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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

What is this 'New' in the *New* American Studies?

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AMERICAN STUDIES IN A MOMENT OF DANGER. George Lipsitz. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). 336 pp. Paper. $19.95. ISBN: 0-8166-3949-3.

THE NEW AMERICAN STUDIES. John Carlos Rowe. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). 304 pp. Paper. $1995. ISBN: 0-8166-3578-1.

At the American Studies Association (ASA) meetings several years back, my schedule necessitated that I skip a much-anticipated session on directions in the field of American Studies that I would otherwise not miss. My colleague/roommate for the conference was able to attend the session and promised to fill me in on what transpired when she returned to our room that evening. Several hours later when we met up at the hotel I asked her, "So, how did it go? How was the session?" "Oh, you know," she grimaced. "The same old thing. Everyone was arguing about how we should do American Studies. Blah, blah, blah--shut up and do your work." I looked at her and nervously smiled in admiration of her candor, and we both began to laugh aloud. Our laughter did not generate from not being concerned about or engaged in the seriousness of the discourses of the field and its transformation, for which we were both committed to in our own varying ways. To the contrary, our joking more accurately generated out of the anxiety many Americanists feel from having to repeatedly validate and legitimate what American Studies is, what it is that we do as practitioners, and why it is that we do it. Often, these insecurities and preoccupations inform our own writing and cultural work, no doubt a by-product of being in a field that hinges its identity and reputation on self-reflexivity, engaging wider publics in the world, and always trying to 'do the right thing'—however broadly or distinctly defined and construed—in intellectual, institutional, and cultural matters.

This self-reflexive turn is apparent in writings on the field since the past three decades. A historical and institutional analysis of the field published in 1979 by Gene Wise in *American Quarterly,* "Paradigm Dramas in American studies,"[1] continues to inspire and inform scholarship and teaching, as well as other interdisciplinary essays that marked significant shifts in the field published in Lucy Maddox's edited collection *Locating American Studies*.[2] Thematic journal issues on the state of American Studies in the journal *American Studies* has showcased theoretical interventions by newer and established scholars on cultural studies, the history of American Studies, and American Studies in the age of globalization. [3] Provocative statements on American Studies over the past couple decades have also come from the American Studies Association Meetings' presidential addresses, the most cited in recent scholarship being addresses delivered by former ASA presidents Michael Cowan, Linda Kerber, Amy Kaplan, Alice Kessler Harris, Mary Helen Washington, Janice Radway, and George Sanchez. These scholars helped us to think through what it is that we want American Studies to do within and outside of the academy. Their presidential addresses made an argument for diverse scholarship, intercultural and radical pedagogies, and community

involvement. Some of the issues taken up in their ASA presidential speeches since the late nineteen eighties made arguments for multi-cultural education, affirmative action, an interrogation of the work of the nation-state, the power of naming, the centrality of African American studies and popular culture studies to American Studies, and the global implications of our engagement with local communities.

Scholarship on the state and growth of American Studies continues to find voice in manuscript form as well. University of California Press and University of Minnesota Press have American Studies publication series, suggesting that a new generation of scholars will continue to add to and enrich American Studies scholarship. The former press published John Rowe's edited text *Postnationalist American Studies* in 2000, which includes an array of case studies on American and Ethnic Studies and has accompanying syllabi for each article. Taken together, the case studies and syllabi in *Postnationalist American Studies* present a diverse vision for what scholars are now defining as the new and prescriptive American Studies.[4] *The Futures of American Studies* (2002), edited by Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman for Duke University Press' New Americanist Series, is a collection of previously published and new statements about the field and it includes contemporary approaches to Ethnic Studies and cultural history.[5] All of these special journal editions, edited anthologies, and public speeches map the impact of cultural shifts and cleavages on U.S. based scholarship through cultural analysis, historical contextualization, and institutional reflection. Further, these texts exemplify how American Studies, as Norm Yetman writes in the introduction to the special journal issue of *American Studies*, *From the Cultural Concept to Cultural Studies* (1997), is an "idea and a movement."[6]

