

# The Management of Diversity, Culture Wars, and the Burning of Los Angeles

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The imperialism of literary studies over the last decade has known no bounds, and the world is, now, the oyster of literature departments in the United States. We do cultural studies, we study culture, and we comprehend culture as a global term; there is nothing that is now considered outside the purview of literary studies—in my department alone there are people working on hydrology, chaos theory, bodybuilding, the Irish Republican Army, mysticism, the history of psychology, Elvis Presley, art history, queer theory, the practice of obstetrics, labor history, virtual reality, endocrinology, popular music, philosophy, quack medicine, video art, early radio, Southeast Asian autobiography, political theory—and on and on, and several of those people are me. This proliferation of acceptable topics in literary studies, or the rise of cultural studies within literary studies (some would say the usurpation of literary by cultural studies) is one important strand in the academic history that leads up to among other things, the revision of curricula along multicultural lines.

Intertwined with this history are popular cultural artifacts of various kinds. Disney's "It's A Small World After All" and Michael Jackson *et al*'s "We Are the World," are, respectively, early and middle formulations of the celebration of what might be called umbrella diversity.

Ethnically thematic baseball caps—not just the “X” caps and African motherland caps found at cultural diversity fairs and other cultural events, but also the “Italian Stallion” or “Thank God I’m Irish” caps found at truck stops around the country—continue the roots-worship of the 1970s that coincided with Arthur Haley’s teleplay, and are expressions of the celebrations of the particular forms of diversity necessary to that umbrella. Market-segmented advertising, *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, currently popular African-American sitcoms, the crossover of rap, the popular and critical success of *The Color Purple*, *The Mambo Kings*, and *The Joy Luck Club*, new literary canons and new multicultural curricula all rely on this same complex form of identity and difference, in particular the same highlighting of difference accompanied by the commercial corraling of diverse populations into target audiences.<sup>1</sup>

Partaking of both the academic and the popular, the culture wars helped make multiculturalism what it is today. Those wars may, however, be over before they ever really got started. The cultural left’s rhetoric of resistance in politicized subdisciplinary journals, like the cultural-right essayist’s quoting of easily discountable excerpts of excess, always functioned more as forms of community building for a specific readership than they served as forays in a debate, much less a war. Every major research university in the country now offers every minority literature course they can staff (and most are actively recruiting staff prepared to teach more), and the majority of anthologies and syllabi have gone multicultural at least to some extent. For most academics at research institutions in the United States, the culture wars continue to exist only as skirmishes between liberal arts faculties and those outside specific faculties—either legislatures, media pundits, parents, trustees, or administrators voicing the concerns of these groups. Those writers that might be construed as the obvious antagonists—Bloom, Hirsch, Kimball, Schlesinger, Bennett, Cheney—have remarkably little force within these academic communities, except insofar as they serve as rhetorical antagonists, argumentative straw-people, images of the enemy.<sup>2</sup> For the aca-

1 *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, ed. Stewart Brand went through many editions through the 1970s; Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982); Oscar Hijuelos, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989); Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Putnam’s, 1989).

2 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988); E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990);

democratic left to continue acting like a progressive minority battling monolithic institutions, rather than like the center of an evolving institution, is disingenuous, counterproductive, and perhaps beside the point.

The six bits or anecdotes that follow attempt to delineate the relations between study and production in the transition to the multicultural university, and there is a collective moral to the stories. The curricular desire multiculturalism might answer appears clear—it would be a desire for a difference from provincialism: American provincialism, Euro-American provincialism, academic provincialism, white male provincialism, middle class provincialism. But in as much as multiculturalism (as a concept) seems to hold out the possibility of an end to all provincialisms, it remains at least as insipid as inspiring a dream. Multiculturalism, of course, is only one paradigm for difference. Cosmopolitanism, which is related but clearly distinct in its connotations of urban and elite knowledges, is another. And cosmopolitanism, I want to argue, comes closer to the truth of all of our current conjunctures. There will necessarily always be some aspect of elite knowledge structuring the conjuncture of established academic and other knowledges, if for no other reason than that established academic knowledges are elite knowledges. That this is far from a trivial theoretical point I hope will be illustrated by the following six anecdotes.

### Teaching Anecdote 1: From Western Civ. to Just CIV

A scant seven and eight years ago I took part in the revamping of Stanford University's Western Culture program, with all its 'meetings and forums, its sit-ins and protests, its national news coverage and administrative groveling to alumni. I worked there along with people like Mary Louise Pratt, the late Jack Winkler, Russell Berman, Sabine MacCormick, Clay Carson, Joel Beinin, Rick Maddox, Ann Swidler, and Renato Rosaldo. all of whom have some credentials as radical or inno-

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Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America* (New York: Norton, 1992): William Bennett and Lyn Cheney served as Secretary of Education and Director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, respectively, during the Reagan-Bush years and gave speeches on multiculturalism that were widely reported and reprinted.

vative thinkers, developing a course we called "Conflict and Change in Western Culture," meant to challenge and supplement, in the Derridean sense of adding to by replacing, the course as it had been taught for the last several decades. I don't know how much the kinds of arguments I was making at that point about the necessity of leaving behind the Plato-to-NATO narrative of Western cultural attainment seemed like news because it was news to me, as a graduate student who basically didn't know much of anything, or whether the arguments seemed radical simply because William Bennett, Allan Bloom, and the stuffiest old birds on the faculty were vehemently arguing against them as radical nihilism, or because the major media coverage we received made us feel like we were news. Clearly in some sense our arguments were not new. They relied, for instance, on a very standard notion of cultural relativism current in anthropological circles since Franz Boas. And although some of us saw the syllabus as a working out of the Derrida contra Foucault debates in favor of Foucault, all that in practice tended to mean was an embrace of culturally critical aspects of Nietzsche's thought and of the philosophical and economic Marx—hardly entirely new stuff. Nonetheless I think what we managed to do—for instance to have students read the Koran and the Islamic North African Platonists of the 15th century, for instance, and Quechua accounts of the conquest of Peru, were new, and were exciting and justifiable responses to the provincialisms and historical partialities of the syllabi we would have otherwise inherited.

