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# Postcolonial American Studies

*Malini Johar Schueller*

*Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*  
Edited by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt  
University of Mississippi Press, 2000

*Postcolonial America*  
Edited by C. Richard King  
University of Illinois Press, 2000

The heightened climate of xenophobia and compulsory patriotism, as well as the rallying together behind “Western” values by many intellectuals in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, makes painfully clear the necessity of interrogating US culture through the lens of postcolonial studies. Repeated invocations of differences between our civilization and their barbarity, entreaties for a “new imperialism,” and calls for reinstating a nineteenth-century type of colonialism, now with the US replacing Britain and France, are ample proof that the suitability of postcolonial theory to the study of US culture should no longer be a subject of debate.<sup>1</sup> Hardt and Negri’s postulation of the contemporary world as the age of unlocalized, nonimperialist empire is surely being tested (xiv, 134).

Nevertheless, although the present moment might warrant a postcolonial understanding of US literature and culture, the relevance of postcolonial analyses to American studies has not always been clear. After all, the master-texts of American studies were consolidating American exceptionalism at the very moment that radical anticolonialist treatises questioning the humanity and universality of modernity were being written by Third World intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and George Lamming. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is widely credited for having inaugurated the field of postcolonial studies, and with Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Benita Parry, Ranajit Guha, and the subaltern studies scholars, the major questions of postcolonial studies were laid out. These questions included the analysis of Western texts as colonial discourse, the investigation of representations of the colonized, the study of forms of resistance to colonization in the literature of the formerly colonized, and issues of neocolonialism, comprador natives, and subaltern representation. Yet despite revisionist histories such as R. W. Van Alstyne’s *The Rising American Empire* (1960) and Carl Eblen’s *The First and Second American Empires* (1967), and later works such as Richard Drinnon’s *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (1980), which demonstrated imperialism as central to national identity from the beginning, much of American studies remained remarkably insular, thus reinforcing

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the idea of the nation's exception from Western imperialism and colonialism. The "postnationalist" agenda of the New Americanists in 1992 was to question the coherence of national identity and to demonstrate its constructedness based on an exclusion of raced and gendered others, not to broaden the field beyond the nation.<sup>2</sup>

The early 1990s witnessed the beginning of a healthy and vigorous debate about the inclusion of the US into postcolonial studies. At its best, this debate has the potential to challenge not only the central assumptions of American studies but also those of postcolonial theory. The major components of this debate are the applicability of the term *postcolonial* to the US, the suitability of the internal colonization model to describe US postcoloniality as well as ethnic studies in general, and, more recently, the questioning of center-periphery models in view of globalization and transnational capitalism. The assertion of the authors of the academic bestseller *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) that "the American experience and its attempts to produce a new kind of literature [could] be seen as the model for all later post-colonial writing" was met with hostility by many critics (Ashcroft et al. 16). Anne McClintock questioned the moral efficacy of using the term *postcolonial* to describe Charles Brockden Brown as well as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (294); Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani suggested that the term *post-civil rights* be used as a parallel to the anticolonial struggles that define the "after" to colonialism (293).<sup>3</sup> Implicitly refusing the postcolonial thesis of *The Empire Writes Back*, many works in American studies have stressed the importance of imperialism to the construction of national identity: *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993), edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease; Malini Johar Schueller's *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature 1790–1890* (1998), a study about the significance of the "Orient" as a site of political and cultural intervention; and John Carlos Rowe's *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (2000), a demonstration of the centrality of imperialism to US culture based on Said's model in *Culture and Imperialism*. On the other hand, Edward Watts's *Writing and Postcolonialism in the Early Republic* (1998) draws on Alan Lawson's Second World model of settler colonialism to describe the colonizing and colonized culture of the US.

Peter Hulme's intervention in this debate reminds us of the problems of seeing US culture in either/or terms, with the silences generated thereby, and of the ethico-political agendas of colonial discourse studies and postcolonial studies. In his essay titled "Including America" Hulme writes, "[T]he adjective [postcolonial] implies nothing about a postcolonial country's behavior. As a postcolonial nation, the United States continued to colonize North America, completing the genocide of the Native population begun by the

