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to Revolutionary Praxis

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“Unruly Subjects”: American Studies from Antidiscipline to Revolutionary Praxis

Scott Kurashige

What time is it on the clock of the world? If Grace Lee Boggs were here today, she would say that we live in a time of great danger but also great hope. We are simultaneously moved on local, national, and global scales to confront white supremacist, neoliberal dispossession; the commodification of every aspect of life, thought, and feeling; ecological disasters once unfathomable, now increasingly routine; the looming prospect of epochal levels of extinction; reactionary violence and exclusion to uphold heteropatriarchy; and genocidal state and corporate policies and practices.

As Trumpism has exposed the bottomless depths of white male fragility, it has also laid bare the corruption of capitalism and the limits of US power. Our theme, “Build as We Fight,” is a call to resist the destructive effects of this rotting system while acknowledging the imperative to create alternative means of survival and models of community from the ground up in order to address social problems that those in power cannot and will not solve. We must organize, and we must struggle over ideas. And there is no better place for us to learn about both than right here in Hawai‘i. I am forever grateful to the members of the ASA staff, Program Committee, and Site Resource Committee who have made this possible, especially the scholars of Hawai‘i who have patiently nurtured my ongoing education.¹

In the face of a history marked by the exploitation and dispossession wrought by plantations, militarism, and tourism, those of us coming from elsewhere are blessed with a wealth of opportunities to learn from and stand with the movements for Hawaiian Renaissance and Indigenous Resurgence. We are here not just to expose the edges of empire but to unite with our Hawai‘i-based members and friends of the ASA at the center of place-based epistemologies, methodologies, sovereignties, and cosmologies. As ice caps melt and typhoons swell, we look to Native Pacific navigators for guidance to chart a path through the treacherous waters ahead.

This address consists of three parts roughly organized into my assessment of the past, present, and future. First, I trace the emergence of the ASA as an

Build As We Fight



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antidisciplinary home for those coming from outside the institutional history of American Studies. Second, I seek to define the openings created by the seismic political and epistemological ruptures marking the crisis of liberal capitalism and contested transition to a new system. Finally, I provide examples of scholar-activist work that seek to build the revolution toward a new social order as we struggle with the degeneration of the existing one.

From the Few to the Many, or Subaltern Pathways to the ASA

My first connection to the American Studies Association nearly two decades ago was entirely fortuitous but simultaneously a product of emerging and prevailing trends within the field. In 2000, I completed a dissertation and started a tenure-track job in the University of Michigan's Program in American Culture. Both were unplanned given that my primary aim during my years as a graduate student was to do socialist organizing connecting student and community activism. Scarcely a month after I began working in Michigan, the ASA's annual meeting came to Detroit. I honestly do not remember knowing anything about this association before colleagues at work advised me to attend that conference.²

Figure 1.

ASA program cover, based on image by the artist Joy Enomoto.

The most exciting aspect of my move to Michigan was the opportunity to work with Grace Lee Boggs in Detroit.³ Although I remain deeply indebted to my academic mentors and influences, my primary intellectual life and home have been among community-based activists and organic intellectuals, especially those rooted in working-class communities of color. Despite earning her PhD in 1940, Grace saw a career in academia precluded by racist and sexist structures. In her trademark way, she discovered opportunity in the midst of crisis, doing groundbreaking revolutionary organizing and theorizing with C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, through which she met her personal and political soulmate, Jimmy Boggs, a Black autoworker from rural Alabama.

Like many in this room—and I would put myself at the top of the list—Grace had been drawn to the ASA through the work of Mary Helen Washington, whose paradigm-shifting 1997 presidential address, “Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center?,” remains the most indispensable reading we have about our field.⁴ As Grace wrote in 2000, “Mary Helen has led the struggle to place scholars of color in leading ASA positions, and to make the organization a force for



Figure 2.
Grace Lee, C. L. R. James, and Raya Dunayevskaya of the socialist collective known as the Johnson-Forest Tendency, circa 1940s. Photo courtesy of the James and Grace Lee Boggs Foundation.



Figure 3.
Grace Lee and James Boggs. Photo courtesy of the James and Grace Lee Boggs Foundation.

institutional change and cross-fertilization between academia and the community, the theme of this year's meeting."⁵

For the Detroit ASA conference, Grace convened a panel titled "Scholars Walk the Talk: Rebuilding Detroit from the Ground Up." Although her panel spoke directly to the theme, response was, to say the least, muted. I was one of no more than ten or twelve people in the audience. However, as Margaret Wheatley stresses in *Leadership and the New Science*, the key to transformative change is "never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about *critical connections*."⁶

That same year, 2000, marked my critical connections to Detroit and the ASA, which have unexpectedly led to this opportunity to put the revolutionary legacy of James and Grace Lee Boggs at the center of our gathering. Unknown two decades ago to the vast majority of conference goers at the ASA and even within Asian American Studies, Grace is now held up as a national model of political praxis by no less than Squad members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib.⁷ As Grace taught us again and again, think dialectically because reality is constantly changing.

Like academia writ large, the ASA was once overwhelmingly white and male, a space made by elite professors with little regard for the salience of queer sexualities or disability justice. Today, it represents more than demographic change. For many of us, Ibram X. Kendi's assertion that "the heartbeat of racism is denial" characterizes life in the academy.⁸ It's no small wonder, then, that faculty and students of color are often told, "Why aren't you more grateful for all you've been given?" The ASA's growing recognition that the purpose of Ethnic and Indigenous Studies goes beyond the academic study of ethnicity or Indigenous peoples has thus been far more than semantic. While the latter could be incorporated into a color-blind racist perpetuation of liberal academic norms, the former insists on structural transformation and an epistemological break.⁹ It is the difference, to borrow from Robert Warrior's 2016 presidential address, between feeling at home or not home at the ASA conference, as well as within academic departments or predominantly white institutions.¹⁰

My bird's-eye review of the five-hundred-plus sessions at this year's conference indicates that the majority of participants represent what we would in past times have called "outsiders" to the field.¹¹ We come together from these varied backgrounds not as representatives of any particular discipline, or even a confederation of disciplines, but to make sense of and tackle the burning issues of our peoples, places, and times. We meet under conditions of intensifying precarity that mandate new means to reverse the widening divide between tenured faculty vis-à-vis students, untenured professors, and contingent



Figure 4.
Photos from the Instagram account of
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

faculty, as well as the gap between the relatively more and less privileged schools. And to be clear, the ASA must be more than a home for academics; we are a site that recognizes the critical role that artists and public scholars play in the production of knowledge. In this regard, I can think of no figure whose work has exerted greater influence over the ASA than Stuart Hall, who defined his position in relation to the mainstream of academic life as that of a “radical outsider.”¹²

If we have learned anything from the nightmare of Trump’s election, it is that we can no longer accept the conventional wisdom of insiders or the old standards they trade in like the myth of meritocracy. Those who are not served by the status quo are most sensitive to how and why reality is changing. Such a recognition highlights the prospect of American Studies serving as a fugitive meeting ground for the multitude of unruly subjects whose radical existence is born out of struggle against the bourgeois, colonial, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and ableist exclusions and marginalizations of the liberal social and academic order.

While I am mindful of Nick Mitchell's important corrective to "fantasy" narratives of insurgent academics, I believe the core of American Studies now consists of subjects of study that have been previously disavowed by the academy.¹³ Faculty, staff, students, and community allies in these fields have thus been forced into an oppositional stance with the university, fighting endless political and intellectual battles to create and sustain programs, departments, and opportunities for students in an often-hostile campus climate. As such, they and we have been repeatedly subjectified as lacking in academic legitimacy, civility, and rigor.