Many of our students, who could choose our course from a menu of options that fulfilled the requirement for a year-long sequence of courses on the history of Western culture, came from the ranks of the hip, the disaffected, and the politicized. Many, of course, approved more fervently our time slots than our syllabus; we fit their schedules better than we fit their intellectual commitments. But even some of these students came to see our course as constituting an important vanguard. We accounted at that time—1985-88—for some 180 out of 1500 or so freshmen, and we saw ourselves, self-righteously, as a kind of Du Boisian talented tenth readying ourselves to uplift our unenlightened brothers and sisters out of the depths of their provincial miseducation.

One day—it was one of those sense- and mind-beguiling Northern California coastal, breezy spring days, teaching outside under the palm trees—I had what I think of as an anti-conversion experience. I was

passionately teaching Nietzsche and Foucault, and saying, with all the ardor of a graduate student unsure of his dissertation, "So, you see, 'Truth' is nothing but the interpretation of those who happen to be in power." And my very quick, smart, visionary pre-law, pre-med, and pre-business school students' eyes lit up: "I am going to be in power," those eyes said, "whatever I think will be the Truth! Key, dude!" I realized then and there that there were vaster possibilities for what I considered the misappropriation of knowledge than I had until that lime considered.

It was with this experience in the back of my mind that I read, last year, an issue of *Newsweek* with a cover story titled "Managing Diversity." Although the lead article was about curricular and textbook controversies, with various academic heavies weighing in with textual soundbites, there were also a number of sidebars about corporate America. Major corporations were providing, these stories reported, remedial diversity training for those of their managers unfortunate enough to have received their bachelor's degrees before the diversity revolution. The leaders of such seminars come from the ranks of otherwise unemployed PhD's in the humanities, and the training consists of activities similar to those surrounding the study of the new canons in the college classroom. A man in Iowa City who is a manager of a production line at Proctor and Gamble—it is a small plant; in fact it only makes trial-size toothpaste—recently went through such training and he is now crazy about black women novelists, and will bend your ear about the beauty, power, and wisdom of the texts of Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Toni Morrison. *Newsweek* was clear about what the value of such training was—these mostly white, mostly male managers were overseeing the production of a diverse work force. In order to manage them effectively. Managers need to understand workers; and the model of understanding is predominately cultural: to understand someone you need to understand their culture.

Now it is fairly clear that neither Henry Louis Gates, Jr., nor bell hooks, to mention two noted African American literary scholars, intend to produce knowledge about black cultural production in order that managers at Proctor and Gamble's Iowa City trial-size toothpaste plant can maximize toothpaste production and, we have to assume, minimize agitation for wage increases or improved conditions. The last thing we at "Conflict and Change" had in mind was knowledge that would help

those in the managerial elite make their workers feel good about earning minimum wage, or help them effectively manage their American firm's plant south of the border. We didn't teach the relations between conflict and change so that managers could do their part to minimize both. But I think there is no other way to understand why this once radical knowledge, produced by the leftiest of campus lefties, has been so thoroughly embraced by the academy as a whole. This is not simply, in Marcuse's terms, repressive tolerance, it is celebration. We have fairs, fiestas of diversity. The MLA job list (which lists almost every academic position in the country in English and American literary studies), in this driest year since the 1970s, had more advertisements for specialists in race and gender than in any other specialty. Students entering my classes are not only much more likely to have read Kate Chopin or Charlotte Perkins Gilman than Henry James, they are more likely to have read Zora Neale Hurston than William Faulkner, Phillis Wheatley than Benjamin Franklin. The newest, most diverse canons determine all graduate work. And corporate America eagerly picks up the slack.

"Conflict and Change" was the pilot program for the requirement that has now officially replaced Western Culture at Stanford. The new requirement is known as Culture, Ideas, and Values, or by its acronym, CIV. Like a sieve, this new net has its own holes, and can be and has been accused of all sorts of new provincialisms. But it is, now, the fundamental humanities requirement at a fairly conservative and very prestigious institution. The voices of Bennett and Bloom, who had once seemed to threaten all that we would-be radicals held dear, now sound like simply the doomed counterarguments momentarily necessary in any discursive changing of the guard. The alumni forums on the necessity of preserving the Great Tradition have been replaced by alumni seminars on the major world and American minority cultures. The big business community that we radicals saw as supporting cultural neo-conservatism, just as we assumed that cultural neo-conservatism existed as an ideological effect of capital and corporate power—Bennett so clearly to us a Reagan1 Republican1 corporate shill—those businessmen (some now our former students) have turned out to be, in effect, our closest allies.

## Teaching Anecdote 2: Country and Western Culture

The scene is a small classroom at a large Midwestern university. A select group of fifteen students is in its first meeting with two professors, one from history, myself from English, team-teaching a course on nineteenth century cultural history in an interdisciplinary honors program. In an attempt to get some elementary notions of the politics of culture on the table and to introduce a central term in nineteenth-century debates about language, the students are asked to talk about "taste." Is there such a thing as good taste? These are smart kids. They have learned cultural relativism until they can roll it off their tongues, with a sigh to be doing it again and a bored glance at their nails, for any new professors they meet, in relation to any subject presented, in the language of any number of liberal arts disciplines. There is no such thing, they told their pros, as good or bad taste; people—different groups, different individuals—just have different values and therefore like different things. It's a plural world, they said, a plural culture here in the United States, even in the Midwest, and that meant, necessarily, plural systems of value, plural notions of good taste. Just a few short years earlier, such arguments had seemed to be a way for my students to engage and think through the cultural issues of their time. In a flash, that time has passed. Students are bored by an issue that has already been totally demystified by *Time*, *Newsweek*, Ted Koppel, and a succession of glum TA's. It is old news. And the national editors have taught us all how to talk about all of the issues involved without offending whatever benighted souls have been left behind in the pitched camps. They have taught us to transcend political correctness by naming it, scoffing at it, and adopting it.

