INTRODUCTION

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> The aide [to George W. Bush] said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' ... 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'
>
> Ron Suskind from "Without a Doubt"

This special issue, called "Circulating 'America,'" starts with the notorious quote from Ron Suskind's exposé of the political-historical worldview of the George W. Bush administration because its sentiments exemplify a prominent domestic perspective on the shifting meaning of "America"—which we put in quotations to signify that its meaning is in question. The collection investigates the complex processes through which key terms—such as the Presidential aide's words *reality* and *history*—come by their various meanings and take on their diverse significance. In this regard, we would do well to reference Fredric Jameson who reminds us that history (or reality for that matter) is not a narrative or a text; it is, however, accessible through narratives and texts. This collection examines some uniquely relevant narratives and texts that enable us to investigate key processes through which ideologies, customs, and meanings circulate in everyday life thereby creating the variety of conceptions that are labeled *reality* or *history* in contemporary "America."

The goal of this special issue is to theorize the domestic and global circulation of "America" as it takes shape in the law, through the media, by consumption practices, via the education system, within the family, through tradition, as a

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consequence of violence, and in a seemingly infinite number of other ways. We investigate key forces that help create and disseminate and then recreate and re-disseminate the evolving meaning of "America" and its place in the contemporary world. As a whole, the collection asks questions that are critical for understanding our political, historical, and cultural moment—especially in the wake of two significant developments:

- first, the rise of contemporary, post-Cold War, globalization and the institutions it has given birth to—such as the World Trade Organization—which erode the traditional conceptions of nation-state sovereignty. Here we must consider not only the specific political, economic, and cultural changes ushered in by contemporary globalization but the changes that arise as a result of the consciousness of globalization.
- second, reconsiderations of the meaning of contemporary imperialism—including the question of whether there can be an imperial center in the current formation. Implied here are questions of whether the US has been an empire or has become one given efforts such as the Iraq War in specific and the War on Terror in general, (the latter known by other names such as the short-lived, Republican-rebranded "Global Struggle Against Extremism" and the former by *The Daily Show*'s much catchier "Mess O'Potamia").

These macro considerations frame our questioning of the relationship between "America" and circulating forces such as Americanization. Indeed, we question just how meaningful the connections between Americanization and globalization are as we try to understand just what new forms and relations develop within and among the social, the political, and the economic in the current historical moment.

These speculations then bring us back to our central question, one that scholars from a broad range of fields have been asking for some time: what do we talk about when we talk about "America"? For many scholars, "What is America?" is a way of asking, "What is it that we study?" But this collection is not necessarily asking a disciplinary question—though several of the contributions do in fact include very specific and well-developed disciplinary discussions. But as a whole, the collection is really asking what is "America" as an idea, an ideology, and a political-cultural force as it circulates today. We ask, first, just what is the relationship between the United States as a global, economic, and military power and "America" as a political-cultural force and idea? And second, does asking

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this question suggest significantly separate spheres between economics, politics, military power, and culture?

This collection, taken as a whole, is an answer to the first question. But as to the second, we begin with the question answered: today, there is no rigid separation between these spheres. But tracing the intersection points between them allows us to explore the intellectual territory between the national idea and the state. And part of that exploration involves the critic examining the site of his or her own critical production. Toward this end, the term *critical globality* highlights the need to be mindful of the location of production and to the "politics of the language" used to theorize globalization and frame it as an object (Wallace 146-7). But we could call on that concept here as equally important to studies of "America." Our goal then is not only to question "America" but also to explore the implications of how our very questions and the locations from which we ask these questions frame current debates.

* * *

All the interventions collected here emerge from this kind of self critical awareness but perhaps none more explicitly than Paul Smith's "Why 'We' Lovehate 'You.'" Responding to a post-9/11 issue of *Granta* asking noted writers to address "What we think of America," Smith offers his own response and brings it together with the *Granta* commentaries and with classic meditations on America by Tocqueville, Certeau, and Baudrillard. Smith argues that the shock of the September 11 attacks facilitated a kind of extreme Americanism—one founded on a capitalist fundamentalism and continuously reproduced through the cultural ideology of "excessively shared values." Certain voices emerge as "the dialectical underbelly to the consolidation of a fundamentalist sense of America." This dialectic constitutes "a 'we'—strangers both within the land and beyond it."

