Forward Editor's Note

GREG ROBINSON

For those who are not already aware, the Forward section of *JTAS* is designed to feature excerpts from outstanding new and forthcoming works in American Studies with a transnational dimension. The current installment focuses on historically informed studies of transnational creativity. These extracts feature a variety of stories of artists in literature, photography, or music who moved across borders, building bridges between cultures, and who in the process challenged accepted norms, especially in terms of crossing existing racial frontiers and defying barriers of prejudice. In the process, they opened the door to recognition of alternate forms of identity, both in American society and beyond. I am impressed by the different approaches that the authors in this section, who come from a wide variety of fields, bring to the study of the past. Through their explorations, they not only have discovered a variety of unsuspected connections—between the Harlem Renaissance and Mexican popular culture, say, or Texas agriculture and Chicana poetry—but have thereby proposed tools for enriching research and teaching about United States history. As an undergraduate and graduate student in history at a pair of well-regarded institutions, I had very few literary or artistic works on my course syllabi, and it did not occur to me to think of looking into them for insight into the unfolding of national history. Yet as the late eminent historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. once observed, if race has generally been repressed from America's history and racial conflict excluded from discussion, then the repressed has returned in the nation's literature—classic works by Mark Twain, Herman Melville, and others are awash in feelings, fantasies, and fears over racial difference. By the same token, one might say that if nonwhites have often been ignored or sensationalized in mainstream discussion in America, and it is hard to find reliable documentation of their lives and experiences in the mass-market press, we must turn to alternate sources such as photography, cultural anthropology, and literature to flesh out that experience. I hope to consider the approaches of these authors in order to better communicate to my own students, in methodological and indeed epistemological terms, how to think about the past and to go about unveiling it.

The first excerpt, from Rashida K. Braggs's *Jazz Diasporas: Race, Music, and Migration in Post–World War II Paris*, offers a stunning portrait of the disparate group of expatriate African American jazz musicians who made Paris their home and discusses the careers they made for themselves. Having settled in the City of Light in hopes of escaping American racism, they discovered that France was not a color-blind society. Using generous extracts from interviews with jazzmen, among other sources, Braggs discusses not only the complex life experiences of the jazzman but also their collaborations with French musicians and their impact on both France and the United States.

Christa Buschendorf, in "The Shaping of We-Group Identities in the African American Community: A Perspective of Figurational Sociology on the Cultural Imaginary," follows the development of a specific African American identity in the writings of two founding thinkers, Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois, according to the schema proposed by the German-born sociologist Norbert Elias. Both Douglass and Du Bois spent portions of their lives outside the United States—Douglass in Haiti, Du Bois in Germany—and both were able to bring in their transnational connections to help enable them to challenge the subordinate role of blacks in US society and to imagine other sorts of identities.

Emron Esplin's *Borges's Poe: The Influence and Reinvention of Edgar Allan Poe in Spanish America* is a fascinating study of the influence of Poe on the famous twentieth-century Argentine novelist Jorge Luis Borges. Even as Charles Baudelaire famously translated Poe's works into French during the nineteenth century and thereby championed his discovery by European intellectuals, during the twentieth century Borges both translated Poe's works and devoted a corpus of literary criticism to them, in the process shifting Latin American readings of Poe from a focus on his poetry to an appreciation of his prose. In addition, Esplin does a series of close readings of Borges's own works to trace Poe's lasting influence on him.

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, in *Writing America: Literary Landmarks from Walden Pond to Wounded Knee*, produces a marvelous travelogue of landmarks associated with American literature. Diverging from descriptions of standard historic places associated with canonical writers, Fishkin examines historic sites of all kinds, from tenements and theaters to battlefields and Japanese American confinement sites, including an unlikely but powerful site—the pumping station that irrigated the produce field in the Texas–Mexico borderlands where Gloria Anzaldúa's family picked crops. If Fishkin is correct that an understanding of place serves to deepen our understanding of literature, this place of hard labor and working-class family struggle sheds powerful light on Anzaldúa's reflections on cross-border identity and *la frontera*. The excerpt presented here gives an overview of the sites along the Texas–Mexico border that the book explores.