But the students misread their teachers this time. We didn't want to hear the line from last year either. We wanted the students to consider the cultural meanings of taste for nineteenth-century gatekeepers, not to display their rote learning. So we pushed them a little, at one point by turning the conversation to music. Yes, we know you all like all kinds of music, some more than others, and that you are perfectly cosmopolitan when it comes to Nigerian high-life or the gamelan orchestras of Bali, not to mention pop extravagance, decadence, or silliness, or even the less polished side of stuff only heard on college radio stations. You don't

love it all, but you can understand why some people do, and yes, you can appreciate it in various ways. But come on, we said, heavy pop metal? You like Whitesnake? You like Warrant? Re serious!

OK, the students said, heavy metal is only rarely any good at all. Yes, it's the stupid stuff our little brothers like. Yes, you're right, no taste at all. (Accompanied, of course, with some backsliding acknowledgements that they can see why the youngsters like it.) But then one student offered, "It isn't metal that's the test case, it's country. I hate country, and I have to admit, I think it's always bad. In bad taste? Maybe. Rut just bad. I don't care. Country sucks." This brought a wave of laughing agreement, amens, and testimonials. My colleague, an easily amused fellow, who knew that that I was at the time moonlighting with a local country band, was delighted by this turn in the conversation, and prompted more and more confessionals, winking at me the while. Not a single student stood up for country music. All agreed that perhaps, after all, there is no accounting for taste, and that if they weren't otherwise overjoyed at having escaped Burt, Coon Rapids, Pocahontas, and Oskaloosa for the wide worlds made available in Iowa City, diverse cultural mecca of the heartland, the fact that one could hear other kinds of music there still would have been reason enough to leave the family farm and the farm town to their own sappy, Nashvillian devices.

I had played in two different kinds of bands in the greater metropolitan Iowa City area, and so I knew that there was virtually no overlap between the people who come to hear country music and the people who come to hear R&B and the blues, and specifically that members of the "university community" came to see the blues regularly but only formed part of the country audience when they were doing amateur ethnographic research. Except that is, for the non-academic staff. My country band's bass player was on the grounds crew. The pedal steel player was a carpenter for the physical plant. What separates the country and blues audiences—although this is changing as country is being remarketed as a mainstream cultural product—is class. Farmers, clerks, laborers, housecleaners, and secretaries, the audience for country in this area is well below the state or national average for college degrees; the blues audience in Iowa City is way above the national average. People in the country audience often tell me of a brother or child or cousin at the U. or who was once at the U.; these upwardly mobile relatives have almost without exception turned their backs on country.



So these students, who have learned to respect all cultures, all roots cultures and all current cultures around the globe have disdain only for the one they have themselves left behind to be celebrated by the rest of their families and the 75% of their high-school classmates who won't get a four-year degree. All roots are valid and valuable except their own. The majority of their former peers will not attend the University, but will come only for trade and maintenance work or minor clerical positions, and therefore will never be educated into a cosmopolitanism that might teach them that their favorite music sucks.

As I worked in the country band and more and more become part of that elaborate, almost baroque subculture, some of the difference I and my new colleagues felt—quite strongly at first—began to disappear. We had reduced each others' provincialisms to an extent, perhaps; we had learned to censor ourselves a bit and had found a 'politically correct' (meaning politically inoffensive) language for our interchanges; and we had come to care for and respect each other. I had gone to my first rehearsal with this band on the very night that the bombing began in the Persian Gulf massacre, when I was, as most everyone I knew was, walking around in shock, glued to CNN, aghast within what seemed a global terror. I must have gone on a bit of rant, because Jim asked me very politely and hesitatingly, when I was through, "So do you consider yourself to be, then, a, a—I don't know how to say this—I don't mean to insult you or anything, but do you consider yourself to be a liberal?" We ended up with enough respect to have arguments and to end them without agreeing. But what continually brought me up short—more with audience members who didn't know me and therefore didn't censor themselves—is the virulent racism in this culture. During the Los Angeles riots two comments in particular stayed with me. Our new soundman's fairly gleeful comment was "Those stupid niggers, they're stealin' five and six TVs and they ain't even got electricity!" suggesting that the looters were in for a big surprise when they got home, set up a bank of TVs, and tried to turn them all on. And a bass player for another country band, who I met for the first time and complimented on the way he "popped" his bass—a vaguely technical term—said, "I wish I was in L.A. right now, poppin' niggers! I'd say 'I got your TV right here! *Rat-a-tat-tat-tat!*'" (In terms of cultural transmission of course, his bass style had come from the African American funk and fusion players of the late 1970s, but I didn't think to bring that up at the time.) What marks the

difference between many of my fellow country musicians and I more than anything (except perhaps their social status and salary differential—even at the bottom of my salary ladder I make almost twice my bass player, the groundskeeper's salary; the latter has worked at the University twice as long as I have) is our racial attitudes. There is perhaps no more salient cultural capital, to put it in Bourdieu's terms, than diversity training. Multicultural attitudes and knowledge are undoubtedly now more important markers of those to whom positions within the managerial and professional elite are open than knowledge of Shakespeare or the Greeks. I assume the importance of television sets to the racist images reflects, as well, the anger against what came to be called the "cultural elite," those media producers who would deny the validity of the "provincialisms" of non-managerial workers, and who represent now to them, thanks to what in retrospect was a quite deft Reagan-Bush smokescreen, the elite itself. That this "cultural elite," comprised by Dan Quayle's reckoning of movie stars, talk-show hosts, and a Pew academics, has become the displaced object of class hatred will go down in the history of class relations as one of the more remarkable ideological manifestations of modern times.

One of the arguments for the expansion of the canon has been that it is bringing to light what Foucault called subjugated knowledges, making audible the silenced voices of the past, and of course this is true. What Foucault also argued, however is that such a reconstruction would be insurrectionary, and those of us who followed his lead felt that Shakespeare's sisters were allies in our own insurrections, insurrections that had at their foundation an empathy, a felt connection to the disenfranchised. Stephen Greenblatt has a brilliant and troubling essay that begins by discussing Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society*, a book central to arguments about the developing world for a couple of crucial decades. Lerner claimed that the difference between modern and traditional societies is empathy, that modern people know how to put themselves in others' shoes, and this is what makes possible interaction across various tribal, ethnic, or cultural differences. What Lerner calls empathy, Greenblatt writes, Shakespeare calls Iago. It is Iago's ability to see things from the perspective of others that makes possible his manipulations and machinations.<sup>3</sup> Iago is, in fact, the modern man who

3 Stephen Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power" in *Society and Literature*, ed Edward Said, English

understands racial difference.