Here I'd like to say a few words in response to that academic commandment, *thou shalt be rigorous*. It is an understatement to say that rigor is a social construct. Scholars who are very good at saying and doing what mainstream academics expect to be said and done are ritually crowned "rigorous." As Koritha Mitchell, scholar of African American literature and racial violence at Ohio State University, states, "When I pay attention to how routinely white mediocrity is treated as merit, I worry a lot less about the judgments of people who owe much of their success to being viewed as qualified simply because they are white."¹⁴

We need a different definition of rigor. For me, it starts with intellectual humility—most notably the ability to recognize what you don't know and, therefore, must learn. "Border crossing" work particularly requires this kind of rigor. I am sure we can all recall concrete instances in our past where this has arisen. Rigor is the grad student who realizes that the syllabus for the required seminar is so inadequate that they must—in preparation for class and various forms of class warfare—read not only the assigned books but also a parallel set of works by more cutting-edge scholars to unravel the canon. Rigor is the adjunct faculty member doing manuscript revisions in the wee hours of night after teaching at three different campuses. Rigor comes from applying and nurturing the double consciousness necessary to negotiate situations like these.

While the ASA has an *institutional* history that is worth knowing, it should be clear by now that our *intellectual* lineage encompasses many strands of praxis that completely transcend that history. To borrow from James Clifford, it is more vital to study the diverse and sometimes conflicting *routes* to American Studies than to profess to know the *roots* of the association.¹⁵ For instance, there is much to learn from the study of Puritanism provided that the subject matter and historiography are properly *provincialized*. The Puritans were a small group of settlers who came to a hemispheric land mass on which millions of Indigenous peoples had made history for hundreds of generations. We could instead see the story of San Miguel de Gualdape as a more repre-

sentative turning point in the long arc of history—not because it marks the 1526 Spanish arrival (in the vicinity of contemporary South Carolina) nearly a century before the Puritans but because it is ultimately a narrative of revolt and marronage creating perhaps the first known community of Indigenous peoples and Africans in North America.¹⁶

As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *Undercommons* has taught us, "The maroons know something about possibility. They are the condition of possibility of the production of knowledge in the university."¹⁷ When scholars of Ethnic and Indigenous Studies bring their corporeal bodies and archival citations to the ASA, they carry forward the spirit of the ancestors in their work. Our intellectual horizons expand tremendously when we follow the pathway of Hōkūlani K. Aikau's *alaloa kīpapa*, acknowledge Glen Coulthard's *grounded normativity*, and respect Brittney Cooper's *embodied discourse*.¹⁸ For her momentous book, *Aloha Betrayed*, Noenoe Silva recounts that she was able to document an incredible record of Kanaka Maoli organizing and resistance to the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation and illegal annexation by the US because she understood the language of her ancestors and presumed they had "a history of struggle" to be recovered. Drawing from both written records and oral traditions of ancestors, Silva writes, "Sometimes they speak to us in dreams, daydreams, or sudden realizations (or even slap our heads!) while we are awake."¹⁹

To reject "disciplining"—double meaning intended—is to understand that traditional forms of scholarship are inadequate to the degree they remain wedded to old truths, categorizations, and methods devised for people other than us and conditions that no longer apply. "Disciplining" minoritized students and untenured faculty, which historically has conferred academic citizenship for some at the cost of reinforcing structures of hierarchy and privilege, has increasingly been exposed as a sadistic form of professional hazing. That is why I foresee the ASA fulfilling its greatest purpose as an antidisciplinary project made up of the stones that the builder refuses.

Disciplinarity, in fact, is a relatively recent, largely twentieth-century phenomenon. This particular division of knowledge and academic labor is a product of almost everything we now reject: Eurocentrism, linear ideas of development, false universalisms, and the reification of ideological assertions of objectivity—all reinforcing structures of domination.²⁰ In this way, disciplinarity has been a core feature of the liberal academy that is now in crisis—a crisis that underlies the increasingly precarious conditions of work and life in higher education but simultaneously offers a historic opening to decolonize the university.

The Crisis of Liberalism and Recognition Politics

It is not hard to find voices on the left and right who consider neoliberalism the ultimate triumph of capitalism. My view, however, falls closer to those who view neoliberalism as a *response* to systemic crisis. This is a crisis that began long before Trump, who should also be seen more as symptom than cause. It has a crucial economic dimension, but it should not be reduced to economic analysis. Neoliberalism is not a new stage of history: it is a rightward movement that, while exhibiting signs of dominance, remains one of multiple competing trends in an era of uncertainty and transition marked by the destabilization of the liberal capitalist order. I want us to be clear about that as I ask us to explore how the many, subaltern pathways to the ASA represent trajectories toward alternative futures.

To state this as forthrightly as possible, the primary rupture in the liberal order was the global revolt of the “long sixties” from Vietnam to Mexico City, Paris, and all points in between. I have attempted to develop this argument through my research on how the urban rebellions in cities like Los Angeles and Detroit exposed the unresolved contradictions of postwar liberalism that have shaped the polarization of race and politics ever since. This year’s annual meeting features reflections on many of the key events that shook the world in 1969 and left a lasting imprint on our fields of study, including Stonewall, Alcatraz, and the Third World Liberation Front strikes for Ethnic Studies. While a review of those histories is beyond the scope of this address, we should be mindful of the specificity those analyses provide as I proceed to paint with what will be an admittedly broad brush.

My reading of systemic crisis is deeply indebted to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, the historical sociologist whose passing in August 2019 constitutes a devastating loss. Wallerstein saw the global revolt of the late 1960s as part of a single historical moment with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that signaled not “the end of history” but the terminal crisis of the global capitalist system. The important and original core of his contrarian argument is that these collective revolts have brought about the collapse of liberalism as the “legitimizing geoculture” of the global capitalist system.²¹

Liberalism here connotes the reformist discourse that emerged in response to the democratic advance of the French Revolution and consolidated into hegemonic doctrine starting in 1848. Its great success for over a century was in co-opting the Right and Left to narrow the parameters of debate to what liberals deemed rational thought and reasonable reform. Hence, for much of the twentieth century, there was bipartisan agreement in US politics (and the

West generally) supporting the domestic and global pillars of liberal capitalism. To win elections, the mainstream parties generally offered variants that went a little bit but not too much left or a little bit but not too much right. Third-party challenges were routinely absorbed into one of the two major parties.

Liberals acknowledged that inequality and exclusion existed in society. Liberal hegemony, however, rested on the promise that these were vestiges of the old caste order that could be overcome through a rational process of incremental reform, meritocracy, and the gradual integration of the excluded into the mainstream of the system. There's a wonderfully pithy quote in Katrina Forrester's review of Edmund Fawcett's history of liberalism:

The liberal dream was “a myth of order in a masterless world.” Crucially, for liberals, this was only a dream. What distinguished them from conservatives was their belief that progress toward such a world was possible; what distinguished them from socialists was their belief that they would never get there.²²

If this sounds like a characterization of your university's administration and its latest diversity plan, that's exactly the point. The university was a central institution of the liberal order, and the material effects of the crisis of liberalism on higher education are all too tangible, undermining and threatening to obliterate tenure, academic freedom, and the future of the humanities. Colleges and universities increasingly resemble hedge funds and real estate investment trusts that value students as collateral in the form of future tuition payments. Moreover, the liberal reforms intended to stabilize education in the wake of the 1960s revolts—such as affirmative action, bussing, magnet schools, and the expansion of student loans—have been caught in the storm of crisis, captured or displaced by neoliberal privatization and financing schemes that have widened social disparities.

