In memory of Emory Elliott
“One of those people on whom nothing is lost”
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Contributors


Michael A. Elliott is Winship Distinguished Professor of English and American Studies at Emory University. He has published articles on the History of Ethnography, Native American Literature, and Public History. He is the author of *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (2002) and *Custerology: The Enduring Legacy of the Indian Wars and George Armstrong Custer* (2007). He is also, with Claudia Stokes, the co-editor of *American Literary Studies: A Methodological Reader* (2003).

John Gamber is Assistant Professor at Columbia University in the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race. He received his BA from the University of California, Davis, his MA from California State University, Fullerton (both in Comparative Literature), and his PhD (English) from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Professor Gamber’s research interests in Ethnic and Literary Studies include Ecocriticism, Transnationalism, Diaspora, Immigration, Relocation, American Indian, Asian American, African American, Chicana/o and Latina/o Literatures, and Literature of the Americas. He has co-edited *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*, and published articles about the novels of Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee), and Craig Womack (Creek), among others, in several edited collections and journals, including *PMLA* and *MELUS*. His current book project, entitled *Positive Pollutions and Cultural*
Toxins (forthcoming), examines the role of waste and contamination in late twentieth-century US Ethnic Literatures.

**Henry A. Giroux** currently holds the Global TV Network Chair Professorship at McMaster University in the English and Cultural Studies Department. His primary research areas are: Cultural Studies, Youth Studies, Critical Pedagogy, Popular Culture, Media Studies, Social Theory, and the Politics of Higher and Public Education. He is on the editorial and advisory boards of numerous national and international scholarly journals, and he serves as the editor or co-editor of four scholarly book series. He has published numerous books and articles, and his most recent books include: *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (2007), *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* (2008), and *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability?* (2009).

**Philip F. Gura** is the William S. Newman Distinguished Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He received his doctorate in the History of American Civilization from Harvard University and is the author of 10 books, including: *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England*; *Jonathan Edwards: America’s Evangelical*; and *American Transcendentalism: A History*. He is also an editor of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. He is an elected Fellow of the Society of American Historians and member of the American Antiquarian Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Colonial Society of Massachusetts. In 2008, the Division on American Literature to 1800 of the Modern Language Association named him Distinguished Scholar.

**Paul Lauter** is A. K. and G. M. Smith Professor of Literature at Trinity College, and general editor of the groundbreaking *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Lauter was active in the civil rights, peace, and labor movements; he worked for a number of social cause organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee, served as a union official at the State University of New York, and co-authored a book about the 1960s, *The Conspiracy of the Young*. His most recent books are *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park*, an edited volume of Thoreau’s writings, and (with Ann Fitzgerald) *Literature, Class and Culture*. He has received the Jay Hubbell Medal for lifetime achievement in American Literary Study, awarded by the American Literature Section of the Modern Language Association, and the Bode-Pearson Prize of the American Studies Association for lifetime achievement in American Studies.

**George Lipsitz** is Professor of Black Studies and Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His publications include *American Studies in a Moment of Danger, Footsteps in the Dark, Time Passages, Dangerous Crossroads*, and *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. He is editor of the Critical American Studies
n series at the University of Minnesota Press and co-editor of the American Crossroads series at the University of California Press. His book *Midnight at the Barrelhouse: The Johnny Otis Story* is scheduled for publication in 2010. Lipsitz has been active in struggles for fair housing and educational equity. He serves as Chairman of the Advisory Board of the African American Policy Forum and sits on the Board of Directors of the National Fair Housing Alliance.


**Kevin R. McNamara** is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles*, the author of *Urban Verbs: Arts and Discourses of American Cities*, editor of *Teaching “America” Abroad*, a special issue of *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, and numerous essays about Cities, Urban Culture, Theories of Diversity and Multiculturalism, and International American Studies. He has been a Fulbright Scholar in the Czech Republic and Turkey, and a Fulbright Interfoundation Award grantee in Greece. Presently, he teaches at the University of Houston, Clear Lake.

**Alyssa MacLean** is a PhD candidate in English at the University of British Columbia, where she is completing a thesis examining nineteenth-century American literary representations of cross-border movement between Canada and the United States. Her research interests include theories of exile and mobility in North America, nineteenth-century US print culture, Black North American Literature, and transnational approaches to American and Canadian Studies.

Jay Mechling is Professor Emeritus of American Studies at the University of California, Davis, where he has taught since 1971. His degrees are in American Studies (BA at Stetson University, MA and PhD at the University of Pennsylvania), and he was one of four editors for *The Encyclopedia of American Studies*. He is a recipient of the American Studies Association’s Mary Turpie Prize for excellence in teaching and curricular development, and he is a recipient of both the Distinguished Teaching Award at the University of California, Davis, and the Davis Prize for Undergraduate Teaching and Scholarly Achievement. He is the author of more than 100 scholarly articles and book chapters, and he was editor of *Western Folklore*, a quarterly journal. He is a Fellow of the American Folklore Society. His book *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (2001) brings together his work on Masculinities, Folklore, and Youth Cultures.