Smith's essay divides the world then into "we" and "you," but, as he makes clear, these are neither consistent labels nor do they correspond to the inhabitants of particular locations. Indeed, "there is no living 'you' or 'we' here, but only a vast range of disparate and multifarious individuals, living in history and in their own histories, imperfectly coincident with the discursive structure of 'America.'" This is the "America" that has been sold to us as the dynamic, utterly modern, progressively multicultural society. And this is why the post-9/11 question, "Why do they hate us?" takes on particular poignancy. "But," Smith explains, "it is not a matter of hating—nor is it as others narcissistically hypothesize a matter of jealousy—'we' don't hate you but rather lovehate you.

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For every one of the features that constitute our imaginary of dynamic America we find its underbelly. Or rather, we find the other movement of a dialectic—the attenuation of freedom in the indifferentiation of an assumed equality, or the great barbarity at the heart of a prized civility..."

Indeed, it is the desire to find a measure of that equality and civility over against barbarity that motivates Bruce Robbins's "Cosmopolitanism, America, and the Welfare State." Robbins begins with a key question: how can citizens of a state be induced into solidarity with one another "without thereby encouraging the sort of national arrogance and exclusiveness that leads to the bombing of foreign populations and the scapegoating of non-citizens?" He examines the cosmopolitanism such a project requires and traces the attempts—and objections to attempts—of scholars from a variety of disciplines as they reach out beyond the confines of the nation. Ultimately, he argues for a sophisticated cosmopolitanism that does not simply dismiss the benefits of the nation and that works against attempts of transnational power and capital to subsume the benefits of the state. While offering no simple resolutions, his conclusion articulates the beginnings of a "left cosmopolitan" answer to his introductory question by calling for extensions of key institutions of the welfare state beyond the national to the global level.

Robbins's conclusion may be arrived at differently from a study of Max Berry's satiric novel *Jennifer Government*, one of the key objects in Russ Castronovo's contribution to this collection. In as much as this novel can be said to bow toward a prescription, it would seem to suggest that in the wake of capitalist forces too huge to really comprehend, sometimes we need to create or defend the older bureaucratic welfare state structures, or as Robbins puts it in his analysis, "institutions for the transfer of income that will not depend on extraordinary outbursts of love or compassion, mechanisms as drab, humdrum, and everyday as a tax."

In the world of *Jennifer Government*, America—or perhaps "America"—is a tax-free zone of territories that includes North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Britain. In this neo-liberal paradise, citizenship and loyalty extend less to nations than to discount purchasing clubs that include all the multinationals; Nike, McDonald's, and ExxonMobile play prominent roles in the story. Paramilitary units run by the NRA on one side and the police on the other protect their clubs' interests. The only force trying to rein them in is the central government, a weak body with few resources to enforce the law. Indeed, if a

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crime is to be investigated, the aggrieved party must pay the costs; if an ambulance is to come to a rescue, arrangements for payment must be made first. Predictably, corporations run nearly unchecked, and corporate boards walk a fine line between creating business deals and running organized crime syndicates.

I reference *Jennifer Government* here because it stands as one frighteningly feasible outcome of the ascendancy of the power brokers described in the Suskind article with which I opened. Barry and Suskind's pieces together suggest one possible trajectory for "America": a course that spans the very narrow gap between the very immense territorial claims of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. To negotiate those territories, Russ Castronovo argues that irony can serve as our map. Max Berry's novel functions then as a case study for using irony to navigate this global territory.

So if, as Robbins concludes, a global welfare structure would be central to any cosmopolitanism suitable for the present, a wide-ranging understanding of irony would seem also to be in order by Castronovo's lights. He examines the way both opponents and cheerleaders of the current regime use irony to promote their political programs. From the right, he studies Thomas Friedman to show how the neo-liberals have taken up irony to advance their Pollyanna view of globalization. Though in these years of consolidated media corporatism, Castronovo could also have studied any number of right-wing media cheerleaders. There are, for example, few more stunning instances of this Friedman-esque irony than Fox News's claims of being "fair and balanced." (Would a right-wing version of Socratic irony have to be renamed Hannitian irony as Sean Hannity uses his awkwardly simple-minded "liberal" sidekick Allan Colmes to help him demonstrate the ostensible superiority of his militant, corporatist, Christian agenda?)

Castronovo finds an alternative to the Right's nearly absurdist pronouncements in progressive figures as diverse as Subcommandante Marcos, Arjun Appadurai, and the Anarchist Clown Bloc. In weaving these various threads together he concludes the following about irony:

> Its penchant for conceptualizing far-flung and simultaneous linkages makes it particularly suited for comprehending a world that increasingly sets up inequitable antagonisms between consumer and producers, entitled and dispossessed, North and South, America and the world. . . . This world makes many today feel miniscule and inconsequential. On the map of global power, the dot that would announce, 'You are here,' has become too small for representation. To remap this world, maps are first needed. Irony provides a map.

