



# EDITOR'S NOTE

In his 1924 essay “The Spirit of Place”—as apt a starting point for American studies as any—the English novelist and critic D. H. Lawrence identifies a paradox: the democratic personality associated with the “land of the free” issues its rallying cry: “Henceforth be masterless.” Yet this directive soon encounters an opposing impulse: “Liberty is all very well, but men [*sic*] cannot live without masters. There is always a master. And men [*sic*] either live in glad obedience to the master they believe in, or they live in a frictional opposition to the master they wish to undermine” (4). These contradictory impulses, Lawrence strongly suggests, are the twin poles constituting US-American cultural identity: “In America this frictional opposition has been the vital factor” (4). So the freedom-loving Ishmael takes to the open seas only to find himself overmastered by the tyrannical Ahab.

Lawrence was thinking retrospectively, reflecting on the major US writers of the nineteenth century—who, in 1924, had yet to gain their due. Yet the paradox he identifies retains a curious explanatory ability with respect to contemporary US cultural and political life. It goes some way in explaining, for instance, why the rioters on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021, could both identify themselves *with* power in the form of a beleaguered president who had been legitimately voted out of office but was attempting to upend the democratic process to stay in, and *in opposition to* power in the form of a cabalistic “deep state” apparently thwarting their desires. On the one hand, authority—and the need to identify with it. On the other, the need to resist.

US-Americans claim a tradition of liberatory protest that spans from acts of civil disobedience against the British crown during the revolutionary period, through the Abolitionist and anti-expansionist movements of the nineteenth century, to the workers’ and women’s rights movements of the early decades of the twentieth century, to the Civil Rights, anti-war, and anti-imperialist organizing of the post-World War II period. Yet who in the present can claim the mantle of such liberatory movements? Can we call the movement taking shape around the protests against Israeli state violence in Gaza on university campuses the rightful heir of this lineage of American dissent while the Capitol Hill rioters were merely a lawless mob, or are all such expressions of collective sentiment similarly in need of disciplinary intervention? Can one be said to be genuinely liberatory while the other is misguided at best, proto-fascistic at worst? For one thing, the Capitol Hill rioters *did* in fact have a leader, and a very powerful one at that: Donald Trump. And they were not acting out of any democratic or egalitarian impulse; fueled by their anger with a perceived liberal-democratic consensus and its culture of “wokeness” and fearful of a withering of white privilege and heteromascularity, they were identifying with a projection of highly privileged, white, male antidemocratic power in its ardent desire to overturn established democratic and legal norms. (As of late yesterday, Trump is a convicted felon—which illustrates that power and privilege *can* still be held accountable by the established legal norms affecting everyone else.)

The protests that have swept US university campuses during the months since October 7 are different.

Israel's war in Gaza and the claims made both in support of and against it are complex. Admittedly, some of those involved in protesting Israeli state violence in Gaza and its tacit US support have come dangerously close to condoning Hamas, a violent religious nationalist movement, in its killing and capturing of Israeli civilians. However, recent dismissals of the protests in the name of combatting anti-Semitism (which is admittedly on the rise) miss the point entirely. At its best, the student-led movement in the US and elsewhere has not only opposed the Israeli state's massively disproportionate use of violence against what amounts to an internally colonized population. It has also called on us to see the current situation in Gaza within the context of settler-colonial violence in the Americas, as well as a long history of racial othering *including* its anti-Jewish variant. Such forms of physical and ideological violence share a deeply entwined history: the onset of European conquest of the Americas coincided historically with an ongoing, large-scale murder and expulsion of European Muslims *and* Jews at the turn of the sixteenth century. When Europeans faced a shortage of arable land and resources in proportion to a growing population, they turned to the Americas, bringing with them portable ideologies of white-European supremacy that justified Native American genocide, as well as the seizure of Indigenous land and the violent importation of African slave labor power to farm it. To be anti-Semitic is to embrace a hateful and harmful ideology linked with other forms of racial and ethnic discrimination and dispossession. To be anti-Zionist is to oppose a settler-colonial ideology that engages in ongoing forms of displacement, oppression, and violence with strong historical links to other such ideologies.

