

some notes on editorial policies and practices

Our editorial process is designed to encourage dialogue, collegueship and communication without regard to disciplinary boundaries. We mean to be helpful to contributors, to suggest ways in which it seems to us that their work might be improved, and to prod them to think of the relationship between what they have done and ideas and hypotheses developed in other sectors of American Studies. We do not merely “accept” or “reject.” We try rather to respond, to enter into discussion. Most articles we print have been revised or expanded in response to our consultants’ suggestions; many of our authors tell us they have enjoyed the interchange with our staff and the stimulation of connecting their often quite specialized work with the interests of scholars in contiguous—or more distant— fields.

American Studies routinely removes authors’ names, titles and university affiliations from all submitted manuscripts before they are sent out to our editorial consultants. This accounts for occasional phrases such as “his/her” in our consultants’ comments.

Articles are evaluated both by specialist and non-specialist consultants. Thus a piece on the social implications of a Melville poem, to make up an example, might go to an authority on Melville’s poetry, to a social historian expert in the period, and (as a non-specialist) to a member of the editorial board whose own research interest begins, say, in cinema history, anthropology or the history of science. The reaction of the non-specialist is considered critical. Even a piece which a specialist reader considers an original contribution to the field is likely to be returned if non-specialists find it too narrow to interest or be of use to students of other areas of American life. Such essays are sometimes accompanied by warm invitations to “broaden the application” and resubmit.

Our use of specialist consultants not on our staff sometimes makes us slower to process articles than we would like: we obviously have no effective way to apply pressure to scholars who are reading papers for us as unpaid contributions to scholarship and collegueship. We do not resent nagging notes from contributors writing to find out how things are going.

Because of the care with which we treat submitted manuscripts, we strongly resent “multiple submissions.” Our policy when we identify such an article is to notify the contributor’s academic dean and chairman.

In cases in which our consultants invite revision and resubmission, *American Studies* sends the revised essay, if at all possible, to the same readers who read it the first time. We consider it editorial malpractice in such cases to engage new commentators—who just might want an article revised back the way it was in the first place—unless the scope of the revised article is different, and we feel new expert judgment is necessary.

We urge authors of revisions to make their alterations as visible as possible, marking new passages with “highlighter” pens or otherwise guiding consultants to the changes. They are encouraged also to indicate their responses to criticism or suggestions, “talking back” informally to our referees in appended notes or explanations.

Almost all articles we accept have been revised in response to consultants’ suggestions. Of those rejected, many are finally turned down not because of their quality but because they are too narrow for us: their authors seem unfamiliar with our editorial policies and the nature of our readers’ interests. Articles which do not ultimately answer the question “What does this study tell us about society or culture in the United States?” are almost never printed. We strongly advise prospective contributors to read through a few recent issues.

American Studies does not use “quotas,” and generally has no backlog. Articles are accepted or rejected because of our perception of their worth, and not because we have run too many or too few on given subjects. We try, when there is a larger-than-usual number of accepted essays in the shop, to find the funds to get all in print within the year. This accounts for the occasional oversized issue.

The same policies apply to our special issues and *festschrift* numbers. We do not accept “by invitation.”

We like to share the comments of our consultants quite frankly with our contributors, and we hope that contributors are thick-skinned enough to take criticism without bitterness. We mean to be helpful, and try to give a personal and detailed response to each submitted piece.

—Stuart Levine