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In short, irony enables the analytical awareness of the contingent interrelations that make up the contemporary global system. And "America" emerges from this matrix as a site that takes irony to its anarchic outer limit.

For her part, Caren Irr makes the related observation that "America" is "one of the places in the world where the capitalist logic is most highly developed"; precisely because it is approaching a nearly anarchic level of capitalism, it is also a site where many important alternatives to the capitalist logic appear. As she explains, "Precisely because of their off-center intimacy with capitalism, American institutions have developed a critical vocabulary that can be enormously useful." But she insists that if we are to confront the ideologies and practices of transnational business, we must get outside the simplistic return to national underpinnings of globalization. "We must do more than claim that globalization equals Americanization by another name."

Irr's "The Americanization of Yoga? Understanding Intellectual Property Rights in the Context of Global Capitalism" tackles the same comfortable dichotomies and oversimplifications that the other essays confront. Here she argues against the too-easy characterization of contemporary intellectual property disputes as "an American enclosure of the global commons," a critique which conflates "America with capitalism and the state with the corporation" while ignoring "the cracks already in evidence within the US intellectual property regime." And more significantly, the conflation of Americanization with globalization "means missing the opportunity to locate and map emergent forms—forms that are noticeably new and not necessarily contained by the pseudo-universal (and pseudo-national) projects advanced by a tiny political and economic elite within the US."

Motivated by a case study of the copyrighting of the ancient practice of yoga, her paper offers a critical materialist history of American intellectual property. Ultimately, she concludes, "Cultural critiques of inequitable tendencies within globalization—especially the tendency towards monopolistic and proprietary control over common intellectual resources—will lose a potentially vital resource if they remain entrapped in the anti-Americanization vocabulary of an earlier era."

Where Irr's paper examines this Americanization vocabulary in relation to law, Phillip Wegner's "The Pretty Woman Goes Global: Or, Learning to Love 'Americanization' in *Notting Hill*" examines it as it receives a Hollywood treatment. Wegner's study of the 1999 film *Notting Hill,* seemingly an uncomplicated Julia Roberts romantic comedy, answers a very complex political ques-

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tion: why does Britain maintain a nearly sycophantic "special relationship" with the US? Ultimately, Wegner finds that the film operates as a forceful allegory for the British need to cling to the US if Britain hopes to maintain any grip on global authority. He concludes that "the film offers a (classed) education in why the British people should learn to stop fearing Americanization, and learn to embrace its benefits—a position also at the heart of Blair's support of the Bush's regimes new global wars."

Wegner argues that underneath its opposites-attract exterior, *Notting Hill* "teaches us that long festering anxieties about U.S. political, economic, and cultural influences have been overblown, and that the time has since been overdue for the British people to learn to love these new realities and accept their own much reduced status in relationship to the globe's sole remaining superpower."

Of course, the term "relationship" operates in its romantic sense in the film as Hugh Grant plays the smalltime British bookstore owner who falls in love with a big-time American screen idol, played by *the* actual American screen idol of the 1990s. Here marriage between lovers from very different walks of life shows that globalization works not to destroy the local but to joyously unite the local with the multinational. But as Wegner explains, the film reverses expectations and embodies the multinational in a woman while the domestic domain is the man's. The effect is to represent class and political conflict as a battle of the sexes that can be resolved romantically and sexually. Wegner turns to Nancy Armstrong's classic analysis of woman-centered novels, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, to illustrate that in *Notting Hill* "middle-class power. . .does not appear to be power because it behaves in specifically female ways" (qtd. in Wegner). The effect is to embody global capital in the figure of Julia Roberts (casting that is just rich with poetic significance given that her signature role is as a prostitute in *Pretty Woman*). Wegner concludes that it was only with the rise of the George W. Bush regime that this disguise of femininity falls away.

Indeed, reading the work of neo-conservatives like Robert Kagan, co-founder of the hugely powerful neo-conservative group Project for the New American Century, illustrates just how dramatically this disguise of femininity can be ripped away and American power can be redrawn as masculine to serve a different—though absolutely integral and allied—set of imperatives to the ones connected with neo-liberalism. And yet the essence of the representation remains. In a depiction that jibes very nicely with *Notting Hill's*, Kagan's Europe (in which he includes Britain) is passive and ineffectual—albeit it is female. Thus, in his

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words, Europe uses its whiles "to influence others through subtlety and indirection." It emphasizes "seduction over coercion" and has rejected the "hard" quality of American foreign policy. In short, "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus" (Kagan)!

