



EDITOR'S NOTE

There is a question I have often asked myself over the past year-and-a-half: What is the mandate of an open-access American Studies journal based in the Nordic countries under the current circumstances? Put simply, where does the ongoing catastrophe unfolding in the United States leave us?

A little over a year into Donald Trump's "shambolic"¹ second presidency, we have seen the shocking and disastrous consequences of his cruel, idiosyncratic, corrupt, and self-serving brand of leadership both within the US and abroad. The news cycle feels distinctly dystopian: the administration has wrought unprecedented damage on democratic norms and institutions within the US, where it has violated (and continues to violate) basic civil and human rights and the rule of law. Outside the US, it has upended longstanding global alliances and norms for its own narrowly nationalistic and ill-conceived purposes. With its ally Israel, the administration has started an [illegal](#), costly, and open-ended war of choice against Iran, which has generated an energy crisis that has often been compared to [the 1970s "oil shocks,"](#) and which continues to create economic chaos. Since coming to office in January 2025, Trump's administration has pursued an agenda of shrinking federal agencies to a bare minimum, vastly increasing presidential power, and replacing nonpartisan civil servants with loyalists—an agenda with clearly neofascist and authoritarian undertones.

A crucial pillar of the Trump administration's war on democratic values is its ongoing attack on academic freedom. This attack has included last spring's assault on the autonomy of major US

research universities such as [Columbia and Harvard](#).² It has also included a large-scale incursion into academic research agendas through the rescinding or termination of already approved research grants, as well as budget cuts and mass layoffs at government agencies responsible for funding research including the [National Science Foundation](#), the [National Institutes of Health](#), and the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#). While budgetary woes and "government inefficiency" are most often cited as the reasons for staff and funding cuts and administration interference, the administration seems to have no trouble justifying its other expenditures, including the [almost \\$33 billion](#) it has spent on the war against Iran, the [currently proposed allocation of \\$1 billion](#) for its White House ballroom vanity project, or the [\\$1.776 billion dollar slush fund](#) it has proposed for rewarding political allies who claim to have suffered harm under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, including the rioters who were prosecuted and imprisoned following the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

Meanwhile, restrictions on travel and visas and well-publicized cases concerning international travelers undergoing harsh treatment at US borders have led international researchers to become reluctant to undertake—and in some cases even to boycott—research-related travel to the US. [Fear and self-censorship among international researchers](#) has been documented both within and outside the US, and in some cases non-US-based researchers are even reluctant to collaborate with US colleagues at all. A year ago, [Norway](#) moved to open itself to US researchers who found themselves under threat, and other European nations such as Belgium,

the Netherlands, and Denmark have followed suit. The parallel that most often comes up in public discussions of such a “brain drain” is with the US offer of asylum to leading public intellectuals fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s, which led to an exodus that eventually included scientists such as Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard, philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, and writers and cultural producers such as Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, and Billy Wilder.

The Trump administration’s attacks on academic and scientific institutions have a clear ideological motivation: they are driven by a hostility toward the values underpinning scientific, social scientific, and humanistic teaching, research, and knowledge production in an open, democratic society. Such an agenda is suggested by a glance at the list of [banned words](#)—including “Black,” “climate crisis,” “ethnicity,” “Native American,” “LGBTQ,” “racism,” “sex,” “trauma,” and “women”—that have either been scrubbed from government websites or used to determine the removal of information from them, or else invoked in decisions to repeal or decline federal research funding. Not coincidentally, several of the words on this list are also keywords for articles that appear in this issue.

In times such as these, what can a journal such as *American Studies in Scandinavia* do? In my view, the best answer to this question is to keep doing what we already do, including the following:

1. Commitment to open research principles.

In an [interview](#), Peter Suber, Senior Advisor on Open Access at Harvard Library, outlined practical steps open access publishing can take in “defending free, neutral, and objective research” under the current circumstances: he suggests placing research in open access repositories housed on non-governmental infrastructure, preferably in multiple locations and in multiple

nations. As a fully open-access scholarly journal published on a non-commercial platform, *American Studies in Scandinavia* remains committed to the standards associated with [Diamond Open Access publishing](#): it is led by scholars themselves and “owned” by a scholarly organization (the [Nordic Association for American Studies](#)); it is fully non-commercial, and thus free of cost for both authors and readers; it aims to be fully transparent in its editorial structure and review process; and it is wholeheartedly committed to academic freedom. Publishing under a [Creative Commons 4.0 license](#) means that the journal’s materials are freely available for anyone wishing to read and disseminate them for non-commercial purposes.

2. Commitment to an inclusive, revisionist, and critical American Studies paradigm.

In its task of critically engaging with national narratives, an American Studies methodology is well positioned to support feminist, decolonial, anti-racist, and queer- and trans-positive research agendas, as well as critical inquiry into forms of inequality and dispossession past and present including the historic and contemporary effects of transatlantic slavery, Indigenous genocide in the Americas, white nationalism, and hetero-patriarchal power structures. In contrast to the current shoring-up of national borders in the US (as well as in European nations), American Studies continues to value open cultural exchange across national as well as disciplinary borders. Importantly, *American Studies in Scandinavia* is located outside the US, enabling it to retain a critical vantage that may become increasingly difficult to maintain from within the US. The journal is in no way beholden to or reliant for funding on the US Government, including its embassies. Its publishing agenda continues to be set independently and on an ever-evolving basis by the increasingly global community of researchers and teachers who submit to, publish in, review for, edit, produce, and read it. *American Studies in Scandinavia* continues to embrace the

principles of equity and inclusion, academic freedom, scholarly collaboration across borders, and democratic values. The journal stands with the [European Association for American Studies](#), the [British Association for American Studies](#), and other such organizations that have stood up for academic freedom and open science.

