THE RACIAL AND GENDERED WORK OF COWS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay offers a history of dairying through the stories told to children. As milk grew into a staple of the standard American diet and became a product attached to childhood nutrition, children's literature created a system of representing the production and consumption of this product. Surveying dairy cows in twentieth-century children's literature, including E. Boyd Smith's *The Farm Book* (1910), Lois Lenski's *My Friend the Cow* (1946), and Doreen Cronin's *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* (2000), this essay identifies a system of representing dairying to children that creates a fantasy of milk production and consumption that formulates gender, race, and labor. On the production side, labor is made invisible through a process in which the reproductive labor of cows is rendered nonreproductive. On the consumption side, the ideal consumer target is the white child—a subject made to read and consume milk as unlabored and nonreproductive. Through a visual system that often depicts a white male farmer hand milking a Holstein cow, children's literature represents dairy production in a way that elides racialized divisions of labor, the laboring maternal cow, and the calves born into this economy of reproductive labor. By paying attention to the peculiar anthropomorphisms of cows in children's literature, I argue that these dairy tales are in concert with the cultural production of dairy—an economy that renders bovine maternal labor invisible and produces white childhood as its telos.

Representative Quotation A pattern emerges in this literature that creates a fantasy of milk production and consumption. On the production side, labor becomes invisible on two fronts. First, the reproductive labor of cows is rendered nonreproductive. Children never encounter scenes of laboring cows—inseminated, gestating, giving birth, nursing. Second, the individual white male farmer renders invisible the laboring hands of migrant and undocumented workers that constitute the modern dairy. By depicting a white male farmer hand milking a spotted cow, children's literature represents dairying in a way that elides racialized divisions

of labor, the laboring maternal cow, and the calves born into this economy of extractive reproductive labor.

PAYING THE PRICE FOR PRIVATIZATION: PRISON FOOD IN THE ERA OF MASS INCARCERATION

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay discusses the development of the prison food industrial complex (PFIC) within the US carceral state. The PFIC is made up of politically connected food services companies and commissary companies (correctional food vendors) contracted by local and state governments to provision correctional facilities; private equity firms also increasingly have a stake in prison food companies. The PFIC developed in the 1980s, when local and state governments increasingly looked to privatizing prison services as solutions to budget crises and the management of unprecedentedly large numbers of people cycling through jails and prisons amid “tough on crime” policies of the late twentieth century. As this essay argues, the emergence of the PFIC has exacted costs on a host of groups, including smaller food producers, unionized public-sector workers, and incarcerated people and their loved ones, while also constituting an overlooked dimension of the ways the US food system disproportionately harms communities of color. In drawing attention to the consequences of the PFIC, this essay seeks to provide new insight into neoliberal reforms of the US carceral state during the mass incarceration era.

Representative Quotation While incarcerated people and households affected by incarceration experience the effects of the PFIC regardless of their race or ethnicity, that Black and Brown Americans are most likely to be incarcerated and for longer periods of time means that they are also disproportionately affected by adverse consequences of the PFIC. Moreover, the PFIC’s bearing on racial justice is not just a matter of disproportionate incarceration. Communities of color are already disadvantaged by a food system that facilitates diet-related health disparities. This inequitable food system sees some of their neighborhoods lacking affordable, healthy foods relative to fast food and junk food; it is also one in which food manufacturers besiege African American and Latinx youth with targeted and especially aggressive advertising for sugary drinks and highly processed, unhealthy items to hook them for life.

BLACKNESS AND THE AESTHETICS OF FREEDOM

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Fleetwood’s centering of imprisoned artists and regular people getting by as central protagonists in the black radical tradition and struggles against racial capitalism raises larger questions about what visionaries we choose to follow to a world that cannot imagine property, rape, cages, terror, hunger, and war.

MAKING RACE THROUGH WAR: MILITARISM AND LIBERALISM IN COLD WAR ASIA AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The long recourse to framing the United States and its Asian allies through the language of transpacific intimacy demonstrates how liberal scripts about race and empire continue to enable US power in Asia and the Pacific. The texts under review provide critical historical context to these tactics of liberal imperial statecraft, demonstrating how the contradictions of the postwar US-led global order were managed through practices of racial liberalism, humanitarianism, and postcolonial nation-building.

TSEDAYE MAKONNEN'S *ASTRAL SEA*: CRITICAL REFUGEE STUDIES AND THE BLACK MEDITERRANEAN AMERICAN RACISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation In the fall of 2021 at the US-Mexico border, Haitian asylum seekers, fleeing political upheaval and dire economic straits, were turned away, detained, or deported by the tens of thousands. President Joe Biden continues to uphold the Trump administration's immigration policy by relying on the language of "safety" during the COVID-19 pandemic. These policies further restrict asylum seekers, violate Black lives, and surveil refugees' movements in the name of preserving American citizens' health. Given that refugee crossings by sea are set to repeatedly emerge as spectacles for international media, contemporary artists like Makonnen will continue to memorialize the range of political and historical conditions that precede the journey of asylum seeking itself. These histories have set the stage for future artistic interventions about displacement, human rights, and border crossings that address the discomfiting elisions of political status between citizens, asylum seekers, and refugees in the name of security.

GLORIA NAYLOR AND "THE OTHER PLACE" OF BLACK FEMINISM AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The significance of Gloria Naylor's archives being highlighted in the twenty-first century is tremendous and in many ways places her rightfully back in the tradition of Black women writers who were writing, publishing, and producing Black feminist scholarship in the seventies, eighties, and nineties [...] In essence, the exhibit brings Naylor's voice back into the literary tradition from which she studied while centering her work—both published and unpublished—as having extraordinary relevance to twenty-first-century African American literary history, politics, and archives.

December 2022

UNSETTLED GROUND: INDIGENOUS PROPHECY, GEOLOGICAL FANTASY, AND THE NEW MADRID EARTHQUAKES

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay explores the differing relations to land, time, and history—human and planetary—that organized responses to the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811–12 and that now characterize responses to the Anthropocene. Indigenous and settler accounts connected the earthquakes to a catastrophic rupture in time, but they located that catastrophe differently. For the US, the disaster was seismic, a geological revelation of human powerlessness. Federal intervention sought to restore the region to the future-oriented time of the nation, while Romantic history and geological fantasy supplemented the inscription of settler-national time on the land by identifying the "Indian" with cultural and geological pasts. Indigenous interpretations connected the quakes to the ongoing rupture that colonialism instantiated. Circulated through the pan-Indigenous revival, the polychronicity of anticolonial assessments of the quakes drew on the energy of prophecy, reflecting what Mark Rifkin identifies as prophecy's ability to gather other-than-chronological possibilities as they interwove the earth's past and the land's present state to make Indigenous futures possible again. Recent approaches to the Anthropocene replicate this division, alternately perpetuating the necropolitics of geological fantasy and embracing a reparative adaptation of what Kyle Powys Whyte (Citizen Potawatomi) describes as "kinship time."

Representative Quotation Indigenous and settler accounts both positioned the earthquakes in relation to a catastrophic rupture in time, but they located that catastrophe differently. For the US, the disaster was seismic, a geological revelation of human powerlessness. Federal intervention sought to restore the region to the linear, future-oriented time of the nation, while Romantic history and geochronology supplemented the inscription of settler time on the land by projecting the "Indian" into cultural and geological pasts. Indigenous interpretations connected the quakes to the rupture that colonization instantiated, addressing them less as disaster than as disaster response.

THE REACTIONARY ROMANCE OF AMERICAN SLAVE REVOLT: SCRIPTING THE UNTHINKABLE IN THE ARCHIVE OF THE 1811 GERMAN COAST UPRISING

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract Enslavers and their allies wrote in terrified, apocalyptic terms about slave revolts, particularly in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US. This essay suggests that by consistently framing slave revolt in these ways, proslavery white Americans constructed and reproduced a dominant, normative narrative about the meaning of Black self-determination, which this essay calls a "reactionary romance." This "romance" deemed

Black self-determination an apocalypse-signaling antagonist against which the privileged body politic must continually and violently struggle in order to reproduce itself. It perversely drew on the rebellious actions of Black people as a way to enclose the prospect of Black freedom in a shroud of terror, rendering the suppression of Black self-determination an esteemed civic duty for the American citizen. This essay critically and historically analyzes this romance as it functions in archival documentation of the 1811 German Coast Uprising in southeastern Louisiana, the largest slave revolt in US history. The way that Louisiana planters told the story of the 1811 Uprising weaponized the reactionary romance to compel an expanding American empire (and its citizens) to protect and expand both the social and material structures of plantation slavery and the limits on moral and political imagination that attended these structures.

Representative Quotation Specifically, by collapsing Black people's struggles for freedom into the paradigmatic figure of the murderous Black race warrior, plantation owners and their allies were able to transform slave revolts into opportunities to reproduce a socially cohering racial script, which both justified the plantation regime and compelled others to help reproduce it. This racial script took the form of what I call a reactionary romance. If, as the political theorist David Scott has argued, peoples struggling against the grip of European colonialism have historically tended to frame their historical teleology within the narrative structures of "Romance . . . depending upon certain (utopian) horizons toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving," the dominant, Euro-American narrative of slave revolt performed a mirror function. It positioned the extant plantation regime as the best of all possible worlds vis-à-vis the privileged "citizens"—and those aspiring to be citizens—to which this romance was directed. In turn, it rendered the struggle to overthrow this plantation regime—particularly by those enslaved within it—as necessarily apocalyptic, representing an "unthinkable" rupture to the known social universe beyond which one should not attempt to exercise one's reason or imagination.

READING ACROSS THE WATER: PLÁCIDO AND TRANSLATION IN *BLAKE; OR, THE HUTS OF AMERICA*

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay examines global networks and alliances in Martin Robison Delany's serialized novel, *Blake* (1859–60, 1861–62). I read Delany's writing on Cuban annexationism and the poet Plácido in relation to the voluminous writing about the latter that was circulating in the US and South American periodical press after the poet's public execution in 1844. I contend that Delany's novel performs what I call an "affective translation" of Plácido's poetry, an oblique translation that models itself on what Delany called "harmony in sentiment," which reproduces his anti-annexationist stance and sense of anticolonial fraternity. My essay sees the work of citation, literary interpretation, and translation as key factors in the novel's vision of hemispheric emancipation, topics I discuss in relation to the work of Delany's immediate contemporaries, including James McCune Smith, who was writing for some of the same newspapers and publications to which Delany contributed.

