

2009

From Multiculturalism to Immigration Shock

Paul Lauter

Trinity College, paul.lauter@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/facpub>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

 **Peer Reviewed**

Title:

From Multiculturalism to Immigration Shock

Journal Issue:

[Journal of Transnational American Studies, 1\(1\)](#)

Author:

[Lauter, Paul](#), Trinity College

Publication Date:

2009

Publication Info:

Journal of Transnational American Studies, American Cultures and Global Contexts Center, UC Santa Barbara

Permalink:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6sr105gs>

Keywords:

Immigration, Study of American Literature, Globalization

Abstract:

Immigration is a tense political topic in virtually every Western country, and in many others as well. In fact, immigration is an international issue: 3 percent of the world's population, 191,000,000 people, now live in countries other than those in which they were born. This paper discusses why immigration is so fraught, the relation of the crisis over immigration to the growing fracture of the Western world's economy, as well as to terrorism like September 11 and the train bombings in Madrid, Mumbai, and London, and how these factors—growing economic disparity, immigration, and terrorism—have altered one of the basic cultural phenomena of the United States in the last three decades, namely, what we call multiculturalism.



From Multiculturalism to Immigration Shock

PAUL LAUTER

I

As we all know, immigration is a tense political topic in virtually every western country, and in many others as well. In fact, immigration is an international issue: three percent of the world's population, 191,000,000 people, now live in countries other than those in which they were born. I want to discuss why immigration is so fraught, the relation of the crisis over immigration to the growing fracture of the western world's economy, as well as to terrorism like September 11 and the train bombings in Madrid, Mumbai, and London, and how these factors—growing economic disparity, immigration, and terrorism—have altered one of the basic cultural phenomena of the U.S. in the last three decades, namely, what we call multiculturalism. I will look at some striking statistics about immigration shortly, but I want to begin with a brief definition of multiculturalism as it has been manifest in the United States. It is different from multiculturalism as practiced, for example, in countries like the Netherlands or in developing nations like India.

In Holland, multiculturalism was a matter of public policy: Dutch society had decided that immigrant groups were entitled to their own cultures and languages, as well as to the Dutch language and to the resident Dutch culture. The government therefore supported various institutions to encourage *both* the integration of immigrants *and* the continuation of distinctive immigrant cultures. These policies were not markedly different, if perhaps a little more fully developed, than those of other western European countries. In India, multiculturalism is a fact of life in terms of language, religious practices, food, and social mores. There, the central question, one important to debates in the U.S., is how to unify a nation that has been diverse from time immemorial.

In the United States, multiculturalism has been debated both within and outside of government circles, but on the whole it has *not* been expressed in

legislation. To be sure, the social movements of the 1960s pushed for and obtained laws forbidding discrimination against minorities and women, and more recently against gay people. And it is also true that black, Latino, Native American, Asian American, and women's studies, as well as some Jewish studies programs, are common on most campuses in America. But in general, multiculturalism is a phenomenon not of public policy but of private decisions made by individuals and groups of similarly situated people to identify themselves by ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, religion, and/or sexual orientation. It also involves efforts to uncover and celebrate the histories, cultures, and politics of the identity groups with which individuals affiliate.

Two kinds of issues have marked debates over multiculturalism during the last quarter-century in the United States. First, is one's identity a matter of descent—family, tribe, nationality, race—or a matter of consent? These were the terms posed by Harvard professor Werner Sollors.¹ That paradigm was criticized as inadequately sensitive to the situations of people of color, who—unlike people from Europe—could not simply dissolve their ethnic or racial identities in the larger population of white America.² The other debate over multiculturalism concerned whether its centripetal, dividing power would fracture the unity expressed in the slogan printed on American dollar bills, *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one. If, the argument went, you promote the values of difference, the notion that identity depends on separate group participation and coherence, then what becomes of national unity, of the meaning of being an American? What holds us together? What gives us the ability to judge values, practices, ideas in a world in which these are often in conflict? Is there any center? And how are answers to these questions affected by traumas like that of September 11, the train bombings, and the terrorist raid on Mumbai?

I am going to argue that such terrorist actions only amplified the sound of a tectonic shift in global economic and social structures that has been gaining strength, especially since the Second World War. That shift is currently focused, in the U.S. and elsewhere—especially Western Europe and Japan, so far—on what I am calling “immigration shock,” on questions like how much, how fast, from where, . . . and then what? These questions, the questions of a globalized and altogether unequal economy, have begun to replace the earlier questions of identity that marked the debate over multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Those identity questions remain of interest, but they were largely the questions of single national societies, as signaled by phrases like “Asian American,” “Native American,” “Black German,” “German Turkish,” “British Asian,” and the like. Indeed, one could argue that multiculturalism was a reformist version of the nationalist cultural paradigm that informed much of the art and scholarship that defined America as “exceptional,” distinct from other corrupt, if advanced, nation-states, especially in Europe. Certainly, the nationalist paradigms that defined the intellectual work of early (1940s and 1950s) American studies myth and symbol scholars were, almost by definition,

monocultural, focused on tales of white and largely Protestant men. These intellectual constructs about “virgin land,” the “American Adam,” and the “machine in the garden” were largely undermined by the new sixties stories of inclusiveness and diversity.³ But these sixties stories, too, remained nation-bound in focus and tenor, whereas the questions of immigration are those of global structures, structures that have been, ready or not, imposed upon us by a rampant and increasingly globalized capitalism. What we are seeing is an economic, social, and cultural paradigm shift. I will therefore write of those global questions and, to the extent that I can, the new structures of inequality that are shaping this particular moment.