Signs of this systemic crisis abound within the marketplace of ideas, too, amid liberalism's fall from self-evident hegemony to one among many competing ideologies. This is because, more than anything else, it was the material promise that capitalism would share its wealth with an ever-widening circle of beneficiaries that sustained liberal ideology. Though the myth of “rugged individualism” perseveres, it was the collective spoils of empire that fueled the American Dream of upward mobility. This was done domestically through the expansion of the “middle class,” globally through the incorporation of “most favored nations” into the American sphere of “free trade,” and transnationally through the liberalization of immigration. While Trump has taken a sledgehammer to US trade and immigration policy, bipartisan neoliberalism had

already hollowed out the so-called middle class. Moreover, as Naomi Klein has made clear, climate change poses an existential “battle between capitalism and the planet” that “no gradual, incremental options” can resolve.²³ Thus, contemporary debate now proceeds unvarnished, pitting Right versus Left and leaving centrist proponents of liberalism whistling in the dark.

This is a highly abbreviated account of a longer, more complex history. But the result is that the era of limited choice (center-right vs. center-left) has been ending, and the era of real, stark choices has been unfolding before our eyes. To be perfectly clear, we can’t be certain if the end of liberal capitalism will result in a better, more humane system or one that is even worse. Yet, as Wallerstein insists, “it is only in such times of transition that what we call free will outweighs the pressures of the existing system to return to equilibria.”²⁴ This means that small acts and visionary ideas can bring about transformative change—what scientists call the butterfly effect.

Wallerstein has characterized this epochal conjuncture of material and epistemological crises as “the end of the world as we know it,” emphasizing both the dangers and the openings that arise amid the decline of liberal hegemony over economics, geopolitics, and knowledge production at the end of the American century. When a system is relatively stable, it projects an aura of inevitability, conveying an overriding sense that the rational thing to do is maximize your utility or position within the system. The failure of liberal reform and mainstream party leaders to address systemic material crises has rapidly opened up alternative and oppositional space both on the socialist left for policies like the Green New Deal and Medicare For All and on the far right for white nationalism, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism. Many of you are already involved in these struggles with an understanding that while voting matters, the change we need goes far beyond the specifics of elections, parties, or personalities.

In concert with reimagining politics, we need to reconceptualize scholarship to meet the challenges of our time. Wallerstein’s work is highly instructive here too. Academia divided “the search for the true and the search for the good” into categories it labeled “social science” and “humanities.” To conceive of both a vision of the future and the means to achieve it, our work must reunite the pursuit of “knowledge, morality, and politics” that were split into “separate corners” by the liberal order. This necessitates not only transcending the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis but also “unthinking” the nineteenth-century premises of social science and knowledge production more generally, including the false assertions of “objectivity” and “rationality” at the core of the liberal university.²⁵

I think our field is in a good place to take this on. So much of the most critical work in American Studies today is built on a legacy of unknowing and refusal. Carter G. Woodson, Malcolm X, Audre Lorde, Bob Marley, and Augusto Boal implored us to reject miseducation, brainwashing, the master's tools, mental slavery, and the "cop in the head." One could argue with considerable justification that the entire field of Asian American Studies began with a rejection of the model minority assimilationism that enabled American-born Asians to access college in the postwar era.

Like the movements to protect Standing Rock and the Amazon, the struggle of the *kia'i* to protect Mauna a Wākea from desecration is interconnected with the movement to dismantle colonial science, "which, under the guise of progress, has all too often helped justify conquest and human rights violations," as the Kānaka ʻŌiwi geneticist Keolu Fox and the Black Caribbean and American astrophysicist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein have stated.²⁶ In her 1988 presidential address, Linda Kerber lamented the field's failure to follow up on the early promise of American Studies to integrate studies of science and technology with the humanities.²⁷ This is precisely the promising direction that the work of scholars like Maile Arvin is now taking us. Indeed, Arvin's work pushes further as it probes the intersection of capitalism, whiteness, and Indigeneity in ways that build on the scholarship of Cedric Robinson, Sylvia Winter, Lisa Lowe, Alexander Weheliye, and others who have not just exposed the injustices perpetuated by Western capitalism but have torn apart the liberal foundations of slavery, genocide, and colonialism.²⁸ "Saying no to scientific research," Arvin writes, "may require repositioning all people within Indigenous conceptions of the human, and liberating us all from the Western ideal of Man as the individual, transcendent subject."²⁹

What is the critical connection linking this scholarship spanning diverse peoples and places, as well as far-reaching work on intersectionality, diaspora, borderlands, the state of exception, bare life, racial capitalism, settler colonialism, Afro-pessimism, and the carceral state? Although there are many undeniable distinctions we must appreciate, the common trend that I see most vividly is a turning away from *the politics of recognition*.

There is, of course, a long history of liberalism defining who belongs within the body politic through the construction of physical, legal, and cultural borders, restrictions, and exclusions. Far from encompassing the universal expansion of rights, liberalism has been the arbiter of who does or does not deserve the rights of citizenship and, indeed, who does or does not qualify as human. The quest for recognition has thus been central to appeals to the state to grant the rights and benefits of citizenship to minoritized populations.

Many viewed Barack Obama's presidential election as the ultimate sign of recognition auguring a new and unprecedented era of inclusive nationalism that would be guided, as Nikhil Pal Singh observed, by the fulfillment of "our better history."³⁰ Whatever hopes one did or did not invest in Obama, however, the rank hostility to the mere fact of a Black president proved all too quickly that the era of bipartisan consensus, steady progress, and racial integration was already behind us.³¹

A growing collective of scholars of empire, race, and Indigeneity have repudiated the politics of recognition as a "colonial trap." Drawing inspiration from Frantz Fanon, Glen Coulthard argues in *Red Skin, White Masks* that "the liberal recognition-based approach to Indigenous self-determination in Canada . . . now serves to reproduce the very forms of colonial power which our original demands for recognition sought to transcend."³² Recognition has been critiqued across varied fields of study as a symbolic form of equality that in practice solidifies domination, often by reinforcing elitism and accommodationism within minoritized communities. Examples of this can be found in Paul Kramer's analysis of US colonial tutelage in the Philippines, the deconstruction of "gay shame" and "homonationalism" by Hiram Perez and Jasbir Puar, respectively, and studies of racial integrationism in one of my core fields, twentieth-century US history.³³

For Audra Simpson, "refusal" comprises the "political alternative to 'recognition,' the much sought-after and presumed 'good' of multicultural politics." In *Mohawk Interruptus*, Simpson chronicles articulations of "refusal" in a range of forms from armed struggle against unwelcome development to an epistemological rejection of "the type of ethnography that claims to tell the whole story and have all the answers." She poses this sharp challenge to settler politics and colonial knowledge production:

Refusal comes with the requirement of having one's *political* sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing: What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so? Those of us writing about these issues can also "refuse."³⁴

Originating as a tactical response of the oppressed caught in asymmetrical relations of power, the politics of respectability go hand in hand with recognition. Yet even when—or perhaps especially when—they succeed on their own terms, we are advised by Brittney Cooper in *Eloquent Rage* "to count the costs of our respectability": "It makes us emotionally dishonest. It makes us unable to see each other. It causes us to sympathize with the dignity vampires who come

to take everything from us while claiming we brought it on ourselves.”³⁵ Robin D. G. Kelley wrote his essay titled “Confessions of a Nice Negro,” in part, as an accounting of the microaggressions he endured in his first tenure-track job at the hands of senior faculty who never ceased to feel self-validated by their acceptance of the soft-spoken minority colleague they projected him to be.³⁶

The academy is nothing if not built on the politics of recognition. One cannot even enter without the proper credentials. Then, there are a series of endless hoops of recognition one must jump through if one seeks to move up the academic food chain. Tenure, on the surface, affords the ultimate level of academic freedom. Too frequently, however, tenure becomes a marker of who has the biggest stake in the status quo and who has been most conditioned to believe the system is working just fine.