Joshua L. Miller is Associate Professor of English at the University of Michigan. He has published articles on twentieth-century US Literature, Language Politics, Visual Culture, and Race. His *Accented America* is a study of the rise of English-Only Americanism and literary Modernist experiments with mixed languages.


Matthias Oppermann is a Lecturer for American Studies and New Pedagogies at the University of Bielefeld, Germany. Since 2003, he has been a Visiting Researcher at the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship at Georgetown University where he is the Electronic Projects Coordinator for the American Studies Crossroads Project. Since 2007, he has also served as Assistant Director for Electronic Projects at the Forum for Inter-American Studies at Bielefeld University. His research interests include the History of American Studies, Digital Storytelling, and Critical Pedagogy. He recently completed his doctoral dissertation on “The Reconstruction of American Studies in US Higher Education” at Humboldt-University, Berlin.

Donald Pease, Professor of English, Avalon Foundation Chair of the Humanities, Chair of the Dartmouth Liberal Studies Program and winner of the 1981
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Distinguished Teaching Award at Dartmouth College, is an authority on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Literature and Literary Theory. In 1996 he founded the Dartmouth Institute in American Studies. He is the author of *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*, *The New American Exceptionalism* and over 70 articles on figures in American and British literature. He is the co-editor of *American Renaissance Rediscovered* and *The Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Professor Pease is general editor of a series of books called “The New Americanists.” He has been awarded Guggenheim, Mellon and Hewlett Fellowships and has twice received an NEH Directorship to teach college teachers about nineteenth-century American Literature.

Richard T. Rodríguez is Associate Professor of English and Latina/Latino Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He received his BA in English from the University of California, Berkeley, and his PhD in the History of Consciousness from the University of California, Santa Cruz. His research, teaching, and writing are grounded in US Latino/a Cultural Studies, with particular interests in Literary and Film Studies, the Visual Arts, Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and Gender/Sexuality Studies. The author of articles and reviews in *American Quarterly, Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies, American Literary History, Latino Studies, Theatre Journal, Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture and Chicana/o Sexualities*, and *Gay Latino Studies: A Reader*, his book *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* was published in 2009.


Jared Sexton is Associate Professor of African American Studies and Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Irvine. He has published articles in *American Quarterly, Antipode, Art Journal, Critical Sociology, Qui Parle, Radical History Review, Social Identities*, and *Social Justice*, and contributed chapters to

**Harilaos Stecopoulos** is Associate Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and U.S. Imperialisms, 1898–1976* (2008), and the co-editor of *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (1997).

**Shelley Streeby** is Associate Professor of Literature at the University of California, San Diego. She is the author of *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (2002) and co-editor of *Empire and the Literature of Sensation: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction* (2007). She serves on the editorial board of *American Quarterly*, has published essays in journals such as *American Literary History* and *boundary 2*, and has contributed chapters to *A Companion to American Fiction, 1780–1865* (2004), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (forthcoming), *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2007), and *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (2000).

**Rebecca Walsh** is an Assistant Professor of English at North Carolina State University. She has written on H.D. and Race (forthcoming in *Approaches to Teaching H.D.*) and has co-authored an essay on Native American erasure in M. Night Shayamalan’s *The Village*. In addition to guest-editing a special issue on global diasporas of the postcolonial journal *Interventions* (5/1 2003), she has published work on Feminist Locational Theory and Women's Writing. She is completing a book manuscript about Modernist Geographic Epistemologies, Transnationalism, and Experimental Poetics, entitled *Modernism's Geopoetics: The Cultural Politics of the Near and Far*. 
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American Studies is a field in crisis, divided between its original nationalist focus on the United States and new interests in the interrelations of the different nations and cultures of the western hemisphere. Some scholars have defended the traditional emphasis of American Studies on the United States, because such an interdisciplinary project is sufficiently complex as to require its own methodology and national boundaries (Ickstadt 2002: 543–7). Other scholars contend that the multicultural and multi-ethnic US cannot be understood adequately without considering its transnational sources, hemispheric interests, and global relations (Rowe 2002: xiii–xxviii). Intellectuals advocating the former position insist that American Studies should not try to cover too many subjects and thus complicate the proper object of study. Scholars advocating the broader contexts of the field contend that American Studies should lead the way in developing new methods of inquiry better suited to global, transnational conditions. In many different fields, the national paradigm for knowledge is no longer an unquestioned universal; the crisis in American Studies is simply one more example of the epistemological problems facing Comparative Literature, American Literature, English, French, German, Italian, and History.

