

Can American Studies be Globalized?

Bernard Mergen

On the evening of February 16, 2000, I enjoyed a supper prepared by a Singaporean chef in a restaurant called "Casablanca" in the city of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The dining room was decorated with reproductions of paintings of European harbors in classic Dutch style and American movie memorabilia that included a big-screen television showing an Ingrid Bergman film. Above the bar, which advertised a special Y2K cocktail, was a neon clock inscribed with the words "American Dream." The sound system played a tape of Bob Dylan songs until the arrival of a local rock band. I had just come from the Mongolian State Opera performance of "Porgy and Bess" sponsored by the U.S. State Department and several multinational businesses. In the following week I would talk to university students and faculty about George and Ira Gershwin, DuBose Heyward, American culture, and democratic values. The evening seems a good place to begin a discussion of the globalization of American studies.

I know this description echoes those of travel writers who take delight in discovering exotic juxtapositions of traditional and modern, but aside from the language spoken by the staff, the most traditional thing in the Casablanca that night was me.¹ As a United States State Department sponsored American Specialist, I represented more than fifty years of American studies in the service of cultural diplomacy, or what some call cultural imperialism. Many different and contradictory messages are contained in this encounter of globalization and American studies. What do fragments of American and European popular culture filtered through southeast Asia mean to Mongolians and tourists? Why did the Mongolian Opera request and the State Department support a production of "Porgy and Bess"? How can the complicated history of Gershwin's opera be explained to an audience who may know Boyz II Men, but not Scott Joplin?

Such questions are central to a discussion of globalization and American studies. They are specific instances of larger issues arising from the unprecedented growth of international business, electronic communications, migration, educational exchanges, and tourism. Whether globalization weakens or strengthens the political nation-state, whether all countries are affected in similar ways, and whether globalization, from an American perspective, is just a new name for a much older element that Ralph Gabriel called “the mission of America,” remains to be seen. The idea of mission, Gabriel asserted, provides Americans with a vision in which they could see their faith in individualism and freedom “invested with world significance.”²

Although Gabriel’s ideas about mission and national character may seem quaint to those who emphasize American imperialism, I want to raise the possibility that the stimuli for the worldwide interest in the United States at present may be similar to those that led to the creation of American studies in the United States in the 1930s—dissatisfaction with traditional academic methods, a search for identity in the face of rapid economic and social change, and a rejection of established historical explanations. Such concerns emphasize the role of national values, obscuring specific economic, political, and popular culture influences. In this sense, American studies is more like what William Marling, in this issue of *American Studies*, calls *globalism*, “the broader cultural context of globalization.” The purpose of my essay is to call attention to some of the ways in which scholars from outside the United States have addressed questions about American culture. That they often place American culture in the context of their own cultures does not always make American studies part of the discourse of globalization, but it may contribute to that end when re-contextualized by Americans looking at the ways in which the world looks at them. And even the harshest critics of American culture must see the irony of McDonaldization, a corruption of individualism and freedom, being “invested with world significance.”

The question raised in the title of this essay is meant to evoke two other questions. One plays off Henry Nash Smith’s 1957 query, “Can ‘American Studies’ Develop a Method?”³ American culture, the subject of American studies, is obviously being globalized everyday. Whether this constitutes the globalization of the academic field is the subject of this essay. A second, related question, is simpler. How have Americanists outside the United States defined their subject? What methods have they used? What results have they achieved? Answers to these questions may be found by approaching the subject of globalization and American studies through five major issues: 1. American influences—what, when, and where? 2. American studies as propaganda. 3. American studies as method as well as content. 4. American studies as part of world culture in English. 5. American studies as what Günter Lenz has summarized as “transnationality, border discourses, and public culture(s).”⁴ I will review these issues by drawing on recent articles in some of the more than thirty journals of American studies published outside the United States, books and essays on the internationalization of American studies, and my experience as Senior Editor of *American Studies International*.

American Influences

By American influences, I mean simply the things that are generally attributed to the United States—democratic political ideals, economic opportunity, personal freedom, a vast array of consumer products, and popular entertainment.⁵ In this sense, American influences are less about a real geographical or political place and more about things and ideals attributed to it. The globalization of American studies begins with the first letters of Columbus, reaches maturity in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and continues in debates over "Americanization" of other nations.

The importance of the subject of Americanization to the creation of American studies should be recalled. The first issue of *American Quarterly*, Spring 1949, focused on "various aspects of American world influences." Three of the eight contributors were not citizens of the United States. The need to legitimize American studies by encouraging scholars from other countries, especially England, France, and Germany, to take American literature and history seriously was at least as strong as the need to wage a cultural cold war against the Soviet Union. If European scholars were critical of American racism, materialism, and imperialism, so much the better. American studies in the United States was presenting itself as radical. In their approach to their subject, the founders of American studies were consciously "breaking down barriers between traditional disciplines, championing an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, and doubting the modernist norm of scientific objectivity."⁶

Some of the contributors to the *Quarterly* commented on the implicit paradoxes in political and methodological radicalism. Grace Flandrau, writing "On What It Is To Be French," remarked that some Americans "have made our [American] defects an American cult," concluding that "The world will not believe in an American principle if we do not believe in it ourselves." Oxford University professor Max Beloff was skeptical of the trend in American universities to treat all subjects as equal, declaring that he

should not like to see a preoccupation with American dialects, folklore, or folk music obscure the original dream of the founding fathers that it was in the political and social sphere, in the spreading of liberty and equality, that the world was to see an example in America. Fundamentally, the projection of America abroad depends upon the vitality of that dream. Unless this is remembered the spread of American Studies may actually prove harmful to our common purpose.⁷

