Postcolonial Theory And The United States: Race, Ethnicity, And Literature

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INTRODUCTION

Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt

Postcolonial Theory and the U.S.: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature opens with essays that are broadly comparative in scope and raise crucial questions regarding the interconnections between postcolonial critique and U.S. ethnic studies—especially Black, Asian American, and Latino/a and Native American studies. These essays all present different ways of understanding the interchange between poststructuralist and postcolonial theory on the one hand and U.S. ethnic studies theory and practice on the other.

Our introductory essay, "On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory," was written especially for this volume. Our thesis is that recent U.S. race and ethnicity studies splits into two groups with rather different premises, the "borders" school and the "postethnicity" school, and that this division can only be fully understood by placing it in two different contexts. First, although these debates in U.S. studies are one of the symptoms of the "culture wars" of the 1980s and 1990s, we believe these debates have an older genealogy: they may be traced back not just to the 1950s but to the early modern period of the 1890s through the 1920s, when "American Studies" was being first constituted as a field in the academy. The second context important for understanding arguments over the role of ethnicity and race in U.S. culture is developments in postcolonial studies. We briefly survey key developments in this field. Then, in the last section of the essay, we focus on three exemplary areas of interaction between postcolonial and U.S. race/ethnicity studies—transnationalism, "whiteness" studies, and feminism. We also make the case that our analysis of current trends in U.S. studies has great relevance for understanding the contradictions in current theories of "globalization." We conclude the body of the essay by presenting what we believe are key challenges to the emerging "borders" paradigm in U.S. studies.

In Arnold Krupat's "Postcoloniality, Ideology, and Native American Literature,"
he gives both a wry deconstruction of how representations of “authentic” Native American cultures and voices have become fashionable both inside and outside of the academy in the 1990s and a vigorous argument for making what he terms “anti-imperial translation” at the heart of any valid sense of the “postcolonial,” especially as it may apply to Native Americans. He also outlines some reasons for his skepticism towards the applicability of this newly fashionable term to Native Americans’ life and art, including literature. In his view, contemporary Native American literatures cannot quite be classed among the postcolonial literatures of the world for the simple reason that there is not yet a “post-” to the colonial status of Native Americans while considerable number of Native people exist in conditions of politically sustained subalternity. Yet some Native American fiction clearly looks and sounds like other postcolonial fiction published elsewhere but also performs ideological work that appears quite analogous—especially when it comes to issues of translation and boundary-crossing. Because historically specifiable acts of translative violence marked the European colonization of the Americas from Columbus to the present, it seems to Krupat particularly important to reappropriate the concept of translation for contemporary Native American literature. To do so is not to deny the relationship of this literature to the postcolonial literatures of the world but, rather, to attempt to specify a particular modality for that relationship. Krupat’s essay concludes with a reading of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). It is reprinted from *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture* (Nebraska UP, 1996).

Mae Henderson’s essay, originally published in *Callaloo* in 1996, gives a comparative history of Black Studies in the 1960s and 1970s and the present and argues that the infatuation of many U.S. scholars with British cultural studies and postcolonial theory in general erases the contributions of U.S. Black Studies to the interdisciplinary study of transnational cultures, while greatly overstating the contrasts between the “nationalist” 1960s and the supposedly “transnationalist” present. Her essay then presents several models for “recovering” the historical evolution of Black Studies as a source for models of cultural studies, particularly via interdisciplinary and cross-cultural modes. She argues that any valid narrative we construct of the genealogy of cultural studies in the United States must create a place for Black Studies as a scholarly and political enterprise that transformed the university into a space of contestation and negotiation over the production and construction of knowledge. The advent of Black Studies was an inaugural moment and remains central to the formation of the contemporary cultural studies project. Its introduction into the American academy has paved the way for the articulation of a series of claims and counterclaims which have made the case for feminist studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, gay and lesbian studies, and cultural studies as well.

