

“Believing in America”: The Politics of American Studies in a Postnational Era

Leo Marx recounts a story, told to him by the eminent British literary historian Richard Hoggart, of an encounter with a young Fulbright scholar who identified himself as a teacher of *American Studies*.

“And what is *that*?” Hoggart had asked. “An exciting new field of interdisciplinary teaching and research.” “What is *new* about that?” “It combines the study of history and literature.” “In England we’ve been doing that for a long time,” Hoggart protests. “Yes,” said the eager Americanist, “but we look at American society as a whole—the entire culture, at *all* levels, high and low.” But Hoggart, who was about to publish his groundbreaking study of British working-class culture—*The Uses of Literacy* (1957)—remained unimpressed. After a moment, in a fit of exasperation, his informant blurted out: “But you don’t understand, I *believe* in America!”

At this point, Hoggart understood completely just what the young man meant, although he also noted that no British scholar would ever be heard saying, “I believe in Britain!” (Marx 120).

The anecdote is representative of the degree to which American Studies, as practiced by Americans in the United States at least,¹ developed out of the political (and personal) convictions of its adherents. The field was always already ideological. American Studies as a field functions not only to study America, but to promote it—it being the idea of “America” itself, something that was not coextensive with the political or geographic entity known as the United States. Contrary to some recent accusations, the early practitioners of American Studies were not blind adherents to a particular government or political policy (far from it). Rather, they were like disciples of a new religion, one whose system of

¹ For the purposes of this essay, I will limit my discussion to American Studies as practiced in the United States. I recognize that this is an example of my not practicing what I preach (i.e., my advocacy of greater international or transnational approaches at the end of this essay), but I want to focus on a particularly American feature of a nationally constituted American Studies: to wit, the quasi-religious fervor of practitioners of American Studies in the U.S.

belief they were in fact helping to create. In studying America, they could reveal its mysteries and uncover its spiritually uplifting significance like apostles spreading the Gospel (thereby also making the mundane world of U.S. social policies better). *Believing* in America appeared to be a prerequisite for the study of America.

The excitement felt by Marx's young Americanist, as well as his chagrin in being forced to recognize that his enthusiasm was so deeply rooted in his personal (rather than merely scholarly) investment in the putative subject, had much to do with the feeling that he was part of something new and grand. As American Studies consolidated its interdisciplinary energies into a field, with its own disciplinary terms and practices, the belief system became more recognizable. Like a new religion, the fervent ideas and ideals become concretized in formal rites and rituals, such that its novices have a canon to study and its adepts are fluent in the catechism. To *believe* in America, then, will involve the identification of various individual and related beliefs. In particular, certain figures, tropes, and symbols began to become concrete terms in the overall ideology or myth of "America." These include, but are not limited to, the image of the nation founded as a beacon to humanity, a model for the world; a national community developed out of a pastoral ideal or an encounter with the wilderness that defined the nation; a primordial innocence, by which the American can be distinguished from the world-weary European; a frontier that imbues the American with a sense of destiny, Manifest Destiny, where a westering movement is ideologically associated with mankind's improvement. These and various other ideas had been part of the American national ideology for some time, of course, but with the advent of American Studies, they become fixed figures in the belief system.

The crisis in American Studies over the last 30 years derives, at least in part, from a crisis in belief. The halcyon days of the early practitioners of American Studies gave way to a generation of scholars and critics who wanted to challenge the perceived consensus about what "America" means. The new Americanists could no longer bring themselves to believe in that "America." The bulk of the new Americanist energy went into making the belief system work better, for example, by including those figures—African Americans, Indians, women—who had been previously excluded. Some of the terms would be altered, but the American Way would include more Americans. This enhanced inclusiveness filled in crucial gaps of the American national ideal, making "America" something to believe in again. Others, however, came to believe that the "America" of American Studies was thoroughly corrupt to the core. *Écrasez l'infâme!* These Americanists called for radical revaluation, in which the colonial settlements, the institution of slavery, and the western frontier be understood for the directly imperialist activities that they were. Racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism were thus posited as *inherently* American characteristics. This has even given rise to what has been called "Anti-American Studies" by one distraught critic.²

² See Alan Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies."

Here, the more vitriolic of new Americanists not only denounce the "American Way" as a false idol, they recast it as a demon.