Merle Curti, surveying "The Reputation of America Overseas (1776-1860)," wondered at the vast amount of information, some of it distorted, about the United States communicated by diplomats, travelers, businessmen, missionaries, emigrant guidebooks, and entertainers before the Civil War. There were so many voices declaring what America was and wasn't that it was already impossible to

identify a monolithic American influence around the globe. By studying the "reputation" of the United States abroad, Curti shows that the study of America, if not "American studies," has a long history and that it is often conflated with the fear of Americanization.⁸ But fashions change. Not a single foreign scholar is included in the recent anthology of *American Quarterly* articles, *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, and the ways in which American studies has developed outside the United States is ignored.⁹

Global American influences have been extensively studied by scholars from other countries. In the 1970s their work seemed to be becoming central to American studies. The ASA biennial convention in San Antonio, Texas, in 1975, was preceded by a "New World Conference" with a dozen participants from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada. Two excellent anthologies were soon published, one edited by Robin Winks, the other by Allen Davis.¹⁰ The essays in the Davis collection, which focused on American influence in the world, came out of a conference held at the Smithsonian in 1976. The twelve contributors, all international scholars, covered a wide variety of topics from architecture, comics, and music to technology, industrial management, and education. Some of the essays were personal and anecdotal, while others were the product of extensive research. For example, Antony Ngubo's essay, "Contributions of the Black American Church to the Development of African Independence Movements in South Africa," used church publications, government reports, and autobiographies to document eighty years of contact between leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal church of the United States and their South African colleagues. The American church, Ngubo concludes, helped bring South African leaders into a world community.

One thing the Davis anthology shows quite clearly is that the nature and degree of American influence depends on the country, the kind of influence, and the historical circumstances. The influence of American comic strips on French cartoonists in the twentieth century is one thing; the influence of the American Constitution on a newly independent country such as Malaya is an entirely different matter. A decade after the Smithsonian meeting, several dozen Malaysian scholars, journalists, administrators, and government officials met, under the sponsorship of the Asia Foundation, to discuss the influences of American courts and legal institutions, the mass media, education, and the arts. In the published proceedings of this conference we can clearly see how the concept of American influence changes with the specific circumstance.¹¹

In her overview of the conference papers, Pamela Sodhy, then lecturer in American history at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and president of the Malaysian Association for American Studies, placed American influence in the context of declining British authority, but pointed out that the influence of the U.S. Constitution came through the filter of a Constitutional Commission made up of British, Australian, Indian, and Pakistani lawyers. Similarly, the influence of the media needs to be understood in the context of the counter influences of Peace Corps volunteers and direct educational exchanges, both of which began

in the 1960s as American television began to reach Malaysia. One of the most interesting examples of the complex layering of British and American influence was noted by Professor Mohamed Ghouse Nasuruddin, Director of the Arts Centre at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, in discussing dance, drama, and theater. A cult of Western dancing began in the colonial era, but television initiated a craze for aerobic dancing, which spread from the modern dance and ballet schools to its own studios. Aerobic dancing was more than healthy exercise; according to Nasuruddin, it was also an attempt to reshape Malaysian bodies to an American ideal.

At about the same time, but an ocean and a continent away, scholars and media professionals were meeting at Western Ontario University to discuss American popular culture in Canada. It is noteworthy that the tone of the papers given at this conference is both more defensive and more humorous. Poor Canada, like Mexico, so far from heaven and so close to the United States. Although limited to aspects of popular culture—television, movies, advertising, sports, and tourism—the participants were interested in all aspects of Americanization. Frank Manning, one of the editors of *The Beaver Bites Back?*—the publication resulting from the conference—emphasizes a point made by several contributors. Canada “is a culture without a mythology, without absolute signifiers, without a clear sense of boundaries—in other words, a culture without the fundamental attributes of American culture.”¹²

This assertion raises two important questions. Does the act of looking for absolute national values impose an American methodology on Canadian culture? Does the failure to find a positive national identity to contrast with American identity doom Canadians to a subordinate position? The answer to both is a resounding no. Paul Rutherford, a historian of Canadian media, sums up the Canadian self-image as peaceful, natural, and victim. The first two attributes are positive, but the third is a legacy of Canada’s colonial past, a nation that never quite became a nation. Yet even this negative image can be used as a call to resist Americanization. Using single episodes of the television melodramas “L.A. Law” and “Street Legal,” Mary Jane Miller of the Department of Film Studies at Brock University argues that the latter, a Canadian program about a small Toronto law firm, while more realistic, was also more didactic and less entertaining. For example, in shows that examined the integration of mentally handicapped persons into mainstream society, the programs differed in several ways. “Street Legal,” the Canadian show, used actors who were themselves handicapped, but ended with a social worker’s simplistic message, “they’ll be fine.” In “L. A. Law,” on the other hand, Benny, played by a non-handicapped actor, became a recurring character, providing more opportunities for understanding his problems. While minor differences in character and plot may seem trivial to Americans, Canadians see their identity in a myriad of small differences. Miller concludes that “the electronic border is not closed, but neither has it disappeared.”¹³

Two conferences in 1990, one co-sponsored by Rutgers University and the University of Haifa in Israel, the other by Uppsala University and the Fulbright