Of course, recasting public politics into gendered positions and private sphere relations is certainly a well-established practice. I argue in my contribution, "A New 'Marshall' Plan: Terrorism, Globalization, Blockbusters, and *Air Force One*," that the top-grossing blockbuster films from the 1990s appropriate the old strategy of representing the nation in the terms and settings of the patriarchal family and remap these ostensibly private relations onto a global setting. In those years of the so-called New World Order, that is, the first decade of the contemporary globalization era, hegemonic forces framed the nation as an illegitimate site for loyalty that would lead to the violent excess of ethnic cleansing and terrorism—unless that loyalty was directed to the American global postnation. Most recently, this position has borne fruit in the first years of the Iraq War as that country's ethnic divisions find expression in the "federalism" of a new Iraq that has weakened the country's center and made it ready for presentation to US corporations for exploitation.

Films such as *Independence Day* and *Armageddon* (1996 and 1998's largest box office pictures), for example, present nationalism as illegitimate even as they promote, paradoxically, a strong nationalistic vision for the US. They reconcile their contradictory impulses by presenting US nationalism *as* globalized post-nationalism. But the 1997 blockbuster *Air Force One* goes one step further, offering a post-national US nationalism rooted in the mission to fight terror throughout the world. Indeed, examining this film shows how the ground was prepared for the hegemonically prescribed reactions to the violent events that were to come on September 11, 2001. Thus, the paper theorizes Hollywood's post-national US nationalism in the wake of global terror, finding that US-led interventionism is offered as compensation for the growing ideological illegitimacy of attachment to national causes.

These filmic reactions to terror provide a context for me to explore the close connections between Hollywood and Washington—a relationship that Irr's contribution offers insight into as well. For it is important to understand that the entertainment industry is one of the few in which the US does not have a trade deficit. Thus, copyright and intellectual property protection become matters of unique importance to the US government. Intellectual-property theft

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in general is a matter of staggering profits—estimates total about $250 billion lost annually for American businesses according to the US Commerce Department. The Motion Picture Association of America puts its total annual loss at about $3 billion. Given these stakes, the Bush White House created the office of the Copyright Czar to combat intellectual property piracy. Thus, it seems that to the old and unwinnable Drug War, a new and unwinnable Piracy War has been added. But, of course, for Washington to demonstrate its serious commitment to a problem it connects the issue to the War on Terror. In this effort, the Senate Homeland Security committee actually held hearings in 2005 to establish connections between terrorist groups—especially Hezbollah—and piracy. (Witnesses called to the hearing could establish no definitive connections, but one explained that he did hear '"subjects make anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish statements' on raids" (McCullagh).)

Of course in today's environment, linking to terror is only one weapon in Washington's public relations arsenal; another as we saw earlier is the invocation of the family, and here it is worth noting the name of the newest—and strictest—US law aimed at protecting copyright: the 2005 Family Entertainment and Copyright Act. The law's name links the word *family* to the word *copyright* in a way that has no immediate obvious relationship but that indicates certain ideological connections illustrated in another significant choice—to house copyright enforcement in the office charged with protecting the US against terrorism, that is the Department of Homeland Security.

The name *Homeland Security* itself should give us pause; it is a term that as Amy Kaplan has observed, has no historical place in American rhetoric. *Homeland* directs attention back to the domestic sphere of home and hearth, even as US and "American" interests have moved well beyond the national sphere. But more significantly, the term mobilizes—that is to say that it both reflects and reproduces—a new kind of insecurity that supposedly now permeates everyday domestic life. "The homeland is not like the home front, for which war is a metaphor . . . homeland security depends on a radical insecurity, where the home itself serves as the battleground" (Kaplan 90). Interestingly, in her contribution to this collection, Elaine Tyler May offers the related observation that while previous wars required home-front sacrifices, "During the War on Terrorism, the nation's leaders asked the people to do just the opposite: take trips, spend money, enjoy leisure time, and buy consumer goods."

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In her contribution, "The Family and the State: A Long-Term Political Relationship," May constructs a history of the connection between "America" and the family that traces the family's key role in the current formation. She explains that with the US's absence of "deeply-rooted historical markers of identity grounded in a national soil, common traditions or customs," the family was assigned the key role in fostering citizenship. "Believing in the rights of the individual, but fearful of tyranny from above as well as anarchy from below, the nation's founders invested in the institution of the family the responsibility for maintaining social order in the democracy."