Representative Quotation The period of Plácido's death coincides with two key events in the Americas: the Mexican-American War (1846–48) that saw the United States invade and appropriate large swaths of Mexican lands, and the growth of US filibustering expeditions into Central and South America. Delany envisaged a pattern in these disparate episodes, and he perceived Cuba's doubly dangerous position: it was both a Spanish colony and under threat of annexation by the United States. Relatedly, his writings throughout this period reflect an image of the United States as a nation in the midst of harnessing its own expansionist powers both internally and externally, becoming, like Spain, an empire of its own.

FROM *BUFFALO DANCE* TO TATANKA KCIZAPI WAKPALA, 1894-2020: INDIGENOUS HUMAN AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN CHOREOGRAPHIES OF SOVEREIGNTY AND SURVIVAL

NEUTRAL

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM BUT THE GROUP TRANSCENDS IT.

Abstract Through a Lakota, Indigenous, and dance studies lens, this essay presents the first extensive study of *Buffalo Dance* (1894), one of the earliest films to depict Native Americans, and in particular, Lakota men. Previous scholarship about *Buffalo Dance* has missed significant details about the film by failing to conduct community-engaged research and a reading of the movement modalities depicted. Instead, my analyses of the dancers' choreographies and interviews with Native experts illuminate *Buffalo Dance* as a brilliant expression of Lakota sovereignty and survival within and beyond US settler colonial confines. Drawing on and expanding Indigenous studies scholars' discussions of sovereignty, I define this concept as follows: Native expressions of agency and authority—rooted in Indigenous worldviews, languages, narratives, experiences, and practices—that relate to human and/or more-than-human collectives and promote Native well-being and futurities. I conclude by considering the contemporary implications of the *Buffalo Dance* choreographies as they relate to Tatanka Kcizapi Wakpala (Buffalo Fighting Creek), another Lakota performance of sovereignty and survival created in 2020 by George Blue Bird—a direct descendant of a performer in *Buffalo Dance*. Connecting these choreographies affirms how the *Buffalo Dance* performance extends into the present and the future.

Representative Quotation In the 1890s, when the US government was attempting to assimilate Native peoples by banning their dances, languages, and martial arts and instituting laws that prevented Native people from leaving reservations, Buffalo Bill's Wild West offered select Native people the opportunity to travel and earn a living, thereby thwarting the genocidal conditions caused by US colonization, including cultural prohibitions, imprisonment, and starvation. Assimilation policies were intended to ultimately undermine Native land claims by socializing Native people into settler society and subverting their unique political status as citizens of and/or connected to tribal nations.

A TECHNOLOGY OF FAMILY: PHOTOGRAPHY AND KINSHIP FORMATION IN TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION FROM ASIA

CRITICAL

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM

Abstract This essay theorizes the role of referral photography, photographs sent to prospective adoptive parents upon assignment of a child, in the formation and racialization of kinship within transnational adoption from Asia. Because the practice is used across domestic and transnational adoption, adoption from Asia offers a case study for which to understand how systems like photography can function as, what I call, a technology of family that has the potential not only to record or represent kinship but also to actively participate in its construction in new and racializing ways. Using archival accounts of adoption from China alongside Korean adoptee Deann Borshay Liem's film *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, this essay analyzes referral photographs as narrative objects that perform a particular role in the kinship formation process, one that facilitates the affective inclusion of the child into the family while racializing the child within a system of interchangeability. I also show how these photographs can be used beyond their initial function to discover new forms of "adoptive" kinship.

Representative Quotation Historical and cultural analyses like that of Eng, Choy, and Jodi Kim have shown how transnational adoption as a practice encompasses not only the development of US military, imperialist, and neoliberal engagement with Asia but also a contemporary diaspora of racialized immigration to the United States and other Euro–North American countries.

CELEBRATING IMPERIAL EDUCATION: THE 2001 THOMASITE CENTENNIAL IN THE PHILIPPINES

CRITICAL

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

Abstract This essay examines the 2001 Thomasite Centennial in the Philippines, marking the arrival of American teachers who came to the colony aboard the US Army Transport *Thomas* in 1901 as a site of contemporary negotiations of US colonial history for the needs of the present. As representatives of colonial love, the Thomasites were both admired and criticized by Filipinos and used by the US as exemplifications of American benevolence. Although the centennial, billed as a commemoration of the Thomasites by American diplomats, was demonstrably an instance of soft power led by the US embassy, the Filipinos recruited for the event were multiply positioned subjects, constrained as well as empowered by the situated yet mutable sites they occupied. Analyzing the centennial through its circulation in different discursive registers—journalistic, promotional, historical, diplomatic, and literary—the essay reveals the contested nature of present-day memory-making of US sentimental colonialism in the Philippines, with different state and nonstate actors struggling to claim historical record. Tony Perez's play "A Hundred Songs of Mary Helen Fee," written for the occasion, simultaneously memorializes Fee and instantiates a critique of the centennial by putting the Thomasite memoir on which it was based in conversation with the colonial archive. The essay illustrates the complexities of postcolonial commemoration and shows how

the centennial functioned as a contested site of American and Filipino diplomacy, critical interrogation, and a strategic rerouting of Thomasite history by Filipinos.

Representative Quotation This essay examines the intricate relationship between memory making and the legacy of American imperialism in its most sentimental form in education, where colonial power was projected as colonial love, and which offered upward mobility for many but only within a system that demanded collaboration with the colonial state.

NUCLEAR SETTLER COLONIALISM AT SEA, OR HOW TO CIVILIZE AN OCEAN AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay asks us to reconceptualize nuclear colonialism in the Pacific as a form of settler colonialism, arguing that through nuclear testing the US applied older settler colonial principles of property and appropriation to previously unclaimed ocean spaces. Through an analysis of the Applied Fisheries Laboratory archives, I show how colonial legal doctrines provided a framework within which the American nuclear complex could conceptualize itself as properly owning the ocean that it had put to "productive use" through nuclear testing, with radiation serving as a settler colonial prosthesis that continues to impose colonial land relations even in the absence of settlers themselves. At the same time, I show how the Pacific itself shaped the emergence of US nuclearism, as its surprisingly resilient ecologies allowed the nuclear complex to continue to think of its destructive activities as compatible with the ongoing survival of life. The essay closes with an analysis of the Marshall Islands Student Association's 2019 campaign "My Fish Is Your Fish," which considers what decolonization looks like in an oceanscape that is permanently occupied by American radiation. For MISA, decolonial nuclear justice involves recomposing Marshallese land relations with the irradiated ocean as a critical form of nuclear decolonization.

Representative Quotation This essay argues that nuclear testing in the Pacific allowed for a profound transformation in the United States' attitude toward the ocean, combining with a militarized sense of westward manifest destiny after World War II to produce a new settler colonial episteme in which the US could occupy not only the islands of the Pacific, as it had been doing for almost a century, but also the ocean itself. The nuclear age, I argue, would produce a new inflection of the age of empire, as the ocean transformed from a space of imperial transit to a space of settler-colonial occupation as a result of the logics and practices of nuclear colonialism at sea.

ELIZABETH "BETITA" MARTÍNEZ: A TRIBUTE AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/XENOPHOBIA BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the twenty-first century has seen the rise of totalitarianism in Russia, China, and the United States, the latter via the growth of Trumpism. The related proliferation of white supremacist movements

and a virulent anti-immigrant hatred have fueled an unbridled epidemic of racially motivated gun violence and threats to women's rights. But Martínez's legacy provides a framework for scholar-activists to address these challenges with an inclusive platform modeled after her commitments to social justice and her radical democratic thinking in the face of despair and uncertainty.

IN BETITA'S GARAGE: TRACING THE ARCHIVAL AFTERLIVES OF ELIZABETH "BETITA" MARTÍNEZ

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation In adding her story to the CPMR archive, we wanted to document Betita's multivalent activist journey in order to trace the genealogy of intersectional feminism and illuminate the linked nature of freedom struggles in the 1960s and 1970s.

WHAT WOULD BETITA SAY? WRITING/EDITING HISTORIES AS RADICAL COLLAGE

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Taken as a whole, Martínez's work is a dizzying, interconnected assemblage, a collage made clear when viewed as narratively represented activism, communities, and her work to build lasting alliances between peoples and movements.

#BETITA TAUGHTME: RISK-TAKING AS A COALITIONAL GESTURE

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation As a freedom fighter and icon of the civil rights, Chicana/o, and women's movements, Betita's accessibility and popular education tools shaped youth of color's political activism and "understanding of their roles in social change" over many generations. For these youth, "to fight for justice alongside" Betita "was to connect to a lineage of nearly a century of revolutionary struggle."

MAPPING INTERNATIONAL FEMINISM: THE WORKS OF ELIZABETH (BETITA) MARTÍNEZ

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation This essay looks closely at how Martínez wove an internationalist feminist vision into her activism and writings after years of multiracial organizing. I claim that throughout her long career as an agent of history, as an organic intellectual and as a movement historian, documenting the intersectionality of the struggles of marginalized peoples all over the world, she engaged in intergenerational knowledge transmission through an internationalist feminist lens.

"TRANS LIES ELSEWHERE": TRANS OF COLOR LIVES, CRITIQUES, AND FUTURES AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA/TRANSPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The impressive archive includes works of trans Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian American artists working within the so-called boundaries of the US, as well as trans artists and activists from South Africa, Thailand, and beyond. Remarkably, as Chen navigates the vast temporal and spatial frames, without conflating one context/community into another, they carefully historicize and contextualize each contemporary artist and their trans embodiments. Through this deep historicization, Chen demonstrates how contemporary racial-gender exclusions of trans of color subjects are not new but rooted in long histories of the intertwining of cis-hetero-patriarchy with settler colonialism, racial capitalism, anti-immigration regimes, and global imperialist processes.