But before I do, I want to discuss briefly that earlier moment and what its successes and failures can tell us about this historical time. The multiculturalism of recent decades began with the demand of the civil rights movement for access, access to the front of the bus, to the lunch counter, to universities and decent, desegregated schools, and above all to the voting booth. While a few activists raised the question in the mid-sixties, who wants to be “integrated into a burning house,” as James Baldwin, paraphrasing someone else, put it,⁴ most people saw the goal as having access to the promises America had held out since its earliest days. “Let us in,” most people said, “not as tokens, or with no deliberate speed, or somewhere down the line, but Now.” “Freedom Now,” as the slogan and chant had it.

To be sure, the general belief of those who formulated women’s studies, for example, or the variety of ethnic studies programs that emerged in universities in the sixties and after, was that institutions like colleges and universities, or courts, or even political parties, would necessarily be transformed simply by what would come in the wake of the entry of large new cadres of previously excluded people. They were right . . . and they were wrong. As had been the case with the accomplishment of women’s suffrage a half-century before, the addition of new constituencies to the voting roles, the student bodies, or even the curriculum, did not in and of itself produce revolutionary change. This is by no means to suggest that there have been no significant transformations brought about by the push for access. On the contrary, the color, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality of various public bodies have altered noticeably, and generally for the better. Hiring practices have changed through affirmative action; the idea, if not the practice, of day care has become commonplace; access to the voting booth is no longer prevented by violence, though it is often undermined; public accommodations and schools are no longer legally segregated, at least not by race; abortion remains relatively accessible, as do a wider variety of career opportunities, at least for some women. These are real accomplishments of the identity-based movements of the 1960s and 1970s. And I do have to say that a book like the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*—to cite my own favorite example—is a better, more inclusive, more accurate, and finally more interesting text than predecessors of the fifties, like *Twelve American Authors* or even the *Norton Anthology* of the 1980s.

But it would be derelict not to point out the situation of today's black and Latino communities, in which more men are in jails than in universities, and in which the situation of secondary schools, especially in minority communities, is everywhere counted as a disaster. It would be absurd not to point to the differentials in wealth and in income that make this period the most unequal in U.S. history. It would be dishonest not to understand how institutions like unions that have protected and supported working people have been attacked, marginalized, and emasculated. To say this another way, what the movement rooted in multiculturalism and in the identity politics it produced did not accomplish was any significant alteration of the American structures of power, structures that are based on increasingly pervasive class determinants.⁵ There are those like Walter Benn Michaels who would argue that the sixties' movements' focus on multiculturalism has had the effect, however unintended, of firming up the American class structure in all its brutality.⁶ This is certainly a question worth discussing, but it is not my point here.

I do, however, want to quantify the economic meanings of class today within the U.S. and outside of it. Writing for CBS MarketWatch during the 2004 election campaign, Thomas Kostigen noted that "the richest one percent of the U.S. population saw its financial wealth grow 109 percent from 1983 to 2001," while "the bottom two-fifths watched as its wealth fell 46 percent."⁷ Here is another measure of the increasing inequality of wages and wealth in America, as formulated by Michael D. Yates: between 1979 and 2000, "the richest 1 percent of all households, whose income is mainly from capital . . . , grabbed an astonishing 38.4 percent of all the income produced over a thirty-one-year period. The poorest 20 percent of households took home a mere 0.8 percent of the total income. Consider," Yates continues, "that in 2003 there were 111,278,000 households in the United States. One percent of this number is 1,112,780 households. These very rich households got a share of the income increase forty-eight times higher (38.4 divided by 0.8) than the 22,255,600 families which comprise the poorest 20 percent of households."⁸ Think about those top and bottom households: in 2005, total income increased by about nine percent. Sounds good, right? But "average incomes for those in the bottom 90 percent dipped slightly compared with the year before, dropping \$172, or 0.6 percent. The gains went largely to the top 1 percent, whose incomes rose to an average"—an average—"of more than \$1.1 million each, an increase of more than \$139,000, or about 14 percent."⁹ In 2005, in fact, the top one percent of earners in the United States gained nineteen percent in income, while the rest of us gained under one percent.¹⁰ Furthermore, the "top 300,000 Americans collectively enjoyed almost as much income as the bottom 150 million Americans."¹¹ Writing in the *Boston Globe* and deriving his figures from the Congressional Budget Office, columnist Derrick Z. Jackson puts it this way: "the share of America's income that went to the highest 20 percent of households increased from 45.5 percent in 1979 to 52.2 percent in 2003. The remaining 80 percent of American households all saw their share of the nation's income drop." One striking measure is the gap between CEOs and workers: it was 42-

Income of CEOs vs. Income of Workers	
<i>Year</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
1980	42: 1
1990	107: 1
2006	431: 1

Figure 1. Numbers from the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy, quoted in Derrick Z. Jackson, "Income Gap Mentality," *Boston Globe*, April 19, 2006.

to-1 in 1980, 107-to-1 in 1990, and now about 431-to-1, or \$11.8 million to \$27,460. Jackson continues, "If the salaries of the average worker had kept up with that of a CEO, he or she would be making \$110,136. Had the minimum wage risen at the same pace as CEO compensation, it would stand today at \$23.01."¹² Until recently, the federal minimum wage of

\$5.15 had not risen since 1997. In fact, the "median income for working-age households fell \$2,375 from 2000 to 2006 (after accounting for inflation)."¹³

