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keep its focus, it reminds us today of the work that is done to make the existence of the economy appear obvious and its truths uncontested. It also should remind us that the goal of fixing what the economy refers to has remained surprisingly resilient. While the field of cultural studies, American and otherwise, has paid much attention to other organizing concepts, such as nation, class, gender, society, and of course culture itself, it has often left the idea of the economy untouched. There have been a number of interesting studies of different “representations” of the economy. These usually assume, however, that the economy itself remains as a kind of underlying material reality, somehow independent of the intellectual equipment and machinery of representation with which it is set up and managed. In the same way, academic economics is often criticized for misrepresenting the “true nature” of the economy. The task now is to account for the great success of economics and related forms of expertise in helping to make the economy in the first place.

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Empire

Shelley Streeby

For most of the twentieth century, the intellectual and political leaders of the United States denied that the nation was an empire. Then around 1994, things began to change, with the neoconservatives aligned with the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) openly embracing the idea of an American empire capable of ruling the post-Cold War world. This shift is a good example of the process Raymond Williams describes in *Keywords* (1976/1983, 11–26), whereby changes in the significance of words occur rapidly at times of crisis. For Williams, World War II decisively shaped the remarkable transformations in the meanings of certain keywords that inspired his book. In the twenty-first-century United States, the response of the Bush administration to 9/11, which sociologist Giovanni Arrighi calls “a case of great-power suicide” (2009, 82), precipitated a similar crisis.

While PNAC’s embrace of empire was a departure from the Cold War framing of the Soviet Union as an evil empire and the United States as the free world’s defender, such an embrace was not a new phenomenon. In 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney’s Christmas card contained the following quotation, attributed to Benjamin Franklin: “And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?” (Bumiller 2003). As this citation demonstrates, ideas about empire as a tyrannical, Old World vice competed from the moment of the founding of the nation with arguments about the divine exceptionality of American empire. Many founders feared the proximity of other empires—British, French, and Spanish—in other parts of the Americas. In

competition with these powerful states, U.S. leaders often asserted, in spite of the prior claims of indigenous peoples, a natural right to the continent on the basis of both geography and the ongoing practices of settlement and colonization by U.S. migrants. Empire, in this context, named both a risk and an opportunity. As Montesquieu (1748) warned, empires threatened republics with corruption and decline by engendering luxury, intermixing alien peoples, and requiring standing armies. The question was whether imperialism and republicanism could be reconciled.

Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase of 1803 pushed this question to a crisis by massively increasing the size of the United States and clarifying the nation's imperial ambitions. Since then, many advocates of empire have repeated Jefferson's statement that U.S. expansion increases freedom's space and thereby contributes to an "empire for liberty," while others have echoed the logic that vast territories endanger republics. Such warnings often rest on comparisons to the rise and fall of other empires, including Rome, Spain, and England, and worries over annexing new lands. William Prescott's 1843 *History of the Conquest of Mexico* encouraged many people to imagine that U.S. soldiers retraced the steps of Spanish conquistadors as they marched on Mexico City during the U.S.-Mexico War (1846–48). Crises in India and Ireland also made the British Empire an unsettling point of comparison, as in 1847, when Theodore Parker compared the U.S. invasion of Mexico to England's "butchering" of Sikhs in India and seizure of lands in Ireland (1863/1973, 26). The annexation of new territories reanimated debates over the extension of slavery as well as the incorporation of Catholics and nonwhites into the nation (Streeby 2002). Empire and slavery thereby became fatally conjoined, and the lands acquired after 1848 further divided the nation, pushing it toward Civil War.

While midcentury historians such as Parker made bleak comparisons to other empires, many advocates of the war used words other than "empire" to describe U.S. expansion. In 1845, *Democratic Review* editor John O'Sullivan (1845, 5) famously suggested it was the nation's "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." The concept of Manifest Destiny situated the New England Puritans as God's chosen people in the Promised Land and built on John Locke's influential argument that land ownership was justified by use, as well as Jeffersonian theories that agrarian democracy extended freedom's space. The concept gave divine sanction to U.S. expansion and made it feel natural and right to white settlers and their descendants, thereby shaping the common sense of scholars who distinguished "continental" expansion across North America from empire, understood as the possession of colonies and settlements overseas. This distinction allowed scholars to claim that the United States did not act as an empire throughout the nineteenth century, a claim that is clearly counterfactual.

