

“You know, I used to be a Jew”

Groucho Marx, Max Reinhardt, and the Transformation of American Studies

Mark Reinhardt

Abstract

Beginning with the unlikely pairing of Max Reinhardt and Groucho Marx, this article unpacks an old, politically troubling Jewish joke as a way of tracing two trajectories that unfolded between Austria and the United States. The first follows the author’s family, the second the interdisciplinary field of American studies. The joke’s commentary on the dilemmas of assimilation, as played out in the family history, frames a more sustained examination of how national identity was understood by the American studies project consolidated in Salzburg and the US just after World War II. Focusing on how the new field’s ways of engaging and occluding problems of race, subordination, exploitation, and land-theft shaped an interpretation of American democracy’s history and prospects, the article puts these issues in the context of Donald Trump’s election as president and the urgency of understanding not only the ruptures but also the historical continuities his presidency represents. Against the backdrop of those reflections, the article considers how contemporary American studies does and might engage the continuities. The field must help shape a national narrative both accessible in idiom and able to reckon with the ongoing history of white supremacy and settler colonialism. Doing that entails not only moving beyond but also borrowing anew from that early, Salzburg-style formation of American studies. It may also benefit from the Jewish joke: the conclusion and two postscripts read the joke’s limitations in the light of recent social struggles yet also note its unnerving relevance to the Trump-era resurgence of antisemitism.

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“You know, I used to be a Jew”

Groucho Marx, Max Reinhardt, and the Transformation of American Studies

Mark Reinhardt

I'll begin with a joke. Or, rather, a story.¹ Actually, it's a story about a joke, a true story that has, over the years, sometimes circulated as if it were just a joke and not (also) an account of a real event. Which seems fair enough: no third party witnessed the event, so judging the reliability of reports proves challenging. Anyway, although the people and circumstances involved in the telling matter to me and to our setting and occasion, the real truth, the truth upon which I want to reflect, resides in the joke itself. Now, as I should acknowledge in advance, by present lights the joke is a bit offensive. But that, too, is part of what makes it worth pondering, part of the truth conveyed to us. Or so I will eventually claim. And now that my setup is nearly as rococo as Schloss Leopoldskron, here's the joke, told as a joke:

A rich man and his hunchbacked friend are walking down a busy city street when they pass a synagogue. “You know,” the rich man says, puffing on his cigar with an air of satisfaction, “I used to be a Jew.” “Yeah?” his friend replies, “I used to be a hunchback.”

I learned the joke from my grandfather, Gottfried Reinhardt, who spent part of his childhood in Leopoldskron. He told it to me back in the seventies, in Salzburg, where my grandparents then lived and I spent formative parts of my childhood. He did so more than once: Gottfried loved to tell that joke. He never said why, but, looking back, I think I know. He'd lived through a lot, most notably the period when assimilationist Jews of the kind who had at some point imagined they were just Germans or Austrians had been taught otherwise, discovering their delusion to be as patent as the rich man's, their identity as inescapable as his deformed companion's. You could hear the wisdom of cruel experience in the way—at once rueful and hearty—Gottfried laughed at the punch line. My surmise is that he numbered his own father among those who'd had to learn that tragic, historical lesson.

From a certain perspective—for example, Alfred Kazin's writing about the inaugural session of the Salzburg Seminar—Max Reinhardt was something of a parvenu.²



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Here was a Jew who had, as a youth, Christianized his surname in order to advance his theatrical career. And when that career had advanced beyond nearly anyone's wildest dreams, he took up residence in the former home of the Archbishop, complete with its own baroque chapel, so that he could stage Catholic morality plays on the steps of the town's main church. So perhaps what made the joke so resonant to his son was how the world had taught both son and father that the father's fantasy was unsustainable.

Such were my initial reflections when, having just received an invitation to speak at my great-grandfather's house, I sought a topic suited to the conference's exploration of "The Changing Nature of American Studies." The invitation arrived less than a month after Donald Trump's inauguration as President, so untenable fantasies and cruel political lessons were much on my mind. They still are. Growing up with the joke's insights prompts one to take the dangers of Trump and Trumpism very seriously. So, I have asked myself, what does taking them seriously mean for American studies? What lessons and fantasies must we examine? Here, I'll pursue a three-part answer. First, I will revisit the joke, unpacking it further by developing a stylized contrast between the two Jewish entertainers named in my title. Second, in their company and in light of the Trump ascendancy, I'll reflect on the founding of American studies in Salzburg and its echoes in the United States. Finally, against that backdrop, I'll briefly discuss some opportunities and challenges facing our field now.

A Few Jews

The joke has any number of minor variations. Some cast the rich man as a Jew who has formally converted to Christianity. Then, the convert may walk by a synagogue or instead pass an Episcopal church. Most tellings are set in the United States, but Fritz Stern remembers one from his Weimar childhood featuring two Germans on holiday in Italy.³ Thanks to the power of Google searches to sift a culture's flotsam and jetsam, I've even found a rare version that substitutes Catholics for Jews, replacing a punch line on the futility of sloughing off Jewishness with one on the impossibility of shaking feelings of religious guilt.⁴ No variation, however, is as common as the basic form with which I began. As best as I can tell, its currency derives from Groucho Marx, who on various occasions recounted it in live public performances. And here the plot thickens: Groucho offered up the final quip not as one of his own, carefully polished zingers but, rather, as part of a story about an actual encounter, one that had been reported by others as well. In Manhattan early in the twentieth century, it turns out, a rich man really did walk by a temple and tell his deformed companion that he used to be a Jew, and really was greeted with the retort, "I used to be a hunchback." It's the self-professed hunchback, the humorist and performer Marshall P. Wilder, who first

told the story, implicitly praising his own perspicacity and wit while explicitly lampooning the social pretensions of his friend, the financier Otto Kahn.⁵ Groucho knew a good comeback when he heard one, but surely one reason why he liked recounting the story was that he had, himself—and famously—lampooned Kahn, whom he knew. *Animal Crackers* (musical 1928; film 1930) satirizes Kahn in the character Roscoe Chandler, a fabulously rich and pompously refined American art collector eventually unmasked as, in reality, Abie the fish peddler from Czechoslovakia.⁶ Chandler, in other words, used to be a Jew, too.