ASIAN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS ACROSS HEMISPHERES, OCEANS, AND ISLANDS AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation How do we make sense of Asian-Indigenous relations across settler colonial states? In what ways have Asian-Indigenous entanglements been structured by militarism, settler colonialism, and liberal empire? In 2000, the Kanaka Maoli scholar-activist Haunani-Kay Trask coined the term "settlers of color" to describe nonwhite, non-Indigenous communities in Hawai'i who, even as they bear the brunt of labor exploitation and racial exclusion, are structurally implicated in the ongoing dispossession of Native Hawaiians. In particular, Trask pinpointed East Asian Americans' rise to key positions of power in the Democratic Party following statehood, marking their direct responsibility for policies that uphold the occupation of the illegally overthrown Hawaiian Kingdom. In response, Asian American scholar-activists in and from Hawai'i such as Candace Fujikane, Jonathan Okamura, and Dean Itsuji Saranillio have developed the field of Asian settler colonialism studies, which seeks to grapple with Asian American attachments to the settler state even as it demands forms of ethical accountability and Asian-Indigenous solidarity, as theorized by Fujikane's term "settler ally."

SITUATING J.C. LEYENDECKER WITHIN THE CONFLICTING NARRATIVES OF THE GAY AND LESBIAN PAST

AMERICAN HOMOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation However, much of the scholarly and popular writing on Leyendecker attempts to draw connections between the content of his work and the poorly documented aspects of his personal life. Most often, this takes the form of attributing its "homoeroticism" to Leyendecker's likely homosexuality, often characterized as tragic, troubled, or closeted. Even when unintentional, in this near obsession with pictorial evidence of his sexuality Leyendecker comes to resemble the stereotype of the shadowy, devious homosexual covertly insinuating an "unnatural" desire where it would not otherwise exist. Ultimately, this approach is a minimizing, minoritizing, and homophobic form of cultural interpretation. Thus, it is somewhat disappointing that the short documentary film *Coded: The Hidden Love of J. C. Leyendecker*, from the director Ryan White (*The Case Against 8* [2014]), focuses on Leyendecker's sexuality and its potential influence on his work, even as it offers the fullest cinematic exploration of the artist and his work to date.

BETWEEN DESTRUCTION AND BEAUTY: EXHIBITING PHOTOGRAPHS OF MILITARIZED LANDSCAPES

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation *Devour the Land* asks its visitors to see these landscapes, to think about the ways that the violences of American militarization are rooted and ongoing, and to do something about it.

March 2023

BODIES IN TRANSIT: SPECULATION AND THE BIOPOLITICAL IMAGINARY

AMERICAN RACISM/CLASSISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay explores the *Bodies in Transit* archive, an artifact of mid-nineteenth-century public health administration in New York City. The ledgers, which tracked the transit of every corpse that moved through the island of Manhattan between 1859 and 1894 and categorized entrants by their cause of death, nationality, and occupation, present a unique lens through which I explore the intersections of speculation, biopolitics, and urban space. I first establish a conceptual framework of "speculation" by dissecting its etymological genealogy, the roots of which share a preoccupation with vision and sight. I note that in

practice, the abstracting and rationalizing tendencies of speculation operate by envisioning, calculating, and coercing specific outcomes into realization. I apply this framework to *Bodies in Transit* to historicize the ways in which biopolitics, the means through which the state forms, represents, and manages populations, are indexed to speculative economic practices. I read *Bodies in Transit* through the framework of speculation to articulate a field of meaning that illuminates the complex material and epistemic conditions surrounding its implementation and utility. As I argue, the ledgers were a response to the acceleration of real estate speculation in Manhattan, a trend that incentivized property owners to disinter burial grounds to relocate corpses to rural areas, and thereby connected the speculative logics of real estate to those of public health, spatial order, and surveillance. By thinking across and through the layered meanings of "speculation," this essay illuminates how the state's economy of knowledge is intimately related to biopolitical practices of surveillance and abstract representations of financial value in the modern city.

Representative Quotation The speculative grammar of statecraft still relies on a field of vision predicated on surveillance, abstraction, and the categorization and construction of social difference. As I have shown, the production of social difference, as codified in the lines of ledgers or the policing of cultural traditions, also renders surplus populations that are politically marginalized. This economy of knowledge, a critical component of biopolitics, today more clearly reflects the necropolitical valence of the state's actuarial calculus: the sublimation of surplus life to the reproduction of capital.

INDIGENOUS BROOKLYN: IRONWORKING, LITTLE CAUGHNAWAGA, AND KANIEIN'KEHÁ:KA NATIONHOOD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM BUT THE GROUP TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

Abstract On May 10, 2013, eighteen hundred feet above the city streets of Manhattan, workers erected the crowning spire of One World Trade Center, marking the completion of the first of six towers that would replace the buildings destroyed on September 11, 2001. Atop that tower stood one of the latest generation of Haudenosaunee ironworkers to follow in the footsteps of Indigenous families who, for the last 140 years, have helped create some of North America's most iconic landmarks. Beginning in the 1880s, ironworking quickly became a principal source of employment for Haudenosaunee men who traveled to jobs throughout Canada and the northeastern United States. By the 1920s, Haudenosaunee families from Ahkwesáhsne and Kahnawà:ke began relocating to Brooklyn, where they opened a string of boardinghouses and established a new community: "Little Caughnawaga." Together, ironworking and "Little Caughnawaga" became a nexus between Kanien'kehá:ka family life, nationhood, and self-determination. This is particularly significant when we consider that Indigenous peoples were conceptually and physically removed from urban spaces that were reframed as "modern" and juxtaposed to perceptions of "Indian authenticity." Yet Kanien'kehá:ka citizens were at the center of building these sites of "modernity," an undertaking that influenced their own rearticulations of Kanien'kehá:ka nationhood.

Representative Quotation The extension of Kanien'kehá:ka nationhood into this modern urban space is particularly significant when we consider, as Coll Thrush reminds us, that Indigenous peoples—despite having centuries of urban histories before colonization—

were physically and conceptually removed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the urban spaces that existed on their territories. In New York City, the Lenape nation experienced removal firsthand. These spaces were reframed as “modern,” associated with settler capitalism and cosmopolitanism, and then contrasted with ideas about where the Indian should and would exist as well as with perceptions of Indian “authenticity.” As Thrush observes, “The city, as the ultimate expression of colonial modernity, seems to offer little space for Indigenous presence. This has been replicated in both popular culture and most academic studies, in which urban Indigenous people, if they are acknowledged at all, are often portrayed as little more than the collateral damage of settler colonialism: as husks, shells, ghosts, and otherwise inauthentic manifestation of some lost past.” Contrary to this conceptual erasure, Haudenosaunee community members were at the center of building these iconic symbols and sites of a supposed “modernity.”

IF BOOKS COULD KILL: LEO TOLSTOY AND THE CULTURAL COLD WAR AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract Drawing on declassified Central Intelligence Agency files and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) archives held at the University of Chicago, this essay investigates how the CIA and its cover organizations sought to manipulate the legacy of Leo Tolstoy as part of the larger Cultural Cold War. In 1960, the CCF marked the fiftieth anniversary of Tolstoy's death by organizing a conference that attracted a wide range of writers and academics from around the world. Secretly sponsored by the CIA, the Tolstoy gathering, which took place in Venice in the summer of 1960, was intended to counter similar events planned by the Soviets, which the CIA feared would portray the Russian novelist as a prophet of Bolshevism. In response, the West hoped to claim Tolstoy as a thinker whose individualist philosophy was unassimilable to either Marxism or capitalism. Essentially, they sought to secularize his Christian anarchism as a form of radical liberty. However, this essay argues, the intelligence community's appropriation of the humanities ultimately conflicts with the pacifist writer's antipathy toward state sponsorship of the arts and the weaponization of culture in the service of nationalistic agendas.

Representative Quotation In our current era of resurfacing Cold War tensions, the time has come for a fuller account of the relationship between the CIA and the Tolstoy Foundation, the CCF's behind-the-scenes organization of the conference, and the significance of this event in the context of US-Russian culture wars. At the same time, I contend that this conference and the intelligence community's manipulation of the humanities in general ultimately conflicts with Tolstoy's antipathy toward state sponsorship of the arts and the weaponization of culture in the service of nationalistic agendas.

SONIC TRANSNESS: CHRISTINE JORGENSEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE IN *KAMING MGA TALYADA (WE WHO ARE SEXY)*

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM/TRANSPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay presents the case for the analytic of "sonic transness" as a way to understand the gendered deployment of voice in the construction of racialized transgender subjectivities. Through a close reading of Christine Jorgensen's vocal performance in the 1962 Philippine film *Kaming Mga Talyada (We Who Are Sexy)*, which includes autobiographical monologue, celebrity impersonations, and songs performed in English and Tagalog, this essay examines the place of Jorgensen's voice and sonic practices in her self-constitution as a global, aspirational, and cosmopolitan white trans subject. At the same time, by listening to the ways in which her voice fades in and out of broader trans histories, this essay's focus on Jorgensen's performance in the Philippines makes audible the global production and extraction of value from trans and gender-nonconforming voices.

Representative Quotation Importantly, sonic transness is never just about gender, since it also includes how sounds of gender shape and are shaped by race and other forms of difference. In this sense, sonic transness, in Jorgensen's case, is also about "sonic whiteness" and sound's relation to imperialism, empire, and occupation. Building on Marie Thompson's notion of "white aurality," Anjuli Joshi Brekke conceptualizes the term *sonic whiteness* to refer to how racialized soundscapes are built on white, middle-class norms that "unreflexively frame whiteness as synonymous with rationality." Sonic whiteness is "marked by its absence" and can be produced through juxtapositions with "sonic orientalism," a concept that refers to the "practice of constructing racialized sonic bodies as aberrant, excessive, hysterical, and/or exotic."

THE COMMODIFICATION OF DR. KING, OR WHAT INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS DID TO CIVIL RIGHTS

AMERICAN RACISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract While a large body of scholarship has emphasized the "Santa Clausification" of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy, or King as a "harmless dreamer," most scholars neglect the legal apparatuses that enable (or disable) his image, likeness, speeches, and voice to circulate in the public sphere. This essay argues that intellectual property plays a vital yet undertheorized role in the whitewashing of King's legacy. Offering an interdisciplinary study of cultural history, visual analysis, and legal discourse, this essay shows that one unrecognized feature of the intellectual property system is its ability to manage civil rights discourse. It demonstrates how the structural commitments of the law—economic incentives for innovation, corporate licensing regimes, and copyright's possessive-individualist model of authorship—contribute to racial hierarchy and economic inequality. By thinking through the social justice implications of managing civil rights discourse, and by offering a model for what I call "counterstorytelling" on digital media where communities on YouTube and Twitter strategically reappropriate commercial uses of King's image, likeness, speeches, and voice on television and redeploy them for social justice causes, this essay

creates space for engaging and resisting the power dynamics that structure the flow of knowledge production in the digital information age.

