

Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities

Volume 8

Issue 1 *Resisting Borders: Rethinking the Limits of
American Studies*

Article 3

2019

A Message from the Professor

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Recommended Citation

Aguilar-San Juan, Karin (2019) "A Message from the Professor," *Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/tapestries/vol8/iss1/3>

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A Message from the Professor

In his 2015 White Paper for the American Studies Association, George Lipsitz states:

American Studies scholars share a dynamic commitment to democratic inquiry rather than a universally agreed upon canon of required methods of venerated works. The field encompasses and eclectic array of practices and pedagogies that cohere around openness to studying diverse research objects, asking a broad range of research questions, and engaging with a wide range of scholarly approaches, methods and theories.[1]

Lipsitz' cogent analysis of the culture and discourse of "the possessive investment in whiteness" (the title of one of his books) strongly influenced the American Studies program at Macalester College when we created it in 2003. Today, we continue to follow his lead as we encourage our American Studies majors and minors to center the study of racism and white privilege. This volume of *Tapestries* presents an eclectic array of essays organized around a range of research questions, all of them returning in one way or another to questions of race, racism, or whiteness.

In June 2018, Simon J. Bronner published an article pungently titled, "The Death of American Studies." [2] Bronner is suing the American Studies Association for supporting the Palestinian-led Boycott Divest Sanction (BDS) movement. Studying Bronner's polemic gave the Senior Seminar a lot to chew on; I

subsequently asked them on their midterm exams to compare Bronner and his anti-ASA position to the football star Colin Kaepernick and his anti-NFL position. When is it necessary to adopt a highly controversial position? And what can you expect to gain or lose in terms of employment, income, status, reputation, credibility, social networks, support of friends and relatives, market opportunities, or personal integrity?

Toward the end of the Fall 2018 semester, these questions were made real again when Marc Lamont Hill, Professor of Media Studies and Urban Education at Temple University and frequent commentator on CNN, delivered the annual El-Kati Distinguished Lecture on our campus. The title of his talk, "From Ferguson to Gaza: Reimagining Black-Palestinian Solidarity" draws connections between racism and state violence in two contexts. Not long after his Macalester visit, after a speech given at the United Nations, Hill was fired from CNN.

Hill's Macalester lecture was organized by Professor William David Hart, Margaret W. Harmon Professor of Religious Studies and a member of the American Studies faculty steering committee. In response to CNN's firing of Hill, Prof. Hart offered this note to the American Studies Facebook page:

The United States of America is a settler-colonial state. The victims of that injustice live among us. CNN's decision to fire Marc Lamont Hill because he speaks the inconvenient truth that Israel is a settler-colonial state is an example of moral and intellectual cowardice. The fact that being pro-Palestinian is regarded as

scandalous is itself scandalous. But in the current debased, fact-free media environment, CNN does not mind such injustice and the Palestinians do not matter.

At the end of his White Paper, Lipsitz says that some of the “most generative frameworks and paradigms” in American Studies come from the “cruel contradictions and painful paradoxes” of U.S. history. We are not separate from those contradictions and paradoxes--and we strive to acknowledge how they shape our relationships and responsibilities. For example, we understand that, to quote Macalester’s indigenous student group PIPE, “settler colonialism is aggressive and persistent for Native people.” As a gesture to this reality, Macalester campus events often begin with this statement, read out loud:

I would like to take a moment to honor the fact that we are on Dakota land. This is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota people (particularly the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands) who were forcibly exiled from the land because of aggressive and persistent settler colonialism. I make this acknowledgement to honor the Dakota people, ancestors and descendants, as well as the land itself.

These Tapestries essays emerge out of particular social, historical, political and global contexts. They were shaped--as is all work that is worth considering--by days and weeks and months of reading, thinking, talking, writing and revising. During our classroom writing and peer-review sessions, student-authors

became increasingly invested in their own ideas. As the concept of a digital publication became more and more of a reality, a certain “pressure” came to bear, not a pressure to produce for status as much as a pressure to say something worthwhile, something that matters to others, something that would show a sincere effort to understand.

Though your encounter with our work is likely mediated by the cellular mindset of the digital age and thus there is no sense of an atmosphere of collaboration, in fact this volume of a Tapestries has been a collaborative effort. Perhaps the most gratifying moment as an instructor has been watching students ask questions of each other, thereby mentoring themselves in the writing and revising process.

At the end of the day, each essay here bears the stamp of the vital debates and questions that animate this shared moment on Planet Earth.

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December 2018

[1] George Lipsitz. (2015). ASA White Paper. www.theasa.net. Accessed online December 11, 2018.

[2] Simon J. Bronner. (2018). “The Death of American Studies.” *European Journal of American Studies*.