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Introduction: The Indispensable Work of the Transnational American Studies Community

ALFRED HORNUNG
Editor in Chief

This spring issue of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* contains a thematic cluster of global reflections on the US 2024 election by twelve international colleagues and four scholars affiliated with US American institutions. It is followed by four excerpts from recent publications in the *Forward* Section. The common subject and research object are the discussion and analysis of the way in which political issues, historical developments, and cultural productions of the United States of America reverberate around the world. The contributions of scholars from Belgium, China, Denmark, France, Hungary, India, Italy, and Poland along with American-based reactions from California, Michigan, New Mexico, and New York relate their own experiences of the election results with references to classic American writers and critics as well as international movements and legislation. All of them address transnational issues and repercussions, some of them written from the perspective of different cultural backgrounds in a host country. Likewise, the four excerpts in the *Forward* Section focus on the transnational range of American politics, culture, and citizenship within and outside of the continental United States. Jodi Kim's study *Settler Garrison* takes us to the military bases of American troops in Asia: South Korea, Japan, Okinawa and Guam; in *Illegal Immigrants/Model Minorities: The Cold War of Chinese American Narrative*, Heidi Kim examines the cautious oscillation of Asian immigrants between their illegal status in the US and complying by the rules of the model minorities, here exemplified with respect to Jade Snow Wong's different versions of autobiographies; this form of W. E. B. Du Bois's double consciousness also governs Anita Gonzalez's *Shipping Out: Race, Performance, and Labor at Sea* in which she relates her performance as a destination lecturer on board cruise ships in the Caribbean, building on her expertise as an African American academic and specialist in theater

studies who negotiates between her task as an edutainer for a medley of mostly white audiences and her role among the international crew of the ship, mostly from the Global South. Twice Mark Twain figures in this issue under the guidance of his most qualified interpreter, Shelley Fisher Fishkin. In the thematic cluster, Shelley edited a sampling of Twain's very pertinent and explicit comments on American politics and politicians. In the *Forward* section, she gives us a glimpse into her 2025 Yale University Press publication, *Jim: The Life and Afterlives of Huckleberry Finn's Comrade* and presents her analysis of Jim's ideological representation in Soviet films of the 1930s and two quite different cultural-political perceptions in two German films from 1968 and 2012. These kinds of contributions, the global and wide distribution of comments on the elections and the research on Americans abroad, could not have been done from a merely national perspective within the continental United States. They also could not have provided the kind of insights and knowledge derived from a transnational American studies approach.

Borrowing President Bill Clinton's commitment to the global role of "the United States [as] the indispensable nation" in his second Inaugural Address of 1997 which recognizes the interdependence of nations and the belief that "we are all … part of the same family" (Clinton 1997), we see this issue as the indispensable work of the transnational American studies community. It is a form of scholarly and scientific collaboration, first established in the European Enlightenment in which American politicians and diplomats participated during their stays in Paris as they negotiated the peace treaty between England and the newly founded United States: Benjamin Franklin and the later presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. During his stay in France, Jefferson not only served as a representative of the United States but also participated in the scholarly activities of the Republic of Letters. According to Jefferson, such scholarly communities "are always in peace, however their nations may be at war. Like the republic of letters they form a great fraternity spreading over the whole earth, & their correspondence is never interrupted by any civilized nation" (Jefferson to John Hollins, February 19, 1809).[1] In this letter he recalls what he reputedly had included in a letter to Francis Hopkinson writing from Paris in 1785 in which he reemphasized the spirit of the enlightenment that "the most unfriendly nations, in the midst of their animosities, have respected those laws which protected the scholars and the learned in their pursuits" (Jefferson to Francis Hopkinson, July 13, 1785). Jefferson's persuasion and practice of an unimpeded exchange of ideas beyond national borders is the credo of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* reenacted in this issue.

The editors of the journal would like to express their gratitude to all authors of this issue and thank them for providing knowledge and insights from the vantage point of their academic affiliation abroad and at home. Special thanks go to *JTAS* editors Kevin Gaines and Jennifer Reimer's initiative of putting together the thematic cluster of global reactions to the US election and pursuing this goal with dedication and scholarly care. In their Introduction and Afterword to this section, they coordinate and

contextualize the different perspectives and provide reflections on their own experiences of the America First presidency. We also acknowledge the editorial curation of the four excerpts from recent publications undertaken by Hoger Droessler and Aiko Takeuchi-Demirci, substituting for *Forward* editor Jennifer Reimer. Last but not least, we owe special thanks to all the very competent members of the transnational editorial management team, guided by the expertise of both managing editors Sabine Kim and Vanessa Evans. We all live and practice the transnational republic of letters in the twenty-first century.

Notes

[1] "From Thomas Jefferson to John Hollins, 19 February 1809," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-9834