

Editors' Note

Our joint appointment as coeditors of the *Journal of American Studies* is a profound privilege and honour. As researchers working within fields – African American, diaspora, and slavery studies, and foreign relations and America in the world studies, respectively – in which *JAS* remains a pre-eminent and prestigious publication, we are inspired by a very real sense of scholarly responsibility with regard to guiding the journal through the next four years. Having benefited from a long-standing relationship both with the journal and with the British Association for American Studies (BAAS), we welcome the opportunity to shape *JAS*'s future direction. In this wonderfully stimulating endeavour, we are hugely indebted to, and are directly building on, the journal's previous editors, who have all played a fundamental and definitive role in establishing *JAS* as a major national and international publication. We are especially grateful to our immediate predecessors, Susan Castillo and Scott Lucas, for their inspirational editorial vision as they have expanded and diversified the journal's scholarly range in a series of ways that have proven to be of great importance to the ongoing life and lives of *JAS*.

Regarding our editorial vision, we work with the conviction that the field of American studies – a field that has many faces, but which can be broadly defined as a scholarly terrain committed to examining the United States in historical, social, political, literary, cultural, philosophical and art-historical, as well as national, international and diasporic, perspectives – is at a highly exciting point in its development. In research terms, a range of methodological innovations and groundbreaking theoretical and intellectual shifts have significantly increased the amount of multi- and interdisciplinary work that is being produced. As regards more practical issues, geographical innovations, which have seen the world get smaller as it becomes easier to travel vast distances and communicate effectively over the Internet, have dramatically changed the ways in which scholars work, think and talk to one another. This has led to an outpouring of American studies scholarship in which researchers are not only working within, but radically reconceptualizing, extant parameters, thereby significantly altering the intellectual landscape. Even a brief examination of early editions of *JAS* in the 1960s as compared to more recent developments clearly demonstrates how much the field/fields has/have changed over the second half of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first centuries.

At the same time, despite revolutionary changes in research areas and methodological frameworks, and as the range of people writing for *JAS* has become so much more diverse, continuities remain regarding an editorial commitment, then and now, to publishing intellectually leading and theoretically innovative scholarship. Over the decades, interdisciplinarity has assumed a more pronounced and definitive role as an intellectual and political necessity by destabilizing and interrogating formal and theoretical boundaries. As historians have begun to read sources using skills long employed by literary scholars; as literary scholars have begun to use archives to powerful effect; as fields focussing on art history, visual culture, race and representation have demonstrated their capacity to uncover figures and groups that were previously marginalized; and as people around the world have begun to bring their own lives, histories and moral, social, political and cultural perspectives to bear on the field, so the intellectual range of the essays submitted to the journal has vastly increased. As these new approaches and methodologies become more embedded and intricately intertwined in both theoretical and formal terms they will undoubtedly lead to more exciting diversions and innovations and lend yet further ballast to an American studies that consists of interlocking yet increasingly divergent and daring parts.

The opportunities looking ahead to the next four years, then, are vast; yet so, too, are the challenges. For while the profound shifts that have revolutionized the field in the past twenty years continue to expand its scope, the necessity of retaining both a central identity and a working intellectual, political and cultural blueprint that can define *JAS*'s focus in broad strokes and provide a sense of purpose remains ever more pressing. Our goal, therefore, is to establish *JAS* as a leading forum within which a diverse range of scholars from across the globe can utilize traditional and established approaches alongside experimental and newly emerging methodologies in order to debate the United States as situated within an array of transnational, transcultural, transatlantic/-pacific and diasporic frameworks, many of which have yet to be explored. Our core aim here is to blend articles that adopt a micro approach with those that are painted on a much larger canvas, in order to draw attention to arguments of significance that not only arise within the essays themselves, but also are further enhanced by ongoing dialogues between authors and *JAS*'s readers. Moreover, we are keen to find ways of presenting these in a way that is engaging and thought-provoking for readers both inside and outside universities as we seek to involve journalists, museum and gallery curators and directors, authors, artists, teachers, public historians and independent scholars in our conversations. As recent controversies attest – whether with regard to the place of American-authored texts on the British A level curriculum, or to the legacies and consequences of US interventionism overseas – these are issues of great importance with profound political, social,

cultural, intellectual and philosophical consequences for the contemporary world.

