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Miscegenation in Natasha Trethewey’s Native Guard (2007)

By Sofia Politidou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

This article examines the changes in the concept of miscegenation, from the slavery era to the 1960s and the 2000s, as recorded in Natasha Trethewey’s Pulitzer Prize poetry collection Native Guard (2007). Through close readings of the poems “Pastoral,” “Miscegenation,” “Blond,” “Southern Gothic” and “South” from the third mainly autobiographical section of the collection, Sofia Politidou argues that while in the past miscegenation was strictly a matter of race for African Americans, today it is also a matter of identity and self-identification.

Trethewey narrates how she experienced discrimination for being a mixed-race person in the early years of her life. She also describes how being a mixed-race person led her on a quest for selfhood. Trethewey believes that American anti-miscegenation laws enhanced her feeling of being different and caused her to doubt her racial identity.

In the twentieth century, years after the institution of slavery was abolished, black people and people of mixed-race origin were still marginalised by the law as second class citizens. Being black was determined less by complexion and more by the “one-drop rule.” Even when it was not evident in their skin colour, people of African American origin were marginalized and maltreated under American racism. After the fall of the Jim Crow system and the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the status of black and mixed-race people altered. Mixed-race marriages from the 1970s onwards were legal, but initially many people refused to accept such unions. Mixed-race people had to face double racism from both whites and blacks. Moreover, children of mixed-race couples have difficulty in deciding whether they should identify with one parent’s racial identity or both. Trethewey describes just such difficulties in her poetry, specifically her own experiences of discrimination, and those of her mother, and towards the end of the collection, her identity crisis and her inability to decide with which of her parents - her white father or black mother - she most identifies.

Trethewey’s writing is greatly influenced by her personal experiences, particularly in the third mostly autobiographical section of Native Guard. Mindy Wilson in her article on Trethewey’s life asserts that the “daughter of a black mother and a white father, Trethewey grew up in a South still segregated by custom, if not by law, and her life astride the color line has inspired her recovery of lost histories, public and private” (The Georgia Review). Trethewey shares with her readers her personal experiences of segregation in Mississippi, where she was born, and in the South in general.

Pastoral

“Pastoral” is about the Old South. The poem’s title connotes a natural and agricultural landscape of fields and livestock, much like the South was during slavery and the feudal plantation system. In

1 According to James Davis’s definition of the “one drop rule,” a black is any person with any known African black ancestry. This definition reflects the long experience with slavery and later with Jim Crow segregation. In the South it became known as the “one-drop rule,” meaning that a single drop of “black blood” makes a person a black. (5)
“Pastoral” Trethewey also narrates a dream that expresses her deepest fears and desires about an experience she had with her white father that made her realize their differences, despite a shared interest in poetry. This experience centres around them having their photograph taken during which Trethewey’s biraciality becomes visible:

Say “race,” the photographer croons. I’m in/
Blackface again when the flash freezes us. /
My father’s white, I tell them, and rural. /
You don’t hate the South? they ask. You don’t hate it? (8-14).

After the camera flash freezes them, she is black. The colour of the flash light is white, and functions as a metaphor for the perspective of white people. In the eyes of white people she looks black, a perspective affirmed in her dream about how her blackness is revealed in a “white” world. She also feels bad for being black, and asserts an identification with her white father’s origins. The tone of the poem at this point is defensive and this feeling is enhanced by the fact that the photographer instead of telling them to “say cheese,” asks them to “Say ‘race’” (11).

Photography is a form of documentation, which in this poem highlights how society needs to document race by putting people into categories, much like putting photographs in albums. In ‘Pastoral’, nature itself objects to this compulsion for documentation and labelling: “a lush pasture, green, full of soft-eyed cows/ lowing, a chant that sounds like no, no” (5-6). In an interview, Trethewey discusses this intersection of poetry with photography:

what has always interested me about a photograph is that even though it seems to capture and eulogize a particular moment, there are all the things that swirl around it, things that are cropped out of the frame, that which was just behind it that we don’t see. And there is always a fuller version of the story that needs to be told. I believe the photographic image is a way to focus our attention, and it can be the starting point for a larger exploration of what else is there. [...] What’s been cropped out or what’s not there—words are like that too. (McHaney)

Trethewey employs photographs in “Pastoral” and other poems in order to ask her readers to think beyond what they see written in the poem. For her, poems and photographs are not only about the experiences they capture but also about what they leave unmentioned and undocumented.

Miscenation

In “Miscenation,” Trethewey describes how her parents had to go to a different state to get married because mixed marriages were illegal in Mississippi back then. Before 1967 interracial marriages were illegal in sixteen states and children born of these unions were regarded as illegiti-
found as a baby on Christmas day. This poem is also about Trethewey’s identity crisis due to her biraciality. According to Dorcas Bowles, many biracial children have a problem of identity due to their biraciality. More specifically, she argues that this identity “quest has been especially troubling for children with one parent African-American and the other, white. Many children from these unions have identified as black; others have taken on a white identity; and still others have considered themselves bi-racial” (417). Like Trethewey, Joe Christmas is biracial. He has been described as one of the loneliest characters in American literature and resembles the tragic mulatto. Faulkner also attributes to this character many of the characteristics of Jesus Christ because he was discovered at Christmas and died at the age of 33, just like Christ. Even though he was part white from his mother and part Mexican from his father, he passed as white. He appeared white and without information about his ancestry he was perceived as white and not as Mexican.

Trethewey talks about how she was given her name by her father: “My father was reading War and Peace when he gave me my name./ I was born near Easter, 1966, in Mississippi” (9-10). The title of Tolstoy’s novel also alludes to Trethewey’s future life experiences as a mixed-race person, and her rejection both by the black and white communities.

Blond

In “Blond,” Trethewey discusses her childhood confusion on first realizing that she is different from her parents. She wonders whether she would look more like a white person if some of her physical features were different. In this poem she describes and compares her two different experiences of race, living with her white father throughout the school year and her black maternal grandmother during the summer in Mississippi.

In the first stanza, Trethewey talks about reaching her Jesus year of 33, being in Mississippi and still being alive. Thus she did not die like Jesus, but she still feels confused about her identity, which is another element that makes her identify with the fictional character Joe Christmas. She concludes the poem by mentioning in the last two lines that even though she knows more about her origins than the tragic mulatto Joe Christmas did about his, she still does not know which one of her parents’ racial heritage she identifies with or wants to identify with. All she knows is that her name remains the same even in Mississippi.

Trethewey’s study about racial identification of mixed-race children found that most children where the mother is black and the father is white “are more likely to be identified as White” (1142). In the second stanza, Trethewey discusses the confusion she feels on receiving a Christmas gift:

When on Christmas day I woke to find/
a blond wig, a pink sequined tutu,/ and a blond ballerina doll, nearly tall as me,/ I didn’t know to ask, nor that it mattered, /
If there’d been a brown version. This was years before/
My grandmother nestled that dark baby/ into our créche, years before I’d understand it/ as primer for a Mississippi childhood. (9-16)

In these lines it becomes clear that Trethewey was raised embracing only her white heritage in her father’s house in New Orleans, with white dolls and blond wigs as Christmas presents. Only in her grandmother’s house does she experience her black racial and cultural heritage. A turning point in her life is when she saw a black baby - her brother - in the family’s cradle, before which she was not conscious of the concept of race.

In the last stanza of “Blond” Trethewey describes her childish reaction of putting on the wig and the costume and the reaction of her parents:

Instead, I pranced around our living room/
in a whirl of possibility, my parents looking on/
at their suddenly strange child. In the photograph / my mother took, my father — almost/
out of the frame — looks on as Joseph must have/

Before 1967 interracial marriages were illegal in sixteen states and children born of these unions were regarded as illegitimate.
at the miraculous birth: I’m in the foreground— /
my blond wig a shining halo, a newborn likeness /
to the child that chance, the long odds, /
might have brought (17–25).
This reference to the ‘miraculous birth’ is again an allusion to Christ and his birth. Being born both black and white makes her feel she is something too white and not white enough respectively. Joel Williamson maintains that, “whereas the problem for mulattos used to be not white enough to be accepted in the white world, now the problem, sometimes, is ‘too white’ to be accepted in the black world. Very light mulattos, mulattos who could pass for white, frequently suffer from an extreme discrimination within the Negro world” (190).

Mixed-race people were often rejected both by blacks and whites for being too white and not white enough respectively. Southern Gothic
This discrimination of being too white and not white enough is described by Trethewey in “Southern Gothic.” The ‘gloomy’ title anticipates some of the bad experiences Trethewey had in the 1970s because of her biraciality. What is of importance in this poem is the verbal abuse she experienced by her classmates at school for being a mixed-race person. She has just returned home,
from the schoolyard with the words that shadow us/
in this small Southern town—
puckerwood and nigger/
lover, half-bred and zebra—
words that take shape/
outside us (12–15).

For her, miscegenation is about race and the racism she experienced in school. Being teased and brutalized was common for mixed-race children, and as Spenser asserts, “numerous examples can be provided of mixed-race adults who have not forgotten their racial brutalization by black children when they were young” (36). Overall, the poem is governed by a pessimistic mood.

South
The poem Trethewey chooses to place last in her collection is “South.” It functions as an epilogue and includes her personal history and History from her birth until the present. Trethewey opens the poem with an epitaph by E.O. Wilson: “Homo sapiens is the only species to suffer psychological exile” (45). After all the difficulties Trethewey has been through in the South, she feels psychologically exiled from it, as well as from her southern identity. In the poem, she returns to Mississippi, the place she has been exiled from for being a mixed-race person, in order to reclaim her identity as a native of the South. Throughout the collection [Trethewey says] I am trying to assert the part of my work which is Southern.” (quoted in McHaney).

The poem starts by going back to the slavery era and the Civil War. The fact that on the war memorials there is no mention of the black people who fought in the Civil War is what makes Trethewey feel exiled in her home state, as if those soldiers were exiled from the history of the place. Trethewey writes:

I returned to a country battlefield/
where colored troops fought and died—/
Port Hudson where their bodies swelled /
and blackened beneath the sun—unburied /
until earth’s green sheet pulled over them,/
unmarked by any headstones, /
Where the roads, buildings, and monuments/
are named to honor the Confederacy, /
where that old flag still hangs, I return /
to Mississippi, state that made a crime/
of me—mulatto, half-breed—native /
in my native land, this place they’ll bury me (23–34).
By writing this poem, Trethewey is trying to right this wrong of excluding the black heroes of the Civil War. The siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, on the Mississippi river lasted from May 21 to July 9, 1863. Nowadays, the place is a monument and a park for people to visit and learn its history. Trethewey returns to the place that has wronged black and mixed-race people throughout the years, the place that made her birth a crime in the past. While in the past she was deemed a stranger in her homeland, now she is a native in her native land. This is the part of the poem that the epigraph refers to, because she and people like her suffered psychological exile from their place of birth. These are some of the factors that make her feel that she does not belong in Mississippi and confused her about her identity. While as a child miscegenation was for her a racial issue, as an adult it has become an issue of selfhood. She is able to decode her life experiences better as a woman than she did as a child. As the poet’s life experiences grow more and more she becomes able to form anew a racial identity.

To conclude, while in the past miscegenation was a legal and racial issue it has become nowadays a problem of identity. Mixed-race people like Trethewey experience great difficulty in identifying with the differently racialised parts of their ancestry. In addition to their inner conflict, they are forced to cope with a racist society which inhibits their quest for identity and self-hood. In order to form a fuller understanding of herself, Trethewey decides to revisit her past and learn everything about her ancestors and her place of origin. She believes that this journey to the past will help her to form a more complete identity for herself in the future. It seems to me that Trethewey’s poetry proposes that people of mixed-race ancestry should formulate their identity by looking to their ancestral past. This knowledge of the past and ancestry is integral to identity formation.

Works Cited


This article argues that the North American Captivity Narrative, with its textual origins in the Puritan imaginary and lived experiences of the New England frontier, should be understood as ideologically structured through the distinctive Puritan vision of an emigrant sacred ‘errand’ from the Old World, to what it envisioned was a new one. It focuses on Mary Rowlandson’s autobiographical account, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, which was first published for an embattled Puritan congregation of Massachusetts in 1690, and constitutes the earliest published example of the tradition of captivity narratives published in North America. This article argues that the North American captivity narrative may not simply be shorn of its ideological and rhetorical contexts, nor the Puritan habitus in which the work was produced. Rather, as Panay contends here, the significance of Rowlandson’s narrative is as Sacvan Bercovich describes it, ‘evidence of private regeneration into a testimonial for the colonial cause.’

The American captivity narrative is a literary genre based on the historical reality of captivity by Indians experienced first by colonial settlers of the eastern seaboard in the seventeenth century. In New England, where women and families were numerous relative to other New World colonies, settlements were designed to be domestic and permanent ones, and constituted the borders of a frontier space beyond which was the domain of the ‘lurking’ Indian. Puritan settlers in New England believed themselves to be ‘in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous and most treacherous, being most furious in their rage and merciless where they overcome’.  

Rowlandson’s account of her abduction by Indians during the conflict known as Metacom’s War (1675-76) became a best seller on publication and is considered to be among the most popular selling books in all American literature. *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* was the first captivity narrative to be published as a full length book and was extremely rare in being written by a Puritan woman.

Formerly of Somerset England, Mary Rowlandson, a mother of three young children, was attacked and removed from her home in Lancaster, New England. She describes the first moments of her ordeal with spare literary power in the opening line of her account: ‘On the tenth of February, 1675, came the Indians with great numbers upon Lancaster’. Rowlandson describes her own physical injuries and the sickening sight of the attacks she witnesses upon family members in the first minutes of the assault. Subsequently, she, along with several of her children and a sister and her young child, set out on a forced march by their Indian captors. During the eleven week captivity from which she is eventually freed on the payment of ransom, Rowlandson experiences a physically and emotionally shat-
tering ordeal. Ultimately, Rowlandson attributes her salvation not to the cold currency with which her life is actually bought, but entirely to the providential intervention of God. At the conclusion of her ordeal she declares, ‘Thus hath the Lord brought me and mine out of that horrible pit, and hath set us in the midst of tender-hearted and compassionate Christians.’

