

# Comparative American Race and Ethnicity Theories: Possibilities for a New Democratic Criticism<sup>1</sup>

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This 2006 special issue of *Works and Days—Intellectual Intersections and Racial/Ethnic Crossings*—was prepared in the context of a series of national, global, and educational crises: the American occupation of Iraq, the mounting national deficits and economic recessions that add pressure to the struggling American middle-class, further budget cuts to public education, arts, and humanities, the tension over illegal immigrants, the downsizing and privatizing of American universities, and the assault on intellectual freedom. And in the middle of it all, America is going through remarkable demographic changes. The twenty-first century America is a multiracial and multiethnic century. According to the United States Census Bureau, the American population will reach 308,936,000 by 2010, with 65.1% whites (non-Hispanic); 15.5% Hispanics (of any race; leading Latino/a scholars call this group Latino/as); 13.1% blacks or African Americans; 4.6% Asians; and 3.0% other races that include American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, two or more races (“Projected Population” n. pag.).<sup>2</sup> By 2050 the American population is projected to reach 419,854,000 with 50.1% whites (non-Hispanic); 24.4% Hispanics (or Latino/as); 14.6% blacks or African Americans; 8% Asians; and 5.3% other races that include American Indians and other groups listed above (“Projected Population” n. pag.).<sup>3</sup>

Is America ready to get more multiracial and multiethnic so fast? Are American universities ready for such rapid demographic changes or ready to further diversify their faculty and students? Are the old epistemological, theoretical, and political paradigms adequate to meet such multiracial and multiethnic challenges? Is America ready to have its dominant racial paradigm between white and black contested, as already forcefully contested, by leading Latino/a and Asian American scholars and by millions of people of color?

As all of the contributors to this volume would agree, the answer right now is an emphatic “no.” But the good news is that many, including the contributors, have participated in the movement to contest the dominance of a racialized America. As part of this project,

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*Intellectual Intersections and Racial/Ethnic Crossings* examines the theoretical, political and cultural similarities, differences, parallels, and intersections among Asian American, Latino/a American, African American, and American Indian cultural criticisms.<sup>4</sup> These counter-hegemonic projects are, indeed, multiple. I define the comparative American race and ethnicity theories as the multiracial, multiethnic, multinational, “multilingual” (Sollors 3), and multicultural theoretical conceptualizations, epistemological exegeses, intellectual formations, critical exchanges and cultural productions in the Americas in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. They are plural, interdisciplinary, and heterocultural in nature; comparative, cross-disciplinary, synchronic (to examine comparatively the discursive formations of multiple ethnic intellectual and political traditions in each historical epoch), and diachronic (to examine the discursive formations of one or more ethnic intellectual and political traditions across multiple historical epochs) in methods; global and transnational in scope; and deeply concerned with social justice.

In our times when the vulgar simplifications of “political correctness” often perpetuate racialized discourse, we need carefully theorized articulations of the intersecting and contested critical categories of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and history in the production of human knowledge. The comparative American race and ethnicity theories represented in this volume exemplify some of the best efforts to theorize, analyze, and take social action in our multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial worlds. They enable us to assert the intellectual presence, space, legitimacy, significance, and explosion of the knowledge productions in each of the interdisciplinary field of Asian American, African American, Latino/a American, and American Indian Studies. But especially significant for this volume is that the contributors begin to map the intellectual intersections and theoretical comparisons between these often compartmentalized fields, and thus to forge coalitions and alliances that better enable us to emphasize at this moment of history the possibility of what Edward Said suggests as a new “democratic criticism.”

In his posthumous *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Edward Said, whom I consider as “the Public Humanist Intellectual of Decolonization” (“An Intellectual Portrait” 32), calls for the practice of socially engaging and socially transformative democratic criticism. The problem is that he did not elaborate much before his death exactly what democratic criticism might mean in the American academic and intellectual context although he had done it and exemplified the best practice of such democratic criticism throughout his prolific career. In my interpretation of Said, democratic criticism means that the very nature of theory, criticism, and humanistic scholarship is democratic: autonomous, reflexive, and “oppositional” (*The World* 29). The very function of a new democratic humanism is to speak truth to power, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, to challenge both the status quo of the dominant social hierarchies of power and all of the dominant epistemological paradigms, structures, and systems of exclusion in the production of human knowledge. According to Manning Marable, a leading

African American scholar and activist, such democratic criticism seeks “to create a new democratic dialogue within the US left or, at least, what remained of it,” “to rediscover [the] organic patterns of democratic resistance,” and “to recover an American voice and democratic vision grounded in a commitment to human equality and possessing a compassionate openness to multicultural diversity, dialogue, and cooperation” (22-23). As Edward Said puts it, the new democratic “criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom” (*The World* 29).

