Free Riders or Front Runners?  
The Role of Social Scientists in the American Studies Movement  
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Gene Wise's classic article "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement" describes the period between 1950 and 1965 as the "Golden Years" of the American studies movement.¹ In Wise's account, this period, marked by the publication of Virgin Land on one end and Brooklyn Bridge on the other, is dominated by the "intellectual history synthesis," the ongoing search for an American mind that grew out of Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought, published in 1927. What distinguishes the "golden years" from the years before 1950, according to Wise, is a shift from individual to cooperative, institutional efforts with corporate support. During these years, several American studies programs were started. American Quarterly was founded, and the American Studies Association was established. At the core of all this activity, Wise places a group of symbol-myth-image scholars with ties so close that he compares them to an organized political conspiracy.²

The triumphs of the myth-and-symbol school during the "golden years" seem to have cemented the status of this school as the core of the American studies movement, in no small part because of Wise's description in "Paradigm Dramas." Subsequent articles commonly have cited Wise as a source of the history of the American studies movement, including, in recent years, articles by John L. Caughey, Linda K. Kerber, Robert Berkhofer, George Lipsitz, Allen F. Davis, Jay Mechling.³ Kerber and Berkhofer specifically link Wise to the widespread view
that the "golden years" of "classic American Studies" are marked by the dominance of myth-and-symbol scholarship. When our graduate students, Americanists-in-training, search for their identity as scholars, they often focus on the origins of the American studies movement, asking questions about its mission and character. Wise's influential account of the "golden years," which describes myth-and-symbol scholarship as a peak of "intellectual depth, which has not been seen since in American Studies," suggests to them that the myth-and-symbol school may be the definitive core of American studies.

For many Americanists, symbol-myth-image scholarship between 1950 and 1965 has come to carry the weight that political science gives to the founding principles of a regime. Students of politics advise lawmakers who would preserve the character of a regime to return periodically to the fundamental principles associated with its founding. Similarly social movement participants look to the history of the movement to maintain the movement's integrity. Recently, Jay Mechling has noted that the American studies movement, like other social movements, needs to revitalize itself by returning to its original principles. In the spirit of a retrospective, revitalizing search, and in response to Wise's own invitation for continuing dialogue, we want to revisit "Paradigm Dramas."

We argue that students of American studies can look to a broader founding core than that implied in Wise's account of the "golden years," a core that includes myth-and-symbol scholarship but is not confined to it. This broader core, or set of fundamental principles, will be illuminated if we look at the role of social scientists in American studies during the crucial "golden years." Social scientists' questions about the "social construction of reality," structures and institutions, issues of dominance and subordination, and popular culture that emerged during these years undermine the impression that the American studies movement was devoted to a search for a monolithic American mind revealed best in high-culture products.

In this article, we first discuss Wise's "Paradigm Dramas" and the responses it has drawn. We then revisit the "golden years" to ask about the role of social scientists during that period as one means of establishing the diversity Americanists historically have claimed for their movement. Our point is that myth-and-symbol scholarship, as it is normally cast by others as well as by Wise, should not be taken as the core of the American studies movement. By highlighting the work of social scientists during the "golden years," we outline a set of founding principles that functions continuously. We argue that if our understanding of the "golden years" is broadened to include Americanists working from a social science perspective, diversity becomes part of the definitive core of American studies and the 1970s proliferation of culture studies no longer appears as a coming apart phase, as Wise writes. Instead, it is cast as an appropriate development of the movement's strengths, not a departure from them. This revised understanding of the period between 1950 and 1965 makes it possible for Americanists in the contemporary multicultural era to embrace the "golden years." It allows us to see American
studies as a continuous movement rooted in the critical, anti-establishment stance associated with its entry into higher education, continuing through the cultural rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s, into the contemporary multicultural era.

I. Wise’s Account

Wise views changes in American studies through a sequence of representative acts, or paradigm dramas, which, he says, “crystallize possibilities for integrated American studies in each state of the Movement’s history.” The representative act for American studies’ “golden years,” its corporate stage, is a 1954 seminar at the University of Pennsylvania, funded by Rockefeller grants, run by Robert Spiller and Thomas Cochran, from literature and history respectively. Wise cites this event as one which dramatizes the collectivization and incorporation of American studies, visible in university and foundation support for symbol-myth-image scholars.

Wise argues that approaching the American studies movement through “paradigm dramas” such as the seminar at Penn improves on the capacity of conventional “climate of opinion” approaches for explaining the American studies movement. He criticizes the latter as “monolithic” and “deterministic.”

The problem we see is that Wise’s own attempt to define the formative era of American studies carries some of the same weaknesses. The paradigm drama he selects to represent the potential of American studies during these years seems “monolithic” in its neglect of social scientists’ contributions. The work of social scientists undermines his claim that the incorporation of the intellectual history synthesis represents the “possibilities for integrated American Studies” at this stage.

Wise writes:

Dominating the Americanist scholarship of the 1930s ’40s and ’50s, the intellectual history synthesis was made up of several basic assumptions. Clustering together to form a kind of paradigm, these assumptions guided scholarship in the field and helped set boundaries within which students of American Studies were trained for well over a generation. In effect, they functioned to make the American past intellectually “usable” for those in the movement.

Wise enumerates the basic assumptions of the intellectual history synthesis and clarifies them by distinguishing the “golden years” from what he terms the coming apart phase of American studies that began after 1965. He draws an instructive contrast between Leo Marx’s 1969 American Quarterly article “American Studies—A Defense of an Unscientific Method” and a 1974 response by Gordon Kelly entitled “Literature and the Historian.” He says that Kelly “ad-
advanced a theoretical model for the new culture studies, drawn from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality*, and from work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz.” The differences that Wise sees between Marx and Kelly are helpful for understanding the differences between the intellectual history synthesis and the coming apart phase, when subcultural studies and cultural criticism mushroomed in American studies programs.