Representative Quotation If the aesthetic logic of the Super Bowl commercial attempted to suture the problematic (in)actions of the NFL with King's legacy, I conclude this section with a series of online users taking to social media to disaggregate the two from each other. For example, the film director Ava DuVernay protested the NFL's stance on civil rights via Twitter: "I will not be a spectator, viewer or supporter of the #SuperBowl today in protest of the @NFL's racist treatment of @Kaepernick7 and its ongoing disregard for the health + well-being of all its players. To watch the game is to compromise my beliefs. It's not worth it. #ImWithKap." DuVernay had her own battle negotiating the intellectual property restrictions surrounding King's legacy. DuVernay opted not to use King's words for the film *Selma* (DuVernay, 2014) because, according to her, she did not want intellectual property rules to control how she represented King. This is unfortunate given DuVernay directed *13th* (2016), a film that continues King's legacy by arguing that ending police brutality and mass incarceration necessitates structural changes to United States capitalism. DuVernay's tweet was accompanied by a spoken word poem by Hannah Drake titled "Dear Colin Kaepernick: All You Had to Do Was Play the Game Boy." Drake's video, like the *Current Affairs* piece, tests the grounds of the fair use doctrine by making use of copyrighted material (images and photographs). To circumvent accusations of copyright infringement, Drake "transforms" the images by drawing an implicit connection between the oppressive social structures perpetuated by the US government and the NFL's treatment of Kaepernick. This aesthetic strategy, I argue, successfully disaggregates the NFL's attempt to align itself with King and the civil rights movement. Drake's piece, like "I Have a Dream," engages a political strategy that utilizes appropriation as a tool. For example, the piece begins by appropriating the voice of a manager: "You didn't know you were on sale, boy? How dare you reject your master, boy? Make us rich, boy! Our job is to break bucks like you, boy!" This audio is accompanied by copyrighted images of Kaepernick alongside a slave block advertisement (see fig. 7). The juxtapositions create a continuity between those who refuse to sign Kaepernick due to his peaceful protests and the oppressive logics of slave owners. Both "owners" deride and chastise Black bodies for demanding anything tantamount to human rights. Drake strengthens her critique of the NFL by juxtaposing copyrighted images of Kaepernick in balletic poses over the words "Entertain us, boy! Didn't you like your name in lights, boy? Didn't we stroke your ego, boy? Keep dancing for us on Monday night, boy!" The words *entertain*, *lights*, and *dance* draw connections between previous racist entertainment regimes such as the minstrelsy and the NFL. Football players, like minstrelsy performers before them, are required to entertain white folk while ensuring that preexisting racial hierarchies remain unscathed. The juxtapositions reveal how the NFL's exploitation of Black bodies is only the newest form of oppression that has a long and varied history. The juxtapositions reveal how the NFL's exploitation of Black bodies is only the newest form of oppression that has a long and varied history.

DOCUMENTING DIFFERENCE: STANDARDIZING FOREIGN PHYSICIANS AMERICAN IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay traces the transformation and standardization of the first cohort of Asian physicians trained outside the United States into Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs) within the United States through documentary regimes. Congress solicited foreign physicians under the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 to address doctor shortages in inner-city and rural communities throughout the country—a trend that continues today. Central to their migratory journey was an archive of expertise, a compilation of documents intended to verify identity, skill, and competence. Through the analysis of a physician's case file, new relations to documentation emerge that reveal how claims of underdocumentation, incorrect documentation, and overdocumentation regulate immigrant possibilities. In adopting this approach, this case study moves away from the unskilled / model minority dichotomy to show how documentary proceduralism operates as a racializing, disciplinary strategy across categories of immigrant labor.

Representative Quotation Newly independent, postcolonial Asian nations were the sites of Cold War battles, and legislators understood immigration to be a useful ideological weapon against communist encroachment. It was a way to monitor postcolonial circulations under a new guise and maintain a world order motivated by a global, unfettered capitalist imaginary. In other words, migration policy emerged in the breakdown of the colonial order to maintain spheres of power and contain the effects of decolonization.

FREEDOM TIME: NEW DIRECTIONS IN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP A SCHOLARLY ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The ongoing unfinishedness of past liberation struggles infuses these three works, each of which charts precise and evocative temporalities of struggle. The question of time and the midcentury movement frequently comes up as a set of questions about periodization and designation: Is the civil rights era properly described as the years from the *Brown* decision (1954) to the passage of the Voting Rights Act (1965)? What kinds of historiographic narratives does a framework of the long civil rights movement make possible or preclude? What is at stake in discussing the midcentury movement as an intensification of or a signal departure from what came before? Is it more appropriate to think of the Black freedom struggle as beginning the moment enslaved Africans touched the soils of the Americas? While not the central concern of the three books considered here, each necessarily reckons with the question of periodization and terminology. But time and temporality are analytic—and affective—categories within each work as well, with Wolcott and Fleming signaling the temporal dimensions of their investigations in their very titles.

WORLDMAKING, POWER, AND ECOLOGIES IN THE "NEGROCENE"

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Although Ahuja's *Planetary Specters* departs from the historical and self-identified African Diaspora and does not fit neatly within the terminology and framework I most often employ and work through—Black Ecologies—I begin with it because it provides critical insight into the present, about “how the turn toward security thinking in environmental politics recapitulates a longer history of racial governance that configures environmental degradation and population growth in the South as the cause of underdevelopment and conflict,” resulting in the “racialized framing of environmental disaster” that obscures “public understanding of the imperial force of carbon in the making of the current geopolitics and racial labor structures of transnational capitalism”.

¡NO VENGAN! IMMIGRATION ART IN THE POST-TRUMP ERA

AMERICAN XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Throughout her speech Harris tapped into xenophobic ideologies that criminalized undocumented immigrants in contrast to immigrants who enter the US through legal pathways, a foreshadowing of the Biden administration's discriminatory political strategies toward undocumented immigration at the US/Mexico border.

June 2023

THE DARK PRELUDE

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Ultimately, Black peoples' hard-won freedom—and their expressions of it—became a compelling, if not primary, rationale for the expansion of the police state.

THE BLACK ANTERIOR

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation And if what we, students of the Black anterior, bring to American studies is a refusal of “America” and its terms, we do not gather each year to tinker with or to “indict,” as Redmond says, “the state of the field.” We gather, rather, in and for the anterior that is in and for us: the life that surrounds the field’s putative object of study, even while in its crosshairs.

IN THE FLOW

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Though the music had a softening effect, it also managed to produce pinpricks of apprehension for those of us who know all too well how so many of those traffic stop ends. Arrest, injury, escape, or death, there are no happy stories once the sirens begin. Add race, class, gender, or geography to the mix, and you have a recipe for chaos, for slaughter.

ON EATING, CRITICAL DISTANCE, AND QALLUNAAT COSMOLOGY

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay produces a reading of Qallunaat—glossed as white people, or sometimes non-Inuit—as they come into view via two things: their relationships with Inuit and with animals, and their reactions to Inuit relationships with animals. Alongside three filmic texts that *appear*—especially to those who follow Qallunaat conventions—to be about Inuit and Inuit practices of hunting and eating seals, this essay reads against the (perceived) grain to shine the spotlight on Qallunaat: What can the tensions between eating and critical distance tell us about Qallunaat cosmology? The three filmic texts in question are the Qallunaat filmmaker Robert Flaherty’s 1922 *Nanook of the North*, the first full-length documentary film; the Inuk performer Tanya Tagaq’s 2012 *Nanook of the North*, in which Tagaq rewrites Flaherty’s version by adding a live soundtrack; and *Tungijjuq*, a 2009 film by Félix Lajeunesse and Paul Raphaël in which Tagaq stars and whose screenplay she co-wrote. This essay also *performs* its reading: Tagaq becomes the theorist who leads us in equal parts through these filmic texts and through the thick, fleshy contexts in which they are embedded. I, neither Inuk nor Qallunaat, take on a hyperbolized critical distance as a quasi-anthropologist. Qallunaat proclivities are eagerly displayed.

Representative Quotation In particular, Polish notes that "uncritical comparison of [people of color] with animals" along with "the role that the rising cultural popularity of white veganism plays in gentrification... further highlights the entrenchment of veganism and whiteness."

A FOREST OF ENERGY: SETTLER COLONIALISM, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, AND SUGAR MAPLE KINSHIP IN THE MENOMINEE COMMUNITY

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract The Menominee have long tapped into and cocreated energy flows within ecosystems, particularly with maple trees. The United States, however, seized nearly all Menominee land, transforming ecosystems into industrial systems, including for maple sugar. Moreover, thermodynamic ideas of energy rendered more-than-human beings into "the ability to do work." Many Menominees, however, have understood "energy" in the more-than-human world from a grounded, relational perspective, guided by an ethical system of reciprocity and an intellectual tradition of interconnectedness. Energy studies has critically examined how societies and cultures are entangled with energy systems, particularly fossil fuels. More research, however, on settler colonialism's impacts on ecological energies from perspectives beyond thermodynamics would greatly strengthen the field. We therefore make three major arguments. First, American settler colonialism is an act of environmental injustice that violently appropriated vast stores of energy, or wealth, embodied in the Menominee's ancestral lands. Second, the Menominee consistently adapted to and resisted colonization by utilizing their ancestral knowledge systems and interspecies ethical frameworks while appropriating dominant science and technology to further their goals. Finally, sugar maple trees provide a material example from which to incorporate an Indigenous energy theory into the study of settler colonialism.

Representative Quotation Adding to the important research done thus far in Indigenous studies and energy studies, we therefore propose that American studies scholars, and energy scholars generally, not only document Indigenous experiences and reactions to settler colonial energy extraction from the perspective of thermodynamics but integrate Indigenous ways of understanding the concept of energy. Thermodynamics itself is an abstract settler-capitalist theory that influenced the plunder of Indigenous lands and lives.