Rafael Pérez-Torres’s “Refiguring Aztlán” addresses the multiple and often complex roles that the image of the Aztec homeland has played within a variety of Chicano/a cultural and political discussions. Noting that various constituencies have invoked Aztlán in order to defend or defy particular articulations of Chicano/a identity, this essay argues that Aztlán serves as an empty signifier. By reclaiming Aztlán in various contexts and for various purposes, Aztlán never ceases taking on numerous forms in the continuing process of Chicana/o self-identifiication on a cultural, social
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and political level. The image of Aztlan suggests a homeland, yet it is a place whose contours are ever contested. Any position—whether nationalist, culturalist, feminist, queer—erases certain aspects of what Aztlan may represent in order to foreground others. This essay offers a genealogy for Chicano critical discourse. It traces the lines of descent by which the term Aztlan has been passed down since its reclamation for the Chicano Movement in 1969. Rhetorically, the term represents a strategy of indigenous affirmation reminiscent of the development of a Mexican nationalist discourse following the Revolution. Politically, it is used to stake a claim for legitimacy and land in the face of military and social oppression against Mexicans and Chicanos begun in 1848 at the close of the war between Mexico and the United States. Culturally, the term comes to represent a kind of spiritual or ethical component to the development of Chicano and Chicana identities. In each case, the term Aztlan contests the continued exploitation of Mexicans and Chicanos by evoking an image that suggests a claim to place before the incursion of European powers. Needless to say, the call to an originary indigenous past can lead to essentialisms and erasures that have persistently bedeviled conceptualizations of Chicano/a identities. It is these erasures that draw Chicano and Chicana critics back to the complex relationship between self and place in order to reclaim, rearticulate, and refigure Aztlan. In the end, Pérez-Torres sees Aztlan functioning most vitally as an “absent unity” that inspires continual reinterpretation and transformation of both Mexico and the U.S. The essay was originally published, appropriately enough, in 1997 in Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies.

Sau-ling C. Wong’s essay, similarly, shows a sophisticated understanding of the many ways in which critiques of nationalism associated with postcolonial theory have influenced Asian American studies. But she is simultaneously aware of how often Asian American histories have been erased or oversimplified where “theory” is concerned. Given current American political and cultural realities, she argues that multiple strategies are needed in both community-building and scholarship to emphasize both the unities and the differences of Asian American experiences and cultures—some strategies stressing pan-Asian American unities and others opening space for complexity and difference (“denationalization”) as needed. Such a balance is the “theoretical crossroads” she promotes. In this Sau-ling Wong shares a position similar to those articulated recently in revisions to their own work made by Gayatri Spivak, Lisa Lowe, and David Palumbo-Lui, among others. Wong’s essay has been frequently cited (and argued with) since its original publication in Amerasia Journal in 1995, and we are pleased to republish it here along with a new headnote specially written for this anthology by the author, in which she chronicles and reflects upon the interpretations the essay has received and the ways in which Asian American studies has evolved since the mid-1990s.

The second section of this anthology focuses on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary and cultural conflicts, yet the essays exhibit a striking set of contrasting assumptions about applying “postcolonial” theory to U.S. social history. Maureen Konkle’s contribution focuses on the early nineteenth-century Native American writer William Apess, which in turn inspires a critique of some of the current assumptions in Native American studies. She argues that William Apess describes U.S. colonial epistemology in his Eulogy on King Philip, which situates a critique of the
emerging nationalist historiography of New England and the U.S. as a whole in relation to Native arguments for the sovereign status of Indian nations in the removal era, particularly those of the Cherokee, which were well known at the time. Apess’s critique shows that the purpose of the production of knowledge about the identity of Indians is to displace the fact that the Indian treaty, which is necessary to legitimate the authority of the U.S. government, concedes the political autonomy of Indians. Apess thus joins the Native political leaders and intellectuals who preceded him and he serves as a precursor of those who followed, for Native people have pointed to the treaty as the demonstration of Europeans’ recognition of their political autonomy and heterogeneity virtually since the beginning of the written record, through to the present day. Apess goes a step further than his predecessors, however, in that he explicitly connects the systematic oppression of Native peoples with the production of knowledge, thus linking politics and epistemology. Apess’s critique thus has far-reaching significance for the criticism of Native American literature, which continues to produce knowledge about the psychological or cultural identity of Indians without addressing the history of that preoccupation. Apess’s rejection of European notions of Indian identity as mere cover for political objectives and his profound knowledge of what writing had done to Native people and what it could do demonstrate that new vocabularies of critical discourse are necessary to address the history of Native writing and the peculiarities of colonialism in North America and the U.S. Konkle’s essay, especially revised for this volume, originally appeared in *American Literature* in 1997.