Likewise with respect to wealth: according to Yates, "in 2001, the richest 1 percent of all households had 33.4 percent of all net worth. The bottom 90 percent had 28.5 percent."¹⁴ By 2006, the richest ten percent in the United States owned 69.8 percent of all assets. And these inequities of income and wealth, as a series in the *New York Times* illustrated, are rapidly widening, with the very rich leaving behind even the merely wealthy, forget the rest of us.¹⁵ Or, as Bernie Sanders put it, "in our country today, we have the most unequal distribution of income and wealth of any major country on earth, with the top 1 percent earning more income than the bottom 50 percent and the top 1 percent owning more wealth than the bottom 90 percent."¹⁶ In short, class disparities have grown wildly in the United States of multiculturalism. While hundreds of thousands of people are losing their homes, living without health insurance, and working two jobs or more, the numbers of the very rich have grown spectacularly and thus have helped to sustain the appearance and the pervasive ideology of open access. Some two million households in the U.S. are worth ten to one hundred million dollars, and there are now between four hundred and one thousand billionaires.¹⁷

Now these figures concern only the richest country in the world, the United States of America. Consider, then, some details about the rest of the world. Kostigan summarizes thus: "Three billion people are living in 'poverty' on less than two dollars per day, 800 million people lack access to basic health care, 17 million people—including 11 million children—die every year from easily preventable diseases and malnutrition, 2.4 billion people lack access to proper sanitation, 1.1 billion do not have safe drinking water, 275 million children never attend or complete primary school education and 870 million of the world's adults are illiterate."¹⁸ In 2007, "the top 0.001 percent" held "\$21 trillion—a fifth of the world's wealth," and the top one percent of the world's population held thirty-five percent of global assets.¹⁹ These

figures are by no means independent of those I cited for the United States or those one could produce for the concentrations of wealth and income in western Europe and in Japan. On the contrary, the enormous wealth of our western societies derives in significant measure, directly and indirectly, from the immiseration of people in what used to be called the “third world.” Think about farm products, like corn. The United States and Europe heavily subsidize the domestic production of such products, which can, in addition, be grown more cheaply domestically by capital-intensive methods of cultivation: more machines, more fertilizer, more bug spray, and bigger industrialized farms. The result is, for example, that Mexican farmers, no longer able to sell their corn and other agricultural products at a profit in competition with U.S. products, thanks to NAFTA, were forced off their farms and into cities both in Mexico and in El Norte, where they became cheap, exploitable labor and, of course, immigrants. In fact, under NAFTA, one-sixth of Mexican farmers have been dislocated. But the story does not end there. More recently, increasing amounts of corn are being diverted from feeding people and animals to biofuels. Lo and behold, this process, encouraged and subsidized by the U.S. government, has led to the price of tortillas in Mexico shooting up by more than fifty percent, further immiserating and displacing Mexican working people.²⁰ In the meantime, American manufacturers—such as are left—as well as service providers hold the whip hand over U.S. workers and their decreasingly effective unions in two ways: first, by threatening to move production or service to low-wage venues across the Mexican—or Mozambican—border, a process made considerably easier by NAFTA and other so-called free trade mechanisms. It is not an empty threat either: something over three million manufacturing jobs have been lost in the U.S. since 2001,²¹ and six hundred thousand or so in the last year. And second, they do so by hiring vulnerable and therefore exploitable undocumented workers to compete with a domestic workforce more or less protected by their citizenship, if little else.²² One result has been a vast increase in the import of consumer and capital goods manufactured abroad, a process which even further erodes jobs within the United States and western Europe without fundamentally improving the status of most workers abroad. The process works this way, write Judith Blau and Alberto Moncada: “Multinationals such as Wal-Mart, Sears, and Tarrant Apparel Group first set up operations in Mexico, where workers are paid \$1.00 per hour, then moved to China, where workers made \$.50 an hour, and then to Bangladesh, where workers make \$.30 an hour, and then to Mozambique, where they make even less.”²³ Every move of a factory or site of other low-skilled jobs from one country or area to another creates a new displaced group of workers, who are detached from their former homes and ways of life, and likely therefore to become transnational migrants, subject to control and exploitation by such transnational corporations.

Such statistics illustrate the increasing disparities between the rich in our countries and the poor both domestically and overseas. Obviously, we are not talking here about the casual accumulation of some surplus value from a handful of workers

down in the Connecticut River Valley, who labor for Mr. Lawrence or Mr. Lowell. Rather, we are talking about the large-scale appropriation of the fruits of the labor of millions of people at home and increasingly overseas. My basic point is this: the current system is producing not only the huge disparities in wealth, income, and life chances that I have barely touched upon, but the very crisis of immigration now haunting Europe and America, like a specter of old. What the “West” (or North, if you prefer) has been doing is extracting enormous wealth—not just hydrocarbons—from the “third world,” and in so doing is setting off a huge flow of immigrants—one might call them economic refugees—from those countries, following the money, so to speak. Western countries continue to want to have it both ways: that is, to devour the financial fruits of what is misleadingly called “neoliberalism” globally, and to try to prevent—or more accurately to control—the influx of immiserated foreign workers cast loose from their roots elsewhere precisely by the policies that produce western wealth. But so long as the current political economy of globalized capital rules, the West will be importing social tension and conflict along with the enormous value it extracts. In a peculiar and perverse way, there is a certain distorted truth to the oft-repeated mantra of the Bush administration that “they” have to be fought over “there” so that “they” do not have to be fought “at home.” This mantra needs to be understood not in the Bushies’ military framework but very differently: unless the West takes major steps to support, indeed to bring about, change in the economic and social conditions of people in the impoverished world, it will increasingly face the problem of finding ways to deal with the growing tide of immigration at home.