For decades Asian American, African American, Latino/a American, and American Indian scholars, artists and activists of color have been doing it all along, and, like the contributors to this volume, have exemplified the fine practice of democratic criticism. As intellectuals and citizens, advocating for democracy and freedom is both our very responsibility and our right. The obligation is to carry out these tasks across all races, ethnicities, genders, and classes. Our multiple tasks, to draw on one of my own essays, are to “unmask, articulate, and resist simultaneously against all systems, networks, structures, hierarchies, orders, forms and styles of power, domination, and injustice in the global context [. . .] in the pursuit of human intellectual, artistic and political freedom as the fundamental conditions of possibilities for the production of all human knowledge” (*Theorizing* 162-63). As Said sums it up powerfully, “criticism belongs in that potential space inside civil society, acting on behalf of those alternative acts and alternative intentions whose advancement is a fundamental human and intellectual obligation” (*The World* 29-30).

Comparative American race and ethnicity theories participate in this new democratic criticism. One of the goals has been to establish American multiracial and multiethnic women and male intellectuals as “*oppositional*” intellectuals to speak truth to power as informed by Edward Said (*The World* 20), as angels of “*progress*,” enabled by Walter Benjamin (258), to rewrite subversively the multiethnic cultural and intellectual histories of our own (not merely to accept the official American history that wipes out our very political, cultural or literary presences or silence our critical or artistic voices), and, in Patricia Hill Collins term, as “*agents of knowledge*” (221) to create decolonizing (not colonial or assimilationist) epistemologies, or theories of knowledge, of our own that empower, inform, and enlighten our own people. American multiethnic female and male oppositional intellectuals are Subjects, not merely objects, of critical inquiry, and major, not minor, intellectual forces. It is particularly significant to emphasize the roles of American multiethnic female and male oppositional intellectuals to counter the anti-intellectual commercialism in the society, the anti-intellectual corporatism in the American Universities, and the anti-racist, activist, yet anti-intellectual sentiments rampant in many ethnic communities. Asian American, African American, Latino/a American, and American Indian intellectual, cultural, and literary traditions have been consistently excluded,

dismissed and marginalized, most often with the accusation of not being intellectual enough, but being too political. However, as Said argues, there has never been humanistic scholarship that is either “pure” or “apolitical” (*Orientalism* 9-15). The racialist, colonialist, orientalist, patriarchal, and capitalist assumptions, metaphors, ideologies, hierarchies, epistemological paradigms, and symbolic orders simply masquerade and naturalize their seeming universality with what we now all know as the extremely problematic and bankrupt politics. Thus, there has been far too few, instead of too many, multiethnic oppositional intellectuals, texts, and discourses. It is necessary, possible and important for each critic to have the freedom to choose to intervene at *any* level of critical inquiry and political activism, either in theory, or in literary analysis, or in pedagogy, or in grass roots social movements, in different institutional, disciplinary, or communal locations, and with global, or national, or regional, or local scopes.

Comparative American race and ethnicity theories contest the multiple, simultaneous, often intersectional, and socially instituted structures of domination and exclusion, such as racialization, whiteness, patriarchy, capitalism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism, which have created problematic but systematic knowledge for epistemic dominance. With rich scholarship already produced in each of the Asian American, Latino/a American, African American, and American Indian cultural criticisms, we seek to analyze the comparisons and crossings, and to build alliances and coalitions between these often compartmentalized fields and histories. This way we can go beyond “ethnic particularism.” Rather than focusing on the oppressions of any one particular ethnic group, we instead need to critique the same multiple dominant macro-political power structures and similarly exclusive paradigms of knowledge that have marginalized both the “subjugated knowledges” and the subjects (Foucault 81) of all Other peoples, races, ethnicities, interdisciplinary fields, and communities only in different micro-political manners and in different historical contexts. As participants in the new democratic criticism, contributors to this volume exemplify a willingness to compare cultural and interdisciplinary histories, to borrow methodologies and critical models from each other, to exchange strategies of resistance and empowerment in various radical social movements, to seek solidarity, and to pursue freedom and equality for all, not just for one’s own immediate community or ethnic group. It is this comparative and intersectional feature and critical trajectory that distinguishes this volume from the pioneering projects of Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd’s *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* and David Palumbo-Liu’s *The Ethnic Canon*, both of which celebrate the multiethnic literatures and cultures.

Comparative American race and ethnicity theories particularly contest and think beyond the dominant American racial paradigm and reductive racial binary between white and black by emphasizing *race as rights* for every individual or group of American citizens of color, as numerous leading Latino/a and Asian American cultural critics, such as Linda Alcoff, Lisa Lowe, and Gary Okihiro have