It goes without saying that these are caricatures. But it goes better *with* saying that the practitioners of American Studies have often used caricatures—sometimes even acknowledged as such—to make their points about "America," what it means, and what one should or should not believe. The field of American Studies, as its label indicates, arises out of a profound sense of the national, of the importance of the nation in itself and in the world. We are now living in a *postnational* era, one in which the very categories of the nation, national identity, and the nation-state are being redefined. As such, the belief system that marks the coherence of an American national narrative inevitably changes. Can one still believe in "America"? If possible, is that even desirable?

The Canadian-born Sacvan Bercovitch, referring to his first encounter with "the ritual of American consensus" in the mid-1960s, noted that it was most clearly audible in protest, where the dissident voices aimed to recall America to its sacred mission. In other words, the protesters *believed* in America, and particularly in the American Way or "American dream."

I felt like Sancho Panza in a land of Don Quixotes. It was not just that the dream was a patent fiction. It was that the fiction involved an entire hermeneutic system. Mexico may have meant the land of gold, and Canada might be the Dominion of the North; but America was a venture in exegesis. You were supposed to discover it as a believer unveils scripture. America's meaning was implicit in its destiny, and its destiny was manifest to all who had the grace to discover its meaning. To a Canadian skeptic, a gentile in God's Country, it made for a breathtaking scene: a poly-ethnic, multi-racial, openly materialistic, self-consciously individualistic people knit together in the bonds of myth, voluntarily, with a force of belief unsurpassed by any other modern society. (Bercovitch 29).

Here we find the overlapping territories of American Studies and the object of study: "America" was something that one *believed in*. Today, because of the interventions of recent revisionist work, it is commonly thought that the main figures in the development of American Studies were cultural conservatives, manufacturing an American ideology that valorized U.S. policies at home and abroad, particularly with respect to the civil rights movement and the Cold War. But as Bercovitch notes, the American dream was perhaps most often used as an ideological tool to criticize those very policies. There was an intense sort of nationalism in the rhetoric of America, but that does not always translate into a whole-hearted acceptance of the means and ends of U.S. power. As Leo Marx points out, somewhat defensively, almost all of the earlier figures in the field were liberal New Dealers or outright Leftists (125). If the results of their efforts turned out celebrating U.S. capitalism and imperialism, that certainly wasn't their goal.

What is true is that they *believed* in America; they were deeply embedded in an American ideology or mythology that they also helped to foster, wittingly or otherwise.

Bercovitch points out that many of the early Americanists were hesitant to acknowledge the ideological bases and effects of their work; in some cases, they were hesitant to call this "ideology" (which had negative connotation, from Marxist *Ideologiekritik*), preferring instead myths and symbols. "Since ideology pretends to truth, the task of analysis is to uncover, rationally, the sinister effects of its fictions. Since myths are fictions, the task is to display, empathetically, their 'deeper truths'—the abiding values embedded in simple plots, the range and richness of formulaic metaphors" (Bercovitch 358). By failing to place the ideological in the foreground of their work, these old Americanists set themselves up for harsh criticism by the new Americanists who specifically identified the project of American Studies as ideological. Yet Bercovitch believes that these later critics, by focusing almost exclusively on the negative aspects of American ideology, seem unable to see how ideology operates both for ill and for good (as with the discourse on civil rights). "We come to feel, in reading these critics, that the American ideology is a system of ideas in the service of evil rather than (like any ideology) a system of ideas wedded for good and evil to a certain social and cultural order" (359). Like their predecessors, these critics seem to *believe* in America nearly as much as Marx's young Americanist of the 1950s, only these critics believe that America is a Great Satan.

A brief survey of the evolution of American Studies illustrates the power of the underlying belief in America. Although its disciplinary roots lie in the late nineteenth century,³ the rise and expansion of American Studies coincided with the end of World War II, and, not insignificantly, the beginning of the Cold War. Prior to the war, American Studies found its voice in a variety of sources, foreign and domestic: V.L. Parrington's literary history, Lewis Mumford's criticism, and D.H. Lawrence's magisterial little *Studies in Classic American Literature*, among others. This culminated, if I may say so, in F.O. Matthiessen's field-establishing *American Renaissance* (1941), in which five figures—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman—are chosen to embody the artistic achievement and promise of America. In leaving out such major popular and influential writers as Irving, Cooper, Bancroft, Douglass, and Stowe, Matthiessen established the *aesthetic* basis of American literary studies, with its clear preference for irony, ambiguity, and complexity.⁴ He

³ For an excellent genealogy of the discipline, at least with respect to American literary studies, see David R. Shumway, *Creating American Civilization*.