As universities have shifted their stance toward minorized subjects from one of exclusion to one marked by differential inclusion, recognition has been further funneled through the discourses of diversity and multiculturalism. In 2001, the University of Wisconsin was so eager to recognize its Black student presence, as David Roediger criticized, that it photoshopped a headshot of Diallo Shabazz onto the cover of its undergraduate application booklet. It’s the kind of tokenism that breeds justifiable cynicism. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed, institutional diversity work is about damage control. We’re the damage they are trying to control.³⁷

Deteriorating conditions have reinforced a fierce sense of urgency for radical intervention in higher education. The majority of faculty are in contingent positions, and the elderly are retiring with unpaid student loans. Hampshire College has suspended admissions and Detroit’s Marygrove College is closing down, while entire public university systems like Alaska’s have seen their underlying educational mission threatened by the prospect of devastating funding cuts. From Charlottesville to Seattle, white nationalists and neo-Nazis have carried out violent attacks and magnified their campus presence. ASA members and friends have been targeted with explicit death threats, and ICE has come after some of our most vulnerable students. Not to be outdone, major universities have disgraced themselves through their protection of sexual predators and sellout to the superwealthy, exposing rampant corruption within the ranks of senior administration.

In response, many of us in and around American Studies and Ethnic Studies have amplified our commitment to understanding and standing with movements of the oppressed. We have particularly seen how expressions of support for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions unnerve the guardians of the status quo. We’ve been denounced by university presidents and by liberals,

conservatives, and moderates in the media. Politicians have even proposed cutting public funding to any school connected to the ASA, while Larry Summers insisted that all colleges and universities must deny faculty any funding to participate in our conference.³⁸ And to top it off, one of the attorneys from the legal campaign against the ASA is now the assistant secretary for civil rights in the US Department of Education. It feels like 1984 all over again.

Perhaps the most unforgettable quote came from a white male senior professor with an endowed chair in “American Civilization,” whose condemnation of the ASA’s alleged “hostility” to Israel gave away the dog whistle to sound a moral panic over the growing influence of Ethnic Studies scholars. “What seems to be the case,” he argued, “is the emergence of Ethnic Studies may have tilted the organization heavily in favor of people of color.”³⁹ (That quote could be used as an endorsement on the ASA website.)

Like Trumpian cries of “I’m not the racist; you’re the racist,” these attacks and mischaracterizations, rooted in white cishet male fragility and anachronistic views of higher education, are empirically baseless, politically spurious, and intellectually bankrupt. But they are tapping into currents of reactionary thought that are both dangerously on the rise and central to the agenda of well-funded agitators. As such, they pose real threats we cannot ignore. We need to defend our comrades who come under attack.⁴⁰ We also need to be organized and ready for mobilization before the next wave of attacks comes. With these challenges also comes a grander necessity and possibility to define and redefine who we are and where we align ourselves and our work.

Building the Revolution as We Fight

Detroit has been the site of some of the most vicious and deleterious white supremacist violence, police brutality, racial segregation, and employment discrimination in the United States. The recent bankruptcy, wrongly portrayed in public discourse as a bailout, was predicated on voter disenfranchisement, authoritarian rule, and a coercive kneeling before the gods of finance to remake the city. The unelected, autocratic emergency manager who controlled Detroit through a state takeover in 2013 described himself as a “benevolent dictator.” His regime served to subsidize billionaire developers while dispossessing the predominantly Black and working-class residents of jobs, pensions, homes, lands, and their right to the city. The chief financial officer, during a meeting about a neighborhood watch program, asked, “Can I shoot someone in a hoodie?” As real estate tycoon Dan Gilbert bought and controlled roughly one hundred properties in Downtown Detroit, the *New York Times* did a

favorable profile that literally cast him as the city's "missionary" savior. When Detroit's bankruptcy was complete, its financial architect and Wall Street's "turnaround" king, Kenneth Buckfire, did a victory lap on the financial news networks, proclaiming he had invented a prototype of neoliberal austerity for Puerto Rico, Greece, and public entities all around the world.⁴¹



Figure 5. Screenshot of Kenneth Buckfire's appearance on Bloomberg News, February 25, 2016. Video last accessed by author on December 29, 2019 at www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2016-02-25/what-puerto-rico-can-learn-from-detroit-s-bankruptcy.

predatory lenders. They have been arrested in acts of civil disobedience to expose the immorality of profiteering from depriving families of water. Such resistance is both essential and not enough. When GM and Chrysler declared bankruptcy, they also dealt a final blow to the twentieth-century model of social justice rooted in the redistribution of industrial wealth. This was a particularly painful lesson for activists to swallow, but what it has forced is a rupture with capitalist discourses of wealth, growth, development, and progress, thus providing an opening for a whole new vision of revolution.

In opposition to this concerted campaign of top-down redevelopment, Detroiters have continued to mount mass demonstrations and defiant protests. They have locked arms to defend homeowners from unjust evictions by



Figure 6. Screenshot of *New York Times* feature story on billionaire developer, Dan Gilbert, who has acquired dozens of properties in Downtown Detroit. The article was published on April 13, 2013.

My firsthand sense of this came through a broader engagement with movement builders and thinkers in Detroit, whose work in environmental justice, youth leadership

development, public art, ending police brutality, disability rights, and queer community building embodied the concept of “building the revolution as we fight.” Each campaign, each struggle was more than a protest or rejection of current injustices; they projected values, built relationships, and proposed new methods to create an alternative system supplanting capitalism. In the aftermath of the 1967 Detroit rebellion, the Boggses adopted this concept from Amílcar Cabral and the revolution of Guiné. C. L. R. James advanced a parallel notion of “the future in the present.” Today, these ideas are widely embraced within

activist currents that promote “prefigurative” and “horizonalist” politics. Our 2019 artist-in-residence, adrienne maree brown, has expanded on these ideas through her work on “emergent strategy” and “pleasure activism.”⁴²

For Grace, urban farming was an exemplar of a {r}evolutionary movement embodying the “quiet strength” of Motown’s transplanted matriarch, Rosa Parks. Detroit has become the nation’s leader in urban farming for two primary reasons. First, the movement was built on the situated knowledge and wisdom of African American elders from the South. Second, those elders saw the unprecedented abandonment of the city with its one hundred thousand vacant lots not as blight but as promise. They saw promise to heal neighborhoods and confront environmental racism, to overcome food deserts and health disparities, and to organize self-governing, self-sufficient communities. Urban farms such D-Town Farm on the Westside and Freedom Freedom Growers on the Eastside view their work as a continuation and advancement of the struggles for “self-determination” that defined the Black Panthers or the Republic of New Africa.⁴³

Whereas most policymakers see the city’s infamous vacant lots as “blight” that must be cleared and marketed to developers, Detroit’s visionary organizers stress the importance of decommodifying the land and returning it to the public commons. Contrary to speculators who seek to drive up rents and land values, they prioritize noncommercial ownership to benefit the community, such as through the establishment of community land trusts. This vision of solidarity economics has become integral to a Black radical agenda through formations like Cooperation Jackson and Black Lives Matter / Movement for Black Lives.

