The Stakes of an Anthropology of the United States

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Within anthropology itself there has not existed a large community of dense, vital critical discussion of work in the United States to give it sustained, systematic meaning. . . . So in the absence of anthropologists themselves defining a distinctive place for this body of research, the work itself becomes fragmented and is dispersed as case studies to be given their significance by other constituencies that more powerfully or more normally define the debates and discussions that articulate what the United States is as a social and cultural phenomenon. . . . Anthropologists join these discussions from the margins of their discipline and through terms usually not of their own making. They have a single point to make, a case to offer, however provocative or important, but rarely have they thought through the stakes of an anthropology of the United States (or of France or Britain) for the project of anthropology itself.

—George Marcus, "How Anthropological Curiosity Consumes

Its Own Places of Origin" (1999, 418–19)

IN LIGHT OF HIS CRITICAL REFLECTIONS CONCERNING THE ANTHRO-
pological "field" in which I am implicated both as a scholar and as a
citizen, I am moved to consider George Marcus's incisive judgment to be
an invitation—an invitation to think through the conceivable stakes of a
critical anthropology of the United States. To be sure, the present gesture is
little more in itself than an invitation to a still more expansive and engaged
dialogue about what precisely might comprise such stakes, and how they
might be formulated, problematized, and strategically deployed. However,
at the outset, in the face of this astounding and glaring (yet seemingly
taken-for-granted) absence, we must frankly recognize that there is plainly
no guarantee that such an endeavor—an anthropology of the United States
(even a "critical" one, as I have suggested)—may be presumed to be a viable
proposition.

The Problem of Anthropology

There is certainly a great need, as Marcus keenly notes in the epigraph to
this essay (see also 1998, 242), to coalesce a density of critical and engaged
dialogue and debate within the field concerned with what might be called
the "anthropology" of the United States. Such a convergence is seemingly
ever-emergent, yet never quite cohesive or coherent. Historically, despite
repeated supposed "discoveries," of apparently newfound anthropological
interest in the United States (as Micaela di Leonardo demonstrates per-
suasively), "there is . . . no such thing as American anthropology's 'turn'
to work in the United States" (1998, 28). Yet, if there has in fact been an-
thropological research situated *in* the United States, from the very incep-
tion of the discipline as an institutionalized academic endeavor, this does
not at all resolve the conundrum of an anthropology *of* the United States.
Indeed, numerous admirable—albeit scattered—exceptions (and also some
rather more dubious ones, for example Mead [1942]) notwithstanding, the
problem is not merely quantitative.[1] For, as Marcus himself has recognized,
we must grapple with what might be at stake in the very positing of an an-
thropology *of* the United States, rather than an anthropology merely *in* its

national space. As Sherry Ortner astutely notes, anthropological work in the United States has commonly suffered "a chronic tendency to 'ethni-cize' the groups under study, to treat them as so many isolated and exotic tribes," in order to satisfy "the classic anthropological desire to see the cultures of these communities as having a certain authenticity in their own terms" (1991, 166–67). One of my concerns in this essay, to which I will return below, is to trouble precisely that classically *anthropological* impulse as such, and to inquire into what it may be about anthropology, as a mode of inquiry, that desires and requires the kinds of objects that are apprehen-sible as something like "tribes"—which is to say, ostensible communities of shared kinship and ancestry. But for present purposes, it ought to be clear that "the 'ethnicizing' move," in Ortner's suggestive phrase (167), tends to induce anthropologists to produce scholarship that unwittingly colludes in recapitulating the hegemonic image of the United States as an ever-prolif-erating cacophony of (multi-) "cultural," apparently self-contained *groups,* without accounting for the more encompassing and systemic genesis of the social *relations* of difference and inequality that produce those "groups" as such. In so doing, the very possibility of inquiring into that larger social formation, through which those "ethnic" differences are assigned their salience, gets occluded. Such "classically anthropological" dispositions, then, seem doomed to yield only so many more exercises of anthropology merely *in* the United States. An anthropology *of* the United States, however, remains exasperatingly elusive.

Inasmuch as virtually all ethnography is parochially located, in some literal sense, somewhere—in some kind of place or nexus of places, or oth-erwise in relation to some set of practices, which would have to amount to something less than "the United States" per se—then it is self-evident that the sort of intimate research encounter that has come to distinguish sociocultural anthropology would be *always* restricted to the claims of an anthropology *in* the United States. But this in fact has always also been true of all other conventionally conceived anthropologies. Compared to the theoretical myopia that has disfigured the anthropological objectification of other places, however, as Di Leonardo argues trenchantly,

> the United States . . . is an even more dense and light-consuming black hole
> in anthropology. . . . American anthropology . . . relies on an implicit, and
> therefore entirely untheorized, American "home." . . . It thus proceeds,
> whether its gaze is focused on the near or the far away, in casual disregard
> of the "America" known to other scholars. . . . (1998, 15–16)

The question, therefore, must concern what might be the conceptual am-
bitions necessary when an anthropology "in" comes to be posited more
generally as an anthropology "of." Surely, this is likewise what Marcus is
interested in when he suggests that the task would be to "articulate what the
United States is *as a social and cultural phenomenon.*" Indeed, in this regard,
Marcus is reiterating a central concern of his earlier work with Michael
Fischer in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique,* which memorably called for
a renewal of anthropology's critical function and suggested that as "there
is no longer a secure, taken-for-granted subject matter for ethnography,
it becomes more important to treat domestic patterns with as deep and
varied an understanding as that applied abroad" (1986, 140). Marcus and
Fischer's appeal for the "repatriation" of anthropology has indubitably
been one of the most significant and enduringly provocative interventions
in the discipline in recent decades.[2] Yet Marcus and Fischer's original
proposition for "repatriation" relied upon a certain presupposition about
the stability and durability of the distinction between "the domestic" and
"the exotic," and therefore about what might be implied by an anthropol-
ogy "at home" (posited as the "*cultural* critique" of *one's own* "culture"
or "society"), in contradistinction with a more conventionally conceived
anthropology among "exotic others" (e.g. 1986, 113, 138; emphases mine).
However, as Amy Kaplan has amply demonstrated in her study of "Ameri-
can" national identity, "the idea of the nation as home . . . is inextricable
from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, move-
ments that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between
the domestic and the foreign, between 'at home' and 'abroad'" (2002,
1). The very notion of an anthropology "at home," then, becomes deeply
troubled, while the challenge of an anthropology of the United States
nonetheless becomes rather more intriguing and provocative. Moreover,

the move to a construction of the United States as a specifically "cultural" object may have been preemptive–if not, indeed, abortive. This simply raises anew the interminably bedeviled but enduringly vexing condition (if not outright inadequacy) of "culture" as a category of analysis. Far more important, however, it also raises the ever urgent and critical question of *who* or *what* can be viably anthropologized.

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If there is no anthropology of the United States as such, it may very well have been precluded by the discipline of anthropology itself. The lack of "a large community of dense, vital critical discussion of work in the United States" (identified by Marcus—himself, one of such a prospective community's most prominent members) is surely a predictable effect of the fact that conventional anthropologists have long viewed the prospect that one might conduct ethnographic research in the United States—especially if one is an "American"—with self-assured suspicion, if not forthright contempt.[3] Doesn't that sort of thing fall within the disciplinary purview of sociology, after all? (Ironically, Marcus's essay itself was published, rather inconspicuously, as part of a forum on anthropology in and of France!) Pervasive and seldom examined disciplinary assumptions about what is and what is not properly "anthropological" might seem like little more than long-sedimented intellectual bad habits, or perhaps bad faith, if it were not precisely for their efficaciousness. Such smug but largely unexamined anthropological exoticism serves to police the boundaries of the permissible within the spheres of research funding, accreditation, and scholarship in general and is especially insidious in *disciplining* practitioners in the rather worldly realms of academic professionalization and promotion. These indeed are among the accumulated codes and practices that Edward Said once memorably referred to as "various modes of *being anthropological.*" He continued, "and if we suspect that as in all scholarly disciplines, the customary way of doing things both narcotizes and insulates the guild member, we are saying something true about all forms of disciplinary worldliness. Anthropology is not an exception" (1989, 213; emphasis Said's). Thus, the

veritable absence, historically and presently, of a distinct and viable anthropology of the United States would seem to have something elementary and fundamental to do with the very ways in which anthropology as such has been constituted and sustained as a discipline. Consequently, it is not at all clear that the problem can be adequately posed—let alone satisfactorily resolved—in terms of the conceivable stakes of such a critical "anthropological" inquiry into the United States (in Marcus's phrase) "for the project of anthropology itself." But this tension may be precisely the point from which to begin to examine this conundrum.