When first proposing a topic to present in Salzburg, all I knew about the joke was my grandfather's telling and a provenance having something vaguely to do with Groucho. Discovering the fuller history, I felt a shock of recognition. Otto Kahn knew not only Groucho but also Max Reinhardt. A leading American patron of the arts in the first half of the twentieth century, Kahn was, indeed, one of the main backers of Reinhardt's US ventures. He was an early visitor (and eventually a donor) to the Salzburg festival and a guest at Schloss Leopoldskron.⁷ So, in Kahn, Max Reinhardt and Groucho Marx shared a relationship to the man whose relation to his own Jewishness became first a witty story, then a Broadway musical and film comedy, and finally a more anonymized joke that offers us something of a parable about history and identity. Perhaps that's enough to justify spending a moment thinking about Marx and Reinhardt together.

In doing so, I'll have to beg your indulgence. Max Reinhardt died long before I was born. I'm a scholar of neither theater history nor Austria and Germany. I can't read any German more complicated than a restaurant menu. What follows is thus made of inference, conjecture, unsystematic reading in English, and a perhaps idiosyncratic interpretation of family lore. But as some of that lore concerns Leopoldskron, let's begin there.

Max Reinhardt set some of his plays and performances amidst Leopoldskron's buildings and grounds. But the locale was also itself the most elaborate production of his career, with sets featuring mirrors and panels from Venice and a library from Sankt Gallen. We're too late for the parties, at least his parties, but we know they were legendary.⁸ Sources of allure and envy, invitations were highly sought-after. The guests included the glitterati of at least two continents. Commoners and aristocrats, actors and bankers, poets and politicians numbered among the *dramatis personae*—according to Max Reinhardt's inventory, even Jews and Nazis mingled together on some occasions.⁹ Gottfried characterizes his father as shy and not altogether comfortable amidst the social swirl. The actor turned director often hovered at the fringes.¹⁰ Still, Max brought to the reconstruction of this house and the parties he held there the many talents of one of history's greatest directors of spectacles.



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Stefan Zweig understood the effects. Once Reinhardt and Hoffmanstahl descended on Salzburg, he wrote, the world took notice and, “all of a sudden I was living in my home town and at the same time in the middle of Europe.”¹¹ Zweig’s work illuminates the Leopoldskron gatherings in other ways, too. He makes vivid the cultural world of which Reinhardt’s theater was a resplendent, perhaps even culminating example. Lovingly, nostalgically, and from the inside, Zweig reveals how powerfully the quest for fame drove young, ambitious Viennese Jews in the Empire’s final decades. (Most of what the world celebrates as Viennese, he remarks, is specifically Jewish.¹²) For these men and women of talent, he shows, the archetype was the great actor, the quest for fame part of a culture in which theater had an unmatched importance.¹³ Hannah Arendt, herself a Jewish refugee, recoiled from Zweig’s sketch: condemning the “unpolitical point of view” of which he boasted, she judged his world a gilded cage. But although sharing none of Zweig’s nostalgia, she found his portrait accurate. She aptly characterized the strivings he chronicled as “the attempt to transform fame into a social atmosphere, to create a caste of famous men like a caste of aristocrats, to organize a society of the renowned.”¹⁴ In that society, aspirants hoped, the limitations of birth or Jewishness would fade, as old identification papers were discarded for the new credentials available to those whose genius had won recognition. We can see, at the very least, elements of that history of aspiration in the society of the renowned created after 1918 at Leopoldskron, with its extraordinary atmosphere of fame.

I have only scraps—some photos and a few books—from Max Reinhardt’s Leopoldskron. I wish I could, even for a moment, step back into its atmosphere. But part of me would also like to bring Groucho Marx along. To the society of the famous we might contrast his credo, “I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member.” Both the remark’s occasion and motivating sentiments are disputed, but they also don’t matter. Whatever the facts, the quote has become representative because it fits so well with Groucho as a comedic character speaking from the position Lee Siegel calls “Archimedean outsidersness.”¹⁵ When Groucho infiltrates high society, he soon enough undoes everything around him, puncturing ambitions, conventions, status, and their accompanying solemnity. Think of Margaret Dumont, her faith in established order and procedures providing the foil for his merciless mockery.¹⁶ And while the gender dynamics of that pairing may, like the Kahn story, play more problematically for us today, Dumont hardly stands alone: in a Marx Brothers movie, male authority figures—bankers, philanthropists, college presidents, and their ilk—all get cut down to size, too. The Marx Brothers’ deflationary treatment, like Zweig’s cult of genius, offers a specifically Jewish response to an experience of social marginality, but the two responses differ wildly. In the great Marx Brothers movies, as Irving Howe once put it, “the disassembled world is treated with total disrespect,

an attitude close to the traditional feeling of Jews that the whole elaborate structure of gentile power is merely trivial.¹⁷ For all the differences of place, time, and tone, the effect is not all that far removed from the one Arendt, in the same period as her reflections on Zweig, attributed to Heine: “It is no longer the outcast pariah who appears the schlemiel, but those who live in the ordered ranks of society.”¹⁸

What can we glean from this? Perhaps counterposing a historical person to a fictional character, and the Austria and Germany of the teens and twenties to thirties and forties America is unfair. May anyone, anywhere, save a movie set or TV studio, *really* behave like Groucho? Mockery, too, has political limits. Some actors weather it better than Roscoe Chandler. Sometimes the “structure of gentile power” is vastly more durable and dangerous than in a Marx Brothers film. No skepticism of the atmosphere of genius would have enabled my great-grandfather to resist the storm blowing from paradise; no matter what, he’d have ended his days in American exile.¹⁹

But I draw the comparison to underscore the challenge he confronted, not to pass judgment or give in to the easy condescension of hindsight. More than a whiff of that condescension wafts through Alfred Kazin’s comments on Leopoldskron and the man who had brought it back to life while helping to transform the city of Salzburg. Kazin calls Reinhardt a Gatsby.²⁰ Both too harsh and too simple, his verdict trivializes and psychologizes what is better understood as a story of historical and political limits. He misses the context of the artistic project in which Reinhardt participated when helping to build, in the Festspiele, an institution that continues to flourish, even now. In a way, Reinhardt inverted Zweig. While the latter thought the world mistook for Viennese a culture created in the main by Jews, my great-grandfather, although also a Viennese Jew—one who, as a careful observer will note when visiting Leopoldskron’s library, installed a Star of David in the grillwork—saw his medium, theater, as distinctively Austrian, because wherever he looked in his homeland, he saw theatricality.²¹