Carla L. Peterson’s essay asks why a comparatively large number of novels written by African Americans were published in the 1850s—after more than a decade in which the primary attention of Black writers had focused on other genres, particularly the ex-slave narrative. Her answer explores how fiction could shape responses to economic and cultural exploitation and underdevelopment in both the North and the South that were significantly different from how other literary forms challenged those inequities. Peterson notes that one of the first conventions these new fictive narratives challenged was that of framing and endorsing the “authenticity” of a Black-authored text by a white writer. She then gives an extended discussion of the role that revising inherited genres and generic expectations—particularly tragic mulatta and picaresque plots—could play in response to colonialism in fiction. The mulatta figure, for instance, could appeal as an exotic and sexualized narrative commodity to be consumed by readers in both North and South, thus paralleling the “surplus” or luxury value that lighter-skinned mistresses had within the slave economy. But in the hands of Black writers the mulatta’s story could also bring the inequities of the slave economy sharply into focus while also embodying acts of resistance. The essay originally appeared in *American Literary History* in 1992.

When Lawrence Buell’s essay was first published in *American Literary History* (also in 1992), it caused controversy for perhaps too easily equating the responses of canonical European American nineteenth-century writers such as Cooper, Bryant, Whitman, Melville, and Thoreau vis-à-vis the United Kingdom with the dilemmas faced and strategies employed by contemporary postcolonial writers such as Achebe and Ngugi. Yet Buell’s original essay acknowledged the difficulties and dangers of what he was trying to do, while urging that U.S. studies of white mainstream/canonical writing
not ignore postcolonial studies because of these complications. In particular, Buell framed the challenge as exploring the border (that is, the link) between "American postcolonialism and American imperialism." The version of Buell's essay presented in this anthology is revised and rethought, a beneficiary of skeptical but also supportive criticism he received from U.S. studies scholars. To the extent that U.S. literary culture is thought in terms of postcoloniality, the place criticism understandably tends to begin is with internal colonization of racial and other minority groups and voices, and their resistance to that. But the dominant Yankee culture during the early years of national history also exhibited a number of defining traits analogous to formations associated with the so-called newer English literatures, particularly but by no means exclusively settler culture discourse. Ironically, it is in so-called "classic" American literature, i.e., the work of the subsequently canonized nineteenth-century white male writers, that one especially finds these parallels. Buell's essay attempts to define, account for, and reflect on some of the broader implications of this peculiar situation.

Amy Kaplan's essay argues that traditional definitions of empire as "expansionist" are inadequate, particularly for the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. America's new empire of democracy, according to Brooks Adams and Franklin Giddings, defined itself ideologically against the territorially based colonialism of the old European empires. Kaplan shows that a complex double discourse of American imperialism emerged in the 1890s: politicians, intellectuals, and businessmen on both sides of the debate were redefining national power as disembodied—that is, divorced from contiguous territorial expansion. In the same period, and often the same breath, masculine identity was reconceived as embodied—that is, cultivated in the muscular robust physique and a "romance" narrative in which this chivalric hero rescued white women and engaged in cultural uplift in "frontier" spaces within past U.S. history, or kingdoms set in the past or future, or countries undergoing colonial crises, particularly in Latin America or the Pacific. Under Kaplan's eyes, these imperial romance narratives conflate and make exotic the threatening poles in contemporary political rhetoric of old-world "tyranny"—empire—and new-world "anarchy"—revolution—against which the U.S. intervenes and defines itself. Kaplan explores links between fictional narratives and U.S. adventures in Cuba, the Philippines, and elsewhere; she also provocatively investigates connections between these fictional soldiers of fortune and the discourse of the "new woman" in this period. She reads a number of once hugely popular novels against this ideological matrix, including Richard Harding Davis' Soldiers of Fortune (1897); Mary Johnson's To Have and To Hold (1900); George Barr McCutcheon's Graustark (1901); and Owen Wister's The Virginian (1902). The essay was originally published in American Literary History in 1990.