Most of these fields developed their scholarly protocols as higher education in Europe and the Americas contributed to twentieth-century modernization. The economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of such modernization revolved around the strengthening of Western nation-states, many of which were historically young, even if they often claimed venerable cultural legacies. The United States and France, for example, trace their national origins to the late eighteenth-century revolutions in which their respective republics were born. Most postcolonial nations in the western hemisphere date to nineteenth-century revolutions against European imperial powers, and modern Italy and Germany achieve national identities in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, respectively. The notable defensiveness of US writers and intellectuals in the nineteenth century regarding the “lack” of national history – a common theme in Irving, Cooper, Emerson, Hawthorne,
Melville, Fuller, Thoreau, and their contemporaries – is by no means an exception but rather the rule in the development of Western nation-states. Most modern nations defined their geopolitical borders through cultural, legal, and social practices that reached historically and geographically far beyond national boundaries.

Nation-specific knowledge is actually very historically limited and useful primarily to students of civics. Even if we were able to generalize across the great regional, ethnic, class, and sexual diversity of the United States what it means to be “a good American,” such a definition would have relatively limited applicability when we consider its historical scope – 233 years of US democracy – and its demographic scope: 300 million Americans versus a global population many times larger. Nevertheless, traditional American Studies focused almost exclusively on this restricted issue: what distinguishes the “true” or “good” American, just as many other nationally based disciplines tried to characterize the essential qualities of the German, French, Italian, or English, to mention only a few. What has subsequently been criticized as the “exceptionalism” of American Studies – its focus on the qualities of “Amerianness” as distinct from other nations – justified itself in part by appeals to universality intended to legitimize the US national model. Thus, precedents for the good American “citizen” could be found in Plato’s philosopher-kings, Dante’s democratic vernacular, Shakespeare’s self-reliant characters, Hegel’s defense of French revolutionary democracy, and many other anticipations of US democracy. US nationalism could thus be viewed retrospectively as the historical destiny leading from feudalism to modernity and so realizing in the democratic American individual the promise of the past. As a consequence, history was read retrospectively for signs of US democratic success in ways manipulated for ideological purposes.

From F. O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) to Richard Slotkin’s *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (1973), the Myth-and-Symbol School shaped the exceptionalist purposes of American Studies for three decades. The great Myth-and-Symbol School scholars, such as R. W. B. Lewis, Henry Nash Smith, Charles Feidelson, Jr, Alan Trachtenberg, and Leo Marx, focused on American myth-making and its expression in specific symbolic structures, such as the American Adam, the Frontier, literary symbols like Hawthorne’s “scarlet letter” and Melville’s “great white-whale,” the Brooklyn Bridge, the Mississippi River, and the nature/culture distinction in general, to understand how Americans interpreted and expressed themselves. None of these influential scholars fully believed such national symbology; all understood its ideological purposes. Fully committed to what today would be considered the theory of “socially constructed knowledge,” the Myth-and-Symbol scholars articulated a national self-consciousness in its historical variations.

The work of the Myth-and-Symbol School was politically liberal and deeply critical of US failures to achieve the promises of liberty and equality for all. Even so, many of the scholars in this mode were captivated by American idealism and
optimistic that social problems eventually would be overcome. The intellectual focus on organizing symbols and unifying national myths tended to reinforce consensus-based history and assimilationist ideals in the settler society of the US. In many of the Myth-and-Symbol School’s accounts, we were Americans first, members of more specific regional, ethnic, or other identity-based communities second. Everyone, from the most recent immigrant to citizens with deep ancestral roots in the US, could find a particular relationship to such national myths and symbols. Certain common traits cut across the different archetypes, so that R. W. B. Lewis’s *American Adam* (1955) depended upon a youthful innocence that also distinguished the frontier spirit of the pioneers exploring Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950), just as Alan Trachtenberg’s *Brooklyn Bridge* (1979) drew upon the technological ingenuity of Americans that Leo Marx analyzed in the complex subordination of nature to culture, crucial to US modernization in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). Even the symbolic qualities of the expressive forms typical of “American Literature” that Matthiessen interpreted as central to our *American Renaissance* in the middle of the nineteenth century would be claimed subsequently by Charles Feidelson, Jr, as intrinsic to *Symbolism and American Literature* (1953), perhaps even part of American novelty and technological ingenuity.