While we are therefore eager to publish articles that are at the cutting edge of international scholarship, we are also interested in thought pieces, forums, critical review essays and contributions that apply scholarly expertise to matters of wider importance. Accordingly, we are eager to solicit submissions that challenge the boundaries of what is typically considered possible within the constraints of a journal article as we welcome scholarly research that is not only methodologically innovative but formally experimental; which offers bold new interpretations or demonstrates new conceptual approaches; which demonstrates the merits of internationalization and interdisciplinarity, but which is also prepared to critically assess contemporary scholarly trends; which tackles issues relating to gender, sexuality, class, power and agency, race and representation, and the intellectual and cultural traditions embedded within the United States; and which, finally, appeals, and is accessible, to a broad range of readers across the globe who will find value in each article even if it is not in their specific area of expertise.

As regards our editorial process at *JAS*, each essay that is submitted to us is first considered by the editors and the journal's editorial board. For those manuscripts that we believe to have potential, initial feedback and commentaries may be submitted to the author. Once the necessary revisions have been made the piece will then be sent to expert external readers for their views, after which a decision and further feedback will be forthcoming. Those pieces that are then considered to be publishable will undergo a further round of revisions and commentary before going forward to publication. This process of extensive commentary and revisions ensures that the essays we publish are of the highest quality and make a substantial and original contribution to both existing and emerging scholarly fields.

We believe that the content in our first issue reflects many of the ideas contained here. Covering a wide array of interdisciplinary research areas and scholarly approaches, this issue opens with Dawn-Marie Gibson's "Nation Women's Engagement and Resistance in the *Mohammad Speaks* Newspaper," in which she highlights the vital role played by women journalists and contributors to the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, and demonstrates the part they played in both promoting the Nation of Islam and challenging its patriarchal structures and gendered norms. Theresa Vara-Dannen's "The Limits of White Memory: Slavery, Violence and the *Amistad* Incident" provides a stimulating investigation into the intersections between historical acts of resistance and ongoing strategies of memorialization. Directly engaging with innovative approaches to literary scholarship, Fiona Anderson's "A Trail of Drift and Debris': Traces of Whitman in the Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson" sheds groundbreaking light on patterns of creative influence and

exchange. Tara Morrisey and Lucas Thompson's article comes to grips with innovative interdisciplinary approaches in "The Rare White at the Window': A Reappraisal of Mark Costello and David Foster Wallace's Signifying Rappers"; Fabienne Collignon's "USA Murated Nation" investigates David Foster Wallace's 1996 novel *Infinite Jest* in terms of the links between Cold Containment, the reconfigured United States energy system and the Cold War. Kristi Branham's "Two Mothers United': Interclass Female Friendship in *Stella Dallas*" provides a thought-provoking examination of female collusion over issues relating to motherhood, womanhood and interclass white female relations. Claudia Bruehwiler's essay on the works of Ayn Rand, lastly, unpicks the relationship between politics and literature in Rand's novels and engages with debates about whether her attempt was to be explicitly political or whether, instead, her focus was on imitating her literary idols.

On the review side, and in honour of Professor Susan Manning's seminal and paradigm-shifting scholarship throughout her career, we include a roundtable led by Andrew Taylor on her final book, *Poetics of Character: Transatlantic Encounters 1700–1900*. We also include review essays by Yomna Saber on recent Langston Hughes scholarship and by Bruce Baker on a series of new historical works on the American South, and thought pieces by Regis Mann and Erin Penner on, respectively, slavery and resistance in African American studies and cultures of death and mourning, as well as forty-five reviews.

As a field that is consistently changing and adapting, American studies remains a research arena in which a multitude of perspectives, voices, methodologies and frameworks can come together and contribute to a much larger discussion. It is our profound hope that, in the next four years, we can deliver articles and conversations that continue that tradition of innovation and endeavour.

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