Commission of Sweden, pushed the subject of American influences in other directions. Several of the papers presented at the Haifa conference were published in *American Studies International* in October 1990, under the special editorship of Ron Robin. One of the most interesting, given the dominance of literary and cultural studies in U.S. American studies in recent years, is Winfried Fluck's analysis of the current state of literary studies, which he sees as fragmented by ever-increasing specialization, a return to political and cultural radicalism, and an emphasis on theory. Since much of the theory that currently dominates American studies comes from Europe, we might speak of the Europeanization of cultural studies, but Fluck's point is that theory is used in a specifically American way, i.e., to provide another level of specialization within the professoriate. American universities, reflecting the practices of the competitive market, encourage individual scholars to assert their views in ways that either ignore or rhetorically overpower competitors. Every scholar must create a specialty that insulates him or her from challenge.¹⁴

In passing, Fluck makes a point about Americanization that I think is even more important than his insights into the morass of academic specialization. "Instead of the customary meaning of a covert or overt, clever or clumsy imperialist ploy, 'Americanization' in this paper is meant to refer to developments that have either already taken place in the United States or are in a state of advanced development there, so that they can serve as models, or, where still contested, at least indicate some of the problems and consequences connected with them."¹⁵ Much of what is perceived as Americanization is clearly a part of a much larger and more complex evolution in all cultures brought about by environmental, demographic, and technological changes.

In 1962, when I began my teaching career at the University of Göteborg in Sweden, I asked my students why they were studying the United States, to which they invariably replied that they wanted to understand what Sweden would be like in twenty years. Late in 1990 some fifty scholars gathered at the Swedish Institute for North American Studies at Uppsala University to discuss American influence in Sweden. Ten papers, all more or less refuting the idea of Americanization, were published under the title *Networks of Americanization*.¹⁶ The anthropologist Ulf Hannerz employs the concept of networks as an alternative to that of the nation as the source of influence. Influences from one country to another must be seen in specific context. While American influences in advertising and entertainment may seem pervasive, they may also be superficial. Hannerz urges us to consider the preconditions in Sweden that lead to acceptance or rejection of American stuff, and to realize that Swedish culture, too, is in constant flux. His colleague Helena Wulff, who studied young Swedes living in New York City, provides concrete examples of the emergence of different kinds of Swedishness among artists, au pairs, and businessmen.

The point here is that the study of American influence, of Americanization, although frequently organized and sponsored by American studies programs, is often really about the emergence of difference, which may be personal, local, or

national. In surveying German fears of *Amerikanisierung*, 1840-1990, Peter Bergmann notes that after World War II, "Americanization became a unifying force among the nations of western Europe, irrespective of whether it had liberated or defeated them. To become 'European' was to go through the school of Americanization."¹⁷ But this is only one ripple from the American stone dropped in a German pond. Heinz Ickstadt's paper at the 1999 ASA meeting in Montreal, "Appropriating Difference: Turkish-German Rap," revealed how an African-American protest music is being appropriated by Turkish youth to define their own subcultures. Singing in English, Turkish, and German depending on the context, Turkish youth, many of them third-generation German citizens, seek respect through musical craftsmanship.¹⁸

The school of Americanization has many classes, most of them electives. Like the Mongolians drinking Y2K cocktails to the strains of Dylan ballads, the Americanization of other cultures seems to be about experimenting with new identities more than mere imitation. Jerzy Durczak's recent essay on Polish attitudes toward American literature in this journal demonstrates yet another paradox. When American influences are no longer forbidden by political authorities they become less appealing and when they are not controlled, popular culture drives out the elite.¹⁹

These examples should be sufficient to make the point that since most of the world has felt influenced by the United States, the globalization of American studies has been going on for a long time, and there is a vast literature on it. Moreover, American studies covers many topics, some more amenable to internationalization than others. If American studies is to retain its original goals of interdisciplinarity and relevance, it must be alert to what those goals mean both within and outside the United States.²⁰

American Studies as Propaganda

Undoubtedly, some of the efforts to encourage the study of the United States abroad are the result of deliberate political propaganda, but the responses to that propaganda are seldom what its creators intended. Nor has "the great bulk of trade in American studies in the twentieth century . . . been one-way, a U.S. export," as Richard Horwitz has argued.²¹ His own anthology is a partial refutation of his assertion, and I do not think that I am the only professor whose teaching and scholarship about the United States have been improved by Fulbright and other exchange experiences. All of us who are interested in the internationalization of American studies must acknowledge some debt to our foreign colleagues. Some non-American scholars may feel that they have not received the recognition they deserve from their colleagues in the United States but, judging from recent meetings of the European Association for American Studies, and articles in American studies journals published around the world, enthusiasm for doing American studies is great and the quality of scholarship is high.²²

Anxieties about propaganda seem to me to stem, in part, from a misunderstanding of scholarship in American studies. Attempting to describe American culture does not necessarily lead to an argument for exceptionalism or patriotism. Recent calls for “critical internationalism,” for “decentering” our perceptions of ourselves and of others seem to be motivated by the belief that American scholarship is both ideologically monolithic and chauvinist and that foreign American studies is limited to immigrant topics, American influences, and comparative analogies.²³ Even if this were once true, which it never was, it does not follow that these subjects cannot be used to debunk stereotypes. Papers presented at the 1992 meeting of the German Association for American Studies clearly illustrate how non-American scholars are using changes in the focus of scholarship in the United States in the contexts of their own social and institutional circumstances to reconfigure American studies. As Günter Lenz and Klaus Milich note in their introduction to the published proceedings, the simple national influence approach to the study of the United States in Germany is undermined by the new minority and postcolonial discourses. “The re-unification of Germany and the prospective unification of Europe, however, have shed new light upon this seemingly played out question of ‘national approaches’ to American culture abroad.”²⁴