From this perspective, Americans were characteristically self-reliant, youthful, hardworking people, willing to use their political, economic, and geographical freedom to pursue new opportunities. They refused to be bound by the past, were curious and inventive, and adaptable to new circumstances, whether in the wilderness or the city. Often lacking formal education, these Americans advocated the “boot-strap” mythology and demonstrated their abilities in specific achievements, including self-expression, rather than abstract honors and inherited privileges. Of course, my brief sketch of the “typical” American vastly oversimplifies the virtues celebrated by the scholars of the Myth-and-Symbol School, but it approximates well enough those characteristics to allow us today to understand why this method was so profoundly criticized beginning in the 1970s. First, such an American is likely to be a white male of European ancestry, who learned his commitment to hard work and technical innovation as part of the “Protestant work-ethic,” as Max Weber would name this ideology long after it had become central to the American “civil religion” (Weber 1958: 1–20). The material rewards of such labor, self-reliance, and ingenuity were available to this Protestant, white male thanks to a capitalist economy in which he occupied a privileged position, whereas other peoples of color, including indigenous peoples, occupied positions ranging from legal slaves to exploited servants and formal wards of the nation-state. In the nominally “classless” society of US democracy, the “American Adam” held a position of distinct social and economic superiority, which was readily visible in his physical appearance, ranging from actual skin pigmentation to dress and possessions.

What of the other inhabitants of the United States who did not fit this profile? Of course, they could emulate this central mythology, “passing” for white in
various ways, suppressing their own religious beliefs in favor of the secularized Protestantism assumed to be central to the civil religion, and even disguising or manipulating their gender or sexuality in the cases of women and gays wishing to function within the public sphere. Otherwise, minorities and women would have to accept their second-class status, including the exclusion of African Americans, Chinese Americans, Native Americans, and women from full political and civil rights and citizenship. Nineteenth-century abolitionists referred to their movement as the “second” Revolution, reminding their contemporaries that the founding fathers had avoided the issue of slavery in the compromises they made to forge a new nation. The first national Women’s Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, but women did not gain voting rights and thus full citizenship for another 72 years with the passage of the nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Although declared ambiguously members of “sovereign dependent nations” by the Marshall Supreme Court in 1831, Native Americans were “removed” from those “sovereign nations,” murdered and starved, and forced to assimilate economically and culturally for almost 150 years before being granted US citizenship in 1924. Oppressed by the corrupt ruling Manchu dynasty in China and suffering from crop failures, Chinese immigrants came to the US on the promise of decent jobs, but were excluded from legal immigration and citizenship from the Burlingame Treaty (1869) to the end of formal “Exclusion Laws” during World War II (1943), when China was America’s political and military ally.

New immigrants, ethnic minorities, women, and gays have suffered personal violence and discrimination throughout US history. Their political, economic, and social organizations have helped them resist and improve their civil rights, and they have properly reminded us that their struggles have been realizations of democratic promises often denied them by the dominant population and the US state. These larger social and political struggles are represented centrally in the academic programs and departments in Women’s, Gender, and Ethnic Studies that were founded in the late 1960s and 1970s at many colleges and universities in the US. Most of these new academic units were established only after lengthy struggles by faculty, students, and staff for the rights to represent their own cultural histories. Although American Studies often helped provide support and sometimes even an academic home for some of these emerging disciplines, many advocates of these programs opposed the synthetic and consensus-based model of the Myth-and-Symbol School. There were also crucial epistemological differences between American Studies and Women’s, Gender, and Ethnic Studies.

Whereas American Studies tended to rely on the canonical model of representing the Arnoldian ideal of the “best that has been thought and spoken,” Women’s and Ethnic Studies were intent on recovering rich cultural legacies that had been repressed and effectively “minoritized.” Many specialists in different Ethnic Studies also argued that the cultural media favored by traditional American Studies did not include the media of greatest importance to particular minority communities.
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Legally excluded from literacy in the slave-holding South, many antebellum African Americans developed alternative means for cultural representation, including music, dance, and other performing arts. Even though the great fugitive slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* ([1845]1982) and Harriet Jacobs’s fictionalized *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* ([1861] 1987), often turned on the protagonist’s education in letters, these and other narratives also testified to the value of orality and performativity in folklore, spirituals, gossip, and religious and political organization. The Myth-and-Symbol School privileged literature and history as the foundations for the interdisciplinary work of American Studies, but scholars in African American, Chicano/a, Native American, Asian American, and Women’s/Gender Studies distrusted conventional histories from which their stories had been excluded and protested that literature did not express fully the cultural vitality of their communities. The *tejano corridos* of the Texas–Mexico borderlands combine story and song, as well as the context of their performances, in ways that cannot be matched in the private reading experience. Popular romance literature did play a crucial part in nineteenth- and twentieth-century women’s culture, but the best-selling women writers were judged by the Myth-and-Symbol School to be of relatively little interest, shaping at best what Ann Douglas judged *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977).