Immigration is rapidly growing, too, both in numbers and in proportion to the resident populations in the United States and western Europe. Likewise, the origins of immigrants have altered noticeably. According to U.S. Census figures, in 1950, those born outside the United States constituted 10,347,395 of a total population of some 150,216,110, or 6.9 percent. In 1970—before the impact of changes in immigration law had set in—the figures were 9,619,302 of a total of 203,210,158, or 4.7 percent. But by 1990, immigration numbers had grown to 19,767,316 of 248,709,873, or 7.9 percent.²⁴ By 2000, the total of the foreign-born was 31,107,889 of 281,421,906, or 11.1 percent, up some 57 percent in a single decade, and the highest as a percentage of the total population since 1930.²⁵ In fact, these figures can be

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Born outside U.S.</i>	<i>%</i>
1950	150,216,110	10,347,395	6.9
1970	203,210,158	9,619,302	4.7
1990	248,709,873	19,767,316	7.9
2000	281,421,906	31,107,889	11.1

Figure 2. Numbers from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division.

compared with the peak numbers of the turn of the twentieth century: in 1900, the foreign-born constituted 13.6 percent of the U.S. population. William Robinson estimates that in 2007 there were at least thirty-four million immigrants in the United States.²⁶

But at least as important in setting the tone for the debate over immigration in the U.S., and elsewhere in the “West,” is where the immigrants are from. In 1970, immigrants to the U.S. from Europe totaled 5,740,891; those from Asia 824,887; and those from Latin America 1,803,970. By 1990, these figures had altered to 4,350,403 from Europe; 4,979,037 from Asia; and 8,407,837 from Latin America.²⁷ The 2000 figures are even more striking: 4,915,557 from Europe; 8,226,254 from Asia; and 16,086,974 from Latin America. Of the latter, over nine million are from Mexico alone, which, because these are census figures and likely do not capture undocumented immigration fully, understates the numbers. Meanwhile the total of immigrants from northern and western Europe has shrunk to just over two million by 2000.²⁸ Such figures also do not catch the impact of immigration in particular areas, where new arrivals are often concentrated, as is illustrated, for example, by the very large number of workers from Lagunillas, Mexico, in Wallingford, Connecticut. The long and short is that shifts of these dimensions have come to overshadow the earlier forms of change that accompanied the civil rights movement and the subsequent struggles to establish multiculturalism as a central feature of American—as well as of western European—society. In many respects, multiculturalism has come to be accommodated within the basic structures of western capitalism, though disputes rage on about just how that accommodation should proceed in education and culture. But the current harsh debates over immigration, the laws to make English the only legal language, the increasing conflicts between native minorities and incoming immigrant workers, the widespread attitude that *mi casa no es su casa*, and the worldwide dimensions of the current struggles all suggest that we have entered a new historical moment.

II

How, one might ask, does all this affect the study of American literature and culture, especially after September 11? I will argue that, culturally, the focus in American studies has undergone an analogous shift from a period of multiculturalism to that of globalization. In the 1970s and 1980s, the major new literary influences were writers of color, especially representative women like Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Marmon Silko, among many others. They are still very significant players, of course. But increasingly for the past decade and a half, writers in western languages, including English, exist and create in a globalized culture, within which national boundaries are much less meaningful, and in which authors like Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez—just to select two arbitrarily—are of immediate local impact. This shift from a focus on domestic multiculturalism to a globalized

“migrant” culture began, I think, with the increasing attention to “borders” and to what Gloria Anzaldúa and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, among others, designated as the “borderlands,” the areas that are defined not by particular national cultures but by their very interculturality, hybridity, unsettlement.²⁹ Anzaldúa, for example, arrived in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, if I may use that literary museum as a cultural barometer, in the fourth edition, which came on the market in 2001.³⁰ Preparing that edition, we had a good deal of discussion about the international dimensions of literature in what are now the United States, from the earliest times into the twenty-first century. This new angle of vision might be represented by the fact that the first two-hundred-plus pages of the anthology consisted of texts written or spoken in languages other than English. This development is stressed even more in the current sixth edition, which contains clusters in the early volume on “America in the European Imagination” and on “Cultural Encounters,” the latter containing brief excerpts from theorists like Mary Louise Pratt, Paul Gilroy, and Paula M. L. Moya and Ramón Saldívar.³¹ As we worked on the sixth edition, a major problem was how to represent the contemporary globalizing of American culture in this anthology of U.S. literature. Addressing that problem, it seems to me, is the underlying meaning of the debate over the name of our enterprise, heretofore “American studies.” That debate is represented by Janice Radway’s presidential address to the U.S. American Studies Association in 1998: “What’s in a Name?” she called it.³² For the very subjects of literary, historical, and social reflection and analysis have modulated from those focused within a national state to those in which the cultural productions even within that state are at least as involved with external as with internal cultural forces. Some unworldly critics, like Alan Wolfe, for instance, have accused people like Radway and me of being uninterested in, if not altogether hostile toward, the United States.³³ The issue is not lack of interest in the culture, society, and politics of the United States but of recognizing that one simply cannot understand these phenomena in isolation. Whether one is talking about hip-hop or current fiction, what is being produced in the U.S. exists in a text-milieu, if not yet a society, less defined by national boundaries than by international flows of people, goods, dollars, and, of course, cultures.