One of the great ironies of the present moment is that US (and Canadian) universities now routinely issue land acknowledgments confirming their situatedness in what was once Indigenous territory. Additionally, some of our most prestigious universities have been pressured to acknowledge their historical complicity in the slave trade. Such acknowledgments can be seen as constituting a long-overdue reckoning with past and present forms of privilege and the violence that has tended to underwrite them and can be seen as the result of decades of activism within the academy and beyond. Yet they can also be perceived as merely performative, representing a liberal-democratic posturing that comes across as mere lip service when not accompanied by genuine action, such as divestment from the most heavily implicated sources of capital, real investments in inclusivity in the present, and the creation of space for open and sometimes difficult public debate.

The irony of acknowledging past forms of settler-colonial violence while failing to see their current manifestation in Gaza in similar terms was not lost on Brooklyn College political science professor Corey Robin, who speculated on X (the former Twitter) that "Maybe in a couple of hundred years, Israelis can open every meeting with a land acknowledgement. Like we do." We can currently see the embrace of a token wokeness such acknowledgments suggest on many university campuses. The official website of the School of the Arts at Columbia University "recognizes Manhattan as part of the ancestral and traditional homeland of the Lenni-Lenape and Wappinger people" and promises to "continue to address issues of exclusion, erasure, and systematic discrimination through ongoing education and a commitment to equitable representation." Yet such words ring hollow in the wake of Columbia University President Minouche Shafik's decision to call on the NYPD to break up a student protest encampment, which led to over 100 arrests. Other universities followed suit, leading

to widely documented instances of police brutality against students and faculty members. (In the case of UCLA, administrators opted not to call the police, instead allowing a mob of counter protesters do the violent work of dispersing the occupation.) Amid such heavy-handed impositions of authority, Lawrence's dichotomy still determines the polarities of our relationship to power: the utopian cry of "Henceforth be masterless" meets the reality principle of "Henceforth be mastered."

One of the explanations offered by Shafik and other university administrators for their decision to use police force in breaking up the demonstrations is safety. The violent, punitive, and dismissive responses with which largely peaceful student protests and encampments have been met aren't about anyone's safety. But such forms of protest do of course invoke discomfort, another frequently cited reason for dispersing them. Discomfort, however, is precisely the affect associated with effective forms of protest and the genuine public debate they aim to bring about. In a text many of us in American studies are familiar with, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), King, writing at the height of the Civil Rights movement, makes it clear that the actions for which he and other movement leaders have been jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, sought precisely to bring about a "creative tension" within the community where they occurred. King goes on to identify "the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice," as a greater "stumbling block in the stride toward freedom" than "the White citizens' 'Councilor' or the Ku Klux Klanner." Revisiting these words affords us a glimpse of King's radicalism in his own moment, as opposed to the sanitized version of King many imagine today.

It is difficult *not* to see the recent attempts to silence dissenting voices on university campuses as part of a larger agenda of limiting academic freedom and narrowing the scope of public debate. In recent months, the attack on academic freedom at US universities has resulted in the ousting of university presidents and other high-ranking administrators, who, unlike Shafik, have failed to quell dissenting voices. The highest profile resignations to occur, those of Harvard University president Claudine Gay (over an apparent case of plagiarism) and University of Pennsylvania president Elizabeth Magill (over an apparent failure to condemn protesters' calls for intifada), had much more to do with retaining the lucrative support of trustees and donors (even if there *were* good reasons for both to resign). Rather than serving a progressive agenda, such dismissals allow wealthy private interests to set the agendas at universities and are much more in line with the ideologically motivated efforts at academic censorship instigated by figures such as Florida governor Ron DeSantis (and not unrelated to the general defunding of humanities and social-sciences departments and academic majors, areas of study that actively encourage critical thinking and democratic debate). Trump, for his part, recently promised a roomful of wealthy donors that if he were elected, he would crush student protests and deport the protestors. Such heavy-handed responses confirm the ongoing existence of the underlying authoritarian current Lawrence identified: "Henceforth be mastered."

Yet despite these efforts of the wealthy and powerful to determine what can be discussed, in what terms, and by whom on US campuses, students and faculty *are* managing to make their voices heard, most recently in staged walkouts at commencement ceremonies and disruption of public speeches, attempts at sowing discomfort that resonate with King's "creative tension." Far from being anti-Semitic, groups such as Jewish Voices for Peace have reminded us that self-

determination for one people cannot justify the displacement of another. A bottom-up critique of state power in the form of the violence increasingly on display in Rafah and elsewhere is an affirmation of a shared humanity, a tacit embrace of Lawrence's dictum: "Henceforth be masterless."

