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KRISTINA BROSS AND LAURA M. STEVENS

## Before Nation, Beyond Nation: The Place of “Early” in Transnational American Studies

### Introduction

In a recent forum on the field published in *Amerikastudien*, Steven Shapiro noted that “Early American Studies has often been the foundling at the door, still too little read or noticed.”<sup>1</sup> The wounded sentimentalism of such a formulation has been with us since the field was founded. But rather than making a bid to include early American Studies in discussions of transnationalism in American Studies broadly construed (an “us, too” argument), we have a bolder claim: American Studies after 1800 needs us.

American Studies is a field fundamentally at odds with the intellectual paradigms that governed its founding. This tension energizes scholarship even as it creates apparently intractable struggles and occasional stagnation. What Gene Wise, back in 1979, termed the “paradigm dramas” of this field are still vividly present, even as the particular nature of that drama has shifted away from, for example, the struggle or clash between an “intellectual history synthesis” dominant in the 1950s and a cultural studies

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Shapiro: *Politics and Emotion in Early American Studies*, in: *Amerikastudien* 58 (2013), p. 493.

approach developed in the 70s.<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case for those who share what Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman identified in 2002 as a widespread “anxiety over futurity that *America* as a nationalist icon and *American studies* as a field formation both evince.”<sup>3</sup> Although American Studies has been since its mid-twentieth-century foundation a font of interdisciplinarity and innovation, and in the wake of the Vietnam War propagated a more critical approach to the myths and ideologies of America, the field has only recently come to question the assumption contained in the synecdochic structure of its very name: that the study of the United States *is* and *encompasses* American Studies.

When that assumption was taken for granted, when American Studies was structured as analysis -- often celebratory but at least patriotic -- of the United States, the place of early American Studies within the wider field was indeed difficult to explain as anything more than the preface to the main story. Not without reason did attention go to those figures and events fitting within a teleological narrative that culminated in the American Revolution, with an early American canon reduced to a few sermons and poems from New England. But the constitutive problem of our sub-field for an earlier understanding of American Studies—what Ralph Bauer calls “the anachronism of writing proto-nationalist literary and intellectual histories for a pre-national era”—is exactly what makes early American Studies so generative of new topics and methodologies today, especially in light of the current clarion call to transnationalism in American Studies generally.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gene Wise: “Paradigm Dramas” in *American Studies. A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement*, in: *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, ed. by Lucy Maddox Baltimore 1999, pp. 166-214.

<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman: *Futures*, in: *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. by Pease and Wiegman, Durham 2002, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Bauer: *Summit of Early Ibero- and Anglo-Americanists, Tucson, Arizona, May, 2002*, in: *Early American Literature* 38 (2003), p. 124.

Let's first stipulate as a working definition of transnational history that offered by Deacon, Russell, and Woolacott in their 2010 collection, *Transnational Lives*: Transnational history focuses not so much on international connections between states as on the connections and movements that have preceded, transcended, or exceeded national boundaries.<sup>5</sup> If the so-called transnational turn in American Studies dates roughly to the end of what has been called the American century, transnational or global approaches to American Studies have moved to the center of the field, with at least three major collections of scholarly essays on this topic published since 2010.<sup>6</sup> There has been vigorous agreement about the intellectually expansive possibilities held out by "comparative, collaborative, border-crossing research" as called for by Shelley Fisher Fishkin in her 2005 American Studies Association Presidential address.<sup>7</sup> How that research should take place, though, and what models should guide it, have remained somewhat in question. The geographical and institutional setting for the pursuit of American Studies clearly is important. Witness the October, 2014 meeting from which this collection has emerged. Looking back once more to 2005, in his response to Fishkin's address, Alfred Hornung envisioned a multi-sited approach to transnational American Studies, in which a diffuse network of scholars and institutions takes up the challenge of understanding America and the United States in and of the world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, Angela Woolacott, eds.: *Transnational Lives. Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present*, London 2010, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, eds.: *Globalizing American Studies*, Chicago 2010; Winifried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe, eds.: *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, Hanover 2011; Laura Bieger, Ramón Saldivar, and Johannes Voelz, eds.: *The Imaginary and Its Worlds. American Studies After the Transnational Turn*, Hanover 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin: *Crossroads of Culture. The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004*, in: *American Quarterly* 57 (2005), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Hornung: *Transnational American Studies. Response to the Presidential Address*, in: *American Quarterly* 57 (2005), pp. 67-73.