Women’s and Ethnic Studies in the early 1970s also departed from American Studies in terms of the geopolitical boundaries of their fields. The Myth-and-Symbol School certainly took into account the international goals of the United States, connecting westward expansion with other imperialist ambitions in Latin America and the Pacific, but its object of study remained centrally the United States. Second-wave feminists understood their political and academic work to transcend national boundaries. With its traditional reliance on the bourgeois, nuclear family and patriarchal authority, US nationalism was part of the problem, not the solution. Like their predecessors, second-wave feminists looked to women who had struggled throughout history for equal rights and such transnational perspectives helped criticize and reform intransient US patriarchy. Feminist scholars cited the powerful feminine deities of pre-Christian religions, as well as women who enjoyed legal and civil equality in the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, to counter prevailing US gender hierarchies. In similar ways, African American activists and scholars pitted “Black Nationalism” against what they considered the illegitimate US state, whose rhetorical promises of freedom and equality masked the racism that had permitted slavery and then replaced it with economic and social racism. Black nationalism drew upon international and transracial ideals of the Pan-Africanism of African and African American leaders who protested European colonialism, in which they often implicated the United States. In some cases, this return to African cultural identification included a rejection of the Christian West in favor of the Muslim “brown belt” that better united the “yellow and brown peoples” exploited by Western imperialism and capitalism.
In a similar fashion, Asian American scholars turned away from the prevailing Eurocentrism of traditional American Studies in favor of transnational routes and cultural influences more relevant to the many different Asian communities to which they traced their origins. Puritan New England is deeply invested in British cultural influences from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, but the same can hardly be said for San Francisco in the era of the Gold Rush and the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. However, fiercely “Yankees” attempted to prevent Chinese immigration, nineteenth-century Chinese workers had a dramatic impact on the cultural identity of California and the West. In *China Men* (1980), Maxine Hong Kingston demonstrates that Chinese immigrants brought as much to “Gold Mountain” as they took from the US, and it is only the provincialism of traditional US nationalism that prevents us from understanding the impact of Confucian culture, the Chinese novel and drama, Chinese cuisine, and many more Chinese influences on our national culture.

El Movimiento also insisted upon an alternative “nationalism,” in this case the utopian “nation” of Aztlán, whose origins are traceable back to the pre-Columbian Mexica (Aztec) people and whose imaginary location could be anywhere from ancient Mexico to the Spanish Southwest or Alta California. Less an actual political state than a state of mind, Aztlán represents a counter-narrative to US imperialism from the Mexican–American War to the present. Chicano and Chicana literature and the arts appeal repeatedly to the utopian promise of Aztlán, reminding us of how many people living within the geopolitical borders of the US think and dream beyond those boundaries. In an analogous sense, the American Indian Movement (AIM) set a political agenda at distinct odds with US nationalism and insisted upon Native American sovereignty, as guaranteed by countless legal decisions and broken treaties. Indigenous peoples have rarely accepted national borders in the Americas and Canada, insofar as such artificial distinctions have generally violated Native Americans’ territorial identifications. Tribal and kinship oriented, rather than nationalist or assimilationist, many indigenous peoples have viewed the nation-state as an inconvenient fiction.

Nevertheless, the central focus for most research and teaching in Women’s, Gender, and Ethnic Studies in the US was on US history and culture, so it is not surprising that American Studies was influenced significantly by these complementary disciplines. By the late 1980s, the panels organized at the annual American Studies Association conventions were dominated by scholarship central to Women’s, Gender, and Ethnic Studies, and traditionally defined Myth-and-Symbol School approaches were in the minority. In this same period, driven in part by the rapid globalization of first-world economies, many dependent upon cultural exports as well as material goods, the international dimensions of American Studies gained central importance in scholarly debates. One-way globalization, of course, was criticized as yet another aspect of first-world neocolonialism or what earlier scholars had designated “free-trade imperialism” (Rowe 2000: 58–60). The focus of traditional American Studies on the unique
characteristics of the US nation was especially subject to such criticism, especially given the new global economy’s emphasis on the exportation of cultural values and lifestyles. Interested in possible counter-narratives to one-way globalization, intellectuals paid more attention to American Studies outside the US. In Germany, for example, centers for “North American Studies” overcame the problem of US nationalism by treating both the US and Canada as related areas. Scholars outside the US were also more attentive to the consequences of US foreign policies and cultural exports for other peoples. By 2004, when ASA President Shelley Fisher Fishkin devoted her Presidential Address to the “Internationalizing of American Studies,” considerable attention had been paid to the ways non-US scholars and perspectives enriched the field (Fishkin 2005: 17–57). Organizations such as the International American Studies Association, and new research and teaching centers such as the Clinton Institute for American Studies at University College, Dublin, were founded, and new international journals, like *Comparative American Studies*, published abroad. International American Studies was by no means new. Many universities around the world had offered curricula and sponsored research in the field since the end of World War II, but a great deal of the previous scholarship had been deeply indebted to the nationalist model of the Myth-and-Symbol School. The “internationalizing” of American Studies in the 1990s represented a second-stage development of the field, in which the intellectual critique of US neo-imperialism and one-way globalization was central.