already done. Such reconceptions of race and citizenship focus on the complex and multilateral racial dynamic, and create the empowering critical and political knowledge of cultural self-representation, identity politics, and assertion of “cultural citizenship” (Rosaldo 27-38) in the twenty-first century. In her article, “Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?”, Linda Alcoff illuminates the paradoxes of race as rights, cultural identities, and democracy in questioning whether the U.S. Latino/as are a race (23-44). Based upon the historical reality that the U.S. Census Bureau has already arbitrarily created five—not two—racial categories, and that the U.S. Latinos have already been racialized into one homogeneous group, Alcoff offers three conceptual alternatives to the racialization of Latino/s and our conceptualization of the discourse of race in general. One alternative for the racialized U.S. Latino/as is to assimilate to the individualist ideology in the dominant white America and to abandon any validity of group or collective cultural identities. However, scholars in Latino/a American Studies consider this the most problematic for the massive amount of already racialized U.S. Latino/as because this assimilationist position is precisely most favored and endorsed by the dominant white America. As Alcoff observes provocatively yet rightly, “European Americans are afraid of strongly felt ethnic or racial identities” (26). It is one thing for the dominant white race to racialize and objectify all of the four Other races for the sole purpose of domination, management, exclusion, and disenfranchisement. It is certainly another to reverse such racial power structures and to threaten and destabilize the dominant racial status quo of whiteness if these disseminated, dispersed and ethnically different racialized subjects across the nation become mobilized to understand themselves as *collectively* legitimate, dynamic, heterogeneous, and formidable political and cultural forces. Linda Alcoff analyzes the second alternative, which is to reject the racialist label of U.S. Latino/as, but to understand Latino/as as ethnicities. One of the problems of the racialization of Latino/as by lumping them into one racial label is that it homogenizes the highly diverse and heterogeneous Latino/as in the U.S. Instead, an ethnic understanding of Latino/as accurately appreciates the vastly different nationalities (Mexican American, Cuban American, Puerto Rico American, etc.), languages, traditions, histories, religions, and so forth, that Latino/a individuals and communities identify and recognize for themselves. However, Alcoff argues convincingly that such ethnic approach is profoundly inadequate and questionable as it reduces race, racialization, and racism to ethnic differences. Linda Alcoff’s third alternative is to confront the reality that Latino/as are already racialized, to conceptualize not only the paradoxes, limitations, difficulties, and contradictions of the racial conditions of Latino/as, but also to fully analyze the importance of Latino/a cultural identity formations in the U.S., the implication of whiteness in the American racial strata, and to contest the very problematic colonial racialist label of “Hispanics,” a label that Alcoff and other Latino/a scholars challenge relentlessly. Alcoff also connects transnationally, a critical method highly important and

frequently used in comparative Latino/a and Latin American cultural and literary studies, the peculiar racialization of the multiethnic and multinational Latino/as in the U.S. to the complex racial categorizations, structures, and colonial histories in Latin America and to transform the very meaning and category of race in general. Closely relevant to claiming race as rights, Renato Rosaldo, the leading Latino scholar who originated the concept of "cultural citizenship," emphasizes the importance of claiming cultural citizenship as rights, critiquing the universal citizenship, contesting the racial structures that have marginalized Latino/as, and asserting the cultural visibility for Latino/as in the public sphere: "Cultural citizenship operates in an uneven field of structural inequalities where the dominant claims of universal citizenship assume a propertied white male subject and usually blind themselves to their exclusion and marginalization of people who differ in gender, race, and sexuality, and age" (37).

In her classic article "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique" Lisa Lowe, a leading and highly respected Asian American cultural critic, vigorously presents a three-fold argument to enrich the Asian American critique of the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal American national culture, and to assert the oppositional force of Asian American cultural criticism (1-36). First, Lowe starts with the historical conditions that Asian Americans (Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Korean Americans, Japanese Americans, Vietnamese Americans, etc.) have been unquestionably racialized, again being lumped into one homogenous group like the Latino/as, since the very beginning of multinational Asian emigration (from China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and South Asia) to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century (Chan 3-23). Lowe contests the problematic "racial formation," "class formation," and "gender formation" of the immigrant and migrant Asian Americans in the United States in the past one-hundred and fifty years. The racist, white, capitalist, legal and political apparatus of the United States has consistently racialized and excluded Asian Americans as either the "Yellow Peril" of the unassimilable aliens (such as in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act), or in the interment of Japanese American citizens or residents during WWII), or, conversely, as the assimilable model minorities, to contain the Asian Americans as a cheap, exploitable, immigrant, and legally vulnerable working class, and to emasculate symbolically Asian American men particularly. This is intricately related to the American racial trope of citizenship and the racist construction of the ideal American citizenry as white, male, middle class, liberal, and heterosexual. Second, Lowe links her micro-political critique of the American domestic nationalist racializing, classing, and gendering of Asian Americans to a macro-political, international, postcolonial, and post-Marxist cultural materialist critique of the American imperialist, neo-colonialist, and multinational capitalist invasions and wars in Asia. She uses examples such as the 1898 Spanish-American War that forced Spain to cede the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico to the U.S. (Chan 16-18), the Korean War, the

Vietnam War, the Cold War, and other examples of multiple violations of Asian regional histories, cultures, geographies, and economies in the past century and a half. Thirdly, Lowe points out that much of the resistant critical practice in Asian American cultural politics can very well arise, grow, and expand in the cracks and the weak spots of the seemingly dominant yet unevenly developed power structures of the American racializing, classing, gendering, and imperialist national culture.