Moving American Studies as an intellectual activity beyond the boundaries of the United States is only half the task, for in spite of powerful transnational impulses currently driving the field, more pressure needs to be placed on the question of how truly to think beyond the bounds of nation, and what is left of American Studies when that happens. The stakes are high in answering these questions, especially for early American Studies as it is understood in the United States. In this country, a longing for nationalist, even exceptionalist narratives remains intense outside academia much more than inside it. Such desires pervade public discourse and parallel the enthusiasm with which our borders are patrolled.<sup>9</sup> In a global context it can be easy for U.S. scholars to slip into transnational approaches that reiterate the nationalist framework of earlier paradigms, for example by tracing the exportation of our country's culture to other parts of the world and be done with it. Such approaches run the risk of evoking or even replicating the United States' foreign policy or its style of global capitalism. How then to undertake the project of a truly transnational American Studies?

From where we stand, early American Studies already has in place some of the structures and conversations that can facilitate a more thoroughgoing move to transnational approaches. This does not mean that all early Americanist scholarship today is inherently transnational or that our approaches are entirely unknown to those working in later eras and other fields. Rather, we think that the idiosyncrasies of our field are particularly well suited to transnational American Studies, perhaps even more than we ourselves have recognized. This essay, then is in part an argument for the

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<sup>9</sup> For a glimpse of a recent iteration of the debate over American exceptionalism, see the *Tampa Bay Times* assessment of Rudy Giuliani's assertion that President Barack Obama does not see America as exceptional, and as a consequence does not "love" his country. Steve Contorno: *Rudy Giuliani: Barack Obama said American exceptionalism no better than other countries*, in: *Tampa Bay Times*, 23 Feb. 2015, Web, 10 Mar. 2015. See also Charles M. Blow: *Who Loves America?*, in: *The New York Times*, 23 Feb. 2015, Web, 10 Mar. 2015.

place of our field within American Studies writ large, but it is also an exploration for ourselves of our place in transnational American Studies.

Our field of early American Studies, as we define it, stretches from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries (sometime a bit beyond); it is contemporaneous with the European nation-state's ascendance but largely precedes the coalescence of nationalist identity and the rise of nationalism as a driving political force. The nature of the materials and events that comprise this three- or four-century era thus has compelled many scholars working in this area to operate conceptually beyond the bounds of nation. In the next few pages, we would like to offer a snapshot of the state of our field, which we see as largely structured by four spatial paradigms: the Atlantic, the contact zone or middle ground, the Western hemisphere, and the globe. Our purpose in taking this approach is not just to summarize some of the exciting developments in our often-marginalized field, but also to open for discussion whether the rubrics that have been directing the recent scholarly conversation regarding this pre-national period have relevance to later eras of American Studies.

This goal is, we admit, rather abstract, and so we shall frame this survey by asking a more grounded question: if you had to choose one life narrative that encapsulated early America – that is, the story of early America that scholars are laboring to tell right now – whose life would it be? Whose life would have been chosen ten years ago? Twenty? Fifty? What spatial and temporal outlines of early America do those individual life narratives trace, and what scholarly approaches make them more or less audible to us as we are situated here and now?

Would it be the apparently quintessential American, Benjamin Franklin, brilliant pragmatist, scientist, printer, and statesman, proponent of the Revolution and engineer of the new nation's constitution? What of his contemporary, Samson Occom, the Mohegan Indian, Presbyterian minister, and celebrated preacher, who toured Britain for three years to raise money for an Indian charity school in New England, published the first Native-authored texts in English, and then eventually founded the pan-Native, Christian Brothertown movement, seeking Native self-determination amidst a war-torn and colonized land? Or how about German-American Franz

Pastorius, lawyer, poet, scholar, signatory of the first anti-slavery petition in the English colonies? We could trace the life of Thomas Dale, governor of the Virginia colony, patron of John Rolfe and his Mattaponi wife Rebecca, better known to us today as Pocahontas. When we think of Dale at all, it is in a “new world” context, but his American colonial experience was a stepping stone to his next appointment in the East Indies. What of Pocahontas herself, a figure of intense and ever-changing cathexis in both Europe and the United States, whose life has been described innumerable times through histories, novels, and films since John Smith first presented her to an English audience, and whose story has recently been retold in light of Mattaponi sacred oral history?<sup>10</sup> Or how about Mary Rowlandson, upstanding Puritan matron but traumatized Indian captive, returned to Boston in 1676 to speak of the divine trials she endured with the strength of her faith?