I am not at all claiming that my country music culture is "traditional;" its traditionalisms tend to be manufactured in Korea and bought in national chain stores; it is not even rural—Nashville is no cow town and neither is Iowa City. Country music culture is a class phenomena that affects traditionalisms, just as certain enclaves of elite WASP culture do. I just point out that its lack of empathy in racial matters, however deplorable for its real effects, is not necessarily answered by an argument for more modern empathy, for more understanding of the workings of difference. With David Duke, the Ku Klux Klan grand poobah turned blow-dried, TV-friendly politician, we perhaps see the effects of a combination of racism and modernist and modernizing empathy. And of course the last insurrection of subjugated knowledge I would like to see is that of the knowledge of racism, which we in the academy dismiss as not a subjugated knowledge at all, but as an ignorance, which is clearly theoretically unsound, however practically wise. Again, here, I find evidence that diversity is a pragmatic concept rather than the more broadly humanist concept or concepts used to promote it—that mutual respect is necessary across lines of difference, for instance, or that knowledge can conquer the ignorance that breeds hatred. Under the new regime not multiculturalism but a specific form of cosmopolitanism, as it has since long before talk of cultural diversity hit the scene, attends the goals of higher education.

## Annals of Scholarship 1: Local Color

In the late nineteenth century in America a literary genre arose, and in fact became one of the dominant forms in the literary marketplace, that has some obvious bearing on the question of provincialism and its alternatives. "Local color" stories, as they were called, were among the most popular fictions from the 1870s on. Such stories were championed by the literary tastemakers of the day, such as William Dean Howells, the dean of American letters, who praised them for their verisimilitude and for their ability to bring different communities, different customs, and

different ways of life to national consciousness. Aware of the vast differences of culture from region to region, literary theorists and polemicists argued that the dream of an American literature could only become real through the aggregation of such local tellings—a precursor of the representative canon. And individual local color writers—notably Hamlin Garland, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sara Orne Jewett, Edward Eggleston, Mary Austin, but also including writers seen then as local writers but since elevated above that status for being more "universal" in their appeal, such as Jack London, Frank Norris, Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, Kate Chopin, and later Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, and others—these writers were assumed to have special knowledge of a specific cultural region because they were natives, and they could therefore represent their own people and own culture accurately. Spokespeople for this loose literary movement, especially Howells, Garland, and Norris, argued that Americans could construct a true nation, at the cultural level, only through such local representation. Like the House of Representatives, hundreds of writers, each with their own regional sensibilities and interests, would collectively author the bills of an American literature. This idea has an oddly familiar ring, accustomed as we have become to the idea of a representative syllabus. With the case of Little Tree still before us ("Little Tree" was a prizewinning author, critically acclaimed as the authentic voice of Native Americans, who scandalously not only turned out to be white, but a former Ku Klux Klan speech-writer), such claims to authenticity also have a very contemporary ring.<sup>4</sup>

The classic local color story has an identifiable form, as in the case of Sarah Orne Jewett's typical collection, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, which represents the people of Maine through the eyes of a summer visitor. This visitor's own story is told as a frame tale; she is from Boston; her family is from Maine; she had spent some time there herself; she is an authoress who now comes to Maine to write. Hamlin Garland's "Up the Coulee" is a story told from the perspective of an actor who is returning to the home of his youth in Wisconsin, but who has after years fully assimilated the values of New York City, now his home. Willa Cather's city-living Jim Burden tells us the story of Antonia. Norris's Eastern author/protagonist Presley refracts the "story of California" in *The Octopus*. Edward Eggleston's *Hoosier Schoolmaster* is not really a

4 Little Tree [Forrest Carter], *The Education of Little Tree* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990)

Hoosier, but an Easterner who has come out to civilize the frontier.<sup>5</sup> Again and again the very form of local color stories belies their urban, cosmopolitan perspective. In each case the authors are not so much native informants as they are emigrants who have lost faith with their provincial origins, and these stories were clearly produced for an urban audience as well. They were, in the very facts of their production, publication and reception, cosmopolitan texts. They could no more speak the authentic voice of provinciality than their urban audience could have heard or wanted to hear such a voice.

There may be no alternative to this. Think for instance of the arguments about the work of Chinua Achebe, who was at first hailed as the true voice of Nigeria, then castigated as too British in his training, perspective and audience. His place as the voice of Nigeria was taken over by Amos Tutuola, whose productions in a Ibo/English pidgin, retaining the traditional cosmology of the Ibo, gave Western readers a powerful sense of immediacy and authenticity. Tutuola has since himself been accused of catering to the sensationalist and imperialist desire for a crossover hit. In the late nineteenth century such complaints were rare; a local color story might be accused of lack of fidelity, but never because of the conflicted cultural commitments of the author. These regional representatives were fully expected to write in the context of cosmopolitanism—not in the cynical way in which we expect US Representatives to place the interests of the beltway above those of their region, but in a fully validated way—that is to write with a cosmopolitan perspective to a cosmopolitan audience, wherever they might live, though this tended to be the Eastern cities. And these texts were cosmopolitan in their relation to elite understandings as well. They portrayed the struggling poor, for instance, along a continuum from the pathetic to the picturesque.

Local color writing is responsible for some of the earliest ethnic texts in America. Abraham Cahan's work was praised for its fidelity to the local world of Hester Street; Howells praised as exemplars of local color writing both Laurence Dunbar, who wrote stories and poems of the black South and Edith Maud Eaton, or Sui Sin Far, who wrote stories of both Japanese- and Chinese-Americans. Even through the Harlem re-

5 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1896); Hamlin Garland, *Main-Trawled Roads* (New York: Century, 1893); Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1900); Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1918); Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (New York: Orange Judd, 1871).

naissance—see Zona Gale's introduction to Jessie Fauset's *The Chinaberry Tree*, for instance<sup>6</sup>—ethnic texts were justified because they made local knowledge national. Local color extended to cultures outside the US as well, as in the case of Lafcadio Hearn's writings about Japan. Hearn married a Japanese woman and was adopted into her family, lived a Japanese life as a son-in-law in his in-laws' house, and wrote versions of Japanese folk tales "authentic" enough to become the sources for a rendition of the tales by the Japanese filmmaker Kurosawa. But Hearn's regular writings for the American magazine market maintained, if nothing else, the double-consciousness of local tradition and cosmopolitan sensibility.