Spanish and British. . . . [A] country can be postcolonial and colonizing at the same time" (122). Clearly, US culture has complexities that we should analyze through postcolonial reading strategies. But this should not blind us to the emancipatory agendas that guided the beginnings of postcolonial studies and through which we have come to see colonialism as integral to modernity's enlightenment project.<sup>4</sup> Postcolonial readings of settler American literature, therefore, cannot ignore the simultaneous brutality of US colonization. It is also clear that in Hulme's argument, "America" and the "postcolonial nation" refer implicitly only to white Americans. Once we begin to think of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans as part of the subjects of America, the questions raised by a postcolonial American studies rapidly change. Models of internal colonization are implicitly assumed by editors who include minority scholarship into postcolonial studies anthologies: witness Mae Henderson's essay "Speaking in Tongues," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman's well-known reader, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (1994), which earlier appeared in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist* (1990, edited by Henry Louis Gates); and essays by bell hooks and Wahneema Lubiano in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (1997). But what are the implications of seeing US minority cultures as postcolonial? Would a postcolonial perspective foreground diasporas consequent upon colonization? How would the connections between slavery and colonization be theorized? Should African American culture, as Carole Boyce Davies argues, be seen as part of a black diaspora?<sup>5</sup>

Clearly the intersection of postcolonial and American studies is producing a set of questions that promise to interrogate and revise both fields. *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*, edited by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, and *Postcolonial America* edited by C. Richard King, attest to the vigor of these questions in shaping the emergent field of postcolonial American studies. However, the two anthologies are very different in scope and methodology. While *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* clearly positions itself as introductory and focuses on literature, *Postcolonial America* presumes some of the debates and is clearly interdisciplinary. *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* includes essays written in the last decade, including key essays by Lawrence Buell, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, Amy Kaplan, and Arnold Krupat. Twelve of the eighteen essays in the volume have been previously published, although in somewhat different form. The focus of *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* is on the imbrications between postcolonial critique and US ethnic studies. In a useful introduction, the editors divide US race and ethnicity studies into two camps: the

“postethnicity” school and the “borders” school. Whereas the post-ethnicity school recognizes cultural contradictions but stresses a progressivist narrative of assimilation and argues for the existence of a postethnic identity, the borders school, while also emphasizing the paradoxes of American identity, stresses how shifting internal and external borders continue to create racial outsiders. The postethnicity school includes scholars such as Werner Sollors as well as intellectuals such as Arthur J. Schlesinger, Jr., David Hollinger, Shelby Steele, and Francis Fukuyama, and can ultimately be linked to Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis of American possibility.

The editors argue that the borders school, influenced most significantly by Chicano/a studies, is the domain in which the most productive exchanges with postcolonial studies will be carried out, particularly in the shared areas of transnationalism and diaspora, whiteness studies, and feminism. The editors contend that many of these exchanges have already taken place, that antecedents of postcolonial thought were present in African American intellectuals such as Claude McKay and W. E. B. Du Bois, and that the border studies critique of traditional assimilationist narratives “would be impossible to contemplate without the influence of postcolonial theory” (31). Here the editors run into a conceptual problem that also underlies many essays in the collection and that needs to be addressed: If the borders school is already postcolonial, what difference does the critical act of naming this convergence make?

This question remains unanswered in many essays. The majority of essays in the section entitled “Contemporary Contestations” have only a tangential relation to postcolonial studies and seem to take for granted the postcolonial nature of ethnic studies. The essays on Native American interpellation (Magdaleno), Caribbean women (Cobham), Arab Americans (Majaj), Puerto Rican identity (Flores), Filipino-American identity (Strobel), and African American and Chicana writers (Salazar) deal with cultural, historical, and identity issues within specific minority communities, and occasionally refer to Bhabha’s ideas of hybridity or third space. But all of them beg the question of what difference postcolonial theory makes to ethnic studies. For instance, Lisa Suhair Majaj’s “Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race” is an interesting examination of the shifting racial categorizations as well as racial identifications of Arab Americans. Neither black nor white, dissociated from whiteness because of their connection with Islam (even though a majority of early immigrants were Christian), yet welcomed as “foreign students” in white schools during the years of desegregation conflict, Arab Americans challenge the definitions and norms of whiteness. Majaj argues that while early Arab Americans anxiously sought “to claim a space within white American culture,” contemporary Arab Americans

such as Diana Abu-Jaber “seek to affirm their identities without minimizing complexity” (332). Although Majaj’s argument is problematically progressivist, the essay is nevertheless useful in situating Arab-American literature within racial formations. However, except for a reference to Said for pointing out the Orientalist othering of Arab Americans, the essay is firmly situated within Americanist theories of race such as those provided by Omi and Winant, Ian Haney Lopez, and Ruth Frankenberg. In what ways do the concepts of Orientalism and whiteness intersect? How are contemporary Arab-American writers postcolonial? Such questions are regrettably left unaddressed in this essay and typify the need for theoretical positioning that a volume such as this demands.