Am I arguing, then, that September 11 and other terrorist acts made no difference? By no means. We have yet to know what all these differences might be. Still, in the U.S., the impact of globalization, manifest as a crisis of immigration, seems quite distinct from the impact of September 11. The situation in western Europe is somewhat more complicated. After all, the overwhelming bulk of immigrants to the United States were and are from Latin America and Asia; the total number of residents who identify themselves as of Arab origins, to take the obvious case, is a relatively modest 1.2 million, and that includes anyone—Berbers and Kurds, for example—from North Africa or much of the Middle East.³⁴ In Europe, the perceived sources of immigration and of terrorism overlap more. September 11 did not change the sources of the new immigration to the U.S., and in a sense the events of that day remain largely marginal to the processes of globalization that I am

describing. What that day *did* bring sharply into focus, at least for this child of the Enlightenment, is the role of religion, and especially religious extremism, in secular democracies. Do the events of September 11 present a ready-made metaphor precisely about that subject, the impact of religious fanaticism on capitalist democracies? I want to approach that question through some historical reflections.

Western secular democracies were established in their somewhat different ways by a series of compromises. That was particularly, though by no means exceptionally, the case in the U.S. These compromises enabled an increasing variety of religions, mostly brought with them by immigrants, to flourish, even as established churches and religious sectarianism faded, often into little more than relics.³⁵ In the U.S., that form of religious expression called deism formed the core belief systems of many, probably most, founding fathers—and mothers, too. But particular churches and sectarian doctrines played little role in fostering revolutionary ideology or practice. It was, rather, people like Thomas Paine—infamously described by Theodore Roosevelt as a “dirty little atheist”—whose skills and ideology brought forward the revolutionary cause. In a significant way, Paine carried on a secular democratic tradition that, historian Russell Shorto has recently argued, was the legacy of Dutch settlement in New Amsterdam, particularly that of Adriaen van der Donck. Shorto argues that New Amsterdam

would become the first multiethnic, upwardly mobile society on America’s shores, a prototype of the kind of society that would be duplicated throughout the country and around the world. It was no coincidence that on September 11, 2001, those who wished to make a symbolic attack on the center of American power chose the World Trade Center as their target. If what made America great was its ingenious openness to different cultures, then the small triangle of land at the southern tip of Manhattan Island is the New World birthplace of that idea, the spot where it first took shape. . . . Manhattan is where America began.³⁶

“Tolerance, openness, and free trade,” which, Shorto claims with, perhaps, some mild exaggeration, marked Dutch society of the seventeenth century (6)—these were transplanted to and flourished in the America of Franklin, Jefferson, and, of course, Paine. Generations of immigrants bought into these ideas, perhaps more often into free trade than into tolerance, but that is another story.

What Paine in particular added to the equation, I want to suggest, was a deep skepticism of, indeed hostility to, organized, sectarian, or fundamentalist religion. Consider the tone of this, one of my favorite passages from Paine:

It is curious to observe how the theory of what is called the Christian Church, sprung out of the tail of the heathen

mythology. A direct incorporation took place in the first instance, by making the reputed founder to be celestially begotten. The trinity of gods that then followed was no other than a reduction of the former plurality, which was about twenty or thirty thousand. The statue of Mary succeeded the statue of Diana of Ephesus. The deification of heroes changed into the canonization of saints. The Mythologists had gods for everything; the Christian Mythologists had saints for everything. The church became as crowded with the one, as the pantheon had been with the other; and Rome was the place of both. The Christian theory is little else than the idolatry of the ancient mythologists, accommodated to the purposes of power and revenue; and it yet remains to reason and philosophy to abolish the amphibious fraud.³⁷

It is passages like this that got Paine into deep trouble in the nineteenth century. Today, however, Paine's reputation has rapidly increased: something like three new books and a large number of articles on him have appeared in recent years.³⁸ He is seen increasingly as a historically significant player in the Revolutionary period. And the improvement in his political reputation seems now to have helped justify the religious skepticism he so brilliantly articulated—and that every day seems more relevant to us Enlightenment types.

Is a reaction against the religious dimensions of September 11 *and* of other fundamentalisms what helps explain Paine's recent popularity? Does the interest in Paine represent a growing discomfort, especially in secular democracies, with the rise of religious extremism and the challenges such fundamentalisms pose to democratic values? It is questions like these that September 11 continues to raise rather than, at least in the United States, the issue of immigration. It is true that Americans have by and large failed to appreciate why fundamentalist religions, especially Islam, have come to constitute the central oppositional force to the West in many parts of the world. We have not perceived or accepted the implications of the fact that it has long been western policy to destroy the forms of resistance presented by the Left, as in the Iran of Mohammad Mossadegh, or even to encourage religious fundamentalism that attacked communist influence, as in Afghanistan. Deprived of socialist or communist, much less secular democratic, forms of opposition to the western capitalist power that continued to consume their bounty and control their daily lives, people in many parts of the third world, and especially in the Middle East, turned to ever more extreme religious fundamentalisms as the only available option against continued western domination. But the events of September 11, and those of Madrid, London, and the Netherlands, as well as in India in places like Mumbai, made apparent the basic conflict between Islamicist fundamentalisms and the values of western or secular democracies, a conflict that had been papered over during the cold war period when the United States and its allies supported any force, however

corrupt or malign, against communism. My point is this: while the dynamic of globalization, which I have here represented by the immigration crisis, may have been exacerbated by September 11, it is by no means identical to it. The perception that Muslim fundamentalism and western secularism are—who would have thought it—at odds also ignores what is to me a more basic question than whether the Prophet can come to the table with George Washington. The question is whether fundamentalisms of any religious definition—Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Islamic—do or do not finally throttle avowedly secular democratic societies. And if one concludes that they do, what is then to be done? Multiculturalism does not provide answers.