In the spirit of Lawrence's paradox, the articles gathered here aptly illustrate the ongoing tension between the democratic and the authoritarian, between expressions of a desire for an open and democratic society and attempts to impose authority. Of course, one's definitions of freedom and authority, and even of truth, depend increasingly upon where one is situated on the political spectrum. Titled "Paranoia, (Para)cinema, and the Right-Wing Mindset: Making Sense of *My Son Hunter*," Joel Frykholm's contribution to this issue addresses a crowdfunded, low-budget feature film released by Breitbart News in 2022, in which the alt-right-embracing British actor Laurence Fox plays Hunter Biden. The film has mostly been dismissed in mainstream media, but Frykholm takes it seriously, as an attempt to control, and even create, an American political narrative that plays fast-and-loose with truth as it attempts to manipulate its viewers into embracing far-fetched conspiracies and bring fringe views closer to the mainstream. Frykholm's article also takes seriously alt-right media mogul Andrew Breitbart's claim that "politics is downstream from culture" as it unpacks the messy range of filmmaking techniques *My Son Hunter* exploits and situates it within an alternative media landscape that has taken shape in the age of the internet.

Maria Lindén's contribution to this issue, titled "Trump's Playbook of Electoral Manipulation: An Interplay of Manipulation Tactics in a Longstanding Democracy," offers a meticulously constructed framework that draws on existing categories of electoral manipulation (and offers two of its own), adducing nine specific manipulation

tactics to explain Donald Trump's sustained and variegated effort at manipulating the 2020 US presidential election results in his favor. Lindén's article argues that the manipulation tactics it identifies need to be considered in the aggregate, as a set of overlapping strategies available to political parties and figures in the US (and elsewhere) to shift election outcomes. Donald Trump's criminal indictment in August 2023 for attempting to overturn the election results based on a bipartisan report on his role in the chaos that occurred in Washington on January 6, 2021, confirms the existence of a disconcerting turn toward authoritarianism in US politics, which is of the utmost concern heading into the 2024 US presidential elections.

In the issue's third article, titled "Crises in the Arctic: Upheavals in the Memoir of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary," Clara Juncker documents the crises facing Josephine Diebitsch-Peary as an early female Arctic explorer. Documented in her 1894 memoir of her participation in a famed 1891-92 expedition to northern Greenland alongside her husband, the explorer Robert E. Peary, Diebitsch-Peary's challenges included gender expectations related to still-prevalent True Womanhood ideals of the nineteenth century, the challenge of reconciling Western biases against the region's native Inughuit inhabitants with her own experiences among them, and the difficulties related to the Arctic landscape, which resulted in a series of mishaps during the expedition itself.

In addition, this issue contains five book reviews, testifying to the lively and widely varying research agendas currently shaping American studies. The first is Laura Castor's review of David Myer Temin's *Remapping Sovereignty: Decolonization and Self-Determination in North American Indigenous Political Thought*. The second, by Jonas Bjork, addresses Gunlög Fur's *Painting Culture, Painting Nature: Stephen Mopope, Oscar Ja-*

*cobson, and the Development of Indian Art in Oklahoma*. The third, by Adam Hjorthén, examines Jennifer Eastman Attebery's *As Legend Has It: History, Heritage, and the Construction of Swedish American Identity*. The fourth, by Roman Kushnir, addresses *Winter's Children: A Celebration of Nordic Skiing*, by Ryan Rodgers. And the fifth, by Shiyu Zhang, assesses Jolene Hubbs's *Class, Whiteness, and Southern Literature*.

I have appreciated the opportunity to work with the thorough, wide-ranging, and highly intellectually engaged scholars whose work is gathered here. In addition, this issue has benefitted from the insights of its external reviewers, as well as the members of the Nordic Association for American Studies board: Jørn Brøndal, Nina Öhman, Lene Johannessen, and Jenny Bonnevier. I also want to acknowledge the indispensable and highly dedicated work of the journal's editorial assistant, Aurora Eide. It is a pleasure working with such a generous and dedicated group of scholars.

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