It’s easy to grasp why the Catholic Baroque, with what he called its fusion of exaltation and sensuous appeal,²² captivated a man of his sensibility, to see what Catholic churches “as a scene” provided that he felt neither Protestant churches nor even synagogues could,²³ and what Salzburg, in particular, offered him as stage and set. How could the man whose *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Los Angeles would feature a torch parade down the Hollywood Hills resist a *Jedermann* in the Domplatz? As an Austrian, however, he understood directing his plays at the Festspiele not only as expressing his own dramatic vision but also, and thereby, as participating in a national project, for as assorted historians have shown, in the First Republic, the Baroque provided one key idiom of reconstruction and collective identification



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amidst the chaos following the Great War, and like many other assimilated Jews of the era, Reinhardt sought to contribute to the project and lay claim to the identity.²⁴ Not everyone, of course, welcomed his use of the idiom. Like Hoffmanstahl, Reinhardt, or, as the antisemitic press liked to call him, “Goldmann-Reinhardt,” faced critics who believed that any virtuosity he displayed must be empty and decadent. For them, he—someone of his *kind*—could only present his material mechanically, soullessly, in an ersatz rendering.²⁵ The tradition he saw as national, hence his birth-right, something he could revive and revise, turned out to be too particular to have room for the likes of him. Fame was not enough to secure his claim as an Austrian.

All this is what I now think lay behind my grandfather’s proclivity for telling me a joke that underscored the social and political constraints on self-invention and assimilation. Am I being fanciful? Would he validate my reading of his family history? I’m not sure. But I know that the story of how my grandfather and great-grandfather became American citizens is also the story of how Leopoldskron passed simultaneously out of their hands and into the purview of American studies, becoming an emotionally fraught part of the Jewish immigrant experience in the United States and, at least for me and my siblings, an American as well as an Austrian place. (Whenever I open a volume from the small shelf in my Massachusetts home that holds my great-grandfather’s books, I see in the front matter the proprietary stamp the Nazi government applied after seizing Leopoldskron for state purposes in 1939. In such jarring moments, time and space scramble; his house is in a sense in mine, and I in his.²⁶) I believe unpacking the joke in relation to this family history helps me read the American landscape now.

American Studies

This is a scary time in the United States, not only at the level of law and policy but also for the affects and attitudes, styles and sensibilities coursing through the body politic. When using the present article’s title in the conference proposal I submitted to the AAAS, I could not know that, months later, white supremacists would rally around the statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, that neo-Nazis would lead the crowd of the ultimately murderous gathering in chants of “Jews will not replace us,” or that the President would find “some very fine people” among the rally’s participants.²⁷ I suppose two lessons of the joke from which my title derives are “Don’t be surprised” and “Don’t take this lightly.” When a leader links resentments over race, immigration, and shifts in sexual and gender norms to economic anxieties and grievances, making them resonate together while attacking the independent press and denying the legitimacy of his opponents, it’s a mistake to assume that either minority rights or democratic commitments will endure.

But the joke's main lesson for American studies in the Trumpian moment is probably not about American Jews, who, as a group, largely passed long ago into the safe space of whiteness and whose individual lives, even after Charlottesville, seem less inflected by prejudice than in earlier eras.²⁸ The period since Trump's election has witnessed a jump in individual acts of antisemitic harassment and violence in the United States today,²⁹ as seen in the thirty-seven percent increase in antisemitic hate crimes reported to the FBI in 2017.³⁰ But these, however terrible and terrifying, still remain isolated events, and the kinds of broad social barriers which limited careers and aspirations for Jews born before the Second World War have crumbled. Rather, the lesson on which I focus concerns how the risks now facing other, considerably more marginal and vulnerable populations fit within the long arc of American history—how to understand material structures of subordination and identify what space is available, for whom, in prevailing narratives of nationhood and popular idioms of belonging and historical memory. Facing a president whose campaign slogan had the widely understood (if often disavowed) meaning, “Make America White Again,” drawing energy from how some sectors of the electorate felt about the candidate's Black predecessor, Americanists must confront not only the ruptures but also the deep historical continuities Trump's victory represents. One fitting way is to consider how analogous problems were engaged or evaded by the American studies project as consolidated, in Salzburg and elsewhere, just after the war.

Opening the first Salzburg Seminar, F. O. Matthiessen proclaimed, “We have come here to enact anew the chief function of culture and humanism, to bring man into communication with man.”³¹ The terms seem musty now, but they name a hope both urgent and grand. Amidst economic and political crises, the need to build democratic institutions was palpable. That reconstruction could be furthered by “scholars familiar with the present state of knowledge and opinion in American universities,” as Henry Nash Smith wrote in *American Quarterly*, seemed plausible to many.³² What could be more fruitful than bringing students divided by nationality, experience, and political commitment together in seminars taught by academic luminaries? Consider the fruits, as they grow today: like the Festspiele, the undertaking begun in Salzburg in 1947 obviously continues to thrive, both in the institutions of the Salzburg Global Seminar and in the association sponsoring this journal.

I won't presume to weigh the institutions' accomplishments or trace their histories, since so many readers will know more than I do about both. Rather, I will probe some limits to the approach to democracy and Americanness in the work of some of the Seminar's early figures because they illuminate our field's contours in a crucial conjuncture. I focus on limits despite all that was extraordinary about these men, women, and their work, and without assuming that what we easily see now could have been as clear to everyone then. The point of the exercise, again, is merely

to sharpen perceptions of the challenges that should matter to us. Underscoring where we've been may help us consider where we're going.