This self-conscious approach to analyzing our own interdisciplinary discipline, the works produced in the field, and we as practitioners, might appear boldly narcissistic to those who do not work within the field of American Studies. Yet, for those within the discipline, the self-reflexive turn that pervades our conscience inspires our best intellectual work and actions. It also reflects the healthy desire to evaluate our scholarship and teaching and its effect on the communities from which we come that nurture and sustain us. None of us in American Studies are perfect, but the unrelenting desire to revisit, revamp, and produce the new American Studies suggests that many of us work with exhaustion toward those ends. We can not just "shut up and do our work," as my colleague mused at our ASA meeting, because good work in American Studies—the intellectual, institutional, and cultural project that examines American cultures in part and as a whole from a cross-cultural, geo-political, and transnational perspective—depends on us doing it with purpose and care.[7] As Jay Mechling writes, American Studies practitioners must "help write the history of the movement to articulate… the assumptions and conditions governing [our] practices, and to be alert always to the ways we might be deceiving ourselves or, worse, *harming others*."[8]

George Lipsitz's *American Studies in A Moment of Danger* and John Carlos Rowe's *The New American Studies* heed Mechling's prescription and grapple with what the 'new' in the *new* American Studies might mean to scholars, teachers, and students in this and other related interdisciplinary fields such as Ethnic Studies, women's studies, globalization studies, and queer studies. These two texts chart the history, problems, and directions in the field; they use innovative and established theories and interdisciplinary methodologies to elucidate the larger cultural meanings and social consequences of their comparative, textual examples, and they do so with the self-critical exactness that defines contemporary and the best of former

American Studies scholarship. Lipsitz examines the work of social movements, cultural workers, and artists as case studies in beginning the work of intervening in disparate social relations experienced disproportionately by aggrieved groups. He employs this material as exempla in owning up to and therefore transforming institutional problems in American and Ethnic Studies. Rowe positions American Studies within theoretical frameworks that are often construed as threatening to, or in opposition to established approaches to the field, such as British cultural studies, postmodernism, and post-structuralism. He also uses textual examples from literature, popular culture, and the politics of everyday life as vital equipment for American Studies teaching and scholarship.

American Studies in a Moment of Danger and *The New American Studies* asks that the new American Studies in the twenty-first century honor former scholarship through critique and integration, become increasingly attentive to the cultures and practices of everyday life, and evaluate artistic production as insights and answers to creating and theorizing a better America. This is necessary, writes Lipsitz, because "new social relations create new social subjects who inevitably create new epistemologies and new ontologies—new ways of knowing and new ways of being"(7-8). Or, in the words of Rowe, the new

> American Studies in the twenty-first century lends itself…to the borderlands dividing the 'America' of traditional 'American Studies' from the several Americas so often ignored and thus trivialized by that disciplinary title, as well as the territories defined to the west, north, and east of the United States, drawing again into view Asian, Canadian, African, and European borderlands in the construction of the imagined and utopian community of a U.S. multiculture. In this regard, the comparatists approach [that reflects the field today] has the advantage of being considerably flexible in its expansions and constrictions (16).

American Studies in a Moment of Danger consists of three sections: 1.) American Studies and Social movements, 2.) Race, Culture, and Collective Struggle, and 3.) Facing Up to What's Killing You. In the first section, a look at three decades, i.e., the thirties, sixties, and eighties, provide the historical framework for Lipsitz to press forward with the project of the new American Studies in the first section, but comparisons to other historical moments, including our current one, does not go unexamined. In Lipsitz's second and third sections, he directs attention to the power of social movements, popular culture, and art. He also ventures into the thorny area of the professional ethics of scholars and matters of institutional bureaucracy symptomatic of the human condition, but often avoided by most writings about the field.

To begin with, Lipsitz draws from Michael Dennings' *The Cultural Front* to highlight the text's contribution to American Studies. Lipsitz argues, "For Denning, the Popular Front during the New Deal and World War II is not so much the creation of the Communist Party and its front organizations." To the contrary, the Popular Front reflects the "visible manifestation of a new popular imagination provoked by the experiences of everyday life, labor, politics, and culture in a time of turmoil and transformation" (38). *Cultural Front* is thus utilized by Lipsitz because of its as ability to engage, with nuance and specificity, the varying social movements and intellectual efforts that constituted the Popular Front of the thirties. Amy Kaplan's discussion of early Americanist work helps him problematize errors of American exceptionalism and lack of attention to questions of race, gender, and sexuality in a global context that handicapped the Popular Front, which he too notes throughout several chapters. Lipsitz concludes that we need the thirties, and therefore must not forget its legacy,

because the political formation of The Popular Front provides an example of how change emanates from the creation of sustained alliances that transgress limited affiliations and venture across social categories. It also provides us with reflections that may help shape and direct social relations in our present time and futures. As practitioners of American Studies, the more radical roots of the field in the 30s and 40s, usually dismissed as the golden age of American exceptionalist zealots, models how we might envision our current work in response to the problems in culture. It also asks that practitioners become a part of the social movements that respond to the needs of society and to consider this work integral to, rather than as a mere extension of, what we do in the field.