On the other hand, Kenneth Mostern’s essay, “Postcolonialism after W. E. B. Du Bois,” illustrates the possibilities of postcolonial ethnic studies by challenging the premises of both. By locating doubling, ambivalence, hybridity—the key concepts identified as postcolonial by Bhabha—in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Mostern suggests first that *The Location of Culture* be read as a double of *Souls* and second that the structure of the double itself represses postcolonial critique such as DuBois’s by representing postcolonialism as new. Most provocatively, through a reading of DuBois, he demonstrates the need to subject major postcolonial concepts to class analysis. He argues that hybridity and ambivalence, for instance, are markers of the postslavery and postcolonial educated middle-class experience, not that of the proletariat. Similarly, Bruce Simon’s essay on Maryse Condé, Bharati Mukherjee, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Hybridity in the Americas: Reading Condé, Mukherjee, and Hawthorne,” considers how hybridity debates can be read in American studies and how readings in American studies can refocus debates on hybridity.

The key essays reprinted in this volume, which the authors were invited to rewrite for the purposes of the collection, also engage significantly with the implications of postcolonial readings of American culture. Thus Buell’s essay, “Postcolonial Anxiety in Classic U.S. Literature,” building upon the settler colonialism arguments of *The Empire Writes Back*, focuses on the postcolonial anxiety of the major writers of the American Renaissance such as Walt Whitman, James Fenimore Cooper, Hawthorne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The most controversial parts of the essay are the parallels Buell draws between canonical US and Third World writers: the indigenization of the colonial language in writers like Whitman and Twain on the one hand and Amos Tutuola and Raja Rao on the other, and the cross-cultural collages of Whitman and Henry David Thoreau compared to those of Salman Rushdie and G. V. Desani. Responding to critics dismayed at canonical US literature being considered postcolonial rather than imperial, Buell argues that the very imperial

dominance of the US necessitates a focus on the cultural anxiety of classic writers because it demonstrates how colonial and imperial mentalities are interlinked. This latter argument usefully points to the problems of focusing on white anxiety alone, without an analysis of white domination. Kaplan's essay, "Romancing the Empire," on the other hand, unpacks the links between imperialism and masculinity in romances about the Spanish-American war. Registering the shift from continental conquest to overseas empire, these romances construct a nostalgic past on which they project desires for global expansion. The two essays thus offer divergent paradigms for reading white American literature through postcoloniality.

Theorizing indigeneity in "Postcolonialism, Ideology, and Native American Literature," Arnold Krupat brilliantly critiques the applicability of *postcolonial* as a temporal marker to describe Native Americans (who are still colonized), but then suggests how Native American novels offer anti-imperial translation. Wong's well-known essay, "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," insightfully engages with questions of transnationalism (seen as a marker of postcolonial concerns) and Asian American studies. Wong suggests that the current progressivist narrative of Asian American studies moving from provincial, national concerns to wider, transnational concerns needs to be critiqued because it devalues the local resistance project of early Asian American studies. Indeed, Wong argues that this narrative might insidiously participate in model minority behavior by suggesting that local racial issues are outdated.

As a contribution to conversations about American postcolonialism, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* is a mixed bag and somewhat incoherent because many of the theoretically engaged essays are familiar to scholars in the field, and some do not deal with the issues of race that the editors focus on; additionally, many of the essays on minority studies are disconnected from issues of postcolonialism. As a pedagogical tool, however, the collection is useful in introducing the student to a history of critical debates, especially as major critics take the occasion to respond to critiques of their essays.

With the exception of the contributions by Jenny Sharpe, Russell T. McCutcheon, and Jon Stratton, all the essays in King's *Postcolonial America* were written specifically for the volume and attempt, with varying degrees of success, to engage with postcolonial theory. The focus of the collection is contemporary America. Following Hulme and Second World theorists, King emphasizes the Eurocentric nature of much of postcolonial theory and argues for a "processual" understanding of the postcolonial derived from Hulme's idea of the postcolonial as a process of disengaging from the colonial syndrome. For King, contemporary US culture reimagines postcoloniality

in terms of change, decentering, and displacement. Postcolonial America means profound changes in the culture; it means a decentering of Euro-American culture and history; it means alternatives to colonial discourse ranging from Black Power to multiculturalism. What distinguishes the contemporary US, King argues, is the centrality of counterhegemonic, anticolonial practices in the public sphere.