If we want to focus on captives, why not Cabeza de Vaca, sixteenth-century shipwrecked Spanish explorer-turned-captive, turned-charismatic shaman, roaming through present-day Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and then down to Mexico, with a brief, disastrous coda as *adelantado* of Rio de la Plata that also ended in captivity when he was imprisoned and sent back to Spain? Or how about Louis Hennepin the Jesuit missionary, seventeenth-century explorer of areas ranging from Quebec to present-day Illinois and Missouri, ethnographer, and Sioux captive? On the other hand, if a captivity narrative is to be our tale, why not attend to the largest system of captivities in this era, the slave trade, looking at someone like Olaudah Equiano? If Equiano, which Equiano? The 10-year-old Igbo boy described in his 1789 autobiography, stolen away from home in present-day Nigeria and sold into slavery in Virginia, or the South Carolina native

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<sup>10</sup> Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow and Angela L. Daniel: *The True Story of Pocahontas. The Other Side of History*, Golden, Colorado 2007.

whose name Vincent Carretta has found in baptismal records and naval rolls?<sup>11</sup>

In the shadow of those who wrote their own life stories, in part or whole, are those who did not, but whose lives of which we only have glimpses or shards might be considered equally representative of America. Alongside Cabeza de Vaca, there is Estevan, the enslaved African man who accompanied him on all his journeys, and whose story has been imagined by Laila Lalani in her recent novel, *The Moor's Account*.<sup>12</sup> Doubling Mary Rowlandson, the Indian captive who came home, there are those who by choice did not, such as Eunice Williams, renamed Marguerite Kahenstenawi Arosen, who was taken in 1704 by French-Allied Mohawks from Deerfield, Massachusetts at the age of seven, raised by Catholic Mohawks at the Kanawake settlement, and married to the Mohawk François-Xavier Arosen. In the shadow of white Indian captives are the defeated Wampanoags, who include Metacom's own son but who are mostly unnamed in the print archives. These were individuals who, at the conclusion of King Philip's War, were sold into slavery in Bermuda. In the bloody wake of European explorers or conquerors, there are the thousands of nameless victims mourned by Bartholomé de las Casas in his *Brevisima relacion de las destruccion de las Indias*, or *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.<sup>13</sup> Or we might include a seventeenth-century woman named Yarico, likely born on the South American mainland and enslaved on the island of Bermuda, where she lived within a community of laborers—both indentured and enslaved. She gave birth to a child whose father is an unnamed "Christian" servant. We know of her because the Englishman Richard Ligon included something of her story in his print description of Bermuda, and

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent Carretta: *Equiano, the African. Biography of a Self-Made Man*, Athens, Georgia 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Laila Lalami: *The Moor's Account*. New York 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Bartholomé de las Casas: *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. by Nigel Griffen, intro. by Anthony Pagden, New York 1992.



because she was fantastically imagined by generations of English writers who constructed her story as a sentimental tragedy.<sup>14</sup>

Even those who wrote their own stories encode shards and shadows of multiple selves. Consider once again Franklin, but a different Franklin than we saw before: this time the self-fashioned gentleman, social-climbing Anglophile, and father of a British colonial governor, rebuffed in London for his efforts at social advancement, who then threw in his lot with the colonies to return to Europe as the toast of Paris, a self-exoticized, raccoon-cap wearing primitive. But once we turn our attention to Benjamin, we might ask: why not consider Jane Franklin, his youngest sister and beloved correspondent, recently brought to light by Jill Lepore, or Deborah Read Franklin, his wife, who, as Carla Mulford has pointed out, ran the print shop when Franklin was away, enabling the very instrument of his public ascendancy and financial success?<sup>15</sup> Which shall be our American life, and what America does that life inscribe?

The answer, of course, is that by now we know there can be no single life to embody America, or more accurately, the Americas. In this cluster of lives, though, one can see how a map of the Americas is drawn and redrawn, with actual stretches of land framed by lines of travel, violence, and trade, linking the two continents and the Caribbean archipelago of the new world with Africa, Europe, and even Asia. Oceans emerge as highways rather than barriers, political boundaries are porous when they are not being redrawn, and people display startling mobility and ingenuity, especially when they are moved against their will. Regions of new interactivity emerge, both within

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<sup>14</sup> Most of these texts are compiled and discussed in Frank Felsenstein: *English Trader, Indian Maid. Representing Gender, Race, and Slavery in the New World. An Inkle and Yarico Reader*, Baltimore 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Jill Lepore: *The Book of Ages. The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*, New York 2013; Carla Mulford: *Writing Women in Early American Studies. On Canons, Feminist Critique, and the Work of Writing Women into History*, in: *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 26 (2007), p. 114.

the Americas and at the land's watery edges. Religion, culture, self-interest, tribe, and class supersede nation as bases for self-identification and loyalty. Violence and death are everywhere, as are dreams of salvation or profit. Language and custom are under the constant pressure of translation and renegotiation, with pidgin languages and hybrid protocols developing while this cacophonous assortment of voices and bodies, agendas and interests, brush up against and occasionally trample each other. *This* is early America.