By providing healthy and affordable food, the urban farms also serve a critical pedagogical function, as corporations seek to hijack the global food supply through biopiracy and monopoly control. In solidarity with peasant and landless movements of the global South, they promote food sovereignty to counter the negative effects of factory farming, consumer culture, and extractive industries. They reconnect youth to elders, shedding light on how diasporic African cultures have traversed slavery, Jim Crow, and the Great Migration. Against models of uplift that frame access to college as an escape from the city, they especially help young people to see that they can have a brighter future in Detroit because they have the power within themselves to transform the city.

Drawing from the work and writings of Martin Luther King Jr., Grace posited urban agriculture as a beacon of the future because it modeled a

Figure 7.

Mural depicting Myrtle Thompson Curtis and Wayne Curtis, founders of Detroit’s Freedom Freedom Growers urban farm. Photo by author.



“two-sided transformation” of our structures and our selves. In this way, she situated it alongside movements creating freedom schools, peace zones to promote community safety through de-escalation and transformative justice, and cooperatives for everything from housing and craft production to health care and child care. The common thread between these movements is the shift they make from rejections to projections. Or, as prefigurative activists have stated, our movements must oppose and propose.⁴⁴

I have found it particularly generative to think about this work and vision emanating from Detroit in conjunction with writings on Indigenous Resurgence, such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *As We Have Always Done*.⁴⁵ I want to draw attention to three aspects that highlight some of the profound, multifaceted implications for work in American Studies.

First, these movements go beyond the politics of protest and putting demands on the state. Like abolitionist movements against slavery, prisons, and whiteness, their horizons of possibility are not shackled by discourses of liberal reform.⁴⁶ Furthermore, they do not get stuck agitating at the stage of rebellion against what is wrong but instead focus on what they stand for, which militates against defaulting to state-centered reform and unleashes the forces of love, creativity, and solidarity. They are preparing for the collapse of capitalism, whether it happens abruptly or gradually, in the near future or within the next seven generations. Importantly, they are not peddling an abstract construct to be realized later but engaging people in a protracted, ontological process of creating a living, evolving alternative now. Moreover, as Michelle Daigle has noted, the resurgence of Indigenous models of self-governance opens avenues to restore the political, legal, and epistemological authority of “women, Elders, youth, and queer, trans, and two-spirited peoples” dispossessed by “colonial-capitalist technologies of power.”⁴⁷

It must be stressed that this type of turning away does not in any way erase contradiction but instead brings others to the forefront to be examined, struggled over, and resolved. For example, some of the most vital work by ASA members today connects Black diasporic and Indigenous studies. This has occurred amid a broader shift to prioritize relations within and among oppressed peoples. I situate my work on Los Angeles within a generation of ethnic studies scholarship that has transcended the focus on LA as an Anglo city of myths to center analyses of race as a relational, polycultural construct. For the 2018 John Hope Franklin Prize-winning book, *City of Inmates*, Kelly Lytle Hernández scoured the “rebel archive” of conquest, rebellion, and incarceration to produce an epic account that links Native genocide, exclusion of Latinx and Asian immigrants, political repression, and antiblackness.⁴⁸

In turning away, we further need to continuously think and rethink how we engage universities and institutions that have been central to systems of oppression. There is a pattern of protest politics many of us know all too well. A racist incident or hate crime occurs, provoking demonstrations and petitions. If the opposition is persistent and disruptive, university leaders offer negotiations and concessions. The level of change may vary based on the intensity of the protest, deftness of the protest leaders, and self-interests of the administrators. Regardless, the real battle always occurs when the concessions are actualized: Who controls the funding? What happens after this group of students graduates? Who hires and manages the multicultural center staff? Where are the tenure lines housed for new faculty hires? And so on.

It is all too easy to find oneself stuck in a game of academic recognition that at best spins around in circles and at worst becomes a downward spiral. There is a surplus of overpaid administrators whose primary job is to co-opt work we aspire to be transformative and exploit minoritized subjects as symbolic representations of “diversity.” In this context, it has become acceptable to conduct research that exposes inequity, so long as the problems are deemed to be outside the walls of the university, the museum, or the NGO. While I am not asking that we replicate fifty-year-old prescriptions, we need to reclaim the Third World Liberation Front’s imperative to establish relatively autonomous institutions that reject colonial standards and situate our work at the center of revolutionary struggle. This leads to the next point . . .

Second, amid the crisis of representative democracy, these movements emphasize direct, participatory democracy. They insist that we cannot divorce *what* we want from *how* we get there. “*How* we live, *how* we organize, *how* we engage in the world—the process—not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation,” writes Leanne Simpson. “Engaging in deep and reciprocal Indigeneity is a transformative act because it fundamentally changes modes of production of our lives.”⁴⁹ The method is the message.

This means we need to look within movements and communities for catalysts and sources of breakthrough in the form of ideas and action, whether through the critical adaptation of disciplinary methods, the production of “rebel archives,” or participatory action research. Landmark histories by Charles Payne and Barbara Ransby remain essential to understanding movement-building dynamics and the organizing tradition of the Black Freedom Movement. Cathy Cohen’s work awakens us to the significance of “secondary marginalization.” Through self-reflection, Grace Lee Boggs came to appreciate how African American women and nonbinary activists were pivotal to “creating more participatory, empowering, and horizontal kinds of leadership.” They have

challenged the “patriarchal culture” that has not only stained the dominant society but also “the charismatic male, vertical, and vanguard party leadership patterns of the 1960’s.”⁵⁰

Freirian pedagogy teaches that the biggest impact occurs not through what we teach but by how we teach. Education for critical consciousness is a practice for self-government. Grace Lee Boggs often invoked V. I. Lenin’s maxim that “every cook can govern.” While this was intended to advance inclusion as a bottom-line principle, it went much further. Opposed to hierarchical models of revolution carried out by parties in the name of faceless “masses,” Grace believed that true and lasting social transformation requires active, critical, and ongoing participation of the people who define the meaning and content of revolution from the ground up, learning from advances but, even more important, from the inevitable setbacks. Many of the greatest pedagogical examples break the walls of the university open, such as Bard College’s Prison Initiative and College Unbound, whose founding provost, Adam Bush, received his PhD from the University of Southern California’s Department of American Studies and Ethnicity.

We also know that the ASA must “walk the talk” because our institutional policy and climate significantly shapes the conditions of knowledge production in our field. Although our work is incomplete, the 2019 Program Committee advanced a number of initiatives to put our values into practice through new guidelines for universal access; over one hundred travel stipends to students, contingent faculty, international scholars, and community-based scholars; an augmented budget for ASL interpretation; professional, on-site child care available at sliding scale rates; and the Organizing Track to advance struggles and movements bridging the campus and community.

Third and finally, these movements are grounded in land and a sense of place that is historical, ecological, and spiritual. Our conference theme consciously invokes a Hawaiian approach to *sust‘āinability*, which positions the land (‘āina, that which feeds) at the center of the concept and praxis. In *A Nation Rising*, Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaika‘ala Wright put forward the principle of *ea* as “life” to highlight Hawaiian social movements that encompass the interconnected realms of culture, politics, and economics. Overcoming colonial expropriations of natural resources and bans on Hawaiian language and schools, these movements have successfully made water a public trust and established Indigenous systems of education. Through ongoing struggles, they continue to build and grow in ways that “surpass state-based forms of sovereignty.”⁵¹

At the same time, questions of land and sovereignty challenge members of diverse movements to forge active and concrete forms of solidarity within what Leanne Simpson calls “constellations of coresistance.” In Detroit, urban agriculture has served as a means for working-class, majority Black communities to reclaim the commons in the face of neoliberal dispossession. Yet, without a framework for negotiating overlapping forms of oppression, such appeals to reclaim the commons can contradict sovereign Indigenous rights to unceded territory, thus situating Black and Indigenous movements for self-determination at odds with each other. Daigle has deftly responded to this dilemma by reminding us to build “relations of accountability and solidarity” that “contend with logics of white supremacy while refusing to re-center white fragility.” She has thus posed this pointed question: “How can radical forms of solidarity be built between Indigenous communities and other racialized communities in settler colonial contexts, to resist against white supremacy and overlapping yet distinct forms of dispossession entangled in the colonial-capitalist production of food across space?”⁵² By confronting rather than evading the tensions that arise within and among nonwhite and Indigenous peoples, it becomes possible to transform points of friction into sites of critical connections.

Those of us in universities and similar institutions have no shortage of places to foster accountability for slavery, genocide, and colonialism. Institutional Research Boards (IRB) often serve first and foremost to protect administrators rather than the public. Every researcher should develop a richer sense of social responsibility, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith outlines in *Decolonizing Methodologies*.⁵³ Decolonization challenges us to address the internal contradictions within progressive policies too. The campaign of free college for all builds on the democratization of education inherent in the creation of land grant universities. Yet, we must continuously ask: on whose land and with what right to grant?

These constitute but a subset of examples of the exciting and urgent work taking place within and beyond higher education today. While we memorialize the guiding lights who gave us the words and analysis to make sense of our peoples’ struggles, we are propelled forward by the new and resurgent sources of clarity and illumination all around us. I have invoked the long battle to define and shape Detroit’s “revitalization” because it provides a window into the epochal conflict between two alternative futures, one characterized by the authoritarian plutocracy of the emergency management regime and the other by the participatory democracy inherent in grassroots activism.

On Mauna a Wākea, there is a functioning model of a university without walls as created by the *kia’i*. As Fox and Prescod-Weinstein state, “Far from

some replay of an ancient clash between tradition and modernity, this is a battle between the old ways of doing science, which rely on forceful extraction (whether of natural resources or data), and a new scientific method, which privileges the dignity and humanity of Indigenous peoples.”⁵⁴ We can find analogues in the struggles at Standing Rock, Tahrir Square, Chiapas, Kashmir, Hong Kong, the West Bank, and elsewhere—all of which provide signs of alternative futures. Although they may have aspects of recognition or redistribution politics, at this moment in history they particularly carry elements and prospects of a whole new system.

We in the ASA have taken small steps toward a long journey. We are at a moment that comes along once in a millennium, where the perils of mass extinction and immense suffering meet the necessity and possibility to restore and create ways of living in harmony with all living things and the Earth. As Grace Lee Boggs proclaimed in her farewell statement, “A revolution that is based on the people exercising their creativity in the midst of devastation is one of the great historical contributions of humankind.” That is how I see this generation’s mission to fulfill or betray.

Notes

This article was adapted from Presidential Address delivered to the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association on November 8, 2019.

1. This paragraph and the next are adapted from the program overview, which I wrote in concert with the Program Committee co-chairs, Hōkūlani K. Aikau, Macarena Gómez-Barris, and David Palumbo-Liu.
2. I had no degree or training under the rubric of “American Studies.” When I was an undergraduate, the University of Pennsylvania dismantled its “American Civilization” program, repudiating a last gasp effort by Murray Murphey (whose passing and longtime editorship of *AQ* we acknowledge) to reinvigorate the program with four new lines devoted to various Ethnic Studies fields. As universities belatedly conceded the political imperative to begin “diversifying” the faculty, hires were disproportionately made in “diversity” fields of study. The absence or presence of diversity funding could make the difference between survival and dissolution or between growth and stagnation for American Studies–related programs and departments.
In concert with antiracist student activism, my studies centered on Black history, and to my great fortune, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham took me on as a mentee when she was an assistant professor. For graduate school, I came back to the West Coast, where the legacy of Ethnic Studies and the Third World Liberation Front strikes far outweighed the prevalence of American Studies per se. My role models for Freirian pedagogy and engaged scholarship were movement veterans of the 1960s like Glenn Omatsu, who worked part-time on *Amerasia Journal* and taught service-learning courses as a contingent faculty member at UCLA, Cal State Northridge, and Pasadena City College. Glenn is an organizing guru in the mold of Marshall Ganz. Student activists called him “Yoda,” as they flocked to him for mentoring.
3. I had met Grace in 1998, when her autobiography *Living for Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) was published, and I invited her to appear with Yuri Kochiyama at an Asian American activism conference at UCLA. Though I had not previously read any of her writings, I

quickly devoured them, as they altered my entire approach to activism and scholarship. Still, it was even more profound to be in such proximity to Grace that we did community organizing work together through the Boggs Center and Detroit Summer, and we had long and running conversations about revolutionary theory and practice.

4. Mary Helen Washington, "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center?" *American Quarterly* 50.1 (1998): 1–23. When I read Washington's seminal presidential address, I was immediately struck by its opening paragraph, which was the exact tonic I needed to overcome the anxiety I felt starting a job in this field. Washington proclaimed she had little to no training or experience in "American studies" per se. "I am now and always will be," she declared, "primarily an African-Americanist." Although Washington characterized this as a "major contradiction" in 1997, it looks more like a prevailing trend in 2019.
 5. Grace Lee Boggs, "Scholars Walk the Talk in Detroit," *Michigan Citizen*, October 22, 2000. In the official summation, program co-chair Sharon O'Brien stressed that the 2000 Detroit conference reflected "the exciting new directions in scholarship on gender, sexuality, post-nationalism, and performativity." See Sharon O'Brien, "2000 Reflections," www.theasa.net/annual-meeting/past-meetings/2000-reflections.
 6. Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 45.
 7. On November 16, 2018, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez posted an image of Grace Lee Boggs's pamphlet "Women and the Movement to Build a New America" on Instagram and noted "@rashidatlaib slipped me this gift." On July 28, 2019, Ocasio-Cortez posted an image of *Living for Change* on Instagram and noted that it was one of two books on her "to-read list."
 8. Ibram X. Kendi, "The Heartbeat of Racism Is Denial," *New York Times*, January 13, 2018. The research of social scientists such as Geoffrey T. Wodtke provides noteworthy insight into the perpetuation of racism among highly educated whites. "Are smart people less racist?" asked Wodtke in a provocative journal article. Survey data consistently demonstrate that whites deemed to have "higher cognitive ability" generally claim to be unbiased and support racial equality. Further evidence, however, reveals they may be "simply more sophisticated racists than their counterparts with lower ability" (Wodtke, "Are Smart People Less Racist? Verbal Ability, Anti-Black Prejudice, and the Principle-Policy Paradox," *Social Problems* 63 [2016]: 43).
 9. American Studies had been created primarily by professors, who had firm footing in the academy but wanted to create a new or second scholarly home. The upsurge of the late 1960s, however, sparked a changing of the guard. In 1969, the rejection of the Vietnam War moratorium resolution put forward by the ASA's newly formed Radical Caucus nearly split the organization. That year's ASA president left in the middle of the conference and later resigned as concessions were made to promote Black, Third World, and women's studies, and end the control of the association by an insular group of men. With the ASA's landmark 1973 conference in San Francisco, a changing of the guard was unmistakable. As Allen F. Davis recounted, "Cultural history, the study of material culture and social history—with its emphasis on gender, ethnicity, race and class—became dominant in the association and displaced the emphasis on American exceptionalism and an American consensus" ("The Politics of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42.3 [1990]: 368).
- Ethnic studies was born out of radical organizing generated by student and community activists of color, who not only felt excluded or severely marginalized but were forced to endure police beatings, arrests, and COINTELPRO-style surveillance and repression to keep their movement afloat. Above and beyond the push for curricular reform or even autonomous colleges of ethnic studies, the Third World Liberation Front condemned the role of higher education in perpetuating monopoly capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy, and correspondingly demanded policies such as open admissions.
- I do not in any way mean to suggest that scholars in ethnic studies universally maintained this original posture, as academic institutionalization, the linguistic turn, and issues of gender and sexuality provoked a new wave of debate within ethnic studies formations during my graduate school years in the 1990s. For some, the longer-standing mainstream academic legitimacy of American Studies was appealing by choice or necessity. For others, moving away from specific Ethnic Studies formations at the campus and national levels stemmed from a criticism of what was referred to as the "cultural nationalist" (not always with total accuracy or precision) tendencies inherent in the 1960s and 1970s models of Ethnic Studies.
10. Robert Warrior, "Home / Not Home: Centering American Studies Where We Are," *American Quarterly* 69.2 (2017): 191–219. The internal transformation of the ASA has set it apart from most

of academia. We cannot forget how much the US academic faculty, despite notable exceptions like HBCUs and Tribal Colleges, remained overwhelmingly white throughout the twentieth century. In 1998–99, whites made up 92 percent of full-time college faculty, and nearly every single one surveyed was convinced their institution treated faculty of color fairly. Almost as many agreed that women and gay and lesbian faculty were treated fairly. Fewer than 10 percent of all faculty surveyed agreed there was “a lot of racial conflict” on their campus. Furthermore, tenure-track faculty positions in Ethnic and Indigenous Studies remained scarce overall and nonexistent on many campuses. Amid the rise of culture wars and canon wars, Eurocentrism prevailed, and most faculty (57 percent in 1998–99) continued to assert that “Western Civilization” should be the foundation of the undergraduate curriculum. See Linda J. Sax, Alexander W. Astin, William S. Korn, and Shannon K. Gilmartin, *The American College Teacher: National Norms for the 1998–99 HERI Faculty Survey* (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, 1999), 21, 37.

11. This includes scholars who come to the ASA primarily or initially from homes in Indigenous, ethnic, gender, queer, and disability studies, as well as those who come from humanities backgrounds beyond the traditional core of literary and historical studies, social scientists, and those based in professional schools. We stand with international scholars like Rana Barakat, who attended the 2019 annual meeting with support of the ASA's Middle East Travel Fund. A historian of Palestine, Barakat's employment at Birzeit University in the West Bank has been suspended as a result of Israeli state action revoking the visas of international faculty in Palestinian universities.
12. Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 224. Hall's circuitous path to a job at a university entailed activist organizing and networking, working as a schoolteacher, and editing *New Left Review*, but conspicuously did not involve getting a PhD. His outsider status, to be clear, should not be mistaken as a residual outcome of exclusion. It was a conscious form of positioning. In *Familiar Stranger*, Hall bristled at the recollection of his colonial education “designed to cultivate and conscript a British-oriented, subordinate ‘native’ elite. Those schooled in such an environment would become ‘subjectified’ from the inside by having their heads stuffed with a curriculum devoted to an idea of civilization to which, it was hoped, they would be motivated to aspire” (117). After becoming one of the privileged few to leave Jamaica for college in the metropole, Hall felt compelled to “construct a sort of intellectual counter-life to Oxford” (224). Hall's conception of diasporic thought resisted conventional academic methodology by emphasizing “the displacements” and situating “the dysfunctions at the forefront” (171). It was attuned to making sense of a different reality than that perceived by the scholastic insiders. That indeed is what underlies the brilliance of what would come to be known as the Birmingham School of cultural studies, which could only come into being on the margins of academia through the work of Hall and a collective of scholar-activists whose primary motive was social relevance rather than academic recognition. We are reminded that *Policing the Crisis*, the paradigmatic, collaboratively authored work that informed the study of race, class, culture, and hegemony for a generation and then some, “began life in the backstreets of Handsworth in Birmingham” and not in a grant application or seminar room. This emphasis on dysfunctions, collectivity, engagement, and problem-posing methodology further positioned Hall and the Birmingham School to address their own contradictions and limitations by devoting overdue attention to gender, sexuality, and “new ethnicities” marked by fluidity and heterogeneity. See Hall, *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 9–10.
13. See Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, “The Fantasy and Fate of Ethnic Studies in an Age of Uprisings: An Interview with Nick Mitchell,” *Undercommoning*, July 13, 2016, undercommoning.org/nick-mitchell-interview/.
14. Koritha Mitchell, “Identifying White Mediocrity and Know-Your-Place Aggression: A Form of Self-Care,” *African American Review* 51.4 (2018): 257. I have repeatedly seen books purport to research and analyze Asian Americans while ignoring the relevant literature, theories, methodologies, and primary sources at the heart of Asian American Studies. This is often because, to their own intellectual detriment, the author's output on the path to publication, tenure, and even awards was vetted only by disciplinary peers and not experts in Asian American Studies. The same can be said for work on any other minoritized subjects.
15. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

16. As a senior fellow working on the Smithsonian Museum of American History's "Many Voices, One Nation" exhibit, I offered the story San Miguel de Gualdape as an alternative way to begin discussing US history. See my epilogue to *Many Voices, One Nation: Material Culture Reflections on Race and Migration in the United States*, ed. Margaret Salazar-Porzio et al. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2017).
 17. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013).
 18. Hōkulani K. Aikau, "Following the Alaloa Kipapa of Our Ancestors: A Trans-Indigenous Futurity without the State (United States or otherwise)," *American Quarterly* 67.3 (2015): 653–61; Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).
 19. Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 6; Silva, "Ke Kū'ē Kūpa'a Loa Nei K/Mākou (We Most Solemnly Protest) A Memoir of 1998," in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 310.
 20. See, e.g., Immanuel Wallerstein, *The End of the World as We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
 21. Immanuel Wallerstein, *After Liberalism* (New York: New Press, 1995), 254. Since the mid-1990s (in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet bloc), Wallerstein has written a series of books that I consider some of the most profound texts for radical intellectuals of our time, starting with *After Liberalism*. These recent works are very different in tone from those written earlier in his career. Most people associate Wallerstein with the development of "world-systems" analysis during the 1970s, when he began to write a series of books arguing that the predominant tendency within global capitalism was the division of the world into core and periphery zones. In political terms, "world-systems" theory lent credence to the idea that Third World or global South national liberation struggles lay at the core of the struggle against capitalism/imperialism, contrary to more orthodox Marxist conceptions of the class contradiction.
- Wallerstein argues that the world system has since entered a crisis period. Like others, he identifies the structural roots of collapse in environmental degradation, the decline of nation-states, and the intense competition generated by globalization. But what is most unique is his contention that the rise of new movements (1968) and the collapse of Eastern socialism (1989) tore apart the reformist liberal ethos that was the primary glue holding the world system together (with America as its principle hegemon). Wallerstein argues that the cold war notwithstanding, the modern world system was relatively stable during the postwar era by comparison with the crisis and bifurcation of the present and recent past. If his earlier works prioritized explicating the mechanics and rules of a stable system, his latest works emphasize the volatility of this "age of transition."
22. Katrina Forrester, "Liberalism Doesn't Start with Liberty," *Nation*, December 23, 2014, www.thenation.com/article/liberalism-doesnt-start-liberty/.
 23. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 22–23.
 24. Wallerstein, *End of the World*, 3.
 25. *Ibid.*, ix. Wallerstein further writes, "I have argued that worldsystems analysis is not a theory but a protest against neglected issues and deceptive epistemologies. It is a call for intellectual change, indeed for 'unthinking' the premises of nineteenth-century social science, as I say in the title of one of my books. It is an intellectual task that is and has to be a political task as well, because—I insist—the search for the true and the search for the good is but a single quest. If we are to move forward to a world that is substantively rational, in Max Weber's usage of this term, we cannot neglect either the intellectual or the political challenge. And we cannot segment them into two hermetically sealed containers. We can only struggle uneasily with pushing forward simultaneously to coming closer to each of them." See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Development of an Intellectual Position," www.iwallerstein.com/intellectual-itinerary/. In *The Paradox of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), J. Kēhaulani Kauanui provides a model of praxis that reconnects knowledge, morality, and politics in a work that interrogates the role discourses of colonialism and sexuality play within Hawaiian sovereignty movements.