MORE UPSET THAN MOST: MEASURING AND UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN AMERICAN RESPONSES TO THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

ANALYZING THE DEEP IMPACT JFK'S ASSASSINATION HAD ON AFRICAN AMERICANS.

NEUTRAL

Abstract A public opinion poll conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (NORC) after President John Kennedy's assassination illuminates African Americans' deep veneration of him. While Americans of every race, religion, and region grieved Kennedy's death, the Black community's anguish seemed more intense, lasted longer, and was complicated by their unique experience. Since 1964, scholars have written about

Kennedy's civil rights leadership, but existing studies only touch on why African Americans mourned him so acutely and cherished his memory so conscientiously. Substantive gains in the final months of his presidency—combined with earlier, symbolic gestures—added up to an enduring affection for Kennedy among Black citizens.

NORC data substantiated the unusual ways that Black mourners processed Kennedy's death. African Americans held segregationists responsible for the assassination, inducing profound gratitude for the martyred Kennedy. Appreciation inspired Black families to hang Kennedy's portrait in their homes alongside images of Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King—a tradition I term "the Trinity." Trinity memorials channeled community grief, conveyed Kennedy's significance to future generations, and remain a touchstone within Black popular culture. This study challenges scholarly assessments of Kennedy's civil rights accomplishments, documenting the genesis and resilience of his memory for African Americans.

Representative Quotation Rosenzweig and Thelen revealed what NORC researchers discovered decades earlier—that African Americans forge powerful bonds with their political heroes and bequeath their legacies to the next generation in hopes that the future may be made better by cherishing the memory of their sacrifices.

MUSLIM AMERICAN PROTEST ICONOGRAPHY AND REVISIONISM: ON THE GENDERED-RACIAL AND SECULAR AESTHETICS OF (NEO) LIBERAL DISSENT AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract In this essay, I account for the continuum of inclusion, regulation, and historical revision formative to "Muslim American" iconography in the late war on terror era. In 2017, a poster of a South Asian Muslim American woman wearing a hijab in the style of the United States flag was touted by transnational media as "the face of the Trump resistance" and carried across pro-immigration and feminist protests that imagined a more inclusive state. It was also rebuked by Muslims for desanctifying the hijab through the US flag, perceived as symbol of the state's settler-imperial violence. Tracing the poster's production—from its source artwork to its distinct revisions—and mass circulations, I consider the intersections of race, gender, and secularism in US politics, markets, and aesthetics. I situate the poster within uneven neoliberal art markets that commodify dissent as well as flexible genealogies of secular arts and civil religion, which racially discipline Islam into an aesthetic of the US state and its resistances. I then focus on the poster's mobilization in the Women's March on Washington, where Muslim women, Islam, and transnational solidarities with Palestine became subjects of feminist inclusion and contention. I argue the shifting aesthetics of gendered-racial and secular (neo)liberalism converge on Muslim American iconographies of protest and inclusion while managing the terms of Muslim protest and inclusion.

Representative Quotation Muslims who rebuked the poster's circulation in the March cited its depiction of US nationalism as a logic of proper (secular) Muslimness and feminism. Some invoked Muslim feminisms through Islamic principles of global justice and community, exceeding the bounds of the state: the fashion writer and activist Hoda Katebi wrote "Please keep your American flags off my hijab," criticizing the substitution of the hijab with a flag that commemorates a state produced by ongoing settler colonialism and imperialism.

UN/BLOCKED: WRITING, RACE, AND GENDER IN THE AMERICAN ACADEMY

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay examines writer's block (and flow) in the American academy. It critically maps the production of blocks in higher education policy, the organization of knowledge, and academics' lived experiences with inquiry. University studies scholars, such as Marc Bousquet and Christopher Newfield, have powerfully critiqued academia's corporatization. This work, however, at times glosses over the diversely felt impacts of institutionalized oppression on writing and learning. In contrast to university studies, faculty development literature has provided granular accounts of writing in a publish-or-perish climate, as in Robert Boice's classic *Advice for New Faculty Members* or Paul Silvia's *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. The latter work, however, tends to offer individualized advice that risks exacerbating the very problems of the knowledge economy. The present essay underscores that written inquiry is both personal and political, bringing intersectional American studies together with university studies and affect studies to extend work on academe and social justice—such as Roderick Ferguson's *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* and Eli Meyerhoff's *Beyond Education: Radical Studying for Another World*. "Un/Blocked" argues that writer's block is less a psychological syndrome than a symptom of nationalist investments in academic writing as a way to manage knowledge, labor, and subject-formation. The slash in the title, then, marks writers' ongoing efforts to grapple with knowledge's terms and conditions—hard work that is part of academic inquiry itself.

Representative Quotation Her writing sometimes gets "too tight," but "decolonizing our writing practice is part of our work," she says matter-of-factly. She purposefully "disorders" her desktop. To keep things "light and loose," she also calendars "blank space" for easing into and out of research. Hallie stores a research log in a cloud and encourages her lab to add to it according to their deadlines and how rested they feel. Hallie considers her Native feminist approaches to writing coextensive with her biosocial methods: both divest from linear notions of scientific progress in ways that sustain her knowledge community and its work.

INTRODUCTION: ABOLITIONIST WORLDMAKING

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Gilmore shows how the abolition of the system of control, criminalization, and punishment that includes jail, prison, probation, policing, security and surveillance regimes, border patrol, and migrant detention is fundamental to building alternative futures. She demonstrates how and why the prison-industrial complex is situated within an expansive economy of United States imperialism and militarism, with consequences that extend into the intimate spheres of interpersonal violence, and must necessarily be addressed in struggles for racial, gender, and environmental justice.

AGAINST INEVITABILITY

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The mothers' working analysis of the law that emerged from this process—"You have to be white to be prosecuted under White law, but you do not have to be Black to be prosecuted under Black law"—sharply clarified a complex racialized scale: the US carceral state exists through a historical and entrenched will to subjugate black people specifically, and, therefore, black people are targeted by the brunt of its violence, and the antiblack system of power that animates carceral violence also devastates communities across different racialized contexts of punitivity.

THE DIALECTICS OF ABOLITION

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Yet Gilmore has emphasized repeatedly that "the prison fix" is not an isolated phenomenon: the decisions to build prisons—and to invest in industrial punishment, policing, and military rather than in public welfare, health care, roads or schools—have been central to a structural reorganization of the US postwar "landscape of accumulation and dispossession." In other words, Gilmore emphasizes the ways that US prison expansion cannot be separated from the multiple crises of racial capitalism as it expanded globally in the second half of the twentieth century and thus, dialectically, that prisons cannot be countered as a single institution and that abolition cannot be understood or fought without consideration of this global imperial context.

PROMISES, PROMISES

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Formed in 1992, Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC) is a Los Angeles-based organization made up of mothers and allies in response to the rapid escalation of policing and imprisonment [...] Gilmore's essays on Mothers ROC highlights an important aspect of her methodology and *Abolition Geography's* power more broadly: storytelling. As Gilmore writes, "The stories I will tell about Mothers ROC are evidence of how people organize against their abandonment and disposal within oppositional spaces delimited by gender, race, class, and violence".

MAKING HISTORY, MAKING WORLDS

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Gilmore's approach to history as dialectical, dynamic, sedimented, syncretic, and always geographic is on display in her account of how prison construction, policing, and the Pentagon are a continuation of imperialism, and how the foundational violence of New Haven as a center of gun manufacturing converged with Yale's place in military research and development—processes obscured by narratives of the region's contribution to liberalism, political theory, and the like. War, at home and abroad, she argues, kept New Haven and the nation going and growing.

AFFIRMATIONS OF FREEDOM

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The imperative to acknowledge how contemporary capitalism remains racial capitalism in no smaller degree now than during the periods of colonialism and slavery protects us from analytic myopia and its deceptive moves - for example, that racism can be excised from future history, leaving the system of capitalism undisturbed.

PLAYING THAT CRYSTAL FLUTE: BLACK INTERVENTIONS IN THE SONIC ARCHIVES

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM BUT THE GROUP TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation In the course of her work, Brooks examines the work of the journalist and essayist Ellen Willis and her connections to the Black radical tradition. Brooks argues that examinations of Willis's work "holds the potential to illuminate the shared and yet rarely recognized affinities between Black and white feminist culture writing as well as the connections between the advent of counterculture music criticism and the Black freedom struggle intellectual politics that created the conditions for the former's flourishing".

TRANSPACIFIC RADICAL SOLIDARITIES: RACIAL CAPITALISM, EMPIRE, AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The four books under review clearly demonstrate how the coconstitutive production of US empire and settler colonial racial capitalism relies on the structure of permanent military expansion to secure the transpacific throughout the nineteenth century to the present.

US URBANISM AND ITS PACIFIC HISTORIES

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation While *Learning from Lē'ahi* was an exhibition about the role of architects in creating militarized environments that support settler colonial systems of occupation, dispossession, and erasure, the show also invited viewers to consider alternative architectural frameworks for just futures responsive to Kanaka cartographies and abundant ecologies.

December 2023

MIDDLE PASSAGES: LESSONS IN RACIAL SUBJECTION AT THE HAMPTON INSTITUTE AND CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay argues that the historically Black Hampton Institute (1868) and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879) are crucial sites to investigate how US political, territorial, and economic conquest were sutured to the project of emancipation after the Civil War. Rather than focusing on these schools' manual education, I turn to their newspapers, the *Southern Workman* and *Indian Helper*, to demonstrate how they developed techniques of discursive representation, rooted in Black fungibility, that made racial subjection appear as racial emancipation in the postbellum period. These newspapers were framed as both tool and evidence of students' subjective transformation. Instead of providing authentic evidence of Black and Native transformation, however, they provide a glimpse into how Hampton's and Carlisle's representations of racial emancipation drew on discursive techniques created in the material and symbolic violence of transatlantic slavery's Middle Passage. The essay concludes by demonstrating how a trio of boarding school stories (1900) by the Yankton Sioux author Zitkala-Ša provides a nascent critique of the ways in which Indian boarding

schools produced Native fungibility as a technique of white domination in the context of postbellum US imperialism.