More specifically, the intellectual history synthesis, as Wise describes it, assumes a homogenous American mind. The coming apart phase, which Wise sees as being imbued with social sciences influences, does not. The approach of symbol-myth-image is holistic. The social science perspectives of the coming apart phase, on the other hand, are cross-cultural, comparative, and plural. The symbol-myth-image perspective focuses on high culture, and/or leading thinkers, Wise tells us, while the social science approach focuses more on structural, institutional features, popular culture and everyday experiences. Finally, whereas a symbol-myth-image approach assumes that the solitary individual creates literature and confronts the world, the social science view in the coming apart phase assumes that the individual’s actions are mediated through social institutions.

The paradigm drama that Wise selects to illuminate the “coming apart” phase is Robert Meredith’s seminar at Miami University in the late-1960s. Emphasizing not the American mind, but cultural critique, Meredith’s seminar reflected the concerns of the times. The teacher’s mission became to help save people from a corrupt culture. Thinking along these lines led to a “proliferation of subcultural studies” and an increased emphasis on activism rather than formal research and publishing, a trend that was visible in the increase in workshops on American Studies Association (ASA) convention programs.

If students today look to Wise’s account of the “golden years,” they get a very different picture of the American studies movement. Instead of the critique of the academy and the larger society which marked the beginning of American studies in the 1930s and 1940s and the coming apart phase, they will find a description of the institutionalization of the myth-and-symbol school, which has been widely criticized for its elitist, monolithic elements. Given that Wise is counted among those critics who welcomed social science influences, it is ironic that his description in “Paradigm Dramas” effectively casts the triumphs of the myth-and-symbol school as the great strength of American studies and movement away from that strong point as weakness or decline. It is from this perspective that Wise is able to describe the proliferation of culture studies that followed the “golden years” as a coming apart phase for American studies, a time when the movement changed direction and abandoned its definitive core.

We contend that this account is problematic. Symbol-myth-image scholarship has been widely criticized—by Wise among others—for its elitist, monolithic elements, and its tendency to abstract from the substance of real life. If we take the stereotypical symbol-myth-image assumptions described by Wise in “Paradigm Dramas” as the core principles of American studies, we create a
puzzling, if not an untenable, separation of America studies from both its early critique and its later diversification into cultural studies.

It seems to us that “Paradigm Dramas” exaggerates the hegemony of myth-and-symbol scholarship during the “golden years” and obscures the early diversity in the movement. As Robert Berkhofer commented ten years ago, “We today probably portray the era of classic American Studies as more unified than it was in practice.” Linda K. Kerber, too, wondered whether there was more diversity in the movement’s early period than scholars had recognized. Even Wise himself correctly notes the presence of social science influences during the early years of American studies. He writes:

Well before the 1970s of course, American Studies had been receptive to anthropological and sociological perspectives. A substantial part of David Potter’s 1954 *People of Plenty*, for example, had discussed how ideas from anthropology, sociology, and psychology might aid in understanding historic American character. And in a prophetic essay of 1963, Richard Sykes had urged American Studies away from humanistic preoccupations, suggesting instead a more anthropological sense of the field. Even Leo Marx, chief spokesman for the humanistic model had been involved in an interdisciplinary faculty research seminar at Minnesota in the mid-fifties; the resulting publication, “Literature and Covert Culture” (1957) is steeped in ideas from social science.

More recently, Jay Mechling has discussed the link between social science influences in American studies during the 1950s and contemporary cultural studies. Mechling believes that American studies, like other social movements, needs to “revitalize” itself by returning to its original critique of society; to its argument “for wholes over parts, for the continuities of experience, for the value of reflexive knowledge.” Otherwise the danger is, as Mechling explains, “that with some success and institutionalization the critique becomes stale and forgotten and the movement comes to resemble the institutions it originally defined itself against.” We agree that, if American studies is to remain a viable movement, it is necessary for participants to continually define its meaning—in the same way that participants in social or political movements do.

If we fail to recognize the diverse disciplines and approaches to American studies during the “golden years,” we may fail to integrate them now. In fact, this is precisely the problem that some see in American studies today. To illustrate: Several papers delivered at the 1996 Meeting of the Mid-America American Studies Association and later published in *American Studies* commented on the theme “From Culture Concept to Cultural Studies,” referring to the changes in American studies since the 1960s. A concern shared by many of the commenta-
tors is that cultural studies has brought into American studies an emphasis on the importance of text over context. As a result, say critics such as Steven Watts, "American Studies has lost touch with the very culture it purports to explain." According to Richard Horwitz, the "excesses" of cultural studies are related to its long history in English departments:

Despite the claims to interdisciplinary vision there, I do not see much on the ground. For example, the gestures toward history and social science (e.g., mantric rants about "the" [singular, continuous?] elite in American and supposed devotion of "positivism" down the hall) are barely recognizable to anyone trained in those disciplines. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the ASA has trouble getting proposals for papers that are not text-based and that some Americanists—people like me, whose humanities/social science orientation is closer to 50/50—feel estranged.26

To elaborate, Horwitz quotes the 1995 ASA Program Committee co-chairs, who noted: "Missing almost entirely from American studies are social scientists—political scientists, sociologists, economists, even anthropologists."27 As an antidote to cultural studies' one-sided approach to the study of culture, Jay Mechling turns to social science, specifically to Anthony F.C. Wallace's *Culture and Personality* (1961).28

As social science-trained researchers working in American studies, we share this interest in social science as a source of critique and interdisciplinary balance. We suspect that social science has long served this purpose for American studies. That is why we have asked whether social scientists involved in American studies during the "golden years" were free riders or front runners. If they were free riders, that is, if they were scholars who shared the assumptions of the intellectual history synthesis and simply grabbed the coattails of myth-and-symbol scholars, then we would not expect to find that they made contributions that shaped the future direction of American studies. On the other hand, if social scientists were among the front runners, who juxtaposed new critical elements to the intellectual history synthesis, we would expect their contributions during the "golden years" to foreshadow the future direction of the American studies movement.