Of course, neither the nation nor the family is a static formation. And in the current moment both institutions are undergoing profound change. Certainly, the idea of the nation as family is evaporating in the US. And with the end of the Cold War's battle for hearts and minds, the weight of costly social programs that were the material manifestations of the nation-as-family rhetoric are being increasingly shed. After all, why worry about supporting a social safety net and reducing the vast inequalities between the wealthy and the poor if the alternatives to capital seem to threaten it less and less? Thus, we arrive at the current situation, which May explains in the following:

> As the nation's leaders waged the war on terrorism in the name of protecting and promoting the American way of life, Americans were expected to hunker down into their private lives and support their leaders, no questions asked. The government abandoned responsibility for the well-being of individual families, exhorting citizens to keep the nation strong by embracing 'family values.'

Terms like *family values* (and the previously mentioned *homeland security*) are required to do much ideological heavy lifting, even as (especially as) conditions on the ground deteriorate. Thus, May's paper asks and answers the key question, "If we know that families have never conformed fully to the ideal of the 'traditional' American family, why is there such an obsession surrounding it now?"

And as every passing year sees the number of the global poor grow and the real salaries of Americans shrink, the family is required to continue shoring up the system. Yet as Hardt and Negri point out in *Empire*, "Today the social institutions that constitute disciplinary society (the school, the family, the hospital, the factory), which are in large part the same as or closely related to those understood as civil society, are everywhere in crisis" (329). It is here that Hamilton Carroll's contribution is particularly helpful. His "Vampire Capitalism: Globalization, Race, and the Postnational Body in *Blade*" examines how the vampire, a figure that has been used since the Victorian era to allegorize the fears associated

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with the rapid changes accompanying capitalist modernization and imperialism, is updated in the current moment of neo-liberal globalization. As he explains

> the increasing incoherence of the traditional sites of national identity (home, family, the body, etc.) and raises questions about citizenship and subjectivity under global conditions that coalesce around its production of the vampire as a hybridized, raced body. What vampirism tropes in *Blade* is racial miscegenation and the corrosive effects of transnational capital on the integrity of national space. It is precisely in these doubled, even competing, tropes that the film's postnational anxieties are most clearly visible. In the film, the dissolving of national borders brought about by the shifting logics of transnational capital is intertwined with a crisis of interiority in which the stability of the national subject is disrupted by the uncanny return of the abject figure of subject formation.

As we might expect from a horror narrative, the vampire references the darkest fears haunting the national body. If Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the reference point of all vampire narratives, "'enacts the period's most important and pervasive narrative of decline, a narrative of reverse colonization,'" in *Blade* and other contemporary vampire stories, "that reverse colonization is replaced by a fear of the effects of transnational flows of migration and capital on the national space, a fear that manifests itself most clearly through a fear of the proximity of the Other under transnational conditions. The ontology of vampirism that *Blade* produces evidences anxieties over kinship, nation, domestic space, the miscegenated body, and reproduction."

Blade—the African-American half-vampire—returns the repressed history of slavery and racism that haunts "America." Of course, there is an official narrative of race that is included as part of "America." This takes many forms, but at its most ideological it represents the problems of race as having been solved, the questions of citizenship as not being in question, and the US as a land of comfortable diversity.

What is interesting, as Edward Chan's "On Returning: "'America'" in *The Fifth Element* and *Kal Ho Naa Ho*" shows, is that this preoccupation with an untroubled vision of American diversity and multiculturalism is not only a domestic affair. Chan uses two representative foreign films to examine how the ideal of America as multicultural paradise has assumed a significant place around the world as well. He examines the investment that cultures outside the US have in the fantasy of "America" as a multicultural nation where the overwhelming weight of history does not seem to burden the present or, put commercially, where background does not stand in the way of success. These films—one French, the other Indian—return the exported, idealized "America" back to the

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US, and in that return Chan sees the caricatured representation of multiculturalism illustrating why and how a sustained, critical multiculturalism has not yet been achieved.

In his analysis of these representative examples of "the Old World and the Third World" looking at "America" we find "'America'"; that is "America" returned and laden with the weight of the "social conflicts that can't be accommodated at home." Thus, "'America'" functions as a multicultural utopia, a no-place for working through contradictions surrounding race and national identity in various locations around the world.