The relations among these different approaches inside and outside American Studies are still unsettled, but the characteristics of a new American Studies can be generally described. No longer focused exclusively on consensus history and assimilationist ideals, American Studies takes into account the many different and constantly changing communities that constitute the United States. Of equal importance are the routes followed by different immigrants to the US, including both the Pacific and Atlantic rims as well as the North–South paths within the western hemisphere. Immigration and diaspora are not just travels, of course, but complex processes of cultural and social movement, including changes in the basic tools of human interrelation. American Studies is thus a poly-lingual field, which should require competency in several different languages relevant to a student’s area of specialization. Indeed, another crucial development of the new American Studies is the rediscovery of the polyglot history of the United States, as Werner Sollors and Marc Shell have demonstrated in *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature* (2000). The new American Studies is also attentive to the ways the US has participated in traditional imperialism, both in Manifest Destiny and slavery, and has developed its own neo-imperial practices, such as it used in the Vietnam War and current occupation of Iraq. Although it is a more controversial claim, the new American Studies should take all of the different nations and communities of the western hemisphere as its objects of study, contending that we cannot understand the United States apart from its historical and geopolitical relations with its neighbors in the hemisphere. Whether or not we accept the
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The hemispheric scope of the new American Studies, the field should be understood as profoundly comparative and transnational, even when it concentrates exclusively on the internal diversity of the US.

How shall we do the work of research and teaching associated with the new American Studies? There are no simple answers to this question, but it is clear that however we define the field it cannot be covered in traditional ways. Even if we choose the more restricted model of a US-centric American Studies, there are simply too many communities, languages, cultural media, historical events, and social and political issues, for us to offer a two- or three-year Major, two or three years of graduate coursework, or a single model for scholarly expertise in such a field. The crisis in American Studies is also a challenge to our theories of knowledge and education. This volume offers a variety of approaches to these issues, mapping out possible boundaries to the field rather than specifying its precise and rigorous contours. Neither a definitive history of American Studies nor a polemical argument for the new American Studies, this volume brings together some of the best scholars in American Studies, and Ethnic Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, to write critically about areas and problems central to the field.

This Companion is divided into four large sections: I. Foundations and Backgrounds; II. Ethnic Studies and American Studies; III. The New American Studies; IV. Problems and Issues. Although there is some sense of a loose historical development, from such foundational approaches as “Puritan Origins” (Gura, chapter 1) or “The Laboring of American Culture” in the 1930s’ left (Denning, Chapter 3) in Part I, to the more recent challenges of Ethnic Studies’ scholars, such as George Lipsitz and Richard T. Rodríguez (chapters 7 and 9), in Part II, and interventions by new American Studies’ theorists, such as Harilaos Stecopoulos and Donald Pease (chapters 12 and 13), in Part III, each section of this book is intended to be contemporary by addressing the continuing relevance of traditional approaches, and historical by considering the backgrounds to current approaches. The problems and issues in Part IV, for example, consider some long-standing problems in American Studies, such as “Regionalism” (McNamara, chapter 18), “The West and Manifest Destiny” (Madsen, chapter 19), and “Popular, Mass, and High Culture” (Streeby, chapter 22), but in ways that suggest how newer approaches – regionalism after nationalism and a “new” West that includes women, minorities, and indigenous peoples – change these conventional areas of American Studies.

In Part I, contributors address some of the most enduring foundations for the field, relevant both to traditional and new American Studies. The five essays in this section are not organized according to specific “schools” or movements, but instead by influential areas of interest in a field that has always been interdisciplinary. Although “Puritan Origins” once designated the solid grounding of the Myth-and-Symbol School in Protestant orthodoxy and pre-national utopianism, Philip Gura offers a fascinating account of how the Puritans have changed from our cultural “founding fathers” to a very specific colonial community clinging to
fragile material and spiritual existences in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England. Yet, if the Puritans have diminished in significance for the national mythology, Gura argues that they are even more interesting to us for inhabiting the intersection of European, American, indigenous, and natural worlds still very much at the center of our intellectual, psychological, and national lives. Less familiar to most American Studies scholars is the long and rich legacy of cultural anthropology that Michael Elliott recovers in “Cultural Anthropology and the Routes of American Studies, 1851–1942” (chapter 2). From Lewis Henry Morgan’s *League of the Ho-de’no-sau-nee* (commonly known as *The League of the Iroquois*) (1851) to Zora Neale Hurston’s African American ethnography, *Mules and Men* (1935), and Afro-Caribbean ethnography, *Tell My Horse* (1938), Elliott reminds us of the roots of contemporary Ethnic Studies in cultural anthropology that sometimes served US imperialism, and at other times criticized it.

