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# Forward Editor's Note

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GREG ROBINSON

The Forward section of *JTAS* continues to expand, both in size and in breadth. This issue contains no less than eight contributions, which span distances in area and thought. As with the current issue as a whole, one aspect of these contributions that I find particularly prevalent and welcome is the various ways they make use of historical approaches. It is not just that fully half of the contributors (Godefroy Desrosiers-Lauzon, Gerald Horne, Mary Nolan, and Kathy Peiss) are professional historians—even those based in other disciplines offer work that I find remarkable for their powerful historical consciousness and for the authors' solid attention to historical context in their treatment of material.

Speaking for myself, I find this especially gratifying. I have long sought to bring my historical training to my own work in American Studies, and I have repeatedly pressed authors from other disciplines, both in *JTAS* and elsewhere, to make use of historical methods and theory. I still recall the time some years back when I joined a group of colleagues, all of whom were literature/culture scholars, in a joint study of a pioneering Asian American woman author. I was able to interview the author's children to gain information about her later life, and they kindly shared family correspondence with me. I meanwhile searched newspaper backfiles for book reviews, publishers' advertisements, and author interviews. One of my cowriters was astounded by such an approach, which seemed to me elementary, and told me that literature specialists had been trained to concentrate on the text itself and not to go outside it for information! The creative use of historical tools is continually present in *JTAS*—and nowhere more so, I flatter myself, than in the Forward section, as this issue's contributions demonstrate.

The first selection is from Prudence L. Carter's *Stubborn Roots*. Carter takes on the formidable task of assessing the impact of race on the culture of public schools, among both students and faculty, in two nations marked by histories of extreme racial inequality: the United States and South Africa. Through school visits, interviews, and patient compilation of statistics, she examines the salience, and in some cases the slippery role, of race in interpersonal and professional relations. In the process, she bravely attempts to bring out the voices and subjectivities of the

people on all sides of the color line(s) with whom she interacts. Her work provides an interesting current-day counterpart to some renowned works of comparative history that have been produced on racial systems in the two nations, such as John Whitson Cell's *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* and the late George Fredrickson's twin books, *White Supremacy* and *Black Liberation*.

Godefroy Desrosiers-Lauzon, a Quebec-born scholar of American history who received his doctorate from the University of Ottawa, investigates the phenomenon of the "snowbirds." Every year, tens of thousands of individuals from eastern Canada and the US Northeast, mainly older people, migrate to Florida for the winter months. Going beyond the usual sociological (and satiric) treatments, Desrosiers-Lauzon studies the development of the migratory flows in the post-1945 period and analyzes them in relation to structural issues in leisure studies, such as the roles of state-promoted tourism, economic development, and environmentalism. Rather than seeing the migrants as contributors to community, either through their presence or their economic input, Floridians have tended to build community by engaging in tourist-bashing—the outsiders being scapegoats for larger concerns over growth and environmental damage. One of the author's important contributions is in addressing the question of how we should understand this group of border-crossing migrants as constituting "Americans," and his implicit response to the set of works, of which Lizabeth Cohen's *Making a New Deal* is perhaps the most prominent, that foreground the role of cultures of consumption in identity formation.

Gerald Horne, a prolific and provocative scholar of race and class, adds to his laurels with his work *Negro Comrades of the Crown*, which unveils the amazing history of the alliances that African Americans in search of individual and group freedom forged throughout the antebellum decades with the British Empire. Black soldiers were recruited by the British, who had their own imperial and diplomatic interests, in opposing the United States. Whether in the War of 1812, in raids from Spanish Florida, in the Caribbean, or in opposing the secession of Texas from Mexico, they eagerly joined in battles against the slave republic and its citizens.

We are honored to include an excerpt from *In Search of First Contact*, the newest work by the distinguished scholar Annette Kolodny. Kolodny has built a career as a feminist critic and activist on behalf of multiculturalism, as well as being the author of major publications on the role of environmental factors and the destruction of land in American history. Here she executes a breathtaking leap into creation stories and folklore of native peoples. Kolodny examines both European (notably Viking) and Native American stories about the first contacts between the New World and the Old World, and brings the Native people's words into the center of historical inquiry.

We are also honored, if saddened, to include a piece by the late Günter Lenz, a germinal and influential German scholar of American Studies. This piece, which is drawn from his contribution to a new anthology volume on transnational American Studies, attempts to make sense of the "transnational turn" by contrasting it with

what he refers to as “transcultural studies” and looking at how both are informed by cosmopolitanism. The piece reflects the delightfully intrepid and open-minded critical spirit of the author—he was such a breath of fresh air that his family name, which means “Spring,” was an apt one. (As a fan of both opera and wordplay, I must confess that whenever I saw Günter I had to resist the temptation to sing out to him “Du bist der Lenz,” citing Sieglinde’s Act I aria in *Die Walküre*).

Mary Nolan’s contribution, which comes from her new book, *The Transatlantic Century*, accomplishes the impressive feat of turning the historical literature on its head. Instead of adding to the familiar story of European influences on the United States and American culture, she instead reveals the pervasive influence of the United States on European culture, even before the United States became a hegemonic world power. To paraphrase the *bon mot* of Oscar Wilde (who toured the United States and frequently used American characters in his writings), if perhaps America still has never really been discovered, Nolan does at least show us how it can be detected.

Kathy Peiss, like Nolan, knocks the established literature askew in her study of the zoot suit. This flashy, over-the-top garb of the 1940s (lovingly reproduced in Luis Valdez’s eponymous play and in Spike Lee’s biopic *Malcolm X*, among others) has long been studied as a uniform of hipsters and *pachucos* in the United States, who were targeted for violent repression by white police and servicemen in the 1943 “Zoot Suit Riots” in Los Angeles. Peiss audaciously opens up her study to discuss the signifier of the zoot suit internationally. In a tour de force, she outlines the sense of cultural identity fostered among zoot suiters and allied long-coat wearers, as well as the political meanings assigned to them, in such diverse places as Mexico, Trinidad, South Africa, and the USSR during the 1940s. As an adopted Montrealer, I was especially intrigued by Peiss’s story of police targeting of zoot suiters in wartime Montreal, and by the ways in which the narrative of the zoot suiters broke down along the social and linguistic fault lines that divided (and still divide) the city’s contested landscape.

Finally, we feature Ramón Saldívar’s piece, which is the opening contribution to the forthcoming anthology, *The Imaginary and Its Worlds: American Studies after the Transnational Turn*. It is a wide-ranging and spirited piece of critical analysis that deals with the “color line” and its relation to the “cultural imaginary” of Americans. Making virtuosic use of examples drawn from texts by a panoply of different Black, Latino, and Asian American authors, Saldívar interrogates the nature (and existence) of “postethnic fiction.” It seems to me a paper that provides more questions than answers, but that is precisely why we publish new works—to have them in the discourse for discussion.

As always, we conclude by expressing our gratitude to the authors and their publishing houses—Cambridge University Press, Dartmouth College Press, Duke University Press, McGill-Queens University Press, New York University Press, Oxford

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