Multiculturalism focused on access and integration, but these are not the primary issues of globalization and the immigration it has generated. The issues here are legitimization, whether one is, and is seen and received as, legal, legitimate, fully a citizen. The issue of multiculturalism was identity: Who are we, and who am I? The issue of immigration is assimilation and/or separation: Of what are we, am I, a part, and who decides? The issue is not what constitutes an identity that needs to be respected, but what constitutes a viable political community and offers the possibility of decent work. And how do the political, social, and economic issues I have been sketching affect the study of literature and culture?

I want to suggest some ways in which these issues directly affect how we read and study the literatures of America. First, when multiculturalism began to be developed in response to the social movements of the 1960s, those of us who taught literature needed to learn both a new approach to literary study and a very different history from that in which we had been trained. Our training was in what was then called the “New Criticism,” and it featured the very close reading of significant texts, mostly from the British tradition, representing what T. S. Eliot called “our civilization.”³⁹ But to read well texts from the African American literary tradition, or from other minority groups, or writing by women, we had to learn to read texts in the contexts of historical events and social forces to which we had paid little previous attention. It had been important, and it remained important, as Eliot had said, to learn the language of the metaphysical poets of the British seventeenth century, like Donne and Marvell (59–67). But now it was equally important to learn about the history of slavery, about slave songs or spirituals, about earlier African American writers we had never, ever read as undergraduates or as graduate students, writers like Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Charles Chesnut, and W. E. B. Du Bois. We now had to learn about Reconstruction and its “failure,” as well as about the blues, about the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance, and just before it the bloody race riots of the post-World War I period. The need for this new knowledge and this new approach to cultural study was made clear to me in 1964 when, during the civil rights movement in Mississippi, I was asked to teach in Freedom Schools about “Negro history,” as it was then called, in addition to poetry and fiction. Likewise, it became essential to learn about Chinese exclusion, Japanese internment, and Indian—Native American—removal, subjects inescapable in many works by Asian American and

Native American writers.

Similarly, to approach women's writing adequately, we had not only to read closely the poems of Emily Dickinson, who was about the only woman writer I had studied in graduate school. We had to learn the facts about discrimination against women, about the struggles of earlier feminists for the vote, for dress reform, for access to fulfilling jobs, for real equality before the law, for control over their own bodies. Then, perhaps, we could adequately read women writers most of us knew little or nothing about, women like Margaret Fuller, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, or Zora Neale Hurston.

Now we need to grasp the dialectic between the forces producing the globalized economy and the consequent flood of immigration, on the one hand, and the rich texts of a globalized culture, on the other. We need to visualize the traffic in women and sweatshops as we read Jessica Hagedorn and learn of New Jersey's Dominican workforce as we read Junot Díaz. We need to understand the social meanings of the corn subsidies I mentioned as we read Gloria Anzaldúa, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Helena María Viramontes, whose wonderful story "The Cariboo Cafe" offers a kind of paradigm for the experiences of displacement to—and within—the United States. As we read Bharati Mukherjee or Bapsi Sidhwa or Chang-rae Lee, we need to listen to the ground tones of outsourcing, the hum of money moving over wires, the jangle of languages superimposed one over another. We need to understand the varied impacts, for good and for ill, of western institutions and styles of education if we would read works like Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* or Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Indeed, we need to understand the nature and impact of globalized culture itself as a commodity. Why do I introduce all the facts and figures I marshaled in Part I of this essay? Because they are essential to understanding this new world I am representing by the phrase "immigration shock."

A second implication for literary and cultural study has to do with rethinking the texts we study. I use as an example Tom Paine, whose extraordinarily effective writing I cite earlier. Why study Paine? Two reasons: One has to do with how he proposes ways of thinking about the role of religion in a democratic society—limited, separated from politics. The other has to do with how he creates an international democratic style, addressed to audiences at least in the U.S., Britain, and France. I respect those who take seriously and study what they claim as sacred texts, the Koran, the Bible, or even those that embody stories of religious import like the *Maharabata* and the *Ramayana*. But many secular democracies have their own valued texts. They are not sacred, certainly, for no one insists that their validity is established by the authority of a god or a set of religious claims. Indeed, not priests, or ministers, or rabbis, or imams certify the value of such texts, nor do such religious people have any special right to interpret them. No crucifixion or table of commandments or empowered prophecy or magical story defines the terms of texts like the American Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, Paine's *Common Sense*, the Seneca

Falls Declaration of Sentiments, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and second inaugural speech. The phrase that begins the Declaration of Independence captures its Enlightenment character and its basic assumptions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Such texts, it seems to me, reward study, particularly in a moment in which secular democracy itself is under challenge. And their study cannot be left in the hands of those who have subordinated values like equality, liberty, democracy itself, either to religious fundamentalism or to what a colleague in Hyderabad called "economic fundamentalism," the specious belief that so-called free markets trump all other critical concerns.

If we begin to think about the study of such foundational texts as the Declaration, we will better be able to approach the literary importance of a political writer like Paine. In fact, Edward Larkin's 2005 book, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, takes on precisely that project. Such an approach forces us to think once again of how literature and revolution are connected rather than, as I at least was once taught, contradictory terms. It seems increasingly important to secular democracies in a moment of intense immigration that we teach the connections between democratic politics and democratic styles of discourse, which one sees so clearly in works like those of Paine. Paine's writing, unlike Alexander Hamilton's, for example, is addressed to the ordinary reader, not to specialists or a limited elite. He asks us to use our "common sense," as one of his most famous pamphlets was titled, in order to come to meaningful conclusions about the politics of his day, and the religions. Paine's book *The Age of Reason*, which brought him into such disrepute among the orthodox in the nineteenth century, speaks to us today about the questions raised by large-scale immigration, by September 11 and similar events around the world, for it addresses in style, as well as content, the issue of the relationship between secular democracy and religious commitments.