Anne Fleishmann's essay on Charles Chesnutt places his paradoxical conceptions of both racial and regional identity as a response to developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the U.S. In doing so, she also critiques currently influential readings of Chesnutt's work (especially Eric Sundquist's) while in general agreeing with recent reconceptions of the period that make Chesnutt as important as Mark Twain to an understanding of the Gilded Age's obsession with guilt as well as gilt, the color-line as well as the production line. Fleischmann argues that Chesnutt's "The Wife of His Youth" is about the demise of mixed-race identity following the 1896
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Plessy v. Ferguson decision. In the story, two particular characters and their abilities to "pass" or not are allegories for race discourses in the South—Mr. Ryder is a biracial, "freebawn" black man whose skin tone allows him to pass as white, while 'Liza Jane is a darker-skinned former slave. Throughout the narrative, different moves are made to "whiten" 'Liza Jane and mask Mr. Ryder's own biracial identity, raising questions concerning the allegiance of either character to their social history. Recent postcolonial theoretical formulations—those that reject a manichean racial duality and affirm the possibility of hybridity—suggest however that rather than simply resolving his dilemmas by finally privileging of his "black" self, Mr. Ryder's choice illuminates how the Plessy decision reinscribed the two-race system of white dominance and black oppression by denying the possibility of creating and cultivating hybrid or syncretic racial and cultural identities. Fleishmann's essay has been accepted for publication in the African American Review.

Kenneth Mostern's "Postcolonialism After W. E. B. Du Bois" argues that if the term "postcolonialism" is understood as the name for certain textual moods (ambivalence), styles (hybridity), and tendencies (interdisciplinarity) rather than as the name for a historical period—as famous definitions by both Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak suggest—then Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folk is clearly a postcolonial text. Mostern suggests that ambivalence, hybridity, interdisciplinarity and the forging of new aesthetic paradigms are best understood not as unique historical events but as the tendency of a class fraction—that of the elite educated "minority" scholar in the twentieth century. Mostern's reading seeks to define the relationship between particular minoritized subjectivities, which we call "races" and "ethnicities," and what marxism would call their class fractions. Further, it also claims that "postcolonial" subjectivity (including Du Bois') does not adequately represent all minority subjectivities—those minority subjectivities that are not formed in the western academy are not representable within postcolonialism. Mostern's essay is scheduled also to appear in the volume Rethinking Marxism, from Guilford Press.

The final section of the anthology, focusing on cultural developments in the U.S. since World War II, is the longest in the anthology because we want readers to confront the paradox that since the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s colonial and postcolonial questions of power have become more rather than less prevalent in U.S. literature and cultural studies.

Jana Sequoya Magdaleno's contribution was originally published in 1993; it has been specially revised and expanded for this volume. It meditates on how ongoing attempts to define "Indianness" in literature and culture are emblematic of global struggles to contain and control difference in modern societies. Building upon premises similar to those in Krupat's essay but pushing her argument further, Sequoya Magdaleno directly faces two contentious issues of cultural appropriation: the ethics of publishing Native American oral sources that are part of the tools of survival of endangered communities, and the politics of the appropriation of Native American studies by the academy in the name of the postcolonial. She also considers the paradox that the concept of the mestizo or the métis refers to historically cohesive cultures in the Americas, but within the U.S. —especially for Native Americans—such an emphasis on mixed-blood and mixed-culture tends to produce fragmentation and dis-
persal of identity and identification rather than cohesiveness. Her arguments on these points should be central to any historical understanding in cultural studies of the virtues and dangers of "hybridity." Sequoya Magdaleno's essay also tests her points with comments on works by N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko, among others. In its earlier incarnation, entitled "Round 1," this essay appeared in 1993 in *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*, edited by Arnold Krupat.

Rhonda Cobham's piece focuses on three Caribbean authors writing in English: Merle Hodge, Erna Brodber, and Paule Marshall. Marshall's work is most obviously relevant for the themes of this volume, for she has lived for many years in the U.S., but by including this essay covering two other Caribbean-based writers we do not mean this as a gesture "annexing" them as U.S. writers—and this is certainly not Cobham's intention either. Rather, Cobham's essay, like this anthology, in effect argues that a full understanding of U.S. cultural history is impossible without a comparative and transnational cultural approach. Thus Avey, the U.S.-born heroine of Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, cannot fully understand how her identity has been shaped via exclusions as well as inclusions until she journeys to the Caribbean. Cobham's essay also demonstrates that Marshall should be considered not just in terms of how she revises U.S. cultural history but from within a primarily Caribbean literary and historical context. Further, Cobham argues that Brodber, Hodge, and Marshall—in contrast to some cultural nationalist and radical feminist writers—seem singularly committed to that oldest of female/colonial responsibilities of maintaining and renewing the sociosymbolic order. All the three novelists discussed are members of that Black middle-class strata of women who have benefited from the intersection of class, racial and sexual bias. The cultural spaces (here figured as "kumblas") that have protected them do not exist for the majority of their lower-class sisters. The narrative and metaphorical experiments of the writers discussed, however, deliberately thematize these representational limitations, so that the texts themselves come to function as a critique of the process they embody. Their openness to the possibility of subversion, while constantly working towards the consolidation of a functioning sociosymbolic order, differentiates their work from the deconstructive strategies common to writers and critics within Western discourse, where the unraveling of the dominant discourse is often represented as a liberating breakdown of all social order. An earlier version of Cobham's essay was published in *Callaloo* in 1993.