Return for a moment to Smith's brief account of the Seminar. That it appeared in *American Quarterly's* inaugural issue reveals the intimate ties between Austrian beginnings and the legitimation of American studies as a distinct field in the United States. It thus gives us a window onto "official" American studies at a founding moment. In his article, the Seminar's importance as an international encounter comes through clearly enough, but, particularly compared to the intensity one finds in the first-hand reports of Matthiessen and Kazin, Smith's account of the Seminar's democratic pedagogy seems fuzzy and anodyne. The American instructors, he writes, displayed a freedom new to European students, for instance in "asserting that the Supreme Court had made a mistake in handing down a certain decision, or that the Negro is unjustly treated in the United States."³³ Far better than propaganda, he continues, freedom of criticism taught European participants the nature of American democracy—and in doing *that*, the Seminar "has restated concretely the ideal, the potential unity (not of course the homogeneity) of Occidental culture."³⁴

Smith has a point. It matters that there was criticism, in a context where some may have found its forms novel or surprising. Still, and even setting aside the ways in which a kind of bounded criticism may function as the most effective propaganda of all, it's worth lingering over Smith's language, and not only for the fatuous pomposity of invoking the "unity of... Occidental culture" so soon after the nightmare of what was, after all, *Western* fascism. It would be anachronistic not to acknowledge that "the Negro has been unjustly treated" was an inflammatory statement in certain American precincts at the time (just as, sadly, it would be naïve to overlook how this appears to be the case in, indeed even a cause of, the Trumpian ascendancy), but it would also be obtuse not to see the difference between the remark Smith lauds and a curriculum putting the historic expropriation of African American labor and appropriation of native land at the center of an analysis of the history of American democracy and the making of American culture. Writing in a small compass, the author can, of course, do only so much; reporting on a fledgling and fragile institution in a zone occupied by the American army, who had only grudgingly abandoned an attempt to require that Seminar instructors be certified as "politically reliable,"³⁵ may have induced him to find some things better left unsaid. But then, it's also worth emphasizing how, one year later and at far greater length, Smith would evade the very same issues in *Virgin Land* (1950), the book that made his career and helped launch the "Myth and Symbol" school that provided the newly consolidated field of American studies with its first quasi-official methodology.

Nowhere is that clearer than when he engages Frederick Jackson Turner's foundational essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893). It's fascinating, today, to see how Smith puts his newly fashioned critical tools to work. When Turner writes that, in the United States, "democracy is born of free land," Smith observes how the text has shifted "from the plane of the economist's abstractions, to the plane of metaphor, even of myth—for the American forest has become almost an enchanted wood."³⁶ Without quite realizing what he is saying or doing, Turner was thus constructing a myth not just of empty land, but also of nature. Smith's argument here is informative both for how it lays bare a transubstantiation crucial to Turner's essay and for how it occludes forces enabling that process. On some level, Smith obviously knows and even says that the very idea of "virgin" land is wholly mythic, a skewed rendering of a continent that was in fact peopled all along. He even makes one late, passing reference to the "European exploitation of native peoples all over the world."³⁷ Yet this observation is nowhere integrated into his analyses of myth or symbol. For instance, the rendering of Indians as symbol, their ideological and mythological categorization as nature, one of the central operations of Turner's text, is something Smith does not trace. *Virgin Land* gives meaningful consideration neither to the project of driving native peoples from their lands nor to the way the endless thirst for land shaped myth and was, in turn, legitimated by the very myths at the book's center.

The use of the myth of nature to aid land theft had been long understood by indigenous peoples and recognized even by sympathetic whites in the first half of the nineteenth century. Consider how in 1829, amidst the debate over Cherokee removal, Jeremiah Evarts had satirically, but accurately, characterized white justifications for re-settlement:

[You] had no business to betake yourselves to an agricultural life. It is a downright imposition on us. This is the very thing that we complain of. The more you work on land, the more unwilling you are to leave it. Just so it is with your schools; they only serve to attach you more strongly to your country. It is all designed to keep us, the people of a sovereign and independent State, from the enjoyment of our just rights. We must refer you to the law of nations again, which declares that populous countries, whose inhabitants live by agriculture, have a right to take the lands of hunters and apply them to better use.³⁸

In the circular logic Evarts exposes, indigenous people must yield because they are nomadic—that is, part of nature—and are all the more undeserving when they violate that nature and root themselves in the soil. The organizing metaphors are all identified in *Virgin Land*, but not the argument they authorized and that put them to work. Smith presents myths of settlement stripped of their settler colonial character, so that the violence of settlement, and the centrality of displacement and

appropriation, are less explicit than in the work of Turner himself.

Now, if the point is to look at a founding moment for American studies as a field, then I am singling out the Founding Father easiest to criticize along such lines. That, due to a report from the US Army's intelligence service, Smith's teacher, F. O. Matthiessen, was barred from returning to Austria to teach after the Seminar's first year offers evidence of how the latter challenged—and by extension the young field and new Seminar could challenge—limits on political dissent.³⁹ A man of the left and a searching, subtle, and original critic, Matthiessen should not be treated dismissively, though as Ralph Poole notes, he often has been.⁴⁰ As Poole shows in his contribution to this issue, *American Renaissance* (1941) offers attentive readers a sly queering of the very national canon it helped form.⁴¹ *From the Heart of Europe* (1948) displays generosity and courage, resisting the emerging Cold War. But for all insights and avenues his works opened, even Matthiessen did not give sustained scrutiny to the kinds of constitutive violence and exclusion that concern me here.⁴²

Nor, though also of a more acerbic temperament than Smith, did Alfred Kazin. Matthiessen and Kazin were certainly critics of American nationalism and racism, but Andrew Gross is right to note that both are “extremely vague” about the history and contours of the problems in the United States, “avoiding the analysis of particular instants of oppression for a more general analysis of alienation and mass society.”⁴³ Kazin's writing about his time in Salzburg viscerally engages the problem of antisemitism. Reflecting bitterly on both the country in which he sojourned and the young American soldiers occupying it, he thought the devastations wrought by fascism and the war required the project of recovering “America as idea.”⁴⁴ But that idea was purified unhelpfully, romanticized even, detached from its relationship to the nation's founding, and enduring, violence. In a manner comparable, as Phillip Gleason observes, to Gunnar Myrdal's then-new *An American Dilemma* (1944), a work of different sensibility but similar limitations, Kazin saw a problem that could be grasped as a tension between a noble creed and an imperfect practice.⁴⁵ He did not present, and there is no evidence that the inaugural session of the Seminar scrutinized, a more complicated, mutually *constitutive*, relation between the structural inequality and violence marking American national development and founding ideas.

Indeed, particularly if one bears Smith in mind, Kazin's language sometimes seems, if unwittingly, to intensify enduring forms of violence through his very articulation of the idea, as when, in his journal a decade after his time in Salzburg, he writes, “America as an idea, as a civilization, is founded on the very idea of immigration, on the idea of a world-civilization and a world frontier.”⁴⁶ Even leaving aside how Kazin reinscribes the frontier, or how, precisely, he understood “world-civilization,” one wonders where his idea leaves those who traveled to the American shore

bound in chains, via the middle passage, let alone those living on the land millennia before Europeans and Africans arrived. The problem inheres in the idiom of immigration. Consider Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s widely cited observation, “Settlers are not immigrants.” As they explain, “Immigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies.”⁴⁷ What would the Salzburg Seminar have looked like had its initial sessions framed the United States as “A Settler State,” casting colonialism as ongoing? The question may prove impossible to answer, as the counterfactual bursts the limits of plausibility, but my remarks below nevertheless aim to make the query more than purely rhetorical.