We do need to reread works of familiar authors like Paine. And we will also need to be better acquainted with authors less familiar to many of my readers, like some of those I mentioned in passing a moment ago: Hanif Kureishi, Tayeb Salih, Saadat Hasan Manto, Monica Ali, or Marjane Satrapi—just to cite a few being taught now by our colleague Susan Friedman in her University of Wisconsin-Madison English course on diaspora, migration, and borders. But the issue, I want to suggest, is less about widening the lens of our syllabi, or *what* we read, study, and value. It is more a matter of *how* we read to accommodate ourselves to the paradigm shift, the change in perspective I have been trying to sketch.

That shift has to do with understanding America in the world and the world in America. And to do that, it is useful to think about cultures other than our own—India, for example. India is a country from which people emigrate—in fact, it provides the fourth largest outflow of people into the immigrant flood. But also it is a country to which people immigrate from places of even less opportunity, like Bangladesh and

Burma, or Myanmar. It is a country in which decolonization remains a living reality and not a distantly celebrated past event, and a country not of a single September 11 but of a continuing series of terrorist actions. The Mexican-U.S. border provides a paradigm for the “borderlands” about which Anzaldúa and Gómez-Peña have written. What crossroads may provide a paradigm for the twenty-first century in the new global world marked by unsettlement, by global flows of capital and people, and by brutal tensions between secular and fundamentalist ideas of society? A crossroads is a place where varied local and global cultures interact, clash, and change. It is no surprise, therefore, that many of the most significant theorists of this new globalized cultural moment derive from the crossroads of South Asia. But my point is not to promote the study of a society and a variety of cultures halfway around the world, however interesting that might be. It is, rather, to suggest in a kind of geographical metaphor the new intellectual opportunities that this new cultural moment offers us. For my own part, as I have faced editing the new sixth edition of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* and perhaps some new courses, I feel rather like I did in 1964, when I discovered, or rather was told about, the fourth black writer I had ever encountered. Change is afoot. How shall those of us who study the United States understand it, interpret it, and, for some of us, teach and maybe even change it? Those questions seem more alive for me today than they have for the last two decades.

Notes

¹ Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

² See, for example, Alan Wald, “Theorizing Cultural Difference: A Critique of the ‘Ethnicity School,’” *MELUS* 14, no. 2 (1987): 21–33.

³ See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950); R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); and Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁴ James Baldwin, “East River, Downtown: Postscript to a Letter from Harlem,” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin’s/Marek, 1985), 266. Originally published as “A Negro Assays the Negro Mood,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 12, 1961.

⁵ For a very recent and important analysis, see Nolan M. McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

⁶ See Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and*

Ignore Inequality (New York: Metropolitan, 2006).

⁷ Thomas Kostigen, "Rich-Poor Gulf Widens: 'Inequality Matters' Conference Puts Nations on Alert," *Sophisticated Investor*, MarketWatch, June 1, 2004, <http://www.marketwatch.com/News/Story/Story.aspx?guid={4299A2CD-D4D1-4B81-89A8-63B872F2E626}&siteid=mktw&dist=nwhpf>.

⁸ Michael D. Yates, "A Statistical Portrait of the U.S. Working Class," *Monthly Review* 56, no. 11 (2005), <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0405yates.htm>.

⁹ David Cay Johnston, "Income Gap Is Widening, Data Shows," *New York Times*, March 29, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/29/business/29tax.html>.

¹⁰ Paul Harris, "Welcome to Richistan, USA," *Observer* (UK), July 22, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jul/22/usa.paulharris>. Harry Hurt III, citing Robert Kutner's book *The Squandering of America: How the Failure of Our Politics Undermines Our Prosperity* (New York: Knopf, 2007), points out that "the richest 400 people" in the U.S. "had 1.1 percent of all the income in America, more than double their 1992 share." Harry Hurt III, "A Grim Diagnosis for the U.S., and a Prescription," *Off the Shelf*, *New York Times*, December 16, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/business/16shelf.html>.

¹¹ Johnston, "Income Gap." Johnston adds that "the top 10 percent of Americans collected 48.5 percent of all reported income in 2005."

¹² Derrick Z. Jackson, "Income Gap Mentality," *Boston Globe*, April 19, 2006, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2006/04/19/income_gap_mentality/.

¹³ Steven Greenhouse, "What Do Working-Class Voters Want? They Want a Fair Deal," *Table for One*, TPM Café, July 1, 2008, http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2008/07/01/what_do_workingclass_voters_wa/.

¹⁴ Yates, "Statistical Portrait."

¹⁵ See *New York Times*, "Future Tax Shock," October 29, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/29/opinion/29sun1.html>; Eric Konigsberg, "A New Class War: The Haves vs. the Have Mores," *New York Times*, November 19, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/weekinreview/19konigsberg.html?ref=weekinreview>; Katie Hafner, "In Web World, Rich Now Envy the Superrich," *New York Times*, November 21, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/21/technology/21envy.html>.

¹⁶ Bernie Sanders, "Wall Street Bailout," United States Senate, October 1, 2008, <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/news/record.cfm?id=303980>.

¹⁷ Holly Sklar's estimate is 482. See Holly Sklar, "Billionaires Up, America Down," McClatchy-Tribune News Service, Truthout.org, October 21, 2007, <http://www.truthout.org/article/holly-sklar-billionaires-up-america-down>; and Harris, "Welcome to Richistan."