3.

In the mosaic of lives we have just presented, one can also find the history of our field over the past thirty years. The rising to prominence of these various life narratives or reframing of previously central ones also contains the story of how early American Studies has absorbed the methodologies, discoveries, or agendas of other fields, including American Studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, provoking changes in the spatial conceits that frame and direct scholarship and teaching. First, the field has altered dramatically in response to the radical revisions that Western U.S. history has undergone, partly through the inception of borderland studies in the 1970s but even more in response to the rise of Native American Studies in the same decade. Most of all, Native Studies has illuminated the indigenous peoples of the pre- and post-contact as complex agents informed by rich cultures and rational self-interest, jostling for advantage in relation to European and African arrivals but also in relation to each other. Native American Studies is "beyond and before nation" in ways even more profound than early American Studies.

The borderland is, of course, a spatial construct based on the idea of a boundary between nations. However useful in later periods, its applications are more limited in an era when nations have not yet actually established borders. Also, like Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier, the borderland is a binary conceit of limited use for a time and space in which far more than two interest groups are interacting with each other through protocols of alliance, exchange, deception, or aggression. Of greater relevance are the metaphors of the Middle Ground and the Contact Zone,

developed respectively by a historian, Richard White, and a Spanish literature scholar, Mary Louise Pratt.<sup>16</sup> They differ primarily in the power relations they designate: the Middle Ground tends to delineate a scenario, like the eighteenth-century Great Lakes Region White famously studied, governed by a sort of chaotic equilibrium in which no party clearly holds the upper hand and interactions are of a transactional nature, intensely negotiated; in contrast, contact zones often describe scenarios marked by asymmetrical relations, especially conquest, colonization, or slavery. What has made both conceits so influential is their ability to describe a dynamic arena with countless players and several vectors of influence bringing interest groups – ever shifting in their agendas and their senses of self – into collision with each other. Their value lies in their conceptual capaciousness and nimbleness, as they help us see multiple parties acting and acted upon, transforming their own cultures and senses of self in the process. That neither term is exactly new to those working in later eras is evidence of at least some ways in which rubrics developed in and for early American Studies can have broader use for study of the Americas, and in fact for regions of cultural intersection beyond these continents.

4.

If the internal spaces of the Americas have been reconfigured, so too have been the watery divides between these two continents and the two to the east. Atlantic scholarship has deep roots, but it has come into its own for scholars of English literatures and cultures in recent years. In the 1980s and 1990s, a transformation in Atlantic World scholarship, led by British historians, challenged the received understanding of this arena. Their work sought to use the contingent, inter- and multi-cultural configurations of Atlantic spaces and people to unsettle older accounts of “the Atlantic world”

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<sup>16</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner: *The Frontier in American History*, forward by Ray Allen Billington, New York 1962; Richard Wright: *The Middle Ground. Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge 1992; Mary Louise Pratt: *Arts of the Contact Zone*, in: *Profession* (1991), pp. 33-40.

that, despite the broad gesture of the phrase, had reified twentieth-century national boundaries and histories.<sup>17</sup> Their work was joined by Paul Gilroy and others who articulated the Black Atlantic as an object of study. Scholars of “other” Atlantics have followed, including literary and cultural studies scholars of all stripes.<sup>18</sup> One can also see the tacit influence of the Annales school, especially Fernand Braudel, with his examination of the Mediterranean as a supranational collection of cultures, circulations, and economies linked together by geographical dicta.<sup>19</sup> Massive digital humanities projects such as the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database have energized research in this area.<sup>20</sup> There are now at least four journals proclaiming their focus on Atlantic studies, many intercollegiate seminars focused on this topic currently flourish, and the past decade has seen the publication of several influential texts geared toward teaching in an Atlantic setting.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Contributions to and reflections on this revisionist moment in Atlantic history include Nicholas Canny, ed.: *Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 1. Origins of Empire. British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford 1998; Alison Games: *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World*, Cambridge 1999; David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds.: *British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. New York 2002; Bernard Bailyn: *Atlantic History. Concept and Contours*, Cambridge 2005; Jack P. Greene: *Atlantic History. A Critical Reappraisal*, Oxford: 2008; Carla Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World*, Philadelphia 2010; Karen Kupperman: *The Atlantic in World History*, Oxford 2012. William O’Reilly provides an overview of Atlantic World historiography: “Genealogies of Atlantic History,” *Atlantic Studies* 1 (2004), pp. 66-84.