Counting Konkle, Buell, Kaplan, and Lisa Majaj, among others, this volume's essays present perspectives that investigate the privileges of whiteness in American culture in what may be taken to be postcolonial terms. In "Arab Americans and the Meanings of Race," Lisa Majaj notes that Arab Americans are in the unique position of being largely excluded from both majority and minority status as currently defined in the U.S. —what Majaj calls the "ethno-racial pentagon" (Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and white) established as normative during the Nixon administration (1968–74). Arab Americans' inconsistent and contradictory history of racialization may shed new light on the inconsistencies of the color-line as it functions in U.S. legal traditions. Majaj also traces the contentious history of the use of the word "Arab" in the U.S., noting that it functions unevenly and contradictorily in all of its uses—as a racial and an ethnic category; as a referent to a language (Arabic) shared by many
but not all; as a religious category that often functions as a code-word for Islamic (even though many Middle Eastern Americans are Christian); and as a strange form of shorthand in which a single ethnic group (Arab) designates many, rather as if “Chinese American” were to be the preferred pan-ethnic/racial term over Asian American. (And like “Oriental,” of course, the word “Arab” in English is embedded with its own complex colonial history.) Majaj shows that although some prefer the term “Middle Eastern American,” the name “Arab American” since the 1970s oil crisis has emerged as the most workable pan-ethnic term than can aid groups’ organization as a political and economic and cultural force in U.S. life. In short, it joins a long history of pan-ethnic terms that aid Americanization, but are themselves not necessarily an endorsement of assimilation or postethnic identity as often defined in current U.S. cultural debates. Majaj’s article ends with a helpful survey of Arab American autobiographies, fiction, and poetry of the past century. After World War II, she argues, there is a significant shift away from narratives adopting an ethnographic stance “explaining” Islam to the West while the authors (often Middle Eastern Christians) dissociate themselves from Islam. Contemporary authors such as Diana Abu-Jaber and the Lebanese-American Lawrence Joseph attempt to negotiate ethnic identity in the U.S. within a racialized framework by examining its contradictions rather than confirming its authority.

Juan Flores’s contribution to this volume argues for the centrality of Arcadio Díaz-Quírones’s essays, particularly La memoria rota: Ensayos sobre cultura y política (published in Puerto Rico in 1993), in contemporary U.S. studies. He shows how Díaz-Quírones’s work corrects much earlier cultural commentary coming out of Puerto Rico which treated primarily as an afterthought the cultural issues faced by Portorriqueño communities within the U.S. His essay also includes a cogent discussion of how Díaz-Quírones’s concept of memoria rota (broken memories) is deeply rooted in U.S./Puerto Rican history and expresses a sense of new possibilities, not just brokenness, that is comparable to (and influenced by) such concepts from postcolonial theory as Homi Bhabha’s articulation of the importance of a “third space” in culture breaking up some of the binary hierarchies of colonial and neocolonial practices. Flores’ essay originally appeared in Modern Language Quarterly in 1996; the revised essay appears both in this anthology and in Juan Flores’ From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity (Columbia University Press, 2000).