We argue that social scientists have contributed important pieces to the ongoing drama in American studies—pieces that have been overlooked in subsequent discussions of the movement. In particular, social scientists were among the forerunners in highlighting the relationship between culture and power, an issue that became increasingly prominent after the "golden years." Further, we argue that recognizing social science contributions allows us to explain the movement in terms broad enough to include both the intellectual history synthesis and the social scientific emphases on structure and power.
The search for social science concerns in American studies scholarship also makes it possible to see the non-elitist elements even in myth-and-symbol scholarship—this despite its institutionalizing and consolidating work. A revised reading of the history of the American studies movement suggests, then, that many criticisms of the myth-and-symbol school as elitist and monolithic are not quite fair. As Linda K. Kerber notes, “there is much that is simplistic” about the memory of the heyday of myth-and-symbol, “when it was possible to ‘know’ of what American Studies consisted.” The classic texts, “while having some elements in common, are also quite different from one another.”29 Contrary to its stereotype, myth-and-symbol scholarship, we believe, has pluralistic elements that made room for the social science contributions we discuss below. For example, we are skeptical that authors such as Alan Trachtenberg fit Wise’s model of the intellectual history synthesis particularly well. His work, Brooklyn Bridge, which Wise identifies as the last major symbol-myth-image work published during the “golden years,” goes well beyond high culture sources Wise links to myth-and-symbol works, reaching deep into rough and corrupt New York City political institutions.30 The recognition of pluralistic, institutional emphases in myth-and-symbol scholarship means that those have been heavily influenced by myth-and-symbol scholarship need not face a gap between scholarly identity and the concerns of contemporary multicultural society.31

Our paper focuses on the differences Wise sees between the “golden years” and the “coming apart” stage. He suggests that the coming apart phase could be viewed as “decline” or as “diversification.”32 We suggest that whether it is viewed as decline or as diversification depends on how one reads the history of American studies during the “golden years.” If myth-and-symbol scholarship is taken as the definitive core of American studies, as “Paradigm Dramas” implies, the coming apart phase almost has to be viewed as a decline. If, on the other hand, one views myth-and-symbol scholarship in relation to the contributions of social scientists, one has to look with some skepticism on the institutionalization of the myth-and-symbol school. One has to ask whether it deserves the foundational status implied in the term “golden years.” Skepticism about the status attributed to myth-and-symbol scholarship, suspicion that it defines American studies too narrowly, leads one to view the coming apart phase as diversification. It appears as appropriate public emergence of scholarship that had been subordinated by the emphasis on the incorporation of the intellectual history synthesis. Our doubt about how well Wise’s description of the “golden years” fits American studies scholarship leads us to reconsider how we should read the early history of the American studies movement.

To reiterate, our interest in Wise’s description of the definitive “golden years” of American studies relates to what his concentration on the incorporation of the intellectual history synthesis leaves out or glosses over. Because his description of symbol-myth-image scholarship of the “golden years” is divorced from subsequent trends toward culture studies, his account is too narrow to explain American studies as a developing movement.
In this regard, it is important to note that between 1949, when the first issue of *American Quarterly* was published, and the last of the "golden years," 1965, prominent social scientists served on the editorial board of *American Quarterly* and contributed articles regularly. Some were officers in the American Studies Association. In light of concerns about defining American studies today, would reconstructing the history of the American studies movement to include the contributions of social scientists such as David Riesman, C.E. Ayres, and Margaret Mead during the "golden years" provide a more continuous picture, and a more usable description than that provided by Wise?

These social scientists, many of whom work from an anthropological perspective are, we assume, among those Americanists most likely to depart from the supposed high culture, elitist emphasis of the intellectual history synthesis. Other reasons for concentrating on social scientists are the traditional neglect—even disparagement—of social science by some humanists in American studies, the continuing dialogue between social scientists and humanists about their respective contributions to the study of American culture, and the useful critique of the intellectual history synthesis that social scientists have provided. In American studies, social scientists have often been cast as the "other." If the "other" is central to the substance of the movement, the movement is diverse.

Specifically, we ask: Were the social science influences that Wise associates with the "coming apart" phase evident in American studies scholarship published during the "golden years"? Based on the contrast Wise draws between the homogeneous American mind assumed by the intellectual history synthesis and the more structural and anthropological scholarship of the coming apart phase, we pose five questions that allow us to assess the extent to which articles written by social scientists depart from Wise's model of the intellectual history synthesis.

