

Editorial

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As coeditors of the *Journal of American Studies* from 2019 to 2022, we have had the privilege of both reflecting and influencing the priorities of “American studies.” We have published articles on book history, crime and punishment, education, empire, urban space, religion and belief, transport and travel, literature and popular culture (music, sport, film, television) and much more. This work showcases the fact that *JAS* is not simply a journal that does “a bit of history” and “a bit of literature,” all of which focusses in some way on the United States. It is something much more than this: it helps to shape, and continues to expand the boundaries of, the interdisciplinary methodologies of the field in a range of innovative ways.

In this, our last issue as coeditors, we reflect briefly on work we have published and commissioned, identifying two particularly vibrant areas of inquiry. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with so many wonderful colleagues and scholars; to have been afforded an insight into the breadth and future directions of scholarship; and to have contributed, in whatever small way, to the vitality of American studies as a field.

“AMERICAN CARNAGE” AND BEYOND

We began our term halfway through the presidency of Donald Trump. Unsurprisingly, over the past four years, multiple submissions and published articles have reflected scholars’ attempts to historicize and analyse the “Trump era” and, often relatedly, the most urgent issues affecting the contemporary United States. Russ Castronovo and Stephen Knadler have provided accounts of both the historical and contemporary roots of white nationalism in, respectively, the Jeffersonian period and during the opioid crisis.¹ Jess Cotton has explored the entanglement of contemporary black poetics with

¹ Russ Castronovo, “Jeffersonian Trembling: White Nationalism and the Racial Origins of National Security,” *Journal of American Studies*, 56, 3 (2021), 372–99; Stephen Knadler, “Opioid Storytelling: Rehabilitating a White Disability Nationalism,” *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 5 (2021), 1098–1124.

the spectre of ongoing racial violence.² Wayne Reed has argued that Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* offers an early, yet insightful, figuration of populist politics.³ A special forum on the history, politics and rhetoric of the Texas "campus carry" laws featured work by a group of European scholars tackling the problems of American gun culture.⁴ James B. Salazar interrogated the problem of "defamation" in the present via an analysis of the "legal life of character" in the era of Theodore Roosevelt.⁵ Finally, Dolores Resano's essay on Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House* (2017) considered how creative writers have grappled with the Trump era and "the expectation that an emerging corpus of literary works would engage with this derealized and 'new' American reality."⁶

Each of these contributions highlights the dense entanglement between the interdisciplinary methodologies employed by American studies and the politics of the contemporary moment. None of them simply offers commentary on the present state of US politics. Instead, they approach new and old subject matter through fresh lenses that cast light not only on those topics of study – texts, events, laws and ideas – but also on how we might conceptualize their entanglement with the world we inhabit.

PERIODICAL STUDIES AND BOOK HISTORY

Our experience over the past four years suggests that periodical studies and book history continue to produce some of the most compelling scholarship in American studies. In their field-defining essay "The Rise of Periodical Studies" (2006), Sean Latham and Robert Scholes noted that this (then) "still emergent field" is "particularly distinguished by its insistence on interdisciplinary scholarship."⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that *JAS*, with its own emphasis on interdisciplinarity, has proven a particularly receptive home for this work. This compelling and diverse scholarship contributes not only to periodical studies and/or book history; it also greatly expands our

² Jess Cotton, "Unfit for History: Race, Reparation and the Reconstruction of American Lyric," *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 3 (2021), 523–50.

³ Wayne M. Reed, "Sleepwalking, Class Mobility, and the Search for the Social Origins of Populism in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*," *Journal of American Studies*, First View, 10 Jan. 2022, 1–26.

⁴ Benita Hesikanen et al., "Forum: Perceiving Security and Insecurity: The Campus Carry Law in Texas," *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2 (2021), 243–311.

⁵ James B. Salazar, "Restoring the State's Power to Defame: The Legal Life of Character in the Era of Roosevelt and Trump," *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2 (2021), 446–73.

⁶ Dolores Resano, "Competing Fantasies and Alternative Realities: Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*," *Journal of American Studies*, First View, 13 Dec. 2021, 2.

⁷ Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," *PMLA*, 121, 2 (2006), 517–31, 517.

understanding of feminist, children's and African American cultural histories. In addition, it encourages us to think in enabling ways about the collaborative aspects of literary production, the economic structures that underpin it, and the ways in which questions of prestige and celebrity play out in the literary marketplace. Rona Cran's essay on mimeograph magazines in New York in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates how women poet–editors such as Diane Di Prima, Hettie Jones and Anne Waldman “were repeatedly excluded from and labeled in reductively gendered terms by the very poetic culture they were integral to shaping, promoting, and sustaining.”⁸ Jill Anderson explores how *Seventeen* magazine's “Curl Up and Read” book review columns empowered the magazine's young female readers – including, in 1964, a young Eve Kosofsky – to articulate emergent literary-critical voices, thus affording “girl readers and writers opportunities for intellectual development and community.”⁹ Paul Bellew investigates the strange career of the child poet Nathalia Crane, whose first poem appeared in the *New York Sun* when she was nine years old. A literary sensation in the 1920s, Crane's success was upended when the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* “began denouncing Crane, alleging her whole literary career was nothing more than an elaborate hoax.”¹⁰

Articles that take book-history approaches to American studies include those by Eli Cook and Daniel King. Cook examines the rise of “Choose Your Own Adventure” children's books in the 1980s, arguing that the phenomenon must be read in the context of the emergence of neoliberalism: the books “reflected and reproduced the ascent of individual choice to the heart of American notions of subjectivity, agency, society, mobility, and freedom.”¹¹ In his essay on Albert Erskine, the white editor at Random House who oversaw publication of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), King builds on scholarship of the past two decades that emphasizes the role of the literary editor. He argues that, notwithstanding the fact that Ellison's and Erskine's relationship was “freighted by the troubled racial politics of the 1950s United States,” Erskine had a keen sense of “the avant-garde project that Ellison was attempting, and used his editorial influence to

⁸ Rona Cran, “Space Occupied: Women Poet–Editors and the Mimeograph Revolution in Mid-century New York City,” *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2 (2021), 474–501, 476.

⁹ Jill Anderson, “‘A Friend, A Nimble Mind, and a Book’: Girls' Literary Criticism in *Seventeen* Magazine, 1958–1969,” *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 4 (2021), 815–40, 815.

¹⁰ Paul Bradley Bellew, “Girl Wonder: Nathalia Crane, Poetic Prodigy of the 1920s,” *Journal of American Studies*, 56, 1 (2022), 38–64, 39.

¹¹ Eli Cook, “Rearing Children of the Market in the ‘You’ Decade: Choose Your Own Adventure Books and the Ascent of Free Choice in 1980s America,” *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2 (2021), 418–45, 424–25.

ensure that *Invisible Man* was reviewed in a way that would develop, rather than hinder, Ellison's ambitious project."¹²

It has been a great pleasure to steer the *Journal of American Studies* these last four years. We modestly hope that we have played some small role in shaping the field. But we also register the way it has profoundly shaped us via every interaction we have had with authors, peer reviewers and editorial staff. Thank you.

¹² Daniel Robert King, "'A Book One Can with Complete Confidence Call Important': Albert Erskine, Ralph Ellison, and the Publishing of *Invisible Man*," *Journal of American Studies*, 56, 3 (2022), 483–511, 485–86.