

## Editors' Introduction

This special issue of *Radical History Review*—"Our Americas: Political and Cultural Imaginings"—emerges from a longstanding dialogue simultaneously personal and political. As friends and scholars in the fields of Latin American history and American studies, we have for many years explored how the questions that animate our intellectual work have found wonderful, if surprising, complementarity. Ideas about empire, regionalism, nationalism, race and ethnicity, class, and gender and sexuality might have been articulated specifically to "Latin America" or "the United States" within the individual professional spaces in which we moved, but it always seemed the case that the most interesting conceptual possibilities emerged when we could gaze at these topics comparatively and connectedly. More to the point, we continually asked ourselves and others whether it was possible to conceive of social investments in local spaces as fully autonomous from the broader regional interactions in which they were embedded. And finally, and more recently, as members of the editorial collective of the *Radical History Review*, it seemed only natural that in a moment of intensified U.S. imperial projects and the globalization of capital, we should strive to formulate an object of study that would stress internationalism, cooperation, and alternatives beyond the overwhelming power of the nation-state.

The "Americas" is one kind of answer to that impulse. As the title of this journal issue might suggest, we were drawn to José Martí's seminal essay "Nuestra América" ("Our America") as we began our inquiry. In 1891, during a time of U.S. capitalist crisis and impending imperialist aggression in the hemisphere, Martí offered a glimpse of what a regional project might look like for the twentieth century that he faced. His "America" was the heterogeneous formation of countries that lay to the south of the United States, which should stand in strong alliance against unfair incursions from the north. But Martí's intervention was more than anti-imperial in the geopolitical sense; it also sought some broader epistemology to contest the ideologies

*Radical History Review*

Issue 89 (Spring 2004): 1–10

Copyright 2004 by MARHO: The Radical Historians' Organization, Inc.

## 2 Radical History Review

that undergirded a looming U.S. invasion. As he wrote: “The scorn of our formidable neighbor, who does not know us, is the greatest danger for our America; and it is imperative that our neighbor know us, and know us soon, so she shall not scorn us, for the day of the visit is at hand.” Naïveté aside, Martí argued most compellingly for dialogue and encounter between and among the varied spaces of Latin America and the Caribbean, and also between that “America” and, indeed, another “America” in the north. And despite the time in which he was writing, one of undeniable racial hierarchies, Martí opined in a most utopian vein: “There can be no racial hate, because there are no races. . . . The soul emanates, equal and eternal, from bodies distinct in shape and color.” It is Martí’s spirit of encounter, tinged by a desire to overcome formidable differences, that inspires this project that we have called “Our Americas,” in which we seek to travel from our specific locations in the United States, toward scholarship and activism throughout the world that Martí was beginning to elaborate, and back again. In that circulation, we have hoped to view different configurations of the political and the social that might help us imagine different possibilities for knowledge.

Casting this issue’s thematic as the Americas has allowed us to explore a set of questions central to an exciting body of work in formation, some of which appears here. Thoroughly integrating regions like “Latin America” and “North America,” while also remaining attentive to the more expansive contours of a formation that would include the Caribbean, as well as other sites of U.S. empire such as Hawaii and the Philippines, is part of the challenge that faces any project of this kind. Specificity helps, and so we begin by proposing that by *the Americas* we mean a transnational and multiregional formation that is ideally defined against the notion of nation-states. Following Martí, we envision such a paradigm as focusing on shared histories of connection and interaction between peoples across, beyond, or underneath national boundaries and regions—a paradigm directly opposed to the bounded and often essentialized “national histories” of discrete countries, as well as to the central organizing principle of a North-South dichotomy.

As such, an Americas paradigm challenges both the myth of U.S. exceptionalism and the idea of categorical Latin American otherness. It offers a much-needed critique of the old, but still very much alive, cold war categories of Latin American and U.S. American area studies, categories that have tended to emphasize essential political, cultural, and economic difference, juxtaposing a “developed” United States to a “developing” Latin America. Such formulations have obscured similar historical processes of European colonization of indigenous peoples, African slavery, and nation building and have posited a stark separation between so-called first and third worlds. In the case of U.S. American studies, an area studies paradigm often allowed histories of the “American experience” that little considered how social relations in the United States were enabled by domination and exploitation abroad. And Latin

American studies has frequently encouraged the view of Latin American social formations (especially those of elite culture and economy) as imitations or lesser-developed versions of their U.S. or European counterparts.