Contributors Catrin Gersdorf, Alfred Hornung, and Lothar Bredella illustrate this contention with specific examples. Gersdorf’s analysis of a popular East German comic strip of the 1950s and 1960s that depicted the United States in the nineteenth century as a place of slavery, petty crime, and violence argues that both the format and the content of the comic subverted the official communist image of the imperialist American state. The format worked against official ideology because American comics had been banned as shallow and obscene. Readers were now asked to take a despised medium seriously. More important, however, the content, while dwelling on the negative aspects of American life, also presented the country as “a place of adventure, fun, and ardent desires.”²⁵

Hornung uses the autobiographical writings of Mary Rowlandson, Benjamin Franklin, Gertrude Stein, and Maxine Hong Kingston to argue that American history is a process of defining America through becoming American.

Both writers [Stein and Kingston] emphasize the cultural and human enrichment to be gained from such an expanded view of the process of the making of (more) Americans. In the face of the most recent developments in Eastern Europe and the possible migrations of peoples to the West, Europeans could learn much from the experiences of the Americans and their efforts to realize the advantages of a multicultural competence.²⁶

Bredella reviews the debates on multiculturalism and bilingualism in the United States and Germany and offers a sophisticated critique of Diane Ravitch, Molefi Kete Asante, and Richard Rorty among others. While noting the radically

different contexts of German and American multiculturalism, Bredella rejects the anti-assimilationist arguments in both countries for a position that supports multicultural curricula because it allows students to learn something about others, even if they can never become the other.²⁷ These are just a few examples of the kind of thoughtful and original critiques of American culture and its influences to be found in non-American scholarship. The days in which European, Asian, African, and Latin American scholars simply mirrored the ideas of their American colleagues are long past. International criticism rather than “critical internationalism” is a firmer base for American studies if Americans are ready to listen.

American Studies as Method

Gersdorf’s essay on anti-American comics in East Germany during the Cold War raises another issue central to understanding American studies in a global context. Many foreign Americanists are less interested in the history or literature of the United States than they are in the approach to area studies and a better understanding of their own cultures offered by American studies’ holistic approach and interdisciplinary methods. This is most obvious in newly independent nations such as Kazakhstan, or nations reformulating their own identities such as South Africa, Mongolia, or Nigeria, but in one sense it is true of all comparative studies. Whether comparative studies “decenter” American studies seems to me less important than what they do for the nation that is being compared to the United States, or what components of the nations are being compared and why.

A Kazakh teacher explained the goals of her class on American history as: “1. on the base of historical events in the USA to find analogical processes in Kazakhstan; 2. peculiarities in the historical development in the USA and Kazakhstan; 3. generalizations of the presented knowledge and development of skills and habits of how to analyze the processes having taken its place in the republic of Kazakhstan; 4. the extension of Kazakhstan’s international ties and norm of political culture in the world.”²⁸ That her outline is both ambitious and vague should not cause us to ignore it, since much of the growth of interest in American studies abroad stems from similar concerns.

I have been particularly struck by the importance of analogy-making in the American studies work of colleagues in South Africa and Nigeria. At the 1989 American Studies Conference held at the University of Lagos, most of the dozen papers were explicitly comparative. Babatunde Agiri’s discussion of oral history methods in Nigeria and the United States is a good example of how carefully focused comparative studies can avoid the problem of over-generalization. Two years later the American Studies Association of Nigeria chose the theme of “Citizenship, Mobility, and the American Dream: What Lessons for Nigeria?” for its annual conference. Papers ranged from a comparison of the role of railroads in stimulating internal migration in both nations to a close reading of Festus Iyayi’s *Violence* and Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*.²⁹ Similarly, when the Ameri-

can Studies Association of Southern Africa met in 1993, comparisons were made between Steve Biko and Malcolm X and between Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* and Dugmore Boetie's *Familiarity in the Kingdom of the Lost*.³⁰ Such exercises in comparison and analogy-making are important for two reasons. First, they obviously contribute to our general knowledge of unfamiliar writers and topics. More important, they allow scholars outside the United States to become comfortable with both the content and methods of American studies. Even if we think the comparisons superficial and the work tangential to our own, it may supply a new perspective, a decentering of our traditional concerns.³¹

It is in the elusive category of national identities that American studies methods may be most applicable, as the recent article on the attitudes of students in Hong Kong toward the United States by Stacilee Ford and Gordon Slethaug in this journal made clear. As young people struggling to cope with political, social, and generational change, the "students find American studies one of the few places at the University where they are encouraged to be reflective about the changes in their identities."³² Likewise, people whose identities are most threatened by Americanization have employed American studies techniques to reexamine the processes of culture change. Such was the case in a sparsely attended ASA session in Montreal in 1999. Isidro Morales of the Universidad de las Americas in Pueblo, Mexico, and Jean-François Côté of the Université de Québec, Montreal, explored the ways in which NAFTA and electronic communication are transforming the North American political system, creating a new public sphere in which citizens are more spectators than actors. Anouk Bélanger of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia demonstrated how one Canadian corporation, Molson, attempted to manipulate French Canadian nostalgia when building a new stadium for the Montreal Canadiens hockey team.³³