What, indeed, are the distinctive epistemological grounds of an "anthropological" knowledge? What are the premises that distinguish them as identifiably "anthropological"? How are these epistemological grounds and conceptual foundations situated in some presumably necessary relation to ethnographic methods? And furthermore, what are the historically specific, material, and practical conditions of possibility for such investigative endeavors? These are of course very general questions, and are, needless to say, beyond the scope of the present essay to conclusively resolve, but they may be productively illuminated by recourse to this particular line of inquiry concerning the problematic relation between the United States and the anthropological enterprise. In his provocative reflections on the subject, Marcus notably suggests that these are among the larger theoretical dilemmas at stake.

> Ultimately, when anthropology comes squarely to face modernity and its complex cultural histories in its own places of origin, it faces not just another place for incorporation in its archive of culture areas but a fundamental question of whether a mere anthropology of the United States, France, or Britain is belatedly possible in the same terms as in the older hopes for an anthropology, say, of India, Polynesia, or Africa. The critiques of the 1980s represented for many a fundamental rupture with this traditional mode of anthropology incorporating new objects of study. Only by the fiction of ethnographic study could it continue to consume itself like it had consumed others. And if all the work in the contemporary United States by American anthropologists . . . does not add up to . . . an anthropology of the United

States . . . then, after all, in what terms can the collective disciplinary project
in which such work occurs now be conceived? (1999, 419)

Marcus gently signals the beleaguered status of the concept of "culture" as
a distinctly anthropological (disciplinary) object of knowledge, as well as
its functionalist foundations in a definite but enduring myth of ethnogra-
phy as an intellectual means of production. Implicitly, moreover, Marcus
is likewise directing our critical scrutiny to the extravagantly unequal
geopolitical positions of the United States—or France, or Britain, in his
not inadvertent examples—in relation to their historical or contemporary
colonies and targets for imperial intrusion and control. The difference, of
course, is decisive. And moreover, truly defining.

If there is—arguably, but not implausibly—a historical specificity that
makes distinctly "anthropological" claims inseparable from some form of
colonial (or imperialist) domination, then it is imperative that we consider
precisely whether a critical anthropology of the United States is even pos-
sible. This is by no means a trivial or merely polemical question. One need
only consider the remarkable prominence and indisputable centrality of
American Indians in the intellectual and historical formations of the insti-
tutionalized academic discipline of anthropology in the United States, in
light of the utter impossibility, contemporaneously, of conceiving of *that*
anthropology—albeit one conducted within the space of the U.S. nation-
state—as something that might have been called an anthropology *of* the
United States.

U.S. Nationalism as a Colonial Formation

Why, indeed, did the pioneering work in cultural anthropology in the
United States treat the subjugation of North America's indigenous peoples
as virtually extraneous to the ethnographic objectification of their ostensi-
bly self-contained "cultures"? As A. L. Kroeber hauntingly remarked, the
genocidal extermination of the Northern California Indians (whom he made
his "object" of study) amounted to "a little history . . . of pitiful events," "a
matter that has comparatively slight relation to aboriginal civilization,"

which he took to be the more proper concern of anthropological inquiry (quoted in Scheper-Hughes 2001, 14). In light of a hegemonic common-sense throughout the nineteenth century that American Indians were literally doomed to extinction in the face of the inexorable "progressive" expansion of white "civilization" (Berkhofer 1978; Horsman 1981, 189–207; Takaki 1979, 80–107), what else, after all, could ever have been the meaning of "salvage ethnography"? In this regard, one can hardly feign professional indignation in the face of Native American repudiations of anthropology, such as Vine Deloria Jr.'s memorably sardonic judgment:

> Behind each policy and program with which Indians are plagued, if traced completely back to its origin, stands the anthropologist. The fundamental thesis of the anthropologist is that people are objects for observation, people are then considered objects for experimentation, for manipulation, and for eventual extinction. (1969, 81; see also Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997)

Why, furthermore, did anthropologists persistently figure indigenous social formations to be on the other side of the frontier of U.S. nationhood, despite their effectively complete spatial and sociopolitical containment within the juridical territoriality of the U.S. nation-state? Similarly, how could Ruth Benedict (1946) have so effortlessly transposed a study of Japanese "resident aliens" (who were ineligible, on explicitly racial grounds, to naturalize as U.S. citizens, but had commonly lived in the United States for the majority of their adult lives, and who were subjected to her inquiries while captive in wartime concentration camps) into the putative ethnography of imperial Japan's "culture," albeit "at a distance"? The strictly racialized suspicion of the Japanese—noncitizens and U.S.-born alike—as irredeemably foreign and presumptively disloyal (which was the basis for their internment, ulti-mately) supplied the material, practical, and ideological conditions of pos-sibility for Benedict's uncritical construction of the "culture" of this "most alien enemy the United States had ever fought in an all-out struggle" (1946, 1) as being "embedded in the rules and values" (6) that could be deduced from what her captive and utterly compromised informants reported of their distant memories of life in Japan (8). Yet, the ethnography of these

U.S. prison camps and their inmates remained, quite frankly, inconceivable in terms of anything that might contribute to an anthropology of the United States. Similarly, how could Margaret Mead—despite her truly extravagant and emphatically heuristic juxtaposition of "American civilization" and "Samoa, a South Sea island . . . inhabited by a brown Polynesian people" whose "primitive," "uncomplex [*sic*], uniform culture" was instructively "not only simpler but very different from our own" (1928, 15–16)—have left, utterly unremarked, Samoa's status as a military colony of the United States? A people without history, indeed. Despite the most valiant liberal postures of anthropological advocacy on behalf of the cultural integrity of the colonized, the brute fact of a defining historical complicity with the U.S. nation-state's truly inexorable colonization of its ever-expansive and increasingly virtual frontiers seems difficult to suppress.[4]

Again, however, the more subtle point has to do not merely with historical complicity so much as epistemological and theoretical complacency. Consider, for instance, Partha Chatterjee's poignant example:

> It is not trivial to point out here that in this whole debate about the possibility of cross-cultural understanding, the scientist is always one of "us": he is a Western anthropologist, modern, enlightened and self-conscious (and it does not matter what his nationality or the color of his skin happens to be). The objects of study are "other" cultures—always non-Western. No one has raised the possibility, and the accompanying problems, of a rational understanding of "us" by a member of the "other" culture—of, let us say, a Kalabari anthropology of the white man. It could be argued, of course, that when we consider the problem of relativism, we consider the relations between cultures in the abstract and it does not matter if the subject-object relation between Western and non-Western cultures is reversed: the relations would be isomorphic.
>
> But it would not: that is precisely why we do not, and probably never will, have a Kalabari anthropology of the white man. And that is why even a Kalabari anthropology of the Kalabari will adopt the same representational form, if not the same substantive conclusions, as the white man's

anthropology of the Kalabari. For there is a relation of power involved in the very conception of the autonomy of cultures. (1986, 17)

Chatterjee's remarks not only remind us of the fundamentally colonial character of the unequal power implied by the very notion that is so central to the programmatic charter of cultural anthropology—that of an autonomy and plurality of "cultures"—but also of the concomitant racialization of that colonial relation. By formulating the problem of a Kalabari anthropology (not simply of the British, say, but rather of "the white man"), Chatterjee recognizes and underscores a globalized fact of white supremacy that has been one of the most profound inheritances of European (and, I hasten to add, U.S.) colonialism. Recall, for instance, the ease with which Mead could distinguish Polynesian "primitives" as "brown" in juxtaposition to the normative but strictly implicit racial whiteness of "our own" "American" anthropological enterprise.