With the tool of the Americas, we can stress the interconnected nature of North and South power relations. It makes impossible the history of the United States without a history of empire, but it does not limit itself to empire alone. Indeed, Latin American studies already has a long and rich tradition of contemplating the consequences of U.S. domination in Latin America, although it has never fully considered Latin America's impact on the United States. Understanding that impact might entail not only studies of Latin America-to-United States immigration and a discovery of "the Latino" (the most familiar way of posing the issue of "Latin America in the United States") but a broader historical dialogue about how, for example, the Haitian revolution shaped U.S. political culture or how notions of racial hybridity officially promoted in Brazil and Mexico challenged U.S. racial formations. An Americas paradigm urges us to stay focused on imperialism, but also to reverse the gaze. Even more precisely, it enables us to multiply construct the gaze from a number of standpoints. It may well be that the important cultural and political influences of a particular historical moment flow most powerfully neither North-South nor South-North but between places similarly situated within the geopolitical framework. For example, we might consider the disproportional weight of post-revolutionary Mexico's film and music industries in the Southern Cone, the Cuban revolution's impact on anti-imperialist movements in Central America, or Argentine anarchism's influence on labor radicalism in Brazil and Chile. An Americas paradigm allows for a very unique form of transnational work. In an era of waning analytical emphasis on the nation-state and increasing focus on global processes, it references the historically specific transnational phenomena that were Europe's colonization and nation-building in its "New World." At the same time, it underscores the discrete existence of multiple regions and nation-states that give "America" plural forms.

To be sure, this is not an entirely new endeavor. Both the fields of American studies and Latin American history have continually expanded their purview in precisely the direction of the Americas. And to a large extent, these efforts have been promising, as scholars look to the North, or to the South. But what these initiatives may not fully convey, that we hope to illuminate, is the persistently integrated nature of social, cultural, and political formations across borders of the familiar regions. Part of the problematic can be seen in the current and welcome trend of writing the cultural histories of the U.S. empire within both American studies and Latin American history. But work from the U.S. side in this realm continues to produce the "other" as part of a U.S. imagination, wherein the critique takes place on the grounds of political analysis, but not through fuller ethnographic or historical texture (voices and sources) of spaces outside of the United States. Latin American studies might be

#### 4 *Radical History Review*

taken to task for the same, and inverted, problem, of holding the United States far too static. In this sense, ethnic and feminist studies have much more to add than simply proposing new topics for the mix. These interdisciplinary projects have posited a set of subjectivities, around what we might call “difference,” that make all overarching frameworks—nation, region, empire—much more porous, contested, and in the process of becoming constituted. As such, the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean, not to mention a range of geographical possibilities within, become formations rather than fixed entities.

It is important to stress that the project of organizing work through the paradigm of the Americas is not motivated by a desire to simply blend two regions; it should invite us to think about older categories of nation and region in new ways. It does not emphasize the comparative history of individual countries, already a familiar practice in Latin American studies, but the history of transnational interactions—spaces of dialogue, linkages, conflicts, domination, and resistance—that take place across, or sometimes outside, the confines of national borders and sensibilities. An Americas paradigm focuses more on shared historical processes than shared geography, language, or governing power to define its site of inquiry. This potentially deprivileges the never fully inclusive Anglo-Spanish axis around which area studies currently construct American “regions.” For example, former British colonies such as Barbados and Trinidad, along with their French counterparts Haiti and Martinique, have only found marginal places in Latin American studies. Even Brazil—today the most populous and economically powerful country in the region—has often been uncomfortably situated within “Latin America.” Meanwhile, the nation-based criteria for U.S. American studies, together with the presumption of Anglo-French difference from the Hispanic, leaves Canada completely excluded from any regional area. Even more problematic have been the places of Hawaii and the Philippines, islands claimed by both Europe and the United States concurrently with their respective imperial expansions, but never fully considered by either Latin American studies or U.S. American studies. Here, of course, we must pose the Americas as a problematic rather than a *fait accompli*. Just as we suggest that the Americas has important analytic possibilities, we might also ask whether “the Atlantic” or “the Pacific” would illuminate other historical flows precluded by our own working models. More generally, this raises the issue of the usefulness and limits of regional categories.