Representative Quotation Put another way, my focus is on what the historian Tiya Miles has called in her scholarship on Afro-Indigeneity a “structuring white present” that has “triangulated” Blackness and Indigeneity as a strategy to maintain its own power.

IMAGINING FREEDOM IN SLAVERY'S FUTURE: *IRON CITY'S* FUGITIVE OTHERTIME IN THE US CARCERAL EMPIRE-STATE

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay examines Black political activism during the Korean War in publications that defined their present moment as slavery's future and characterized slavery and antiblack racism as part of an ongoing war against Black people, connected to US empire's wars abroad. In particular, it reads Lloyd Brown's novel *Iron City* (1951), about four Black men incarcerated on trumped-up charges, alongside Paul Robeson's *Freedom* newspaper (1950–55) and William Patterson's *We Charge Genocide* (1951). Centering on four Black men *serving time*, the novel demonstrates that one tactic in the war against Black freedom is through the control of time and shows a connection between incarceration and slavery by revealing the disciplinary mechanism of time in service of US empire. Rather than acquiesce to the omnipotence of empire's time and endless wars, however, *Iron City*, exemplifying the Black radical thought of the 1950s, imagines a different future, which I term fugitive *othertime*. Building on Saidiya Hartman's theorization of a “fugitive *elsewhere*,” “an imagined place [that] might afford you a vision of freedom,” I argue for reading *Iron City* for its dream of a fugitive othertime, as an imagined temporality in which that elsewhere might exist.

Representative Quotation Applying the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that as long as imperialism exists, war will always exist, then, we can therefore say that as long as US imperialism exists, the war against Black freedom will continue, as what Nikhil Singh calls the “long war” and Dylan Rodríguez calls “domestic warfare.”

"WE ARE THESE HOMES": EMPLACED RACIAL TRAUMA IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay contributes the concept of emplaced racial trauma to theoretical conceptualizations of race, space, and trauma. Defined as the spatialization of racism-induced traumatic experiences, emplaced racial trauma seeks to describe the geography that the felt experience of race and racism creates, particularly as it relates to anti-Black spatial dynamics. This geography is characterized by the materiality of its ontological existence, the manner in which it concentrates historical memory and connects disparate spaces of racial trauma, and the dialectical relationship it maintains with placelessness, especially as it pertains to displacement. I ground the theory in empirical examples drawn from three films that center Black people, stories, and spaces: *Mossville: When Great Trees Fall*, *Whose Streets?*,

and *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*. Through an analysis of the spaces and people represented in these films, I demonstrate the (re)production of spaces of emplaced racial trauma, their impacts on the material world, and the relationships that their residents form with them. These geographies are shown to inform the sociospatial world as it is continually constructed, operating as sites of racial harm but also localities in which inhabitants might subvert spatial domination.

Representative Quotation Emplaced racial trauma as a geography and component of collective memory is productively studied through the films presented here, but the concept requires theoretical and empirical expansion. Namely, the concept's applicability to other historically marginalized racial groups and the particularities of the traumatic geographies forged in their communities deserve rigorous unpacking, especially given the United States' context of settler colonialism and the attendant land theft suffered by Indigenous peoples.

CITIZENSHIP VIOLENCE, ILLEGALITY, AND ABOLITION IN THE UNDOCUMEMOIR

AMERICAN XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay contributes a study of the undocumemoir to existing scholarship on undocu literature. I define the undocumemoir as an evolving literary form that transgresses literary boundaries and is distinguished by three defining characteristics: an engagement with immigration law and policy, a narrative arc of illegality, and the adoption of one or more generic conventions of established literary forms. I provide a reading of three recent undocumemoirs and argue that the undocumemoir departs from discussions of legal citizenship as full legal and political inclusion and show, instead, what I call citizenship violence and define as legal citizenship's function as a mechanism to criminalize and contain migrants. I interpret the undocumemoir's critique of citizenship violence as an incipient abolitionism invested in the creation of a borderless world that both echoes Black abolitionist and recent immigrant rights advocates' critiques of legal citizenship, and invites a consideration of the liberatory potential in the rejection of legal citizenship.

Representative Quotation Recent discussions among immigrant rights advocates about legal citizenship, however, have gestured toward the limits of legal citizenship in protecting migrants from state violence and its function as a mechanism for criminalizing and imprisoning migrants.

LAUNDERING MILITARIZATION: PREPAREDNESS, PROFESSIONALISM, AND POLICE COMMON SENSE

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract US police militarization is commonly understood as military violence abroad flowing to domestic policing, where it does not belong. Despite years of reform efforts, attempts to demilitarize local police have thus far failed to effect substantive change. This essay builds on the history of US policing, as well as sixteen months of ethnographic research with police

in Maryland, to suggest that the ideological labor of policing contributes to these failures. Specifically, I examine two elements of what I call *police common sense*: preparedness as moral practice and violence as professional technique. In so doing, I demonstrate how policing metabolizes militarization as an apolitical technical craft that counterintuitively reduces violence, and that allows officers to fulfill their primary ethical role as stewards of public crises. Demilitarization reforms function in tandem with the political work of preparedness and professionalism to consecrate “good” militarization as commonsensical and legitimate. These reforms thus inadvertently lend power to the notion of police as the “thin blue line” between extreme violence and innocent (white) society.

Representative Quotation Police common sense translates violence from a method of enforcing white supremacy and maintaining class dominance into an apolitical means toward the righteous end of law enforcement.

ALIENATED SPECIES AND UNSETTLED ECOLOGIES: LOCATING “REDNECK” CONSERVATION IN THE RACIAL DISCOURSE OF “ASIAN” CARP INVASION AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract Science studies scholars identify parallels between anti-immigrant and anti-invasive species rhetoric but have yet to consider how this linked racial discourse of invasion functions as part of a settler colonial project or what alternative forms of conservation arise through this confluence. Looking at this confluence through the lens of settler colonialism and Indigenous studies scholarship demonstrates how a form of environmental practice that I term “*redneck*” conservation reveals the racial and colonial logics of dominant invasive species discourses and practices. I propose the term *alienated species* to highlight these interconnections. Further, through a case study of “Asian” carp that explores social media, news media, and popular culture alongside Indigenous approaches, I argue that self-identified “redneck” settlers operationalize this discourse—alongside militaristic, masculinist embodiment—to position the “alien” as a foil against which they define whiteness and nativity while perpetuating Indigenous erasure. In this way, erasures of indigeneity and attacks against Asianness jointly produce the white male settled subject. In contrast, Indigenous communities engage a range of alternative responses to the carp and other alienated species within both formal land management strategies and everyday practices, such as harvesting. These responses reveal an Indigenous ethic of belonging that animates different ways of living on and providing care for the land, including the humans forced to live together.

Representative Quotation In this essay, I have argued that a racial discourse of invasion linking anti-immigrant rhetoric and normative responses to alienated species fortifies the US settler state.

(RE)MAPPING WORLDS: AN INDIGENOUS (STUDIES) PERSPECTIVE ON THE POTENTIAL FOR ABOLITIONIST AND DECOLONIAL FUTURES

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation The impacts of settler colonialism, and its tentacles of white supremacy, settler masculinity, and heteronormative patriarchy, are far-reaching and multifarious.

REFORMING THE CHORUS: INSURGENT COLLECTIVITIES IN HANSBERRY'S SMUG BOHEMIA

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation As Alton's fraught conversations with these friends reveal, *Sidney Brustein* is deeply concerned with the social relations and hierarchies produced by and through whiteness, even as those power structures go largely unacknowledged by many of its characters.

March 2024

CONVERSIONS OF JACOB HODGES: RELIGION, RACE, AND LABOR IN PRISON REFORM LITERATURE

AMERICAN RACISM

CRITICAL

Abstract Born to a free Black family, Jack Hodges (ca. 1763–1842) was arrested for the murder of a white man in 1819 and served a term at New York's Auburn State Prison, the world-famous prototype of industrial prison discipline, where he experienced a life-altering Christian conversion. Also known as Jacob Hodges, he became one of the nineteenth century's most famous incarcerated African Americans, appearing in popular crime writing, children's books, reform society reports, and spiritual biographies. Today, however, Hodges is unacknowledged, even among scholars of race and prison studies. My interdisciplinary essay advances both historical and interpretive claims. I reconstruct Hodges's life in the crucible of evangelical Protestantism, racial assimilation, and industrial market capitalism, which worked together, I argue, to shape the ideology of the modern prison system. I also analyze the vivid fantasies about Hodges that circulated in reformist literature. Unlike the majority of captives, whose struggles left only faint traces in the archives, Hodges was neither the object of dehumanizing violence nor the subject of coldly rational surveillance; he was listened to, admired, and treated with sympathy. As a case study in evangelical reformism's

sentimental, possessive style of love, the literature about Hodges poses special challenges and opportunities for abolitionist reading.

Representative Quotation In life, reformers' intercessions had benefited Hodges in substantial ways. By working with white authorities, he avoided hanging, received favorable treatment in prison, and secured an early release. In exchange, however, they made some heavy demands on Hodges. They expected him to remain available to them for intimate conversation, readily deferential to their wishes, compliantly renewing their pathos and their sense of righteousness, even after his release. They used his prison Bible for a prop. They demonstrated such extreme possessiveness toward Hodges that his Black neighbors wondered whether they had stolen his enshrouded body from its grave. After Hodges's death, evangelical reformers exploited his memory to pursue both material gains and affective intensities. Publishing accounts of his conversion, they solicited resources and political support for their enterprise. His conversion served as evidence that their prison ministry was competent to oversee the education of orphaned souls and the assimilation of dislocated laborers. They also gratified their own self-image as benevolent, spiritual agents in their culture.

RECLAIMING THE KOREAN WAR MINOR: BEYOND A POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD INNOCENCE

CRITICAL

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM

Abstract This essay employs the "Korean War minor" as a methodological lens to demonstrate the need for more Asian Americanist critique at the intersection of American childhood studies and empire studies. While scholars have shown how children and children's culture were central to advancing US Cold War policy at home and abroad, this body of research largely neglects to interrogate the centrality of whiteness to dominant constructions of children/childhood. Attending to childhood as a technology of racist, patriarchal, imperial power, I elucidate how the biopolitics of the Korean War produce juvenile Asian-raced and gendered bodies at the precarious boundaries of childhood, as not quite children but, rather, *childlike*. I grapple, in particular, with how to reclaim the "girl" from US military archives, as the rubric of the "boy-mascot" and "camptown woman" overdetermine and constrain how the girl is allowed to come into view. I develop and enact this decolonial practice of reclaiming the Korean War minor through an analysis of Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl*, a novel that is particularly invested in narrating the camptown girl into being. *Fox Girl* directs attention to the limits of a politics of childhood innocence and prompts a generative reconceptualization of childhood in relation to justice.