<sup>18</sup> Jace Weaver: *The Red Atlantic. American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927*, Chapel Hill 2014.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Fernand Braudel: *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. by Siân Reynolds. New York 1973.

<sup>20</sup> The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, Web, 16 Mar. 2015.

<sup>21</sup> The quarterly *Atlantic Studies*, published by Routledge for The Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and America, is now in its twelfth year; the Transatlantic Studies Association, founded in 2002, is connected with *The Journal of*

The virtues of Atlantic scholarship are clear, for to operate within this conceptual space is to peel away epistemological structures that have been assembled through and by nationalisms and nations, in an effort to see how peoples, cultures, environments, and political organizations interacted around and across the oceanic rim as those very epistemological structures were coming into existence. If this spatial conceit holds particular salience for the centuries between Euro-American contact and the consolidation of national territories at the end of the eighteenth century, it has been deployed to equally good effect by many scholars working in later centuries. It is important to note, however, that contemplations of the Atlantic — in the eighteenth century as well as the twenty-first — do not necessarily question a nation-centered paradigm of analysis. There is arguably some exhaustion of this spatial conceit, and a struggle between old and new Atlantics is still underway. Over the past few years a lateral, transatlantic model of scholarship, one we might call a NATO-inflected form with emphasis on the so-called special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States and with tacit focus on northern latitudes, has come under some fire for failing to examine the Atlantic world in its totality. William Boelhower has delivered a forceful argument that what he calls “a new Atlantic paideia, . . . in development over the preceding 15 to 20 years, [which] begins in the wake of post-colonial critique and cultural and indigenous research methodologies” has overtaken an old paradigm, which has been complicit in the production of disciplinary knowledge resulting from the European

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*Transatlantic Studies*, also published by Routledge; *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, a biannual published at Glasgow and Brunel Universities, is now in its fifteenth year; and *Ofo: Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, was first published in 2011. It is important to note that scholars in other areas have been much more invested in Atlantic world studies than have either British or New England researchers. The *Spanish Atlantic Studies* journal, for instance, dates to the 1950s. More broadly, the hemispheric turn in American Studies has been led by scholars of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. See O'Reilly: *Genealogies*.

reading of the Atlantic world.”<sup>22</sup> Instead, he argues that “an extended phenomenological awareness of the different conditions between life on land (the landscape) and life on sea (the hydroscape) is fundamental to the new Atlantic studies research matrix.” This matrix, with its “archaeospace” of the ocean, and with its questioning of conquerors’ narratives, rearranges Atlantic history and knowledge production to focus on the dispersed, the wandering, the conquered, and “the submerged and the drowned of the slave trade.”<sup>23</sup>

Such approaches to Atlantic scholarship have placed some pressure on literary studies, especially Anglophone literary study, even as they call more attention to the Caribbean, because of the challenges of adhering to this standard of attentiveness to the illiterate, conquered, and enslaved while attending to the written word. This is part of a broader crisis of confidence that literary early Americanists are suffering, as seen in Eric Slaughter’s 2008 identification of a trade gap between history and literature in Atlantic studies, with literature importing much but exporting little, as well as in the recent *Amerikastudien* forum led by Phillip Schweighauser’s self-named “polemic” on the loss of engagement with questions of the aesthetic.<sup>24</sup> Much of this crisis has been aggravated by the push to move beyond national structures, with their canons, their marginalized writings, and their silenced illiterate underclasses. Literature scholars face particular challenges in the new Atlantic studies as they determine how to reconcile their highly focused methods and written materials with a vast space populated by multi-lingual

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<sup>22</sup> William Boelhower: *The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix*, in: *American Literary History* 20 (2008), pp. 84-85.

<sup>23</sup> Boelhower: *Rise of the New Atlantic*, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Slaughter: *History, Literature, and the Atlantic World*, in: *Early American Literature* 43 (2008), pp. 153-186; Philipp Schweighauser: *Early American Studies Now. A Polemic from Literary Studies*, in: *Amerikastudien* 58 (2013), pp. 465-87. Slaughter’s article was published alongside responses by Jonathan Elmer, Elizabeth Dillon, Eliga H. Gould, and Bryan Waterman. Schweighauser’s article was published alongside responses by Ed White, Stephen Shapiro, and Duncan Faherty.

and largely illiterate multitudes. The same concerns apply to our remaining two spatial constructs, the hemispheric and the global.

5.