Increasingly, it seems to me, we must turn to non-American associations and journals of American studies to find new ways of thinking about national identity and globalization. One good example is Tunde Adeleke's essay "Who Are We? Africa and the Problem of Black American Identity," in the *Canadian Review of American Studies*. Adeleke, a Nigerian teaching at Loyola University in New Orleans, examines the paradoxes of African-based identity among black Americans who, suffering from the stigma of the slave past, were forced to accept that past as evidence of inferiority. Analyzing the writings of Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner, Adeleke finds that they advanced what he calls a slaveocentric position, one that emphasized European values acquired through the transplantation experience. Rather than rejecting African cultural identity, he argues, these men and their followers sought to establish an American identity acceptable to Euro-Americans, who were constructing their own uncertain identities studded with similar paradoxes.³⁴

American studies, caught up in the vortex of globalization, will increasingly be a mask for all kinds of group- and national-identity building. Arguing that nations must choose a path between total sovereignty and complete integration of

markets, ideas, information, and values, the President of the Malaysian Association for American Studies recently wrote:

If we reflect on the link between Globalisation and American Studies, we might be better able to appreciate the role and impact of global capital flows, the ongoing cultural debate between “Americanisation” and “globalisation”, the tensions arising from political, economic, and ethnic/cultural inequalities, the role of national, regional, and international leadership in shaping a more equitable regime, and the prospects of addressing some of these issues in a more positive manner. In dealing positively with globalisation, each nation/society apparently needs to re-discover its own hidden potential and convert seeming adversities into real opportunities.³⁵

American Studies as Part of World Literature and Culture in English

As both the spelling and the sentiment of the above quotation implies, American studies is and will remain part of an even larger enterprise in many countries of the world. There are probably as many “American Studies Centres” as there are “American Studies Centers.” The study of U.S. literature and culture is part of North American Studies that includes Mexico at the Kennedy Institute of the Free University of Berlin; part of the Centre for Africa, North America, and South America in Pakistan; and part of British Commonwealth and American Studies at the National University of Mongolia. The titles of some journals reflect this linkage as well: *Estudos Anglo-Americanos* was a publication of the Associação Brasileira de Professores Universitários de Inglês; *The Journal of American and Canadian Studies* is published by the Institute of American and Canadian Studies of Sophia University in Japan; Adam Mickiewicz University publishes *Polish-AngloSaxon Studies*; and *EurAmerica: A Journal of European and American Studies* is a product of the Institute of European and American Studies in Taipei, Taiwan.

In the many institutions struggling to introduce American material into curricula modeled on Soviet Russian, British, or French educational systems, the reality is that U.S. literature and culture must compete with established area studies and pedagogical practices. The competition can be a positive stimulus for improving American studies. As Pierre Guerlain pointed out in an essay on the traditional pro-British bias of language and civilization teachers in France, “British authors or documentary producers are often an important source of materials for European Americanists . . . [and] American scholars contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of British literature and social classes. . . .

Common research groups, maybe based on the model of teams involved in Area Studies, should render our fratricidal fights obsolete without erasing our benign border frictions that give life more zest and spice."³⁶

The subject of world literature in English is evolving. "This field lacks a clear and agreed vocabulary," writes Malcolm Page. "The clumsy but useful phrase, 'World Literature(s) in English,' originated in the United States." In most English language departments outside the United States, attention is given to works by authors from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa as well as the United States, but, as Page points out, the term "British Commonwealth Literature" is misleading because membership has changed and not all literature from Commonwealth countries is in English.³⁷ Nevertheless, World Literature in English seems a useful term, covering all who write in English, whether they originate in former British Commonwealth countries or not.³⁸

The fruitfulness of placing American literature in the context of other literatures in English is best seen in American studies journals from countries such as India. C. Vijayasree's essay on Indian biography and Sushila Singh's article on "Multiculturalism and Its Limits," in the *Indian Journal of American Studies* are good examples of this kind of cross-cultural analysis. Vijayasree asks if Indian biography in English is possible, then argues that "Biography as a study of human personality is necessarily influenced by the specific cultural climate it springs from." Citing the work of V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, who drew insights from the Hindu theories of human personality, Vijayasree suggests that an English literary genre such as biography can be approached in interesting new ways by examining it in different cultural contexts. Similarly, placing American notions of multiculturalism in an Indian perspective yields a better understanding of the role of specific historical and social forces.³⁹

The other side of the issue of placing American studies in the context of literature in English is that of American literature in languages other than English. As Werner Sollors and others have pointed out, there is a great irony in the current emphasis within the American Studies Association on multiculturalism when it focuses exclusively on examples in English. The important work of Harvard University's Longfellow Institute under Sollors' direction in making the literature in Languages of What Is Now the United States (LOWINUS) better known to the American studies community will help to correct this problem.⁴⁰ The importance of considering works written in other languages as part of American studies is frequently illustrated in journals published outside the United States, for example Dina Jordanova's article in *JAST: Journal of American Studies of Turkey* on the Bulgarian writer Kolyo Nikolov, who defected to the United States in 1976 only to return disillusioned in 1979. The article is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is Nikolov's outrage over being lumped by Americans in an ethnic category that included Romanians, Czechs and others.⁴¹

Transnationality

As I hope the topics and examples above suggest, I am in general agreement with Günter Lenz's analysis of so-called "new Americanist postnational narratives," border discourse, and critical internationalism. While these are all worthy of attention and may provide useful ways of understanding relations among local, national, and global institutions and identities, they all seem to lack historical contexts and human actors. Lenz proposes greater dialogue between American and non-American scholars, "border discourses," that

transcend the parochialism of many multiculturalist debates on cultural difference, which often lack an explicitly comparative, intercultural perspective. American Studies should provide, instead—and this I consider to be vitally important—a *forum and force-field* for explicitly addressing the working of American public culture as a dialogue of competing discourses under conditions of unequal power, and for studying the *interrelations* between the various politically authorized minority discourses and interdisciplinary studies programs that are engaged in, as well as transcend, U.S. national culture(s).⁴²

If I understand Lenz's position, institutionalized American studies needs to put up or shut up about globalization.