We use these questions to categorize social science articles that appeared in *American Quarterly* between 1949 and 1965. We focus on *American Quarterly* as a national journal and as the only American studies journal whose volumes span the "golden years." We do not claim that *American Quarterly* is representative of American studies scholarship during these years; we focus on it because it is the forum that one would expect to be most inclined toward the symbol-myth-image scholarship said to dominate the period and least inclined toward social science scholarship. Thus, we argue that any substantial social science contributions in the pages of this highly visible, mainstream journal of the ASA, whose editorial board is populated by several myth-and-symbol scholars, are strong evidence that social scientists were more than free riders in the early stage of the American studies movement. There is ample evidence of social science contributions elsewhere—in the bibliographies of American studies scholarship published for a number of years in *American Quarterly* and in regional association journals such as *American Studies* and its predecessor,
Bulletin of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association. By focusing on American Quarterly, we mean to ask how close to the mainstream social scientists were.

In our investigation, we include articles by persons we identified as social scientists—using American Quarterly and biographical dictionaries (Directory of American Scholars, American Men and Women of Science, Who's Who in America); articles by persons with interdisciplinary affiliations in American studies, American culture or American civilization who wrote from a social science perspective; and articles by persons whose disciplinary background or affiliation we could not identify but who wrote from a social science perspective. As noted above, we take our understanding of a social science perspective from Wise’s account in “Paradigm Dramas”—specifically from the structural and anthropological elements that Wise contrasts with the intellectual history synthesis.

The following questions serve as the basis for categorizing the articles:

1) Does the article assume the homogeneous American mind that Wise associates with the intellectual history synthesis? Can we recognize characteristics associated with that mind, such as hopefulness, innocence, pragmatism? Is there a sense of a “mind” that endures, that penetrates all forms of America’s past? (Some articles written by social scientists, particularly of the national character school, fit Wise’s description of the intellectual history synthesis; we do not count these as evidence of diversity.)

2) Are the topic, evidence, and approach holistic? Or are they plural, particular, cross cultural, comparative, reflexive, conscious of proportion rather than essence?

3) Do the topic, evidence, and approach focus on high culture and/or leading thinkers, or do they focus more anthropologically, on structural and institutional features, popular culture, and everyday experiences? Is there an emphasis on high culture, on literature and great thinkers, as the key to culture? Is any literature or high culture aspect in the article privileged, in the sense that it is considered prior to everyday experiences? Does it transcend them? Or is it contextualized?

4) Does the author write as if the solitary individual creates and confronts literature (or anything else), or does the author see an individual’s action as mediated through social institutions? Are the individual’s thought and action contextualized?

5) In any case where an article does have an anthropological approach to culture, does it still assume a holistic culture? Is it merely a different version of the American mind—one that
starts from popular culture or institutions instead of from high culture? Is the sense of culture in the article “value-directed”?

To the extent that answers to any of these questions suggest something other than a holistic American mind exemplified in high culture, it suggests that the incorporation of the intellectual history synthesis does not do what Wise claims it does. That is, it does not capture an “integrated” moment in American studies. If the assumed dominance of this synthesis masks significant scholarship that appears in the pages of the journal of the American Studies Association, the incorporation of the intellectual history synthesis may represent instead the limitations that an integrated American studies would have to overcome. Another possibility is that the intellectual history synthesis itself is much less limited, much less conservative, than descriptions that reduce it to “a search for the American mind” imply. We suggested earlier that Wise’s version of the intellectual history synthesis model does not describe Brooklyn Bridge very well. Indeed, in American Historical Explanations, Wise himself argues that Brooklyn Bridge is the “most focused, and grounded, of all the symbol-myth-image works” because it moves from abstract to concrete levels of analysis.35

II. Findings

We located 43 articles written by social scientists or from a social science perspective for the period 1949-1965. This figure represents approximately 11 percent of all articles published in American Quarterly for that time frame. Of the 43 articles in question, only 2 fit Wise’s description of the intellectual history synthesis. The remaining 41 diverge significantly from that model and from each other. We now present a categorization of these articles.

Social Science and the American Mind: Articles that fit Wise’s model

Two articles fall into this category: Clinton Rossiter’s 1951 article, “Roger Williams and the Anvil of Experience,” and Marvin Meyers’ 1953 article, “The Jacksonian Persuasion.” Rossiter focuses his analysis on the ties between Roger Williams’ personal experiences and his political theory, arguing that Williams’ experience in public service stimulated his ideas on free inquiry, compromise, and the necessity of authority. Rossiter concludes:

Yet it would be mistake, too, not to recognize in Williams the earliest exemplar of the American tradition of political pragmatist . . . Some of his half-dozen working principles have been absorbed into the great body of American thought, some have not. But all were the product of a general technique that unnumbered Americans, most of whom never heard of Roger Williams, were to
make the leading article of their political faith. No idea is sound until it has been tested through experience; if it has been learned through experience, so much the sounder. To this extent at least Roger Williams was the first American political thinker (original emphasis).36

The values offered to and held by the Jacksonian public serve as the focus of the analysis in Marvin Meyers’ article. Wise lists his work on the Jacksonian persuasion as a prominent example of the intellectual history synthesis.37 Casting his argument in “great man” terms, Meyers asserts that Jackson understood the struggles and ideals of the everyday individual and, in reading Jackson’s papers and speeches:

. . . one finds the steady note of praise for simplicity and stability, self-reliance and independent economy and useful toil, honesty and plain dealing. These ways are in themselves good, and take on the highest value when they breed a hardy race of free citizens, the plain republicans of America.38

These articles share the traits Wise associates with the intellectual history synthesis—a holistic view of American culture and a focus on high culture. Both Williams and Jackson are portrayed as great thinkers whose works and words transcend everyday experience. Social structure and its mediating influence are not a part of either analysis. To this extent, then, the articles fit rather neatly into Wise’s model.