Lipsitz's chapter "Dancing in the Dark" distinguishes the sixties from popular representations of the decade espoused in rhetoric from the way in which it was lived and shaped by activists and artists. For all of the distortions and mistakes of the decade and of its key players and transformers, the work towards fair housing, employment opportunities, and exposure of domestic terrorism perpetuated by the state offers contestatory memories of a decade that might still bear fruit for inspiring social movements today. Herein lies the most significant work of Lipsitz's chapter on the sixties' active players and political naysayers: the turmoil, trials, and tribulations forayed in the sixties were partially corrected and implemented by the carefully organized social movements of the seventies. Given this insight, a realization of the very troubling times in our own historical moment can help American Studies practitioners eschew a mythicized sixties as well as thirties. Instead of bemoaning the passing of the two decades' social movements and descending into the trap of neo-liberalist rhetoric that celebrates past activism as a way to elide current and future social responsibility, Lipsitz reveals critical impetuses to write about, form, and support the existing grassroots movements and people that affect change on local and global levels everyday.

While social movements provide the material to see how real change may occur in culture, Lipsitz's last chapter in section one on the eighties, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen," examines the influence of popular culture on studies in American and cultural studies. Morrison's *Sula*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Dizzy Gillespie's and Duke Ellington's jazz, popular film, fashion, and literature provide brief examples for Lipsitz to raise new questions about the complicated nature of national identity and the cultural work of popular culture. Lipsitz models ways to think about centering diverse voices in American Studies beyond add and stir integration, thereby challenging the slightly archaic and provincial "what is an American" question that pervaded earlier scholarship and teaching in the field. Those familiar with the version of this groundbreaking essay published in *American Quarterly* in 1990, which discusses the specter of British Cultural Studies and its influence (mostly for the better) on American Studies, will notice significant revisions of the essay on the author's part. In this version, Lipsitz has inserted a useful synthesis of the cultural and political environment of the nineteen eighties that contextualize his diverse examples from popular music and culture.

The rise of neo-conservatism via the Reagan-Bush years provides the social-political framework for considering how the theoretical turn in American Studies toward British, French, and Italian cultural studies and theorists provided the analytical tools necessary for theorizing a post-industrial, post-civil rights society marked by hybrid and multiple racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and differently-abled identities. Learning to listen to the popular artifacts of diverse cultures over historical time and *hear* what they have to say, argues Lipsitz, makes for a more empathetic and materially grounded American Studies. Lipsitz

reviews theoretical approaches most absorbed in American Studies, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, Derridian deconstruction, subaltern subjectivity as theorized by Gramsci and developed further by post-colonial theorist Spivak, and refutes new directions in the field as careerist and trendy. To the contrary, Lipsitz contends that these frameworks revolutionized the study of culture and made the questions, process, and conclusions of the field intellectually sophisticated and more appropriate to a world in a state of constant ebb and flow. Lipsitz asserts the study of popular culture in American Studies as a serious scholarly endeavor, which exposes how Americans come to know and define themselves through what they consume and expend, how ideology is deployed, upheld, and resisted in the complex realm of mass culture.

In part two of *American Studies In A Moment of Danger*, the Miami music scene, poster art, and seventies cinema show changes in social relations and how interethnic, artistic, and political alliances were formed among unsuspecting actors. The backdrop of Miami allows Lipsitz to show how sexuality and culture informed the lyrics of musicians, but they acted in ways not always congruent with popular understandings of their music. Some may be surprised to read rap group's 2 Live Crew's front man, Luther Campbell (aka Luke Skywalker) campaigned for former US Attorney General Janet Reno's run for prosecuting attorney in Dade County, Florida in 1990, and sponsored voter registration drives in the very same county. The group and front man gained media attention for the censorship of their rap album *As Nasty as the Wanna Be* and their sexual, and some argued misogynistic, public performances the same year. Lipsitz reveals Campbell's activism as a possible hidden agenda of those who orchestrated the witch-hunt to end 2 Live Crew's perceived obscene musical platform. His example as well as other culturally hybrid music acts show how music is tied to political movements, and how the embrace of rap, hip hop, jazz, pop, and rhythm and blues among Black and Latino groups might act as an example for critical formations outside of music subcultures. This suggests that the two groups and other historically marginalized people might rethink the tendency to fight over scarce resources and instead see the utility in forming interethnic alliances for political ends.