> Upon leaving and then returning, the image of "America" that reflects back is always refracted. And nowhere has its own image been refracted back more intensely than from Latin America. Thus, Susan Gillman's contribution examines how "America" functions in the collective imaginary of what Jose Marti called "Our América." She asks how the "multiple geographies" of the North and of the South overlay "the multiple histories, of colonization and revolution, slavery and rebellion" that are the legacy of the interrelations of the hemisphere's people.

Killed on the battlefield in 1895, during Cuba's revolutionary struggle against Spain, Martí nonetheless, posthumously as it were, brought into being the culture of Our América that was identified by Fernández Retamar with the hemispheric events of 1898. That kind of disjunctive temporality, underwriting a history produced through, not despite, its own missing links, is characteristic of the ways in which Fernández Retamar adapts Martí to construct a comparative Americas tradition.

Gillman discusses the history of a hemispheric tradition of reform novels—using Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* as a starting point—to articulate how Martí and Retamar's uses of this, and other key novels, create a "Caliban tradition" that adapts works by transforming them from their original contexts to make them useful for other times and in other places. Indeed, she argues for this kind of adaptation as an approach to comparative postnational US Studies. But she maintains that Martí's approach marks a stark departure from common disciplinary practice with its focus on expanding the canon (for example, including non-English-language texts) or enlarging the geographic parameters under analysis (such as with the Black Atlantic). In translating *Ramona,* Martí' establishes what Gillman calls "an adaptive reading practice...attuned to the spatiotemporal relation that is critical to comparability." Thus, Gillman's intervention proposes

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a new disciplinary approach as well as an exploration of key texts that would operate in contemporary Americas Studies.

I position the collection's last paper, Susan Hegeman's "Culture, Patriotism, and the Habitus of a Discipline; or, What Happens to American Studies in a Moment of Globalization?" in conversation with and as a response to the other essays. As a discussion of disciplinary concerns, Hegeman offers timely perspectives on "America" as an object of study. As a discussion of the contemporary global-economic-political formation, she considers "America" in relation to what has become the key dialectical relationship in globalization scholarship: the supposed struggles between the local and the global. Indeed, in studying the disciplinary questions surrounding "America," she finds a preoccupation with the questions of globalization the US's role in the world. Thus, against the well-rehearsed fear of mono-culture and McDonaldization spread through globalization—a fear she doesn't dismiss—Hegeman also sees the ways globalization reverses that dynamic as well. As she explains, if globalization is "a notoriously homogenizing force," in other arenas it

> does not produce homogenization at all, but rather has intensified the production of new particularities, whole new polyglot forms of exotica, of people, objects, and ideas recombining in new ways and places. Against the alleged obliteration of local color represented by the image of Starbucks in Vienna, we might as easily invoke, say, the popularity of Bollywood films in West Africa, or the adoption, in France, of parts of hip-hop culture by the children of Algerian immigrants.

Hegeman's launching points for her discussions are the debates within American Studies about the shape of the discipline in the current moment of globalization especially in light of attendant disputes over cultural identity, political responsibility, and the appropriate relationship of the scholar to "America." If these debates were born from the need to make the field reflect both the diversity within the US and the increasingly porous nature of the borders surrounding the nation, the diversity has also caused scholars to reevaluate just what is the connection between American Studies and the various notions of American culture. But if this question demarcates a set of possibilities and problems about "America," they also lay the groundwork for thinking through the task of creating a meaningful sense of global community.

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Finally, I want to conclude this introduction by returning to the notorious quotation from Ron Suskind's "Without a Doubt"; that is, the description of

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the White House as the seat of an empire creating reality and shaping history. I want to ally this collection of essays tracing the circulations of "America" to the "reality-based community." I do so not to argue that this collection emerges from a stable, univocal perspective upon which we can slap the label "REALITY" but because these papers articulate the processes by which "America" shapes the realities and histories of those who face it at the point of a gun, through an image on the screen, via the execution of the law, through the managing of the family, and in an uncountable number of other ways. What I want to argue here is that those whose goal it is to create a progressive future should question history's ostensible actors.

The aim of progressive scholarship is to get beyond the impoverished notions of history suggested by those in power. And here we see why this collection is called "Circulating 'America.'" Circulations do not respect limits and boundaries; they swirl and eddy as they move outside and between lines of demarcation. By approaching our study from the perspective of critical globality, we see "America" is a fluid, circulating force whose meaning is discursively produced. It moves beyond the old antinomies of global and local, particular and homogeneous, inside and outside. Here we hope not just to study and theorize how "America" circulates, but to also reach beyond disciplinary confines to circulate a "reality-based" understanding of it.

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