King's introduction usefully articulates the possibilities inherent in examining the complex relationship between colonialism and culture in the contemporary US. However, two problems are worth mentioning because they indicate central debates within postcolonial and American studies. First, although King turns to the writings of Australian and other theorists of settler postcolonialism in order to criticize what he sees as the restrictive focus of most postcolonial studies that deal with European colonization, he never discusses the issue of settler colonialism. This issue remains central to the arguments of these critics and has energized much critical debate, especially following the publication of Buell's essay. Second, while dismissing Frankenberg and Mani's periodization of the present as "Post-Civil Rights," as too focused on race, identity, and juridical structures, King simply ignores the significance of race in the contemporary US altogether. This deliberate omission is seen in most of the essays in the volume, all of which position various minority cultures in supposedly unracialized terms such as *native*, *diasporic*, *anticolonial*, and so on.

Although we cannot doubt the utility of these critical terms taken from postcolonial studies, we need to be aware that minority groups risk being homogenized if race is simply kept out of the picture. Indeed, as Jenny Sharpe cogently points out in this volume, members of transnational diasporas need to be located within specific racial formations. King's dismissal of race as an analytical category participates in what Wong designates as the problematic narrative of progression from concerns of race and nation to those of transnationalism, and what Singh and Schmidt describe as the "post-ethnicity" school. As both postcolonial and American studies grapple with issues of globalization and transnationalism, issues of historicity already raised by Ella Shohat, Arun Mukherjee, and Benita Parry will have to be indexed with race in relation to the contemporary US. Finally, the absence of any reference to gender is noticeable both in King's introduction and in virtually all the essays in the collection.

But despite these methodological omissions, some of which are inevitable in any collection, *Postcolonial America* offers enough new and interesting material to warrant praise. The major strength of this anthology is its interdisciplinarity. The essays range from analyses of legal cases to postcolonial readings of literature, advertising, film, music, national monuments, academic disciplines, and postcards.



The sheer variety of essays covering the spectrum of contemporary culture should make the volume valuable for both students and scholars interested in postcolonial understandings of the present. The best essays make complex and provocative arguments.

In "Subject to Justice: The 'Cultural Defense' and Legal Constructions of Race, Culture and Nation," Donna Kay Maeda makes a case for a reading of US law through postcolonial theory. Legal cultural defense arguments for Asian Americans (for cases ranging from infanticide to homicide, justified as Asian cultural practices), Maeda argues, rest upon a problematic colonial context "that produces East as other to the West" (89). Maeda finds use in legal studies instead for Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of the Inappropriate Other and Bhabha's idea of hybridity. Considering the US as a location of hybridities rather than of "competing American and other cultures" questions the idea of a singular "American" culture apart from Asian difference. However, although Maeda perspicaciously critiques the production of colonial (East-West) dichotomies in cultural defense cases, her conception of the postcolonial space as simply hybrid, shorn of power dynamics and systemic oppression, is problematic and illustrates the dubious value of marginalizing racial politics that King advocates in his introduction. John Dorst's essay, "Postcolonial Encounters: Narrative Constructions of Devil's Tower National Monument," takes us to cultural practices and material culture. Dorst argues that the cultural production of the Devil's Tower monument in Wyoming demonstrates how neocolonial, bureaucratic strategies of management and control contain the oppositional practices of Native Americans who attempt to appropriate the site for their specific rituals. In another direction, Russell T. McCutcheon in "The Imperial Dynamic in the Study of Religion" suggests that modern religion studies are not postcolonial but neocolonial because they have simply replaced primitivist paradigms of otherness with universalist presumptions about the researchers' ability to understand common human experiences. All these essays engage with postcolonial theory though not with the Second World versions advocated by the editor.

*Postcolonial America* also attempts to intervene in debates about the changing nature of postcolonial and American studies in the face of globalization and transnationalism. Elena Glasberg's analysis of Chrysler's advertisement using the Antarctic, "On the Road with Chrysler: From Nation to Virtual Empire," is paradigmatic of the idea that globalization enables a postnational thinking beyond center-periphery models and cannot therefore be conceptualized through postcolonial theory. The advertisement, she argues, is a move to virtual empire through an unpeopled, uncharted "fifth world" that calls into question the idea of nation and of the "local." She further argues that this particular example illustrates the need

for American studies to be unmoored from both national and global-local rubrics in order to participate in transnational studies. While Glasberg minimizes questions of oppression and domination, E. San Juan Jr.'s essay, "Establishment Postcolonialism and Its Alter/Native Others" (which has nothing to do with postcolonial America), convincingly argues for the importance of situated "national popular" cultures as forms of resistance to global capitalism; similarly, Jenny Sharpe in "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race" suggests the need to account for the historical specificities of different national formations.

