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# Forward Editor's Note

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GREG ROBINSON

The works appearing in this issue's Forward section revolve around a theme that is ubiquitous in transnational American Studies: the complex ways in which people place themselves, or are placed by others, within the binary of "insider/outsider." While outsiders are often marginalized because of their status, they can also bring new ideas and cultural developments and offer useful perspectives on domestic life. Many of the selections featured here center on racial questions. In one sense, this is hardly surprising. After all, in the United States, with its history of racial and ethnic hierarchies, nonwhites have tended to be treated as "outsiders" and have been forced to struggle for visibility and success. Yet the varied ways in which race plays out in these excerpts are complex and often unexpected.

Gordon Chang's essay, excerpted from *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, focuses on Zhang Shuqi, a Chinese-born artist who worked in the United States during the period of World War II and acted as a cultural diplomat for China. Zhang strongly influenced American mass culture by bringing methods of Chinese brush painting to a general audience. However, despite the popular "orientalist" association of Zhang's art with traditional brush painting (and, beyond that, timeless Chinese culture), his work was in fact strikingly modern.

The excerpt from William Gleason's *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature* juxtaposes the work of Richard Harding Davis and Olga Beatriz Torres, two international travelers during the generation preceding US involvement in World War I. Davis, a popular author and magazine editor, barnstormed through Central and South America, which he made the subject of a popular travelogue and "imperialist novel." Torres, a teenaged girl, traveled north from Mexico into the United States and reported on conditions there in a series of letters published after her death. Yet despite their obvious disparities in point of view, the two works not only address similar themes of US power (albeit from different directions) but they both focus on architecture and how it reflects race and class structures. The excerpt forms a fascinating counterpoint to Rhys Isaac's pioneering study of architecture and social hierarchy in colonial Virginia, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1983).

Daniel Kotzin's *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist* offers a new view of Magnes, a prominent American rabbi and Zionist leader who emigrated to Palestine after World War I and became the first president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Paradoxically, as Kotzin demonstrates, it was through his work in Jerusalem that Magnes most clearly sought to realize his American values. In the face of pressure from leaders of the Yishuv for a Jewish state, Magnes championed democracy, humanistic values, and Jewish–Arab binationalism.

Margarita Marinova's text is excerpted from her new work *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing*. The work's purpose is to examine "the diverse practices of crossing boundaries, tactics of translation, and experiences of double and multiple political and national attachments" found in a group of writings about encounters between Russians and Americans between 1865 and the Russian Revolution of 1905. (These encounters provide a prelude to the more famous American travelogue of 1930s Soviet satirical writers Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *Odnoretazhnaia Amerika* [Single-Storeyed America].) Contrasting viewpoints on race and ethnicity form an important element of Marinova's corpus, and one fine example is the extract shown here, which treats the encounter of Russian-Jewish revolutionary Vladimir Bogoraz (Tan) with a Black American student working as a Pullman porter, and the Russian's unwittingly humorous incapacity to view him outside of stereotypes (in a fashion that anticipates the character of the mother in Shirley Jackson's mordant short story "After You, My Dear Alphonse").

Birgit Brander Rasmussen's *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* is a fascinating discussion of various non-alphabetic writing by indigenous peoples. According to its blurb, it "recovers previously overlooked moments of textual reciprocity in the colonial sphere, from a 1645 French-Haudenosaunee Peace Council to Herman Melville's youthful encounters with Polynesian hieroglyphics." The text reproduced here takes on Melville's iconic novel *Moby Dick* and explores Ishmael's description of the tattoos on the body of the Polynesian harpooner Queequeg and on his coffin. Rasmussen posits these as a fictionalized embodiment of actual Polynesian writing.

This issue's Forward also features a pair of excerpts from the anthology *Bridging Cultures: International Women Faculty Transforming the US Academy*. The book is composed of a series of memoirs by foreign-born women scholars working in various disciplines, in which they reflect on their personal experiences as foreigners in US academia. The introduction by Federica Santini, Sabine H. Smith, and Sarah R. Robbins underlines the crucially feminist nature of "standpoint epistemology"—that is, the identifying and critiquing of one's own particular viewpoint and "positioning." Sabine Smith's contribution proceeds to recount her own experience as a foreign-born woman scholar, and how she both contributes to the education of her students through her understanding of her native German language and culture and is herself shaped by her position as an outsider in the United States—Smith glories in the sense of liberation her status offers her.

José David Saldívar's work, excerpted from *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*, focuses on Américo Paredes, whom he refers to as a "proto-Chicano." Here he discusses Paredes's columns written from Asia for the United States Army magazine *Stars and Stripes* and how his experience in Asia between 1945 and 1950 crossed with and informed his evolving viewpoint on US–Mexican borderlands and his "outernationalist" envisioning of a "Greater Mexico."

Amy Sueyoshi's *Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi* is a fascinating study of the writings and character of the transnational Japanese-born poet Yone Noguchi during his years in the United States, as seen through the prism of his interlocking sexual/romantic affairs with western writer Charles Warren Stoddard, historian Ethel Armes, and editor Léonie Gilmour (a liaison that produced the famed sculptor Isamu Noguchi). Sueyoshi's detective work, matched with her sensitive analysis, allows readers to grasp the complicated ways that race, class, and "exoticism" inform intimate relations.

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