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Reprise Editor's Note

NINA MORGAN

This edition of *Reprise* presents a broad range of approaches to transnational American Studies in excellently researched and strongly argued pieces that ask relevant and timely questions about the impact of form on content, of ideology on reality. How do textbooks shape the way we teach US history? What do narratives of the Vietnam War suggest about post-Cold War American exceptionalism? How were 1950s filmic representations of violence in US schools important transnationally as images of postwar American life? What blindnesses to the aesthetic value of certain literary forms pervade the ideologically locked critiques of today's critics? What can the history of images of US Presidents tell us about the transnational mobility of political contexts? How might a comparison of newspapers transnationally produce a historical understanding of the development of a specific identity across cultures?

Thomas Bender's 2009 essay, originally published in *Contexts: The Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, asks the important question of how a nation-specific curriculum in history—that is, how “American” history itself—can be taught with the least influence of political factions and the least interference of commercial factors, in light of the fact that both elements, the political and the commercial, have played a role in the construction of the US history textbook. Bender's essay, “Can National History Be De-Provincialized? U.S. History Textbook Controversies in the 1940s and 1990s,” demonstrates the complexity of the problem as multiple stakeholders seek to control, limit, or promote particular elements of the narratives of US history. Professional historians, Bender argues, like history itself, have “no responsibility to supply comfort”—that is, no role in promoting nationalism or American exceptionalism—yet he also warns that, due to changes in the textbook industry, they also may have little role in determining what is finally published. Bender's essay, which specifically discusses the impact of political conditions—World War II, for example—on the daily practice of teaching and writing about history, serves as an insightful reminder of the complexity and vulnerability of a nation's memory.

This problem of historical thinking is also taken up in William V. Spanos's chapter “Vietnam and the *Pax Americana*: A Genealogy of the ‘New World Order,’” which was originally published in his book-length study entitled *America's Shadow: An*

Anatomy of Empire (1999) and is here reprinted, courtesy of the University of Minnesota Press. Spanos's prescient, unrelenting, and wide-ranging analysis of the consequences of the Vietnam War argues that the contemporary moment—including the Gulf War, Operation Hope in Somalia, American interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, for example—has its “provenance” in the Vietnam War, yet the Vietnam War has essentially been underanalyzed and forgotten under the anesthetic of the American amnesiac condition, which perpetuates, systematically, an interpretation and misrepresentation of American exceptionalism and imperialism. Spanos's philosophically informed interpretation of Vietnam Era literature, as well as other mediated representations of war, suggests that the Derridean specter haunts the “triumphalist” American representation of the post-Cold War reality, the New World Order or “*Pax Americana*,” and that the various politically correct theories that predict the decline of the nation-state or that celebrate the rise of American multicultural democracy will have mostly been the blind leading the blind toward a misapprehension of the global phenomenon of American hegemony.

Adam Golub's research in “A Transnational Tale of Teenage Terror: *The Blackboard Jungle* in Global Perspective” on the Cold War era depiction in popular film of the US educational system as plagued by juvenile violence—specifically in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955; based on the novel by Evan Hunter)—is timely and sets into motion a series of relevant questions about the global perception of on-campus violence, US youth, and US culture. Golub focuses on the film's reception in post-occupation Japan and West Germany in order to highlight the role of geopolitics in assessing the social and cultural “honesty” of a critical self-representation in fictional narrative, as well as the US government's willingness or unwillingness to allow such depictions their freedom. This essay expands the transnational interpretation of the value of this film by not only comparing how different countries responded to the film but by demonstrating that the intervention of the film into the political moment affords significant insight into the inner workings of cultural diplomacy. A highly teachable essay, this work could be usefully paired with more contemporary narratives problematizing juvenile violence and educational space in US culture and elsewhere; furthermore, it highlights the transnational interpretative framework as essential to an understanding of the mutuality of the political and forms of representation when read in historical context. *JTAS* is grateful to *Red Feather: An International Journal of Children's Visual Culture*, which originally published Adam Golub's essay in 2012.

In a fierce defense of the aesthetic properties of the ethnic autobiography, Isabel Durán, “as an outsider” to the politics of “Chicano” critics working in the US (“I am Spanish, and live in Spain”), argues that certain politicized critical approaches to ethnic autobiography inside the US have insisted on an identity politics that reads ethnic or minority writing as “good” if and only if it is “obedient” to the critic's political ideology, regardless of its aesthetic value as art. Proposing a “renewed theory of the aesthetic,” Durán offers a strong refutation of Ramón Saldívar's critical assessment of Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory*, while simultaneously demonstrating how a

transnational American Studies produces very different intellectual concerns, in this 2003 essay entitled “Latino Autobiography, the Aesthetic, and Political Criticism: the Case of *Hunger of Memory*,” previously published in *Nor Shall Diamond Die: American Studies in Honour of Javier Coy*, edited by Carme Manuel and Paul Scott Derrick (Valencia: Biblioteca Javier Coy d’estudis nord-americans, Universitat de València).

Udo Hebel examines the recent critical history of visual cultures in American Studies in his essay “‘American’ Pictures and (Trans-)National Iconographies: Mapping Interpictorial Clusters in American Studies,” focusing his analysis specifically on “political photography” and the concurrency of contexts that inform his reading of the history of US presidential images. This beautifully researched article, previously published in *American Studies Today: New Research Agendas* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014), takes up questions related to “tensions” between disciplinary concerns and transdisciplinary potentialities for interpreting the representation of the political inside the framework of transnational American Studies.

Greg Robinson’s article “Whispers of the Unspeakable: New York and Montreal Newspaper Coverage of the Oscar Wilde Trials in 1895,” originally published in 2010 in the French-language journal *Rue des Beaux Arts*, no. 24 (2010), is here republished and—with much gratitude—translated (for the original text, please see <http://www.oscholars.com/RBA/twenty-four/24.7/Articles.htm>). Robinson’s transnational study focuses on how reading the specific language of newspaper reports of the Oscar Wilde case, literally from a distance, from places less emotionally attached to and nationally distinct from the scandal’s epicenter in London, England, provides insight into “the state of everyday public knowledge and discussion of (homo)sexuality, at least west of the Atlantic”; thus Robinson’s fascinating research, which involves numerous newspapers—from the elite *New York Times* to the *New York Herald*, from the *Montreal Daily Star* to the French-language papers of Quebec—concludes that the popular press, read transnationally, offers key insights into the developing attitudes toward and levels of interest in the newly forming identity of the “homosexual” across societies.

JTAS thanks the editors and staff who have helped to secure permissions to republish these pieces.