How can problematizing the foundations of the anthropological discipline within this or that colonial venture enable an anthropology of those same colonial formations as such? If it is possible, then what are its stakes? Talal Asad, a distinguished critic of anthropology's historical complicity with colonial power, has called for such a reversal in "From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony" (1991). Numerous valuable contributions to critical scholarship notwithstanding, however, the efflorescence within the U.S. academy of so-called historical anthropologies that have taken as their object the colonialisms of the British or French or other Europeans (in times and places at a distinct and safe remove from the imminent sociopolitical circumstances of their practitioners) have largely (and regrettably) elided or evaded these questions insofar as they specifically pertain to the imperial power of the United States or to the particular status of U.S.-based anthropologists as de facto citizens of empire. In an attempt to summarize much of the insight generated from the intersection of postcolonial criticism with this historical anthropology of colonialism, Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have rightly contended that the colonies constituted the space—both imaginary and physical—in which the inclusions and exclusions built into the very

notions of citizenship and sovereignty were determined (1997, 3). These theoretical insights are seldom directed toward a critical scrutiny of the United States, however. In an important (if very recent) exception, Stoler herself pointedly notes that "colonial studies has subscribed to a myopic view of empire that sidelines a wide range of imperial forms as anomalous. . . . On this view, the United States is one of several exceptions, at the edges of empire proper rather than an exemplar. . . ." (2006c, 127; see also 2006b; 2006d).[5] This stubborn tendency has indeed always been a familiar strain in the broader discourse of "American" *exceptionalism* (see Hietala 1985, 173–214). "One of the central themes of American historiography," William Appleman Williams noted at the height of the Cold War (1955), "is that there is no American Empire." Indeed, at least prior to September 11, 2001 (when the United States unceremoniously assumed a more blunt and aggressively imperialist posture, with respect to the entire planet, and notably reanimated public debate about the explicit question of U.S. empire across the political spectrum), "the notion of the American Empire," in Kaplan's words, "would have been rejected in the United States as a left-wing polemic . . . [that] seemed to say more about the persons using the term than about the phenomenon itself" (2004, 2). Following both Said and Kaplan, Stoler adds, "discourses of exceptionalism are part of the discursive apparatus of empires themselves" (2006c, 140).

In one rather prominent formulation of the exceptionalist disavowal of the precisely *colonial* foundations of U.S. nationalism—albeit one that has enjoyed extraordinary celebrity for its expressly anti-"imperial" gesture— Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) elaborates a notion of genuinely global and putatively deterritorialized sovereignty, emergent as an "Empire" that literally eclipses all nation-state-based projects of imperialism. Notably, Hardt and Negri's conception of *Empire* is both emphatically disarticulated from the specific global hegemony of the United States *as such* (while nonetheless positively derived from what they identify to be the historical specificity of the "American" federalist constitutional formulation of sovereignty) and practically materialized, only through the historical ascendancy of U.S. power (2000, 160–82).[6] In *Multitude* (2004), their adroit but agonistic post-September 11, 2001 attempt to revise and

recuperate the alternately incisive and impressionistic argument for Empire in the face of the reinvigorated U.S. unilateralism that so many have decried as atavistic imperialism, Hardt and Negri posit the disparity between the "exceptional" status of the United States as "the beacon of republican virtue in the world" and its exceptionalism—"purely a question of might"—as "the only remaining superpower" to signal a direct and absolute contradiction (8–9). The praise that the authors bestow upon that "rare flower" (160) that was the protoimperial innovation of the U.S. constitutional formulation of sovereignty as a "project operating on an unbounded terrain . . . decidedly open to expansive movements, to the renewed declaration of the democratic foundations of power" (165–66), however, is quite exuberant and rather unrestrained. Most important for my purposes here—in their theoretically overburdened plea for the noncolonial character of U.S. sovereignty, and despite brief but sanctimonious caveats about the brutal subjugation of Native Americans and the ignominious "paradox" of African slavery (169–72)—Hardt and Negri uncritically and unconscionably recapitulate the pluralist conventions and plainly racist conceits of a liberal U.S. nationalism for which "the frontier is a frontier of liberty" (169), through and across which "the free exodus of the multitude, unified in plural community, could continue to develop, perfect itself, and realize a new configuration of public space" (172). This "new democracy" and the "new nation" produced from "hybrid identities" (172), in Hardt and Negri's account, is little more than a refashioned multiculturalist revivification of the iconic mythology of Fredrick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis (1893), if not its subsequent global dissemination as an obscene Cold War-era Frankenstein monster.[7]

Here, again—and also returning to the problem of anthropology—it is necessary to recall the perfectly eloquent and forceful critique of Edward Said, who had the rather unique temerity to pose the problem with the candor that it commands:

> When we consider the connections between the United States and the rest of the world, we are so to speak *of* the connections, not outside and beyond them. It therefore behooves us as intellectuals . . . to grasp the role

of the United States in the world of nations and of power, from *within* the actuality, and as participants in it, not as detached outside observers . . . The imperial contest . . . is a cultural fact of extraordinary political as well as interpretive importance, because it is the true defining horizon, and to some extent, the enabling condition of such otherwise abstract and groundless concepts like "otherness" and "difference." The real problem remains to haunt us: the relationship between anthropology as an ongoing enterprise and, on the other hand, empire as an ongoing concern. (1989, 217; emphases Said's)[8]

And haunt us it does (or should, in any case). Indeed, by now, it haunts us in at least a *double* sense, for we are speaking simultaneously of the constitutively *colonial* character of U.S. nation-state formation, historically—with regard to historical conquests and annexations perpetrated against Native North America, Mexico, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Samoa, Alaska, etc.—as well as the broadly *imperial* contemporary configuration of U.S. hegemony on a global scale. Put somewhat differently, the challenge before a conceivable anthropology of the United States, conducted in and about the United States (in its more parochial "national" configuration), cannot evade the analogous demand presented for *any other* anthropology, conducted elsewhere, by researchers located within the U.S academy. That common demand requires that the imperial configuration of the United States—in relation to the rest of the world, generally, and in particular relation to virtually every place formerly colonized by some other, historically prior imperium—supplies the true defining horizon and, to some extent, the enabling condition of anthropology as such.

U.S. Imperialism as an Anti-Colonial Formation

In the era following decolonization in what was then increasingly known as the "third world" (where the discipline's practitioners had previously been accustomed to cutting their teeth), the call for anthropology's "repatriation" may have been just another case of the proverbial chickens

coming home to roost. This was the case precisely in that those formerly known (to both colonial rule and anthropology), quaintly, as "natives" now aspired, in more or less militant ways, toward self-determination. Additionally, the customarily intrusive and purely extractive investigations of anthropologists were increasingly in as bad an odor as the whole regime that had originally provided their conditions of possibility. Hence, the presumed crisis in anthropology was largely a misrecognized or dissimulated symptom of a political crisis in the wider social order upon which anthropology was predicated (Trouillot 1991, 44 n. 17). Yet, if anthropologists were often sent packing along with the colonial administrators who had previously facilitated their relations to their "objects" of study, it simultaneously became less and less clear, after all, where or what "home" was anymore. During the 1990s, it was easier to gloss over the extensive and intricate material and practical connections between the United States and the rest of the planet through the obfuscating (if often unwitting) lens of a predictably vague, elusive, depoliticizing, and, above all, effectively neo-liberal discourse of "globalization."[9] The basic tasks and challenges of positing anew the most elementary questions for social theory in more forcefully transnational terms, nevertheless, had already come into a fair degree of clarity. Marcus's essay, published at the end of that decade, is keenly aware of this problem, and perhaps, retrospectively, also somewhat implicitly circumspect about his own previous commitment to the call for anthropology's repatriation.