Representative Quotation As I have strived to demonstrate, innocence is an ideological fiction produced and mobilized by adults in service of a wide range of different but interconnected projects - white supremacy, US empire, Korean ethnic nationalism.

MINOR SETTLER GRIEF: KOREAN DIASPORA, SETTLER COLONIALISM, AND THE PASTORAL FANTASY IN *MINARI* (2021)

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract The critically acclaimed film *Minari* (2021), directed by Lee Isaac Chung, has been recognized for its emotionally moving on-screen representation of a rural Asian American experience. Building on transpacific scholarship, the present essay examines *Minari* as a narrative of "minor settler grief," an expression of grief by minor settlers that is closely tied to colonial and militarized aesthetics of earth across the Pacific. The article ties *Minari*'s Korean American farming efforts in 1980s Arkansas to the intersecting histories of settler colonialism in the US and Japanese empires and South Korean authoritarian developmentalism. It considers the Korean nativist aesthetics of earth at work in *Minari*, an aesthetics of pastoral fantasy that had served imperialism and authoritarian developmentalism, as well as anticolonial imaginations in modern Korea and the diaspora. The essay argues that minor settler grief functions by obscuring relationalities, such as the histories of Native American removal in present-day Arkansas. Mining these histories and visual references enables a critique of certain expressions of grief that produce settler colonial recognition and forgetting.

Representative Quotation Dean Itsuji Saranillio, following Trask, emphasizes that one needs to question "what one is doing rather than how one identifies" and when and why specific recognitions of Asian Americans take place within "paradigms of colonial thought and structures of feeling that uphold them," pointing to the settler colonial significance behind specific moments of Asian settler recognition.

NETWORKS OF APPREHENSION AND THE EVERYWHERE BORDER

AMERICAN XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Digital technologies that effectively hardwire oppressive suspicions are thus the very means the state uses to naturalize a more objective and effective means of border control.

UNPINNING *MADAMA BUTTERFLY*

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM BUT WITH TIME, REDEEMING PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

NEUTRAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Throughout "The Butterfly Process" and this production, BLO's engagement with *Madama Butterfly* has been driven by the call to critically contextualize the work, not only in the history of opera but also Asian American history, so as to convey the diverse lives of real people of Asian descent in the United States and what representations and performances of Japan onstage have meant for them.

AGENTS OF THE SETTLER STATE: INCARCERATED FILIPINO WORKERS, CONJUGAL MIGRATION, AND INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION AT THE IWAHIG PENAL COLONY

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay examines a conjugal migration program at the Iwahig Penal Colony in the early twentieth-century Philippines that was designed by American colonial administrators and built by incarcerated Filipino men. The penal colony was part of a settler colonial project that was pushing to transform Indigenous spaces into terrains primed for the influx of land-seeking migrants from Hispanicized islands. Before the prison was opened, Indigenous Tagbanua lived at the site, which had never been governed by Euro-American colonizers. US officials cast Tagbanua families as impediments to development. The penal colony's incarcerated men were from lowland areas that had come under colonial rule for centuries. Colonial administrators saw their labor, conversely, as the linchpin that would turn the land, and eventually the entire island, into a terrain for commercial agriculture. Bureaucrats worked to transport women to Iwahig who had been in romantic relationships with prisoners before their arrests in order to support this project. Even though only 10 percent of incarcerated men were ever joined by their female partners, state agents cynically characterized the nuclear families formed through conjugal migration as institutions that sat at the foundation of the penal colony's settler colonial goals. Ultimately, American colonizers used these logics to confiscate Indigenous land that they identified as "underutilized," and integrate it into the colonial political economy.

Representative Quotation This is a story about how the American colonial state used incarcerated, Hispanicized, Filipino men and their families as agents of settler colonization in an area of the Philippines that was claimed by the US but sat outside its colonial control.

"SEE DETROIT LIKE WE DO": WHITE SAVIOR CAPITALISM AND THE MYTH OF BLACK OBSOLESCENCE

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay investigates the phenomenon of wealthy white men who use financial means and power to "revive" Detroit after a perceived "death" through what we call white savior capitalism. This "death," popularized by media portrayals of decline, relies on projecting an image of Detroit, a Black-majority city on stolen Native land, as a vacant, postindustrial "frontier" despite the continued existence and resistance of Black and Indigenous residents. We trace the prehistory of white savior capitalism to the area's eighteenth-century conquest by French settlers, the exclusionary redevelopment policies of Mayor Coleman Young's administration (1974–94), and Detroit's use of federal antipoverty funds and eminent domain to establish a General Motors Plant in the Poletown neighborhood. Finally, we demonstrate how the recent and ongoing "rediscovery" of Detroit by businesspeople such as Dan Gilbert gave rise to white savior capitalism. Parallel to these developments, activist movements in the Black Left have presented alternative solutions and imagined futures that include Black and Native Detroit.

Representative Quotation In what follows, we approach the obsolescence of Black labor as a white capitalist's fantasy, albeit one that is valuable for what it reveals about race, power, and the political economy of Detroit and other Black-majority cities located on Native land.

June 2024

THE OIL PAINTINGS IN THE DEPARTMENT STORE: *THE ROBE* AND RACIALIZED TASTEMAKING IN 1950S DETROIT

AMERICAN RACISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay examines the promotion of Twentieth Century–Fox's production of *The Robe* (1953)—which exhibited Dean Cornwell's oil paintings in local department stores in Detroit—in relation to the city's sociocultural context and racial tensions. It argues that ongoing issues in the city such as property ownership, racialized topographical boundaries, and class aspiration can be traced across Detroit's film culture in the postwar period, particularly in the burgeoning middlebrow culture of materialistic consumption. The promotional campaign's use of art exhibitions in department stores represented a significant moment for new ideas about class, culture, and racial identity in the city, contributing to the formation of the white suburban middle class and functioning as an example of racialized tastemaking. Accounts of this postwar cultural shift, particularly as it pertained to film culture, have underemphasized the importance of racial identity and exclusion to such formations. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates film history, material culture studies, and cultural history, this essay uses the Cornwell exhibition as a case study for understanding the impact of racial tensions on class identity in 1950s Detroit.

Representative Quotation These racialized tastemaking efforts - while in many ways characteristic of broader postwar cultural unification - were predicated on the ostracizing of Detroit's African American population, in an example of what we might call the "exclusionary middlebrow."

"THE END OF OUR WORLD": TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST LITERARY PRACTICE AND THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay considers how a transnational feminist literary practice, one that proceeds through the modality of rereading and rewriting, opens up the meaning and possibilities for the right to self-determination, against and beyond the settler state sovereignty into which it has hardened. It examines the 1995 short story "My Elizabeth," by the Arab American writer Diana Abu-Jaber, as an unexpected source of political theory, which rewrites self-determination from the perspective of occupied peoples—namely, Native peoples in the United States and Palestinians—subject to ongoing settler colonialism. Abu-

Jaber's portrait of intimacies between subjects "in transit" imagines how "radical futures past" become the source of alternate affective and political communities in the present.

Representative Quotation In short, colonial and postcolonial peoples have weathered enormous shifts in the doctrine of sovereignty, engineered first to legitimize conquest and colonial occupation and extraction, and then, with the incorporation of newly independent states into the international economic and political order, to obviate the many injuries and far-reaching damage inflicted by colonialism under the guise of neutrality and universality.

PERTENENCIA MUTUA: INDIGENOUS OAXACANS CONTESTING SETTLER COLONIAL GRAMMARS

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

Abstract Drawing on *settler colonial grammar of place*, the colonial practice of naming and renaming Native land through mapmaking processes that historically deny, erase, and homogenize Indigenous communities, this essay argues that Indigenous Oaxacans disrupt settler colonial renaming of land by engaging in their community's collective understanding of *pertenencia mutua* (mutual belonging)—an Indigenous Oaxacan relational consciousness of belonging across Abya Yala ("the Americas") that allows them to recognize their role as Indigenous visitors on Native land and as Native to Abya Yala. Theorizing through *pertenencia mutua* offers a deep understanding of Indigenous efforts to (re)build communities in their struggle against settler colonial violence, including through naming practices and grammar of place. Using semistructured interviews, oral histories, and social media content, I analyze how Indigenous Oaxacan young adults engage on the ground and on social media to unsettle colonially named places by placing their identity and their own communities in relational existence. Such unsettlings call for the retheorization of place.

Representative Quotation *Settler colonial grammar of place (or settler grammar)*, a framework by Goeman, as the colonial practice of naming and renaming Native land, which is a mapmaking process informed by "settler colonial spatial logics" that historically makes Indigenous peoples and communities invisible, becomes useful in considering how Indigenous Oaxacans acknowledge their presence on Native lands.

SWITCHING OFF WITH SLEEPCASTS: INSOMNIAC LISTENING AND SONIC SELF-CARE

AMERICAN CLASSISM

Abstract Meditation apps present mindful listening as sonic self-care: a pathway to managing anxiety, depression, insomnia, and the distractions of other digital media. This essay investigates the collection of audio "sleepcasts" produced by Headspace, a Silicon Valley digital wellness corporation that claims over seventy million users of its meditation app. Sleepcasts are designed to extend media engagement and the productive labor of self-care beyond waking hours and past the threshold of consciousness. As they guide listeners through "night-time journeys" to palliative virtual escape zones, sleepcasts choreograph a

CRITICAL

CRITICAL

sensory fade-out from hypervigilant insomniac listening to oblivious somnolence. I show how Headspace drew on a century-old scientific model of sleep as conditioned performance, blended with the domestic ritual of the children's bedtime story, to conjure fantasies of restorative travel, fulfilling work, and intimate relationships with virtual caregivers. These sedative audio journeys follow tourist itineraries shaped by colonialism, aligning "mindfulness" with the privileges of cosmopolitan mobility. By tethering sleepcasts to bedtime, Headspace cultivates nightly listening as ritualized self-care that is the mirror image of one's day job—the labor of rest that makes the next day possible. Meanwhile, listeners remain productive participants in the attention economy even as they fall asleep.