Lenz maintains a guest's politeness toward his American hosts. I will be more candid. As the publication of this issue of *American Studies* demonstrates, American studies in the United States has recently rediscovered the world. Fifty years after the founding of academic American studies, some of its practitioners seem to have decided that the object of their quest lies elsewhere. After searching for America they have concluded that, like Gertrude Stein's Oakland, there is no there there. But they believe in margins, borders, and *fronteras* where races mingle, classes clash, and genders bend.

But borders enclose as well as expose. American studies will be most useful to understanding globalization if it maintains its historic purpose of describing, comparing, and explaining the core of the national culture of the United States. Retaining this focus does not mean acceptance of old myths or endorsement of the status quo; rather, it is a challenge to do better with our proven tools—interdisciplinarity, self-reflexivity, and holism. While the interrelations of racial, ethnic, class, gender, generational, and regional identities and cultures are part of the fascinating fabric of all cultures, they exist in political and territorial entities called nations and share laws, rituals, and history. Each unit, local and national, ascribed or chosen, has borders that ultimately link all the nations of the globe. Forget the melting pot and the salad bowl. The new metaphor for the process of culture change might be the sponge. American culture is just a few cells in a big wet *Porifera*. Squeeze it and out pours something we call "culture" that is quickly

reabsorbed by other cells. The cultural stuff is endlessly recycled, creolized, hybridized.

The metaphor also restores nature to the dialogic. I would add the natural environment to Lenz's model. Dialogues require physical sites; even electronic communication begins and ends somewhere. Our international colleagues seem to recognize the importance of place better than we do these days, as the theme of the 2000 biennial conference of the European Association for American Studies, "Nature's Nation Reconsidered," makes clear.⁴³ In a time when the global environment is threatened by local practice, attention to the importance of place in American studies offers considerable benefits. I was struck by the interest in American rivers, parks, even wastelands, expressed in several sessions of the EAAS. The subtitle of the conference theme, "American Concepts of Nature from Wonder to Ecological Crisis," was broad enough to include animals in American history and literature, the human body, and coasts and beaches as sites of marginal discourse.⁴⁴ Native American studies, with its concomitant attention to the importance of place, has long been better integrated into the EAAS than the ASA.

Recent essays in *American Studies in Scandinavia* and the *British Journal of American Studies* suggest how place can be used to expand, yes, even "decenter," our traditional ideas about American culture in international, perhaps even "global," contexts. Dominique Leblond analyzes the ways in which Japanese-American internees conceptualized and reappropriated the exterior and interior surroundings of their desert relocation camps during World War II. Using memoirs and unpublished records of the War Relocation Authority, she shows how the internees maintained family and ethnic identity through the use of paper carp, items sculpted from wood, and gardens, while participating in dances and games in the "American" spaces of recreation halls and baseball fields. Leblond concludes:

[I]n imprinting their presence in the American deserts, the internees also legitimized their presence in the United States; they marked the American space with a *nikkei* heritage, and complemented it with new sediments. . . . In a sense their symbolic investment of space not only challenged the suffering endured but it also rooted the exiled in the American land through the transformation of that landscape. A different sense of discovery was produced in the camps: one more of acquisition than of inheritance.⁴⁵

Leblond's shrewd recombination of ethnic, political, and landscape discourses should stimulate a new look at similar cultural encounters in which institutional boundaries are remapped physically and mentally.

Eric Kaufmann, lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of Southampton, is not primarily engaged with the land in his reconsideration of American exceptionalism, but his discerning analysis of the creation of an Anglo-

Saxon-American ethnic identity in the early-nineteenth century acknowledges that, like other groups—Québécois, Afrikaners, and Anatolian Turks—who invented their ethnicity, the sense of national territory, however unclearly imagined, was crucially important. Kaufmann's main points are that nativism is best explained as a cultural, not an economic, phenomenon and that the specifically WASP ethnicity that emerged before 1850 was obscured by a universalist rhetoric of liberal democracy that welcomed diversity but demanded conformity. In concluding that "... the United States was not an exception to the rule that nations are formed by core ethnic groups which later attempt to shape the nation in their own image," he raises new questions about the meanings of transnationalism and public culture, multiculturalism and globalism.⁴⁶

Conclusions

Examples of the ways in which the internationalization of American studies illuminates both its subject and the processes of globalization abound. I have selected a few essays that I think represent the richness and variety available today. The very diversity makes it difficult to engage, but if we are serious about moving American studies beyond the geographical and mental borders of the nation and academic field, we must begin by recognizing the legitimacy of the various points of view expressed by non-American Americanists.

We Americans need to listen to the ways in which our colleagues abroad (including Mexico and Canada) are working with concepts of American (national) culture and character. We may resist the idea of national culture, but it remains viable and necessary in many parts of the world. Nor should we use transnationalism and globalism simply to disguise old domestic quarrels about capitalism and anti-imperialism. In short, the answer to the question posed in the title is yes, American studies can be globalized, but perhaps not in ways we Americans would prefer. Inevitably, like the faint echoes of jazz that return to us in "world music," as Alex Seago observes in this issue of *American Studies*, we may glimpse "the complexities of contemporary cultural globalization and its relationship to Americanization." Seeking the global in the national contributes to the current fragmentation of American studies.