⁴ Of course, the most famous omission, one requiring a specific comment in explanation, was Edgar Allan Poe. Although the principle reason Poe was left out was strictly historical—i.e., that book focused on works produced between 1850 and 1855, and Poe died in 1849—Matthiessen gives other reasons for excluding him. "Poe was bitterly hostile to democracy," and "his value, even more than Emerson's, is now seen to consist in his influence rather than in the body of his own work." Poe's "stories, less harrowing upon the nerves as they were, seem relatively factitious when contrasted with the moral depth of Hawthorne and Melville" (Matthiessen xii, n.3). In other words, Poe is neither American enough nor artist enough to be included.

also confirmed that the principle purpose of art in America was to challenge the regnant orthodoxy. American literature, the literature worth studying at any rate, was in some sense *subversive*, and a generation of critics set out to celebrate this paradox: the greatness of American literature lies not so much in its celebration of America but in its *American* critique of the United States.

Although *American Renaissance* is a major landmark, Matthiessen still belongs to the formative period or prehistory of American Studies as an established field. Leo Marx's anecdote above hails from the giddy moment of the field's realization in the 1950s. For better or for worse, American Studies came to maturity during the Cold War. Many of its leading figures were combat veterans, a number of whom might not have attended university at all were it not for the G.I. Bill. The defeat of fascism in Europe and totalitarianism in Japan, combined with Marshall Plan-inspired good feelings about America's positive role in world affairs, emboldened these young scholars and critics not only to "believe" in America but to believe, sincerely, that this America was something to be championed. Delving into U.S. history and literature, the newly formed American Studies would identify and create an "America" that could symbolize freedom itself, not only for its own citizens but for the outside world. The mythic America was alluded to in the *ur*-texts of American literature already, from the Puritan sermonizing about the New Jerusalem through the Enlightenment rhetoric of the Revolutionary period to Lincoln's redefinition of the United States as a nation "dedicated to a proposition, that all men are created equal."⁵ The pre-war generation undoubtedly *believed* in America as well, and "America" came to be defined by such figures as Van Wyck Brooks and V.L. Parrington. What changed was the role of that America in a geopolitical configuration markedly altered by the war. The rhetoric of America as leader of the "free world" (indeed, the very idea of a "free world") provides a telling instance of this change. Hence, the emergence of American Studies was timely.

The excitement of the Americanists of this era had much to do with the perceived novelty of the enterprise, evident in the anecdote above. As Hoggart well knew, English literary studies had long been concerned with the historical, and had often focused attention on its culture as a whole. Thus, Hoggart had his reasons to be skeptical that this American Studies was doing anything new. But, as the historical context reveals, the fact is that American Studies *was* new, or at least its practitioners were somewhat justified in believing it to be. The Americanists were not just studying American civilization; they were in fact *creating* American civilization (to use David Shumway's phrase). Many of the important literary historical and critical works of this period established, or perhaps *reinscribed*, the fundamental national ideology or mythology upon which American Studies as a field rested. The American national narrative was being written or rewritten in the 1950s. As Donald Pease as put it,

⁵ On the rise of nineteenth-century American national narrative, and the local, personal, and literary narrative forms that competed with it, see Arac.

these national narratives constructed imaginary relations to actual sociopolitical conditions to effect imagined communities called national peoples. The image repertoire productive of the U.S. national community can be ascertained through the recitation of its key terms in the national meta-narrative commonly understood to be descriptive of that community. Those images interconnect an exceptional national subject (American Adam) with a representative national scene (Virgin Land) and an exemplary national motive (errand into the wilderness). ("National Identities," 3-4)

While it is true that these images appear in various guises throughout American history, it is not surprising that they also appear as the titles of three major contributions to American Studies in the 1950s: R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955), Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), and Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956). The image repertoire of American national narrative was established and reinforced through the practice of American Studies.