Gary Y. Okihiro, a leading Asian American historian, cultural critic and scholar on the studies of race and ethnicity, critiques and deconstructs the dominant American racial paradigm of race only as between white and black. He examines the gradual creation, constant assertion, and institutionalization of whiteness, the arbitrary stratification of all Other racial colors and racial groups, the racialization of Asian Americans in American history, and claims the Asian American rights of political inclusion, citizenship, and legitimate collective and individual self-representations (*Common Ground* 28-54). In "Margin as Mainstream," Okihiro reverses the traditional conception of the "center" residing in the mainstream. Instead, as he argues, the marginalized multiracial and multiethnic Others are precisely the *very center* in the process of proclaiming its own cultural identities, enriching and strengthening the American national culture, literature, politics, and the American Character, and defending the true ideals and principles of American democracy, freedom, and justice. Okihiro's vision articulates the essence of comparative American race and ethnicity theories as democratic criticism and oppositional intellectual practice:

Although situating itself at the core, the mainstream is not the center that embraces and draws the diverse nation together. Although attributing to itself a singleness of purpose and resolve, the mainstream is neither uniform nor all-powerful in its imperialism and hegemony. Although casting the periphery beyond the bounds of civility and religion, the mainstream derives its identity, its integrity, from its representation of its Other. And despite its authorship of the central tenets of democracy, the mainstream has been silent on the publication of its creed. In fact, the margin has held the nation together within its expansive reach; the margin has tested and ensured the guarantees of citizenship; *and the margin has been the true defender of American democracy, equality, and liberty. From that vantage, we can see the margin as mainstream.* (175; emphasis added)

As the leading Latino/a and Asian American scholars have informed us, the empowerment of people of color, the racial (not racialist), political, and cultural self-representations, and the destabilization of the dominant racial paradigm are vital parts of rights, citizenship, and democracy. Despite the historical realities that Asian Americans, African Americans, Latino/a Americans, and American Indians have been racialized brutally as the visible Other races and invisible members in the American national community,

Asian American, Latino/a American and American Indian cultural criticisms are asserting our critical presences, forces, and visibility to complicate the inadequate and one dimensional racial binary, contributing valid knowledge to the important intellectual and political discussions on race, rights, American culture, citizenship, and American democracy. One of the key points of all this research has been the complete dismantling of all forms of biological determinism of race and denouncing race as essence.

Decolonizing race and resistance against whiteness and racialization are enormously urgent counter-hegemonic and subversive acts: such practices are at the heart of any movement towards a new democratic criticism. One of the leading critics of whiteness, George Lipsitz powerfully and eloquently critiques this fundamental but problematic ideology. In *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness*, he argues:

[W]hite Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provide them with resources, power, and opportunity. This whiteness is, of course, a delusion, a scientific and cultural fiction that like all racial identities has no valid foundation in biology or anthropology. Whiteness is, however, a social fact, an identity created and continued with all-to-real consequences for the distribution of wealth, prestige, and opportunity.

[. . .] I use the adjective “possessive” to stress the relationship between whiteness and asset accumulation in our society, to connect attitudes to interests, to demonstrate that white supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential, and snarling contempt than a system for protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility. [. . .] I contend that the artificial construction of whiteness almost always comes to possess white people themselves unless they develop antiracist identities, unless they disinvest and divest themselves of their investment in white supremacy (vii-viii).

In other words, whiteness establishes itself as a social, historical and epistemological category, and thus naturalizes its authority and power over all Other colored races. Whiteness makes itself a universal, neutral, natural, and transparent epistemological, political, and socio-economic standard, from which all Other four races and racialized peoples are separated and arbitrarily classified as sub-human or non-human. Consequently, our alternative histories demonstrate how the Other races are so often socially and epistemologically kept, positioned, contained, and maintained violently in subordinate positions. Whiteness guarantees and entitles some white Americans to accrue the majority of “resources, power, opportunity.” In the current turning point of the American racial history whiteness is no longer in a hierarchical racial binary opposition between white and black; instead, whiteness is located in a complicated, dynamic, and ever-changing five-party racial structure in the twenty-first century, with its fictional centrality or superiority



stripped off and its assumed epistemological and political authority formidably challenged and rapidly disappearing.

Furthermore, Lipsitz argues for a theorized activism that calls for inclusive coalitional efforts from responsible citizens of all colors to fight against racial injustice:

I hope it is clear that opposing whiteness is not the same as opposing white people. White supremacy is an equal opportunity employer: non-white people can become active agents of white supremacy as well as passive participants in its hierarchies and rewards. [. . .] White people always have the option of becoming antiracist, although not enough have done so. We do not choose our color, but we do choose our commitments. We do not choose our parents, but we do choose our politics. (viii)

Who should have the obligation to resist racialism and whiteness? How? In his introductory “Bill Moore’s Body” of *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*—which my students love and respect very deeply—George Lipsitz also narrates a moving autobiographical account of his own moment of anti-racist awakening in his youth by watching the news of Bill Moore, who was an ordinary young white man who was murdered by other white men for launching a one-man march to join the civil rights movement in the racially turbulent deep South in 1963. “Moore was a white man murdered by other white men because he opposed white supremacy” (xiii). The message that Lipsitz sends out is moving, tragic, very powerful, and unlike any that I have seen: “For Bill Moore, disapproving of white supremacy in principle wasn’t enough; he felt he needed to put his life on the line trying to end it. Bill Moore fought against white racism because he personally found it intolerable, not just because he imagined it might be intolerable for someone else” (xiii). Lipsitz gives us a remarkable sense of hope that antiracism and ending racialization, racialism, and whiteness are the very responsibility of every American citizen or resident, white or colored. Despite the danger that Lipsitz warns rightly on individual resistance acts without massive or considerable collective coalitions and alliances, Moore demonstrated remarkable courage and heroism to risk his life to oppose white supremacy and racism. “Bill Moore was murdered because too few people had his kind of courage and commitment, because too many white people kept silent about white supremacy even though they knew it was wrong” (xv). Moore’s heroism demonstrates that in the face of racist or sexual injustice the silence of any white person or man simply means complicity with such injustice. Similarly in front of racist and sexual injustice, the silence of any person of color or of any woman, forced or voluntary, also means complicity with and surrender to the vicious forces of racial injustice, whiteness, and patriarchy.