Michael Denning’s “The Laboring of American Culture” (chapter 3) recalls the fundamental importance of the 1930s’ left in the development of American Studies as a discipline, and it does this work by reconsidering the intersection of cultural and economic production in the practices of labor organization and the emergence of the Cultural Front. Denning’s influential book, *The Cultural Front* (1997), develops at length this argument; in this essay, Denning considers the relevance of the old left’s class solidarity for our contemporary age, both in the current economic depression and for our everyday practices as scholar-activists of American Studies. Paul Lauter reconsiders the old claim that US democracy promised a “classless” society, even though the historical reality is that from its very beginnings the US created new class distinctions, often modeled on older European models, in order to confront new circumstances and yet still retain wealth in a relatively small group. The fact that most US laws relate to property, rather than to civil and human, rights is one indication that ownership and citizenship have been closely linked since the founding of the nation. What, then, of indigenous peoples who had very different conceptions of land use from enclosure and ownership and also eschewed accumulation in favor of shared resources? We know that under the Dawes Act (the General Allotment Act of 1887) Native peoples were coerced to follow Euro-American notions of ownership and accumulation, rejecting their own tribal socialisms for Western capitalism. Lauter makes the valuable point that the “awakening” of “class consciousness” in the US has been traditionally a difficult task, despite these obvious signs of a profoundly hierarchical national culture. Once again, American Studies and Ethnic Studies converge in their efforts to criticize the apparent universalism of a national culture that is of very recent invention and an obvious European import.

Language and Religion are two other basic areas of study for traditional American Studies, each of which has undergone a considerable revival and transformation with the advent of new American Studies. Jay Mechling (chapter 5) challenges us to rethink the role of religion in ways that go far beyond the usual emphasis on the development of a “civil religion” out of the various religious heterodoxies
that drove many dissenters to colonial America. Not only did 9/11 and the Bush administration’s “war on terrorism,” often characterized as a “new crusade,” bring religious conflicts into the mainstream of American politics, but the rise of religious fundamentalisms and various religious denominations’ command of electronic and other digital media demand much more serious consideration of the diverse powers of contemporary religions in American lives. Joshua Miller’s essay on American languages (chapter 6) reminds us that the US has always been multi-lingual, not just as a consequence of the different languages spoken by recent immigrants but also thanks to the many different dialects spoken across the US. The common misconception that the US has an “unofficial” national language of English is belied by demographics throughout US history demonstrating the wide range of languages used in everyday communication. English may be the dominant language, but there are countless other functional languages that make any legal motions for “English Only” doomed both to legislative and practical failure.

In Part II, we have made an effort to treat the most influential approaches to Ethnic Studies, including “Ethnic Studies” as a field (Lipsitz, chapter 7), Native American Studies (Gamber, chapter 8), Chicano/a and Latino/a Studies (Rodríguez, chapter 9), African American Studies (Sexton, chapter 10), and Asian American Studies (Lowe, chapter 11). But these essays are not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of such complex and independent disciplines. George Lipsitz’s “Blood Lines and Blood Shed: Intersectionality and Differential Consciousness in Ethnic Studies and American Studies” analyzes the shared anti-racist and activist goals of scholarship, teaching, and social reform, rather than offering a narrow definition of the distinctive qualities of Ethnic Studies. In his formulation, the field encompasses prison reform not simply because the majority of those incarcerated in the US are people of color; gay studies and queer activism are not just for the sake of gays from ethnic backgrounds. Lipsitz writes comfortably about “Ethnic Studies and American Studies,” ignoring the sort of disciplinary controversies between these two disciplines. Intellectual coalition-building is what Lipsitz advocates, so that the struggle for greater social justice includes all those peoples deprived of equal civil and human rights. “Ethnikon” has an interesting range of meanings in Greek, although most often it is translated by modern scholars as “nation,” even though national belonging would have been alien to the ancient Greeks. The very ambiguity of the term “ethnic” suggests in Lipsitz’s approach to “Ethnic Studies” the sorts of affiliations that come from shared struggle and mutual identification, rather than from ancient cultural traditions or racial classifications.

Other contributors to this section offer more specific disciplinary definitions, such as John Gamber does in his “Native American Studies,” but all recognize the need to maintain flexible definitions in this transitional era. Students understandably ask, “What is the ‘proper’ term for ‘Indians’?” They know that naming the diverse indigenous peoples of the pre-Columbian western hemisphere according to Christopher Columbus’s infamous “mistake” can hardly be correct, but they
also know that the activist group, the American Indian Movement, uses the term, and that academic departments and programs carry different names: Native American Studies, American Indian Studies, and Indigenous Studies. Gamber does not try to settle these nominal differences, but instead uses the terms in relation to the specific groups that choose and prefer them. Similarly, Jared Sexton takes up the familiar dispute regarding such disciplinary titles as Black, African American, Africana, or African Diaspora Studies to address the much larger questions of how black people in the US understand their relationships to the peoples and cultures of the Caribbean, Brazil, Africa, Mexico, and many other regions traditionally ignored by traditional American Studies. Sexton argues that these terms are inadequate to the complexity of racial and ethnic identifications across national and within US borders. What, for example, are the “proper names” for mixed-race identities and how should such subjects negotiate the intersections of racial and ethnic communities historically at odds with each other?