Then came a period of reevaluation, the "Great Divide," as Marx calls it, in the "mis-named political upheaval" called the "Sixties," which occurred between 1965 and 1975, occasioned by the crises of the Vietnam War and civil rights movements (122). The integral, seamless unity of the "America" developed by and through American studies could no longer hold up to scrutiny. The vivid and daily spectacle of the injustices countenanced and, indeed, facilitated by the American Way, whether in Mai Lai or in Selma, Alabama, could not but undermine that American ideal. As a generation of marginalized, disgruntled, or simply disappointed people "discovered" that the American Way was in fact merely a myth, that there was no providential national mission (errand into the wilderness), that America was not a "shining city on the hill" or a "beacon to humanity," that the *idea* of America was in fact disconnected to the reality of the United States—in other words, that they could no longer bring themselves to *believe in America*—this is the point at which American Studies should be *fundamentally* altered. Or so it would seem.

As Bercovitch makes clear, the power of the American myth is perhaps even more strongly felt by the dissidents within the United States than by the apologists for the status quo. Indeed, one of the cornerstone beliefs in the national narrative was that America is founded on dissent, from the radical Protestant pilgrims through the Revolutionary Founding Fathers, extending onward to the abolitionists and up to the present time, embodied in civil rights leaders, feminists, environmentalists, and so on. The continuing force of *that* "America" can be illustrated by Bercovitch's clear, straightforward contrast between an outsider's and an insider's respective points of view on the undermining of the regnant American mythos. Asking the rhetorical question, "What would happen, in short, if 'America' were severed once and for all from the United States?" Bercovitch answers:

Nothing much, from an outsider's point of view: only a fresh, non-apocalyptic sense of the exigencies of industrial capitalism; a certain modesty about the claims of nationality; a more mundane distinc-

tion between the Old World and the New, as denoting metaphor of geography, rather than the progress of humanity; a more traditional sense of "frontiers," as signifying limits and barriers rather than new territories to conquer; a relativistic assessment of the prospects and constraints of liberal democracy (the benefits of open competition, for example, or the abuses or representative individualism), none of these heaven-ordained either as a sign of national election or as an augury of doom.

But that (to repeat) is an outsider's perspective. Considered from within the culture, the de-mythification of "America" meant everything. It would dissipate the very core of personal and communal identity. It would undo this society's controlling metaphors and narratives, its long-ripened strategies of cohesion, assimilation, and crisis-control. To imagine a liberal United States without "America" was like imagining feudal Europe without the myths of aristocracy and kingship. It seemed a contradiction in terms. (65)

Rather than exploding a myth in favor of a more rational explanation, the crisis of American Studies becomes a crisis of faith. What happens when the Americanist can no longer *believe* in America?

The first and most visible effect of this crisis is not a turn to atheism but a strengthening of the initial faith. American Studies after the Great Divide may have appeared to turn away from the beliefs of the 1950s Americanists, but in reality the new American Studies built upon those beliefs. The principal achievement was the recognition of the ways in which the regnant American myth involved the exclusion of various people, notably nonwhite men and all women, Indians, "foreigners," the working classes, gay men and lesbians. Often, however, the major contribution to American Studies was to write these groups back into the national master narrative. This effort has been largely salutary, and the literature and history of the United States has been made both richer and more accurate by virtue of the more inclusive and complete picture. But the overarching myth of "America" has not thereby changed much. In many instances, the greater inclusiveness has reinforced the myth by emphasizing that idea of America as a nation of nations, containing the entire world—one of the central motifs of American national narrative. The greater inclusiveness also underscores another theme of American ideology, that of constant progressive movement, a teleology as ingrained as the Puritan teleology, assuring Americanists that today is better than yesterday and tomorrow looks even brighter (as the promise of the American Way is extended to those previously left out). This further allows practitioners of American Studies to feel that they are part of the progressive movement of American history, extending liberty and freedom to all. Now *that* is an America to believe in!

Others have been less sanguine about the ruling mythos of American Studies. Not content to preserve the national narrative, extending it to previously marginalized populations, the so-called New Americanists embrace an avowedly *postnational* position.⁶ By approaching

⁶ I refer primarily to those identified by Donald Pease as New Americanists, especially in his two collections of essays, *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon* and *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*. See also John Carlos Rowe, *The New American Studies*.

their subject from the vantage of non-national subjects, often through the lens of race, class, and/or gender, these critics openly denounce the national metanarrative that undergirds the belief system of American Studies. It is not enough to simply include formerly excluded subjects. As Donald Pease argues, the American national narrative developed through and *depended on* the exclusions of subjected peoples ("women, blacks, 'foreigners,' the homeless"). A rewriting of the national narrative with these "national subject peoples" now included, therefore, would not be the same national narrative, no matter how much a liberal imagination might wish it so.⁷ It is in this sense that Pease uses the term *postnational*: that the national narrative cannot stand once these "subject peoples" have asserted themselves, and above all, asserted their difference from the national symbolic system; this difference cannot be wholly integrated within the national narrative. When these figures "surge up," as "unintegrated externalities, they expose national identity as an artifact rather than a tacit assumption, a purely contingent social construction rather than a meta-social universal" ("National Identities," 5).

