



EDITORS' NOTE

The US and the Arctic: Special Issue Editors' Introduction

In 2019 US President Donald Trump proposed that the US buy Greenland from Denmark. The latter nation rejected this suggestion and many news outlets poked fun of the idea. Trump's proposition, however, reveals a number of problematic implications about the Arctic as a place and concept. Since at least the 1860s, the US has attempted to buy the island several times, and this most recent attempt reveals the persistence of a certain kind of imperialist arrogance on both the Danish and US-American side of the question. It signals that Greenland (and the whole Arctic by implication) is a place to be purchased, a colonially controlled space without voice or agency. The two competing nations have even engaged in humorous exchanges, as a 1945 issue of *Grønlandsposten* [The Greenland Post] exemplifies. Among the news stories reported in its final pages, the readers discover that the American station at Skjoldungen, Angmagssalik, was almost buried in a sudden avalanche. The eleven men stationed there apparently managed to save themselves, but two American ships braved the ice to come to their rescue. Finding everyone in good health and good spirits, the ships' crew offered home passage to all eleven, an offer they cheerfully accepted. *Grønlandsposten* notes with some satisfaction that a group of Danish men replaced the Americans. Not only do Danes and Americans negotiate ownership of

Greenlandic land, but at least one Canadian also had his eyes on Greenland, Trump-style. After mentioning mundane small-town news stories, *Grønlandsposten* reveals casually that the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* on November 3, 1945, reported that Senator A. N. McLean, a liberal member of the Canadian Senate for New Brunswick, recommends that Canada take steps to acquire Greenland from Denmark. *Grønlandsposten* humorously advises readers to stay calm, since this scenario is clearly absurd. Attempts to buy Greenland apparently have become so routine that Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen also, at first, along with the Danish population outside of Greenland, considered Trump's offer a joke, another outrageous gesture from the unpredictable 45th President.

In this special issue, we explore the multiple ways in which the Arctic and the United States intersect discursively, culturally, ideologically, legally, politically, and economically. In our original call for papers, we invited potential contributors to reflect on the following questions: Why is the United States interested in the Arctic? What role has the United States and the Scandinavian countries historically played in the region? How has the Arctic been portrayed historically, culturally, and literarily? What kinds of decolonial and indigenizing processes are happening in the Arctic in the 21st century and in the past? What role does climate change play on Arctic communities and economies?

The four articles on the Arctic in this volume will not address all of these questions, since the fields of American Studies and Arctic Studies have just begun what could be a long relationship. Arctic Studies have found homes in places like UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, in Tromsø, at Copenhagen University and Aalborg University, Denmark, and in associations such as the Greenland Society housed in Gentofte, a suburb of Copenhagen, and several Greenlandic cultural houses in Odense, Aarhus, and Aalborg, to name a few. But Americanists—in Scandinavia and elsewhere—have only recently, and maybe thanks to Trump, begun to incorporate the Arctic into our discipline. We hope with this special issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* to encourage further research about the Arctic seen through an American Studies prism, and the articles here are meant to initiate a conversation at various focus points that more research should take further, deeper, and elsewhere.

Alaska Native, Inuit, and other Arctic Indigenous voices are conspicuously absent from this issue, a flaw we hope future research will remedy. Originally conceived partially as an opportunity to explore and feature these voices, the issue fails in this mission. We see this failure not as an example of disinterest in or by Indigenous voices but as a failure to reach researchers, students, and others who could have added much-needed nuance to this theme. However, this absence of the Indigenous perspectives highlights a central tendency of research into the Arctic: a bilateral colonial focus on the history, politics, and

cultures of the Scandinavian countries and the United States, resulting in the exclusion of Greenland as a nation and the erasure of Indigenous peoples in Canada and Alaska.

The first article in this special issue confronts this historical erasure of the region. In his contribution, “‘No One Thinks of Greenland’: US-Greenland Relations and Perceptions of Greenland from the Early Modern Period to the 20th century,” Ingo Heidbrink traces the history of US-Greenlandic relations, focusing on the erasures and exclusions of Greenland, culturally and politically, and accounting for historical perceptions of the Greenlandic people.

The second article by Susan B. Vanek, Andreas Mentrup-Womelsdorf, and Jette Rygaard, “An Odd Assortment of Foreigners in Greenland: Towards the Political Implications of Arctic Travel during the Late Interwar Years,” dives into a specific phenomenon and period in Greenlandic history to show how the expeditions and artworks by American scientists and artists exploring Greenland in the 1920s and 1930s aided in transforming the geopolitical relationships between the US, Denmark, and Greenland.

Switching focus from Greenlandic history and colonial encounters to different kinds of silences, Clara Juncker’s contribution, “Race to the Pole: Matthew Henson, Arctic Explorer,” investigates the memoir of the African American assistant explorer, Matthew Henson, whose travels and trials with the Arctic expeditions of Commander Robert E.

Peary highlight the complex racialized positionality of the explorer and the erasures of African Americans in the history of the region. Juncker critically recuperates Henson's narrative and details how the explorer skillfully constructs his centrality to the polar expeditions—and Arctic history—in spite of attempted racist erasure.

Zachary Lavengood's "China and the 21st Century Arctic: Opportunities and Limitations" ends the issue. This article continues to expand the scope of the special issue through an analysis of China's role in the Arctic in a more contemporary light. Lavengood analyzes the multiple drivers of Chinese engagement with the Arctic region and discusses how China's Arctic politics have evolved and continue to expand, concluding that there are still key factors to overcome before China moves from being a "near-Arctic state" to inevitably solidifying itself as a major power in the region.

Ultimately, we are sending *American Studies in Scandinavia* on an Arctic journey, with all the excitement, commitment, and danger such an expedition involves. We hope this issue will land on an ice floe drifting in unexpected or interesting directions.

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