Any attempt to represent cultural difference may need to follow some such track as that laid down by local color writing. As long as the social groups of the audience and those of the subjects of a text do not overlap, some mediating perspective, some empathy is needed, and the result is almost invariably, or I could even say is logically, a form of cosmopolitanism. The nineteenth century writers were aware of this, as were their critics. To survey the provinces was in no way to put one's own values on hold. Reveling in the exoticism of Harlem's cultural milieu in fiction, as it was for New Yorkers dancing in Harlem clubs, provided a form of entertainment, not a cultural alternative. The favorite works of local color writing, even when they seem to criticize the cultural center, as in the case, for instance, of Huck Finn's critique of civilization, do so through that center's cherished fantasies of cultural transcendence—in Huck Finn's case the individual errand into the wilderness, the youthful rejection of constraint, and the melding into nature. An important step beyond local color, multiculturalism may be seen as among other things, the imperialist fantasy of cultural transcendence par excellence.

<sup>6</sup> Zona Gale, "Introduction," in Jessie Redmon Fauset, *The Chinaberry Tree* (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1931).

## Annals of Scholarship 2: America: A Family Matter

The 1920s is a decade in American cultural history that has long captured the popular imagination; booze, dance crazes, flagpole sitting, Al Capone, the lost generation, and, for our purposes, the Harlem Renaissance and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. In a novel from 1925 that has often been used to represent the jazz age, *The Great Gatsby*, one of the characters, Tom Buchanan, reads and enthusiastically recommends a book by "this man Goddard," which he says has changed his life. "Goddard" was a stand-in for Lothrop Stoddard (PhD Harvard), famous as an intelligence tester, who was one of a whole slough of academic experts writing scientifically about racial difference in the twenties. Goddard's book, which warns against impending race suicide, does not in fact change Tom's life. He goes on very much as before. But he does use it to justify some aspects of his private life, especially those tinged with class difference—most importantly the climax of the novel, the hit and run death of his working-class mistress.

The race books of the 1910s and 1920s enact some of the anti-provincialisms I and others have argued for in relation to current curricula. Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*, for instance, takes a global perspective. He starts in 500,000 BC and covers the history of homo sapiens across the entire earth. He also foresees an era of post-nationalist life, in which "far more value will be attached to racial in contrast to national or linguistic affinities." Like many of his contemporaries, he believes that race is important because every mixture of races produces a "leveling." And he believes that modern charity maintains defectives at the price of eventual race suicide. Grant was a fully accredited scientist, an officer of the American Geographical Society, the Museum of Natural History, and the New York Zoological Society, but his is a fairly wierd science. He concludes that Dante, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo Da Vinci were Nordic types, that Asian civilization was introduced by his Nords. King David of the Old Testament had some Nordic blood, as did Christ. Greek and Roman civilization, Persian civilization, the civilization on the Indian subcontinent—all these owed their "vitality" and accomplishments to Nordic invasions. He argued against ideas of the melting pot, against what he saw as the misplaced sentimentality of attempts to "deliberately blind

ourselves to all distinctions of race."<sup>7</sup> Grant had great respect for difference.

Lothrop Stoddard, in *The Revolt Against Civilization*, finds it fortunate that the last remnants of savagery—African "Bushmen" and Australian "Blackfellows"—are on the verge of extinction. But the "lure of the primitive" has nonetheless attracted revolutionary (for Stoddard read "devolutionary") souls who want to level civilization: "Yes, yes," he writes after his survey of modern trends in art, literature, and social thought, "'civilization is unbearable,' 'progress must be stopped,' 'equality must be established,' and so forth and so forth." Clinton Stoddard Burr's *America's Race Heritage* is also full of fears of "American manhood ... weakened by constant mongrel dilution," but it too argues from a global perspective for a post-nationalist ethic and for a respect for difference. We "must get rid of all notions of nationality which are puerile," Burr writes. "The time has come to banish national prejudices among folk of similar blood strain; and even men of different race, while they acknowledge the necessity of guarding their blood from admixture, must learn to respect and laud the best qualities in those of different race or creed or political ideals." Charles C. Josey's *Race and National Solidarity* asks the question of difference in the broadest way: "Is the destruction of all group consciousness possible?" The problem, Josey finds, is that our idealism, our desire for good for all or the end of armed conflict, for instance, is based on a conviction that good for all is possible. Internationalism, with its ideal of peace and mutual understanding, would rob people of their sense of belonging to a group, which is a necessary source of energy and ambition. Josey takes race pride to be a fundamentally useful form of human understanding, and one which is essential to social progress.<sup>8</sup>

These academic and popular debates permeated national politics as well. Woodrow Wilson's sneak preview and written endorsement of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) is well known. Wilson's testimonial was distributed as the first frame of the film, in which he claims that the story of the Ku Klux Klan reclaiming America for Americans from the black rapists running amok during reconstruction was the most

7 Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York: Scribners, 1916).