Characteristics of articles that do not fit Wise’s model

As we noted earlier, 41 of the 43 articles under consideration here do not fit Wise’s model of the intellectual history synthesis. While the articles focus on a wide range of subjects and use varying methodologies, they do share one key characteristic. Stated simply: all of these articles give explicit recognition to structural and/or institutional forces. Accompanying this recognition is the assumption (whether explicitly stated or implied) that individuals’ actions are mediated through those social institutions, structures, and contexts. This statement is not meant to imply that individual actions are determined by those forces, rather that individuals and groups interact with and take account of those forces. And, indeed, they may actively confront or challenge institutions and structures.

The following classification scheme allows us to present both the differences and similarities noted in the social science articles that do not fit the intellectual history synthesis model. These categories are presented in analytical terms only—some articles may contain elements that fit into more than one of the categories we describe.
Popular Culture. Several authors focus on popular culture—popular music, the hot rod subculture, television, football, movies, and the increasing popularity of do-it-yourself projects. These authors take as their task the identification of differences between American cultural, class, and ethnic groups and how those differences are reflected in the use and interpretation of various components of popular culture. Within this category, we note two subgroups. In the first subgroup are articles whose authors seek to demonstrate how a particular pop culture phenomenon is a means of critiquing the dominant culture. The second subgroup consists of articles in which demographic and/or socioeconomic differences are reflected in or absorbed by popular culture.

Authors whose work falls into the first of these subgroups see protest against dominant culture in what people do with leisure time. Roland Albert (1958), for example, argues that do-it-yourselfers “find the satisfying feeling of individual identity and measurable accomplishment they fail to get from their everyday routine in an office, at the assembly line or behind a counter.” He concludes that do-it-yourselfers’ refusal to get involved in society “may be a healthy protest against society’s ever increasing demands for participation.” Similarly, Gene Balsley (1950) argues that serious hot rodders, rather than being seen as followers of the latest fad, are instead more accurately described as useful critics of the automobile industry. Finally, David Riesman’s 1950 study of popular music distinguishes between majority and minority attitudes and indicates that the latter contain “socially rebellious themes” that are critical of adults and adult culture. What each of these articles has in common is the element of cultural critique that Wise asserts is more characteristic of the coming apart stage than of this period of the American studies movement.

The second subgroup contains articles that demonstrate how popular culture often illuminates structurally rooted cultural differences, such as those based on demographics, ethnicity, or class. For example, Margaret Midas’ 1951 article, “Without TV” presents the results of a study of parents’ attitudes toward an early television advertisement. The advertisement in question urged parents to purchase a television set quickly so that their children would not feel like social misfits. Midas’ interview of parents show that upper middle class white professionals were more likely than other groups to recognize the manipulative qualities of the ad and reject the idea that purchasing a television was vital. She argues, however, that this group still conforms to the culture, but to other media rather than to television and thus are “themselves the most beautiful examples of conformity” in her study.

Tensions between generations, social class, and character types play an important conceptual role in David and Evelyn T. Reismans’ 1952 analysis of movies and audiences. These authors observe that audiences’ use of movies has shifted. Movies have metamorphosed from a class learning tool to a way of understanding complex interpersonal networks and interactions, a shift that is a natural result of the overall move from an inner-directed to an other-directed personality type.
David Riesman and Reuel Denney continue this theme in their 1951 analysis of football in America. Their article addresses what they term the “ethnic, class and characterological struggles of our time.”44 They contend that the game has adapted and been modified in order to incorporate varying cultural strands and an ever widening and diverse audience. Herbert Gans (1953) makes a similar argument about what he calls “Yinglish” music, a form popular first in the Catskills. Using Mickey Katz’s records and career as a case study, Gans argues, “Katz’s records mirror the marginality of the American Jewish community.”45 That community is marginal because it must balance a Protestant ethic and value system against a strong loyalty to Jewishness. Finally, Chadwick Hansen’s 1960 article, “Social Influences on Jazz Style: Chicago, 1920-1930” devotes considerable attention to the tension between minority groups’ push to be acculturated and the desire to maintain the integrity of their own cultures. Hansen takes as his case study the experience of Black jazz musicians who found themselves forced to import some elements of White middle class music into their own in order to become popularly successful. While Hansen claims that “the Southern Negro made a real social advance” in becoming part of the Northern White culture, he also warns that jazz as music probably suffered artistically from the attempt to combine it with mainstream popular music.46

**Regional Cultural Studies.** This group of articles does not fit the intellectual history synthesis model of an holistic American mind because they focus on regional cultures. Lowry Nelson’s 1949 article on America’s rural heritage, for example, considers both the material and nonmaterial aspects of rural culture and their influence on major social institutions.47 Anthony F. C. Wallace’s 1952 article “Handsome Lake and the Great Revival in the West” is regional in focus as well. Wallace compares two prophets, Joseph Smith, who led the Mormons, and Handsome Lake, an Iroquois prophet. “The reason why both Iroquois and frontier whites, as populations, were simultaneously hungry for religious inspiration,” he argues “lies, I think, in an accidental congruence of similar social difficulties.”48

Still another example of regional cultural studies is James Parsons’ 1955 article, “The Uniqueness of California,” an attempt to understand the popular belief that California is somehow different from the rest of the country. “The regional consciousness of Californians, remarkably strong for so restless and rootless a population, has had its own origins in the common problems and interest imposed by geography.” Parsons argues. “A sense of separateness and apartness from the rest of the nation, a regional awareness, gives California much of its distinctive character.”49 Edward Parsons’ emphasis throughout the article is on the heterogeneous nature of both the geography and culture of California. So, too, Janosik’s 1955 analysis of suburban growth and development, which emphasizes turf battles among multiple governmental units,50 and Sidney Goldstein’s 1954
article, "Migration: Dynamic of the American City," a case study of the effects of population growth and composition on Norristown, Pennsylvania, make no claim that America is a holistic culture with a recognizable and enduring mindset.