And so we hope for this particular rendering of the Americas, which organizes its narratives around transnational interactions and allows for a blurring of these boundaries, to begin to model an untying of the regional straightjacket. For example, an Americas history of slavery and/or slave rebellions would consider shared influences and dynamics among parts of the United States, Brazil, Venezuela, and the Caribbean (including English-, French-, and Spanish-held islands). An Amer-

icas history of independence struggles might examine conversations taking place between leaders' points of collaboration and disagreement. Certainly Americas projects have been prefigured by the extensive past scholarship on, for instance, comparative slavery and comparative revolutions. But the project here is to transform comparative national histories into histories of connection. What did Toussaint L'Ouverture mean to enslaved people in Alabama and northern Brazil? How did the Philippines' José Rizal challenge and/or influence Cuba's José Martí? Why was there no equivalent to the Haitian revolution in the United States? What was different or the same about Cuba's and the Philippines' struggle for independence?

Thus an Americas paradigm offers a particular challenge to the analytical primacy of the nation. It urges us to consider how many of the most significant social formations that mark the Americas' various regions and states were profoundly non-national in character: indigenous settlement; European conquest and colonization; African slavery; Enlightenment-based independence movements and republic building; mass (im)migrations; populist welfare states; cold war political cultures. Colonial historians and historians of so-called Pre-Columbian America have always been aware of this, but since U.S. and Latin American colonial and indigenous history are comprised as distinct "fields," even these narratives attribute unique and privileged authority to the power of imperial states. (Common wisdom that asserts "The British and the Spanish had such different ways of settling their colonies" or "The Inca built an empire, the Sioux were nomads" only reinforces the notion of essential U.S. and Latin American difference.) The aim of an Americas paradigm is not to declare historical differences—or the power of nation-states in creating these differences—irrelevant; nor does it simply compel us to see commonalities. Rather, we might think about how social formations such as colonization or migration are propelled by historical forces beyond the nation, as well as how they take their distinct shapes within transnational and transregional processes. For example, Europeans fiercely debated the issue of African slavery among themselves, across imperial borders, religious lines, and social classes—cleavages that had much to do with how slavery was differently or similarly implemented and resisted in the Americas. And Jewish families who fled Europe's transcontinental anti-Semitism for "America" might have ended up half in New York, half in Buenos Aires, and they were sure to have compared notes in constructing their "immigrant experience."

If one of the main impulses of an Americas paradigm is to see transnational processes of domination, another powerful impulse, political as well as historical, is that of locating instances of transnational solidarity against those dominations. Histories of slave rebellion, indigenous resistance, labor radicalism, feminism, abolition, socialism, revolution, or geopolitical alliance, for example, all gain enormously from analytical approaches that privilege transregional forces and influences across borders. Beyond stressing the internationalism/transnationalism of these solidarities, an

6 *Radical History Review*

Americas paradigm also may reveal how very American they often were—resistances and counterhegemonic projects that linked people with shared regional subjectivities vis-à-vis their opponents: uprooted African slaves against European masters; American creoles against Spanish rulers; defenders of the Mexican, Cuban, or Nicaraguan revolutions against U.S. foreign policy.

While we widen the lens to view transnationality more fully, we must nonetheless remain aware of the various historical projects—of slavery, of state formation, of social movements—that have been articulated nationally. The nation-state and nationalism have shaped all forms of modern cultural and social life throughout the United States and Latin America, just as they have around the world. How to reconcile that fact with other developments across national borders is a central dilemma for a range of interpretive moments, like that of the Americas. And, relatedly, alongside connections within and across the Americas, there has been disjuncture. Whether the Americas, then, is a fragmented or integrated entity, is a question that should be accorded some degree of flexibility.

The Americas paradigm that we construct here should compel us to consider transnational histories that may not be primarily geopolitical in nature—histories that are not so much about connections across nations as they are about dynamics underneath or outside the nation. Histories of race, gender, and sexuality may especially fall into this category. To be sure, race, gender, and sexuality have integrally constructed and been constructed by categories of nation, but they are not formed and experienced exclusively within national terms. Diasporas of slavery and immigration, for example, generate sensibilities that prohibit or destabilize notions of civic belonging. Likewise, the patriarchal and heterosexual economies that undergird nation-states fail to contain a myriad of diverse gendered and sexual identities, acts, and livelihoods.

Lastly, we wish to say a word about interdisciplinarity. This journal issue is self-consciously designed to be interdisciplinary, by which we mean that we actively sought essays and other writings that might bring different methodologies to bear on an Americas paradigm. Such an approach involves a fusion of disciplinary techniques—anthropology, literary criticism, social history, political science—that together animate the historical meaning of, or historical questions about, the Americas. In other words, this is not simply a collection of essays representing distinct disciplinary fields. We believe that the questions and challenges raised by the Americas paradigm are especially suited to, and needful of, interdisciplinary work. Because the Americas paradigm seeks to examine transnational connections, the close textual readings or ethnographic approaches of literary criticism and anthropology, for example, may prove particularly useful in bringing seemingly unrelated historical events and dynamics into dialogue with one another. Just as the geographical forma-

tions brought together under the rubric of “the Americas” elicit the model of juxtaposition and integration, so, too, do the assorted methodologies inspire a comparativist understanding of epistemology.