At the same time comparative American race and ethnicity theories posit that the Asian American, African American, Latino/a

American, and American Indian multiethnic oppositional intellectuals, scholars, artists, students, and activists do not have to fight alone. Critical exchanges such as those represented in this volume call out for more work and more dialogues with the fragmented culture of the American left. Another related dimension of the new democratic criticisms has been the growing body of work analyzing privatization and corporatization of American universities, and the unequal class stratification and divisions of labor within the academy. The work of such critics as Stanley Aronowitz, Marc Bousquet, David Downing, Paul Lauter, Cary Nelson, Jeff Williams, and many others intersect well with American multiethnic studies. Meanwhile, the comparative American race and ethnicity theories can contribute forceful new knowledges on the racialized and gendered, in addition to classed, divisions of academic labor in all aspects of the institutional, disciplinary, and curricular structures. The class, race, and gender divisions in our academic worlds call for critique and transformation from all practitioners of the new democratic criticism. As George Yúdice argues in this volume, the struggles of area studies, ethnic studies, Latino/a and Latin American Studies within the American universities are integral to the critique of “the Cold War University” or “Neoliberal University” in this era of globalization and economic and political restructuring. The common goals for a progressive American multiethnic left is to defend intellectual freedom for all, build bridges between these compartmentalized fields, forces, and radical traditions, and maintain the integrity of a truly democratic criticism.

*Intellectual Intersections and Racial/Ethnic Crossings* begins with three articles by George Lipsitz, R. Radhakrishnan, Gary Okihiro and Elda Tsou, who combine conceptual rigor, theoretical sophistication, relentless activism, and counter-hegemonic critical courage. In “Unexpected Affiliations: Environmental Justice and the New Social Movement,” George Lipsitz examines the challenges and possibilities in the coalitions and alliances forged in American multiethnic environmental social justice movements, where “spatialization is raced and racial formation is spatialized environmentally.” As Lipsitz argues, the significance of movements for environmental justice, a key site where communities of color can find common ground without denying their differences, lies in their ability to go beyond discourses of exclusion rooted in liberal individualism—beyond challenging isolated acts of discrimination aimed at individuals—to instead expose the collective practices and patterns that produce inequality and that keep whole collectivities subordinate to others. In this way, the environmental justice movement switches attention away from minority victimization and toward white privilege. On the one hand, the uneven effects of neo-liberalism on diverse populations manifest the basest forms of nativism, racism, and linguistic chauvinism. On the other hand, members of aggrieved communities of color are constantly incited against each other, and invited to seek the rewards of whiteness for themselves by denying dignity, resources, and rights to others.

Lipsitz carefully examines three concrete cases in the environmental justice movement in the aggrieved communities of color,

where race matters in daily life—as residential segregation, neighborhood exposure to pollutants, and occupational safety hazards. Young Laotian immigrant women still in high school have joined with the African American-led West County Toxics Coalition in Richmond, California to fight against the storage of toxic, explosive, and corrosive chemicals near their homes, against lax safety practices by nearby refineries that have resulted in explosions and accidental emissions of pollutants, and against lead and other contaminants in the ground, water, and air. African American activists in St. Louis have mobilized to pressure city and state officials to enforce laws banning lead-based paint on the interior walls of apartments and houses inhabited by children from low-income families. Chicano community activists in San Diego struggle against the way their neighborhoods are disproportionately impacted by pollutants from shipyards, chrome-plating shops, traffic from nearby highways, and storage of toxic wastes close to concentrations of population.

As Lipsitz enlightens us, “the racialization of space and the spatialization of raced are class projects in the U.S.” These struggles against environmental racism are locally based, territorially defined, pragmatically oriented toward immediate ameliorative reforms, and organized around the social identities of race rather than around ideological critiques of capitalism. By concentrating the worst environmental hazards in minority communities, capitalists attempt to divide the working class, to recruit white workers to the cause of uncontrolled development, and to make the health injuries suffered by working class communities of color appear to stem from their own poor choices about their health and housing rather than from corporate recklessness and greed. Yet precisely because spatial segregation plays a vital role in the ideological legitimacy and political hegemony of capitalism, the challenges posed to environmental racism from within aggrieved communities of color contain the potential to create struggles that unite the particular and the universal in new ways, that start with the situated knowledge and specific oppressions of working class people of color and then proceed to build affiliations and identifications capable of challenging the pursuit of profit as the sole principle guiding individual and collective life.