> To speak of an anthropology of the United States in the context of these ongoing rethinkings [about "globalization" and transnational processes] means something quite different from what it might have meant before the 1980s. For example, now that the viability of the nation-state is itself in question, hope for an anthropology of the United States, wittingly or not, implies a position, or a taking of sides, on the question of how contemporary social and cultural life is most saliently organized and reproduced. There is thus nothing innocent or matter of fact in evoking belatedly an anthropology of the United States. (1999, 420)

There is, indeed, "nothing innocent or matter of fact" in the long-deferred aspiration toward an anthropology of the United States, but such a gesture need not necessarily hearken back nostalgically to a forlorn innocence (naiveté, really) about the erstwhile integrity of "the nation" or its presumed isomorphism with a putative national "culture." It is indubitable that the interdisciplinary field that has come, regrettably but revealingly, to be called "American" studies was indeed established, sometimes quite deliberately, upon epistemologically and methodologically U.S. nationalist premises and conceits, and long guarded a basic commitment to an uncritical "American" exceptionalism.[10] Nonetheless, Janice Radway's 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association—in which she warns of "the risk of functioning as just another technology of nationalism . . . ritually repeating the claims of nationalism by assuming [a national subject] as an autonomous given inevitably worthy of scholarly study" (1999, 12)—is truly symptomatic of an already robust self-critical reflexivity that has flourished in that field. The prominence of Radway's refreshingly lucid remarks merely epitomizes the prestigious zenith achieved by what had been, and continues to be, a truly vibrant intellectual effervescence among a wide array of American studies scholars who are devoted precisely to breaking out of the epistemological confinements of those foundational U.S. nationalist (and imperial chauvinist) presuppositions.[11] A critical anthropology of the United States, therefore, need not—and, in the wake of the creative tumult in American studies during the last 10 or 15 years, *ought not*—duplicate the same misguided steps taken *decades* earlier by scholars in the latter field. Instead, as I have already suggested, we may be confronted with the decisive challenge of simultaneously theorizing precisely this double (and contradictory) character of the United States: its more prosaic and often quite parochial historical specificity as *a mere nation-state* (one among literally a world full of them), but also its rather unique status as a global power whose distinctive recipe for *empire* has historically relied upon the ostensibly anti-colonial and "democratic" conceit of upholding the (at least nominal) national sovereignty of client states in the devout and stringent service, nonetheless, of global capital accumulation.

Enigmas of an Imperial Nation-State

How, then, does the current toxic conjuncture of "globalization" and empire enable, in some new way, the parochialization of the U.S. nation-state and U.S. nationalism? In what ways might ethnographic work in the United States productively elucidate this genuinely global concern? At the very least, ethnographers would have to more carefully and creatively fashion the purported "unit of analysis," or "object of study," of their research endeavors in a manner that deliberately situates the apparently mundane locations of their studies within a less literal, counterpositivistic conception of transnationally and imperially inflected conjunctural spaces (De Genova 2005; see also Hart 2004). It is important to emphasize that such spaces ought not to be simply understood as mere intersections of "the local" and "the global," taken abstractly, according to what by now has become a truly trivial and platitudinous convention. Rather, such ethnographic sites would have to be apprehended as material and practical conjunctures of the national and the transnational (if not, frankly, imperial), which is really to say, sites of social *interrelation* produced at the articulations of a variety of spatial scales, prominently including "national" states and global capital. It is precisely in this regard that they might be best comprehended as counterpositivistic conjunctures where an apparently mundane "place" comes to be apprehensible as inextricable from material and practical relations that meaningfully and eventfully link it to processes that otherwise seem to be evident only on the far side of the globe. This is, after all, what empire has always been about. With respect to the United States, at the heart of this conceptual dilemma lies the challenge of navigating the dialectic between the apparent "inside" and "outside" of that which is commonly taken for granted as the territorially delimited "national" social formation (see also De Genova 2006). On the one hand, this requires a theory of the state adequate to the task of specifying how and why a global relation of "the political," systemically abstracted and separated from the immediate processes of exploitation and capital accumulation, is pervasively manifested in the form of territorially defined "national" states charged with the always historically specific work of labor subordination and social control

(see Holloway 1994). On the other, it necessitates a critical attention to the manifest but suppressed instability or restlessness of that distinction between inside and outside, and therefore an acute sensitivity to the very historicity and historical specificities of how the ostensible "object" in question—namely, the U.S. nation-state—has itself been always a moving target, indeed, a *social relation* of conflict and struggle.

Here, we must revisit the remarkably persistent and pernicious refusal to recognize the history of colonization that has been constitutive of U.S. national formation and, consequently, the ubiquitous elision of the intractably *colonial* dimensions of U.S. nationalism and national identity. How else might we meaningfully comprehend the enduring modern foundations of federal Indian law, for instance, based principally upon U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall's decisions in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), which continue to figure the legal status of Native American tribal sovereignty as precisely *not* that of foreign nations, but rather as that of "domestic dependent nations" (Aleinikoff 2002, 95–150; Ruppel 2003)?[12] How else might we fathom the esoteric significance of Puerto Rico's enduring juridical status as an "unincorporated territory" of the United States, determined in the *Insular Cases* to be "foreign in a domestic sense" (Aleinikoff 2002, 74–94; Burnett and Marshall 2001; Rivera Ramos 2001)? How else, moreover, might we interrogate the contention of the Bush administration that U.S. courts have no jurisdiction over the *habeas corpus* petitions of alleged "enemy combatant" detainees imprisoned, without charges or any semblance of due process of law, at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, on the grounds that the military installation is "outside the sovereign territory of the United States" (e.g. Philibin and Yoo 2001)? My intention with these questions—in accord with Benedict Anderson's claim (1991, 7) that all nationalisms require for the "nation" in question to be imagined as a unity having very definite limits, but necessarily supplemented by Etienne Balibar's contention, in a different context, that the "visible" nation "must regulate its transformations by reference to another, invisible collectivity, which transcends frontiers and is, by definition, transnational" (1991, 61)—is to emphatically direct our attention to the sociopolitical production of the "national" formation

itself. Any notion of "American" nationhood rests upon a production of nation-state space (and sovereignty) delineated by physical borders and also conceptual boundaries, constituting both an inside *and* an outside, which, in the case of the United States, have virtually always been entangled with palpably colonial—and hence racialized—circumstances (De Genova 2006). As Balibar notes, strikingly echoing W. E. B. Du Bois's much earlier discourse (1920) during the aftermath of World War I,

> the European and Euro-American nations, locked in a bitter struggle to divide up the world into colonial empires, recognized that they formed a community and shared an "equality" through that very competition, a community and an equality to which they gave the name "White." . . . [I]t is only as "racism"—that is to say, only to the extent that the imperialist nation has been imagined and presented as the specific instrument of a more essential mission and destiny . . . that imperialism has been able to turn itself from a mere enterprise of conquest into an enterprise of universal domination, the founding of a "civilization." (1991, 62)

Thus, the expansionist program of U.S. nation-state formation, historically, and all of its still quite stout conceits about the extension of liberty and republican institutions of self-government, however fatuous, were always situated within a global context of imperialism in which racism and "civilization" were deeply interlaced (see, for example, Bederman 1995; Hietala 1985; Horsman 1981; Kaplan 2002; Jacobson 2000; Takaki 1979). However, from the vantage point of the overtly colonized or otherwise racially subjugated, as Du Bois memorably remarked, "there was but one unanimity" among the various contenders for imperial prerogative—"the doctrine of the divine right of white people to steal" (1920, 48). Du Bois eloquently (if acerbically) exposed what he called the "religion of whiteness" (31), for which "whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" (30).

U.S. Nationalism as a Racial Formation

From the critical vantage point that identifies the United States as a "national" social formation whose inside and outside have been intrinsically forged through conquest and colonization, the inclusions and exclusions implied thereby for U.S. citizenship and "American" national identity—to return to the point signaled earlier by Chatterjee, and now by Du Bois and Balibar, respectively—come to be inextricable from a racial formation of white supremacy (De Genova 2005; 2006; De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003). I hasten to insist (as I have done with respect to the problem of empire) that identifying the inseparability of U.S. nationalism from a sociopolitical order of white supremacy is no merely flamboyant or narrowly polemical gesture. Rather, it is a matter of scrupulous scholarly precision, rigor, and clarity. Whereas it is an utterly banal commonplace for virtually any commentator to observe that the United States is a social formation deeply distinguished by the enduring legacies of racism, the term *white supremacy* is often presumed to conjure the hackneyed and easily disparaged image of white-hooded Klansmen or atavistic goose-stepping cryptofascists and thus, when deployed to characterize the U.S. social formation as a whole, can tend to provoke alarm if not paroxysms of disavowal. However, *racism* ultimately proves to be a relatively vague and amorphous term that often facilitates the dissipation of its more strict sense (namely, *white* race-ism) by lending itself to a dispersion of meaning whereby it may refer to any and all forms of prejudicial bias about presumably natural "racial" differences. In contrast, the term *white supremacy* has the advantage of establishing plainly that what we are considering is a social and political order of domination and subordination that systemically generates and upholds inequalities of wealth, power, and prestige by privileging racialized whiteness over and above all other categories of "racial" identity. It would seem that the United States readily and extravagantly lends itself to innumerable empirical confirmations that this characterization is perfectly appropriate in describing its racial predicament. With recourse to an analytical framework of *white supremacy*, moreover, all supposedly "racial" *differences* are necessarily subject to a more careful critical scrutiny of how such distinctions operate relationally within an economy of