As a result, the U.S. expansion into the Philippines in the 1890s became widely regarded within conventional histories as an aberrant period in which the United States uncharacteristically acted as an empire. The "new" overseas empire required the extension and protection of networks of U.S. commercial interests, investments, and military bases in addition to or instead of the annexation of lands (LaFeber 1963). The truth is that little of this activity was new. From early on, the United States tried to influence, control, or even take over "overseas" places such as Cuba, and the notion of a commercial empire was strongly articulated as early as the 1860s by Abraham Lincoln's secretary of state, William Seward. While U.S. leaders retreated

from the previous pattern of annexing territories and making them into states after the 1890s, this shift was more of an innovation in empire's administration than a break. Indeed, by calling the 1890s empire "new" and distinguishing continental expansionism from overseas imperialism, scholars naturalized the violent displacement of indigenous people, even as they implied that empire was an exception in U.S. history rather than the norm.

The idea that the 1890s was an aberrant period of empire belies the extent of U.S. military and commercial intervention around the world in the decades that followed. Theodore Roosevelt stated in his 1904 corollary to the Monroe Doctrine that "chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere . . . may force the United States, however reluctantly, . . . to the exercise of an international police power" (Roosevelt 1904, 831). The idea that the United States is an international police power defending civilization has often justified interventions in Latin America, and although Roosevelt's frank endorsement of empire differs from other, seemingly benevolent attempts to build international institutions, such as Woodrow Wilson's founding of the League of Nations in 1919, both shared a vision of the United States as a "world cop" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 177). Wilson spoke of preserving peace while Roosevelt claimed war kept men strong and defended civilization against savagery, yet Wilson sent U.S. troops to intervene in Russia, Mexico, Haiti, Central America, and the Dominican Republic during his presidency. The seeming benevolence of Wilson's hierarchical internationalism derived from his rearticulation of U.S. intervention around the globe in idealistic Jeffersonian language as the extension of universal values: his 1917

declaration that the United States was devoted to making the world "safe for democracy" has often been echoed by U.S. war hawks, most recently by George W. Bush during the early-twenty-first century "war on terror."

But if U.S. leaders have used the word "empire" as a way to justify U.S. imperialism from the beginning, it is important to recognize that the deployment of the term to speak back to U.S. power is equally enduring. In the brilliant "Eulogy on King Philip" (1836/1992), for instance, the itinerant preacher, orator, and organizer of the Mashpee Revolt William Apess compared the leader of the Pequot Rebellion in Massachusetts favorably to George Washington and other "emperors" of the past as he exposed the "inhumanity" of the English colonization of Massachusetts. And over the course of U.S. history, many other American Indian writers have found it necessary to take on this enduring task of disturbing the historical and ongoing disavowal of the colonization of indigenous people. Since the "creation of the United States as a political entity," as Jodi Byrd puts it, "American Indians have existed in a space of liminality, where what was external was repeatedly and violently reimagined and remade as internal in order to disavow the ongoing colonization of indigenous people that is necessary for the United States to exist" (2011, 136). In other words, the colonizers of North America, who came from "external" faraway places, reimagined themselves as "internal" to the nation even as they violently displaced the indigenous people who were already living there.

It is not surprising, then, that despite the complicated hierarchies involved in the production of mediated narratives by indigenous people, such as *Life of Black Hawk* (Black Hawk 1833/2008) and *Geronimo: His Own Story* (Geronimo 1905/1996), these texts, along with John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854/1977), foreground the violent reimagining

of the external as internal and the traumatic spaces of liminality that empire engenders in ways that disturb its disavowal. Later, decolonization and civil rights struggles in the 1960s and 1970s made the word “empire” important again as a metaphor for the struggles of other aggrieved groups, though as Byrd cautions, when imperialism becomes an “empty referent that can be claimed by any marginalized group, to use it to describe the historical and spatial positionality of indigenous nations is a colonial violence that undermines sovereignty and self-determination” (2011, 137). That is, when “empire” becomes a metaphor, the specificity of the violent displacement of indigenous people as the origin story for the nation may disappear from view in ways that diminish and disregard indigenous nations’ prior claims to sovereignty and self-determination.