¹⁸ Kostigen, "Rich-Poor Gulf Widens."

- ¹⁹ Joseph A. Giannone, “World’s Richest Got Even Richer Last Year: Report,” Reuters, September 4, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idUSNo437922320080904?sp=true>.
- ²⁰ Noam Chomsky, “Starving the Poor,” *Khaleej Times*, Noam Chomsky Website, May 15, 2007, <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20070515.htm>.
- ²¹ Mark Weisbrot, “Who’s Afraid of a Falling Dollar?” AlterNet, November 8, 2007, <http://www.alternet.org/story/67307/>.
- ²² William Robinson, “Globalization and the Struggle for Immigrant Rights in the United States” (keynote address, “El Gran Paro Americano II” Immigrant Rights Conference, Los Angeles, February 3–4, 2007). Available online at ZNet, March 10, 2007, <http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/1864>.
- ²³ Judith Blau and Alberto Moncada, *Human Rights: Beyond the Liberal Vision* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 101.
- ²⁴ Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, “Tech Paper 29: Table 2. Region of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population: 1850 to 1930 and 1960 to 1990,” U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, March 9, 1999, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab02.html>.
- ²⁵ Nolan Malone, Kaari F. Baluja, Joseph M. Costanzo, and Cynthia J. Davis, “The Foreign-Born Population: 2000,” U.S. Bureau of the Census, December 2003, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-34.pdf>.
- ²⁶ Robinson, “Globalization.”
- ²⁷ Gibson and Lennon, “Tech Paper 29.”
- ²⁸ Dianne Schmidley, “The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: March 2002,” U.S. Bureau of the Census, February 2003, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-539.pdf>. See also U.S. Bureau of the Census, Public Information Office, “Number of Foreign-Born Up 57 Percent since 1990, According to Census 2000,” June 4, 2002, <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/cbo2cn117.html>.
- ²⁹ See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1993). I use the term “unsettlement” in the sense developed by Michael Geyer in his important article “Multiculturalism and the Politics of General Education,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 499–533, particularly 528–29. Geyer’s suggestions for the development of general education programs are, perhaps, more relevant to the kind of educational challenge I am outlining than to multiculturalism in an earlier sense of that term.
- ³⁰ See Paul Lauter et al., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).
- ³¹ See Paul Lauter et al., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature: Volume A: Beginnings to*

1800, 6th ed. (Boston: Cengage, 2009).

³² See Janice A. Radway, "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," *American Quarterly* 51 (1999): 1–32.

³³ See Alan Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies," *New Republic*, February 10, 2003, 25–32.

³⁴ G. Patricia de la Cruz and Angela Brittingham, "The Arab Population: 2000," U.S. Bureau of the Census, December 2003, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-23.pdf>.

³⁵ One might recall Benjamin Franklin's comments that the "Dogmas" of Presbyterianism, "such as the Eternal Decrees of God, Election, Reprobation, &c. appear'd to me unintelligible, others doubtful," and he therefore "absented [himself] from the Public Assemblies of the Sect." Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, in Lauter, *Heath Anthology*, 6th ed., 911–12.

³⁶ Russell Shorto, "Prologue: The Missing Floor," in *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 3.

³⁷ Thomas Paine, "The Age of Reason," in *Thomas Paine: Representative Selections*, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (New York: American Book, 1944), 239.

³⁸ See Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005); Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Vikki J. Vickers, "My Pen and My Soul Have Ever Gone Together": *Thomas Paine and the American Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁹ T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 65.

Selected Bibliography

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Baldwin, James. "East River, Downtown: Postscript to a Letter from Harlem." In *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985*, 263–68. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985.

Blau, Judith, and Alberto Moncada. *Human Rights: Beyond the Liberal Vision*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. Edited by Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.

Foner, Eric. *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*. Updated ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- Geyer, Michael. "Multiculturalism and the Politics of General Education." *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 499–533.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry*. St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1993.
- Kaye, Harvey J. *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. New York: Penguin, 1991.
- Kutner, Robert. *The Squandering of America: How the Failure of Our Politics Undermines Our Prosperity*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
- Larkin, Edward. *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Lauter, Paul, et al. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature: Volume A: Beginnings to 1800*. 6th ed. Boston: Cengage, 2009.
- Lewis, R. W. B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- McCarty, Nolan M., Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.
- Michaels, Walter Benn Michaels. *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. New York: Metropolitan, 2006.
- Paine, Thomas. *Thomas Paine: Representative Selections*. Edited by Harry Hayden Clark. New York: American Book, 1944.
- Radway, Janice A. "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," *American Quarterly* 51 (1999): 1–32.
- Robinson, William. "Globalization and the Struggle for Immigrant Rights in the United States." Keynote address, "El Gran Paro Americano II" Immigrant Rights Conference, Los Angeles, February 3–4, 2007. Available online at ZNet, March 10, 2007, <http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/1864>.
- Salih, Tayeb. *Season of Migration to the North*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1991.
- Shorto, Russell. *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America*. New York: Doubleday, 2004.
- Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Vickers, Vikki J. "My Pen and My Soul Have Ever Gone Together": *Thomas Paine and the American Revolution*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Viramontes, Helena María. "The Cariboo Café." In *The Moths and Other Stories*. Houston: Arte Publico, 1995.

Wald, Alan. "Theorizing Cultural Difference: A Critique of the 'Ethnicity School.'" *MELUS* 14, no. 2 (1987): 21–33.

Wolfe, Alan. "Anti-American Studies." *New Republic*, February 10, 2003, 25–32.