Hemispheric studies encompasses borderlands, contact zones and the Atlantic World, but insists on new coordinates of study, particularly the north-south axis in the Americas. Hemispheric research on colonial America has been of signal importance to the broadening of all early Americanists' approaches, but it has been an especially significant corrective for those of us who focus on British contexts and Anglophone literature. Work such as Ralph Bauer's has changed the field of early American Studies, both through his published scholarship and through the founding of a series of Ibero-Anglo "summits" organized under the Society of Early Americanists. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's work, especially *Puritan Conquistadores*, has been influential in Anglo-American studies, demonstrating how American Studies must begin with a consideration of Spain's colonial empire.<sup>25</sup> Scholars including Gordon Sayre and Tamara Harvey have demonstrated how very much can be accomplished through comparative projects that straddle linguistic and national divides, helping us to see how much our understandings of these early texts are penned in when we limit the conversations in which their authors participated to writings from just one language.<sup>26</sup> Recent anthologies and critical editions of recovered texts, such as Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer's *The Literature of Colonial America*, along with bilingual editions of Nahuatl drama and French missionary

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<sup>25</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra: *Puritan Conquistadors. Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700*, Stanford 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon M. Sayre: *Les Sauvages Américains. Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature*, Chapel Hill 1997; Tamara Harvey: *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse Across the Americas, 1633-1700*, Burlington 2008. See also the recent anthology of essays comparing religious traditions in the Americas: Stephanie Kirk and Sarah Rivett, eds.: *Religious Transformations in the Early Modern Americas*, Philadelphia 2014.

works, allow us to understand—and even better, to teach—a range of cultural expressions that challenge U.S. nationalist Anglocentrism.<sup>27</sup> This important scholarship reminds us that indigenous cultures had writing and other sophisticated signification systems as well as complex oral traditions before contact with Europeans; that Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Germany as well as England laid claim to, invaded, and colonized American and West Indian lands; and that Spanish was (and is) as much an “American” language as English.

6.

Continental, Atlantic, hemispheric: recently early American scholars have scaled up their perspectives even more as they contemplate the meaning of America within a transnational, transoceanic, or global framework. In her book *Folded Selves: Colonial New England Writing in the World System*, Michelle Burnham argues that if we are to understand colonial American culture, we must deploy new spatial orientations, to recognize how and why colonial subjects (in America and elsewhere) placed themselves in the world.<sup>28</sup> Her analysis depends on macro-historical world-systems theory, and this is an important, if not central, driving force within much of Global studies. It’s an especially vital force for a global approach to early American Studies, because it dates the beginning of our current “world system” to the early modern period. From a contemporary perspective, it can be easy to assume that people in earlier times were atomized and isolated. Perhaps one of the most valuable services that early American Studies can offer the larger field in our current moment is simply to puncture that

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, eds.: *The Literatures of Colonial America. An Anthology*, Malden 2001; Louise M. Burkhart: *Holy Wednesday. A Nahuatl Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*, Philadelphia 1996; Louise M. Burkhart, Barry D. Sell, Miguel Leon-Portilla, eds.: *Nahuatl Theater, Vol. 1. Death and Life in Colonial Nahuatl Mexico*. Norman 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Burnham: *Folded Selves. Colonial New England Writing in the World System*, Hanover 2007.



assumption by tracing personal and discursive connections between early Americans and the world.

But we think we can do more. An important criticism of Global studies, as we suggested earlier, is that it neglects local influences and can parallel first-world or superpower interests in (especially) economic globalization. Lynn Hunt, in her book *Writing History in the Global Era*, urges us to take a “middle ground” through our approach to globalization as “a series of transnational processes in which the histories of diverse places can become connected and interdependent.”<sup>29</sup> Hunt’s discussion of historical approaches to globalization eschews analysis from “above,” arguing that it takes “the modern dominance of the West” as a given.<sup>30</sup> Early American Studies can help undo such a telos; our field has as its object of study the Americas both before and beyond nation, and, as we’ve tried to suggest, early American Studies has changed powerfully in the last several decades, so that the predominant scholarly impulse is to understand American history and culture as contingent, unfinished, and subject to change.

7.

At least, that’s the ideal. There are problems and limitations to early American scholarship, some of which will best be addressed by scholars and institutes outside the United States. Attempts to stretch across geographies, languages and cultures are difficult. Truly comparative or synthetic work demands facility in several disciplines and languages. In a 2003 review essay surveying several studies of colonial Nahuatl literature, Hilary Wyss, even while arguing for the necessity of breaking down intellectual borders, gestures toward the reasons they continue to stand.

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<sup>29</sup> Lynn Hunt: *Writing History in the Global Era*, New York 2014, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Hunt: *Writing History*, p. 62.