inequalities, and are thus inevitably politicized. In this way, likewise, this critical lens opens up the possibilities for exploring how such differences have themselves been *produced* historically and continue to be reproduced or reconfigured through ongoing social struggles over their symbolic meanings, practical effects, and overall sociopolitical locations within the larger system of racialized social relations. Much as any system of rule is ultimately tenable—not through brute force alone—but also requires unrelenting ideological persuasion and symbolic affirmation, and so may be productively interpreted as an always unstable and conflicted historical contingency achieved through some quotient of both coercion and consent, so also may U.S. white supremacy (and its dynamics of racialization and racial formation) be very aptly depicted as a racist *hegemony* (in Gramsci's sense). But its defining and decisive feature has always been, and continues to be, precisely the systematic maintenance of a racial hierarchy in which whiteness is exclusively guarded as the most privileged condition (which is to say, in short, white supremacy). That this phantom whiteness is an elusive and treacherous fabrication, of course, ought to be fairly evident, but its semblance of objectivity and purity—its precisely *un*natural yet terrifyingly naturalized social reality—has been forged and exulted only through a bloody history of excruciating credulity.[13]

It may be instructive, then, to recall how anthropologists working in the United States have chronically opted, in Ortner's telling phrase, "to 'ethnicize' the groups under study, to treat them as so many isolated and exotic tribes" (1991, 166). This quest for the putative "cultural" authenticity and integrity of readily identifiable (and hence, objectifiable), apparently bounded and self-contained (tribe-like) "groups" is, indeed, as Ortner suggests, an all-too-familiar and generically anthropological complex, after all. And likewise, inasmuch as such tribalizing gestures have a certain ubiquity within the discipline as such, we are well reminded again of the *colonial* foundations, specifically, for such distinctively anthropological modes of seeing, sorting, and ranking "difference." Moreover, and more particularly (as Ortner also posits in her specific effort to theorize the absence of *class* as a salient category of social analysis in U.S. anthropology), the disciplinary susceptibility for what she calls "the 'ethnicizing' move"

(1991, 167) is doubtless also a systematic effect of the hegemonic discursive and ideological displacement of class antagonisms and immobility in the United States onto the presumed "failure of individuals," as well as into any and all other arenas of social life "that are taken to be 'locked into' individuals—gender, race, ethnic origin, and so forth" (171; see also Rapp 1978; Schneider and Smith 1973; Smith 1996, 185–201). Elsewhere, Ortner contends that "race and ethnicity" are "the dominant social categories in American discourse,"—seemingly self-evident and self-explanatory, "always already part of an ethno-anthropology" (1998, 4)—and that "at the level of American cultural thought . . . there is no class [category] . . . that is not always already racialized and ethnicized" (10). But the systemic occlusion of social inequalities in favor of naturalized, apparently essential or primordial differences begs another question about *why* it is, in the United States, that racialized (or "ethnic") differences in particular assume the pronounced and intransigent prominence that they do. Gender and sexuality undeniably serve, as Ortner deftly demonstrates, to refract all manner of class anxiety and conflict *within* classes or status groups variously constituted as racialized or "ethnic" communities (see also Rapp 1978). And by now, it is abundantly clear that *all* nationalist discourses are thoroughly imbued with patriarchal and heternormative preconditions for the very possibility—and reproduction—of any notion of "the nation" as the sort of "community" that may be modeled on the image of an extended family, inevitably naturalized in terms of shared heritage (if not ancestry, outright) and common virtual kinship. But it is inevitably *race,* above all else, that provides the central and ultimately decisive explanatory vehicle and organizing framework in the United States for more broadly *national* configurations of social division and inequality. It is *racial* difference that is most routinely and insistently pressed into the service of rationalizing the fractures and always potentially traumatic eruptions that mutilate the fantasy of "national" wholeness.

The "ethnicizing" tendency in anthropological work concerning the United States, moreover, may itself be a symptom of, as well as a vehicle for, the greater ideological shell game by which the onerous social fact of racialization gets refracted and diluted. As Raymond Smith has argued

persuasively, *ethnicity* is an analytic category that effectively "distracts attention from the continuing power of racism, and trivializes more complex processes of nationalism" (1996, 187; see also Harrison 1995; Williams 1989). By appearing to bridge differences of "culture" *and* "race"—thus construing race, at least implicitly, in stubbornly anachronistic terms as a straightforward fact of putative biology—the term *ethnicity* retains an indelible residue of primordialist assumption and actually serves to obscure and confuse matters still further. In any case, the fact that an exaggerated emphasis is persistently placed upon the *differences* among "groups" identified by "race" (or "ethnicity," or "culture") is finally an integral part of the workings of white supremacy, whereby the value standards of the national social formation as a whole are defined in terms of race (see Smith 1966, 104–5). As Du Bois poignantly put it long ago, "Say to a people: 'The one virtue is to be white,' and the people rush to the inevitable conclusion, 'Kill the nigger!'" (1920, 34). And this remains true even when, as in the aftermath of Civil Rights struggles, "race" is pervasively treated alternately as a source of depoliticized multiculturalist fetishization or liberal anxiety and evasion, if not explicitly repudiated in favor of an official neo-conservative endorsement of "color-blindness". Given that class inequalities are widely perceived as corresponding to the spatial and sociopolitical frame of "the nation" and its ostensibly "national" economy, that these essentialized "group" differences should likewise become the cipher through which the more generic divisions of rich and poor become apprehensible is also a predictable consequence of a national social order of white supremacy.

The thematic by which "the nation" is continuously constituted spatially and politically, in terms of an ever-contingent but nonetheless definitive *inside* and thus also a defining *outside,* is equally salient in the presumptive ascription of some categories of people to the sociopolitical status of genuine "insiders" (as "Americans," that is) and in the simultaneous relegation of other categories of people to one or another social condition of "outsider." The figure of the indissolubly "unassimilated," furthermore, conjures the specter of social groups who are irreconcilably suspect as always-already marginal (and therefore potentially antagonistic) to the nationalist

mission. In this regard, notably, it is not only the always-ambivalent figure of "the immigrant"—with recourse to which a xenophilic U.S. nationalism sustains its narratives of a Promised Land whose choice-worthiness is routinely upheld through the spectacle of foreign "outsiders" who voluntarily forsake their origins in favor of "becoming American"—who may ultimately prove to be too incorrigibly "foreign" to be "assimilated" (De Genova 2005, 56–94; Honig 1998; 2001, 73–106). Rather, more generally, the inherently problematic figure of "the minority" remains always as an intractable excess distillation of the ever-incomplete project of national formation. Beyond the *outside* palpably signaled by "immigrants" (the sheer foreignness of "foreigners," that is), nationalism must also always contend with another kind of still more vexing "foreign"-ness—namely, the alterity of the nation-state's "internal minorities," an *outside* that is always-already and inextricably *inside* (see also Balibar 1991; Chatterjee 1993; Fitzpatrick 1995). And in the United States, the figure of "the minority" is invariably *racialized*—archetypically, as Black, but more generically, as something other than white.[15] For (white) "American" nationhood, as Ralph Ellison keenly observed, Black Americans have been made to serve as "a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for the 'outsider'" (1970, 165–66).[16] Thus, the particular "internal minorities" presumed to be at least enduringly obstreperous (if not essentially inimical) to the "American" "nation" are systematically constituted in racialized terms.[17] That is to say, the *kind* of "minorities" that pose a problem for "American" *national* definition are above all *racial* ones. Du Bois famously explored "the strange meaning of being black" in the United States (1903, xi) in terms of the ever-unasked question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (43), and formulated his answer in terms of the racialized double-consciousness by which "one ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals . . ." (45).[18] How, then, must we begin to think about the converse problem that involves the comparably vexed but seemingly *un*strange harmony of "American"-ness and whiteness?[19] The equation of "American" national identity with racial whiteness inevitably surfaces as an operative premise of U.S. nationalism itself.