Leny Mendoza Strobel focuses on contemporary issues in Filipino American cultural identity and their implications for Asian American panethnic consciousness. Behind the “new face” of the Filipino American community in the mid-1990s are significant shifts that need to be articulated in how cultural identity and Asian panethnic consciousness are understood. The Filipino American presence within Asian American Studies needs to be expanded beyond the Bulosan and Philip Vera Cruz generation, the literary contributions of the “flip” generation, and the oral history books by Cordova, Vallangca, and Espiritu. While there is an emerging body of scholarly work, the post-1965 community has yet to be extensively studied. Numerous materials have been generated in the last ten years by the community itself, however, such as the Filipino American Experience Research Project at San Francisco State University, newspapers and magazines, television programs, and cultural productions in California such as the
Filipino American Arts Exposition project of the Philippine Resource Center. Strobel's article gives an overview of some of these materials, along with data from her own interviews with students, writers and artists, and other community members. In particular, she focuses on examples of attempts to develop community institutions that would make access to indigenous knowledge and narratives of decolonization available not just to academics but to all sectors of the community. The essay also discusses the importance of community arts festivals across the U.S. and gives a brief survey of emerging Filipino American writers and artists of the 1990s beyond fairly well-known names such as Hagedorn, Gonzalez, Bacho, and Villanueva—including Ruth Mabanglo, Eileen Tabios, Cecilia Manguerra-Brainard, and Bino Realuyo. Strobel's essay has been revised and updated especially for this anthology; an earlier version was published in *Amerasia Journal* in 1996.

Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth's essay, written especially for this volume, asks how the increasing presence of postcolonial diasporics—such as the South Asians—in the United States is changing the definition of Asian America/n, and hence altering ethnic American literature. While some South Asian Americans are comfortable with an Asian American identification, many consciously and actively "dis-identify" themselves from this ethno-racial category. Part of this disidentification stems from the recognition by many South Asian Americans that Asian American social and cultural spaces have historically been dominated by literary artists and scholars of East Asian ancestry even though South Asians were among the earliest immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century, and South Asian Americans today outnumber the Japanese Americans. Highlighting the ambivalent position of postcolonial South Asians within Asian American literary and cultural studies, this essay locates four South Asian American writers of diverse backgrounds who occupy the interstitial "third space" in Homi Bhabha's phrase—Agha Shahid Ali, Shani Mootoo, Tahira Naqvi, and Abraham Verghese—and analyzes their works within the rubric of the U.S. ethnic canon. Shankar and Srikanth argue that South Asian American literature offers a unique vantage point from which to view and comprehend this critical time of flux within the Asian American and North American demographic landscape. The equivocal position of South Asian American literature within Asian American studies epitomizes many South Asians' desire to be a part of yet remain apart from the rest of Asian America.

Inés Salazar's wide-ranging, comparative essay—also written especially for this anthology—stresses the power of cultural memory and cultural revision in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, and Helena Maria Viramontes' "The Moths." Much of the literature by African-Americans and Chicanos is marked by an acute awareness of the condition of diaspora and a concomitant longing for "home," that is, a place of belonging. However, the literature by women studied in this essay suggests that they experience the condition of diaspora differently from men. For them, "home" as a site of nostalgia for uncomplicated return is fraught with potential peril. Simplistic invocations of home, both materially, as in "the family," and figuratively, as in "culture," are often aligned with patriarchal values. Just as significantly, the texts discussed also weave a complex critique of mainstream American society for its role in subjugating women of color politically, socially, and economically. Thus,
figures in these texts engage in transgressive behavior by actively opposing the expectations both of their own communities and of larger American society. In doing so, they create an alternative to conceptions of community engendered either by a strictly race-based analysis or by white feminist theory. These writers also invoke a long legacy of activism by women of color that does not owe a debt to white feminism and in fact often precedes it. This legacy in turn serves as a foundation for new, more inclusive figurations of community. In this model, women of color lead the way transforming the very meaning of American society.

Bruce Simon’s essay "Hybridities in the Americas" concludes our anthology. Simon uses the work of three novelists (Hawthorne, Condé, and Mukherjee) to demonstrate the advantages of comparative readings of cross-cultural migrations and reconfigurations. Simon also presents an exemplary instance of how contemporary literature reshapes our interpretation of canonical texts—Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, in this case—and suggests that our sense of what is at stake in such reimaginings becomes profounder when we see these events in postcolonial terms: Mukherjee’s and Condé’s revisions of Hawthornian romance seek in divergent ways to emplot the powerful repressions that lie under claims to authority and the ability to "speak" for others. Simon’s essay has not been previously published. Its breadth and historical range and its central focus on issues of ethnicity and colonial power bring this volume to an appropriate close.