As a final example of regional analysis that focuses on diverse cultures and the institutional or structural forces that shape them, we briefly consider Paul Conner’s 1965 article on patriarchy. Conner defines his task as an effort to explain what he terms the Southern United States’ “infatuation” with patriarchy. He traces the popularity of this ideology to rural isolation, biblical religious bases, and European feudal traditions, but is careful to point out that it was powerful men who were most infatuated with the notion and that slaves and women suffered from it.

Institutional Analyses. The articles in this category share a strong institutional emphasis. Although some of them appear to assume an American mind, their analysis of that mind differs in crucial respects from the analysis that Wise associates with the intellectual history synthesis. One particularly important difference is social scientists’ recognition that the American mind refers not to an inclusive culture but to a dominant culture that is supported by institutional power structures that often exclude minority cultures. This recognition of dominance carries implicitly the kind of cultural critique that Wise associates with the later coming apart stage of the American studies movement.

We divide the institutional analyses into three subcategories: those that deal with institutional changes, those that seek to clarify some aspect of the dominant American tradition, and those that examine the influence of other cultures on American values and culture.

1) Institutional Change and Cultural Shifts: Articles that fall into this subcategory investigate various institutional or structural changes and how they have brought about cultural shifts or struggles. C. F. Ayres serves as our first example. Ayres, an economist, contributed two articles to American Quarterly, both in 1949. While both articles describe something about the American way of life, they do not fit with Wise’s model because both are at least somewhat comparative, critical, and, most importantly, contain a strong institutional emphasis. In “Land of the Free Ride” Ayres implies that the American mind is tied to particular economic conditions and can be expected to change now that the frontier has been developed. In “The Industrial Way of Life,” Ayres more forcefully argues that “Industrial society did not originate in America and is not the product of peculiarly American circumstances. . . . The spirit of our civilization, if one may speak of such a thing . . . , is the spirit of science and machine technology. It is not the spirit of Protestantism, or of property, or even of nationalism.” For Ayres, then, the American mind is influenced strongly by structures and institutions and thus is not static.
Cedric Cowing’s 1958 article on speculative competence also falls into this subcategory. Cowing examines the impact of amateur traders on the market. He writes:

The real problem these experts and commentators faced there was one that has plagued most of human history: how to assimilate a very large group—one given to extremes of gullibility and suspicion, because it lacks experience—without deranging the structures that has been carefully erected over much time. . . . In the post-Crash political climate, market regulations were finally instituted.55

Here, again, we see the tension between individuals and institutions in the context of larger social structural change.

David Riesman, who appears to be the most prominent social scientist in the American studies movement during this period, provides an additional example of institutionally based analysis. His 1953 article, “Psychological Types and National Character” is essentially a commentary in which he worries in print about the potential for abuse of social science discoveries. He warns, for example, “our ideology of tolerance and our assumption that the melting pot would serve to boil away these differences have prevented us from giving them sufficient academic attention.”56 Moreover, he encourages other scholars to recognize that the United States is not homogeneous and to link observations about character with institutional developments.

Other articles that demonstrate the changing nature of values and ideas and how those changes are tied to institutional, economic, and technological shifts include Morrell Heald’s 1961 article on business thought in the 1920s,57 Arthur Cole’s 1962 article, “The Price System and the Rites of Passage,” which shows how rites of passage “involve agencies and institutions external to the household” that are, in an increasing number of cases large, commercial corporations,58 and Max Lerner’s 1952 article, “Big Technology and Neutral Technicians,” which documents how America’s “love affair” with big technology “has joined the impersonal power of the machine to the dynamism of the American character.”59

We can conclude this section of the discussion by considering two additional examples: Lucielle C. Birnbaum’s 1955 article, “Behaviorism in the 1920s”60 and Kenneth O’Brien’s 1961 article, “Education, Americanization, and the Supreme Court: The 1920s.”61 Both authors describe conflict in values that emerged during the 1920s and how institutions both shaped and responded to that conflict. In the former case, the conflict centered on appropriate childrearing practices, which were rooted at the time in both Puritanism and the Enlightenment. In the latter instance, the conflict centered around what language children were allowed to use in public schools and whether it was the state or parents who had the authority to
make such choices. In both articles these conflicts are placed in the context of the post-World War I era.

2) **Clarification of a Piece of the Dominant Tradition**: The second subcategory contains those articles whose authors attempt to clarify some aspect of the dominant American tradition. Mulford Q. Sibly’s 1950 article, “The Traditional American Doctrine of Freedom of Thought and Speech” addresses the role of the law, certainly an important social institution, in defining spiritual freedom. John Mallan’s 1956 article, “The Warrior Critique of the Business Civilization” attempts to clarify another neglected aspect of the American tradition, namely the materialist complacency and non-militaristic values of many American businessmen. A third example of this type is Sillars’ 1957 article, “Warren’s All the Kings Men: A Study in Populism?” Sillars’ explicit location of populism in poor agricultural areas in the Midwest and South in the 1930s and his compelling claim that a certain set of social conditions gave rise to populist leaders do not fit Wise’s description of symbol-myth-image scholarship. A final example in this subcategory is Gregory Stone’s 1959 article, “Halloween and the Mass Child.” Finding evidence of Riesman’s “other-directed” character type in the consumption and conformity of children and their parents at Halloween, Stone suggests that “national holidays and observances may have been transformed into vast staging areas for the anticipatory socialization of mass men.”