An Invitation to Exile

The problem (and theoretical problematization) of Blackness and "American"-ness as "two warring ideals," immortalized by Du Bois, became a proverbial material force that could and did make history, precisely when it was taken up by a mass movement during the 1960s (see Marx 1844, 137). One need only recall the ominous judgment of the Kerner Commission's Report (1968, 1), prepared as a presidential advisory investigation into the causes for the urban insurrections in the African American communities of Detroit and Newark in 1967: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." Writing only a month or so after the publication of the report, in the still more dramatic aftermath of similar revolts following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., whereby insurgency seemed manifest in virtually every African American urban community throughout the United States, Clifford Geertz was invited by the *New York Times Magazine* to reflect on the question of violence in U.S. society.[20] Writing very much as an "American" and only secondarily as an anthropologist—but not in any substantive sense as an anthropologist of the United States—Geertz's remarks are quite revealing:

> The fact is that the present state of domestic disorder in the United States
> . . . is a product of a long sequence of particular events whose interconnections our received categories of self-understanding are not only inadequate to reveal but designed to conceal. We do not know very well what kind of society we live in, what kind of history we have had, what kind of people we are. We are just beginning to find out, the hard way . . . (1968, 24–25)

If this intervention was plainly a calculated provocation—a (white) liberal appeal to somehow confront the racial equivocations of what we may call the "American" ideology—it was nonetheless also a rather candid confession of utter incomprehension about the substantive meaning of the explosive racial crisis of his times by one of the most eminent U.S. anthropologists of all time: "We do not know very well what kind of society we live in . . . what kind of people we are."[21]

Margaret Mead was also called to explore the significance of racism for the U.S. social formation, in a seven-and-a-half hour dialogue with James Baldwin in 1970 (their first encounter). Mead, of course, was a comparably eminent U.S. anthropologist, but with considerably greater claim to the credential of having engaged the challenge of producing an interpretation of the United States (notably, one addressed to her expressly "American" readers in terms of "our own culture" [1942, xxvii]). In this instance, Mead was more or less explicitly figured not only as an "American" but also as a white liberal. In one particularly illuminating series of exchanges, Baldwin introduces the theme of "exile."

> Mead: You see, I can go anywhere in the world. I can take any people in my arms.
> Baldwin: *You* can!
> Mead: I have. . . .
> Baldwin: We are both exiles.
> Mead: No, I am not an exile when as an American I go abroad. I am not an exile.
> Baldwin: I am an exile. But I was an exile long before I went away. . . . My country drove me out. The Americans drove me out of my country. (Baldwin and Mead 1992, 202; emphasis in original).
>
> Baldwin: Yes, but you see, *there is an area where we both were exiled.* You said you weren't, but you are, because of what you know.
> Mead: I am what?
> Baldwin: An exile—
> Mead: Oh, no, I am not.
> Baldwin: —from the mainstream of life in this country.
> Mead: I am not an exile. I am absolutely not an exile. I live here and I live in Samoa and I live in New Guinea. I live everywhere on this planet that I have ever been, and I am not an exile.
> . . .
> Baldwin: You refuse to accept the condition [of being an exile].
> Mead: No. It is just not—it really isn't meaningful to me to say that. I am

not an exile. I accept the condition of man, the condition of man at this
present state and the condition of man where I live and the point of greatest
responsibility for that, but I am no exile. I am at home.

Baldwin: I can't say that. . . . I am not at home. I am not at home.

Mead: Anywhere on this planet?

Baldwin: Forever. (216–17; emphasis in original)

Mead is remarkably adamant about her own anthropological (white and
imperial) cosmopolitanism. In the guise of a universal humanism, she may
go abroad "as an American" and avowedly feel secure that her identification
with the human condition ensures that she will be "at home" everywhere
on the planet. In stunning contrast, from the vantage point of the irreduc-
ible and irreconcilable specificity of his experience of racial subjugation
as a Black man, Baldwin has been existentially repudiated, castigated, and
banished, and has no other recourse than exile, wheresoever he may find
himself in the wide world. This is emphatically not to imply, however,
that Baldwin's is a position of abject despair, but rather to insist that the
deep resources of often intransigent hopefulness in Baldwin truly *exceed*
the possibilities of the "America" that has expelled him. Thus, the irreduc-
ible intimacy of his "belonging" nonetheless remains resolutely barred
on any terms that might satisfy the requirements of his sheer open-ended
human possibility. Baldwin's uncompromisingly exilic yet unrelenting
engagement with the social order of white supremacy in the United States
perfectly enacts, then, in Nahum Chandler's (n.d.) telling phrase, a relation
"of exorbitance." Even in spite of Baldwin's repeated, gracious—even mag-
nanimous and indeed exorbitant—gestures eliciting Mead's identification
of her own predicament with his (inviting her to disavow her own effective
identification with the racial and imperial order that has materially and
practically constituted her social privilege and anthropological conceit),
she is obstinate. Yet what indeed is the extravagant luxury implicated by
such an uncritical will to be confidently and comfortably "at home," within
both the near and far horizons of U.S. global power?

The incommensurability of Mead's ("American") anthropological
sense of planetary entitlement (with its deep anchorage in a [European]

Enlightenment universalism) and the quite discrepant exilic worldliness of what may be called Baldwin's militant particularism are instructive for this appraisal of the conceivable stakes of *something like* an anthropology of the United States. For what is crucially at stake in the example of Baldwin's position, for present purposes, is the question of the *standpoint* from which one might formulate an inquiry into the United States as a distinctive social formation. To put the question very bluntly: does one deliberately fashion an anthropological inquiry about the United States as an accomplice of its imperial projects, or in any event, as a more or less robust beneficiary of its hierarchical racial order? That one may ultimately *be* such an accomplice, witting or unwitting, or such a beneficiary, exuberant or ambivalent, frankly presents a separate dilemma. The immediate and preliminary problem, however, concerns whether such premises may viably continue to be left unexamined in the more elementary task of properly posing the questions.

Critical inquiry into the sorts of fundamental and arguably crucial questions about the United States as a social formation that I have sought here to accentuate has been advanced by scholars overwhelmingly *not* working within the discipline of anthropology. Both American studies and (U.S.) ethnic studies—the interdisciplinary (or, in Fredric Jameson's [1993] suggestive phrase, "postdisciplinary") fields of study that this essay has situated as inevitable interlocutors for an anthropology of the United States—are distinguished by a remarkably low visibility of anthropologists. As Kamala Visweswaran has argued insightfully with respect to the allied fields of multiculturalism and cultural studies, these "counterdisciplinary formations . . . radically foreground race and racial identity precisely because the modern anthropological notion of culture cannot do so" (1998, 70). One might be usefully reminded here of Terence Turner's lament (in the face of cultural studies and curricular battles over multiculturalism) that anthropologists have tended to "[sit] around like so many disconsolate intellectual wallflowers, waiting to be asked to impart our higher wisdom, and more than a little resentful that the invitations never come" (1993, 411). In Turner's at times smug and derisive assessment, "the multiculturalism of the cultural nationalists and fetishists of *difference*" is a purportedly

"uncritical" variety of multiculturalism for which "*culture* reduces to a tag for ethnic identity and a license for intellectual and political separatism" (414; emphases Turner's). Against this move by which multiculturalism "tends to become a form of identity politics . . . fraught with dangers both theoretical and practical" (411–21), and flagrantly in spite of his own ac-knowledgment that "much anthropological thinking about culture has been [similarly] uncritical" as well (415), Turner nevertheless makes an agonistic plea for anthropology to reclaim and reanimate its disciplinary role as hegemonic arbiter of culturalism. "Much as St. Paul revealed to the Athenians the identity of the unknown god they had been worshipping," he concludes, with no small measure of hubris, "anthropologists might play a useful role in helping multiculturalists realize the revolutionary impli-cations of the course upon which they have embarked" (428). At least in part, it is precisely such preposterous arrogance on the part of disciplinary scholars in general—and for our purposes, anthropologists in particular—that interdisciplinary fields of study have flourished intellectually while the conventional disciplines have often languished in morbid stagnation. Despite Turner's overwrought call to arms, and his appeal for a revitalized culturalism notwithstanding, it is fair to say that with regard to the most ur-gent questions in the critical study of the United States—as both a national social formation of white supremacy and an incomparable imperial power on the global scale—anthropologists have largely remained "inconsolate wallflowers." Indeed, to paraphrase but invert the title of Turner's essay, it may be instructive to ask instead, "What is ethnic studies that anthropolo-gists should be mindful of it?"