Teaching Transatlanticism: Resources for Teaching Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Print Culture, edited by Linda K. Hughes and Sarah R. Robbins, provides an authoritative discussion of the diverse literature on British–American literary contacts

(whether between canonical writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, women writers such as Harriet Martineau, or other sorts of connections) and how the editors themselves joined forces to create a transatlantic seminar. As an adopted Canadian—though on the French side—I am especially interested in their attention to the larger North American aspects of transatlantic connections. Despite countless scholars' evocation of the Atlantic world, I think that specialists in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature sometimes lose sight of the fact that there is not a simple England–US binary across the waters. Rather there was a British presence in North America, and the migrations of English people and literature also went on to the British possessions.

Steven S. Lee's *The Ethnic Avant-Garde: Minority Cultures and World Revolution* explores the influence of the Soviet Union and Russian-style communism on nonwhite American writers and intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Paul Robeson. During the early years following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviets not only claimed a place of honor as a workingman's state (and enjoyed a powerful if brief renown as a place of modernist cultural production) but likewise cultivated an image as champions of ethnic pluralism through their nationalities policy and their deployment of folklorists to explore and valorize ethnic cultures. Lee's careful account of the complex association of "vanguard" and "avant-garde" provides food for thought on how the Soviet image of pluralism helped minority intellectuals navigate the troubled path between separatism and assimilation to mainstream (white) United States society.

Frank Mehring's *The Mexico Diary: Winold Reiss between Vogue Mexico and Harlem Renaissance (An Illustrated Trilingual Edition with Commentary and Musical Interpretation*) reproduces artist Winold Reiss's extraordinary images from Mexico. Reiss, a German American painter, was active in the Harlem Renaissance, most notably through his illustrations (commissioned by editor Alain Locke) for the iconic 1925 anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Mehring has uncovered Reiss's accounts of his 1920 trip to Mexico and a gallery of accompanying artworks, combining them with music inspired by the diary (on which Mehring himself offers guitar and banjo accompaniment). While there have been other examples of connections between the Harlem Renaissance and Mexican modernism—the Harlem nightclub drawings of Mexican-born artist Miguel Covarrubias, for instance—Mehring lucidly traces the influence of Mexican folklore and religious art on 1920s African American modernism.

Mark Rice, in *Dean Worcester's Fantasy Islands: Photography, Film, and the Colonial Philippines*, provides a new look at Dean Worcester, a scientist who became an authority for Americans on the Philippines following US colonization in 1899. Over the course of fourteen years, he traveled the Islands photographing Filipinos, especially members of non-Christian minorities, compiling thousands of photos, which he deployed in support of books, articles, and lectures lauding the American imperial project. Rice shows that Worcester actually turned theories of racial pluralism upside down, using his photos to support the thesis that it was the very ethnic and religious

heterogeneity of Philippine society that rendered the Filipinos unfit for self-government and made American rule indispensable over the long term.

Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference, edited by Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher, takes as its subject African American writer Richard Wright's sojourn in Indonesia during the period of the famous 1955 Bandung Conference. Wright, who described himself as "living in exile" from American racism in Paris, spent several months in Indonesia to report on the conference, which he afterwards discussed at length in his book *The Color Curtain*. Roberts and Foulcher have uncovered a series of lectures and interviews that Wright gave during his time in Indonesia and in the process demonstrate both the close connections that Wright was able to form with Indonesian students and intellectuals and their keen understanding of American society and race relations.

Finally, Kathy-Ann Tan, in *Reconfiguring Citizenship and National Identity in the North American Literary Imagination*, explores the work of the New York–based Indian writer Amitava Kumar and his book *Passport Photos* as a way to deconstruct dominant practices of securitization and border control in US immigration law. Kumar, writing shortly before 9/11, examines how the extreme security measures that American immigration authorities have implemented exert control over the bodies of aliens, particularly from non-Western countries, as to have the effect of turning them "into lawbreakers, if not terrorists." Tan brings Kumar's work in conversation with an early essay by Hannah Arendt in the *Menorah Journal* (ancestor of today's *Commentary*) on refugeeism as expressing the modern condition and thus forming the starting point of a reconstruction of political philosophy.

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