Finally, American studies will not be internationalized by conferences, associations, or journals alone, but by the conscious effort by each of us to think globally while we act locally, a cliché that may not save the environment, but may clear the air for American studies. It seemed to work at the University of Arts and Culture in Ulaanbaatar when I learned that the Director of the Mongolian Opera had fallen in love with "Porgy and Bess" when he had seen a production in Bulgaria in the 1950s. This revelation allowed me to contextualize my lecture. Heyward's story was Mongolia's story, a fragile Bess who's lost her Soviet Crown and entered an uncertain future with American Sportin' Life. Not a perfect analogy, perhaps, but it helped me to lead the audience back to "Porgy" as an icon of the cultural Cold War; back to George Gershwin and DuBose Heyward, the

urban ethnic and the Southern WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), each determined in his own way to celebrate African-American culture as quintessentially American; and back to the political hurricanes of the Chinese and Russian revolutions from which modern Mongolia, and at least part of modern America, emerged. A century is not too long a span to measure globalization.

Notes

1. See for example, Pico Iyer, *Video Nights in Kathmandu* (New York, 1988), or more on target, Nick Middleton, *The Last Disco in Outer Mongolia* (London, 1992), which describes an earlier incarnation of the bar I was in. I thank Tom Carmichael, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy, Ulaanbaatar, for this reference. I also thank James Deutsch for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

2. Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought* (New York, 1955), 25. The possibility that globalization is actually an extension of the American "democratic faith" is explored by Frederick Buell, "Nationalist Postnationalism: Globalist Discourse in Contemporary American Culture," *American Quarterly*, 50:3 (September 1998). For an extensive review of the literature of globalization, see Buell's *National Culture and the New Global System* (Baltimore, 1994).

3. Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly*, 9:2, part 2 (1957).

4. Günter H. Lenz, "Toward a Dialogics of International American Culture Studies: Transnationality, Border Discourses, and Public Culture(s)," *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 44:1 (1999).

5. On the long-running debate over the use of "American" as a synonym for the United States of America, see "American? Studies: A Dialogue Across the Americas," *American Studies International*, 37:3 (October 1999).

6. Jay Mechling, "American Studies as a Social Movement," in *An American Mosaic: Rethinking American Culture Studies*, Marshall Fishwick, ed. (New York, 1996).

7. Grace Flandrau, "On What It Is To Be French," *American Quarterly*, 1:1 (Spring 1949), 22; Max Beloff, "The Projection of America Abroad," *American Quarterly*, (Spring 1949), 29.

8. Curti, "The Reputation of America Overseas (1776-1860)," *American Quarterly*, 1:1 (Spring 1949).

9. Lucy Maddox, *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline* (Baltimore, 1999). The inclusion of K. Scott Wong's "The Transformation of Culture: Three Chinese Views of America," could have been a gesture towards the topic of internationalizing American Studies, but Gary Okihiro's commentary attempts to place Wong's piece in the context of Asian American studies. For further comments on the lack of an international perspective in this book, see Ian Tyrrell's review in *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 19:1 (July 2000).

10. *Other Voices, Other Views: An International Collection of Essays from the Bicentennial*, Robin Winks, ed. (Westport, Conn., 1978) and *For Better or Worse: The American Influence on the World*, Allen F. Davis, ed. (Westport, Conn., 1981).

11. *The United States and Malaysia: The Socio-Cultural and Legal Experience*, Pamela Sodhy, ed. (Kuala Lumpur, 1988).

12. *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada*, David H. Flaherty and Frank E. Manning, eds. (Montreal/Kingston, 1993), 18. See also Richard Gwyn, *The 49th Paradox: Canada in North America* (Toronto, 1985), who argues for the importance of political differences as economic and social differences diminish.

13. Mary Jane Miller, "Inflecting the Formula: The First Seasons of *Street Legal* and *L.A. Law*," *The Beaver Bites Back?* 122.

14. Winfried Fluck, "The Americanization of Literary Studies," *American Studies International*, 28:2 (1990).

15. Fluck, 9.

16. *Networks of Americanization: Aspects of the American Influence in Sweden*, Rolf Lundén and Erik Åsard, eds. (Stockholm, 1992).

17. Peter Bergmann, "The Specter of Amerikanisierung, 1840-1990," *American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Mike-Frank G. Eptropoulos and Victor Roudometof eds. (Westport, Conn., 1998), 81.

18. Heinz Ickstadt, "Appropriating Difference: Turkish-German Rap," paper presented at the American Studies Association/Canadian Association of American Studies meeting,

Montréal, Canada, October 30, 1999. For a detailed study of the meanings of popular music in an earlier period of German history, see Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, 2000).

19. Jerzy Durczak, "Mixed Blessings of Freedom: American Literature in Poland under and After Communism," *American Studies*, 40:1 (Summer 1999).

20. For other excellent discussions of American influences and the scholarship it has generated, see: Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, 1994); Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana, 1996); Pierre Guerlain, *Miroirs transatlantiques: la France et les Etats-Unis entre passions et indifférences* (Paris, 1996); Phil Melling and Jon Roper, eds., *Americanization and the Transformation of World Cultures: Melting Pot or Cultural Chernobyl?* (Lewiston, NY, 1996); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York, 1997); Yahya R. Kamalipour, ed., *Images of the U.S. Around the World: A Multicultural Perspective* (Albany, 1999); Heidi Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger, eds., *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (Providence, R.I., 2000); and Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., "*Here, There, and Everywhere*": *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, N.H., 2000). Ron Robin provides a brief bibliography of books in English on the impact of U.S. culture abroad in *American Studies International*, 28:2 (October 1990), 6-8.