Now What?

Much of my story about the Seminar should feel familiar. I’ve drawn on insights from many literatures and moments in the unfolding of the American studies project.⁴⁸ The familiarity highlights a danger. In their guide to the field, Philip Deloria and Alexander Olson bemoan the way “each generation of scholars” in American studies ends up “characterizing earlier disciplinary norms as repressive, only to themselves come under critique later in their careers.” While this can reflect the development of new critical insights and commitments, they argue, it can also “become a cycle of rote critique that purges historiographical and institutional memory and forces young scholars to reinvent the wheel when usable pasts—complicated ones, to be sure—sit somewhere close at hand.”⁴⁹ How could what I’ve said avoid those pitfalls? How might we think about the limitations of the work I’ve discussed while also seeking a more usable past? In response, I offer five simple comments and lines of reflection.

First, a clarification: It may seem that I have pulled a bait and switch, beginning with a joke directing us toward a *future* about which we’re willfully blind, and here targeting founding figures in American studies for willful blindness regarding past violence. But both the joke and the story I’ve told concern failures to navigate the *present* due to a limited grasp on the enduring structures of oppression, their related fantasies, and how the unfolding of structures and fantasies over time shapes lives as past projects into future. Deloria and Olson help us understand how the temporalities overlap.⁵⁰

Second, an admission: Even granting how Matthiessen and Kazin offer a critical edge missing from Smith’s work, I’ve excluded important cases. Had my Salzburg figure been John Hope Franklin, who came a few years later, the story would have to change somewhat. If I moved further afield and took W. E. B. DuBois or C. L. R. James as touchstones for critical thinking in the era, the tale would differ more profoundly still. But that would not be a recounting that stayed within the contours of Amer-

ican studies as it was being consolidated in the American academy at the time of the Salzburg Seminar and the founding of *American Quarterly*. Reckoning with what those contours encompassed and left out remains crucial.

Third, however, a qualification: To assert subjection's constitutive role in American democracy, tracing how the former has both drawn support from and informed what Kazin called "the American idea," is not to prescribe the parade of horrors as the only valid genre of American studies scholarship. Nothing good for our work can come from always and reflexively dismissing aspirational rhetoric as mere hokum. The difficult challenge is to understand how conquest, subordination, and empire are entangled with emancipatory yearnings and ideals in multi-layered relations not well-captured by pitting noble idea against imperfect reality, on the one hand, or emphasizing a merely exterminist political theology, on the other. Much of the best work flowing from, for instance, the transnationalist, feminist, queer, and critical race currents in American studies models the kind of inquiry such engagements require.⁵¹

But insofar as that may go without saying, now, I would add, fourth, a recuperation. My stress on theoretical and political limits hardly renders worthless the work done in early forms of the American studies project and their Leopoldskron incarnation. The Salzburg authors offer our own time models of scholarly analysis in a more public idiom. An odd dynamic has marked much of the past generation or two of American studies work: Insights and commitments born of the struggles of insurgent social movements have entered the field amidst the steady march of professionalization and specialization. Radical claims about American cultural forms and identities, or their entanglements in empire and relation to transnational circuits are thus sometimes articulated in language less demotic, and in that sense less democratic, than the writing of Alfred Kazin or even Henry Nash Smith. The former, in particular, participated in the consolidation of a field while consciously resisting both the blandness and the jargon of specialized disciplinary writing.

The events in the streets of Charlottesville, the re-branding of white supremacy as "white nationalism," the impassioned defense of Confederate monuments, and the kind of "historical analysis" offered when General John Kelly, Chief of Staff to the President of the United States, bemoaned the Civil War's origins in "the lack of an ability to compromise"—all indicate how much power the most retrograde national narratives retain.⁵² Treating that durability as a mere failure of information or knowledge would be ingenuous, academic in the most pejorative sense. General Kelly's commentary was a tactical move in the short-term news cycle, and even insofar as it rested on ignorance, that ignorance was willed or motivated, what Freud calls "disavowal" and Baldwin names "innocence,"⁵³ its failures a matter less of knowledge

than acknowledgment.⁵⁴ Still, Kelly's pernicious foray into history had enabling cultural conditions, which the field must fight to transform. These include the authority and resonance of assorted received histories. Given the powers, interests, and identifications involved, altering national narratives is no easy task. But though not sufficient, it's necessary to making certain kinds of political changes. Whether the recent removals of Confederate monuments make for good short-term electoral politics is unclear, but in the longer view, rendering the historical defenses of commemoration literally incredible remains an essential political and intellectual task. Here, the earlier reach for a more public idiom for an American studies intervention into American stories is worth emulating.

Whose stories? Fifth, bearing that question in mind, I end with a worry and a challenge. Despite periodically mentioning the transnational, writing for an Austrian journal makes me aware of how much a national focus—perhaps, viewed from afar, a parochially American set of preoccupations—dominates the latter half of this article. The call for intervention I just made is civic as well as scholarly. Living where I do, I am preoccupied right now with what animates those whose thoughts, feelings, and acts might (I fear) deepen and extend, or (I hope) resist, then end the Trumpian moment. I can't not write as an aggrieved and alarmed US citizen. But though accurate, that answer isn't wholly satisfying, not least for raising a difficulty I have no wish to obscure or set aside. Lurking in my remarks may lie some disavowed model of inclusion, a project of making right long-standing injustices by making equal citizenship real for all. Although such a project would overcome some of the shortcomings of the American studies project exemplified by the early Seminar, it would exacerbate others. For like the idea of "a nation of immigrants," the ideal of inclusive citizenship enables a violent erasure of some lives and histories.