In the future, theories of globalization will, no doubt, play a major role in postcolonial readings of the US because they focus on contemporary flows of information and virtual communities, and challenge models of dominance on which theories of imperialism have been based. A key argument has been that of Arjun Appadurai, who suggests that the new cultural scene is one of global flows and disjunctures, a "global culture of the hyperreal" (29) in which many people live in "imagined worlds" (rather than imagined communities/nations) (33). More recently, Hardt and Negri have argued that we now live in the age of empire, which, although it derives from and converges around the US, is not localizable (xiv, 247). Empire, they argue, is postmodern, postnational, and not imperialist (134). However, one should note that Appadurai's analysis of globalization through metaphors of movement and disorganization overlooks both the gross economic inequities unleashed by multinational corporations as well as the one-way movement of American pop culture to Third World countries. Scholars working with globalization also need to be reminded that although new technologies have emerged, globalization is not a new phenomenon but rather coincident with the beginnings of capitalism and, as Samir Amin points out, propelled by the development of underdevelopment (19). Critics of globalization have also offered sobering analyses. Aihwa Ong, for instance, suggests that the "flexible citizenship" of diasporic Chinese from Hong Kong amounts to flexible accumulation of capital (138–41). A major field wrestling with issues of postcoloniality and globalization is Asian American studies.<sup>6</sup> Viet Thanh Nguyen and Tina Chen, the editors of a 2000 special issue of *Jouvert* titled *Postcolonial Asian America*, contend that a postcolonial perspective introduces the contradictory concerns of homeland and diaspora as well as global capitalism which "creates the conditions of migrancy and resettlement for many postcolonial Asian populations" (3, 5). What needs to be questioned, however, is whether diverse populations are inherently destabilizing and disruptive of modernity.<sup>7</sup> As world-systems theorists such as Wallerstein have cogently demonstrated, capitalism thrives on and needs polymorphous groups.<sup>8</sup>

Laura Donaldson's essay in *Postcolonial America*, "Son of the Forest, Child of God: William Apess and the Scene of Postcolonial Nativity," points to both the future possibilities and current limitations of American postcolonialism. In a brilliant reading of William Apess—writer, Methodist preacher, and architect of the 1833 Mashpee revolt—as America's first oppositional, postcolonial intellectual, using mimicry for resistance, Donaldson argues that the postcolonial be used as an important though necessarily partial framework for understanding Native American literature. Using English as a vehicle for resistance and tapping the insurgent underside of Methodism, Apess attempted to create an alternative nationness, an imagined postcolonial community from the standpoint of the colonized. Donaldson's essay is anomalous in King's collection because it is the only one to address early American culture, the rest being devoted to the post-1950s. Similarly, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*, with the exception of one essay on Apess and two on the 1850s, focuses on post-1890s cultures, indeed predominantly the culture of the post-1960s. This emphasis is similar to that of *The Cultures of United States Imperialism*, which centered largely on post-1898 culture. Effectively, this narrow channeling of postcoloniality into contemporary US multiculturalism, or at most its rechanneling into the post-1898 era, leaves more than two centuries of imperial, colonizing literary and political culture intact and resistant to decolonization. The focus implicitly suggests that there was a singular, nonimperial culture prior to 1898. It also ignores, as Donaldson points out, early oppositional intellectuals.

Postcolonial studies can intervene to suggest how US cultural history has always been a contradictory set of narratives with an endless entanglement of imperial and colonial experiences, and native resistances. A few works have already undertaken this task. Part of John Carlos Rowe's book, as well as studies by Schueller and Watts (mentioned above) have attempted postcolonial interrogations of pre-1898 US culture. A more particularized study, Geoffrey Sanborn's *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* (1998), demonstrates how Melville's representations of cannibalism in *Typee*, *Moby-Dick*, and "Benito Cereno" embody resistance to colonialism. More recently, drawing on the work of Mary Louise Pratt, Bruce A. Harvey in *American Geographics* (2001) shows how different white bourgeois ideologies were constructed in travel narratives and geographical textbooks through representations of non-European others from 1830 to 1865. The anthology *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* (edited by Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts, 2003) attempts to widen the focus of postcolonial American studies to the very beginnings of Anglophone colonization.