Pease's use of the term *postnational* is somewhat misleading.⁸ In his view, the New Americanists have destabilized the coherent and integrated wholeness of national narrative, exposing it an artificial construct, but there is nothing specifically *postnational* about the project.⁹ As Millette Shamir notes, the "post" in *postnational* is not a temporal marker, but rather indicates the New Americanists's antagonistic relationship to national narrative. However, as with the disillusioned or disappointed American Left, the New Americanist project replicated the older one, exhibiting the same features that Bercovitch had identified as the American Jeremiad. New American Studies "resembled the Jeremiad in its propensity for self-criticism, lament over past moral failings, and, particularly, in its disguised notion of a promised land, a better, more inclusive, more multicultural America in the act of becoming, an act understood to include speech acts of the New Americanists themselves" (Shamir 380). Far from being *postnational*, these narratives served to emend and amend the old Americanist national narrative. In other words, by replacing the old

⁷ "When understood from within the context of the construction of an imagined national community, the negative class, race, and gender categories of these subject peoples were not a historical aberration but a structural necessity for the construction of a national narrative whose coherence depended upon the internal opposition between Nature's Nation and peoples understood to be constructed of a 'different nature'" (Pease, "National Identities" 4).

⁸ Pease has since revised his use of the term to make it more consistent with the exigencies of globalization and the waning influence of the nation-state form. See his "National Narratives, Postnational Narration."

⁹ To a certain extent, the prefix indicates postnationality's association with postmodernity. That is, for Pease (following Lyotard), if the postmodern condition entails the dismantling of the master narratives of the Enlightenment (including, presumably, national metanarratives), then the postmodern condition might also occasion a *postnational* one.

national narrative with a new one, the New Americanists similarly create an "America" to believe in.¹⁰

The *postnational*, if it is to be a useful term in dealing with American Studies, must not replicate the problems of the national. By *postnationality*, I refer specifically to the current condition, in the era of globalization, in which the nation-state is no longer the locus classicus of culture, the economy, or even politics. As Jürgen Habermas has recently written, the "phenomena of the territorial state, the nation, and a popular economy constituted within national borders forms a historical constellation" that globalization has now put into question (*The Postnational Constellation* 60). Under the auspices of globalization, the national models—including those used for the study of literature and culture—are no longer reliable or even desirable. Hence, the "belief in America" that typified early American Studies and continues to affect new American Studies is not entirely relevant, and may be detrimental, in a postnational world. One cannot effectively approach a postnational study of the literature, history, and culture of the United States with a particular belief in America established at the outset. In other words, one should not *believe in America* as did the young Americanist of Leo Marx's anecdote. But neither should one *believe in America* as the despondent critics of the Bercovitch's Sixties or the disenchanted New Americanists of today do, either as a hope deferred and unfulfilled or as an ideological apparatus designed to repress this or that version of the masses. The underlying belief remains the same, and it remains suspect in a postnational era.

Edward Said, writing in a different context, urged that criticism be secular. By this he meant that criticism must sever its ancient connections to mysticism and the exegesis of Scripture and recognize its situatedness and affiliations in the world. Throughout this essay I have been suggesting that American Studies, as it was originally constituted as a field and as it continues to be practiced in the United States, has had a quasi-religious aura, such that its leading practitioners have subscribed to a belief system that is an American ideology. Whether Americanists acknowledge this belief in America, the result has often been the creation, elucidation, and even derogation of an American national narrative. This sacred narrative then elevates and removes the object of study—America itself—from the world. Said elegantly explains the problems associated with a criticism based on such grand ideas.