As the exemplary work of Native American and indigenous studies scholars such as Audra Simpson, Jodi Byrd, Joanne Barker, and Glen Coulthard emphasizes, for native peoples citizenship is often not a solution but the name of their problem.⁵⁵ When bestowed unilaterally, as in the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, it has served as a means for eroding collective bonds, dividing communities and limiting power, undercutting indigenous sovereignty while simultaneously rendering some indigenous persons "aliens" in parts of their homelands.⁵⁶ As Simpson's brilliant account of the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawà:ke demonstrates, those caught between an unsought form of citizenship and an unwanted alien status may respond not through the struggle for recognition but with assorted practices of refusal. The Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, she writes, "insist on being and acting as peoples who belong to a nation other than the United States or Canada. Their political form predates and survives 'conquest'; it is tangible (albeit strangulated by colonial governmentality) and is tied to sovereign practices ... [T]hey *know this*. They refuse to *let go of this knowledge*."⁵⁷



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Working through the implications of this knowledge is among the most important directions in which American studies is heading, though the journey calls into radical question the “we” or “you” who are going. What a democratic resolution means when the boundaries of the demos are contested in this way poses questions as deep and difficult as they are urgent. I proffer no answers here, claiming no privileged insight. I have no wish to cast myself as the settler intellectual who, by blending “decolonial thought with Western critical traditions,” proves “superior to both” and, like “the escapee from Plato’s cave,” laments that he sees what no one else can.⁵⁸ I do not see. Many of the key issues, which continue to cleave indigenous communities, are not for me, or any member of a settler majority, to work out. Yet some are urgent for American studies as a field. We will need, I imagine, to learn to think in new ways about nested and overlapping sovereignty, alternate belongings, reconfigured citizenships, matters on which indigenous studies and struggles will almost certainly provide the crucial impetus. And those needs seem a fitting ending: for all of the ways in which they lie beyond the ken of the Jewish joke with which I began, and for all of its limits, it pertains even to these struggles, because it is, at its core, about how fraught and complex belonging can be.

Who’s Laughing Now?

In concluding, I want to keep my opening promise and—finally—acknowledge how and why the joke is problematic, and what that might suggest to us. In order to puncture the misrecognition of comfortably assimilated Jews by underscoring what is permanent and inescapable, the joke ends with a term that has deservedly fallen into ill repute. That we owe the original story’s punch line to the man it characterizes marks the distance between his moment and ours. Rendered as a joke, at least, the punch line is one that, were it not for its very specific connections to the topic at hand and the venue in which I first presented it, I’d be unwilling to deliver in a large, formal gathering, let alone in print. In the United States, the noun “hunchback” is now considered derogatory, a harsh way of naming severe kyphosis and reducing a person to an affliction. This linguistic shift didn’t just happen. It’s a very small instance of the large changes wrought by more than a generation of disability activism and the related rise of disability studies.⁵⁹ Because of those changes, using the derogatory term for comic effect would now, in progressive circles, seem all too close to the grotesque manner in which Donald Trump, on the campaign trail in the summer of 2016, imitated a disabled reporter for the *New York Times*. So, just as Jewishness in the United States feels less precarious than at the time when Otto Kahn got his comeuppance from Marshall Wilder, the barriers and prejudices facing the disabled have been confronted, leading to transformations, however imperfect and incomplete, in law, in the built environment, and in the way some disabilities signify.

American studies has long had something to say about those shifts in the terms of identity and difference, those moments of resignification, and about the struggles that make them possible. At its best, our field captures the joke's enduring kernel of insight, namely how risky it is to minimize or misread enduring prejudices and structures of oppression, while also repudiating the joke's reductive essentialism, its excessive confidence about what can or can't be altered. Both the legacy of the American studies project that began in Salzburg and the dangerous political forces shaping the American present suggest some of the shifts and struggles we must pursue going forward.

Postscript

When are we in danger of minimizing enduring prejudice, and when do claims that prejudice will persist express not insight but essentialism? It's often too soon to know. This, too, is part of the joke's pertinence. I received a reminder during the Leopoldskron gathering. The morning after my keynote address, I awoke to an email from a friend urging me to view an attached video clip. Watching the video, I discovered that, only five hours after my remarks (which had included the previous paragraph), the comedian, Larry David delivered the opening monologue on *Saturday Night Live*. Following a few remarks about his early, desperate years working in New York, David launched a sketch—incorporating a grotesque miming of deformity—in which a vulgar Quasimodo unrealistically demands to date “only the best-looking woman in Paris.” After segueing to an extended riff on how prominent #MeToo cases have heightened his own anxiety over gentiles' views of Jews and thus, of course, himself, David ended with a routine about how he would have handled the dating dilemmas facing Jewish men in the concentration camps.⁶⁰ Taken as a whole, the monologue suggests that, though perhaps attenuated, the links between Jewishness and deformity persist in the American cultural imagination, links David, likening himself to Quasimodo, invited viewers to confront. The dominant response to his performance underscores the distance disability activism still has to travel: the skit swiftly became notorious, but whereas cries of outrage over the Holocaust joke resounded in the mainstream press,⁶¹ the hunchback routine drew few comments. The work of resignification continues, then; the struggles the field must engage are far from over.

P.P.S.: The (Not-So?) Repressed Returns ... Again

On Saturday, October 27, 2018, a man wielding an assault rifle entered Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue and opened fire, killing eleven people—by most accounts, the deadliest attack on Jews in American history. Forced by the event to ask, again,

how to steer between understating and essentializing prejudice, I can only repeat, mournfully, “It’s often too soon to know.” Months earlier, I had submitted what both the journal’s guest editors and I considered the present article’s final version. But the massacre and resulting commentary left me uneasy about my portrait of Jews’ status in the Trump era, and I asked permission to make changes. Above, I described Jews as having entered “the safe space of whiteness.” I am letting the line stand, and have scarcely altered the surrounding paragraph, for they still capture how American social categories bear on many Jews much of the time. The barriers that once impeded Jewish career aspirations have not returned. But Pittsburgh exposed complexities my account obscured. I’ll end with them.