In the most elementary sense, one of the founding premises of all genuinely critical scholarship in that field of academic inquiry known, for better or for worse, as "ethnic" studies is precisely the enduring salience of specifically *racial* oppression for all people not racialized as "white" in the United States.[22] Indeed, ethnic studies emerged as an intellectual project precisely from the convulsive racial crisis and mass social struggles that so befuddled U.S. anthropology's most distinguished luminaries. Likewise, and predictably, ethnic studies scholars are the direct academic inheritors of the critical traditions of more properly public intellectuals of color—such

as Du Bois, Ellison, or Baldwin, among many others—who made their lives' vocations a deeply engaged and unrelenting interrogation of "America" and "American"-ness, and who did so in the only terms conceivable—racialized ones. Moreover, their eloquent perspectives on not only "the strange meaning of being black" but also on the sociopolitical production of whiteness itself (and also the specifically *racial* predicament of U.S. whites) emerged precisely from racially oppressed people's everyday traditions of scrutinizing white people and formulating and disseminating critical knowledge about the workings of white power.[23] For communities of color, such critical resources have proven, as often as not, to be a matter of life and death. Thus, while ethnic studies has embodied an audacious and robust effort at systematic intellectual, creative, and historiographic *self*-representation by members of these same subordinate (minoritized) groups, it has likewise supplied the corrosive questions that signal an epistemic groundwork for the dismantling of white supremacy's most supreme if commonly unspoken conceit—whiteness itself.

As an intellectual itinerary, ethnic studies has long affirmed the necessity of such counterhegemonic rhetorical and representational strategies against enduring structures that alternately enforce the sociopolitical invisibility, marginalization, and containment or spectacular criminalization, hysterical denunciation, and coercive repression of the racially subordinated. Likewise, ethnic studies has also been posited against the elitist and Eurocentric (racial) chauvinism that has historically defined academic standards, conventions, and biases. In practice, then, these ethnic studies protocols have more or less universally manifested themselves through a repudiation of the objectification and (often) pathologization of these racially oppressed groups, and have thus sustained a critical interrogation of the traditional methodologies of disciplinary social science, with anthropology prominent among them.[24] In addition to all that the field has to teach us about both the momentous and the everyday workings of white supremacy, therefore, ethnic studies has forcefully challenged (typically, though not exclusively, white) anthropologists and other social scientists seeking to conduct research among racialized "minority groups" to seriously and substantively engage the critical subjectivities of the people (or

"communities") whom they presume to make their "objects" of study.[24] The various ethnic studies fields have established, repeatedly and conclusively, that to conduct research related to the oppressed "minorities" of the U.S. nation-state from the unexamined standpoint of its privileged (white) "majority" involves exactly the kind of naïve ethnocentrism that is, by definition, a perversion of anthropology's putative aims as a distinctive mode of inquiry and yet has persistently remained the perverse fixation by which the anthropological conceit thrives. This, of course, can only mean that anthropological concerns with ethnographic self-reflexivity would be minimally compelled to become more thoroughly politicized, insofar as the ethnographer is charged now with a rigorously critical scrutiny of her/his own sociopolitical location in relation to those interlocutors who are the veritable *subjects* of research. Yet, it is inescapable that such practical subversions of the epistemological and methodological conventions of social science objectification, if pursued consistently and unforgivingly, might ultimately render the ethnographic encounter the exact *opposite* of "anthropological" (De Genova 2005, 22–25).

The ramifications of all this extend considerably farther than only such research that may concern racially subordinated groups, moreover. The specific questions and themes that I have foregrounded throughout this essay have long supplied the defining intellectual itinerary and political agenda of ethnic studies. Indeed, this field has been an exceedingly vital source of so much recent critical energy within the field of American studies. And yet, ethnic studies is nonetheless commonly presumed to be little more than a subsidiary specialization—itself merely an amalgam of particularities and particularisms (African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, and so forth)—encompassed by that supposedly broader or "universal" field, concerned as it is with all things "American." On the contrary, ethnic studies scholarship is surely no mere derivative—indeed, at its best, it provides a genuinely *counter*-"American" studies framework for which a searching interrogation of white supremacy and furthermore, the specifically colonial dimensions of U.S. national formation become the *only* viable avenue by which to meaningfully apprehend the United States as such.[26] If I am correct in my contention—which is, after all, an

indispensable claim of virtually all critical ethnic studies scholarship—that racial oppression and imperialism have been and remain central and constitutive features of the U.S. social formation, U.S. nationalism, and "American" national identity, then could there conceivably be *any* ethnographic research in (and presumably on) the United States that would not be deeply conditioned by (and, thus, which should not be consciously shaped by) the consequences of these insights? And if one begins to suspect that there really is no viable way, after all, to recuperate anthropology as such, the problem of an anthropology of the United States may nonetheless have served rather effectively as the scene for the posing of a question that persists to haunt us.

<center>❧</center>

<center>N O T E S</center>

1. For notable examples, see Crapanzano (2000), Di Leonardo (1984; 1998), Ginsburg (1989), Lamphere (1987), Lutz (2001), Marcus and Hall (1992), Merry (2000), Newman (1988; 1999), Ong (2003), Ortner (2003), Rapp (1999), Stewart (1996), Susser (1982), Weston (1991), Williams (1988; 1994; 1996; 2002), Yanagisako (1985), and Zavella (1987); or much earlier, Davis, Gardner, and Gardner (1941), Drake and Cayton (1945), Hurston (1935), Lynd and Lynd (1929), Powdermaker (1939; 1950), Schneider (1968), Schneider and Smith (1973), Warner and Lunt (1941; 1942), Warner and Srole

(1945), Warner and Low (1947), Warner (1949; 1959; 1961; 1962), and Warner, Meeker, and Eells (1960).

2. It is suggestive, however, to note here the awkward ironies of the multiple valences of the term *repatriation.* In contexts of migration, the term has served as a euphemism for expulsion and the distinctly coercive "return" of people to their ostensible or presumed places of origin. Likewise, the term refers to a museum's or other colonial authority's (usually very belated) relinquishing of indigenous human remains—as well as other archaeological artifacts or other indigenous treasures originally plundered by anthropologists or other colonial emissaries—to the "native" communities for whom they are figured as one or another kind of patrimony. I am indebted to Josh Price for calling my attention to this dissonance.

3. I consistently deploy quotes around the terms "America" and "American" whenever they modify the United States in order to emphatically problematize the appropriation of "American"-ness by U.S. nationalism, which of course has always been an affront to the rest of the Americas (see Saldívar 1991).

4. For a thorough examination of the witting and unwitting collusion of anthropologists with United States militarism and espionage during World War II and the Cold War, see Price (1998; 2002a; 2000b; 2000c; 2003; 2005a; 2005b). For related considerations of the state surveillance directed against activist anthropologists, see Price (1998; 2004).

5. For an important exception at the level of substantive historical inquiry (notably *not* produced by an anthropologist) which explicitly invokes the insights of the historical anthropology of European colonialisms, see Kaplan (2002).

6. For an analogous but discrepant argument by an anthropologist—which notably *rejects* the usefulness of characterizing the United States as an empire—see Kelly (2003).

7. See, for example, Billington (1956; 1971), Billington and Hedges (1949), and Merk (1963). For less romanticized accounts of westward expansion in the United States and its mythification, including critiques of the Turner thesis and its Cold War legacy, see Drinnon (1980), Hietala (1985), Hoefle (2003; 2004), Limerick (1987), Matsumoto and Allmendinger (1999), Nobles (1997), Slotkin (1973; 1985; 1992), and White and Limerick (1994).

8. Notably, Said remains characteristically generous—perhaps too much so—toward the prospect that "individual scholars working in . . . anthropology" may yet be able to defy the guild conventions and corruptions of "a 'field' like Orientalism defined either canonically, imperially, or geographically" through "allegiance to a discipline defined intellectually" (1979, 325). From within anthropology, Johannes Fabian similarly posits "the possibility that those ritually repetitive confrontations with the other which we call fieldwork may be but special instances of the general struggle of the West and its Other. . . . The praxis of field research, even in its most routinized and professionalized conception, never ceased to be an objective reflex of antagonistic political relations . . ." (1983, 149), only then to enigmatically gesture toward the prospect of "put[ting] anthropology back on its feet" (165; see also 2001). I am grateful to Scott Michaelsen for reminding me of these equivocations in Said's and Fabian's critiques, respectively.