The swift and ferocious dawn raid on her home, her capture and removal along with several of her children shatters a previously peaceful frontier existence. Rowlandson constructs her narrative with care and skill to show that the experience provides an emotional and spiritual watershed in what was hitherto an unremarkable life. Once captured she is forced to obey the instructions of her captors to travel beyond the relative security of her previous life to a world of ‘those barbarous creatures - a lively resemblance of hell’. She describes her journey as a forced removal from civilisation by employing a unique literary device that she describes as a series of ‘removes’. Each remove is symbolic of her journey into the ‘heart of darkness’ and each provides her with the opportunity to reflect on the contrasts between her present circumstances and former life, drawing as she does from this renewed comfort and strength in her faith in God. Richard Slotkin argues that ‘this method of marking the passage of time reinforces the impression of captivity as an all-environing experience, a world in microcosm, complete even to having its own peculiar time-space relationships’.

Contexts of Captivity in Puritan New England

Recently Linda Colley has suggested that the Indian Captivity narrative should be understood as emerging through the established tradition of European captivity narratives. European narratives of captivity centred on the experiences of soldiers and seamen along the Barbary Coast and described their ordeals in bondage amongst the Muslim nations of North Africa. These, she suggests, are adapted through the captivity contexts of early English migrants to America to form an embryonic American genre, substituting Native Americans for North Africans in what is still though, fundamentally, a geo-political drama centred on the imperialist expansion of the English state in familiar centuries old contexts of inter-nation rivalry and competition centred on the Mediterranean Sea. More personally, Colley identifies in Sovereignty and Goodness of God, perhaps the most famous of these narratives, numerous references Rowlandson makes to her native country of origin England, and extrapolates from this that ‘at one level, this is a narrative that is fixated on the bonds of Englishness’.

Richard Slotkin however, contends that the Indian captivity narrative serves as an archetypal drama for the early American colonies, the earliest examples of which dramatise the traumatic experience of Puritan relocation and subsequent struggles to settle the New World. Sarah Pike also observes that ‘early New England was a site of spiritual warfare for colonists who cast American Indians and witches as their demonic adversaries’. In the Puritan imaginary the individual captive in their suffering comes to represent the perilous existence of the whole community, an individual who stands in for a society in torment ‘betwixt God and the Devil’, on the cusp of civilisation and barbarity.

The narrative thus forces to prominence the individual sufferings of those taken captive, removed from their frontier home and taken against their will by hostile Indians into a wilderness domain. The Indian captivity narrative is located in historical contexts of conquest and colonisation. So far as the English Puritans are concerned this is primarily undertaken to fulfil a mission of Sacred Errand identified by Perry. In addition to this there is also a larger geo-political context, the struggle by European powers and their North American proxies to secure influence, territory and wealth in the Americas. The Indian Captivity narrative arising from these contexts thus provides a historically and politically meaningful text for the study of emergent American identities, one in which the cruelties and privations suffered by individual citizens are ideologically por-
trayed as the symbolic trials of the entire colonial community to establish the right of settlement and ultimately of environmental conquest. Linda Colley ignores the radical Puritan origins of the earliest American examples of the captivity narrative of the New World, and focuses instead almost exclusively on the wider struggles of European powers for geopolitical dominance of North America. In doing so she identifies the Massachusetts migration as commensurate with that of others in Virginia and the West Indies, as an imperialist adventure on behalf of the emergent English state to expand its territorial authority to the New World. This in turn, wrongly I think, leads her then to use examples of captivity narratives from Virginia and New England interchangeably, and so neglects the distinction between the very different communities from England that settled these two graphically distant and ideologically distinct colonies.

That Rowlandson was a Puritan and member of a revolutionary religious community is of vital importance to understanding the meaning of her captivity, her motivations in writing it, those of her Puritan sponsors and publishers in distributing it, and therefore the extent to which her narrative may be read uncomplicatedly as an extension of a prior Old World narrative tradition. Stephen Mennell makes the point that American development proceeded quite differently to that typically found in Western European countries where more or less unified elites emerged to become dominant. By contrast he observes that American development was characterised by the emergence of ‘several competing model setting elites. There is no single homogenous American habitus.’ So, whilst settlement of Virginia was indeed intended to extend the religious and moral virtues of God’s ‘elect nation’ to new territories, the New England colony of Massachusetts Bay was envisaged by its proselytisers and settlers not as an extension of the English state but as a radical re-imagining of it, a deliberate and defiant withdrawal from an old world believed by many of their most prominent and influential ministers to be corrupted beyond redemption. This Puritan rejection of England as elect nation followed by emigration and resettlement is based on the radical re-envisaging of providential history, the apocalypse of Puritan eschatology.

For Puritan emigrants, England is thus rejected as sacred space in sacred time, and instead, appropriating Exodus as analogous to describing their migration to the New World, the Puritan emigrants envisage the New England landscape not only as the site of a new biblical commonwealth, but also as ‘the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse’. Rowlandson’s attachment to her Englishness and the interpretation she makes of this therefore, as a member of the radical Puritan colony of Massachusetts, is unlikely to be so unproblematically envisaged as that of an ‘ex-pat’, to use modern terminology; simply because England as elect territory or elect nation, is rejected in the eschatological reading of history to which Rowlandson and her contemporaries so piously and strictly adhered.

As the first published in America for an emigrant audience, Rowlandson’s captivity narrative must then I think be understood as an innovative New World text because the experiences it describes are imagined and understood in the contexts of a profound re-ordering of ecclesiastical history by a revolutionary community in the sacralized space of the New World. Although breakaway and separatist protestant communities had previously envisioned such radical breaks with eschatological orthodoxy in Europe, such communities arose especially in France; the community to which Rowlandson belonged was the first to envisage the Promised Land as residing beyond Eurasia and the known world of biblical knowledge. The Indian Captivity Narrative then, whilst not describing in printed form a unique human drama, since examples emerged first in Europe to describe the plight of Barbary captives in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, nevertheless provides for a radically different captivity tale from these because the conditions of its production occur in a place and from within a community of self proclaimed ‘visible saints’ that has made a revolutionary break with its past, and that believes itself to be elected by God to fulfil a sacred historical mission.

The Captivity Story and the American Jeremiad

Gary Ebersole argues that the Rowlandson narrative provides an ‘interpretive frame’ for the earliest captivity narratives by
‘imposing the then Calvinist covenantal theology on the historical reality of captivity.’

He goes on to suggest that influences such as the sermon and spiritual autobiography are informative of its rhetorical style and narrative organisation, and that in particular the early New England captivity narrative is influenced most profoundly by the protestant jeremiad. The traditional jeremiad of the Old World pulpit ‘decried the sins of the people – a community, a nation, a civilisation, mankind in general – and warned of God’s wrath to follow’. It was an attempt by rhetorical bludgeon to demonstrate the vengeful destructiveness of God’s displeasure, [who] ‘writes his severe truths with the blood of his disobedient subjects’. Mary Rowlandson’s account of her captivity by Indians is described by Ebersole as inspired in large part by the jeremiad, arguing along conventional lines that the narrative functions in New England in a traditional sense to warn against ‘backsliding’ in the colonies and the terrible consequences that follow.

This interpretation is countered to some extent, though significantly, by Sacvan Bercovitch who argues that the traditional protestant jeremiad described by Ebersole actually undergoes significant modification by English Puritan radicals prior to their emigration to the New World. The jeremiad which they take to New England, and which subsequently inspires Rowlandson, is designed primarily ‘to direct an imperilled people of God toward the fulfilment of their destiny, to guide them individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God’. The American jeremiad functions not only as a corrective for individual and community sin or disobedience as is the tradition in Europe, but also as a reminder to the New England congregation that they remain chosen by God. The American jeremiad insists that the fulfilment of sacred history, the creation of the ‘City on the Hill’, is God’s divine plan for them. Thus the American jeremiad ‘inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming to the world, and despite the world, the inviolability of the colonial cause’. This important modification of the traditional form can be accounted for, Bercovitch argues, by the particular interpretation made by the New England Colonists of their role in the unfolding of sacred history. The Puritan radicals understood this role and their part in it as instruments specifically chosen for a sacred historical design.

Avihu Zakai similarly emphasises the exceptional project of the New England colony. He begins by arguing that New England was envisioned by the earliest proponents of the migration as sacred space within sacred history, whilst England and the Old World was, concurrently, desacralized. The migration itself was justified with reference to two biblical accounts concerning what Zakai calls the ‘human drama of salva-
tion and redemption’. Drawing from the account of the Jewish flight from Egypt contained in the Book of Exodus, and from the flight of the woman, who is analogous with the true church of God, from the ‘dragon’s rage’ in the Book of Revelations, leading Puritan separatist John Winthrop sets out the proposed migration in a correspondence with his wife as an unfolding cosmic drama in three acts: deliverance, pilgrimage and glorification. Zakai’s identification of the narrative structure of deliverance, pilgrimage and glorification to describe the processes of the New England journey towards the ‘American city of God’ has similarities with the structure of Rowlandson’s narrative as well, and subsequently to the structure of succeeding captivity tales even when these are no longer religious in tone or content. Richard Slotkin describes the typical structure of the captivity narrative following its religious phase as ‘capture, trial and return’, and argues that this dominates in the era of mass communications and the emergence of a full blown American popular culture. This then further cements the Rowlandson narrative as descending not from the European tradition of Barbary captivities, or the newly hybridised providence tales of the sixteenth century as Hartman suggests, but rather as emerging through a distinctive American jeremiad, itself a modification of the traditional form found in European contexts.

**War, Text and Conquest on the New England Frontier**

The form in which the American jeremiad emerged in seventeenth century New England ‘was not a matter of crime and punishment, but of regeneration through suffering’. This subtle if significant modification of the jeremiad as traditionally delivered is further reconstituted according to Deborah Madsen ‘since popular forms such as the captivity narrative’ were also made to function as jeremiads. Understood in this way, Rowlandson’s account may be read, as Bercovitch puts it, for its intention ‘to create a climate of anxiety that helped release the “progressivist” energies required for success of the venture’. For the colonists this venture was an “errand into the wilderness” as a chosen people of God.

Rowlandson’s captivity account should thus be understood as entirely subordinate to the main covenantal exercise which was to ‘portray the settlers as a people of God in terms of election, the body politic, and the advancing army of Christ’. Rowlandson’s narrative, sponsored and circulated by Puritan authority Increase Mather is designed to achieve and promote just such an ideological effect. The published account, after a relatively long history of transfer from Puritan pulpit to written auto-biography, takes place at a pivotal moment in the Colony’s history. Published in 1682 but having undergone her captivity during Metacom’s War (1675-76), The Sovereignty and Goodness of God advances the Puritan project of progressive colonisation through sacred errand by advocating ‘regeneration through suffering’ of its frontier inhabitants in a period of the rapid escalation of land seizure for domestic settlement and the brutal expansion of farming.

The causes of Metacom’s War are instructive of the future progress of the colonies and the consequent demise of Native American tribes and were twofold. Firstly, local tribes became increasingly angry at the colonists’ insistence on fencing land which had the effect of disrupting established migrations of deer upon which local tribes depended. Secondly, anger mounted also at the practice of allowing the periodic free foraging of domestic cattle which destroyed vital Indian crops. On the colonists’ side, their resentment was sharpened by a growing refusal of Indians to accommodate frontier expansion by selling their lands. The relationship of colonists to the land they believed was decreed to them by divine providence was fraught with complex considerations and accommodations, between pious adherence to radical scriptural interpretation and the emergence of acquisitive entrepreneurial capitalism. The resolution of this conundrum was settled finally by an ingenious reconciling of both sacred and secular elements of the puzzle, the accommodation of land speculation and profit-based ownership with the divine mission of settling the wilderness for the Glory of God. Ultimately, in New England, the religious and the economic as Taylor acknowledges, ‘were interdependent in the lives of people who saw piety and property as mutually reinforcing’.

In the first few months of Metacom’s War, initial Indian military successes threatened to forestall if not entirely disrupt the relentless westward spread of the colony. This proved to be short lived though, and by conflict’s end in 1676 it is estimated that some 40% of the local native inhabitants had either been killed, or else sold into slavery. Entire
tribes were eliminated or else quickly disintegrated. Furthermore, the wilderness country under Indian control now indisputably belonged to the colonists. Rowlandson’s account, whilst often demonstrating her fear of her Indian captors and sometimes using barbarous rhetoric to describe them, is not entirely unsympathetic towards them, though there is no sense of understanding of the causes of conflict other than those she attributes to God. In ultimately attributing the motives of her captors to the machinations of ecclesiastical providence, Rowlandson’s narrative ‘assumes a communal significance as a typological repetition of the biblical story of Babylonian captivity. In the same way that her suffering repeats that of the captive Israelites, so her eventual release signifies the glorious future destiny of God’s newly chosen people in the New World’.32

Sacred Errand as construed in the Puritan’s reading of sacred history involves flight from the corrupted Old World Egypt (England) to the New Israel (New England) through the design of, and by the grace and guidance of God. Justifying the separation Thomas Brightman uses the story of the Woman’s flight into the wilderness from the ‘dragon’s rage’ contained in Revelations. Brightman declares the Woman analogous to the ‘the image of the Church’, and thus the Woman’s flight into the wilderness is transformed by him into the Church’s flight into the wilderness ‘signifying the migration of saints from a corrupted nation’33 If the vision of Puritan errand is looked at in this way as Zakai suggests it should be, then Mary Rowlandson’s account of her journey into the wilderness of the New England landscape written under the close tutelage of Increase Mather, begins to seem intentionally symbolic of the entire enterprise which constitutes the Puritan migration to the New World, since in the Puritan imaginary the colony is enacting the unfolding of providential history contained in scriptural allusion. Thus, through the experience of Indian Captivity and using the rhetorical form established through the familiar Protestant jeremiad, but with the significant modifications Bercovitch argues are apparent in the American variant, Mary Rowlandson’s narrative becomes one in which ‘her rhetoric renders her at once a microcosm of colonial history, and a guide to the American future’.34

Notes

“Love American Style”
Race, Cuban Identity and Cultural Tyranny in Showtime’s Dexter

By: Donna Maria Alexander (University College Cork)

This article focuses on representation of Cubans in the television series Dexter, paying particular attention to episode 1.5, “Love American Style” with some brief references to other episodes. Assimilation, the American Dream, nationalism and crisis of identity are among the themes and issues that this article investigates. Border theory provides the dominant theoretical framework of the article.