8 Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt Against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man* (New York: Scribners, 1922); Clinton Stoddard Burr, *America's Race Heritage* (New York, 1922); Charles Conant Josey, *Race and National Solidarity* (New York, 1923).



accurate picture of this era in American history yet produced. Warren G. Harding, in a campaign speech in 1920, said "There is abundant evidence of the dangers which lurk in racial differences. I do not say racial inequalities—I say racial differences.... The problem incident to racial differences must be accepted as one existing in fact and must be adequately met for the future security and tranquility of our people." He pledged himself to policies that would "guarantee not only assimilability of alien-born, but the adoption by all who come of American standards, economic and otherwise, and a full consecration of American practices and ideals." Charles W. Gould made clear why this "full consecration" was a good thing in *America: A Family Matter*. Like these other texts on race, Gould's takes a global perspective, and it too recounts the history of the species from the earliest evidence across the face of the globe. A race develops a "conformity of ideas and aspirations," he writes, and gives the white race in the centuries before the common era as an example: "The whole race throbbed with the same emotions, pulsated with the same ideas, and gradually came to have, as it were,... a peculiar and self-created aggregate individuality—attuned to vibrate in harmony and unison throughout the mass."<sup>9</sup>

And of course these same questions of race and national identity were taking their paradigmatically sinister turn in Germany in the twenties as well, along with a clearly sinister form of globalism. And in Germany racist and globalist arguments were embraced by the economically disenfranchised, among others, who were encouraged, by those with enough empathy to know how to manipulate them, to curb their own empathies with racially different neighbors. On the American scene then, as now, class difference regulated the ratio of empathy to racism—as can be seen by the way Ku Klux Klan officers appropriated the language of the academic race theorists—although now the ratios are clearly different. These connections are perhaps a bit forced, but the point, nonetheless, is that multicultural perspectives alone, even when accompanied by talk of respecting difference, do not necessarily make for an environment of true and, well, um, "liberal" tolerance. The same arguments can be used to quash interchange and movement towards equality and dignity that are used to foster them. The academic racist tracts from the

<sup>9</sup> Harding's speech is quoted in Russell Francis, *The Shadow of Blooming Grove: Warren G. Harding and His Times* (New York, 19. See Charles W. Gould, *America: A Family Matter* (New York, 1920).

twenties celebrated racial difference in terms at once both politically opposite and discursively similar to today's multiculturalists. Arguments about cultural difference and preservation can be used in order to encourage a politics of racial exclusion and privilege just as easily as they can be used to argue a politics of inclusion and equality.

### **Popular Culture 1: Global Advertising**

This is in some ways a teaching story as well. A student of mine, one of the yuppiest students I have ever known, one who walked briskly in a brisk business suit, snapping open her leather brief case on her lap as a prelude to any conversation, wrote a paper for me in the early 1980s on advertising, and specifically on notions of market segmentation. Since the paper turned out to be largely plagiarized from *Advertising Age* and the other trade journals, I had my first exposure to those journals in my attempt to explain the wild fluctuations of writing ability from paragraph to paragraph in this student's paper. What the advertising journals were full of—this is 1981-82—were theories, descriptions, and attempts to determine the success of various market-segmentation practices. The basic idea was that an agency should produce different ads for the same product for specific target audiences, Hispanically inflected ads (not just translations) in Hispanic neighborhoods, middle-class black ads for middle-class black publications, and the like.

This strategy was developed, in other words, at the same time that arguments for cultural diversity in curricula were developing. In fact, the lag would suggest that faculties picked up this theme somewhat later than the advertisers. In 1985 the prestigious international agency Saatchi and Saatchi went a step further and announced their theory of "global advertising." Given the interdependence of the world, this argument goes, and given the fairly crude way in which advertising works, the most efficient way to advertize on a global scale is to produce a single ad and broadcast it everywhere. The same representation of a blond and tan California beach party can sell Sunkist orange soda to Vietnamese immigrants in Texas, to businesspeople in Singapore, to skinheads in Germany, and to mall rats in Canberra. From 1985 through 1988 or so,

the trade journals discussed the merits, effectiveness, and theory of global advertising. The unspoken assumption of the advertisers—and perhaps we academics as well?—was that "global" did not include everyone, just potential consumers of their products, those with disposable income.

Global advertising turned out to be a bust, finally. The numbers just didn't work out. During the same period there was also talk of "event advertising," which is credited to the Orwellian 1984 Apple computer ad, played just once during the Superbowl in 1984, in which the Macintosh conquers the Big Brotherisms of its competitor, IBM. Apple logged one hundred million dollars of new orders in the 48 hours after the ad was aired. Event advertising, in which the preannounced showing of the ad becomes an event that people will watch for, think about, and talk about as an event—the various Bud Bowls ever since are probably the clearest, and clearly the stupidest examples—was theorized and evaluated in the trade journals and seemed to be doing well. But a spectacularly unsuccessful advertising event spelled its demise. Also for the Macintosh, this was a follow-up ad aired during the Superbowl in 1988, done by the same agency as the Big Brother ad. This was the so-called "lemmings ad," in which blindfolded businesspeople (significantly black, white, Asian, male, and female) walking single file in drab grey suits with identical brief cases (looking oddly like my Stanford plagiarizer, in fact) continue to walk numbly right over a cliff. Apple received overwhelmingly negative response to the ad and orders dropped. What the event proved, for many, was that market segmentation is, in fact, important. In an attempt to sell computers to businesspeople, representing them as mindless lemmings is probably not a good idea. Advertisers instead want in their advertisements images of target audiences which, like good texts for representative syllabi, authentically represent the dignity and humanity of the group.

The other trend has been towards notions of aesthetics. What worked about the Big Brother ad, these arguments go, was its strikingly aesthetic presentation, and it was the aesthetic effect that accounts for it working as an event and as persuasion. This notion I find to have an oddly ominous ring to it. I have noticed that my most disaffected and moodiest graduate students—that emotional cohort which five years ago was complaining about lack of representation on syllabi (mine, in other words)—are complaining about cultural studies, and arguing in various

ways for a return to aesthetics. This is not at all the Bennett-Bloom-Hirsch argument, which found either philosophical, social, traditional, or political justifications for the old canon. They argue instead about beauty divorced from the world, for the pure beauty of pure form, as in the New Criticism or in other forms of classicism. These students understand the relations between aesthetics and politics, they say, they just happen to be more interested in the former than the latter. One thing for us to consider as we gaze into the future of our own activity is that the next wave, already rolling in, may have assimilated multiculturalism but be nonetheless violently apolitical, and committedly aesthetic. Which brings us, of course, to Michael Jackson.