In another case study in Lipsitz's book, he reveals anxieties and struggles of communities as represented in the poster art of Chicano activists/artists where they decry immigration legislation and the always-already illegal status assumed of undocumented workers. Lipsitz writes of many Chicano poster artists, including Yolanda Lopez, Rupert Garcia, and Rodolfo (Rudy) Cuellar, whose work defines oppositional thinking about their communities. As public artifacts and statements, their work reaches wide audiences and stakes a rightful claim in the public spaces that mark their historical legacies of class and land struggle. Through this work, Chicano communities find political expression and contest to their subjugated status through the inversion of nationalistic signs used against them. Films *Lean On Me*, *Dirty Harry*, blaxploitations's *Blacula*, and *Which Way is Up*? work in a different fashion than poster art midway through Lipsitz's text. These and other popular films in the seventies and eighties are a refraction of conservative cultural attitudes and are indirect evidence and inventions of the social history of racial and ethnic groups.

Since "people with power want those they rule to be divided and to fight each other so they will not unite and fight side by side against their true enemy," aggrieved groups find themselves in the position of "crabs in a barrel," reveals Lipsitz in one of the most daring statements in his text. Here, he takes on the actual players in the academy and in social movements. Lipsitz prescribes that divisions among subordinated groups may still produce

alliances if they inhabit the strength and courage to cross boundaries, dismantle borders, and work toward issues and agendas that help forge collective change for aggrieved communities. In order to not see the gains of one group as taking away from another group, interethnic alliances must see the utility in forging ahead with trust over debilitating trepidation. Various groups face different forms of oppression at different historical moments, but he argues that members of marginalized groups are "more powerful with allies" than they are when they try to operate alone (125).

Suspicion among aggrieved groups because of their successes and perceived mistakes, in-group and out-group jealousies, and failing to draw upon the multiplicity of identities to find common ground, are typical reasons academic and social-political alliances fall apart. As an answer to this, Lipsitz asks that we strive to collectively overturn contemporary racial profiling and police brutality, unfair housing access, discriminatory labor practices, the prison industrial complexes' choke hold on class, ethnic, and gender minorities to help individuals see the need to advocate for groups and not obsess over individual liberation from oppression. Since the aforementioned circumstances affect a broad range of groups, the fight to end these oppressions offer opportunities for interethnic alliances, with the hopes of turning into lasting relationships that might withstand repeated unfair assaults from institutional, large scale, systemic forms of racism.

Lipsitz returns to similar prescriptive analysis of institutions as his text ends, written with brilliance in the chapter "Taking a Position and the War of the Position." He argues that success in collaborative efforts is reliant on the following factors: 1.) realizing no social movement or their practices is perfect, but that does not mean they cannot provide insights for change, 2.) avoiding epistemological solipsism by listening to the stories and experiences of others who face discrimination and learning to hear their words, 3.) working to avoid efforts for self-actualization only, and instead concentrate on the type of social critique and awareness that allows us to see how oppressive social structures work to suppress groups as well as individuals, 4.) letting go of an assumed perpetual marginal status, which hinders self-reflexivity, 5.) foregoing the tendency to position oneself as the "last radical town" and to not demean those who disagree with perceived radical tactics as against you, 6.) learning not to pull each other down like crabs in a barrel, 7.) ceasing to impose on our allies misdirected anger, engaging in winner takes all politics, and poisoning the well from which all in the academy must drink, 8.) avoiding the engagement in identity politics and instead learn to craft identities based on political and social movements.