The television series, Dexter (Oct 2006 – present), explores the life of the fictional, white serial killer, Dexter Morgan, who is also a blood spatter analyst for the police force based in Miami, Florida. The series contains what Ewan Kirkland describes as “an admirably multiracial cast” that features Hispanic, black, Asian and white characters (210), and that reflects Florida’s demographics. Miami Dade has the largest concentration of Cubans in its populace. In terms of diaspora, Cubans are certainly well represented in Dexter, with a number of prominent characters both in law enforcement as well as the greater civilian population. A number of characters including Lt. Maria LaGuerta (Lauren Velez) and Sgt. Angel Batista (David Zayas) have been in the show from the beginning. Characters such as Assistant District Attorney Miguel Prado (Jimmy Smits) featured in an entire season (Season 3) and others such as Jorge Castillo (José Zúñiga), who is central to the main discussion in this article, appears in just one episode. As well as diasporic representations, viewers are presented with an abundance of Cuban food, religion, music and culture. A number of Cuban characters often hold unsubtitled Spanish conversations with one another. Thus, Dexter presents an authentic representation of Miami through its embrace of the Cuban population and its cultural rituals.

Representation of Cuban characters
This article focuses on the representation of Cubans in Dexter using the episode, “Love American Style” (1.5) in which Jorge Castillo appears, as a case in point. While almost all characters in Dexter are flawed in some way, the Cuban characters really stand out in this respect. It is worth discussing a number of these characters across different seasons of the show before focusing on Jorge Castillo. Cuban characters are generally well represented in number and in social status, often occupying positions of respect in their careers and communities. However, they also tend to be power hungry, highly manipulative, sexually deviant and sometimes murderous.

For example, Maria LaGuerta, lieutenant of Miami Metro Homicide Department, is portrayed as having climbed to power through her political manipulation of the Cuban masses and the media in Miami. Maria is often portrayed as engaging in sexually inappropriate behaviour towards work colleagues including the protagonist, Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall). The first time we are introduced to Maria in the pilot episode titled “Dexter” she is surrounded by a horde of journalists while at the same time openly flirting with Dexter who is clearly uncomfortable with her behaviour. As Maria gives Dexter an overtly sexual wink, apparently
unconcerned that the news cam-
eras are rolling, we hear Dexter in
voiceover thinking, “I wish she’d
stop that. It’s one of those mating
rituals which I really don’t under-
stand.” Dexter’s reference to
“mating” reduces María’s seduc-
tive overtures to a primitive act
that removes any sense of emo-
tion from her flirtation.

Angel Batista is a detective in the
Homicide department. As series
One progresses we learn that
Angel has been unfaithful, is in
the process of a divorce and fre-
quently indulges in alcohol and
casual sex, or, as he calls it “la
passion.” The use of his mother
tongue in this way provides a
definite linguistic link between
Angel’s Cuban identity and his
sexual desires. We also see Angel
indulging in illegal solicitation of
prostitutes, and his sexual appe-
tite even leads him into a trap of
being falsely accused of rape in
season Two. Thus, his career and
reputation are constantly put at
risk due to his dubious behaviour.

Confirming racial stereo-
types
The Third season centres on a
Cuban villain who confirms the
racial stereotypes discussed here:
Miguel Prado, assistant district
attorney of Miami, is a murder-
ous, manipulative, power hungry
Cuban alpha male living under
the guise of high social status and
respect. Miguel appears to be a
celebrity of sorts in the Cuban
community, receiving praise and
admiration for his high success
rate in reprimanding criminals.
However, despite this admirable
exterior, Miguel is revealed as a
messy, volatile murderer. In his
article, “Dexter’s Whiteness,”
Kirkland juxtaposes Miguel and
Dexter to display a clear racial
contrast:

Hence, when Miguel’s hot-headed
Cuban identity is contrasted with
Dexter’s typical white male serial
crime killer stereotype, it
becomes clear that characters in
the series are constructed in
close accordance with their
racial backgrounds.

A close examination of “Love
American Style”, the fifth episode
of the first season illuminates
further the issues of race and
identity of Cuban characters. In
this episode the protagonist, Dex-
ter, is stalking his next kill, Jorge
Castillo, a human trafficker and
cold blooded killer. If Jorge’s cus-
tomers cannot pay a release fee
on entering the States under his
protection he drowns them and
luxurious lifestyle as the epitome
of the American dream and the
cornerstone of their marriage:

Jorge Castillo: We want the
same life.

Valerie Castillo: We want
the same thing

Dexter Morgan: You share
the same dream?

Valerie Castillo, Jorge
Castillo: Yes that’s it.
Thus, Jorge’s extravagant life-
style and ideal marriage to a
beautiful white woman demon-
strate his attempt to assimilate
into the dominant culture of
North America. Critics such as
Frantz Fanon have commented on
intermarriage and the role of
white women in assimilation. In
Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon
states that men of colour often
engage in relationships with

While the practised killer
[Dexter] remains attached
and aloof, unclouded by
emotion, the DA [Miguel]
pursues a personal ven-
detta against Ellen Wolf

...when Miguel’s hot-headed
Cuban identity is contrasted
with Dexter’s typical white male
serial killer stereotype, it
becomes clear that characters in
the series are constructed in
close accordance with their
racial backgrounds.

whom he messily murders
then dumps into an open
grave. Dexter sleeps
soundly in his bed untrou-
bled by the atrocities he
has committed, but Miguel
has restless nights. While
Dexter has a granite set of
ethics, Miguel has no dead
white man’s Code to live
by and, as a consequence,
spirals out of control (212).

Jorge and his wife view their
luxurious lifestyle as the epitome
of the American dream and the
cornerstone of their marriage:

Jorge Castillo: We want the
same life.

Valerie Castillo: We want
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Dexter Morgan: You share
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white women “to be acknowledged not as black but as white . . . who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love . . . I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness” (63). In the case of Jorge and Valerie’s marriage, it can be argued that she is a trophy wife attesting to her husband’s success in climbing up the racial ranks and assimilating into the dominant white society of the United States.

Living the American Dream

The title of the episode, “Love American Style”, is derived from a television show of the same name which first aired in America in 1969. It was a comedy series that featured a line-up of celebrity guest stars appearing in anywhere from one to four short stories within an hour and that focused on versions of love and romance. The opening theme of the “Love American Style” show bombards viewers with a visual and lyrical display of white American patriotism. A plethora of nationalistic images including the American flag with fireworks in the background symbolise American notions of freedom and independence because these images are particularly evocative of American Independence Day celebrations. In his article “U.S. Independence Day a Civic and Social Event: Americans celebrate July 4, 1776, adoption of Declaration of Independence,” Michael Jay Friedman describes the national celebration as “a major civic occasion, with roots deep in the Anglo-American tradition of political freedom.” The lyrics of the opening song refer to a love that is greater than “the red white and blue” of the American flag and on a “star-spangled night,” alluding to the American national anthem. The distinctively Anglo American national pride and patriotism we see in this mid-twentieth century show is emblematic of Jorge’s vision of the “American Dream,” thus displaying a deliberate thematic link between this episode of Dexter and the mid-twentieth century show of the same name.

In a discussion of the representation of “culturally plural societies” (151) Stuart Cunningham argues that “Much diasporic cultural expression is a struggle for survival, identity and assertion, and it can be a struggle as much enforced by the necessities of coming to terms with the dominant culture as it is freely assumed” (154). In an endorsement of Cunningham’s assertion, this article examines Jorge’s denial and betrayal of his ethnic identity in order to achieve his desire of living the “American dream.” Ultimately his Cuban ethnicity is effectively “othered” by his actions and therefore his identity remains on the margins and borders of American society. Chicana theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa says of the US that “the only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger” (25-6).

Jorge not only aligns himself with white Americans, but even claims to be one, thus denying his Cuban origins and exploiting other Cuban immigrants in order to achieve the class status and material goods needed to pass as a privileged American. His use of Cuban immigrants to finance his assimilation highlights the tension between his true identity and his desired one. Thus, Jorge is clearly caught in the border between Cuban and US culture and identity. Anzaldúa states that “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (25). In view of this statement, Jorge’s border identity is evident through the symbolism of his junkyard which is filled with used car parts and rusting vehicles including an old family camper van, symbolic of his desire to accumulate the material goods necessary to fully assimilate into dominant American society. The cars and motor vehicles that Jorge has accumulated are broken down, defunct and immobile, representative of Jorge’s flawed and morally tainted chasing of the American dream. Dexter makes a similar observation during his visit to Jorge’s work premises stating that:

I don’t understand America’s obsession with cars. I can just imagine squeezing Rita and the kids into this thing [camper van], hitting the open road, crammed quarters, public bathrooms, hours of nothing but conversation. Someone’s American dream, my nightmare.

Behind this public business Jorge uses his fishing boat to operate his human trafficking enterprise, drowning illegal immigrants and condemning their bodies to the body of water that Jorge surely crossed in pursuit of his new life as an affluent American citizen. The junkyard that is filled with dilapidated vehicles and the fishing boat he uses to transport and murder illegal immigrants are symbolic of Jorge’s perception of the dominant culture in the US and the mobility that it affords those who are part of it. However, the deadly role that these defunct and disguised vehicles play in Jorge’s flawed efforts to facilitate his American lifestyle is indicative of his eventual failure.

Furthermore, the dialogue that passes between Dexter and Jorge about boats and sailing during the serial killer’s visit to Jorge’s junkyard is significant. Jorge’s wry comment that he has “a row boat with a hole in it” expresses the murderous and monetary function that his fishing vessel plays in his tyrannical treatment...
of his Cuban customers. In her essay “Eating the Other” bell hooks observes that “cultural, ethnic and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate” and “the other will be eaten, consumed and forgotten” (39). In this case “the other” is drowned, submerged and concealed within the body of water that forms the border between Cuba and America to aid in Jorge’s assimilation and passing within the dominant American culture. Elaine K. Ginsberg states that passing is about “the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing” (2). The drowning and submergence of illegal immigrants represents Jorge’s metaphorical drowning of his own ethnic background. Jorge profits from his part in the human trafficking industry and then proceeds to immerse his connections with Cuba in the body of water that he himself once crossed in search of his “American Dream.”

During their maritime conversation Dexter’s quip in Spanish which translates as “Perhaps the fish will find you” is also of an ominous and prophetic nature as Jorge is soon to meet his death at Dexter’s hands and will then be dumped at sea like his victims. Following this, we have seen that Jorge denies his ability to speak Spanish saying, “I’m American pal, just like you.” However, later in the episode, we see Jorge ordering a group of terrified Cuban immigrants into captivity in his junkyard speaking mostly in Spanish, further evidence of his rejection of his Cuban origins.

Jorge’s rejection of his race, language and culture, as well as his blatant tyranny against his own people fragment his identity, symbolised by the severed chunks of his remains that are tossed into the oceanic border space by Dexter. Following his death under Dexter’s blade, Jorge’s final resting place relocates him within the border between Cuba and America thus metaphorically returning him to the Cuban identity he left behind in his failed attempt to merge seamlessly into the dominant American culture. Despite his attempts to pass as American, Jorge’s abuse of his cultural knowledge for personal and financial gain only results in a violent clash of differing identities. Jorge cannot escape his “border” identity no matter how well he masquerades as a member of the dominant culture of the U.S. Anzaldúa defines borders and borderlands as open wounds that never close, spaces where “the third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture” (25). Jorge’s liminal identity emulates Anzaldúa’s description of border cultures as continuous collisions of converging and diverging identities, cultures and places.

Works Cited


“The true meaning of money?”
Explaining Banking in Theodore Dreiser’s The Financier

by Jude Davies, Professor of American Literature and Culture, University of Winchester

What can a one-hundred-year-old novel tell us about banking and financial systems that remains relevant in the post-2008 depression? Plenty, and much of it troubling and unpalatable, argues Jude Davies in this assessment of Theodore Dreiser’s novel The Financier, published exactly a century ago.

“The true meaning of money yet remains to be popularly explained and comprehended.”
- Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (1900)

October 2012 marks the hundredth anniversary of Theodore Dreiser’s novel The Financier. The first volume of a trilogy loosely based on the career of real-life tycoon Charles Tyson Yerkes, The Financier tells the story of the rise, fall, and second rise of one Frank Cowperwood, set against a detailed account of the American financial system as it operated in 1860s and 1870s Philadelphia. The novel has “aged gracefully” according to Leonard Cassuto’s recent article in the Wall Street Journal, not only because “Cowperwood’s world remains familiar,” but also because “readers will recognize the contours of today’s financial markets” in Dreiser’s novel (Cassuto 2012). More than this, I argue that The Financier yields a distinctive understanding of the stock market and those who speculate in it, one whose unpalatable truths are all the more relevant in the current period of confusion following the 2008 financial crisis.

The Business Novel and Progressive Politics

The Financier was one of many reactions against the increasing concentration of wealth and the growth of corporate power in late nineteenth-century America. In particular, as Roark Mulligan shows in his recent critical edition, The Financier stands at the intersection of the literary tradition of the business novel, with the early twentieth-century political tendency known as Progressivism, which sought to reform and regulate American business. The American business novel had been defined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s The Gilded Age (1873), a work so influential as to have given its name to a common view of the period as a betrayal of core American principles in the rush for quick wealth and self-aggrandisement. Twain and Warner pointedly satirised and censured the so-called “robber barons” of the time, focusing espe-
cially on land speculators, who preached individualism and *laissez faire* while manipulating local and national government. Hence the business novel in this period shaped itself an exposé of the dissonance between an overt ideology of unregulated capitalism with a covert dependence on shady deals with legislators and public officials. Later works in this tradition, such as Henry Blake Fuller’s *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893) and *With the Procession* (1895), and novels by writers such as David Graham Phillips, William Dean Howells and Upton Sinclair, maintained the link between literary representations of business and “muck-raking” journalism. In 1908, shortly before Dreiser began planning *The Financier*, Sinclair depicted American financiers in *The Moneychangers* (1908) with the same kind of moral outrage that animates *The Jungle* (1906), his famous and still popular indictment of the meat industry in Chicago.