. . . . .

The pieces included in this issue move fluidly among genres: the scholarly article, the reflection on Martí’s seminal works, a contribution to a collective intervention into a broader debate in the field of “Americas studies,” and the contemplation of how to put a new intellectual paradigm into practice in the classroom. They have taken as their broad topic the Americas and explored the many possibilities and limitations therein to suggest an exciting and new field of study.

Several pieces in this journal issue address the central challenge that an Americas paradigm raises to thinking about nation and region. John D. Blanco’s article, “Bastards of the Unfinished Revolution: Bolívar’s Ismael and Rizal’s Martí at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” examines contrasting visions of revolutionary independence embodied in the respective writings of Cuba’s José Martí and the Philippines’ José Rizal. Crucially, Blanco underscores that at the time these contemporaries (and friends) wrote, both Rizal and Martí located their homelands within a broader Spanish American heritage, yet in just a few brief decades, the Philippines would all but disappear from conceptual belonging to the region of “Latin America.” Blanco ponders how this vanishing, along with Rizal and Martí’s disagreements, emanated from differing resolutions of, and possibilities for, anticolonial liberalism. Rizal ultimately rejected Simon Bolívar’s post-Enlightenment program for creole-led republics for its expansionist impulses and failure to adequately incorporate “natives” (whom Rizal regarded as both the leadership and subalterns of the Philippines). In contrast, Martí embraced the Bolívar legacy but reworked questions of manifest destiny and racial inclusion to posit a future, raceless nation in alliance with peers against the United States. While Martí’s utopianism was seminal to establishing a new Latin American modernity, its reliance on European heritage as a crucial part of the national mix, and its reiteration of the centrality of a North-South divide, worked to exclude the concerns and claims raised by Rizal.

Aimee Rowe’s “Whose ‘America?’ The Politics of Rhetoric and Space in the Formation of U.S. Nationalism,” considers the questions of nation and region in terms of spatial imaginaries. She examines how political discourse on immigrants and immigration in the 1980s was central to casting the United States as a white space threatened by brown intruders. Her work highlights how the United States is constantly being formed and reformed in response to new subjects and racial ideologies intimately connected to the United States’ positioning toward, and domination in, the “regions” of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a racial world different

8 *Radical History Review*

from the one that African slavery produced, although its patterns take shape from those of the past. It is a world where racial claims about “the American nation” are clearly forged in an Americas-wide regional context.

Thinking across national boundaries is a well-worn tradition within Latin American studies. If area studies per se were a product of cold war interests, there have long abounded multiple competing concepts of, and agendas for, “Latin America” and “the Latin American.” During the twentieth century, many intellectuals and activists embraced these terms—similar to Martí’s “Nuestra América” before them—in a spirit of Pan-American, anti-imperialist solidarity. They located shared challenges of anticolonialist action, capitalist modernization, revolutionary emancipation, anti-authoritarian struggle, democracy building, and the like, which were seen as tied to transnational historical dynamics specific to Latin America as a region. Closely wedded to this was the political project of building transnational alliances and solidarities to foment progressive change. In a special forum entitled “Personal Histories of Latin Americanisms,” we offer four brief essays from leading Latin American scholars—Néstor García Canclini, Arturo Arias, Martín Hopenhayn, and Rossana Reguillo—who contemplate the history and current relevance of the concepts *Latin America* and *the Latin American* for intellectual and political work. These essays suggest that while the terms’ presumptions of universalism and natural political alliance have been soundly discredited or historically disappointed, the terms continue to hold promise or, indeed, in an era of North and South American free trade agreements, may be imperative. The authors caution against a Latin Americanist nostalgia that would reiterate past (and failed) dreams of developmentalist triumph or socialist revolution, yet they also implicitly warn against any facile application of an Americas paradigm that would obfuscate the chasm between U.S. world dominance, and, as Hopenhayn suggests, “the ferocious loss of sovereignty” suffered by Southern neighbors. The challenge, they agree, is to engage Latin America’s extreme heterogeneity, while simultaneously framing its regional construction within the porous, multilayered, and uneven connections to dynamics not only within the United States but around the globe.