In the spirit of Stuart Hall and Gramsci, he writes that our work towards transformation in the public sphere and academe must never forget the need to master the difficult task of winning the war of maneuver where liberatory ideas and practices replace repressive ideology. Thus, we must "not only win the war of maneuver by controlling resources and institutions, [we] must win the war of position as well." This means that not only is "hegemonizing hard work," as Stuart Hall writes, but also this means that hegemony is not a bad thing at all, depending on what the hegemony or dominating force is and does. If a new historic bloc creates a cultural hegemony directed at a redistribution of wealth, resources, and transforms the modern academy for the better, that would be a hegemony worth fighting to maintain. Lipsitz adds about hegemony and the repressive nature of many academic institutions that, "the things that can kill you can also cure you—if you know the right way to use them" (287).[9]

John Carlos Rowe's *The New American Studies* addresses similar discourses in the field as Lipsitz, but he pays less attention to cultural politics and social movements. Instead, he concentrates on a re-reading of literary texts and close readings of popular film, television, media, and social problems with the hope that his work "might provoke and challenge colleagues also committed to broadening the scope of American Studies and articulating its relationship with complimentary fields" (xxviii). The text is organized by theoretical essays on comparative analysis, postmodernism, globalization, the rise of cultural studies and by textual examples on writers Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and Muriel Rukeyser, high art and visual culture, war and consequence, and the rhetoric of the nation's domestic relations. Rowe's chapters on postmodernism, poststructuralism, and cultural studies infiltration into American Studies grapple with postmodern arguments, texts, and discourses relevant to institutional and intellectual shifts in the field and at times, in the classroom. He focuses on the expansion of literary conventions in the mid sixties to mid seventies, post-structuralist approaches to scholarship that characterized intellectual work in the eighties, and the nature of the post-industrial society and information technologies that changed individuals' relationship to society. He argues that by isolating the "contact zones"[10] between and within cultures, countries, and people—as argued and theorized elsewhere by Mary Louise Pratt—literary texts become mirrors of the "cultural and historical conditions that produced it," and are thus informative for studying culture and society at large (11-12). Throughout, Rowe accomplishes the ambitious task of interweaving and adding texture to literary canons, popular tastes and practices, and public policy.

As our field is usually under siege by universities and conservative critics, a comparative American Studies model, Rowe begins with his first chapter, sustains itself with intellectuals who seek to educate students, critics, and university administrators that the work we do in American Studies is important to the educational process and society as a whole. Like Lipsitz, Rowe does so without digressing into celebratory notions of the field in disingenuous and destructive ways that hides rather than illuminates the contradictions of social and political life. Rowe asserts that comparative American Studies might center on unpacking conflict and commonality in the U.S., and the diverse cultures within, beyond, and between our imagined, although aggressively enforced, physical borders. For particular institutions, the comparatist model grows effectively when American Studies programs learn to work "cooperatively with traditionally allied programs in ethnic, women's, gender, sexuality, and cultural studies" and participate in the difficult work of "spelling out protocols for sharing courses and existing faculty defining new faculty positions, and recruiting new faculty" (60-61). In this way, American Studies becomes a collaborative, cooperative intellectual and institutional venture, as opposed to an imperialist project that subsumes ethnic, gender, and cultural studies in an umbrella fashion. For our students this is especially vital, because a truly comparatist model and institutional collaboration in American Studies helps students deal with the problems they are likely to incur in culture. It also provides "models … for negotiating their own multicultural contact zones" (14) instead of "superficial pluralism or deceptive assimilationism" (9).

Rowe explains how the post-modern turn in literature utilized the arguments targeted at less-conventional writing and turned it on its head to assert the merits of self-conscious literary writing that made its perceived faults virtues. Social changes prescribed in the stories of writers Pound, Eliot, and Faulkner, argues Rowe, did not make a break with history in their post-modern fiction. Rather, in congruent with post-modernist approaches to literature and the

novel, these authors recoup and disrupt established writing conventions to transform the nature of writing, texts, and social critique itself. Later works of the nineteen seventies by Maxine Hong Kingston and Louise Erdrich are introduced in Rowe's discussion as expanding post-modern approaches to writing even further, by centering the experiences and historical narratives of Asian Americans and American Indians. In so doing, these literary texts and others like them offer an alternative historical explanation of gender, race, and ethnic specificity absent from previous works of modernist literature.

Insofar as post-structuralism is intended to debunk myths that underpin Western conceptualizations of history and illustrates that there is no one meaning but a multiplicity of meanings to be found in cultural texts, post-structuralism is shown by Rowe to invoke a style dedicated to the precision of language in reflective ways that spur consciousness with the hopes of improving social relations. The language of post-modernism and post-structuralism is often dense and difficult to navigate through, but Rowe explains such a predicament as something that should turn our attention to the realization that reading and interpreting texts should be hard and thus requires hard work. Rowe encourages the need to slow down to figure out the contradictions and work theory and cultural studies poses to us, while remaining cognizant of the material implications of our political economy and slippages in language. This is, of course, a provocative position that would surely make many with aversions to cultural studies and theory feel intellectually challenged and uncomfortable. What then are the practical uses of Rowe's arguments for the American Studies classroom, where students are often initially uncomfortable with the claims of the cultural studies project and unfamiliar with navigating and understanding the mutually constitutive poles of the intellectual and cultural work of theory? Quoting Paul de Man Rowe justly includes: "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance."[11] Yet, he also adds that this does not mean we should not keep trying to make more clear how theory aides in overcoming "a narrowly nationalist or exceptionalist model" (79).

As Rowe leaves theoretical debates in American Studies and delves into his textual examples, his reading of Hawthorne, James, and Rukeysermodern creatively and in unexpected ways recover race, gender, class, and sexual relations and identities as unfixed and troubled by dominant culture belief systems not always apparent at first glance. A useful juxtaposition of nineteenth century women writers with the anxiety ridden, masculine narratives of James and Hawthorne expose their work to reflect fears of the growing self-sufficiency and autonomy of women in general and of the artistic achievement of artists such as the sculpture Harriet Hosmer and Maria Louisa Lander in particular. Hawthorn and James are not ideological replicas of each other in Rowe's chapters on literature; the former (Hawthorn) fixates on the female subject because of a feeling of dislocation of masculine authority and the latter (James) finds threatening the sexual relations and sexual aesthetic identified in the work of women artists and, perhaps, in James's own subconscious.

Other literary forces, such as the poetry of Muriel Rukeyser, is used as an example of an author's consecrated effort to expose material injustices in culture. Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, a long poem that lyrically illustrates Union Carbide's attempted cover up of nearly 2,000 workers who contacted pulmonary silicosis from exposure to dry silica, is partly from Rukeyser's own investigation and oral histories with the plant's victims. For Rowe, part of the mastery of this work is Rukeyser's mythic feminist aesthetic and reliance on the multiple voices of the workers affected by Union Carbide's cover up. *The Book of the Dead* documents workers' struggles but also manages to assert them as agents of change, as opposed to mere

victims of industrial corruption. Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* thus performs poetic justice in more than figurative ways, as its narrative "contends that the political an legal reforms demanded by the exposure of Union Carbide's deliberate endangerment of its workers must be accompanied by a broadly based reconceptualization of our social relations to the natural world" (141).

A discussion of literary production shifts to television, film, and public policy, as Rowe continues his examples that engage the new American Studies methodology. A chapter on representations of the Vietnam War provides a wealth of information on counter-stories to the dominant U.S. military discourse. Peter Davis' documentary *Hearts and Minds*, Lynda van Devanter's *Home Before Morning*, and the compilations *Bloods* and *Brothers* show the irony of being drafted "to fight a war of imperialist aggression against other subaltern peoples"(175).[12] Rowe intervenes in the less critical and dominant narratives of this war propagated by *Rambo* films and other films that on the surface appear progressive, such as *Courage Under Fire*. Many fictitious and autobiographical visual and literary narratives of the Vietnam War are deceptive in their insistence on understanding war through Anglo American male subjectivity or their "carefully composed" content that "does not question [U.S.] foreign policy and military conduct"(179). Here, Rowe's examples that counter this model would be complemented by exploring the place of Asian American soldiers who suffered and persevered in a war where they were perceived to look like, and therefore were often treated like, 'the enemy.' On this, Peter Kiang's work on Asian American Vietnam Veterans and PTSD, (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and the documentary *Looking Like the Enemy* on Asian American soldiers in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and after are particularly instructive.[13]

Rowe provides readers with close readings of fifties and seventies television shows, where he deconstructs gender, domesticity, and ethnic representations in the shows *Bewitched*, *I Dream of Jeanie*, and *I Love Lucy*. However, the last chapter's explanation of how ideologies of difference inform public policy will stand out for its grounded inquiry into contemporary social questions of family and nation. The representation of Cuban Americans as a sign of exotic difference, the American Dream, and capitalist ethos in *I Love Lucy* in his prior chapter on television provide an intellectual launching for his venture into similar matters in the debate of Elián González. Many readers will remember Elián González, a six-year-old migrant to the U.S., who found himself in the middle of a custody battle between his birth father in Cuba, and Cuban American relatives in Miami, Florida, while the nation via mass media voyeuristically watched. Ideological notions of family values became the underpin of whether the six year old would remain in the U.S. (he had entered the U.S. undocumented with his mother who died along the way) or return to Cuba to reside with his estranged father.