Like these Native American thinkers, intellectuals aligned with transnational social movements have recognized the risks of using empire as a metaphor. Writers and scholars such as Cyril Briggs, Alexander Berkman, Hubert H. Harrison, Emma Goldman, C. L. R. James, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, and Lucy Parsons worked in the early decades of the twentieth century to link histories shaped by empire without leveling differences among marginalized groups, though many of them were punished, imprisoned, and deported for doing so (Streeby 2013). From this perspective, the widely influential 1993 anthology *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, is best understood as a contribution to ongoing debates within American studies, not as an origin point. The book grew out of a 1991 conference that was organized “in the shadow of three macropolitical events—the end of the cold war, the Persian Gulf War, and the Columbus quincentennial” (Pease 1993, 22). Kaplan focused in her introduction on imperial amnesia, arguing that “imperialism has

been simultaneously formative and disavowed in the foundational discourses of American Studies” (1993, 5). And several contributors engaged British cultural studies, including José David Saldívar, who located himself within the University of California–Santa Cruz’s Center for Cultural Studies as he used Raymond Williams’s theory of the “country-city opposition” to analyze “the experimental anthropological and anti-imperialist literary work of Américo Paredes” (1993, 292–93). Such transnational connections helped put empire on the agenda of American studies, following the lead of Stuart Hall (1992a), Paul Gilroy (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982; Gilroy 1991), and others who had worked hard in the previous decades to persuade their colleagues to confront the way imperialism had shaped and constrained imaginings of the English people–nation and culture.

This return of empire as an object of inquiry also coincided with reformulations of American studies away from a primary focus on history and literature. Despite the dominance of these disciplines in the affiliations of contributors to *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, the social sciences are represented, and the impact of interdisciplinary formations such as women’s studies and ethnic studies is evident. This broadening of the disciplines and interdisciplines contributing to American studies and the conversation about empire continued apace in the flagship journal of the American Studies Association (ASA), *American Quarterly*, during the 2000s. It has also been evident at the ASA’s annual meetings, which have focused in recent years on topics ranging from “American Studies and the Question of Empire: Histories, Cultures and Practices” in 1998 to “Dimensions of Empire and Resistance: Past, Present, and Future” in 2012.

Within these diverse discussions of empire, new tensions have emerged, even among scholars critical

of “empire studies.” One influential example of these tensions is Caroline Levander and Robert Levine’s *Hemispheric American Studies* (2008a), which was also a special issue of the journal *American Literary History*, garnered many grants, and inspired panels at an array of professional conferences. Although the scholarship of the book’s contributors was wide ranging, their disciplinary affiliations were more homogeneous: twelve of eighteen worked in English departments, two in literature, two in Spanish, and two in American studies. The editors began their introduction by focusing on “Americanist literary criticism” but ultimately aspired to address the question of how to “reframe disciplinary boundaries within the broad area of what is generally called American Studies” (2008b, 3). “Empire studies” emerges as the bad other for the editors, who worry that “recent tendencies to conceive of the U.S. in the American hemisphere solely in terms of empire and imperialism tend to overlook the complex series of encounters that collectively comprise national communities in the Americas,” such as the “hemispheric cultural flows” that move in multiple directions (7). Their counterstrategy therefore proposes to approach “literary and cultural history from the vantage point of a polycentric American hemisphere with no dominant center” (7).

There are several kinds of hemispheric projects at play in this collection, but Levander and Levine’s conceptualization of a hemisphere with no dominant center risks disregarding enduring asymmetries of power. The keyword “hemisphere” can serve neither as a panacea for the ills of empire nor as a replacement for the keyword “empire,” since U.S. corporations and imperialists have also promoted their own versions of a hemispheric America. As Amy Kaplan explained in her 2003 ASA presidential address, both words have vexed histories, and neither will satisfactorily resolve

complicated problems of institutional and geopolitical power.