*The Financier* tackled a major political controversy, “riding a tidal wave of discontent” (Mulligan 2012: 567) at the American financial system. Bankers’ manipulation of the money supply had caused financial panics in 1893 and 1907, which resulted in deep and lengthy economic depressions, and caused widespread discontent. In the 1890s the Populist movement had articulated a moral and class-based opposition to financiers who kept tight control of the money supply while farmers and workers suffered the consequences, a conflict which resonates with contemporary debates in the United States and in Europe. However, when reform was finally achieved in December 1913, a year after *The Financier* was published, it was the work of Theodore Dreiser had demonstrated some sympathy with Populist attacks on Eastern bankers in 1896 (see Dreiser 2011: 4), but before starting work on *The Financier* he was firmly aligned with Progressivism. As editor-in-chief of the mass-circulation Butterick trio of magazines from 1907 to 1910, he took an overtly reformist stand, committing the flagship magazine *The Delineator* to a “humanitarian” editorial policy (Dreiser 1907) which included campaigning on typically Progressive issues such as pollution, the adulteration of food, and the care of destitute children. But in stark contrast to Dreiser’s own editorials, and to contemporary muck-raking novels and journalism, moral outrage is noticeably absent from *The Financier*.

**Frank Cowperwood as dialectical hero**

While *The Financier* clearly belongs to the literary tradition of the business novel, and Dreiser affiliated himself with Progressive causes, the exact nature of the novel’s relation to both – and hence the orientation of its account of the financial system – remains provocative. The one reformer figure in *The Financier*, Skelton P. Wheat of the Citizens’ Municipal Reform Association, is portrayed fairly negatively, his moralistic reform programme easily manipulated by the Philadelphia financial and political elites. More striking is the combination of admiration and condemnation in the novel’s depiction of central protagonist Frank Cowperwood, whose character and career Dreiser traces as exemplifying the “*genus financier.*” Cowperwood’s most salient characteristics are his immense personal power and charm, and his skepticism towards conventional morality. Following the motto “I satisfy myself,” he views society in terms of a struggle between individuals, with personal strength trumping all other considerations. Dreiser places early in the novel an incident whereby the young Frank witnesses the life and death struggle of a lobster and a squid, which have been fished out of the Delaware Bay and deposited in a tank and displayed to the public. Since the squid has no weapon with which to defend itself, and has no means of escape from the tank, the lobster’s eventual triumph is inevitable. The incident makes a great impression on Frank, resolving the “riddle” of “How was life organized?” in Darwinian terms: “things lived on each other...[and] men lived on men.” (Dreiser 2010: 9) Cowperwood’s subsequent conduct in business affairs reflects this lesson, contrasting significantly with that of his father Henry, a conservative bastion of the Third National Bank of Philadelphia, whose watchwords are honesty and personal integrity. For Frank, these terms have only a limited market value, and he takes advantage of the corrupt system whereby favoured bankers were allowed to invest money from Philadelphia’s treasury without paying interest, so long as the funds were returned by the end of each month. Frank is similarly unconstrained by conventional sexual morality, embarking in his early thirties on an extra-marital affair with Aileen Butler, the eighteen-year old daughter of a business associate. (In a sequel published in 1914, *The Titan*, Cowperwood has numerous sexual affairs, interspersed with business episodes in a manner that caused one reviewer to liken the structure of the novel to a “club sandwich.”)

Strands of social Darwinism, Nietzschean philosophy, and self-projection (Cowperwood’s rejection of conventional sexual morality chimes with Dreiser’s own behaviour and disgust at what he called “moralic mush”) mean that...
The Financier can be read as an admiring portrayal of the American capitalist, and Cowperwood as a kind of prototype for Howard Roark, the protagonist of Ayn Rand’s vindicatory novel of individualism The Fountainhead (1943). Yet there is also plenty of textual support, as well as corroboration in Dreiser’s own criticisms of bankers and corporate America, for a view of Cowperwood as an example of the kind of economic and social menace that Progressive legislation is required to regulate. As Roark Mulligan notes, Dreiser portrays Cowperwood dialectically, as both a challenge to the robber barons through exposing their hypocritical morality, and the epitome of their excesses (Mulligan 2010: 560). This dialectical sense was suggested to Dreiser by Edwin Lefèvre’s 1911 magazine article entitled “What Availeth It?”, a key influence which also suggested Charles Yerkes as a fitting novelistic subject:

In this way the overt selfishness and amorality of Yerkes - and Cowperwood - becomes a reproach to the practice of Carnegie and others who justified their inordinate wealth by reference to their private, personal morality, as if their rigid opposition to basic rights for their workers and their violent suppression of labour disputes were completely irrelevant.

The True Meaning of Money?

Beyond these moral and political criticisms, The Financier refracts a more widespread Progressive-era concern with the immateriality of money that is intensified by the institutionalisation of speculation under finance capitalism. Almost the first thing that Cowperwood learns about the financial system is its unpredictability and the arbitrariness of valuations. An early mentor explains that “anything
through their own solidity and confidence alone. “Money was the first thing to have – a lot of it [..]” Frank reflects to himself during his first great financial opportunity. “Then the reputation of handling it wisely would treble, quadruple, aye, increase its significance a hundred and a thousand fold.” (Dreiser 2010: 81)

Clare Virginia Eby perceptively defines Dreiser’s depiction of the immateriality of money by contrasting it with that of the contemporary social critic Thorstein Veblen. As she puts it, “whereas Veblen puts it, “whereas Veblen sees it, was to include in his valuation of the loan a calculation of “State pride and State patriotism,” and to sell it directly to “small banks and private citizens.” (Dreiser 2010: 81) The lesson intensifies the already businesslike turn of Cowperwood’s mind. Previously, Cowperwood has sought to maintain as much as possible the autonomy of financial and business considerations from all other contexts. This governs his views of slavery as being of interest solely in relation to the negative economic impact of friction between North and South, of Lincoln as a great man within the political sphere, and the Civil War as a regrettable interlude because “[i]t really delayed […] the true commercial and financial advancement of the country” (Dreiser 2010: 41, 50-1, 100). Cowperwood now sees an opportunity in putting a price on patriotism. What he learns from Cooke is the project of making a rational assessment of the market’s irrationality, in this case the irrationality of feeling for the nation. But for both this apparent super-rationality will flip into its opposite.

A decade later Cowperwood has built a fortune, largely by hypothecating funds from the Philadelphia treasury, but loses it all, and is plunged into bankruptcy and ultimately imprisonment. Cowperwood’s fall pivots on another example of market irrationality, the panic caused by the Great Fire of Chicago in 1871, where he is caught on the wrong side, going “long” in anticipation of friction between North and South, of Lincoln as a great man of the Mixed Motivations of the Financier

In a novel of repetitions and variations, Dreiser parallels Cowperwood’s career with that of Jay Cooke, the Philadelphia financier who made his name during the Civil War and whose bankruptcy precipitated the crash of 1873. Through these parallels, The Financier intertwines both men’s financial manipulations with particularly intense periods of American national feeling, and the effects of such emotions on the financial markets.

Cowperwood’s “first great financial opportunity” (Dreiser 2010: 80) arises out of the need to generate capital to finance the Union – in his case, the State of Pennsylvania – during the Civil War. In doing so he follows the example set by Cooke in July 1861 when he took on at par a loan to the State whereas “the general opinion was that it […] could only be sold at ninety.” (Dreiser 2010: 81) Cooke’s masterstroke, as Cowperwood sees it, was to include in his valuation of the loan a calculation of “State pride and State patriotism,” and to sell it directly to
the 1873 stock market crash affords Cowperwood the opportunity to rapidly build up another fortune. Reversing his exposure in 1871, he “goes short,” that is, undertaking to sell stocks and shares at a rate discounted from market rates, in anticipation of being able to buy them up at a still lower rate after the market has fallen further.

The 1873 crash, upon which Cowperwood’s second rise is predicated, is represented in *The Financier* as a farcical repetition of key elements from 1861-2. Centre-stage again is Jay Cooke, now the head of a respected firm, which as in the previous period, backs a national project - the Northern Pacific Railroad and sells subscriptions to middle class people who would not normally invest in the market; as Dreiser puts it, “vending his wares direct to the people - clergymen, grocers, etc.” (Dreiser 2010: 546).

According to *The Financier*, the bubble of investment in railroads that caused the 1873 crash was rooted in the distorting power of “a vision of empire,” in this particular case the economic “development of [...] the extreme northern one-third of the United States.” “Here, if a railroad were built,” according to this vision, “would spring up great cities and prosperous towns,” a project that resembled in scope the contemporary construction of the Panama Canal and “bade fair apparently to be as useful to humanity.” (Dreiser 2010: 545).

Trying to repeat the strategy that had proved successful during the Civil War, Cooke is led astray by the lure of fostering America’s economic development, the dream of being useful to humanity, and the wish to democratise access to the financial markets, as well as the simple desire to make money. It is Cowperwood’s suspicion of all this save the desire to make money, and his sense that the emotive pull of the Northern Pacific had led to its over-valuation, that gives him “a great opportunity” which he seizes with both hands. (Dreiser 2010: 546)

Were this all, *The Financier* might justly be celebrated as a powerful portrayal of an amoral financial manipulator in a system which is partly arbitrary and partly rigged by behind-the-scenes deals. Yet Dreiser will have Cowperwood succumb repeatedly to the lure of exactly the kinds of visions of national power, economic development, social utility, and human productivity that - as *The Financier* depicts - had bankrupted Jay Cooke and Co. and precipitated the crash of 1873. Instead of simply playing the market, Cowperwood concerns himself with trying to leave a material legacy, amassing a major art collection and, over *The Financier* and its sequel, *The Titan*, developing much of the urban infrastructure essential to the modern cities of Philadelphia and Chicago. His deepest and most authentic longing is to develop street-car lines, the urban mass transit of the day. Even at the climax of *The Financier*, at the height of his triumph as a “bear,” Cowperwood is overcome with disgust at financial speculation and his own activities on the exchange:

“... a vision of empire,” in this particular case the economic “development of [...] the extreme northern one-third of the United States.” “Here, if a railroad were built,” according to this vision, “would spring up great cities and prosperous towns,” a project that resembled in scope the contemporary construction of the Panama Canal and “bade fair apparently to be as useful to humanity.” (Dreiser 2010: 545)

In short, Cowperwood makes most money dealing with money in the abstract, purely as a medium of exchange, unrelated to the material world or economic growth. Yet his strongest desire is to be genuinely productive - a desire that is self-defeating. This dialectic determines the repetitive structure of the trilogy, of success followed by failure, followed by renewed success, until Cowperwood finally succumbs to Bright’s disease.

**The Nation and the Market**

*The Financier* then suggests there are two modes of financial speculation: rapacious, which usually brings a success which is unsatisfying; and intentionally productive, which brings hubristic overreach and failure. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this dualism explodes the distinctions through which Progressives sought to regulate the “abuses” of capitalism and ensure its productivity, efficiency, and moderation. Of course Progressivism is long spent as a political force, and in some respects *The Financier* foretells its swing to the political right and subsequent dissipation during World War I. But it also makes uncomfortable reading for those of us who are drawn to excoriate unethical banking practices, while depending upon global financial systems for credit, capital, investments and pensions. Dreiser’s novel spectacularly refuses the kind of moral rhetoric that post-
2008 opposes “hard-working Americans” to “greedy” bankers.

A widespread sense of the inability of our political institutions to address the contemporary crisis suggests that in some way we are already familiar with the implications of The Financier. The financial system Dreiser depicts is a shadowy, even mystical presence that co-opts attempts to control or regulate it, whether on the part of individuals or in the name of the nation. Indeed, far from imposing a stabilising framework upon speculation, Dreiser shows the nation as adding to the irrationality of the market, both directly in economic terms, in forms such as the land grants made to encourage railroad construction, and in giving rise to the less tangible but equally powerful “vision of empire” (Dreiser 2010: 545) that turns out to be “only a vision of empire” (Dreiser 2010: 548, emphasis added).

If this discredits both laissez-faire and regulatory regimes, and outflanks positions on the left and the right of the political spectrum, it might also lead to a counsel of despair and quiescent resignation. However The Financier was not Dreiser’s final word on the topic. Having continued Cowperwood’s story in The Titan (1914), Dreiser returned to the projected trilogy at intervals and was still working on the final volume, entitled The Stoic, when he died in December 1945. Shifting geographical focus, The Stoic depicts Cowperwood’s involvement in the financing of London’s underground railway. It rehearses the inevitable decline and ultimate failure to realise his visions, his death, and the subsequent dissipation of his fortune, his art gallery and other possessions, all of which had been foretold in an appendix to The Financier. Still, a potentially different form of human agency is exemplified by Berenice Fleming, Cowperwood’s main (though not exclusive) lover throughout the volume. She spends several years in India studying Hindu mysticism, and then returns to New York where she uses her inheritance from Cowperwood to found a hospital for the poor of the lower east side. Generations of critics and readers have been disappointed by this ending, which goes against Dreiser’s habitual emphasis on the limits of human agency, and betrays the philosophical register of the trilogy summed up early in The Financier by Cowperwood’s conviction that those who espoused “ethical and religious” principles “were following false or silly standards.” (Dreiser 2010: 66-7) But in another way Berenice’s time in India brings full circle a trajectory begun with Frank’s earliest encounter with the abstracting power of financial instruments, when his father shows him “a series of shares in the British East India Company” whose plain looks belie their value (Dreiser 2010: 12). If The Stoic’s investment in religious mysticism is found unconvincing, Dreiser might be read nevertheless as pointing towards the building of an international and humanist response to global capitalism. Such an interpretation is given weight by a short piece entitled “Interdependence,” that Dreiser wrote in 1945, in the midst of working on The Stoic and only a few months before his death. Responding to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Dreiser tried to envision a post-war world characterized by a progressive cosmopolitanism. “People must move into other countries,” he urges. “They must study strange and unfamiliar ways and customs and try to learn from them. They must learn to understand, and wish to, their fellow men [sic.] on the globe.” (Dreiser 1945: 70)

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Notes

[1] For summaries of Dreiser’s political writing on Ev’ry Month and the Delineator see Dreiser, Poetical Writings 3-5, 8-11.