In the end, Elián González did return to Cuba, and dominant conceptualizations of the family as a matter of direct blood line and borders between nations and cultures remained in tact. González's case shows the imagined and material nature of physical borders. Rowe's analysis is particularly posthumous here, as in the wake of 9/11 borders have in fact—as he writes—become increasingly enforced in the name of national security, and the family remains a dominant signifier assumed to require national protection. Rowe's final chapter links his discussion of globalism, media, and new information technologies extremely well, as all are implicated in how the Elián González case was represented by the media, interpreted

by U.S. courts and domestic and foreign governments, and understood by the nation's constituents.

One thing Rowe and Lipsitz might address more directly is a matter I brought up earlier in regard to Rowe's examination of cultural studies, that is, the relevance of their texts beyond committed scholars to the field and their pertinence to training students in American Studies. Rowe makes mention of our struggle to encourage students to place their educations into their own hands and transgress traditional notions of the transmission of knowledge, such as the 'banking method' of instruction (i.e., a method where a perceived authority transmits knowledge to empty receptors). Yet, both authors could say more about the absolute need to use these texts and others like them in the classroom to train students in American Studies. Many students choose American Studies because of their desire to do interdisciplinary work, and even fewer graduate students, because of the interdisciplinary nature of our field, are likely to have undergraduate training in American Studies. Indeed, not too many students come to American Studies because of their love of or disagreement with the foundational writings of Vernon Louis Parrington, Perry Miller, Henry Nash Smith, and Leo Marx.[14] Given other fields' tendency not to place under critical examination its practices to the same extent American Studies does, reading about the history and competing discourses in the field might produce an epistemological ball of confusion for students.

Nevertheless, Rowe's and Lipsitz's texts and the discourses about our field are essential reading for courses that introduce students to American Studies, our theories and methodologies, as well as courses related to the issues Rowe and Lipsitz passionately engage: class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation. To learn from our past as a field and how at specific historical moments we responded as an intellectual collective—and not always in agreement and in the same way—is necessary to realizing the culpability in making sure we do not, to the best of our ability, perpetuate the problems in culture under examination. Critics of our field might bemoan such efforts and the proposed political nature of American and cultural studies work and writing as a whole. In response to such sentiments, Rowe astutely writes, "If knowledge production is not political, then what social function does it perform?" Liberal and interdisciplinary training is and should remain political, he continues, "Because liberal education prepares students to become thinking, critical, good citizens" (78).

There is no secret formula of success to our work. The new American Studies is not a magic bullet, nor is it uniformly accepted or practiced by all practitioners in the field. Still, Rowe and Lipsitz significantly inform how an interethnic and postnationalist American Studies might realize our mission as an intellectual and community development project, which is reliant upon ethical and proactive practices of American Studies practitioners and cultural workers. *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* and *The New American Studies* show that our struggle as scholars, teachers, and learners is to "tell the truth [in our scholarship] and not get trapped," (Lipsitz, 291) and to remember, "American Studies has a long tradition of social critique" and that "its practitioners should help recast debates about social justice" (Rowe, 148). Lipsitz and Rowe challenge their readers to become better scholars, colleagues, and students and to continue to grow and move skillfully and without fear into all that the twenty-first century holds for our futures.

Notes

[1] Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *American Quarterly* Volume 31: 3 (Fall 1979). See also Richard Horwitz, "Roots of American Studies" in *The American Studies Anthology* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001).

[2] Lucy Maddox ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of A Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[3] See the special issues in the journal *American Studies*: *From Culture Concept to Cultural Studies*, Volume 38:2 (Summer 1997); *American Studies: A Critical Retrospective*, Volume 40:2 (Summer 1999); *Globalization, Transnationalism, and the End of the American Century*, Volume 41:2/3 (Fall 2000).