R. Radhakrishnan’s article, “Race and Double-Consciousness,” revisits theoretically W. E. B. Du Bois’ warring concept of double-consciousness to explore ways of producing a way of thinking, feeling, and acting beyond the epistemic regime of binarity. Radhakrishnan asks such questions: how should one multiply, proliferate, and heterogenize double-consciousness beyond its initial mandate, and at the same time maintain the initial “trace” of the double-conscious mode of knowledge? If the truth of race is nothing but the truth of racialization, i.e., the truth of a lie, then, how should double and multi-consciousness be weaned away from its binary commitment to “race”? Is race still the dividing line, and in the same way in which Du Bois diagnosed it? Radhakrishnan draws from a rich variety of scholarly reconceptions of race, including Frantz Fanon’s decolonizing revolutionary phenomenology, Linton

Barrett's connection between a radical blackness and a critique of the colonial modernity, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks' psychoanalytic critique of the master signifier of whiteness, Paul Gilroy's *Against Race*, among others. Radhakrishnan gives powerful and lucid definitions of race, racialization, and racism as follows: "'race' refers to a scopic regime or epistemology that enjoys the status of a categorical *a priori* that is not open to historical construction and deconstruction; racialization is the actual process by which the human subject is profiled and read as racial with the caveat of course that 'white' will not be subjected to such an epidermal read; and racism refers to the willful hierarchization of difference and the unleashing of brutal power on the bodies of the inferior and pre-historical subjects." Radhakrishnan argues that the political battle against racism needs to be informed by a thorough and rigorous epistemological critique of binarity as such.

Gary Okihiro and Elda Tsou argue in "On Social Formation" that comparative ethnic studies must abandon the concept of racial formation, which has been central to the field since its inception by insisting on the salience of race as an organizing principle. The foregrounding of race, however, has limited our view of the ways in which class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and nation inflected and mediated the experience of race, and has constrained our intellectual and political work. By contrast, Okihiro and Tsou examine how all those social categories meet and interact to form aggregations of power and their articulations—the principal object of ethnic studies. Further, unlike the Marxist literature that deploys "social formation" to an understanding of the material bases of society and the structures and relations of production, Okihiro and Tsou's formulation expands on the multiple materialist foundations and social realities where intersections between race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and nation take place. The conception of "social formation" in this article attends to the multiplicity of forces at work in the locations and exercises of power. It demands a complexity in our thinking to ascertain how social categories overlap, interact, conflict with, and interrupt each other. It provides a rubric for solidarity among anti-racist, feminist, queer, Marxist, and critical theories for political coalitions among peoples of color, but also among and across created divides of gender, class, sexualities, citizenship, and so forth. Okihiro and Tsou problematize a series of limits in ethnic studies, including racial formation, race-based thinking, cultural nationalism, nationalism, and patriarchy. They narrate a conceptualization of "social formation," applies such conceptual method of "social formation" to the re-reading of the literary text of "The Seventeen Syllables" by Mitsuye Yamamoto, a prominent Japanese American short story writer, and remains optimistic and inclusive in looking forward to the social transformations, justice, and equality in the future.

The next three articles by Rajini Srikanth, Daryl J. Maeda, and Amar Wahab examine the theoretical, cultural, and political challenges faced by Asian Americans or diasporic Asians in the Americas when they encounter and interact with various aspects of black

culture in different historical eras, either with the contemporary African American Muslim culture, or with the radical black nationalism during the Civil Rights movement era, or with the complex and mostly black Creole nationalist discourse in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century architectural and visual culture in Trinidad. Rajini Srikanth's thought-provoking article—"When Empathy Disappears: The Disconnect between African and Asian American Muslims"—raises important questions about the unsettling racial, religious, and political questions confronting African American and Asian American Muslim communities in the United States. Srikanth explores the extent to which Islam either facilitates or hinders a bridging of Muslim African Americans and Muslim Asian Americans. Under what circumstances, if any, can the priorities of African American Muslims and those of Asian American Muslims intersect? Richard Turner, the African American religious studies scholar, notes that Islam first came to North America in 1527. Islam played a not insignificant role in helping slaves defy their condition of bondage. During the Civil Rights movement Islam surfaced again as a powerful tool of resistance and assertion. Muslim Asian Americans are targets of religious and racial profiling in the United States' "War on Terror"; the large number of South Asian American detainees in domestic holding centers and military chaplain Yusuf Lee's experience at Guantanamo Bay illustrate the lengths to which this aggressive campaign against Muslims can extend. Yet, despite these obvious assaults against the civil liberties of Muslim Asian Americans, there is little solidarity along religious lines between Muslim African and Asian Americans. Tariq Modood, British sociologist, points to religion as the force enlarging the chasm between Afro-British (largely Christian) and Asian British (largely Muslim and Hindu) communities, who were once united as "blacks" in fighting racism in Britain. However, when religion ought to be a binding force, what circumstances impede the intersection of the social and political agendas of Muslim Asian and African Americans, and how might these obstacles be overcome?