[2] Cowperwood’s interest in using finance productively is even stronger in The Titan and The Stoic, novels which complete Dreiser’s trilogy narrating Cowperwood’s story. It is worth noting that Moddelmog also emphasizes the attachment to the material that belies Cowperwood’s ability to manipulate the abstracting and irrational nature of the market. For him, Cowperwood’s attraction to physicality and property ownership are aspects of his attachment to earlier forms of financial accumulation. See Moddelmog 2000: 208-11.
Alice Neel Portraits of Women in 1970's America

By Loretta Cremmins

This article examines five portraits by the American artist Alice Neel painted between 1970 and 1980, and mainly explores gender roles. It also discusses living in New York in the 1970s.

Acknowledgements: Louis Masur, Amy Henderson and Carolyn Kinder Carr.

Linda Nochlin and Daisy

*Linda Nochlin and Daisy* (1973) depicts a middle-aged mother and young daughter seated on Neel’s Empire sofa. Nochlin, clad in khaki pants and matching shoes, crosses her legs tightly and leans back behind her daughter Daisy. Her left hand on the sofa appears bony and thin, while her right hand is more hidden and rests on Daisy in a protective manner. Nochlin is shown as tense and rigid, with an air of anxious intelligence. The clothing is casual and wrinkled, although the wearers seem stiff. While both mother and daughter stare directly ahead, the viewer’s eye is drawn to young Daisy’s wide stare and open mouth. Her youthful face is vibrant and inquisitive and her demeanor reveals impatience at having to pose, whereas Linda’s wrinkled face looks worried and tired. The disparity in color, texture and emotion underlines the generational differences, although the sitters’ almost identical poses suggests their similarities.

During sittings, Neel dictated neither the pose nor the gesture.

Instead she wanted her sitters to behave naturally and to choose the way they wished to sit. During the sitting, Neel proceeded to talk to them, amusing Daisy with fairy tales and recounting episodes of her early life, her politics, and her past to counter the boredom of the process of posing. What evolved was an atmosphere of reciprocity that lasted the six sit-
Dialogue and discussion, often on controversial subjects, characterized Neel's painting style. She was also very aware of her 'audience' and tried to appease feelings of monotony and anxiety. On the issue of anxiety, Nochlin explains:

My mother was horrified by the portrait. She said, 'You don't look so anxious and so worried in real life.' I'm rather a smiling type, actually. But Alice painted everyone like that. In a way, all her portraits embody the anxieties of their times. They're portraits of a universal existential anxiety. But they also embody, on a more literal level, the relative painfulness of sitting for a portrait.  

Neel's recognition and depiction of obvious and repressed emotions provide us with a painting of real humans with whom many viewers can sympathize and relate.

Linda Nochlin (1931–), a prominent art historian and feminist, has written extensively on nineteenth century French Realist painters such as Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas. She is also known for her article “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” which helped to introduce the feminist movement to the art world. By the early 1970s, Neel had produced a number of portraits of strong women. When she heard of Nochlin's pioneering feminist work, "not only in the historical recovery of female agency and her championing of contemporary women artists, but also in her crucial understanding of the social history of women's oppression and the politics of the erotic," Neel approached Nochlin about sitting for a portrait that also included her daughter. The latter was no mistake on Neel's part since she chose to paint Nochlin as a woman and mother rather than a writer or critic in her 'modern urban maternity.' This phrase highlights the double life of the female intellectual, in which the committed feminist takes on the dual roles of both mother and thinker.  

When asked why she gave up custody of her first child, she replied: “You see, I always had this awful dichotomy. I loved Isabetta, of course I did. But I wanted to paint.” Painting prevailed over society’s prescribed motherly role.

Double life

Linda and Daisy introduces the theme of the double life of the female intellectual, but does not resolve it, partly because Neel struggled with this dichotomy throughout her life. The tension between Neel's domestic responsibilities and her urge to paint led her to make some questionable decisions. For example, she gave up custody of her first child: “You see, I always had this awful dichotomy. I loved Isabetta, of course I did. But I wanted to paint.” Painting prevailed over society's prescribed motherly role: “I used to think the way the normal world thinks: there's a certain function for women, that they have to do the ordinary things.” Neel's son confirms that she resists this function. As he says, "she didn't want any of it, she didn't want that stuff, she wasn't interested in it." The figure of the stay-at-home mother who cooks, cleans and raises children is powerful in American culture, necessitating that Neel's case she become "the world's best conniver. ... When the [other] children were small, I worked at night, which was hard to do." Neel thus debunked the myth of “blissful all-absorbing motherhood,” as did so many working women in their real lives.  

It was only in the 1970s after he children had left home to go to college that Neel was able to devote herself solely to painting — without feelings of maternal guilt. Overall, she sought to share and legitimate similar stories in her 1970's paintings of women and children, such as Linda and Daisy.

Mary Garrard offers a feminist reading of the Nochlin portrait in her piece Alice Neel and Me. She remarks, Alice astutely contrasts Daisy's energy and innocence with her mother's tempered experience- her face is open where Linda's is wary; her dangling legs signal expectancy, Linda's crossed legs convey mature self-protection. The portrait speaks of generational continuity and its revitalization—surely applicable to feminism and its generational legacy as to individual families.
For Garrard, the mother’s legacy is passed to child and future generations, thereby disrupting the traditional patriarchal view of children as bearers of the father’s heritage, most obviously through his surname. This female-centered reading thus serves to overturn traditional familial or patriarchal customs consistent with the women’s liberation movement. Importantly, however, Neel’s motives were not exactly in line with feminism, although she did believe in female liberation. In an exhibition catalog, Neel records her delight regarding the “changes in American society, in history catching up with her.”

What Neel truly respected about the women’s liberation movement were the solutions it offered to the double life of the female intellectual issue, as depicted in Linda Nochlin and Daisy and in her own life. In her honorary doctoral address at Moore College of Art in 1971, Neel declared:

The women’s lib movement is giving the women the right to openly practice what I had to do in an underground way. I have always believed that women should resent and refuse to accept the gratuitous insults that men impose upon them. The woman artist is especially vulnerable and could be robbed of her confidence... I have only become known in the sixties because, before, I could not defend myself.  

This quotation highlights the way in which Neel championed feminist causes without exactly being a feminist, an important distinction that comes to light in her 1975 painting of Chuck and Cindy Nemser.

Cindy Nemser and Chuck

Cindy Nemser and Chuck shows a nude couple seated on Neel’s empire sofa that also featured in the Nochlin portrait. Cindy sits in front of her husband and leans forward with arms crossed concealing her most feminine parts. Chuck lounges behind his wife in a more relaxed pose, with his legs crossed. While one of Chuck’s hands protectively holds his wife’s waist, the other is placed gently on his own knee. Cindy’s black hair is echoed by Chuck’s black head and chest hair. We see that Cindy is in fact touching her husband with her left hand. Despite the physical contact, both subjects gaze directly forward at the painter rather than at each other.

The brightest part of the painting is Cindy’s midsection and upper leg. The viewer’s eye is instantly drawn to the illuminated curves of her body. Chuck is shown darker and behind the light, almost in a shadow, to the point that he blends in with the sofa and takes on a greenish hue. As Phoebe Hoban remarks, “Neel’s portraits of men...are not agonized, they are not heroic, they are human and vulnerable.” By placing Cindy in the foreground, Neel represents a strong woman who “outshines” her husband. At the same time, however, Chuck’s hand reminds us of his sustaining and supporting role in their relationship, which arguably parallels their working relationship as editors for the Feminist Art Journal. Moreover, the painting reveals clues about the civility of this relationship—the two aren’t fighting for the spotlight. Rather, Cindy and Chuck accept their roles and appear content in them. Theirs is a relationship of reciprocity: Cindy comes first in the title and is in the foreground of the painting, but she is also given her husband’s surname, as if to acknowledge his importance to their relationship.

Neel believed that her nude portraits helped to reveal her sitters’ “natural” selves. With the Nemzers, Cindy recalls how they arrived smartly dressed, but Neel disapproved of “all those clothes, and that Mickey Mouse jewelry!” Cindy recounts,

I could see where this was going. This went on for about an hour, at one point she said, ‘I’ll paint you in your underwear with your husband fully dressed’. I didn’t think that was very dignified, so I finally said to him, “You know she’s just
going to wear us down. We might as well do what she wants. I’d rather it be a classic nude...It was very cold in her apartment. My husband remembers that. He said we were posed together because we were trying to keep warm. Later, when I interpreted it as a portrait, I thought that the way he had his arm around me was protective. We were together and holding hands. It was loving. This all came about very naturally. She never suggested the pose... Interesting enough, my husband really wasn’t nude. He still had his underwear on.

This recollection shows Neel’s remarkable skill of helping people let go of preconceived notions and plans for how the painting ‘should’ look. Furthermore, it reveals her way of extracting truth from people and relationships while letting them think it occurred ‘naturally.’

By disrobing the Nemsers, Neel stripped her subjects down to the classic pair in human history, the nude male and female. Yet Neel defies history by placing the man in the shadows, stripping him of his absolute power and dominance. In *Painted Truths*, Jeremy Lewison asserts that the occasion of Neel painting a nude was more “an opportunity to make an unclothed portrait, for instead of reducing the female form to a mere object of flesh, she endowed it with personality, wit, and humanity, particularized with the sitters’ facial features and restored their dignity as human beings, rather than treating them as sexual objects.” Denise Bauer also argues that “Neel’s bold and unsentimental nudes shattered the myth of woman [as] ‘changeless and unchangeable’ and deconstructed the visual convention of the female nude’s ‘beauty of form, harmony and timelessness’.” Furthermore, Neel’s nudes reverse, contradict and often satirize traditional female representations by capturing the complex experience of living in a female body. While Chuck holds his wife’s waist, she is not simply submissive and sexualized, but a complex and multifaceted woman who is strong yet supported for this is the complete experience of being a woman.

Importantly, Neel did not label herself a ‘Feminist’ nor she did intend to create ‘Feminist art.’ As Mary Stevens observes, “Alice concentrated on Alice. Everyone knew she wasn’t really a feminist.” Neel merely refused history’s established gender roles by blurring and questioning the traditional dichotomy: man as powerful and public, woman as passive and private. In her opinion, men and women were equally capable. “I was in the exhibition The New York Group in 1938 at the ACA Gallery—seven men and I.” she recalls, “They were so embarrassed because I was a woman, but I didn’t feel any different. I had it inside me, but outside, these people ran over me even though I was a much better painter.” Thus Neel sought to break history’s traditional gender roles even before the women’s liberation movement. She also insisted that applying gender categories to art served to limit it: “When I was in a room working, I wasn’t aware of being a woman artist. I don’t think there’s basically a difference between women’s art and men’s art. I don’t agree with any of that poppycock. It’s either good art or bad art, and that’s it.” And yet, after years of obscurity, Neel readily accepted the attention and support the feminist movement afforded her.

Margaret Evans Pregnant

Neel’s method of fighting for equal opportunity was by painting groundbreaking portraits. And when she looked at the history of Western art, she found a glaring inequality between the experiences that had been painted. She found that a large part of being a female had been wholly overlooked, most notably, pregnancy.

*Margaret Evans Pregnant* is of a heavily pregnant woman seated on a small yellow chair. Margaret sits upright, eyes focused straight ahead, hands clutching the chair. Completely nude, her skin encompasses a series of shades, which reveal bathing suit tan lines and spotted legs. Placed behind Margaret is a mirror that offers a partial reflection of her body and looks older than her. Margaret’s discomfort is evident, a fact that suggests a break with Neel’s customary style of encouraging her sitters to find a comfortable pose. She also breaks with her style by painting the stomach first, rather than outlining the figure and beginning by painting the head. By diminishing the importance of the head, Neel’s painting suggests that the body is simply a container. Neel’s daughter-in-law recalls a conversation about pregnancy in which Neel declared that, “your body ceases to be your own. You become a vessel. At a certain point you lose your self-image.”

What also fascinated Neel about pregnant nudes were the physical alterations, perhaps further explaining the deviant starting point of this portrait. Carolyn Carr argues that, “Neel relished every detail of the physical transformation of the topography of the female body.” Thus Neel viewed pregnancy as depleting and self-sacrificing in one respect, but also physically mesmerizing in another. Not one to hide the truth, Neel illustrates these experiences in both the method and final product of *Margaret Evans Pregnant.*
The mirror behind Margaret has created considerable critical speculation, yet Neel’s own motive for this section of the painting remains unknown. “It could represent,” Jeremy Lewison hypothesizes, “her identification—presumably unconscious—with the sitter. This might also explain why Evans looks considerably older in the mirror. The mirrored image is an uncanny double of the sitter and the artist, presaging older age.”²⁵ Equally plausible is Lewison’s alternative reading: say, although Neel’s reflection is not available in the mirror to her as a painter, the features in the reflection appear to be a combination of her own and Evans’s.²⁶

Given that many of Neel’s works are autobiographical, it is plausible that she figuratively included her own reflection in the mirror. It is also possible the Neel as a more experienced mother projected her own recollected experiences of pregnancy onto Margaret. This practice of injecting autobiographical details onto women sitters is similar to what occurred in Linda Nochlin and Daisy. Moreover, the unease visible in this painting echoes that of Daisy. Whereas Daisy’s youthful uneasiness made it difficult to stay still for long sittings, Evans was in her eight month of pregnancy with twins. What’s more, it can be assumed that both sitting down and rising from this small uncomfortable chair was a difficult task. In both instances, Neel used this unease to further understand her sitters and uncover their inner emotions. By representing sentiments that were otherwise not apparent, Neel captured different experiences of femininity in realistic terms. As Bauer observes, of the Evans portrait: “she does not generalize, exploit or romanticize the condition.”²⁷ When asked why she painted pregnant nudes, Neel replied,

As though to complement this sense of distortion, and to make room for the bulk of the figure, Neel expands the space behind Evans, splitting the rear wall into two different planes. The mirror image is also a distortion. Some have suggested that it is an imaginative portrait of Evans at a later, postpartum stage. However, close scrutiny of Auder’s film reveals that the reflected image could be as much Neel’s profile as Evans’. That is to say, although Neel’s reflection is not available in the mirror to her as a painter, the features in the reflection appear to be a combination of her own and Evans’s.²⁶

When asked why she painted pregnant nudes, Neel replied,

It isn’t what appeals to me, it’s just a fact of life. It’s a very important part of life and it was neglected. I feel as a subject it’s perfectly legitimate, and people out of false modesty, or being sissies, never showed it, but it’s a basic fact of life. Also plastically, it is very exciting… I think it’s part of the human experience. Something the primitives did, but modern painters...
have shied away from because women were always done as sex objects. A pregnant woman has a claim staked out; she is not for sale.  