## Popular Culture 2: Black or White

Michael Jackson's recent video, to the song "Black or White," can be seen to comment on many of these same points. I assume most readers have seen it, but I'll provide a brief description. The first segment of the video shows the pasty-white MacCauley Calkins, of *Home Alone* fame, playing rock and roll guitar, fantasizing his rock stardom in his suburban adolescent bedroom. His father, played by George Wendt, who stars as the hapless and happy-go-lucky 'Norm' on TV's *Cheers*, yells at him to quiet down. In response the boy sets up enormous guitar amplifiers in the living room and literally blasts his father out of the house, through the roof in fact. Then the music starts and we find Michael Jackson dancing through a succession of scenes, one with Zulu dancers (so hey, when the Zulus have a Michael Jackson, we'll watch their videos,<sup>10</sup>) one with dancing Cossacks, one with Thai dancers, one through what appears to be a scene of an Indian attack in a bad Western movie. This section ends with Michael Jackson singing from the torch of the Statue of Liberty. In the third segment we then find ourselves watching a succession of heads, all of different racial and ethnic backgrounds that are, using the latest computerized video technology, transforming from one into the other in front of our eyes. At the end of this scene we see a

<sup>10</sup> One of the most often quoted lines from Bloom's book claims that when the Zulus produce a Tolstoy, we will read him, a line often taken to betray the essence of Bloom's Western-culture-centrism

black panther stalking across the set. Then, in a fourth segment later cut from all the broadcast versions of the video, the panther turns into Michael Jackson, who, as he stalks through the city streets, starts smashing the windows of parked cars in a vandalizing dance of pure anger.

There are a few things anyone who has seen the video immediately notices, not the least of which is the incongruity of this man, who has spent so much time, money, and pain to look more and more white, singing "It doesn't matter if you're black or white." The digital video morphing used to do the face transformations in the third segment is also used by plastic surgeons to demonstrate the projected effects of various procedures to their patients. And given the obvious message of the lyrics, which like the visual images from segments two and three are happy invocations of the diversity fiesta, the move to violence seems incomprehensible. Its banishment from the airwaves—on the grounds that black youth who look up to Jackson will find this an important validation of the desire to do damage to property—seems not to have aroused any agitation against censorship.

I was at first a bit confused by this video but I now find it to be stunningly prescient. If I am correct that the managerial exploitation of diversity has been in the service of keeping a lid on discontent, then we can see segments two and three of the video (and the necessarily ironic lyrics in Jackson's mouth) as high camp renditions of the diversity fiesta, not within the modernist aesthetic that has made for both sides of the debate over multiculturalism (Arthur Schlesinger's recent attack on multiculturalism invokes most of the standard metaphors of modernist dread, for instance, asking, "Will the center hold?"), but in a postmodern vein. Rather than T. S. Eliot's etherized patient, Jackson instead offers a picture of the nose job client, giggling in hyperspace, etherized on the airwaves. And the end of such ludic and aesthetic evasion, as Jackson performs it, is what is usually called "senseless" violence. The residents of South Central Los Angeles have since responded to the idea that they can eat multiculturalism in exactly the way Jackson predicted they might. Jackson's video suggests that all the talk of equality in the world, all the celebration of diversity money can buy, will not contain the "anger," that affective synecdoche for the complex of understandings of and reactions to enforced racism and economic oppression. The textbooks of Los Angeles have been rewritten, but the anger remains, for the

anger is not just about culture.

The refrain of Jackson's song turns out to be not a celebration but a warning. The first three sections of the video take place in what are clearly sound stages; the last is more realistically a run-down street. The difference between cultural celebration and cultural violence is the difference between urban and suburban, commercial and institutional space on the one hand and the unprotected street on the other: What matters is not color but access. The odd form of the media's coverage of South Central L.A. reinforces this distinction. Trained to think in terms of cultural difference, the media continually represented the conflict as a black-white race riot, created by "white" lack of understanding and "black" anger. The folk understanding of the riots, constructed by these media representations and their conversational dissemination, takes the riots as a black-white affair, even though the police report as hispanic over 60% of those arrested. Perhaps most telling in this regard were the often repeated picture captions and TV voiceovers reporting the activity of black looters while the accompanying images were of Latinos. What led looters of all races to commit property crimes in the obvious full view of television cameras was not cultural difference but an economic life that led them to feel they had nothing to lose and goods to gain. What united the rioters in their action was not their cultural identity but their economic position and trajectory.

This should stand to remind us that Culture is an inadequate term, and the more so the more it slides and shimmies between its global meanings and its local meaning as cultural production and products. The burning of Los Angeles, like the edited segment of Jackson's video, was quickly removed from our television screens, its eruption replaced by more orderly forms of culture—the political campaigning in which race was not mentioned, for instance, and in which "middle class" was supposed to include everyone except "the very rich" and "welfare cheats." The consensus among polltakers and poll readers in this last election was that "the economy" was the new unifying political force; the prime victim of our poorly managed economy, according to most commentators, was this same middle class. The increasing number of families whose incomes have slipped below the poverty line and those whose incomes have frozen at \$75,000 to \$100,000 for a few years are construed as different only if they are culturally different; and that cultural difference is construed as a problem only if and when people don't understand

each other's culture. The attempt to wage culture war by political groups in desperate disarray in the last national election, and the failure of those attempts to affect the numbers in the polls, should also remind us of the poverty of the concept in relation to its enforced employment. "Culture" is a paradigm that rules somewhat despotically over all work in the liberal arts; many academic fine artists now claim that they are doing visual anthropology, and over the last two decades Clifford Geertz has been more often quoted by literary theorists than any aesthetician. "Culture" is the essence of academic ideology in the sense that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe understand ideology: that is it is a concept that pretends to encompass more than it actually does.<sup>11</sup> Under some uses of the term, of course, "culture" can include economic systems and relations, but the culture in multiculturalism (like that in popular, high, mass, low, or academic culture) almost invariably refers to the more narrow sense of culture as art and artifact, style and form, ritual and belief, and vaguely ethnographic concepts of kinship- and association-based social organization. But of course in some ways, in some social and economic ways, it doesn't matter, as Jackson says, whether we are (culturally) black or white.