Quite simply, they are “a wonderful mechanism to prevent us all from going mad from overwork.”<sup>31</sup>

There are additional mundane forces at work as well that make trouble for those interested in scaling up scholarly frameworks for American Studies to the transnational, one of the most important being the general inability among scholars in the United States to conduct research in more than one language. As important as hemispheric approaches are, for instance, the fine scholarship we cited earlier has had perhaps less impact than it should have, since so many from the United States have to rely on texts in translation rather than undertaking important recovery and research efforts ourselves. This is all the more reason that scholars from within and without U.S. borders need sustained conversations.

The transnational imperative may force a revision in how the admission and training of graduate students in American Studies as well as American literature and history programs take place, with a higher premium placed on multilingualism. Such change will be years in the making, however, especially given the external and internal pressures under which humanities education in the United States currently operates as well as the rigid, status-driven paradigms that dictate how we hire, promote, teach, and assess. At any rate, multilingualism alone can only have a limited salutary effect, for the nature and scope of most transnational scholarship is that it cannot be pursued in solitary, monadic fashion. The venues in which transnational scholarship will flourish in the future are less likely to be single-authored monographs than essay collections, forums, workshops, review essays, conferences, jointly authored publications, and large-scale digital humanities projects. Even single-authored articles and monographs, the traditional habitats of humanities scholarship, will depend largely on these other types of research and writing, for transnational study must take place through conversation and sometimes collaboration with others. Such

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<sup>31</sup> Hilary Wyss: *Missionaries in the Classroom. Bernardino de Sahagún, John Eliot, and the Teaching of Colonial Indigenous Texts from New Spain and New England*, in: *Early American Literature* 38 (2003), p. 506

dialogue needs to take place across the lines of nation and language, but also across temporal lines, so that early Americanists and specialists in later eras read each other's work and actually listen to each other.

8.

Why bother with other times? It is easy enough to show that early America was transnational because it was largely pre-national, and even to show how current scholarly approaches are bypassing or surpassing the frame of nation as one imposed by the present on the past. What case is to be made, though, for our bolder assertion that transnational American Studies benefits from, even *requires*, attention to this earlier, often neglected, time?

Our answer takes the form of a thought experiment: a new mapping of the Americas that encodes time as well as space. The relative ease with which we now move around or communicate with others far away distorts our sense of how humans' locations, and the places where they can go, affect who they see themselves to be. Imagine that we could construct a sort of temporal-migrational map of the Americas before 1800 — a map that assigned gradients of density and depth to paths of frequent and rapid movement, or that expanded and compressed space depending on how often and easily people moved through it — the result, we believe, would be a picture of the Americas that had less to do with national boundaries than we tend to think when we look back upon the past from the present. Attentive to how and why humans moved, and how quickly they moved, such a map would provide a clearer, truer picture of affiliations, identifications, alliances in this hemisphere. It also should and indeed would have to change the practice of American Studies focused on the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries through its visual documentation of how peripheral, arbitrary, or after-the-fact national boundaries and identities were within American history.

Revising the question we posed earlier about American lives, but with attention to this question of the relation of time and place, will highlight some of what we mean here. Our revised question, then, is who

moved within or towards early America? How did they do so, and how long did it take? Let's consider three examples from one year, 1704.

First, in December of this year, Sarah Kemble Knight, a widow of Boston, travelled by horse, foot, and ferry to New York in order to settle a relative's estate. This round-trip journey of some four hundred miles, with a stay of two weeks in New York, took five months with various pauses and rests along the way. When she reached Manhattan, Knight responded to it as a pleasant but largely foreign land, far more diverse than Boston. It was a place where "hearths were laid with the finest tile that I ever see," "The English [went] very fasheonable in their Dress," the Dutch had their own clothes and manners, and the religious landscape was far more diverse.<sup>32</sup> Nothing in New York was as jarring to her, though, as the poverty and lack of refinement she found in rural southern New England. During her passage through all these spaces Knight mused, endured, and wryly observed, sometimes in verse, for the benefit of the audience she knew she would have back home.

Second, earlier that same year, also in the Colony of Massachusetts, Jean-Baptiste Hertel du Rouville led a combined force of French, Pocumtucs, Abenaki, Iroquois, Wyandot, and Pennacook fighters to raid the settlement of Deerfield. They took over one hundred English captives on a forced march of some three hundred miles to New France. This journey, which eighty-nine captives survived, varied in its length depending on the captives' destinations, with the shortest retreat from Deerfield lasting twenty-seven days but with the majority reaching Fort Chambly "about a month and a half after the assault," according to Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney.<sup>33</sup> It was a journey shorter than Knight's, but far more difficult, and it entailed a much more profound and traumatic experience of the foreign. "Who can tell what sorrows pierced our souls, when we saw