While none of these authors discusses institutional changes, they clearly ground their analyses in institutional and structural contexts. Wise’s description of the intellectual history synthesis does not adequately describe the version of American mind depicted in these works.

3) **External Influences on American Culture**: Articles that fall into the third of these subcategories take as their task an examination of the influence of other cultures on American culture and/or institutions. Frank Thistlethwaite’s 1957 article on Anglo-American relations, in which he describes similarities between American society and the Liberal Party in England, serves as one example. A second example of this type is Lewis Feuer’s 1962 article on travelers to the Soviet Union and their influence on New Deal policies. Feuer argues that the common conception that New Deal pragmatism is uniquely American is misleading and that, in fact, many of the ideas in the New Deal were rooted in the Soviet Union and its experiments with socialism. Neither of these articles fits neatly into Wise’s intellectual history synthesis model. While they may carry some assumptions about a homogeneous American mind, that mind is not uniquely American—it has institutional and cultural roots in other societies.

**Biography Meets History.** This category contains articles that provide readers with semi-biographical accounts of individuals. These accounts serve as data that give insight into the culture and institutions of a particular time period. Heinz Eulau’s 1952 article, “Man Against Himself: Walter Lippmann’s Years of Doubt” serves as one example. Eulau argues that “Walter Lippmann’s personal development in those years [1914-1917] was probably an accurate reflection of
the changing state of American liberalism in general. He was as sensitive a barometer of the period’s intellectual and emotional atmosphere as can be found. Additional articles of this type include Lewis Feuer’s 1958 article, “H.A.P. Torrey and John Dewey: Teacher and Pupil” in which he portrays Dewey’s relationship with Torrey in order to shed light on the pragmatists past. Frederickson’s 1959 article on Veblen, and Paredes’ 1960 essay on Luis Inclan share this approach. All of these authors place their biographical subjects in context and emphasize the structural roots of their ideas.

Methods and Concepts. The next major category of social science articles consists of those that are methodological or theoretical rather than substantive in nature. In a 1951 article, Margaret Mead compares and contrasts the methodological approaches of historians and anthropologists and urges synthetic efforts. Richard Sykes (1963) sets forth a definition of both American culture and American studies, arguing that American studies is “closer to the social sciences theoretically than to the humanities.” In contrast, Hollander’s 1949 article on the formation of group images and Cantril’s 1954 work on the qualities of being human are theoretical explorations into individual’s cognitive processes and the influence social institutions may have on those processes. None of these authors assumes a homogeneous American mind, nor does any focus on American great thinkers as privileged sources.

Power Relations. The final category includes articles in which the concept of power occupies center stage. Among the articles here are Keeler’s 1950 work on “The White City and The Black City,” which deals explicitly with power relations that are reflected in urban settings. Record’s 1956 article, “Negro Intellectuals and Negro Movements in Historical Perspective,” which represents an attempt to connect differences over remedies for subordination to academic status, and Ruchames’ 1956 analysis of Jim Crow railroads and the individuals who worked to eliminate them.

III. Conclusions

As constituted in “Paradigm Dramas,” Wise’s description of the early years of the American studies movement presents a misleading holistic impression about what scholars were doing. Social scientists had a significant minority role in American studies scholarship during the “golden years,” even in the journal of the American Studies Association. Social scientists were not free riders. Very few of them grafted onto or shared the assumptions that Wise associates with the intellectual history synthesis. In fact, one might argue that social scientists were front runners in the American studies movement, because the American Quarterly articles they authored exhibited forward-looking traits that Wise observes in the next stage of the American studies movement. Many of them had an interest in subcultural studies, in cultural criticism, and in the relationship between culture
and social structures. The connection between their work and the cultural analyses of the coming apart phase supports our argument that the foundational principles of the American studies movement are broader than can be encompassed by the intellectual history synthesis. This connection suggests further that defining the movement broadly enough to incorporate the work of social scientists offers a much needed link between developmental stages of the movement. As we noted earlier, this link allows us to understand the coming apart phase as appropriate diversification rather than as decline. It also offers a clear path to the contemporary interest in multiculturalism and diversity.

A particular contribution of social scientists during the “golden years” is their examination of power relations. This is also a vital aspect of the coming apart phase in the American studies movement, though it is not mentioned in Wise’s description. He casts the interest in subcultural studies that emerged in the 1960s in terms of difference or diversity but not in terms of the issues of subordination and dominance that give rise to cultural criticism. Social scientists such as Ayres and Riesman explicitly recognize that culture is related to structures and institutions; they clarify the link between culture and power.

Many of the social scientists who published in American Quarterly during the “golden years” were, at the same time, spreading the message about culture and power in their home disciplines. It was during this period that ostensibly “value-free” quantitative methods began to dominate many of the social science disciplines. It was also during this period that the behavioral revolution in social science created an academic milieu in which empiricist concerns challenged, and in many instances, displaced the traditional emphases on culture, values, and underlying social structures. Thus social scientists such as David Riesman, with a more qualitative approach, may have gravitated toward American studies in search of a more hospitable audience. However, it would not be correct to view Riesman and others as outcasts from social science journals. Many of the social scientists who published articles in American Quarterly during the “golden years” (David Riesman, Herbert Gans, Lowry Nelson, Anthony C.F. Wallace, and Gregory Stone, to name a few) continued to publish articles in social science journals during the same period, despite the behavioral revolution and the ascendency of quantitative measures. Like the scholars trained in history and literature who preferred American studies to their traditional disciplines, many social scientists undoubtedly saw in American studies an environment friendly to their concerns.