Many of the contributors to this volume work explicitly to deconstruct the familiar boundaries of their respective disciplines, suggesting that another characteristic of the new American Studies is a critical self-consciousness regarding strict disciplinary boundaries. In “Reckoning Nation and Empire: Asian American Critique” (chapter 11), Lisa Lowe focuses on Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture of Life* (1999), and suggests that the Korean American novel invokes Japanese colonial militarism in Asia as an allegory for US wars in Asia and the Middle East, in order to highlight how the Asian American criticism of US exceptionalism continues to be as important today, after the “war on terror,” as it was during the Cold War when the field began. Her essay points to Asian American Studies as a field at a crossroads: the study of Asian Americans can provide stories of immigrant inclusion and assimilation, suggesting that the US nation has transcended its imperial past, or it can connect the formation of Asian Americans to the US Cold War role in East Asia and then bring these insights to bear on the ongoing wars of the US empire. For Lowe, Asian American Studies is not a discrete discipline about identity-formation or assimilation, but part of a broader critical account of global imperialism.

Part III consists of six essays dealing with the distinctive features of the new American Studies. In “Hemispheric Drama and Performance,” Harilaos Stecopoulos (chapter 12) takes up the challenge to American Studies in a genuinely hemispheric and thus postnational framework, focusing on drama and performance theory as ways of thinking and acting across borders and outside narrow national contexts. From Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* to Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s postmodern, transnational performances, drama has allowed audiences to engage new worlds and negotiate different discursive, even linguistic, practices more readily than other literary genres. Of particular interest in Stecopoulos’s treatment of hemispheric drama are indigenous peoples and cultures from Shakespeare’s Caliban to Gómez-Peña’s and Coco Fusco’s collaboration, “The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Indians Visit the West” (1992–4),
in which they pose as two unknown specimens of the fictional Guatinaui people, presumed to inhabit an island off the Northwest coast of Yucatan. We are reminded that whenever we lift the veil of strictly nationalist knowledge, we begin to “see” indigenous peoples and their pre-Columbian realities. Donald Pease’s “Postnational and Postcolonial Reconfigurations of American Studies in the Postmodern Condition” (chapter 13) provides the comparative American Studies practiced by Stecopoulos with its proper theoretical frameworks in the postcolonial work of Homi Bhabha, Pease’s own postnationalist arguments, and the broader postmodernity to which both respond. On the one hand, we identify postmodern theories, such as Derridean deconstruction, with radical challenges to the dominant ideology, including the mythology of the US state; on the other hand, we recognize in postmodern theories many of the characteristics of a new, postmodern economy on which first-world nations since the mid-1960s have relied to export digital technologies, Western culture, and complementary fashions and lifestyles. Pease shows us how American Studies can avoid the trap of a new, “global” America – the familiar US nation rendered as a cosmopolitan illusion or mere advertisement – by turning instead to the diverse and resistant “Americas” articulated by such Latin American intellectuals as José Martí in his classic essay, “Our America” ([1891] 2002), and his postmodern heirs, Enrique Dussel, Rodolfo Kusch, and Walter Mignolo.

In my own contribution to this section, “Culture, US Imperialism, and Globalization” (chapter 14), I follow Pease’s lead by suggesting how US neo-imperialism has worked recently to create an illusory internationalism that actually duplicates the basic values of traditional US nationalism, permitting the US to appear to be attentive to cultural and social differences around the world when in fact it works to internalize and control such “foreignness” within a familiar American mythology. If we truly wish to internationalize American Studies, we will have to consider comparatively other social, political, and state organizations to measure the successes and failures of the US and the other nations of the western hemisphere. Such US neo-imperialism has a long history, which Rebecca Walsh (chapter 15) helps us understand by focusing on a forgotten story, “The Foreigner,” by Sarah Orne Jewett. Walsh’s interpretation of this story written by Jewett during the Spanish–American War, arguably America’s first public venture in traditional imperialism, is Walsh’s means of reminding us how gender hierarchies and US imperialism were deeply imbricated from the very beginning. Combining several different feminist approaches from second-wave cultural recovery work to more radical gynocriticism as a means of undermining patriarchal assumptions, Walsh transforms the “local color” author, Jewett, into a much more interesting critic of emerging US foreign policies in the Caribbean and Pacific, as well as exploring the relationship of US imperialism to such domestic issues as the marginalized status of women, who were struggling in 1900 for such basic political rights as the vote.

David Nye’s “The Rapprochement of Technology Studies and American Studies” (chapter 16) and Matthias Oppermann’s “The World Wide Web and