Representing this undeterred collective project of voicing critique while fostering democratic inclusivity, the articles presented in the current issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* cover a range of vital topics. Leading off the issue, Reetta Humalajoki's "Seeing Indian in Chicago: Photographic Resilience in an Urban Indigenous Community, 1958-1980" takes as its starting point a 1985 exhibition of photographs at Chicago's Newberry Library, which included images made by Indigenous photographers Ben Bearskin, Leroy Wesaw, and Dan Battise. Humalajoki argues persuasively that the images made by these photographers included in the exhibition subtly worked to challenge harmful stereotypes regarding Native Americans, and also to resist the assimilationist tendencies of the period of termination and relocation, which coerced its participants to adopt "American" lifestyles. By contrast, Humalajoki maintains, the photographs she examines allowed Indigenous photographers to "present life in Chicago through Indigenous eyes—not 'seeing Indians' but 'seeing Indian'" (7).

Next in the issue, Aurora Eide's article "The Sapphic Gardens of Elsa Gidlow: Queer Nature in *On a Grey Thread*," winner of the 2025 Nordic Association for American Studies Orm Øverland essay prize, examines Gidlow's overlooked 1923 collection of poems *On a Grey Thread*, claiming that the collection responds to what she calls the "nature paradox": the idea that "on the one hand, early twentieth-century sapphic women were seen as biologically abnormal and as wild predators (i.e., too natural), but on the other hand, they were treated as sinners who commit

crimes against nature (i.e., too unnatural)" (24). Contesting this paradox, Eide claims, Gidlow's poetry—which anticipated by decades her own radical gardening practices at Druid Heights, an artists' retreat she founded in the San Francisco Bay area—reclaims more-than-human nature as a space where sapphic desire can thrive.

Next, Kaisa Ilmonen's article "Intersectional Cultural Memory as Memory Activism in Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise*" engages with Cliff's novelistic rewriting of the US Civil War period and its aftermath as an act of "memory activism," which leverages a notion of "multidirectional memory" to produce an alternative archive that resists the exclusivity of conventional national narratives by unearthing a speculative history that restores the presence of Black, queer, and Indigenous figures—many based loosely on actual historical figures—to the historical narrative. Ilmonen makes a compelling case for an "activist" interpretive project as a dialogue between text and reader, a project of "reading for something, in this case for multiplying the representations of US history, as memory activism takes place in the dialogue between the text and the reader's interpretation" (44).

The issue's final article, Morten Feldtfo's Thomsen's "Mindless Consumption or Hopeful Anarchy? 1980s Slasher Cinema Goes to the Mall," returns us to the scene of the Regan-era shopping mall to examine two cinematic representations of that space as a location for cinematic body horror: *Chopping Mall* (1986) and *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (1989). Thomsen offers a historically astute reading of these two cultural artifacts to contend that the mall as they present it can be understood as "a place of both mindless consumption and hopeful anarchy" (63), a place to embrace capitalist values, but also to rebel, even violently, against Reaganite "law and order," with its militarized policing of social and commercial space, and ultimately against the dispersive logic of consumer capitalism itself.

The issue also includes two book reviews: J. Michelle Coghlan reviews Andrew Hartman's *Karl Marx in America* (2025). Coghlan situates Hartman's contribution vis-à-vis recent books on nineteenth-century radical social movements to draw out the implications of engaging with such earlier radicalisms in our own fraught historical moment. Erin Kathleen Small Capistrano reviews Patrick McKelvey's *Disability Works: Performance after Rehabilitation* (2024) to situate for us its contributions to the fields of performance studies and disability studies.

I am grateful to a number of individuals for their assistance and contributions in bringing this issue together. First, Jenny Bonnevier, President of the Nordic Association for American Studies, deserves special thanks. I would also like to thank the other members of the journal's editorial board: Nina Öhman, Stephen Darren Dougherty, Marianne Kongerslev, Karin Molander Danielsson, and Kim Khavar Fahlstedt. Also deserving of special thanks are Oscar Winberg, the journal's editor for history and politics, and Jordan Howie, its book review editor. Per Pippin Aspaas and Johan William Højlund Jacobsen, of the University of Tromsø's Diamond Open Access program, as well as Claus Rosenkrantz Hansen at the University of Copenhagen Business School Library, also deserve special thanks. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who have worked to ensure the high academic standards of the articles in this journal. *American Studies in Scandinavia* continues to be a community-led project and, as such, a space of hope in dark times.

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Notes

1. This adjective seems to me to be the most accurate descriptor for the administration. It has been applied by Barack Obama, Reagan speech writer Peggy Noonan, and international relations scholar Janice Stein, among many others.

2. I have also addressed issues surrounding academic freedom, including the threats to the autonomy of Columbia and Harvard, in my [Editor's Note](#) in last spring's issue.