To say of such grand ideas and their discourse that they have something in common with religious discourse is to say that each serves as an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation,

¹⁰ As I suggested above, this is actually a dual belief: a belief that the America invented by old American Studies is ideologically corrupt, a "bad" America, and a belief in the New Americanist vision (or revision), a "good" America that is more multicultural and hence less hegemonic. The dynamics of "believing in America" are not very different as one moves from old to new visions of America.

criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly. Like culture, religion therefore furnishes us with systems of authority and with canons of order whose regular effect is either to compel subservience or to gain adherents. This in turn gives rise to organized collective passions whose social and intellectual results are often disastrous. The persistence of these and other religious-cultural artifacts testifies amply to what seem to be necessary features of human life, the need for certainty, group solidarity, and a sense of communal belonging. Sometimes of course these things are beneficial. Still it is also true that what a secular attitude enables—a sense of history and human production, along with a healthy skepticism about various official idols venerated by culture and by system—is diminished, if not eliminated, by appeals to what cannot be thought and explained, except by consensus and appeals to authority. (290)

Said is referring specifically to Orientalist discourse, but his words could easily apply to promoters of an American national narrative. An American Studies that still requires and still fosters a *belief* in America impedes the interdisciplinary study of the history and literature of the United States and the wider world of which it is a part. A more secular approach is needed.

I do not want to end on a negative note, however. Two distinct but related developments in American Studies give me hope that the more secular approach is gaining ground in the field. First, the large and growing body of work from numerous non-U.S. Americanists, in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, have forced many in the United States to rethink their positions on a number of issues. Non-American Americanists bring a critical consciousness to the old American problems without much recourse to the sacred language of the national narrative. (Consider Bercovitch's comparison of insider's and outsider's perspectives on the American Way.)¹¹ The second development is the increasingly transnational approach to American Studies by practitioners within the U.S. This is not exactly the same thing, but clearly it benefits from the international community of American Studies scholars. More and more Americanists are now viewing their subject as situated within a global or at least transnational context.¹² This has enabled a fresh look at persistent questions within American Studies, while also opening up new inquiries, using inherently transnational categories—genre, for instance—to create new, postnational narratives.¹³ Of course, both of these developments stem from the fact of globalization, of our

¹¹ Of course, "foreigners" have been practicing American Studies for a long time. The key difference now is that new Americanists are willing, even eager, to entertain the outsider's point of view.

¹² Comparative studies are not new of course, but until recently, American Studies scholarship rarely involves comparative literary study; in some case, this was by definition (i.e., if one is doing comparative literature, one is not doing American Studies). But now American Studies as a field is actively drawing connections between previously isolated areas of critical investigation

¹³ See Wai-chee Dimock, "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents." Dimock's career provides an excellent example of the trend toward transnational American Studies. Her first book, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism*, was a "New" Americanist study with all of

postnational condition today. There is not space here to go into detail about this condition now. Suffice it to say that national narrative cannot have the power to compel belief as it once did, a point emphasized by John Carlos Rowe (see his "Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies"). Its era is passing, or perhaps has passed, and its most fervent adherents are like the devotees of ancient gods, still respected for their cultural and mythic value, but no longer worshipped.

Perhaps the first great postnational work in American Studies actually emerged around the same time that American Studies was forming itself into a cognizable field. Written by a foreigner, in conditions that further amplified his foreignness, it is a landmark in the development of the secular, global American Studies currently underway. I am speaking of course of C.L.R. James's brilliant study of Herman Melville, published in 1953 and written in Ellis Island while James was awaiting deportation (under suspicion of being a communist at the height of McCarthyism). James's profound, personal commitment to the post-national is evident in his dedication to the book: "For my son, Nob, who will be 21 years old in 1970, by which time I hope he and his generation will have left behind them forever all the problems of nationality" (*Mariners* 2). While that dream remains unfulfilled, the dedication elegantly suggests the hope for an imagined community without borders, a post-national world, and for the sort of cultural criticism best suited to it. A truly postnational American Studies will bring secular, worldly criticism to bear on the still important questions of the cultures of the United States, the role of that country in the world, and the relations of the world to it. Practitioners of the reconstituted field may no longer truly *believe* in America, but the resulting American Studies will be more credible and worthwhile to its global laity.

the promise *and* the problems associated with New Americanism. Her recent work, building upon rather than departing from the earlier studies, specifically rejects a nationalist framework and organizes itself along an international or global trajectory. See "Literature for the Planet" and "Pre-National Time: Novel, Epic, Henry James."

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