When Jeff Sessions, then the Attorney General, denounced the shooting as “an attack on all people of faith,”⁶² the phrasing infuriated me—and not only because Sessions used the tragedy to reiterate his specious claim that “religious liberty” is under assault in the United States. Sessions also failed to acknowledge that the killer, who reportedly yelled, “All Jews must die” as he entered the temple,⁶³ murdered his Jewish victims as *Jews*. Yet even acknowledging that obvious fact would not suffice, because characterizing the victims as killed for their Jewish “faith” misrepresents modern antisemitism. The Pittsburgh attacker *racialized* his victims. He had company—in the United States, as in Europe, the most organized and active hate groups make the essential, heritable alienness of Jews central to their ideologies, entangling Jew-hatred with hostility to Black and Brown peoples. Those chanting “Jews will not replace us” in Charlottesville invoked an imagined Jewish conspiracy to foster immigration and race-mixing. The Pittsburgh murderer was driven by the theory that wealthy Jews were behind the caravan of Central American refugees then making its way toward the US border in search of a safe haven.⁶⁴ And although such fantasies are most frequent in the cesspools of “alt-right” websites and social media, they are hardly confined to the fringes of American political discourse. They also emanate from the centers of power, as when a guest on *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, broadcast nationally on the Fox Business Network, referred to the “Soros-occupied State Department” or when the American president, emulating Viktor Orbán, himself linked Soros to the caravan.⁶⁵ And it was Trump, after all, whose final TV ad of the 2016 election showed images of prominent Jews (Soros among them) while the candidate’s voiceover railed against “a global power structure that is responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class, stripped our country of its wealth and put that money into the pockets of a handful of large corporations and political entities.”⁶⁶ That the Pittsburgh shooter saw even Trump as controlled by Jewish interests excuses no one. However rare or isolated the shooting, the ideology behind it remains part of the American cultural atmosphere.

I confess to feeling surprised to find myself writing this postscript—surprised

events made the writing necessary. I suspect my grandfather would respond to my surprise with his hearty-rueful laugh. Perhaps I did not listen to his joke as carefully as I thought I had. American studies might listen further, too.

Notes

- 1 This article began as a talk at the seventieth anniversary of the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, celebrated by the Austrian Association for American Studies at Schloss Leopoldskron, in Salzburg. Writing not only for the occasion but also about the setting, I conceived of the talk as a site-specific work. Revising the talk, this article extends the analysis of the history and current challenges of American studies as a transnational field. Because the underlying argument takes inspiration from the family history discussed in the opening section, however, I have left that portion largely intact, preserving the lecture's informality and references to Leopoldskron as immediate surround.
- 2 Alfred Kazin, "Salzburg: Seminar in the Ruins," *Commentary* (July 1948): 62. Ralph Poole's fine work on the seminar drew Kazin's article to my attention. Ralph Poole, "Isn't there a ghost in this romantic old castle?" *American Studies at Salzburg's Schloss Leopoldskron*, in *German-American Encounters in Bavaria and Beyond, 1945–2015*, ed. Birgit M. Bauridl, Ingrid Gessner, and Udo Hebel (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 103–28.
- 3 Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 99.
- 4 Greg Callaghan, "10 Questions—Mikey Robins," *The Australian*, July 2, 2011, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/questions-mikey-robins/news-story/ced9a5686960ae3ed34ccceobca8foe4>.
- 5 Theresa Collins, *Otto Kahn: Art, Money, and Modern Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 261. Collins, Kahn's biographer, is among the many who tell the story—but her supporting footnote cites Groucho's Carnegie Hall performance. In light of the reliance on Groucho, and especially given Stern's German variation, a tough-minded empiricist may question the reliability of the claims that the single origin is the Kahn-Wilder encounter. But Groucho isn't the only source. For example, Theodor Reik reported decades earlier that the Kahn-Wilder story "is told in New York" (90). In any event, it is so often reported as a true story that I am content, for my purposes, to treat it as one. Theodor Reik, *Jewish Wit* (New York: Gamut Press, 1962).
- 6 Written by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, *Animal Crackers* was a 1928 musical starring the Marx Brothers and Margaret Dumont, all of whom again starred in the 1930 film version directed by Victor Heerman. It is widely considered one of the best of the Marx Brothers films.
- 7 Lisa Silverman, "Max Reinhardt between Yiddish Theatre and the Salzburg Festival," in *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre*, ed. Jeanette R. Malkin and Freddie Rokem (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 212; Collins, *Otto Kahn*, 2, 175, 304.
- 8 Christian W. Thomson, *Leopoldskron* (Siegen: Verlag Vorländer, 1982), 45.
- 9 Gottfried Reinhardt, *The Genius: A Memoir of Max Reinhardt* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 163.

- 10 Ibid., 27.
- 11 Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, trans. Anthea Bell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 371.
- 12 Ibid., 43–4.
- 13 In *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig, for example, writes that “In an actor at the imperial theatre, spectators saw an example of the way to dress, enter a room, make conversation, were shown which words a man of taste might use and which should be avoided” (36). Similarly, Max Reinhardt wrote, “The old Imperial Vienna was a theatre city unlike any other . . . And the actors dominated Vienna.” Quoted in Martin Esslin, “Max Reinhardt: ‘High Priest of Theatricality,’” *The Drama Review: TDR* 21, no 2 (1977): 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145120>.
- 14 Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 318, 325. My reading of Zweig’s book is indebted to Arendt’s commentary. Given that the latter is a searing critique, it’s worth noting that Arendt, no Austrian, uses language similar to Zweig and Reinhardt in describing the unique centrality of the theater and the actor among Viennese (322).
- 15 Lee Siegel, *Groucho Marx: The Comedy of Existence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 122.
- 16 Margaret Dumont served as foil to the Marx Brothers in several stage productions and seven of their films (including both versions of *Animal Crackers*). From production to production, she played essentially the same character, a wealthy, uptight, widow and socialite, wooed (opportunistically) but also relentlessly (and gleefully) humiliated by Groucho.
- 17 Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 567.
- 18 Arendt, *Jewish Writings*, 279.
- 19 I invoke Walter Benjamin’s great phrase in his ninth thesis on the philosophy of history. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 392.
- 20 Kazin, “Salzburg,” 62.
- 21 Michael Steinberg makes the point that theater was “essentially Austrian” for Reinhardt (47). In his 1917 memorandum proposing the building of a festival theater in Salzburg, Reinhardt himself referred to “the special talents of the Austrian peoples” in theatrical arts (3). Similar sentiments come through in Reinhardt’s remarks collected by Oliver Sayler. Michael P. Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theater and Ideology, 1890–1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Max Reinhardt, *A Festival in Salzburg* (Salzburg: Salzburg Festival, 2017); Oliver Sayler, *Max Reinhardt and His Theater* (New York: Brentano’s, 1924).
- 22 See Sayler, *Max Reinhardt*, 66.
- 23 Reinhardt, *The Genius*, 24.
- 24 See Steinberg, *The Meaning*; Silverman, “Max Reinhardt”; Michael Patterson, “Populism versus Elitism in Max Reinhardt’s Austrian Productions of the 1920s,” in *The Great Tradition and its Legacy: The Evolution of Dramatic and Musical Theater in Austria and*