Representative Quotation As listeners "switch off," they remain in stand-by mode, continuing to generate data about their intimate habits, anxieties, and comforts while their Headspace subscriptions auto-renew in the app store. They are productive and useful even as they lose consciousness, immersed in the virtual worlds and fantasy jobs that Headspace offers as functional substitutes for extended rest, actual travel, or a sustainable workload. This is the app's call to "cruel optimism": perhaps switching off with sleepcasts could pave the way to finding fulfilling work, taking an actual vacation, or participating in a vibrant and welcoming community. One night at a time, sleepcasts invoke these dreams as they are indefinitely deferred.

"ENDURING DRUGS"

AMERICAN RACISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Indeed, the deregulation of medications like buprenorphine allows white middle-class Americans to access addiction medications easily with much less surveillance in contrast to the daily dosing regimen of methadone most often relegated to racialized spaces. This is just one of many spatial corrections fueled by racial capitalism to allow whites to hold on to their privileged position under late capitalism.

EDGEWORK AND EXCESS: JIMI HENDRIX, THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF FUZZ, AND THE REHEARSAL OF BLACK LIBERATION

AMERICAN RACISM BUT THE INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDS IT

NEUTRAL

Abstract This essay shows how Jimi Hendrix's experiments with fuzz anticipated notyet-audible sonic worlds and evinced Blackness in sound. Focusing on the American guitarist's debut album, *Are You Experienced* (1967), I describe fuzz as an entryway into the politico-theatrical scene of Black sociality. My analysis pivots on two axes: edgework and excess. I argue that Hendrix's pursuit of new sonic territory, as well as the mathematical-electrical engineering that brought such sounds into being, can be read as an aesthetic practice of edgework, but also that the resulting music—which early reviewers described as "hellish," "freaky," "unimaginable," and "manic"—acts as a sign of fuzz's unruly excess. Across my analysis, I am in conversation with Matthew Morrison's theory of "Blacksound," which shows

how US popular music attempts to essentialize and delimit Black performativity. If Hendrix's fuzz tone is audible as an enactment of fugitivity born from a tradition of radical Black aesthetics, I argue, then its unruly and anarchistic ethos refutes racial essentialism, insisting on agency, beauty, and life in the face of social death. Through this intervention, I develop a theory of "rehearsal" as a future-oriented Black performance sensibility that creates the conditions in which living otherwise becomes imaginable and achievable.

Representative Quotation In this rubric, the historical development of US popular music unfolds as a dual process of cultural co-optation and erasure. Even as Morrison recounts the historical processes by which US popular music has attempted to dispossess Black people, he emphasizes that the diversity of sounds produced by Black people often resist and cut such systems of containment.

NATIVE SURVIVANCE AND THE VIOLENT PLEASURES OF RESIGNIFYING THE COWBOY

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/IMPERIALISM

No Abstract

Representative Quotation Whereas racist or patriarchal exclusions may mark the identificatory limits of the cowboy, for Indigenous peoples, the problem is one not of exclusion but of colonial violence: of attempted genocide.

CRITICAL

December 2024

ASIAN INCLUSION AND THE RACIAL PEDAGOGY OF ALLYSHIP IN JAMES A. MICHENER'S COLD WAR NOVELS

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM

Abstract This essay examines the Cold War cultural politics of Asian inclusion through the Cold War novels of the popular mid-twentieth-century American writer James A. Michener. An analysis of his Korean War novel, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1953), and his historical novel, *Hawaii* (1959), draws out the transnational dimension of his representation of Asian inclusion and the constitutive role that US militarism plays in this. Michener's novels show a cultural vision of an American way of life for Asians built from the sites of combat and war ruins. By tracing what it calls a racial pedagogy of allyship in Michener's cultural construction of East Asian subjectivity, the essay queries how a flexible and dynamic hierarchy of developmentalism guides Asian inclusion in postwar US imperial formation. Contending with the limits of Cold War racial liberalism for Asians entails an active rethinking of ideals such as freedom, justice, and equality against Cold War militarism.

CRITICAL

Representative Quotation This essay engages with this Cold War liberal sincerity that allowed a cultural warrior like Michener to envision US occupation as beneficent based on the premise that his Cold War novels contain important ideas on US militarism and East Asian subjectivity that have been overlooked in studies of racial liberalism.

TOWARD AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF MONEY: RACIAL CAPITALISM, STAGFLATION, AND UNEMPLOYMENT AS ECONOMIC POLICY

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM/XENOPHOBIA

CRITICAL

Abstract This essay details the economic austerity of the 1970s during the era of stagflation and monetary instability. It describes the role of racism, patriarchy, and other social systems of difference in these policy choices, and thus argues that an intersectional analysis is critical to understanding the fabrication of money. As the US dollar transitioned fully off the gold standard, policymakers tolerated significant unemployment as they sought to manage inflation. The unemployment and economic violence of this era was widespread, but not evenly shared. Instead, policymakers constructed monetary stability and faith in fiat currency on the backs of the most vulnerable. However, grassroots movements, such as Coretta Scott King's Full Employment Action Council and the National Welfare Rights Organization, pushed for alternative solutions to both inflation and wagelessness. By outlining these contests, I suggest that although violence has been intertwined with the history of money, critical analyses of money also reveal shared interdependencies across the world.

Representative Quotation During this era, existing relations of racism, patriarchy, and other social systems of difference were renovated and provided explanatory paradigms for policymakers' choices, as they fabricated monetary stability on the backs of the most vulnerable.

MISSIONARY POSITIONS: HOW AMERICAN EVANGELICALS LEARNED TO LOVE GLOBAL AIDS WORK, 1985-2005

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM/HOMOPHOBIA, BUT THERE ARE ALSO BENEFITS

NEUTRAL

Abstract From the mid-1980s to mid-2000s, American missionaries conducted information campaigns across the United States to change US evangelicals' perceptions of the AIDS epidemic and secure their support for global AIDS work. Drawing on colonial discourses about suffering foreign bodies and souls, missionaries conditioned US evangelicals to shift their feelings about AIDS from disgust to grief, which activated practices of compassion. Evangelicals then funded abstinence-only sex education courses packaged as AIDS prevention programs across the Global South. Missionaries' messaging facilitated US evangelicals' transformation in these decades from the most implacable foes of people with HIV/AIDS domestically to some of the biggest supporters of AIDS work internationally. Assessing US evangelicals' changing attitudes about and involvement with the AIDS epidemic reveals how transnational religious networks linked US conservative political

priorities to global health humanitarianism and how religious actors expanded American global power in a postcolonial context.

Representative Quotation Rhetoric spotlighting families assuaged evangelicals' homophobia by portraying foreign people with HIV/AIDS as heterosexual, and this rhetoric also associated the epidemic with the chance to redeem families, a cause that would appeal to evangelicals who were fighting for "family values" in the United States.

AMERICA'S POVERTY IN THE SECOND GILDED AGE

AMERICAN RACISM/SEXISM/CLASSISM

CRITICAL

No Abstract

Representative Quotation That tired narrative—that if only the poor made better choices about childbearing, employment and education, and criminalized activity, they would enjoy better lives—ignores the structural violence at the heart of our capitalist system.

TRANSPACIFIC MUUMUUS AND THE RISE OF JAPANESE NEOCOLONIAL TOURISM IN HAWAII

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

CRITICAL

Abstract Introduced by American missionaries during the 1820s, the loose-fitting Mother Hubbard muumuu undergarment was indigenized by Native Hawaiian women into a dress embodying modern Pacific femininity. But it was Japanese textile and garment exports that fueled the mass production of muumuus as neocolonial tourist commodities under US-Japan trade agreements and postwar export-led growth policy. Using magazines and newspapers in Japan, as well as archival material from Hawai'i, this essay explores the transpacific discourse and political economy of the muumuu's reinvention into a garment that would mobilize middle-class Japanese women's participation in Hawai'i's neocolonial tourism industry. It illuminates how the transpacific muumuu's circuits of production, distribution, and desire drew Japanese consumer practices into Hawai'i's restructuring from industrial agriculture to international tourism. The movement of Japanese textiles and the women who wore them integrated Japan, Hawai'i, and the United States in the formation of the neocolonial Pacific's preeminent consumer space.

Representative Quotation While postwar imperial culture in Hawai'i has been characterized by neocolonial Americanization operating through the guise of autonomy and civil rights "granted" to Hawaiians and Asians under US statehood, a transpacific lens elucidates how Japan's postwar alignment as a deimperialized US ally entrenched another crucial layer to the liberal disavowal of formal colonialism in the Pacific. By focusing on the muumuu's transpacific circulation, this essay resists a "nation-centered narrative of U.S. exceptionalism" and instead demonstrates how relations between Japan, Hawai'i, and the continental United States made the modern neocolonial Pacific world.

"DEATH BEFORE REENLISTMENT": VANDALISM AND SABOTAGE ONBOARD THE USNS *GENERAL JOHN POPE*

CRITICAL

AMERICAN RACISM/IMPERIALISM/CLASSISM

Abstract The USNS *General John Pope*, which had ferried troops across the Pacific throughout World War II and the Korean War, was reactivated in August 1965 as a civilian-run ship of the Military Sea Transport Service. Although official histories of the *Pope* evoke a sense of pride, discipline, and martial prowess, four hundred vandalized canvas bunk beds taken from the ship and preserved by Texas Tech University's Vietnam Graffiti Project tell an altogether different narrative of the years from 1965 to 1970. I argue that GI tagging and vandalism onboard the *Pope* not only functions as a subterranean archive of soldiers' war experience but also falls in line with a larger pattern of soldiers' resistance, which mobilized quotidian practices to sabotage military infrastructure and produce bonds of solidarity in the concomitant traditions of racial and working-class struggle. Ultimately, the present essay claims vandalism as both a form of revolt and a critically understudied resource for historical scholarship.

Representative Quotation I do know, however, that these soldiers were disproportionately working class and Black, that many of them felt disillusioned by the failed promise of economic mobility through military service, and that some had started to see their position in the war as a function of classed society.

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