As a field, American postcolonialism is still in its infancy. What texts should be read as colonial discourse? What are the cultural and political differences between European colonization and US colonization? What constitutes postcolonial resistance in US culture? Should the post be periodized? Are all racial minorities postcolonial? Do we need to establish differences among these minorities? These are questions still being debated. As Singh and Schmidt's introduction to *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* suggests, postcolonial and US ethnic studies will likely have a fruitful convergence. This convergence was clearly indicated in the 1994 publication of Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, which carried endorsements from both Said and Toni Morrison. In his introduction, Bhabha mapped out a postcolonial modernity emergent from the writings of the migrants, transnationals, and dispossessed. This writing, emanating from interstitiality and unhomeliness, creating cultural hybridities, and interrupting the progressive linear time of modernity, Bhabha argued, is exemplified in border writers such as Rushdie, Morrison, and Nadine Gordimer. *The Location of Culture* is an important text for thinking about American postcolonialism not only because of the status given to *Beloved* as the ur-postcolonial text but also because of the questions it raises. The first set of questions concerns African American studies and the postcolonial. Should all diasporic and minority literature be treated similarly? Should colonization and slavery simply be equated socially, culturally, psychologically, and materially? Clearly, despite similarities, there is a need for caution and a consideration of specificity that Bhabha does not allow. Yet the number of studies linking the postcolonial and the African American suggests potentialities for the interconnection.<sup>9</sup>

The second set of questions concerns the production of much of postcolonial theory in the US academy. Critics such as Aijaz Ahmed have charged that US postcolonial theory has flourished because of its complicity with global capitalism given its emergence at that moment, its privileging of the position of the elite migrant intellectual, its attractiveness as a narrative eliding specific inequities of class, and its inbuilt incapacity for praxis because of its critique of *grand narratives* (68, 69). Clearly, the situating of US postcolonial theory should be of interest to scholars of American studies broadly conceived, particularly because postcolonial theorists are energetically engaging with facets of US multiculturalism. At the moment, unfortunately, there seems to be no move in this direction.<sup>10</sup>

Singh and Schmidt's *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* recaps the debates about American postcolonialism over the past decade, while King's *Postcolonial America* attempts to intervene in those debates. Despite the twentieth-century emphasis of both and the

lack of engagement with postcolonial issues in some essays, particularly in Singh and Schmidt's collection, both suggest directions for rethinking future American studies scholarship. More importantly, these works demonstrate that the period of critical isolationism and exceptionalism in American studies is over.

## Notes

1. Paul Johnson sees nineteenth-century European colonialism as necessitated and sparked by the US intervention against the "pirate" states of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli at the end of the eighteenth century; he commends the colonization of the Philippines as a necessity for pirate hunting and argues that the US and its allies can suppress criminal states by "administering obdurate terrorist states" (22); Edward Rothstein argues that because the destruction of September 11 calls for a transcendent ethical perspective, hopefully the "relativism of pomo and the obsessive focus of poco will be widely seen as ethically perverse" (17). See also Wolf.
2. See Pease.
3. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge also make a useful distinction between the experience of the "imperial center" for colonized subjects and the separation from and attachment to the "mother country" for settler colonial subjects (285).
4. For a cogent critique of postcolonial studies' turn from analyzing the operations of colonial discourses to seeing colonialism as negotiatory, see Parry, 3–21.
5. Davies takes seriously the *post* in postcolonial as a temporal marker and argues that postcoloniality blinds us to oppression in the present. She also critiques what she sees as postcolonial studies' tendency to subsume Third World, women's and minority writing.
6. Numerous critics have debated the postcolonial status of Asian American studies. See, e.g., Ma and Shankar.
7. Bhabha presumes that the transnationals and migrants produce a contramodernity (5–7); Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Acts* similarly suggests that Asian American cultural practices engage in a disidentification from the dominant culture (9).
8. Wallerstein writes, "Capitalism has been able to flourish precisely because the world-economy has had within its bounds not one but a multiplicity of political systems" (348).
9. See, e.g., MacLeod; Elliott; and Mohanty.
10. Tim Watson's analysis of American literature curricula abroad as "a postcolonial instrument of US foreign policy, remarkably similar to the British uses of literary education in India during the nineteenth-century colonial period. . . ." demonstrates the importance of also subjecting contemporary American postcolonialism to such scrutiny (63).

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