- Central Europe*, ed. Michael Cherlin, Halina Filipowicz, and Richard L. Rudolph (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 72–81.
- 25 See Steinberg, *The Meaning*, 166; Silverman, “Max Reinhardt,” 212; Andres Müry, “Xenophobia,” in *Das große Welttheater: 90 Jahre Salzburger Festspiele* (Salzburg: Salzburg Festival, 2010), 84–5.
- 26 Well before the founding of the Salzburg Seminar, then, Leopoldskron became a site of American studies in the sense I am characterizing, and would have lived on as one for my generation of my family even had the Seminar never come into existence.
- 27 Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman, “Trump Gives White Supremacists an Unequivocal Boost,” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-charlottesville-white-nationalists.html>.
- 28 I qualify my language for two reasons. First, even accepting the problematical historical settlement by which, at least, Ashkenazi Jews in America became understood as “white” over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, obviously not all Jews in America fit that description. The experiences and status of some Sephardim proved different, and of course, Jewishness hardly makes African American or Latinx Jews socially white. Second, however, there are reasons to wonder about the whiteness settlement itself. I address these in this article’s postscript.
- 29 Jaleed Kaleem, “Anti-Semitism in U.S. Surged in 2017, a New Report Finds,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-anti-semitism-adl-20180226-story.html>.
- 30 Francie Diep, “Anti-Black and Anti-Semitic Attacks Top the FBI’s 2017 Records for Hate Crimes,” *Pacific Standard*, November 13, 2018, <https://psmag.com/news/anti-black-and-anti-semitic-attacks-top-the-fbis-2017-records-for-hate-crimes>.
- 31 F. O. Matthiessen, *From the Heart of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 13.
- 32 Henry Nash Smith, “The Salzburg Seminar,” *American Quarterly* 1, no.1 (1949): 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3031250>.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 35 Thomas H. Eliot and Lois J. Eliot, *The Salzburg Seminar: The First Forty Years* (Ipswich, MA: Ipswich Press, 1987), 29.
- 36 Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 253.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 257.
- 38 Jeremiah Evarts, *Essays on the Present Crisis in the Condition of the American Indians; First Published in the National Intelligencer Under the Signature of William Penn* (Boston, MA: Perkins & Marvin, 1829), 55–6. I was first drawn to this passage by the excellent commentary of Alison McQueen and Burke A. Hendrix. My remarks are indebted to their analysis. Alison McQueen and Burke A. Hendrix, “Tocqueville in Jacksonian Context: American Expansionism and Discourses of Indian Nomadism in Democracy in America,” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 671, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717000895>.
- 39 Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, trans. Diana Wolf (Chapel Hill: Uni-

versity of North Carolina Press, 1994), 165.

40 Poole, “Isn’t there a ghost,” 106–7.

41 Ralph J. Poole, “Huck Finn at King Arthur’s Court: F. O. Matthiessen, the Salzburg Seminar, and American Studies,” *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v1i1.70>.

42 Poole’s subtle, insightful reading shows that it’s not quite right to say that Matthiessen ignored fundamental exclusions, insofar as the latter’s work teased out alternatives to, and put pressure on, what would later be called heteronormativity. But Matthiessen’s story of America does not engage the dimensions of subordination that concern me in this article.

43 Andrew S. Gross, “Death is So Permanent. Drive Carefully.?: European Ruins and American Studies Circa 1948,” in *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck and Donald Pease (Hanover, NE: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 91.

44 Quoted in Phillip Gleason, “World War II and the Development of American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1984): 345, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712737>.

45 Gleason, “World War II,” 352.

46 Alfred Kazin, *Alfred Kazin’s Journals*, ed. Richard Cook (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 205.

47 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 6–7, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.

48 In addition to Gleason, Gross, and Poole, one could consult many efforts to engage the history of the field by practitioners of the “New American Studies” during the 1990s and early 2000s.

49 Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User’s Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 100.

50 I thank my colleague Jeff Israel for conversation about this.

51 Consider, to take just two examples from among many, Fred Moten’s *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and the late José Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

52 Maggie Astor, “John Kelly Pins Civil War on ‘Lack of Ability to Compromise,’” *The New York Times*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/us/john-kelly-civil-war.html>.

53. Sigmund Freud, “The Infantile Genital Organization: An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 19: The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson, ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 143; James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 6.

54 I take my sense of acknowledgment from Stanley Cavell. See, in particular, Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Consider, specifically, his analysis of how “the recognition of the other’s specific relation to oneself” requires “the revelation of oneself as having denied or distorted that relation” (428, 338). On this, and its relationship to both Baldwin and psy-

- choanalysis, see also George Shulman, "Acknowledgment and Disavowal as an Idiom for Theorizing Politics," *Theory & Event* 14, no. 1 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2011.0003>.
- 55 Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
- 56 Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 134–7.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 58 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 16.
- 59 See, for example, Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).
- 60 Larry David, "Stand-Up Monologue," *Saturday Night Live*, season 43, episode 6, *YouTube*, November 4, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0eeNijdv3I>.
- 61 See, for example, Debra Birnbaum, "Larry David Criticized for 'SNL' Jokes About Holocaust," *Variety*, November 5, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/larry-david-snl-monologue-holocaust-1202607500/>.
- 62 Quoted in Matt Stout, "Speaking in Boston, Jeff Sessions Says He May Pursue Death Penalty Against Pittsburgh Shooter," *The Boston Globe*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/10/29/jeff-sessions-says-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooter-could-subjected-death-penalty/SHPESlzsolwW4l7ASXvgGK/story.html>.
- 63 Barri Weiss, "A Massacre in the Heart of Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/opinion/synagogue-shooting-pittsburgh.html>.
- 64 Tara Isabella Burton, "The Centuries-Old History of Jewish 'Puppet-Master' Conspiracy Theories," *Vox*, November 2, 2018, <http://www.vox.com/2018/11/2/15946556/antisemitism-enlightenment-george-soros-conspiracy-theory-globalist>.
- 65 Josh Marshall, "A Country Awash in Fox's Dark Toxins," *Talking Points Memo*, October 28, 2018, <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/edblog/a-country-awash-in-foxs-dark-toxins>.
- 66 Daniel Politi, "Is Donald Trump's Closing Campaign Ad Anti-Semitic?" *Slate*, November 6, 2016, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/11/is-donald-trumps-closing-campaign-ad-anti-semitic.html>.

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