The fact that Neel chose ‘basic facts of life’ as worthy of portraiture is what makes Margaret Evans and her other pregnant nudes remarkable. In addition to distinguishing her from other painters and artists, this truly made Neel a humanist as she audaciously inserted a part of life that had been previously ignored into art history's lexicon.

**Jackie Curtis and Ritta Redd**

This bright portrait of two individuals is quizzical and ambiguous. On the left is Ritta Redd, who sits timidly behind the more dominant Jackie Curtis. Redd’s blond curls and similarly hued shirt work to frame his innocent boyish face. One hand rests softly on his right knee. Coming out the bottom of worn blue jeans are Redd’s sheepishly positioned feet. While the right foot awkwardly pigeon-toes inward, the left is pushed in and back by Curtis’ aggressive leg. The result is a clumsy position that further suggests Redd’s timidity. In contrast, Curtis is bold and strong. In addition to being physically larger, his body is the center and focus point of the painting. Wig-like red hair is further exaggerated by thick red lipstick and heavy blue eye shadow. While Redd’s face seems youthful and soft, Curtis’ larger features seem harder and almost mask-like. Furthermore, Curtis’ exposed legs tell a story of their own. The right one is placed firmly in the nearest foreground while the left pushes backwards to touch Redd. There is also a small hole in the right stocking that reveals matching nail polish.

Jackie Curtis and Ritta Redd appear to be a heterosexual couple yet the lines between female and male are blurred. Jackie, an androgynous name, appears masculine and brave, although dressed as a woman. Redd, who ’wears the pants‘ in this painting, is depicted as smaller and softer. The unfinished grey background that surrounds this couple places them in a metaphoric ‘gray zone’ in which gender categories are unclear. Clothing and traditional gestures no longer help us determine biological sex. To Pamela Allara, “gender is performed.” Hence the two are acting out identities rather than expressing the way they were biologically born. Allara understands this portrait by looking at the feet, reading the togetherness as a duality of their genders where the subjects are both male and female. In Phoebe Hoban’s recent book *The Art of Not Sitting Pretty*, she labels these body parts as “prurient feet,” thereby marking them with an unwholesome, immoderate and sexual undertone. Thus Neel succeeded in capturing the sexual nuances of this couple, right ‘down to their toes’ and blurs historically established lines between human biological sexes.

Second-wave feminists challenged gender roles, as well as the meaning of gender itself. Gender for Neel was always
“gender and...” meaning there was something supplementary to this category, that gender itself wasn’t final. After reading Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Neel agreed that one is not born, but becomes a woman. As de Beauvoir argued, “the body is not a thing, it is a situation.” In viewing Jackie Curtis and Rita Redd, one can see how Neel was of the same opinion since this painting suggests a complex negotiation of gender not limited by traditional definitions of appearance and behavior. In this respect, Neel allows her subjects to be who they are. In the same way that Neel brought pregnant women into the public eye through works such as *Margaret Evans Pregnant*, Neel captured the experiences of marginalized people such as transvestites and carried them into the realm of high art.

**Self-Portrait**

Neel’s most intrepid and notorious choice of subject matter for a portrait was her self-portrait, a customarily innocuous focus. In 1980, when Neel put her signature style and critical view to work on herself, she once more broke away from tradition to produce a shocking painting. *Self-Portrait* shows Neel in her eightieth year of life, seated in a chair in her studio. She is shown completely naked, with nothing but her glasses, paintbrush and a rag—“her aging body equipped with just the tools of her craft.” Seated comfortably yet still upright, Neel’s body is pointed away while her gaze is straight ahead. The expression on Neel’s face is ambiguous, her eyebrows are raised inquisitively but her eyes and mouth appear almost motionless. It seems as if she is bored, tired or intensely concentrating. Her left hand hangs limply as it lets the bright white rag dangle freely. In her right hand she holds her paintbrush erect, a motion that her raised right toe directly mirrors. The background and foreground, unfinished, show blocks of three primary colors, blue, yellow and green.

“Frightful isn’t it?” she told Ted Castle, “I love it.” Neel continued, in her customary witty manner, “At least it shows a certain revolt against everything decent.” By choosing a subject that even she claims is indecent truly shows how unconventional Neel was. Mary Garrard has a different reading of the painting in which she moves beyond the single innovative aspects to the overall wonder of one work of art being able to accomplish so much:

She’s deploying the gaze as subject and as artist, and I think she’s very aware of all the complications of self-portraiture and the gender conventions all those things—plus age. It’s not hard to break it down into all those component elements. But what’s beautiful about it is that it says it in one gestalt. It’s not like ‘Here are itemized points I am making’; it’s that the image contains, as a kind of potent object, all those ideas. I can’t think of any counterpart....It really is quite extraordinary. It’s something that is both unique and deeply in dia-
An anecdote from Carolyn Carr, Deputy Director of the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery is particularly useful in highlighting how groundbreaking Neel’s self-portraits continue to be. “When I would do lectures,” Carr recalls, “I’d start with [the Portrait Gallery’s portrait of] George Washington and end with Alice. There was always a gasp when she came on the screen. Honestly because everything is sagging— but lively and energetic... That is her last, or nearly her last, painting that sort of recognizes the most powerful elements of her style, as evident in her 70s.” The audience’s gasp of astonishment is proof of how the image of a naked elderly female is still not comfortably accepted. Moreover, it is still not widespread in art history.

Neel’s character and work resist singularity or being tied to one movement or theme. While Garrard believes “The theme of all her portraits is the self and its defenses, the self and its dreams,” such an assertion fails to encapsulate all Neel’s themes. Others comment on Neel’s idiosyncrasies, which arguably capture her true spirit and intentions better than professional art critics. Jack Baur, retired director of the Whitney Museum, wrote a witty poem about his good friend Alice and her work: “Ah! What innocent blue eyes, soft as violets, sharp as knives, Dissecting all our private lives.” What Baur caught here is so telling of Neel, her facade and her method of painting. Baur explains how Neel would appear benevolent and harmless. Henry Hope, who once sat for a portrait by Neel, provides us with insight into the truth of this claim. He describes Neel as she was later in her life, “Plump, exuding vitality and good spirits, she gives the impression of a happy, slightly zany grandmother ... rambling on about painting instead of cooking.” Thus soft as violets is an appropriate and fitting description. Yet when Neel began to examine her sitters, her eyes became ‘sharp as knives’ because she would figuratively cut through the skin and into their inner emotions. These different accounts of Neel’s life and work show the way in which her personality and character were inseparable from her work, with her friends in particular giving deep insight into her themes and style.

**A window into a great city**

Neel’s work also serves as a window into life into late twentieth century. Her paintings offer stunning insights into felt experiences, particularly the anxieties and worries people carried with them through the crowded streets and in racing taxis. Despite dealing with emotions, Neel avoided the sentimental: “I try to paint the scene. A human comedy like Balzac—the past, present, and future interlaced with the levels of society, like Proust. It’s terrible to think that life happens and just goes, disappears. I paint my time using the people as evidence,” Neel wrote, “I believe in art as history. The swirl of the era is what you’re in and what you paint. I love, pity, hate and fear all at once, and try to keep a record.” Neel’s portraits represent the individual in context whose experiences resonate more widely and are meaningful for a diversity of people, from those who were well connected in the social scene and politics to those who were on the margins due to income, race or sexual orientation. In a speech presenting Neel with the First National Women’s Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award in the Oval Office, Jimmy Carter declared:

> We honor Alice Neel, who has been painting for more than fifty years, for creating an incomparable visual record of the life of one of America’s great cities, New York. Her pictures have captured the souls of the very old and the very young, of the rich and the poor, of laborers and intellectuals, artists and businessmen, of poets and salesmen, eccentrics and squares. Her portraits are profoundly democratic for she has understood and recorded the psyche of a range of personalities unprecedented in the art of portraiture. The vitality, truth and humanity of her work make her one of America’s great artists.

**An American Odyssey**

In referring to her lifelong pursuit as “an odyssey particularly American,” Neel taps into a classic American trope of overcoming oppression. A female realist painter in a male dominated world, Neel reflected the twentieth century from a woman’s point of view. A realist portrait painter in a time when abstract impressionism was popular and sought after, Neel remained steadfast to her style despite the attention she could have gained by changing styles. Neel places herself among the likes of those famously oppressed, among them, Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Huckleberry Finn and Willy Loman. Yet, before her death in 1986 from cancer, Neel overcame her oppression by becoming recognized in the art world as a strong, female painter, honored by politicians, celebrities, critics and other artists.
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288 pages. £38.00. ISBN 0195335686

Reviewed by Philip Stogdon, PhD, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010, an independent scholar, the title of whose doctoral thesis was ‘Like nothing else in Tennessee: the writer James Agee’.

American Modernism and Depression Documentary acknowledges its debt to William Stott’s Documentary Expression and Thirties America, and thus draws the reader to Jeff Allred’s distinctive concern: modernism and its reverberations.

Allred’s book turns on the chapters examining three collaborations of words and photographs: Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White’s You Have Seen Their Faces (1937); James Agee and Walker Evans’ Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1941); and, Richard Wright and various photographers’ 12 Million Black Voices (1941). Allred attempts to establish that these ostensibly documentary books are also or (rather) significantly modernist.

Allred promotes the modernism of You Have Seen Their Faces by suggesting that the fictionalised folk-idiom captions appended, as if quoted speech, to the subjects of Bourke-White’s photographs, work against Caldwell’s explanatory prose. However, Caldwell’s language reveals not a trace of modernist sensibility, and the bathetic captions, alone, cannot support the claim Allred makes for the work.

Allred’s critique of 12 Million Black Voices is more profound, scrutinising Wright’s deployment of the word ‘we’ to assert his identification with the black figures of the book’s photographs, hitherto the subjects not just of the camera but of white authority. This ‘we’ forms a ‘knot’ involving the status of such subalterns and Wright’s psychological and aesthetic processes contingent on them. Wright thereby rehearses misgivings, persistent in ethnography, about representations of peoples denied the opportunity (or deemed unable) to speak for themselves. Similarly, Wright’s reflection on the ‘outward guise [that] still carries the old familiar aspect which three hundred years of oppression...have given [black Americans]’ is owed (for its visual imagery and self-reflexive conviction) to W.E.B Du Bois’ notion (from 1903, and not cited by Allred) of ‘double consciousness’.

Modernism, Allred maintains, is marked by interruption and dissonance, by subjectivity and difficulty. Then, perhaps realising that such qualities are not intrinsically modernist, Allred alludes to exemplary figures including Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore. These writers, and the single lines of poetry with which Allred qualifies them, are enlisted to provide a perfunctory aesthetic context for what he terms ‘documentary modernism’, and its constituent ‘plausible fictions of the real.’ But this phrase is misconceived; the modernism of Stevens et al does not fictionalise the real but, rather, advances its fictions as a part of the real.

It is precisely that aspiration, depending on the vitality of particular words, with which Allred is at odds, and is exposed in his consideration of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Twice he refers to his ‘perverse reading’ of the text, ‘the center’ of which he ‘will largely ignore’ in favour of ‘the relatively few and oblique moments that feature cars and highways.’ He refuses to ‘reinscrib[e] the privilege ... of interpretive difficulty that keep[s] professional readers of texts in business.’ Allred’s ‘frustration’ with Agee’s actual language is relieved by reading Walter Benjamin on photography. But secondary reading distances Allred from the source material, causing him to obscure a central element of the book - and of modernism - namely Agee’s fallible verbal structures, relative to reality and the camera’s facile certainties.

Allred bemoans the ‘tired debate about literary value’, but it is writing itself (its grain) that escapes his attention. His impoverished Agee bibliography fails even to cite that writer’s reviews on Faulkner, Williams and (in 1936, shortly after his Alabama fieldwork) Gertrude Stein in which Agee, in a piece entitled ‘Art for What’s Sake’, argued the claims of imaginative art at a time of political and economic crisis. All-
red’s omissions and impatient readings of the ‘literary’ appear, therefore, less ‘perverse’ than neglectful, and undermine the plausibility of his principal contention.


264 pages. £20.99. ISBN 0748623566

Reviewed by Lee Sartain, University of Portsmouth

When you first think of African Americans and culture the immediate response is to consider music - from slave work songs to jazz and the blues to hip hop. Visual art is not the medium that academics would immediately connect with African American communities, except for one or two artists, such as Aaron Douglas, a painter who we would generally place in the 1920s Harlem Renaissance and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Therefore Bernier’s book is rather a revelation and firmly places the visual arts at the centre of the African American experience to tell the narrative of slavery to emancipation to freedom from the nineteenth century to modern times.

The book has a number of plates which gives the broadest appreciation of the range of paintings, photographs and sculptures by black artists. This is supplemented by the author who encourages the reader to seek out further visual evidence via the internet with an extensive sourcing of the materials through galleries and archives. What this allows, through multimedia and encouraging individual research, is quite an astounding understanding of black artists. While it had been said that visual art was problematic for African Americans as you “have to sit down and make art” (p.1) and that it was easier “to make music, no matter how much hell you were catching” (p.7) the book immediately starts off with one of the most interesting examples of the ordinary that has become art with Dave the Potter. Dave, a slave, made everyday objects, such as pots, but, unusually for the time, finished them off with a rhyme etched onto the glazing which became “vehicles of covert, yet overt, protest” (p.25), which is even more surprising as slaves were not meant to be able to write, let alone write poetry. Such useable items proclaimed rhymes as ‘Dave belongs to Mr Miles/ where the oven bakes & the pot biles’ is “open to multiple readings” (p.27). Bernier thereby links slave oral history to music and resistance to slavery and directly links this to “the sparing style of the three-line blues”. It is interesting to interpret these pieces alongside African American history and there is a clear parallel with the long civil rights struggle over centuries and music that perpetually emerges into the art which has contested the negative stereotypes of blacks in the USA.

The author combines a lucid appreciation of the art she observes and incorporates a wide range of historical and artistic scholars along the way. This is a remarkable book that covers a range of artistry and engages the reader in fully appreciating the links between “personal memory, ancestral knowledge and historic events” (p.218).