Daryl J. Maeda examines the construction of Asian American identity, masculinity, and radical politics through performing blackness and macho black nationalism during the Civil Rights era in his stimulating and vivid article, "Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness, 1969-1972." Maeda makes the convincing argument that Frank Chin, the prominent masculinist Asian American playwright and activist, as well as the larger Asian American identity formation with divided visions, consciously performs the Black Panthers' language and style, their radical black model of racial resistance, and the Third World internationalist radicalism for multiple purposes. Such cross-ethnic performance and Asian American identity politics seek to awaken, not without contradictions, a radical racial awareness of the racial formation of Asian Americans to counter the unsettling phenomenon of assimilation, and to formulate a similarly male-dominant and nationalist Asian American radical identity politics at the expense of marginalizing

Asian American women even in the social movements. The Asian American radical activist men try to build cross-racial and cross-ethnic political coalitions and solidarity between Asian Americans and other racialized American minority groups in the common struggles of resistance against racism. Finally, they are anxious to assert Asian American masculinity in the political theatre as an attempt to counter gender formation and racial formation.

Amar Wahab's article, "Contesting Cultural Citizenship? The East Indian Big House in Trinidad's Nationalist Discourse," complicates and critiques the issues of cultural belonging and ethnic authenticity in contemporary Trinidad in the Americas. He reads the emergence of the architectural cultural signs of big houses in Trinidad's East Indian immigrant and ethnic community in relation to the unsettling nationalist (Afro-Creole) discourse. First, Wahab historicizes the co-presence between ethnic and Afro-Creole nationalist discourse in Trinidad in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century to reveal the competing claims to political influence and political representations between the British colonial past, the post-colonial and post-independence Afro-Creole dynamic nationalism, and the emergent East Indian ethnic/immigrant and socio-economic presence that destabilizes these claims to cultural citizenship. Second, Wahab presents the visual images of the East Indian big house and monster house, as well as their colors, styles, designs, and aesthetic features, as the very site of contested representation and re-imagined national consciousness that blur the boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, commodification, nationalist politics, colonial history, and the postcolonial predicaments.

The next two articles are contributed by two vigorous American Indian feminist scholars, Kathryn D. Manuelito and Lisa M. Poupert, on the empowering theoretical, cultural, political intersections between American Indian indigenous feminist epistemologies and African American feminism. In her article, "Womanism to Indigenism: Identities and Experiences," Kathryn D. Manuelito borrows from Alice Walker's enabling articulation of womanism that connects to the understanding of American Indian indigenous womanism despite American Indian women's suspicion of feminism in general. Manuelito acknowledges that womanism is a movement that embraces African American women not as separate or in opposition to African American men, but as partners who work together from the location of shared community and the shared experiences of countering racist, economic, and cultural oppressions. Second, Manuelito illustrates that the American Indian indigenous womanism is an epistemology in and of itself, influenced by Eva Marie Garroutte's notion of "racial indigeneity" and Patricia Hill Collins' empowering conception of the African American feminist epistemology. Third, Manuelito examines the complex gender systems among the diverse American Indian nations. Particularly her poetic articulation of the powerful and versatile roles of the Diné indigenous women as Mother/Grandmother/OtherMother/Spiritual Leader/Matriarch/Warrior constitutes an original and beautiful contribution to comparative American multiracial and multiethnic feminist scholarship.

Lisa M. Poupart's article, "Voicing Resistance, Sharing Struggle: African American Feminism and American Indian Decolonization," is an ambitious and passionate comparison between African American feminist cultural criticism and American Indian women's experiences of decolonization. Although Poupart argues that there have been very few American Indian feminists, American Indian people resisting colonial domination and the loss of traditional cultures in the twenty-first century can indeed benefit from a wide range of works by leading African American feminist scholars, writers and activists, including Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, and others. These black cultural critics enhance the intellectual understanding of the social construction of femaleness, the multiple racial, gender, and class structures of power that oppress women of color, and resisting against the Western patriarchal capitalist imperialism. Poupart particularly examines in-depth the social, cultural and psychological devastations of internalized oppression, advocates for the urgency of decolonization, and asserts the necessity for American Indian indigenous women, feminists, and communities to create and claim the knowledge of resistance.

This issue ends with two eloquent articles by two prominent scholars on Latino cultural criticism, George A. Yúdice and Juan E. Poblete, on the complex but very important issues of Latino/a and Latin American cultural criticism and interdisciplinary formation in the larger historical and geopolitical contexts of globalization, cold war ideological battles, U.S. national imaginary, Latin American immigration to the U.S., and the complex self-reflections on the Latino/a identity formations in the late twentieth- to early twenty-first-centuries. In "Rethinking Area and Ethnic Studies in the Context of Economic and Political Restructuring," George A. Yúdice maps a stimulating critical historiography of the changing post-Cold War economic, political, and cultural ideologies of American higher education apparatus, within which and occasionally against which the area studies of ethnic studies, Latino/a and Latin American Studies, and cultural studies grow in often trying times. First, Yúdice informs us relentlessly that "[a]rea studies is largely a creation of the Cold War," and that American universities have been structured as "Cold War Universities." U.S. government, various influential foundations and other policy-making institutions oriented the university to create area studies to deal with massive decolonization movements in Third World countries in order to both gain knowledge of them as a way of managing their potential challenge to capitalism and to gain leverage over Soviet influence. Meanwhile, as a socialized resource for capital, the Cold War University is also used as a site for research and development for numerous capitalist industries, such as defense, health, and others, while tolerating only certain intellectual freedoms and encouraging humanist and social scientist celebrations of American cultural superiority. Second, Yúdice examines "the Neoliberal University" from the Civil Rights era throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Numerous area studies have grown considerably during this period, mostly due to the expansion

