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Author

Robinson, Greg

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Forward Editor's Note

GREG ROBINSON

This issue's Forward offering exemplifies the purpose of the section, which is to showcase outstanding new or forthcoming works in American Studies with a transnational dimension. In so doing, these works point up the paradox inherent in that purpose. On the one hand, we use the geographical area covered by the United States, with the historical experiences and cultural expressions of the people there, as a handy point of departure. As Marcia Gay Harden's Lee Krasner describes painting in the film *Pollock* (2000), "You can't abstract from nothing." On the other hand, the nature of our inquiry directly challenges fixed categories of space and nation, precisely because it reveals the importance of other forms of belonging and self-identification. The same paradox exists in terms of how we treat national identity. Our work looks at the people of the United States outside a national context, working inside international, and even global, networks of exchanges of ideas and goods. This underlines the artificial nature of national boundaries and the insufficiency of the political entity as a category of analysis. Yet by drawing such larger connections, we risk being misunderstood: our purpose is not thereby to argue for the universalism of American culture, still less normalize the global hegemony of Washington's state power. Instead, what this means is that we offer a home to works that do more than step outside the box: in a sense, they reject the very notion that there is any box to step out from.

There is a neat three-part thematic division among the works in the latest Forward section: two of the selections center on transnational Native Studies, three on Asian American Studies, and three on global history. While this selection is largely the work of happenstance, it does reflect well some of the preoccupations of *JTAS*, as can be gauged from the subject matter of the articles and special forums in recent issues. However, a cursory read through these selections will reveal the multiple axes of attention, as well as the striking originality, of their contents.

Kornel Chang's *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.–Canadian Borderlands* challenges the accepted historical narrative of the US and Canadian West by highlighting the role of Asian migrants—merchants, smugglers, laborers, and others—and their interaction with white groups in the development of the region.

Extending the work of scholars such as Erika Lee and Andrea Geiger in a new direction, he presents both the 49th Parallel and the Pacific Ocean as borderlands of white Anglo self-assertion, mediated through anti-Asian movements. In the process, Chang reshapes our understanding of the process of nation-building on both sides of the border.

James H. Cox's *The Red Land to the South* explores Native American literature in the period from the 1920s to the 1960s, an era that has been all but forgotten—the time between the conquest and the modern American Indian Movement. Cox discovers a group of American Indian writers who were inspired by the activism of aboriginal peoples across the border in Mexico and their revolutionary self-expression of their indigeneity. One especially compelling feature of Cox's study, in my view, is his groundbreaking discussion of the work of poet/playwright Lynn Riggs, whose 1931 drama *Green Grow the Lilacs* was the basis for the classic musical *Oklahoma!*, within the canon of indigenous literature.

We are privileged to feature the work of the illustrious historian Akira Iriye, professor emeritus at Harvard University and a past president of both the American Historical Association and the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Iriye's series of books on the cultural and psychological dimensions of international relations, particularly between the United States and East Asia, transformed classic diplomatic history and have served as beacons for historians and policymakers alike. The excerpt here is drawn from the opening chapter of Iriye's *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future*. It offers a stimulating account of the rise of transnational history in the last generation, the place of the United States within it, and the interaction of the transnational with the international.

As with Akira Iriye, we are honored that the Forward section includes a selection by the esteemed political scientist Ira Katznelson. Katznelson's historical book *When Affirmative Action Was White* (2005) has helped reshape the terms of scholarly and popular debate on racial-preference programs. *Fear Itself* likewise provides a new and critical approach to the New Deal. As in his earlier book, Katznelson underlines the power that white Southern elites claimed during the 1930s to apply the reforms of the Roosevelt administration in ways that supported their power and discriminated against minorities. At the same time, he offers a useful transnational analysis of how the New Deal was received internationally, alongside the programs of Fascist and Communist regimes.

Karen Kuo's *East Is West and West Is East*, as is indicated by its clever title, calls into question the tired clichés about essential and fixed differences between Asia and the West. One highlight is her chapter, which we excerpt here, on Shidzué Ishimoto (AKA Kato Shidzué), the Japanese writer and birth control advocate, the American reception of her 1935 memoir *Facing Two Ways*, and her uneasy relations with US birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger. As I have discovered in my own work on the 1930s Japanese/American writer Ayako Ishigaki (who wrote an admiring review of Ishimoto's book), feminist scholars have too often assumed that feminist ideas

moved solely from West to East, whereas in fact Japanese and other Asian women developed their own ideas and were in some ways ahead of their American counterparts.

In her new book *Modern Minority*, Yoon Sun Lee, professor of English at Wellesley College, provides a fine example of how transnational approaches can broaden our understanding of literature. In my blurb for the work (as a historian I was flattered to be asked), I stated that the author “takes us on a dizzying tour of Asian American texts as she explores the concept of ‘everyday’ life. Deftly interpolating literature, oral history, and cultural artifacts, the author draws our attention to the power of the ordinary in interpreting modernity.” In the present excerpt, Lee considers the work of two transnational Asian American writers, Carlos Bulosan and Younghee Kang. She points up the special complexity of their subject positions, writing simultaneously from the point of view of racial minorities in the United States and members of colonized populations in their native lands of the Philippines and Korea.

Beth H. Piatote’s new work *Domestic Subjects*, like that of James H. Cox, explores Native American literature. However, she centers on an earlier period, the climax of the “Indian Wars” of the late nineteenth century, which was accompanied by a new movement among white lawmakers and “friends of the Indian” to institute a policy of assimilation, a policy, partly voluntary and partly coerced, of indigenous peoples. Piatote reflects on how the effects of this policy (and parallel policies in Canada) were reflected and contested in the writings of five Native authors. Although they wrote in a variety of genres, they all made use of gender politics and the trope of “domesticity” in expressing their own subjectivity.

The final selection is made up of a pair of excerpts from Brian Russell Roberts’s new book *Artistic Ambassadors*. Roberts, professor of English at Brigham Young University, has put together an audacious historical exploration of the African American authors and cultural figures who worked in the US diplomatic service abroad, from Frederick Douglass’s stint as US Minister to Haiti to James Weldon Johnson’s service as ambassador in South America and the Azores. These authors (themselves part of a tradition of US literary figures, from Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne to John Hay, who served as diplomats) were not the only Black writers on mission. As notable is Roberts’s discussion of “hip-to-mats,” the cosmopolitan writers from W. E. B. Du Bois to Richard Wright who intervened in international affairs and served as unofficial (or even anti-official) symbolic representatives of Black America overseas.

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