304 pages. £11.99. ISBN 0393070107

Reviewed by Gary Morton, Research Assistant in the ASRC

I know what you are thinking: surely this has been done numerous times before? Not in this way. The book is a collection of works that spans over 70 years of Edmund Morgan’s professional career. This is history from a historian that generally goes against the grain of popular historians. His research is exhaustive as he commentates on the thoughts and feelings of famous Americans and the not so famous ones who shaped the United States in its embryonic years from 1600-1800.

For this reason, the book’s contents are not really what many people would expect from the
front cover and the title of this book, which pictures the proud and focussed General Washington looking over the battlefield. Morgan’s unorthodox approach even extends to Washington and Benjamin Franklin parts in constructing the constitution and laying down the foundations for the United States. It is not really about the former’s military successes against the British or the latter’s guile for invention but more about their quiet diplomacy and learning when to make concessions for the greater good even if it goes against the popular view.

The main topics of this book are politics and religion, and a large portion is dedicated to the Puritans but not necessarily the popular ones. Some of the essays focus on more obscure Puritans and their dealings with each other and the authorities. In a way, the essays about unorthodox ‘heroes’ symbolise the way in which Morgan, and his mentor and subject of his Epilogue, Perry Miller, approach the early history, religion, and politics of the United States.

Sometimes this tactic of looking at the more obscure characters who shaped early America goes a little too far. As a reader, it is sometimes difficult to relate or understand these people as we do not really know them. The depth of research is apparent, especially concerning the Puritans. One chapter is dedicated to the Puritans and sex, arguing that although they believed and preached God-given moral values, they never neglected, or severely punished, human desires. Any offenders were treated with ‘patience and understanding’ which resulted in a different society to that typically depicted by historians. This again seems to be the whole point of the collection of works: to go against the assumed views that people have of the early societies and their citizens. Throughout the book though, it is difficult to link the main message to the title.

Having said that, it does contribute to an understanding of how Americans are the way they are. The main traits of the heroes portrayed in this book show resilience, independence, vociferousness, and yes, diplomatic natures. Sometimes it is good to look at history in a slightly different light and this book does just that.


432 pages. £13.99. ISBN 0199734089

Reviewed by Adam Burns, Newcastle University

In early January 1910, Angel Island in San Francisco Bay was established as one of a number of new immigration stations across the United States in the early twentieth century. Between 1910 and 1940 it served as the Pacific gateway through which around a million people entered or left the United States and became popularly – though perhaps inaccurately – known as the “Ellis Island of the West” (23). Angel Island seeks to tell the many and varied stories of the immigration station’s diverse visitors within the context of the United States’ complex and sometimes contradictory approach to the issue of immigration.

Lee and Yung are both specialists in Chinese immigration history, and it was the Chinese who were the primary focus of the station from its very conception. Unlike the mainly European clientele of the more famous Ellis Island, Angel Island’s immigrant visitors were far from likely to become naturalised citizens and for most the process was long, arduous and frequently unsuccessful. The station was thus, as the authors are keen to emphasise, not only a gateway into the United States but also a gateway out. Despite their previous works on Chinese immigrants, the authors are keen to present a picture of the global nature of migration to Angel Island. Indeed, what marks out the aims of this book from previous explorations of the station’s history, is that it provides a far more rounded view of the diversity of the immigrant experience. To achieve this aim, the book draws upon a vast array of fascinating oral and family histories as well as written and archival materials.

The book’s first and penultimate chapters focus on the Angel Island Immigration Station itself, exploring its history and evolution and the nature of the immigrant diversity covered in more detail in the intervening chapters. These remaining chapters deal one-by-one with the largest immigrant groups that passed through Angel Island: Chinese, Japanese, South Asians, Koreans, Russians and Jews, Mexicans, and Filipinos. Each chapter takes a chronological look at each of these groups, their experiences and how Angel Island, and the United States in general, reacted to those who wished to enter.

Lee’s previous monograph, At America’s Gate (2003), presented the United States as a nation that gradually transformed from an
open-door approach to immigration, to becoming a “gatekeeping nation,” beginning with the first federal law on immigration in 1875. Lee and Yung portray this troubled dynamic throughout *Angel Island* with a multiplicity of rich and insightful vignettes of those who experienced firsthand America’s ambivalent attitude towards immigration. They also offer some important lessons for those involved with the United States’ still troubled approach to immigration policy today.


Reviewed by Mark Rathbone FHA, who teaches History and Politics at Canford School, Wimborne, Dorset, where he is Head of Academic Administration.

Described on the dust-jacket as a “compact biography” and “admirably succinct”, Brinkley’s book certainly lives up to its billing. Whilst compactness can be a virtue, it can also be taken to extremes. To reach the end of a book and remain hungry for more is a tribute to the author. But after taking in less than a hundred pages (excluding notes and bibliography) in largish font, well-spaced with generous headers and footers, readers reader might fairly consider that they have been short-changed by the publishers.

Crucial episodes in FDR’s career pass in a flash. His run as vice-presidential candidate in 1920 gets four sentences; his authorisation of the Manhattan Project to develop atomic weapons, 12 lines; the Yalta conference, which shaped the future of Europe for the next 45 years, one paragraph. The New Deal gets slightly fuller treatment, but even here there is little time to reflect on one alphabet agency before being whisked off to the next.

In contrast to the book itself, the notes are quite detailed and the bibliography is a useful summary of Roosevelt primary sources and scholarship.

What is here is well-researched, fluently written and eminently readable, and as a brief introduction to Roosevelt for the general reader it serves its purpose. But to a serious student of the USA in the first half of the twentieth century, it simply does not offer enough. A book twice its length would still have been concise and would have enabled Brinkley to go into a little more detail and to reflect a little more expansively on the career of one of the greatest American presidents. Roy Jenkins’ biography of FDR, a little over 200 pages of rather denser print than Brinkley’s, is hardly a weighty tome, yet for the general reader or the serious student it offers a more substantial and satisfying study of Roosevelt’s life and legacy.


Reviewed by Ben Offiler, University of Nottingham

In *From Colony to Superpower*, George C. Herring, a leading historian of the Vietnam War, has produced a valuable and important history of the United States. As editor David M. Kennedy notes in his introduction, Herring “has written not simply a history of American diplomacy, but a history of diplomacy’s role in shaping America’s unique history and its singular identity” (xiii). Herring writes persuasively that “foreign policy has been central to the [U.S.] national experience from the outset” and his central thesis argues that “foreign policy has had a huge impact on American life” (1).

From revolutionary pamphleteer Tom Paine’s recognition of the role of diplomacy in gaining independence, Herring argues, foreign policy has been integral to U.S. history. Regarding the smaller world of the post-Second World War and Cold War eras, this is blindingly apparent; the
One can imagine a minor complaint might be that whilst the material presented is based upon a magisterial command of the historiography, there is little use of primary sources or original research. However, this criticism would ignore the point of the book, which is to provide an overarching history of American foreign relations that highlights the integral role diplomacy has played in the broader trends of American history. Besides, a work of this scope based on original research would have taken ten times as long to write (necessitating new chapters as present day becomes history, the scholarly equivalent of painting the Forth Bridge) and would be ten times the length. As it stands, From Colony to Superpower is an excellent introduction to American foreign relations for students and a useful guide for historians interested in relating their own research to the broader sweep of America’s long foreign policy history. For this reason it is likely to become the standard introductory foreign policy text in universities for the foreseeable future.

288 pages. £65.00. ISBN 1846311802

Reviewed by Helena Goodwyn Queen Mary, University of London.

Susan Castillo and David Seed, editors of American Travel and Empire, have created a wide-ranging and invaluable resource that considers how the impact of travel writing has shaped perceptions of hemispheric America. As the editors state in their introduction, the collection of essays are in keeping with the ‘transnationalist turn’ in American Studies and accordingly they discuss the impact not only of the travel writing of citizens from the United States but also those of other countries.

In ‘What Are We Doing Here? Scenarios for Early English Colonies in North America’, Donald Ross argues that North America, as an ‘imagined place’ in the sixteenth century, existed through Colonial Charters which sought to present North America as a commercial interest with the potential for expansion or ‘translation’ of English values, people and institutions.

Susan Castillo, in ‘“The Lies of a Distant Traveller”? The Travel Writing of Louis de Hennepin’, examines Hennepin’s Description of Louisiana and Nouvelle découverte, and in doing so provides a reassessment of the latter text’s censure and Hennepin’s discredit as a writer. Castillo’s re-evaluates Hennepin as an author caught by the conflict of travel writing framed by Empire. Charles Forsdick presents another of Hennepin’s contributions to travel writing, alongside others, in ‘French Representations of Niagara: From Hennepin to Butor’. Forsdick’s focus on a particular ‘French gaze’ seeks to adjust the tendency towards critical attention on English language texts about the Falls, and to analyse Niagara Falls as an imaginative focal point for French perceptions of North America.

Wil Verhoeven’s “Come to these Arcadian Regions where there is room for Millions”: Citizen Imlay and the Empire in the West” asserts a connection between British Jacobin radicals emigrating to America in search of political
freedom in the 1780s and 90s, and early land speculators embracing the frontier as a stage set for the acquisition of fame and fortune. Verhoeven employs Gilbert Imlay’s _A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America_ (1793) and the succeeding epistolary romance _The Emigrant_ (1793) to expose what he sees as a ‘cross-Atlantic symbiosis’ between the two groups.

In ‘The Conquest of Antiquity: The Travelling Empire of John Lloyd Stephens’ Gesa Mackenthun discusses the adventurer-diplomat-archaeologist Stephens, and the impact that his travel narratives had on the development of an American cultural identity as distinct from that of Europe. Shirley Foster writes in, “‘A Confession of Unwashed and Shabbily Dressed People’: Nineteenth-Century Americans and Urban Britain’ of Hawthorne’s _Our Old Home_ (1863), amongst other accounts written by American travellers. These travellers’ notional innocence, Foster argues, and their romantic imaginings of the Old World, were corrupted by their actual experiences in British cities, which in turn impacted upon their sense of nationalism and individualism. ‘Sunny Tropic Scenes: US Travel Writers and Guantánamo Bay, Cuba’ is Peter Hulme’s synopsis of travel writing about Guantánamo Bay, taking in three particular moments of political importance: the 1898 Spanish-American War, the period before the collapse of the Soviet Union (1990), and the relative present. In ‘Henry James and the “Swelling Act of the Imperial Theme”’ Peter Rawlings discusses James’ writings on the British Empire, specifically in relation to the Second Afghan War (1878-80), the British invasion of Zululand in 1879, and the Scramble for Africa.

Tim Youngs’ ‘The Pacifist Traveller: Kate Crane-Gartz’ seeks to re-establish Kate Crane-Gartz as a writer of cultural and political importance, whose neglect as a travel writer Youngs suggests may be attributed to her politics. David Seed’s essay ‘American Ambassadors: Travellers in the Cold War’ examines the difficult negotiation of the established writer in the role of American ambassador during the Cold War period. Judie Newman provides a critique of the American feminist Emily Prager’s writings about American-Chinese relations, focusing in particular on the often controversial topic of transnational adoption, in her essay ‘In The Missionary Position: Emily Prager in China’.

_American Travel and Empire_ is a diverse and engaging contribution to the study of travel writing and to American Studies.

**Literature**


182 pages. £38.00. ISBN 1571134816

Reviewed by Rachel Malkin University of Cambridge

William Carlos Williams’ emphasis on language’s materiality, and his unidealised attention to the ordinary and close at hand, form part of a concerted rejection of shopworn models of the poetic. Ian Copestake presents Williams’ case for the curative powers of a reinvigorated poetry, seemingly corroborating Wallace Stevens’ observation that he yet remained, in some ways, a romantic.

Copestake considers Williams in relation to some well-considered contexts, and also focuses on several less explored ones, allowing shifts and consistencies in Williams’ position to emerge over time. Copestake finds the Unitarian religion in which Williams was raised to be of definitive importance for his poetic project, and this is a consistent thread through the book. He also discusses Williams’ early emulation of Keats, how Pound’s and H.D.’s examples changed his oeuvre, and the importance of Marianne Moore for Williams’ understanding of the relationship between form and perception. An interesting chapter on Williams and the Pre-Raphaelites reintegrates modernism with its predecessor movements, and American poetry with European sources of inspiration (as Copestake points out, the extent of Williams’ use of flower and foliage imagery is striking, and the importance of such motifs is reflected in the poet’s fascination with medieval Unicorn Tapestries). Copestake is led by Williams’ own interests, and by the possibility of the latter’s having built a systematic artistic enterprise. His approach combines attention to empirical historical context and biographical data, as well as close readings, with a theory of what Williams understood the ethical aspect of poetry to be. It is in relation to this last idea that he places Williams firmly in the line of what Richard Denning has called an ‘Emersonian modernism’.

Paradoxically, despite the taint of indebtedness to European phi-
Copestake illustrates that Williams didn’t openly speak positively of Emerson until fairly late in his career, but sees this as an Emersonian gesture in itself, demonstrating a shared belief in the need to ground American poetry in an unmediated response to experience, unhindered by authority, whether institutional or literary. Since, as Copestake notes, the Unitarianism of William’s Rutherford was also somewhat Emersonian, the great man’s shadow is hard to avoid. Copestake’s book thus intersects with some strong current trends in American poetry criticism, though approached from a slightly different angle. As Copestake shows, Williams’ understanding of the ‘immediate’ with which he wanted to put his readers into contact encompassed senses both of directness, and of a local, specifically American milieu. While Copestake alludes to the democratic ethos of Williams’ attitude, the link between this approach to knowledge and American democracy is made more mutedly than in the work of others who share his focus on terms like process and experience; perhaps a reflection of both his viewpoint (from outside the US), and his literary critical method. Copestake’s Williams is both Emersonian and pragmatist through an antifoundationalism that is initially fostered by his Unitarian upbringing, so that epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical questions become intimately related around an idea of the provisionality of truth. Copestake argues that Williams attempted to write this provisionality into the structure of his verse, casting the construction of knowledge as something the reader takes part in, and the undoing of fixity as an ethical activity.

Copestake’s clear and readable argument finds a seriousness in Williams’ conception of poetry as vocation with which he seems to empathise. What is at stake in this analysis is the search for a kind of non-dogmatic faith. Williams’ writing is described at the book’s close as ‘an act of faith’ in which poetry is a very means of potential spiritual and social renewal.


Reviewed by Teodora Domotor, University of Surrey

This book aims to cover the period of American history and literature between 1865 and 1929 in detail. Philip R. Yannella emphasises that the seven chapters are not intended as a comprehensive analysis; they instead represent a brief guideline as how to read texts in their contexts. The timeline of data pertaining to history and cultural productions is very useful at the beginning of the book as it offers a clear overview of historical events that writers became inspired to incorporate in their works. Nonetheless, the author highlights that literary pieces from this era do not necessarily focus on actual political accounts. Fictional characters are meant to convey the impact of incidents on humanity as well as emotions attached to such experiences.

Each chapter is divided into two parts: ‘The Context’ and ‘The Literature’. Yannella begins each section with a synopsis of historical records, followed by an investigation as to how these events influenced writers, and how they captured these sentiments in literature. The consistent structure of the book provides a coherent, clear line of argument which is easy to follow. The chapter entitled ‘Immigrants’ proves to be particularly engaging: along with portraying the prejudicial nature of American politics, Yannella gives interesting insights into the works of immigrant authors who were either born or published at the time (Italian-American Mario Puzo, Irish-American Finley Peter Dunne, Jewish-American Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska and Mary Antin) as well as American novelists (Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather), who discuss complicated questions regarding the ill-treatment of aliens in the ‘land of opportunity’. Additionally, Yannella enriches his study with several journal and magazine articles of that period. He successfully demonstrates the shaping of multicultural American society as complex and difficult. The analysis of literary pieces within the chapter falls short on consistency of proportion though: Puzo’s ‘Choosing a Dream: Italians in Hell’s Kitchen’, for example, is reviewed in thirteen lines whereas other works receive two pages of attention.

Although occasionally the chapters do not go into sufficient depth, the book provides excellent supplementary reading. Its general appearance is also appealing; the cover image (Storm from La Bajada Hill, New Mexico, 1946 by Laura Gilpin) depicts a part of an American landmark, Route 66, which became famous between 1910 and 1930. The publication contains a Table of Con-

Reviewed by Jon Stewart, Brighton Institute of Modern Music & University of Southampton

Music

Jazz, blues and country are commonly celebrated as uniquely American musical genres. Literary examinations of America’s ‘other’ forms of roots music, including distinctively French styles like Cajun or Zydeco, and Mexican-German genres such as Banda, Tambora, Norteño, and Tejano (‘Tex-Mex’), are thin on the ground by comparison. Brasseaux’s work is possibly the first serious, full-length, academic history of the Cajun music, as only a handful of articles and book chapters have been published elsewhere. Fortunately the home DVD market is currently witnessing a boom in historical documentary feature film reissues, and anyone interested in Cajun Breakdown will also enjoy the work of renowned auteur Les Blank (www.lesblank.com). Always For Pleasure (1978) followed Mardis Gras Indians, while J’Aï Ete Au Bal (1989) captured the founders of modern Cajun music on film.

Brasseaux’s book builds on a familiar narrative: Arcadian French settlers colonised Nova Scotia in 1604 but were evicted by British ethnic cleansing a century and a half later during the ‘Great Upheaval’. Around three thousand survivors eventually fetched up in Louisiana, where their name became colloquialised as ‘Cajun’, and what was originally a simple a cappella music gradually developed into a distinctive, infectious rhythm driven by the harmonically limited diatonic button accordion (one octave, usually in the key of C), fiddle and metal triangle.

Cajun fiddle virtuoso Harry Choates changed the course of American cultural history when his recording of ‘Jole Blon’ (Pretty Blonde) reached number four in the US pop chart in 1946. The song’s influence is comparable to that of the first jazz hit (The Original Dixieland Jazz Band’s ‘Livery Stable Blues’) and country’s first big seller (Vernon Dalhart’s ‘Wreck of the Old 97’). Each composition instigated a profound dialogue between ethnic and socio-economic groups that impacted a wide range of cultures. Cajun’s influence on country music, for example, is vast -- not least via hillbilly boogie artist Moon Mullican who also enjoyed a hit with ‘Jole Blon’, then released a succession of derivative numbers such as ‘New Jole Blon’ and ‘Jole Blon’s Sister’, then co-wrote ‘Jambalaya (On The Bayou)’ with Hank Williams as a reinterpretation of the traditional Cajun melody ‘Grand Texas’.

Brasseaux argues that a hitherto overlooked consequence of the success of ‘Jole Blon’ was the use of promotion techniques targeting particular marginalised ethnic groups that established a peripheral market for minority music still exploited in America today. The immediacy of the Cajun rhythm also engendered an attempted colonisation of the genre by New Orleans socialites that recalls controversies over Nic La Roca and the contested origins of jazz. Brasseaux shows how field recording pioneers John and Alan Lomax, National Folk Festival promoters Sarah Gertude Knott and Lauren C. Post, and the first stars of the genre Joe Falcon and Cleoma Breaux – a husband and wife team perhaps approximately equivalent to the Carter family in country music -- were among those important individuals who helped define and codify the modern form of Cajun music.

Brasseaux’s central thesis, that ‘adaptation is a hallmark of the Cajun survival strategy’ (p. vii), is an ever-present in this narrative. This is the affecting story of how a disadvantaged rural ethnic population engaged in complex and nuanced cultural transactions with a dominant national culture, not as some powerless backwater oddity but as independent participants in an energetic exchange of ideas. It was, of course, distinctly working class music; and Brasseaux is mindful of the hostility towards Cajuns as a disadvantaged and stereotyped ‘other’ in American culture. His exhaustive, self-assured and thoughtful monograph explores a hugely neglected aspect of the American ethnic experience with authority and sensitivity.
This intelligent and well-argued book is the culmination of the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Study (MCPCE) which embodied wide-ranging interviews with young people from the African American, Hispanic and white communities and it contains fascinating data on their political attitudes, especially after the election of the first black president, Barack Obama, in 2008. Cohen analyses the values of American youth in a sympathetic manner that reflects on historical racism and modern structural problems that were not resolved by the civil rights movement (1955-1968). However this is an optimistic book which does not hide from the major problems faced by black American youth but refuses to say that there is no hope.

The book focuses initially on hip hop music as being a classic American moral panic that is used by the white authorities and the black middle classes to condemn black youth. Indeed, Cohen highlights that any discussion on black youth focuses disproportionately on hip hop lyrics which ignores the wider racism and misogyny in mainstream American society. Comedian Bill Cosby in a 2004 speech ‘celebrating’ fifty years of the Supreme Court Brown decision, which desegregated US schools, typifies this attitude that young black people have not taken advantage of the older generation’s fight for rights and that there is now a need for a “cultural revolution” away from sexual deviance and criminality (p.30). This conservative interpretation of society (which was a deliberate strategy of the mainstream civil rights groups) has created a “neo-liberal discourse” (p.228) in which an extreme libertarian social attitude interprets failure by groups or individuals as being their own fault and that a structural analysis of racism has “little traction” (p.46).

There is a very perceptive interpretation of Obama’s views and political use of race that places him firmly in the Cosby mode of denigrating black youth whilst playing to mainstream ideas of individualism. Indeed Cohen places Obama in a third wave of post-civil rights politicians who do not see themselves as black leaders but as politicians who happen to be African American (p.207) and who have appeal across racial lines. However despite black American decline in voting at the start of the century due to a deterioration in confidence in the “fairness and legitimacy of the political system“ during the Bush years, the black youth vote was part of the ‘change’ agenda that swept Obama to power in 2008 (p.171). There were approximately two million more black voters in 2008 compared to the 2004 election (p.172), which was similarly matched by rises in the white and Hispanic electorate. Yet African American youth do not seem to expect their lives to change simply because one black man was elected president. Cohen presents a wealth of easily accessible data to present African American youth as being realistic about the United States and their own prospects and opportunities. Indeed this neo-liberalism appears to have infiltrated deep within the black community with many seeing Obama as a figure of hope but that the government itself cannot (or will not) help them. Yet Cohen is rarely pessimistic and shows the younger black generation using technology and grassroots groups to push their agenda, although, curiously, choosing not seeing their actions as strictly political (p.160).

This is a fascinating book that teachers could use in the classroom and which would be directly applicable to students’ lives, especially with selective use of the statistical tables that could start discussion on these topical issues. Highly recommended.


256 pages. £22.50. ISBN 0195181743

Reviewed by Mark Rathbone FHA, who teaches History and Politics at Canford School, Wimborne, Dorset, where he is Head of Academic Administration.

This book is essentially the story of three state governors: JP Coleman of Mississippi (1956-’60), Luther Hodges of North Carolina (1954-’61), and LeRoy Collins of Florida (1955-’61). Anders Walker...
skilfully reconstructs how each of the three men used their positions to organize legal resistance to desegregation, while arguing for formal compliance with Brown v. Board of Education.

The story of massive resistance to desegregation in the South is a familiar one, but Coleman, Hodges and Collins are not part of it. They were southern white moderates, whose strategy to defend segregation was more subtle, yet arguably more effective. All three men realised that violent or defiantly illegal resistance to integration would turn white opinion in the rest of the United States against the South and play into the hands of the Civil Rights Movement. A moderate response, deterring violence, talking reasonable language and making token concessions, would disarm the Civil Rights Movement and enable the South to retain most aspects of segregation.

So, while Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas courted bad publicity for his state and federal intervention by blocking the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, Governor Coleman of neighbouring Mississippi devised a less confrontational means of circumventing integration of schools: the pupil placement plan, which assigned students to schools not according to their race but to wider sociological factors, such as “morals, community welfare, and health”, while nevertheless excluding almost all African Americans from white schools. Anticipating Brown, Coleman, remarkably, had begun work on this in 1953, and his strategy postponed genuine integration in Mississippi while keeping both white extremists and civil rights activists under control.

Governor Hodges of North Carolina was influenced by Coleman’s strategy and even tried to persuade African Americans to maintain segregation voluntarily, arguing that this would enable them to preserve their culture and traditions, and offering incentives such as improving facilities in black schools. Hodges focused attention on high rates of illegitimate births amongst African Americans in order to justify continuing de facto segregation, though his efforts to portray a moderate image for North Carolina were marred by the Monroe case in 1958, when two African American boys were jailed for kissing two white girls.

Governor LeRoy Collins of Florida is the most interesting of the three. At times he appeared so moderate that he seemed to be encouraging the civil rights movement. So his response to the lunch-counter sit-ins which began in Greensboro, North Carolina early in 1960 was to make a speech agreeing that lunch-counters should be desegregated. Yet this apparent moderation concealed a desire to preserve the greater part of Jim Crow by making tactical retreats on relatively minor matters.

All three men, remarkably, considering their segregationist background, were appointed to important positions by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson: Hodges, as Secretary of Commerce in the Kennedy administration; Coleman, as a federal judge delivering rulings which put a conservative, and at times obstructionist, interpretation on civil rights laws until he retired in 1981; and, Collins, as head of the Community Relations Service, a federal agency established by the 1964 Civil Rights Act to mediate in racial disputes. In this capacity, he was heavily involved in negotiations surrounding the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, ostensibly mediating, but in reality, Walker convincingly argues, trying to blunt its impact.

Walker ends by quoting Martin Luther King’s view that it was moderates like Collins, Hodges and Coleman, not the “Citizens’ Councillors or Ku Klux Klanners” who were the greatest obstacle to racial reform.

Altogether a fascinating angle on the civil rights era and an excellent book.


Reviewed by Janine Bradbury - The University of Sheffield
field of African American Studies. As Jeanette R. Davidson’s edited collection of essays convincingly argues, this discipline not only embraces its relationship with the community it serves, but is also one which has done much to promote the visibility of black culture on university syllabuses, validating and encouraging the presence of black students on campus.

Jeanette R. Davidson’s edited collection of critical essays introduces the pedagogic, theoretical and ideological significance of this subject to students and scholars new to the subject area. It is also, however, fantastic reading for anybody in higher education who is interested in public engagement in an increasingly globalised academic context or in the connections between race, ethnicity and education in general.

The structure of the book reflects an effort to relay how, why, where, what, and for whom African American Studies speaks, thinks and functions. The opening section, ‘History and Theoretical Perspectives’, outlines the social, historical and critical contexts out of which Black Studies arose; ‘Community Service, Social Activism and the Academy,’ explores the civic relevance of African American Studies; the section entitled, ‘International Perspectives’, explores the diasporic and international dynamics of the discipline; and the closing section, ‘Selected Areas of Scholarship’, offers recent case studies of what African American Studies does.

Although diasporic examinations of African American Studies abound on both sides of the Atlantic, a real highlight of this collection is Mark Christian’s essay ‘Black Studies in the UK and US: A Comparative Analysis’. Drawing from a place of epistemic authority (partly based on his own personal experiences and his Jamaican, Liverpudlian, Spanish and American heritage), Christian examines the marked absence of Black Studies in Britain, the attraction of Black British academics away from the United Kingdom to jobs in established African American Studies departments in the United States, as well as the complex tensions between white liberal educationalists and black studies advocates. The sensitive yet authoritative way that this volume as a whole engages with awkward, uncomfortable, yet absolutely fundamental pedagogical and social issues makes for compelling reading.

Those interested in interdisciplinary research will be interested in the broad range of methodologies used by the essayists in this collection. The book features theoretical analyses from Perry Hall and Molefi Kete Asante, interviews with the late Manning Marable and actor Danny Glover, and stretches beyond the popular historical, literary and sociological foci of African American Studies into areas such as religious studies, philosophy and performance art.

Despite the scope covered by the content of the essays, its methodological range and what seems to be an attempt to internationalise and broaden the influence and status of Black Studies, the academics who have contributed to the volume seem to come from a narrow range of regions and institutions within the United States (all of the contributors seem to be based in either Oklahoma, Ohio the South, or Pennsylvania). Whether this holds any relevance to our understanding of those ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions the book so boldly addresses is never fully addressed or realised. This concentration of contributions risks precluding the ambitious aims of the collection – which is to demonstrate the pertinence of African American Studies to people from a broad range of backgrounds. This said, this fact in itself is an interesting line for future enquiry, confirming that this text is an invaluable and much needed departure point for discussions about the pertinence of African American Studies to academics in the UK and beyond.

Notes