How might we read the connections and disjunctures of the Americas? Many of the authors whose work appears here have a great deal to say in answer to that question. Two in particular, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo and Aisha Khan, approach the quandary through cultural historical work that is specifically transnational in nature, but whose reading of constructed connections lays bare disjuncture, and vice versa. Saldaña-Portillo’s “Wavering on the Horizon of Social Being” takes the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo as an overt (and to be sure, imperial) signifier of repairing conflict, but one that created the forever-racialized categories of Mexican and U.S. national political cultures. It is not an accident, then, that figures appearing on, as Saldaña-Portillo suggests, “the horizon of social being,” like the indigenous



subject, should pose such problems for both national discourses of race, and, to some extent, for some of the institutional consequences of expanding the purview of Latin American or American studies through the broader geography of the Americas.

In many respects, Khan's "Sacred Subversions? Syncretic Creoles, the Indo-Caribbean, and the 'Culture's In-between'" also speaks to the challenge of mixture within the nation. In "callaloo" Trinidad, East Indian subjects embody a classic post-colonial dilemma: purity and discrete identity versus creolization and integration. Trinidad's social systems for racial meaning, much like Mexico's, were deeply determined by paradigms imposed through colonial and imperial arrangements. In Trinidad, Khan points out, black-white dichotomies created some subjects as outsiders to national culture, and also to particular forms of citizenship. The romance of particular regional models (Latin American studies and Caribbean studies in particular) with "mixture," in the form of *mestizaje* and creolization, have left out a range of experiences, say both Saldaña-Portillo and Khan. Just as these two essays may, in exposing a range of silences, put an important brake on an easy celebration of the Americas, they also stress the power of an Americas model that can be fully inclusive and stimulate the possibility of comparative colonialisms as a powerful analytic.

José Martí's work, both in the essay "Our America" and other important pieces, raises most profoundly the question of solidarity as a site of both utopian possibility and anxious difficulty. Several pieces included here take up that very structuring paradox. Ian Lekus's article, "Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba," recounts the deeply moving but equally troubled history of U.S. gay and lesbian solidarity with the Cuban revolution. While the emerging U.S. gay rights movement saw its own aspirations for liberation and equality mirrored in the promises of a new Cuba, widespread homophobia among both Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the revolutionary government of Cuba worked to silence and ultimately exclude U.S. homosexuals from international work, as well as to abet the quashing and persecution of nonheterosexual identifications within Cuba.

Here, transnational investments in heterosexual (and often patriarchal) gender norms are shown to sharply limit the reach of transnational solidarity and the liberatory call for a better life for all. This raises questions not only about the compatibility of different emancipatory agendas but, more fundamentally, about the constitution of some international alliances through complicity with, or active promotion of, certain exclusions and oppressions.

A number of pieces in the "Reflections" forum elicit similar questions from other perspectives. Paul Giles's "The Parallel Worlds of José Martí" challenges the static representation of the United States as simply an imperial power by showing that even Martí had a good deal of ambivalence about his "neighbor to the north" and employed a rather shifting sense of the key terms *our* and *America*. Taking

10 *Radical History Review*

Giles's insight seriously might require not only that we reimagine links between and among nations but also that we see the constitutive populations, perhaps, in more complex ways, in order to give proper place to internal heterogeneity. Salah Hassan's "The Figuration of Martí: Before and after the Revolution" takes early Martí writings to show how the necessarily fractured subject of Martí, through time, could be transformed into a fully celebratory hagiography that served Cuban national discourse. Patricio del Real's "'Nuestra América': Territory and Place" asks the critical question "Whose America?" through an exploration of spatiality, which leaves the very territory of Latin America, and its built environment, open to some question. And Carlos E. Bojórquez Urzáiz, in "Indigenous Components in the Discourse of 'Nuestra América,'" returns to the problematics of Saldaña-Portillo and Khan around questions of indigeneity and mixture, but with a more optimistic reading derived from Martí's writings.

And as in most issues of the *Radical History Review*, we include in closing a section on teaching. Kate Masur, Diana Paton, John Beck, and Gemma Robinson have taken on the significant challenge of creating university courses, and a master's program, on the Americas. The syllabi included show an admirable breadth, and the explanatory essays describe the excitement involved in new intellectual projects, with the necessary caution about the difficulties of so expansive a topic that nonetheless has limits. It is perhaps in the transregional future that students are encouraged to imagine that we can find similar gestures of all the writings included in this journal issue, and in worlds beyond.

—Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman