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Introduction

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Introduction to “New Scholarship on the Caribbean and the United States”

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In our previous special issue reviewing new work in Caribbean literary and cultural studies from 2012, I argued for the importance of academic reviews for fostering dialogue around important issues in our field.¹ The current special issue translates that idea of dialogue to a geographical context, looking at conversations and cultural exchanges that cross borders, bodies of water, and academic disciplines. Caribbean writers and intellectuals have always been resistant to national and disciplinary boundaries, whether in the *Nuestra América* project articulated by José Martí in the nineteenth century, the negritude of Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, the vision of multicultural Empire held by J.E.C. McFarlane and Una Marson, or the dreams of federation that nourished West Indian writers during the 1950s. Those transnationalists looked to the Latin American mainland, Africa, the commonwealth, or the rest of the Caribbean as sites where Caribbean culture and identity has historically been rooted and routed.

In the past decade, scholarship reading the Caribbean vis-à-vis these other sites has been supplemented by an explosion of important and influential work on the connections between the Caribbean and the United States. There are many reasons for the increased scholarly investment in this particular transnational relationship: the rising presence and visibility of Caribbean diasporas in the United States along with more and more Caribbean scholars being located in U.S. universities; a post-9/11 renewal of U.S. territorial imperialism, nearly dormant after U.S. defeat in Vietnam, reminding us of the Caribbean’s privileged place in the development of U.S. imperial ideologies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, or even Chaguaramas;² anniversaries of events like the Haitian Revolution and the abolition of the slave trade placing the hemispheric significance of slavery and its opponents at the front of our consciousness.

Just as Caribbean Studies has increasingly included the U.S. within its purview as in many ways a Caribbean space, the twenty-first century has seen an expansion of American Studies to acknowledge the shifting and permeable nature of that field’s object of study. Is the “American” in American Studies a hemispheric designation, and if so, how much does that transnational ambition owe to a history of manifest destiny and overseas imperialism? The reviews in this issue explore the overlaps between these academic fields and call into question the idea of area studies or geographical boundaries as a way of organizing our intellectual endeavors.

Our dialogue between Jeff Karem and Nicole Waligora-Davis sets up two of the central concerns of this issue: first, the commonalities and distinctions between African Americans in

¹ Dalleo (2012), <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1229&context=anthurium>.

² I use the qualifier “nearly” to describe the dormancy of U.S. military adventurism between Vietnam and 9/11 because of the numerous exceptions to this lull. Caribbeanists are aware of one of the most important early attempts by U.S. imperialists to snap the American public out of what Ronald Reagan described as its “Vietnam Syndrome,” the 1983 invasion of Grenada. The burgeoning scholarship on the relationship between the U.S. and the Caribbean has included examinations of what the Grenada revolution and invasion mean to the contemporary Caribbean, including recent books by Shalini Puri and David Scott, the essays from Puri’s edited collection, as well as the conclusions to my *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* and Michelle Stephens’s *Black Empire*.

the U.S. and Caribbean people; and second, the history of U.S. imperialism in the region. Kareem and Waligora-Davis explore how these two issues overlap and interact in fascinating ways. Their research shows African Americans navigating their identities as both like and unlike their Caribbean neighbors. African Americans simultaneously find themselves members of the black diaspora and citizens of U.S. Empire. That double consciousness means that at times, African Americans have been able to reap the benefits of imperial privilege, even as the racist logic of American Empire repeatedly returns to definitions of blacks as a group regarded as—and often, legally treated as—a foreign body within the United States. Kareem's *The Purloined Islands: Caribbean-U.S. Crosscurrents in Literature and Culture, 1880-1959* and Waligora-Davis's *Sanctuary: African Americans and Empire* focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a period in which American identity is redefined in terms of a post-slavery, expansionist capitalism, and figures like W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and William Faulkner negotiate and appropriate their debt to Caribbean intellectuals like Antenor Firmin and Claude McKay and events like the U.S. occupation of Haiti.

The issue's opening dialogue establishes the complex particularities of black experience in the Americas that remains a central focus in the works reviewed by Taylor Hagood and Sika Dagbovie. These two books, Valerie Loichot's *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse* and Elizabeth Christine Russ's *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination*, take the plantation as defining structure of American experience. The Caribbean and the U.S. south thus form part of a larger plantation society, defined by slavery and its aftermath along with the formative presence of creolized African culture. Hagood's review opens by noting Édouard Glissant's influence in raising awareness of the greater plantation, and indeed, the work of Glissant (along a parallel focus on the plantation by Antonio Benítez-Rojo) has surely paved the way for the rise in scholarly engagement with the Caribbean's U.S. connections. The books examined in these reviews take up symbols of the world left behind by the plantation such as orphanhood and physical landscape, showing how slavery's remnants span from Venezuela to Ohio.

Our next three reviews place the plantation and imperialism in the background to explore the other major theme of the scholarship explored in this issue: diaspora. Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero reviews Kezia Page's careful theorization of the diaspora-nation relationship and its representation through the concept of remittance in *Transnational Negotiations in Caribbean Diasporic Literature: Remitting the Text*, while Nadia Celis and Raj Chetty look at two edited collections—respectively, Vanessa Perez Rosario's *Hispanic Caribbean Literature of Migration: Narratives of Displacement* and Louis Parascandola and Carl Wade's *Eric Walrond: The Critical Heritage*—that give a sense of the many facets of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States. These books examine migrant writers from the nineteenth century to today whose roots extend to Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua, Guyana (in the case of Walrond, via Barbados and Panama), Haiti, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Diaspora becomes a twin to the nation, frequently in opposition to it, sometimes indistinguishable from it. Most frequently, these reviews complicate our understandings of diaspora and the nation by calling attention to the lived experiences gathered under these abstractions.

Our final set of reviews bring together these varied themes in a set of books on Haiti. The importance of Haiti to examining the intersection of the Caribbean and the U.S. can be seen in the way that even the books in the earlier reviews circled back to the second independent nation in the hemisphere. Page's examination of diaspora, while focused primarily on the Anglophone islands, can't get away from engaging with Edwidge Danticat's important theorization of the

global and the local, while in our opening dialogue between Karem and Waligora-Davis, U.S. imperialism in Haiti—culminating in the 1915 to 1934 marine occupation—stands as a shadow over all the transnational exchanges they examine. Karem reads Waligora-Davis’s chapter on the U.S. occupation of Haiti as where the author “most fully realizes her aim of uniting an analysis of the United States’s racialized policies at home and abroad,” while Waligora-Davis sees Karem’s readings of Haiti as prime examples of how “places like Haiti became objects of cultural fetishization and questionable scientific study.” The connections between Haiti and the U.S. show how the histories of plantation, imperialism, and diaspora intersect and intertwine.

If Haiti was implicitly central to much of the diverse scholarship reviewed here—the Caribbean nation with which the U.S. has the longest and arguably most complex relationship—the final reviews in the issue take on Haiti directly as object of study. Matthew Casey shows how Millery Polyné’s *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* covers a similar period and subject to Karem’s and Waligora-Davis’s studies, but in this case places writers, activists, artists, and intellectuals alongside diplomats, educators, businesspeople, and journalists as all part of the networks connecting these African diasporic populations. Elizabeth Kelly reviews Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon’s edited collection, *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution*, which puts these pan-African exchanges into the historical context of the plantation system’s first and greatest defeat. The final reviews examine Haiti in regional context, with Kate Houlden looking at how Mimi Sheller’s *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* juxtaposes Haiti and Jamaica in terms of how freedom and belonging are enacted in these sites, while Hadassah St. Hubert reviews Jamaica-based historian Matthew Smith’s *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* as a case study of the oldest Caribbean nation navigating U.S. imperialism after its occupation.

Donette Francis, in her introduction to *Anthurium*’s Fall 2013 special issue, describes Miami as “the crossroads of the Americas and the North Atlantic.”³ *Anthurium*’s Miami-location allows us a unique vantage point on this crossroads, and we hope that this issue is able to take advantage of *Anthurium*’s positioning to look at recent scholarship on the relationship between the Caribbean and the United States. Our reviewers, from graduate students to full professors, located in geographical sites extending beyond Florida to Mississippi, Texas, Maine, Ohio, New York, Indiana, and Liverpool, and located disciplinarily in departments of English, Cultural Studies, History, and Romance Languages, demonstrate the ever-growing reach of the global Caribbean. The legacies of plantation, imperialism, and diaspora remain troubled, but we offer the scholarship reviewed here as some of the unexpected fruit borne out of these histories.

³ Francis (2013), <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1314&context=anthurium>.

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