Kaplan’s insights present scholars with three specific challenges as they approach the question of empire. First, debates about empire should be recast in transnational, historical, and comparative contexts in ways that complicate simplistic characterizations of empire studies. A focus on empire need not obscure connections made below, above, and beyond the level of the nation, as well as multidirectional exchanges among diverse parts of the world and voices from other places. Second, scholars of empire should recognize difference, contradiction, and disruption, rather than turning the story of U.S. empire into a seamless narrative (McAlister 2005). Third, work on U.S. empire should be comparative and multilingual, not exceptionalist or conducted only in English. Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Latin American studies scholars, many of whom use the word “empire” themselves, have been making this point for a very long time. Indeed, the work of some of the contributors to *Hemispheric American Studies*, including Jesse Alemán and Kirsten Silva Gruesz, contradicts the editors’ ambitions to distinguish strongly between the “hemispheric” from empire studies.

The turn—or return—to empire in American studies, particularly within the subfields of American literary studies and American cultural studies, was relatively late in coming. At the inception of cultural studies in the U.S. academy, it was neither as interdisciplinary as its British counterpart nor as invested in responding to contemporary social problems. The English department was often its home in the United States, while the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham and its collective projects, including important books such as *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989), were part of an interdisciplinary formation responding to contemporary struggles. In the United

States, interdisciplinary and problem-based fields such as ethnic studies often confronted the category of empire earlier because of their closer connections to social movements struggling over imperialism and colonialism, such as the Chicana/o movement and the antiwar movement. When we define American studies in terms of programs and institutions, we must recognize the way it emerged as a post-World War II form of area studies that had ties on some campuses to the CIA, the Cold War security state, and U.S. empire. But we should also attend to what George Lipsitz has called that “other American studies, the organic grassroots theorizing about culture and power that has informed cultural practice, social movements, and academic work for many years” (2001, 27).

The pressing question today is whether American studies will be shaped in the future by disciplinary retrenching, impossible attempts to depoliticize the production of knowledge, and the cutting of interdisciplinary programs and departments in the neoliberal university, or whether it will remain open to that other, grassroots American studies of which Lipsitz writes, as well as the interdisciplinary crossings that are crucial for connecting the university to social movements. It would be strange to have “empire” recede from the American studies lexicon while debates over U.S. global military involvement and the decline and fall of the “American empire” continue to make it meaningful to broader publics and audiences. Even as we reflect on the limits of empire as a paradigm and consider the perils and possibilities of hemispheric and other frameworks, American studies scholars need the keyword “empire” to respond to what is happening in the world around us.

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Ethnicity

Henry Yu

The term “ethnicity” gained widespread currency in the mid- to late twentieth century, naming a process by which individuals or groups came to be understood, or to understand themselves, as separate or different from others. This meaning of “ethnicity” commonly referred to the consciousness of exclusion or subordination, though it also indexed social practices—language, religion, rituals, and other patterns of behavior—that define the content of a group’s culture. The spread of this theory of ethnic culture created two mutually exclusive, analytically separate categories: “ethnicity,” defined as cultural traits, was utterly divorced from the workings of the physical body, defined as “race.” When anthropologists such as Franz Boas (1940) of Columbia University and sociologists and anthropologists from the University of Chicago began to teach students in the early twentieth century that cultural characteristics were the most interesting social phenomena for study, they spread at the same time the idea that any attention to physical characteristics was intellectually inappropriate. Attacking justifications for racial hierarchy grounded in biology, social scientists used the concept of ethnicity as a weapon against racial thinking.

“Ethnicity” thus became the term that named an alternative to the earlier biological emphases of racial hierarchy. In *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (1942), one of the most significant antiracist books published in the twentieth century, the anthropologist Ashley Montagu argued that race as a category of analysis should be dropped as a dangerous invention and that “ethnic group” was a more neutral