26. Keolu Fox and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, "The Fight for Mauna Kea Is a Fight against Colonial Science," *Nation*, July 24, 2019, www.thenation.com/article/mauna-kea-tmt-colonial-science/.
27. Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 41.3 (1989): 425.
28. See, e.g., Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Sylvia Wynter, *On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); and Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
29. Maile Arvin, "The Polynesian Problem and Its Genomic Solutions," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2.2 (2015): 41.
30. Nikhil Pal Singh, "Disciplining American Studies? A Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly* 61.1 (2009): 32. Singh further writes: "To the question of American studies in its moment of danger, Phil Deloria combines wise and disciplined counsels of risk management with ambitious and inspired calls to intellectual self-confidence and conjoint action—a prescient offering for what we now might view as the age of Obama. Yet, we would be mistaken if we believed that all that we require is competence and a willingness to be more agreeable. As Stuart Hall and his coauthors argue in one of the great collaborative works of interdisciplinary cultural studies, *Policing the Crisis*, coercive institutionalizations have a way of nesting themselves within the order of things even during moments of a return to more consensual modes of governance. By extension, the promise of a more capacious and inclusive 'Broadway and Main,' like the iteration of the 'America' we inhabit, remains dependent upon the institutional inheritance of a garrison state, one with many victims, no definite location, and evidently no finite duration."
31. This was entirely predictable, if one heeded the sage advice of the Tony Award-winning singer-songwriter Stew, the lodestar of my graduate school years in Los Angeles. "An Obama presidency," said Stew, "will be the quake that unearths the kind of overt, white-hot racism in both the media and the populace that liberals and conservatives have been telling us doesn't exist anymore, but that black people have known all along was still alive and well." See "Richard Belzer, Ice-T Jack Up the Election," *Village Voice*, October 29, 2008.
32. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 23–24.
33. Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Hiram Perez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It Too," *Social Text*, nos. 84–85 (2005): 171–91; Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Kramer provides a sustained analysis of the politics of recognition in *The Blood of Government*. As Kramer documents, the US model of benevolent assimilation and colonial tutelage forced Filipinos to adhere to white supremacist standards if they wished to demonstrate their ostensible progress toward fitness for self-government. My work on postwar US history has examined how the liberal politics of integration repressed social democratic movements for structural reform, forcing claims for racial advancement to rest on educated professionals of color proving they were model citizens.
34. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 11, 34.
35. Brittney Cooper, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* (New York: St. Martin's, 2018), 207.
36. Robin D. G. Kelley, "Confessions of a Nice Negro, or Why I Shaved My Head," in *Speak My Name: Black Men on Masculinity and the American Dream*, ed. Don Belton (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 12–22. Kelley writes that "the more ensconced I became in the world of academia, the less threatening I seemed" to the point that he and his partner "found ourselves in the awkward position of being everyone's favorite Negroes." They regularly "attended dinner parties where we were the only African Americans in the room" and white people felt "perfectly at ease asking dumb or unanswerable questions" about race.
37. David Roediger, "What's Wrong with These Pictures? Race, Narratives of Admission, and the Liberal Self-Representations of Historically White Colleges and Universities," *Washington University Journal of*

- Law and Policy* 18 (2005): 203–22; Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). I am drawing on Yen Le Espiritu's formulation of multiculturalism as "differential inclusion." See, e.g., Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
38. Peter Schmidt, "Backlash against Israel Boycott Puts American Studies Assn. on Defensive," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 2, 2014.
39. Sean Savage, "American Studies Professors: Israel Boycott Antithetical to Values of Academia," December 18, 2013, www.jns.org/american-studies-professors-israel-boycott-antithetical-to-values-of-academia/.
40. One of the most urgent and important sessions of the 2019 annual meeting was titled "Defending Academic Freedom, Protecting Our Colleagues," which was specifically designed to empower the voices of our members who have been subjected to various attacks on and off campus. Chaired by former ASA president Curtis Marez, the panel examined the challenges that have arisen when faculty and students have worked to make higher education accessible for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons, to address the chilling presence of ICE on campus, and to support academic freedom and human rights in Palestine. I thank Elizabeth Esch for helping to organize this presidential session, which featured Michelle Jones (NYU), Sandra Soto (University of Arizona), Rabab Abdulhadi (San Francisco State University), and John Cheney-Lippold (University of Michigan).
41. These issues are documented in Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).
42. James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); C. L. R. James, *Future in the Present: Selected Writings* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977); adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017); brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).
43. Grace Lee Boggs wrote "[r]evolution" to connote the interconnectedness of revolution and evolution. The subject of urban farming in Detroit is discussed in greater detail in Grace Lee Boggs with Scott Kurashige, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), see esp. chap. 4; and Kurashige, *Fifty-Year Rebellion*, chap. 6.
44. See, e.g., Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011).
45. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
46. Simpson writes, "There is no demand upon the state or its citizens other than to get out of the way and respect Indigenous self-determination and nationhood. What if we take their lead and stop begging the state to be accountable but shift our energy into building our nations on our own terms?" (*As We Have Always Done*, 237).
47. Michelle Daigle, "Tracing the Terrain of Indigenous Food Sovereignities," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 46.2 (2019): 303.
48. Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Natalia Molina's writing on multiethnic communities has particularly advanced the study of race as a relational construct; see *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Over the past two decades, I have regularly discussed with Daniel Widener the concept of polyculturalism as articulated by Robin D. G. Kelley and developed in Vijay Prashad's *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon, 2001).
49. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 19.
50. Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Boggs, *Next American Revolution*, 173.
51. Goodyear-Ka'opua, Hussey, and Wright, *Nation Rising*, 5, 12. They further write, "Hawaiian social movements have been, at their core, about protecting and energizing 'Ōiwi ways of life: growing and eating ancestral foods, speaking the native language, renewing relationships through ceremonies, making collective decisions, and simply remaining on the land" (12).
52. Daigle, "Tracing the Terrain," 312. On "constellations of coresistance," see Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 228–31.

53. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012). Smith writes, "As a site of struggle research has a significance for indigenous peoples that is embedded in our history under the gaze of Western imperialism and Western science. It is framed by our attempts to escape the penetration and surveillance of that gaze whilst simultaneously reordering and reconstituting ourselves as indigenous human beings in a state of ongoing crisis. Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization. In its clear links to Western knowledge research has generated a particular relationship to indigenous peoples which continues to be problematic" (9).
54. Fox and Prescod-Weinstein, "Fight for Mauna Kea."