[4] Barbara Bronson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Maillouix, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sanchez, Shelley Streeby, and Henry Yu organized under the rubric post-nationalist American Studies consortium in 1996 to present a new Americanist (or (re)visionary) approach to the theory and methods within the field. Their intellectual formation realizes the possible problems and concerns the term might have within the field (as do I). Thus, post-nationalist American Studies requires more discussion. By post-nationalist the authors do not mean the signifier of the nation is not important and without material implication. To the contrary, they assert that a post-nationalist American studies signifies the current nation-state, both in its performance of imperialism and exclusion, and in the possibilities of its constituents actively pursing anti-colonialist endeavors and cultural inclusion. See Barbara Bronson Curiel [et al], "Introduction," John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Postnationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3-6. See also the colloquium on postnationalist American Studies, "Dislocations: Transatlantic Perspectives on Postnational American Studies," in *The 49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies*, Issue 8 (Summer 2001).

[5] Donald Pease & Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002).

[6] Norm Yetman, "Introduction," *From Culture Concept to Cultural Studies*, *American Studies*, Volume 38:2 (Summer 1997), 7.

[7] As Barry Shank writes of the new American Studies, in its best moments it:

> Denaturalizes societal divisions along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality…repudiates the concept of a single American culture; it demystifies the amorphous American middle class, it strives to specify the interactive relationships between cultural production and material conditions; and it …deconstructs monolithic interpretations of American [cultures].

See Barry Shank, "Commentary to Robert Berkhofer's 'A New Context for a New American Studies,'" Lucy Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of American Studies* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 306.

[8] Jay Mechling, "Commentary to 'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies," in Lucy Maddox ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of A Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 213 (emphasis mine).

[9]In addition to Lipsitz's observations about university and academic politics, there are a host of recent

essays, books, and documentaries on diversity and the changing face of the academy that would help to add nuance to his arguments. See for example the documentary, *Shattering the Silences* (1997) on faculty of color in the academy, which is available from California Newsreel, 149 9th Street San Francisco, CA 94103. See also Lila Jacobs, Jose Cintron, and Cecil E. Canton, eds., *The Politics of Survival in Academia: Narratives of Inequality, Resilience, and Success* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990); Elizabeth Hadley Freydberg, "American Studies: Melting Pot or Pressure Cooker?" in Joy James ed., *Spirit, Space, Survival: African American Women in (White) Academe* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Lena Wright Myers, *A Broken Silence: Voices of African American Women in the Academy* (New York: Bergen and Garvey, 2002); Shirley Lim ed., *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe: Strangers in the Tower?* (Modern Language Association of America, 2000); Raymond Padilla ed., *The Leaning Ivory Tower: Latino Professors in American Universities* (New York: State University of New York, 1995); Devon Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson, ed., *Indigenizing the Academy: Native Academics Sharpening the Edge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) forthcoming.

[10] See Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession 91*, 33-41.

[11] The quote here is by Paul de Man from the edited text Wald Godzich, ed., *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 19.

[12] I abbreviated the titles in the text. The complete bibliographic information and a brief explanation of their subject matter is as follows: Peter Davis' *Hearts and Minds*, (1975) distributed in the U.S. by Warner Brothers, centers the experiences of an American Indian veteran; Lynda van Devanter and Christopher Morgan, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (New York: Beaufort Books, 1983) explores the treatment of military nurses by U.S. soldiers; Wallace Terry ed., *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 1984) and Stanley Goff and Robert Sanders, ed., *Brothers: Black Soldiers in Nam* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1982) contain narratives from Black male soldiers.

[13] Peter Kiang, "About Face: Recognizing Asian & Pacific American Vietnam Veterans in Asian American Studies," *Amerasia Journal*, 17(3), 22-40. *Looking Like The Enemy* (1996) is available through the Japanese American National Museum, 369 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

[14] Texts that are considered seminal, foundational readings of early Americanist work include: Henry Nash Smith *Virgin Land: the American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1950) Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden*: *Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London: Oxford University Press 1964), Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony To Providence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1953); *The Life and Mind of America* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1965), Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1973), John Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in American Civilization* (Newton Centre, Massachusetts: Branford Publishers 1957), and Alan Trachtenburg, *The Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (New York Oxford: 1965).

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