21. Richard P. Horwitz, "The Politics of International American Studies," *Exporting America: Essays on American Studies Abroad*, Richard P. Horwitz, ed. (New York, 1993), 398.

22. See, for example, Walter Hölbling, "Coming into View: European Re-Visions of 'America' After 1945," *American Studies International* 37:2 (June 1999).

23. Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Domínguez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism," *American Quarterly* 48:3 (September 1996).

24. *American Studies in Germany: European Contexts and Intercultural Relations*, Günter H. Lenz and Klaus J. Milich, eds., (Frankfurt & New York, 1995), 10.

25. Catrin Gersdorf, "'The Digidags in America': The U.S.A. in the Mirror of an East German Comic Strip," *American Studies in Germany*, 49. According to Gersdorf, the strip was influenced by Donald Duck and its characters Dig, Dag, and Digidag traveled through history and outer space.

26. Alfred Hornung, "The Making of Americans: Mary Rowlandson, Benjamin Franklin, Gertrude Stein, Maxine Hong Kingston," *American Studies in Germany*, 113.

27. Lothar Bredella, "Multiculturalism between Assimilation and Segregation: The Debate on Multicultural Curricula in the United States and Germany," *American Studies in Germany*.

28. Larissa Yerokhina, "Pedagogic Aspect of Training Students in the USA History and Country Studies," *First Central Asia International American Studies Conference: American Studies Perspectives* (Almaty, 1999), 15-16. Sometimes, of course, the motives for using American studies as a front for other activities are based on economic realities. The recent renaming of the American Studies Research Centre (ASRC) in Hyderabad, India, as Indo-American Centre for International Studies (IACIS) was motivated by the need to solicit funds from Indian sources, but justified in terms of cross-cultural research. See *IACIS Newsletter*, 75 (April-August 1999), 1.

29. Babatunde Agiri, "Oral History and the Study of Nigeria and America," *American Studies in Nigeria* (Lagos, 1989); Olasiji Oshin, "Population Movements, Urbanisation, and National Integration: The Historical Role of Railways in the United States and Nigeria," *Nigerian Journal of American Studies*, 2 (July 1992); Tanimu Abubakar, "Social Mobility and the Novel: A Comparative Analysis of Iyayi's *Violence* and Wright's *Black Boy*," *Nigerian Journal of American Studies*, 2 (July 1992).

30. *Black Writing: An American Studies Perspective from Southern Africa*, Greg Cuthbertson, ed., (WITS, South Africa, 1994)

31. That was certainly my experience when I found myself the only person in the audience at a session on feminism given by five young teachers from Taiwan at the ASA meeting in Seattle in 1998. The speakers raised dozens of important points about cross-cultural influences, translation, women's rights, and the definition of national literatures. For a sample, see Pin-chia Feng, "Re-mapping Asian American Literature: The Case of *Fu Sang*," *American Studies International*, 38:1 (February 2000).

32. Stacilee Ford and Gordon Slethaug, "Hong Kong Students Look at the U.S.A.: American Studies in Hong Kong," *American Studies*, 40:2 (Summer 1999), 178.

33. "North American Dynamics: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects," Sunday, October 31, 1999, American Studies Association/Canadian Association for American Studies, Montréal, Québec, Canada.

34. Tunde Adeleke, "Who Are We? Africa and the Problem of Black American Identity," *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue canadienne d'études américaines*, 29:1 (1999).
35. K. S. Nathan, "Message From the President," *MAAS Newsletter*, 15:2 (March/April 2000), 1.
36. Pierre Guerlain, "American Studies and the 'War' with Britain Within French Universities," *American Studies International*, 32:2 (October 1994), 49.
37. Malcolm Page, "The Sun Never Sets: Some Recent Novels from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa," *American Studies International*, 33:2 (October 1995), 1. The distinction between British and American literature is, of course, notoriously unclear because of transatlantic crossings. One of my Mongolian colleagues told me that he had translated many American novelists, including Graham Greene.
38. Bruce King has published extensively on the subject. See his special issue of the literary magazine *Chelsea 46* (1987) for a representative anthology of writing from the Antipodes, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.
39. C. Vijayasree, "Indian Biography in English," *Indian Journal of American Studies*, 27:2 (Summer 1997), 12; Sushila Singh, "Multiculturalism and Its Limits," *Indian Journal of American Studies*, 27:2 (Summer 1997), 59-63.
40. *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, Werner Sollors, ed., (New York, 1998).
41. Dina Iordanova, "America as *Gurbet*: The Litanies of a Repentant Émigré or Kolyo Nikolov's Writings on the US." *JAST: Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 7 (Spring 1998).
42. Lenz, "Toward a Dialogics of International American Culture Studies," 19.
43. See also the innovative approach taken at a 1997 conference in Odense, Denmark and published in *Technologies of Landscape: From Reaping to Recycling*, David E. Nye, ed. Amherst, Mass., 1999).
44. For an interesting excursion into the human body as the site of American culture, see the essays edited and introduced by Mario Klarer in *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 44:3 (1999).
45. Dominique Leblond, "The Sacralization of the American Deserts in the War Relocation Camps for Japanese Americans," *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 31:2 (1999), 10-11.
46. Eric Kaufmann, "American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo-Saxon Ethnogenesis in the 'Universal' Nation, 1776-1850," *Journal of American Studies*, 33:3 (December 1999), 456.