I do not mean to simply repeat, as Marxian culture critics or Ross Perot have variously argued, that "the economy" is the central issue of our time. Nor do I want to simply concur with Paul Levine, who has argued in a recent review article that the culture wars are, indeed, over, because although the war may be over the battles were never won.<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century in America, when cultural conservatives, both high and low, argued for a cosmopolitan, "universal" classicism maintained through exclusivity and exclusion, cultural progressives argued for an inclusive, modernizing cosmopolitanism that celebrated provincial difference. Current debates also pit exclusive universalizing versus inclusive particularizing cosmopolitanisms. The arguments that have exposed conservative universality (at the beginning of the century the New Humanism, for instance, in the latter half the New Criticism, and now the academic right) as unrepresentative and partial are sound enough, have never been effectively countered, and are, at any rate, already established enough in academic work to no longer be a live

11 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

12 Paul Levine, "War No More," *The Nation*, 8 February 1993, 170-73.

issue. Therefore the negative arguments of the multiculturalists have succeeded. But the positive arguments—that through multicultural syllabi we give voice to the voiceless, we recover lost great works, we represent and foster "resistance," we allow particularity its full expression, we help engender personal dignity and thereby cultural equality through ethnic identification—seem less supportable.

Raymond Williams and others have argued that central to literary and artistic modernism were the "metropolitan perceptions" of those in urban centers.<sup>13</sup> I have argued that local color writing, hardly "modernist" in any standard sense, also participated in the cultural legitimization of metropolitan perspectives. Multiculturalism, like modernism and local color literature, is sprung from the ongoing processes of modernization, processes which continue to require the corraling of populations. To suggest that multiculturalism might "resist" such processes is bunk. To consider multiculturalism fully inclusive because it represents the high culture of various ethnic constituencies is delusion. To press for an even more inclusive cosmopolitanism, one constructed along economic and social difference as well as racial, ethnic, regional, and gender differences, and one that insists upon disciplinary cosmopolitanism as well, might provide at least a few of the necessary ingredients to any alternative to sensible or senseless violence. Or yes, it may be Utopian. Or it may be counter to the services a university is supposed to provide its society, or the latest form of guilty noblesse oblige parading as progressivism, or simply the next wave of complicity with systematized difference. But without some such knowledge, to paraphrase the classic modernist response to another war, what forgiveness? It may be true that some of the many new subspecialties in cultural studies are themselves a form of niche marketing of academic labor, but the inclusiveness is nonetheless the necessary and welcome concomitant of multiculturalism's successful attack on the politicized exclusivity of the old canon. It is welcome not because it "make[s] the world a better place for you and me," to quote another Jackson lyric, but because it seems to people as diverse as radical literary critics and corporate personnel directors to be the most justifiable approach to the study of cultural production in an institution serving a plural society.

13 Raymond Williams, "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism," *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989)



The positive arguments of the multiculturalists find their ironic echo not just in the celebration sequences in Jackson's video, but in its opening section as well. The prepubescent boy blasting his father into orbit with the power of his guitar amplifiers is a childish but nonetheless archetypal image of rock music's revolutionary force. This image of the absolutely insincere child star performing a sixties fantasy of cultural rebellion only to drop his father (also a brand-name star acting tongue in cheek) into the diversity fiesta helps us see more warrant for the rage of the ending. The introduction announces the futility of the end's violence. No matter how music historians might construe the progression from Jimi Hendrix to Michael Jackson, academic historians can notice parallel movements from the Chicano and Black Power movements to today's multiculturalism. In both cases there is heritage, there is increased commodification, and there is a movement from cultural periphery to cultural center. One of the pertinent facts of contemporary higher education is the steadily decreasing enrollment of African American students over the last decade and a half. As African American authors are added to syllabi, African American students disappear from classrooms. The recruitment and support of minority students is of considerably more importance than either the increased representativeness of syllabi or a reiteration of classic pieties.

Like ethnic literature, country music in America has recently begun moving into the center of cultural consciousness. Country singers like Garth Brooks now sell as many records as Jackson, and while some of the purists in the country music scene bemoan what they see as the Coca-Cola-ization of their communities' cultural products, others see the inevitable power of country music's traditionalism, Americanism, and individualism for a broader audience. Clint Black's 1991 hit "Put Yourself in My Shoes" uses a set of rhetorical transformations typical in country lyrics by turning the clichéd figure of the title into a conceit and then ironically literalizing the metaphor: the song's tag line is "If you could put yourself in my shoes, you'd walk right back to me." This linguistic play, more common to country music than any other popular form, suggests a sense that language is more malleable than reality, and the conditional tense highlights the fictionalizing at work in the lyric. Whatever ontological confusion is created by such play is resolved by the image of the self attaining its desire. As in many country songs, the fiction espoused in "Put Yourself in My Shoes" is one in which lyric

language provides a better environment for the life of the self than can be found, as a Garth Brooks song has it, "Here in the Real World," where "the boy don't always get the girl." A country hit right after the gulf war had as its chorus line, "George Bush will sleep tonight in a big white house but I won't/Saddam Hussein still has a job but I don't," and whatever cultural critique is contained in country songs often finds expression in the image of the heartbroken or otherwise desolate (and occasionally triumphant) self. What was until very recently the broad, multigenerational audience for local country bands has been growing and fragmenting into market niches, sometimes based on age, sometimes based on "rock-oriented" versus "traditional" commitments. But still common to all country's manifestations is the idea that to express the deepest of human experiences is to always come back to the experience of the isolate self, and that the only "others" of significance are romantic love objects, the family, or the enemy—"if you don't like the way I'm livin'" sings Charlie Daniels, "you just leave this long-haired country boy alone."

Of course the desire to put students in others' shoes is based on very different assumptions, and I continue to agree that to educate students or anyone toward a more empathetic reading of difference, a less self-oriented understanding of the world, has at least the potential to dampen, however slightly, the tinder of the next Los Angeles fire. To say that nonetheless the tinder remains and cannot be turned into more useful fuel through the transformation of literary syllabi is perhaps unnecessary, but neither does such humanistic humility suggest that therefore attempts to politicize criticism should be abandoned. Criticism is politicized, as even *Newsweek* knows. The function of criticism, as has always been the case, is to confront again and anew the question of the relation of art to politics, or more broadly, the relations of aesthetics and ethics, here in our real world. The pearls of past literary traditions are obviously useful to any such question. But the world is also, as it has always been, our oyster.