More social scientists published in American Quarterly and served on the editorial board during the first part of the incorporation stage than in the latter part. Social scientists served on the editorial board every year from 1949 through 1957. But none served from 1958 though 1965. Also the number of social science articles published in American Quarterly declined after 1958. In the average year between 1958 and 1965, there were half as many articles published as in prior years. In 1964, no social science articles were published. The declining role of
social scientists supports the argument that the incorporation of the intellectual history synthesis during the "golden years" should be read as a limiting rather than as an appropriately definitive event in the history of American studies.

A likely reason suggested to us for the decline in social science articles in *American Quarterly* after 1958 is that social science literally lost to literature and history in a struggle over the editorship of *American Quarterly*. The American civilization program at the University of Pennsylvania, which was noted for its social science emphasis, had published *American Quarterly* since 1951, when the journal was moved from the University of Minnesota. In 1959, a struggle at Penn over the editorship of *American Quarterly* resulted in a shift away from the social sciences.\(^{80}\)

This was not an isolated instance of antipathy toward social science. In the same year, Henry Nash Smith published an article in *American Quarterly* accusing social sciences of having a "mutilated image of man and culture," this is an article labeled by Wise as perhaps "the most influential essay ever published in the field."\(^{81}\) Twelve years later, Leo Marx was still echoing this theme. Even while calling for "commerce" between humanists and social scientists, he accused the latter of being shallow and mechanical in their approach to culture.\(^{82}\)

Thus, if the institutionalization of the intellectual history synthesis squeezed out the social sciences, that paradigm does not, as Wise argues, "crystallize possibilities for integrated American Studies" at that "state of the Movement's history."\(^{83}\) Instead it exposes the limitations inherent in any effort to build American studies on a single unifying paradigm. The contemporary dominance of the cultural studies approach, criticized by some Americanists for being almost exclusively text-based, also exposes the limitations of a single paradigm. If today's American studies scholars were more aware of the diverse social science influences present in American studies during the "golden years," perhaps they would be more willing to accept alternative approaches as enhancing the field rather than seeing them as challenging the field. A common concern among students of revolutionary social movements is whether the principles that motivate a revolution will be destroyed after the revolutionaries have won and are faced with the task of building a structure that has the capacity to implement the principles of the revolution.

Their question is whether the movement will stagnate as leaders attempt to institutionalize it. From this perspective, Wise's "coming apart" phase in American studies can be read as a critique of the cost of such institutionalization. The coming apart phase, with its emphasis on social science concerns of culture and power, can be read as the re-emergence of neglected revolutionary principles that might be used to revitalize the American studies movement—even today.
An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain American Studies Association and the Mid-America American Studies Association, Fort Collins, Colorado, April 7-9, 1995. We wish to thank Buford Farris, Elizabeth Kolmer, and Timothy Uhl for their useful comments on the conference presentation. We are particularly indebted to Brian Hohlt for research assistance. We also wish to thank American Studies' three anonymous reviewers for their insightful critiques.

2. Ibid., 300-301, 306-311.
7. Ibid. Mechling calls attention to this point.
8. This is not to deny that there were social scientists, particularly of the national character school, whose work portrayed a version of the holistic American mind. See our discussion below of social science articles that fit Wise’s description of the intellectual history synthesis.
10. Ibid., 308, 310.
11. Ibid., 295-96.
12. Ibid., 306.
13. Ibid., 320.
14. Social science research, too, can be holistic, presenting a different version of the American mind. Thus even in cases where popular culture is the starting point, we are obliged to ask if the author(s) present a pluralistic, comparative and experience-grounded analysis. See our discussion below.
16. In “An American Studies Calendar” for example, Wise writes: “Unquestionably the movement did experience regeneration during the decade of the sixties, and I am among those who favor the opening up of American Studies which came as a result of those years.” American Quarterly 31 (Bibliography Issue, 1979): 407-408. See also Wise’s description of the shortcoming of the myth-and-symbol school in American Historical Explanations, (Minneapolis, 1980), 314-315.
19. We are grateful to Buford Farris for raising doubts in our minds about the dominance of myth-and-symbol scholarship and about holistic descriptions of that scholarship.
20. Berkhofer, 606; see also 588-89.
22. Wise, “Paradigm Dramas,” 322. See also “An American Studies Calendar,” wherein Wise notes the publication of many social science articles and books and the founding of several social science organizations as significant events in American studies between 1900 and 1965 (412-427).
27. Ibid., 68.
28. Ibid., 18-20
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31. Indeed, experienced American studies scholars who have spent their academic careers in the movement may well not experience this gap. Having absorbed American studies' early critique of the academy through their own experience, they suffer no identity crisis from Wise's account of the "golden years." They can share Jay Mechling's opinion that Wise authored "the definitive intellectual history of the American studies movement" (Mechling, 9). They can proceed, with Mechling, to see the virtues of the social scientific culture studies that are very much a part of contemporary American studies scholarship, without being derailed by Wise's emphasis on myth-and-symbol scholarship as the defining core of American studies. Those entering American studies today are not in this position. It is primarily for them that the history of American studies needs to be reconstructed.
34. We do not claim to have identified every social science article published during these years.
35. Wise, American Historical Explanations, 315, 352.
42. Margaret Midas, "Without TV," American Quarterly 3 (Summer 1951): 166.
79. Even Leo Marx has noted that "many of the teachers and scholars who first became interested in American Studies were . . . influenced by the emerging concept of culture in its modern anthropological sense." See "Thoughts on the Origin and Character of the American Studies Movement," *American Quarterly* (Bibliography Issue 1979): 397-98.
80. We are indebted to Murray Murphey for pointing this out.