

# Guest Editors' Note: Currents and Countercurrents

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The articles of this issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* all spring from the 23d biennial conference for the Nordic Association for American Studies (NAAS), held at Karlstad University in May 2013. Calling on scholars to investigate currents and countercurrents in all areas of American culture, the conference attracted some eighty participants from fourteen different nations. American Studies in the Nordic countries has always been a multi- and, sometimes, interdisciplinary venture, bringing together researchers from a number of different research fields who share an interest, in one way or another, in “things American.” The conference in that respect was typical of the academic diversity of NAAS, as is reflected in the six essays presented here.

In “Indian Boarding School Gothic in Older than America and The Only Good Indian,” Elizabeth Kella looks at how two recent feature films make use of tropes borrowed from popular culture to re-examine a controversial subject: the history of Indian boarding schools. As Kella demonstrates, in the films in question, Gothic conventions and other fictive strategies become a means to formulate a counter-narrative of sorts to an official history that has often neglected this episode of American history.

Bent Sørensen, in “Almanac Songs and Singers: Protest, Détournement and Incorporation,” situates the radical leftist singing group the Almanac Singers, led by Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, in the turbulent discourse climate of the US in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Tracing the group’s performances from their earliest anti-capitalist and anti-war songs to their later, more liberal contributions negotiating a unified (war) effort against Fascism, Sørensen productively draws on Guy Debord’s terminology of

détournement (“turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself”) to explain how the Almanacs managed to retain a radical edge even as they pandered to a market in which folk music was increasingly becoming a commodity.

American politics are brought more directly into focus in Alf Tomas Tønnessen’s article “Goldwater, Bush, Ryan and the Failed Attempts by Conservative Republicans to Reform Entitlement Programs.” The three Republicans all met significant resistance when suggesting reforms of Social Security and Medicare in the United States. Tønnessen suggests that the successive failure by Republicans to reform entitlement programs indicate that Americans are less conservative on economic issues than their general skepticism of government power would imply, which would support the view of scholars who have found that Americans are often ideologically conservative, but operationally liberal.

In “‘Far Darker than the Ikea Paradise of Sensible Volvos’: American Perceptions of Sweden Filtered Through Crime Fiction,” Ulf Jonas Björk sets out an argument that allows us to gain perspective upon America by seeing how it sees other nations, in this case Sweden. Crime fiction written by Swedish authors has enjoyed considerable success in the United States in recent years; Björk traces to what extent, if at all, these works have had an impact upon the image of Sweden amongst Americans in general.

Transnational concerns of a different kind are at the forefront of Lena Ahlin’s contribution to this issue, “‘All we wanted to do, now that we were back in the world, was forget’: On Remembrance and Forgetting in Julie Otsuka’s novels.” Through a reading of Julia Otsuka’s *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) and *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011), Ahlin’s article effectively demonstrates how literary texts can be a means to remember and reconfigure historical traumas, in this case the incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II.

In the final piece of this issue, “Burger King and Transnational American Studies: Lessons from the 2013 Nordic Association for American Studies Conference,” Abby Goode and AnaMaria Seglie provide an illuminating discussion of the challenges and potentials of American studies as currently practiced, focusing especially on the turn towards transnational concerns. Taking their experience at the 2013 NAAS conference in Karlstad as their point of departure, Goode and Seglie not only provide a useful overview of the emergence of the transnational paradigm in the US, but suggest how

American studies beyond the US can contribute to reshaping the discipline globally.

Spanning film studies, musicology, political science, journalism, as well as literary studies, the six articles thus offer vivid testimony of the manifold nature of the field that is American Studies in Scandinavia.