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Kemble Knight: *The Journal of Madam Knight*, Introduction by George Parker Winship, Boston 1920, pp. 53, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney: *Captors and Captives. The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield*, Amherst 2003, p. 138.

ourselves carried away from God's sanctuary, to go into a strange land?" asked John Williams, one of the most famous of these captives, in the sermon he delivered upon his return.<sup>34</sup>

Third, in the same year when these expeditions from Massachusetts took place, thousands of other captives were forced to weave a highly profitable web of transatlantic commerce well beyond the bounds of New England. One hundred ships of English, Dutch, French, and Portuguese ownership set out from the west coast of Africa — the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, Senegambia — seeking destinations such as Antigua, Martinique, the Dutch Caribbean, Barbados, Brazil, Jamaica, and Virginia. These ships carried slaves in quantities ranging from one hundred to over six hundred, making a journey of approximately four thousand miles, which lasted between forty-eight (for the ship *Martha*, from Whydah to Nevis) and one hundred and four (for the ship *Whidah*, from Whydah to Jamaica) days. Among the ships that reached their destination, between 5 and 19% of the slaves on board died.<sup>35</sup> No narratives record the experiences of these thousands of Africans from that particular year of the slave trade. That they were even more bewildered and horrified than Williams, though, more driven to despair, goes without saying, even as the shock they personally felt took place amidst a wide-scale normalization of their experiences and their identities as chattel. "I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits," wrote Olaudah Equiano of the Middle Passage he remembered experiencing — or as Carretta argues, claimed to have experienced — in the 1750s. Equiano's fear that the men who had captured him were determined to cook and eat him, was, after all, at least a metaphorically accurate description of how the slave trade consumed humans as labor.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John Williams: *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*, Boston 1707, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, Web, 16 Mar. 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Olaudah Equiano: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*, In: *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta, New York 2003, p. 55.

If one thing is clear from this assortment of journeys to and within America in a single year, it is that the time-span of a journey did not correlate with the distance to be travelled, let alone to the relative misery and disorientation of the travelers. The least traumatic journey of these three took the longest. New York was, in this sense, farther away from Boston than either city was from the Gold Coast. Raw distance in space also did not correlate with trajectories of identification and connection, as networks of epistolary correspondence and luxury trade readily demonstrate. The terrain, the mode of transport, the reasons for and conditions of travel all affected what the journey was like, how long it took, and how it affected the traveler's sense of who he or she was and where he or she felt at home.

These journeys, and the experiences of those who took them, also had little to do with the boundaries and categories of nation. If nation was there, it often was a secondary category of identity, even of territory, and rarely before the 1770s was that national identity actually American. Sarah Knight approached the Dutch in New York as different, but to some degree she also viewed the "fasheonable" English there as alien. She felt and expressed relative kinship with both groups, though, in opposition to the *vulgaris* of all races and nations populating the countryside. For her the primary lines of identification were of city versus country. Williams, caught up in a peripheral theater of Queen Anne's War (or the War of Spanish Succession), in which England and France along with their various allies jostled for supremacy, was less disturbed to be among the French and various Indian peoples than he was to be among Roman Catholics. For him religion was the most salient and crucial category of identification. And surely nation — at least European nation, with the apparatus of a nation state — meant little to the miserable victims of the slave trade amidst their own landscape of horrors, as they were jumbled together with each other across the lines of ethnicity, language, tribe, or place to be harnessed (literally and conceptually) by the developing ideology of race.

Our point is that the ways in which the paths of movement within early America, as well as to and from these two continents and scattered islands, reveals a map that has little to do with nation. To be sure, hints of nation are visible in trajectories of migration, correspondence, and trade, and

in the affiliations colonists felt to their European points of origin as well as to metropolitan centers of governance and culture. The whole picture, though, is vastly more complex than a focus on nations and the national can encompass. It is also a picture that continues to shape American identities and cultures, whether those who toss about the term “American” mean to designate the United States or the two continents of the Western hemisphere. After all, as the term “flyover country” suggests, it is still the case that many residents of the major east coast cities tend to feel more kinship with the residents of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and London than with the residents of the nation’s more rural interior. To attend to the map — especially the kind of map we imagine — is to see more clearly what America looks like today, and what “America” signifies globally, beyond the boundary and idea of nation. The peoples and cultures of these two continents are more visible, even those usually rendered invisible, when we see beyond the boundaries and categories of nation, looking at texts, lives, events, and cultural phenomena that bypass the circumference designated by the initials “U.S.” Going back in time facilitates this renegotiation of space. Transnational scholarship is more viable and successful when it takes into account the pre-national.