9. For critical problematizations of the term "globalization," see Harvey (2000, 53–72) and Holloway (1994). For an insightful critique of U.S.-dominated "globalization" as the culmination of a century-old strategy of avowedly depoliticized hegemony that emphasizes geoeconomic rather than geopolitical prerogatives, see Smith (2005).

10. See, for a distinguished example, comments by Marx (1999).

11. For a variety of instructive interventions intended to problematize American studies from within the field, see Buell (1998), Desmond and Domínguez (1996), Kaplan (1993; 2002), Kaplan and Pease (1993), Lowe (1998), Mackenthun (1996), Pease (1990), Pease and Wiegman (2002), Porter (1994), Rowe (1998; 2000a; 2000b), Saldívar (1991; 1997), and Singh (1998).

12. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), in Getches, Wilkinson, and Williams, Jr. (1998, 106); see chapter 3 in Ruppel (2003).

13. For historical scholarship on the social production of whiteness, see Allen (1994; 1997), Almaguer (1994), Brodkin (1998), Delgado and Stefancic (1997), Domínguez (1986), Foley (1997), Fredrickson (1987), Guglielmo (2003), Hale (1998), Harris (1993), Horsman (1981), Ignatiev (1995), Jacobson (1998; 2000), Jordan (1968), López (1995), Nelson (1998), Roediger (1991; 1994; 2002), Saxton (1990), and Takaki (1979).

14. See Bonilla-Silva (2001), Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003), Goldberg (2002, 200–238), Gooding-Williams (1993), Gubar (1997), Lipsitz (1998), Omi and Winant (1994), Singh (2004), Steinberg (1995), Steinberg (1997), Wellman (1997), Winant (1994, 57–68).

15. For reasons of racial politics, I capitalize "Black" and "Blackness" as they refer to the social condition and historical specificity of African Americans, whereas I deliberately do not capitalize "white" or "whiteness." In 1953, Ralph Ellison, for instance, referred to the capitalization of the term "Negro" as "one of the important early victories of my own people in their fight for self-definition" (1964, 253). In contrast, as David Roediger explains, "it is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false, it is that whiteness is *nothing but* oppressive and false. . . . Whiteness describes not a culture but precisely . . . the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back" (1994, 13).

    For a discussion of the divergent rationalities of racialization that have served historically to sustain the hegemonic white/Black binary, and which render problematic the racialization of all those racialized as neither white nor Black, see De Genova (2006).

16. For discussions of the theme of African American disqualification from "American"ness, see De Genova (2005, 167–209), Hellwig (1982), and Morrison (1994). In addition, for related reflections by African American intellectuals on the intrinsic relation between "Americanization" for (European-origin) "immigrants" and the effectively obligatory denigration of Blackness, see Baldwin (1984; 1998, 178–79), Du Bois (1920; 1969,51), Ellison (1970; 1998, 166), and Malcolm X (1965), as reported by Alex Haley (1973, 399); see also Roediger (1998, 18–21); for a related historical essay on this theme, see Roediger (1994, 181–98). For an important consideration of the history of the legal disenfranchisement of African Americans through recourse to figures of the "alien" and the "foreign," see Wald (1993).

17. Indeed, this point is thoroughly corroborated (rather than contradicted) by the post-September 11, 2001, state-sponsored profiling and more general targeting of "Muslims" on suspicions of "terrorism." As a result of these practices, religious or "cultural" differences have been ubiquitously produced as apprehensible in racialized terms, such as the elision of the geographical referent "Middle Eastern" into the essentialized quasi-phenotypic condensation "Middle Eastern-looking"; through these practices, a rather extraordinary array of actual religious diversity and "cultural" divergences (to say nothing of political opinions and allegiances) has come to be effaced under the homogenizing constellation of "Arab"/"Muslim"/"fundamentalist"/"terrorist" (Cainkar 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; Cole 2003; Human Rights Watch 2002; Maira 2004; Saito 2001; Volpp 2002; see also Naber 2000; Prashad 2000).

18. As Nahum Chandler has suggested persuasively (2000, 250–51, 255; see also 1996b), following Ralph Ellison, the problematization of African American identity that Du Bois elaborates becomes instructive—indeed utterly necessary—for clarifying the social processes at work in the more general production of "American" identities as such. In a related yet still more programmatic gesture, Chandler (n.d.; see also 1996a) has explored the theoretical implications of Du Bois's work on "the problem of the Negro" as one that critically destabilizes the defining presupposition of a unitary or homogeneous ("white") European subject, and the attendant project of (white, racial) purity that conceptually organizes "race," more generically, as a category of social distinction.

19. For a contemporary analysis of how white people construct their own whiteness as "American"-ness, see Frankenberg (1993, 137–235; 1994). For historical accounts, see Hale (1998), Horsman (1981), Nelson (1998), and Takaki (1979).

20. Hannah Arendt was similarly invited and published an essay alongside Geertz's; in her essay (despite various manifestations of her characteristic failure of critical acumen with regard to the United States in particular), Arendt notably conveyed her alarm at the prospect of "a white backlash of such proportions" that it would threaten the very existence of "the American Republic" (1968, 24–25).

21. If this judgment seems ungenerous with regard to Geertz's capacities as an otherwise evidently erudite scholar and insightful observer of social life, or if it appears to fail to comprehend the presumable subtlety of Geertz's rhetorical strategy, one need only consider that nowhere in the essay in question—nor anywhere else in the extent of Geertz's intellectual work, to the best of this author's knowledge—did he ever advance any declarative propositions with regard to the question about U.S. society that he formulates here.

22. The problematization and critique of the institutionalization of the figure of the "ethnic" in ethnic studies is a vital task that regrettably must remain beyond the scope of the present essay; it will suffice to note here that the academic institutionalization of the insurgent energies that have been the source of this field's defining intellectual charter has involved a predictable kind of reification, which itself is partly exposed by the fatuous positivity implied by the very name. It then becomes treacherously easy to uphold the absurd and plainly stupid proposition that ethnic studies entails the study of "ethnic groups," in their putative transcendental or essential purity and objectivity,

whereas the racialized distinctions and discriminations and their attendant sociopolitical regimes that constitute the proper *problem* of this field of inquiry are in fact finally apprehensible only *relationally,* in their mutually constitutive *negativity* (see Chandler n.d.; see also Chandler 1996a).

23. For an example of such everyday discourses among African Americans, see John Gwaltney's rather extraordinary ethnography (1980); for a historical account, see Bay (2000). For analogous themes from ethnographic work among Native Americans, see Basso (1979); among Puerto Ricans, see Ramos-Zayas (2001). For analogous perspectives from Texas Mexican folklore, see Paredes (1966). For critical perspectives on whiteness by African American intellectuals, see Du Bois (1920), Editors of *Ebony* (1966), hooks (1992, espec. 165–78), Morrison (1992), Roediger (1998), Wright (1957), see also Chandler (2003). For analogous Chicano intellectual perspectives, see Chabram-Dernersesian (1997).

24. For various ethnic studies critiques of disciplinary social science, see, for example, Blea (1988), Deloria (1969), Gómez-Quiñones (1971; 1977; 1982), Kelley (1997), Ladner (1973), Madrid-Barela (1973), Mihesua (1998), Mirandé (1985, 1–13, 185–221), Montiel (1970), Rocco (1976), Romano-V. (1968; 1970), Vaca (1970a; 1970b), and Vizenor (1994). For work on the histories of anthropology and sociology in relation to the politics of race in the United States, see Baker (1998), Berkhofer (1978), Biolsi and Zimmerman (1997), Di Leonardo (1998), Jew (2006), Liss (1998), Michaels (1995), Michaelsen (1999), Steinberg (1995; 1997), Visweswaran (1998), and Yu (2001).

25. See, for example, Díaz Barriga (1997), Paredes (1977), Rosaldo (1989, 168–217), see also De Genova (2005, 13–55), Rosaldo (1985), Rosaldo (1986), and Sommer (1999).

26. See, for example, Allen (1994; 1997), Almaguer (1994), Bederman (1995), Drinnon (1980), Goldfield (1997), Jacobson (2000), Jennings (2000), Kaplan (2002), Kaplan and Pease (1993), Lepore (1998), Limón (1998), Nelson (1998), Roediger (1991), Singh (2004), Smith (1997), Somerville (2000), Takaki (1979), Wald (1995), Wiegman (1995), and Wilson (2000).

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