of the university under the Cold War, massive amounts of mobilization, protests and social movements by blacks, minority groups, women, anti-Vietnam war protesters, and students, and the U.S. government's managerial politics to defuse pressure for social equity under the often token initiative of multiculturalism. Black studies, Chicano studies, Puerto Rican studies, Asian American studies, women's studies, and gay/lesbian/queer studies seize the opportunities in this era to establish and to grow. Third, Yúdice argues convincingly that currently American universities enter the era of globalization, when the U.S. seeks to be more competitive and dominant in the new global economy of information and knowledge and considers diversity as an asset in training the new generation of competitive executives, managers, and labor force. In such changing historical conditions, Yúdice critiques the demoralizing restructuring logic of downsizing, privatization, and corporatizing of universities on one hand, and cautions against the potential danger of the culturalism prevailing in multiple area studies being complicit with the university system and the corporate world that are intimately joined in globalization.

Juan E. Poblete's ambitious article, "U.S. Latino Studies in a Global Context: Social Imagination and the Production of In/Visibility," focuses on the emergence of a complex transnational framework for the analysis of contemporary Latin/o American issues. In this perspective, there is a serious effort at confronting the multiple angles created by the differential acceleration of the flows of people, discourses, goods, and capital across the continent. Those angles must include, more often than not, the intersectionality of the sub-national regional, national, supra-national regional, and global dimensions. In those intersections, some questions are paramount: how is the nation as a social and cultural imaginary being transformed by transnational processes? How is it reacting to those developments? Are we witnessing the emergence of transnational, bi-national, trans-border, trans-local, inter-national, micro- or macro-regional social and cultural imaginaries? The answer to some of those questions is being written by multiple actors across the hemisphere, from migrant workers to business leaders, from town councils to Mercosur. This is what Arjun Appadurai and others have called an expansion of the research imagination of the social and human sciences. These disciplines can and must also perform a role in making new and old invisible dynamic, visible, and in understanding how exactly those already visible, are being visibilized by the current paradigms, methods, and approaches to Latin/o American Studies.

In conclusion, as the contributors in this volume have demonstrated in these rich critical exchanges, comparative American race and ethnicity theories that connect Asian American, African American, Latino/a American, American Indian cultural criticisms have created dialogues, empowerment, solidarity, and alliances between what Foucault calls "the fragmentary genealogies" (85) of the multiethnic American left in large. The conjunctural critical categories of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, nation, culture, and history have enriched the critical vocabulary and democratic language for a new



democratic criticism in Multiracial and Multiethnic twenty-first century. *Intellectual Intersections and Racial/Ethnic Crossings* is a modest attempt to open up some dialogues on these complex and contested issues, which are situated historically and socially in our trying times when democracy is constantly threatened and endangered: George W. Bush's claims to be the "decider" of American politics, the government's stubborn extension and escalation of multiple wars in Iraq, against terror, and possibly against Iran while ignoring the public protests and massive disapproval, the disturbing lack of, or uneven access to, rights, citizenship, education, prosperity, or legitimate representations for disenfranchised individuals or communities of color, and the conservative attacks on diversity, equity, and intellectual freedom. Thus, American multiethnic female and male oppositional intellectuals have more urgent responsibilities to continue the practice of such insurgent democratic criticism, voice dissidence, articulate resistance strategies, and create democratic knowledge that empower, question, engage, and transform. I end this introduction with a quote from Foucault on knowledge, power, intellectuals, and democratic criticism:

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not [only; my addition] to critique the ideological contents . . . but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not [only; my addition] changing people's consciousness . . . but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. (133)

We remain hopeful for a more inclusive, just, and democratic future.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is inspired by Edward Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that Census Bureau particularly defines "Hispanics of any race" as a category. It includes Hispanics or Latino/as of any color, and seems to differentiate itself from "non-Hispanic whites," or "non-Hispanic blacks or African Americans." It is also interesting to read the small percentage of American individuals as belonging to two races, three races, four races, or even five races in this not only increasingly multiracial and multiethnic but also increasingly racially hybridized era, an issue that I cannot address in this article due to limited space. Then we really question the validity and usefulness of racial categorization or racial classification.

<sup>3</sup> According to "Projections of the Resident Population by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Nativity; Middle Series, 2075 to 2100," the American total population will reach 570,954 by 2100 with 40.3% whites (non-Hispanic), 33.3% Hispanics (of all races; or Latino/as), 13% blacks of African Americans (non-Hispanic), 12.6% Asians and Pacific Islanders, and 0.7% American Indians. In this separate projection data sheet, Pacific Islanders are grouped with Asians, not with American Indians and other races.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that comparative American race and ethnicity theories include the studies of broader ethnic cultural and critical traditions, such as Jewish American, Irish American, Italian American ones and many more. This volume examines comparatively Asian American, African American, Latino/a American, and American Indian cultural criticisms. See Werner Sollors.

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